

THE
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

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

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

WITH
INTRODUCTIONS

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NEW EDITION.

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
LONDON AND NEW YORK

1906

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LONDON AND BECCLES.

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THE BOOK OF NAHUM.

INTRODUCTION.

§ I. SUBJECT OF THE BOOK.

THE prophecy of Nahum, as the title asserts, is concerned with one subject alone. It is "the burden of Nineveh;" it announces the fate of that evil city. In the Greek Bible it is placed immediately after Jonah, as being the complement of that book. Jonah had preached repentance to Nineveh, and the people had hearkened to his voice, but had soon relapsed into their old sins; and now Nahum pronounces their sentence. Their pride, oppression, idolatry, and especially their defiance of God's sovereignty, are severely rebuked, and the certain and complete destruction of the nation is plainly announced.

The prophecy is composed of three strophes, answering almost exactly to the three chapters into which it is divided. It begins (ch. i.) with stating God's purpose to inflict punishment on Nineveh. The Lord is just and severe, long-suffering, indeed, as the continued existence of Assyria proves, yet the certain Avenger of wrong-doing. Who has ever withstood his power? Earth and sea, and all the inhabitants thereof, bear witness to his irresistible might. And Nineveh must perish, in spite of its riches and its armies, because it has exalted itself against God and his people. Thus the Lord's justice shall be revealed and established, when he brings ruin on his enemies and happiness to his children. Then (ch. ii.) the prophet announces more in detail the destruction of Nineveh. She shall be besieged, she shall struggle in vain, she shall be taken and plundered and utterly wasted. Comparing her future ruin with her past splendour, the prophet is lost in admiration of the equity and wisdom of God, who doeth all these things. What is the cause of this calamity he then proceeds to state (ch. iii.). Assyria had become notorious for cruelty, treachery, rapine, idolatry. It had seduced other nations to follow its steps. And now its might should save it no more than its strength had saved Thebes, so lately captured. Its towers and fortresses should fall, its soldiers

should lose heart, its palaces be consumed with fire, its inhabitants be put to the sword, and the Assyrian empire, lately so formidable and strong, should become a byword of derision among all people.

This prophecy, so precise and assured, was the result of no human prevision; it was the outcome of no glance of a far-seeing statesman's eye. It was something more definite than a general confidence in God's moral government, and the ultimate triumph of righteousness. When Nahum prophesied Assyria was at the height of its prosperity. No enemy in its neighbourhood was left unsubdued; the distant Egypt had submitted to its arms; Phœnicia and Cyprus owned its sway; Judæa paid annual tribute; commercial enterprise had drawn unto it the riches of all nations. No one at this epoch could have foreseen the speedy end of this prosperity. Nahum needed a single-hearted courage and a full persuasion of the truth of his mission to denounce the crimes of this flourishing kingdom, and to proclaim its coming downfall. In fifty years the end came. A combination of enemies overthrew this mighty empire. On the death of Assurbanipal matters began to assume a dangerous attitude. Egypt rose against its former conqueror; Babylon revolted; the Medes, now become a powerful monarchy, prepared to attack Nineveh. The reigning monarch (whose name is uncertain), the successor of Assurbanipal, himself marched against the latter, sending Nabopolassar to recover Babylon. The Medes were defeated, and for a time driven back. Nabopolassar also was successful, and received as a reward for his services the title of King of Babylon. Here he managed affairs so skilfully, and strengthened himself so effectually, that, after fifteen years, he found himself able to throw off the Assyrian yoke, and to establish his own independence. The Medes, meantime, under Cyaxares, had recovered from their late defeat, and were only deterred from attacking Nineveh by an inroad of the Scythians into their own country. In order to strengthen his position, Nabopolassar made alliance with all the enemies of Assyria, and became the ruling spirit of a strong confederacy, which comprised Medes and Persians, Egyptians, Armenians, and other nations, all animated with the fierce desire of revenging themselves on Assyria. Josiah of Judah, as a tributary prince, was drawn into the contest, and fell at Megiddo, while endeavouring to arrest the advance of the Egyptian army. About B.C. 612 the allied forces attacked Nineveh, but were repulsed with loss. Victory for some time hovered over the Assyrians; but the enemy, reinforced from Bactria, proved irresistible. The Ninevites, fearing for their final safety, attempted to escape from the city. They were, however, overtaken, and again shut up within their walls. Here they valiantly defended themselves for more than two years, when a circumstance, against which no remedy availed, laid them at the mercy of the besiegers. An unusually heavy and long-continued flood of the river Tigris carried away a large section of the huge rampart that surrounded the city. Through the gap thus formed the enemy forced their way within the walls and captured the place. The king, rather than fall

into the hands of his implacable foes, gathered his wives and his treasure into the palace, and burned himself with them there; the town was sacked, and a great number of the inhabitants were massacred. Thus fell Nineveh, B.C. 608, according to the prophecy of Nahum, so that, a few years afterwards, Ezekiel could say (xxii. 22, 23), "Assyria is there and all her company: his graves are about him: all of them slain, fallen by the sword: whose graves are set in the sides of the pit, and her company is round about her grave: all of them slain, fallen by the sword, which caused terror in the land of the living."

§ II. AUTHOR.

Of the Prophet Nahum nothing definite is known but what he himself says. His name, which means "Comforter," does not occur elsewhere in the Bible, but is found, according to Gesenius ('Mon. Phœn.,' pp. 134, 137), in Phœnician inscriptions, and under the form *Náouμος* in one of Bœckh's Greek inscriptions ('Corp. Inscript.,' iv. 3). He calls himself "the Elkoshite" (ὁ Ἐλκεραῖος). This is not a patronymic, but signifies "a native of Elkosh," or Elcesi, which, as Jerome says ('Prol. in Nah. '), was a small village in Galilee, well known to the Jews, but in his time showing very few traces of ancient buildings. It is supposed to be represented by the modern *El-Kauzeh*, a village a little eastward of Ramah in Naphtali. That Nahum was a native of Galilee is perhaps intimated by the name Capernaum, which is interpreted, "village of Nahum," and by the fact that he shows special interest in the northern portion of the Holy Land, in his mention of Carmel, Lebanon, and Bashan, as languishing under the rebuke of God. It is probable that, when Esarhaddon re peopled the northern province with a mixed population imported from his own dominions, Nahum with many of his countrymen removed to Judæa. This may have given direction to his oracle. There is, however, nothing provincial in his language to serve as an indication of his locality, but we should judge that he must have removed from Galilee to Judæa, and uttered his prophecy in the latter province. A late tradition, mentioned by Asseman ('Bibl. Orient.,' i. 525; iii. 352), and adopted by some modern writers, maintains that Nahum was born in Assyria of parents who had been carried thither after the capture of Samaria, and that his sepulchre was to be found at Alkush, ten miles north of Mosul, on the left bank of the Tigris, in which spot also, as the story goes, were buried Jonah, Obadiah, and Jephthah. "It is a place," says Layard ('Nineveh,' i. 233), "held in great reverence by Mohammedans and Christians, but especially by Jews, who keep the building in repair, and flock here in great numbers at certain seasons of the year. The tomb is a simple plaster box, covered with green cloth, and standing at the upper end of a large chamber. The house containing the tomb is a modern building. There are no inscriptions, nor fragments of any antiquity about the place." The story arose some two thousand years after the prophet's time, and was probably invented to

account for his knowledge of Assyrian affairs, which was supposed to denote a resident and eye-witness, or else was founded simply on the similarity between the name of the village and that of his birthplace. Elkosh and Alkush were near enough in sound to suggest identity, and mediæval tradition, credulous and uncritical, fastened upon the Assyrian village as the scene of Nahum's birth and labours, and it became a shrine for pilgrims' honour, with no more reason than in the case of Jonah and Obadiah. And as to Ewald's opinion that Nahum was born of parents living in captivity there, we have only to say that the Israelites were not deported to Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser, but into Media, Babylon, and Mesopotamia. That no one living in Canaan at that time could have exhibited Nahum's acquaintance with Nineveh and its people, is an assertion utterly groundless. The knowledge displayed is not necessarily that of an eye-witness, and was doubtless also possessed by many Jews who had mixed with Gentiles, or had become acquainted with the foreign soldiers who had too often forced their way into the Holy Land. And if it be said that the prophecy is concerned wholly with Assyria, and contains little or no mention of Judæa, which could scarcely have been the case if the writer had been resident in the latter country, it must be answered that the whole tenor of the utterance is to demonstrate the destruction of the power hostile to Judah, the type of the most brutal form of heathendom, and to comfort the Hebrews with the assurance of final victory. But, say the critics, Nahum employs Assyrian words, which a Judæan could never have used. It is true that three such expressions have been found in ch. ii. 7 and iii. 17, but they prove nothing in favour of the assumption. The first, *huzzab*, as it is given in our version, may be considered a Hebrew word taken as a verb, and rendered, "it is decreed," or "it is decided," but is more probably an appellative, as shown in the Exposition; the second is probably also a Hebrew word, derived from *nazar*, "to separate," and meaning "the crowned," or "the levied for war;" the third, *taphsar*, occurs in Jer. li. 27, and is an Assyrian official title, which might well be known in Judæa, and is here used most appropriately. There is nothing, therefore, to negative the general opinion that Nahum was a native of Palestine, and exercised his prophetic office in that country.

§ III. DATE.

The time when Nahum prophesied has always, till quite lately, been considered most uncertain, and critics have variously assigned it to dates differing as widely as those of Jehu and Zechariah. Ewald regards him as a prophet of the Captivity, arguing that the prominence given to Assyria, and the merely cursory mention of Judah, could have proceeded only from a seer who was himself an exile from the promised land, and probably resident in the country which he denounces. It is obvious to remark that, commissioned as he was to prophesy against Nineveh, he must necessarily make this the chief subject of his utterances; and, in reality, comfort and

encouragement to Judah from the central part of his prophecy, to which all the denunciations of the enemy converge. A majority of critics have considered him to have prophesied during the reign of Hezekiah, and to have been a contemporary of Micah and Isaiah. The place assigned to his work in the Hebrew canon affords support to this opinion, which is supposed to be further confirmed by the language of ch. i. 11, 12, which, it is said, alludes to the invasion of Judæa by the Assyrians; and that of ch. ii. 13, which, it is affirmed, hints at the mission of Rabshakeh (Isa. xxxvi.). It must be allowed that the allusions are most obscure if regarded as concerned with those facts (see the Exposition, *in loc.*). One thing is certain, viz. that Nahum prophesied after the deportation of the ten tribes. The words of ch. ii. 2 ("The Lord hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel," etc.) can refer to nothing else than that event. Another point is that there are many passages in Nahum and Isaiah which are so similar that one prophet must have copied from the other; but which was the original, which the borrower, cannot be settled by a mere comparison of the writings. But all surmises as to the prophet's date have been set at rest of late years by certain discoveries in the Assyrian inscriptions (see Schrader, p. 450, etc.). In ch. iii. 8 our prophet speaks of the capture and destruction of No-Amon, and the deportation of its inhabitants, as a recent and well-remembered event. No is Thebes, in Upper Egypt, called by the Greeks Diospolis, the capital of that part of the kingdom; and we now learn from the cuneiform records that Assurbanipal, the son and successor of Esarhaddon, took that city in his second expedition against Urdamani, or Rud-Amon, the successor of Tirhakah, and carried the inhabitants away. This invasion took place soon after the death of Tirhakah, which occurred B.C. 664. So we may reckon the date of Nahum's prophecy to have been within ten years of the fall of Thebes, during the reign of Manasseh, whose name was suppressed in the title of the book, owing to that king's evil reputation.

As an instance of destructive criticism, we may note that Hitzig and others, knowing no corroborative evidence concerning the capture of No, at once concluded that the passage in Nahum which asserted this fact was an interpolation deserving of no credit. The inscriptions have happily proved the veracity of the prophet, and the rashness of his critics.

§ IV. GENERAL CHARACTER.

Among the minor prophets Nahum holds the highest place. His prophecy is a poem, stately, orderly, and impressive, all the parts of which are well arranged and mutually conducive to the unity of the whole. It is eminently tuneful and rhythmical, the words "re-echoing to the sense," and hurrying the hearer away with the speaker in complete sympathy. The style is full of force, the colouring brilliant, the picturing lifelike. The majestic opening, in which are described the attributes of God, his mercy and justice, is equalled by the vivid representation of the sack and

ruin of Nineveh, which he paints as if passing before his own eyes. The language is pure and classical, with a certain originality in words and forms which separates it from other writings. It is true that here and there may be found remembrances of Joel and Isaiah; but these expressions may be derived from sources common to all the prophets, and from which, unconsciously as it may be, they drew some materials. And this incidental indebtedness does not diminish the character of originality in treatment and execution which is claimed for Nahum's work. The variety of illustration, the force of imagery, the elegance of diction, the clearness of style, in spite of rapidity of transition, give a unique character to this poem, and differentiate it from all others in the collection. There are no Messianic references; nor is there room for any lengthened array of moral and religious ideas; but these are entwined in forcible, if concise, terms. God's existence, justice, and providence are everywhere asserted, witnessed to by the past, expected in the future; and from the coming judgment is drawn a lesson of comfort for the chosen people.

§ V. LITERATURE.

The special commentaries on Nahum are chiefly these: Bibliander (Zurich, 1534); Peritus (Coimbre, 1582, etc.); Gesner, 'Explicatio' (Wittenberg, 1565); Augustin de Quiros (Seville, 1622); Crocius (Brême, 1620); Ursin, 'Hypomnemata' (Frankfort, 1652); Hufenreffer (Stuttgart, 1663); Tarnovius (Rost., 1623); Van Hôke, 'Explicatio' (1709); Kalinsky, 'Observationes' (Breslau, 1748); Agrek (Upsal, 1788); Greve (1798); Grimm, 'Erklärung' (Düsseldorf, 1790); Svanborg (1806); Bodin (Upsal, 1806); Fröhn, 'Curæ' (Rostoch, 1806); Justi (Leipzig, 1820); Hölemann 'Illustratio' (Leipzig, 1842); O. Strauss, 'Nahumi de Nino Vaticanum' (Berlin, 1853); also G. Strauss, 'Nineveh und das Wort Gottes' (Berlin, 1855); Vance Smith, 'The Prophecies relating to Nineveh and the Assyrians' (London, 1857); Breitenicher, 'Nineveh und Nahum' (Munich, 1861); Reinke, 'Aelt Version' (Munster, 1867); B. B. Edwards, 'Translation of Nah.', in *Biblioth. Sacra*, v. 551.

§ VI. ARRANGEMENT IN SECTIONS.

Part I. (Ch. i. 1—15.) The judgment upon Nineveh decreed by God.

- § 1. (Ch. i. 1.) The heading of the book.
- § 2. (Ch. i. 2—6.) The Divine justice is described, and the irresistible power of God illustrated by his control of the material world.
- § 3. (Ch. i. 7—11.) But the wrath of God falls not on those who trust in him; it is reserved for his enemies generally.
- § 4. (Ch. i. 12—15.) And especially for Nineveh, which shall be utterly destroyed, while Zion shall rejoice at the joyful news of its ruin, and keep her feasts in safety.

Part II. (Ch. ii. 1—13.) The execution of the decree; the destruction of Nineveh.

- § 1. (Ch. ii. 1—8.) Nineveh shall be besieged, because God is about to exalt his people by taking vengeance on the enemy, whose defence is of no avail.
- § 2. (Ch. ii. 9—13.) The city is plundered, and lies waste in terrible contrast with its former excellency.

Part III. (Ch. iii. 1—19.) The cause of the judgment—the sins of the city, which bring inevitable punishment.

- § 1. (Ch. iii. 1—7.) The crimes that have brought this fate upon Nineveh.
- § 2. (Ch. iii. 8—13.) The ruin can be no more averted than was that of No-Amon.
- § 3. (Ch. iii. 14—19.) In spite of all its efforts and all its resources, it will meet with a terrible end.

THE BOOK OF NAHUM.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Vers. 1—15.—Part I. THE JUDGMENT UPON NINEVEH DECREED BY GOD.

Ver. 1.—§ 1. *The heading of the book.* The book has a double title, the first giving the object of the prophecy, which otherwise would not be evident; the second, its author, added to give confidence in its contents. The burden; *massa* (Hab. i. 1)—a term generally used of a weighty, threatening prophecy (Isa. xiii. 1), though translated by the LXX. *λήμμα* here, and elsewhere *ὑπασις* and *ῥήμα*. Some prefer to render it "utterance," or "oracle." The word is capable of either meaning. It almost always (except, perhaps, in Zech. xii. 1) introduces a threat of judgment. Of Nineveh. The denunciation of this city is the object of the prophecy. The effect of Jonah's preaching had been only temporary; the reformation was partial and superficial; and now God's long-suffering was wearied out, and the time of punishment was to come. (For an account of Nineveh, see note on Jonah i. 2.) Some critics have deemed one part of the title an interpolation; but the connection of the two portions is obvious, and without the former we should not know the object of the prophet's denunciation till ch. ii. 8. *The book of the vision.* This is the second title, in apposition with the former, and defining it more closely as the book in which was written the prophecy of Nahum. It is called a "vision," because what the prophet foretold was presented to his mental sight, and stood plainly before him (comp. Isa. i. 1). The Elkoshite; i.e. native of Elkosh, for which, see Introduction, § II.

Vers. 2—6.—§ 2. *The prophet describes the inflexible justice of God, and illustrates NAHUM.*

his irresistible power by the control which he exercises over the material world.

Ver. 2.—God is jealous, and the Lord avengeth; better, *Jehovah is a jealous and avenging God*, as Exod. xx. 5; Deut. iv. 24; Josh. xxiv. 19. The threefold repetition of the name of *Jehovah* and the attribute "avenging" gives a wonderful force to this sublime description of the Divine character. God is here called *jealous* (*ζηλωτής*, Septuagint) anthropopathically, as ready to defend his honour against all who oppose him, as One who loves his people and punishes their oppressors. Is furious; literally, *master of fury*, as Gen. xxxvii. 19, "master of dreams." The Lord is full of wrath (comp. Prov. xxii. 24; xxix. 22). The word used implies a permanent feeling, like the Greek *μῆνις*. He reserveth wrath. The Hebrew is simply "watching," "observing" for punishment. Septuagint, *ἐξέλασεν αὐτὸς τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτοῦ*, "himself cutting off his enemies;" Vulgate, *irascens ipse inimicis ejus*. God withholds his hand for a time, but does not forget. All this description of God's attributes is intended to show that the destruction of Assyria is his doing, and that its accomplishment is certain.

Ver. 3.—Slow to anger (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7). Nahum seems to take up the words of Jonah (iv. 2) or Joel (ii. 13). God is long-suffering, not from weakness, but because he is great in power, and can punish when he will. Will not at all acquit the wicked; literally, *holding pure will not hold pure*; i.e. he will not treat the guilty as innocent. Ἀθωῶν [Alex., ἀθώων] οὐκ ἀθωώσει (Septuagint); *Mundans non faciet innocentem* (comp. Exod. xx. 7; xxxiv. 7). The Lord hath his way, etc. The prophet grounds his description of the majesty and might of God upon the revelation at the Exodus and at Sinai (see Exod. xix. 16—18; Ps. xlviii.; xlvii.). The clouds are the dust of his feet. Large and

grand as the clouds look to us, they are to God but as the dust raised by the feet in walking. As an illustration of this statement (though, of course, the fact was utterly unknown to Nahum), it has been remarked that recent scientific discovery asserts that clouds owe their beauty, and even their very existence, to the presence of dust-particles in the atmosphere. The aqueous vapour, it is said, condenses on these particles, and thus becomes visible.

Ver. 4.—The great physical changes and convulsions in the world are tokens of God's wrath on sinful nations. **He rebuketh the sea**, as at the passage of the Red Sea (Exod. xiv. 21; Ps. cvi. 9). This is a sign of omnipotence (comp. Luke viii. 24). **All the rivers**. A generalization from the miracle at the Jordan (Josh. iii.; comp. Ps. cvii. 33; Isa. 1. 2). Septuagint, *ποταμούς ἐξησμών*, "making rivers desolate;" Vulgate, *flumina ad desertum deducens*. **Bashan** (see note on Amos iv. 1). **Carmel** (see on Amos i. 2). **Flower of Lebanon**. This district was famous, not only for its cedars, but also for its vines and flowers (comp. Hos. xiv. 7; Cant. iv. 11). These three regions are mentioned as remarkable for their fertility, and they occur most naturally to the mind of a native of Galilee, as was Nahum. They also geographically are the eastern, western, and northern boundaries of the land. They are used here proverbially to express the truth that God can cause the most luxuriant regions to wither at his word.

Ver. 5.—The mountains quake. The mountains, the very emblems of stability, tremble before him (Amos viii. 8). **The hills melt**; *Οἱ βουνὶ ἐσαλεύθησαν*, "The hills were shaken" (Septuagint). The hills dissolve like wax or snow at his presence (see Amos iv. 13; Micah i. 4). **Burned**; Septuagint, *ἀνεστάλῃ*, "recoils," "is upheaved," as by an earthquake. This rendering has the greatest authority. **The world**; i.e. the habitable world, and all living creatures therein (Joel i. 18—20). Nature animate and inanimate is represented as actuated by the terror of conscious guilt.

Ver. 6.—Who can stand? (Ps. lxxvi. 7; Joel ii. 11; Mal. iii. 2; comp. Rev. vi. 17). **His fury is poured out like fire** (Deut. iv. 24); like the brimstone and fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. xix. 24), or like the molten lava that issues from a volcano (Jer. vii. 20). Septuagint (reading differently), *ὁ θυμὸς αὐτοῦ τήκει ἀρχάς*: *consumit principatus* (Jerome). **Are thrown down**; rather, *are rent asunder* (comp. 1 Kings xix. 11; Jer. xxiii. 29). If such is the power of God, how shall Assyria resist it?

Vers. 7—11.—§ 3. *The prophet prepares the way for proclaiming the punishment of*

Nineveh by declaring that the wrath of God falls not on those who trust in him, but is reserved for his enemies.

Ver. 7.—The Lord is good. The Targum adds unnecessarily, "for Israel" (Ps. xxv. 8). He is "good," in that he is a strong hold in the day of trouble, as in the perilous time when the Assyrians attacked Judæa (comp. Ps. xxvii. 1; Jer. xvi. 19). **He knoweth**; loves and cares for (Ps. i. 6; xxxvii. 18; comp. 2 Tim. ii. 19; and see note on Amos iii. 2).

Ver. 8.—With an overrunning flood. This may be merely a metaphor to express the utter devastation which should overwhelm Nineveh, as the invasion of a hostile army is often thus depicted (comp. Isa. viii. 7; Dan. xi. 26, 40); or it may be an allusion to the inundation which aided the capture of the city (see note on ch. ii. 6). **Of the place thereof**; i.e. of Nineveh, not named, but present to the prophet's mind, and understood from the heading (ver. 1). (For the utter destruction of Nineveh, comp. Zeph. ii. 13, etc.) The LXX. has, *τοὺς ἐπρεγόμενους* ("those that rise up"). The Chaldees has a similar reading, with the meaning that God would exterminate those who rise up against him. **Darkness shall pursue his enemies**. So the Septuagint and Vulgate. But it is better rendered, *He shall pursue his enemies into darkness*, so that they disappear from the earth. If this is the meaning of the clause, it resembles the termination of many Assyrian inscriptions which record the defeat of a hostile chieftain: "and no one has seen any trace of him since."

Ver. 9.—The prophet suddenly addresses both Jews and Assyrians, encouraging the former by the thought that God can perform what he promises, and warning the latter that their boasting (comp. Isa. x. 9, etc.; xxxvi. 20) was vain. **What do ye imagine against the Lord?** *Quid cogitatis contra Dominum?* (Vulgate). This rendering regards the question as addressed to the Assyrians, demanding of them what it is that they dare to plot against God; do they presume to fight against him, or to fancy that his threats will not be accomplished? But the sentence is best translated, *What think ye of the Lord?* *Τί λογίζεσθε ἐπὶ τὸν Κύριον*; "What devise ye against the Lord?" (Septuagint). This is addressed not only to the Jews in the sense, "Do ye think that he will not accomplish his threat against Nineveh?" but to the Assyrians also. **He will make an utter end**. This denunciation is repeated from ver. 8 to denote the absolute certainty of the doom. **Affliction shall not rise up the second time**. The Assyrians shall never again have the power of oppressing Judah as they have ruined Israel;

there shall be no repetition of Sennacherib's invasion. Septuagint, *ὅτι ἐκδικήσει δις ἐπιταυρὸν ἐν θλίψει*: *Non vindicabit bis in idipsum* (Jerome). From this text the Fathers take occasion to discuss the question how it is that God does not punish twice for the same sin.

Ver. 10.—While they be folded together as thorns. The clause is conditional: "Though they be intertwined as thorns." Though the Assyrians present an impenetrable front, which seems to defy attack. (For the comparison of a hostile army to briars and thorns, see Isa. x. 17; xxvii. 4; Henderson.) And while they are drunken as drunkards; and though they be drunken with their drink, regarding themselves as invincible, and drenched with wine, and given up to luxury and excess. There may be an allusion to the legend current concerning the destruction of Nineveh. Diodorus (ii. 26) relates that, after the enemy had been thrice repulsed, the King of Nineveh was so elated that he gave himself up to festivity, and allowed all his army to indulge in the utmost licence, and that it was while they were occupied in drunkenness and feasting they were surprised by the Medes under Cyaxares, and their city taken. An account of such a feast, accompanied with sketches from the monuments, is given in Bonomi, 'Nineveh and its Discoveries,' p. 187, etc. We may compare the fate of Belshazzar (Dan. v. 1, etc.). They shall be devoured as stubble fully dry; like worthless refuse, fit only for burning (Exod. xv. 7; Isa. v. 24; Joel ii. 5; Obad. 18). The LXX. renders this verse differently, "Because to its foundation it shall be dried up (*χρησθήσεται*: *redigentur in vepres*, Jerome), and as bind-weed (*συνδαξ*) intertwined it shall be devoured, and as stubble fully dry."

Ver. 11.—The reason of the destruction and of the punishment is told. There is one come out of thee. Nineveh is addressed; and we need not refer the words entirely to Sennacherib and his impious threats, but may take them generally as expressing the arrogant impiety of the Assyrians and their attitude towards Jehovah. A wicked counsellor; literally, a counsellor of Belial; i.e. of worthlessness. The expression, perhaps primarily applied to Sennacherib, also regards the plans prepared by the Assyrians for destroying the people of God, a type of the world arrayed against piety.

Vers. 12-15.—§ 4. The destruction of Nineveh is emphatically announced, and Zion is depicted as rejoicing at the news of its ruin, and celebrating her feasts in safety.

Ver. 12 —Thus saith the Lord. An expres-

sion used to introduce a solemn declaration. Though they (the Assyrians) be quiet. *Shalem* has this meaning elsewhere, as Gen. xxxiv. 21; but this is unsuitable here, where it must be translated, "in full strength," "unimpaired," "complete," like the thorn-hedge in ver. 10. Vulgate, *Si perfecti fuerint*. Though they be unbroken in strength, and likewise (on that account) many in number. Septuagint, *τάδε λέγει Κύριος, κατάρχων υδάτων πολλῶν*, "Thus saith the Lord, ruling over many waters." So the Syriac and Arabic. Jerome interprets "the waters" to mean the heavenly powers (Ps. cxlviii. 4). Yet thus (though such is their state) shall they be cut down. The verb is used of the mowing of a field or the shearing of sheep, and implies complete destruction. When he shall pass through; better, and he shall pass away. The number is changed, but the same persons are meant, spoken of as one to show their insignificance and complete annihilation. Septuagint, "Thus shall they be dispersed [*διασταλήσονται*: *dividentur*, Jerome], and the report of thee shall no more be heard therein." The following clause is not translated. Though I have afflicted thee. The Lord addresses Judah, referring to the oppression of Judæa by the Assyrians in the times of Ahaz and Hezekiah (2 Kings xvi. 18; 2 Chron. xxviii. 20, etc.; xxxii.). I will afflict thee no more; according to the promise in ver. 9. This is further confirmed in what follows.

Ver. 13.—His yoke. The yoke of Assyria, probably referring to the vassalage of Judah (2 Kings xviii. 14; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11). (For the metaphor of "yoke" denoting subjugation, comp. Lev. xxvi. 13; Jer. xxvii. 2; Ezek. xxxiv. 27.) Jeremiah (xxx. 8) seems to use these words of Nahum to announce the deliverance of Israel from captivity. Burst thy bonds in sunder; by the final overthrow of the Assyrian power (Ps. ii. 3; Jer. ii. 20).

Ver. 14.—Concerning thee. The prophet addresses the Assyrian, and announces God's purpose concerning him. That no more of thy name be sown. There is no special reference to Sennacherib in this or the next clause, but the prophet means that the Assyrian people and name shall become extinct. Out of the house of thy gods (Isa. xxxvii. 38, where the murder of Sennacherib in the temple of Nisroch is mentioned). An account of the religion of the Assyrians will be found in Layard, 'Nineveh and its Remains,' vol. ii. ch. 7. Graven image; carved out of wood or stone. Molten; cast in metal. The two terms comprise every kind of idol, as in Deut. xxvii. 15; Judg. xvii. 3. The Assyrians used to destroy the images of the gods worshipped by conquered

nations (2 Kings xix. 18). Bonomi ('Nineveh and its Palaces,' p. 163) gives a picture of soldiers cutting up the image of some foreign deity, and carrying away the pieces. So should it now be done unto their gods. I will make thy grave. I will consign thee, O Assyrian, and thy idols to oblivion (Ezek. xxxii. 22, etc.). It is not, "I will make it, the temple, thy grave," as those who see a reference to the death of Sennacherib (2 Kings xix. 37) render it; but, "I prepare thy grave"—I doom thee to destruction. The reason is given: *For thou art vile; quia inhonoratus es* (Vulgate); *στραχέεις*, "for they are swift" (Septuagint). The word is also translated "light," weighed in the balances, and found wanting, as Dan. v. 27.

Ver. 15.—The second chapter commences here in the Hebrew and Syriac; the Anglican follows the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Chaldee Versions. This seems most agreeable to the method of the prophecy, wherein threat is succeeded by promise, denunciation of the enemy by declaration of comfort to Judah (comp. ch. i. 6, 7, 12, and

13; so here vers. 14 and 15). The prophet announces the joy with which Judah receives the news of the overthrow of Nineveh. Behold upon the mountains, etc. Isaiah (lii. 7) uses these words to proclaim the coming of Messiah (comp. Isa. xl. 9; Rom. x. 15). The messengers come from the East across the mountains of Palestine, announcing the fall of Nineveh and the consequent peace and security of Judah—a type of the overthrow of God's enemies and the safety of his Church. There may be an allusion to the custom of spreading tidings by beacon fires. Keep thy solemn feasts. Judah is exhorted to resume the observation of her solemnities, which were interrupted during the enemy's occupation of the country, or which could not be properly attended by the distant inhabitants. Judah must offer her praises and thanksgivings for deliverance, and perform the vows which she made unto the Lord in the time of peril. The wicked (Hebrew, *Belial*) shall no more pass through thee. *Belial* is here the adversary, the opposing army (see ver. 11).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*A vision and a burden.* I. THE VISION OF NAHUM. 1. *The person of the prophet.* (1) His name. Nahum, "Consolation"—fitly borne by one whose mission was to be the comfort of God's people. That so many in the Hebrew Church and nation possessed names prophetic of their future destinies points as its explanation to an overruling providence, which in this way kept alive in the hearts of the people a strongly operative belief in a Divine interposition in human affairs. That names are not now in this fashion significant does not prove that God is less cognizant of or interested in mundane matters, but merely shows that such devices are not now required to enable thoughtful persons to detect God's finger in the progress of history. (2) His birthplace. Elkosh; not to be sought for in Assyria, as e.g. in the modern Christian village of Elkosh, east of the Tigris and north-west of Khorsabad, two days' journey from Mosul, where the tomb of the prophet is still shown, in the form of a simple alabaster box of modern style (Michaelis, Eichhorn, Ewald, etc.); but in Galilee, perhaps in the present-day village of *Helceszi* (Jerome, Hitzig, Delitzsch, Keil, etc.). (3) His parentage. Unknown. That his father's name was Elkosh (Strauss) could only be maintained by regarding "the Elkoshite" as a patronymic, and the Elkoshites as a distinct family. Of this, however, Scripture affords no trace. (4) His time. Uncertain. According to Josephus ('Ant.' ix. 11. 3), Nahum prophesied in the reign of Jotham. But the prophecy itself rather points to a later date—not to the earlier years of Hezekiah, before the destruction of Sennacherib's army (Jerome, Fausset), but to a point of time after that event, and consequently after the conquest of Samaria and the deportation of the ten tribes (Vitringa, Hitzig, Delitzsch, Keil, Nägelsbach in Herzog), more particularly to an age after the destruction of No-Amon, or Thebes (ch. iii. 8), which took place soon after Tirhakah's death, in B.C. 664. Hence B.C. 660, or the last years of Manasseh, may be accepted as the most probable date for Nahum's prophecy (Schrader, 'Die Keilinschriften,' p. 452; Kleinert, in Riehm; Sayce, 'Fresh Light,' etc., p. 154). 2. *The nature of his vision.* (1) Not political foresight merely, since the destruction of Nineveh occurred in B.C. 609—606 (Schrader), i.e. a full half-century later than the days of Nahum, which is too broad a chasm to be spanned by purely human sagacity. If the Preacher is not in error (Eccles. iii. 11; viii. 7), Nahum required more than mere natural ability to enable him to predict the downfall of the great Assyrian capital fifty years before it happened. (2) Divine inspiration alone can explain the utterance of Nahum. "The

Lord God will do nothing but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos iii. 7). Compare the examples of Abraham (Gen. xviii. 17), Moses (Numb. xii. 6), Samuel (1 Sam. iii. 11), Elijah (1 Kings xviii. 36), Jeremiah (xi. 18), Daniel (ii. 19), etc. The details given in Nahum's prophecy concerning Nineveh are such that they must have been obtained either by direct personal knowledge or by Divine revelation. But inasmuch as the former hypothesis—the ground upon which some scholars and critics locate Elkosh in Assyria—is rendered impossible by the time when Nahum lived (shortly after the destruction of No-Amon), it can only have been by the latter method that he acquired his information.

II. THE BURDEN OF NINEVEH. 1. *The city.* Nineveh; in Assyrian *Ninua*, or *Nina*, equivalent to "Station," "Dwelling," if the word be of Semitic origin; equivalent to "Fish-house" if derived from the Accadian (Delitzsch). A city remarkable for: (1) Its antiquity. Founded by Asshur, who went forth out of the land of Shinar, or Babylon, and builded Nineveh, the present-day *Kouyunjik* and *Nebbi Yunus*, opposite Mosul on the Tigris (Layard, Smith, Schrader); Rehoboth Ir, the site of which is unknown; Calah, represented by the mounds of *Nimrud* (Layard, Smith, Schrader); and Resen, or *Selamiyeh* (Layard, Smith, Schrader), between Calah and Nimroud (Gen. x. 11, 12). "The foundation of Nineveh, the modern Kouyunjik, probably goes back to as early an age as that of Assur (Kalah Shergat, the original capital), but it was not until a much later period that it became an important city, and supplanted the older capital of the kingdom" (Sayce, 'Assyria: its Princes,' etc., p. 22). (2) Its size. Even from earliest times it was regarded as a great city, including Calah, Rehoboth Ir, and Resen, as well as Nineveh proper. In Jonah's day it was "a great city" (i. 1), "an exceeding great city of three days' journey" (iii. 3). This accords both with the statements of classical writers—one of whom gives its circumference as four hundred and eighty stadia, or twelve geographical miles—and with the discoveries of modern research, according to which Nineveh appears to have been used to designate at one time Nineveh proper, at another time the four large prominent cities—Nineveh, equivalent to *Kouyunjik* and *Nebbi Yunus*; Calah, *Nimroud*; Resen, *Selamiyeh*; and Dur-Sargina of the inscriptions, *Khorsabad*. These four cities "formed a trapezium, the sharp angles of which lay towards the north and south, the long sides being formed by the Tigris and the mountains, the average length being about twenty-five English miles, and the average breadth fifteen" (Delitzsch, on Jonah i. 1). "The circumference of these four quarters or towns has been given by the English Jones at almost ninety English miles, which may correspond to a circuit of three days' journey" (Schrader, 'Die Keilinschriften,' p. 448). (3) Its population. In Jonah's time it contained over a hundred and twenty thousand young persons at and under seven years of age (Jonah iv. 11), which would give a population of six hundred thousand (Niebuhr, Delitzsch, Keil) or seven hundred thousand (Schrader) souls—a number exceeded by many modern cities. (4) Its wealth. Nahum speaks of Nineveh as having multiplied her merchants above the stars of heaven (ch. iii. 16); and that this was so her situation "at the culminating point of the three quarters of the globe, Europe, Asia, and Africa" (O. Strauss), might naturally lead one to expect. That Nineveh contained immense stores of gold and silver (ch. ii. 9) accords with the statements of ancient writers, which represent the spoil of Nineveh as having been unparalleled in extent. So completely also was it plundered that "scarcely any fragments of gold and silver have been found in its ruins" (Kitto's 'Cyclopædia,' iii. 334), thus verifying the prediction that she should be "empty, and void, and waste" (ch. ii. 10). (5) Its power. The crowned ones, *i.e.* nobles, and the marshals, *i.e.* the captains, of Nineveh were as plentiful as the locusts and great grasshoppers (ch. iii. 17); in which case what must have been the number of the common soldiers? To these—the levied and selected ones (for war) and the soldiery—rather than to the princes and commanders, according to another interpretation (Keil), the prophet's language refers. The shields and scarlet coats of her mighty men, the rattling of her war-chariots, and the prancing of her horses are vividly depicted (ch. ii. 3; iii. 1); as well as the fierceness and destructiveness of her warfare (ch. ii. 11, 12). (6) Its wickedness. This, which in Jonah's time was so aggravated as to call forth against it a threatening of Divine punishment (Jonah i. 2; iii. 4, 8, 10), was not less conspicuous in the days of Nahum. The "bloody city, full of lies and rapine" (ch. iii. 1), had fully justified her designation by the manner in which

she had deceived and destroyed the nations, Syria, Phœnicia, Philistia, Israel, and even Egypt. 2. *The burden.* This, which refers to Nahum's oracle concerning Nineveh, appropriately describes: (1) Its momentous character. A burden on the prophet's soul until it was uttered, it forthwith became a weight of doom upon the city against which it was pronounced. (2) Its certain fulfilment. Laid upon the bloody city by Jehovah's hand (ch. ii. 13; iii. 5), it would inflict a grievous wound and cause a bruise for which there should be no healing (ch. iii. 19).

LESSONS. 1. The argument from prophecy for the inspiration of the Scriptures. 2. The superiority of the Christian dispensation, whose messenger was not a prophet of Jehovah, but the Son of God (Heb. i. 1). 3. The excellence of the gospel, which contains a burden, not of wrath, but of mercy.

Vers. 2—6.—*The wrath of God—a warning.* I. NECESSARY AS TO ITS EXISTENCE. Based upon the character of God as a jealous God. Jealous: 1. *For his own glory*, and therefore admitting of no rival claimant to man's worship and homage (Exod. xxxiv. 14; Deut. iv. 24). 2. *For his holy Law*, and therefore shut up to punish iniquity (Exod. xx. 5; Deut. v. 9; xxix. 20; Josh. xxiv. 19). 3. *For his own people*, and therefore impelled to take vengeance on their adversaries.

II. RIGHTEOUS AS TO ITS CHARACTER. Directed only and always: 1. *Against his adversaries*; i.e. against those who decline to do him homage, and show this by worshipping idols. 2. *Against those who dishonour his holy Law* by their disobedience and unrighteousness. 3. *Against those who oppress and tyrannize over his people*, as the Assyrians had done and were doing.

III. FURIOUS AS TO OPERATION. The wrath of Jehovah is not a trifle. Nahum speaks of it as something that has fury in it (vers. 2, 6). The prophets generally represented it as terrible in its forth-flashing against sin and sinners (Deut. xxix. 28; 2 Chron. xxviii. 13; Isa. xlii. 9; Jer. xxi. 5; Zeph. i. 18; Zech. vii. 12). Christ did not view it as of small moment (Luke xxi. 23; xxii. 22). Reason does not warrant the idea that it will be slight and easy to bear, it being the anger of a great and holy God.

IV. SLOW AS TO MANIFESTATION. It does not spring forth readily. Scripture distinctly testifies that God is slow to anger (ver. 3). 1. *Jehovah himself claimed that such was his character*, (1) when he spake to the people at Mount Sinai (Exod. xx. 6); and (2) when he declared his Name to Moses (Exod. xxxiv. 6). 2. *The Bible throughout concedes to him this character.* Moses (Numb. xiv. 18), David (Ps. lxxxvi. 15), Jonah (iv. 2), Micah (vii. 18), Nehemiah (ix. 17), alike proclaim it. In the New Testament, Paul (Rom. ix. 22) and Peter (2 Pet. iii. 9, 15) entertain the same idea. 3. *Experience sufficiently confirms the Divine claim and the Scripture representation.* The providential treatment of the world, of the antediluvian race, of Israel and Judah, of Nineveh and Babylon, of unbelievers in Christendom and of idolaters in heathendom, —the best evidence that God is not willing that any should perish.

V. CERTAIN AS TO INCIDENCE. 1. *His character such as to demand this.* "He will by no means clear the guilty." If he did he would contradict the representations of his character, falsify his word, and endanger his government. Hence his long-suffering cannot arise from any secret sympathy which he has with sin, but must spring solely from his own inherent mercifulness. 2. *His power sufficient to secure this.* If Jehovah is slow to anger, this proceeds not from any defect in his ability to execute wrath upon his adversaries. He is of great power—a truth explicitly set forth in Scripture (Gen. xviii. 14; Exod. xv. 11; Deut. vii. 21; Job ix. 4; Ps. lxxxix. 8, etc.), and amplified and illustrated by Nahum, who depicts that power in a threefold way. (1) By its character as supernatural. "The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet" (ver. 3). As such it is mysterious, violent, and swift, inscrutable as to origin, immeasurable as to vehemence, incalculable as to velocity. (2) By its effects as irresistible. Nothing can stand before it; not the most uncontrollable element in nature, the sea, which with its dashing billows and moaning waters is to the human mind a striking emblem of power. "He rebuketh the sea and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers" (ver. 4)—an allusion to the drying up of the Red Sea and of the Jordan for the Israelites to pass over (Exod. xiv. 22; Josh. iii. 17). Jehovah's supremacy over the sea a frequent theme with Scripture writers (Job

ix. 8; xxxviii. 8, 11; Ps. xxix. 3; lxxv. 7; lxxiv. 15; Isa. xlv. 27; li. 10). Not the freshest and most vigorous, of which Bashan, Carmel, and Lebanon are cited as examples—these languish and fade, their beauty decaying and their fruitfulness departing when he directs against them the fury of his wrathful power (ver. 4; cf. Ps. cvii. 34). Not the most solid and stable, the mountains, the hills, the earth, the world, all of which quake, melt, and burn at his presence (ver. 5; cf. Ps. lxxviii. 8; Micah i. 4; Isa. lxiv. 1). Not the most exalted and wise, the living creatures that dwell upon the surface of the globe, beasts and men, both of which are upheaved with terror before the manifestations of Jehovah's power (Joel i. 18, 20; Hos. iv. 3; Ps. lxxv. 8).

APPLICATION. "Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?" (ver. 6).

Vers. 7, 8.—Consolation in God. I. IN HIS LOVE. "The Lord is good." 1. *Revealed in his Word.* (1) Made known to Moses (Exod. xxxiii. 19; xxxiv. 6); (2) proclaimed by David (Ps. lli. 1; c. 5; cxix. 68); (3) announced by Jeremiah (Lam. iii. 25); (4) confirmed by Christ (Matt. xix. 17). 2. *Attested by his works.* (1) In creation, God having made the earth to be an abode of happiness for innumerable myriads of creatures: "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord" (Ps. xxxiii. 5). (2) In providence, by his being good unto all (Ps. cxlv. 9), and making all things work together for good to his people (Rom. viii. 28). (3) In grace, by the gift of his Son to be man's Redeemer (Rom. viii. 32; 2 Cor. ix. 15), and by the various blessings of salvation he for Christ's sake bestows upon them—pardon, peace, adoption, holiness, light, strength, life, heaven. 3. *Experienced by his saints.* From the beginning of time downwards, good men have been partakers of, and delighted to bear testimony to, the goodness of God, saying, like David, "The Lord is my Shepherd," etc. (Ps. xxiii. 1); "He hath dealt bountifully with me" (Ps. xlii. 6); confessing, like Solomon, "There hath not failed one word of all his good promise" (1 Kings viii. 56); acknowledging, like Jacob, "He hath fed me all my life long unto this day" (Gen. xlviii. 15). 4. *Illustrated by his Son.* The highest, clearest, and fullest evidence that God is good was furnished by Jesus Christ, who was good in himself (John x. 11), and went about continually doing good (Acts x. 38).

II. IN HIS POWER. "He is a Stronghold in the day of trouble." 1. *Accessible.* (1) To all troubled ones, amongst his believing people (Ps. xli. 1; Prov. xiv. 26; Isa. xxv. 4), and amongst mankind generally, if they care to avail themselves of it (Ps. xci. 9). (2) From every quarter of the globe, from every rank and condition of society. Jehovah the God, not of the Jew only, but also of the Gentile (Rom. iii. 29); not of the rich and learned and outwardly virtuous, to the exclusion of the poor, ignorant, and degraded, nor of these to the disadvantage of those—with him is no respect of persons (2 Chron. xix. 7; Rom. ii. 11; Eph. vi. 9; Col. iii. 25). (3) In every form of calamity—in the day of national adversity, such as had often befallen Israel undivided (Exod. xiv. 10; Judg. vi. 1, 2; x. 9; 1 Sam. iv. 2), and Judah in separation (2 Chron. xiv. 9; xx. 1; xxxii. 1), and such as was soon to threaten the latter again, if not from the Assyrian, from the Babylonian power; in the day of domestic tribulation, such as overtook Job (i. 13—19), David (2 Sam. xv.—xviii.), Jacob (Gen. xlii. 36), Jairus (Matt. ix. 18), the centurion (Luke vii. 2), the widow of Nain (Luke vii. 12), the nobleman (John iv. 46), and the household of Bethany (John xi. 1); in the day of personal affliction, which may be either spiritual like the distress which fell on David (Ps. xxxviii. 3), or material like that which overtook Lot (Gen. xix. 29), bodily like that which struck Hezekiah (Isa. xxxii. 1), or mental like that which crushed Jeremiah (ix. 1), occasional like that which happened to Manasseh (2 Chron. xxxiii. 12), or perpetual like that which was the lot of Paul (2 Cor. iv. 10). 2. *Impregnable.* This inevitable, considering what kind of a fortress it is—Divine, and by what munitions it is guarded, the royal battalion of the Divine attributes, by Jehovah's omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, faithfulness, wisdom, holiness, love. Against this manifestly no weapon can prevail. "Mine omnipotency shall be your guard. I am God Almighty, your Almighty Protector, your Almighty Benefactor. What though your enemies are many? More are they that are with you than they that are against you; for I am with you. What though they are mighty? they are not almighty," etc. (Alleine's 'Heaven Opened,' pp. 256, 257). 3. *Sufficient.* Every

succour the soul needs in its day of trouble is found in God, and found completely—for the soul's guilt, pardon (Isa. i. 16; xliii. 25); for its pollution, cleansing (Ezek. xxxvi. 25); for its anxiety, peace (Isa. xxvii. 3; Matt. xi. 28); for its weakness, strength (Isa. xlv. 24); for its darkness, light (Ps. cxviii. 27; 1 Pet. ii. 9; 1 John i. 5); for its death, life (Isa. xxv. 8; Rom. iv. 17).

III. IN HIS KNOWLEDGE. "He knoweth them that put their trust in him." He knoweth them: 1. *Collectively*. All that belong to the body of his believing people he exactly and always knows, so that he can think and speak of them as his people (Isa. xxxii. 18; 2 Tim. ii. 19), as Christ does of those who are his (John x. 14). 2. *Individually*. Not in the mass merely, but separately and singly, he knows them (2 Sam. vii. 20; Ps. cxxxix. 1; 1 Cor. viii. 3, Heb. iv. 13), as Christ also calls his own sheep by name (John x. 3). 3. *Thoroughly*. (1) Their characters—seeing that he searches the heart (1 Kings viii. 39; Jer. xvii. 10; Ps. cxxxix. 2; Luke xvi. 15; Acts i. 24; xv. 8; 1 Thess. ii. 4). Hence he can never err as to their persons. (2) Their conditions—since nothing can be hid from him, neither person (Jer. xxiii. 24; Hos. v. 3) nor thing (Ps. cxxxix. 15; Jer. xvi. 17), but both alike are manifest in his sight (Heb. iv. 13). Hence he can never mistake as to their circumstances, but must always understand precisely what they need. 4. *Efficiently*. Different from the wicked, whom he knows afar off (Ps. cxxxviii. 6), i.e. as persons estranged from and hostile to him elf, them that put their trust in him he knows appreciatively and helpfully, so as to love, cherish, protect, and assist them. "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly"—to their persons to love them, to their characters to admire them, to their wants to supply them, to their souls to save them.

CONCLUSION. Note: 1. The characters of those for whom this consolation exists—they put their trust in God. Remark upon the simplicity and efficacy of faith. 2. The evil fate of them who, being destitute of faith, are his enemies—they shall be destroyed by an overrunning flood, their habitations swept away, their persons engulfed, their hopes disappointed, their projects defeated, their ambitions scattered to the winds; they shall be pursued by (or into) darkness (see next homily).

Ver. 8.—*Pursued by* (Authorized Version), *into* (Revised Version), *darkness*. I. A WOEFUL FATE. 1. *The picture*. That of a defeated enemy pursued by a victorious general who comes up behind his foes like the shades of night upon a wearied and dispirited traveller stumbling forward upon an uncertain and perilous way, as Abraham fell upon the kings by night and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobab (Gen. xiv. 15); or, who drives them on before him into the gloom of night, where they encounter unforeseen dangers and perish, as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah did when chased by Chedorlaomer's troops (Gen. xiv. 10). 2. *The interpretation*. The defeated enemy is the sinner; the pursuing conqueror is either darkness, meaning those calamities which God has ordained to follow sin, or God himself, by whom the sinner shall be chased into such disastrous overthrow. In either case, with darkness behind or darkness before—and, in reality, it is both behind and before—the condition of God's enemy is pitiful indeed.

II. A CERTAIN DOOM. Pursued by or into darkness. There is no "peradventure" about the lot of the ungodly. What is here predicted is not contingent, but absolute; not what ought to be merely, or what may be only, but what shall be. 1. *God's Word hath declared it*. "The wicked shall be silent in darkness," etc. (1 Sam. ii. 9); "The eyes of the wicked shall fail," etc. (Job xi. 20); "He shall be driven from light into darkness" (Job xviii. 18); "Let their way be darkness and slippery places" (Ps. xxxv. 6); "The candle of the wicked shall be put out" (Prov. xxiv. 20); "The children of the kingdom [who have become God's enemies] will be cast into outer darkness," etc. (Matt. viii. 12)—"And the Scripture cannot be broken" (John x. 35). 2. *God's character requires it*. If his love and mercy make it sure that none who return to him will be rejected (Isa. lv. 7; Jer. iii. 22; Hos. xiv. 4), his holiness and justice render it equally imperative that the impenitent and unbelieving, the rebellious and disobedient, should be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of God and from the glory of his power (Rom. i. 18; 1 Cor. vi. 9; 1 Pet. iii. 12). 3. *Sin itself enures it*. Every action that a man performs carries in its own bosom its reward

or punishment. "The wages of sin is death," just as certainly as "the fruit of holiness" is "everlasting life" (Rom. vi. 21—23).

III. A JUST RETRIBUTION. To be pursued by or into darkness is a fitting lot for those who in their lifetime have loved the darkness rather than the light. 1. *The law of moral retribution demands that this shall be so.* "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" (Gal. vi. 7). He that walks in darkness here cannot hope to walk in light yonder; he who does the deeds of darkness on earth will not likely begin to do deeds of light in heaven. 2. *The character of the wicked makes it certain that this shall be so.* No being can act otherwise than in accordance with its nature. Mere change of place suffices not to alter one's nature. No reason to think that passing from one form of existence to another will effect any radical transmutation of one's being. Hence they who have died in darkness will (in all probability) continue to dwell in darkness.

LESSONS. 1. Forsake sin. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." 2. Follow holiness. "Walk as children of the light."

Vers. 9—14.—*A wicked counsellor.* I. His PERSON. 1. *The Assyrian power.* Represented in Hezekiah's reign by Sennacherib; in Manasseh's (Nahum's time) by Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal; in each successive reign by the ruling sovereign. 2. *The unbelieving world.* Of this Assyria was now the symbol, as in former times Egypt had been, as in later days Rome was (John xv. 18; Jas. iv. 4). 3. *The unrenewed heart.* The carnal mind is enmity against God (Rom. viii. 7).

II. His CHARACTER. 1. *Powerful.* The Assyrian in Nahum's age was "in full strength" (ver. 12), a well-organized and firmly knit confederacy like "tangled thorns" (ver. 10), which were dangerous to touch, and a multitudinous people (ver. 12) in comparison with which Judah was but a handful. The same elements of power coexist in the unbelieving world—force (Eph. ii. 2), order (Eph. vi. 12), numbers (1 John v. 19)—in comparison with which the Church of God is weak, disunited, and small. The individual transgressor also not unfrequently exhibits an energy, a determination, and a capacity to enlist others upon his side which are wanting in the followers of God and Christ. 2. *Self-reliant.* Like drunkards drenched in drink (ver. 10), the Assyrians were foolishly confident, and believed themselves to be invincible. In like manner, the unbelieving world in general and the individual sinner in particular, are of opinion that they are more than sufficient to cope with any form of calamity that may assail them, and to ensure their own safety against any foe, bodily or ghostly, earthly or unearthly, human or Divine. 3. *Vile.* (1) The Assyrian court was notorious for its gluttony and revelry, especially in the days of Assurbanipal. The world also runs to strange excess of riot in eating and drinking (Rom. xiii. 13; 1 Pet. iv. 4). (2) The Assyrian people were worshippers of idols (ver. 14); and the world of to-day has its idols before which it delights to prostrate itself and present homage. (3) The Assyrian kings were tyrannical, cruel, and oppressive; and so also is the world.

III. His DESIGNS. 1. *Evil.* "He counselleth wickedness" (ver. 11)—in particular oppression of the people of Jehovah (ver. 13). Such was the aim of Assyria towards Judah; such is the aim of the world towards the Church; and of the unbeliever towards the believer. 2. *Impious.* His wicked counsels are also directed "against the Lord" (vers. 9, 11). This was the spirit of Assyria as represented by Rabshakeh in the time of Hezekiah (2 Kings xviii. 28—35; 2 Chron. xxxii. 11—17; Isa. xxxvi. 7, 14, 15, 18—20; xxxvii. 10—13); and of Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentile world, and the unbelieving Jews in the days of Christ (Ps. ii. 1; Acts iv. 25—28); and is the spirit still of the unrenewed heart (Rom. viii. 7). 3. *Vain.* The fruits of a corrupt "imagination" (vers. 9, 11), they will prove idle and worthless. Assyria's schemes for the subjugation of Judah came to nought; so resulted in defeat those of Herod and of Pilate, of the Jews and of the Gentiles against the holy Child Jesus; and so will terminate in shame those of wicked men generally against the truth.

IV. His DOOM. 1. *Certain.* The decree had gone forth against Assyria when Nahum spoke. "The Lord hath given commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy seed be sown" (ver. 14). A similar decree has gone forth against the ungodly world (2 Pet. iii. 7; 1 John ii. 15—17), and against unbelievers as individuals

(Phil. iii. 19; 1 Thess. i. 9). 2. *Complete.* Of Nineveh Jehovah was to make "a full end," so that no second affliction should be required to destroy them (Calvin, Hitzig), or should be able to proceed from them (Keil, Fausset) against Judah (ver. 9); the Assyrians were to be "destroyed utterly as dry stubble" (ver. 10), "to be cut down and pass away," so that Jehovah should no more (at least by their hand) afflict his people (ver. 12); the royal house was to come to an end, no more of that name being sown (ver. 14); the very divinities of Assyria and Nineveh were to be exterminated (ver. 14). More complete ruin was inconceivable; so will all the enemies of God and Christ be utterly destroyed (Jer. xii. 17; Ps. xxxvii. 38; Matt. xxi. 41; 2 Pet. ii. 12).

LESSONS. 1. The danger of forming designs against either God or his people. 2. The wisdom of taking warning in time before it is too late. 3. The certainty that, when God begins the work of judgment, he will also make an end.

Ver. 15.—*Glad tidings for God's people.* I. THE DESTRUCTION OF A POWERFUL FOE. 1. *The historical allusion.* The "wicked one" whom Nahum represents as "utterly cut off" was the power of Assyria, whose certain and complete annihilation he has just predicted (ver. 14), and now depicts as accomplished. 2. *The spiritual application.* Capable of being applied to every deliverance wrought by Jehovah for Judah, in particular to her deliverance from Babylonian captivity, it is specially true of that emancipation which was wrought for mankind sinners by the destruction of the Church's greatest foe, the prince of the power of the air, over whom Christ triumphed through his cross. This the first note of the gospel message that Christ hath destroyed death, and him that hath the power of death, the devil (Heb. ii. 14).

II. THE PROCLAMATION OF A BLESSED PEACE. 1. *The scene depicted.* The prophet represents heralds as appearing on the mountains encircling Jerusalem with the joyous announcement that the ancient and terrible enemy she feared was overthrown, and could no more invade her land or oppress her people, and that henceforth she might dismiss all anxiety and be at peace. 2. *The sense intended.* The prophet wished to convey the thought that when once the power of Assyria was broken there would be no cause of alarm—that Judah might rest at ease, and prosecute her national career without fear of being disturbed by hostile invasion. 3. *The symbol interpreted.* As the destruction of Nineveh meant peace for Judah, so the overthrow of Satan and the powers of darkness means peace for God's believing people. This the second note of the gospel message. After the work of redemption the publication of peace (Acts x. 36; Eph. ii. 14—17). As Judah's duty was to behold the peace-messengers upon the mountains of Judah, and to believe their message, so the duty of the New Testament Church is to recognize him whom God hath sent, and to receive his gospel of peace.

III. AN INVITATION TO A JOYOUS FEAST. 1. *The feasts referred to.* These were the three principal feasts enjoined upon the Hebrew Church by Moses—the Feast of the Passover, commemorative of the nation's deliverance from Egypt; the Feast of Harvest, in which the firstfruits of the field were presented to the Lord; and the Feast of Ingathering, when the labours of the year were happily concluded by the safe storing of the well-filled sheaves. In addition were other feasts which need not now be mentioned. The above-named three were pre-eminently glad some in their causes and their forms. They gave expression to the nation's thankful joy in thinking of the Divine mercifulness, the Divine faithfulness, and the Divine goodness—first, in sparing them and making them a nation; next, in faithfully keeping with them his covenant of seed-time and harvest; and, thirdly, in making such abundant provision for their wants, of all which they had been made partakers. Hence they fitly stood as types of the great feast of salvation to which God's believing people are invited in consequence of Christ's atoning and redeeming work, and in which God's mercy, faithfulness, and goodness are expressed—that feast of fat things full of marrow, and of wines on the lees well refined, of which Isaiah speaks (xxv. 6), that feast to which Christ alluded in his parables of the wedding banquet (Matt. xxii. 2) and of the great supper (Luke xiv. 16), and that feast which is symbolized in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. v. 8). 2. *The invitation given.* (1) To whom addressed? To Judah, God's ancient people; and, while in one sense the overtures of the gospel are extended to all, in another they belong only to them who believe and are God's people through faith in Christ Jesus. (2) On what based? Not on any merit or good works on the part of Judah,

as e.g. on Judah's prowess in defeating her ancient enemy, but solely on the fact that Jehovah had done so; and the people of God in the Church of Christ are invited to participate in the joyous banquet of salvation, and to celebrate their New Testament feast, not because of any worthiness in themselves, or because of any share they have had in overthrowing their arch-foe (since they have had none), but exclusively because their adversary hath been destroyed for them—because God's right hand alone hath gotten him the victory (Ps. xcvi. 1).

IV. A SUMMONS TO A PLEASANT DUTY. 1. A *becoming* duty. The payment of Judah's vows meant her performance of the engagements she had come under to be faithful and obedient to Jehovah, observing his worship, and keeping his commandments. To do this had been her duty from the first, though she had often failed in it; to return to it now after experiencing Jehovah's mercy was in the highest degree proper. 2. A *necessary* duty. Without this Judah would not be truly grateful for her deliverance, her outward observance would be insincere and hypocritical, and her inner life would be practically unchanged. So the highest evidence a soul can give of its thankfulness for Divine mercy, of its own heartfelt sincerity, and of its genuine conversion and regeneration; is obedience. 3. An *agreeable* duty. What should be easier or more delightful than service which springs from love? So to gracious souls God's commandments are not grievous, and hearts constrained by the love of Christ find that his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

Learn: 1. The possibility of extracting gospel truths from Old Testament Scriptures. 2. The clearer light which shines in the Christian records concerning God's gracious work of redemption. 3. The larger responsibilities that rest upon such as have experienced the salvation of Christ.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The messenger of judgment.* Notice here—

I. THE MESSENGER: HIS PERSONALITY. "Nahum the Elkoshite." 1. *His name.* "Nahum," signifying "Consolation;" and whilst this scarcely accords with the character of his mission as the proclaimer of Divine judgments, yet, interspersed with the heavy tidings concerning Nineveh, we have here very tender and consolatory words addressed by him to his own afflicted nation (vers. 7, 12, 13—15). 2. *His birthplace.* He was "the Elkoshite," a native of Elkosh, a village of Galilee. This has been questioned, and a tradition has been appealed to representing that he belonged to the Captivity, and was born at Alcosh, a town near Mosul. It has been urged, however, that much of the phraseology he employs, together with certain familiar references to places, connects him unmistakably with North Palestine.

II. THE CHARACTER OF HIS MESSAGE. "The burden of Nineveh." 1. It was a message to be delivered to a heathen nation. Like the message of Jonah, to which it has been fittingly described as being "the complement and the counterpart," it indicates that God holds wider relations with mankind than the Jews were prepared to admit; and that all nations and peoples lie within the range of his providence and power. 2. It was a message full of dark forebodings. It told of impending judgment and of national destruction and desolation. The sombre announcements were unrelieved even by a single word of hope being addressed to the guilty nation. The Ninevites had previously recognized the Divine righteousness, and upon their repentance had experienced the Divine clemency; but this had been followed by relapse into the grossest iniquity, and there remained now only the experience of the threatened ruin—the nation should be "utterly cut off." "The burden of Nineveh" was also the burden of Nahum. His few words recorded here addressed to his own people are sufficient to indicate that he was a man of refined susceptibilities; and to such a man his commission must have been indeed oppressive. Yet he would not shrink, but would faithfully fulfil his trust. Whilst the mercy and love of God should be the constant theme of the modern teacher, yet the great and solemn fact of his retributive justice must not be ignored. There is to be declared "all the counsel of God" (Acts xx. 27).

III. THE DIVINE AUTHORITY WITH WHICH HE WAS INVESTED. A plain man unfolding such teachings respecting a mighty heathen power might well be required to

furnish his credentials. And we have his authority expressed in the words, "the vision of Nahum." A Divine insight had been imparted unto him; there had been given him "visions and revelations of the Lord," and of his terrible doings about to be wrought. Such apprehension of spiritual realities is absolutely essential in order to constitute any man a messenger of God to his age (1 Cor. ii. 10—16; 1 Pet. i. 12; 1 John iv. 14).

IV. THE PERMANENT RECORD OF HIS SOLEMN TEACHING. "The book of the vision," etc. (ver. 1). This is the only form in which mental thoughts and conceptions can be lastingly perpetuated. The matchless works of the great masters in painting, sculpture, and architecture, which have excited the admiration of the whole world, can have but a limited existence; no copy equal to the originals can be made; and in the waste and wear of time these must inevitably pass away; whereas the literary productions of men of genius will continue to live on; for time does not impair that art by which books are reproduced and the circle of their influence extended. The Bible is a collection of books; and the remarkable unity combined with progressiveness traceable therein furnish a very convincing evidence of its Divine origin. Written prophecy forms a most important feature in this development of truth. It was not only necessary that the prophets should labour (as they did so earnestly) to maintain religion amongst the people who had been chosen of God and separated to his praise, but also that, as the work of prophecy advanced, there should be indicated and recorded how that the Lord was working among the nations, Hebrew and heathen alike, and bringing about the fulfilment of his all-wise and gracious purposes. And viewed under this aspect, "the book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite" fills an important niche, whilst its grave words of admonition and warning may well lead evil-doers to reflection and penitence, and its occasional words of hope to the pious and God-fearing may serve, in troublous times, to keep their hearts in quietness and assurance.—S. D. H.

Vers. 2—6.—*The Divine vengeance.* In engaging in work for God, the worker must not be unmindful of the terrible consequences resulting from despising the riches of Divine mercy and grace. There is, assuredly, such a thing as retribution following a course of alienation from God's ways. It must be so. The very love of God renders the punishment of the ungodly absolutely essential. Objectors sometimes point to the scriptural teaching concerning the future of the impenitent as indicating that the God of the Bible is unlovely and severe. But surely, where there is love there will also be found regard for justice. There is a mawkish sentimentalism about the teaching which dwells upon the love of God to the exclusion of all regard for his rectoral character. There is much of this teaching prevalent to-day. It is the recoil from extreme Calvinism, and, as is usual in such cases, the very opposite extreme is reached. It is impossible to indicate the extent to which the intense sense of God possessed by the Reformer of Geneva gave strength to his work; and let God be realized by us as "infinite Justice, infinite Love, and infinite Truth, blended in one indivisible ray of whitest light," and the thought of his all-embracing sovereignty and wise and perfect administration will be found full of comfort and inspiration to our hearts. And so long as he is righteous, sin, unrepented of and unabandoned, must be followed by bitter results; and hence, whilst joyfully proclaiming "the acceptable year of the Lord," we must also declare the coming of "the day of vengeance of our God." In these verses—

I. LIGHT IS CAST UPON THE NATURE OF THE DIVINE VENGEANCE. Our conceptions of the Divine Being are sometimes assisted by our ascribing to him certain characteristics belonging to the children of men. Analogy, however, in this direction must not be pressed too far, or we may be led to form very erroneous views concerning our God. We have in these verses a case in point. Nothing is more strongly to be condemned in men than the cherishing by them of the spirit of jealousy and of vengeance; yet this is here ascribed to God. "The Lord is jealous, and the Lord avengeth," etc. (ver. 2). But then "jealousy" and "vengeance" mean something very different when applied to man from what is intended when the same terms are used in reference to God. By jealousy on the part of man we understand envy, but by the same word in reference to God we are reminded of his regard for the maintenance of truth, his holy concern for the upholding of righteousness. And by vengeance on the part of man we understand revenge, a determination that satisfaction shall be given for the injury we

consider has been done to us; whereas the same word as applied to God carries with it no such idea of vindictiveness, but simply a pure desire that the cause of justice and rectitude may be established and secure complete vindication. Since this brief book of prophecy has almost exclusive reference to the Divine judgments to fall upon the Assyrians, it is all-important that we clearly understand at the outset that Divine vengeance has absolutely no malice in it, and is ever exercised in the maintenance of righteousness. This is indicated in the next verse in three particulars (ver. 3). 1. *The Divine slowness.* "The Lord is slow to anger." Vindictiveness will not brook delay; human vengeance reckons with its victims at the earliest moment; revenge burns; passion rages; but the Divine vengeance delays, that perchance, through penitence, the blow may not be required to fall. 2. *The restraining of Divine power.* Man, cherishing the spirit of vindictiveness, sometimes lingers because conscious of his want of power to inflict the penalty; but God "great in power" (ver. 3) restrains his might, holds back his avenging hand, that "space for repentance" may be given, and the fact be made manifest that he "desires not the death of the wicked." 3. *The Divine concern for the maintenance of his pure Law.* "And will not at all acquit the wicked" (ver. 3). His vengeance is not vindictive, but is exercised in order that the supremacy of his holy Law may be asserted. He has graciously made provision for the forgiveness of sin and the salvation of transgressors from condemnation (Rom. viii. 1), and they who wilfully persist in iniquity must bear the consequences, which will light upon them, not because God is vindictive, but because the honour of his pure Law must be sustained.

II. THIS ASPECT OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER IS SET FORTH IN GRAPHIC IMAGERY. (Vers. 3—6.) For sublimity and grandeur this passage stands unrivalled. The Divine vengeance is presented to us here: 1. *In its irresistibility.* Like the whirlwind, it sweeps everything before it (ver. 3). 2. *In its terribleness.* In vivid symbolical language all nature is represented as full of terror at the Divine manifestations (ver. 5). 3. *In its destructiveness.* Desolation is brought about—the sea and the rivers are dried up at the rebuke of the Lord; the rich pastures of Bashan, the beautiful gardens of Carmel, and the fragrant flowers and fruitful vines and stately trees of Lebanon languish (ver. 4); as a devouring fire this vengeance consumes in every direction (vers. 5, 6); yea, so mighty is it that the very rocks crumble to pieces when it is put forth (ver. 6).

III. THIS VIEW OF OUR GOD IS PRESSED HOME UPON OUR HEARTS BY EARNEST INQUIRY. "Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?" (ver. 6). The design of the questions is to quicken conscience. They contain and suggest the answers. Humbled in the very dust of self-abasement, we cry, "Enter not into judgment with thy servants, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps. cxliii. 2).—S. D. H.

Ver. 7.—*The Divine goodness.* "The Lord is good." The word "good" is used here in the sense of the desire to promote happiness. The prophet affirms that "the Lord" possesses this disposition—that whilst he is powerful he exerts this power in saving, not in destroying, "judgment" being "his strange work;" that whilst his presence fills all space, and his omniscient eye penetrates all, he is concerned, in his watchfulness, that none of the creatures he has formed should lack the blessings his bounteous hand has to bestow; and that as he is eternal in his duration, so the streams of his bounty shall ever continue to flow. "The Lord is good." This inspiring truth was revealed even from the earliest times, and is inscribed in Scripture upon every page. Abram in the vision by night (Gen. xv.), Jacob in his weary wanderings (Gen. xxviii. 10—22), and Moses in "the holy mount" (Exod. xxxiii. 19), were alike favoured with special revelations of it. The very thought of God thus woke up within the psalmist the faculty of song, and led him to strike his lyre and to sing with holy fervour, "Thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive" (Ps. lxxxvi. 5); "They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness," etc. (Ps. cxlv. 7); "Ob, taste and see," etc. (Ps. xxxiv. 8). And prophets unite with psalmists in bearing this testimony (Jer. xxxiii. 11; Isa. lxiii. 7). Very different was the conception formed by the heathen. We think of the tyranny, caprice, and revenge supposed to characterize heathen deities, the acts of cruelty ascribed to them, the impurity of heathen rites, and the wearisomeness of heathen penances, and we rejoice that the voice from heaven has

spoken unto us, and that the truth which heathen worshippers did not know has been so clearly revealed to us in the bright assurance, "The Lord is good." "The Lord is good." Nature, with her ten thousand voices, bears emphatic testimony here. Benevolence marks all the operations of the Creator's hands. All his works declare his goodness. The majestic sun, the full-orbed moon, the stars countless in number and sparkling in the vault of heaven, the refreshing and fertilizing shower, the gentle breeze, the woods re-echoing with the notes of little songsters, the varied landscape, the carpeted earth, the tinted flowers, all seem to speak and to say, "The Lord is good." "O Lord, how excellent is thy Name in all the earth!" (Ps. viii. 1); "O Lord, how manifold," etc. (Ps. civ. 24). "The Lord is good." As in creation so in providence, the same testimony is borne. Specially is this so in the Divine dealings with man, supplying his wants, ministering to his necessities, scattering blessings in his path, and daily, yea, hourly, sustaining and preserving him from peril and danger. His goodness, too, is seen in that he is "kind even to the unthankful," and bestows his favours not only upon "the just" but also upon "the unjust," sustaining even those who live in rebellion against him. Nor does the fact that whilst the ungodly often seem to "prosper in their way," "waters of a full cup are wrung out to his people," militate against the declaration of this text; for God's providence takes into account the *entire welfare* of his servants, and adverse scenes may be necessary in order to the promotion of this; and, the discipline accomplished, deliverance shall be theirs, whilst the arm of the oppressor shall be broken (vers. 12, 13). "The Lord is good." This truth, impressed upon the pages of the Old Testament, receives its highest exemplification in the records of the New. In him whose advent prophets predicted, and whose work was shadowed forth in type and symbol, and in the free redemption he has wrought; in the seeking and self-sacrificing love and the compassionate mercy and grace of God as thus expressed, we see the noblest, purest, brightest token that "the Lord is good." In this Divine goodness, ever watchful to guard us; almighty, and hence equal to every emergency of our life; immutable too, and therefore an unfailing dependence amidst the mutations and fluctuations of our earthly lot,—let us rest with unswerving trust, until at length, every bond sundered, we, as "the ransomed of the Lord, come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon our heads," there with adoring gratitude to reflect upon the memory of his great goodness, and to praise him for his mercy and grace and love for evermore.—S. D. H.

Ver. 7.—*God our Stronghold.* Great, indeed, is the honour sustained by the man who fulfils the mission of being a comforter to others, who is enabled to minister to sorrowing and stricken ones, who watches with them in their Gethsemanes, and by his gentle words and tender sympathy imparts consolation to their wounded hearts. "I dwelt as a king in the army; as *one that comforteth the mourners*" (Job xxix. 25). No service makes a greater demand upon a man than this, yet he has an abundant reward for the self-sacrifice involved, in beholding the objects of his regard no longer in "ashes," but raised out of the dust and made comely; no longer with disfigured countenance through grief, but radiant with joy; no longer arrayed in gloom, but clad in the beautiful garments worn on festal days (Isa. lxi. 2, 3). Nahum, whilst the minister of condemnation to the Ninevites, was also the minister of consolation to his own people in their sadness and sorrow. Only a few of his words to Israel are recorded, but they are words full of consolation and hope. Here he pointed to God as the Stronghold of his servants. "He is a Stronghold in the day of trouble" (ver. 7). We have here—

I. A COMMON UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE. "Trouble." Man is born to this. Trials arise; conflicts must be engaged in; the cares and anxieties of life press; hopes are frustrated; injustice triumphs; slander blights; sickness, disease, death, prevail; our best and dearest pass away from our view; graves are opened; the tears fall fast; and immunity from all this is granted to none, *each* must pass through dark experiences and encounter adverse influences: this is the discipline of life.

"In this vain world the days are not all fair;

To suffer is the work we have to do;

And every one has got a cross to bear,

And every one some secret heart-ache too."

II. A DEEP INWARD NEED ARISING OUT OF THIS EXPERIENCE. It is implied here that man circumstanced thus needs help. He knows not how to bear the ills of life unaided and alone. He who has to face the pitiless storm needs to be robed to resist the stress of adverse weather, and he who has to confront the foe requires to be armour-clad. This need of the sorrowing heart cannot be supplied by earthly sources. The world's cheer then comes to the man like songs to a heavy heart, and he has no taste for its music. Scepticism can cast no bow of promise across the cloud; whilst human philosophy may counsel the cherishing of the spirit of indifference, but which under the pressure it is impossible to cultivate.

III. THIS NEED AMPLY MET IN GOD. "He is a Stronghold in the day of trouble." The figure is a very striking one. There stands the castle with its thick walls and buttresses and its brave defenders ready to resist any attack. The foes attempt a landing, and the inhabitants, old and young, hasten to the fortress. The drawbridge is lifted, the moat is filled with water, and all are safely lodged in the stronghold, and in the day of visitation are securely guarded and safely kept. Even thus is it with the good in "the day of trouble." So David cried, "Thou hast been a Shelter for me and a Strong Tower from the enemy" (Ps. lxi. 3, 4). God was his "Light and his Salvation" (Ps. xxvii. 1), his "Pavilion" (Ps. xxvii. 5), the Solace of his every grief as well as the Centre of his every joy. He loved him, he trusted him, he knew that the dearest experience in life is the experience of God's love and care. So Hezekiah and his people when threatened by Sennacherib. The Assyrian army gathered in all its strength around "the city of God," and Jerusalem became as a mountain shaken by the swelling of the sea, portions of which were crumbling and falling through the violence of the waves, and the whole of which seemed ready to be borne entirely away; yet the king and his subjects were calm and tranquil; they committed their cause to "the Strong One," and rested in his protection, and cried with holy fervour, "God is our Refuge and Strength," etc. (Isa. xxxvi.; xxxvii.; Ps. xli.). And let us only realize that Jehovah is to us a living Presence, the Source of our inspiration, the Strength of our hearts and our abiding Portion, and we shall give to the winds all craven fear, and in our darkest seasons shall sing—

"A sure Stronghold our God is he,
A timely Shield and Weapon;
Our Help he'll be, and set us free
From every ill can happen.
And were the world with devils filled,
All eager to devour us,
Our souls to fear shall little yield,
They cannot overpower us."

S. D. H.

Ver. 7.—*The Divine regard for trusting hearts.* "And he knoweth them that trust in him." Something more than mere acquaintance is involved here; the meaning undoubtedly is that he intimately and lovingly regards those who commit themselves and their way unto him, and will tenderly care for them and promote their weal; yea, still more, even that he knows and cares thus for such *personally and individually*, not overlooking any of them in the multitude, but regarding thus each and every such trusting heart.

I. THIS TRUTH ADMITS OF AMPLE CONFIRMATION. There is something very wonderful in this thought. Is it not almost past conception that he who has the direction of all worlds dependent upon him, and whose dominions are so vast, should look upon his servants in this small world of ours, separately and with loving regard, and should interest himself in our personal concerns? So too, awed and humbled as we stand in the midst of the vast and mighty works of God, we feel impelled to cry, "When I consider thy heavens," etc. (Ps. viii. 3). Yet that it is so is abundantly confirmed in the teachings of Scripture. 1. *See this truth taught in type.* Call to remembrance the breastplate of the Jewish high priest, that splendid embroidered cloth which covered his breast, and in which were set precious stones bearing the names of the tribes of Israel. And did not those precious stones, worn so near the heart of the high priest, symbolize the truth that all sincere servants of God are dear

unto him; that he not only bears them up in his arms with an almighty strength, but bears them also upon his heart with the most tender affection? 2. *See this truth taught in prophecy.* It is therein declared that there is nothing so impossible as that God should forget his trusting children. "Zion said, The Lord hath forgotten me, and my Lord hath forsaken me" (Isa. xlix. 14, 15). And in response to this fear the Lord declared that this could never be, and that his love and care are even more enduring than that of mothers. "Can a woman," etc.? (Isa. xlix. 15); "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands" (Isa. xlix. 16). Undying remembrance surely! The name is inscribed there, never to be obliterated, a ceaseless memorial before his face. 3. *The New Testament unites with the Old* in bearing this bright testimony; for does not Christ, as the good Shepherd, declare that "he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out"? do we not read also the assurance, "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim. ii. 19)? yea, is it not even affirmed that this Divine knowledge and care respecting the good shall be perpetuated evermore (Rev. vii. 15—17; xxi. 3, 4)?

II. *THIS TRUTH IS CALCULATED TO EXERT A STRENGTHENING AND STIMULATING INFLUENCE.* This thought, if more intensely realized by us, would prove helpful in many ways. 1. *It would render us less dependent than we are upon human supports.* What over-anxiety is felt by us at times in reference to the success of our plans and projects, or for the continuance to us of those in whom our prosperity, humanly speaking, centres! But if we grasped fully the assurance here expressed, we should be led to depend less upon earthly sources and more upon him who has loved us with an everlasting love; who, though unseen by us, ever encompasses our path, and who, in the season of their deepest extremity, will guide and strengthen all who stay themselves on him. 2. *It would give increased reality to the sacred exercise of prayer.* We too often draw nigh unto God as though we were seeking One who, because he is invisible, is necessarily at an infinite distance from us, and who may or may not regard our cry, and perhaps it is not too much to say that we sometimes draw nigh without any distinct apprehension of the Being to whom we profess to come, and whose aid we invoke; but then we should indeed feel prayer to be a reality and not a merely formal exercise, and by such intimate and hallowed communion should renew our spiritual strength. 3. *It would strengthen and aid us in our conflicts with sin.* In this strife we sometimes suffer defeat; and in our endeavours after the Christian character and life we are painfully conscious at seasons of failure. How cheering in such circumstances is the thought that all our aspirations after truth and purity and goodness are known unto our God; that he is acquainted with all the circumstances of our case; that he is conscious we have not designedly strayed from him; and that he follows us, with loving regard, in all our wanderings, with a view to bringing us back to his fold!—S. D. H.

Vers. 8—15.—*Antagonism to God and his rule.* Nahum doubtless prophesied during the reign of Hezekiah, and shortly after the defeat of Sennacherib by the destroying angel of the Lord (Isa. xxxvii. 36). That memorable event, it would appear, was present to his mind and is referred to in these verses, although his thoughts were also carried on to the future and to the complete and final overthrow of the Assyrian power in the destruction of the capital, and which forms the theme of the succeeding chapters. The latter part of this first chapter may be regarded as introductory to the description to be given of the ruin of Nineveh; and in the mind of the seer, as he wrote these verses, the events which had recently transpired and darker events yet to come were associated together. The significance of the conflicts waged by Sennacherib against Hezekiah lies very materially in the fact that his enterprises were designedly antagonistic to the *God of the Hebrews*. It is not simply an ambitious sovereign seeking to extend his dominions and to spread his conquests that is presented to us here, but a mortal man, invested with regal honour, resolved upon measuring his strength with that of the Supreme Ruler. The historical records we possess bearing upon the career of this Assyrian king present him to us as one who thought he could "outwit Divine wisdom, and conquer omnipotence itself" (2 Kings xix. 10—13; Isa. xxxvi. 13—20); and viewed thus they become suggestive to us of important teachings bearing upon that moral antagonism to God and his authority

which unhappily prevails in every age. Concerning this opposition to the Most High and his rule, note—

I. ANTAGONISM TO GOD HAS ITS ORIGIN IN A DEPRAVED HEART. Evil thoughts and vain imaginings, self-sufficiency and self-conceit, revellings and drunkenness, all betoken an evil heart, and these are here associated with the action of Assyria. "For thou art vile" (ver. 14); "a wicked counsellor" (ver. 11), etc. So in every age. Men with hearts alienated from all that is true and right desire not the knowledge of his ways, and say unto him, "Depart from us;" and "they set themselves against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and let us cast away their cords from us" (Ps. ii. 2, 3).

II. ANTAGONISM TO GOD REVEALS ITSELF OPENLY IN THE ACTIVE OPERATIONS OF EVIL MEN. As here: 1. Unprincipled leaders are forthcoming (ver. 11). 2. Combinations are formed. "Though they be entire, and likewise many" (ver. 12); "While they be folden together" (ver. 10). 3. Plots are conceived. "They imagine evil against the Lord" (ver. 11). 4. Mischief is wrought. "The yoke" of Assyria was upon Judah, and because of the threatened invasion the hearts of the good Hezekiah and his subjects failed, and were in sore distress. The Assyrians were as "thorns" to Judah (ver. 10). And so evil men, antagonistic to God and to the principles of his rule, are ever a blight and a curse.

III. ANTAGONISM TO GOD CAN ONLY END IN DEFEAT AND DISHONOUR. In the case of Assyria this discomfiture was: 1. *Divinely inflicted*. "I will make thy grave" (ver. 14). 2. *Sudden*—so far as the proud, vaunting Sennacherib and his hosts were concerned (Isa. xxxvii. 36). 3. *Complete*. "He will make an utter end" (ver. 9). 4. *Permanent*. "The Lord hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown" (ver. 14). "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might" (Judg. v. 31).—S. D. H.

Vers. 8—15.—*Spiritual redemption symbolized*. The expression in ver. 11, "a wicked counsellor," is rendered in the margin "counsellor of Belial." "Belial" is used in the Old Testament to indicate sensual profligacy (Judg. xix. 22; xxii. 13; 1 Sam. ii. 12); and in the New Testament as a synonym for Satan (2 Cor. vi. 15). The term was here (ver. 11) applied to Sennacherib; and the deliverance of Judah from the vauntings and oppressions of this mighty and evil Assyrian monarch described in these verses (8—15) may be taken as serving to illustrate the spiritual deliverance of men. There is thus suggested—

I. DELIVERANCE FROM SERVITUDE. Assyria had been a bitter scourge to Judah. Through the action of his predecessors, Hezekiah found himself the vassal of this heathen power, and his attempts to free himself from the yoke had only resulted in his fetters being fastened the more securely; until now, by Divine interposition, the power of the oppressor was broken (ver. 13). So sin yielded to becomes a tyranny. It gains an ever-increasing power over its subjects. The fetters of habit become forged about them that they cannot release themselves. There is no slavery like that of sin—only the grace of God can sunder the fetters and free us from the galling yoke; but "made free" thus, we become "free indeed" (John viii. 34—36).

II. DELIVERANCE FROM SORROW. "Affliction shall not rise up the second time" (ver. 9); "Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more" (ver. 12). The promise was conditional. The people humbled themselves before God in penitence, and it was implied that they should not be afflicted again if they continued in God's ways. In this they failed—the reformation proved but partial; still, God never afflicted them again through Assyria. So suffering is disciplinary, and "made free from sin" there accompanies this deliverance from sorrow. The character of life's trials become changed to the good; they are not looked upon as harsh inflictions, but as lovingly designed by the All-wise and All-gracious.

III. DELIVERANCE RESULTING IN PRIVILEGE. "O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows" (ver. 16). Whilst under the yoke of Assyria, there had been the restriction of their religious privileges, but now these could be renewed and enjoyed without restraint, and the ransomed of the Lord could return to Zion with songs, and pay their vows unto the Lord, and keep the sacred festivals. Spiritual freedom is

with a view to holy and joyous service. The Emancipator becomes enthroned in the hearts of the enfranchised; they love him supremely; his service is their delight; they become bound to him in loving loyalty and devotion for ever.

IV. DELIVERANCE PROCLAIMED IN THE SPIRIT OF HOLY GLADNESS. (Ver. 15.) Let the countenance be lighted up with joy as the announcement of the "good tidings" is made. With a glad heart let the proclamation be published that, through the abounding mercy and grace of God, it is possible for sinful men to become delivered from condemnation and freed from the slavery of sinful habit, and to soar to that higher and holier realm where God is, and to exchange the miserable chains of evil for those golden fetters which only bind to the holy and the heavenly. There can be no more exalted or joyous service than that engaged in by the man who stands upon the mountains ringing this great bell, that, guided by its sound, the imperilled traveller may make his way across the snowy wastes, to find in Christ a sure and safe retreat from the storm and tempest. "Behold upon the mountains," etc. (ver. 16; Isa. xl. 9).—S. D. H.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Great sins bringing great ruin.* "The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies." But little is known of Nahum, whose name signifies "Comfort." He was a native of Elkosh; generally supposed to be a Galilean village. He lived probably in or about the year B.C. 650. The burden of his prophecy is the destruction of Nineveh, which destruction was predicted by Jonah a century before. Nineveh was destroyed about fifty years after this prophecy was uttered, and so complete was its overthrow that the very site where it stood is a matter of conjecture. The prophecy, though divided into three chapters, is a continuous poem of unrivalled spirit and sublimity, and admirable for the elegance of its imagery. "The third chapter is a very striking description of a siege—the rattle of the war-chariot, the gleam of the sword, the trench filled with corpses, the ferocity of the successful invaders, the panic of the defeated, the vain attempts to rebuild the crumbling battlements, final overthrow and ruin." The opening words suggest two remarks.

I. THAT THE GREAT SINS OF A PEOPLE MUST EVER BRING UPON THEM GREAT RUIN. The population of Nineveh was pre-eminently wicked. It is represented in the Scriptures as a "bloody city," a "city full of lies and robberies;" its savage brutality to captives is portrayed in its own monuments, and the Hebrew prophets dwell upon its impious haughtiness and ruthless fierceness (Isa. x. 7, 8). In this book we have its "burden," that is, its sentence, its doom; and the doom is terrible beyond description. It is ever so. Great sins bring great ruin. It was so with the antediluvians, with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was so with the Jews in the time of Titus. Thirty-seven years after the crucifixion of our Lord, the Roman general, with a numerous army, laid siege to their city, and converted it into a scene of the greatest horrors ever witnessed on this earth. The principle of moral causation and the eternal justice of the universe demand that wherever there is sin there shall be suffering; and in proportion to the amount of sin shall be the amount of suffering. "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

II. THAT THE GREAT RUIN THAT COMES UPON GREAT SINNERS PRESENTS GOD TO THE "VISION" OF MAN AS TERRIBLY INDIGNANT. "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies." The passions of man are here ascribed to God. In this form of speech the Eternal Spirit is often represented in the Bible as having feet, hands, ears, mouth; but as he has none of these, neither has he any of these passions. It is only when terrible anguish comes upon the sinner that God appears to the observer as indignant. The God here was the God who only appeared in the "vision" of Nahum—the God as he appeared to a man of limited capacity and imperfect character. Jesus alone saw the absolute God. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." The God of Jesus of Nazareth had no jealousy, no vengeance, no fury. He was love. "Fury is not in me, saith the Lord" (Isa. xxvii. 4). If God has anger,

it is the anger of principle, not passion—the anger of love, not malevolence. It is indeed but another form of love: love opposing and crushing whatever is repugnant to the virtue and the happiness of the universe.

CONCLUSION. Beware of sin. Ruin must follow it. “Be sure your sins will find you out.”—D. T.

Vers. 3.—*The patience of God.* “The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.” These words suggest two thoughts concerning God’s patience.

I. HIS PATIENCE ALWAYS IMPLIES GREAT POWER. “The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power.” This is a remarkable expression. It seems as if the prophet meant, God is “slow to anger” because he is “great in power;” if he had less power he would be less patient. A man may be “slow to anger,” slow to deal out vengeance, because he lacks power to do so. But God is “slow to anger” because he has abundance of power. In order to see the power revealed in his forbearance towards sinners in this world, think of four things. 1. *His exquisite sensibility.* There are some men “slow to anger” because they have not the susceptibility of feeling an insult or offence; their patience, such as it is, is nothing but a natural stoicism. Many men are lauded for their calmness under insults, who are rather to be pitied for their natural insensibility; or denounced for their moral callousness. But the great God is ineffably sensitive. He is sensibility itself. He is love. He feels everything. Every immoral act vibrates, so to speak, on his heart-chord; and yet he is “slow to anger.” 2. *His abhorrence of sin.* It is the “abominable thing” which he emphatically hates. His whole nature revolts from it. He feels that it is antagonism to his will and to the order and well-being of the universe. 3. *His provocation by the world.* Multiply the sins of each man in one day by the countless millions of men that populate the globe; then you will have some conception of the provocation that this God of exquisite sensibility, of an ineffable hatred to sin, receives every day from this planet. One insult often sets man’s blood ablaze. Surely, if all the patience of all the angels in heaven were to be embodied in one personality, and that personality were entrusted with the government of this world for one day, before the clock struck the hour of midnight he would set the globe in flames. 4. *His right to do whatever he pleases.* He could show his anger if he pleased, at any time, anywhere, or anyhow. He is absolutely irresponsible. He has no one to fear. When men feel anger there are many reasons to prevent them from showing it; but he has no such reason. How great, then, must be his “power” in holding back his anger! His power of self-control is infinite. “He is slow to anger, and of great power.” “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. iii. 9).

II. HIS PATIENCE PRECLUDES NOT THE PUNISHMENT OF THE IMPENITENT. “And will not at all acquit the wicked.” That is, the impenitent wicked. However wicked a man is, if he repents he will be acquitted. “Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts,” etc. (Isa. lv. 7). 1. To “acquit” the impenitent would be an *infraction of his law*. He has bound suffering to sin by a law as strong and as inviolable as that which binds the planets to the sun. “The wages of sin is death;” “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Sin leads to ruin: this is a law. 2. To “acquit” the impenitent would be a *violation of his word*. “The wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God;” “Unless ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;” “I will laugh at your calamities, and mock when your fear cometh.” 3. To “acquit” the impenitent would be to *break the harmony of his universe*. If inveterate rebels and incorrigible sinners were acquitted, what an impulse there would be given in God’s moral empire to anarchy and rebellion!

CONCLUSION. Abuse not the patience of God; nay, avail yourselves of it. While he forbears, and because he forbears, repent! “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom. ii. 4).—D. T.

Vers. 3—6.—*God’s power.* “The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it

dry, and drieth up all the rivers," etc. Here is a description of God's power unrivalled in its sublimity and soul-stirring force. "Power belongeth unto God." It is absolute, inexhaustible, ever and everywhere operative. "He fainteth not, neither is weary." His power is here presented in two aspects.

I. AS OPERATING IRRESISTIBLY IN NATURE. 1. *It works in the air.* "The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." He is in the "whirlwind" and in the "storm," and has his way in the clouds. As men walk on the dust of the earth, he walketh upon the clouds of heaven. He creates the whirlwind and the storm; he controls the whirlwind and the storm; he uses the whirlwind and the storm. "He maketh the clouds his chariot, and rideth upon the wings of the wind." He awakes the tornado and simoom, he forges the thunderbolts, and he kindles the lightnings. 2. *It works in the sea.* "He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers." There is undoubtedly an allusion to the Red Sea and the Jordan. "He holdeth the winds in his fists, and the waters in the hollow of his hands." His "way is in the sea," and his "path in the great waters." The billows that rise into mountains, as well as the smallest wavelets that come rippling softly to the shore, are the creatures of his power and the servants of his will. 3. *It works on the earth.* "Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth." No spots in Palestine were more fruitful than these three; they abounded in vigorous vegetation and majestic forests. But their life and their growth depended on the results of God's power. All the blades in the fields, all the trees in the forest, would languish and wither did his power cease to operate. Nor is his power less active in the inorganic parts of the world. "The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein." "He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth: he toucheth the hills, and they smoke." He piles up the mountains, and again makes them a plain; he kindles the volcanoes and quenches them at his pleasure. God's power is seen in all the phenomena of the material world. How graphically and beautifully is this presented in Ps. civ.! The fact that God's power is ever acting in the material universe is: (1) The most *philosophic* explanation of all its phenomena. The men who ascribe all the operations of nature to what they call laws fail to satisfy my intellect. For what are those laws? (2) The most *hallowing* aspect of the world we live in. God is in all. "How dreadful is this place! it is none other than the house of God." Walk the earth with reverence. "Take your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

II. AS IRRESISTIBLY OPPOSED TO THE WICKED. "Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him." The mightiest rocks are but as pebbles in his hands. "He taketh up the isles as a very little thing; he weigheth the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance" (Isa. xl. 12, 15). His anger, as we have said, is his determination to crush the wrong; and there is no power in the universe that can thwart him in this. Who can stand before this? Were all the creatures in the universe to stand up against it, the attempt would be as feeble and as futile as the attempt of a child to turn back the advancing tides with his little spade. Sinner, why attempt to oppose him? You must submit, either against your will or by your will. If you continue to resist, the former is a necessity. He will break you in pieces like a potter's vessel. The latter is your duty and your interest. Fall down in penitence before him, yield yourselves to his service, acquiesce in his will, and you are saved.—D. T.

Vers. 7, 8.—*Opposite types of human character, and opposite lines of Divine procedure.* "The Lord is good, a Stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him. But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies." The previous verses were introductory to the subject which the prophet now takes up, namely, the safe keeping of the Jews by Jehovah, in view of the tremendous attack the King of Nineveh was about making on their country and their city, and also to announce the terrible doom of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian foe. In these verses there is a very striking and significant contrast (1) between the characters of men, and (2) between the lines of Divine procedure in relation to them. Here we have—

I. TWO OPPOSITE TYPES OF HUMAN CHARACTER. 1. *Here we have the friends of God.* There is here a twofold description of them. (1) "They trust in him." This is the universal character of the good in all ages. Instead of placing their chief confidence in the ever-changing creature, they centre it in the immutable Creator. They trust his love ever to provide for them, his wisdom as their infallible guide, and his power as their strength and their shield. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord." (2) He acknowledges them. "And he knoweth." This means that he recognizes them as his loyal subjects and loving children, his people. In Hos. xiii. 5 he saith, "I did know thee in the wilderness," which means, "I did acknowledge thee, and took care of thee!" The words imply the cognizance of special sympathy with the just. He knows them; they are always in his mind, his heart. "Can a mother forget her sucking child," etc.? 2. *Here we have the enemies of God.* "Darkness shall pursue his enemies." The men who misrepresent our characters, oppose our expressed wishes, seek to undermine our influence, and are ever in association with those who are opposed to us—such men, whatever may be their professions of regard and friendship, we are bound to regard as enemies. Is it not so with men in relation to God? Those who pursue a course of life directly opposite to the moral laws of Heaven, whatever they may say, are his enemies. How numerous are God's enemies! These two great classes comprehend the human race to-day. The race may be divided into very numerous classes on certain adventitious principles, but on *moral* grounds there are but two—God's friends and God's enemies.

II. TWO OPPOSITE LINES OF DIVINE PROCEDURE. God's procedure is very different towards these two opposite classes of men. 1. *He affords protection to the one.* When the hosts of Sennacherib were approaching Jerusalem, Hezekiah the king, under Divine inspiration, said to the people, "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah King of Judah" (2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8). Thus it is ever. God is always the Refuge and Strength of his people in times of tribulation. As a Refuge, he is: (1) *Ever accessible.* However suddenly the storm may come, the refuge is at your side, the door is open. "I will never leave thee," etc. (2) *Ever secure.* The sanctuary once entered, no injury can follow. Amidst the most violent convulsions of nature, the wreck of worlds, the shatterings of the universe, there is no endangering the security of those who avail themselves of this refuge. 2. *He sends destruction to the other.* "But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies." The image of a flood which breaks through every barrier is not unfrequently used in the Bible to represent overwhelming armies of invasion. The primary allusion here, no doubt, is to the way which Nineveh was captured by means of the Medes and Babylonians. A flood in the river, we are told, broke down the wall for twenty furlongs. The rolling tide burst its barriers, bore away the defences of the city, and opened an easy and unexpected way for the invading armies. On all finally impenitent men destruction must come as irresistibly as a flood. The destruction, however, of existence, conscience, or moral obligations would be the destruction of all that would make existence worth having.

CONCLUSION. The grand question of every man is—How do I stand in relation to God? If I am his friend, his procedure is in my favour, it guards me and blesses me every step. If I am his enemy, his procedure is not in my favour, not because he changes, but because I put myself against him, and it must be my ruin if I change not. As he proceeds in his beneficent and undeviating march, he showers blessings on the good, and miseries on the evil, and this for ever.—D. T.

Vers. 9, 10.—*Sin.* "What do ye imagine against the Lord? He will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time. For while they be folded together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." These words suggest a few thoughts concerning sin.

I. THE ESSENCE OF SIN IS SUGGESTED: IT IS HOSTILITY TO GOD. It is something directed against the Lord: it is opposition to the laws, purposes, spirit of God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither

indeed can be" (Rom. viii. 7). It involves: 1. The basest *ingratitude*; for to him we owe everything. 2. The greatest *injustice*; for he has supreme claims to our devotion and obedience. 3. *Impious presumption*. Frail worms raising their heads against the Infinite!

II. THE SEAT OF SIN IS SUGGESTED: IT IS IN THE MIND. "What do ye imagine against the Lord?" Sin is not language, however bad; not actions, however apparently wicked. Words and deeds are no more sin than branches are the sap of the tree. They are the mere effects and expression of sin. Sin is in the mind—in the deep, secret, mute thoughts of the heart. God's legislation extends to thought, reaches it in the profoundest abyss. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. xxiii. 7). Christ, in his sermon on the mount, taught this. Adultery, robbery, murder, are all perpetrated on the arena of the heart. How necessary the prayer, "Create within us clean hearts, O God"!

III. THE FOLLY OF SIN IS SUGGESTED: IT IS OPPOSITION TO OMNIPOTENCE. "What do ye imagine against the Lord? He will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up a second time." "How mad is your attempt, O Assyrians, to resist so powerful a God! What can ye do against such an Adversary, successful though ye have been against all other adversaries? Ye *imagine* ye have to do merely with mortals, and with a weak people, and that so you will gain an easy victory; but you have to encounter God, the Protector of his people" (Fausset). In opposing him: 1. *He will completely ruin you.* "He will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time." The literal meaning of this is that the overthrow of Sennacherib's host was so complete that Judah's affliction caused by this invasion would never be repeated. The man who opposes God will be utterly ruined. 2. *He will completely ruin you, whatever the kind of resistance you may offer.* "For while they be folded together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." You may be combined like a bundle of thorns, offering resistance; you may have all the daring and temerity of drunkards, albeit you "shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." All this was realized in the destruction of his enemy. Oh the folly of sin! Fighting against God is a mad fight. "What do ye imagine against the Lord," then? Sinners, submit.—D. T.

Vers. 11—14.—*Corrupt kings.* "There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the Lord, a wicked counsellor. Thus saith the Lord; Though they be quiet, and likewise many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass through," etc. These words suggest a few thoughts concerning human kings and kingdoms.

I. HUMAN KINGS ARE SOMETIMES TERRIBLY CORRUPT. "There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the Lord, a wicked counsellor." This evidently means Sennacherib, the King of Nineveh. He was one of the great moral monsters of the world. "He invaded the land of Judah with an immense army, besieged Lachish, and having reduced that city, threatened to invade Jerusalem itself. Hezekiah, dreading his power, sent him an obsequious embassy, and by paying three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold, purchased an inglorious peace. But no sooner had Sennacherib received the money than, disdaining his engagements, he prosecuted the war with as much vigour as if no treaty had been in existence, sending three of his generals and a powerful army to besiege Jerusalem. Being informed that Tirhakah King of Ethiopia joined by the power of Egypt, was advancing to assist Hezekiah, he marched to meet the approaching armies, defeated them in a general engagement, ravaged their country, and returned with the spoil to finish the siege of Jerusalem. Hezekiah, in the extremity of his distress, implored the succour of Heaven; and the insolence and blasphemy of Sennacherib drew upon the Assyrians the vengeance of God. And, in perfect accordance with the prophecy of Isaiah, the sacred historian informs us that the angel of the Lord slew, in one night, one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army." Such is a brief and very partial sketch of this monster. Alas! he is only a type of the vast majority of men who have found their way to thrones! They have been in all ages the chief devils of the world. There are kings that have powers ordained of God; but such kings, and those only, are "a terror to evil-doers and a praise to those that do well." We are commanded

to honour the king; but such a king as this Sennacherib, who can honour? A king, to be honoured, must be honourworthy; he must be just, ruling in the fear of the Lord.

II. CORRUPT KINGS OFTEN RUIN THEIR KINGDOMS. "Though they be quiet, and likewise many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass through. Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more." These words seem to be addressed to Judah concerning the utter destruction that will befall their enemies, and their consequent deliverance from all fear from that quarter. It was here said they should be destroyed: 1. *Notwithstanding their military completeness.* "Though they be quiet." The word "quiet" means *complete*. No doubt the military organization, discipline, and equipment of Sennacherib's mighty army, as he led them up to attack Jerusalem, were as complete as the intelligence, the art, and the circumstances of the age could make them. Notwithstanding this, ruin befell them. 2. *Notwithstanding their numerical force.* "Likewise many." Their numbers were overwhelming, yet how complete their destruction! They were "cut down," and their name ceased. Nineveh has been long since blotted from the earth. The account given of the destruction you have in 2 Kings xix. 35, "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." Then followed, in due course, the complete destruction of Nineveh itself by the forces of the Medes and Babylonians. So utterly was it destroyed, that even the references of classical writers to it are to a city that is long since extinct. It was a wonderful city; it stood, according to the account of some, on an area ten times the size of London; its walls a hundred feet high, and so broad that three chariots could be driven on them abreast. It had fifteen hundred towers, each two hundred feet in height. In 1842 Botta began to excavate, and three years afterwards Layard commenced his interesting and successful explorations. The remains which were discovered by these excavators filled the world with astonishment. "A city, an empire, had risen from the silent slumber of ages; its kings could be numbered, and its tongue mastered; while its history, manners, customs, and dwellings formed an unexpected revelation, wondrous in its variety and fulness." Who brought all this ruin on this grand old city? Sennacherib, a ruthless despot and a bloody warrior, and his successors, as savage as himself. And what cities and empires have been ruined by such men in all ages! Who broke up ancient dynasties? Despots. And in modern times who has brought all the suffering, the disorder, and the spoliation that has befallen France during the last sixty years? Despots. Until despotism is put down, such will continue to be the case.

III. THE RUIN OF CORRUPT KINGDOMS IS A BLESSING TO THE OPPRESSED. "For now will I break his yoke from off thee [that is, 'thee, Judah'], and will burst thy bonds in sunder." "Yoke" here refers to the tribute imposed upon Hezekiah King of Judah by Sennacherib (2 Kings xviii. 14). And so it ever is—when despotism has fallen, the oppressed rise to liberty. What teeming millions of men are groaning, not only in Asiatic countries, but in European countries, under the tyranny of despots! These arrogant, haughty autocracies must fall, as Assyria and other ancient despotisms fell, before the yoke shall be taken from the neck of the oppressed, and their bands burst asunder.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Realize the truth of prophecy.* When Nahum uttered these fearful predictions in relation to Nineveh, Nineveh shone in unabated splendour, and stood in unabated strength; but after a very few generations had passed away the predicted ruin came, and Nineveh has long since been buried in the oblivion of centuries. Have faith in the Word of God. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of his Word shall fail to be accomplished. 2. *Realize the importance of promoting education among the people.* By education I do not mean what is merely technical or scientific, but chiefly moral. The education that teaches the people the sense of personal independency and responsibility, the duty of self-respect, the inalienable right of private judgment, and a liberty of action circumscribed only by the rights of others. It is when such an education as this spreads among the peoples of the world that despotisms will moulder to dust. When men shall know the moral truth, the moral reality, then the truth shall make them free.

"It's coming yet for a' that,
That man to man the world o'er
Shall brithers be for a' that."

D. T.

Ver. 15.—*Three things worthy of note.* "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off." A mighty army has gone up against Nineveh, and so certain it is that it will be utterly destroyed that the prophet speaks of it as past. He has seen the "messenger" upon the mountain proclaiming deliverance to Judah. The "mountains" are those round Jerusalem, on which the hosts of Sennacherib had lately encamped, and the messenger of peace scales the mountains that his welcome presence may be seen. How transporting the message must have been! Sennacherib, the disturber of the nations, is no more, and Jerusalem is delivered. The first clause of this verse is applied in Isa. lii. 7 to the message of peace brought to the world through Jesus Christ. There are three things here worthy of note.

I. **PEACE PROCLAIMED.** "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace." Glorious to the ears of the men of Jerusalem must have been the intelligence that their great enemy was destroyed, that the Assyrian hosts were crushed, and now peace was come. A proclamation of peace is indeed "good tidings." A proclamation of *national* peace is "good tidings." What country that has been engaged in a bloody campaign, in which its commerce has been all but ruined, the flower of its manhood destroyed, and its very existence imperilled, does not hail with rapture the proclamation of peace? But the proclamation of *moral* peace is still more delightful. Paul quotes these words, and applies them to the ministers of the gospel. "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. x. 15). As there is no war so painful, so terrible, as a moral war, the war of a soul with itself, with the moral instincts of the universe, and with the will of its God; so no tidings are so delightful to it as the tidings of peace, peace brought through Jesus Christ, the "peace that passeth all understanding." "My peace I give unto you, . . . not as the world giveth give I unto you."

II. **WORSHIP ENJOINED.** "O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows." "During the Assyrian invasion the inhabitants of Judah were cut off from all access to the metropolis; now they would be at liberty to proceed thither as usual, in order to observe their religious rites, and they are here commanded to do so." Observe: 1. *War disturbs religious observances.* War, which has been called the totality of all evil, is an enemy to the progress of religion. It not merely arrests the march of the cause of truth and godliness, but throws it back. It is said in Acts ix. 31, "Then had the Churches rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." The storm of persecution which Stephen had invoked and Saul aided had abated, and the Christian religion advanced. As peace in nature is the time to cultivate your ground and sow your seed, peace in the nation is the time to promote growth in religion and virtue. 2. *In war men are disposed to make religious vows.* When dangers thicken around, and death seems close at hand, the soul naturally turns to Heaven, and vows that, if life is preserved, it shall be devoted to God. When peace comes they are called upon to "perform" their "vows." But alas! how often are such vows neglected! and we are told (Eccles. v. 5) it is better not to vow, than to vow and not pay. Worship is a duty ever binding.

III. **ENEMIES VANQUISHED.** "For the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off." Here is encouragement. Sennacherib is gone; Nineveh is in desolation. They will "no more pass through thee." The time will come with all good men when their enemies shall be utterly vanquished. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." What a blessed time for the world, when the wicked shall no more "pass through" it! This will be its millennium.

"Peace is the end of all things—tearless peace;
Who by the immovable basis of God's throne
Takes her perpetual stand; and, of herself

Prophetic, lengthens age by age her sceptre.
The world shall yet be subjugate to love,
The final form religion must assume;
Led like a lion, rid with wreathed reins,
In some enchanted island, by a child."

(Bailey.)

D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1--13.—Part II. THE EXECUTION OF THE DECREE; THE DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH DESCRIBED.

Vers. 1--8.—§ 1. *Nineveh shall be besieged, because God is about to exalt his people by taking vengeance on the enemy, whose defence, howsoever formidable, is of no avail.*

Ver. 1.—Nahum addresses Nineveh, and forewarns her of the siege she was about to undergo (see Introduction, § I.). **He that dasheth in pieces; the disperser; qui dispergat** (Vulgate); *ἐμψύων*, "panting" (Septuagint). The mixed army that invested Nineveh is so called from its effect on the inhabitants of the neighbouring lands. Others translate it, "the maul," or "hammer"—an appellation of Cyaxares, which reminds one of Charles Martel and Judas Maccabæus. **Is come up before thy face.** Placing his forces in thy sight, that thou mayest see his power and thine own danger. **Keep the munition.** The prophet urges the Ninevites to guard their fortress well. Some connect this clause with the preceding: "the disperser is come to maintain the siege;" as the Vulgate, *qui custodiat obsidionem*. But the other interpretation is more forcible, and suits the rest of the verse. The LXX., reading differently, gives, *ἐξαιρούμενος* [+ σε, Alex.] *ἐκ θλίψεως*, "one delivered from affliction." **Watch the way,** by which the enemy approaches. **Make thy loins strong.** Gather up thy strength, the loins being regarded as the seat of strength (2 Chron. x. 10; Job xl. 7; Ezek. xxix. 7; 1 Pet. i. 13). So weak, effeminate people were called in Latin *elumbes*, "loinless." **Fortify thy power mightily;** *Ἀνθίστααι τῇ ἰσχύϊ τῇ σόφῃ* (Septuagint). Make yourselves as strong as possible (comp. Amos ii. 14).

Ver. 2.—This ruin shall fall on Nineveh because God is mindful of his chosen people, whom Assyria has oppressed. **Hath turned away.** It should be rendered, *returneth to, or restoreth, bringeth back; reddidit* (Vulgate); Isa. lii. 8; Hos. vi. 11. The excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel. The Lord restores the glory and honour of Jacob, the nation in its political aspect, and

the high privileges of the spiritual Israel, the chosen people of God (comp. Obad. 18). **For.** Asshur is visited because Judah has had its full measure of punishment. The emptiers have emptied them out. The plunderers (the enemy) have plundered the Jews. **And married their vine branches.** The heathen have cut off the members of Israel, the Lord's vineyard. (For the metaphor "vine," comp. Ps. lxxx. 8, etc.; Isa. v.; Jer. xii. 10.) Not only from what is read in the Bible (e.g. 2 Kings xv. 19; xvi. 7, etc.; xvii. 3; xviii. 14), but from the details in the cuneiform inscriptions, we learn that the Assyrians were a constant danger and annoyance to Israel, and harassed continually both the southern and northern provinces.

Ver. 3.—The prophet describes, as though himself an eye-witness, the army advancing against Nineveh. **The shield of his mighty men is made red.** "His heroes" may be either God's heroes, as sent by him to war against the evil city, or those of the "dasher in pieces" of ver. 1. The shields of the early Assyrians were usually circular or oval in shape, formed of wicker-work, with a central boss of wood or metal. In the latest period they were made straight at bottom and rounded only at top (Rawlinson's 'Anc. Mon.,' i. 440). Some bronze shields have been brought to England from Nineveh; these are circular, about two feet and a half in diameter, the rim bending inwards, and forming a deep groove round the edge. The handles are of iron, and fastened by six bosses or nails, the heads of which form an ornament on the outer face of the shield (Layard, 'Discoveries,' p. 194). There were used also in sieges tall oblong shields, sufficient to protect the entire body, constructed of wicker-work or the hides of animals (Bonomi, 'Nineveh and its Discoveries,' p. 320, etc.). The shields are said to be "made red," either because they were really so coloured (though the monuments have not confirmed this opinion), or else because of the polished copper with which they were sometimes covered (Josephus, 'Ant.,' xiii. 12. 5). Septuagint, pointing differently, *πλα δύνασσεως ἀντρῶν ἐξ ἀνθρώπων*, "the arms of their power from among men." Are in scarlet. The word rendered "scarlet" is found nowhere else.

Septuagint, mistaking the word, *ἐν πυρὶ* ("sporting in fire;" Vulgate, *in coccineis*). It is derived from the term applied to the *coccus*, or worm which was used in dyeing to give to cloth a deep scarlet colour (Henderson). Some have seen in the colour of the soldiers' garments an emblem of the Divine wrath of which they were the appointed ministers. This colour was much affected by combatants in old times as in modern days. Professor Edwards quotes Ælian, 'Var. Hist.' vi. 6, "It was necessary to enter into battle clothed in purple, that the colour might denote a certain dignity, and if drops of blood from wounds were sprinkled on it, it became terrible to the enemy" (comp. Xen., 'Cyrup.' i. 3. 2). Red or purple seems to have been the favourite colour of the Medes and Babylonians (Ezek. xxiii. 14), blue or violet that of the Assyrians (Ezek. xxiii. 6; xxviii. 23, etc.) (Orelli). The chariots shall be with flaming torches; literally, *are with fire of steels*; i.e. flash with steel, and so the clause should be translated, as in the Revised Version. Commentators generally refer the description to the steel bosses of the wheels; but the Assyrian chariots (and those of the Medes and Chaldeans were not dissimilar) were conspicuous for shining metal, hung round with gleaming weapons and figures of the heavenly bodies, carrying bright-armed warriors, the horses covered with trappings, which flashed under the sunshine, and fastened to poles of glittering steel. There is no trace in the monuments of chariots armed with scythes, which seem to have been unknown before the time of Cyrus. They are first mentioned in 2 Macc. xiii. 2 (see Livy, xxxvii. 41). The word *peladoi*, translated "torches," is an *ἀπὸ λέγόμενον*. The LXX renders it, *αἱ ἥνλαι*, "the reins," whence Jerome obtained his version, *ignæ habent currum*; but it means, "things made of iron or steel," and by critics uninstructed in monumental discoveries was naturally referred to the scythes with which chariots were armed in later times, instead of to the gleaming metal with which they were adorned. In the day of his preparation. When the Lord marshals the host for battle, as Isa. xiii. 4. The fir trees shall be terribly shaken; i.e. the spears with their fir or cypress shafts are brandished. So Homer often calls the spear "the ash," from the material of which the handle was made (comp. 'Il.' xvi. 143; xxii. 225, etc.). The Septuagint rendering is very far from the present text, *Οἱ ἵπποις θορυβηθήσονται*, "The horsemen shall be thrown into confusion." Nor is the Vulgate any better, *Agitatores consopti sunt*, which is explained to mean that the invaders are so carried away by their courage and fury, that they act as if

intoxicated. "Sensus utique non sperneudus," says a Roman Catholic commentator, "at unum desidero, ut soil. ex verbo ipso fluat"—which is certainly not the case. The text is possibly corrupt, and might be corrected from the Septuagint. Certainly there seems to be no other passage in the Hebrew Scriptures where the metaphor of "cypress" is used for "a spear." After the mention of the chariots, it is not unnatural that the writer should proceed, "and the riders are in active motion," urging their horses with hand and whip and gesture (see Knabenbauer, *in loc.*).

Ver. 4.—The chariots shall rage in the streets. The chariots rave, dash madly (Jer. xvi. 9) about the open ways in the suburbs, or in the plains of the country. The description still appertains to the besiegers, who are so numerous that to the Ninevites, looking from their walls, their chariots seem to dash against one another. They shall seem—their appearance is—like torches. Thus is described the gleaming of the chariots and the armour (see on ver. 3; 1 Macc. vi. 39, "Now when the sun shone upon the shields of gold and brass, the mountains glistened therewith, and shined like lamps of fire").

Ver. 5.—The prophet turns to the Ninevites and their preparations for defence. He shall recount his worthies; he remembers his nobles. The King of Nineveh calls to mind the mighty captains who have often led his armies to victory, and sends them to defend the walls (comp. ch. iii. 18). The LXX, anticipating the next clause, adds here, *καὶ φεύσονται ἡμέρας*, "and they shall flee by day." They shall stumble in their walk. In their fear and haste, or half-drunken, they totter and stumble as they hasten to the walls of the city. The defence shall be prepared; literally, *the covering is prepared*. If this refers to the operations of the Ninevites, it means some kind of breast-work or fascine erected between the towers; but it most probably depicts the sight that meets their eyes from the walls. They see the besiegers bringing up their mantelets and towers. As used by the Assyrians, the machine called "the covering" is either a wooden tower or a wicker mantelet in which was suspended a battering-ram. It stood on four or six wheels, and the larger sort had archers posted in the various stories, both to annoy the enemy and to defend the engine. The rams were provided with lance-headed extremities, and must have rather picked at and loosened the courses of bricks of which the walls were composed than battered them down (see Bonomi, 'Nineveh and its Palaces,' pp. 160, 234, 243, etc.; Layard, 'Nineveh,' ch. v. p. 376, etc., figs. 57, 58). The Septuagint rendering applies rather to

the besieged, Ἐτοιμάσουσι τὰς προφυλάκας αὐτῶν, "They shall prepare their defences."

Ver. 6.—All defence is vain. The prophet describes the last scene. **The gates of the rivers shall be (are) opened.** The simplest explanation of this much-disputed clause is, according to Strauss and others, the following: The gates intended are those adjacent to the streams which encircled the city, and which were therefore the best defended and the hardest to capture. When these were carried, there was no way of escape for the besieged. But, as Rosenmüller remarks, it would have been an act of folly in the enemy to attack just that part of the city which was most strongly defended by nature and art. We are, therefore, induced to take "the gates of the rivers," not literally, but as a metaphorical expression (like "the windows of heaven," Gen. vii. 11; Isa. xxiv. 18) for an overwhelming flood, and to see in this a reference to the fact mentioned by Diod. Sic. (ii. 27), that the capture of Nineveh was owing to a great and unprecedented inundation, which destroyed a large portion of the fortifications, and laid the city open to the enemy. "At the north-west angle of Nineveh," says Professor Rawlinson, "there was a sluice or flood-gate, intended mainly to keep the water of the Khosr-su, which ordinarily filled the city moat, from flowing off too rapidly into the Tigris, but probably intended also to keep back the water of the Tigris, when that stream rose above its common level. A sudden and great rise in the Tigris would necessarily endanger this gate, and if it gave way beneath the pressure, a vast torrent of water would rush up the moat along and against the northern wall, which may have been undermined by its force, and have fallen in" (Rawlinson, 'Ancient Monarchies,' ii. p. 397, edit. 1871). The suggestion that the course of its rivers was diverted, and that the enemy entered the town through the dried channels, has no historical basis. Dr. Pusey explains the term to mean the gates by which the inhabitants had access to the rivers. But these would be well guarded, and the opening of them would not involve the capture of the city, which the expression in the text seems to imply. The LXX. gives, Πύλαι τῶν πόλεων διηνοιχθῆσαν, "The gates of the cities were opened." **The palace shall be (is) dissolved;** or, *melteth away.* Some take this to signify that the hearts of the inhabitants melt with fear, or the royal power vanishes in terror. That the clause is to be taken literally, to denote the destruction of the royal palace by the action of the waters, seems to be negated by the fact that the Assyrian palaces were built on artificial mounds of some thirty or forty feet in elevation, composed of sun-dried bricks united into

a solid mass, and were thus secured from the effects of an inundation (see Bonomi, 'Nineveh and its Discoveries,' p. 129, etc.). There is evidence, too, that fire played a great part in the destruction of the temples and palaces (see note on ch. iii. 13).

Ver. 7.—**And Huzzab.** The Anglican rendering (which has the authority of the Jewish commentators, and is endorsed by Ewald and Rückert) takes *Huzzab* as an appellative, either the name of the Queen of Nineveh, or a symbolical name for Nineveh itself, as Sheshach, Pekod, and Merathaim were for Babylon (see Jer. xxv. 26; l. 21; li. 41; Ezek. xxiii. 23), which was formed or adopted by Nahum for the purpose of describing its character. *Huzzab* may mean "established," "set firm" (Gen. xxviii. 12), and confident in its strength; pual from *natsab*, "to set," "to fix" (Wordsworth). We may dismiss the idea that *Huzzab* is the name of the queen. Such a personage is unknown to history; and there is no reason why she should be mentioned rather than the king; and persons are not introduced by name in prophecy except for some very special reason, as Cyrus (Isa. xlv. 28). The alternative rendering, "it is decreed," adopted by Keil, Pusey, and many modern commentators, is unexampled, and comes in baldly, and not at all according to the prophet's manner. Henderson joins the clause with the preceding, thus: "The palace is dissolved, though firmly established." The Septuagint gives, Ἡ ὑπόστασις ἀπεκαλύφθη, "The hidden treasures are revealed," or, "The foundation is exposed;" Vulgate, *Miles captivus abductus est.* It seems best to take *Huzzab* as an appellative representing either Nineveh or Assyria, as the country between the Upper and Lower Zab (Rawlinson, in 'Dictionary of the Bible'), or as meaning "firm," "bold." Thus Egypt is called *Rahab*, "arrogant" (Isa. xxx. 7); the King of Assyria, *Jareb*, "contentious" (Hos. v. 13); Jerusalem, *Ariel*, "God's lion" (Isa. xxxix. 1). **Shall be led away captive;** better, *is laid bare.* She, the queen of nations, is stripped of her adornments and ignominiously treated. **She shall be brought up.** *She is carried away* into captivity. "Brought up" may mean brought up to judgment, as ch. iii. 5; Isa. xlvii. 2, 3 (Pusey). **Her maids shall lead her;** rather, *her handmaids moan.* The inhabitants of Nineveh, personified as a queen, or the lesser cities of her empire, follow their mistress mourning. **As with the voice of doves** (comp. Isa. xxxviii. 14; lix. 11; Ezek. vii. 16). They shall not only show the outward tokens of sorrow, but shall mourn inwardly in their hearts, as the LXX. renders the whole clause, καθὼς περιστέρας φθγγόμεναι ἐν καρδίαις αὐτῶν, "as doves moaning

in their hearts." Tabering; beating on a tabret. (For smiting the breast in token of sorrow, comp. Luke xviii. 13; xxiii. 48; Homer, 'Il.' xviii. 31, *Χερεὶ δὲ παύσαι Στήθεα πικρὰ ἄγροντο.*)

Ver. 8.—The prophet compares the past and present condition of Nineveh. But **Nineveh is of old like a pool of water; and (or, though) Nineveh hath been like a pool of water all her days.** Others, altering the points in accordance with the Septuagint and Vulgate, translate, "But as for Nineveh, her waters are like a pool of water." This is what she has come to, for "her waters" represent herself. She is compared to a pool or reservoir (Neh. ii. 14; iii. 15) from the multitude of her inhabitants gathered from all parts of the world, and streaming unto her, both as tributary and for commercial purposes (comp. Jer. li. 13; Rev. xvii. 1, 15). **Yet they shall flee away.** In spite of their numbers, the multitudes represented by "the waters" fly before the enemy. In vain the captains cry, **Stand, stand.** They pay no attention. **None shall look back.** No one of the fugitives turns round or gives a thought to anything but his own safety.

Vers. 9—13.—§ 2. *The city is plundered, and henceforth lies waste, in terrible contrast with its former excellency.*

Ver. 9.—The prophet calls on the invaders to come and gather the spoil of the city, which God gives into their hands. **Take ye the spoil.** Fabulous stories are told of the amount of the precious metals stored in Nineveh and Babylon. "Sardanapalus is said to have placed a hundred and fifty golden beds, and as many tables of the same metal, on his funeral pile, besides gold and silver vases and ornaments in enormous quantities, and purple and many-coloured raiments (Athen., lib. xii.). According to Diodorus, the value of the gold taken from the temple of Belus alone by Xerxes amounted to above 7350 Attic talents, or £21,000,000 sterling money" (Layard, 'Nineveh,' ii. 416, etc.; comp. Dan. iii. 1, where the size of the golden image or pillar, sixty cubits high and six cubits broad, shows how plentiful was gold in these countries). Bonomi: "The riches of Nineveh are inexhaustible, her vases and precious furniture are infinite, copper constantly occurs in their weapons, and it is most probable a mixture of it was used in the materials of their tools. They had acquired the art of making glass. . . . The well-known cylinders are a sufficient proof of their skill in engraving gems. Many beautiful specimens of carving in ivory were also discovered. . . . The condition of the ruins is highly corroborative of

the sudden destruction that came upon Nineveh by fire and sword. . . . It is evident from the ruins that both Khorsabad and Nimroud were sacked and then set on fire. Neither Botta nor Layard found any of that store of silver and gold and 'pleasant furniture' which the palaces contained; scarcely anything, even of bronze, escaped the spoiler" ('Nineveh and its Discoveries,' pp. 334, 336). There is none end of the store; Vulgate, *Non finis est divitiarum*; Septuagint, *Οὐκ ἔν περας τοῦ κόσμου αὐτῆς*, "There was no end of her ornament." And glory out of all the pleasant furniture; literally, *vessels of desire*. It is plainer to translate, *There is abundance of all precious furniture.*

Ver. 10.—She is empty, and void, and waste. *Bukahum' bukah, um' bulakah.* The three words are of very similar meaning and sound, and express most forcibly the utter ruin of the city. A Latin commentator has endeavoured to imitate the Hebrew paronomasia by rendering them, "vacuitas, evacuatio, evanidatio"—a translation more ingenious than classical. The paronomasia is better rendered by "vastitas, vastitia, vaonitas," and the German, "leer und ausgeleert und verheert." "Sack and sacking and ransacking" (Gandell). An analogous combination of words is found in Isa. xxiv. 3, 4; xxix. 2, 3; Ezek. xxxiii. 29; Zeph. i. 15. Septuagint, *ἐκταραγμός, καὶ ἀναταραγμός, καὶ ἐκθρασμός*, "thrusting forth and spurning and tumult." The heart melteth. A common expression for fear and despondency (Josh. vii. 5; Isa. xiii. 7; Ezek. xxi. 7). The knees smite together (Dan. v. 6). So in Homer continually, *λύτο γούνατα*. Much pain is in all loins. The anguish as of childbirth. Septuagint, *ὥδινες*, "labour-pains," in contrast with the injunction in ver. 1 (comp. Isa. xiii. 8; xxi. 3; Jer. xxx. 6). Gather blackness (Joel ii. 6); or, *withdraw their colour*; i.e. wax pale. But the Hebrew rather implies that the faces assume a livid hue, like that of coming death. Hence the LXX. renders, *ὡς πύρκαυμα χύτρας*, as the burning of an earthen vessel, which is blackened by the fire; and Jerome, *sicut nigredo ollæ* (comp. Jer. xxx. 6).

Ver. 11.—The prophet asks, as if in consternation at the complete collapse of the great city—Where is the site of Nineveh? **Where is the dwelling (den) of the lions?** The lion is a natural symbol of Assyria, both from that animal's cruel, predatory, ravenous habits, and from its use as the chief national emblem. Nergal, the war-god, has a winged lion with a man's face as his emblem. See the figure in Rawlinson, 'Anc. Mon.,' i. 173, who adds (p. 308) that the lion is accepted as a true type of the people, blood, ravin, and robbery being their

characteristics in the mind of the prophet. The feeding-place of the young lions may mean the subject lands whence they took their prey. And the old lion; rather, *the lioness*. The lion is designated by different names, which may, perhaps, refer to the various satraps and chieftains of the Assyrian kingdom. There are the full-grown male lion, the lioness, the young lion able to seek its own food, and the whelp too young to find its own living. Instead of "the lioness," the LXX., Vulgate, and Syriac, reading differently, give, *τοῦ εἰσελθεῖν, ut ingrederetur*, "that the lion's whelp should enter there." And none made them afraid. They lived in perfect security, without fear or care, irresistible in might (Lev. xvi. 6; Micah iv. 4; Zeph. iii. 13).

Ver. 12.—The figure of the lion is continued, and this verse, in loose apposition to the preceding, may be best explained by continuing the interrogation in thought—Where is now the lion that used to tear in pieces, etc.? The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps. The Assyrian monarch provided for his children and dependents by plundering other nations. His lionesses may mean his wives and concubines. It was the custom both with the Persians and Assyrians to assign towns and provinces to their favourites. Xenophon (*Anab.* i. 4. 10) mentions certain villages as set apart for the girdle of Queen Parysatis. A Lapidé quotes Cicero, *Verr.* ii. 3. 33, "They say that the barbarian kings of the Persians and Syrians [*i.e.* Assyrians]

are wont to have many wives, to whom they assign cities in this fashion—this city is to provide a girdle for her waist, that a necklace, that again to dress her hair; and so they have whole nations, not only privy to their lusts, but also abettors of them" (see Arnold's note on Thucydides, i. 138; comp. 2 Macc. iv. 30).

Ver. 13.—I am against thee. The destruction shall be surely accomplished, because God himself directs it. Literally, *I to thee* (ch. iii. 5; Jer. li. 25; Ezek. xxxviii. 3). The Lord of hosts (*sabaoth*), Lord of the forces of heaven and earth, and therefore omnipotent. *Κύριος παντοκράτωρ* (Septuagint). I will burn her chariots in the smoke. "Chariots" stand for the whole apparatus of war and military power. Septuagint for "chariots" gives *πληθος*, "multitudes." Thy young lions. Thy fighting men, the metaphor being continued. Cut off thy prey. Thou shalt no more be able to pillage other countries. Thy messengers. These are the heralds who carried the king's commands to his lieutenants, or those, like the imperious Rabshakeh (2 Kings xviii. 17, etc.; xix. 23), who summoned nations to surrender, and imposed tributes. "O Nineveh," writes St. Jerome, "thou shalt suffer all that has been spoken. I the Lord will burn to ashes thy chariots, and will cause thy nobles and satraps to be devoured by the sword; never again shalt thou lay countries waste, nor exact tribute, nor will thy emissaries' voice be heard throughout thy provinces."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*A predicted invasion.* I. THE ENEMY DESCRIBED. 1. *His violence.* Nahum calls him "a dasher in pieces" (ver. 1), and represents his warriors as "mighty" and "valiant" (ver. 3)—epithets which apply with fitness and force to the Medo-Babylonian army under Cyaxares and Nabopolassar. 2. *His boldness.* He comes up against Nineveh, not stealthily and under cover of darkness, but openly, pitching his tent opposite the city gates. His fearless attitude was a proof that God was secretly impelling him, using him against Assyria as formerly Assyria had been used against other nations. 3. *His invincibility.* Nineveh may "keep the munition, watch the way, make her loins strong, fortify her power mightily,"—all will be in vain. The onset of this terrible assailant will be practically resistless. Whether irony (Fausset) or poetry (Keil), the meaning is the same, that Nineveh's utmost exertions will not be able to ward off her ruin. 4. *His fierceness.* With crimson-coated soldiers, bearing red-coloured shields and shaking terribly tall spears of fir, and with chariots flashing with the gleam of steel plates, his appearance was fitted to inspire terror (ver. 3). "The chariots of the Assyrians, as we see them on the monuments, glare with shining things made either of iron or steel, battle-axes, bows, arrows, and shields, and all kinds of weapons" (Strauss). 5. *His impetuosity.* The swiftness and the fury of his attack are vividly described (ver. 4). His chariots the prophet represents as raging, driving on madly, through the streets, as crowding the broad spaces in such a fashion as to jostle against and threaten to run down one another, as flashing to and fro like torches, as running hither and thither with the celerity of lightning.

II. THE ATTACK EXPLAINED. 1. *The Assyrian oppression of Israel.* "The

emptiers," i.e. the Assyrians, "have emptied out" the Israelites, and "marred their vine branches." They had done so by their devastation and depopulation of the northern kingdom (2 Kings xvii. 6), and by their repeated invasions of the southern (Isa. x. 5—11; 2 Chron. xxxii. 1). Now the time was come when they themselves should be emptied (ver. 10) and their branches marred (Ezek. xxxi. 12). Jehovah had employed the Assyrian as the rod of his anger to punish Israel and Judah; but he had never concealed his purpose, when this was done, "to punish the fruit of the stout heart of the King of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks" (Isa. x. 12). 2. *The Divine remembrance of Israel.* Having promised never to forget her or finally cast her off (Isa. xlv. 21; xlix. 16; Ps. lxxxix. 33, 34), he had returned to the excellency of Jacob as to the excellency of Israel (Keil), or had brought again the excellency of Jacob as the excellency of Israel (Revised Version). Both renderings are admissible, and both conduct to the same goal. The doom of Nineveh was certain because Jehovah was about to restore Judah to her ideal excellency as "Israel," and this he was to do by himself, returning to her as if she were an ideal Israel.

III. THE RESISTANCE BEGUN. 1. *Suddenly.* Nineveh at length realizes her danger and bethinks herself of her warriors: "He remembereth his worthies" (ver. 5). Assyria had good generals and valiant troops; to these she now turns. 2. *Hastily.* Not a moment is lost. Men and marshals hurry to the wall. No time to trifle when such enemies as Cyaxares and Nabopolassar thunder at the gates. 3. *Vigorously.* The defence (Authorized Version), mantelet (Revised Version), or movable parapet, literally, the covering one, the *testudo* or tortoise (Keil), is prepared—probably "either a movable tower with a battering-ram, consisting of a light framework covered with basket-work, or else a framework without any tower, either with an ornamented covering or simply covered with skins and moving upon four or six wheels" (Keil). 4. *Blindly.* Their energy and haste only lead to confusion: "They stumble in their march." The more haste, the less speed.

IV. THE CONQUEST COMPLETED. 1. *The capture of the city.* This was effected by forcing the gates in the city wall: "The gates of the rivers are opened" (ver. 6). These were the gates leading from the river into the city (Luther, Keil), rather than the dams or sluices through which the waters of the river were admitted into the canals which protected the palace. 2. *The demolition of the palace.* "The palace is dissolved," not by the inundation of water from the river (Fausset), since the palaces were usually "built in the form of terraces upon the tops of hills, either natural or artificial, and could not be flooded with water" (Keil); but by the inrush of enemies against it. The prophet means that "there will be no impediment to hinder the approach of enemies, for all the fortresses will melt away, and that of themselves, as though they were walls of paper, and the stones as though they were water" (Calvin). 3. *The deportation of the queen.* "And Huzzab is uncovered," etc. (ver. 7). This may signify either that the consort of the king is seized, degraded, and borne off into inglorious exile (Ewald), or that Nineveh, personified as a queen, is now covered with shame, and that she who had formerly been established is now swept off into captivity (Keil, Fausset, Calvin). In the former case the handmaids who accompany her, mourning with the voice of doves and beating on their breasts (literally, "hearts") are the ladies of her court; in the latter, they are most probably the inhabitants who bewail the fate of their once famous city and kingdom (Calvin, Keil). 4. *The flight of the inhabitants.* "They," i.e. the masses of the people, "flee away" (ver. 8). (1) Most unexpectedly, since "Nineveh hath been of old like a pool of water," so strong, impregnable, and inaccessible to any foe, as well as so prosperous and flourishing that the thing least to be anticipated was that its inhabitants should flee from it. (2) Most determinedly, however, they do so, giving no heed to the few patriotic men who call upon them to remain. "Stand, stand, they cry; but no one looketh back" (ver. 8). 5. *The spoliation of the treasure.* (1) The quality of the treasure—silver, gold, pleasant furniture. "The Assyrians were celebrated for their skill in working metals. Their mountains furnished a variety of minerals—silver, iron, copper, and lead, and perhaps even gold" (Layard's 'Nineveh,' ii. 415). (2) The quantity of the treasure: "none end of the store." That gold, silver, and precious vessels should have been abundant in Nineveh is sufficiently explained by remembering, in addition to the mines just mentioned, the enormous tribute received and rich spoils carried off from

conquered nations ('Records of the Past,' vol. i. 37, etc., 59, etc.). 6. *The desolation of the scene.* "She is empty, and void, and waste" (ver. 10)—the effect of this description being heightened in Hebrew by the combination of three synonymous and similarly sounding words, *būqāh umebhūqāh umebullāqāh*. Emptied of her population and despoiled of her treasure, she became a total ruin. According to Strabo, when Cyaxares and his allies took the city, they utterly destroyed it (Layard's 'Nineveh,' ii. 159, 204). 7. *The horror of the vanquished.* "The heart melteth and the knees smite together, and anguish is in all loins, and the faces of them all are waxed pale" (ver. 10). "Hence we may learn how foolishly men boast of their courage, while they seem to be like lions; for God can in a moment so melt their hearts that they lose all firmness" (Calvin).

LESSONS. 1. The retributions of Divine providence (ver. 1). The destroyers of others may expect themselves to be destroyed (Isa. xxxiii. 1). 2. The hopelessness of defending one's self against the invasions of Heaven (ver. 1). "Who would set the thorns and briars against me in battle?" (Isa. xxvii. 4; cf. 'Herod,' ix. 16, "Whatever necessarily comes from God, it is impossible for man by any contrivance to turn aside"). 3. The true ideal of a nation's greatness (ver. 2)—the dwelling of Jehovah in her midst (Ps. xlii. 5). 4. The utter vanity of all earthly glory (ver. 8). The world's strength, riches, honours, are all destined to perish (1 John ii. 17). 5. The horrors of the wicked when the terrors of judgment come upon them (ver. 10). "Then shall they say to the mountains and the rocks, Fall on us," etc. (Rev. vi. 16).

Vers. 11—13.—*The parable of the lion's den.* I. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE DEN.

1. *Its site.* Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. (1) Old, extending over centuries at least. (2) Capacious, having caves in it for its prey, and room in it for the lion, lionesses, and lion's whelps to walk about. (3) Strong, surrounded on two sides by water and seemingly impregnable—a secure retreat, in which its inhabiting wild beasts felt themselves safe. 2. *Its occupants.* The lions above referred to. (1) The old lion—the King of Assyria. (2) The lionesses—the queens and concubines of the reigning prince. (3) The lion's whelps, or young lions—his sons, princes, nobles, and warriors. 3. *Its prey.* The spoils of the nations. Syria, Phœnicia, Philistia, Israel, Judah, and even Egypt had felt the might of Assyria and contributed to swell the ravin she had stored in her cities.

II. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE DEN. 1. *Its certainty.* According to Nahum, Jehovah was against Nineveh, and that was enough to secure its overthrow. "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil," etc. (Ps. xxxiv. 16). Besides, his uttered threatening, "I will burn her chariots [i.e. all her military armament] in the smoke," rendered her doom inevitable. The word of Jehovah can as little fail in threatening as in promise. 2. *Its celerity.* So little difficult would be the task to Jehovah, that he would not need fire, but only smoke, to consume the power of Nineveh. "In short, the prophet shows that Nineveh would be, as it were in a moment, reduced to nothing, as soon as it pleased God to avenge its wickedness" (Calvin). 3. *Its completeness.* (1) Her warriors should be destroyed: "The sword shall devour thy young lions." (2) Her spoiliations should cease: "I will cut off thy prey from the earth." (3) Her emissaries should be silent: "The voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard," exacting tribute from the nations thou hast conquered.

Learn: 1. That Jehovah is against sin in nations no less than in individuals. 2. That national wickedness is the certain prelude to national ruin.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*God the Vindicator of the oppressed.* I. THE OPPRESSION OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE BY THE ASSYRIANS. 1. *This is expressed figuratively.* "The emptiers have emptied them out" (ver. 2), had exhausted their resources, as the contents of a vessel poured out until every drain had been withdrawn, so had both Israel and Judah been impoverished by the Assyrians. "And marred their vine branches." Ancient Israel was often described as God's vineyard (Isa. v. 1; Ps. lxxx. 9). This vineyard the foe had ruthlessly invaded, casting down and injuring its fruit-bearing trees. 2. *These*

figurative representations are sustained by historical fact. The more familiar we become with Assyrian history the more do we trace in that vast heathen power the prevalence of the haughty, overbearing spirit. Its rulers and people vainly supposed that national greatness consisted in the possession of might to be used in oppressing other nations and peoples. To be able to depict upon the walls of the palaces of Ninus battle-scenes indicative of military triumph, accompanied by great spoil and cruel chastisement inflicted upon their adversaries, seems to have been their highest ambition. Their whole relationship to Israel and Judah was based upon this principle. The favoured of Heaven, having forsaken their God, and hence lost his protecting care, turned in their exigencies to Assyria for aid, but only to find, in this supposed helper against their foes, a more powerful enemy. In this way the kingdom of Israel was first made tributary to Assyria by Pul (2 Kings xv. 17—20), and, soon after, its tribes were carried away into captivity by Shalmaneser (2 Kings xvii. 3—23), whilst the kingdom of Judah in like manner became compelled to acknowledge the lordship of Tilgath-Pilneser (2 Chron. xxviii. 16—21). Hezekiah sought to cast off the Assyrian yoke, but this only resulted in the nation, in Nahum's time, being brought into circumstances of extreme peril (2 Kings xviii. 13—17), and from which eventually supernatural help alone was able to deliver it (Isa. xxxvii. 36).

II. DIVINE INTERPOSITION PROMISED ON BEHALF OF THE OPPRESSED. (Ver. 2.) Such interposition had in a measure but recently taken place (Isa. xxxvii. 36). "The angel of death" had "breathed in the face of the foe," and had caused "the might of the Gentile" to "melt like snow," and the oppressor to return humbled to his capital (Isa. xxxvii. 37). The time, however, for the complete and final interposition of Heaven had not yet arrived. Still, it *should* come. The seer, in rapt vision beheld it as though it had been then in operation, and for the encouragement of the oppressed he declared that the Divine eye observed all that was being endured, that the Lord Almighty still regarded them with favour (ver. 2), and would yet make them "an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations" (Isa. lx. 15).

III. THIS DIVINE INTERPOSITION EVENTUALLY TO BE EXPERIENCED VIEWED AS CARRYING WITH IT THE ENTIRE OVERTHROW OF THE OPPRESSOR. (Ver. 1.) Asshur should in due course be brought low, and the yoke of bondage should fall from off the necks of the captives. In "the day of visitation:" 1. *Agents should not be wanting to carry out the Divine behests.* The defection of the Assyrian general, the forces of the King of Media, and the overflowing of the Tigris, should all combine to bring about the accomplishment of the Divine purpose; and these forces are here personified as "the dasher in pieces" (ver. 1). 2. *Resistance should be in vain.* They might "keep the munition, watch the ways," etc. (ver. 1), but all to no purpose. The proud power must inevitably fall, and in its overthrow proclamation be made that it is not by means of tyranny and oppression and wrong-doing that any nation can become truly great and lastingly established, but by the prevalence in its midst of liberty, virtue, and righteousness. Nineveh in her downfall

". . . seems to cry aloud
To warn the mighty and instruct the proud
That of the great, neglecting to be just,
Heaven in a moment makes a heap of dust."

S. D. H.

Vers. 3—13.—*The downfall of Nineveh, as illustrative of the Divine and the human elements in revelation.* There are two elements in the Bible, the Divine and the human. God speaks to us in every page, nor does he speak the less emphatically, but all the more so, in that he addresses us through men possessing throbbing hearts, and who were passing through experiences like our own. We honour the volume as being in the highest sense God's Word, nor do we honour it the less in this respect because we rejoice that he has been pleased to make holy men the medium of communicating his will. The account given in these verses of the predicted ruin of Nineveh must be taken as a whole, and in the graphic picture here presented to us we have strikingly illustrated this twofold character of the Scriptures of eternal truth.

I. THE ACCOUNT CONTAINED HERE OF THE PREDICTED OVERTHROW OF NINEVEH SERVES TO ILLUSTRATE THE DIVINE ELEMENT IN REVELATION. Nahum flourished in the

reign of Hezekiah (B.C. 725—696), and Nineveh was destroyed between B.C. 609 and 606). He lived and prophesied thus say a hundred years before the occurrence of the events he so vividly described, and when the Assyrian power was in the zenith of its prosperity. His announcements were very distinct and definite, and by placing these and the records of secular historians given at a subsequent period side by side, we see how minutely the predictions of this seer have been fulfilled, and that hence, in making these, he must have been God's messenger, uttering, not his own thoughts, but those which had been communicated to him by "visions and revelations of the Lord." In ch. i. 10 we read, "For while they be folden together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." The secular historian writes, "While all the Assyrian army were feasting for their former victories, those about Arbaces, being informed by some deserters of the negligence and drunkenness in the camp of the enemies, assaulted them unexpectedly by night, and falling orderly on them disorderly, and prepared on them unprepared, became masters of the camp, and slew many of the soldiers and drove the rest into the city" (Diodorus Siculus, bk. ii. p. 80). In ch. ii. 6 we read, "The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved." The secular historian writes, "There was an oracle among the Assyrians that Nineveh should not be taken till the river became an enemy to the city; and in the third year of the siege, the river, being swollen with continual rains, overflowed part of the city, and broke down the wall for twenty furlongs. Then the king, thinking that the oracle was fulfilled, and the river had become an enemy to the city, built a large funeral pile in the palace, and collecting together all his wealth and his concubines and eunuchs, burnt himself and the palace with them all, and the enemy entered at the breach that the waters had made, and took the city" (Diodorus Siculus, bk. ii. p. 80). In ch. ii. 9 the prophet, as though addressing the adversaries of Nineveh, said, "Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture;" and the same secular historian already quoted informs us that the conquerors carried many talents of gold and silver to Ecbatana, the royal city of the Medes. No language could be more explicit than that in which Nahum predicted the total destruction of the city (ch. ii. 10—13; iii. 7, 15—17). The Prophet Zephaniah used words equally plain (ii. 13—15). Their utterances would have appeared very strange to the Ninevites at the time they were spoken; as strange, indeed, as similar utterances would appear if addressed at the present time to the inhabitants of our own metropolis; but they were true nevertheless, and the facts of history furnish abundant confirmations. For upwards of two thousand years after its overthrow, Nineveh lay buried in the earth. History and tradition indicated its probable site, and the mounds to be found in the supposed districts, and out of which the Turks obtained materials for building purposes, of evident antiquity, invited research; and within a very recent period such research has been carried on, the long-buried palaces of the kings of Assyria have been discovered, huge sculptures have been carefully dug out of the mounds, and the national museums both of France and England are now enriched with these long-lost works of art, testifying not only to the ancient splendour of the Assyrian empire and its capital, but also to the truthfulness of the prophetic records, and to the prophets as speaking and writing under the inspiration of the Almighty, and as being indeed the messengers of him who has said, "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done" (Isa. xli. 9, 10).

II. THE ACCOUNT CONTAINED HERE OF THE PREDICTED OVERTHROW OF NINEVEH SERVES TO ILLUSTRATE THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN REVELATION. Holy Scripture is remarkable in its variety—not variety in purpose, for this is single throughout, but variety in expression. History, prophecy, poetry, parable, proverb, miracle, biography, vision, epistle, are all laid under tribute. As there is a Divine element in the Bible, so also there is a human element therein. Whilst upon the writings of each of its contributors there is unmistakably the impress of the operation of the Spirit of God, there is likewise, throughout the whole, clear indications of the preservation of those natural gifts and endowments which the respective writers possessed. There was no suspension of the powers of the men who were honoured of God in communicating to their fellow-men a knowledge of his will; but rather there was the retention of their

own individual peculiarities and natural qualities, whilst the Divine Spirit operated through these and turned these to the most useful account. Biblical critics are agreed in recognizing "the classic beauty and the finished elegance" of the style of Nahum, and in assigning to this writer a place in the first rank of Hebrew literature. "The variety in his method of presenting ideas discovers much poetic talent in the prophet. The reader of taste and sensibility will be affected by the entire structure of the poem, by the agreeable manner in which the ideas are brought forward, by the flexibility of the expressions, the roundness of his turns, the delicate outlines of his figures, by the strength and delicacy, and the expression of sympathy and greatness, which diffuse themselves over the whole subject" (De Wette's Introduction). "Nahum of all the prophets has the most impassioned style; and in none is found the change of numbers, of persons addressed, and of suffix-relations, with such frequentness and immediateness as in him. At the same time, his language has wonderful energy and picturesque beauty. The painting does not embrace merely single rhythms and groups of words, but whole series; and in connecting his thoughts, he shows, with all his vehemence, great and varied skill" (Kleinert). His description of the siege and fall of Nineveh, contained in this chapter (vers. 3—13), is wonderfully vivid. As we read the account, even at this distant date, the stirring scenes seem to live again, and to pass in review before us. We see the attacking warriors in their scarlet attire and with their chariots armed with sharp instruments of steel (ver. 3), and the defenders of the city, suddenly startled, hastening their preparations, their chariots in the hurry jostling against each other in the streets, and the gallants summoned by the king hastening to the ramparts, which the foe is seeking with battering-rams to cast down (vers. 4, 5). We behold the overflowing of the river, facilitating the advance of the enemy, and paralyzing the people by reason of the popular tradition now seemingly being fulfilled (ver. 6). We witness the inhabitants brought low in shame and dishonour, moaning like a captive woman (ver. 7), or fleeing for their very life in hopelessness and despair, conscious that resistance is vain (ver. 8). We view the spoiling of the city—the conqueror carrying away the gold and the silver to the Median capital, the trophies of victory (ver. 9). Finally, we picture to ourselves the prophets of the Lord gazing upon the waste and desolation, reflecting upon the proud being abased, their offspring cut off, their gains confiscated, their boastful messengers silenced, and ascribing all the terrible reverses thus experienced to the righteous retribution of the Lord of hosts (vers. 10—13); and we feel, as we linger upon the scene thus graphically portrayed, that whilst rejoicing in this volume of revelation as having been given by inspiration of God, and as containing Divine lessons abounding both in encouragement and warning, we may well prize it also even on the lower ground of its literary merit, and heartily rejoice in the infinite variety of human powers and endowments here consecrated to the presentation of the loftiest and grandest spiritual teaching.—S. D. H.

Ver. 13.—*Man incurring the Divine displeasure.* "Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts." This attitude of God towards man—

I. IMPLIES WRONG-DOING ON MAN'S PART. God is not thus adverse to man for naught. "His delights are with the sons of men" (Prov. viii. 31). Sin alienates man from God, and causes God to be righteously displeased with man.

II. INVOLVES MAN IN PRESENT DISTRESS. Man cannot be at ease whilst under the ban of Jehovah. "In his favour is life" (Ps. xxx. 5). Separation from him through sin means disquietude and unrest. "The worst troubler in the world is a wilful heart." "Conscience nakes cowards of us all." "The heart melteth, the knees smite together" (ver. 10).

III. RESULTING IN ULTIMATE RUIN TO SUCH AS WILFULLY PERSIST IN SIN. God is "the Lord of hosts." All power is his. "Who shall stand when he is angry?" (Ps. lxxvi. 7). All have sinned, and hence have incurred the displeasure of him who "is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" but in Christ, whose day the seers saw afar off, God is reconciled to man; so that the distress and ruin indicated can alone result from man refusing to be reconciled unto God.—S. D. H.

Ver. 13 (with ch. i. 15).—*The messengers of Nineveh and the messengers of Zion: a*

comparison. "And the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard" (ver. 13); "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!" (ch. i. 15). Messengers, differing very materially in their character and mission, are referred to in these words. The messengers of Nineveh and the messengers of Zion are alluded to in these passages. A comparison of these respective messengers may prove suggestive and useful in its application to certain developments in these modern times. From the Second Book of Kings and the Second Book of Chronicles we learn that the heralds or messengers of Nineveh cherished the spirit of blasphemy with reference to the God of heaven. The faith of the pious Hebrews consisted in the recognition of the one living and true God, and of his providential care over all his creatures; and it was against this bulwark that the emissaries of Assyria constantly directed their assaults in words foul and filthy (see Rabshakeh's appeal to the Jews, 2 Kings xviii. 33—35; and his letter, 2 Chron. xxxii. 17). The great and distinguishing characteristic of the messengers of Zion was loyalty to the God of heaven. Their feet stood upon the mountains, and their voice proclaimed to the people, "Behold your God!" (Isa. xl. 9); "Thy God reigneth!" (Isa. lii. 7). In the present age there are messengers who boldly declare their non-acceptance of the teaching that recognizes the Divine Being and his working, and who seek to disseminate their views, and in doing so are not particular if they blaspheme the God of heaven. And whilst there are such messengers in the world doing their injurious work, there are also those who are thoroughly loyal to the King of kings, who delight to show forth his praise, to tell the story of his love in the gift and work of Christ, and to seek to draw men in loving obedience to his authority and will. Note certain contrasts, then, suggested; thus—

I. CAPTIVITY IN CONTRAST WITH FREEDOM. The messengers of Nineveh approached Jerusalem, to which Sennacherib was laying siege, but they bore no tidings of liberty. They claimed *full submission*, and declared that even this must be followed by captivity in a strange land (2 Kings xviii. 31, 32). The assurance of ultimate deliverance came from the messengers of the Lord (ch. i. 12, 13). Sin is bondage. Evil passions, habits, desires, are fetters; a life of alienation from the true and the right is a life of hard bondage. Transgressors are slaves. And scepticism has nothing to offer such by way of helping them to escape. The messengers may expatiate to such a one upon the nobleness of virtue, may sound in his ears some wise sayings of sages and philosophers, may remind him of the injury he is inflicting upon himself, and bid him "be a man," and "turn over a new leaf." But he is down; he is conscious of moral inability; he lacks inward strength. Lo! the messengers of Zion come. They tell him of the great Father's unwearied love, the Saviour's obedience unto the death of the cross, the energizing and sanctifying Spirit ready to gird him with all-sufficient strength, the elder Brother who has proved his trials and his tears, and who is prepared to be near him in every season of need as his "strong siding Champion." He feels the tidings to be "good;" is bowed low in penitence; his eye of faith turns to the hill called Calvary, and rises to the everlasting hills whence cometh help; the fettered soul is released, is free, for the messengers on the mountains have proclaimed deliverance to the captive, and the opening of the prison to the bound (Isa. lxi. 1).

II. STRIFE IN CONTRAST TO PEACE. The messengers of Nineveh to Judah had nothing conciliatory to convey; they told only of contention and strife. The assurance that peace should ultimately be enjoyed came to the anxious King of Judah from God's messengers, who published peace. The messengers of scepticism have no proclamation of peace to make; their work is altogether destructive; contumely is their delight; to seek to unsettle the minds of men and to shake their faith is their poor mission. It is the privilege, however, of the messengers of Zion to proclaim those spiritual and eternal verities in which the heart may securely and tranquilly repose, and to point to him who can quell every storm and give rest unto the soul.

III. GLOOM IN CONTRAST TO GLADNESS. Hezekiah and his people were in extremity; it was to them a time of "trouble;" but not a ray of hope came to them through the messengers of Nineveh. Their worst fears were confirmed; the foe was unrelenting. Their hope was in God, and in the words spoken by his holy prophets. So in the extremities of life—in sickness and sorrow, and specially at life's close, hope springs not from unbelief, but from the words God has addressed to us through his servants. The gospel has no rival in such seasons. Scepticism has no voice then, or, if it speaks, it

but deepens the prevailing gloom; but the good tidings God has revealed dispels our sadness and fills the soul with immortal hopes. Happy messengers, who are thus enabled to "comfort all that mourn," etc. (Isa. lxi. 2)!

IV. SHAME IN CONTRAST TO HONOUR. The voice of all messengers who blaspheme the holy Name of God "shall be no more heard," for God will put them to silence; but voices publishing his love and grace shall go sounding on through the ages—the bright succession of proclaimers shall not cease. Growing numbers shall be raised up who shall find their way to all nations and kindreds and tribes, until the glad tidings shall reach every shore, and the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth (Isa. xi. 9).—S. D. H.

Ver. 1.—ch. iii. 19.—*Wicked nations: 1. They are often allowed to exist on this earth until they reach a terrible degree of wickedness.* "He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily," etc. We take these two chapters together, (1) because they treat of one subject, viz. the destruction of Nineveh; (2) because scarcely any detached verse would supply suggestions for a practical discourse; and (3) because our purpose in these sketches is not critical, but homiletic. The critical part has been admirably done by Henderson, Keil, and others, and is found in the Exposition. We shall therefore endeavour to gather up all that is practical in these two chapters under three general headings. 1. *That nations are often allowed to exist on this earth until they reach a terrible degree of wickedness.* 2. *That it is the decree of Heaven that, however long they exist, the time must come when they shall be utterly destroyed.* 3. *That Providence often employs one wicked nation to inflict ruin upon another.* We shall devote a separate sketch to each of these propositions. Our subject now is that nations are often allowed to exist on this earth until they reach a terrible degree of wickedness. Assyria, the nation referred to here, was one of the oldest kingdoms in the world; it could count its age by centuries. Generation after generation came through centuries, played their part, and passed away, whilst Assyria stood. Its beginning is so far back that it is lost in obscurity. An early reference to it in Scripture will be found in Numb. xxiv. 22. Reference to its capital, Nineveh, and its founder, Asshur, we have also in Gen. x. 11. Our proposition suggests two questions—

I. WHAT WERE ITS LEADING CRIMES? From these chapters we can infer a few. 1. *Rapacity.* The city is described as the dwelling-place of lions. "Where is the dwelling of the lions?" etc. (ch. ii. 11, 12). "The point of comparison is," says Keil, "the predatory lust of its rulers and warriors, who crushed the nations like lions, plundering their treasures and bringing them together in Nineveh." As lions prowl about with ravenous instincts in search of their prey, and are utterly regardless of the sufferings and agonies they inflict, so long as they gain their object, so the King of Assyria and his minions went forth to rifle and to ruin distant countries, in order to augment their wealth and promote their aggrandizement. This rapacity seems to have been their habit; the city was a dwelling-place of lions. What an enormity is this!—man preying upon man like predatory beasts. The spirit of this rapacity lives too strongly in modern nations. It is seen, not only in aggressive wars, but in trade and commerce—the strong everywhere preying on the weak for the sake of gain. 2. *Cruelty.* The lion instinct was so prevailing in the population, that the very city is called "the bloody city" (ch. iii. 1). The golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," was trampled in the dust. Instead of respect being paid to the rights of men, life itself was cheaply held; their feet were "swift to shed blood." It lived by rapine. Its cruelty is handed down in its sculptures, where we have lions of every form, winged and unwinged. Cruelty is the worst stage of depravity. When all social love in the human breast gives way to malevolence, what have you but a devil? There are men in every age and country whose chief pleasure is to inflict torture. Atrocities are being perpetrated to a greater or less extent in all ages and lands. "Beasts," says our great dramatist, "are not cruel save when urged by hunger;" but men are often so, and into a cruel nature it is impossible to work the humane and generous.

"You may as well use question with the wolf,
Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb;
You may as well forbid the mountain pines

To wag their high tops, and to make no noise
 When they are fretted with the gusts of heaven;
 You may as well do anything most hard,
 As seek to soften that (than which what's harder?)—
 A cruel heart."

8. Imposture. The city is represented as "full of lies and robbery" (ch. iii. 1), or, as Keil renders it, "full of deceit and murder." Falsehood and violence were rampant. The imposture or falsehood is expressed in the fourth verse, "Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts." "The idolatrous practices of the Ninevites, and the means which they employed to seduce others to worship their gods, are here represented as the principal cause of their destruction. At the same time, the commerce, luxury, etc., which they carried to the greatest height, are not to be excluded; for in making contracts and treaties with the more powerful of their neighbours, they not only employed these as inducements, but did not scruple to deliver into their power nations and tribes that were unable to help themselves (comp. Joel iii. 3, 6, 8; Amos i. 6). The metaphor of an unchaste female, and the seductive arts which she employs, is not unfrequent in the prophets" (Henderson). The cunning and deceptive policy is here called whoring or love-making, because it was that selfishness which wraps itself up in the dress of love, but under the appearance of love seeks only the gratification of its own lust. It was a mistress of this art, and by it sold nations, deprived them of their independence and liberty. Such are some of the crimes here referred to, of which the Assyrians were pre-eminently guilty—rapacity, cruelty, imposture. These imply every species of moral evil, and moral evil in its most inhuman and ungodly aspects. Where these are there is no rectitude, no benevolence, no moral order, no true religion.

II. WHY WAS SUCH A NATION ALLOWED TO EXIST SO LONG? It was wicked from the beginning: why did not righteous Heaven crush it at the outset? Why was such a monster of iniquity allowed to perpetrate such enormities in the world from age to age? The question is similar to that which Job asked, "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?" (Job xxi. 7). Without presuming to penetrate the mind of God, or give the reason, we can see some important purposes which the continuation of the existence of wicked men in this world answers. It serves to show: 1. *The freedom of the human soul.* The natural tendency of all the blessings and beauty of life, the spirit of grandeur and beneficence that runs through all nature, are against wickedness and in favour of virtue and holiness. Notwithstanding this, men are wicked. They have a power to resist the Divine, to pervert the good, and outrage their own natures. Here is freedom of nature. Men are not bad by necessity; they are bad by their own free determination. 2. *The wonderful forbearance of God.* Though wickedness is to the last degree repugnant to his holy nature, and though by a volition he could annihilate a universe of sinners, through his infinite love he forbears. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. iii. 9). 3. *The existence of a future state of retribution.* Under the righteous government of God such a state of things cannot go on for ever. There must come an end, a balancing of the world's accounts, and an administration of justice to every soul. Human society is in an abnormal state; like water in a flood, it is hurrying onward to a more settled destination. "The mills of God grind slowly."—D. T.

Ver. 1.—ch. iii. 19.—*Wicked nations: 2. However long they exist, they will be utterly destroyed.* "He that dasheth in pieces," etc. "The Scripture," says Sherlock, "takes notice of a certain measure of iniquity, which is filling up from one generation to another, till at last it makes a nation or family ripe for destruction. And although these persons on whom this vengeance falls suffer no more than their own personal sin deserved, yet, because the sins of former generations, which they equal or outdo, make it time for God utterly to destroy them, the punishment due to the sins of many generations is said to fall upon them" (Gen. xv. 16; 2 Kings xxiv. 3, 4; Matt. xxiii. 32—36). So thorough was the destruction of Nineveh, that its very site for ages was a matter of conjecture. The wonderful discoveries of Botta in 1842, followed up by

Layard in 1845, not only determined its site, but disclosed the dwellings, ornaments, history, manners, of the inhabitants of the old Assyrian metropolis. Now, in the prophecy which Nahum gives, we learn that its destruction reveals several things.

I. THE FRUITLESSNESS OF THE MOST STRENUOUS EFFORTS OF RESISTANCE. "Keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily" (ch. ii. 1). This is supposed by some to be ironical, and to mean—Do your utmost to resist, concentrate all your forces, bring them into vigorous play, it will be utterly worthless. No doubt Nineveh, in her extremities, strove to the utmost to crush the invader and to preserve her own existence. But all efforts failed; its doom was sealed, its time had come, it had filled up the measure of its iniquity. There is no resisting God's judgment when it comes. "There is no discharge in that warfare." We learn from this prophecy that its destruction reveals—

II. THAT THE SAME VIOLENCE WITH WHICH IT DESTROYED OTHERS WAS NOW EMPLOYED FOR ITS OWN DESTRUCTION. Nineveh was a city of blood, full of lies and violence, the dwelling-place of ravenous lions, which had preyed upon other nations and ruined them. Now this violence is brought to bear upon them. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." See the description given of its conquerors (ch. ii. 3; iii. 2, 3), "The shield of his mighty men is made red," the emblem of slaughter. "The chariots shall be with flaming torches," their wheels rolling with such velocity that they flash lightning from the stones. They "rage in the streets," jostle against each other, and "run like the lightnings," and there are the "noise of the whips," the "rattling of the wheels," the "prancing of the horses," the flashing of the swords and the glittering spears. Crowds are struck down, "a great number of carcasses," there is "none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses," etc. The Bible is full of the doctrine of retributive justice; it abounds with examples of sinners receiving back in punishment the very same evils that they have inflicted on others. "Every man shall be rewarded according to his works." How often it happens in the government of the world, that the deceiver is punished by deceit, the ambitious by ambition, the avaricious by avarice, the violent by violence! "His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate."¹

III. THE WORTHLESSNESS OF ITS CHIEF METHOD OF DEFENCE. "The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved" (ch. ii. 6). "The river wall on the Tigris (the west defence of Nineveh) was 4530 yards long. On the north, south, and east sides there were large moats, capable of being easily filled with water from the Khos-ru. Traces of dams, gates, or sluices, for regulating the supply, are still visible, so that the whole city could be surrounded with a water barrier. Besides, on the east, the weakest side, it was further protected by a lofty double rampart, with a moat two hundred feet wide between its two parts, cut in the rocky ground. The moats, or canals, flooded by the Ninevites before the siege to repel the foe, were made a dry bed to march into the city, by the foe turning the water into a different channel, as Cyrus did in the siege of Babylon" (Maurer). This, however, is not substantiated. "In the earlier capture of Nineveh by Arbaces the Mede and Belsis the Babylonian, Diodorus Siculus states that there was an old prophecy, that it should not be taken till the river became its enemy; so, in the third year of the siege, the river, by a flood, broke down the walls twenty furlongs, and the king thereupon burnt himself and his palace and all his concubines and wealth together; and the enemy entered by the breach in the wall" (Fausset). It is often thus with the sinner, that the very things on which he relies contribute to his ruin. It may be wealth, physical strength, genius, morality, etc.; but when judgment comes, these, like the Tigris, "flee away."

IV. THE INEVITABLENESS OF ITS UTTER RUIN. The reason of it was, "I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts" (ch. iii. 5). "Art thou better than populous No?" (ch. iii. 8—10)—the Egyptian name for Thebes, the possession of Ammon. The populousness of Thebes and its wonderful natural productions did not save it from ruin. Her "strength" was "infinite," yet she was "carried away into captivity," if she could not resist, neither canst thou. "How vain," says a modern expositor, "are all the defences of sinners when the Lord is against them! No-Ammon, or Thebes,

¹ See a little volume entitled, 'The Retributive Justice of God commencing in this Life,' by Rev. J. Langley (Hatchards and Co.).

was one of the grandest and most magnificent cities of the earliest ages. Yet her rampart and sea-wall, with her seemingly infinite strength, were of no avail to save her young children from being dashed in pieces and all her great men from being bound in chains. Such was to be the doom of Nineveh likewise. God acts on the same unchanging principle in all ages, and in the case of all nations. Unrighteousness towards man and impiety and idolatry towards God bear the same bitter fruits everywhere, however for a time transgressors may seem to prosper. Let us as a nation remember that our safety consists, not in our fleets and armies, nor even in the 'multiplication of our merchants above the stars of heaven' (ch. iii. 16). Riches, like the cankerworm or the grasshopper (ver. 17), certainly make themselves wings, they fly away (Prov. xxiii. 5). The strongholds (ver. 12) on which we rely would fall before the invader as easily as the ripe fruit into the mouth of the eater, if God were against us. The nobles and captains who are the glory of England would soon be abased in the dust (vers. 17, 18). Our security therefore depends on our godliness. Wickedness persevered in continually (ver. 19) would bring on us a grievous wound, not to be healed, and the very nations now in alliance with us would clap their hands over us, exulting in the tidings of our fall. Let us therefore repent of our sins as a nation, as families, and as individuals, and 'bring forth worthy fruits of repentance.'" —D. T.

Ver. 1.—ch. iii. 19.—*Wicked nations: 3. Providence often employs one wicked nation to inflict ruin upon another.* "He that dasheth," etc. "He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face." "The disperser hath come up before thee" (Henderson); "A dasher in pieces comes against thee" (Keil). Who is "he that dasheth in pieces"? The Medo-Babylonish army. This mighty army, under the command of Cyaxares and Nabopolassar, composed of Medes and Babylonians, wrought the terrible destruction so graphically predicted in these chapters. And beneath its triumphant power Nineveh fell, between B.C. 626 and 608—fell to rise no more. Both these powers—the Medes and the Babylonians—were pre-eminently wicked, as bad in every respect, if not worse, than the Assyrians. These were the battle-axe with which God broke in pieces the Assyrian power. As a rule, in the government of the world, God employs one wicked nation to destroy another. Who destroyed Edom and Egypt, and Persia and Moab, and Greece and Rome? These were all destroyed by the hands of wicked men. Why this? Why does not the Almighty punish wicked nations by some other way? Why does he not destroy them without any instrumentality whatever, by a mere volition; or, if he employs instrumentality, why not the blind forces of nature, or wild beasts, or poisonous reptiles? Why should he employ wicked men as his instruments? The method clearly answers certain purposes.

I. IT MAKES THE PUNISHMENT APPEAR MORE TERRIBLE. Who would not sooner die by a flash of lightning, or a pestilential blast, or a predatory beast, than in deadly conflict with a man with whom he has measured his strength? In such a death passions are roused that burn in the centre of the soul, and a terrible humiliation is felt. A wicked man can have no greater tormentor than a wicked man. The greatest tormentors of fiends are fiends. In punishing wicked men in this way the Almighty declares to their consciences that they are so wicked that the wicked shall destroy them. Those of their own flesh and blood and character shall wreak vengeance on their head.

II. IT REVEALS THE ENORMITY OF SIN. Man was made to love his brother. His social instincts, his physical relationships, and the law of interdependence, as well as the laws of God, demonstrate this. But when you see him flaming with malign emotions towards his fellows, and wrestling in a deadly conflict, what a revelation of the enormity of sin! The battle-field is at once the product and the type of hell. Such a manifestation of sin is surely hideous enough to make us stand aghast with horror and hate.

III. IT SHOWS GOD'S MASTERY OVER HUMAN ACTIONS. The wicked engage in bloody wars, and thus become the instruments in administering the just penalties of sin; not to obey the Divine will, but to gratify their own avarice, ambition, malice, and greed. They do not serve Providence by their will, but *against* it. God is such a Master of human souls that he "maketh the wrath of man to praise him." It is not

optional with man whether he shall serve God or not; serve him he must; the option is whether he shall serve him willingly or unwillingly, as an agent or as an instrument. God links the devil himself to that providential chariot which is bearing on his great purposes to their fulfilment.

CONCLUSION. Two things should be remembered in connection with this subject.

1. That the *wickedness* of nations does not necessarily imply *wickedness* in all their members. There are good men in every nation under heaven, even in the worst. There are Noahs, Lots, Daniels, Jobs, amongst the corruptest people. 2. That the *ruin* of nations does not necessarily imply the *ruin* of all their members. Nations are but assemblages of individuals—abstractions, nothing more. They have no future existence: there is no Egypt, Persia, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome, Germany, Italy, England, etc., in eternity. Nor are there any Churches there, Papal or Protestant, Conformist or Nonconformist. "Public bodies and communities of men, as such, can only be rewarded and punished in this world. This world is the only season for national punishments."

"The individual culprit may sometimes

Unpunished to his after-reckoning go.

Not thus collective man; for public crimes

Draw on their proper punishment below:

When nations go astray, from age to age

The effects remain, a fatal heritage."

(R. Southey.)

D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Vers. 1—19.—Part III. THE CAUSE OF THE JUDGMENT—THE SINS OF THE CITY, WHICH BEING INEVITABLE PUNISHMENT.

Vers. 1—7.—§ 1. *The prophet specifies the crimes which have brought this ruin upon Nineveh.*

Ver. 1.—*The bloody city*; literally, *city of bloods*, where blood is shed without scruple (comp. Ezek. xxiv. 6, 9; Hab. ii. 12). The cruelty of the Assyrians is attested by the monuments, in which we see or read how prisoners were impaled alive, flayed, beheaded, dragged to death with ropes passed through rings in their lips, blinded by the king's own hand, hung up by hands or feet to die in slow torture (see Bonomi, pp. 168, etc., 190, etc., 225). Others have their brains beaten out, or their tongues torn out by the roots, while the bleeding heads of the slain are tied round the necks of the living, who are reserved for further torture (Layard, 'Nineveh and Babylon,' p. 456; Bawlinson, 'Ancient Monarchies,' ii. 503, etc., edit. 1864). The royal inscriptions recount with exultation the number of the enemies slain and of captives carried away, cities levelled with the ground, plundered, and burnt, lands devastated, fruit trees destroyed, etc. It is all full of lies; ἄλη ψευδής, "all lie" (Septuagint). The Assyrians used treachery in furthering their conquests, made promises

which they never kept, to induce nations to submit to their yoke. Such, doubtless, were those of Rabshakeh (Isa. xxxvi. 16). Rawlinson, "Falsehood and treachery . . . are often employed by the strong, as furnishing short cuts to success, and even, where the moral standard is low, as being in themselves creditable (see Thucyd., iii. 83). It certainly was not necessity which made the Assyrians covenant-breakers; it seems to have been in part the wantonness of power—because they 'despised the cities, and regarded no man' (Isa. xxxiii. 8); perhaps it was in part also their imperfect moral perception, which may have failed to draw the proper distinction between craft and cleverness" ('Ancient Monarchies,' i. 305). *Robbery*; rather, *rapine*, or *rending in pieces*. The figure applies to the way in which a wild beast kills its prey by tearing it to pieces. So the three crimes of Nineveh here enumerated are bloodshed, deceit, and violence. In the uncertainty concerning the word (*pereq*) rendered "robbery," which only occurs in Obad. 14, where it means "cross-way," the LXX. translates, ἀδικίας πλήρης, "full of unrighteousness." The Vulgate is correct, *dilaceratione plena*. The prey departeth not. They go on in the same way, gathering spoil into the city, never ceasing from this crime. The monuments continually record the booty that was brought to Nineveh (see, for instance, the 'Annals of Assurbanipal,' *passim*; 'Records of the Past,' vol. ix.; Schrader,

'Keilinschr.,' 195, etc., 216, 233, etc.; comp. Isa. xxxiii. 1). Septuagint, *Ὁ ψηλαφθῆσεται θῆρα*, which gives a sense contradictory to the text, "Prey shall not be handled."

Ver. 2.—**The noise of a whip.** The prophet describes the advance of the investing army. He hears the cracking of the whips of the charioteers, and the rattling of the wheels of the chariots, and the galloping horses, and the chariots bounding over the plain. Probably all the expressions in this verse refer to chariots and to horses yoked to them, which varied in number from one to three. The whip was a simple thong attached to a short handle. Comp. Virg., 'Georg.,' iii. 106, etc.—

" . . . illi instant verbere torto

Et proni dant lora; volat vi fervidus axis;
Jamque humiles, jamque elati sublime vi-
dentur

Aera pro vacuum ferri, atque adsurgere in
auras."

Ver. 3.—**The horseman lifteth up.** The Hebrew is more vivid, the words standing in pairs, as if describing the successive onsets of the enemy. So Pusey. It is best to render, "horsemen making to rear;" or as Septuagint, *ἰππῆς ἀναβαλνστος*, "horseman mounting;" so the Vulgate; Henderson. Horsemen are seen in the most ancient sculptures of Nimroud, and in the bas-reliefs of Kouyunjik (comp. Judith ii. 15; Ezek. xxiii. 6; Layard, 'Nineveh,' ii. 356). Both the bright sword; better, and the flaming sword (Gen. iii. 24); literally, the flame of the sword. And the glittering spear; literally, the lightning flash of the spear (Hab. iii. 11). These are the arms of the foot-soldiers. **A multitude of slain.** The effect of the assault is described. So numerous are the corpses that one cannot help stumbling over them; the invaders themselves are impeded by the heaps of dead bodies which they have to mount. The LXX. connects this verse with the following, thus: "They shall grow weak in their bodies by reason of the multitude of their fornications."

Ver. 4.—**The cause is given that has brought this punishment.** Because of the multitude of the whoredoms. This term is commonly applied to idolatry, the swerving from the true God and turning to false deities; and it is thought that it cannot be used in that sense here, as Assyria had always worshipped idols, and could not be said to have forsaken or proved false to the Lord. Hence Hitzig, Keil, and others refer the term to the treacherous friendship and crafty politics by which Nineveh ensnared other states, seeking really only her own interests (comp. Isa. xxiii. 17). But this habit of treachery has been already mentioned in ver. 1 (where see note); and, as

Knabenbauer remarks, the Assyrians used no meretricious blandishments to effect their conquests, but the cruel arts of war and the stern ordeal of the sword. It is scarcely probable that the prophet would omit idolatry among the crimes of the Assyrians that called for vengeance, as all their wars were carried on in the name of their gods, and the monarchs professed to be under Divine protection and influence. The term "whoredom" is applied to the idolatry, not only of the Israelites, but to that of Jezebel (2 Kings ix. 22), who was always a heathen. The idolatry of the Assyrians may very well be so called, because it was a wilful ignoring of the light of nature and natural religion (see Wisd. xiii. 1; Rom. i. 19, etc.). They were careful, too, wherever they carried their arms, to erect there symbols of their deities, and to compel conquered nations to receive them and pay them Divine honour. With this idolatrous worship was associated that gross immorality which even Herodotus (i. 199) termed utterly disgraceful (comp. Baruch vi. 43). Rightly is Nineveh called the well-favoured harlot; for her splendour and magnificence were unsurpassed, dazzling all beholders and hiding the rottenness that lay below the surface. The mistress of witchcrafts. She was skilful in employing every art to seduce nations to her side. We hear much of magic in connection with Babylon and the Chaldeans, but not in reference especially to Assyria. The expression here is metaphorical, alluding to the secret practices which she employed to gain her ends and to make her rule attractive (comp. Rev. xviii. 2, 3). **That selleth nations.** Depriving them of freedom and making them tributary, or, in some cases, actually selling the inhabitants as slaves (comp. Deut. xxxii. 30; Judg. ii. 14; Joel iii. 3; Amos i. 6, 7). **Families.** Not only nations in the aggregate, but smaller bodies, individuals, so that none escape. Septuagint, *λαοὺς*, "peoples."

Ver. 5.—**I am against thee** (see note on ch. ii. 13). The Lord will punish Nineveh with the utmost ignominy, treating her ("the whore," ver. 4) like a harlot or adulteress. **Thy skirts.** The borders of the long flowing dress which added to her pomp (comp. Isa. xlvii. 2, etc.; Jer. xiii. 26; Lam. i. 8). Upon (before) thy face. So that thou mayst know thine own shame. **I will show the nations.** All men shall see what thou really art, like an adulteress haled before the congregation.

Ver. 6.—**The metaphor is continued.** Nineveh shall be like a vile woman exposed to the insults and ill treatment of the rabble (comp. Ezek. xvi. 37, etc.). **A gazing-stock.** That all may see thee and take warning. LXX., *εἰς παράδειγμα*, "for

a public example," which recalls Matt. i. 19.

Ver. 7.—*Shall flee from thee.* As an object of disgust, or fearing to be involved in thy ruin (Rev. xviii. 10, 15). *Who will bemoan her?* No one will pity her for her well-deserved chastisement (Jer. xv. 5). *Whence shall I seek, etc.?* Truly, nowhere in all the world (comp. Isa. li. 19).

Vers. 8—13.—§ 2. *The ruin of Nineveh can be averted no more than was that of No-Amon.*

Ver. 8.—*Art thou better than populous No?* "Better" probably means here more prosperous. "Populous No" ought to be rendered, *No-Amon*, i.e. No of the solar god Amon. This is the celebrated Thebes, in Upper Egypt, called in Egyptian Pa-Amun, "the House of Amun," and in the inscriptions Ni, which is the same word as No. The name Amon is attached because that god was particularly worshipped there. The LXX. has, *μερίδα Ἀμμὸν* ("a portion of or for Ammon"), translating the word "No." St. Jerome, misled by his Hebrew teacher, renders, "Alexandria populorum," as if Thebes stood on the site of the much later city of Alexandria; whereas we see from Assurbanipal's annals that he was forty days marching from Memphis, where he defeated Rudammon, to Thebes (see G. Smith, 'Assurbanipal,' p. 55). On the grandeur and magnificence of this city, Denon (quoted by Rawlinson, 'Ancient Monarchies,' i. 309, note 7), writes, "On est fatigué d'écrire, on est fatigué de lire, on est épouvanté de la pensée d'une telle conception; on ne peut croire, même après l'avoir vu, à la réalité de l'existence de tant de constructions réunies sur un même point, à leurs dimensions, à la constance obstinée qu'a exigée leur fabrication, aux dépenses incalculables de tant de somptuosité" ('Egypte,' ii. 226). "In the long and rich valley of the Lower Nile, which extends above five hundred miles from Syene to Memphis, almost any situation might furnish a site for a great city, since, except at Silsilis and at the Gebelein, the valley is never less than two miles wide, the soil is always fertile, good quarries are always at hand, and lavish Nature is so bounteous with her gifts that abundant sustenance can at any point be obtained for a large population. But in this wealth of eligible sites, there are still degrees of eligibility—spots which Nature has distinguished by special favour, and, as it were, marked out for greatness and celebrity. Such a position is that which the traveller reaches when, passing through the gorge of the Gebelein, he emerges upon the magnificent plain, at least ten miles in width, through which the river flows with a course from south-west to north-east for a

distance of some forty miles between Erment and Qobt. Here, for the first time since quitting the Nubian desert, does the Nile enter upon a wide and ample space. On either side the hills recede, and a broad green plain, an alluvium of the richest description, spreads itself out on both banks of the stream, dotted with *dom* and date palms, sometimes growing singly, sometimes collected into clumps or groves. Here, too, there open out on either side, to the east and to the west, lines of route offering great advantages for trade, on the one hand with the Lesser Oasis and so with the tribes of the African interior, on the other with the western coast of the Red Sea and the spice region of the opposite shore. In the valley of Hammamât, down which passed the ancient route to the coast, are abundant supplies of *breccia verde* and of other valuable and rare kinds of stone, while at no great distance to the right and left of the route lie mines of gold, silver, and lead, anciently prolific, though exhausted now for many ages. Somewhat more remote, yet readily accessible by a frequented route, was the emerald region of Gebel Zabara, where the mines are still worked" (Rawlinson; 'Ancient Egypt,' ii. 124, etc.). Thebes was situated on both banks of the Nile, the principal portion lying on the east; the Necropolis and Memnonia were on the west. It seems never to have been surrounded with a wall (notwithstanding its "hundred gates"), the river and canals forming a sufficient defence. At the present time the ruins are some twenty-seven miles in circuit, including Luxor and the remains of the great temple at Karnak. *The sea.* The Nile formed its rampart. Great rivers are called seas in the poetical books. Thus Isa. xix. 5; xxvii. 1; Jer. li. 36. *Her wall was from the sea; or, of the sea.* The sea was her wall. Septuagint, *ὅσαρ τὰ τεύχη αὐτῆς*, "water her walls."

Ver. 9.—*Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength.* Urdamaneh, or Rudammon, in whose time this capture of No-Amon took place, was son and successor of Tirhakah, who is called expressly King of Ethiopia (2 Kings xix. 9; Isa. xxxvii. 9). *Egypt.* The Egyptians proper, combined with the Ethiopians, formed the kingdom of Egypt under the twenty-fifth, the Ethiopian, dynasty. And it was infinite. The power of Egypt was boundless, its forces innumerable (see 2 Chron. xii. 3). Pusey notes a remark of Cato (in Steph. Byzant. ap. Boet., iv. 27) that the Egyptians connected with Thebes amounted to seven millions. In Isa. xlviii.—xx. Ethiopia and Egypt are represented as combined against Assyria, and conquered by it (Wordsworth). Septuagint, *ὅκ ἐστὶν πέρας τῆς φυγῆς*,

"There was no limit of the flight." This is thought by Jerome to be connected with the previous verses, and to refer to Nineveh. Put and Lubim were thy helpers. No-Amon is here suddenly addressed. Put, or Punt, designates either a part of Arabia or that part of the coast of Egypt opposite to it (see Ebers, 'Ägypt. und die Büch. Mos,' p. 64, etc.). Lubim are the Lybians, dwelling on the west of the Canopic mouth of the Nile. Thus the enumeration of the forces of Thebes is regularly arranged, beginning with the south, Ethiopia, then through Egypt proper to the north, and then to the provinces on the east and west (Knabenbauer). The Vulgate translates the two terms, *Africa et Libya*. The LXX combines them in one, *Αἰθιοπες*. These peoples are named together elsewhere: e.g. Jer. xli. 9; Ezek. xxvii. 10; xxx. 5; xxxviii. 5.

Ver. 10.—Yet was she carried away. In spite of her strong position and infinite resources, Thebes was captured and despoiled; and shall Nineveh fare better? Surely not. This capture of Thebes took place B.C. 664, and must have been in men's minds when Nahum wrote his prophecy. The Assyrians twice took Thebes in the days of Assurbanipal. The first time it is merely recorded that the soldiers, under the commander of the satraps, made a slaughter in the city. The second capture is thus described in the monarch's own tablet (Brugsch, 'Egypt,' i. 272—275, Eng. transl.): "Urdamaneh fled alone, and entered Thebes, the city of his kingdom . . . I directed my march in pursuit of him. I came to Thebes. He saw the strength of my army, and left Thebes, and fled to the city of Kipkip. Of that whole city (Thebes), with thanksgiving to Asur and Istar, my hands took the complete possession. Silver, gold, metals, stones, all the treasures of its palace whatsoever, dyed garments of berom and linen, great horses [elephants?] men and women, great and small, works of zakh [basalt?] and marble, their keles and manzas, the gates of their palace . . . I tore away and carried to Assyria. I made spoil of the animals of the land without number, and carried them forth in the midst out of Thebes. I caused a catalogue to be made of the spoil. I returned in safety to Nineveh" (see a different version in G. Smith, 'Assurbanipal,' p. 52, etc.). Were dashed in pieces. The prophet describes the usual treatment of captured cities (comp. 2 Kings viii. 12; Ps. cxxxvii. 9; Isa. xiii. 16). At the top of all the streets. In the most public places, where many streets converge (Lam. ii. 19). Cast lots. The victors divided the nobles among themselves by lot (see note on Obad. 11). Were bound in chains. We find in the Assyrian

monuments delineations of captives with their arms bound together by a rope held by a soldier, sometimes men, sometimes women and children; the women are tearing their hair in despair (see Bonomi, 'Nineveh and its Palaces,' pp. 226, 277). In a bas-relief at Khorsabad captives are led by a rope fastened to a ring in the lip (comp. 2 Kings xix. 28; see Rawlinson, 'Anc. Mon.,' i. 304; Layard, 'Nineveh,' fig. 60, and vol. i. p. 376).

Ver. 11.—Thou also shalt be drunken. Nahum makes the application: The fate of Thebes shall be thine, O Nineveh. Thou shalt drink to the full the cup of God's wrath (see note on Obad. 16; and comp. Jer. xxv. 15, 17, 27). The metaphor indicates the effect of some overwhelming calamity that makes men reel with terror or stupefies them with amazement. Thou shalt be hid; thou shalt be powerless, or reduced to nothing; *Ἐσθ' ἡνεσώπαμένη*, "Thou shalt be despised" (Septuagint); *Eris despecta* (Vulgate). Nineveh, which was taken and destroyed between B.C. 626 and 608, was so effectually "hidden" that its very site was discovered only in late years, and its monuments have only been partially disinterred after immense labour. Thou also shalt seek strength because of the enemy; or, thou also shalt seek a stronghold from the enemy. As the Egyptians fled for refuge from one place to another (see note on ver. 10), so shall the Assyrians attempt in vain to escape the enemy. History records that they endeavoured to effect a retreat from Nineveh during the siege (see Introduction, § I.).

Ver. 12.—Shall be like (are) fig trees with the first-ripe figs. The Assyrians' fortresses are as ready for destruction and as easy to destroy as ripe figs are ready to fall from the tree at the least shake of the eater (Isa. xxviii. 4).

Ver. 13.—The reason why the fortresses are so readily taken is now given. Are women. The Assyrians were essentially a brave nation, but they should be now no more able to resist the enemy than if they were women (comp. Isa. xix. 16; Jer. l. 37; li. 30). The gates of thy land. The various approaches and passes which lead into Assyria (comp. Jer. xv. 7; Micah v. 6). So Strabo (xi. 12. 13) speaks of certain mountain passes as "the Caspian gates," and Xenophon ('Anab.,' i. 4. 4) mentions "the gates of Cilicia and Syria." The famous defile that led into Greece was called Thermopylæ. The fire shall devour thy bars. Hitzig, Keil, and others take the "bars" metaphorically, meaning the forts and castles which defend the passes; but the literal sense is the most natural, as in the parallel passage, Jer. li. 30 (see note on Amos i. 5). It was the Assyrians' custom to set fire to the gates

of any city that they attacked (see Bonomi, 'Nineveh and its Palaces,' pp. 178, 185, 192). "It is incontestable," says Bonomi, in another place, "that, during the excavations, a considerable quantity of charcoal, and even pieces of wood either half-burnt or in a perfect state of preservation, were found in many places. The lining of the chambers also bears certain marks of the action of fire. All these things can be explained only by supposing the fall of a burning roof, which calcined the slabs of gypsum, and converted them into dust. . . . It must have been a violent and prolonged fire to be able to calcine not only a few places, but every part of these slabs, which were ten feet high and several inches thick. So complete a decomposition can be attributed but to intense heat" (ibid., p. 213).

Vers. 14—19.—§ 3. *In spite of all its efforts and all its resources, Nineveh shall meet with a terrible end.*

Ver. 14.—Nahum ironically bids the Ninevites prepare for the siege they were about to sustain. **Draw these waters for the siege.** The drinking water necessary for a long siege is meant. This injunction is not particularly applicable to Nineveh, which from its situation was abundantly supplied with water, unless there was danger that the enemy would divert the courses of the rivers. But the warning would come home with peculiar force to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, among whom Nahum prophesied (2 Kings xx. 20; Isa. xxii. 11; xxx. 20). **Fortify thy strong holds; strengthen thy fortresses.** Repair all defects in thy defences (2 Chron. xi. 11). The mode of doing this in the Assyrian fashion is then denoted. **Go into clay, and tread the mortar.** The soil round Nineveh was of a tenacious quality; and when moistened with water and kneaded either with feet or hands, with the addition usually of a little chopped straw, was easily formed into bricks. These, even without the aid of fire, became dry and hard in the course of a few days. But it is plain from the investigations of ruins that the Assyrians used both kiln-baked and sun-dried bricks, though the mass of the walls was usually composed of the latter, the more durable material being employed merely as an accessory (see Bonomi, 'Nineveh and its Palaces,' p. 9; Layard, 'Nineveh,' ii. 252). Xenophon, 'Anab.' iii. 4. 11, speaks of the brick wall (πλινθίων τεῖχος) of a town he calls Mespila. **Make strong the brick-kiln.** There is an uncertainty about the meaning of the last word (*malben*), which occurs only in two other places (2 Sam. xii. 31 and Jer. xliii. 9). In the latter passage it may possibly mean "a square" or "open quadrangle." Jerome has, *tene la-*

terem; the LXX., *κατακρήτησον ὑπὲρ πλινθίων*, "make them strong above (equivalent to 'stronger than') brick," connecting it with the following verse. Some translate it, "brick-mould." If the Anglican Version is correct, the prophet bids them repair their kilns, unused in the days of prosperity, when they had no need to look to the security of their walls. Virtually the same sense is elicited by rendering, "lay hold of the brick-mould."

Ver. 15.—**Thers.** In the very place where thou hast taken all these precautions. **Shall the fire devour thee.** That fire played a great part in the destruction of Nineveh is asserted by historians and proved by the remains of the city discovered in modern times (see note on ver. 13; also Herod., i. 106; Diod. Sic., ii. 25—28; Athen., xii. 529). The fate of the last king, who burnt himself and his palace, is a well-known story (see Justin, 'Hist.' i. 3; Eusebius, 'Chron.,' i. 9; xiv. 3; xv. 7; Syncell., 'Chron.,' i. 396, edit. Dind.) (Knabenbauer). **The sword shall out thee off.** While fire destroys the buildings, the sword shall devour the inhabitants of the city. **The cankerworm;** literally, *the licker* (Joel i. 4). The locust in its earlier stage is thus described (see ver. 16). The figure implies that the destruction of Nineveh should be sudden and complete, as that wrought on vegetation by an irrad of locusts. **Make thyself many.** Collect thine armies, gather hosts as innumerable as the locusts, it will be all in vain. The "cankerworm" represented the enemy; the "locusts" represent the Assyrians themselves.

Ver. 16.—Its extensive commercial relations shall not save it. **Thou hast multiplied thy merchants.** Nineveh was most favourably situated for carrying on commerce with other countries. The roads from Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, and Phœnicia, that led into Media, Persia, and the interior of Asia, converged at Nineveh, and brought thither merchandise from all lands; and the Assyrians themselves exported their own produce and manufactures to the far West. Among these are enumerated textile fabrics, carpets, dyed attire, and embroidered work, carvings in ivory, gems, spices (see P'awlinson, 'Anc. Mon.,' ii. 179, etc.; Layard, 'Nineveh,' ii. 414, etc.). **The cankerworm spoileth; or, spreadeth itself for plunder;** Vulgate, *expansus est*; Septuagint, *ἐμψήσιν*, "attacked." The cankerworm (see note on ver. 15) are the enemy, who spread themselves over the rich produce of Nineveh, and then flee away laden with spoil. Pusey makes the cankerworm represent Nineveh. She spread herself everywhere wasting and plundering, and now she is gone, has disappeared. But the former explanation

better suits the comparison in ver. 15, where "the licker" is the enemy; and it is most natural that the prophet should allude to the fate of that commercial wealth which he has just mentioned, as in previous verses he contrasts the riches and power of Nineveh with the ruin that awaits them.

Ver. 17.—**Thy crowned.** The word *minnezar* is found only here, and, as its derivation is uncertain, it has received various interpretations. The Anglican Version derives the word from *nezar*, "a diadem," and "the crowned" are the officials of upper rank. "High officers of state in Assyria were adorned with diadems, closely resembling the lower band of the royal mitre, separated from the cap itself. Very commonly the head was encircled with a simple fillet or hoop, probably of gold, without any adornment" (Gosse, 'Assyria,' p. 463, quoted by Strauss; see the figures in Bonomi, p. 319). Others derive it from *nazar*, "to separate," in the signification of "those separated or selected for war." Septuagint, *δ συμμικτός σου*: i.e. the band of mixed mercenary troops—a rendering in which Wordsworth acquiesces. Knabenbauer (referring to Strassmaier's Assyrian vocabulary) considers the word to be a transliteration (as being resolved into *ne*) of the Assyrian *ma-as-sa-ru*, which means "guardian," or some inferior officer. With this agrees the Vulgate *custodes*. As the locusts; i.e. in multitude. That the number of captains and superior officers would be very great may be conjectured from the inscriptions which sometimes enumerate the captives carried off from conquered countries. Thus in the account of the capture of some insignificant nation, the then king boasts that he took away 13,000 fighting men, 1121 captains, and 460 superior officers (Strauss, *in loc.*). The prophet's meaning is that if the officers, etc., are so numerous, the multitude of soldiers and civilians must be truly immense. **Thy captains.** *Taphsar* is an Assyrian word, occurring only in Jer. li. 27. It is probably the same as *duparru* or *dip-sarru* of the inscriptions, and is taken to signify "a scribe" (see Schrader, p. 424). Such officials are often represented on the monuments (see Layard, ii. 184), and seem

sometimes to have been of high or priestly rank. Jerome translates, *parvuli tui*, though in Jeremiah, *loc. cit.*, he retains the Assyrian word. The Septuagint omits it. **Great grasshoppers; swarms of locusts** (Amos vii. 1). **Which camp in the hedges in the cold day.** Locusts become torpid in cold weather; so the captains and princes of Nineveh are paralyzed and useless in the day of calamity. **They flee away.** Thus the Assyrian army perishes and leaves no trace behind. The LXX. adds, "Woe unto them!"

Ver. 18.—**Thy shepherds.** The princes and counsellors, on whom the safety of the state depends. **Slumber.** Sleep the sleep of death—slain in the war (Ps. lxxvi. 6). **O King of Assyria.** The power and evil of Nineveh personified, not any particular king. **Shall dwell in the dust; are lying, or are at rest, in death;** Septuagint, *ἔκοιμισε τοὺς θυράδας σου*, "Put to sleep thy mighty men" (comp. Euripides, 'Hec.' 473, where *κοιμίζειν* is used in the sense of "to slay"); Vulgate, *sepelientur*. **Is scattered upon the mountains.** Their shepherds being dead, the flock, the herd of common people, is scattered abroad and perishes, because no man gathereth them—there is no one to collect them. "The mountains" referred to are those which shut in Assyria on the north.

Ver. 19.—There is no healing of thy bruise; there is no assuaging of thy hurt (Revised Version; Jer. x. 19). The ruin is irretrievable; no one shall restore the destroyed kingdom (see Zeph. ii. 13, 14). **Thy wound is grievous; Pessima est plaga tua** (Vulgate); *Ἐφλέγμανεν ἡ πληγή σου*, "Thy wound is inflamed." The "wound" is the stroke or plague inflicted by God (Lev. xxvi. 21). **Shall clap the hands over thee.** All who hear of thy destruction will rejoice over it (Ps. xlvii. 1; Lam. ii. 15). **Thy wickedness.** The cruelty and oppression of Nineveh have been universally felt. If Edom is the type of insidious foes of the Church's own household, Nineveh is the emblem of open, blaspheming infidelity, arrayed in powerful opposition against God's people. In the overthrow of this kingdom there is a prophecy of the destruction of all anti-Christian powers, which shall be utterly crushed in the latter days.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—**Woe to Nineveh.** I. THREATENED. (Ver. 1.) 1. *By the prophet.* Jonah (iii. 4) had once before announced the destruction of the Assyrian capital, which threatening, however, was averted by the repentance of its inhabitants; Nahum's prediction was literally fulfilled, because Nineveh in due time filled up the measure of its iniquities. 2. *In the name of God.* Had Nineveh's doom been pronounced only by Nahum's lips, it had been harmless; but Nahum was the mouthpiece of Jehovah, who already had declared himself against the great and wicked city (ch. ii. 13), and a second time repeats the fact, "Behold, I am against thee, saith

the Lord of hosts" (ver. 5). There is a wide difference between God's threatenings and man's.

II. DEPICTED. (Vers. 2, 3.) 1. *The advance of a hostile force.* "The noise of the whip [of charioteers urging on their steeds], and the noise of the rattling of wheels [of war-chariots in motion], and prancing horses [*i.e.* horses leaping up and starting forward as they feel the spurs dug into their sides], and jumping chariots [*i.e.* springing up as they dash along the rugged ground]." 2. *The attack upon the city.* "The horseman mounting [or, 'charging,' *i.e.* causing his steed to leap up and advance against the city]; and the flashing sword and the glittering spear;" rather than "the horseman lifteth up the bright sword and the glittering spear" (Authorized Version). 3. *The appearance after battle.* "A multitude of slain, and a great heap of carcases." So numerous, indeed, are the fallen, that "there is none end of the corpses, and they," the Medo-Babylonian invaders, "stumble upon their corpses," *i.e.* the dead bodies of the Assyrians.

III. JUSTIFIED. (Vers. 1, 4.) By the character of Nineveh. 1. *A city of blood*; literally, "of bloods," *i.e.* of bloodshed or murder, alluding to the barbarous and inhuman character of her warfare. 2. *A city of deceit.* Referring to the vain promises of protection with which she beguiled the nations to put their trust in her—promises which she never kept any more than did Egypt. 3. *A city of oppression.* "The prey departeth not." She is never done rending in pieces and tearing some nation or people. 4. *A city of seductions.* A city of witchcrafts, the prophet comparing her brilliance and prosperity, by which she fascinated surrounding powers and secretly drew them to seek her favour, to the grace and beauty with which a harlot attracts and bewitches passers-by.

IV. EMPHASIZED. (Vers. 5, 6.) By Jehovah, who declares that her doom will be: 1. *Certain*; since he, Jehovah, is against her: "Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts." 2. *Shameful*; since he will treat her, not as a chaste matron, but as a polluted harlot, whose skirts are thrown above her head, that her person may be exposed (Isa. xlvii. 3; Jer. xiii. 22; Ezek. xvi. 37—41; Hos. ii. 3). 3. *Visible*; since he will cause the nations to see her nakedness, and the kingdoms to behold her shame.

V. ATTESTED. (Ver. 7.) By two things. 1. *The horror of the nations.* "It shall come to pass that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee." Not so much in disgust (Keil) as in terror (Ezek. xxxi. 16); cf. the effect produced by the fall of Tyre (Ezek. xxvi. 21; xxvii. 35), and of the mystical Babylon (Rev. xviii. 10). 2. *The absence of helpers.* Her fate was so richly deserved that no one interposed to ward off the stroke. In her hour of sorrow no one bewailed her; in her moment of weakness no one assisted her (Isa. li. 19).

Learn: 1. That greater woes have been pronounced against sinners in general than were uttered against Nineveh—read the woes of Christ in the Gospels (Matt. xxiii. 13, 14, 15, etc.; xxvi. 24; Luke vi. 24, 25, 26; xi. 42, 46). 2. That these woes will no more fail in their fulfilment than did those directed against Nineveh. God's word never returns to him void (Isa. lv. 11). 3. That God's judgments upon the wicked will eventually vindicate themselves in all men's eyes as just. "Salvation and honour and power," etc. (Rev. xix. 1, 2).

Vers. 8—13.—*The story of No-Amon.* I. THE BRILLIANT CITY. 1. *Its sacred name.* No-Amon, in Egyptian, *Nu-Amun*, or "Dwelling of Amun;" in Greek, *Θῆβαι*, or Thebes, with which corresponded the Egyptian *Ta-ape*, or "City of Thrones." Originally the capital of a nome, it subsequently rose to be a royal city. It became the residence of the Theban dynasty of Pharaohs. Homer describes it as having had a hundred gates ('*Iliad*,' ix. 383). 2. *Its impregnable situation.* "Among the rivers [or, 'canals']. " "In all the long course of the Nile there is no site that can compare with that of Thebes," writes Stanley Leathes. At Thebes "the mountains (Libyan and Arabian) open out a great amphitheatre, such as a king would choose to build his capital therein." "Nothing more lovely than this great amphitheatre, with its border of yellow sand and rampart of cliffs, can be seen in all the land of Egypt" ('*Picturesque Palestine*,' etc., iv. 190, 191). With the Nile running through, and canals formed round it, the city enjoyed a strong natural position. 3. *Its military strength.* (1) Its

native forces, those of Egypt and Ethiopia, were practically numberless. (2) Its foreign auxiliaries, Put and Lubim, or the Libyans in the north of Africa and those contiguous to Egypt, were reliable.

II. THE DISASTROUS OVERTHROW. 1. *Its unexpected occurrence.* "Yet was she carried away." Notwithstanding her regal magnificence and boasted strength, she was captured and destroyed. Of this humiliation of Egypt's proud capital the monuments afford express information. Rudammon, the nephew (son of his sister) and successor of Tirhakah of Egypt, sat upon the throne. In an expedition against Egypt and Ethiopia, Assurbanipal of Assyria (B.C. 665) marched his forces first against Memphis, which Rudammon incontinently left, and then against Thebes, into which the alarmed fugitive had fled to save his life. The Assyrian king thus relates the issue of his campaign: "After Rudammon the road I took; I went to Thebes, the strong city; the approach of my powerful army he saw, and Thebes he abandoned, and fled to Kipkip. That city (Thebes), the whole of it, in the service of Assur and Ishtar, my hands took; silver, gold, precious stones, the furniture of his palace, all there was; garments costly and beautiful, great horses, people male and female, two lofty obelisks covered with beautiful carvings . . . a hundred talents their weight, set up before the gate of a temple; with them I removed and brought to Assyria. Its spoils unnumbered I carried off. From the midst of Thebes, over Egypt and Ethiopia, my servants I caused to march, and I acquired glory. With the tributes peacefully I returned to Nineveh, the city of my dominion" ('Records of the Past,' i. 67, 68; cf. Schrader, 'Die Keilinschriften,' p. 449). 2. *Its frightful severity.* In addition to the information supplied by the Assyrian conqueror, the sacred narrative declares that it was accompanied by heart-rending excesses. (1) The population of the gay capital were exiled. "She went into captivity." The deportation of conquered peoples into strange lands was then a customary practice, and seemed the only means that sovereigns like Shalmaneser, Tiglath-Pileser, Assurbanipal, and Nebuchadnezzar had for keeping them in subjection (2 Kings xvii. 6). (2) The young children were ruthlessly massacred—they were "dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets." These were probably butchered to avoid trouble and inconvenience upon the march. This inhuman practice was likewise frequent in ancient warfare (2 Kings viii. 12; Isa. xiii. 16; Hos. xiii. 16). (3) The princes and nobility were degraded. They were parted among their conquerors by "lot" and "bound in chains;" after which they were borne off into slavery.

III. THE PROPHECIC WARNING. The fate of No-Amon will one day overtake Nineveh. 1. *Righteously.* "Thou also shalt be drunken." Nineveh will be made to drink of the cup of Jehovah's wrath on account of her sins (Isa. li. 17, 21; Obad. 16). As Jehovah dealt with the Egyptian capital, so will he deal with the Assyrian. "The particle 'also' is here emphatical; it was introduced that the Ninevites might know that they could not possibly escape the punishment which they deserved; for God continues ever like himself" (Calvin). 2. *Resistlessly.* "Thou also shalt seek a stronghold because of [or, 'a defence against'] the enemy." Nineveh would call in vain for allies to help her against the terrible Medo-Babylonian power, as No-Amon had fruitlessly looked to surrounding peoples for aid against Nineveh. 3. *Easily.* "All thy fortresses shall be like fig trees with the first-ripe figs; if they be shaken, they fall into the mouth of the eater." The ramparts of Nineveh will go down at the first touch of the foe. "Hence a useful doctrine may be deduced: whatever strength men may seek for themselves from different quarters, it will wholly vanish away; for neither forts, nor towers, nor ramparts, nor troops of men, nor any kind of contrivances will avail anything; and were there no one to rise against them, they would yet fall of themselves" (Calvin). 4. *Surprisingly.* "Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women: the gates of thy land are set wide open to thine enemies." The very last thing Nineveh would ever dream of would be that her warriors, hitherto invincible, would become faint-hearted as women, and that her fortresses would be as easily passed through as opened gates. Yet exactly these two things were what should happen to Nineveh. 5. *Utterly.* "The fire hath devoured thy bars," and "thou shalt be hid." Nineveh should perish in flames and pass away as if she had never been, her very site for centuries remaining unknown.

LESSONS. 1. The worthlessness, for nations and cities, as for individuals, of purely material glory. 2. The certain ruin of nations, cities, and individuals who do not

build on the only permanent foundation of righteousness. 3. The frequency with which, in the history of nations, no less than of private persons, coming events cast their shadows before.

Vers. 14—19.—*The fall of Nineveh.* I. PREPARATIONS FOR A SIEGE. (Ver. 14.) In anticipation of the impending attack upon their capital, the inhabitants of Nineveh are exhorted by Nahum (ironically) to provide for their safety. 1. *For their sustenance.* This they should do by laying up within their city a plentiful supply of water for drinking, so as to enable them to withstand a prolonged siege. "Draw thee water for the siege." This, in a land like Assyria, would be likely to give way earlier than bread. It is only in seasons of exceptional scarcity arising from long-continued drought, or from such calamities as occur in war, that men come to estimate correctly the value of water. 2. *For their defence.* This, on the other hand, they should do by strengthening their fortresses; for which again they would need an abundant store of bricks. Hence the prophet's exhortation, still satirical in its tone, "Strengthen thy fortresses; go into the clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brick-kiln." The Assyrians, like the Egyptians, as the monuments attest, prepared their bricks with clay, which they mixed with straw, and sometimes burnt, at other times merely drying them in the sun (Layard, 'Nineveh,' ii. 252); and quantities of these would be required, when the evil day arrived, to repair the breaches that might be made in the walls, or to construct an inner line of defence when the outer should be taken.

II. RESULTS OF THE SIEGE. (Ver. 15.) 1. *The burning of the city.* "There," in the midst of thy fortifications, "the fire shall devour thee." That Nineveh perished by fire is attested equally by ancient writers and by the state of the ruins. 2. *The slaughter of its inhabitants.* "The sword shall cut thee off, it shall devour thee like the cankerworm." The thought is that, even should the people of Nineveh be as numerous as a swarm of locusts, yet should they be swept away as completely as every green blade is swept away by the "cankerworm," or "licker," i.e. by the locust (Joel i. 4; ii. 3). 3. *The plundering of its treasures.* "Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the cankerworm or [licker, i.e. the army of the enemy] spoileth, and flieth away." "As soon as the soldiers entered a captured city they began to plunder, and then hurried away the spoil. They led off the horses, carried forth on their shoulders furniture, and vessels of gold, silver, and other metals; and made prisoners of the inhabitants, who probably became the property of those who seized them" (Layard's 'Nineveh,' ii. 377). That Nineveh was a rich city may be inferred from the spoils she had taken from surrounding nations during her career of conquest, as well as from her favourable position for commerce. The costly produce of India was conveyed through Nineveh and Babylon towards the West (Layard, 'Nineveh,' ii. 414). That Nineveh, who had so often despoiled others, should be herself despoiled was an instance of just retribution. 4. *The annihilation of its army.* "Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy marshals [or, 'scribes'] as the swarms of grasshoppers which camp in the hedges in the cold day," etc. (ver. 17). Whether the "crowned" ones should be understood as signifying the princes of Nineveh (Calvin, Gesenius, Fausset), or the warriors in general, whom it represents as "levied," "selected," "picked" (Keil); and whether the "marshals" here spoken of should be regarded as "military leaders," and thus as practically synonymous with the "crowned" ones, or as common soldiers, though of a special excellence (Keil);—it is probable that the destruction of the army of Assyria is that which the language is designed to set forth. Though the war-force of Nineveh should be as numerous as the locusts, or as swarms of grasshoppers, which pitch their camps in the walls at nights and in cold weather, yet they would as completely vanish as do these insects when the sun ariseth. 5. *The destruction of its nobility.* "Thy shepherds slumber, O King of Assyria: thy worthies are at rest." Assyria's princes and great men, her "royal counsellors, deputies, and generals" (Keil), should be slain and lie in still death. With grim satire the prophet represents them as having sunk into peaceful slumber after the labours of a long and busy day. Perhaps he intended to recall the scene which had once been witnessed before Jerusalem, when the stout-hearted (of Sennacherib's army) were spoiled, when they "slept their sleep," and "none of the men of might found their hands," when at the rebuke of Jacob's God "both the chariot and horse were cast into a deep sleep" (Ps. lxxvi. 5, 6). 6. *The dispersion*

of its people; i.e. of such of them as had escaped the sword. "Thy people are scattered upon the mountains, and there is none to gather them" (ver. 18). Compare the language of Micaiah to Ahab with reference to the result of the battle of Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kings xxii. 17). 7. *The exultation of the nations*. "All that hear the bruit of thee clap the hands over thee" (ver. 19). Wherever the report of Nineveh's overthrow should penetrate, it would awaken no compassion. As all nations had suffered from her wickedness, so would they rejoice in her humiliation. None would seek to help her or raise her up. Hence her downfall would be final; there would be no assuaging of her hurt; her wound would be grievous, would be dangerously bad, would be incurable.

Learn: 1. That the day of doom can be averted as little by ungodly men as by wicked nations. 2. That the resources of civilization—commerce and gunpowder—are powerless defences against Heaven's artillery. 3. That nothing and no one can upraise what God has overthrown. 4. That God's righteousness in judging the wicked—whether individuals or nations—will ultimately vindicate itself in the eyes of all.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7.—*The guilt and ruin of Nineveh*. We have here—

I. A MOURNFUL REVELATION OF NATIONAL GUILT AND DEPRAVITY. (Vers. 1, 4.) The Assyrians are here charged with: 1. *Unrighteous war*. (Ver. 1.) There may be times in a nation's history when war becomes a dire necessity; but all war prompted, not by the desire to defend against unworthy aggression, but by unholy ambition, aggrandizement, lust of conquest and glory, deserves the severest reprobation. And such were the wars of the Assyrians, and which secured to their capital the unenviable appellation here used, "the bloody city," i.e. "city of bloods," founded and built up by strife and bloodshed. 2. *Cunning craftiness*. "It is all full of lies" (ver. 1). It gained its unrighteous ends by deceit. Like "the strange woman" (ver. 4), who bedecks herself in showy attire, puts on winsome manners, and resorts to bewitching arts, in order to attract, and then conducts her victim to the very "chambers of death," so Assyria, under show of friendship, brought other powers under her yoke, and effected their overthrow. With cunning craftiness she lay in wait to deceive, so as to enrich herself at the expense of others. 3. *Continuous spoliation*. "It is full of robbery" (ver. 1); "The prey departeth not" (ver. 1). Nineveh was great in barbaric splendour, and abounded in costly treasures; but this was secured by spoils taken in war and by tribute extorted from feebler nations unable to resist her encroachments; by robbery she thus continually made additions to her stores. This iniquity was perpetrated despite professed penitence and reformation resulting from the ministry of Jonah; and now the cup was full. Hence we have—

II. A SOLEMN DECLARATION OF IMPENDING DIVINE JUDGMENT RESULTING IN NATIONAL RUIN AND SHAME. Observe: 1. *The intimate connection between the sin and the shame*. "Because of," etc. (ver. 4). The war so graphically described (vers. 2, 3) was declared by the prophet as the outcome of the national guilt. 2. *The marked retributive nature of the Divine judgment*. (1) Assyria had delighted in war: by war she should fall (vers. 2, 3). (2) She had practised deceit: her real character should be exposed to her confusion and disgrace (ver. 5). (3) She had triumphed over other nations, and in her victory had shown no consideration towards the vanquished: she should herself now be humiliated, and be made a gazing-stock (ver. 6). (4) She had blasphemed the God of Israel: now he would be against her, and would bring all this ruin upon her (vers. 5, 6). 3. *The entire absence of sympathy towards her in her reverses*. (Ver. 7.) No regret should be felt at her fall. No sympathy should be expressed. From her shades men should flee (ver. 7). She should be thought of only as a beacon and a warning—"to point a moral." She should be utterly "desolate"—"cut off" and "laid waste" (ver. 7). This is the end of evil-doing (Job xviii. 17; xxvii. 23; Prov. x. 7; Eccles. viii. 10; Jer. xvii. 13).—S. D. H.

Vers. 8—13.—*No Amon, a sign*. There are certain great principles regulating the Divine government, and these are abiding. The seer spoke in harmony with these
NAHUM. E

when he declared beforehand the ruin of Nineveh. Men, through unbelief, are slow to accept these principles and to acknowledge the inevitable results of their working. They are deceived by *present appearances*. They reason from things as they are, and conclude that, where there is material prosperity, this will of necessity continue. Such was the difficulty with which Nahum had to contend. Assyria in his day was the dominant power, acknowledged and, on account of its tyranny and ambition, dreaded by all. How, then, could the Hebrews credit the announcements of this prophet? Nahum felt their difficulty, and hence, in enforcing his teaching, he wisely turned from the future to the past, and, by referring to what God had done, he indicated what might yet be expected. He appealed to No-Amon as a sign. Consider—

I. NO-AMON A SIGN TO THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH CONCERNING NINEVEH. By "No" (ver. 8) is intended the renowned city of Thebes, the capital of Upper Egypt, called No-Amon, from the idol Ammon enshrined there and represented in the Egyptian monuments by a ram or by a man seated on a chair and with a ram's head. The sign thus chosen by the prophet by way of enforcing his teaching was singularly appropriate. Could Nineveh boast of remarkable natural advantages? So could No-Amon (ver. 8). "It was situate among the rivers," etc. It was surrounded by the Nile and its canals (rhetorically here called "the sea," and actually so called still by the Bedouins), and which served as a natural fortification or bulwark. Could Nineveh pride herself in the multitude of her hosts ready to do her bidding? So could No-Amon. In this respect "her strength was infinite" (ver. 9). Cato computed the number of Egyptians connected with Thebes at seven millions. Could Nineveh glory in her foreign alliances? So could No-Amon (ver. 9). Yet despite all these advantages, No-Amon suffered defeat, and experienced the cruelties attendant thereon (ver. 10). The reference is not to the complete destruction of No-Amon (which was mainly effected by Cambyzes, B.C. 525, and entirely completed by Ptolemy Lathyrus, B.C. 81), but to the expedition of Sargon against Egypt (Isa. xx. 3, 4), B.C. 714. Profane history gives no record of this; but the inscriptions on the monuments found in the palace at Khorsabad, built by Sargon, mention Egypt in connection with the wars of that king, and, when clearly deciphered, appear likely to strikingly confirm the scriptural representations (see Spiegel's 'Nineveh and Assyria' in Herzog's 'Cyclopædia'). And as No-Amon, despite her resources, suffered at the hands of Assyria, so in the time to come should Assyria, notwithstanding her present glory, suffer through the foes who should rise up against her. Complete destruction should overtake her, and the records of her past triumphs and glories lie hidden under the mounds (ver. 11). No power enabling her to withstand the enemy should be available (ver. 11). Her strongholds when assailed should prove like fig trees with the first-ripe figs, which fall without effort on his part into the eater's mouth (ver. 12). Her proud warriors should be in her midst as weak and timid women, their hearts failing them for terror. Her gates should be thrown wide open, and their bolts consumed by fire (ver. 13).

II. NO-AMON AND NINEVEH A SIGN TO MODERN NATIONS. No-Amon, which in Nahum's day had only been partially subjugated by the Assyrians, subsequently fell beneath the power of the conqueror, and so "proud Thebes," "the world's great empress on the Egyptian plains," came to nought. Nineveh, too, which in his time was great indeed in worldly glory, has likewise passed away, and is no more seen. Solemn impressions must be excited within the minds of reflecting men when they are privileged to visit the sites of these ancient despotisms, and to gaze upon the relics of departed greatness (see Stanley's 'Sinai and Palestine,' Introd. xxxviii.—xl.; Wilkinson's 'Ancient Egypt,' iii. 266, 329, 330; Layard's 'Nineveh and its Remains,' i. 6, 7. A voice comes to us from the colossal statues, the decorated palace halls, and the royal tombs of No-Amon; and from the uncovered mounds at Nimroud and Khorsabad, and which seems to say to us: 1. "*The Word of our God shall stand for ever.*" (Isa. xl. 8.) 2. National stability is not secured merely by (1) *strong natural defences*; (2) *influential foreign alliances*; (3) *vast accumulated treasure*; (4) *great military prowess and success*. 3. *Permanent influence, whether for individuals or for nations, has its foundation laid in righteousness and in the fear and love of God.* (Ps. cxliv. 15; lxvii.)—S. D. H.

Vers. 14, 15.—*Human efforts as directed against the Divine purpose. We have*

furnished us in these verses an illustration of human effort as directed against the accomplishment of the purpose of God. Sometimes this course is taken by men unconsciously, but it was scarcely so in this instance. We know that the Assyrian power in the time of Sennacherib boldly defied the God of heaven, and it seems with the lapse of time to have gone from bad to worse. It was the Divine will that at length the arm of Assyria should be broken, and that its haughty and oppressive rule should cease; and the prophet here set forth how that, in the day of trial, human strength should do its best in order to avert the destruction divinely intended to be wrought. Some regard ver. 14 as simply indicating the fact that the Assyrian power would maintain a prolonged defence; whilst others view the prophet as speaking ironically, and as mocking the vain endeavours of the defenders of Nineveh, just as Isaiah ridiculed the makers of idols (xliv. 9—20). Be this as it may, he certainly declared here prophetically that human effort should be enlisted against the overthrow divinely purposed, and that this should utterly fail; the fire should devour, and the sword should cut them off; yea, as destructive as the locusts should the instruments of the Divine vengeance prove (ver. 15). We may find all this suggestive as applied to man's hostile action in relation to the Divine working in the spiritual realm.

I. IT IS AN UNDOUBTED FACT THAT HUMAN EFFORT IS DIRECTED AGAINST THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN GRACE. That purpose is the entire subjugation of evil—the recovery of a lapsed world to allegiance to Heaven, and hence its restoration to holiness and happiness. This benevolent purpose of our God is repeatedly expressed in his Word (Ps. ii. 6; Isa. lii. 10; John xii. 32; Rev. xi. 15). The redemptive plan rests upon it, the unfailing consciousness that he was fulfilling the Divine counsels sustained the Christ as he pressed on with his glorious toil (Heb. xii. 2), and the mighty hope supports his followers in all holy service. Yet such is the aversion of the hearts of men by nature, that against this glorious and loving will of our God human effort has from age to age been directed. The antagonism has taken various forms—persecution, idolatry, scepticism, worldliness; all these forces have been employed in order to bring the counsel of God to nought. Note—

II. THE WEAKNESS OF HUMAN EFFORT AS THUS DIRECTED. So weak, indeed, are such endeavours, that in spite of them the Supreme Ruler sits on the throne of his majesty in perfect repose. He views with calm composure and without even a momentary apprehension and with scornful contempt, this plotting and working of evil-doers (Ps. ii. 4, 5).

III. THE VANITY OF ALL SUCH ENDEAVOURS. They must inevitably prove ineffectual. So has it been, and so shall it be. Monumental pillars were raised to the memory of Diocletian, in that “he had everywhere abolished the superstition of Christ, and had extended the worship of the gods;” yet to-day this “superstition of Christ,” as they called it, is everywhere spreading. The crescent shall wane before the cross; and despite the baneful influences of scepticism and worldliness, the Christ shall become enthroned in every heart. “The burial-place of Christianity cannot be pointed out; it is not; for the living have no tomb.” Its adversaries may “draw waters for the siege, fortify their strongholds,” etc. (ver. 14), but they shall surely be defeated (ver. 15), for “*the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*”—S. D. H.

Vers. 16—18.—*The instability of material greatness.* We have vividly described here—

I. MATERIAL GREATNESS. This consisting in: 1. *Extensive commercial relations.* “Thou hast multiplied thy merchants,” etc. (ver. 16). “The point at which Nineveh was situated was certainly the culminating point of the three quarters of the globe—Europe, Asia, and Africa; and from the very earliest times it was just at the crossing of the Tigris by Nineveh that the great military and commercial roads met which led into the heart of all the leading known lands” (Strauss, quoted by Keil and Delitzsch, ‘Commentary on Minor Prophets,’ vol. ii. note p. 38). “The lists of plunder or of tribute carried off during the world-empire of Egypt, before it was displaced by Assyria, attest the extensive imports or manufactures of Nineveh; the titles of ‘Assyrian nard, Assyrian amomum, Assyrian odours, myrrh, frankincense, involve its trade with the spice countries; domestic manufactures of hers apparently were purple

and dark-blue cloaks, embroidery, brocades, and these conveyed in chests of cedar; her metallurgy was on principles recognized now; in one practical point of combining beauty with strength she has ever been copied" (Pusey on 'Nahum,' p. 394). 2. *Vast military resources.* (Ver. 17.) "Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers." By the term here rendered "crowned" some have understood subordinate princes (see Sennacherib's boast, Isa. x. 8), and by "captains" military officers; but it has been urged with force that such interpretations hardly agree with the comparison to locusts, the number of vassal princes and military officers being comparatively small; and that probably the terms are technical for certain classes of the soldiery (Keil and Delitzsch, *in loc.*). The comparison of these to the locusts and grasshoppers indicates the vast hosts of warriors Assyria could command in her expeditions. 3. *Influential counsellors and commanders.* (Ver. 18.) The "shepherds" and "nobles" were the king's counsellors, and the commanders of his armies, the government of the kingdom devolving upon the former, and its defence upon the latter. In all that constitutes the material strength of a people Assyria was great. Notice—

II. THE INSTABILITY OF MATERIAL GREATNESS. The prophet, looking on to the future, declared that these material tokens of greatness would all fail in the day of trial which was inevitably before them. All these outward indications of prosperity and power would then fade away. The merchants, like the cankerworms in the fields, would remain whilst they could secure any gains, but would seek some safe retreat in the time of national calamity (ver. 16). Their military forces should then perish and be no more, even as the locusts with the shining of the sun depart, leaving no trace behind (ver. 17). Their counsellors, too, should sleep the sleep of death (ver. 18), and their commanders lie beneath the dust of the earth (ver. 18). And even so everything that is connected with material glory is unenduring. Seneca related how that one known to him was raised above the inordinate love of the world by the sight of a Roman triumphal procession. When the scene ended he said, "I have seen all this pomp and magnificence put in such order and passing slowly along; yet it is all gone: why should I esteem that which is so momentary?"

* For all that in this world is great and gay
Doth as a vapour vanish and decay."

III. THE HOPELESSNESS OF THOSE WHO HAVE THIS AS THEIR SOLE DEPENDENCE. "Thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them." Nothing remains in such a case but irretrievable ruin. They only are safe whose repose is placed in the higher and heavenly Source of help. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man," etc. (Ps. cxlvi. 3—6).—S. D. H.

Ver. 19.—*Hopelessness.* "There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous." Nothing can be more distressing than the consciousness of powerlessness in the presence of the deepest human need; to witness from the seashore the wreck, and to be utterly unable to save the shipwrecked mariners; to be sure that some one is in the burning edifice, and yet for it to be impossible to reach him and to bring him out; to stand before an audience alarmed by some needless cry, and to see the rush towards the doors, and to be unequal to checking it; or even to be by the bedside of one in life's youth or manhood's prime, and to hear that disease has, humanly speaking, prematurely seized its victim, and that medical help cannot cure, but only, and that for a time, alleviate. This position is occupied by many an earnest-hearted worker for God and the good of souls, in relation to the moral salvation of men. Nahum sustained it in reference to the Ninevites. He saw in them a people wrecked through the adverse winds and tempests of evil, consumed by the fires of unholy passion, on the mad rush to ruin and death, diseased through and through so that recovery was impossible; and hence, unable to heal, he cried in the sadness of his heart, "There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous" (ver. 19). So Isaiah said, "Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick," etc. (i. 5, 6). So still. Note—

I. THIS STATE OF MORAL HOPELESSNESS IS NOT REACHED ALL AT ONCE, BUT IS BROUGHT ABOUT BY DEGREES.

II. IT IS NOT BROUGHT TO PASS THROUGH DIVINE HELP AND STRENGTH BEING UNAVAILABLE.

III. IT CANNOT BE EXCUSED ON THE GROUND OF THERE BEING A LACK OF WARNINGS AND EXPOSTULATIONS.

IV. IT IS ENTIRELY SELF-CAUSED; THE TRANSGRESSOR BRINGS HIMSELF INTO THIS STATE OF HOPELESSNESS; THE SINNER IS HIS OWN DESTROYER. "Take heed lest ye be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. iii. 12, 13).—S. D. H.

Ver. 19.—*The overthrow of evil-doers a source of thankful joy.* "All that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?" These last words in the Book of Nahum are truly impressive. The messenger closes his brief prophecy in the same tone in which he commenced it, the vengeance of God being still his theme. At the outset he declared the solemn fact; at the end he applies the truth thus announced to the particular case in hand. "The magnificent dirge" forming this third chapter "is one sustained shout of wild exultation that the oppressor has fallen at last. The naked disrowned corpse of the glorious city is cast out to the scorn and disgust of the world. No spark of pity mingles with the prophet's delight. In this storm of indignation and vengeance the spirit of prophecy in the northern kingdom breathes its last. Under this doom Nineveh vanishes from view, to be no more seen till in our day the discovery of her buried remains has given new life to the whole of this portion of sacred history" (Stanley's 'Jewish Church,' ii. 315, 316). The theme suggested by this final utterance of Nahum is *the overthrow of evil-doers a source of thankful joy*. Wherever the report of the fall of Nineveh should reach it should occasion a sense of relief and should excite rapturous delight. "All that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands," etc. (ver. 19). This satisfaction, providing it does not arise from revenge, may be amply justified. See this in that—

I. THE FALL OF WRONG-DOERS MEANS A DIMINUTION OF SUFFERING. It is to this that the prophet specially alludes when he says, "For upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?" meaning that through her guilt she had proved a bitter scourge to all who had come under her influence, and that hence there would be general thanksgiving at her fall in that the tyranny would cease.

II. THE FALL OF WRONG-DOERS MEANS THE TRIUMPH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. The true-hearted, as they witness the prevalence of iniquity, and as they see on every hand hollowness and insincerity, treachery and malice, envy and jealousy, slander and calumny, tyranny and oppression, are led ardently to long for the time when sin shall be completely vanquished, and when right shall be victorious; and since the discomfiture of wrong-doers brings on the final triumph, they rejoice in this, though with a chastened joy, thankfulness for the victory of the right being blended with pity for transgressors.

III. THE FALL OF WRONG-DOERS VINDICATES THE DIVINE RECTITUDE. The honour of their God is very precious to the hearts of the faithful and true. This is often impugned when manifest injustice and wrong seems to pass unpunished. The sceptical appeal to such inequalities, and ask tauntingly, "Where is now thy God?" "Is there a God that judges in the earth?" And when, in the history of men and of nations, God interposes in judgments and vindicates his rectitude, his servants cannot but praise and give thanks.

Note: 1. From the discomfiture and defeat which must eventually be the outcome of evil-doing, God would save men. "He willeth not the death of the sinner." 2. How benevolent the ministry of those who seek men's deliverance from evil! 3. How great the folly of not heeding the call to righteousness given through them! 4. How intense will be the joy of the redeemed Church of God when our poor sin-stricken humanity shall be completely healed, and the full conquest over sin be gained by "the Lord and his Christ"!—S. D. H.

HOMILETICAL INDEX

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