

THE
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

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ZEPHANIAH.

Exposition

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THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH.

INTRODUCTION.

§ I. SUBJECT OF THE BOOK.

THE prophecy of Zephaniah has been called by Kleinert the *Dies iræ* of the Old Testament; and there is much truth in this designation. It is, indeed, replete with announcements of judgment to come; it is wholly occupied with this subject and its consequences, and exhortations founded thereon; not that this is the final object of the prophecy, but it is introduced uniformly as being the means of establishing righteousness in the earth, making God's power known, purging out the evil, and developing the good. The prophet is inspired with the idea of the universal judgment which shall affect the whole world; he sees this anticipated by particular visitations on certain heathen nations; he sees heathendom generally overthrown; he warns his own countrymen of the punishment that awaits them; and he looks forward to the salvation of Israel when all these things have come to pass. The book is one continuous prophecy divided into three parts; it contains, perhaps, many utterances condensed into one systematic whole, which comprises the threat of judgment, the exhortation to repentance, and the promise of salvation.

The prophet begins abruptly with announcing the judgment upon the whole world, upon idolaters, and specially upon Judah for its iniquity; he describes the terrible character of this judgment, and upon whom it shall fall, viz. the chieftains who affect Gentile habits and oppress others, upon the traders who exact usury, upon the faithless who have no belief in Divine providence (ch. i.). Having depicted the day of the Lord, he exhorts the people to repentance, and urges the righteous to persevere that they may be protected in the time of distress. He gives a reason for this exhortation by a more extended announcement of the Divine judgment which shall fall upon nations far and near—Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Ethiopians, Assyrians, yea, and upon Jerusalem herself, whose princes, judges, and prophets shall be justly punished. This display of vengeance shall lead to a reverential awe of the Name of the Lord, and prepare the

way for the pure worship of God (ch. ii. 1—iii. 8). This introduces the announcement of Messianic hopes. The nations shall serve the Lord with one accord; Israel shall return from its dispersion, purified and humbled, the evil being purged away; it shall be safe under God's special care, and shall rejoice in happiness undisturbed; the oppressor shall be destroyed, and the holy nation shall be "a name and a praise among all people of the earth" (ch. iii. 9—20).

The prophecy of Zephaniah is in some respects supplementary to that of Habakkuk. The latter had foretold the punishment of Judah through the Chaldeans; the former shows how the judgment will affect, not the Jews only, but pagan nations also, yea, the whole earth; but he does not name nor accurately describe the instruments of this vengeance. This reticence has given occasion to much speculation on the part of critics. Those who believe in the predictive element of prophecy, and acknowledge the inspiration of Divine foreknowledge in the utterances of the prophets, have no difficulty in seeing the fulfilment of the announced judgment in the action of the Chaldeans, whom Zephaniah, in agreement with the general and comprehensive character of his oracle, does not specifically name. But Hitzig and those who reject all definite prophecy take much pains to discover an enemy to whom the prophet could allude without resorting to supernatural knowledge. They find this convenient invader in the horde of Scythians who, as Herodotus relates (i. 103—106), burst into Media, went thence towards Egypt, were bought off by Psammetichus, and on their return a few stragglers plundered a temple at Ascalon. This inroad is reported to have happened about the time that the prophecy was uttered. But Herodotus's account of the Scythians, when carefully examined, is proved to be full of inaccuracies; and even this gives no support to the figment of their attack on the Jews, of whose existence they were probably unaware, nor to any destruction of the nations mentioned by Zephaniah effected by them. Whether it was revealed to the prophet that the Chaldeans were to be the executors of the Divine vengeance, or whether the exact instruments were not identified in his view (the law of moral government being present to his mind rather than any definite circumstances), the fact remains that he announces certain events which we know were not fulfilled by any proceedings of Scythians, but were exactly accomplished by the Chaldeans (see note on ch. i. 7).

The peculiarity in Zephaniah's prophecy is the extension of his view to all lands and nations, their spiritual concerns, their future condition. While cursorily announcing the fate of Jerusalem, he dwells chiefly upon the exercise of God's power upon the exterior kingdoms of the world, and how they are ordained to work out his great purposes.

§ II. AUTHOR.

Of Zephaniah we know absolutely nothing but what he himself mentions in the superscription of his book. No information can be gathered from

the contents of the prophecy, where the writer's personal history is wholly unnoticed. He calls himself "the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah." As it is usual to mention only the name of the father, it has been inferred that the genealogy is carried up to the fourth generation because Hizkiah, *i.e.* Hezekiah, was a celebrated personage, and most probably the famous King of Judah. But the inference is not undoubted. Hizkiah is not called "King of Judah" in the genealogy, which would naturally have been done had he been the ancestor intended, as in Prov. xxv. 1; Isa. xxxviii. 9. There is room enough, indeed, between Hezekiah and Josiah for the four specified descents, though only three are named in the case of Josiah himself; but the name Hezekiah was not unknown among the Jews, and we cannot assume without further support that the person here mentioned is the king. It is fair to argue that the insertion of the genealogical details shows that the prophet was of distinguished birth; but further it is impossible to go with any certainty.

The name of the prophet is variously explained, as "The Lord hath hid," or "The Lord hath guarded," or "The Lord's Watch-tower." Keil is generally followed in interpreting it as "He whom Jehovah hides, or shelters." The LXX. writes it *Σοφονίας*: Vulgate, *Sophoniah*. There were others who bore this name (see 2 Kings xxv. 18; 1 Chron. vi. 36; Zech. vi. 10, 14). The details given by Pseudo-Dorotheus and Pseudo-Epiphanius ('De Vit. Proph.,' xix.), among which is the assertion that he was a member of the tribe of Simeon, have no historical basis.

§ III. DATE.

Zephaniah, in the inscription of his book, states that he prophesied "in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, King of Judah;" and this assertion has never been seriously disputed. The only question is in what part of that king's reign did he exercise his office. Josiah reigned thirty-one years, according to the usually received dates—from B.C. 640 to B.C. 609. The destruction of Nineveh, which Zephaniah foretold, took place quite at the end of Josiah's reign, and his prophecy must have been uttered some time before this event. No other data for determining the question exist save what may be gathered from internal evidences. And these are most uncertain, depending chiefly upon inferences drawn from the great reformation effected by the good king. Did he prophesy before this reformation was begun, or after it was effected, that is to say, in the first or second half of Josiah's reign? A third alternative may be added—Was it during the progress of this religious amelioration? Those who assign the prophecy to the earlier period, before the king's eighteenth year, when his vigorous measures produced their happy results, rely upon the fact that the prophet speaks as though idolatry and the disorders which Josiah repressed were still rampant, even the members of the royal family being implicated in the

general iniquity. It is inconceivable, they say, that Zephaniah should have taken this gloomy view, and have entirely omitted all mention of the young prince's noble efforts to effect a change for the better, had this attempt already been commenced. All this points to a time when Josiah was still a minor, and before he had begun to assert himself in the direction of affairs. On the other hand, it is contended that certain statements in the body of the work prove that the reformation was being carried on at the time when it was composed: the public worship of Jehovah existed (ch. iii. 4, 5), and this side by side with that of Baal and with many idolatrous practices (ch. i. 4, 5); there were priests of Jehovah as well as priests of false gods at the same time. Nor can we reason from Zephaniah's silence concerning reforms that none had been essayed; for Jeremiah, who began to prophesy in the thirteenth year of Josiah, is quite as strong as Zephaniah in his denunciations of idolatry, the fact being that, though it was publicly abolished, it was still practised extensively in secret. Others, again, claim a still later date for the prophecy, because it speaks of the extermination of the *remnant* of Baal (ch. i. 4), which implies that the purification had already been effected, and that only isolated instances still existed; the prophet also speaks of and refers to the Mosaic books as well known to his hearers (comp. ch. i. 13, 15, 17; ii. 2, 5, 7, 11; iii. 5, 19, 20), which could only have been after the discovery of the "book of the Law" in Josiah's eighteenth year (2 Kings xxii. 8). It must be noted that on this occasion reference was made to the Prophetess Huldah, not to Zephaniah (2 Kings xxii. 14). Hence some suppose that he was dead at this time.

From this brief recapitulation of arguments it will be seen that each of the three theories mentioned above has much to be said in its favour; and that the only safe conclusion to adopt is this—that although the present book, as now displayed in the sacred canon, forms one connected whole, it is composed of prophecies uttered at various times and gathered by their author into a volume and arranged on a definite plan. Its place in the canon is the same both in the Hebrew and Greek, and coincides with the chronological order to which it is assigned.

§ IV. GENERAL CHARACTER.

Some critics have spoken disparagingly of the style of Zephaniah's prophecy, as being prosaic and bearing no comparison with any of the other Hebrew poets. There is some truth in this criticism; but the censure is exaggerated and unjust. Of the remarkable purity of his language there can be no doubt; and if his rhythm is at times faulty, judged by the standard of the highest models, and sinks into prose; if he is wanting in sublimity and elegance; it must be allowed that he is always easy and full of life, often vehement, fiery, and severe, and that the force and conciseness of his utterances leave a definite impression on the mind which needs no

rhetorical artifice to make it permanent. Like other prophets, he connects himself with his predecessors by employing their language, not from poverty of idea, not from "declension in the originality of prophets of this date," but because he designs to give, in a compendious form, "the fundamental thoughts of judgment and salvation which are common to all the prophets" (Keil). He predicts judgment; the particular instrument he leaves untold. The destruction, not the destroyer, is the subject of his oracle. His future is vague, and extends even to the end of time; particular period or special agent is beyond his scope to name. He culls isolated expressions and striking words from his predecessors, Isaiah, Joel, Amos, and Habakkuk; he avails himself of their language with respect to judgment to come, and God's love for the righteous among the people, and applies it to his own purpose (see Pusey, p. 441). The peculiar nature of this prophecy, its comprehensiveness and universality, has been well intimated by Bucer, who says, "Si quis desiderat secreta vatum oracula brevi dari compendio, brevem hunc Zaphanjam perlegat."

§ V. LITERATURE.

Of special commentaries on Zephaniah the most noteworthy are the following: M. Bucer, 'Sophon. Proph.' (Argent., 1528); Laren, 'Tuba Zeph.' (Magdeb., 1653); Jansen, 'Analecta in Sophon.,' Tarnovius, 'Comment.' (Rost., 1623); Noltén, 'Dissert. Exeget.' (1719); 'Comment.' (Franc., 1724); Cramer, 'Scyth. Denkmäler' (1777); Von Coeln, 'Spicilegium' (Bresl., 1819); P. Ewald, 'Zeph. übersetzt' (Erlang., 1827); Strauss, 'Vaticin. Zeph. Comment. Illustr.' (Berlin, 1843); Reinke, 'Der Proph. Zeph.' (Munst., 1868).

§ VI. ARRANGEMENT IN SECTIONS.

The book is divided into three parts.

Part I. (Ch. i.) The judgment upon all the world, and upon Judah in particular.

§ 1. (Ch. i. 1.) Title and inscription.

§ 2. (Ch. i. 2, 3.) The prelude, announcing the judgment upon the whole world.

§ 3. (Ch. i. 4—6.) This judgment will fall specially upon Judah and Jerusalem for their idolatry.

§ 4. (Ch. i. 7—13.) The judgment is described as regards its objects, viz. the princes, the traders, the irreligious and profligate.

§ 5. (Ch. i. 14—18.) The near approach and terrible nature of this judgment.

Part II. (Ch. ii. 1—iii. 8.) Exhortation to repentance and to perseverance.

§ 1. (Ch. ii. 1—3.) Let all examine their ways before the day of the Lord comes, and let the righteous specially seek the Lord more earnestly, that they may be safe in the judgment.

§ 2. (Ch. ii. 4—7.) The exhortation is supported by the announcement of the punishment on various nations, which shall prepare the way for the acceptance of true religion; and first the punishment shall fall on the Philistines.

§ 3. (Ch. ii. 8—10.) Then upon the Moabites and Ammonites.

§ 4. (Ch. ii. 11.) Jehovah destroys idolatry, that pure religion may reign over all the earth.

§ 5. (Ch. ii. 12—15.) The judgment shall fall on the Ethiopians and Assyrians.

§ 6. (Ch. iii. 1—5.) If God punishes the heathen, he will not spare the hardened sinners in Judah.

§ 7. (Ch. iii. 6—8.) This is the only way left to secure salvation for Israel and the whole world.

Part III. (Ch. iii. 9—20.) Promise of the conversion of the world and the happiness of Israel.

§ 1. (Ch. iii. 9, 10.) The heathen shall be converted, and shall help in the restoration of Israel.

§ 2. (Ch. iii. 11—13.) Israel restored to God's favour shall be cleansed and sanctified.

§ 3. (Ch. iii. 14—20.) She shall be comforted and largely blessed by the presence of Jehovah, and exalted to honour in the eyes of all the world.

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

VERS. 1—18.—Part I. THE JUDGMENT UPON ALL THE WORLD, AND UPON JUDAH IN PARTICULAR.

Ver. 1.—§ 1. *Title and inscription.* The word of the Lord (see note on Micah i. 1). Zephaniah, "Whom the Lord shelters" (see Introduction, § II.). The son of, etc. The genealogy thus introduced shows that the prophet was of illustrious descent; or it may be inserted to distinguish him from others who bore the same name. *Hizkiah.* The same name which is elsewhere written in our version *Hezekiah.* Whether the great King of Judah is here meant may well be questioned (see Introduction). Other prophets have prefixed their genealogies to their books (see Zech. i. 1; and in the Apocrypha, Baruch i. 1). In the days of Josiah. Zephaniah here gathers into one volume the denunciations and predictions which he had uttered during the reign of Josiah, both before and after the great reformation effected by that good king (2 Kings xxiii.).

Vers. 2, 3.—§ 2. *The prelude, announcing the judgment upon the whole world.*

Ver. 2.—I will utterly consume; literally, *taking away I will make an end.* Jeremiah (viii. 13) uses the same expression. The prophet begins abruptly with this announcement of universal judgment before he warns Judah in particular of the punishment that awaits her, because his position is that the way to salvation is through chastisement. Vulgate, *congregans congregabo*, where the verb must be used in the sense of "gathering for destruction." All things. More expressly defined in the following verse. This awful warning recalls the judgment of the Flood and the pre-

liminary monition (Gen. vi. 7). *From off the land; from the face of the earth,* not the land of Judah alone. *Saith the Lord; is the saying of Jehovah.* The prophet in this is merely the vehicle of the Divine announcement.

Ver. 3.—*Man and beast, etc.* This is not mere hyperbole to express the utter wasting and destruction that were impending, but points to the mysterious connection between man and the lower creation, how in agreement with the primal curse even material nature suffers for man's sin (Gen. iii. 17; Rom. viii. 22). If we expect a new heaven and a new earth, we know that God will show his wrath against the old creation defiled with sin (2 Pet. iii. 10; comp. Jer. iv. 25; ix. 9, etc.; Hos. iv. 3). *And the stumbling-blocks with the wicked.* Not the sinners only shall be swept away by this judgment, but also all offences, all causes of stumbling, whether idols or other incentives to departure from truth and right. Septuagint, *καὶ ἀσθενήσουσιν οἱ ἀσεβεῖς*, "and the ungodly shall be weak;" Vulgate, *et ruinæ impiorum erunt.* These versions seem to have missed the point. I will cut off man. It is on man's account that this judgment is sent—a truth which the prophet enforces by reiteration.

Vers. 4—6.—§ 3. *The judgment will fall especially upon Judah and Jerusalem for their idolatry.*

Ver. 4.—I will also stretch out mine hand. This expression is used when God is about to do great things or inflict notable punishment (see Exod. iii. 20; xv. 12; Deut. iv. 34; Isa. v. 25; Jer. li. 25, etc.). Judah. In so far as Judah was rebellious and wicked, it should incur the judicial punishment. Judgment was to begin at the house of God (1 Pet. iv. 17), the sin of the chosen people being more heinous than

that of heathens. Hence it is added, upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, because, having in their very midst the temple of God, with its services and priests, they ought especially to have abhorred idolatry and maintained the true faith. The remnant of Baal; i.e. the last vestige. One cannot argue from this expression that the reform was already carried so far that Baal-worship had almost disappeared. The next verse shows that idolatry still flourished; but the term implies merely that God would exterminate it so entirely that no trace of it should remain. The LXX. has, "the names of Baal," τὰ ὀνόματα τῆς Βαάλ (Hos. ii. 17). (For Josiah's reform of these iniquities, see 2 Kings xxiii. 4, etc.) The name of the Chemarims (*Chemarim*). The word means "black-robed," and is applied to the idolatrous priests whom the kings had appointed to conduct worship in high places (2 Kings xxiii. 5; Hos. x. 5). "The name," says Dr. Pusey, "is probably the Syriac name of 'priest,' used in Holy Scripture of idolatrous priests, because the Syrians were idolaters." Not only shall the persons of these priests be cut off, but their very name and memory shall vanish (Zech. xiii. 2). With the priests (*kohanim*). Together with the legitimate priests who had corrupted the worship of Jehovah (ch. iii. 4; Jer. ii. 8; Ezek. viii. 11).

Ver. 5.—That worship the host of heaven upon the house-tops. In this verse two classes of false worshippers are mentioned, viz. star-worshippers, and waverers. The worship of the sun, moon, and stars was a very ancient form of error, the heavenly bodies being regarded as the representatives of the powers of nature and the originators of events on earth (see Deut. iv. 19; xvii. 3; Job xxxi. 26, 27; 2 Kings xvii. 16). It was especially prevalent in the time of Manasseh (2 Kings xxi. 3). On the flat roofs of the houses, which were used as places of meditation, recreation, or conference (comp. Josh. ii. 6; 1 Sam. ix. 25; 2 Sam. xi. 2; Acts x. 9), they erected altars for family worship of the heavenly bodies. Here they both burned incense (Jer. xix. 13) and offered animal sacrifices (2 Kings xxiii. 12). "In Syrian cities," says Dr. Thomson, "the roofs are a great comfort. The ordinary houses have no other place where the inmates can either see the sun, smell the air, dry their clothes, set out their flower-pots, or do numberless other things essential to their health and comfort. During a large part of the year the roof is the most agreeable place about the establishment, especially in the morning and evening. There multitudes sleep during the summer" ('The Land and the Book,' p. 39). **Them that worship and**

that, etc.; rather, *the worshippers who, etc.* These were people who endeavoured to blend the worship of God with that of Baal, or halted between two opinions (1 Kings xviii. 21). **Swear by the Lord; rather, swear to the Lord;** i.e. bind themselves by oath to him, and at the same time swear by Malcham; *swear by their king, Baal, or Moloch;* call upon him as god. Septuagint, κατὰ τοῦ βασιλείως αὐτῶν, "by their king." But it is, perhaps, best to retain the name untranslated, in which case it would be the appellation of the god Moloch, who could hardly be omitted in enumerating the objects of idolatrous worship (see Jer. xlix. 1, 3; and notes on Amos i. 15; v. 26).

Ver. 6.—**Them that are turned back from the Lord.** This is a third class, viz. apostates and open despisers. Those who follow him no more, renegades who have left his service. The Vulgate reproduces the original by, *qui avertuntur de post tergum Domini*. **Those that have not sought the Lord.** These are the indifferent, who do not trouble themselves about religion. The chief classes mentioned in these two verses are three, viz. the open idolaters, the syncretists who mingled the worship of Baal with that of Jehovah, and those who despised religion altogether.

Ver. 7.—13.—4. *The judgment is described with regard to those whom it will affect, viz. the princes, the traders, the irreligious and profligate.*

Ver. 7.—This judgment, so fearful, is near at hand, and must needs occasion the utmost terror and dismay. **Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God;** literally, *Hush, from the face of the Lord Jehovah!* εὐλαβείσθε (Septuagint); *silete a facie Domini Dei* (Vulgate). The expression is like Hab. ii. 20. The reason of this silent awe is next given. **For the day of the Lord is at hand.** The day of judgment is thus called (Joel i. 15; Isa. xiii. 6; Amos v. 18, 20; Obad. 15). The Lord hath prepared a sacrifice. The words are from Isa. xxxiv. 6 (comp. Jer. xlvi. 10; Ezek. xxxix. 17, 19). The sacrifice is the guilty Jewish nation. The punishment of the wicked is regarded as a satisfaction offered to the Divine justice. **He hath bid his guests; he hath consecrated his called.** The "called ones" are the strange nations whom God summons to execute his vengeance. Septuagint, ἤγαγε τοὺς κλητοὺς αὐτοῦ. These are said to be "sanctified," as if engaged in a holy war, when summoned to punish those who had become as heathen. So those who are called to chastise Babylon are termed "my sanctified ones" (Isa. xiii. 3), as being the instruments appointed and set apart to

carry out this purpose (comp. Jer. xxii. 7; li. 27, 28; Micah iii. 5). The particular agents intended are not specified by the prophet, whose mission was not directed to any such definition. He has to speak generally of the judgment to come, not of those whom God should employ to inflict it. We know from other sources that the Chaldeans are meant, they or the Assyrians being always announced as the executors of God's vengeance on his rebellious people. The notion, adopted by Ewald, Hitzig, and others, that the prophet refers to some supposed invasion of Scythians which took place about this time, would never have been started had not such authors desired to eliminate the predictive element from prophetic utterances. The vague account of Herod. i. 105 gives no support to the assertion that the Scythians invaded Palestine in Josiah's reign; nor is there a trace of any knowledge of such irruption in Zephaniah or Jeremiah (see Introduction, § L).

Ver. 8.—The prophet names the three classes of people who shall be smitten in this judgment. First, the princes. In the day of the Lord's sacrifice (see note on ver. 7). God is speaking; so the name of the Lord is employed instead of the pronoun (comp. Lam. iii. 66). **I will punish; literally, visit upon** (ver. 12; Amos iii. 14). **The princes.** The heads of tribes and families, nobles and magistrates. **The king's children (sons);** Septuagint, τὸν οἶκον τοῦ βασιλέως, "the house of the king." The royal family, not specially the sons of Josiah, who, if they were then in existence, must have been mere children, but princes of the royal house. The reference may be particularly to the sons of the king reigning when the judgment fell (see 2 Kings xxv. 7). The king himself is not mentioned as subject to the judgment, inasmuch as he was pious and obedient (2 Chron. xxxiv. 27, etc.). In the mention of these "children" Keil finds proof of the late origin of the prophecy. Such as are clothed with strange apparel. This clause must represent the sin for which the princes are "visited." "Strange" apparel means "foreign" apparel, and this implied foreign manners and habits. The Israelites were reminded by their very dress that they were a peculiar people, consecrated to God's service (Numb. xv. 37, etc.; Deut. xxii. 12). These nobles, however, assumed the dress of the Egyptians and other nations with which they came in contact, and, despising their own national customs, copied the manners and vices of foreigners (comp. Isa. iii. 16—24; Ezek. xx. 32; 1 Macc. i. 11—15).

Ver. 9.—Those that leap on (over) the threshold. These are the retainers of the princes, etc., named in ver. 8. There is no

allusion to the circumstance of the priests of Dagon abstaining from treading on the threshold of their temple in consequence of what happened to the idol at Ashdod (1 Sam. v. 5). It is inconceivable that this merely local custom, which demonstrated the impotence of the false god, should have been imported into Judah, where, indeed, the worship of Dagon seems never to have made any way. The following clause explains the meaning which the Latin version intimates, *Omnes qui arroganter ingreditur super limen*—all those who, carrying out their masters' wishes, violently invade the houses of others and pillage them of their contents. The expression, "to leap over the threshold," seems to have been a common term for burglary and stealing with violence. **Which all their masters' houses.** These retainers plunder and steal in order that they may increase their masters' treasures. The king (though not Josiah) may be meant, the plural being the plural of majesty, or the idol-temples. The LXX., followed by Jerome, renders, "who fill the house of the Lord their God." This is plainly erroneous, as there is no question here about the temple at Jerusalem. **Violence and deceit; i.e.** the fruits of, what they have extorted by, violence and fraud (Jer. v. 27).

Ver. 10.—The second class which shall be smitten, viz. the traders and usurers, the enemy being represented as breaking in upon the localities where these persons resided. **The fish gate.** This is generally supposed to have been in the north wall of the city towards its eastern extremity, and to have been so called because through it were brought the fish from the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee, and there was a fish-market in its immediate neighbourhood (see Neh. iii. 3; xii. 39; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 14). It was probably on this side that the Chaldeans entered Jerusalem, as Zedekiah seems to have escaped from the south (Jer. xxxix. 4). The LXX. has, ἀπὸ πύλης ἀποκερτοῦργων, which Jerome notes as a mistake. **From the second district,** the lower city upon the hill Acra, to the north of the old town, Zion. This is so called, according to one rendering, in 2 Kings xxii. 14 and Neh. xi. 9. **A great crashing.** Not merely the crash of falling buildings, but the cry of men when a city is taken and the inhabitants are put to the sword. **The hills,** on which the greater part of the city was built. Keil thinks that the hills surrounding the lower city are meant, viz. Bezetha, Gareb, etc., as the hearer of the cry is supposed to be on Zion.

Ver. 11.—**Maktesh; the Mortar;** Septuagint, τὴν κατακεκομμένην, "her that is broken down." The word is found in Judg. xv. 19 of a hollow place in a rock, and it is

here used in the sense of "valley," and probably refers to the Tyropœum, or part of it, the depression that ran down the city, having Acra and Zion on its west side, and Moriah and Ophel on its east, and extended south as far as the pool of Siloam. It does not seem a very appropriate appellation for a lengthy valley like the Tyropœum, nor is there any trace of such a name being applied to it elsewhere. It may have been a name affixed to a certain locality where a bazaar was situated or certain special industries had their seat; or it may have been invented by Zephaniah to intimate the fate that awaited the evil merchants, that they should be, as it were, brayed in a mortar by their enemies. **The merchant people; literally, people of Canaan.** So Septuagint and Vulgate (comp. Hos. xii. 7; Hist. of Susannah 56; Zech. xiv. 21). The iniquitous traders are called "people of Canaan," because they acted like the heathens around them, especially the Phœnicians, who were unscrupulous and dishonest in their transactions. **Are cut down; are silenced;** Vulgate, *conticuit* (Isa. vi. 5; Hos. x. 7). **They that bear (are laden with) silver.** Those who have amassed wealth by trade and usury. The LXX. has, *οἱ ἐπληρωμένοι ἀργυρίου*, "those who are elated with silver;" St. Jerome, *involuti argento*.

Ver. 12.—The third class which shall be smitten, viz. the profligate and riotous. **I will search Jerusalem with candles (lights).** No evil-doer shall escape. The enemy whom God summons to execute his wrath shall leave no corner unsearched where the debauchees hide themselves (comp. Luke xv. 8). Jerome and commentators after him refer to Josephus's account of the last siege of Jerusalem for a parallel to these predicted proceedings of the Chaldeans. Here we read how princes and priests and chieftains were dragged from sewers, and pits, and caves, and tombs, where they had hidden themselves in fear of death, and were mercilessly slain wherever they were found (Josephus, 'Bell. Jud.' vi. 9). **The men that are settled on their lees; i.e. confirmed, hardened, and inveterate in their evil habits.** The metaphor is derived from old wine not racked off, which retains all its flavour and odour, and becomes thick and viscid (see Isa. xxv. 6; Jer. xlviii. 11). The LXX. paraphrases, *τοῖς καταφοροῦντας ἐπὶ τὰ φυλάγματα αὐτῶν*, which Jerome renders, *qui continentur custodia suas*. **That say in their heart.** They do not openly scoff at religion, but think within themselves these infidel thoughts. **The Lord will not do good, etc.** Just what God says of idols (Isa. xli. 23). These "fools" (Ps. xiv. 1) deny God's moral government of the world; they will not see the working of Divine providence

in all that happens, but, secure and careless in their worldly prosperity, they assign all events to chance or natural law, placing Jehovah in the same category as the idols worshipped by heathens (comp. Job xxii. 12, etc.; Ps. x. 4, etc.; xciv. 7).

Ver. 13.—**Their goods; literally, their strength;** their wealth in which they trusted shall become the prey of the enemy, and thus they shall learn that God ruleth in the affairs of men. **They shall also build houses, etc.** They shall prove in their own case the reality of the punishment threatened in the Law (Lev. xxvi. 32, etc.; Deut. xxviii. 30, 39; comp. Amos v. 11; Micah vi. 15).

Vers. 14—18.—§ 5. *To arouse the self-confident sinners, the prophet here enlarges upon the near approach and terrible nature of this coming judgment.*

Ver. 14.—Having signified the victims of the judgment, Zephaniah recurs to what he had said in ver. 7, and enforces upon his hearers its near approach. **The great day of the Lord (Joel ii. 1, 11).** Even the voice of the day of the Lord. The day is so close at hand, that the sound of its coming can be heard. Some translate, "Hark! the day of Jehovah." **The mighty man shall cry (crieth) there bitterly.** There, on the battle-field, the hero is panic-stricken, and cries out for fear. The Greek and Latin Versions connect "bitter" with the former clause. Thus the Vulgate, *Vox dñi Domini amara*; Septuagint, *φωνὴ ἡμέρας Κυρίου πικρὰ καὶ σκληρὰ τέτακται*, "The voice of the day of the Lord is made bitter and harsh."

Ver. 15.—**That day is a day of wrath;** Vulgate, *Dies iræ, dies illa*, words which form the commencement of the famous hymn. The better to describe the terrible nature of the judgment, the prophet crowds together all available expressions of terror and calamity. First, it is a day when God's anger shall blaze forth (Isa. ix. 18). **Of trouble and distress.** In its effects upon sinners (Job xv. 24). **Of wasteness and desolation.** As if things returned to the primeval chaos (Gen. i. 2; comp. Job xxx. 3; xxxviii. 27, where there is a similar combination; see note on Nah. ii. 10). **Of darkness and gloominess** (Joel ii. 2; Amos v. 18, 20). **Of clouds and thick darkness** (Deut. iv. 11; comp. Hab. iii. 11).

Ver. 16.—**A day of the trumpet and alarm.** "Alarm" means "the sound of alarm." Among the Jews trumpets were used to announce the festivals (Numb. xxix. 1), and to give the signal for battle or of the approach of an enemy (Jer. iv. 5, 19; Ezek. xxxiii. 4). Here it is the signal of destruction (Amos ii. 2). **The fenced cities.** The strongest fortresses shall feel the irresistible

attack (Micah v. 11). **The high towers.** These are the turrets built at the angles of the walls for the better defence of the city, and to annoy the besiegers (ch. iii. 6). LXX., ἐπὶ τὰς γωνίας τὰς ὑψηλάς, "upon the lofty angles;" Vulgate, *super angulos excelsoſ*. Others take the words to mean "the battlements" on the walls. Henderson quotes Tacitus's description of the later walls of Jerusalem, "Duos colles immensum editos claudebant muri per artem obliqui aut introrsus sinuati, ut latera oppugnantium ad ictus patescerent" ('Hist.,' v. 11).

Ver. 17.—In this storming of cities and universal ruin, sinners shall perish without hope. I will bring distress upon men. I will drive them into the utmost straits (comp. Deut. xxviii. 52, 53). They shall walk like blind men. Not knowing where they go in their terror and confusion, seeking a way of escape and finding none (see Deut. xxviii. 29, on which this passage is founded; comp. Job v. 14; Isa. lix. 10). Because they have sinned, as shown in vers. 4—12. Their blood shall be poured out as dust. The point of comparison is rather in the

worthlessness than in the abundance of dust. Bloodshed is as little regarded as dust that is trodden under foot (comp. 2 Kings xiii. 7). The comparison with water is found elsewhere (cf. Ps. lxxix. 3). **Their flesh as the dung.** The verb from the preceding clause may be taken by zeugma with this clause; then the meaning is that their dead bodies are left unburied to rot on the ground (Jer. ix. 22). Or the substantive verb may be supplied (comp. Job xx. 7).

Ver. 18.—Neither their silver, etc. They cannot bribe this enemy; their wealth cannot win for them immunity (Isa. xiii. 17; Ezek. vii. 19). **The fire of his jealousy** (ch. iii. 8). The whole earth (for, as we have seen in ch. i. 2, 3, the judgment is universal) shall be punished in the wrath of the Lord, who will not have the honour which is due to him given to any other. **He shall make even a speedy riddance;** more closely, *he shall make an end, yea, a speedy end* (comp. Nah. i. 8; Isa. x. 23, which our text imitates). (For the sudden and unexpected arrival of the day of the Lord, see Luke xvii. 26, etc.)

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The prophet and his times.* I. HIS PEDIGREE. (Ver. 1.) This is the solitary instance in which the lineage of a prophet is traced back in Scripture four generations. The reason would seem to be in order to indicate his relationship to Hezekiah, the pious King of Judah. Note: 1. The honour connected with a pious ancestry. 2. The perpetuity of the influence of a good life.

II. HIS AUTHORITY. This was not derived from his royal descent, but from his being under the inspiration of the Almighty. "The word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah" (ver. 1). The words of those high in rank are often invested with a value they do not intrinsically possess, but the utterances of this prince of Judah claim our regard as the words of one taught by the Spirit of God.

III. HIS AGE. He prophesied "in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, King of Judah" (ver. 1). Unhappily, the reforms instituted by the good Hezekiah had not been sustained during the succeeding reigns, so that the nation, both politically and spiritually, had relapsed into a thoroughly corrupt state by the time that the boy-king Josiah came to the throne. Consecrated from early life to the service of the true God, the youthful monarch devoted the energies of his early manhood to the rooting out of idolatry from his land, and to the restoration and re-establishment of the temple and its services. Zephaniah, doubtless, prophesied shortly before this work of reformation commenced, and the influence of his faithful ministry would be helpful to the royal reformer in carrying out his noble work.

IV. THE CHARACTER OF THE MESSAGE WITH WHICH HE WAS DIVINELY ENTRUSTED. This was: 1. Very dark. He was, indeed, a messenger of judgment; the solemn responsibility devolved upon him of announcing "the terrors of the Lord" (vers. 2, 3). The anger of the Lord was kindled against Judah, and though to be delayed until Josiah should be gathered to his rest, it must at length fall (2 Kings xxii. 3—20; xxiii. 21—27; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 8—33; xxxv. 1—19). 2. Very comprehensive. His predictions of judgment were not limited to Judah, but were directed also against heathen nations—Philistia, Moab and Ammon, Ethiopia, and Assyria (ch. ii.). 3. Yet withal not lacking encouragement; for whilst he told of impending judgment, he called to repentance, unfolded the mercy of the Most High, and indicated how that even the darkest events impending would be overruled for the well-being of the race.

Vers. 4, 5.—*A corrupt priesthood and its pernicious influence.* The work of reformation carried on by Hezekiah was unquestionably great, yet it cannot be correctly described as having been complete. The weeds of idolatry were extensively destroyed by him, yet many roots remained, and, springing up, bore a fresh harvest of evil in the succeeding reigns, so that the godly Josiah found himself confronted with a powerful remnant of idolatry. In dealing with this he must have been materially assisted by the bold denunciations of Zephaniah; and these were fittingly directed first of all against the corrupt priesthood (ver. 4). We have here—

I. AN EXALTED OFFICE. That of the priest. The Jewish priesthood was of Divine appointment, chosen and set apart by God to the most sacred duties, and the whole being typical of the character and mission of the great High Priest who was in the fulness of time to appear. And whilst in his work these functions received their consummation, and the Aaronic priesthood passed away, yet Christ when he ascended upon high “gave gifts unto men,” etc. (Eph. iv. 11—13). The work of the ministry is scriptural, noble, honourable. Those divinely called to it have to teach the truth of God, to seek to win men to righteousness and heaven, to lead worshippers to the very throne of the Eternal, to direct the activities of the Church, and to shepherd the flock of Christ. The work is “a good work” (1 Tim. iii. 1), and faithfully to do it is to secure present and eternal honour.

II. THIS HIGH OFFICE CORRUPTED. Those here styled “the Chemarims” were Jewish priests, some of whom were of the tribe of Levi, and others chosen from the lowest of the people, who sold themselves to the faithless kings of Judah, and at their bidding offered polluted rites at the altar of God, and joined with the heathen priests in serving the altars of Baal (2 Kings xxiii. 5; Hos. x. 5). The highest and holiest functions may still be perverted. This is the case when motives other than those of love to God and to the souls of men impel to engaging in ministerial service, or when in rendering such service any compromise is made with error and sin.

III. THE PERNICIOUS INFLUENCE RESULTING FROM SUCH CORRUPTION. “Like priests, like people.” Hence, immediately following the allusion to the corrupt priesthood, reference is made to the people as worshipping the host of heaven upon the house-tops (ver. 5). Luther says, “The chemarim produced an erroneous opinion among the people that they were of all others the most assiduous in religion and Divine worship,” and if so, their influence over the people would be proportionately increased through their zeal, and no wonder that, following these false guides, idolatry and irreligion so widely prevailed in the land. A faithless and disloyal ministry in any age must prove a blight and a curse.

IV. THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS PRONOUNCED AGAINST THESE FAITHLESS ONES AND THEIR ADHERENTS. Their followers should be visited with retribution, whilst as to these false leaders, they should be “cut off,” and their very name be blotted out. Their fate speaks silently and solemnly to all who claim to be ministers of God. His charge to all such is, “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman,” etc. (Ezek. ii. 17—21), and this is his promise attached to fidelity, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. ii. 10).

Ver. 5.—*Divided service.* “That worship and that swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham.” It is not two distinct classes of persons that are here referred to, but one and the same class. The allusion is to such as sought to be identified both with the service of God and the service of Malcham. It is an example of divided service that is here presented to us, an illustration of men attempting that which the great Teacher in a later age declared to be altogether impracticable, even to serve two masters.

I. AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK ATTEMPTED, AND RESULTING IN FAILURE AND SHAME. 1. *The task.* *Malcham*, or *Malkâm*, or “king,” was a term used for Baal, and who is thus described on the Phœnician inscriptions. The times being corrupt, and idolatry being popular in the land, there were those who, from considerations of policy and interest doubtless, attempted to combine the worship of Jehovah and that of Baal, or Malcham. The same spirit prevails still; men desire to serve both God and mammon, and too much resemble those who were “willing to serve God so that they did not offend the devil.” 2. The task is an impossible one; it cannot be accomplished. (1) Scripture

proclaims this to be an impossibility (Josh. xxiv. 19—25; 1 Sam. vii. 3; 1 Kings xviii. 21; Ezek. xx. 39). (2) Proverbial sayings of different nations recognize this. "Lay not two saddles on one horse;" "A true subject serves not two sovereigns;" "Ye cannot go east and west at the same time." (3) Men do not attempt this in the ordinary affairs of life, but concentrate their energies upon one purpose. (4) One plain reason accounts for the impossibility, viz. the service of God and that of Malcham, or mammon, or worldliness, are so thoroughly opposite in their nature that there can be no union. "You cannot be heavenly and worldly too. If I am heavenly I sanctify the world, and if I am worldly I debase the heavenly. You are therefore one of two things, and there is no mixture in your character." 3. To attempt it can only result in defeat and disgrace. They who sought to worship God and Malcham were to be "cut off." Their conduct met with the Divine displeasure, and was followed by such manifestations of his disapproval as filled them with confusion and shame. Other instances: Meroz (Judg. v. 23); the young ruler (Matt. xix. 22); Peter in the high priest's hall (Matt. xxvi. 75).

II. A MORE EXCELLENT COURSE OF ACTION. 1. Weigh well the respective claims of God and of Malcham, Christ and mammon. This is the way in which men wisely act in reference to temporal things, and they should also act thus in reference to religion. 2. Yield yourself faithfully, wholly, and irrevocably to the master whose claim you feel to be the strongest. "If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." Multitudes, as they have thus reflected upon the claims of Christ, have felt these to be paramount; as they have thought of his bright and beautiful teaching, his wonderful, self-sacrificing human life, and as, gathering at Calvary, they have contemplated his humiliation unto death, they have been constrained to acknowledge his undoubted right to their loving confidence and entire service, and, yielding themselves up to him without reservation, have found in so doing happiness and peace.

Ver. 6.—*The sin of apostasy.* "And them that are turned back from the Lord." Some biblical expositors regard the whole of this verse as referring to one class, even to such as are utterly indifferent and unconcerned in reference to God's claims; whilst other commentators regard this class as referred to in the latter part of the verse, and view the expression, "And them that are turned back from the Lord" as an allusion to those who, having professed loyalty to God and his truth, had allowed themselves to be drawn away and to walk no more with him. Concerning this sin of apostasy, note—

I. THE CAUSES WHICH HAVE RESULTED IN MEN FALLING INTO THIS SIN. 1. *Temporal success.* Favourable progress in the affairs of this life has proved the ruin of many spiritually. They have set their hearts upon their treasures, and have bowed down before the golden image (Deut. xxxii. 15). 2. *Temporal adversity.* "The cares of life," as well as "the deceitfulness of riches," will often choke the Word. The very troubles which should unite men to God by a closer bond (for if all else fail, *he abides*) have been permitted to drive them away from the Source of consolation and help. 3. *Mental difficulties.* Forgetful that Truth is boundless and immeasurable, and that after the most earnest research there must remain profound depths yet to be explored, the inquirer has wanted to understand fully now, and, failing in this, has, through pride of intellect, brought himself into a state of mental unsettledness, so that even the plainly declared truths of revelation have lost their charm to him, and he has taken shelter in unbelief. 4. *Worldliness;* by which term is meant love of the untrue and unsubstantial; regard only for the outward, the transient, the unreal; the world becoming invested with ruling power over the man, instead of the man reigning over it. So Paul wrote of Demas, that he had yielded here (2 Tim. iv. 10).

II. THE INTENSE SADNESS ASSOCIATED WITH THIS COURSE OF ACTION. 1. It involves the violation of the most solemn and sacred vows. 2. It is attended by separation from the most holy and helpful associations. 3. It hinders the progress of the cause of God. 4. It grieves and dishonours the Lord.

III. THE SPIRIT WHICH SHOULD BE OHERISHED BY THE FAITHFUL IN REFERENCE TO THOSE THAT ARE TURNED BACK FROM THE LORD. 1. There must be no palliation of their sin. Zephaniah uttered burning words of condemnation with reference to these transgressors, and we shall not really help such by making light of their sin. 2. Yet

we should earnestly seek their recovery. We should endeavour by kindness and gentleness to restore these erring ones. Although they may be darkly stained by sin, they are still our brethren. Whilst they have stumbled and fallen in the path, it is in very weakness that we ourselves have trodden it. The tender, loving word may perchance win them back to holiness and to God. In voyaging, some vessels are completely lost,—they go down through the storm, and utterly perish; others arrive at the port, but with masts broken and sails torn through battling with wind and wave; whilst others outride every storm, and with full sail enter the destined haven. Thus was it, one has pointed out, with the three associates of St. Paul who are specially referred to in 2 Tim. iv.; and thus is it in the spiritual life. Demas, wrecked; Mark, overpowered by adverse gales and seemingly crushed, yet rising again and reaching the harbour at length in safety; but Luke, “the beloved physician,” holding peacefully and tranquilly on his course all through, and having ministered to him an abundant entrance to the heavenly kingdom (see paper by Dr. Maclaren, *Good Words*, 1877, p. 595). May our course be as the last-named of these disciples, unmarked either by failure or even by temporary estrangement, but being steadfast and immovable! May no place be found by us amongst those “that have turned themselves back from following after the Lord”! May we, escaping the perils of the sea of life—all its shoals and quicksands—reach at last the haven of eternal rest and felicity!

Ver. 6.—*The sin of indifference.* “And those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired for him.” Various classes of transgressors are alluded to in these verses (vers. 4—6). The corrupt priests and their followers, those dividing their allegiance between God and Baal, the backsliders in heart, are all spoken of in brief and forcible sentences. And now, in the expression before us, allusion is made to the unconcerned and indifferent, and who are described as “those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired for him.” This class is, in some respects, the most hopeless of all. An idolater is interested in worship, and may become convinced of his folly in rendering this to “the work of his own hands.” The divided heart is partially directed to God, and may be won over to complete loyalty. The backslider may remember the joys he has forfeited, and, by the sacred memories of the past, which even his estrangement cannot obliterate, may be constrained to return unto the Lord. But in proportion as a man is callous and indifferent to the claims of God, he places himself outside the circle within which holy and gracious influences operate. Less fear need be cherished of the pernicious influence of the scepticism of the age than of the fatality attendant upon the spirit of indifferentism to God and his claims which so widely prevails. Observe—

I. THE PREVALENCE OF THIS SPIRIT MAY BE ACCOUNTED FOR. 1. The reason of it is to be found in the fact of *possession*. Nothing is more calculated to lead a man to be indifferent in reference to higher claims than to find property increasing in his hands. The consciousness of independence, the sense of self-sufficiency, and the feeling of comfort, all tend to lead him to think and act as though he had “need of nothing.” “A certain man made a great supper, and bade many.” One thus invited said, “I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused” (Luke xiv. 16—18). See well to it, ye who have secured the possessions of earth, that ye do not, through the influence of these material things, come short of participation in the true festal joys. 2. Another reason lies in the fact of *familiarity*. Is it not so that our very familiarity with anything is likely to lead us in a sense to be somewhat indifferent to it? A walk may appear long, and may be long; but take it frequently, and the distance will appear to lessen, and in time it will cease to affect you. View constantly the scenery of some charming dale, and however much of quiet enjoyment you will get out of it perpetually if you are a lover of natural beauty, yet you will not be so enthusiastic as a stranger who gazes upon it for the first time. And much of the prevailing indifference concerning God and his truth may be traced to this cause. When King Clovis heard for the first time the story of Calvary, it is said he grew excited, and cried out, “I wish I’d been there with my Franks; I’d soon have settled those Jews!” The novelty charmed the rude king; but men all around us are so familiar with the story that they are not moved thus; and multitudes are so unconcerned respecting these great themes as that they may be described as “those who have not sought the Lord, nor inquired for him.” 3. This indifference may also

be traced to *custom*. The power of habit is very strong. Men became confirmed in their ways (Jer. xiii. 23).

II. THEY WHO CHEERISH THIS SPIRIT RUN THE RISK OF INCURRING INFINITE LOSS. Loss may be incurred unintentionally and through indifference and neglect. You neglect to insure your property, and perchance a fire breaks out and destroys it, and you find yourself thrown back for years to come; or you neglect your health and fail to heed the first symptoms of disease, and it may end in the disease gaining too firm a hold for it ever to be eradicated; and so spiritual and eternal honour may be forfeited, not wilfully, but through indifference and unconcern.

III. HENCE THE SUPREME VALUE OF THE PRESENT TIME WITH ITS OPPORTUNITIES. Our great dramatist has it—

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune—
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.”

And it is so that there is a tide in the spiritual affairs of men. Human feelings, sentiments, desires, ebb and flow like the sea; and there are seasons in which this tide sets towards piety; and such a season, if only improved, “is the accepted time,” “the day of salvation.” Use it, and it shall not be said that you belong to those “that have not sought the Lord,” etc. (ver. 6).

Vers. 7—18.—“*The day of the Lord.*” The reader of this brief book of Scripture, forming his conclusions from this opening chapter exclusively, is likely to get a very false impression respecting the spirit and views of the writer. The chapter deals entirely with sin and its punishment, and, taken alone and apart, conveys undoubtedly a very strong conviction as to the terribleness and severity of God. The seer seems to linger in thought upon the coming judgments, and to reiterate these in every possible form, and even to exult in the retributions which should at length fall upon the sinful nation. His “song” appears to be altogether “of judgment.” That we may rightly estimate, however, his spirit and teaching, we should remember: 1. That the great and solemn fact of Divine retribution for sin ought not to be ignored. Whatever theory may be held respecting the doom and destiny of the impenitent, the fact remains stamped on every page of the volume of revelation, in Old and New Testament alike, that sin shall result in chastisement, that man shall reap as he sows. The prophet in this respect is in perfect agreement with all the Bible writers. 2. That the prevailing corruption of his times necessitated a strong insistence, on the part of the prophets, upon the approaching judgments on account of national transgression; and this also was in harmony with the character of the dispensation. 3. That whilst sternly declaring the Divine punishment to fall upon the nation because of its sinfulness, Zephaniah also, as he proceeded, dwelt very frequently upon the Divine intention to purify through chastisement, and pointed out the gracious purpose of the Most High by means of coming tribulations to sanctify and save. His “song” was “of mercy” as well as “of judgment.” Here, however (vers. 7—18), he dwells specially upon the Divine judgments, and points to “the great and notable day of the Lord,” “the day of vengeance of our God.” These judgments he sets forth—

I. IN STRIKING SYMBOL. (Ver. 7.) Sacrifice was well understood in Jerusalem. Offerings were offered on Jewish altars to the true God, and, when the people had become corrupt, also to Baal. Jehovah now declared by his holy prophet that the people, having proved faithless, should themselves be sacrificed; they should be the victims, and the heathen who should effect their overthrow would, in so doing, be consecrated to his service. This symbol is used also in the same sense by other prophets (Isa. xxxiv. 6; Jer. xlvi. 10; Ezek. xxxix. 17).

II. IN VIVID DESCRIPTION. (Vers. 10—13.) The prophet witnesses in imagination, and describes with realistic power, the coming siege and destruction of the city by the Chaldeans. He sees “the fish gate” (ver. 10), the weakest part, assaulted, and hears a loud cry (ver. 10), telling that it has fallen, and that the invaders have gained admission; whilst “the sound of wailing” coming from the inhabitants of the lower part of the city (“the second,” ver. 10) intimates that, having gained an entrance, the

foe is carrying on the work of destruction. "A great crashing from the hills" (ver. 10) indicates that the invaders, with their engines of war, are striking against the walls and forts. And as the work of invasion proceeds, he marks how it becomes concentrated upon the mercantile part of the city, "El-Wad," or "The Valley" (called by Zephaniah "Maktesh," or "The Mortar," ver. 11); the merchants being destroyed, their "silver" and "their goods" becoming "a booty;" their houses rendered a desolation, and their vineyards laid waste (vers. 11, 13).

III. IN MOURNFUL SONG. (Vers. 14—18.) Concerning this song it has been well said, "There are no grander verses, none more sombre and tragic, none in which terror is more picturesque, in the literature of the world. They call for little comment. They are to be felt rather than critically analyzed and explained" (Cox, in 'Bible Educator,' vol. ii. 257). The expression, "the day of the Lord," so frequently used in this chapter, is employed in the New Testament with reference to the final judgment (Jude 6). That day will be a day of wrath to those who persist in working unrighteousness (Rom. ii. 8, 9). "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. v. 11); "Be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. v. 20).

Vers. 8, 9.—"No respect of persons." I. SOCIETY IS COMPOSED OF VARIOUS GRADES. There are royal personages, "the princes" and "the king's children" (ver. 8); there are "the merchant people" (ver. 11); there are masters and servants (ver. 9); there are nobles in affluence, who can clothe themselves with "strange apparel" (ver. 8); and there are the poor and needy. Nor would it be advantageous to society to break down these distinctions. An equal division of wealth and rank would be found both impracticable and undesirable. What is needed is the cultivation, amongst all sections of society, of the spirit of regard and good will. If the injunctions of God's Word were heeded, wrong-doing would cease, the ruler would not oppress the subject, the employer would not act unjustly towards the employed, nor the employed refuse to abide by just regulations. It is not by breaking down the social distinctions of society that the existing wrongs are to be redressed, but by a wider diffusion amongst all classes of the pure teachings of the religion of peace and love.

II. IN EACH OF THESE GRADES THE WORKING OF EVIL MAY BE TRACED. In vers. 8 and 9 this is indicated. Princes, nobles, retainers, menials, alike corrupted their way. Pride in bearing and in attire, the emulating of the vices of the heathen, injustice and wrong, "violence and deceit," prevailed amongst all classes. Sin is a disease, the contagious influence of which spreads through society at large, causing sickness and ending in moral death. It has been fittingly compared to the Egyptian plague of frogs, for as these coming up from the river afflicted king, nobles, magicians, and people alike, so sin in its varied forms and hurtful influence has been felt by all.

III. THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS ON ACCOUNT OF SIN WILL BE RIGHTEOUSLY AWARDED AND WITHOUT PARTIALITY. Princes, nobles, merchants, servants, will be reckoned with according to their works (vers. 8, 9). With God there is "no respect of persons." Here social position and influence screen wrong-doers at times from reaping the just consequences of their evil-doing. However justly the administrators of human law may desire to act, and to remove the reproach that "there is one law for the rich and another for the poor," the fact remains that the former class, when pursued by the hand of justice, can command assistance such as is denied to the latter, and the employment of which has often moderated the sentence inflicted. But the "righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness," will "give to every man according as his work shall be."

Ver. 12.—*Searching Jerusalem with candles.* Jerusalem here stands for the nation at large. The whole land was corrupt and was to fall, and the prophet singles out Jerusalem as being the centre of influence, but his remarks apply to the people generally. We have suggested here—

I. PROSPERITY IN WORLDLY AFFAIRS RESULTING IN FALSE SECURITY. Success in secular matters is to be desired. Rightly improved, such prosperity becomes a source of good to its possessors, and through them to their fellow-men. The danger lies in the temptation to pride and self-sufficiency, leading men to "think more highly of themselves than they ought to think." In proportion as men grow rich are they in peril of feeling themselves to be "full," and to "have need of nothing."

II. FALSE SECURITY LEADING TO INDIFFERENCE TO GOD AND HIS CLAIMS. Being "at ease," "their eyes standing out with fatness," "having more than heart could wish," they "lightly esteem" the Lord and ignore his claims. They are not atheists in theory, but they are so in practice; they do not trouble to deny the Divine existence, but they live in total disregard of him to whom they are indebted for all that they possess; they say in their hearts, "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil" (ver. 12).

III. INDIFFERENCE TO GOD AND HIS CLAIMS FOLLOWED BY MORAL CORRUPTION AND INIQUITY. Those acting thus are compared to wine that is settled on its lees. "The lees are the refuse of the wine, yet stored up with it, and the wine, unremoved, rests as it were upon them. So do men of ease rest in things defiled and defiling." Taking this course, Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem had become corrupt and full of iniquity.

IV. MORAL CORRUPTION AND INIQUITY ABOUT TO BE BROUGHT TO LIGHT THROUGH THE DIVINE SCRUTINY. "And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles" (ver. 12). In the day of terrors drawing near, "he would go through the city, making diligent search, trying house by house, man by man. As the vintner goes through his cellar, torch in hand; or as the head of the household, taper in hand, searches every nook and corner of his house before Passover, lest any morsel of leaven should be hidden in it; so Jehovah would search Jerusalem *with candles*, hunting the evil out of every dark nook in which they have concealed themselves, suffering none to escape."

V. INIQUITY THUS DIVINELY REVEALED WILL ASSUREDLY BE FOLLOWED BY DIVINE RETRIBUTION. "And I will punish," etc. (ver. 12). Sin cannot go unpunished. The Divine revelation of sin is with a view to this retribution, and serves to vindicate the rectitude of the Most High.

Learn: 1. To guard against the spirit of self-sufficiency and worldliness engendered of ease and luxury. 2. To scrutinize your own conduct, using faithfully with a view to this the torch of (1) conscience, (2) of God's holy Word, (3) and of the perfect example presented in the life of "the Man Christ Jesus." 3. To pray earnestly for deliverance from all that is evil, and to be led into right paths, and so to be preserved from being at last condemned with the world. "Search me, O God, and know my heart," etc. (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS

Vers. 1—6.—*A prophet of doom.* I. THE MEANING OF HIS NAME. Zephaniah, "One whom Jehovah hides." Hiding in the day of calamity a blessing promised to them that fear God (Ps. xxxi. 19, 20), who are therefore styled God's hidden ones (Ps. lxxxiii. 4), and may confidently reckon upon God's extending to them his protecting care in the midst of peril (Ps. xxvii. 5), yea, may even boldly flee unto him to hide them (Ps. cxliii. 9).

II. THE DIGNITY OF HIS PERSON. The scion of a kingly house, "the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah." Mentioned here, not because they had been prophets, but probably because they had been celebrated persons, perhaps good men, these ancestors of Zephaniah—three of them, like himself, with Jehovah in his name—may have been introduced to show that the prophet, while descended from the good King Hezekiah, belonged to a different branch of the family from Manasseh and Amon; proceeded from the line in which Hezekiah's goodness was transmitted, and thus had more than royal blood in his veins (not always an advantage)—hereditary piety in his soul.

III. THE TIME OF HIS APPEARING. 1. *The age fixed.* (1) "The days of Josiah, the son of Amon, King of Judah;" *i.e.* not before B.C. 640, when Josiah began to reign. (2) Before the fall of Nineveh (ch. ii. 13), which took place in B.C. 625. (3) Probably after Josiah's reformation had begun and before it was completed, since the prophet speaks of a "remnant of Baal" as existing at the time when he began to prophesy. (4) Hence the date of Zephaniah may be placed between Josiah's twelfth and eighteenth years, or between B.C. 628—622 (Hitzig, Keil, and Delitzsch), though by

some interpreters (Ewald, Havernick, Pusey) it has been fixed earlier—to wit, prior to Josiah's twelfth year. 2. *Its character declared.* (1) Generally, as regards the whole land of Judah, an age of widely spread, deeply seated, and well-nigh incurable wickedness, of deplorable religious apostasy, of intensely debasing idolatry, of shameless hypocrisy, and of gross worldliness and indifference to Divine things (ver. 4). (2) Particularly, as regards Jerusalem, an age of rebellion, disobedience, irreligion, prayerlessness, unbelief, violence, treachery, desecration of Jehovah's sanctuary, insensibility to correction, and deep-seated immorality (ch. iii. 1—4), with all of which the metropolis and its inhabitants were chargeable (cf. Jer. v. ; vi.).

IV. THE SOURCE OF HIS INSPIRATION. "The word of Jehovah." Whether this came to him by direct revelation through voice (Jer. i. 4) or vision (Isa. i. 1; ii. 1), or indirectly by meditation on the moral and political condition of his countrymen as well as on the character of Jehovah and the laws of righteousness by which he governs the universe, is not said and need not be inquired into. It suffices to know that the prophet claimed for his message that it had been expressly given him—put into his heart and mouth—by Jehovah; while his predictions certainly were such as could not have been announced without the aid of Divine inspiration.

V. THE BURDEN OF HIS PROPHECY. Judgment. 1. *Divine.* The instrument is not mentioned; the first cause alone is placed in the foreground—"I will utterly consume;" "I will cut off;" "I will stretch out mine hand." The present-day tendency is to set God in the background, if not to deny his agency altogether, alike in the production of material phenomena and in the superintendence of the social, moral, and political worlds, and to concentrate attention principally, if not exclusively, upon what are merely God's instruments. The prophet's way of looking at men and things accorded more with sound philosophy and true science, not to say sincere religion, than the practice prevailing in many so-called enlightened circles to-day. 2. *Universal.* The judgment should embrace the wide earth. "All"—"man and beast, the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, the stumbling-blocks and the wicked"—should be arraigned at Jehovah's bar. If the language pointed not to a general judgment of men and nations at the end of the world, it at least emphasized the thought that no part of the world, no age or nation, could escape the ordeal of appearing before Heaven's tribunal or elude the grasp of Divine retribution. The terms in which Jehovah declares his purpose to visit the wicked with destruction are such as to show that the complete fulfilment of the prophecy can only be reached in the great and terrible day of the Lord at the close of time (cf. Isa. xxiv. 1—23). 3. *Particular.* While enclosing the whole world in its sweep, the threatened judgment should fall with a special stroke upon Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem—as it were beginning with the house of God (1 Pet. iv. 17). That the instruments of judgment would be the Scythians of whom Herodotus (i. 15, 103, 106; iv. 10, 12) speaks as having invaded Upper and Higher Asia (Hitzig, Ewald, Bertheau), is not supported by sufficient evidence, whilst the fact that neither Herodotus nor the Old Testament reports any conquest of Jerusalem by them seems decisive against their being considered the executors of Jehovah's wrath. The agents actually employed were the Chaldeans (2 Kings xxv. 9), though it was not Zephaniah's purpose to indicate by whom the judgments should be carried out. 4. *Complete.* Thorough-going; upon both the world in general and Judah in particular. "I will utterly consume all from off the face of the ground, saith Jehovah." (1) As regards the world, the destruction should be as wide-sweeping as had been that of the Deluge (Gen. vii. 21). (2) As regards Judah and Jerusalem, the purgation as effective. "The remnant of Baal should be cut off," *i.e.* root and branch extirpated, or the work of extirpation, if already begun, should be carried forward till not a vestige of the hated idol-worship should be seen. (a) First, the idolatrous priests of both kinds should be swept away—the Chemarim, or "the priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places round about Jerusalem" (2 Kings xxii. 5; Hos. x. 5); and the priests, not "the idolatrous priests in the stricter sense" (Keil), but the unworthy priests of Jehovah who had either secretly or openly favoured the prevailing Baal-worship (Fausset, Farrar). (b) Next, the idol-worshippers of both kinds should be cut off—the thorough-paced devotees of the heathen cultus, who worshipped the host of heaven upon the house-tops, and the temporizers who tried to combine the worship

of Jehovah with that of Baal, offering oaths of allegiance partly to Jehovah and partly to their king, *i.e.* Baal. (c) And finally, apostates and open despisers of the Jehovah-religion should be punished—those who had turned back from serving Jehovah, and those who had never served him at all (ver. 6).

Learn: 1. The value of an honoured and pious ancestry. 2. The light the Word of God (contained in Scripture) can cast upon the future. 3. The certainty of a day of judgment for men and nations. 4. The impossibility of eluding the just judgment of God. 5. The inevitable ruin of them who will not serve God. 6. The impossibility of trying to serve God and idols. 7. The danger of neglecting religion hardly less than that of apostatizing from it.—T. W.

Vers. 7—13.—“*The day of the Lord’s sacrifice.*” I. THE INTENDED VICTIMS. 1. *Their persons catalogued.* (1) The royal household. Josiah exempted on account of his piety (2 Kings xxii. 19, 20; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27, 28)—a testimony at once to Divine faithfulness and to the superior advantage of godliness (Ps. xvii. 7; xci. 9, 10; 2 Pet. ii. 9; Rev. iii. 10). But included were the princes, or “the heads of the tribes and families who naturally filled the higher offices of state” (Keil); the king’s sons, either Josiah’s children, then quite young, Jehoiakim being six and Jehoahaz four years of age, and Zedekiah not yet born; or Josiah’s brothers and uncles who were also king’s sons; and the superior servants of the palace, who are probably referred to as those who “leap over the threshold and fill their masters’ houses with violence and deceit” (ver. 9). (2) The rich merchants of Jerusalem. Described by their residence, their occupation, their prosperity, and their doom. The part of the city in which they were located, named most likely by the prophet himself, *Maktesh*, or “The Mortar,” was “most probably the depression which ran down between *Acra* on the west, and *Bezetha* and *Moriah* on the east, as far as the fountain of *Shiloah*” (Keil), “the cheese-makers’ valley” of *Josephus*, styled by the present-day inhabitants *El-Wād*, or “The Valley.” There they traded, lending money upon usury, and were called by the prophet “people of *Canaan*,” because of their resemblance to *Canaanitish* or *Phœnician* merchants. With such success had they carried on their business, that they were “laden with silver.” Yet were they doomed to be destroyed, ground to pieces, and bruised to death, by the *Babylonian* conquerors, like corn in a mortar when the pestle descendeth. (3) The irreligious debauchees and rioters of the metropolis generally. Characterized as persons who had settled on their lees, and said in their hearts, “The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.” (For an explanation of the figure, consult *Exposition*, and see homily on ver. 12.) The language pointed to those whose material prosperity had been their moral and religious ruin, who, having grown wealthy and luxurious, had also become atheistical at least in practice, saying in their hearts, and acting as if they believed, that either there was no God at all, or if there were, that he was perfectly indifferent to their characters and conduct—a form of infidelity that has seldom lacked representatives among foolish and ungodly men (*Job* xxii. 12—14; *Ps.* x. 4; xiv. 1; xciv. 6, 7). 2. *Their sins specified.* (1) Of the royal household, two—wearing foreign clothes and leaping over the threshold. The former referred to the custom of copying the dress and with that the manners and luxuries of heathen peoples, and in particular, in Josiah’s time, of *Egypt* and *Assyria*, or *Babylon*. Among the *Egyptians* “the dress of the king was most gorgeous, consisting of robes of the most beautiful stuffs and the richest ornaments” (*Budge*, ‘*Dwellers on the Nile*,’ p. 181). *Nahum* (ii. 3) describes the *Assyrian* soldiery as arrayed “in scarlet;” while *Ezekiel* (xxiii. 12, 15) depicts the *Assyrian* warriors as “clothed most gorgeously,” and speaks of the *Chaldeans* as “girded with girdles upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads.” Of course, the sin against which the prophet inveighed was not the mere adoption of *Egyptian*, *Assyrian*, or *Babylonian* habiliments, but the inclination to look to and lean upon, to follow after and copy, these nations in their luxuries and idolatries rather than to remain faithful to Jehovah’s Law and worship, which the imitation of their dress revealed. Clothes, according to *Carlyle* (‘*Sartor Resartus*,’ i. 1), are “the vestural tissue which man’s soul wears as its outmost wrappage and overall, wherein his whole other tissues are included and screened, his whole faculties work, his whole self lives, moves, and has its being.” Hence a person’s dress is no mean indication of a person’s inner self. “Outward dress,” says *Pusey*,

“always betokens the inward mind, and in its turn acts upon it.” In Isaiah’s time the Jerusalem ladies were distinguished for gay attire and wanton hearts (Isa. iii. 16—23). Peter (1 Epist. iii. 3) exhorts Christian women to adorn themselves, “not with that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel, but with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.” The *latter* of the two sins charged against the royal household, that of leaping over the threshold, is believed (Calvin, Keil, Ewald, Pusey, Farrar) to allude, not to the custom of leaping over the threshold of the king’s palace (Hitzig) in imitation of Dagon’s priests, who, when they entered their idol’s temple in Ashdod, trode not upon its threshold (1 Sam. v. 6); but to the practice, observed probably by “dishonourable servants of the king,” of intruding into other people’s houses in order to deprive them of their property through violence and fraud, and with the spoils so obtained to enrich the king, whose dependants they were, and whose favour they desired to retain. Should this interpretation be correct, it suggests useful thoughts about the distribution of guilt, or the mutual responsibility of masters and servants for each other’s evil deeds. If the king’s servants merely carried out the orders of their royal master, they were no less criminal in Heaven’s sight than he; if they acted on their own motion, the king who profited by their plunder became a partner of their guilt. (2) Of the merchants, also two—avarice and usury. Had they been merely successful traders who had prospered through honest dealing, they had not been condemned; but they were “laden with silver,” acquired through nefarious practices such as deceit and usury. Wealth honourably obtained is no offence against Heaven, and, if righteously employed, may contribute to the happiness and influence of both the individual possessor and the community of which he is a member; riches heaped up by wicked arts are a curse to those who have them, and often go as they have come by violence and fraud. To “provide things honest in the sight of all men” (Rom. xii. 17) should be the aim of all, but especially of Christians. “On the bells of the horses of trade and commerce should be, Holiness unto the Lord” (Zech. xiv. 20). Happy the nation “whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth” (Isa. xxxiii. 8). (3) Of the debauchees and rioters, two—self-indulgence and infidelity. “Settled upon their lees,” they abandoned themselves to the gratification of their sinful desires and corrupt inclinations, closed their minds and hearts against better things, and proceeded to daring and presumptuous unbelief, denying the Divine providence if not challenging the Divine existence. All sin tends to lead the soul away from God; to cause it first to shut out thoughts of God, and finally to conclude that God has ceased to be. 3. *Their punishments proclaimed.* (1) The sinners of the royal house would be called to account for their iniquities. Though God seemed to be at a distance from them, like a man upon a far journey, he would return and visit upon them the evil deeds of which they had been guilty. Nations no more than individuals, and persons in high station no more than persons in low, can escape the just judgment of God (Rom. ii. 3). (2) The merchants would be despoiled of their unjust gains (Isa. xxxiii. 1), and themselves overwhelmed with ruin (Jer. xvii. 11). If good men are sometimes deprived of wealth at a stroke, as Job was, and thus seem to have no advantage above their wicked neighbours, they are never, as these are, utterly undone by the loss of material possessions. In the fall of their houses they do not themselves perish, but find in God a Portion larger, more satisfying and secure, than their silver or gold (Hab. iii. 17, 18). (3) The debauchees and rioters would be dragged forth from their darkest retreats and required for their sensuality and unbelief. “The same diligence which Eternal Wisdom used to seek and to save that which was lost, lighting a candle and searching diligently till it find each lost piece of silver, the same shall Almighty God use that no hardened sinner shall escape” (Pusey).

II. THE OFFICIATING PRIESTS. 1. *Jehovah himself.* “I will punish;” “I will punish;” “I will search;” and “I will punish,” saith the Lord. Whatever subordinate agents or secondary causes may be employed to inflict Divine vengeance upon rebellious nations and wicked men, the hand that directs these agents and wields these causes is God’s. He is “the Judge of all the earth” (Gen. xviii. 25), and “shall judge the people righteously” (Ps. lxxvii. 4), rendering to every man “according to his work” (Ps. lxxii. 11). He “shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil” (Eccles. xii. 14). “He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world” (Acts xvii. 31). 2. *Jehovah’s ministers.* Described as his called and

sanctified ones; *i.e.* not personally holy, but specially consecrated for the work to which they were appointed. (1) In the case under consideration these were to be the Chaldean armies, which in little more than thirty years were to fall upon Jerusalem, and pour out upon it the vials of Jehovah's wrath (2 Chron. xxxvi. 16, 17). (2) In the world generally the events of his providence are the instruments selected for the execution of his victims (Ps. cxi. 7). (3) The last minister of judgment will be his Son, into whose hands he hath committed all judgment (John v. 22), and before whose tribunal all must appear (2 Cor. v. 10). To him belong the epithets "called" and "sanctified" in their highest sense.

III. THE ENCOMPASSING SPECTATORS. The faithful remnant of Israel, those who still adhered to Jehovah and mourned as did Josiah, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah, Huldah the prophetess, Hilkiah the priest, and others, over the degenerate condition of the nation. So in the world still are God's believing people called to witness, and often actually do witness, the execution of God's judgments upon the ungodly. So in the last day, when the vials of Divine indignation will be outpoured upon the finally impenitent, the saints who have been counted worthy to attain Christ's kingdom and glory will behold the appalling scene, as Abraham beheld the burning of the cities of the plain, and will say, "Hallelujah! salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God; for true and righteous are his judgments" (Rev. xix. 1, 2).

IV. THE RESULTING IMPRESSIONS. Pointed to in the solemn "Hush! be still" (ver. 7), with which the prophet opened his roll of woe. When he summoned the spectators to be silent before the face of Jehovah, he signified that silence was to be the effect produced upon their spirits by the spectacle they were about to witness. And this silence would be one: 1. *Of awe*; as they contemplated the overpowering revelation of the majesty of God, of his holiness and justice, of his power and fidelity, which would be afforded by his judgments upon the wicked. 2. *Of submission*; as they recognized the equity of those judgments by which sin was punished, the Divine Law vindicated, and God's glory proclaimed. 3. *Of amazement*; as they marvelled how ever they who had once themselves been sinful, had through grace escaped those calamities which they saw overtaking the wicked.

Learn: 1. That God deals with men and nations upon the principle of moral retribution. 2. That neither national nor individual wickedness, if unrepented of, can evade its just recompense of reward. 3. That God's judgments upon both will ultimately be approved by all.—T. W.

Ver. 7.—*The soul's silences before the presence of the Lord.* I. A SILENCE OF ADORATION. As becomes a creature in the presence of his Creator (Zech. ii. 13; Hab. ii. 20), and a sinner in the presence of the Holy One (Job xl. 4).

II. A SILENCE OF CONTEMPLATION. As befits the soul in those moments in which God reveals himself in nature (Job xxxvii. 14) or in grace (Gen. xvii. 3; Exod. xiv. 13).

III. A SILENCE OF EXPECTATION. As a praying soul maintains when looking out for a response to his supplications (Ps. lxii. 1, 5, margin), or a perplexed spirit when waiting for God to clear up the mystery of his providence (Ps. xxxvii. 7, margin).

IV. A SILENCE OF SUBMISSION. As they preserve who recognize the ills of life to proceed from the hand of God (Ps. xxxix. 2; Lam. iii. 28, 29).

V. A SILENCE OF APPROBATION. As God's judgments will enforce upon all who behold them (Ps. xli. 10).—T. W.

Ver. 8.—*Foreign clothes.* I. A BOND OF INTERNATIONAL UNION. The interchange of commodities among the different peoples of the earth one of the surest means of promoting peace and causing wars to cease.

II. A SIGN OF ADVANCING CIVILIZATION. When a nation's wants multiply beyond its own power directly to meet them, it naturally draws upon the resources of lands and peoples beyond itself. Thus while the existence of these wants marks the upward progress of the nation itself, the effort needed to supply them acts as a stimulus to other peoples to join in the onward march.

III. A SYMPTOM OF DECLINING PATRIOTISM. No truer indication that the national sentiment amongst a people is becoming feeble than the slavish imitation of the manners and customs, speech and dress, of a stronger neighbour.

IV. A SYMBOL OF RELIGIOUS DEOLENSION. In this light regarded by the prophet. Egyptian or Chaldean raiment worn by Judæan princes and peasants meant that their hearts were hankering after Egyptian or Chaldean idolatry. So when Christians conform to the world's ways, adopting its maxims and principles, manners and customs, thoughts and feelings, sentiments and practices—all of which should be to them what foreign clothes were to Israel—there is reason to suspect that a backward movement in religion has begun.—T. W.

Ver. 12.—*Settled on one's lees.* I. A PICTURE OF PROSPEROUS EASE. The image—that of wine which has been allowed to settle in its cask, without having ever been drawn off or emptied from vessel to vessel—naturally suggests the condition of one who has become prosperous and affluent, who has never been visited by misfortune, agitated by calamity, or disturbed by affliction, but who through long years has been left to feast and fatten, like an ox in his stall, or (adhering to the metaphor) to fill and settle like a cask of wine.

II. A SYMBOL OF RELIGIOUS (OR, RATHER, IRRELIGIOUS) DEGENERATION. As wine, left upon its lees, retains its flavour—good or bad, as the case may be—so does the soul acquire a moral flavour from the things in which it delights, and on which, as it were, it rests. Nay, as good wine becomes better and bad wine worse from being allowed to settle on its lees, so do pious souls become stronger and more fixed in goodness, but ungodly souls more confirmed and rooted in wickedness, by being suffered to rest, the one on the holy inclinations and the other on the sinful lusts which form the lowest strata respectively of their beings.

III. A PRECURSOR OF APPROACHING DOOM. As bad wine allowed to settle on its lees rapidly deteriorates and reaches such a state of badness as to be unfit for use, so wicked men that settle on their lees, gratifying their sensual desires and venting their atheistical opinions, ultimately sink to such a point of moral degeneration as not to admit of recovery, and as allows nothing to be anticipated for them but swift and sudden destruction.

LESSONS. 1. The danger of prosperity. 2. The value of adversity.—T. W.

Vers. 14—18.—“*The great day of the Lord.*” I. RAPIDLY APPROACHING. “The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly” (ver. 14). This was true of the Chaldean invasion, then little more than one generation distant—so near, in fact, that the prophet could hear the bitter cry of the mighty man who saw himself confronted by its terrors; and is true of that other and greater day of the Lord, the day of judgment (2 Pet. ii. 9; 1 John iv. 17; Rev. vi. 17), which the Christian is directed always to consider as at hand (Phil. iv. 5; Jas. v. 8, 9; 1 Pet. iv. 7; Rev. xxii. 12), because the exact moment of its coming no one can tell (Matt. xxiv. 36; xxv. 13, 42).

II. TERRIBLY ALARMING. What the Chaldean invasion should prove to the guilty city of Jerusalem and nation of Judah the prophet depicts by heaping together all the images of horror that his mind can conceive or his language express, calling the time of that visitation a day of wrath and fury, in which Jehovah should pour out his indignation upon the land and its inhabitants, letting loose upon them the ferocious warriors of Babylon; a day of trouble and distress, in which men should be hemmed in on every side by calamity and pressed down by anguish, walking like blind men and falling like wounded and dying soldiers; a day of wasteness and desolation, in which fields should be devastated, houses overthrown, and men and women put to the edge of the sword; a day of darkness and gloominess, of clouds and thick darkness, in which not so much as a single star of hope should appear in the political firmament; a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities and against the high battlements, in which their fortified towns and cities should experience the shock of pitiless assailants. But even more appropriately will these images apply to the day of judgment, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed in flaming fire and with his holy angels (2 Thess. i. 8).

III. FIERCELY DESTROYING. 1. *Absolutely unavoidable.* “The mighty man crieth bitterly there,” “because he cannot save himself, and must succumb to the power of the foe” (Keil). So would it be in the hour of Babylon's descent upon Judah and Jerusalem; so will it be in the day of the revelation of the wrath of the Almighty (Rev.

vi. 15—17). 2. *Utterly consuming.* "Their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make an end, yea, a terrible end, of all them that dwell in the land" (comp. Ezek. vii. 19). The same doom of utter extermination will overtake the finally impenitent in the day when God awakes in terrible majesty to execute judgment on the ungodly. Of these "God shall make an utter, terrific, speedy destruction, a living death, so that they shall at once be and not be; be, as continued in being; not be, as having no life in God, but only a continued death in misery" (Pusey).

LESSONS. 1. Gratitude to God, who hath made provision through the gospel of his Son for delivering men from the wrath to come. 2. The duty of all to whom that gospel is made known to embrace its provisions and escape from impending peril, while yet the day of mercy lasts. 3. The wisdom of living in constant anticipation of that day, and of perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. 4. The urgency of making known to men the gospel, that they may flee from the wrath to come.—T. W.

Vers. 1—18.—*The judgment threatened.* We learn from ver. 1 that Zephaniah received from the Lord his message to Judah in the days of Josiah, the last of the godly and reforming kings, who, after the gross corruption of the preceding reigns of Manasseh and Amon, restored to a large extent the purity of the worship of God, and was the means of bringing about a certain kind and degree of repentance and amendment in the people. Probably, however, the major part of Zephaniah's prophecy belongs to the early part of Josiah's reign, before his greatest public reformation was begun; for there is no allusion to that hopeful work in the book of the prophet, and there is no mention of Zephaniah in the history, where Jeremiah and Huldah the prophetess are described as aiding and guiding the king's efforts to bring the people back to godliness. But the word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah doubtless prepared the way for the work of full reformation, though the messenger may not have been spared to take part and rejoice in it. His message is, first, an announcement of the judgment of Jehovah against the people, which occupies the whole of ch. i.; and ver. 7 may be taken as its central point, containing the lesson of duty, on which all that precedes and follows it converges. We shall best feel the force of this lesson if we begin from the outside of this oracle, the more obvious and manifest appearance of the judgment of Jehovah here announced, which the prophet puts at the beginning and end (vers. 2, 3, 14—18).

I. THE NATURE OF THIS JUDGMENT. At the very outset it is described in a way fitted to startle and alarm; for it is to be of a most sweeping and universal nature (vers. 2, 3). The words remind us of nothing less than the universal deluge, by which the old world was swept away. A destruction like that is impending over Judah. There had been many chastisements sent on the people before; the land had been invaded, the royal treasuries rifled, the country laid waste. No fewer than ten of the twelve tribes of Israel had been not very long before carried away into Assyria. Still, these visitations had been only partial; a remnant had always been left; and many were apt to trust that so it would ever be. Because God had given Israel the land, they thought that some part of it at least must always be theirs. But now they are warned that this is a false confidence, and that, in spite of the gift of the land to Abraham's seed, the corrupt race that now inhabit it shall be utterly cut off. Moreover, this judgment, that is to be so sweeping, is also very near at hand. In the old world the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah; but now he has waited long and sent messenger after messenger; and at last the time of delay is nearly exhausted, and the judgment is close at hand, for their iniquity is all but full. The day of the Lord is represented as hastening to meet them; the sound of its coming is already heard, and very soon it will be here. Have not all these lesser judgments been foretastes of it?—the capture of Galilee by Tiglath-Pileser, the removal of the whole northern kingdom by Shalmaneser or Sargon, the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib? and has not each one of these been more sweeping and far-reaching than the former? Are not these signs and harbingers of the great day of the Lord here announced? Then how terrible and irresistible is this judgment (vers. 15—18)! Physical strength and power shall not deliver the guilty nation. There are, indeed, fortified cities in the land, and high towers to bar the entrance of an enemy; and it may seem as if behind these they

might defy the invader ; but against them shall be raised the sound of the war-trumpet, and the battle-shout of a great host, before which they shall not be able to stand. Skill and wisdom shall not be able to save them. These have often enabled armies very much inferior in numbers to conquer great hosts ; but now there shall be perplexity and dismay, and men shall be groping like blind men in the dark, unable to devise any means of resistance or escape, bewildered and disheartened. Wealth sometimes may be used to buy off an invading monarch or army. So in former days kings of Judah had repeatedly obtained relief from foreign foes by giving up to them the treasures of the palace and temple. But in this invasion neither silver nor gold shall be of any avail to deliver them. The prophet does not indicate more particularly from what quarter this terrible invasion shall come—that is left to be made manifest by the event. For the terribleness of the judgment did not arise merely from the fact that it was to be inflicted by a great worldly power, which would be overpowering in force and would not care for bribes ; but from this, that that power, whatever it might be, was to be the instrument of Jehovah's wrath against the nation. Israel had often been saved from fierce attacks of mighty nations before, and enabled to defy their rage ; but that had not been because of their wisdom or courage, but because they trusted in God, and had his protection. Now, however, there was coming on them the day of the Lord's anger ; he was to hide his face from them, and therefore it would be to them a day of such darkness, dismay, and despair. This brings us somewhat nearer the centre and heart of this prophecy, and leads us to consider—

II. THE CAUSES OF THE JUDGMENT, ANNOUNCED AS SO SWEEPING, NEAR, AND TERRIBLE. These are the sins of the land, of which a long and dark catalogue is unrolled (vers. 4—12). First comes what was the great besetting sin of ancient times, as it has ever been of men who possess not or will not receive God's revelation of himself, idolatry, the worship of the seen and earthly as Divine, instead of the only true God who is invisible and spiritual, the worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator. The invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead, are seen and understood by the things that are made ; for "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork." But men, not liking to retain God in their knowledge, keep back this truth in unrighteousness, and come to regard the powers of nature as themselves Divine ; and worship the heavens, the earth, the sun, the stars, as gods, instead of regarding them as the works of the true God, who is above them all. Thus they fall into a religion that is purely sensuous, requiring no elevation of the soul above what can be seen and heard and felt—a religion also that is divorced from morality, for when men come to regard the processes of nature as the highest thing that there is, they can see in them no moral law or order. Such was the corrupt religion of the heathen world, left by God to its own way, and against this his revelation to Israel was designed to testify, declaring him to be a Being spiritual and holy, the one living and true God. But the chosen people were ever tempted to fall back to that sensuous and immoral conception of God that found expression in the idolatry of the surrounding nations. Various forms of such idolatry as was then common are here alluded to. There was the Phœnician worship of Baal, which had been introduced long ago by Jezebel into the northern kingdom, and through Athaliah into Judah ; and there was also the more recently imported worship of the stars and heavenly bodies, the form of idolatry that prevailed in the Eastern countries with which Judah was now beginning to be acquainted. This worship was performed by burning incense and offering sacrifices on the flat tops of the houses, looking up to the sky and host of heaven. But along with these gross forms of idolatry there is also condemned the corrupt worship of Jehovah. The worship at the high places, with which the kohanim (ver. 4) were connected, was indeed a worship of Jehovah, but had become in course of time thoroughly idolatrous in its character ; the pillars or groves placed beside the altars came to be worshipped as symbols of the Deity, and, as in Bethel and Dan, idols were identified with him. Thus the true invisible God was degraded to the likeness of the idols of the heathen, and this worship at the high places had to be utterly condemned and swept away. Another corruption of the pure worship of Jehovah was the combination of it with that of the heathen deities. There were those who worshipped and swore to Jehovah, and at the same time swore by Malcham (ver. 5) their king, *i. e.* Baal. They thought that they could preserve their

allegiance to the God of Israel while yet they paid homage also to Baal. They would thus be halting between two opinions, or trying to make a compromise, which on any view of it must degrade the true God. It could only imply either that Jehovah and Baal were both real powers over their several nations, and so Jehovah would be merely a local or national deity; or else that they were but different names of the same supreme power, which would thus be made a mere nature-power, such as Baal was conceived to be, not the holy God who had revealed himself to Israel. Then the prophet speaks (ver. 6) of what is implied in all this, and lies at the bottom of it all. These corrupt forms of worship were really a forsaking the Lord; and the beginning of the evil lay in ungodliness; they did not seek the Lord, nor inquire for him. Many who might not be guilty of any of the kinds of idolatry that prevailed, might yet be liable to this reproach, which is surely the severest of all. They professed that they knew God, but they did not look to him in their times of trouble, they did not seek to know his will from his Law or his prophets, they did not call on him for help in time of need—he was to them, in fact, but a name or an idea, not a real, living, personal God. If this was all their religion, it was no wonder that they should be easily led to adopt some visible symbol of the Deity, or to cover up the hollowness of their profession by abundance of rites of worship, or to associate their belief in one Lord with the service of the deities of neighbouring countries, which seemed to be more realities to their devotees. Such were the corruptions of religion in Israel. With these were associated great social evils. Along with the foreign religious rites there were introduced also foreign customs, that marred the simplicity of the national character. This appeared most prominently in dress, which is here especially mentioned (ver. 8); but that was doubtless only an outward symptom of much more radical evils. According to the Law, Israel was to be distinguished from other nations by their dress as well as by their religion. Their characteristic dress was to be marked, on the one hand, by simplicity and decency (Lev. xix. 19; Deut. xxii. 11, 12), and on the other hand, by having fringes as a memorial of Jehovah's Law (Numb. xv. 38). But now they were growing ashamed of this outward mark of their religion, and came to adopt the more varied and splendid costume of their neighbours. This probably indicated in general habits of luxury and ostentation, which would naturally begin and be most prevalent among the princes and courtiers, though from them they would spread to other classes. Such selfish indulgence was especially to be condemned at a time when the nation was far from being in a secure or prosperous state. It had suffered serious losses, and barely escaped from imminent dangers; and even now the land was much impoverished compared with its former state, and the great empires around were becoming more powerful and threatening. Surely this was not a time to imitate foreign luxurious customs, and to be ashamed of the ancient and godly simplicity of Israel's manners. Such luxury could only be maintained by the rich and the princes by means of oppression and extortion; and this is another evil described as the cause of the judgment (ver. 9). Those who leap on the threshold may refer, as some think, to the Philistines, who formed, with other foreigners, the royal body-guard; or they may simply indicate, as others think, the eagerness with which the satellites of the princes intruded into the houses of the citizens, in order, by their oppressive exactions, to fill the houses of their masters. Anyhow, the verse indicates that, in order to keep up the splendour and luxury of the court, the people were oppressed, and exorbitant taxes or contributions levied from them by a system of fraudulent charges, or forcible domiciliary visitation. This is the natural accompaniment of a selfish oligarchy in an impoverished and declining state. Then, further, the merchant people in Jerusalem, who seem to have had as their place of business the valley between the hills of the old and new city, are as Canaanites in their transactions; the balances of deceit are in their hand; they have laden themselves with silver by usury and fraud. Such ill-gotten gains seem to be alluded to in ver. 11, and threatened with destruction when the enemy shall burst into the city by the fish gate at the north-west, its most exposed side; when the cry from it shall only be answered by a helpless howling from the new city and crashing from the higher parts, and the hollow valley where merchants most did congregate shall be, as it were, a mortar (Maktesh), in which they shall be trodden down and bruised to pieces by the invading host. At least there is described a prevailing avarice and hasting to be rich, as one of the causes on account of which this

crushing judgment comes. Finally, we have set before us the careless self-indulgence of those who are at ease amid all this prevailing evil, who have had no changes, and have no fear of change, who say or think that neither good nor evil, blessing nor judgment, is to be looked for from God (ver. 12). All things continue as they were; and the thought of a present, living God, the Judge of the earth, and the Avenger of wrong, has faded from men's minds. Such are the various forms of evil that are indicated by the prophet as the cause of the judgment which he announces. Can it be said that they are unknown in our day and in ourselves? No doubt the outward forms of idolatry and oppression then rampant are strange and repulsive to us; but are we free from the tendency to degrade the living God to a mere nature-power, which is the essence of idolatry? And are not ungodliness, neglect of God's spiritual worship, selfish ostentation and luxury, neglect and oppression of the poor, love of money, and careless self-indulgence, but too well known among us? The picture is not one of mere historical or antiquarian interest, but of ever-present moral significance. It teaches us that such evils always lead to ruin, that they lay a nation helpless at the feet of its enemies, and make its continued existence impossible. All history confirms this lesson; and revelation bids us look beyond all merely historical catastrophes to that final judgment of the Lord which shall, in the fullest sense, be universal, embracing, not one nation only, but all mankind, and searching out each individual, to be confronted with his Judge and with the fruit of his own doings.

III. THE LESSON OF ALL THIS IS EXPRESSED IN THE WORDS, "HOLD THY PEACE AT THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD GOD." (Ver. 7.) This is the first and most urgent duty. The prophet has further directions to give in following discourses; but this is the immediate effect that the announcement of judgment should have. A silence of awe and humility is what becomes men in the presence of God, when he rises up to judgment as the Lord of all the earth. "Be still, and know that I am God," is his voice as the day of the Lord approaches. This implies a recognition, on the one hand, of the reality, and on the other hand, of the justice, of God's judgment. It should be received as a real expression of God's wrath against the sins of men. Let not the evils that come upon nations or individuals in consequence of their sins be regarded as mere accidents, or as only due to the operation of natural laws. They may be brought about immediately by such second causes, but behind all these we are to recognize the mind and will of the living God. He speaks to us as truly by the ordinary courses of nature as by the most stupendous miracle, and if he shows us that earthly conceptions of the Divine degrade and brutalize man, that selfishness and selfish indulgence, luxury and oppression, bring a people to ruin and lay them helpless at the feet of their foes, that is a real and most solemn judgment of God against these things. Let us be silent also as recognizing the justice of this judgment. These things are evil, deserving of abhorrence and destruction; and God, who in his laws of nature appoints ruin to be their consequence, shows himself just and holy. Let us humbly acknowledge this; and in so far as these evils of ungodliness and selfishness have found place in us, let us put our hand on our mouth, acknowledging that we have nothing to answer to God, and are verily guilty in his sight. There is hope for us if we thus confess our sin. There is hope in the very fact that God announces his judgment against our sin. For what is the announcement? It is that God will utterly sweep away the evils that are done in the land; it is against those that the fire of his wrath is kindled; and if men will cling to these evils, and hug their sins to their bosom, he will sweep away the wicked with the stumbling-blocks. Both together shall be destroyed, for God will be rid at last of sin. But if any are willing to be separated from their sins, by however humble and painful a process that may be, then the assurance that God will utterly sweep away the evil will have hope for them. The fire that is to devour the whole land is a fire of jealousy as well as of wrath. Because the Lord loves his people with a jealous affection, in spite of all their unfaithfulness, he will, if they but silently trust themselves to him, make the fire of his anger against their sin to purify and perfect them. Thus this coming of the Lord for judgment is the harbinger of final salvation to those who desire to be purged from those evils against which his wrath is revealed. Therefore "let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption; and he will redeem Israel from all his iniquity."—C.

Vers. 1—6.—*The Word.* “The word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, King of Judah. I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast,” etc. Of Zephaniah we have no information but what is contained in his prophecy. His genealogy is given in the first verse of this chapter. He prophesied in the reign of Josiah, probably between the twelfth and eighteenth years of his reign. In the first chapter he predicts the utter desolation of Judah. In the second, he exhorts his countrymen to repentance in view of the approaching judgments, and threatens the surrounding nations, Philistia, Moab, and Ammon. In the third, after a severe rebuke of Jerusalem, he foretells, in glowing language, its future purification and enlargement, and the destruction of all its enemies. The style is distinguished neither by sublimity nor elegance. He resembles in many respects his contemporary, Jeremiah. He borrows some of the language of former prophets (comp. ch. ii. 14 with Isa. xiii. 21 and xxxiv. 11; ch. ii. 15 with Isa. xlvi. 8). “The genealogy of Zephaniah is given through Cushi, Gedaliah, and Amariah to Hezekiah; for in the original Hebrew the words ‘Hizkiah’ and ‘Hezekiah’ are the same. As it was unusual that the descent of prophets should be given with such particularity, it has been assumed with some probability that Hezekiah was the king of that name; though in this case we should have expected the addition, ‘King of Judah.’ The chemarim are the idol-priests; that is, priests devoted to idol-worship. In 2 Kings xxiii. 5, where the writer is speaking of the reformation under Josiah, the word is translated *idolatrous* priests; in Hos. x. 5, simply *priests*, which is its meaning in the Syriac language. Some have maintained that the invasion of Judah to which Zephaniah refers was that of the Scythians described by Herodotus; but this is very improbable. From the fact that the king’s children are included in the threatened invasion—in the Hebrew, ‘I will visit upon the princes and the king’s children’—some have inferred that they must have been already grown and addicted to idolatrous practices; consequently, that Zephaniah wrote later than the eighteenth year of Josiah. But, as Keil and others have remarked, the mention of the king’s children may have been added simply to indicate the universality of the approaching visitation; not to say that the prophetic vision of Zephaniah may have anticipated the sin and the punishment of these king’s children, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim” (Barrows). In these verses we learn two things.

I. THE DISTINGUISHING CAPACITY OF MAN, AND THE WONDERFUL CONDESCENSION OF GOD. 1. *The distinguishing capacity of man.* What is that? To receive the word of Jehovah. “The word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi,” etc. This Zephaniah, who from the fullness of his genealogy here given, was perhaps a person of note, was, however, mainly distinguished by this—viz. that he received a word from Jehovah. What is it to receive a word from another? Not merely to hear it, to remember its sound, or to write it down, but to *appreciate* its meaning. This is the grand distinction of man as a mundane existence. It is not the reasoning principle that distinguishes man from other creatures on earth, for other creatures possess this in some degree; not the durability of his existence, for other creatures may live as long as he; but the capacity of taking in ideas from the Infinite Mind, to understand and realize God’s thoughts. In a sense, there is a greater distance between me as a man and the most intelligent animal on this earth, than there is between me and my Maker. The highest animal cannot take in and understand my thoughts; but I can take in and understand the thoughts of my Maker. “The word of the Lord” comes to every man at times—comes in visions of the night, comes in the intuitions of conscience, comes in the impressions that nature makes on the heart.

2. *The wonderful condescension of God.* How amazing the condescension of God to speak to man! Many of the poor little wretched creatures who are called emperors and empresses would, perhaps, not deign to speak to paupers, to hold converse with them; but the “Lord, though he be high, yet hath respect unto the humble;” “Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, To that man will I look who is of a contrite heart.”

II. THE MORAL CORRUPTION OF MAN, AND THE EXCLUSIVE PREROGATIVE OF GOD.

1. *The moral corruption of man.* There are three great moral evils indicated in these verses. (1) *Idolatry.* “I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the

name of the Chemarims with the priests; and them that worship the host of heaven upon the house-tops." The remains of Baal-worship, which as yet Josiah was unable utterly to eradicate in remoter places. Baal was the Phœnician tutelary god. His name means *lord*; and the feminine god corresponding and generally associated with him was Ashtaroth. As he was represented by the sun, so she was the goddess answering to the moon and the rest of the heavenly host. In fact, it was the worship of nature; a worship to which corresponds the pantheistic and scientific exaltation of Nature and her laws in our own days, as if God were the slave of his own world and its laws, instead of the Lord, Creator, and Sustainer, who can and will modify, alter, and suspend the order of the present system of things, according to his own sovereign pleasure, and in furtherance of the higher moral laws, in subserviency to which the laws of nature exist. From the time of the judges (Judg. ii. 13) Israel had fallen into this idolatry; and Manasseh had lately set up this idol within Jehovah's temple itself (2 Kings xxi. 3—7): "He reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove [symbol of the goddess Ashtaroth] . . . and worshipped all the host of heaven. . . And he built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord said, In Jerusalem will I put my Name. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. And he set a graven image of the grove [the symbol of the heavenly host] that he had made in the house, of which the Lord said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put my Name for ever." Josiah began his reformation in the twelfth year of his reign (2 Chron. xxxiv. 3, 4, 8), and in the eighteenth had as far as possible completed it. "And the name of the Chemarims with the priests." These chemarim were in all probability subordinate ministers of the idolatrous priests, and their duty was to assist them at the altar. "Them that worship the host of heaven upon the house-tops." The houses in the East had flat roofs, open to the heavens, and there the worship was performed. Idolatry is one of the great sins of the world; it is confined to no age or land. Its spirit is loving the creature more than the Creator. (2) *Backsliding*. "Them that are turned back from the Lord." Indeed, idolatry is an apostasy, and so is all sin. All sin is a going back from the Lord. "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the Fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. ii. 13). (3) *Indifferentism*. "And those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired for him." This is the most prevalent of all sins, and is one of the great roots of all immoralities—an utter neglect of religion. Religious indifferentism is the great sin of England to-day. God and his claims are everywhere practically ignored. This indifferentism, like a vast pool of mud, generates all that is morally noxious, pernicious, and vile in our midst. 2. *The exclusive prerogative of God*. What is that? To *destroy*. "I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling-blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the Lord." (1) No one can really destroy but God. "I kill, and I make alive." Annihilation is as far behind the power of the creature as is the work of creation. Man may crush the forms of things, but the essences lie infinitely beyond his touch. (2) God has a *right* to destroy human life. He has a right because it belongs to him. He has a right because through sin it has forfeited its existence. (3) His destructive work is as *beneficent* as his sustaining and creating. Destruction is a principle in all nature; one plant destroys another, one animal destroys another, and there are elements in nature whose work is destruction. From destruction new life and beauty come; destruction keeps the universe alive, fresh, and healthy.—D. T.

Vers. 7—18.—*The day of war the day of horrors*. "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord." These verses present a graphic and soul-stirring description of the horrid day of war which was about to dawn on the Hebrew land. It is called a "day of wrath," a "day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers." No more awful day than the day of war. It is a day when fiends are released from prison and let loose on earth. The war-day is represented here—

I. AS A DAY OF ENORMOUS SACRIFICE. "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God: for the day of the Lord is at hand: for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice." A sacrifice! 1. *It is an enormous sacrifice of life.* Several classes are referred to here as the victims of this war. (1) *Royalty.* "I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel." The reference is here probably to the princes of the royal house, to the children of the king who would be on the throne at the time of the fulfilment of the prophecy. In 2 Kings xxv. 7 it is said that Nebuchadnezzar slew the sons of King Zedekiah before his eyes. When the savage and bloodthirsty lions of war are let loose, they are regardless of all social distinction; they seize the princes as well as paupers. No class in society, perhaps, as a rule, deserve the destruction more than the rulers of the people. They for the most part create the wars, and often deserve to be struck down. Through all history they have generally been the war-makers. War is their own child, and their child sometimes strikes them down. (2) Another class referred to is the *nobility.* "In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit." Some suppose that there is a reference here to the Philistine custom of not treading on the "threshold," which arose from the head and hands of Dagon being cut off on the threshold before the ark (1 Sam. v. 5). It scarcely matters; reckless men in power are referred to—men that fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit. "The servants of princes," says Calvin, "who have gotten prey like hounds for their masters, leap exultingly on their masters' threshold, or on the threshold of the houses which they break into." War sometimes, and insurrectionary war always, strikes savagely at the higher classes. It plays sad havoc with aristocracies; it sets manors in flames, and treads coronets in the dust. (See another and more probable interpretation in the Exposition.) (3) Another class referred to is that of the *traders.* "Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down: all they that bear silver are cut off." Some translate Maktesh, "Mortar," a name employed for the valley of Siloam, from its hollow shape. It was a valley at the eastern extremity of Moriah, where the merchants dwelt. The invading army seizes the wealth of the country. Greedy conquerors have always had a keen eye to this. (4) Another class referred to is the *masses.* "And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." This is not a bad description of the masses of people in all ages. They are: (a) *Unconspicuous.* Pretty well all alike, they do not stand out in the country from the generality. War has no particular aim at them, though it strikes them indiscriminately; still, though unconspicuous, war will find them out. "I will search Jerusalem with candles." (b) *Religiously indifferent.* "Settled on their lees." This means crusted, hardened, like wines long left at the bottom undisturbed. "That say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." Religious indifferentism has always been the leading characteristic of the masses. Note the sacrifice of life in all these classes—the rulers and the ruled, the rich and the poor, the ignorant and the learned, the innocent and the guilty, the young and the old, all in war form one huge sacrifice of blood. It is overwhelmingly awful to think of the lives that have been sacrificed in war even since the year 1852. In the Crimean War (1854) it is estimated that 750,000 fell; in the Italian War (1859), 45,000; in the war at Schleswig-Holstein, 3000; in the American Civil War, 800,000; in the war between Prussia, Austria, and Italy (1866), 45,000; expeditions to Mexico, Cochin China, Morocco, Paraguay, 65,000; in the Franco-German War, 215,000; Turkey massacres in Bulgaria, 25,000; total, 1,948,000. This is one of the sacrifices that war has made, not only in civilized lands, but even in Christendom during the last thirty-five years; and the perpetrators of these enormities call themselves Christians, professed disciples of him who said, "I came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them;" "If thine enemy hunger, feed him." 2. *It is an enormous sacrifice of property.* "Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof." Who can estimate the amount of property that the wars during the last thirty years have utterly destroyed? The Crimean War cost £340,000,000; the Italian, £80,000,000; the American Civil War, £1,400,000,000;

the Franco-Prussian, £500,000,000; and the comparatively smaller wars, £1,000,000; an amount altogether of £2,400,000,000—a sufficient sum to supply every inhabitant of the globe, not only with the necessities, but with the comforts and educational advantages of life. "Give me," says Stabbins, "the amount that has been spent in war, and I will purchase every foot of land of the globe. I will clothe every man, woman, and child in an attire that kings and queens might be proud of. I will build a school-house upon every hillside and in every valley over the habitable earth. I will supply that school-house with a competent teacher. I will build an academy in every town, and endow it; and a college in every state, and fill it with able professors. I will crown every hill with a church consecrated to the promulgation of the gospel of peace. I will support in its pulpit an able teacher of righteousness, so that on every sabbath morning the chime of one hill shall answer to the chime of another around the earth's broad circumference; and the voice of prayer and the song of praise shall ascend like the smoke of a universal holocaust to heaven." To talk of the glories of war is to exult in the horrors of hell. I confess that a quivering seizes my nerves, and a chilly sadness comes over my spirits, when I hear men calling themselves Christians, especially ministers, uttering one word in favour of war, whether defensive or aggressive. The man who defends war defends the devil himself.

II. AS A DAY OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION. All these horrors of war are here represented as judgments from the Almighty. It is called the "day of the Lord." He is represented as having "prepared a sacrifice," referring to the awful sacrifice of life and property; as having summoned his guests—the warriors, men of blood—to battle. Indeed, it is called the "Lord's sacrifice." He is represented as saying, "I will punish the princes;" "I will search Jerusalem with candles;" "I will bring distress upon men." And again, "The whole land shall be devoured by the fire" of his jealousy; "for he shall make even a speedy riddance." In Bible phraseology, the Almighty is often represented as the Author of that which he *merely permits*. He does not *originate* wars. The consciousness of warriors attests this. All the passions of greed, revenge, and ambition, whence all wars spring, are self-generated in the breast of the man of blood. His moral constitution will not allow him to ascribe them to his Maker; he charges them on himself. He feels that he is not their Author, and he knows that they stand in awful contrast with the holy and beneficent will of the almighty Maker of the universe. He does not instigate these abominations, but allows, uses, and controls them. In using war as a punishment for sin, three things are to be observed. 1. *That all who perish in war righteously deserve their fate.* God says here, "I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned." War, in its most savage recklessness, does not strike one man down who has not sinned, and whose sin does not deserve death. The penalty of death that comes to men in war would, by the moral laws of the universe, come to them sooner or later in some other form. "It is appointed to all men once to die;" "The wages of sin is death." 2. *That warriors, in executing the Divine justice, demonstrate the enormity of the evil requiring punishment.* Where can sin be seen in aspects so complete in all that is morally horrific, outrageous, and infernal, as in the battle-field? No thoughtful man can gaze on it there without feeling that the righteous Governor of the universe, for the happiness of his creation, is bound to visit it with his hot displeasure. 3. *War, as an officer of Divine justice, reveals the amazing freedom allowed to the sinner in this world, and God's controlling power over hostile forces.* Who will say that man is a slave when he sees the warrior going forth with a free step on a mission directly hostile to the beneficent laws of the universe, the moral institutions of his own nature, and the revealed will of Heaven? He allowed men even to put to death his own Son upon the cross. Here is liberty. Whilst human freedom is revealed, God's controlling power is also most strikingly manifest. "He maketh the wrath of man to praise him." He has servants who serve him *against* their will, as well as servants who serve him *with* their will. Warriors and devils are of the former class. "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Gen. i. 20); "I have raised thee up for to show in thee my power" (Exod. ix. 16); "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ." Out of the wars and tumults of his enemies he will bring something glorious, a Lord and Christ.

“Patiently received from thee,
Evil cannot evil be;
Evil is by evil healed,
Evil is but good concealed.”

(Charles Wesley.)

D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—ch. iii. 8.—Part II. ΕΧΗΡΤΑ-
TION TO REPENTANCE AND TO PERSEVER-
ANCE.

Vers. 1—3.—§ 1. *The prophet urges all to examine their ways before the day of the Lord come; and he prays the righteous to seek the Lord more earnestly, in order that they may be safe in the judgment.*

Ver. 1.—Gather yourselves together. So the versions; and this rendering is probably correct. The prophet calls upon his nation to assemble themselves together in order to take mutual counsel or to make general confession and supplication to God. Another rendering, based on some alteration of letters, is, “Set yourselves to be ashamed; yea, be ashamed” (comp. Isa. xlvi. 8). *Yea, gather together.* The LXX. renders the two words, *συνάχθητε καὶ συνδέθητε*, “be ye gathered and bound together;” “Id est,” says Jerome, “estote vobis caritatis vinculo copulati.” O nation not desired; Vulgate, *gens non amabilis*—a litotes for abominable, hated for its sins, unworthy of God’s love and care. The Septuagint rendering, *ἀπαιδευτον*, “unchastened,” points to the meaning affixed by the Chaldee paraphrase, “that does not wish to be converted,” having no desire for amendment; like what is said in Jer. ii. 30, “they received no correction.” Others render, “which does not turn pale,” *ἕ. e.* which is not ashamed, comparing Isa. xxix. 22. The verb *kasaph* seems to have this meaning in niphal, according to Talmudic use; but its usual signification is “to pine” or “long for.” The Revised Version gives in the margin, “that hath no longing”—a rendering adopted by Professor Gandell, implying that the people are quite satisfied with their present condition, and have no aspiration for anything better or higher (comp. Hos. xii. 8). This is a very apposite interpretation; but there is no sufficient ground for rejecting the translation of the Authorized Version, which is supported by high authority, is agreeable to the use of the word, and affords a satisfactory sense.

Ver. 2.—Before the decrees bring forth. Before the result follows the fiat. The Divine purpose is represented as a woman labouring with child, travelling before it

comes to execution. This is thrice repeated in substance, to show the certainty and speed of its arrival. Before the day pass as the chaff. “Before” is not in the Hebrew, and the clause is parenthetical, “Like chaff the day passeth.” “The day” must be still the day of the Lord, not the day of life or the day of repentance. God brings on the judgment as easily and as quickly as the wind carries the chaff before it. The Septuagint and Syriac join the two clauses together; thus the LXX., *Πρὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς ὡς ἄνθος παραπορεύμενον*, “Before ye become as a flower that passeth away.” And Jerome gives, “Priusquam pariat jussio quasi pulverem transeuntem diem,” “Before the decree beget the day which passeth by like the dust.” The present Hebrew text does not confirm these versions. The figure of the chaff is common (see Job xxi. 13; Isa. xvii. 13; xxix. 5).

Ver. 3.—The prophet here addresses especially the pious among the people, urging them to perseverance in the right way. *Ye meek of the earth.* The humble, peaceable, religious, among the Israelites are primarily meant; whose character is the direct contrary of the proud, self-confident infidels mentioned above (comp. Isa. xi. 4; Amos ii. 7). But there is no reason why the admonition should not include the heathen who are striving to live after the light of conscience (Isa. xxiv. 5; Rom. ii. 14, etc.). *Which have wrought his judgment.* Who have fulfilled the ordinances of God’s Law. *Seek righteousness.* This and the following injunction explain what is meant by “seek the Lord” at the beginning of the verse (Deut. xvi. 20). *Seek meekness.* Persevere in showing a humble, gentle temper. Septuagint, *καὶ ἀποκλινασθε αὐτὰ*, “and answer them.” *It may be.* Even the righteous shall scarcely be saved (comp. 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18). *Ye shall be hid.* Ye shall be preserved in the time of judgment (Ps. xxvii. 5; xxxi. 20; Isa. xxxii. 2). This recalls the prophet’s name, which is interpreted, “Whom the Lord hides” (comp. Amos v. 14, 15).

Vers. 4—7.—§ 2. *The admonition is enforced by the announcement of the punishment that is about to fall on various nations, which shall prepare the way for the general*

acceptance of true religion; and first the sentence shall reach the Philistines.

Ver. 4.—There is reason enough why Judah should tremble when the nations around her, such as the powerful and turbulent Philistines, fall before the invading host. Four of the five cities of the Philistines are mentioned, as denoting the whole territory, which again is the representative of the heathen world more definitely particularized later on. Thus the four quarters of the world are virtually specified: the Philistines representing the west, the Moabites and Ammonites (vers. 8—10) the east, the Cushites (vers. 11, 12) the south, and the Assyrians (vers. 13—15) the north. Gaza (see note on Amos i. 6) shall be forsaken; depopulated and desolate. There is a paronomasia in the Hebrew: *Azzah* will be *azubhah*. Some of the other localities are treated in the same manner (comp. Micah i. 10—15, and notes there). Ashkelon a desolation (see note on Amos i. 8). They shall drive out Ashdod. The inhabitants shall be expelled. (For Ashdod, see note on Amos, *loc. cit.*) At the noon day. The hottest part of the day, the most unlikely time for a hostile attack, hence the expression is equivalent to “unexpectedly and suddenly” (comp. Jer. xv. 8). Ekron shall be rooted up. In the Hebrew paronomasia, *Ekron* (“the Deep-rooted”) shall be *teaker*. (For Ekron, see note on Amos, *loc. cit.*, where the fulfilment of prophecy concerning that town is noted.) Gaza (see note on Amos i. 7), after being depopulated and again re-peopled by Alexander the Great, fell into the hands of Ptolemy, and was destroyed by Antiochus, B.C. 198 (Polybius, ‘Reliq.’ xvi. 40; Pusey, p. 457). Often rebuilt, it was as often razed to the ground; and the present representative of the ancient town, Ghuzzeh, stands upon a hill composed of the accumulated ruins of successive cities. Of the condition of Ashkelon, Dr. Thomson writes, “There are no buildings of the ancient city now standing, but broken columns are mixed up with the soil. . . . Let us climb to the top of these tall fragments at the south-east angle of the wall, and we shall have the whole scene of desolation before us, stretching terrace after terrace, quite down to the sea on the north-west. . . . No site in this country has so deeply impressed my mind with sadness. . . . They have stretched out upon Ashkelon the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness. Thorns have come up in her palaces, and brambles in the fortresses thereof, and it is a habitation of dragons and a court for owls (Isa. xxxiv. 11—13)” (‘The Land and the Book,’ p. 546). “It was for ages,” says Dr. Porter, “a great and

strong city. Under the Philistines, the Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans, the Saracens, the Crusaders, it was a place of note. The shattered walls that still surround the site were built by Richard Cœur de Lion. When I first clambered to the top of a broken bastion, a scene of desolation burst suddenly upon my view for which I was not prepared, though I had seen Baalbec and Palmyra, Heliopolis and Memphis. The whole site was before me, and not a fragment of a house standing. One small section was covered with little gardens; but over the rest of the site lay smooth rounded hillocks of drifting sand. The sand is fast advancing—so fast, that probably ere the close of the century the site of Ascalon will have been blotted out for ever” (‘Illust. of Bible Proph.’ p. 21). As for Ekron, *hod. Akir*, travellers note that it is now a little village, consisting of about fifty mud houses, without a remnant of antiquity except two large walls; its very ruins have vanished. The omission of Gath, a town at this time of small importance (see note on Amos i. 6), is probably owing to a feeling of the symbolism of numbers, four denoting completion, or the whole, like “the four winds, the four ends of the earth,” etc.

Ver. 5.—Woe. The denunciation extends to all Philistia. The inhabitants of the sea coast. Both the Greek and Latin Versions retain the notion of the Hebrew word *chebel*: “Ye who inhabit the measured allotment of the sea.” “Philistia,” says Sir C. Warren, “consists of an undulating plain from fifty to a hundred feet above the level of the sea, reaching thirty-two miles from Ekron to Gaza, with a breadth of from nine to sixteen miles. To the east of this the hills commence, not the hill-country, but a series of low spurs and undulating ground, culminating in hogs’ backs, running nearly north and south, and rising in places to twelve hundred feet above the ocean” (‘Survey Memoirs: Jerusalem,’ p. 436). The nation of the Cherethites. So in Ezek. xxv. 16. Zephaniah calls the Philistines by this name for the sake of a play on the word, *Cherethites* meaning “Cutters-off,” and they were devoted to being “cut off” (*karath*). Part of David’s body-guard was composed of the same people (1 Sam. xxx. 14). The name seems to have belonged to a portion of the Philistines who inhabited the southern part of the district. “One of the principal villages of Philistia is now called *Kerethiya*, so that the term may apply to the inhabitants of this town—an ancient Cherith not mentioned in the Bible” (Conder’s ‘Handbook to the Bible,’ p. 237). They have been supposed to have emigrated from Crete, but there are no reliable grounds for this theory, though the LXX. in the present

passage has, Πάροικοι Κρητῶν, "sojourners of the Cretans;" and the Syriac gives a similar rendering, St. Jerome renders, "gens perditorum," "nation of destroyers." The word of the Lord is against you. The sentence is pronounced in the words following. O Canaan. O Philistia, which shall be as Canaan, and in like manner exterminated. Canaan means "Lowland," a name which originally was applied to the Phœnician and Philistine tracts on the sea-coast. I will even destroy thee. The like threat is uttered by Jeremiah (xlvii. 4, 5) and Ezekiel (xxv. 15—17).

Ver. 6.—Dwellings and cottages for shepherds; better, *pastures with caves for shepherds*. In the use of the word *keroth*, "diggings" ("cottages," Authorized Version) there is probably intended another play on the "Cherethites." Neale, "The road from Gaza to Askalon lay along the sea-shore. . . . In the winter months many parts of it are impracticable, owing to the encroachment of the sea. The surf then dashes wildly into the huge caverns worked out of the endless sand-hills that line this coast. These caverns were tenanted, when we passed, by goatherds and their flocks. Thither they resort for shelter from the fierce heat of the noontide sun; and here during the night the goats are penned. There are wells and reservoirs in the vicinity which furnish water for the flocks the whole year round, and the brambles and thorn-bushes that flourish near the seaside form their pasture" ("Eight Years in Syria," i. 40, 41). Septuagint, ἔσται Κρήτη νομὴ ποιμνίων, "Crete shall be a pasture of flocks."

Ver. 7.—And the coast shall be for the remnant, etc.; *it will be a tract for the remnant*. The district will be the possession of the Jews, who should be restored to their land (Obad. 19). Zephaniah virtually predicts the Captivity and the return, and intimates that the destruction of hostile nations is the means of advancing true religion. They shall feed their flocks thereupon. Where the Philistine cities stood shall be the pasture-ground of the Israelites' flocks. Ashkelon. One city is mentioned as a type of all. For. This is the reason why they are permitted to triumph thus. Shall visit. In a good sense, to protect and cherish (Exod. iv. 31; Ruth i. 6; Ps. viii. 4; Zech. x. 3; Luke i. 68). Turn away (reverse) their captivity. Bring them back from their exile to their own land (comp. Joel iii. 1; Micah iv. 10). The phrase, however, is often (and possibly here) used metaphorically for the abolishment of misery and the restoration to a happy condition (comp. Deut. xxx. 3; Job xlii. 10 (15); Jer. xxix. 14). The full accomplishment of this prophecy concerning the overthrow of

Philistia is of a spiritual nature, and must be looked for in the Messianic era, when the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of Christ; and so in the subsequent predictions.

Vers. 8—10.—§ 3. *The punishment shall fall next upon the Moabites and Ammonites, representing the east.*

Ver. 8.—*The reproach of Moab*. As this refers to past actions, it must signify the hostile attitude which Moab always assumed towards Israel. *The revilings of the children of Ammon*. Both these descendants of Lot proved themselves bitter enemies of the Jews. Keil refers to Numb. xv. 30 and Ezek. xx. 27, where the word *gadaph* is used in the sense "to revile or blaspheme by actions" (For the persistent hostility of Moab, see note on Amos ii. 1, and for that of Ammon, the note on Amos i. 13.) Magnified themselves against their border. They carried themselves haughtily, showed their pride by violating the territory of the Israelites. This pride and self-exaltation is a leading feature of the character of these two nations (comp. Isa. xvi. 6; Jer. xlviii. 29, etc.). The destruction of the kingdom of Israel and the weakness of that of Judah gave occasion to these neighbours to display their haughtiness and independence. The LXX. has, "my borders." God himself assigned its boundaries to Israel, as to other nations (Deut. xxxii. 8); and to invade these was an offence against him.

Ver. 9.—As I live. This is a common formula to express certainty, God, as it were, pledging his existence to the truth of his declaration (Deut. xxxii. 40; Isa. xlix. 18, etc.). God calls himself, The Lord of hosts, therefore able to fulfil his threats; and the God of Israel, and therefore ready to punish wrongs done to his chosen people. As Sodom. This threat came home with particular force to the Moabites and Ammonites who dwelt in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea, and had before their eyes this awful proof of the chastisement with which sin meets, and which had happened in the time of their forefather Lot. "There are no settled inhabitants," says Dr. Porter, writing of Moab, "but the hillsides and glens are studded with the ruins of ancient towns and villages. We at length pitched our tents by the lonely fountain of Heshbon. The site of this royal city is commanding—a rounded hill on the edge of a vast plateau, which extends on the south and east to the horizon, and on the west breaks down in steep slopes, jagged cliffs, and wild ravines, to the Dead Sea and Jordan valley, nearly four thousand feet below. The hill was the nucleus of the city. Its sides are covered

with ruins, and remains of houses, temples, and other buildings are strewn over a considerable section of the adjoining plain. All is desolate. Not a building, and scarcely a fragment of a wall, is standing; yet, though deserted for centuries, it bears its ancient name. I looked from Heshbon far and wide over the ancient territory of the Moabites, and saw desolation everywhere. The old towns and villages are all deserted and in ruins. In fact, there is not at this moment a single inhabited town or village in Moab, except Kerak, which stands on the extreme southern border. The sites of many were visible—grey mounds dotting the plain" (*Illust. of Bible Proph.*, pp. 24, 25). "The cities, towns, villages, are all in ruins. . . . And no attempt is ever made to rebuild or repair; no man ventures to seek even a temporary abode among the ruined cities of Moab. The local Arab avoids the old sites, and seeks rest and security amid rocks and ravines; the powerful desert tribes sweep over the country periodically, and devour and destroy all in their track" (*ibid.*, p. 28). Even the breeding of nettles; rather, a possession of nettles; a place where nettles only grow. Vulgate, *siccitas spinarum*. The identification of the plant *klarul* is uncertain. In Job (xxx. 7) it is represented as of sufficient growth to conceal fugitives; hence some think it is the wild mustard. Dr. Pusey, relying on a notice of Professor Palmer, considers it to be the mallow, which grows in rank luxuriance in Moab. The LXX., reading *daleth* instead of *mem* in the *ἄραξ λεγόμενον mimshaq*, rendered "breeding," has *Δαμασκός ἐκλελειμμένη*, "Damascus shall be left." Salt-pits. All travellers note the abundance of rock-salt in the vicinity of the Dead Sea (see Deut. xxix. 23; and comp. Ps. cvii. 34; Jer. xvii. 6). A perpetual desolation. The prophecy intimates that this country should never recover its prosperity (comp. Ezek. xxv.). The residue of my people shall spoil them. A partial fulfilment of this prophecy occurred when Judas Maccabæus smote Ammon (1 Macc. v. 6, etc.), and Alexander Jannæus subdued the Moabites (Josephus, 'Ant.' xiii. 13. 5); but the prophet looks forward to a spiritual fulfilment under the Messiah, as we see from ver. 11 (comp. Isa. xiv. 1, 2; xlix. 23, etc.). The faithful remnant shall win possession of the heathen strongholds, and convert the nations to Christ, and incorporate them in the Church.

Ver. 10.—*This shall they have.* All these calamities mentioned above shall fall on the Ammonites and Moabites in punishment of their pride and spite and insolence (see note on ver. 8).

Ver. 11.—§ 4. Before passing to the

judgment on the nations of the south and north, the prophet shows the object of all these chastisements: *God destroys idolatry in order that pure religion may reign over all the earth.* The Lord will be terrible unto them. The Lord shows himself as a terrible God over the Moabites and Ammonites, but only as parts of the heathen world, and with a view to a universal result. This is the purpose of the revolution of himself as Judge. Septuagint, *Ἐπιφανήσεται Κύριος ἐπ' αὐτοῖς*, "The Lord will appear against them." For he will famish all the gods of the earth. The verb means literally, "to make lean," and then "to destroy;" hence the LXX., *ἐξολοθρεύσει*. The word may be chosen in order to express the idea that worshippers will no more be found to offer sacrifices and drink-offerings to the gods (see Bel and the Dragon 6, 12). The nations being destroyed, the gods revered by them would vanish and be heard of no more. Men shall worship him. Idolatry abolished, men shall learn to worship Jehovah. Every one from his place. Every one shall worship God in his own place and country; the Lord shall be universally recognized, and his worship shall no longer be confined to one temple or one land, but wherever men dwell there shall they offer their homage and adoration (comp. Isa. xix. 18, 19; Mal. i. 11, where the same truth is signified). Such passages as Micah iv. 1 and Zech. xiv. 16, which seem to imply that all nations are to come up to the material Jerusalem to pay their devotions, require evidently a spiritual interpretation, and denote that the heathen converted to Christ shall be received into the Church, and join in the worship of the true Israel. The isles of the heathen; or, *coasts of the nations*; the most distant countries that lie across the seas (Gen. x. 5; Ps. lxxii. 10; Isa. xi. 11, etc.).

Vers. 12—15.—§ 5. *The judgment shall fall upon the Ethiopians and Assyrians, representing the south and north.*

Ver. 12.—*Ethiopians; Cushites.* These are named as the most remote inhabitants of the south with which the Israelites were acquainted (Ezek. xxxviii. 5). *Ye shall be slain by my sword; the slain of my sword are they,* the second person being dropped, as one cannot address the dead (Orelli). The Lord's sword is the instrument which he uses to effect his purpose of punishment (comp. Isa. xxvii. 1; xxxiv. 5; lxvi. 16). The Ethiopians are reckoned among the forces of Egypt (2 Chron. xii. 3; Nah. iii. 9, etc.). The prediction had a fulfilment when the Assyrians conquered Egypt, and again under Nebuchadnezzar. It shall have a more sublime accomplishment when the

sword of the Spirit shall reduce the utmost south to the dominion of Christ (see Isa. xlv. 14; Ps. lxxviii. 31). The commencement of this conversion is seen in the chamberlain of Queen Candace (Acts viii. 27, etc.).

Ver. 13.—The north, represented by Assyria, as yet unconquered, and still apparently flourishing. Though this country lay to the north-east of Palestine, its armies attacked from the north, and it is generally represented as a northern power. Its destruction was foretold (Isa. x. 12; Ezek. xxxi. 11, etc.; Nah. i. 14, etc.). In this verse the Hebrew verbs are not in the simple future, but in the imperative or optative mood, "Let him stretch out his hand," etc., as though the prophet were praying that the enemies of his people might be overthrown. Nineveh. St. Jerome gives *speciosam*, rendering the proper name according to his notion of its Hebrew etymology. Its proper meaning, in Accadian, would be "Fish-house," i.e. house consecrated to the god of fish. (For a description of Nineveh, see note on Jonah i. 2. For the destruction of Nineveh, see the Introduction to Nahum, § I.) Dry like a wilderness. The country shall become an arid desert. Assyria was greatly indebted for its remarkable fertility to a very successful system of artificial irrigation, and when this was not maintained, great tracts soon relapsed into a wilderness (Layard, 'Nineveh,' ii. 68). "Cultivation," says Professor Rawlinson, "is now the exception instead of the rule. 'Instead of the luxuriant fields, the groves and gardens of former times, nothing now meets the eye but an arid waste' (Cheany). Large tracts are covered by unwholesome marshes, producing nothing but enormous reeds; others lie waste and bare, parched up by the fierce heat of the sun, and utterly destitute of water; in some places sand-drifts accumulate, and threaten to make the whole region a mere portion of the desert" ('Anc. Mon.,' i. 41).

Ver. 14.—Flocks; herds. The prophet describes graphically the desolation mentioned in the preceding verse. The "herds" are not sheep and cattle, as in parallel cases (Isa. xvii. 2; xxvii. 10; xxxii. 14), but all the beasts of the nations—all the wild beasts that infest the country. Septuagint, πάντα τὰ θηρία τῆς γῆς. The Hebrew will hardly bear Keil's rendering, "all kinds of beasts in crowds." (Compare similar predictions, Isa. xiii. 21; xxxiv. 11, 14). The cormorant (*kaath*); probably the pelican; Vulgate, *onocrotalus*; the Septuagint gives, χαμαιλέοντες, which word Schleusner thinks to have been interchanged with κάρακες that follows soon afterwards. But in the latter

place Jerome has *corvus*. The pelican is found in the Assyrian monuments under more than one appellation (see 'Transact. of Soc. of Bibl. Archaeol.,' viii. 93, etc., and 141). The bittern (*kippod*). Most recent critics translate this by "hedghog" or "porcupine." The Septuagint has, ἐχῖνοι; the Vulgate, *ericus*. But neither hedghog nor porcupine utters cries or frequents pools of water, and it may well be doubted whether some marsh-loving bird is not meant. Certainly the following clause suits the habits of a bird better than those of a hedghog (see 'Bible Educator,' iii. 312, where Dr. Tristram is quoted saying, "As a matter of fact, the bittern is very abundant in these swamps of the Tigris, and in all the marshy grounds of Syria; and its strange booming note, disturbing the stillness of the night, gives an idea of desolation which nothing but the wail of the hyena can equal"). No notice of the bittern seems to be found in the Assyrian monuments, though the mention of the heron is not uncommon. The *kaath* and *kippod* are commonly mentioned together, e.g. Isa. xxxiv. 11. The upper lintels; "the capitals" of the columns (see note on Amos ix. 1, where the same word *kaphor* is used). Their voice shall sing in the windows; literally, the voice of the songster in the window. Birds shall perch and sing in the apertures of the ruined palaces. Vulgate, *Vox cantantis in fenestra*; the LXX. has, θηρία φωνήσῃ ἐν τοῖς διαρύγμασιν αὐτῆς, "Wild beasts shall cry in the breaches thereof." Others translate, "Hark! it singeth in the windows." There are no traces of windows in any of the Assyrian palaces, even in the case of chambers next the outer walls. If daylight were admitted, it must have entered through openings in the ceilings (Layard, 'Nineveh,' ii. 260). Desolation shall be in the thresholds. The word rendered "desolation" (*chorebh*) Jerome notes may be read as meaning "sword," "drought," and "raven;" he adopts the last signification, and translates, in agreement with the LXX., *corvus*. But it seems best to take the term as signifying "desolation;" no human creature shall be found there, only ruin and rubbish. Ewald renders, "Owls shall sing in the windows, crows on the threshold, 'shivered, crushed.'" For he shall uncover (*he hath laid bare*) the cedar work. God, or the enemy, has so destroyed the palaces that the cedar panelling is exposed to the weather. Jerome has, "Attenuabo robur ejus." We see by Sennacherib's boast (Isa. xxxvii. 24) that the Assyrians imported cedars for building purposes. And we have monumental evidence of the employment of cedar in palaces at least since

the time of Assurnazirpal, B.C. 860. Esarhaddon reports that he received cypress and cedar from Lebanon as tribute; and Assurbanipal states that in erecting his palace he used cedar pillars from Sirjon and Lebanon (Schrader, *Die Keilinschrift. und Alt. Test.*, pp. 183, 453). Neriglissar, King of Babylon, B.C. 559, in rebuilding his palace, records that he "arranged tall cedars for its roof" (*Records of the Past*, v. 142).

Ver. 15.—This is the rejoicing city. Such is the fate of this once exulting city, that dwelt carelessly, secure, with no fear of danger at hand (Isa. xlvii. 8, on which this

passage is founded). I am, and there is none beside me. Thus, in effect, Nineveh claimed for herself the attributes of Almighty God. She stands alone, mistress of nations, a type of the powers of this world, which defy themselves and defy the Lord. Septuagint, *Οὐκ ἔστι μετ' ἐμὲ ἑτερος*, "There is no more any after me." Shall hiss. In scorn (Job xxvii. 23; Jer. xix. 8; Micah vi. 16). Wag his hand. He shall shake or wave his hand with the gesture of dismissal, as if saying, "Away with thee! get thee gone!"—a rehearsal of the awful "Depart ye!" in the final judgment (comp. Nah. iii. 19).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The evil summoned to repentance.* Having declared fully and faithfully the Divine judgments, the prophet changed his tone, and, turning to another aspect of truth and blending compassion with severity, he tenderly entreated those who had become so estranged from God to return to him with all their hearts. This is how he appeals to his godless fellow-countrymen. "Gather yourselves," etc. (vers. 1, 2). Notice—

I. THE HARDENING EFFECT OF SIN. Evil hardens those who indulge in it, even as the fire hardens the material brought under its influence. You read such words as Jer. ii. 25; xviii. 12; Zech. vii. 12, and you cannot help being impressed with the hardening tendency of sin. So here (ver. 1) note the words, "*O nation not desired.*" The word rendered "desired" means "to turn pale," "to become white with shame." It is the same word used by Isaiah (xxix. 22), "Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale." Indulgence in sin renders men stubborn and stiff-necked. There is a spiritual condition expressively described as "past feeling." The heart may become hardened, and the conscience seared. "Take heed," etc. (Heb. iii. 13).

II. GOD'S INFINITE CONDESCENSION AND GRACE IN MAKING ANY APPROACH OR APPEAL TO THOSE THUS CONFIRMED IN EVIL-DOING. He might have left such to reap the full consequences of their transgressions, whereas in truth, all down the ages his seeking love has been going out after such with a view to their restoration, and even his chastisements have had the same merciful intention. 1. We see this seeking love of God manifested in ancient time in the raising up of these prophets, men full of faith and power; bold, courageous, daring; and in sending these forth to expostulate with the callous and impenitent, if perchance they might be led "to break off sin by righteousness." 2. In the Incarnation. He who spake in time past to the fathers by the prophets, subsequently spoke unto them by his Son (Heb. i. 1). "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." 3. In the institution of the Christian ministry, sending forth his ambassadors to proclaim to the estranged the conditions of reconciliation and peace (2 Cor. v. 20).

III. GOD'S CALL ADDRESSED TO EVIL-DOERS IS A CALL TO REPENTANCE. "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together" (ver. 1); i.e. "Bend yourselves," bend low in contrition in view of transgression—repent, and submit yourselves to God. The nature of repentance must be understood in order to this. There enters into it the element of sorrow; the deep humbling of the soul; yet sorrow alone does not constitute it; there must accompany this the breaking away from sin, and the turning unto God. "Repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ" are sacred and imperative duties and obligations; yet there is no merit in them, but the heart must rest entirely in the mercy of God, which is so large that man has only to bend his heart before God—to be willing—and God's all-regenerating power shall be experienced. Then "bend yourselves, bend, ye people, that do not grow pale" (ver. 1).

IV. THIS SPIRIT OF PENITENCE AND SUBMISSION TO THE LORD GOD SHOULD BE CHERISHED WITHOUT DELAY. (Ver. 2.) A British general, on being asked when he could be ready to take the command of the forces, answered, "Now." He knew as

a soldier that the call of duty did not admit of delay. When a course is felt by us to be right, we ought at once to pursue it. "What is 'now'? 'A bright presence.' Wrestle with it, and say, 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me!' 'A sweet garden.' Go, gather in it the fruits of life! 'A true temple.' Bow down in it, and consecrate yourself to him who has placed you within its shrine! 'A living rescue.' Use it, that you may run into the ark of safety! 'A rich banquet.' Now the feast is spread: 'Come, eat, O friends, drink, O beloved! yea, eat and live for ever!'" (Martin Tupper's 'Proverbial Philosophy,' p. 204). "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. vi. 2).

Ver. 3.—*The good stimulated to a truer life.* It is a truth admitting of abundant illustration, that even in the most degenerate times God has had a people to show forth his praise. He has not left himself without witnesses. Whilst in this prophet's day there was "the remnant of Baal" (ch. i. 4), there was also "the remnant of the house of Judah" (ch. ii. 7), "the remnant of Israel," that did no iniquity nor uttered lies (ch. iii. 13). "The meek of the earth" clothed with humility and working righteousness (ver. 3).

I. TRUE PIETY INFLUENCES BOTH THE CHARACTER AND CONDUCT OF ITS SUBJECTS. It is an inward grace, manifesting itself outwardly in holy excellence and holy living. 1. *Humility* is the token referred to as indicating its influence upon the character. "Ye meek of the earth." Meekness is power tempered with gentleness—it is the soul restraining, holding back its own power. (1) It manifests itself towards God. He has marked out to man the true way of life; but man has the power to decline to pursue this course. "The meek of the earth" are such as, although conscious of this power, yield themselves up in passive obedience to God, to receive the impress of his Spirit, and to be moulded at his will. (2) And it manifests itself towards man. The possessor of this heavenly grace, in his intercourse with his fellow-men, lays aside all parade and show and ostentation; whilst under wrong, in patience he possesses his soul, and although he may have the power to revenge the wrong done, he holds back this power, ruling his spirit, and proving himself mightier than he who taketh a city. 2. *Rectitude* is the token referred to as indicating the influence of true piety upon the conduct. "Which have wrought his judgment" (ver. 3). It prompts to obedience to God's revealed Law—to righteousness of life—obedience rendered by a heart thoroughly loyal to God and to righteousness, and which, becoming the very habit of the soul, is rendered easy and pleasant.

II. THE GROWTH OF THE SOUL IN HOLY CHARACTER AND CONDUCT IS GRADUAL. The reiterated counsels and exhortations addressed to the good by prophets and apostles indicate that the goal had not been reached. Such are to "go on unto perfection" (Heb. vi. 1), to seek to be continually advancing, ever to be aiming after a purer and holier life. "Nearer, my God, to thee." "Not as though I had already attained," etc. (Phil. iii. 12).

III. THIS PROGRESS IS TO BE SECURED AS THE RESULT OF DIVINE DISCIPLINE AND PERSONAL ENDEAVOUR. 1. *Divine discipline.* In the time of national calamity described by this prophet, and ere long to befall his land, the good as well as the evil would suffer—the sorrowful experience would be passed through by all, whilst the Divine discipline thus designed to rouse the indifferent was intended also to purify the good, and to contribute to the perfecting in them the Divine character and life. And such being ever the gracious intention of God, let the good circumstanced thus sing—

"Great Master, touch us with thy skillful hand,
 Let not the music that is in us die;
 Great Sculptor, hew and polish us, nor let
 Hidden and lost thy form within us lie.
 Spare not thy stroke; do with us as thou wilt;
 Let there be nought unfinished, broken, marr'd;
 Complete thy purpose, that we may become
 Thy perfect image, O our God and Lord!"

2. *Personal endeavour.* The seer here stimulated the good to persevering effort so as to attain unto a truer life. "Seek ye the Lord;" "seek righteousness;" "seek meek-

ness." By earnest prayer, by calm reflection and meditation, and by holy service, man is to co-operate with God with a view to his own spiritual growth. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," etc. (Phil. ii. 12).

IV. THEY WHO THUS PROGRESS IN THE DIVINE LIFE SHALL BE RENDERED SECURE IN THE DAY OF CONFLICT AND JUDGMENT. "It may be ye shall be hid," etc. (ver. 3). The "may be" was not intended to express uncertainty with reference to their security, but rather to keep them from becoming too confident and self-reliant. They who continue in the love and service of God cannot but be secure, for their safety is amply guaranteed (Isa. xxvi. 20; Ps. xxxi. 20; Isa. xxxii. 2).

Vers. 4—7.—*The doom of the Philistines.* The prophet, having declared the judgments to come upon Judah, turned his thoughts to the surrounding heathen nations, and proclaimed the doom they should experience. Several reasons probably influenced him in taking this survey and in calling attention to the chastisements inflicted upon other lands. (1) A desire to make it clear to his people that with God there is no respect of persons; (2) that wrong-doing works evil issues wherever it is practised; (3) to make vivid to them that the dark clouds of retribution were gathering, and so to rouse them out of their apathy and to stimulate them to return to righteousness of life. In referring thus to the heathen, he began with the Philistines, the natural enemies of his nation. We have here—

I. A SOLEMN DECLARATION OF DIVINE JUDGMENTS TO BE EXECUTED AGAINST EVIL-DOERS. 1. The nation referred to was that of the Philistines. They were very influential in Palestine. Occupying the coast, they were in possession of the trade carried on with Europe and Asia. Besides this transit trade, they had vast internal resources. They were given to agriculture, and hence we read that the Israelites had to go to the Philistines "to sharpen every man his share and his coulter, his axe and his mattock." In their prosperity they built their five great cities, Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. They were warlike and idolatrous, and through their self-sufficiency and boastfulness, their tyranny and oppression, together with their idol-worship, they became offensive in the sight of Heaven. 2. The judgments here declared as about to overtake them. Their cities should be destroyed, their land rendered desolate, their inhabitants should be removed, the busy tract by the sea, where once trade and commerce flourished, should become pastures and folds for sheep, and where once stood the abodes of prosperous merchants, the humble shepherds should construct their huts (vers. 4—6). 3. The fulfilment is unquestionable; the word of the Lord by the mouth of his holy prophet has been amply verified. It is true that the Gaza of to-day is a populous town, and hence those ready to carp and cavil have urged that Gaza has not been forsaken. But the ruins which have been found and explored within a mile or two of modern Gaza indicate the site of the ancient city, and tell how that city has indeed, like the others, passed away. "The Word of our God shall stand for ever."

II. A TENDER ASSURANCE OF DIVINE MERCY TO BE MANIFESTED TOWARDS THE FAITHFUL. In terms of exquisite beauty and gracious tenderness he represents the faithful servants of Heaven, "the remnant of Judah," as visited by God in the midst of their dark experiences, brought by him out of captivity and conducted by his guiding hand to the green pastures, where their wants are fully supplied by day, and to quiet resting-places, where by night they may lie down and repose in perfect security, as being under the Divine Shepherd's guardian care (ver. 7). The verse has been taken by some literally, and they have either seen its fulfilment in the return of the pious Jews after captivity in Babylon, or they look on to the fulfilment in the conversion of the Jews and their restoration to their own land; whilst others are content with recognizing in the words a confident assurance and a beautiful symbolical picture of that ultimate peace and security and abundance which all the ransomed of the Lord shall enjoy. Certain it is that we may take the seer's stern words pronouncing the doom of the Philistines as conveying a clear intimation that evil-doing shall assuredly be followed by Divine retribution, whilst from his words of promise to the faithful we may draw the encouraging and inspiring consciousness that the faithful and God-fearing shall be sustained and comforted in present sorrow, and shall at length emerge out of the gloom and the darkness into the sunshine of a true prosperity.

Vers. 8—10.—*The Divine judgment upon the Moabites and Ammonites.* The Moabites and Ammonites were related to the Israelites by kinship. They were the descendants of Lot—the Moabites by Moab, the elder son of that patriarch, and the Ammonites by Ben-Ammi, or Ammon, his younger son (Gen. xix. 37, 38). With these tribes, in view of this blood-relationship, the Israelites were distinctly forbidden to wage war (Deut. ii. 9, 19). These pastoral tribes, however, did not act thus peacefully toward Israel. They cherished the spirit of hatred in reference to the Israelites, which manifested itself in their revilings and boastings, and also in the incursions they made upon their territory (Isa. xvi. 6; Jer. xlviii. 29). The prophet here proceeds to declare against these tribes the judgments of God. Note—

I. THE PREVAILING SIN OF THE MOABITES AND AMMONITES. *Pride* (ver. 10; Jer. xlviii. 29). This spirit manifested itself (1) in their evil-speaking,—“they reproached and reviled God’s people” (ver. 8); (2) in their arrogant and insolent bearing,—they “magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts” (ver. 10); (3) in their deeds of oppression and cruelty,—they “magnified themselves against their border” (ver. 8), crossing this and making raids upon Judah, and taking special advantage of those seasons when, through conflict with foreign adversaries, that nation had become enfeebled. This sin of pride, so characteristic of these tribes, is still very prevalent, and lies at the very root of human misery; it leads to the cherishing of false appearances, to inconsiderateness and injustice with reference to the rights of others; it occasions misunderstandings, and then, standing in the way of mutual concession, causes alienation. It inflicts likewise self-injury, carries with it its own chastisement in the unhappy spirit it engenders; it is its own condemnation, for it is evident to all that trees whose boughs do not bend to the ground are not very well laden with fruit; and it ends in ruin, for “pride goeth before destruction,” etc. (Prov. xvi. 18).

II. THE SURE PUNISHMENT WITH WHICH THEY WERE TO BE OVERTAKEN ON ACCOUNT THEREOF. (Ver. 9.) 1. Their cities were to be destroyed. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah of old had become engulfed in the Dead Sea, upon which these haughty ones constantly gazed without recalling the past and laying to heart its lessons of warning, so theirs should likewise pass away. 2. Their rich pasture-lands should become barren, and the fertile region changed into a region of nettles and salt-pits and a perpetual desert (ver. 9). 3. Israel, so often oppressed by them and called upon to endure their scorn and contempt, should eventually triumph over them, and take possession of their territory as the spoils of war (ver. 9). 4. This fate should really come to pass, since Jehovah was against them, and was pledged to its accomplishment. “Therefore as I live,” etc. (ver. 9). All that his people had suffered through their haughtiness, he had known (ver. 8), and would duly requite. And so ever, since he reigneth, shall pride be subdued and the haughty oppressor be laid in the dust. “He scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He puts down the mighty from their seats, and exalts them of low degree” (Luke i. 51, 52).

“True dignity abides with him alone
Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
Can still suspect and still revere himself
In lowliness of heart.”

Ver. 11.—*The Divine purpose in reference to the race, and the way of its fulfilment.* A very erroneous notion has been widely entertained respecting God’s relations to the peoples of the earth. The representation has been very current that, in selecting the Jewish tribes and constituting these his “peculiar treasure,” the Most High left all other nations to their own resources, and that they became practically outcasts from his love and care. We have, however, abundant evidence that such is by no means the teaching of Scripture; that whilst with a view to the revealing and developing of his plan of redeeming mercy he did select the Jewish race, imparting to them special privileges and communicating to them a knowledge of his will, yet that all the nations were likewise under his government and nurture. We think of what is recorded in the Bible respecting Job the Chaldean, Balaam the heathen soothsayer, the mission of Elisha to the woman of Sarepta, and of Jonah to Nineveh, and the Divine revelations made to heathen monarchs, and, with all this before us, we cannot foster the notion that the world outside the pale of Judaism was disregarded by Heaven, but we see

clearly that, whilst God was working out his special purposes of love to the race through the medium of "the chosen people," he was also in various ways by his Spirit striving with *all* the children of men. The beauty in the teachings of the Hebrew prophets consists in the fact that they were so ready to acknowledge all this; that they broke through the narrow boundary of exclusiveness which the Jews guarded so jealously, and told of the Divine working in all lands, and of the Divine intention to bless the entire race. The case of the Prophet Zephaniah is a conspicuous example of this. Whilst declaring the Divine judgments to light upon his own people, he also looked north and south, east and west, and saw the retributions which were to come upon the heathen nations. Nor did he rest here, but, peering still further into the future and apprehending the Divine Ruler as bringing order out of chaos, and out of trial and sorrow working good for the race, he paused in the midst of his dark announcements of coming woe to proclaim this loving design of his God (ver. 11), whilst at length, having ended his predictions of impending evil, he again turned to this cheering theme, and lingered upon it even to the very end of his prophecy (ch. iii. 8—20).

I. THE DIVINE PURPOSE AS HERE EXPRESSED. This includes: 1. The complete extinction of idolatry. This is most expressly referred to here under the figure of starvation. The gods of the heathen should die through want and neglect. "He will famish all the gods of the earth" (ver. 11). 2. The full establishment of the worship of God. "And men shall worship him every one from his place" (ver. 11). 3. The universal acknowledgment of him by Gentile nations. "Even all the isles of the heathen" (ver. 11). The thought of the universality of this acknowledgment of the true God eventually is seen to be the more decidedly expressed here as we remember that in ancient times whole countries and continents were described as "the isles."

II. THIS DIVINE PURPOSE IS TO BE WROUGHT OUT THROUGH THE OUTWARD DISCIPLINE OF CONFLICT AND TRIAL. "The Lord will be terrible unto them" (ver. 11). Men are to be humbled that God may be exalted. They pursue their own designs, and often care only for the realization of their own selfish ends, but "the Lord sitteth in the heavens," ruling over all, and, through all the conflicts and strifes, the turmoils and trials of individuals and nations, he is bringing to pass his loving purposes; and is leading on to the glory of the latter day.

III. THE THOUGHT OF GOD AS WORKING THUS YIELDS INSPIRATION AND STRENGTH TO TRUE AND LOYAL HEARTS AMIDST THE DIFFICULTIES AND DISCOURAGEMENTS IN HOLY SERVICE. This was to Zephaniah the source of strength. Whilst faithful to his trust as the messenger of judgment he made to his own and to heathen nations the stern announcements of coming tribulation, he paused again and again to reflect upon the thought that these very judgments should be made to contribute to the accomplishment of God's merciful and gracious design to bless and save the race.

Ver. 12.—*The doom of Ethiopia.* We have here simply a passing allusion, yet we do well to pause and reflect upon it. Every word of God is "profitable," and even words which at first glance seem unimportant are found on reflection to be suggestive of holy teaching. We are reminded here—

I. THAT THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS REACH EVEN TO REMOTE PLACES. Ethiopia was in the south, and at the extreme south. Now, Judah had other and nearer foes in that direction. There was Edom and there was Egypt; but the prophet, in his announcement of coming Divine judgments, carried his thoughts beyond these, and fixed his mind upon those dwelling at the remotest point. "Ye Ethiopians also," etc. (ver. 12). Remoteness will not screen wrong-doers.

II. THAT IT IS PERILOUS TO STAND IN ASSOCIATION WITH THOSE WHO ENGAGE IN EVIL-DOING. These Ethiopians or Cushites had no direct conflict with Judah, but they were in alliance with Egypt; and through this alliance they would have to suffer in the time of coming retribution. Egypt was specially singled out for judgment because of her oppression, and Ethiopia, as one of her allies, her "helpers," would fall under the retributive chastisements of God (Ezek. xxx. 4, 5). They who ally themselves with transgressors make themselves participators in their crimes, and must expect to be partakers of their plagues.

III. THAT THE EVIL PASSIONS OF MEN ARE MADE TO FULFIL THE DIVINE BENEDICTS. War is a terrible evil. In no way are the evil passions of men more surely let loose

than in such conflicts; yet by these military conflicts God's purposes have at times been accomplished. Nebuchadnezzar and his forces, invading Egypt and destroying the Egyptians and their allies the Ethiopians, were instruments God employed to work his will. God through his holy prophet declared, "Ye Ethiopians also, ye shall be slain by my sword" (ver. 12).

Vers. 13—15.—*The doom of Assyria.* It was very natural that the prophet, in unfolding the Divine judgments upon heathen nations, should turn his thoughts to the north and to the Assyrian empire. That power was, in his day, at the very zenith of its prosperity, and his own nation was peculiarly exposed to its tyranny and oppression. The Hebrew seers frequently referred to this empire and to the ruin which should eventually overtake it; and whilst Zephaniah's allusion is very brief, limited indeed to three verses, it is nevertheless remarkably graphic and vivid. Observe—

I. THE STERN SENTENCE. (Vers. 13, 14.) 1. It foretold that the prevailing power which was seeking the overthrow of the kingdom of God in Judah should itself be completely destroyed. In a few descriptive touches he set forth the utter ruin which should befall the haughty Assyrian nation. She should be destroyed, and her capital become a dry, desolate waste in the midst of which the beasts of the desert should make their home. Her temples and palaces should lie broken, pelicans and hedgehogs lodging in the fallen capitals, whilst instead of the strains of the men-singers and women-singers, no more to be heard in her palaces, the notes of some solitary bird sitting in the window of some outer wall should alone sound forth. "Desolation" too "should be on the thresholds," and heaps of sand blown from the desert should mingle with the wreck of the city, until at length every trace of the former magnificence should have disappeared. And the acknowledgment should be made that this ruin was merited; the passer-by should hiss with very scorn, and move his hand in token of supreme contempt (vers. 13—15). 2. It declared this ruin to be the result of the Divine working. "And he will stretch out his hand," etc. (ver. 13). 3. This stern doom thus pronounced has literally come to pass. Modern research has been amply rewarded in the evidence which has thus been supplied of the fulfilment to the very letter of God's declarations uttered through his holy prophets. "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever."

II. THE SOLEMN REFLECTION. (Ver. 15.) 1. In reading these words we are led to feel that the prophet had a vivid realization of the future, and of the changes which were to take place. He saw "the rejoicing city" full of worldly prosperity, and he saw it likewise in its desolation, and his heart was moved as he reflected upon the instability of mere earthly greatness and might. 2. He traced the coming overthrow of the Assyrian power to its true causes. (1) *Pride*. "That said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me" (ver. 15). (2) *Selfishness*. "There is none beside me." Her interests centred in herself. There was no regard for the rights of others. She sought only her own ends, and sought by oppression and cruelty to make all surrounding nations tributary to her own worldly splendour and prosperity. And fostering this unholy spirit, she "dwelt carelessly," crying, "Peace and safety," wrapt in carnal security, until at length "sudden destruction" came upon her, and she was left in her desolation, silently yet emphatically to proclaim to all after-ages that true prosperity for nations, as for individuals, lies not in material greatness and worldly aggrandizement, but in the cultivation of the fear of God and in rectitude and righteousness of life.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*A call to repentance, addressed to the nation of Judah.* I. THE CONDITION OF THE NATION DESCRIBED. Not its physical or material, but its moral or religious, condition. The former prosperous and fitted to inspire vain thoughts of stability and permanence. Its upper classes devoted to money-making and pleasure-seeking (ch. i. 8, 12; cf. Jer. iv. 30); its lower orders, here not the victims of oppression (ch. i. 9; iii. 1; cf. Jer. v. 27, 28; vi. 6), well-fed and comfortable (Jer. v. 7, 17). The latter degenerate and deserving of severe reprehension. 1. *Irreligious.*

According to the marginal rendering of both the Authorized and Revised Versions, the nation was "not desirous," *i.e.* possessed no longing after Jehovah, his Law, or worship, but had forsaken him, and sworn by them that are no gods (Jer. v. 7), offering up sacrifices and pouring out drink offerings unto other divinities in the open streets, and even setting up their abominations in the temple (Jer. vii. 17, 18, 30). For a nation no more than for an individual is it possible to remain in a state of irreligious neutrality or indifference. The people whose aspirations go not forth after him who is the King of nations as well as King of saints will sooner or later find themselves trusting in "lying vanities," or creating divinities out of their own foolish imaginations (Rom. i. 23). Between theism and polytheism is no permanent half-way house for either humanity as a whole or man as an individual. 2. *Shameless.* This translation (Grotius, Gesenius, Ewald, Keil and Delitzsch, Cheyne, and others) depicts the moral and spiritual hardening which results from sin long continued, passionately loved, and openly gloried in, as Judah's apostasy had been (ch. iii. 5). A whole diameter of moral and spiritual being lies between the shamelessness of innocence (Gen. ii. 25) and the shamelessness of sin (Phil. iii. 19). The former is beautiful and excites admiration; the latter is loathsome and evokes reprehension and pity. "A generation," says Pressensé, "which can no longer blush is in open insurrection against the first principles of universal morality" ("The Early Years of Christianity," iv. 392). 3. *Hateful.* So the Authorized Version, followed by Pusey. The degenerate nation, addicted to idolatry and sunk in immorality, was not desired or loved by God; but, on account of its wickedness, was an object of aversion to God. No contradiction to the truth elsewhere stated that God still loved the people and desired their reformation (Jer. ii. 2; iii. 14); neither is it inconsistent to preach that "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. vii. 11); and that, nevertheless, "he willeth not that any should perish, but that all should turn to him and live" (2 Pet. iii. 9).

II. THE DUTY OF THE NATION DEFINED. To "gather themselves together." The figure, derived from the gathering together or collecting of stubble or dry sticks, "which are picked up one by one, with search and care" (Pusey), points to that work of self-examination which, in nations as in individuals, must precede conversion, and must be conducted: 1. *With resoluteness.* Being a work to which their hearts were naturally not disposed, it could not be entered upon and far less carried through without deliberate and determined personal effort. Hence the prophet's reduplication of his exhortation. To make one's self the subject of serious introspection, never easy, is specially difficult when the object is to detect one's faults and pronounce judgment on one's deeds. 2. *With inwardness.* A merely superficial survey would not suffice. An action outwardly correct may be intrinsically wrong. Hence the individual that would conduct a real work of self-examination must withdraw himself as much as possible from things eternal, take his seat on the interior tribunal of conscience, and gather round him all that forms a part of his being, in addition to his spoken words and finished deeds, the feelings out of which these have sprung, the motives by which they have been directed, the ends at which they have aimed, and subject the whole to a calm and impartial review. 3. *With minuteness.* The things to be reviewed must be taken one by one, and not merely in the mass. Words and deeds, motives and feelings, when only glanced at in the heap, seldom reveal their true characters; to be known in their very selves they must be looked at, considered, questioned, weighed separately. All about them must be brought to light and placed beneath the microscope of conscientious investigation. 4. *With thoroughness.* As each word, act, feeling, motive, so all must be taken. None must be exempted from scrutiny. Nor will it suffice that they be passed through the ordeal of examination once; the process must be repeated and re-repeated till the exact truth is known. "For a first search, however diligent, never thoroughly reaches the whole deep disease of the whole man; the most grievous sins hide other grievous sins, though lighter. Some sins flash on the conscience at one time, some at another; so that few, even upon a diligent search, come at once to the knowledge of all their heaviest sins" (Pusey).

III. THE DANGER OF THE NATION DECLARED. Unless the duty recommended and prescribed were immediately and heartily entered upon and carried through, the judgment already lying in the womb of God's decree would come to the birth, and the day of his fierce anger would overtake them. 1. *The event was near.* Should Judah

continue unrepentant, the hour of doom would be on her before she was aware. It was rapidly approaching, like chaff driven before the wind. So will the day of the Lord come upon the wicked unawares (Luke xvi. 34). 2. *The issue was certain.* Like chaff before the wind, too, her people would be driven away to pitiless destruction. The like fate is reserved for ungodly men generally (Ps. i. 4; Job xxi. 18). Nothing can avert the final overthrow of the unbelieving and impenitent, whether nation or individual, but repentance and reformation, not outward but inward, not seeming but real, not temporary but permanent.

Learn: 1. The reality of national no less than of individual wickedness. 2. The responsibility that attaches to nations as well as men. 3. The necessity of self-examination for communities as well as for private persons.—T. W.

Ver. 3.—*An exhortation to the meek, addressed to the believing remnant of Judah.*

I. A CHEERING TESTIMONY. 1. *To the existence of a believing remnant.* Dark as the outlook for Judah was, degenerate as the mass of her people had become, there were yet those belonging to her community who either had not apostatized from Jehovah or had reverted to their allegiance (see 2 Kings xxii., xxiii.; 2 Chron. xxxiv., xxxv.). Since "the days that were before the Flood" (Gen. vi. 5—7, 12, 13), God has never wanted a seed to serve him, though oftentimes it has been small, and as in the days of Elijah (1 Kings xix. 10, 18) scarcely perceptible, at least by man. Compare the times after the exile (Mal. iii. 16) and those preceding the birth of Christ (Luke ii. 25). "Even so at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. xi. 5). However discouraging in some respects the present aspect of society may be—what with infidelity in the upper and learned classes, indifference towards religion among the masses, and lukewarmness on the one hand with fanaticism on the other in the Church itself—there are, nevertheless, those who fear God and think upon his Name, who believe in Christ and seek to follow in his steps, who sigh and cry for the irreligion of the age, mourn over the deadness and divisions of the Church, and pray for the coming of that happy era when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord," etc. (Isa. xi. 9). 2. *To the beauty of their characters.* Designated "the meek of the earth." Indicating (1) their patience in enduring the disesteem, scorn, ridicule, and perhaps also oppression, spoliation, and persecution heaped upon them for their nonconformity to general custom in the matter of religion, and for venturing to dissent from common practice in serving Baal; and (2) their humility in maintaining intercourse with others, but especially in communing with God. Such virtues of patience and humility lie at the root of all religion (Matt. v. 3, 5), were exemplified by Jesus Christ (Matt. xi. 29; xxvii. 12; 2 Cor. x. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 23), and are demanded of all his followers (Eph. iv. 2; Col. iii. 12; 1 Pet. ii. 21). 3. *To the piety of their lives.* They had "wrought Jehovah's judgment," i.e. had honestly endeavoured to carry out what Jehovah had prescribed as the right thing to do in the matter of worship and duty. This, after all, the ultimate test of sincerity in religion, which signifies not the mere acceptance of certain propositions relating to God, his worship, and his commandment, but the carrying out of God's will in respect of both. Compare what Samuel said to Saul (1 Sam. xv. 22), what Christ explained to his followers (John xiv. 15; xv. 14), and what Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2 Cor. x. 5).

II. AN URGENT ADMONITION. 1. *Its import.* Explained by two clauses: "Seek righteousness, seek meekness." Only in these ways could Jehovah be sought—neither by coveting the material and temporal tokens of his favour, such as health, comfort, protection, prosperity, nor by maintaining the external forms of his worship, however elaborate or costly, but by aspiring after inward and outward, spiritual and moral conformity to his Law (righteousness) and character (meekness). The same sense attaches to the phrase when addressed to Christians, who are exhorted to follow after righteousness and meekness (1 Tim. vi. 11), and to seek both in Christ (Matt. xi. 29; Rom. x. 4). 2. *Its incidence.* Declared by the words, "all ye meek." Addressed to the humble-hearted, first in Judah, and then in the whole world. The obligation to seek Jehovah grounded for both on (1) their relations to Jehovah as his creatures and servants; (2) their own free choice of him as their Lord and King; (3) the nature of religion, which is not an act to be performed once for all, but a habit of soul to be maintained throughout life; and (4) the necessity of attending to their own safety,

which could not otherwise be secured than by patient continuance in well-doing (Matt. xxiv. 13; Rom. ii. 7; Rev. ii. 10). 3. *Its urgency.* Proclaimed by the threefold "seek." The like diligence demanded of all in the matter of religion. (1) Because of the majesty of him whose service it is (2 Chron. ii. 5; 1 Tim. vi. 15). (2) Because of its intrinsic excellence as a purely spiritual service (John iv. 24; Rom. xii. 1). (3) Because of the momentous issues involved in it according as it is sincere or insincere (Job viii. 13; Prov. x. 28). (4) Because of the shortness and uncertainty of man's opportunity on earth to make his calling and election sure (Eccles. ix. 10; Eph. v. 16; Phil. iv. 5).

III. AN ENCOURAGING CONSOLATION. 1. *A promise of safety for the righteous.* Not a doubtful promise, though introduced by "it may be." From this phrase it cannot be inferred that the prophet was uncertain whether the meek in the land would be protected in the day when Jehovah poured out his wrath upon Judah and Jerusalem; or whether the meek generally would be sheltered in the day of judgment. Merely he intimated that the hiding would be difficult; not the hiding of them by Jehovah, with whom nothing could be hard or easy, but the supplying by them of the moral and spiritual conditions without which God's hiding of them could not come to pass. The ultimate salvation of the meek is guaranteed (Ps. cxlix. 4; Matt. v. 5); but the actual process, in time, of saving them is attended by so many difficulties that there is need for constant watchfulness against the danger of coming short. 2. *A threatening of doom for the ungodly.* If the difficulty of saving the righteous be so great, what possible loophole of escape can there be for the ungodly (Luke xxiii. 31; 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18)? The overthrow of the wicked an additional security to the salvation of the righteous.—T. W.

Vers. 4—15.—*Divine judgments upon heathen nations.* I. THE NATIONS SPECIFIED. 1. *Philistia in the west.* (1) Its situation. "The sea-coast," "the region of the sea," or "the track by the sea." Extending along the Mediterranean, from Gaza in the south to Jaffa in the north, and reaching back to the hill-country of Judah in the west, it consisted of two parallel strips of land; one "of undulating plains, about twelve miles in breadth, bordering on the sea-coast, elevated from fifty to a hundred feet above the sea-level, without distinctive features, and composed of the richest alluvial deposit;" and another "twelve to fifteen miles wide, consisting of a series of hills and spurs from five hundred to eight hundred feet above the sea-level, and broken through by broad valleys" ('Picturesque Palestine,' iii. 151). (2) Its names. "The land of the Philistines," "of the Cherethites," "of Canaan." Of these the first describes it as a land whose inhabitants had been originally "immigrants," Philistia—in Hebrew *Peleseth*, in the Assyrian inscriptions *Pilastu*, *Pilasta*, and *Palastav*—being derived from a root signifying "to wander about." The second depicts these inhabitants from a tribe settled in the south-west of the country, the Cherethites, a race of "Cutters," or "Executioners," who had achieved their settlements by means of the sword (Amos ix. 7). Whether they came originally from Crete (Gesenius, Hitzig, Baur in Riehm's 'Handwörterbuch'), which must then be identified with Caphtor (Deut. ii. 23; Jer. xlvii. 5), settling down first on the Egyptian coast (Gen. x. 14), and gradually creeping north towards the Palestinian coast, though extremely probable, is still a matter of debate. The names of Philistine kings preserved in Assyrian inscriptions and bearing a more or less Semitic character suggest that the people must have been of Semitic origin (Schrader, 'Die Keilinschriften,' 2 auf. 167). The third name, Canaan, "Lowland," was probably given to it because that had been its primitive designation, although the appellation afterwards was transferred to the whole country, just as Philistia or Palestine was. (3) Its chief cities. Four mentioned—Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron—in the Assyrian inscriptions *Haziti*, *Iskaluna*, *Asdudu*, and *Amkaruna*. Their early histories may be learnt from Scripture. Gaza, the modern *Guzzeh*, originally inhabited by the Avim (Deut. ii. 23), and, prior to the conquest of Palestine, by the Caphtorim or Philistines, and a remnant of the Anakim (Josh. xi. 22), was the scene of Samson's feats of strength, imprisonment, and destruction, and the site of a temple of Dagon (Judg. xvi. 1—3, 21—30). Ashkelon, situated on the sea (Josh. xiii. 3), had also been the scene of one of Samson's feats (Judg. xiv. 19). Ashdod possessed a temple of Dagon, in which the captured ark was placed (1 Sam. v.). Ekron, the most northern

of the five chief cities, with a temple of Beelzebub (2 Kings i. 2), was the city from which the ark was sent back to Israel (1 Sam. v. 10). 2. *Moab and Ammon in the east.* In the Assyrian inscriptions *Ma'ab, Ma'aab, Muaba, and Bit Ammán.* Here conjoined probably because (1) of their blood-relationship, the Moabites having been descended from Lot's son Moab (Gen. xix. 37), and the Ammonites from the same patriarch's son Ben-Ammi (Gen. xix. 38); (2) of their geographical contiguity, their territories lying east of the Jordan,—that of Moab south of the Arnon, and stretching from the Dead Sea to the Syrian desert, and that of the Ammonites a little to the north-east, "in a mountainous district not annexed by Israel" (Conder); and (3) of their mutual hostility to Israel, having more than once joined forces in an attack upon the latter (Judg. iii. 13; 2 Chron. xx. 1). 3. *Ethiopia in the south.* The land of Cush, in Assyrian *Kúsu,* the furthest south territory known to the Hebrews, was probably regarded as embracing Nubian Ethiopia and Arabia (Gen. ii. 13; 2 Chron. xxi. 16; Esth. i. 1; Isa. xviii. 1; Ezek. xxix. 10; xxx. 5). Its inhabitants, dark-skinned (Jer. xiii. 23), were of a war-like character (Jer. xlvi. 9). Ethiopians composed part of Shishak's army (2 Chron. xii. 3). Zerah their king was defeated by Asa (2 Chron. xiv. 9—15; xvi. 8). "They were a race cognate with the Egyptians, but darker in complexion and coarser in feature—not by any means negroes, but still more nearly allied to the negro than the Egyptians were" (Rawlinson's 'Egypt: Story of the Nations,' p. 315). 4. *Assyria in the north.* Founded by Asshur (Gen. x. 11), who appears to have given his name first to the city he founded, and then to the empire it began, Assyria had as its capital Nineveh, the modern *Koujunjik.* (On the history of Nineveh as detailed by the cuneiform inscriptions, see Layard's 'Nineveh;' Sayce's 'Assyria, its Princes, Priests, and People;' and Schrader's 'Keilinschriften'). "The Assyrians were allied in blood and language to the Hebrews, the Aramæans, and the Arabs;" "were a military people, caring for little else save war and trade;" and "if less luxurious than their Babylonian neighbours, were also less humane" (Sayce). Israel's contact with Assyria began in B.C. 853, with Ahab's contribution of ten thousand infantry and two thousand chariots to assist Benhadad II. of Damascus against Sbalmaneser II. of Assyria ('Records of the Past,' iii. 99), and ended with the fall of Nineveh in B.C. 606.

II. THEIR SINS RECORDED. 1. *Idolatry.* All alike guilty of worshipping false gods—the Philistines of doing homage to Ashtaroah, Dagon, and Beelzebub; the Moabites, to Baalpeor and Chemosh; and the Ammonites, to Moloch; the Ethiopians, most likely to the gods of Egypt, Amen-Ra, Ptah, Osiris, Anubis, Thoth, Isis, Hathor, etc.; and the Assyrians, to the old Babylonian divinities, Bel, Anu, and Ea. Idolatry regarded as a sin not in Israel alone (Exod. xx. 3—5), but in heathen peoples as well (Ps. xcvi. 7; Rom. i. 25). 2. *Enmity against Israel.* In this also all had been partakers—the Philistines from the days of the judges (Judg. x. 7); the Moabites and Ammonites from the same period (Judg. iii. 13); the Ethiopians in the times of Rehoboam and Asa (2 Chron. xii. 3; xiv. 9); and the Assyrians under Tiglath-Pileser II., who first invaded the northern kingdom in the reign of Menahem (2 Kings iv. 19). In particular the Philistines of Gaza, in the days of Jeroboam II., had sold captive Israelites to Edom (Amos i. 6); the Moabites under Mesha the sheepmaster, in the days of Jehoram, son of Ahab, not only revolted against Israel (2 Kings iii. 5), but carried the torch of war into Israelitish territory, defeating the Israelitish king and making many prisoners ('Records of the Past,' 2nd series, ii. 200); while the Assyrians invaded Judah so late as the days of Manasseh, and even deported that king to Babylon (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11). 3. *Pride.* This more especially the sin of Moab (ver. 10) and of Assyria (ver. 15), of whom the former despised and magnified herself against Israel, and the latter exulted in her own fancied security and superlative greatness.

III. THEIR JUDGMENTS PRONOUNCED. 1. *In character equally severe.* (1) Deportation of their inhabitants. The Philistine cities will be overtaken by this fate (ver. 4). Moab and Ammon shall be involved in a like doom. The former "shall be as Sodom," and the latter "as Gomorrah" (ver. 9). Ethiopia shall not escape, but her people shall be "slain by Jehovah's sword" (ver. 12). Assyria shall suffer similar calamity. Nineveh will become a desolation, etc. (vers. 13, 14). (2) Desolation of their lands. The land of the Philistines, the tract by the sea, shall be pastures with caves for shepherds' huts, and folds for flocks (ver. 6). The territories of Moab and Ammon shall become a possession of nettles and salt-pits and a perpetual desolation (ver. 9).

Nineveh will become dry like a wilderness (ver. 13), and desolation shall be in her thresholds (ver. 14). (3) Occupation of their deserted lands by Israel. "The Philistine coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah" (ver. 7). Of Moab and Ammon it is written, "The remnant of my nation shall inherit them" (ver. 9). 2. *In incidence equally certain.* All rested on a common ground, and were pronounced by a common voice, that of Jehovah. "The word of Jehovah was against the land of the Philistines" (ver. 5). Unto Moab and Ammon Jehovah had undertaken to be terrible (ver. 11). Jehovah's sword was to slay the Ethiopians (ver. 12). He should also stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria (ver. 13). What God directly by his own voice, or indirectly through the voice of another, undertakes to do is as good as done. 3. *In result equally good.* In threatening to destroy the above-mentioned nations—from their number and situation obviously designed to represent the whole heathen world—Jehovah practically engaged that the issue of his judgments would be to famish all the gods of the earth (ver. 11), *i.e.* cut off their worshippers, and so starve or make them lean, and in this way cause them to vanish from the face of the earth. Thus the ultimate result of his punishing the heathen would be (1) to reveal the nothingness of idols, whose inability to protect their worshippers would thereby be revealed; (2) to extinguish idolatry, since men would no longer serve divinities that were powerless to save them; and (3) to hasten the conversion of the world, since "all the isles of the nations" would be induced by what they saw to worship Jehovah "every one from his place."

Learn: 1. That God sees and notes the attitudes of nations towards himself and his kingdom. 2. That God is as much against nations that do wickedly as he is against individuals that sin. 3. That the strongest and most flourishing empires can be easily overthrown when God becomes their assailant. 4. That social and political convulsions are all hastening on the era when "the meek shall inherit the earth." 5. That national judgments are a prelude and premonition of the judgments of the great day when "before him shall be gathered all nations."—T. W.

Ver. 3.—*The duty of seeking the Lord.* This may be taken as the key-note of the second discourse of the prophet (ch. ii. 1—iii. 7), in which, after having uttered the solemn threatening of judgment in the former discourse, he gives more explicit directions as to what is the duty of the people in the view of this impending calamity. The call in ch. i. had simply been "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God," *i.e.* to recognize the reality, nearness, and justice of the judgment he announced; but now the prophet gives more particular and express admonitions as to what people should do. What he calls upon them to do is, in one word, to seek the Lord; but in this discourse he enlarges at some length on the grounds and the way of doing so.

I. WHY OUGHT MEN, IN VIEW OF SUCH A JUDGMENT, TO SEEK THE LORD?

1. Because the judgment is universal. It is not merely a local visitation on the land of Israel, in which it alone is to suffer at the hands of some powerful and successful invader. In that case prudence might dictate the propriety of seeking escape by allying themselves with the conquering power, or taking refuge in some other land not exposed to its invasion. It might even be suggested by the idolatrous superstition of those days, that the cause of the triumph or safety of other nations was the power of their gods, and that this might be a reason for worshipping or fearing them. But the judgment is to be from the Lord, the only living and true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and it is to show itself as such in this that it shall include all nations in its sweep; it is to be on the countries round about, as well as on Judah. The most prominent of the neighbouring nations are mentioned as involved in the calamity—the cities of the Philistines on the sea-coast to the south-west (vers. 4—7), Moab and Ammon on the south-east (vers. 8—10). These had been old hereditary enemies of Israel, and were inclined to rejoice in her calamity, and boast themselves as if their old hatred was now to be gratified. But this very jealousy and pride offend the Lord and bring down his judgment on them too. Then even the more distant nations of the Ethiopians far to the south-west, beyond Egypt, and Assyria in the remote north-east, with the great luxurious and proud city of Nineveh, were to be visited too; so that there would be no quarter of the earth to which Israel could turn for safety (vers. 12—15). So it ever is when God visits men; he makes it to be felt

that vain is the help of man, and that there are no devices of human power, or riches, or wisdom, by which his hand can be escaped. It does not always need universal and sweeping judgments to show this; and it is our wisdom to learn the lessons even from single and separate manifestations of the power of God's wrath; or from the records and threatenings of these old judgments and their lessons. 2. But this is only a negative motive; it shows us in what quarters we are not to turn—that we can find no help in man. But the prophet gives also positively a reason why we should seek the Lord, and that is because his judgments are sent with a view to mercy. This is pointed out both in regard to Judah (ver. 7) and in regard to the Gentiles (ver. 11); for not only is the captivity of Judah to be turned back, but all the isles of the heathen are to worship the Lord. Such is ever the design of God's judgments against sin in this world. They are, indeed, expressions of his wrath and foretastes of his curse against sin, and as such they are fitted and intended to produce fear, and to lead men to hold their peace at the presence of the Lord God, and to humble themselves under his mighty hand. But the design of them never is simply to destroy. It may be needful ultimately, for the glory of the Lord, that the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and that the wicked be no more; and that utter destruction shall surely overtake the impenitent, when the Lord shall destroy the stumbling-blocks with the wicked, when "the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire" (Matt. xiii. 41, 42). That is the doom solemnly denounced against the impenitent. But is not the very denunciation of it, stern as it is, an act of mercy? It is a warning graciously sent in time, lest that doom should come upon them unforecast and unexpected—a call to them to flee from the wrath to come, a signal of danger ahead, that may lead sinners to arrest their onward and downward course. Now, if the warning in words is thus manifestly merciful, so also are these foretastes of judgment that are but warnings in deed given when those in words have been disregarded. Had Israel listened to the words of the prophets, and turned from their evil ways, it might not have been necessary that God should send on them the judgment of the Captivity; but when they would not take warning from the solemn words of the Lord denouncing judgment, it was needful that they should be made to feel that these were not mere words, and be taught by actual inflictions in deed. But these were also sent in mercy, like the famine that came on the prodigal son in the far land to which he had wandered and wherein he wasted his substance in riotous living. Suffering may pierce the heart which the mere threat of suffering, however solemn and earnest, had failed to touch; and in that case the suffering, as well as the warning of it, has a gracious end. Even to the heathen nations, the judgment is with a view to mercy. Had Israel been faithful to their God and their calling, they would have been a kingdom of priests to spread the knowledge of the true God and of his grace and mercy among the Gentile nations around. But since they would not do this willingly, in the way of faithfully walking in the covenant of their God, he shall bring it to pass that by the judgments they undergo they shall be the means of making known his way in the earth, and his salvation among all nations. The heathen shall learn in the ruin of Israel to recognize the justice of the Lord, and the very nations that destroyed Israel shall be taught that the hand of God is on them too, and that they cannot escape his righteous judgments. "The Lord will be terrible to them; for he will famish all the gods of the earth." When he sent a grievous famine on the far country where the prodigal was, this might lead some of the citizens of that country, as well as the prodigal himself, to see how vain and perishing was the abundance in which they had been trusting, and might constrain him to look to that father's house from which he had gone away; when the heathen mariners in the ship in which Jonah was fleeing from the Lord found that none of their gods could save them from the great storm sent by the Lord against his disobedient servant, they cried to the Lord, and they "feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows." So when the heathen nations shall find that the judgments of God against his people for their sin come upon themselves also, and that none of their gods can save them, they too, says the prophet, "shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen." Thus the judgment, even as regards them, is with a view to mercy; and this is the strong positive reason that all have to seek the Lord. Are you suffering

calamity or trouble of any kind, and does conscience tell you that this affliction is not undeserved, nay, that it is the natural consequence and the just punishment of your sin? Then do not on any account let this drive you to despair; do not think that there is no hope for you; do not give way to mere idle grief or vain regret of the past that cannot be recalled; believe and be assured that the suffering has been sent in mercy as well as judgment, that it is a proof that God has not yet pronounced against you that most awful of all sentences, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hos. iv. 17); and instead of hardening your heart in disobedience, or wringing your hands in despair, let God's judgments move you to "seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near."

II. But the prophet not only sets forth the strong motives which the impending judgment affords to seek the Lord; he also INDICATES THE WAY IN WHICH THIS IS TO BE DONE. More especially there are two parts of this duty that he emphasizes, the one religious and the other moral, both of which must be combined. 1. The more directly religious duty is humiliation and prayer to God (vers. 1—3a). The somewhat obscure language of ver. 1, in the exact rendering of which scholars differ, seems to indicate, in the way of general humiliation before God, either a public gathering for a day of fasting, such as that described by Joel (ii. 15—17), or more directly the feeling of shame and humiliation arising in the hearts of those who had before been strangers to it. Then the very expression, "Seek the Lord" (ver. 3), describes religious exercises of prayer and worship. If the judgment threatened against Israel, or any Divine judgment, is to have its right and designed effect, there must be a recognition of a personal God and of our personal relation to him. "Seek righteousness, seek meekness." There is something more implied here than merely "a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness." Could we be called to seek such a power in any other way than by seeking righteousness? Yet seeking the Lord is here spoken of as something distinct, though not to be separated, from seeking righteousness; and the anger of the Lord, so repeatedly and emphatically mentioned in vers. 2 and 3, is not to be explained away as a mere figure for the infliction of punishment. The "power that makes for righteousness" is a Person in whose favour lies our only true happiness. Were it not so, the evils that follow on sin would be no call to humiliation or to shame, for they would be the result of a mere law or tendency. But since we have to do with a living Person, who not only punishes but is grieved and displeased at our sins, we have reason not only to fear but to be humbled and ashamed before him. Such feelings are essential to true repentance; they find expression in that confession of sin which everywhere in Scripture is made a requisite for its forgiveness. A true confession implies grief and shame for sin, and an acknowledgment of it, and expression of these feelings to God; and without this, even though the judgments that follow on sin could be removed, God's displeasure and wrath would not be turned away—there would be no reconciliation, and the offender would be no nearer to God than before. But where there is this humiliation before God as the living God with whom we are in a personal relation, then there can be also prayer to him, and this also is implied in the call to seek the Lord. We are not only to turn to him for refuge, as a Power that will save us; we are to speak to him as a Person, and ask him first and chiefly to forgive us for our past sins, and then, if it is his will, to save us from the judgments that they deserve. Such is the religious duty to which the prophet here calls Israel, and this movement of heart-religion must ever enter into the exercises of soul to which we are impelled by God's judgments, if these are to have a salutary effect. 2. But this religious exercise must never be separated from the moral duty here enjoined along with it. Humiliation, confession, and prayer can never be sincere if they remain alone, or if the sense of sin prompts to nothing more than these; for the religious element of repentance, however important it is, cannot be made to supersede the moral. There must be a grief for sin, not only because it has offended God personally, but because of its intrinsic evil; for the offence that it gives to God does not spring from any mere arbitrary command on his part, but from his own essential nature as the perfectly and unchangeably Holy One. Therefore that is no real approach to him that does not imply a hatred of and turning from sin and a seeking after righteousness. Hence the command, "Seek the Lord," is closely connected with "Seek righteousness, seek meekness;" only in this way can the God of Israel, who is essentially holy, be really sought. Righteousness

and meekness are the virtues here specially mentioned, for these contain the sum of moral duty, and are opposed to the violence and deceit, the avarice and oppression, that had been depicted in ch. i. as the evils which brought down the judgment of the Lord on Judah and Jerusalem. If we would truly seek the Lord, we must turn from the sins of which we have been guilty, and set about those duties that we have been neglecting. This may be no easy task. It may imply a seeking, a searching of heart with great diligence to detect the hidden roots of evil, a pursuit of holiness with labour and perseverance in order to overcome inbred habits of sin, and to acquire habits of goodness. The character is not to be renewed or changed by a single effort or in one day; it requires a lifelong effort to "put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and put on the new man, which after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth." But the work can and ought to be begun at once, and will be so begun if we really seek the Lord. If we know the Lord as the Holy One, and feel the evil of sin as it is in his sight, then our turning to him in repentance really implies a turning from all sin and a seeking righteousness and meekness. This too must be prompt and immediate. There is no time to be lost; the day of the Lord is at hand, his judgment is announced, his wrath has almost begun to burn, the dark thunder-clouds are as it were big with the approaching storm. Therefore let there be no delay; make haste, and tarry not, before the decree brings forth its terrible execution. Judgment is still, as it were, in the womb of the Divine law and order, but ere long it must break forth, and the day of the Lord's wrath will sweep away all the wicked of the earth as chaff. Before that day comes, yet there is time, time enough to seek the Lord, but no time to waste in dallying with sin or halting between two opinions. Finally, be it remembered that this call is addressed to all alike, to the godly as well as to sinners. It is especially addressed to all the meek of the earth, who have wrought God's judgment, as well as to those who have still to seek righteousness and meekness. For, indeed, those who have most earnestly repented will most feel their need of the ever-fresh and repeated call. That repentance is not genuine which is not virtually continued and actually repeated even to the very end of life, is a principle of Protestant theology, and most important for practical religion. We must not be content in this matter with any past experience or exercises of soul; as long as we have in us or about us anything of the sins that provoke God's anger, our repentance must be continual. The whole of a Christian's life should be a turning from sin to God. In view of the sin that dwells in us, and our continual shortcomings of the righteousness and meekness required by God's Law, we must be constantly humbling ourselves before God and asking his forgiveness; and we must also be striving against sin, making it our earnest effort to abandon all practices and habits that are wrong, to eradicate passions and tempers of mind at variance with God's holy Law, and to acquire and cultivate the qualities required by it. We are to be putting off the old man and putting on the new, constantly day by day. Alas! how often do we forget this! How many days do we spend without conscious striving against sin or effort after holiness! Can we wonder that we should need rebuke and chastening from the Lord if we are thus neglecting what is an essential element of Christian life? Again, this repentance needs not only to be constantly going on as to the principle or power of it, but there are occasions when it needs to be actually renewed. One such occasion is when a believer falls into any grievous sin, such as wounds his conscience and destroys his peace. Then he must not be satisfied with a mere general acknowledgment of sinfulness; he must come once more, as he came at first, to God through Christ and anew, as at first, with the returning prodigal say, "Father, I have sinned," etc.; anew, as at first, turn from his sin to God with full purpose of heart and endeavour after new obedience. No fresh burden of guilt is to be got rid of in any other way than that, and in that way all may be removed. Another occasion when we ought actually to renew our repentance is when we seek to enter into spiritual communion with God. Israel of old was commanded to keep a solemn day of fast and humiliation for sins just before the joyful Feast of Tabernacles, and in regard to the New Testament feast of the Lord's Supper it is said, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." There cannot be faithful self-examination without a remembering and bringing to light of much sin, and that must needs call for humiliation and prayer for forgiveness, and renewed efforts after holiness. But if, thus searching and trying

our ways, we turn unto the Lord, and lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens, we shall assuredly find him; we shall experience that mercy which he shows to those who confess their sins, and we shall be made more and more partakers of his holiness. Thus we shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger, for we shall be able to say to him, "Thou art my Hiding-place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance."—O.

Vers. 1—3.—*Sin and repentance: the bane and the antidote.* "Gather yourselves together," etc. Here is an exhortation to the men of Judah to repent ere the Chaldean invaders approach, and wreak destruction on their land. Two thoughts are suggested.

I. SIN EXPOSES MAN TO RUIN. It was sin, in the form of idolatry and gross immorality, that exposed the Jewish people to the terrible doom that was now hanging over them. Sin is evermore the cause of all human suffering. Corporeal sin brings corporeal suffering; moral sin brings moral suffering; national sin brings national suffering. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." 1. *The suffering that follows sin is sometimes very terrible.* It was so now. Sin brings upon a people famines, pestilences, wars, perdition. 2. *The suffering expresses God's antagonism to sin.* "The fierce anger of the Lord," or, as Henderson has it, "the burning anger of Jehovah." God's anger is not a passion, but a principle; and the principle is antagonism, not to the happiness of his creatures, but to their sin and their wickedness. The connection between sin and misery is a beneficent arrangement. It is well that misery should pursue wrong.

II. THAT REPENTANCE DELIVERS MAN FROM RUIN. To prepare for the coming doom, the men of Judah are called upon to repent. "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired," which may mean, "not worthy of the grace or favour of God." Some translate it, "not waxing pale," meaning, "being dead to a sense of shame." Others regard the expression as meaning, "not desiring to repent." 1. *The preparation for repentance.* "Gather yourselves together," etc. "Gather yourselves together" in connection; deliberate together as to the best way of securing the friendship and protection of God. "Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders" (Joel ii. 16). It is well for sinners, in the prospect of their doom, to meet and confer concerning their relations to Almighty God. 2. *The nature of repentance.* It is here represented as seeking the Lord. "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth;" or, as Henderson renders it, "Seek ye Jehovah, all ye humble of the earth." There are two seekings here. (1) *The seeking of God.* Which is to be understood in a moral sense, seeking his friendship; for in a natural sense he is "not far from every one of us." But we are all away from him in sympathy. (2) *The seeking of meekness.* "Seek righteousness, seek meekness," etc. Indeed, to seek moral excellence is to seek God; and to seek moral excellence is repentance; it is a turning away from the creature to the Creator, from the wrong to the right. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." 3. *The urgency of repentance.* Do it now. "Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you." It will be too late to repent when the judgment comes. "They shall call upon me, and I will not answer;" "Many shall say to me at that day," etc. (Matt. vii. 22).

CONCLUSION. As sin is in the world, judgments are in the world. Retribution, like an invading army, is always marching toward the victim. Repentance is the only means of deliverance. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."—D. T.

Vers. 4—7.—*The sinner's baleful influence, and God's disposal of all.* "For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon," etc. Here the prophet makes the punishment awaiting the neighbouring states, which he goes on to specify, an argument for immediate repentance. "For Gaza shall be forsaken." Gaza was one of the five principalities of the Philistines, and was situated on the coast of the Mediterranean at the southern extremity of Canaan. "Ashkelon a desolation." This was another of the fenced cities of the Philistines, situated on the shore of the Mediterranean, between Gaza and Ashdod. "Ekron shall be rooted up." Another Philistine city,

lying north-west of Gath, and north of Ashdod. "Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea-coast!" The Philistines dwelling on the sea-coast south-west of Canaan. "The nation of the Cherethites"—the Cretans, the name applied to the Philistines that sprang from Crete. "O Canaan, the land of the Philistines." They occupied the strip of land on the south shore of the Mediterranean (Josh. xiii. 3). Two facts are here suggested.

I. THAT THE CALAMITIES FALLING UPON ONE SINNER OFTEN INVOLVE OTHERS. It was so now. The ruin that was approaching the Hebrew nation would be most calamitous to the Philistine cities, and indeed to the neighbouring states. Gaza would be "forsaken," Ashkelon would be a "desolation," Ashdod would be "driven out," Ekron would be "rooted up," the inhabitants of the seashore, the Cherethites, the Canaanites, all would be involved. So vital, strong, and numerous are the ties that connect man with man in this world, that the condition of one must affect the condition of others. It is so: 1. With *nations*. At no period in the world's history was it more manifest than now. No one state or kingdom of Europe can be affected without influencing others. What was called "the Eastern question," in that terrible war between the sultan and the czar, affected every part of the civilized world. 2. With *individuals*. A man cannot fail in health, in business, or in character, without painfully affecting others in some way or other. What sufferings the failures of the Gurneys, the Petos, and the Grants have brought upon thousands in this country! This shows: (1) The social connection between man and man. No man can live unto himself. Each man is a link in the great chain of human life; and he cannot move without influencing others. Each man is a link in the great human body; and, if one suffers, all suffer. (2) The duty of each man to look well after his own conduct. A sinner has no right to say he will do what he likes, and that no one may properly interfere with him. If his actions terminated in himself, there might be some reason in such a claim; but as they cannot, and they must affect others, every man, all society, the whole human world, have a right to protest against the sinful conduct of any individual man.

II. THAT THE LOT OF MAN IS AT THE DISPOSAL OF ALMIGHTY GOD. "And the sea-coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon; in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the Lord their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity." "And the line of the sea shall be pastures, with cisterns for shepherds and folds for sheep. Yea, the line shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah, thereupon shall they feed; in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down at even; for Jehovah their God shall visit them, and reverse their captivity" (Henderson). Here the Almighty is represented as arranging the future home and circumstances of "the remnant of the house of Judah." Paul at Athens said that God had "determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts xvii. 26). Though we are free and conscious of our freedom, we are at the disposal of One above us. He has appointed: 1. Our *place* in the world. He has set bounds to our habitation "that we cannot pass." 2. Our *period* in the world. "My times are in thy hand." The periods of our birth and death are all arranged by him. "Man's days are determined; the number of his months is with thee" (Job xiv. 5). We are often tempted to imagine that chance rules us. We are struck with the apparent contingency when we look at men's circumstances in connection with their *choice*. None of us has any choice as to the condition, the place, the time, in which we are to be born or brought up. We are struck with the apparent contingency also when we look at men's circumstances in connection with their *merits*. How often do we find feeble-minded men in eminent positions, and men of talents and genius in obscurity! some, by what is called a *hit*, making fortunes and earning fame, whilst honest industry plods on with little or no success; vice in mansions, and virtue in the pauper's hut! Verily the race is not always to "the swift, nor the battle to the strong." But amidst all this feeling of contingency, and over all, there is the ruling plan of the beneficent God.—D. T.

Vers. 8—10.—*The persecution of the good.* "I have heard the reproach," etc. "The threat now turns from the Philistines in the west to the two tribes in the east,

viz. the Moabites and the Ammonites, who were descended from Lot, and therefore blood-relations, and who manifested hostility to Israel on every possible occasion." The passage suggests three facts.

I. THAT GOOD MEN ARE OFTEN SUBJECT TO ANNOYANCES FROM THE UNGODLY WORLD. "I have heard the reproach [abuse] of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people [abused my nation], and magnified themselves against their border." These people, the Moabites and the Ammonites, were constantly annoying and abusing the chosen people in the time of Moses. Balak, the King of the Moabites, sought to destroy the Israelites by means of Balaam's curses (Numb. xxii.). And in the time of the judges, both peoples endeavoured to oppress Israel (Judg. iii. 12; x. 7). The charge here probably refers to the hostile attitude assumed by both tribes at all times toward the people of God. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah accused them of annoying them (Isa. xvi. 6; Jer. xlviii. 29). The hostile conduct of Moab and Ammon towards Israel is only a specimen and an illustration of the antagonism of wicked men towards the truly pious. They "reproach" them; they charge them with superstition, fanaticism, cant, hypocrisy. Their revilings are often bitter and constant. "It has been," says an old writer, "the common lot of God's people in all ages to be reproached and reviled on one account or another." There is an eternal enmity between the two seeds—the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. The conduct of a truly good man can scarcely fail to exasperate worldly and ungodly people. It condemns their selfishness, their greed, their falsehood, their pleasures. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before," etc.; "If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call those of the household!" "Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother; and wherefore slew he him? because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." In corrupt society, we may lay it down as a truth that the better a man is, the more pure, honest, true, righteous, the more he will be hated and annoyed by his neighbours. The best men, the men of whom "the world is not worthy," are always persecuted.

II. THAT THESE ANNOYANCES ESCAPE NOT THE NOTICE OF GOD. "I have heard the reproach of Moab." I have heard the whole, all their calumnies, reproaches, revilings; not a word has escaped me, not a syllable has been lost. Observe: 1. *God's attention to the minute concerns of human life.* He who is the Maker and Manager of the universe, to whom the creation is as nothing and less than nothing, is not indifferent to the utterances of little human creatures on this earth, which is itself a mere speck in space. "I have heard the reproaches."

"He sees with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall."

2. *God's special interest in his people.* Good men are his children, as dear to him as the apple of the eye; and whatever happens to them, even a reproachful word, affects him. It is truly consoling, it is energizing, to know that the great Father is interested in all that pertains to us. "Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. xxxii. 19).

III. THAT GOD WILL NOT FAIL TO CHASTISE THE AUTHORS OF SUCH ANNOYANCES. "Therefore as I live, saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and salt-pits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them. This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts." Mark: 1. The *doom* of those reproachers. "They shall be as Sodom and Gomorrah." "This simile," says Keil, "was rendered a very natural one by the situation of the two lands in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea. It affirms the utter destruction of the two tribes." Their land is to abound with "nettles and salt-pits," the products and proofs of utter ruin. 2. The *cause* of their doom. "This shall they have for their pride." All the persecutors of the good will meet with a terrible chastisement. Sooner or later God will avenge his own elect. Hence let the godly victims of persecution, when they are "reviled, revile not again;" "Vengeance

is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord;” “Blessed are they which are persecuted,” etc. (Matt. v. 10).—D. T.

Ver. 11.—*Good things in the future.* “The Lord will be terrible unto them,” etc. “Jehovah is to be feared above all the gods of the earth, for he will cause them to waste away; and all the inhabitants of the maritime regions shall worship him, each from his place.” While announcing the destruction of the surrounding idolatrous nations, the prophet was inspired to predict the gradual but certain destruction of idolatry universally throughout the earth. The period predicted should be one in which all peculiarity of local worship should cease, and Divine worship be acceptable wherever presented in sincerity and truth” (Henderson). The passage reminds us of two good things that are in the future of our world.

I. THE DESTRUCTION OF IDOLATRY. What is idolatry? It is the giving of our supreme affection to creature-objects. It is not confined to the worship of heathen deities, which are for the most part the productions of human invention and art. The spirit of idolatry often exists where heathen idolatry is denounced. Whatever objects a man loves most is his god. In our England and throughout Christendom there are gods many, although they have no recognized temple. Wealth is a mighty god, power is a mighty idol, pleasure is a mighty idol, fame is a mighty idol. Before these idols the vast majority of the civilized world prostrate their souls in the ardour of devotion. The destruction of idolatry, therefore, does not mean the beating to dust or the consuming to ashes the idols that fill the temples of heathendom, but means the withdrawal of man’s supreme love from every object short of God. You may burn up all heathen temples, and leave idolatry as rampant as ever. To “famish all the gods of the earth” is to draw man’s supreme sympathy from all things except God. This is the great moral famine that is to be desired, to be prayed for and struggled after. The other good thing in the future of our world is—

II. THE ADVANCEMENT OF TRUE WORSHIP. “And men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen.” Observe: 1. The *object* of true worship. “Men shall worship him,” that is, Jehovah. Him, not it—not the universe, but the infinite Personality that created it, the Fountain of all existence, all energy, all love, all blessedness. Him—the Creator of the material, the Father of the spiritual. 2. The *scene* of true worship. “Every one from his place.” Wherever he is. The worshipper need not go to any particular scene—no temple, chapel, or cathedral. “From his place.” It may be in solitude or in society, on the mountain brow or the seashore. “Neither in this mountain” nor on that mountain, but everywhere. “God is a Spirit.” 3. The *extent* of true worship. “Even all the isles of the heathen.”

CONCLUSION. What a glorious future awaits the world! How blessed will those ages be when every man of every tribe and clime shall have his heart centred in supreme love upon the one great Father of all!—D. T.

Vers. 13—15.—*National pride and national ruin.* “And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness. And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations,” etc. Dr. Henderson’s translation of this passage is not only beautiful, but seems so faithful and clear as scarcely to require any exposition.

“And he will stretch his hand over the north,
And destroy Assyria.
He will also make Nineveh waste,
An arid region like the desert.
And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her,
All the wild beasts of the nations:
Both the pelican and the porcupine
Shall take up their abode in her capitals:
A voice shall sing in the windows,
Desolation shall be in the thresholds,
For the cedar work is laid bare.
This is the exulting city which dwelt securely,
Which said in her heart,

I am, and beside me there is none.
 How she is become desolate !
 A resting-place for wild beasts !
 Every one that passeth by her shall hiss,
 He shall shake his head."

Two facts are suggested.

I. THAT MEN ARE OFTEN PRONE TO PRIDE THEMSELVES ON THE GREATNESS OF THEIR COUNTRY. The men of the city of Nineveh—the capital of Assyria—were proud of their nation. It is called the "rejoicing city," and represented as saying, "I am, and there is none beside me." This was the voice of the population. There was much in the city of Nineveh to account for, if not to justify, the exultant spirit of its population. It was the metropolis of a vast empire; it was a city sixty miles in compass, it had walls a hundred feet high, and so thick and strong that three chariots could be driven abreast on them; it had twelve hundred massive towers. The boasting spirit of the men of Nineveh concerning the grandeur of their country is by no means uncommon; it beats in the hearts of modern nations. Italy, Austria, Germany, America, England, each says in its spirit, "I am, and there is none beside me." Nations are egotistic, they exult in their own greatness, they sing their own praises. This spirit of national boasting is *unjustifiable*. There is nothing in a nation of which it should be proud, except moral excellence; and, alas! how little moral excellence there is in the most virtuous kingdom of the earth! On the contrary, how much ignorance, sensuality, worldliness, intolerance, impiety, that should humble us in the dust! It is, moreover, a *foolish* spirit. It is a check to true national progress, and its haughty swaggerings tend to irritate other countries.

II. THAT THE GREATEST COUNTRY MUST SOONER OR LATER FALL TO RUIN. "He will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria," etc. This great city, peopled with pompous boasters, became a *receptacle for beasts*. "Flocks shall lie down in the midst of her," etc. "All the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant [the pelican] and the bittern [the porcupine] shall lodge in the upper lintels of it." The wild grim birds that haunt all ruins. Not only a receptacle for beasts, but a *derision to travellers*. "Every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand." Such was the doom that came on this great city when Cyaxares and Nabopolassar, 600 years B.C., struck it down. This is the fate that awaits all the nations under heaven, even the greatest. Egypt, Syria, Babylon, Rome, Greece, have risen, prospered, and decayed. The symptoms of decay are manifest in many of the grandest nations of Europe. The more thoughtful amongst us discover those symptoms in the life of our England. England has nothing more to become, they say; the plum is overripe, and it must rot; the tree has exhausted all its latent vitality, and it must wither; the sun has passed the meridian, and it must go down. Thoughtful men point to the sad lack of capacity in our statesmen, the unscrupulous greed of our traders, the grumbling of our artisans, the weakness of our pulpits, the haughtiness of our ecclesiastics, the hollowness of our religion, the infidelities of our scientists, the diminution of our revenue and the increase of our pauperism, the arrogance of one class and the flunkeyism of another, pampered indolence here and starving toil there, jobbery in politics, swindling in commerce, cant in religion, and strikes in trade,—and say these are unmistakable marks of national corruption.—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Vers. 1—5.—§ 6. *The prophet turns to Jerusalem, and warns her that, if God punishes the heathen, he will not spare the hardened sinners in Judah.*

Ver. 1.—*Woe to her!* This is addressed to Jerusalem, as is seen by vers. 2—4.

Filthy; rather, *rebellious*, i.e. against God. The LXX., mistaking the word, renders, *ἐπιφανής*, "notable." So the Syriac. Jerome has *provocatrix*. The true sense is seen by the expansion of the term in ver. 2. Polluted by her many sins. Jerome, following the Septuagint ἀπολεωτρομένη, "ransomed," has, *redempta*, which he explains, "Captivitatibus tradita, et rursum re-

dempta." The oppressing city, that acts unjustly and cruelly to the weak and poor. So the three sins for which she is here denounced are that she is rebellious against God, defiled with sin in herself, and cruel to others. The Septuagint and Vulgate translate *jonaħ* ("oppressing") "dove," which seems singularly inappropriate here, though some try to explain it as applied to Jerusalem in the sense of "silly" or "stupid" (Hos. vii. 11).

Ver. 2.—The voice; *i. e.* of God, as heard in the Law and at the mouth of his prophets (comp. Jer. vii. 24, etc.; ix. 13). Received not correction. They took not to heart the chastisements sent upon them, and did not profit by them. She trusted not in the Lord, but in man. When danger threatened, she relied on human aid, made alliances with the heathen, or else had recourse to idols and prayed for help to false gods, as the next clause complains. She drew not near to her God. She broke the covenant which she had made, would not avail herself of the privilege bestowed upon her, and had no intercourse with the Lord in prayer and worship.

Ver. 3.—Roaring lions. The princes, who ought to protect the people, are ready to tear them in pieces and devour them (Prov. xxviii. 15). Probably the violence and arrogance of the chiefs had increased during the minority of the king. This must have been written before the great reformation. Evening wolves (see note on Hab. i. 8). The judges, whose duty it was to administer justice and to set an example of equity and virtue, are themselves most cruel and rapacious. They gnaw not the bones till to-morrow; *they gnaw no bones in the morning*; that is, they are so greedy that they eat up all their prey at once and leave nothing till the morning. The versions drop the metaphor, and render, "They leave not to the morning" (comp. Ezek. xxii. 27).

Ver. 4.—Her prophets. These are the false prophets, who have no true mission from God (comp. Micah ii. 11; iii. 5). Light; either, *frivolous* or *empty boasters*. The word means properly, "boiling over," like water. Vulgate, *vesani*; Septuagint, *πνευματόφοροι*, which means, probably, not "inspired by an (evil) spirit," but "carried away by the wind" "light" (comp. Matt. xi. 7). Treacherous persons; literally, *men of treacheries*, who uttered their own fancies as if they were commissioned by God, and so really opposed him whom they professed to represent (Jer. xxiii. 32). Her priests have polluted the sanctuary (*what is holy*). Not the temple only, but all that has to do with God's service, worship, rites, sacrifices; they make no distinction between what is sacred and what is profane (Ezek. xxii. 26).

ZEPHANIAH.

They have done violence to the Law. Chiefly, doubtless, by distorting its meaning, and neither observing it themselves nor teaching others to keep it.

Ver. 5.—In the midst of this congregation of sinners God is continually manifesting his righteousness; he leaves not himself without witness; and therefore their iniquities are without excuse. The just Lord is in the midst thereof; or, *the Lord in the midst of her is righteous* (Deut. xxxii. 4). His presence was associated with the temple; his moral government was always being manifested. He would not be "just" if he left sinners unpunished. Every morning; Hebrew, "in the morning, in the morning." The phrase is rightly explained in our version (comp. Exod. xvi. 21; Ps. lxxxvii. 5). Doth he bring his judgment to light. His prophets proclaim his perfect justice; his judgments on the heathen manifest it (ver. 8; Hos. vi. 5). It is not from ignorance of the Law that the people sin. He faileth not; or, *it faileth not*; Vulgate, *non abscondetur*. God never ceases thus to act; or, his justice is clear as day. But the unjust knoweth no shame. In spite of this hourly manifestation of God's justice, and the enactments of the Law so well known, the perverse nation will not amend its ways, feels no shame at its backslidings (Jer. iii. 3; vi. 15). The Septuagint Version, according to the Vatican manuscript, is curious here, and in the latter part somewhat like St. Matthew's rendering of Isa. xlii. 3, *Καὶ οὐκ ἔγνω ἀδικίαν ἐν ἀπαρτήσῃ, καὶ οὐκ εἰς νεῖκος ἀδικῶν* (comp. Matt. xii. 20), which Jerome translates, "Nescit iniquitatem in exactione, nec in sempiternum injustitiam," and explains, "When God exacts from every man the sum he has committed to him, he will not be unjust, nor allow injustice to prevail."

Ver. 6—8.—§ 7. *Obdurate and blinded as nations are, these extreme measures are the only way left to secure salvation for Israel and the whole world.*

Ver. 6.—God speaks, showing why he has sent these judgments. I have cut off the nations. The reference is to facts well known to the hearers (though not specified here); such as the ruin of Pentapolis, the destruction of the Canaanites, the defeat of the Chaldeans in Hozekiah's time, the conquest of cities and countries by the Assyrians, and the devastation of Israel itself. Their towers are desolate. Their towers (see note on ch. i. 16), in which they trusted for defence, are overthrown and lie in ruins. Others translate, "street-corners," where people most do congregate. Streets; perhaps, *roads*; signifying the open country.

E

So Keil. None inhabitant (comp. Jer. iv. 7).

Ver. 7.—Taught by such examples, the Jews might have learned to repent and amend their ways. I said. God represents himself as reasoning as a man would reason. Surely thou wilt fear me; Septuagint, “only fear me.” This is the one condition for salvation. Or, according to our version, Judah must learn experience from my threats and visitations, and return unto me. Thou wilt . . . receive instruction; Septuagint, “receive ye discipline,” accept the correction and learn the lesson which it is meant to teach (Prov. xxiv. 32). Their (her) dwelling. Jerusalem or Judæa. The temple is never called the dwelling-place of the people. This sudden change of person is very common in the prophets. Howsoever I punished them; rather, according to all that I appointed concerning her. God had ordained certain punishment for Jerusalem if she reformed not. The Anglican Version means that God would never cut them off wholly, however severely he might chastise them. The Hebrew will not carry this; nor are the Greek and Latin Versions quite correct. Septuagint, *Ὁὐ μὴ ἐξολοθρευθῆτε ἐξ ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῆς πάντα ὅσα ἐξεδίκησα ἐπ’ αὐτήν*, “And ye shall not be cut off from the face thereof for all the punishment that I inflicted upon it;” Vulgate, *Propter omnia in quibus visitavi eam*. But they rose early. Warning, reproof, and chastisement were expended in vain; the people only gave themselves up more ardently to their evil doings. “To rise early to do a thing,” is a phrase used to signify the acting with zeal and full purpose (comp. Jer. vii. 13, 25; xi. 7, etc.). Corrupted all their doings. Like the inhabitants of the earth before the Flood (Gen. vi. 12; comp. Ps. xiv. 1). The Septuagint rendering is peculiar, *Ἐτοιμάσου, ὄρθρισον, ἐφάρται πάσα ἡ ἐπιφυλλίς αὐτῶν*, “Prepare thyself, rise early, all their produce is spoiled.” St. Jerome, moralizing on this, adds, “Nisi præparati fuerimus, non nobis oriatur sol justitiæ. Orto autem sole. omnes racemi de vinea Sodomorum dissipantur et pereunt; ut non solum grandes botri, sed etiam quod parvum esse videbatur in nobis, Christi lucerna radiante disperat.”

Ver. 8.—Therefore. Because of the outrage done to God’s “long-suffering,” he must needs punish. Wait ye upon me; wait ye for me. The exhortation is addressed to the pious among the Jews, as in ch. ii. 3, and is used in a good sense (Ps. xxxiii. 20; Isa. viii. 17), urging them not to despair, but to be patient under the affliction, in the assured hope of salvation. The same expression is used in Hab. ii. 3. I rise

up to the prey. This is a phrase denoting effort and the effecting of some great object. Jehovah seizes the prey when the nations, roused by judgment inflamed, are converted unto him (Isa. liii. 12; Ps. lxxviii. 18). The LXX., pointing the last word differently (ἦν), renders, *εἰς ἡμέραν ἀναστρέψω μου εἰς μαρτύριον*: “until the day of my rising up for testimony.” Jerome, “In die resurrectionis meæ in futurum.” The Fathers interpreted this of the times of Messiah—some, of Christ’s resurrection from the dead; some, of his rising up to divide the spoil (Gen. xlix. 9, 27. See St. Augustine, ‘De Civit.’ xviii. 33; Eusebius, ‘Dem. Ev.’ ii. 17; and Jerome and Cyril, *in loc.*). But such interpretations are alien from the intention of the passage, however allowable as glosses. For my determination is; literally, my judgment (*mishpat*) is. My justice is displayed, as ver. 5. The word, according to Keil, never means, “decree” or “decision.” That I may assemble the kingdoms. Not for utter extermination, but to bring them to a better mind (Isa. xxvi. 9; Joel iii. 11, etc.). Fire of my jealousy (ch. i. 18). God will allow no rival anywhere (Nah. i. 2). This is the reason of the severity and universality of the judgment. The Masorites note that this is the only verse in the Bible which contains the whole Hebrew alphabet.

Vers. 9—20.—Part III. PROMISE OF THE CONVERSION OF THE WORLD AND THE HAPPINESS OF ISRAEL.

Vers. 9, 10.—§ 1. The heathen shall be converted, and shall help in the restoration of Israel.

Ver. 9.—Will I turn to the people (*peoples*) a pure language (*lip*). When his judgments have done their work, God will bring the heathen to the knowledge of him. He will purify their lips, which have been polluted with the names of idols and the worship offered to false gods (Ps. xvi. 4; Hos. ii. 17); the confusion of Babel shall be done away, and all shall speak the language of faith in one God. This, of course, points to Messianic times. For “pure lip,” the Vulgate has, *labium electum*; the LXX., by a mistake of a letter (*bheduralah* for *bheruralah*), *γλώσσαν εἰς γενεάν αὐτῆς* (sc. ἦς), “a tongue for her generation.” With one consent; literally, *with one shoulder*; *ἑνὸς ὑγῆν ἕνα*, “under one yoke” (Septuagint); *humero uno* (Vulgate). The metaphor implies that all will help to carry the same burden, and to accomplish the same work, bearing the gospel throughout the world, and being all of one mind in the service of Jehovah (Jer. xxxii. 39; Isa. xix. 23, 24; Rev. xi. 15).

Ver. 10.—From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia (*Cush*); *i.e.* from the distant south, a type of the remotest parts of the world (ch. ii. 12). The rivers of Cush (Isa. xviii. 1), are the Nile, the Atbara, and their affluents. My suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering. From the ends of the earth, the Jews who have continued faithful to Jehovah, and have not lost their nationality among the Gentiles, but have considered themselves as belonging to “the dispersion,” shall be again received of the Lord, and bring their oblations unto him. This may be the sense intended; but looking to the thought in Isa. lvi. 20 (where it is said that the Gentiles shall bring the Israelites out of all nations as a meat offering unto the Lord), we had better render the passage as the Revised Version margin, “They shall bring my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, for an offering unto me.” The remote Gentiles shall show their faith in God by siding the Hebrews among them to turn to the Lord; this shall be their offering to the true God, whom they have learned to adore. When they themselves are converted, they shall be evangelists to the Hebrews of the Dispersion. For this work of the Gentiles in converting the Hebrews, Wordsworth compares Cant. iii. 4; viii. 8, 9; Isa. lxi. 5, 6; lxxv. 18—21. St. Paul speaks to the same effect in Rom. xi. Offering (*minchah*). The pure meal offering (Mal. i. 10, 11, where see notes; comp. Rom. xv. 16; Phil. ii. 17). Dr. Briggs renders, “From beyond the rivers of Cush will be my incense (*athar*); the daughter of Phut will bring a minchah.” This brings out the parallelism. The universal worship of Messianic times is expressed in the ceremonial terms of the old dispensation, but has a very real applicableness to the Christian religion (see note on Mal. i. 11).

Vers. 11—13.—§ 2. *Israel, restored to God's favour, shall be cleansed and sanctified.*

Ver. 11.—In that day. When the Lord rises to seize the prey (ver. 8), when the Gentiles are converted, and Judah returns to her obedience. Shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings. God addresses Israel repentant and converted, and assures her that she shall not have to reproach herself any more, or to blush for her iniquities, because God blots them out, or because she sins no more as she has done. And the great help to this improvement is the abolition of the cause and incitement to sin. I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride (*thy proud triumphers*, Isa. xiii. 3). God will cut off all those who gloried in their temporal prosperity without thought of God,

who in the pride of their heart walked as they pleased, deeming themselves accountable to no one, subject to no law. Such shall no longer be found in the holy nation. **Haughty because of (in) my holy mountain;** *i.e.* in the temple (Isa. xi. 9). They shall no longer exult in the exclusiveness of their privileges, or feel a vain-glorious confidence in their own election, or the sanctity of their temple or its provision of worship. The Gentiles should be admitted to the covenant, and share in their privileges. Here we see adumbrated the nature of the Christian Church, an organized body no longer local, insulated, but Catholic—a spiritual temple open to all believers.

Ver. 12.—A further characteristic of Messiah's kingdom is here unfolded. No worldly pomp or splendour shall be found in it; its members are not proud, conceited, self-reliant. I will also leave in the midst of thee. I will leave over, as a remnant saved in the judgment (comp. Rom. ix. 27; Micah ii. 12, and the note there). **An afflicted and poor people.** The two epithets are elsewhere joined together (Job xxxiv. 28; Isa. xxvi. 6) to express the feeling of patience under affliction and inability to help one's self by one's own efforts. The spirit signified is just the contrary of the haughty, complacent, self-satisfied temper previously mentioned (1 Cor. i. 26; Jas. ii. 5). **They shall trust in the Name of the Lord.** All self-confidence shall be abolished, and the religion of the remnant shall be characterized by quiet trust in God.

Ver. 13.—The remnant of Israel (see note on ver. 12). Though they claim no worldly eminence, the true Israelites shall be conspicuous for spiritual graces. **Shall not do iniquity.** Their acts shall be just and holy; their daily conduct such as becomes the children of God's election (Lev. xix. 2; 1 John iii. 9). **Nor speak lies.** There shall be no lying prophets there, and all fraud and double-dealing shall be abolished. The proof of their righteous conduct is found in the favour of the Lord and the security in which they shall live. **For they shall feed, etc.** The remnant is compared to a “little flock” (Luke xii. 32), of which the Lord is the Shepherd (comp. Micah vii. 14). The blessing is that promised to Israel in the Law if she kept the commandments (Lev. xxvi. 5, 6).

Vers. 14—20.—§ 3. *Israel shall be comforted and largely blessed by the presence of Jehovah, and exalted to honour in the eyes of all the world.*

Ver. 14.—In view of the coming blessing, the prophet bursts forth in exultation, yet with a vein of prophecy running through all the canticle. **After the late denuncia-**

tion of woe and judgment, he soothes the faithful with the promise of the grace and peace which the time of Messiah shall bring. Sing, O daughter of Zion (Isa. i. 8; Zech. ii. 14; ix. 9). He calls on the restored remnant of Judah to show its joy by outward tokens. O Israel. All the tribes are to unite in praising God. This is one of the passages where "Israel" is supposed to have been written by mistake for "Jerusalem." So Jer. xxiii. 6. The LXX. gives, *θύγατερ Ἱερουσαλήμ*, "daughter of Jerusalem" (see note on Zech. i. 19). The prophet enjoins a triple note of exultation in order to confirm the universal joy. (On the use of the number "three" in this passage, see Dr. Pusey's note, p. 480.)

Ver. 15.—In this and following verses the prophet gives the reasons why Zion should rejoice. Thy judgments. The chastisements inflicted on thee in judgment, rendered necessary by thy iniquity (Ezek. v. 8). These God has removed; this is the first ground for rejoicing. Septuagint, *τὰ ἀδικήματά σου*, "thine iniquities." When God removes the punishments, he forgives the sin. He hath cast out (cleared quite away) thine enemy. The enemies who executed the judgment are utterly dispersed. The King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee (Obad. 21). The theocracy is restored. Under the judgments which fell upon Israel, Jehovah seemed to have left his people; now he is in the midst of them as their King (Isa. xii. 6; lii. 7; Hos. xi. 9). The perpetual presence of Christ in the Church is here adumbrated. Thou shalt not see evil any more. So the Septuagint. Another reading adopted by Jerome is, "Thou shalt not fear." In view of the following verse, this seems rather tautological. With God in their midst, the people shall see, *i.e.* experience (Jer. v. 12), no evil (Rev. xxi. 3, 4).

Ver. 16.—It shall be said. So obvious to all men shall be the happy and secure position of Zion under God's favour and rule, that they shall join in bidding her cast away fear and exult in the Divine protection. Fear thou not (comp. Matt. xiv. 27; xxviii. 5, 10; Luke xii. 7, 32). And to Zion. Probably vocative, O Zion. Let not thine hands be slack. Be not despairing or faint-hearted, but work with energy and confidence (comp. Isa. xiii. 7; Heb. xii. 12); or the sentence may be rendered, "Jerusalem will be called Fear not, and Zion, Let not thine hands be slack." In this case we may compare the names *Hephzibah* and *Beulah* given to Jerusalem (Isa. lxi. 4), and *Jehovah-Tsidkenu* (Jer. xxxiii. 16).

Ver. 17.—In the midst of thee; better, *is in the midst of thee* (see note on ver. 15). Is mighty; he will save; rather, a Mighty One who will save; LXX., ὁ δυνατὸς σώσει

σε, "The Mighty One shall save thee." This is the real ground of confidence: the Lord will restore thy salvation. He will rejoice over thee with joy, now that thy iniquity is purged, and thou art united again to him, as a chaste and comely bride (Isa. lxii. 5; Jer. xxxii. 41; Hos. ii. 19). He will rest (Hebrew, *be silent*) in his love. This is a human expression, denoting that perfect love which needs no outward demonstration. For the very greatness of his love God rests, as it were, in quiet enjoyment of it. Some take it to mean that in his love for his people he is silent about, makes no mention of, past sins; but this seems less suitable, as this clause is merely an expansion of the preceding one. The Septuagint and Syriac Versions render, "He will renew thee in his love;" and Ewald has proposed to alter the present reading to, "He will do a new thing." But there is no sufficient reason for making the change. With singing. Again he gives to his ineffable love outward expression. The LXX. paraphrases accurately, "He will rejoice over thee with delight as on a day of festival" (Isa. lkv. 19).

Ver. 18.—The love which God feels he shows in action. He cares for the exiled and dispersed, and will gather them again and comfort them for all their sorrows. I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly; or, *far removed from the solemn assembly*. Those who grieve because by their exile from the Holy Land they are debarred from duly attending the periodical festivals, these God will restore, and enable them again to participate in the sacred feasts. The above version and explanation are undoubtedly right, as the Latin Version is certainly wrong, *Nugas, qui a lege recesserant, congregabo*; that is, the light and fickle persons, who have estranged themselves from the Law, God will reclaim, and join them to the congregation of the true Israel; and this, *quia ex te erant*, for their origin's sake, because they are descendants of the chosen people. Who are of thee; they are of thee, O Zion. These are the true Israelites; this is why they mourn for the cessation of the festivals, and why they shall be restored to the Holy Land. To whom the reproach of it was a burden; *i.e.* who felt the desolation of Zion and the reproaches uttered against her by enemies (Ps. cxxxvii.) as a burden grievous to be borne. The Vulgate has, *Ut non ultra habeas super eis opprobrium*; *i.e.* "That they may be no more a disgrace to thee;" the LXX. reads somewhat differently, *Ὀυαί, τίς ἔλαβεν ἐν αὐτῇ ἀνειδισμόν*; "Alas! who took up a reproach against her?"

Ver. 19.—I will undo all that afflict thee; I will deal with in punishment (Jer. xviii. 23); Vulgate, "I will slay." The restora-

tion of Israel is preceded by the destruction of the enemies of God and the Church. Septuagint, *Πῶς ἐν σοὶ ἕνεκέν σου ἐν τῇ καρπῷ ἐκείνῳ λέγει Κύριος*, "Dominus dicet ad Sion, Ecce, ego faciam in te propter te, id est, faciam ultionem tuam" (St. Jerome). **Her that halteth** (Micah iv. 6). The afflicted of Israel, here compared to a lame and footsore flock of sheep. Septuagint, *τὴν ἐκπεπιεσμένην*, "pressed," like grapes or olives, to extract the juice. **Her that was driven out.** The exiled and dispersed. **I will get them praise and fame; I will make them to be a praise and a name.** This is in accordance with the promise in Deut. xxvi. 19. **In every land where they have been put to shame; literally, in every land of their shame.** The scene of their shame should be the scene of their glorification. The prophet does not consider that the restored theocracy shall be confined to the geographical limits of the Holy Land; he looks to its dissemination throughout the world. Wide as the dispersion itself shall be the diffusion of the

knowledge of God and the admiration of his doings towards Israel (*comp. ch. ii. 11; iii. 9; Ezek. xx. 41; xxviii. 25; Zech. viii. 23*).

Ver. 20.—Will I bring you again (in). He repeats the promise with some slight verbal changes. **I will lead you like a flock to the pastures of Zion. People; peoples.** **When I turn back your captivity; i.e.** when God brings them all home into the spiritual Zion from which they were long exiled (but see note on ch. ii. 7; and *comp. Hos. vi. 11; Amos ix. 14*). **Before your eyes.** Most certainly and evidently, so that what they hoped for they shall plainly see (Deut. i. 30; xxx. 3, etc.; Isa. lii. 8, 10). **Saith the Lord.** All this shall assuredly come to pass, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. In the prophet's eye the restoration from captivity and the times of Messiah are synchronous, or the former is so closely connected in idea with the latter that he speaks of both under one set of terms, applying the same imagery to both.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—Guilt and retribution. Having taken a mental survey of the surrounding heathen nations, the seer returns again in thought to his own people. It was, indeed, in their interest that he had been led to take this wide review of God's dealings with men. He desired to make very real to them the Divine law that sin cannot go unpunished, and that national guilt must inevitably be followed by chastisement; yea, more, that if this law operated in heathen lands, much more might they expect to come under it who had enjoyed the special illumination of God's Spirit, to whom he had given his holy oracles, and amongst whom he had raised up a succession of faithful men to guide them into the paths of truth and righteousness. In these verses observe—

I. THE PROPHET PRESENTS A HEAVY INDICTMENT, SETTING FORTH THE GUILT OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM. 1. This indictment contained certain counts directed against the people in general. They were charged with (1) inward defilement: "filthy and polluted" (ver. 1); (2) outward tyranny: "the oppressing city" (ver. 1); (3) practical atheism. God had spoken unto them, but they had not hearkened unto his voice (ver. 2). He had corrected them, but they did not humble themselves under his chastening hand (ver. 2). He had offered himself to them as the Object of trust, but they withheld their confidence from him, and rested in an arm of flesh (ver. 2). He had intimated his willingness to enter into fellowship with them, and to inspire and strengthen them, but "they drew not near unto him" (ver. 2). He had frustrated and brought to confusion their adversaries, and had covered with confusion and shame the godless nations around them, but instead of being warned by these Divine judgments, executed in their sight against evil-doers, they had themselves wilfully persisted in their iniquity (vers. 6, 7). 2. This indictment contained also certain counts directed against the leaders of the nation in particular (vers. 3, 4). (1) The princes were charged with cruelty, devouring, like roaring lions, those they ought to have protected (ver. 3). (2) The judges were marked by greed and rapacity, and were insatiable as evening wolves, so that justice was perverted, and wrong remained undressed (ver. 3). (3) The prophets of the people, who claimed to be messengers of God to them, were trifling and insincere, so that no reliance could be placed upon their words (ver. 4). (4) The priests profaned the temple and its services, and dishonoured the Law they were appointed to expound and enforce (ver. 4).

II. THE PROPHET DECLARED THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD, AND THE CONSEQUENT

RETRIBUTION THAT SHOULD BE EXPERIENCED BY THE EVIL-DOERS. (Vers. 5, 1, 8.) God is righteous (ver. 5). He is so absolutely and essentially. His perfections are all conformed to this, and, when truly contemplated by us, only render his righteousness the more manifest and intense to us. His Law is distinguished by this, and all his doings are guided by this. "He thinks, and feels, and purposes, and acts always according to what ought to be, and never in accommodation to what is; he makes uncompromising rectitude the rule of all his judgments and proceedings in all his dealings with men. He is not facile and bending, open to appeals and appliances from without, but inherently and unalterably righteous" (Candlish). And God being thus essentially and eternally righteous, iniquity cannot go unpunished; and transgressors persisting shamelessly in wrong-doing must reap the due reward of their deeds. In no spirit of vindictiveness, but in strict accordance with this rectitude, so perfect and entire, by which he is characterized, God here, by "the mouth of his holy prophet," pronounced "woe" unto Jerusalem (ver. 1), and declared his "determination" to gather the godless nations and to assemble the rebellious kingdoms, and to pour upon them his indignation, etc. (ver. 8).

III. THE PROPHET INDICATED THE TRUE ATTITUDE OF THE GOOD IN THE LAND WHILST THE PREVAILING INIQUITY WAS REACHING ITS CULMINATION AND WHEN THE JUDGMENTS OF HEAVEN SHOULD FALL. They should wait in the exercise of patience and of hope, assured that out of the chaos wrought by sin God would evolve his purposes of love, bringing good to the race. "Therefore wait for me, saith Jehovah" (ver. 8).

Ver. 9.—*Symbols of the final prosperity of God's spiritual kingdom.* This verse introduces us to brighter scenes. The writer has unfolded the guilt of his own and other nations, and has declared the terrible judgments which, in consequence of the prevailing iniquity, should be experienced; and now, in the closing portion of his prophecy, he seeks to comfort the true-hearted in such troublous times by lingering upon the glorious future of the Church of the living God. His faith pierces the mists and clouds, and apprehends the noble victories to be won in the coming time by the Lord and his Christ, and the halcyon days that lay beyond. We are not to imagine that the ancient prophets realized the full significance of the predictions they uttered respecting the glory of "the latter day." They wrote under the inspiration of God's Spirit, and we doubt not there was often a deeper meaning underlying their utterances than even they supposed. Unconsciously they "testified beforehand" of a "glory" such as, if fully seen by them, would have dazzled and bewildered them by its very splendour. We must avoid placing narrow interpretations upon their words in reference to these high themes. It were weak indeed to seek the complete fulfilment of the glowing predictions which form the closing portion of this prophecy in any one nation, and still less in any particular event in that nation's history. The prophets themselves, partial although the light they possessed was, would not thus have restricted their own words, for they recognized and rejoiced in the thought of God as working in the interests of the whole race; and we, with the increased light possessed by us, ought not to be less comprehensive than they. Viewing this verse (ver. 9) in this spirit, we may see set forth in it a striking symbol, the characteristics of the sincere and genuine subjects of the spiritual kingdom of God. Such are distinguished by—

I. PURITY IN HEART AND LIFE. "For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language;" literally, "a purified life" (ver. 9). Degeneracy reveals itself in a marked manner in the evil utterances of men. The filthy jest, the coarse oath, the brutal curse, the foul names, which have often offended our ears as we have walked along the public streets, indicate the depravity of hardened hearts. Equally expressive of this is uncharitable speech, whether taking the form of open reproaches or the cowardly and more dangerous form of secret slander. Double-tongued utterances, too, reveal the wickedness of the human heart—utterances which appear to convey a twofold meaning, good and evil, the good being simply a kind of disguise employed for the purpose of rendering the evil the more effective. And vain and frivolous speech likewise serves to indicate wrongness of heart; "idle words," useless effectless words, words which some spend so much time in dropping from house to house, words very unsavoury to all sensible minds, and which, if they accomplish anything, only work mischief and mistrust. In contrast to this, and as indicating the opposite disposition of mind and

heart, we place true speech. "The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life" (Prov. x. 11), "natural, clean, life-giving, refreshing;" "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright" (Prov. xv. 2); "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life" (Prov. xv. 4); "The lips of the wise disperse truth" (Prov. xv. 7). Happy they who resemble the character portrayed by George Eliot, in her 'Scenes of Clerical Life,' and of whom she says, "He was the man to give me help and comfort when everything else failed: every word he says seems to have a new meaning. I think it must be because he has felt life more deeply than others, and has a deeper faith. I believe everything he says at once; his words seem to come like rain on the parched ground. It has always seemed to me before as if I could see behind people's words as one sees behind a screen, but in this man it is his very soul that speaks." And since speech thus reveals character, no more appropriate symbol could have been chosen by Zephaniah than this for the purpose of setting forth the Divine renewal in man, and of expressing that purity in heart and life which should characterize the members of the true Church of God in the happier days to which, despite the prevailing gloom, he looked forward so hopefully. "For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language."

II. DEVOUTNESS IN SPIRIT AND DISPOSITION. Purified in heart, they should be rendered devout in spirit. Fellowship with God should be their delight. They should no longer grovel in the dust, but their aspirations should tend towards God and heaven. Delivered from idolatry and superstition and worldliness, they should all "call upon the Name of the Lord" (ver. 9). "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my Name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my Name, and a pure offering" (Mal. i. 11).

III. UNITY IN PURPOSE AND AIM. "To serve him with one consent," literally "with one shoulder." The symbol was suggested by the thought of a number of men being engaged in bearing a heavy burden. They walk in step, they act together, they stand shoulder to shoulder, the weight is proportionately shared by each; such, indeed, is their agreement and concert that it would seem as though there were but one shoulder among them. And so shall it be with the Church of God eventually. The time shall come when all divisions and strifes shall cease, when all antagonisms, whether real or seeming, shall be no longer traceable amongst good men, when that true unity in heart, in life, and in endeavour shall become manifest, for which the great Intercessor yearned, and for which he prayed as he cried, "That they all may be one" (John xvii. 21—23). Happy era, predicted in this verse, and which, since "the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," shall assuredly come at length, when all God's servants shall "with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. xv. 6).

Ver. 10.—*The restoration of the Jews.* These words have been regarded by some biblical expositors as having reference to the conversion of the Gentiles. This utterance of Zephaniah in the Old Testament, and the prophecy of Caiaphas recorded in the New (John xi. 51, 52), have been associated together in their minds, and they have thought that by the "dispersed" Zephaniah meant the Gentiles, even as Caiaphas described the Gentiles as "the children of God that were scattered abroad," and that when the prophet alluded to the dispersed "beyond the rivers of Ethiopia," he meant to intimate that the Gentiles even from the remotest parts should eventually be brought home to God. Others, including many of the ablest interpreters, take the opposite view. They regard ver. 9 as referring to the Gentiles in their relation to the truth and the kingdom of God, and as intimating the great fact of the calling of the Gentiles, who should be led with one consent to serve the Lord, and then refer to this tenth verse as having special reference to the spiritual restoration of the Jews, who, through the agency of the Gentiles thus converted to God, should at length be brought in (Rom. xi. 30, 31). Accepting this latter interpretation, we have here declared the spiritual restoration of the Jews (ver. 10). Note—

I. THEIR PRESENT POSITION. 1. *Dispersed.* Scattered over the face of the whole earth. "Can you find a country which they can call their own? Can you find a nation in which they are not? In Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, and the furthest islands of the Southern Sea, among bond and free, copper-coloured and yellow, white and black, wherever there are men, there are Jews." 2. *Yearning.*

Crying out to God, longing for the fulfilment of their cherished hopes. In exile they are still his "suppliants," expecting the promised Messiah, and, whilst many of them are embittered against Christianity, there are not wanting numbers who have embraced it, and openly avowed their faith in Christ, whilst many are his disciples "secretly," ready to avow themselves his, only shrinking from the pains and penalties involved, whilst a still larger number are inquiring concerning him, and are easily accessible to the missionary of the cross.

II. THEIR ULTIMATE RESTORATION. 1. The fact of their spiritual recovery is here emphatically declared (ver. 10). From the remotest parts they shall come and surrender themselves as an offering unto God. "All Israel shall be saved." They shall be brought in with the fulness of the Gentiles, and "there shall be one flock, one Shepherd" (John x. 16). Their restoration to their own land is a question of comparative unimportance in view of this spiritual recovery which is so frequently declared in the unerring Word of God (Rom. ix. 1—6, 8, 9; x. 1—4; xi. 1, 9, 11—15, 23—32; 2 Cor. iii. 12—16). 2. It is implied here that this spiritual restoration shall be effected through the agency of the Gentiles. The offering here referred to as to be brought unto the Lord was "the meat offering." The idea expressed here is that, just as the children of Israel presented the meat offering unto God, so the Gentiles themselves, converted to him, should labour for the conversion of the Jews, and, crowned with success in this holy service, should bring these Hebrew converts as a meat offering unto the Lord. And the meaning is still more clear if we remember the signification of the meat offering. It was a sacrifice in which the Jew recognized God's goodness and grace in the bounties of his hand, and acknowledged that these gifts were his by right, and ought to be consecrated unto him. And even so, it is here declared that the Gentiles should recognize God's mercy in bringing home to himself his chosen race, and should present these converts to him as those who were his in virtue of all he had done for them, and who ought to be entirely consecrated to his service. The Church of Christ should ever prove herself a missionary Church, and in these enterprises a conspicuous place should be assigned to work for the spiritual good of God's ancient people, whose "falling away" shall result in "the reconciling of the world," and the restoration of whom shall be "as life from the dead" (Rom. xi. 15).

Vers. 11—17.—*Pictorial representation of the Church of God in the latter age.* Dark days were in store for his people when this prophet prophesied. The Captivity was in prospect, and there would soon be occasion for them, by "the rivers of Babylon," to "weep as they remembered Zion." Still, he would have them remember that it would not be ever thus, but that the time should come in which the ransomed of the Lord should return to Zion with songs and with gladness. In these verses he draws a beautiful picture of the Church of the future. How far his description has been realized in the past in the experience of the Hebrew Church in connection with the return from captivity, it would be impossible for us to indicate; certain, however, is it that, for the full realization of this, we must turn to the future, to the Church of God in the latter age. We do well to unite with the good of all past times in looking on by faith to that bright day of God which shall yet dawn upon the world sin has darkened and sorrow blighted, and to anticipate, with expectant hearts, its glorious appearing. Concerning the Church of the future, we are reminded here of—

I. HER PERFECTED CHARACTER. Her members are represented as: 1. *Purified.* So pure indeed should they be as that "they should not be ashamed for all their doings wherein they had transgressed against God" (ver. 11); *i.e.* they should have "no more conscience of sin" (Heb. x. 2). So completely should they be delivered from the old life of sin that even the remembrance of the sinful past should all be obliterated, and should no more rise before them to disturb and distress. 2. *Humble.* No longer puffed up with spiritual pride, boasting of themselves as being the favoured of Heaven, and glorying in their special advantages of ancestry and country, "they should no more be haughty because of God's holy mountain" (ver. 11), but should be lowly in heart, and clothed with that humility and meekness which is in the sight of God of great price. 3. *Trustful.* Resting wholly in "the Name of the Lord, which is a strong tower" (Prov. xviii. 10). "And they shall trust in the Name of the Lord" (ver. 11). 4. *Sincere.* They should reach unto the heights of holy obedience, and which is,

indeed, the climax. "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, or speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth" (ver. 13).

II. HER HIGH PRIVILEGES. 1. Deliverance from all sorrow. "Thou shalt not see evil any more" (ver. 15). 2. Enrichment with peace and tranquillity. "For they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid" (ver. 13). 3. Safety under God's protecting care. "The King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee;" "Fear thou not" (vers. 15, 16).

III. HER DIVINE RESOURCES. In the seventeenth verse the love of God towards his servants is declared in words of exquisite beauty and tenderness. "The prophet speaks of the eternal love and joy of God towards his people as an exuberant joy, one which boundeth within the inmost self, and again is wholly *silent in his love*, as the deepest, tenderest, most yearning love broods over the object of its love, yet is held still in silence by the very depth of its love, and then again breaks forth in outward motion, and leaps for joy, and uttereth what it cannot form in words; for truly the love of God in its unspeakable love and joy is past belief, past utterance, past thought" (Pusey). And since he who thus loves is "mighty," the objects of this Divine love need not fear nor grow faint-hearted ever, for their resources are infinite and eternal.

IV. HER RAPTUROUS JOY. "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel," etc. (ver. 14). The joy of the redeemed eventually shall be full and all-sufficing, and, in anticipation of entering into this experience at length, all God's servants, even in the dark days, may well lift up their heads, and "in the darkness raise their carols of high praise."

Ver. 15.—*The abiding presence of God with his Church.* "The King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee." This truth was constantly affirmed in the Old Testament with reference to the Jewish Church; and as the Church of God through all ages is one Church, we may take the promises of God to Israel of old as having their application to his Church still. So may we apply to her to-day those assurances contained in the Hebrew Scriptures (Ps. xlvi.; xlviii.), or that contained in the text, or, turning to the New Testament, we may grasp the gracious promise of the God-Man, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20).

I. INDICATE SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH GOD HAS ESTABLISHED THIS TRUTH OF HIS ABIDING PRESENCE WITH HIS CHURCH IN ALL AGES. 1. By having "a remnant" to his praise even in the darkest times. It is an undoubted fact that, whatever dark clouds of persecution, or indifference, or declension may have arisen, God has had all through the season of darkness a people to show forth his praise. These Hebrew prophets, amidst their emphatic testimony against the iniquity prevailing in their times, constantly recognize with thankfulness "a remnant" as remaining true to God and to righteousness. Elijah at Horeb thought himself to be the only servant of Heaven remaining in his corrupt day; but God removed the veil concealing from his view the secret and hidden Church, and, lo, he beheld "an exceeding great army," where he had supposed himself to be the solitary warrior for the truth. "Yet have I left me seven thousand in Israel," etc. (1 Kings xix. 18). In "the dark ages," when the light of Christian truth had become well-nigh extinguished, there were not wanting those who dared to maintain the truth of God in its simplicity and purity. Even within the pale of the Church of Rome in those days there were some who deplored the prevailing corruptions, and who longed for a return to the simplicity in teaching and the purity of life by which the early Christians were characterized; whilst outside her communion were associations of Free Christian societies, as in Lombardy and in the Alps, who were as lights shining in dark places. The Nestorians, "the Protestants of Asia," referred to by Mr. Layard, serve as another illustration, and who, away in the remote valleys of Kurdistan, and entirely separated from intercourse with other Christian communities, have preserved through so many centuries a knowledge of the Christian faith in the purity of its character and the simplicity of its worship. There has ever been "a remnant" true to God, and serving as a clear token of his abiding presence with his Church. 2. By raising up in her midst, and qualifying, men for special service. Whilst we may not "glory in men," we may magnify God's grace and power in them; and it is intensely interesting to note how he has in every emergency raised up his agents to do his work. Moses and Joshua, in relation to the deliverance of the Israelites and their settlement in Canaan; Ezra and Nehemiah, in connection with

the return from the Captivity in Babylon; the faithful prophets raised up to declare the judgments of Heaven against idolatrous nations; Luther, Melancthon, Zwingle, called by him to take part in the work of the Reformation; and Owen, Howe, Bunyan, Baxter, Flavel, and others, following, to wield the pen effectively in support of the truth, and so to confirm and to consolidate the work of their predecessors. And by thus raising up men and endowing them with gifts for special service, God has confirmed to his Church the assurance of his abiding presence. 3. By frustrating and bringing to nought the evil designs of her enemies. He has repeatedly proved that "no weapon directed against his Church can prosper," and has made manifest the folly of those who have sought to overthrow the kingdom of truth and righteousness. "The wrath of man shall praise him," etc. (Ps. lxxvi. 10). 4. By opening up new fields for the extension of her influence. India has been placed under British rule, and the opportunity given of making known to its teeming millions "the unsearchable riches of Christ." The exclusiveness that prevented access to the empire of China has passed away, so that the missionary may go through the length and breadth of the land. The heart of Africa has been penetrated, and there is now the prospect of her sable tribes becoming elevated and blessed through Christian influence. And in thus opening up the world for Christian enterprise to bestow upon it all its energy and zeal, God has shown himself as being still with his Church. "The King of Israel," etc. (ver. 15).

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT THIS THOUGHT OF GOD'S ABIDING PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE IS CALCULATED TO AFFORD TO THEIR HEARTS. 1. In view of the character of the age in which we live, as related to Christian truth. Many are seeking to restore that papal supremacy which has proved such a blight in ages that are past; many are cherishing the spirit of scepticism, and would have us even banish God himself from his universe; and there is also a widespread spirit of indifference abroad in relation to the highest spiritual realities. Yet still we will not despond, for "the Lord of hosts is with us," and as he caused the light to burn and to prevail even in the darkest ages, so he will still work until the light shall shine in every land, and all flesh see together the revealed glory of the Lord. 2. In view of apathy, coldness, and declension in holy service. Such seasons *do* occur, and such lifelessness and deadness at times falls upon the Church of God and upon Christian communities. Yet God does not forsake us even when we thus grow lukewarm in his service. He is with us still, and will grant us renewal and revival if we will but turn to him with all our hearts. 3. In view of the losses the Church of God is called upon to sustain through the ravages of death. The last foe is ever active. Beneath his unsparing hand the useful as well as the useless fall—the true-hearted worker for God as well as the idler whose life is altogether barren of good. But amidst these changes the chief Shepherd liveth; all holy gifts and heavenly graces are his bestowments, and he will not fail his Church, but will raise up a bright succession of devoted servants to do his bidding and to help on the grand consummation. Hence we will not despair; for "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early" (Ps. xlvii. 4).

Vers. 18—20.—*Words of help and hope to the exiled and banished.* The closing words of this prophecy, contained in these verses, are amply sufficient to indicate that although the writer was a messenger of judgment, and as such addressed burning words of denunciation to evil-doers, he was also a man full of tenderness—a Barnabas as well as a Boanerges. Whilst, being commissioned by God to reprove the ungodly, he did not spare such, yet he also knew how to speak words of help and hope to the sorrowful and distressed; indeed, we find him here anticipating sorrow, being beforehand with consolation, and providing the balm for wounds yet to be inflicted.

I. THE CASE SUPPOSED. The prophet had spoken of captivity; yet he was conscious that God would restore his people at the close, and bring them from Babylon to their own land. But, whilst confident as to this, he knew that, in the very nature of the circumstances, only a portion of God's people would be privileged thus to return, and that many of them would be dispersed among the heathen in various places, and would be unable to come back with those who should be restored "when the Lord should turn again the captivity of his people." And he also knew that, amongst these scattered ones, there would be those who, in their remote exile, would mourn for the solemn assembly, and whose hearts would be burdened in view of their banishment (ver. 18).

II. THE WORDS OF HELP AND HOPE ADDRESSED BY THE PROPHET TO THOSE THUS CIRCUMSTANCED. 1. He assured them that the Lord their God would bring to nought their oppressors. "I will undo all that afflict thee" (ver. 19). 2. That the Shepherd of Israel would in his own time regather every member of his flock, however scattered they were, and however feeble some of them might be. "And I will save her that halteth, and gather," etc. (ver. 19). 3. And that in the very lands where they would be put to shame he would eventually secure to them lasting honour and imperishable renown (vers. 19, 20).

III. THE PROPHET AN EXAMPLE TO TEACHERS OF RELIGION IN EVERY AGE. There must be the bold denunciation of wrong, but there should ever accompany this tenderness of spirit, revealing itself in the endeavour to comfort and cheer troubled hearts. And in proportion as this spirit is cherished by us do we resemble the great Prophet of the Church, who was "anointed to comfort those that mourn," etc. (Isa. lxi. 1—3).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Jerusalem the rebellious and polluted; or, the wickedness and woe of a degenerate city.* I. THE NUMBER AND VARIETY OF HER SINS. 1. *Rebellion.* This, marking her attitude towards God, is amplified and detailed as consisting in four transgressions. (1) Disobedience. She had not obeyed Jehovah's voice speaking to her through the Law and the prophets, enjoining on her precepts and imposing on her duties, but, like an ordinary heathen nation, had said, "Who is Jehovah, that we should serve him, or that he should reign over us?" (2) Insubordination. She had not received correction, *i.e.* had not accepted with meek submission the discipline or chastisement Jehovah had laid upon her in consequence of her sins, as for instance when he brought against her Shishak of Egypt (1 Kings xiv. 25, 26), Jehoash of Israel (2 Kings xiv. 13), Sargon or Sennacherib of Assyria (2 Kings xviii. 17; 2 Chron. xxxii. 1), but had resented it, not only adhering to her disobedient ways, but improving on them, "rising early and corrupting all her doings." (3) Unbelief. Not trusting in Jehovah, she had alternately trusted in Assyria and Egypt. Whereas her confidence in Jerusalem's stability and impregnability ought to have rested on the fact that Jehovah had chosen it to place his Name there, had entered into covenant with the nation of which it was the capital, had established in it his worship, and had promised to protect it, she was constantly basing her hopes on a political alliance either with the northern power against the southern, or with the southern against the northern (Isa. xxxvi. 6; Hos. xiv. 3). (4) Irreligion. Having renounced all faith in Jehovah, she had scarcely maintained the pretence of observing his worship—had not drawn near to him, either externally in the way of celebrating those rites he had prescribed, or internally by pouring out her heart before him in supplication of his favour and help. 2. *Pollution.* This declares what the city was in herself. The completeness of her defilement discovered itself in the wickedness of all classes of her population, but more especially of her civil and spiritual rulers. Of the latter, (1) the prophets were light and treacherous persons, vain-glorious boasters, boiling up with their own conceited imaginings, men of treacheries who published their own false dreams as if these had been the true visions of God (Jer. xxiii. 32), and thus caused the people to err (Isa. ix. 16; Micah iii. 5). As they exercised their callings without having themselves been called to these by God (Jer. xiv. 14), they were not his prophets, but hers. Scarcely less polluted were (2) the priests, who, as Jehovah's ministers, ought to have been holy (Lev. xxi. 6; Numb. xvi. 5), but who, through being themselves impure, profaned that which is holy, or defiled the sanctuary and all connected with it—its rites, persons, things, places, sacrifices, and violated the Law (Ezek. xxii. 26) "by treating what was holy as profane." 3. *Oppression.* Revealing her behaviour towards man: her civic dignitaries practised cruelties ferocious and unprovoked upon those over whom they ruled. (1) Her princes in the midst of her, *i.e.* her kings and nobles, like roaring lions rushing on their prey (Prov. xxvii. 15), ground down her poor and unresisting population by excessive taxations and labours. (2) Her judges, in their administration of law and (so-called) justice, were so fixedly bent on their own enrichment, and so insatiably greedy of their evil gain, that they seemed like hungry and rapacious evening wolves

which could not leave a bone of their prey till the morning, but must devour it ere the night passed (Hab. i. 8; Jer. v. 6; Ezek. xxii. 27).

II. THE AGGRAVATION AND HEINOUSNESS OF HER SINS. 1. *Against Divine grace.* She had been guilty of all the foregoing wickednesses, though Jehovah had been in the midst of her. That he chose at the first to establish his presence in her was a favour—a special favour; that he remained in her after she had become rebellious, polluted, and oppressive, was more than a special favour—was an exceeding great mercy. 2. *Against Divine example.* In all Jehovah's dealings with her he had shown himself "righteous," even proved that he would not and could not do iniquity; nevertheless, she had not followed in Jehovah's steps, but had turned aside into crooked paths and unclean ways. 3. *Against Divine instruction.* Jehovah had brought his judgment to light every morning by causing his Law to be proclaimed to the nation daily by the prophets. Yet she had rebelled against the light and done the works of darkness. 4. *Against Divine warnings.* She had seen Jehovah cutting off the nations around, throwing down their battlements, and rendering them desolate, "making their streets waste," etc. (ver. 6); and still she had closed her ears against the warnings these providential judgments gave. 5. *Against Divine expectation.* Jehovah had hoped she would fear him and receive the instruction and correction he had intended for her; but she had not done so. Rather she had risen early and corrupted herself, thereby proving herself one of the unjust who know no shame.

III. THE RECOMPENSE AND REWARD OF HER SINS. 1. *A severe penalty.* Woe; and the cutting off of her dwelling. Unless she repented and turned from her evil ways, she would be overwhelmed with the righteous indignation of God, and her place as a nation wiped out—an impressive symbol of the doom threatened against unbelieving and unrepentant sinners under the gospel. 2. *A contingent penalty.* If she feared Jehovah and accepted correction, her dwelling should not be cut off, and the vials of woe should not be outpoured upon her (Jer. xviii. 7). So are God's threatenings against sinners contingent on their continued impentence. But this presupposed, it becomes: 3. *A certain penalty.* Nothing could avert the woe and the cutting off in Jerusalem's case but repentance and reformation, neither of which she showed; and so when within less than a century it became apparent that there was no remedy, the sluice-gates of wrath were opened, and she was cut off without compassion (2 Chron. xxxvi. 16, 17). So will it be with those under the gospel, who, being often reprov'd, yet harden their necks—they shall be utterly destroyed, and that without remedy (Prov. xxix. 1).

Learn: 1. The danger of sin. 2. The certainty of judgment.—T. W.

Ver. 5.—*The shamelessness of sin.* I. A DEMONSTRABLE FACT. 1. *Asserted by Scripture.* In addition to the statement of the text, that "the unjust knoweth no shame," may be cited other declarations to the same effect from both the Old (Jer. iii. 3; vi. 15; viii. 12) and the New (Eph. iv. 19; Phil. iii. 19) Testaments. 2. *Proved by experience.* Besides the individuals to whom the above passages allude, persons are often met with in actual life who not only seem, but so far as can be discovered from their behaviour actually are, insensible to shame.

II. A PSYCHOLOGICAL ENIGMA. 1. *Shame the fruit of sin.* Exemplified in the case of Adam and Eve (Gen. ii. 25; iii. 7). Shame is the outward sign of the soul's inward consciousness of guilt. 2. *Sin the death of shame.* If shame does not lead to repentance, and so to the destruction of sin, sin will soon assert its supremacy over shame and lead to its extinction.

III. A SIGNIFICANT PHENOMENON. Teaching: 1. *The possibility of complete spiritual deterioration.* When a soul can no longer feel ashamed on account of sin, when its moral perceptions have become darkened, and its conscience is deadened, the process of spiritual or religious degeneration has reached its lowest point. The soul is practically dead in trespasses and in sins. It has become essentially and permanently unjust. 2. *The impossibility of ultimate redemption.* The soul that cannot blush is at least perilously near the condition of those of whom it is written, "It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance" (Heb. vi. 6).—T. W.

Vers. 8—13.—*The gracious acts of Jehovah; or, Israel's glorious future.* I. THE

RESTORATION OF ISRAEL. (Ver. 8.) 1. *The time indicated.* The day that Jehovah riseth up to the prey; *i.e.* to take for himself as a booty or spoil out of the nations he visits a people who shall desire his salvation and confess his Name. Among those who shall then be captured by Jehovah will be Israel, or at least a remnant thereof, who shall be brought again to their own land. The time thus indicated began with Persia's overthrow of Babylon, to which doubtless the prophet's language primarily refers, continued till the advent of Christ, in whom Jehovah rose up not merely to bring redemption to the pious remnant of Israel (Luke i. 68), but to take out of the Gentiles a people for his Name (Acts xv. 14), and will not terminate till the close of the present era, during which, by the gospel, is being gathered out of all nations and kindreds, peoples and tongues, a people for Jehovah, of whom ancient Israel was but a shadow and a type (Matt. viii. 11; Luke xiii. 29; Rev. vii. 9). 2. *The instrumentality declared.* A work of judgment upon the nations of the earth, which work again commenced with the destruction of Babylon, and will only be finished when Christ appears a second time to execute judgment upon all (Jude 15), and in particular to pour out his wrath upon the impenitent and unbelieving (2 Thess. i. 7, 8; Heb. x. 27; Rev. vi. 17). As in Zephaniah's time Jehovah declared it to be his fixed purpose to hold such an assize of the nations, so has he revealed his intention to hold another and a grander at the end of time (Acts xvii. 31); and as he further maintained (to adopt another rendering) that the holding of such an assize, with what would inevitably result from it, viz. "the devouring of all the earth with the fire of his jealousy," *i.e.* the destruction of his enemies by his judgments, and the salvation of his people by his grace, should be a clear vindication of his righteousness, so does he in respect of the final judgment claim that its decisions will manifest to all the righteous character of himself and his government (Rom. ii. 2, 5; 2 Thess. i. 5; Rev. xvi. 5). 3. *The duty prescribed.* To wait for Jehovah. Addressed, not to the whole wicked and corrupt nation (Hitzig), but to its pious remnant (Keil and Delitzsch, Pusey, Fausset, Farrar), this counsel was in effect: (1) A warning against apostasy. Though Jehovah's judgments should descend upon the nation, they, the meek of the land (ch. ii. 3), were not to discontinue either believing in Jehovah or practising his religion, but were to steadfastly adhere to both. (2) An intimation of mercy. Since, even before the judgment fell, Jehovah counselled them to wait for him after it had fallen, the sense could only be that he had it in contemplation to interpose in his own time for their deliverance. (3) An encouragement to hope. In the darkest hours of their despondency, when the nation's fortunes should be at the lowest ebb, they should not yield to despair, but look expectantly forward to the good time coming. The duty here prescribed that of God's people collectively and individually at all times, but especially in seasons of calamity and affliction.

II. THE ENLARGEMENT OF ISRAEL. (Vers. 9, 10.) 1. *The accession of the Gentiles.* (1) The outward occasion of this turning of the nations to Israel. The visible, historical instrumentality by which it should be brought about has been declared to be the pouring out upon them of Jehovah's indignation. When God's judgments are abroad, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness (Isa. xxvi. 9). Nations and communities no less than individuals, and these no less than those, not unfrequently require to be whipped into obedience and chastised into submission. Calamities in the shape of wars and pestilences bring powerful kingdoms and haughty empires to their knees, when nothing else will. Prodigals and profligates need experience of servitude and starvation at the swine's trough, before they will return in penitence to God. (2) The impelling force. Jehovah's grace in turning to them a pure language (literally, "lip"). Not imparting to them instruction through his servants the prophets (Luther, Hofmann), but purifying their lips defiled by the worship of idols (Hitzig, Keil, and Delitzsch). This, again, was only possible by first purifying their hearts, or weaning them from the love of their debasing superstitions. The fountain must be cleansed if the stream running from it is to be pure; the tree must be good if its fruit is to be good (Matt. xii. 33). The prime mover in all religious awakenings and reformations is God (Ezek. xxxvi. 27; John iii. 3, 5; vi. 63; Rom. viii. 2; 1 Cor. xv. 10). (3) The formal expression. Calling upon the Name of the Lord. A phrase used to designate the worship of Jehovah by Abraham (Gen. xii. 8), and of Christ by believers under the gospel (Rom. x. 13). The Name of God signifies his manifested

character (Exod. iii. 15; xx. 24; xxiii. 21; John xvii. 6); to call upon his Name, to invoke the help that Name proffers and warrants to expect. (4) The animating Spirit. "To serve him with one consent," or "one shoulder;" signifying that their adherence to Jehovah shall not be purely formal but essentially spiritual, not of outward ceremonial alone but also of inward devotion, not forced and constrained but voluntary and of personal choice, and not fragmentary and isolated but united and combined. 2. *The ingathering of the dispersed* (Jews). These the prophet represents: (1) As objects of Jehovah's affection, even in the countries of their exile. Jehovah speaks of them as his dispersed (men may forget their covenant relationship to God; he never forgets his relationship to them), and as the daughter of his dispersed (cf. ver. 14), a designation of Israel shaped after similar expressions of Isaiah (ii. 8; iv. 4; xxii. 4) and Jeremiah (iv. 11, 31; vi. 2, 14),—God's love to men changes not, though their circumstances and even their characters may change. (2) As returning to Jehovah's service. From the furthest bounds of their dispersion, even from beyond the rivers (the Nile and the Astaboras) of Ethiopia and from other countries into which they may have been scattered. No spot too distant or condition of existence too abject that one may not find his way back from it to God. In a spirit of penitential entreaty. Jehovah calls them his suppliants, to indicate the mood of mind in which they shall return (Zech. xii. 10). In so doing "he describes the character of all who come to God through Christ" (Pusey). To offer acceptable worship. What Jehovah styles "his offering," was the *minchah*, or meat offering due to him according to the Law of Moses (Exod. xxix. 41; Lev. ii. 8; Numb. iv. 16), the tribute they owed him as their Divine King (1 Sam. x. 27; 1 Kings iv. 21). According to another rendering (De Wette, Keil and Delitzsch, Fausset, Revised Version margin), the offerers are the Gentiles, and the offering the Jews of the dispersion, whom the former shall bring and present to Jehovah. Though favoured by Isaiah (lxvi. 20) and Paul (Rom. xi. 25, 26, 31), it is doubtful if this view of the passage was in the prophet's mind (Hitzig, Pusey).

III. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAEL. (Vers. 11—13.) 1. *In the enjoyment of spiritual peace.* When the Lord had turned again her captivity, and brought her back to himself with weeping and with supplication (Jer. xxxi. 9; 1. 4; Joel ii. 12), she should no longer be ashamed for or "on account of" her past iniquities. Not because these would then have ceased to be reprehensible and fitted to cause shame, but either because they would then have ceased to be (Keil and Delitzsch), or because God would then have forgiven them (Pusey). A new heart and a quiet conscience—two of the first gifts bestowed upon returning penitents. 2. *In the possession of heart-humility.* Then all her proudly exulting citizens should be cut off, and all her haughty leaders abased, so that none should remain in her but an afflicted and poor people, who should no more be haughty in Jehovah's holy mountain. Meekness of mind, lowliness of heart, poverty of spirit, an indispensable characteristic of true religion in the soul (Matt. v. 3; xi. 20; xviii. 4; Col. iii. 12; 1 Pet. v. 5, 6). 3. *In the exercise of living faith.* They, i.e. the inhabitants of restored Jerusalem, shall trust in the Name of the Lord. If true religion begets a spirit of lowliness towards one's self, it inspires a feeling of calm and confident trust in God (Ps. ix. 10). 4. *In the pursuit of true holiness.* The members of God's spiritual Israel should neither commit injustice nor tell lies, nor practise deceit of any kind. These again, righteousness and truth, are absolute requirements from all who claim to be possessed of sincere religion (Phil. iv. 8). 5. *In the satisfaction of all her needs.* Like Jehovah's flock, she (Israel) should want nothing (Ps. xxiii. 1). She should have: (1) Food. She should "feed" (Isa. xl. 11). (2) Rest. She should "lie down" (Ps. xxiii. 2; Ezek. xxxiv. 15). (3) Protection. "None should make her afraid" (Ps. xci. 1—7; cxxi. 3—8).—T. W.

Vers. 14—17.—*The reciprocal joy of Israel and Jehovah.* I. THE JOY OF ISRAEL IN JEHOVAH. (Vers. 14—16.) 1. *The character in which Israel is summoned to rejoice.* Indicated by the names in which she is addressed. (1) Daughter of Zion. Zion meaning "sunny," hence "arid," and so "thirsty," or thirsting after God. (2) Israel. Signifying "Prince of God," or one who has power with God, and can prevail. (3) Daughter of Jerusalem. Equivalent to "City of peace." At all events, those whom God calls to rejoice in the fulness of his salvation are those who hunger and thirst after righteous-

ness (Matt. v. 6), those who seek his face and call upon his Name (Rom. x. 12), and those who are possessed of a spirit of peace (Matt. v. 9). 2. *The enthusiasm with which she is invited to rejoice.* Suggested by the threefold call to sing, shout, and be glad. "*Sing*,—it is the inarticulate, thrilling, trembling burst of joy; *shout*,—again the inarticulate, yet louder swell of joy, a trumpet-blast; and then too, deep within, *be glad*,—the calm even joy of the inward soul; *exult*, the triumph of the soul which cannot contain itself for joy; and this with the whole heart, no corner of it not pervaded with joy" (Pusey). 3. *The grounds on which Israel is called to rejoice.* (1) Judgments taken away. The calamities inflicted on her because of her iniquities have been removed (Isa. xl. 2). Meaning, her sins have been pardoned. Believers under the gospel have the same cause for exultation. For them, as for Israel, is no condemnation more (Rom. v. 11; viii. 1). (2) Enemies cast out. In the case of Israel this was so far true that henceforth she was no more seriously harassed as a nation after the restoration. Of believers under the gospel it is true that their chief enemy, the prince of this world, has been cast out by Jesus Christ (John xii. 31), while sin, which represents his power in them, will ultimately be expelled from their renewed natures (Gal. i. 4; Eph. i. 4; v. 27; Titus ii. 15). (3) God returned. As her covenant God,—"the Lord thy God;" rightful King,—"The King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee;" powerful Protector,—the Lord thy God is "a Mighty One who will save thee." In the same characters God abides in the Church and dwells in the heart of the believer. (4) Prosperity secured. With Jehovah in her midst she shall no more see or experience evil (Ps. xci. 10). The same true of the Christian believer, in whose heart God dwells (2 Thess. iii. 3; 1 Pet. iii. 13). 4. *The signs Israel shows that she does rejoice.* (1) No more fear. "In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not." So Christ says to his little flock, "Fear not!" (Luke xii. 32; John vi. 20). (2) No more despondency. "O Zion, let not thine hands be slack." Drooping hands are the sign of a fainting heart. Believers are exhorted to faint not (Luke xviii. 1; 2 Cor. iv. 16). (3) No more indolence. Slack hands are idle hands; and no greater enemy to activity in Churches or individuals exists than lack of joy, as nothing stimulates to religious work like the experience of religious joy.

II. THE JOY OF JEHOVAH IN ISRAEL. (Ver. 17.) 1. *The character of this joy.* The joy: (1) Of a conqueror over the prey he has captured (ver. 8); Israel in her restoration being a trophy of his prowess. (2) Of an artificer in the work of his hands (ver. 11); Israel in her purified condition being a production of his grace. (3) Of an owner in the value of his possession (ver. 10); Jehovah speaking of Israel as "his dispersed." (4) Of a lover in the object of his affection, as *e.g.* of a bridegroom in his bride (Isa. lxii. 5). 2. *The tenderness of this joy.* It was a joy springing out of love to Israel, the joy of one who seeks the happiness of another, rather than of one who glories in his own felicity. In God's joy over Israel is no element of selfishness; it is all sympathy and affection. 3. *The intensity of this joy.* Marked by the gradation of clauses. Beginning with an inward feeling of delight, it swells in volume and deepens in tenderness till it becomes too great for utterance, and the subject of it is "silent in his love," after which it keeps on rising like a tide, till at length it overflows the soul's banks and breaks forth into song. 4. *The spontaneity of this joy.* It is not meant that Jehovah's joy in Israel is occasioned or evoked by Israel's joy in Jehovah, but rather that Jehovah's joy in Israel should prompt and sustain Israel's joy in Jehovah. As "we love him because he first loved us" (1 John iv. 19), so can we only "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. v. 11) when we realize that he for Christ's sake is well pleased with us.—T. W.

Ver. 17.—*God and his people.* I. GOD'S RELATION TO HIS PEOPLE. 1. Their covenant God. 2. Their rightful King. 3. Their mighty Saviour.

II. GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE. He is in their midst. 1. In the Spirit of his Son. 2. In the Word of his truth. 3. In the ordinances of his Church.

III. GOD'S WORK FOR HIS PEOPLE. Salvation: 1. From the guilt and power of sin. 2. From the danger of ignorance and error. 3. From the temptations and corruptions of the world. 4. From the fear of death and the dominion of the grave.

IV. GOD'S DELIGHT IN HIS PEOPLE. 1. True and tender. 2. Full and deep. 3. Perfect and abiding.—T. W.

Vers. 18—20.—*The turning again of Israel's captivity; or, good news for sin's exiles.* I. **LIBERTY FOR THE CAPTIVES.** "I will deal with all them that afflict thee," etc. Those members of the Israelitish community who were soon to be carried off into exile and enslaved in a foreign land were to be eventually (in the day when God rose up to the prey) rescued from their oppressors and set free from the reproach of slavery which pressed upon them like a heavy burden. So were the members of the human race captives of sin and Satan, and bondmen in a far-off land of alienation from God, when Christ came to preach deliverance to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that were bound (Isa. xli. 1; Luke iv. 18). So are men by nature sin's captives still (John viii. 34), and the burden of the gospel message still runs, "If the Son shall make you free, then are ye free indeed" (John viii. 36).

II. **COMFORT FOR THE SORROWFUL.** "I will gather them that sorrow for the solemn assembly." Those about to be exiled in Babylon, especially such among them as should preserve their piety, would regard it as the saddest element in their lot that through banishment they were no longer permitted to take part in the festal assemblies of the nation, in particular in the Feast of Tabernacles, the most joyful of all their celebrations (Hos. xii. 10). To them, therefore, it would come "like cold water to a thirsty soul," or "like good news from a far country," that they should afterwards, "at that time," be restored to their religious privileges, and the fellowship with Jehovah which these signified. So men "in sin," being far off from him whose favour and fellowship alone is life, when they first awake to this thought, are filled with sorrow, and mourn after God, after that reconciliation and communion with him in which alone true happiness can be found (Ps. xxxi. 16; li. 8—12; lxxxv. 4, 6; cxliii. 7, 8). To all such the gospel promises comfort and consolation (Matt. v. 4).

III. **GATHERING FOR THE DISPERSED.** Many of Israel's sons and daughters should be scattered into far-off lands when Jehovah rose to pour his indignation on the nations (ver. 8). But into whatsoever region they should have wandered, Jehovah would re-collect them in the day when he turned again Israel's captivity. So have men by sin been driven away into many different "far countries."—into conditions of existence where their material environments, dispositions of soul, and habits of life have become widely divergent. But up out of all situations and from all characters God by his grace can bring men who have departed from him and separated from each other, and can form them again into a united community, a holy brotherhood, a spiritual household, a redeemed family. To do this is the aim of the gospel (Eph. ii. 17—22).

IV. **GLORY FOR THE SHAMED.** Whereas the approaching exile would lead to Israel becoming overwhelmed with dishonour, when the Lord turned again her captivity that dishonour would be wiped out, and she should once more acquire a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth. This certainly was true of the Jewish people, who, for all their humiliation, rose to a position of commanding influence because of her relation to Jehovah and the Christian Church, to which no nation on earth has ever attained; while Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome, her great world-rivals, and frequently her oppressors, have passed away into comparative oblivion. So, if sin turns man's glory into shame, the gospel of Jesus Christ promises to reconvert man's shame into glory; and this it does by giving to the Christian Church a position and power possessed by no other human institution, and by conferring on the individual believer the glory (1) of a good name; (2) of an influential life; (3) of a peaceful end; and (4) of a blessed future.

LESSONS. 1. "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound" (Ps. lxxxix. 15). 2. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark xvi. 15).—T. W.

Vers. 9—20.—*The promise of restoration.* Very remarkable is the way in which the most gracious promises are in this book interwoven, and, as it were, wrapped up in threatenings of judgment. This appears in ch. ii. 11, where it is declared that the Lord shall be terrible to the nations that magnified themselves against his people, and shall smite all the gods of the earth, so depriving these nations of their fancied support and confidence; and then it is added that men shall worship him every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen. The deserved judgment would really prove to be the greatest blessing, leading them from the worship of dumb

idols that could not save to that of the living and true God. So it is in the very similar prophecy given here. It is not certain whether ver. 8 is to be understood as a warning given in solemn irony to the ungodly Jews, or an encouragement addressed to the faithful remnant among them; and so the precise connection of ver. 9 with the preceding context is not quite clear; but in general it is plain that it speaks of the conversion of the peoples to God as the result of the terrible revelation of his judgments against them. Thus we see how true it is that the Lord delighteth not in judgment, but in the midst of wrath remembers mercy. Now, this is no isolated or exceptional case, but an instance of the general principles on which God acts in his dealings with men. It may therefore be taken to illustrate the conversion of sinners to God at any time and in any circumstances. We may notice two things that it shows us: (1) the cause; (2) the results of conversion.

I. THE CONVERSION OF THE PEOPLES IS HERE TRACED VERY DIRECTLY TO THE AGENCY OF GOD. It is his doing, and that not merely indirectly, by the influence of the judgments that he has been threatening to send, but by an inward work of renewal wrought in the people. The judgments of God may convince the heathen of the vanity of their idols, or even show them that they should call on the Name of the Lord, and that they must do so if they are to be delivered; but then how shall they do so? The Lord is revealed as the just God, who will not do iniquity, and every morning doth he bring his judgments to light; but their lips, with which they should call upon him, are impure, they have taken up the names of other gods, they have been full of cursing and bitterness. May they not well feel as Isaiah did, when he saw the vision of the Holy One, that they are undone, for they are men of unclean lips, and dwell among a people of unclean lips? Who can enable such peoples, whose lips are accustomed to falsehood and profanity and uncleanness, to worship the God who is a Spirit, and seeketh such to worship him as will worship him in spirit and in truth? Who but that very God himself, who purged Isaiah's lips, who touched the lips of Jeremiah and put his words in his mouth? It must be he himself who enables them to call on him, by an act of gracious will and mighty power, purifying their lips and opening their mouths. The nature of this act of Divine power and grace is not more particularly described, but the language used suggests a comparison with what is said of Saul after he had been anointed by Samuel to be king over Israel, "God gave [Hebrew, 'turned'] him another heart" (1 Sam. x. 9). It is the same phrase as is used here, and so the meaning is that God will give to the peoples another lip, which shall be pure, instead of their former unclean lip. But a change of lip or language cannot be conceived apart from a change of heart, as, on the other hand, the new heart that God gave to Saul showed itself at once in his language, for when a company of prophets met him, he prophesied among them (1 Sam. x. 10). Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; and so, if the lips are to be pure, filled with the praises of God and calling on his Name, the heart must be changed. Now, this renewal of heart, showing itself in the utterance of the lips, is everywhere in the Bible traced to the Spirit of God as his special work. So it was with Saul. "The Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied." This working of the Spirit, too, is of God's sovereign and free grace. It comes on the most unlikely and unworthy objects. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." So it was with Saul. He seemed an unlikely person to receive such a gift, and men said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" and the answer was, "But who is their father?" Men receive not the gift by descent from any human ancestry, but by the direct bestowal of God; and so it may come upon any, and is to come at last, as Joel prophesied, on all flesh, even on the servants and handmaidens. Thus this prophecy is connected with those that point to the great manifestation of the grace and power of God's Spirit that was made at Pentecost, when the disciples of Jesus, speaking with new tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance, testified of the new and pure language that the Lord was to turn to the nations. He will pour out his Spirit on all flesh; and even those nations that were most alienated from him, and sunk in impurity of heart and life, may receive the heavenly gift. But this, like all the promises of God, is given in Christ. He it is that sends the gift of the Spirit, as he is exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and remission of sins. Listen, then, to him as he graciously and freely offers it, and comply with his

loving call, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. And this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive" (John vii. 37—39). When we seek to determine in theory the exact relation of order between the gift of the Spirit and our faith, we run into difficulties that we cannot solve. But in practice these difficulties need not trouble us, or are solved by our actually coming to Jesus in faith. We need not wait till we are conscious of the renewing influence of the Spirit in order to come to Christ; we may be sure that any impulses that lead us to Christ are from him, and that the Lord's own gracious call is sufficient warrant for us to believe on him, that we may be fully conscious of the indwelling of the Spirit.

II. THE RESULTS OF CONVERSION, AS HERE INDICATED, ARE SEVERAL. 1. "That they may all call upon the Name of the Lord" (ver. 9). The first movement of the renewed heart is towards God; the first utterance of the pure lip is prayer to him. So it was said of Saul, when the Lord arrested him in his career of persecution, "Behold, he prayeth." The tendency of the natural heart is away from God, and the lips are by nature slow and backward to call upon him. But when the Lord changes the heart, and turns to the peoples a pure lip, then they call upon his Name, they comply with the call formerly given by the prophet, to seek the Lord. Instead of endeavouring to hide themselves from his presence, or to find some refuge or defence against his judgments, they are led to see that there is none that can deliver them out of his hand, but that he himself is merciful and gracious, and that if they turn to him and implore his mercy, they shall be delivered. For his name is "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means spare the guilty" (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7); and that affords a strong encouragement to all the nations to call upon him. His Name is just the expression of his character, and that is one of grace and love, of mercy and forgiveness; so that even the most sinful may call upon him. 2. "To serve him." The words of the lips, the prayer of faith, may be the first result of the change wrought by God's Spirit in the soul; but that will not remain alone, but, if it is sincere and genuine at all, will lead to service in deeds. They shall not merely honour him with their lips, but shall serve him. He is the Lord, as well as the Saviour, of the world; and when they call upon his Name as their Saviour, they will further give themselves to him as their Lord. They have been refusing to serve him before, saying, "Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?" asserting that they were not in bondage to any man, but their own masters, yet really serving divers lusts and pleasures. But now, weary and heavy laden with the burden of the service of self and sin and the world, they come unto Christ, and take his yoke upon them; they enter that service in which alone is perfect freedom. It is a most essential characteristic of the converted, that they serve the Lord. They count themselves his servants, as Paul, for example, speaking of Christ, says, "Whose I am, and whom I serve." They are not their own, but bought with a price; and they seek to realize this by living, not for themselves, but for him who died and rose again for them. This does not imply that they go out of the world and separate themselves from its active work and affairs, to spend their time wholly and exclusively in exercises of worship. The service that the Lord would have given to him is to be carried on in the world; they are to be "not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." By diligence in the duties of the calling in which God has placed them, by uprightness and sincerity in word and deed, by letting no corrupt communication proceed out of their mouth, but that which is good for the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers, by working with their hands that which is good, that they may have to give to him that needeth; and, above all, by walking in love, after the example of Christ, God's servants serve him; and this they are enabled to do by the work of his grace in their hearts. 3. Another result here indicated as flowing from conversion is unity and harmony among the nations. "They shall all call on the Name of the Lord, and serve him with one consent." The invocation of the true God is to be in common, and the service rendered to him a united and harmonious one, "with one shoulder," as the words literally mean, as if bearing the yoke together, and equally taking part in the work. This implies a gathering together of the nations in peace and good will. Idolatry and polytheism

ever go hand-in-hand with national exclusiveness and mutual hostility. Each people is supposed to have its own patron gods, each land its own local deities, and the servant of one god naturally becomes the enemy of the people of another. Religion, in this corrupt form, tends to separate men, and set one against another. Ungodliness, too, has much the same tendency. When men recognize and worship no god or power above the earth, their selfish passions and interests set each one against his fellow. But when the one universal Lord and Maker of all is recognized as God, then the consideration that we have all one Father, and that one God created us, forms a tie of brotherhood among all nations. And this is strengthened by the fact that, when his judgments are abroad on the earth against all nations alike, all are invited and encouraged to trust in his mercy and call on his Name. "For the same Lord over all is rich unto all who call upon him." This does away with every ground of separation, as if there were many local or national deities, as the heathen thought; it does away even with the special privileges of the seed of Jacob, which the Jews were apt to abuse, so as to foster a selfish and exclusive pride; for "in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free, but Christ is all and in all." True conversion, also, by taking away the ungodliness of the natural heart, removes the great root of selfishness, and gives a ground, a motive, and an example for love to all men. In proportion as men are brought nearer to God are they brought nearer also to one another. He is the Centre and Sun of the universe, and the more the paths of any of the creatures depart from him, the more will they diverge from one another; while the nearer they come to God, the closer will they find themselves drawn to their fellows, who may have started from very distant points and been led by very different ways. These things, then—prayerfulness, diligence in God's service, and brotherly love—may be taken as genuine and sure evidences of that great change that must be wrought in every man ere he can see the kingdom of God—a change that is secret and mysterious in its own nature, though known and recognized by its fruits.—C.

Vers. 1—5.—*A religious city terribly degenerate.* "Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city! She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God," etc. "To give still greater emphasis to his exhortation to repentance, the prophet turns to Jerusalem again, that he may once more hold up before the hardened sinners the abominations of this city in which Jehovah daily proclaims his right, and shows the necessity for the judgment, as the only way that is left by which to secure salvation for Israel and for the whole world" (Keil). We have two things here to look at.

1. *A PROFFESSEDLY RELIGIOUS CITY TERRIBLY DEGENERATED.* Jerusalem is distinguished not so much for the beauty of its architecture, the extent of its population, the measure of its trade and resources, as by its being religious. There the one temple stood; there the worship, with its imposing ritual, was daily performed; there the priests lived and God was specially manifested. But how morally degenerate it became! She is here represented as "filthy," "polluted," and "oppressing." "She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God." In this degeneracy all classes of the community seemed to be involved. 1. *The "princes" are mentioned.* "Her princes within her are the roaring lions." Like rapacious beasts, they preyed on all about them, they lived on people, they devoured their property. As a rule, "princes" have too often lived upon the people; they are devourers of their means; they consume everything, and produce nothing. 2. *The "judges" are mentioned.* "Her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow." Or, as Henderson renders it, "they gnaw no bones till the morning." So insatiable are they, that they leave not a single bone till the morning, of the prey that they have caught in the evening. 3. *The "prophets" are mentioned.* These "prophets are light and treacherous persons." In their life and teaching there was no truth, gravity, or steadfastness. They were "treacherous," false to man, and false to God (Jer. xxiii. 32; Ezek. xxii. 28). 4. *The "priests" are mentioned.* These "polluted the sanctuary" by desecrating the sacred place, and outraged the "Law" by distorting its meaning and misrepresenting its genius and aim. Like Hophni and Phinehas, their wicked lives made the sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred. Such was the degenerate condition into which this holy city is represented

as having fallen. How many modern cities to-day, which call themselves Christian, have sunk into a similar degeneracy! London, Paris, Rome, St. Petersburg, etc., are all highly religious in profession, and have religious means in abundance. What is the moral condition, not only of their masses, but of their "princes," their "judges," their "prophets," and their "priests"? Ah me! under the cover of religion there rolls the sea of putrescent depravity. Morally, how much better is London than Bombay, Peking, or Jeddo?

II. A PROFESSEDLY RELIGIOUS CITY TERRIBLY DEGENERATED, ALTHOUGH GOD WAS SPECIALLY WORKING IN ITS MIDST. "The just Lord is in the *midst* thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame." In every city, and amongst every people, the just Lord, the righteous Jehovah, is and works—works by the operations of material nature, by the events of human life, by the suggestions of human reason, and the dictates of human conscience. But in Jerusalem he was in a more especial sense, and he wrought in special ways. The temple was his dwelling-place, and the gleaming Shechinah was the symbol of his presence; and specially did he reveal himself to some of its noblest men. And yet, notwithstanding all, Jerusalem sank; with God amongst them working to raise them, they fell lower and lower. What does this teach? 1. *The wonderful freedom which the Almighty allows to wicked men on the earth.* Though he strives to improve them, he does not coerce them. He makes no invasion of their moral agency. 2. *The tremendous force of human depravity.* What a power sin gains over man! It binds him in chains often stronger than adamant. It loads him with a weight which he cannot shake off, but which sinks him deeper and deeper into the abysses of wickedness.

CONCLUSION. 1. Do not hinder Christian propagandism from entering a city because it is nominally Christian. The gospel is wanted there, perhaps, more than anywhere else, more even than in pagan populations. 2. Do not expect that the world will be morally renovated by miraculous agency. Almighty Goodness does not coerce. There is no way by which mere force can travel to a man's soul.—D. T.

Vers. 6—8.—*Terrible calamities in human history.* "I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction," etc. In these verses the prophet sums up all that he had said in the preceding verses of this chapter, and thus closes his admonition to repentance with the announcement of tremendous judgments. These verses remind us of three great truths of universal importance, claiming the attention of men wherever they exist.

I. THAT THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH THE MOST TERRIBLE CALAMITIES IN HUMAN HISTORY MAY BE ASCRIBED TO GOD. Here he is represented as cutting off the nations, destroying their "towers," making their "streets waste," so that "there is no man," and "none inhabitant." What particular nation is here referred to cannot be determined with certainty. We know that he did destroy nations—the Canaanitish nations, also Assyria and Babylon. These calamities are here ascribed to God. In Bible language he is frequently represented as doing that which he only permits. Nations destroy each other, he allows them to do so. Though he does not give them the disposition for the work, he imparts the power and the opportunities.

II. THAT THE GRAND DESIGN OF SUCH CALAMITIES IS THE PROMOTION OF MORAL IMPROVEMENT AMONGST MANKIND. Why did he permit the wreck and ruin of those nations, and all the dire desolations here recorded? Here is the answer, "I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction." The grand end of all his dispensations with men is to generate within them the right state of mind in relation to himself; in other words, to make them "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." "Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to enlighten him with the light of the living" (Job xxxiii. 29, 30). As the storms, the snows, the frosts, and the cutting winds of winter help to bring on the luxuriant spring, so the calamities in human life contribute to the moral regeneration of mankind.

III. THAT THE NON-REALIZATION OF THIS DESIGN AMONGST A PEOPLE EXPOSES

THEM TO TERRIBLE RETRIBUTION. "But they rose early, and corrupted all their doings." The men of Jerusalem, instead of becoming better for these terrible calamities, grew worse. They "corrupted all their doings." This they did with assiduity. They "rose early." They began their morning with it. "Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey; for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy." Or, as Keil renders it, "Therefore wait for me, is the saying of Jehovah, for the day when I rise up to the prey; for it is my right to gather nations together, to bring kingdoms in crowds, to heap upon them my fury, all the burning of my wrath; for in the fire of my zeal will the whole earth be devoured." The Almighty here speaks after the manner of men, as he does almost everywhere in the Bible, in condescension to human infirmities. He speaks as if he were disappointed in the moral results of the calamities which he had sent, and as if his nature now glowed with the fires of his indignation. There is, of course, really no disappointment for him, for he knows the future, and "fury" is not in him.—D. T.

Vers. 9, 10.—*The good time coming.* "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the Name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering." Henderson supposes that the poem from this verse to the end of the book relates to Messianic times; that the prophet points to that dispensation of remedial mercy under which we live, and which commenced more than eighteen hundred years ago. We may therefore regard these words as pointing to at least two of the great characteristic blessings that will come to the world during the continuance of the gospel age; and these two are moral purity of language and spiritual unity of worship.

I. MORAL PURITY OF LANGUAGE. "Then will I turn to the people a pure language." Or, as Keil renders it, "a pure lip." Human language is looked upon in different aspects by different men. Some look upon it grammatically, trace its etymology, and arrange its words and sentences according to the conventional rules of speech; and some look at it logically, study it in its relation to the law of human reasoning; some look upon it philosophically, view it in relation to the nature of the things it is intended to represent; and some look upon it morally, contemplate it in its relation to the law of conscience and God. Grammatical language is mere conformity to acknowledged rules of speech; logical language, conformity to recognized principles of reasoning; philosophical language is conformity to the order of nature; moral language is conformity to the moral law of God. There is a regular gradation in the importance of these aspects of language. The first is of the least importance; the second and third come next; and the last is the most important of all. It is strange and sad to see that the amount of attention which men pay to these aspects is in the inverse ratio of their importance. The first, the least important, is the most attended to; the second, next; the third, next; and the last, the most important of all, almost entirely neglected. In the department of speech we have more grammarians than logicians, more logicians than philosophers, more philosophers than honest saints. It is *moral* purity of language that is wanted in the world, and that is here promised. Language that shall be used, not without meaning, as it is oftentimes used now, nor to misrepresent meaning, as is often the case. A "pure" moral language implies two things. 1. That the state of the heart should be in accord with Divine reality. 2. That the words of the lip should be in accord with the state of the heart. In other words, purity of soul and veracity of expression.

II. SPIRITUAL UNITY OF WORSHIP. "That they may all call upon the Name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent." "That they may serve him with one accord" (Henderson). Who are to serve him with one accord? The nations, partially specified in the tenth verse. "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia [Cush] my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering." The glorious point to be observed is not that all nations shall worship, for worship will ever belong to the race; but that all nations will worship with *one accord*. There is a oneness in their worship. Unity of worship does not necessarily mean unity of theological opinion or of ritualistic

observances; but unity of object, the *same* God in the same *spirit*—reverence, gratitude, adoration.

CONCLUSION. What a glorious future awaits the world! All men morally pure in speech, all men heartily one in worship. Thrice hail the day!—D. T.

Vers. 11—13.—*A sketch of a morally regenerated city.* "In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain," etc. "These verses," says Henderson, "contain a description of restored and regenerated Israel. The being not ashamed of their sinful practices does not mean their not feeling a compunctious sense of their intrinsic odiousness and demerits, but is expressive of the great change that should take place in the outward condition of the Jews. That condition, into which they have been brought by their obstinate rebellion against Jehovah and his Messiah, is one of disgrace. When recovered out of it, all the marks of shame and infamy shall be removed. The Pharisaic spirit of pride, and the vain confidence in the temple and the temple-worship, which proved the ruin of the nation, shall be taken away. The converted residue shall be a people humble and poor in spirit (Matt. v. 3; xi. 5), and of a truly righteous and upright character; and, having fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel, they shall be safe under the protecting care of their heavenly Father." These verses may be regarded as giving a *sketch of a morally regenerated city.* It is marked by—

I. **THE UTTER ABSENCE OF THE BAD.** There is an absence of: 1. *Painful memories.* "In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings." Thou wilt not need to be ashamed of all thy iniquities, (1) because they are all forgiven; (2) because they will occur no more. Whilst regenerated souls will perhaps ever remember their past iniquities, the memories will not be associated with pain, they will awaken no moral shame. So flooded will the soul be with new loves, hopes, and purposes, that everything painful in connection with the past will be buried in comparative forgetfulness. Departed saints cannot but remember their old sins, but, in view of pardon and purification, the remembrance of them is associated with pleasure, not pain. 2. *Wicked citizens.* "I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride," or, "thy proud triumphers." In a thoroughly regenerated city there will be no proud vaunters, no blustering pretenders, no arrogant worldlings. The voices of such men will not be heard; they will not be seen in the streets, in the marts of commerce, the chambers of legislation, or the scenes of recreation. 3. *All crimes.* "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth." No wrong committed, no lies spoken, no deceit practised. The whole atmosphere of the city cleared of such moral impurities.

II. **THE BLESSED PRESENCE OF THE GOOD.** "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the Name of the Lord." Who will be the citizens? 1. *Men of humility.* Delitzsch translates the word "afflicted," "bowed down;" and Henderson, "humble." Humility is evidently the idea. There will be men who are "poor in spirit." Moral humility is moral nobility. The humbler a man is, the nobler and the happier too. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." 2. *Men of piety.* "They shall trust in the Name of the Lord." Their chief confidence will be placed, not in their strength, their wealth, or their wisdom, but in God. They will centre their trust, not in the creature, but in the Creator. 3. *Men of concord.* "They shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid." There will be amongst them no acrimonious disputations, no commercial rivalries, no social jealousies or envyings, no painful divisions of any kind. They will be united as brethren, one in leading thoughts, loves, and aims.

CONCLUSION. This is indeed a model city. What a city this! When shall such a city appear on this earth? Ah! when? It is in the distant future, but it has been gradually rearing from the dawn of the Christian era to this hour. It will, I believe, be one day completed, the "topstone" will be put on with shoutings of triumph.—D. T.

Vers. 14—17.—*Joy, human and Divine.* "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord

hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy," etc. Here is a call to the regenerated inhabitants of Jerusalem to exult in the mercy of God, who has wrought their deliverance, at the same time, a beautiful description of the sublime delight with which Jehovah will regard them in the future. The words bring under our notice joy, human and Divine.

I. THE JOY OF THE REGENERATED MAN. "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice." What is the joy? 1. *The joy of gratitude for the deliverance from evil.* "The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy." What is the joy of the slave in the hour of his emancipation, of the prisoner on leaving his cell, of the long-suffering invalid on his restoration to full health? Far more is the joy of the man who feels himself morally delivered—delivered from the power of sin, and brought into the "glorious liberty of the children of God." Gratitude is always an element of joy. 2. *The joy of conscious security.* "Even the Lord is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more." What joy breaks forth in the apostolic challenge, "Who shall separate us from the love of God?" etc.! Here is the joy of regenerated humanity, the joy of gratitude for the greatest deliverance, the joy of conscious security from all possible dangers.

II. THE JOY OF THE REGENERATING GOD. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee [within thee] is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." What is the joy of God? It is the joy of infinite benevolence. What is the joy of the genuine patriot when he has delivered his country from a power that threatened its utter destruction? What is the joy of a loving physician when he has rescued his patient from the very jaws of death? What is the joy of a loving parent who has rescued his child from ruin? Some such joy as this—ininitely superior—is the joy of God over regenerated humanity. In this joy the redeemed will participate; indeed, it will be their heaven. "Enter into the joy of thy Lord." "Rejoice over thee with singing." *Does God sing?* Yes; in all the happy voices of the universe, especially in the shouts of the redeemed.—D. T.

Vers. 18—20.—*The moral restoration of mankind.* "I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee," etc. "The salvation held up in prospect before the remnant of Israel, which has been refined by the judgments and delivered, was at a very remote distance in Zephaniah's time. The first thing that awaited the nation was the judgment through which it was to be dispersed among the heathen, according to the testimony of Moses and all the prophets, and to be refined in the furnace of affliction. The ten tribes were already carried away into exile, and Judah was to share the same fate immediately afterwards. In order, therefore, to offer to the pious a firm consolation of hope in the period of suffering that awaited them, and one on which their faith could rest in the midst of tribulation, Zephaniah mentions, in conclusion, the gathering together of all who pine in misery at a distance from Zion, and who are scattered far and wide, to assure even these of their future participation in the promised salvation" (Delitzsch). These verses may be taken to illustrate *the moral restoration of mankind.* Taking them for this purpose, we have the restoration and the Restorer. We have here—

I. THE RESTORATION. What is the restoration? 1. *From the deprivation of religious privileges to their enjoyment.* The Jews, who were in a state that rendered it impossible to celebrate their religious festivals at Jerusalem, are here represented as filled with sorrow or grief when they reflected on the privileges of their ancestors. "By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept," etc. Though unregenerate men may live amidst religious privileges, they are really deprived of them, for they do not possess and enjoy them. Their moral restoration brings them into that happy enjoyment. Though the ungodly man holds the gospel in his hand, he is morally exiled from it. It is more distant from him than was the temple from the Jew in Babylon. 2. *From the sufferings of oppression to the happiness of deliverance.* "Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out." The literal reference is here, of course, to Babylonian tyrants. By the providence of God these were overcome. Their power

was broken, their counsels confounded, so that they were forced to surrender their prey. "I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out." The Hebrew captives were delivered, and brought back to their own country and city. In moral restoration the power of the oppressor is broken, the soul is delivered from the power of Satan and the bondage of corruption. "Being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." What was the tyranny of Babylon to the Jews, compared to the tyranny of evil over the soul? 3. *From the condition of reproach to that of true honour.* "I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame." High above all nations was Israel at one time. The "reproach" brought on them was one of their sorest grievances; that reproach has been partially wiped away, the Jewish people are the most distinguished of the races of the earth, for of them Christ came, who is the glory of his people Israel. When a man is morally restored, he becomes truly honourable, not before. Goodness is moral majesty. There is no true royalty which has not its foundation in moral excellence.

II. THE RESTORED. All the restoration sketched in these verses was effected by whom? Not by Cyrus and his battalions: they were but instruments. It was Jehovah. "I will gather;" "I will save;" "I will get them praise;" "I bring you again;" "I will make you a name;" "I turn back your captivity." So in moral restoration. No one can restore a soul but God. It is his work. 1. A work which he does by moral means. By the gospel. 2. A work which, from the nature of the case, must proceed gradually. 3. A work which will one day be consummated. —D. T.

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