THE

PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE

VERY REV. H. D. M. SPENCE, D.D.,

DEAN OF GLOUCESTER;

AND BY THE

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

WITH

INTRODUCTIONS

BY THE

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II. SAMUEL.

Exposition

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Homiletics

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Homilies by Various Authors.

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THE SECOND
BOOK OF SAMUEL.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Second Book of Samuel is virtually the history of David's reign, while the First had comprised a twofold narrative, that, namely, of Samuel's reformation of Israel, followed by the account of the uprise and fall of Saul. And never had king a more pathetic history than Israel's first monarch. Full of hope and vigour, yet modest, brave, and generous, he had entered in a most praiseworthy spirit upon the duties of his high but difficult office. Unhappily, there was a flaw in a character otherwise so noble. Throughout the history of Israel one great principle is never forgotten, and that is the presence of a higher than any human power, ever ruling in the affairs of men, and making right and justice prevail. And Saul could not bring himself into accord with this power, and again and again crossed the boundary which lay between the king's authority and that of God. It might seem a small matter, that at a time of great urgency Saul could not wait till the expiry of the seven days appointed for Samuel's coming to Gilgal (1 Sam. xiii. 13); and to lose a kingdom for such hastiness seems to many modern commentators a hard measure. Nor are excuses wanting for his leniency towards the Amalekites, and Saul himself could see in it at first no violation of God's command (1 Sam. xv. 20). But in both cases there was present the same spirit which made him murder in cruel haste the high priests at Nob, and put even their women and babes at the breast to death for the supposed violation of his royal authority. Saul could not submit to the Power that is higher than man, nor consent to make his own will bend to that of God; and this wilfulness was rebellion as hateful and contrary to right as open dealings with unclean spirits, or the actual abandonment of Jehovah for idols (1 Sam. xv. 23). It is easy to see its hatefulness in such deeds as the murder of the priests and the repeated

attempts to slay David. The unerring judgment of God condemned it at its first outbreak, and before it had ended in crime; and this condemnation was in mercy. Had Saul repented and humbled himself in heart, his course would have been one ever brightening into light. But he was stubborn and rebellious, and the gloom deepened round him till all was dark.

Saul was not prepared to do right because it was right; and when Samuel and those who loved the right for its own sake drew away from him, his vanity was wounded, and jealousy took possession of his heart. Undoubtedly he was a man possessed of great mental and bodily gifts, and his achievement in so rapidly raising the militia of Israel and crushing Nahash the Ammonite gave him just reason for exultation. It was a deed in which he gave proof of high courage, strong will, and great military capacity. He must have been himself surprised at the rapidity and completeness of his success. And in that hour of gratified self-love he could be generous and noble-minded (1 Sam. xi. 13). But it was largely vanity as well as fanaticism which led to the rash vow which nearly cost Jonathan his life; and when he heard the women sing of David having slain his ten thousands, this wrong done to his self-love filled him with a mean spite against one who would have been the truest of his friends, and his strong bulwark against the evils which filled his latter years with distress. And it was this brooding jealousy which disturbed the balance of Saul's mind, and made him subject to fits of mania, marked generally by intense depression, but breaking out occasionally into deeds of fierce violence.

Saul, in the midst of his violent acts, had never ceased to be a religious man, though there was none of that personal love and loyalty to Jehovah which so distinguished David. It was the national religion to which he gave his allegiance; and it was as a statesman and patriot that he respected it, though doubtless he never shook off the influence of Samuel. But there was little genuine piety in his heart, and no trust in God, nor any feeling of union with him. In domestic life he retained his simple manners, and did not give way to that voluptuousness which disgraced David, and filled the last twenty years of his life with shame and sorrow. But as a ruler he had failed. It had seemed at first as if the hope of Israel, that under a king the nation might dwell safely, would be fulfilled in him. For many years he was a vigorous and successful chieftain, and a hero in war. And Israel under him was rapidly advancing in the arts also of peace. Protected by the military successes of the king, Samuel was able in tranquillity to carry on his schools, and through the sons of the prophets to promote the great work of internal reform. Justice was administered (1 Sam. vii. 15), and the rudiments of learning were being generally acquired. When the younger son of a farmer, evidently little thought of at home, and in his brother's estimation fit only to look after a few sheep, could read and write, education must have been a thing not uncommon. For David thus taught was but a mere drudge at home. His elegy over Saul and Jonathan tells us of domestic refinement; of women clad in scarlet, and with jewels of gold.

Saul had done much; but in his last years he brought all to ruin, and at his death he left his country in abject thraldom, and with all its national liberties trampled underfoot.

In his fall Saul involved in equal ruin his son Jonathan, one of the most generous and beautiful characters that ever the world saw. And his death at Gilboa was but the ending of a path wrapped in deepening shadow and leading inevitably to misery and disaster. In 1 Sam. xiv. we see Saul in almost as bad a light as when he murdered Ahimelech and his brethren. The youthful Jonathan and his armour-bearer had wrought one of those feats of desperate valour which are not uncommon in the history of the Israelites. And their bravery had stricken the raw levies of the Philistines with panic, increased by the action of a body of Hebrews drawn from the districts conquered by the Philistines, and forced to serve in their army. They were posted in the rear to guard the camp, and their defection placed revengeful enemies in the very pathway of flight. Saul meanwhile concludes from the absence of Jonathan and his armour-bearer that it was some brave exploit of theirs which was causing this confusion in the Philistine host; but when the priest asks counsel of God, with just the same absence of self-control as had made him refuse to wait for Samuel at Gilgal, Saul bids him withdraw his hand from the ephod and desist. He needs no counsel from above. He will act for himself, and with extraordinary rashness and absence of good sense he commands the people under a solemn curse to abstain from food until all is over. They must fight the battle and pursue fasting. Had he given himself time for reflection, he would have felt that the slight loss of time spent in taking refreshment would be more than compensated by increased vigour of body and power of endurance. The pursuit, too, had come suddenly, and his men were not prepared; and to have partaken of the provisions cast aside by the runaways would have kept up their strength. They must at last stop from sheer exhaustion, and then the whole army would be in a state of ravenous hunger. Worst of all, he was laying a trap for those who had gained the victory. Saul's body-guard would hear his orders, and obey with grumbling. Jonathan and all who joined in the pursuit from a distance, rushing from caves and from the hills of Ephraim, would be in danger unwittingly of bringing upon themselves a curse.

The results were most disastrous. When they reached Aijalon the people were so faint with hunger that they began slaying sheep and oxen, and eating them without observing the command of the Law, that they must carefully free the flesh from the blood. And Saul, aghast at this violation of a solemn ceremonial ordinance, bids his body-guard disperse themselves among the people, and compel them to bring their oxen to a large stone, and there slay them in the manner prescribed. There was thus long delay before the wants of the troops could be supplied, and when at last they had taken a hurried meal, and Saul was eager to resume the pursuit, they gave him so sulky an answer as to be virtually a refusal. And now the priest,

mediating between king and people, purposes to ask counsel of God, and Saul consents. But no answer comes. Saul had refused God's counsel in the morning, and now the oracle is silent.

But Saul sees no fault in himself. Fault he assumes there is, and he will find it out by drawing lots. He bids the people stand on one side, and himself and Jonathan on the other; and again, with a sulky answer, the people assent. Again and again the lot falls, till Jonathan is left, and Saul, nothing doubting that he is guilty, asks for confession; whereupon Jonathan tells him how, unwitting of his command, he had tasted almost by chance a little honey. Never was man more innocent than Jonathan, and God by him that day had wrought a great deliverance for Israel. Yet his guilty father, with dark fanaticism, condemns him to death. The people indeed rescue him, but all his legal rights were gone. In the eye of the Law he was a dead man, and henceforward Jonathan ever acts as if there was a bar between him and the kingdom. He never once speaks as if it were possible for him to inherit Saul's throne, or as if he were ceding to David anything to which he had a claim. His father's curse, his father's condemnation, still rested upon him. The people had saved him by force, but the legal act remained, and the father had destroyed the son.

From first to last Saul was the destroyer of himself, his family, and his kingdom. Samuel foretold his fall, but the warning was given personally to the king to move him to repentance. Repentance would have saved him, and Samuel allowed him ample time; for, during four or five years, he did absolutely nothing to help on his words to their accomplishment. Only after this long delay, spent by Samuel in mourning (1 Sam. xv. 35), at God's express command he arose and anointed David; but neither of them, either openly or by secret conspiracy, took any steps to compass Saul's ruin. All that David did he was driven to do. To the last he was loyal to his king. And when in an evil hour he deserted his country, and entered the service of the Philistine king of Gath, it was almost a renunciation of his anointing. He seems himself to have given up all idea of ever becoming king, and, in a fit of desperation, to have thought only of saving his life. To his countrymen this open alliance with their enemies put him entirely in the wrong, and sorely he was punished for it by a seven years' delay. Yet slowly both predictions were moving on to their fulfilment, and if the purpose was Divine, the human agency was that of the self-willed Saul.

There is thus a tragic interest in the First Book of Samuel. Unrepentant, stubborn, wilful even in his deepest depression, the king struggles against his fate, but each effort only entangles him in fresh difficulties, and burdens his conscience with darker crimes. The one pathway of safety which David tried, and not in vain, in his season of terrible sin, Saul will not try. He sees his doom; is driven by it to melancholy, is unhinged in mind; but the prophet's words, "rebellion," "stubbornness," indicate the unyielding elements of his nature, and stubbornly he died in the lost battle-

field. Like Prometheus, he defied the Almighty, in deeds if not in words, but the heroism was gone, and in that last sad scene, when, in mental and moral degradation, the despairing monarch sought the witch's cave, stubbornness alone remained. And, meanwhile, the other purpose of God was growing in strength, and, through strange scenes of heroism and feebleness, the shepherd-boy becomes the nation's champion, the king's son-in-law, an outlaw and a deserter, before finally he becomes a king.

In the two Books of Samuel, David's uprising and reign, his sins and his terrible punishment, are given us in great detail, not merely because of their intrinsic interest and the clearness with which they teach the great lesson that sin is ever punished—not merely this, but even more because he was a most important factor in the development of Israel as the Messianic nation. There is in this respect a parallel between the Book of Genesis and the Books of Samuel. The great business of the one is the selection of the man from whom was to spring the nation predestinated to be the depository of God's revealed truth. In the Books of Samuel we have the choice of the man who, next to Moses, was to form that nation for its high office, and to be the ancestor of Christ. In David the great purpose of Israel's existence was to advance a great step onwards. Eight hundred years had passed since the choice of Abraham, and four hundred since Moses gave laws and political unity to those sprung from him; and it had often seemed as if the folk were too tiny to be of any real service to mankind, and as if it must be crushed out of existence by the more powerful kingdoms that surrounded it. It was a territory so small, was placed in so dangerous a position on the very battle-ground of Egypt and Assyria, and the constitution of the realm was so little adapted to purposes of war, that it seemed impossible for it to have more than a short-lived endurance. But small as was Israel, God had chosen it to light a torch that should illuminate the whole world, and God's Word, which is the light of men, received through David a most precious addition to its contents.

As a preparation for the selection of David, the work of both Saul and Samuel was necessary. Saul had given Israel a sense of unity and, at least, a taste of the blessings of independence. The wish for a united Israel was as strong an influence in the uprise of David's empire as it has proved in modern times in the endowment of Europe with a united Italy. This right feeling had begun in Samuel's time, brought about probably by the tyranny of the Philistines; and Samuel, who saw in it a tacit reproach to himself, who had done so much, for not having done more, withstood it in vain. Saul's victory over the Ammonite Nahash, won by united Israel, made this feeling so strong, that David's election to the crown came as an inevitable necessity, though long delayed by his relations with the Philistines; and, when elected, he had not to build up the kingdom from the foundations—Saul had done that, but to retrieve the evil results of one terrible disaster. But the moral and mental development wrought by Samuel was a condition even more indispensable to David's kingdom than

Saul's restoration of the nation to political life. David's empire was a matter of vast importance to Israel as the Messianic nation, and Saul prepared the way for it. But it was a matter, after all, of only secondary importance, and Samuel's reforms had kindled again into brightness the nation's inner life. He purified Israel's morals, fanned its decaying faith into heroic confidence in Jehovah, and enriched it with a high civilization. The learning which had always had a home in the sanctuary, and which was for a time trampled out when Shiloh was destroyed, found a new dwelling in the Naioth at Ramah. Reading, writing, music, history, not merely existed there, but were taught to an ever-increasing number of the choicest spirits of Israel. Ramah was the centre of an active propaganda, and the sons of the prophets went back to their homes as missionaries, bound to teach and to elevate and to indoctrinate with Samuel's views all the inhabitants of their villages or towns. And these views had a strong practical bearing both upon the political and the spiritual life of the nation. The eighth psalm, composed by David to be sung to a melody learnt by him when in the service of Achish, King of Gath, is testimony enough to the refinement both of thought and of language that followed upon Samuel's reforms. For David, the youngest of a large family of sons of a yeoman at Bethlehem, could have gained only in Samuel's schools that acquaintance with literary arts, and that knowledge of the history of his country, which undoubtedly he had acquired somewhere. To suppose that he could have obtained them elsewhere is to suppose, what probably became true in course of time, that Samuel's scholars had already set themselves to teach in all parts of the country. Among a race of farmers learning would not advance with such extreme rapidity; but the Israelites were no common people, and their progress was sure and steady. It is probable that Gad, David's friend throughout his life, joined him at the very beginning of his wanderings as an outcast, from a personal affection which began when they were school-friends together at Ramah. For Gad, who is expressly said to have been a prophet (1 Sam. xxii. 5), is by the name certified to have been one of Samuel's scholars. He chose a very hard life when he went to be chaplain to a band of men composed of such dangerous elements as David's freebooters; but he loved David, was confident in his power of governing them, and deep in his heart was the conviction that Samuel's prophecy would surely be fulfilled.

And this captain of a band of wild outlaws was destined in course of time to remodel the temple service, to teach men to "prophesy," *i.e.* to testify to Divine truth, on harp and cymbal and psaltery (1 Chron. xxv. 1), and to give to the national worship its most spiritual element. Not only did David write psalms himself, but his temple service gave them a use, made them the common property of all, and caused others also to give expression to their devotion in the same way, as occasion called their feelings forth. The psalms were not mere lyric compositions, the result of poetic genius and fervour; no doubt many psalms at first were simply so; but they soon

became the voice of the nation's worship, the expression of its faith and love and trust in its God. In this there was a distinct advance, and a most pure and ennobling and spiritual element was added, not merely to the ritual of the temple, but to the worship of God in the homes of the people. The sacrifice was full of teaching, but its details were coarse, and to us would be revolting. In the psalms sung to bright melodies in the temple, we have a form of worship so perfect, that it has lasted from David's day unto our own time; and the similar use of hymns in our services has enriched our Church with a body of spiritual poetry almost as precious as David's psalms. And like hymns in our own days, the psalms would be learnt by the people, and sung in their homes; and the worship of Israel would consist not merely of stately services in the temple, but of the voice of prayer and praise chanted throughout the land to the tunes of Asaph and his brethren, and in David's words.

In this respect we reap the benefit of David's varied experiences. Had he been a man of unblemished morality, his psalms would have struck no deeper note than those of Korah, or Asaph, or Jeduthun. In Jeremiah alone we should have had a psalmist whose words were the outpouring of a troubled heart. As it is, the passion-fraught nature of David hurried him into sins so terrible as to cover his character with disgrace, and bring upon him twenty years of severe punishment, ever following blow upon blow, and darkening even his death-bed with the fate of his eldest son, of the nephew who had been the pillar of his safety in every danger, and of the priest who, having alone escaped from the slaughter of his family at Nob, had been David's faithful companion all the days of his life. No regal splendour, no greatness of glory, could compensate for the lurid gloom of that death-bed. But God overruled all this misery for lasting good; for David has been for all ages the psalmist of sorrow and of repentance. Myriads of sinners have found in the fifty-first psalm the best expression of feelings that were rending their hearts. Nor does this psalm stand alone. When we read utterances such as those in Ps. xxxi. 9, 10; xxxviii. 4; xl. 12, etc., the words would seem overstrained did we not know the greatness of David's sin, the depth of his penitence, and the stern righteousness which punished him not once only, but with ever-recurring severity.

The words quoted by St. Paul from 1 Sam. xiii. 14, that David was a man after God's heart, often trouble the minds of believers, because they take them as the Divine verdict upon his whole character. Really they are spoken of him such as he was when Samuel anointed him, and when his youthful piety was still unstained. Yet to the very last he manifests such tenderness, such spirituality, and so devout and personal a trust in God as still to justify, though with large exceptions, this high estimate of him. And almost all his psalms belong to the days when trouble and anguish had stirred depths in his soul which otherwise would have remained stagnant. There are but few which belong to the days of his pure innocence. His poems then would have celebrated the beauties of nature, the Creator's

goodness, the brave exploits of his countrymen, and the like. It was after his terrible fall that the contrite and humbled David poured forth from the inmost recesses of a struggling breast the words of earnest penitence, of deep humiliation, and withal of intense trust in the God who was punishing him so sternly, and of unwavering faith in the Divine goodness, which was manifesting itself to him as justice that could by no means clear the guilty.

The Second Book of Samuel is thus the basis and the justification of the Book of Psalms. The intensity of feeling manifested there is proved to be no mere poetry, but the cry of real distress. And because of the reality of his repentance David was forgiven; but his forgiveness did not save him from punishment. Never was history more sad than David's from the day when Nathan said, "Thou art the man!" unto that last death-bed scene, when, troubled by the cry of rebellion, he was forced to condemn old friends in order to prevent civil war and save the throne of his chosen son. And as David's sin was the violation of domestic chastity, so all his sorrows sprang from the same source, and not only were his own sons the workers of his misery, but it was in and by his children that he was punished.

Yet amidst it all, David was a man after God's heart in this respect at least, that there was neither rebellion nor stubbornness in his character. His sins were greater than those of Saul, but they were not persisted in. David humbled himself before God, and bore his chastisement not only meekly, but with a clinging love to the hand that was scourging him. Let but God deliver him from blood-guiltiness, and amid the ruin of his earthly happiness he would sing aloud of Jehovah's righteousness (Ps. li. 14).

But besides the interest inseparable from the study of a character such as David's, the Second Book of Samuel gives us the history of the founding of Israel's empire. War is a dreadful thing, and involves a terrible amount of material loss and injury; but it is at once God's penalty upon national debasement, and his remedy against national meanness and selfishness. Nations rise to moral greatness through war, and when they have been sinking through social corruption and private immorality, it is generally war which reveals to them the gangrene in their midst, and either forces them by repeated disaster to humble themselves for it, or displaces them in order that a worthier people may fill their room.

So Israel had displaced the Canaanite tribes in Palestine. And with all their faults, the repeated acts of heroism of which we have the record in the Book of Judges prove them to have been a race of sterling worth. No commonplace people could have produced such men as Saul and Jonathan, to say nothing of Samuel, whose wisdom and goodness and ability as the restorer of a crushed nation, and the founder of institutions which enriched it with intellectual and moral and religious life, raise him to an extraordinary pre-eminence. Yet the extraordinary men of a nation always hold some relation to its ordinary level, and Samuel did not stand alone. He was followed by David and the numerous worthies of his court. But Israel could not have maintained its heroism and nobleness by the mere

memory of the feats recorded in the Book of Judges. Even then the nation was sinking downwards. Jephthah and Samson were men of lower worth than Barak and Gideon. The ruinous defeat at Aphek, followed by the capture of the ark and the destruction of the national sanctuary at Shiloh, convinced Israel of its degradation, and made it ready to yield to Samuel's exhortations. Then followed a period of struggle, and then came the empire of David and the splendour of Solomon's court. It was a short-lived glory. Christ's kingdom was not to have much of earthly magnificence about it. But the Messianic people before his advent had a tremendous work to do, and needed some noble memories to strengthen them as well as grand hopes bidding them ever move onwards. And David's grandeur and the splendour of Solomon, who to this day holds a unique position in the imagination of Oriental nations, gave them what they needed. Throughout a checkered history they continued to be a firm, strong, and heroic people, and with powers of endurance which have enabled them to remain a miracle and a wonder to the present day.

David's wars and conquests had thus a great importance for Israel, and therefore for mankind. But his empire was also a symbol of the Christian Church, and David is the representative of sin-stained fallen man finding forgiveness through repentance. And there is thus a reason for the restriction to him of the promise that the Messiah should be his Son. It is never renewed to any of his successors. Solomon was the glory of the East for his wisdom; Hezekiah and Josiah emulated David's piety, and were unstained by his sins; but no prophet hails them as the inheritors of David's promise. The seed of Judah's kings were to serve as "eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (Isa. xxxix. 7). It was from Nathan, a son uncrowned, and scarcely mentioned in the history, lost quickly to view among the crowd of ordinary citizens, that *he* was to spring who is the Church's King, but who nationally was but a sucker from the cut-down stem of Jesse (Isa. xi. 1). We have given the reason above. David is the type of fallen man, sternly chastised for his iniquity, but finding forgiveness, rest, peace, strength, in "the God of his salvation" (Ps. li. 14).

We have thus in the Second Book of Samuel a history essential to Holy Scripture, and of profound and even painful interest. For never had human soul a more checkered record of sin and sorrow, of discord in its relations with itself, of intense contrition and earnest pleading for forgiveness, and of genuine faith, than that which is set before us here. But without the Psalms, which disclose to us the inner working of David's heart, we should lose much of its significance. For here, chiefly, we have David's sin and his lifelong punishment; while there we have the struggle of his soul wending its way through darkness and sorrow upwards to forgiveness, to light, and to joyful communion with God.

The book is composed of three separate parts, of which the first ends with the list of David's chief officers (ch. i.—viii.). This narrative probably included a good deal of the latter part of the First Book of Samuel,

the division of the history into two portions being unauthoritative. It gives the history of David in its noblest aspect, and if we include in it the victory over the giant, it might be called in Homeric phrase the Ἀριστεία τοῦ Δαυίδ, the prowess and brave achievements of a hero. It traces him step by step till from the sheepcote he becomes the sovereign of all Israel, whereupon immediately he brings the ark to Jerusalem, and is appointed (ch. viii.) the Messianic king, whose office it is to build the temple, to ordain a spiritual worship for Jehovah, and, as Messiah's representative, to take the heathen for his inheritance. It was probably a contemporary document, as was also the next, which forms ch. ix.—xx. In it we have the record of David's sin and its terrible consequences. Beginning abruptly with his kindness to Mephibosheth, but of which we see the reason when we come to the details of the flight from Jerusalem and sorrowful return, it next gives us fuller details of David's conquests, but only to lead up to the history of David's sin, committed when his heart was turned away from God by the glory of earthly victories. All that follows is the painful record of God's just severity. This narrative also ends with a catalogue of David's chief officers, but there is now a touching difference. At the end of ch. viii. we read that David's sons were his *cohanim*, his confidential ministers. His family was then happy and united, and his children were the chief stay of his throne. At the end of ch. xx. it is a stranger, Ira the Jairite, who is *cohen*, David's private counsellor. His sons have all lost their father's respect, and the numerous children who had once been his pride are now a terror to him and a cause of unhappiness. Perhaps in this mention of Ira as David's *cohen* we may find an explanation of the fact that all David's elder children were passed by, and the succession to the throne given to Solomon, who at this time was but eleven or twelve years old. For if no one was any longer fit to be entrusted with the office of *cohen*, still less was he fit to be king. But we also see the fitting punishment of the king's polygamy. David had set a bad example in multiplying unto himself wives, and he reaped from it an evil harvest. His son and successor was even more sensual, and his many wives wrought also his ruin.

The remaining four chapters have no internal connection with one another, nor are they placed in chronological order. For ch. xxii., which is virtually identical with Ps. xviii., was written shortly after Toi's embassy (ch. viii. 10); the "last words" in ch. xxiii. belong to the very close of David's reign; while the execution of Saul's descendants, the battles with the Philistines, and the numbering of the people record events which happened in the earlier years of the kingdom. The "last words" give us the assurance that David's closing years were tranquil, and spent in an unbroken walk with God. The storms of his life were over, and so also was his enjoyment of the pleasures of victorious war and of royal state and magnificence. But his sin had been forgiven him. There was peace in his own heart and undiminished trust in God. Time would never quite heal

his sorrow at the death of son after son, caused alike by his own sin and theirs. If Saul had wrought the ruin of his kingdom, David had wrought the ruin of his family and home. But the one was stubborn in his perverseness, the other was humbled and penitent, and his sin was taken away. And now, calm and thankful, he was approaching the haven of eternal rest in Jehovah, and the enjoyment of that "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, which was all his salvation and all his desire" (ch. xxiii. 5). It was the peaceful end of a troubled life; and it makes us confident that he had been accepted, and that the words of his penitential psalms came from his heart. And we, when we recite them, may feel sure that we are using the words of one who, if he had sinned much, had also been forgiven much, because he had a large love for God, warm genuine piety, and deep and earnest penitence.

THE SECOND
BOOK OF SAMUEL.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1.—**Now it came to pass.** During the last few days events had been crowding fast upon one another. Living as fugitives at Ziklag, in the land of the Philistines, David and his men, unfit for the peaceful occupations of agriculture, had been driven to seek their maintenance by raids upon the wild tribes in the desert. Of these the chief were the Amalekites, whose home was the bare region lying between the south of Judah and Egypt. We have ample proof that this race was utterly hostile to all order and quietness; it lived by the plunder of others, and, sheltering itself in the recesses of the wilderness, broke out thence on every opportunity to carry ravage and ruin into all the neighbouring districts. The Amalekite was thus every man's enemy, and the object of universal dislike; and the cruelty which he habitually practised would justify to David's mind the barbarity with which he put to death all whom he found, man and woman alike. But his object was not justice. His cruelty was the result of selfish motives. For it was necessary for him to keep tidings of his real doings from the ears of Achish, who naturally would not approve of David's military activity. He very probably had put him there upon the borders to protect his realm from incursions; but David in the Amalekite war was the assailant, and was, moreover, practising his men for ulterior objects. Achish most probably received a share of the captured cattle; but his inquiries were met with an equivocation (1 Sam. xxvii. 10—12), which made him suppose that David, with the usual bitterness of a renegade, had been harrying his own tribesmen. And the falsehood soon entangled David in most painful consequences; for Achish, nothing doubting of his fidelity, and of his bitter hatred of Saul, determined to take him with him in the grand army of the Philistines, which was slowly moving northward for the conquest of the land of Israel. David had God's promise of ultimate safety, and he ought not to have deserted his country. As a deserter to the Philistines, he had to descend to falsehood, and now treason seemed inevitable. His only choice lay between betraying his country or the king who had given him so hospitable a refuge. The jealousy, or rather the good sense, of the Philistine lords (1 Sam. xxix. 4) saved him from this dreadful alternative, and he was sent back, to his great joy, to Ziklag. But it was a dreadful sight which there met his view. With strange mismanagement, he had left no portion of his men to guard his little city, and the Amalekites had made reprisals. The news of the Philistine army upon its march upwards would be quickly carried through the desert, and the wild tribes would be sure to take the opportunity for gathering plunder far and wide. So undefended was the whole country, that they met nowhere with resistance. And David saw, on his return, only the smoking ruins of the little city where for many months he had dwelt. His wives, Ahinoam and Abigail, the wives and children of his men, had all been carried away for the Egyptian slave-market. So secure were the Amalekites, that they had no fear about encumbering their march with a vast multitude of children and cattle. And to add to his distress, his men, indignant, and not without reason, at David's want of precaution, were threatening to stone him as an alleviation for their distress. Never had David's fortunes fallen so low as at that moment; but quickly they were to rise again. By energetic action he not only recovered the spoil and the captives taken from Ziklag, but also won the immense wealth gathered by the Amalekites in a wide raid made at a time when there was

no one to resist them. His own share of the spoil was so large that he was able to send valuable presents of sheep, oxen, and camels to his friends in Judæa, probably not without some prescience that the way to his return might be opened by the events of the war between the Philistines and Saul. The dangerous issues of that war could not be hidden from him; but he would find solace for his anxieties in the active work of restoring order at Ziklag, and in providing hasty shelter for the women and children whom he had brought back to their desolated homes. But his suspense did not last long. For when **David had abode two days in Ziklag**, news came which confirmed his worst fears. The battle had been fought; Israel had been routed; and Saul and Jonathan, the friend who had been to him more than a brother, lay among the slain.

Ver. 2.—**On the third day.** This means the third day after David's return with the spoil and captives recovered from the Amalekites. If we study the data, we find that David had marched with Achish as far as Aphek in the plain of Jezreel (1 Sam. xxix. 1), opposite to which, on the rising ground near Gilboa, Saul had posted his army. A march of three days had brought him back to Ziklag (1 Sam. xxx. 1), and after the shortest possible delay he had started in pursuit of the Amalekites. The rapidity of his movements is proved by so large a proportion of his hardy men falling out of the ranks at the brook Besor; but nevertheless some time must have been lost at Ziklag in discovering the greatness of their disaster, in searching for any who might possibly have escaped, in getting food, and in mustering again together for the pursuit. Near the brook they seem to have found the Egyptian slave who became their guide, and who had been abandoned three days before David found him. It follows, therefore, that the Amalekites were then three days' march in advance, and however rapidly the pursuit was urged on, we cannot allow less than five days for it, and one for the battle (vers. 12, 13, 17). The march homeward would take a longer time, as David was now encumbered with flocks and herds, women and children. If it took eight days, the time occupied in it by the Amalekites, the whole period that had elapsed since David was sent away from Aphek by the Philistine lords would be eighteen or nineteen days; and it is thus evident that the Amalekites were plundering Ziklag at the very time when he was being dismissed, half angry, half rejoicing, at the slight put upon him, but little thinking of the sad need there was for his presence elsewhere. Now, the messenger from Gilboa, if an active runner, would easily traverse in two days the distance which David and his men had travelled in three. And thus it follows that the battle at Gilboa was fought on the very day of David's happy return from the pursuit, and about nineteen days after the review at Aphek. If the word "to-morrow" in 1 Sam. xxviii. 19 seems to imply a more rapid march of events, we must remember that the meaning of the word in Hebrew is more indefinite than with us (comp. Gen. xxx. 33; Exod. xiii. 14). **With his clothes rent, and earth upon his head.** Though the Amalekite came **out of the camp**, yet we are not to suppose that he had been one of the combatants. Every army is followed by a vast number of vagabonds, intent upon gain, purchasing of the troops their booty, plundering wherever they have the chance, and carrying on a lucrative but illicit trade. He was more probably a sort of gipsy sutler than, as many suppose, the slave of some Israelite. He professes, however, to be upon Israel's side, and appears with the usual marks of sorrow. By so doing he hoped to commend himself to David, whom he knew to be too patriotic to rejoice at the defeat of his countrymen, though he doubted not that he would hear with joy of the death of so inveterate a personal enemy as Saul. On this account, and because the way would now stand open to David's ambition, he evidently felt sure of receiving a large guerdon for his news. There is, moreover, a further interest in his conduct; for it demonstrates the existence of a widespread popular feeling that David was destined to be Israel's king. It was this conviction which made him give David kingly honour; for he **fell to the earth, and did obeisance.** And all Israel, on the morrow after the defeat, would probably have done the same, but for David's own conduct. Israel was too high-spirited a nation to take at once for a king a man who had marched with their enemies to fight against them, even though they knew that the voice of prophecy had appointed him to inherit Saul's throne.

Ver. 3.—**Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped.** Non-combatants would hang about the army, watching, as soon as the battle had begun, the fortunes of the day, and immediately that they saw the impending defeat of their own side, would think chiefly of their personal safety. But for an active young man the opportunity would then have come for booty. The Philistines, in pursuit of the enemy, would soon leave the battlefield in their rear, and multitudes would quickly prowl about it to plunder the dead. While so busied, the Amalekite falsely represents himself as having come by chance upon the wounded, but still living, Saul.

Ver. 6.—**As I happened by chance upon**

Mount Gilboa. The story of the Amalekite is at variance with the account of Saul's death given in the last chapter of the preceding book. There, sore pressed and wounded by archers, hopeless of escape, and unable to make any further resistance, in sore distress at the death of his sons and the loss of the battle, Saul and his armour-bearer fall upon their own swords. Here, closely pursued by chariots and horsemen, the king is so utterly deserted by all his body-guard that he calls to a vagabond prowling about for booty to slay him. Naturally, Ewald and his followers, who regard the books of the Bible as mere patchwork, find here the marks of different narrators, whose stories the compiler of the Book of Samuel pieced together without having the shrewdness to observe that they were utterly irreconcilable. Some modern commentators have, however, attempted to harmonize them with little success. Really, the story of the Amalekite is a most improbable fiction, and utterly untrue. He knew nothing as to the manner of Saul's death, but found the body, probably some time after the king had fallen; and he was able to strip it because the pursuing Philistines were hurrying forward to make their victory complete, without being aware of what was the crowning glory of their success. As the pursuit advanced it would soon become safe for the Amalekite and others like him to try and secure some of the booty before the Philistines returned. Archers shooting from a distance might easily so distress Saul as to make him despair of escape—and it appears from the first narrative that they had not recognized him; for Saul is afraid lest they should do so, and, having taken him alive, should "abuse," or make a mock of him. Here chariots and horsemen are in close pursuit, and the king faces them grimly; nevertheless, they allow a stranger, who would not have dared to mix himself up with the battle, to rob them of their prize. We may feel sure that it was not until the tide of battle had moved onward in pursuit that the Amalekite ventured upon the field to rob the dead. When so occupied he came upon a corpse, now for some brief space dead, and at once recognized the tall form of the king, whose identity was made more plain by the golden circlet upon his helmet. At once he saw the chance of larger gains, and hastily tearing off the royal crown and the bracelet from the fallen monarch, without a thought of rescuing the remains from the indignities which the Philistines were sure to inflict upon them, he hurried away with his tidings. Of course, he knew nothing of David's recent conduct, nor that for some time he had accompanied the invading army, nor that Ziklag had just experienced rough treatment from his own countrymen. Still, if he had told the truth, he would have fared well; for he brought news of great importance. But truth was not a virtue much practised in those days, and, fancying that the treatment he had met with from Saul would fill David's heart with bitter rancour against him, the Amalekite invented this story of his having slain the king with his own hands, in the expectation that it would win for him a double reward.

Ver. 9.—**Anguish.** This word, which occurs only in this place, comes from a root signifying to entwine or knot together. On this account Jewish commentators explain it of cramp, which often follows upon loss of blood; but it is equally possible that it means vertigo, or giddiness, when things seem to dance or interweave themselves together before the eyes. The next words signify, **For yet is my life whole within me,** and give the reason why Saul asked the Amalekite to slay him. The story is at least plausible. It represents the king as deserted by his army, even to the last man, and with the Philistine cavalry and chariots in close pursuit. He is not mortally wounded, but, as giddiness prevents his escape, there is danger of his falling alive into the enemy's hand; and as they would probably not have killed him, but carried him in triumph through their cities, the way would still have been blocked against David's succession. The fear of this indignity would account for Saul's earnest appeal to the Amalekite to slay him, and, so requested, it seemed right to put him to death, instead of trying to carry him off to a place of safety. But all this was merely to keep up appearances, and in his heart he doubted not that David would regard it as a signal service that his enemy was put out of the way.

Ver. 10.—**After that he was fallen**; Hebrew, *after his fall;* that is, his defeat; for Saul was standing and supporting himself with his spear. **The crown,** probably, was a narrow band of gold encircling the royal helmet. **Bracelet.** We read of "bracelets" in Numb. xxxi. 50, in the enumeration of the spoil taken from the Midianites, and there too apparently they were the ornaments of warriors. In the Assyrian monuments chiefs are generally represented with ornaments upon their wrists and arms (see Layard, 'Nineveh,' etc., pl. 18).

Ver. 12.—**They mourned, and wept, and fasted.** The sight of Saul's royal insignia was clear proof of Israel's disaster; and this sorrow of David and his men shows how true their hearts were to their country, and how unbearable would have been their position had not the prudence of the Philistine lords extricated them from the difficulty

in which they had been placed by David's want of faith. But David had other reasons besides patriotism for sorrow. Personally he had lost the truest of friends, and even Saul had a place in his heart. For he would contrast with his terrible death the early glories of his reign, when all Israel honoured him as its deliverer from the crushing yoke of foreign bondage, and when David was himself one of the most trusty of his captains. Otto von Gerlach compares David thus weeping over the fall of his implacable enemy with David's Son weeping over Jerusalem, the city whose inhabitants were his bitter foes, and who not only sought his death, but delivered him up to the Romans, to be scourged and spitefully intreated, and slain upon the cross.

Ver. 15.—**Go near, and fall upon him.** This was no hasty sentence, for they had "fasted until even." And before pronouncing it David asks, "Whence art thou?" that is, he makes more full inquiry into his condition and previous doings. He knew that he was an Amalekite, and most probably had seen clearly enough that his whole story was false; but before deciding upon his fate, he desired fuller information as to the man's previous life. His question elicits from him that he was a subject of Saul. For the word "stranger" means a settler, who had withdrawn from his own country and joined himself to Israel. Moreover, it was the Amalekite's father who had done this, and probably he was one of many, who, finding their old nomad life too dangerous, had sought a home in the southern districts of Judah; but when the war broke out, the old instinct of these Bedaween made them follow the army for pilfer and trade in spoil. But as the son of a settler, the Amalekite owed by birth allegiance to Saul, and, should the occasion arise, was bound to render him loyal aid. Now, according to his own account, he had found Saul in no immediate danger of death, "for his life was still whole within him." Escape was at least possible with the Amalekite's aid, but he is eager to kill him. And David's question, "How wast thou not afraid . . . to destroy the Lord's anointed?" virtually means, "How wast thou not afraid to kill thy own king?" The Lord, that is, Jehovah, was no name of power to any outside the covenant people, nor in settling in Judæa did the Amalekites accept the national religion. But the words would show even to a stranger that Saul was Israel's lawful and consecrated king. Commentators, with strange perverseness, have found in these words an outbreak of selfishness on David's part, and have supposed that he wished to guard his own person against future treason by making a wholesome example. But this is both to misunderstand the examination of the culprit summed up in vers. 13, 14, and also to put aside all account of the deep and agonizing sorrow which was rending David's heart. What would have been an Englishman's feelings if news had come that we had lost, for instance, the battle of Waterloo, and if the fugitive who brought the information had said that he had killed the wounded commander-in-chief? In David's case, besides deep distress at the disaster which had befallen his country, there was personal grief for the death of Jonathan and of Saul's other sons, who were David's brothers-in-law; and the words really prove his loyalty to Saul himself. He was still Jehovah's anointed, whatever his conduct might have been; and we have found David on previous occasions actuated by the same generous respect for duty when clearly it was contrary to his own interests (see, for instance, 1 Sam. xxvi. 9). David put the wretch justly to death for meanly murdering one whom he might possibly have saved. And the man's very purpose was to suggest to David, in a covert way, that escape really was possible, but that he had made all things sure, and so deserved a large reward. As a matter of fact, he had not killed Saul, but had invented the story because, judging David by his own immoral standard, he had supposed that he would regard the crime as a valuable service.

Ver. 17.—**David lamented with this lamentation.** The Hebrew word for "lamentation" is *kinah*, a technical term for an elegy or poem commemorative of the dead. Thus Jeremiah wrote a *kinah* in memory of King Josiah (2 Chron. xxxv. 25); and there is little doubt that the "lamentations" there spoken of were a collection of dirges, in which probably this ode written by David held an honoured place. In ch. iii. 33, 34 we have a short *kinah* in Abner's honour, which possibly formed part of a longer poem, of which those two verses only are quoted as sufficing to prove, not only David's innocence, but also his indignation at Joab's foul deed. In both these places we have remains of David's secular poetry, and find it marked by the same strong emotion and the same sublimity of thought as distinguish his psalms. We observe also the nobleness of David's nature in his total silence concerning himself, and his generous eulogy, not of Jonathan only, but also of Saul. The mean envy and the implacable jealousy of the latter are no more remembered, and he sees in him, not the personal foe, but the brave king who has fallen in his country's cause.

Ver. 18.—**Also he bade them teach the children of Judah [the use of] the bow.** The old view is that given by the inserted words, and is well put by Ephrem Syrus in his

commentary upon the passage. He says that, as Israel's defeat at Gilboa was the presage of a long struggle, and as the Philistines had gained the victory there by their skill in archery, David used his utmost authority with his own tribe to get them to practise this art for their protection in future wars. This explanation would be plausible were it not that we have reason for believing that the Israelites were already skilful in the use both of the sling and the bow, in both of which the Benjamites especially excelled (1 Chron. xii. 2). The modern view is that given in the Revised Version, where the inserted words are "the song of" the bow. "The Bow" is thus the name of the elegy, taken from the allusion to Jonathan's skill in the use of that weapon (ver. 22; comp. 1 Sam. xviii. 4; xx. 36); and the meaning is that David made his own tribesmen, who were probably ill disposed to Saul and his family, learn this dirge, not so much for its preservation, as to make them give the fallen king due honour. Similarly Exod. iii. is called "The Bush" in Mark xii. 26. **The book of Jasher.** See on this book Josh. x. 13, where the Syriac Version calls it "The Book of Canticles," and understands by it a collection of national ballads commemorative of the brave deeds of Israelite heroes. Jasher literally means "upright," and the Book of Jasher would be equivalent to "Hero-book," the Hebrews always looking to the moral rather than the physical prowess of their great men.

Ver. 19.—**The beauty of Israel.** The word *zebi* means both "beauty" and also "the gazelle." Ewald takes it in the second sense, and explains it of Jonathan, "everywhere the first in courage, in activity, and speed; slender also and of well-made figure, and whose personal beauty and swiftness of foot in attack or retreat gained for him among the troops the name of 'the gazelle.' The Syriac Version also translates 'gazelle,'" but Ephrem says that the whole Israelite nation is meant, the flower of whose manhood lay slaughtered on Mount Gilboa. Which signification we take must really depend upon the meaning we attach to the words, "thy high place;" and these in the Authorized Version have nothing to refer to, and so become unmeaning. The Revised Version follows the Vulgate in taking Israel as a vocative, and renders, "Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places." The sense would thus be that given by Ephrem, Israel's glory being its "mighty" men or heroes, its warriors slain upon Mount Gilboa with their king. But ver. 25 makes it plain that the "high places" are Jonathan's, and not those of the nation; and the more correct rendering is "O beauty [or, 'gazelle'] of Israel, slain upon thy high places! how are the heroes fallen!" Thus Jonathan is certainly meant, and the heroes are the young prince and his father; and as the hunted antelope is said to return to its lair in the mountains, and there await its death, "gazelle" is probably the right rendering. In a dirge in honour of Saul and Jonathan we may be pretty sure that Jonathan would be referred to in its opening words, and the camp-name of his friend would bring back to David's mind many a brave feat wrought together, and many a pleasant hour of companionship in past years.

Ver. 20.—**Gath . . . Askelon.** By thus localizing the triumph, and bringing before the mind the thought of multitudes in these well-known places rejoicing with dance and song over the news of their victory, a more affecting picture is produced by the contrast with Israel's distress than could have been effected by mere generalizations. Probably, too, there was present in David's mind the remembrance of scenes which he had witnessed in these towns. In course of time, "Tell it not in Gath" became a proverb (Micah i. 10). **The daughters.** It is the custom in the East for the women to celebrate the prowess of the nation's warriors (Exod. xv. 20; 1 Sam. xviii. 6; Ps. lxviii. 11 Revised Version). **Uncircumcised.** For some unknown reason, this word is used as a term of reproach, especially of the Philistines (1 Sam. xiv. 6; xvii. 26).

Ver. 21.—**Fields of offerings;** Hebrew, *fields of terumoth.* The terumoth were heave offerings (Lev. vii. 14, 32), and the Vulgate, regarding these as thank offerings, translates, "Fields of firstfruits." The sense would thus be, "Fields of corn such as was used for heave offerings." Still, this gives us no suitable meaning; for Gilboa was not a place fit for the growth of corn; and Theodoret, in his version, has preserved a different reading, which is probably right, namely, "Ye fields and mountains of death." **The shield . . . is vilely cast away.** This rendering contains a classical idea derived from the Greeks and Romans, among whom it was a disgrace for a soldier to return without his shield. But this imputes personal cowardice to Saul—a reproach which is entirely undeserved; for he did not cast away his shield, but remained steadfast unto death. The right translation is, "For there the shield of heroes, yea, the shield of Saul, was defiled," stained, that is, with blood. We have no proof whatsoever that the Israelites had the same notion as the Greeks, and if they had, David would certainly not have put such a stigma upon the fallen king. [As though he had] not [been] anointed with oil. By rejecting the inserted words, we get the original, with all its simplicity, but with all its difficulty.

"There the shield of the heroes was defiled:
The shield of Saul not anointed with oil."

The interpretation put upon these words in the Authorized Version is taken from the Vulgate, no mean authority, but it is one which cannot be reconciled with the Hebrew, where it is not Saul, but his shield, which is referred to. It was a Jewish custom to anoint the shield with oil before a battle (Isa. xxi. 5), in order probably to make the missiles of the enemy glance off from it without injury. And bearing this in mind, David now contrasts the sad issue of the battle with the hopes with which the warrior had in old times gone forth to war. Then his shield glistened brightly; now it was defiled with blood. In the Revised Version the rendering, "vilely cast away," is retained, the Revisers not having perceived that "defiled," which they have placed in the margin, is absolutely required for the text by the contrast with "the shield not anointed with oil."

Ver. 22.—**From the blood of the slain.** In old time, Saul and Jonathan had been victorious warriors, who had returned from the battle-field stained with the blood of their enemies: from this battle they return no more, and their weapons have lost their old renown.

Ver. 23.—**Lovely and pleasant.** The words of the Authorized Version contain a beautiful antithesis, which, however, does not exist in the Hebrew, which celebrates the close union of father and son in life as well as in death.

"Saul and Jonathan, the lovely and pleasant,
Neither in their lives nor in their death were they divided."

Notwithstanding Saul's rash vow, Jonathan had ever been his father's faithful friend and companion, nor had his affection for David made him untrue to the ties of natural affection. And David generously commends his friend for thus acting.

Ver. 24.—**Ye daughters of Israel.** In old time, the women of Israel had celebrated Saul's triumphs (ver. 20), but now it is their sad office to bewail his death. And a touching reason is given for their sorrow. During Saul's reign the condition of the women had greatly improved. When a nation is in the miserable plight described in 1 Sam. xiii. 19—22, there is neither safety nor comfort for the weak; but when the strong arm of Saul had won freedom for Israel, the women were the first to reap the benefit, and "their scarlet clothing with delights," that is, their delightful or delicate clothing of bright colours and their golden ornaments, prove that the nation had made a great advance in prosperity and culture during the happier years of Saul's reign.

Ver. 26.—**Thy love to me was wonderful.** Never was there a purer friendship than that of Jonathan for David. It began just after the combat with Goliath, when the young prince, instead of seeing in David a rival, who had equalled his own feat of valour, took him to his heart, put upon him his own robe and armour, and thus presented him to the army as his friend and brother. Nor did his father's hatred of David, nor the knowledge that David was to inherit the kingdom, interfere with his love. He remained a dutiful son to his father, and accepted his inferior position with magnanimity, without once seeing in David cause for blame; and it surpassed the love of women, because, to requite their devotion, they look for protection and homage, the more delightful because it is paid by the strong to the weak. But here the lives of the two friends could not combine in one happy fusion of mutual union. Their hearts were bound together, but a hard fate, of which they were fully aware, made the ruin of the one the certain result of the happiness of the other. Nevertheless, Jonathan, with everything to lose, and David with everything to gain, remained true and loyal friends.

Ver. 27.—**How are the mighty fallen!** This lament, which occurs three times, is the central thought of the elegy. Glorious and noble in their past lives, the heroes had now fallen, not as Wolfe fell at Quebec, with the shout of victory in his ears, but in the lost battle. And David seeks relief for his distress in dwelling upon the sad contrast between the splendid victories which Saul had won for Israel when first chosen to be king, and the terrible defeat by which life and kingdom had now been lost.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—The facts of this section may be stated thus: 1. David having retired to Ziklag during the conflict between Israel and the Philistines, a messenger from the seat of war comes to pay him homage. 2. David, being as yet in ignorance of the event on Gilboa, and being impressed by the signs of mourning on the stranger, is prompted to ask whence he came. 3. Eager to ascertain further information, he learns from the Amalekite, not only that Saul and Jonathan were dead, but that, according to the

stranger's story, the former had been killed by the hand of the narrator. 4. In evidence of the truth of his story, the man produces Saul's crown and bracelet.

Waiting on Providence. David's retirement at Ziklag is to be regarded in connection with his well-established conviction that he was the chosen servant destined to occupy a foremost place in establishing the kingdom of God, and his persistent resolve not to take a single step of his own devising that would seem to force on the removal of Saul from the throne, in order to secure thereby his own elevation. Events had forced him into a quasi-public position as the rival of Saul, much as he disclaimed all rivalry; and now, in a foreign land, with a following not of his own seeking, and sensible that a crisis was at hand, he felt that he could do nothing but maintain a resolute inactivity, leaving the issue of impending events to Providence. A belief in Providence is very common; in word men express their dependence on it, and there are seasons in human life when, perhaps, all we can do is to wait on Providence. There is, however, a false, even wicked, waiting, which is but another name for idleness or fatalism, or vague looking for some lucky chance. Considering the case of David, we can trace some of the features of a true waiting on Providence. There is—

I. DEEP CONVICTION OF BEING DEVOTED TO A HOLY CAUSE. Life is devoted to a Divine, not a merely human, purpose. This was pre-eminently characteristic of David at this time. He was conscious of being personally identified with the working out of God's holy purpose towards mankind. He had passed out of the realm of self-seeking into the kingdom of God, and in public and private lived for God. Here lies the beginning of our right and privilege to wait on Providence. As our Lord's life was a nobler instance of consecration to a holy cause than was David's, so now ours may be an instance less conspicuous than his, though in our measure as real. It is possible for us to be one with Christ and his kingdom—absorbed, amidst even private and domestic life, with the purpose dear to his heart. Our life gains power and glory only in proportion as we are enabled to cherish a well-founded conviction that we are not living for merely temporal and material considerations, but for God, and in that sense are his chosen servants for specific purposes, as truly as was David when, in retirement at Ziklag, he knew he was the chosen King of Israel.

II. FREEDOM FROM SELFISH AND MALEVOLENT DESIRES. David desired not elevation for the sake of personal gratification; nor did he desire disaster for Saul that a great obstacle to his own advance might be put aside. Men consecrated to God are open to the subtle temptation of desiring events to move on so as to promote their own personal ease at the cost of much that is sacred. Under plea of greater usefulness, we may long for Providence to open a pathway for us, when, if motives are severely scrutinized, there is discovered a secret longing for personal gratification. The interlacings of human life are such that the displacement of one may be a pre-requisite to the freer action and wider usefulness of another; and one whose course is hampered by obstacles may almost unconsciously cherish the wish that some event may happen which, by the trouble and loss it brings to another, will promote his own interests. No one truly waits on Providence who cherishes this spirit. The man of business who, amidst difficulties, looks out eagerly for the downfall of others as a means of his own improved chance in competition, must not flatter himself that all along he has been quietly waiting on Providence. It often requires very high religious principle to labour on in obscurity, blessed by apparently few results, with a calm trust in God untainted by the desire that others, possibly less worthy in character, may be swept away by resistless events to make more room for ourselves. David's sentiments towards Saul, who stood in his pathway, are full of instruction to all.

III. RECOGNITION OF GOD'S CEASELESS CONTROL OVER OBSTACLES, AND OF HIS STEADILY UNFOLDING PURPOSES. Most probably David's followers, knowing as they did that Saul stood between him and the throne, often marvelled at his patient inactivity. But by a keener spiritual vision than they possessed, he recognized the perfect control of the God he served, and had amazing faith in the sure though slow unfolding of his purposes. Hence he could wait and be still. This quality has always entered largely into the character of those who have done great service in the interests of truth and righteousness. Our Saviour, during his earthly life, was a conspicuous instance. He was despised, rejected, of the people there were none with him, and events

seemed to the minds of his disciples (John xiv. 1; xvi. 19—22; Luke xxiv. 21) to be disastrous to his cause; and yet all through he never distrusted the Father, and in fulness of confidence could anticipate the results of a steady unfolding of the Divine purpose (John x. 16). So likewise we in secular and spiritual affairs may be said to wait on Providence when, in spite of difficulties that almost crush out our life, we, being conscious of oneness with Christ, stagger not in our belief in the all-controlling wisdom and power, and rest in the certainty of an order of things which is being directed towards the realization of the Divine purposes with which our entire life is identified. "Have faith in God." He slumbers not; he sleeps not; he works, and who shall let?

IV. READINESS FOR ACTION, REGULATED BY RESOLVE ONLY TO ACT IN HARMONY WITH HIGHEST LAW. David was ready to act whenever occasion offered; but he would not create occasion, and that because he saw that, in the continuance of Saul's life and reign, there was involved a great principle. For had he not been chosen by God? and was not God now allowing him to work out his own chastisement in harmony with far-reaching moral laws? David could only act in harmony with the Divine law which seemed to be expressed in Saul's sad life—namely, the removal of the unworthy by a natural process. There was a reserve of power in Christ during his life among men which could have accomplished startling results had he put it forth—just as David could have precipitated events by putting forth his strength against Saul—but he restrained himself. He was patient, and abstained from any action that would run counter to the moral and physical laws by which God was then governing mankind. On the same principle he now carries on his work in the world. Men do not understand him when they look for an extension of Christianity in violation of the laws of moral and social life which God has ordained. We are entrusted with more power than it is fit to put forth. Its exercise is to be regulated by regard to law. Especially in embarrassed circumstances, when it seems as though, in our business, our domestic affairs, or Church action, we could make marked advance by a vigorous effort in a given direction, does it become us to ask whether such action would be in harmony with the law of righteousness. During the sorrows of the Church (Luke xxi. 9—21), when it seemed as though active resistance by the sword was essential to self-preservation, the disciples were to be patient, and not run counter to the law of the gospel by endeavouring to maintain a kingdom of peace by carnal weapons. We must wait for God, be ready to act when action will harmonize with the holy laws of God's government.

V. JUDICIOUS USE OF TIME, AS JUSTIFIED BY THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR POSITION. David could not act against Saul; he could not benefit Israel by seeking to rid them of an unworthy ruler; but he could seek to remedy the evils caused by the Amalekites at Ziklag (1 Sam. xxx. 1, 26), and also discipline and organize his adherents (1 Chron. xii.), and so put himself and his men in a position to move towards Palestine when God opened the way. The disciples of Christ were powerless to act on the world for some weeks after his death, but they cherished faith in their Lord, and, till the time appointed by Providence came, they wisely kept together for prayer and mutual encouragement (Acts i. 14; cf. ii. 1—13). The Christian Church may believe itself called to enter on a great missionary enterprise in an at-present inaccessible country. It must not violate the laws of God by rushing into disaster under plea of promoting a good cause, but must gather up materials and become ready to enter in when a higher power opens the way. The same principle applies to our extension of business, our entering on new or wider professions, and especially if we are ambitious to consecrate ourselves to the work of the Christian ministry. Those who, after the example of David, wait on Providence, will find in the end that the ways of God, though apparently slow and often trying to patience, are indicated by the issue.

A subtle temptation. The Amalekite who came to David may be regarded as an instance of a quick-witted cunning man, observant of facts affecting the interests of others, and swiftly ingenious to work them up into a plausible form, ostensibly for the advantage of strangers, but really for his own advancement and material gain. He knew just enough of the outward development of the kingdom of God to see in events an opportunity for making them subservient to his own purposes. Like some of the present day, who are aliens to the spiritual Christian commonwealth, but who scruple

not to make a profession of some interest in it a means of attaining to social position and material prosperity, so did he pay honour to the chosen servant of God for what he could gain thereby. But the main point in his conduct centres on David. He came practically in the form of a tempter to one who had long been under the force of strong temptation to desire and seek the removal from position, if not from life, of one who had been both an ungrateful enemy and an obstacle to the carrying out of his life's mission. We have seen in our comments on the First Book of Samuel how bravely David had withstood all the influences which urged to action against Saul. He had triumphed, and was now calmly waiting on Providence at Ziklag. But now the hand of Providence was being manifested without any action of his own. For does not this stranger declare the great news that the miserable king was fallen; that by an act of his own he had saved Israel from the shame of his dying directly under Philistine hands; and that the crown—the symbol of authority—was now within David's own camp? Is there not here, then, release from the severe tension of self-restraint which for years had been put on thought and deed? Now surely David may breathe freely, and even bless God and take courage! Gratitude to such a newsbearer was surely due, and a sobered gladness may legitimately be cherished! Let us, then, consider the nature of subtle temptations.

I. THEY MAY SPRING FROM UNLOOKED-FOR SOURCES, AND SO TAKE US OFF OUR GUARD. Who would have supposed that an Amalekite—a man whose tribe had been in conflict with David—would have appeared before him as bearer of news most momentous as affecting his future career? The apparent disinterestedness of one who could not be a partisan would render David open to the natural effect of the tidings on an ordinary heart. So in our life subtle temptations, calling us to no ostensible act of wrong, spring up we know not how, and take us by surprise. It may be an evil thought is suddenly obtruded in a line of ordinary thought; or a friend hints at a possibility without suggesting a deed or a feeling; or a set of facts start before the observing faculty, conveying, by their convergence on a matter of special interest to us, an impulse to cherish a definite class of feelings which, when examined in cool moments, is found to be essentially unholy. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation," was an exhortation based on a profound knowledge of the manifold avenues along which subtle promptings to evil may enter into and possess the soul.

II. THEY MAY NOT CALL TO ANY DEFINITE ACTION. In this case David was even relieved, by the fact of the tidings, from the pressure that had so long been on him to take action for his own advancement. Whatever appeal there was in the temptation was simply to the seat of feeling. The constitutional weakness of man is to feel satisfaction when an enemy is removed, and, though conventional custom may lead us to say that that satisfaction is tempered by sadness, it is to be feared that in this there is more of form than reality. Many men would not see any temptation in this narrative. They cannot see that character lies in feeling cherished, more than in acts that manifestly violate some law of God or man. Incitements to deeds of open vice do not form the most dangerous evils of our lot. Satan ruins more by undermining than by direct assault. The weakening of the inner seat of purity and kindliness alone need not involve any deed or word known to our fellow-creatures.

III. THEY MAY PRESENT THEMSELVES UNDER COVER OF CONSIDERATIONS OF EXPEDIENCY. Judging from the standard that governs the lives of most men, the Amalekite imagined that his story would gratify David for two reasons—one, that hopes long cherished of being of service to Israel were soon to be realized; the other, that Saul was set aside by other hands than his own. There can be no doubt but that, in proportion to the strength of his hope of some day being the means of raising Israel from the sorrows which had come by the misrule of Saul, so would be the tendency to rejoice in its speedy realization; and this he knew would be legitimate. Hence, although, as a kindly good man, he might well abstain from cherishing any secret satisfaction at the disaster which had befallen Saul, yet, in view of the beneficial issues about to flow from the event, would there not be valid ground for so doing? Was not the welfare of the nation of more importance than sentiment for an individual? And could he not distinguish between malicious joy, and satisfaction in the rising of public good out of personal disaster? It is thus easy for one nation to find, by a swift process of thought, plausible pretext for satisfaction in the calamities of another nation. Possibly our

Church life is not free from the subtle temptation, when we observe, in the decay of rival parties or denominations, a probable increase to the strength of our own. Business men may argue that benefits to society arise from the downfall of houses trading on an insecure basis, and so cover the real character of the personal satisfaction entertained. We need to be much on our guard when the reasoning powers are stimulated to justify sentiments which in their simple nakedness would be instinctively abhorred by a very holy and loving nature. In moral matters the first judgments are safest.

IV. THEY DO NOT REVEAL OR SUGGEST THE IMMEDIATE AND REMOTE CONSEQUENCES OF YIELDING. The point of the temptation, as it fell on David's nature, was simply to develop a certain feeling of satisfaction that, as he could not and would not raise a hand against Saul, some one else, in a natural course of events, had been permitted by Providence to do so, and thus had secured the opening of the door for which he had been waiting. Now, this feeling, so natural to many men, so commonly cherished under kindred circumstances, even though a human weakness, was simply a private transitory sentiment passing over the inner life, and forming no feature in conduct. It seemed to begin and end there and then. Its presence, if permitted, was a trifle, and inflicted no injury on society. Thus, while other temptations on presentation startle the ordinary mind by being associated at once with damage to social position, or to family or nation, temptations of this class do not reveal or suggest at the time their consequences. Of course, evil is to be resisted as evil apart from effects; and a pure mind will immediately detect the essentially immoral nature of any internal incitement to transitory impurity of sentiment. But it is easier to many to detect and resist temptations of the other class. No doubt every deterioration of feeling does issue in disastrous consequences, as surely as do open acts of vice, only the subtle process escapes notice. Consequently many good men, forgetting this, often entertain suggested transitory feelings of evil, which, did they but duly consider the necessary deterioration of their entire life which thereupon sets in, they would carefully watch against and resist.

PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. We ought to act at all times under the influence of the fact that at no hour are we free from the possibility of being subjected to very subtle temptations. 2. The more cultivated and tried our piety, the more likely is it that the trials of our religious purity will come in forms not suggestive of open acts of transgression. 3. Whenever the reasonings of expediency come in to justify the indulgence of sentiments of which doubt may have arisen as to their moral quality, we may safely be suspicious of fallacy, and so should close the debate at once. 4. It is very possible that a long season of persistent temptation to actual wrong, as in the case of David for years past, may culminate in a temptation more severe, because more difficult of detection, and which, if yielded to, would virtually undo the work of years of resistance. Therefore we need to be specially watchful when the end of our trials is near.

Vers. 11—27.—The facts of the section are: 1. Having become assured, through the testimony of the Amalekite, of the defeat of Israel in the death of Saul and Jonathan, David and his men spent the rest of the day in mourning. 2. On the morrow David examines the Amalekite as to the particulars of Saul's death, and being shocked at the sin and shame of slaying the Lord's anointed, he condemns the man to death. 3. Being left to his own reflections on the sad event which had happened to Israel, he composes an elegy, as an expression of his own feelings and for the use of Israel, in which he refers in impassioned language to (1) the greatness of the calamity; (2) its possible humiliation and shame to Israel should it become freely known in Philistine cities, and its future mournful associations with the locality in which it occurred; (3) the better qualities of Saul and Jonathan in their relation to their country and to each other; (4) the reason for sorrow even among the *non*-fighting members of the community, as they reflect on the improved personal comforts incident to Saul's reign; and (5) his special friendship with Jonathan, as the joy and solace of bygone years. The teaching of these facts and expressions of feeling may be summarized by embracing the public act of mourning for Saul and the poetic lament under one conception, and unfolding the various truths thus contained. But, in order to secure more consecution in dealing with those two items, we may consider first the teaching

embodied in the conduct of the Amalekite in its contrast with that of David; and this can perhaps be best expressed by setting forth a contrast of states of mind. Hence notice—

Secularity and spirituality of mind in contrast. The conduct of the Amalekite was very natural, as we find men in general. So far as he had a policy, it would have commended itself to multitudes. Observant, shrewd, and on the alert for an advantage, he evidently was well aware of the feud between Saul and David; and knowing how of late David had smitten his own countrymen, he judged it more prudent to conciliate him by performing an act conducive to his elevation to a throne, than by simply purloining jewels on a battle-field. The story concocted about his actually slaying Saul was told with the utmost self-complacence, as though no one could doubt the mercifulness and the utility of the act; and no one could have been more amazed than himself when David represented the act as most shocking, and condemned him to die for such wicked temerity. On the other hand, David's conduct is the reverse of what would have been generally pursued. For Saul had been a most bitter and unrelenting enemy; had charged him with crimes most heinous; had driven him into a painful exile; had returned generosity by increased hatred; and was, as David knew, the only living obstacle to his return to Israel and elevation to the throne. And yet, not only had David been unwilling to do a single deed that might be construed as tending to weaken Saul's legitimate authority, but he now even deplores the reported action of this his would-be foreign helper, and charges him with having committed, on his own showing, a most shocking crime. Now, the contrast of the conduct and views of the two men is to be found in the utter dissimilarity of their respective habitual states of mind. The one was *intensely secular*, and the other *intensely spiritual*. Consider—

I. IN WHAT SECULARITY AND SPIRITUALITY OF MIND RESPECTIVELY CONSIST, AND HOW THEY EXPRESS THEMSELVES. 1. *The one consists mainly in the tendency to look at things out of their spiritual relations, and the other to look at them in those relations.* As a matter of fact, we know that, consequent on the existence of a supreme Being and a moral government which he exercises over spiritual beings, the whole universe is comprised of two distinct yet inter-related spheres—the material and perishable on the one hand, and the spiritual and imperishable on the other. As men necessitated to work out the first lines of our destiny under material conditions, and therefore in incessant contact with the perishable, we are, through the bluntness of our superior perceptions, superinduced by sin, prone to regard all events as pertaining to our fleeting earthly experience. This is secularity of mind—the mind that sees only the lower side of man's life, and takes no note of the higher destiny of which he is capable. On the other hand, spirituality of mind, while recognizing the value and Divine source of our common lot as creatures of struggle under material conditions, perceives the reality of the higher invisible sphere, and estimates all things in the lower according to its relation to the great facts and dominating laws of the higher. The Amalekite looked on Saul as simply a man belonging to a mundane order of things, in which other men were striving for the mastery with him. David saw the existence, alongside the mundane order, of an invisible kingdom, and he recognized in Saul an embodiment of a Divine principle—an institution of Divine authorization. For was he not the Lord's anointed? Was there not more in his existence than was comprised in range of Amalekite vision? Here lies the dividing line between the two great classes of men. The one sees a passing age, with its wants and struggles appropriate to that age; the other sees an invisible and enduring spiritual order, and that man is to be viewed in relation to that order. The one, therefore, is carnal, restricted in range, utilitarian, and in league with practices that "pay;" the other is religious, wide as infinity in range, pervaded by conscious supremacy of holy principles, and in alliance with only what is pure and pleasing before God. 2. In accordance with their essential nature, they will respectively manifest themselves at times, *the one in a use of sacred things for personal gain, and the other in self-abnegation out of reverence for what is Divine.* It was the purely secular mind of the Amalekite that led to his endeavour to make gain out of the death of the Lord's anointed, and that, too, without supposing that he was doing anything remarkable. It was David's high-toned spirituality that led him to ignore all the wrongs he had experienced at the hand of Saul, and to pass by the faults and

follies of the unhappy monarch, and, instead of finding pleasure in prospect of his own coming promotion, to feel as though in the act done by the Amalekite a violence had been perpetrated against the most holy of institutions. So has it been in all ages, and is still. Men can barter religious professions for gain; or calmly and irreverently handle sacred subjects as though of common import; or behave in the presence of sacred realities as though treading on unhallowed ground. Judas, Simon Magus, the revilers at the cross, have their counterparts in those who seek gain by complying with the will of godless authorities, professional zealots for Christianity, and cynics who make sport of sacred things. 3. But, also, *it is a tendency which in each case gives colour to the entire life.* It was not a new thing for the Amalekite thus to think and feel concerning Saul and his relation to Israel and David; for all along Saul had been to him simply one of many rulers among men, and the conflict of the past years had been only a trial of human strength and skill. And, also, David's profound reverence for the Divine idea in Saul's kingship, and his faith in the reality of a Divine purpose for men being incorporated with it, had permeated his life during the weary days of exile. The two men were always governed by their respective tendencies. The one life was narrowed, rendered gross and hard by persistent secularity; the other was broadened, refined, and beautified by constant communion with the unseen and eternal. The whole domestic and private as well as public life of men is affected for the worse or better as they are secular or spiritual in tone. Spirituality is favourable to every phase of human experience. Secularity means debasement. Were society pervaded by so pure, unselfish, and spiritually perceptive a temper as was David's, and more so, David's greater Son, how smoothly would the machinery of life move on, and what music would there be in its roll!

II. THE FINAL RESULT OF INDULGING IN THESE OPPOSITE STATES OF MIND. As a fact, the Amalekite's zeal brought him disappointment—death. David's fine perception of the sanctities of life, his habitual reverence for Divine institutions as seen in all his relations to Saul, his consciousness that God was establishing his own kingdom in his own way,—all this issued in elevation to a position where spirituality of mind could be exercised for the greater good of Israel. Prophetic is this of the end of all secularity and spirituality. The one must end in disappointment—in loss of those things which it was thought would be gained, and even in judicial separation from the pure in heart (Matt. xvi. 26; vii. 21—23). The other is an education by which we become qualified to rise in the kingdom of God, to exercise over others a higher and wider influence than otherwise could be obtained (1 John iii. 2, 3; Matt. xxv. 23; 1 Tim. vi. 11, 12; Rom. iii. 21).

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. It is a dangerous thing to form our estimate of what others may do from the ideas and feelings that govern our own actions. The Amalekite could not conceive of any one not rejoicing in the death of a foe. 2. Dull perception of spiritual realities is a real impoverishment of life, as truly as is an affliction of blindness or deafness. 3. Regard for Divine institutions is to be cultivated irrespective of the imperfect character of men who act in connection with them. 4. The exposure of a base spirit is sure to be the result of a direct judgment of the Son of David when we are called to stand before him. 5. Any attempt to court the favour of the chosen King in Zion by deeds and spirit not in harmony with the holy laws of his kingdom, will inevitably end in banishment from his presence (Luke vi. 46; xiii. 25—27).

Sorrow for the miscarriage of life's great purpose. Contrary to what ordinary men would have imagined, the news of the death of Saul at once diverted David's thoughts from his own personal advantage accruing therefrom, and at once developed an extraordinary sorrow. It must not be concluded that the setting apart of the rest of the day for purposes of mourning (vers. 11, 12) was simply compliance with custom in paying outward respect for the memory of a deceased monarch and his son. No doubt such an act could be decently performed by one who saw in the disaster an occasion of personal joy; indeed, a heartless rival, who cared alone for his own elevation to the throne, would, as a matter of mere policy, encourage the observance of tokens of public sorrow; for history testifies to the presence of a large element of hypocrisy in the elaborate manifestations of grief that have characterized the obsequies of rival rulers. But David was not a man of ceremony; and the elegy penned for the expression of his

own anguish of spirit—so tender and pathetic as it is—must be accepted as the interpreter of the act of public mourning in David's camp. None but a deeply earnest and sincere man could thus write of the woe which came to men on the heights of Gilboa. Tested by the principles that govern the secular mind, the elegy is perfectly unaccountable, especially considering Saul's long-continued persecution of David and the open pathway to the throne which the defeat at Gilboa laid open to him. But there was a wonderful spiritual unity in David's life; and to those who have followed our interpretation of his conduct, and motives as set forth elsewhere (see 'Pulpit Commentary,' 1 Samuel, Homiletics, pp. 365, 415, 482, 513), there can be no difficulty in perceiving in this public act, and in the elegy, a culmination of the intense and painfully loving interest with which he all along had watched the downward course of the unhappy monarch. There were, indeed, several items entering into his sorrow. He thought of the kingless nation, and mourned for the bereaved "house of Israel" (ver. 12). He thought of the chosen people, distinguished above all nations as the channels of a great and merciful Divine purpose to the world, and he mourned for "the people of the Lord." He could not forget the man whose love to him had been "wonderful, passing the love of women," and he wept for Jonathan (vers. 12, 26). But, most of all, he thought of one great in position, great in responsibilities, who once had set before him the possibilities of a grand destiny in connection with the unfolding of God's merciful purpose to mankind; and he mourned with an overwhelming sorrow that he had fallen on the field a defeated, ruined man, covered with the shame and misfortunes of a woeful miscarriage of his life's mission.

I. FAILURE IN LIFE'S MISSION IS THE GREAT DISASTER OF LIFE. David knew that death came to all men, and that the removal from earth of one who has figured before our vision disturbs the whole current of feeling. Had Saul died under some circumstances David would have sorrowed, but the pang of this his sorrow would not have been experienced. He had known Saul as the chosen of God, equipped for high enterprise in the kingdom of God, and in a position to prepare the pathway for the coming of a mightier king. Splendid opportunities arose; strong influences were brought to bear; but all in vain. Life's mission failed. The noble work was not done. Fine abilities were wasted. Dishonoured, abandoned by God, covered with shame—the shame of an abortive life—he passed away. Simple death would have been glory and blessing as compared with this. What was true of Saul may be true of others and, unhappily, is too often the fact. God has a purpose in the life of every human being, and our business in this world is to comprehend the nature of that purpose and realize it in our experience. It is an unutterable disaster if, knowing why we are here, and possessing all the appliances and means of carrying out God's will, we nevertheless pass away as unprofitable servants (Matt. xxv. 26—30). There are instances of frequent occurrence in which splendid abilities, robust health, excellent social position, fine openings for usefulness, are all wasted by the dominance of unholy passions, and men have to witness the sad spectacle of early promise issuing in a dishonoured name and premature grave. Those who believe that all who are born amidst Christian influences are sent into the world to work out for themselves and others a pure and blessed destiny, and that this can only be secured by our personally falling in the line of Christ's purpose and becoming one with him in the deepest spiritual sense, as Saul was expected to fall in the line of God's great purpose to man through Israel, and live in its spirit,—such persons recognize a terrible miscarriage of life when men live, it may be, in ease and wealth and respectability, but alien in heart to Christ, and then die in the same condition. They have not laid up treasure for the future. Nations and communities are also charged with their respective life-work, and it is a fearful thing when, through unfaithfulness, their mission is abortive. Jeremiah's wail over Judah (Jer. ix.), our Saviour's lamentation over Jerusalem, and his prospective sorrow over the Church at Laodicea (Rev. iii. 14—20), were based on the same view of miscarriage of life's purpose as was David's lament over Saul.

II. The sorrow felt for a miscarriage of life's purpose is DEEPENED BY THE APPREHENSION OF ITS EFFECT ON THE REPUTATION AND PROGRESS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. Saul was not simply a monarch maintaining his own special interests as one among the many kings of the earth; he was regarded by David as, and in fact was, the official representative of the theocracy—the kingdom of God in its early stage of development.

It was the pride and joy of devout men that Israel's king governed a people chosen of God for the assertion and exposition of principles superior to those which obtained in the heathen nations. The pledge of prosperity had been given to the chosen people, and their history had demonstrated to the heathen again and again that the God of Israel was indeed supreme. The uncircumcised Philistines could not know, or if they knew could not appreciate, the spiritual conditions on which national prosperity was guaranteed; but they would be quick to boast over Israel's adversity, and to magnify their idols to the detriment of Jehovah's fame. "Tell it not in Gath" was David's spontaneous expression of the increased anguish of his spirit on account of the failure of Saul's life and work. The possibility of the holy kingdom of God among men being a subject of ridicule and blasphemy—the thought of God's honour being for a moment treated with scorn by the ignorant heathen—this was trouble upon trouble. A kindred sorrow falls on all true hearts when, by the wrecked character and abortive lives of professors of religion, or workers in connection with God's holy kingdom, there arises the possibility of the scoffing world bringing the name and interests of Christianity into reproach; for every blasphemous word and triumph of joy against Christ is regarded by the loving soul as another thrust into his side. Irreligious men can little know the anguish of true Christians whenever occasion is given, by the inconsistencies and apostasies of life, to dishonour the sacred Name.

III. THE DUE RECOGNITION OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THIS DISASTER DEPENDS ON A SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION OF THE GRAVITY OF OUR EARTHLY LIFE. No doubt many astute men regarded David's great sorrow as a sheer extravagance. Nothing in the event, from their point of view, could justify such a wail over a bitter foe and ostensible rival. The answer to that reflection on the reasonableness of David's sorrow lies in this—that he looked on Saul's life upon its Godward side, and saw beneath the political and merely terrene aspect a spiritual issue, which issue, affecting as it did all that is most great and momentous in man, threw all else into the background. It is only a spiritual perception—a penetration beneath the temporal and material interests to the invisible and eternal relations and possibilities of human existence—that can enable one thus to judge, feel, and act (1 Cor. ii. 15). Habitual contact with the visible and perishable unfits men for recognizing the true solemnity of life, and the subtle elements that enter into the determination of human destiny. Nominally many may adopt our Lord's view of the bearing of man's present spiritual state upon his future condition (Matt. xx. 1—16; xxv. 1—13, 31—46), and yet practically place a successful issue of life in the acquisition of knowledge and wealth, and the development of humanly related virtues. Such persons are disposed to think Christ rather hard and unreasonable in pronouncing the man to be a "fool" (Luke xii. 20) who congratulated himself on the fact of his social and material prosperity. For the same reason they deem Christians narrow and uncharitable when they indicate great anxiety for the future condition of those who, while outwardly prosperous and, on the man-ward side, virtuous, pass away without affording evidence of that renewal of nature by which alone they can come into absorbing sympathy with Christ, and cause the whole tenor of their life to flow in the line of Christ's mission to the world. Saul's failure on the spiritual side was seen by David to lie at the root of his general failure; and those only who estimate modern issues of life by the supreme test of the spiritual, can see in many lives, otherwise excellent, a woeful miscarriage of life's main purpose and consequent irretrievable disaster (1 Cor. i. 18, 19; ii. 6—10; 2 Cor. v. 17, 20, 21; Phil. iii. 8, 9, 18, 19).

The incidental teachings of a great disaster. All events have a teaching function in the Divine economy, and we are exhorted to extract good out of evil. It is possible that in the general evolution of human interests the immediate, if not remote, effects of disastrous events are counterbalanced by the contribution they make to the sum total of instruction, by means of which God ultimately elevates the world in purity and peace. The sad issue of Saul's life was doubtless a blessing to David, in that its solemn lessons gave a tone to his subsequent course, which enabled him to withstand many of the perils of position; and we, studying the words of David when the sorrow was fresh upon him, may, in addition to what has already been noticed, gain instruction on several matters which, in its helpfulness to our life, shall illustrate the truth that under the all-controlling hand of God "all things work together for good."

I. As there is a disposition on the part of irreligious men to find delight in the sins and frailties of Christians, and also to find therein excuse for their own impiety, it BEHOVES ALL WHO HAVE THE NAME AND CAUSE OF CHRIST AT HEART TO BE VERY GUARDED IN THEIR REFERENCES TO THE SINS AND MISERIES OF BACKSLIDERS AND THE ERRING. The sins of professors are to be the subject of silent sorrow, and, when possible, of Church discipline; not to be paraded before the world, as though such free publicity were a due chastisement for their unfaithfulness. The spirit that can readily go and "tell it in Gath" is not the spirit of Christ. The evident pleasure which some feel in making known the shortcomings of professedly religious men, can only spring from a desire to excuse their own indifference, or from a wicked Phariseeism, or from a defective sense of the sacredness of the Name of Christ. Where there is sincere sorrow there will be tenderness, and the family instinct will avoid the publicity of family misfortunes. Christians! weep and pray, but "tell it not in Gath" (Jer. ix. 1—3, 17—19).

II. THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH REVEALS WHAT SERIOUS INJURY HAS BEEN CAUSED TO RELIGION BY THE IMPERFECT LIVES OF ITS PROFESSED FRIENDS. The "uncircumcised" did know of Saul's disaster, and it made them strong in hostility to the chosen race, and at the same time weakened the hearts of the men of Israel. Saul damaged the cause of righteousness and mercy as well as his own personal reputation. Too often has Christ been wounded in the house of his friends (Zech. xiii. 6). Considering the many miscarriages of those who were professedly engaged in the furtherance of the kingdom of God on earth, it is a marvel that the progress of Christianity has been what it has. They little think how much they retard the final supremacy of Christ who, by a Saul-like unfaithfulness and degeneracy, encourage antagonism among his foes, and produce paralysis among his friends.

III. MOMENTOUS EVENTS BRING OUT THE FACT THAT CULTURE IS OF SECONDARY IMPORTANCE TO RELIGION. David, as is seen from his varied compositions in the Psalms, and also from this elegy, was a man of fine æsthetic taste. He rejoiced in the exquisite beauties of nature. The dewy slopes of Gilboa, and the fat pastures of its valleys, teemed with objects of delight to his cultured taste; but now that his spiritual yearnings were unsatisfied, now that the holy Name of God was being dishonoured, all considerations of beauty in nature, and joy in the higher culture of life, must be utterly set aside. Let Gilboa become a waste, let the joy of local associations perish, since the religious side of life is languishing! The scenes amidst which our loved ones die are often cherished in the memory with mournful pleasure, and we seem to invest them with a more tender loneliness because there the joy of our life fell asleep. But when the smitten heart bleeds over a shipwrecked character—a life failing in its noblest purpose—then the local associations have no charm; blight and desolation are felt to be the most appropriate accompaniments of an unrelieved sorrow. So truly do great tragic events in life bring out the fact that our religious nature will assert itself as above all mere culture and æsthetic refinement.

IV. A WISE AND TENDER HEART CAN, while overwhelmed with sorrow because of spiritual disaster, APPRECIATE THE VALUE OF HUMANLY RELATED VIRTUES. We have made a distinction between virtues that have simply a human aspect, and those qualities which enter into the essence of religion and are Godward in aspect. David's great grief was that, so far as his religious life and work were concerned, Saul was degenerate and practically ruined. But, as a relief to his anguish on this account, he turns toward the manly virtues of the deceased king, and with exquisite tenderness dwells on them. His courage, his love for Jonathan, and his benefactions to his subjects (vers. 22—24), afford some solace for a heart that can find none in contemplating the spiritual mission of the king. *Nil mortuis nisi bonum.* He could not, from very sorrow and reverence for the most sacred things, speak of the sad miscarriage of his life's work; and this reference to the good of his life was really an expression of deep affection, and at the same time an indication of a sorrow secret and unutterable. Christians who, with the light that Christ gives, see spiritual ruin where others see only, and rejoice in, humanly related virtues, are not blind to the manifest virtues of men; and often, in their silent sorrow for the absence of spiritual saving qualities, they can speak with subdued emotion of the charms and attractions of personal character.

V. THERE IS A WONDERFUL CHARM IN FILIAL PIETY MAINTAINED UNDER MOST ADVERSE

CIRCUMSTANCES. "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided" (ver. 23). Yes; every heart says "yes." We feel the charm of Jonathan's fidelity to his poor erring father even to the bitter end. David's appreciation of this is, under the circumstances (1 Sam. xx. 1—4), most beautiful. Jonathan knew that David was a holy man, vilely treated by his own father, and destined to ascend the throne; he loved him with a tenderness passing the love of women, and was under provocation again and again to revolt from his father's rule; but with patience, tenderness, and faithfulness, he stood by him to the end, lamenting his sins, restraining his evil propensities, and variously striving to lessen the evils of his government. The filial instinct prevailed. Piety purified and strengthened it. A lesson here for sons—the more valuable in proportion as parents may be irreligious or imperfect. It is a noble thing for a son to watch over, care for, and tenderly restrain the tendencies of an erring father. To some it is given to have that for their special work. Remember Jonathan.

VI. IT IS POSSIBLE TO CHERISH VERY TENDER AND HELPFUL FRIENDSHIPS EVEN AMIDST THE PRESSURE OF LIFE. The friendship of David and Jonathan, begun in days of peace, ceased not during all the subsequent seasons of toil and separation. Doubtless David had often been comforted in his solitude and wanderings by the remembrance of that true heart which beat in sympathy with his own, and Jonathan would be upheld in his delicate and painful task of helping and restraining an errant parent by the assurance that David was not unmindful of him before the mercy-seat. The tendency of the hurry and pressure of daily business is to crush out the finer and more tender susceptibilities of the heart, and rob men of the consolations and elevating influence of wise and holy personal friendships. For self-culture, for solace, for spiritual fellowship, and for the acquisition of moral strength, it is well for all men to cherish a few well-selected friendships.

VII. THERE IS A BLESSED INFLUENCE ATTENDING THE CHERISHING OF HALLOWED MEMORIES. David's hallowed memories of Jonathan were to him for years to come a means of blessing. His life was more sober and tender and spiritual for the sweet memory of one so lovable and dear. The language of vers. 25, 26 was the indication of a permanent element in David's subsequent life. We suffer loss when beautiful characters are taken away, and we find a gain. For though visible communion is no more, the tender memories are more constant, and touch more closely the deeper springs of life.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

The Hebrew monarchy. (Introductory.) The Hebrew monarchy holds a prominent place in the development of the purpose of God to establish his kingdom upon earth. In accordance with this purpose Abraham became the father of a *family*, distinguished beyond others by the knowledge of the true God and the hope of his promised salvation; the family grew into a *nation*, and its government was constituted, by the agency of Moses, a *theocracy* (a word first used by Josephus, 'Contra Apion,' ii. 17); and the theocracy (impaired in its practical influence during the period of the judges) was united with a *monarchy*, which commenced with Saul, acquired strength and splendour under David, culminated in the glory of Solomon, and soon afterwards declined to its fall; leaving behind it, when it fell, the undying hope of its restoration under "the King Messiah" (1 Sam. ii. 10). Consider—

I. ITS THEOCRATIC FOUNDATION. Although a king was sought in a wrong spirit, his appointment was not incompatible with the principles of the theocracy. What were these principles? 1. *Its supreme Head*, Lawgiver, and Judge was JEHOVAH; its *subjects* were his chosen people Israel. Having revealed himself to them as the one living and true God, and redeemed them out of bondage, he made a covenant with them, and became to them all, and more than all, that a human king was to other nations (Exod. xv. 18; 1 Sam. xii. 12; Zeph. iii. 15). "He raised and consolidated his universal rule into one of a special nature" (Kurtz, 'Hist. of the Old Covenant,' iii. 107). The *personal relation* thus formed between him and his people was designed to maintain among them his exclusive worship, to keep them separate from the idolatrous and corrupt nations around them, and to make them "a kingdom of priests and a holy

nation." 2. *Its laws* were his revealed will, pertaining to the entire circle of civil and religious life. "The commonwealth of the Jews, different in that from all others, was an absolute theocracy; nor was there, nor could there be, any difference between the commonwealth and the Church" (Locke). 3. *Its sanctions* were his favour and displeasure, blessing and curse; reward or punishment of a *temporal* nature following obedience or disobedience, and administered by properly constituted authorities or a special and extraordinary providence. 4. *Its officers* were his appointed servants, whose part it was to declare his will and administer his laws, and who (whether priests, prophets, judges, elders, or princes) were themselves subject to them (Michaelis, 'Laws of Moses,' i. 190; Warburton, 'Div. Leg.,' v. 3; Fairbairn, 'Typology,' ii. 443). In harmony with these principles a human king was appointed (as already provided for, Deut. xvii. 15—20); not, indeed, to reign independently of the Divine King, or according to his own will and pleasure, but as his viceroy and minister. "To the theocracy was added the monarchy, not to subvert or gradually supersede it, but to fulfil the wants of the age by its side. The pure theocracy became a Basileo-theocracy" (Ewald). "The Hebrews under the reign of David clearly recognized the theocratic nature of their constitution" (Jahn).

II. ITS PRACTICAL EFFICIENCY. The condition of the people rendered the regal office necessary; and it served (especially during the reign of David) to: 1. Gather them into *closer union*, and so consolidate and increase their strength. Nothing was more urgently needed. Their common faith (or rather unbelief) and the previously existing officers of the theocracy were insufficient to maintain the practical union and co-operation of the tribes. 2. *Defend* them against their adversaries, by whose attacks their very existence was imperilled. It secured their safety and independence, and it extended their dominion "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates," as it had been promised of old (Gen. xv. 18). 3. Establish *order* and the more regular and impartial administration of *justice*. In the days of the judges "every man did that which was right in his own eyes," being subject to no proper restraint by a king, as responsible "minister of God and avenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Rom. xiii. 4). 4. Promote the *main purpose* of their national calling, viz. to receive and conserve "the oracles of God" (Rom. iii. 2) for the ultimate benefit of mankind. "By the constitution of the Hebrew government the civil and municipal statutes of the nation were not only founded upon their *religious belief*, but they were also so framed as to have the support of that belief for their main object" (Russell, 'Connection,' bk. xviii.). And this object was more effectually accomplished under the circumstances by means of the monarchy than it would otherwise have been.

III. ITS MANIFEST IMPERFECTION. Like other institutions dependent for their worth upon the conduct of weak and sinful men, it was marked, in its actual working, by numerous defects; being: 1. Administered in a manner that did *not fully accord with its nature and design*. "Whate'er is best administered is best." The authority and power entrusted to the king were frequently used in self-will and for self-exaltation. Hence the misery in which the reign of Saul (really an autocracy) terminated. And even the administration of David, although distinguished by surpassing ability and fidelity, was by no means faultless. 2. Weakened and marred by the *personal crimes* of the monarch. David's transgressions exerted an injurious influence, not only upon himself and his family, but also upon his government. They sowed the seeds of insubordination and rebellion. 3. Often employed for *the oppression and corruption of the people*. "Its tendency was to absolutism." The magnificence of Solomon was largely based upon oppressive taxation and forced labour; and, instead of opposing and excluding, he suffered and indulged idolatrous practices—most fatal of all things to the throne and nation. 4. Liable to *frequent changes and gradual deterioration*. Even a good monarch could not hold his office long "by reason of death;" and the hereditary principle did not insure a successor of like character. With the secession of the ten tribes the early splendour of the monarchy became dim; and its course, with intervals of glorious revival, was downward. It virtually terminated with the Captivity (Hos. iii. 4, 5); after which the civil government was subject to a foreign heathen power, and the theocracy survived chiefly as a political hierarchy; at length "the Romans came and took away their place and nation."

IV. ITS TYPICAL SIGNIFICANCE. It was not only a stage of preparation for the

kingdom of the Messiah, but also a *type* or divinely ordained foreshadowing of it. 1. It rendered the conception thereof *more definite and vivid.* "With the establishment of the kingly power, a new class of ideas was brought into view and developed, which for want of the requisite material groundwork could not be previously illustrated; and it now became possible to descry from a distance and to announce in appropriate and intelligible terms the coming kingdom of the Messiah." 2. It was associated with *express promises and predictions* (ch. vii. 12—16; xxiii. 3—5). "When mankind was limited to a single family, the Hope of the future had lain in the seed of the woman; the patriarchal age had looked forward to a descendant of Abraham; the Mosaic to a Prophet and a Legislator. In like manner the age of the Jewish monarchy in its bloom of youth and prowess was bidden to fix its eye upon an ideal David, who was to be the King of the future of the world" (Liddon, 'Bampton Lectures,' p. 79). "The establishment of the kingdom was in the truest sense a defection from God, and yet, humanly speaking, it was a necessary defection. An earthly king fell infinitely short of the type of Divine government represented by Moses, or Joshua, or Samuel; but he was at once a definite centre, and a clear sign of something greater than himself. If he presented the spiritual idea in a fixed and limited form, he also gave distinctness to the conception of the present moral sovereignty of God, and furnished imagery under which the prophets could construct a more glorious picture of the future" (Westcott, 'The Gospel of the Resurrection,' p. 68). 3. Even its defects and failure *intensified and exalted* the expectation. With every disappointment hope sprang up afresh, and found its purest expression in the utterances of the prophets (Isa. ix. 6, 7; liii.; Micah v. 2). "What was earthly and carnal in the theocracy was made to fall into comparative abeyance, that the glory of its spiritual excellence might be brought more prominently into view" (Fairbairn). Whilst the general expectation immediately before the advent of Christ was of a temporal kingdom, many "waited" with lofty, spiritual hope "for the Consolation of Israel." 4. It was (as a type) *fulfilled* in a higher and more *spiritual* manner in the kingdom of Christ. In this kingdom the principles of the theocracy are preserved and exhibited in perfection. It is the *real* theocracy. Its supreme Head (Eph. i. 22) is at once Divine and human. Its subjects consist of those who are inwardly renewed, and serve him from the heart. It is spiritual, righteous, peaceful, and blessed. Although in the world, it is not of the world. It can coexist in time and place (as the ancient theocracy could not) with every form of civil government; and, without any formal connection or *concordat* therewith, it can exert a sovereign influence over it. It claims the submission of every individual and every nation, and it is destined to fill the earth and endure for ever.

REMARKS. 1. The purpose of God to set up on earth a kingdom of heaven is the key of history. "The grand idea of a kingdom of God is the connecting thread that runs through the entire course of Divine revelation." 2. The methods which God adopts in his dealings with men are adapted to their actual condition, and the accomplishment of immediate and beneficent ends; his revelations of himself are accommodated to their capacity for apprehending and profiting by them. 3. He allows men a large liberty of choice; and, when they use it wrongly, patiently bears with their imperfections and sins, and overrules them for their correction and improvement. 4. His procedure is marked by a progressive development; and the facts and truths involved therein contain the promise and prefigurement of later and greater realities. "The Old Testament, when rightly understood, is one great prophecy of the New" (Augustine). "Christianity lay in Judaism, as leaves and fruit do in the seed; although it certainly required the Divine sun to bring them forth" (De Wette). 5. What is expedient in one age may not be so in another, which has received a higher revelation of the Divine will. The relative worth of institutions and men must be judged of according to their circumstances and the measure of light possessed, their absolute worth according to the highest conceptions of truth and righteousness. 6. God selects and exalts one nation, not for its own good merely, but for the good of others and the fulfilment of his benevolent purposes toward mankind. 7. As the people of God in ancient time were taught to look forward to the coming of the Messiah, so we are now taught to look forward to his coming again, and the complete establishment of his kingdom.—D.

David's reign: B.C. 1051—1011. (References: 1 Chron. x.—xxix.; 1 Kings i., ii.; Psalms. For his earlier life, as shepherd at Bethlehem, servant of Saul at Gibeah, outlaw in the wilderness of Judah and elsewhere, see 1 Sam. xvi.—xxxiv.) When Saul fell on Gilboa, David was about *thirty years old*; the age at which Joseph stood before Pharaoh, the Levites entered on their official duties, and Jesus began his public ministry. The Second Book of Samuel describes the steps by which he became king over Judah, and (after seven years and a half) king over all Israel, the consolidation and victorious expansion of his kingdom (ch. i.—x.); his deplorable fall (when about fifty years of age), his repentance, the consequences of his transgression, and the restoration of his impaired authority (ch. xi.—xx.); and (in an appendix, ch. xxi.—xxiv.) among other things some events and utterances of his last days (his life ending at three score years and ten). "He most happily combined all the qualifications for becoming the true support of the extraordinary efforts of this period; and he thus succeeded in winning, not only a name unequalled in glory by any other king of Israel, but also a halo of kingly fame as ruler of the community of the true God, unattainable by a king of any other nation of antiquity" (Ewald). "The reign of David is the great critical era in the history of the Hebrews." In it we see—

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE DIVINE KING OF ISRAEL FULFILLED. That purpose (subordinate to the larger purpose mentioned in the preceding homily), to make David ruler instead of Saul, was: 1. *Previously indicated.* It was first announced by Samuel, in indefinite terms (1 Sam. xiii. 14; xv. 28), symbolized in the anointing of David (when about sixteen years old), afterwards doubtless plainly declared to him by the prophet, and clearly manifested by the course of events. It was also more and more generally recognized (1 Sam. xxiv. 20; xxv. 30; ch. iii. 17, 18). 2. *Vainly opposed,* at first by Saul, and, after he had been made King of Judah, by Abner and "the house of Saul." It was impossible for them to succeed. "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord" (Prov. xxi. 30). 3. Gradually, surely, and fully *wrought out.* There were times in which it seemed to fail, but only to become more apparent and effectual; like a stream disappearing beneath the surface of the earth, and after a short distance bursting forth with renewed strength. 4. Its fulfilment shows the power and faithfulness of God, and should *confirm our faith* in the fulfilment of all his promises. "Wait on the Lord." "There hath not failed one word of all his good promise," etc. (1 Kings viii. 56). "The Davidic age, with those that lie immediately around it, towers by its special glory like a giant mountain above a wide tract of more level periods. It was, moreover, soon afterwards recognized by the nation itself as a period of unique glory in the fortunes of the monarchy; and its memory has therefore been preserved in the historical narrative with the most exuberant fulness of detail" (Ewald).

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE HUMAN KING OF HIS CHOICE PORTRAYED. The interest of David's reign centres in David himself; his activities, achievements, experiences, utterances, so fully recorded, not only in the history, but also in his psalms. His character (more completely revealed than that of any other man) was the growth of a noble and gifted nature under the influence of Divine grace. 1. It was matured by long and varied *discipline.* While keeping his father's flock, in the court and camp of Saul, as an exile at the head of his heroic band, by persecution, calumny, hardship, meditation, temptation, prayer, and during his "apprenticeship to monarchy" in Hebron, his natural endowments and moral qualities were strengthened, developed, and perfected. 2. It was marked by a many-sided *excellence.* His insight, skill, prescient sagacity, tender sensibility, sympathy, imagination, fervour, versatility, courage, magnanimity, power of leadership, and of winning the passionate attachment of others, were never surpassed. He was "one of the greatest men in the world" (Bayle). "The most daring courage was combined in him with tender susceptibility; even after he had ascended the throne he continued to retain the charm of a pre-eminent and at the same time childlike personality" (Wellhausen).

"Great, valiant, pious, good, and clean,
Sublime, contemplative, serene,
Strong, constant, pleasant, wise!
Bright effluence of exceeding grace;
Best man! the swiftness and the race,
The peril and the prize!"

(Christopher Smart.)

"There never was a specimen of manhood so rich and ennobled as David, the son of Jesse, whom other saints haply may have equalled in single features of his character; but such a combination of manly, heroic qualities, such a flush of generous, godlike excellences, hath never yet been seen embodied in a single man" (Edward Irving). "The most thoroughly human figure, as it seems to me, which had appeared upon the earth before the coming of that perfect Son of man, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Charles Kingsley). (1) In relation to *God* he was eminent in faith, hope, and love; loyal obedience, fervid zeal, holy aspiration, enthusiastic devotion, lowly submission, and thankfulness (Neh. xii. 36). (2) In relation to *men* he was tenderly affectionate toward his family; considerate and grateful toward his friends; generous and forgiving toward his enemies; faithful and just, self-denying and self-sacrificing toward his people. (3) Beyond any other monarch of Israel he was a truly *theocratic king*. His heart was perfect with the Lord his God (1 Kings xi. 4). "David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings xv. 5). 3. It was marred by *grave defects* and aggravated transgressions. Although these were in great measure due to the spirit of his age, the effect of temptation incident to his position, contrary to the general course of his life, and deeply repented of, yet they incurred heavy guilt, and were followed by severe chastisements. 4. It thus affords a *warning* as well as an *example*. "In this history we have the pattern of a pious and prudent prince. Its utility and profit for example of life appears in the prudence, piety, zeal, humility, equity, and good government of David, and all other his heroic and godly virtues worthy of imitation. As also are set down David's infirmities and falls, as examples of the weakness of the best when they watch not over themselves, or are left to themselves, proponed to be eschewed, *ut majorum ruina sit minorum cautela*, as likewise his repentance to be imitated, and the sharp corrections notwithstanding, as medicinal corrasives wherewith he was chastised; as we see in the Lord's dealing with his dearest sons and servants (Heb. xii. 6, 7)" (W. Guild, 'The Throne of David:' 1659).

III. THE MAJESTY OF THE DIVINE-HUMAN KING MESSIAH FORESHADOWED. David is to be regarded, not simply as an individual, but as a noble, though imperfect, representation of the *idea* of a theocratic king, and therefore also as an adumbration of One in whom that idea would be perfectly realized (Luke i. 32). "His relation to the history of redemption is most peculiar and remarkable. The aim and import of the Old Testament history to prefigure, prophesy, and testify of Christ concentrated in him as in a focus" (Kurtz). "As we have a great increase of the prophetic light breaking forth, and encompassing the family and kingdom of David so subsequent prophecy reverts often to the same subjects, insomuch that there is no individual, king or other person, one only excepted, of whom more is said by the prophets than of this king and his throne" (Davison, 'On Prophecy'). "It is David who, without intending it, supplies the personal foundation of all the Messianic hopes, which from this time contribute with increasing power to determine Israel's career; and so he stands at the turning-point in the history of two thousand years and separates it into two great halves" (Ewald). High above him, in the dim and distant future, rose the majestic form of "the King of kings, and Lord of lords." "A person, as such, can never be a symbol. It was not David, or Manasseh, or Ahab, that was the type of Christ as King of Zion; it was the *royal office* with which these were invested, symbolical as that was of the theocracy, which was typical of the kingly dignity of the Redeemer" (W. L. Alexander, 'Connection of the Old and New Testaments,' 315, 418). The kingly dignity of the Messiah appears in: 1. His Divine appointment (Ps. ii. 6, 7) founded on the Incarnation. "In Jesus the Christ, Jehovah and the Son of David become one. Heaven and earth interpenetrate, that they may unite in him and be united by him" (Delitzsch). 2. His glorious exaltation after deep humiliation and patient endurance. 3. His righteous administration (Ps. lxxii. 1, 2). 4. His advancing triumph over the enemies of his kingdom and our salvation—"the devil with all his retinue, the world, the flesh, sin, death, and hell; whatever doth oppose his glory, his truth, his service; whatever consequently by open violence or fraudulent practice doth hinder our salvation" (Barrow). 5. His munificent gifts and the blessings of his reign; refuge, refreshment, repose (Isa. xxxii. 1, 2); "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." As a King he gathers,

governs, protects, and perfects his people. 6. His wide dominion. 7. His endless continuance. "His Name shall endure for ever."

EXHORTATION. 1. Submit to his rule. "Kiss the Son," etc. (Ps. ii. 12). 2. Rejoice in his salvation. 3. Co-operate with his purposes. 4. Look forward to his final triumph.—D.

Vers. 1, 2.—(ZIKLAG.) *A change of dynasty.* "When he came to David he fell to the earth, and did obeisance" (ver. 2). The title of David to the throne was primarily conferred upon him by the will of God, as declared by Samuel. But it remained in abeyance while Saul lived, and began to take effect only at his decease. On returning to Ziklag from his pursuit of the Amalekites, David occupied himself in repairing its ruins, and awaited tidings from the field of battle. On the morning of the third day there came a young man, "the son of a stranger, an Amalekite," bringing news of the defeat of Israel and the death of Saul and Jonathan. In proof of his statement he brought the king's *diadem*, "a small metallic cap or wreath which encircled the temples, serving the purpose of a helmet, with a very small horn projecting in front, as an emblem of power" (Jamieson), and *bracelet* (or armlet worn above the elbow), and laid them at the feet of David, as the future king (ver. 10). His conduct reminds us of a well-known custom, according to which, whenever a French monarch departed this life, an official of the royal household appeared at the window, broke his staff, and cried, *Le roi est mort!* ("The king is dead!"); then took a new staff and shouted, *Vive le roi!* ("Long live the king!"). The change that occurred was—

I. OCCASIONED BY THE FALL OF AN UNFAITHFUL RULER. "After the death of Saul" (ver. 1). 1. Men are entrusted with power by God that they may employ it, not according to their own will and for their own honour, but according to his will and for his glory. This Saul failed to recognize. 2. Whenever a man misuses his trust he is sooner or later deprived thereof, and suffers the penalty of his sin (1 Sam. xv. 23). 3. No man can fall into sin and destruction without involving others in his ruin. How often has a monarch's unfaithfulness caused the downfall of his dynasty! 4. The place from which he falls is thereby prepared for a more faithful man, and such a man is seldom wanting for the place. "Take therefore the talent," etc. (Matt. xxv. 28). "Saul's elevation was a first experiment in monarchy doomed to failure from the beginning; it was only when the people had been trampled down by his tyranny and involved in his fatal defeat that a lasting monarch was set according to the Divine will in the person and family of David, who was in this sense the man after God's own heart" (P. Smith, 'Ancient History,' i. 168).

II. AWAITED WITH PATIENCE BY A RIGHTFUL SUCCESSOR. "David abode in Ziklag." He was long ago assured of his royal destination. But: 1. The purpose of God is often slow in its accomplishment; which requires to be waited for in faith and patience. 2. Its slow accomplishment presents a strong temptation to impatience, and the adoption of rash and unworthy expedients that hinder rather than promote the desired end. David was subject to such a temptation, and for the most part overcame it. In so far as he yielded to it he suffered the consequences of his imprudence (1 Sam. xxvii. 1). 3. By patient continuance in well-doing men are best prepared for what God has prepared for them. David did not deem the crown "a thing to be grasped at." "What God has destined for him, he would not have until God gave it to him" (Hengstenberg). "Endurance is the crowning quality." *Qui dura vince* ("He conquers who endures"). 4. To those who await the accomplishment of the Divine purpose in a right spirit, it comes surely and at the right time, often suddenly and by unexpected means. "By degrees doth the Lord perform his works to exercise the faith, the hope, the patience, and constancy of his chosen, but at last to the full he accomplisheth whatsoever he promiseth" (Guild).

III. RECOGNIZED AS INEVITABLE BY A SELF-SEEKING OBSERVER. It is remarkable that one of an alien and hostile race should be the first to perceive and acknowledge the speedy and certain transfer of the crown. He was a watchful observer of the course of events; acquainted, probably, with the general opinion concerning David, and with his present position; and, although possessing little love for his character and expecting little good to the Amalekites from his accession, he was desirous of using the occasion for the furtherance of his personal ends. 1. The tendency of human affairs is often so

apparent that its result may be easily anticipated by all but the most obtuse. 2. A stranger or an enemy frequently perceives the destination of a man of ability more clearly than those who are intimately connected with him. 3. One who is supremely concerned about his own interest is quick to see anything that may be made conducive to it, however blind and unfeeling he may be in other respects. 4. His attempt to turn it to his own advantage sometimes turns only to the advantage of another, and to his own disappointment and ruin. "David had been long waiting for the crown, and now it is brought to him by an Amalekite. See how God can serve his own purpose of kindness to his people, even by designing men who aim at nothing but to set up themselves" (Matthew Henry).

IV. EFFECTED BY THE OPERATION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE. "The Lord slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse" (1 Chron. x. 14). "God is the Judge; he putteth down one and setteth up another" (Ps. lxxv. 7; 1 Sam. ii. 1—10). By his providential working: 1. His purposes are fulfilled and the truth of his Word is confirmed. "By a series of events following in the ordinary course of Providence, without any miracle interposed, this prediction (given by Samuel and exhibited in the act of anointing) was brought to pass. David was raised to his divinely appointed station, when his shepherd's staff became a sceptre, and his flock a great people; none contributing more to the preparation of this event than Saul himself. . . . The complicated narrative is the exposition of the prophetic prescience" (Davison). 2. Those who oppose his purposes are overthrown. 3. He who humbly waits their fulfilment in the way of obedience is promoted. 4. Individuals and nations are constrained to turn from their own way, and submit to his plans as the wisest and best (ch. ii. 4; iii. 9; v. 2). "The secret springs of revolutions are unaccountable, and must be resolved into that Providence which turns all hearts as the rivers of water" (Matthew Henry). "Notwithstanding those appearances which obscure the providence of God, it often makes itself conspicuous in the midst of them all. When we have allowed to human agency, to human wisdom and human power, a large circle of events imputed to nothing else, we see the Divine wisdom frequently disencumber itself from all communication with second causes, and stretch itself out in the face of all men, in defeating and confounding the plans of human wisdom, in the failure of the deepest schemes" (R. Hall).—D.

Vers. 2—10.—(ZIKLAG.) *Selfish craft.* Beyond the assertion of the Amalekite that Israel was defeated and Saul and Jonathan were dead, of which the diadem and bracelet afforded proof, it is uncertain how far his story was true. His statement concerning his own conduct cannot be satisfactorily reconciled with that of 1 Sam. xxxi.; and, although credited by David, it was probably a fabrication, his motive therein being the desire of reward, as David himself clearly perceived (ch. iv. 16). In him we have a picture of what sometimes appears in others under higher moral influences, viz.: 1. *Dominant selfishness.* He is supremely concerned about his own interest. Self-love is an original principle of our nature, and, when properly regulated, points in the direction of virtue and happiness. But it easily degenerates into selfishness, "the source of all the sins of omission and commission which are found in the world." And when a man comes under the dominion of the latter, he may sink into any depth of meanness. 2. *Subtle scheming.* Amidst the dying and the dead, after the battle, his only thought is of gain; and, having plundered the fallen king of the regalia, he coolly calculates how he may dispose thereof to the greatest advantage; and then hastens a long distance across the country to one whom he expects to find ready to welcome the prospect of his own elevation by an enemy's death, and to pay him "the wages of unrighteousness." 3. *Feigned sympathy.* He comes into the presence of David "with the marks of distress and dismay—dust and clay smeared over his face, and his clothes torn"—on account of the disaster which has befallen Israel (1 Sam. iv. 12). But how little does his appearance correspond with the feelings of his heart! "Self-love sometimes borrows the face of honest zeal" (Hall). 4. *Obsequious homage.* "He fell to the earth, and did obeisance;" prostrating himself before the rising sun of the new era with abject, insincere, and wicked mind. "To those who are distinguished in the kingdom of God as specially called and favoured instruments of grace, falsehood and hypocrisy draw near most pressingly and corruptingly in the guise of humility and self-abasement" (Erdmann). 5. *Plausible lying.* (Vers. 6—9.) He artfully mingles

falsehood with the truth he utters, for the sake of enhancing the value of his good offices. If he had been satisfied with simply telling the tidings of the death of Saul, all would have been well with him; but by his gratuitous inventions he entangles himself in a dangerous snare. 6. *Unconscious self-accusation.* "I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen" (ver. 10). He accuses himself in the excuses he makes for his conduct. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse.* Even the request of Saul would not have justified his act or absolved him from responsibility. And how could he be sure that the wounded king could not live? Even the most hardened villain deems it needful to endeavour to palliate his offence. And he who is solely intent upon his own interest often makes admissions that clearly reveal his guilt. 7. *Fatal miscalculation.* He judges of the character of another by his own, meets with a generosity, loyalty, and justice which he cannot understand, fails of his purpose, and receives a reward which he did not anticipate. "The incident gives us the opportunity of marking the immense difference in the order of mind and character which may subsist between two individuals brought together by one event, and having their attention occupied by one and the same object" (J. A. Miller, 'Saul'). "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness" (Job v. 13). "The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands" (Ps. ix. 16; Prov. vi. 15; xviii. 7).—D.

Vers. 11, 12.—(ZIKLAG.) *Unselfish grief.* "They mourned, and wept" (ver. 12). Few things are more remarkable in the character of David than the generosity which he displayed with respect to Saul. He once and again spared his life; and, instead of rejoicing, he was overwhelmed with grief at his death. He entirely lost sight of any advantage which it promised to himself, in his sorrow over the disaster which befell the king, his sons, and the people of Israel. We have here—

I. THE NEWS OF A GREAT CALAMITY, now only too fully confirmed (vers. 5—11). A calamity is deeply affecting when, as in this case, it: 1. Consists of a combination of mournful events (ver. 12). 2. Falls on those who are intimately connected with us. 3. Occurs suddenly and unexpectedly. 4. Involves irreparable loss, and affords little prospect of alleviation. And the cloud of affliction is peculiarly dark when it is pervaded by Divine wrath (Hos. xiii. 11). "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and my acquaintance into darkness" (Ps. lxxxviii. 18).

II. THE SCENE OF A GRIEVOUS MOURNING. The sincerity and intensity of David's grief, in which his six hundred men shared, were shown by (1) rending the garments; (2) wailing aloud; (3) fasting; (4) until the evening; common signs of sorrow in the East, as genuine as any other, and relieving as well as indicating a burdened heart. What a "day of trouble" was that on which David and his heroes sat there watching the sinking sun! (For other days of a like nature, see ch. ii. 24; iii. 32; vi. 9; xii. 1, 16; xiii. 21, 30; xv. 13; xviii. 33; xx. 4; xxi. 1; xxiv. 13, 17.)

III. THE PROOF OF AN EXCELLENT DISPOSITION. Sorrow is an evidence of love. David's disposition was: 1. Forgiving toward an enemy. "For Saul." 2. Faithful toward a friend. "For Jonathan his son." 3. Patriotic. "For the house of Israel." 4. Devout. "For the people of the Lord." "The uprightness of his heart and the sincerity of his feelings cannot for a moment be doubted by those who read his lament over Saul and Jonathan with an unprejudiced mind. Pretended sorrow never could speak thus" (Hengstenberg). "The only deep mourning for Saul, with the exception of the Jabeshites, proceeded from the man whom he had hated and persecuted for so many years, even to the time of his death; just as David's Successor wept over the fate of Jerusalem even when it was about to destroy himself" (O. von Gerlach).

Observe: 1. That the most generous grief requires to be restrained within due bounds. Its excessive indulgence is injurious and wrong. 2. That the beneficial effect of trouble is not usually experienced at "the present," but "afterward" by means of reflection and submission (Heb. xii. 11). 3. That to the eye of faith the darkest cloud is illumined by Divine goodness and mercy. "At eventide weeping cometh in to tarry for a night; but with the morning cometh a shout of joy" (Ps. xxx. 5).—D.

Vers. 13—16.—(ZIKLAG.) *Capital punishment.* "Thy blood be upon thy head" (ver. 16). The grief of David at the death of Saul was associated with indignation at the conduct of the Amalekite, who, according to his own confession, had taken part in

its infliction. At sunset he recalled the unhappy messenger, and having further questioned him, testified his abhorrence of his deed, and ordered his execution. Notice—

I. THE CRIME which was laid to his charge, viz. the intentional and unjustifiable taking away of the life of another: 1. Proceeding, like every act of murder, from indifference to the sacredness of human life and the dignity of human nature, created in the image of God. 2. Aggravated in guilt by irreverence toward the person of the king, "the Lord's anointed," who ought, on account of his high position, to have been held in special honour (1 Sam. xxiv. 6; xxvi. 11; xxxi. 5). "When the Israelites were under royal authority, it would appear to have been a maxim of their law that the person of the king was inviolable, even though he might be tyrannical and unjust; and, in fact, this maxim is necessary, not only to the security of the king, but also to the welfare of the subject; for it is the dread of assassination and treacheries that usually makes kings tyrants, and novices in tyranny absolute despots" (Michaelis). 3. Exhibiting disobedience to the command of God. "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod. xx. 13), i.e. do no murder (Exod. xxi. 12). With this law the Amalekite was probably acquainted. He knew, at least, that it was wrong to take away life without adequate reason. Hence he sought to justify the act by pleading the request of Saul (ver. 9), and his suffering condition, which it was mercy to terminate. But how could Saul authorize another to do to him what he had no right to do to himself? Genuine loyalty and mercy would have prompted a different course of conduct; and malice and selfishness were clearly the motives of the deed. There was in it nothing praiseworthy, but everything to be abhorred and condemned (ver. 14).

II. THE EVIDENCE on which he was convicted. "Thy mouth hath testified against thee," etc. (ver. 16). His confession was: 1. Voluntarily made; not extorted from him by the infliction or threatening of suffering, or the promise of reward. 2. Confirmed by the signs of his connection with the death of the king (ver. 10). 3. A sufficient ground, under the circumstances, for judgment, without further inquiry. Even if, as is probable, he did not actually commit the deed, he took upon himself the responsibility, and justly incurred the consequences thereof. But why did he not retract and repudiate his confession? Perhaps he thought that it would be of no avail; and he would thereby have acknowledged his falsehood and mercenariness. Possibly he did retract, and was not believed. For "a liar is not believed though he speak the truth." Considered in relation to his times, the evidence on which David acted was sufficient; but the incident affords an illustration of the uncertainty which often pertains to the crime of murder and the fallibility of human judgment.

III. THE AUTHORITY by which he was condemned. Although David was not yet publicly recognized as civil ruler, to whom the right of judging properly belonged, yet he was fully justified in assuming the office, inasmuch as: 1. It had been virtually conferred upon him by the appointment of the Divine King of Israel. 2. The chief hindrance to its exercise was removed by the death of Saul. There was no higher authority than his in the land, and it had been acknowledged by the Amalekite himself (ver. 10). 3. Its assumption was necessary to the fulfilment of the purpose of his appointment, the manifestation of the justice of God, and the promotion of the welfare of the people. He may have wished to clear himself from the suspicion of complicity in the king's death, to show that he entertained no feeling of revenge against him, and to gain the esteem of the people of Israel; but his main motive was of a higher nature. He acted on theocratic principles, as on a subsequent occasion (ch. iv. 9—12).

IV. THE PUNISHMENT which he suffered (ver. 15). "When the sentence of death was pronounced by the king, it was executed by his body-guard" (ch. xv. 18; xx. 23). *Capital punishment* may be upheld on the ground of: 1. *The claims of justice.* It has been generally felt, even from the most ancient period (Gen. iv. 10, 14), that the murderer deserves to die. 2. *The teaching of Scripture.* "Whoso sheddeth man's blood," etc. (Gen. ix. 6). "This was the first command having reference to the temporal sword. By these words temporal government was established, and the sword placed in its hand by God" (Luther). It gave the *right* and imposed the *duty* of inflicting death; and it is of permanent obligation (Lev. xxiv. 17; John xix. 11; Acts xxv. 11; Rom. xiii. 4). 3. *The welfare of society.* It exalts the principle of justice; declares the dignity of man in the most impressive manner; effectually prevents the offender from repeating his offence; powerfully deters others from following his example; and

thus conduces to the security of human life. Severity to one is mercy to many. On the other hand, it may be said that: 1. The claims of justice are adequately satisfied by a lifelong penal servitude. 2. Scripture, rightly interpreted, does not justify the infliction of death. The Noachic precept (if it be such) was adapted only to an early stage of society, its literal fulfilment is no longer required, and the principle on which it rests (the dignity of man) is preserved and more fully maintained by the revelations and influences of Christianity. The whole spirit of the New Testament is in favour of seeking the reformation rather than effecting the destruction of the offender. "Mercy glorieth against judgment." Even the fratricide Cain was spared (Gen. iv. 5), as if to show the possibility and propriety of sparing the life of the criminal. 3. The welfare of society is more fully promoted by sparing his life than by taking it away. Hardened criminals and persons under the influence of strong passion are not deterred by the fear of death; other persons are more powerfully affected by other motives. The possibility of the innocent suffering a penalty which is irreversible causes hesitation in its infliction where there is the least doubt, and so the guilty often escape, punishment becomes uncertain, and men are tempted to commit crime in the hope of impunity. As a matter of fact, crime does not increase in those countries where capital punishment is abolished. "After the Divine permission to inflict capital punishment which had been given for a considerable period of time, had displayed itself as the most extreme madness in the execution of Christ, the question of its abolition has become only a question of time. The question is whether Christ may not have done enough for this" (Ewald, 'Antiquities,' p. 174).—D.

Vers. 17, 18.—(ZIKLAG.) *The song of the bow.* I. THE OCCASION of this lament, threnody, elegy, or funeral dirge, was the arrival of fatal tidings from Gilboa. "There were only two in that great slaughter concerning whose fate David was eager to know the truth—his enemy and his friend. 'How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead?' (ver. 5). When the news was fully established, he immediately went through all the signs of Eastern grief. He and his six hundred heroes sat with their clothes rent, uttering the loud Oriental wail, observing the rigid Eastern fast until the sunset of the fatal day released them. Then David roused himself to action. The first vent to his grief was in the stern exaction of the life of the unhappy messenger, according to the hard temper of those fierce times. The second vent was in the touching dirge, which, according to the tender spirit of the sweet psalmist of Israel, he poured forth over the two departed chiefs" ('The Songs of Israel,' *Good Words*, 1863). It was probably accompanied by his harp, that had long been silent, but was now taken up afresh and struck to a song of sorrow which for tenderness and intensity has never been surpassed. "The genius and origin of the elegy among the Hebrews may be clearly traced to their manner of celebrating their funeral rites" (Lowth). "If you attend to David's harp, you shall hear as many hearse-like airs as carols" (Bacon).

II. THE TITLE of "The Bow" (*Kesheth*), which it appears to have received, may have been derived from the mention of the bow in ver. 22, as the favourite weapon of Jonathan (1 Sam. xviii. 4; xx. 20), as it was of his tribesmen (1 Chron. xii. 2); or "because it was a martial ode" (Keil). It is improbable that David introduced "the *use* of the bow" (Authorized Version) into the tribe of Judah, either as a tribute to the memory of his friend, or as a means of repairing the recent disaster; for that had been long familiar. But he "bade them teach the children of Judah" the *song* of "the bow" (possibly that his youthful warriors might sing it in their military practice with the bow)—a title given to it in the Book of Jashar (Josh. x. 13), or collection of national songs, in which it was preserved. "When the writer of 2 Samuel transferred the dirge to his own pages, he transferred it, as we might do any of the psalms, with its title, which was as follows: 'For the children of Israel to learn by heart. Kasheth from the Book of Jasher'" ('Speaker's Commentary').

III. ITS FORM is that of a *lyrical* composition, the oldest as well as the most common species of Hebrew poetry; and (like the rest) it is distinguished by *parallelism* or rhythm, "the measured rise and fall of feeling and utterance, in which the poet's effort to become fully master of his poetic inspiration finds harmonious expression, and the external rhythm of sound is properly subordinated to the rhythmic pulsation of thought"—(*British Quarterly Review*, January, 1877). It contains a refrain or

chorus, twice repeated; and falls into three *strophic divisions* marked by its recurrence, either at their commencement (Keil) or their close (Kitto, 'Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature'); or, according to more common arrangement, into five or six stanzas. "The putting of lamentations into poems made them the more moving and affecting, and the more lasting" (Matthew Henry).

IV. IN SUBSTANCE and general character it is an outburst of natural grief (as the song of Hannah was of spiritual gladness) over the fallen heroes, and a celebration of their worth. "We can hardly call it religious poetry. It is not a psalm or hymn. The name of God never occurs in it. It is a war-song which sums up the national feelings of every age over the graves of its departed heroes" (Stanley). Yet it is instinct with most generous and devout feeling. "As in view of the remains of a friend all the pain which he caused us while living is forgotten in the remembrance of his excellences and the kindness which he showed us, so David no longer has a memory for the period of persecution now past. He is a man, and not the judge of the dead. Therefore Saul stands before him only in his virtues, and he celebrates not only Jonathan, but also Saul, as loved ones who can never be forgotten. We see in this case that anger belongs only to the accidental utterances of noble souls, whose constant motive is love" (Delitzsch, 'Old Test. Hist. of Redemption'). "Though God often reproved his ancient people for paying religious homage to the idols of the heathen, yet we never find that he reproved them for paying funeral honours to departed men of superior merit among their own nation. Their example in this respect, therefore, seems to have a Divine sanction, and plainly teaches us the propriety of lamenting the death and commemorating the virtues of those who have been eminently useful in life" (N. Emmons).—D.

Vers. 19—27.—*David's lamentation over Saul and Jonathan.* In this lamentation there is—

I. A DECLARATION OF THE CAUSE OF MOURNING.

> "O pride of Israel, on thy high places slain!
> *Alas! fallen are the heroes.*"
>
> (Ver. 19.)

This is the key-note. It contains "the theme of the entire ode." 1. Men of rich endowments are the ornament, beauty, and glory of a people. 2. Such men are sometimes stricken down suddenly and under unexpected circumstances. "Not on the level plains where defeat from the chariots and horses of the enemy might have been expected and had been before encountered, but on the high places where victory seemed the rightful prize of the mountain chiefs and the indomitable infantry of the Israelitish hosts"—there the towering form of Saul was "hit by the archers" (1 Sam. xxxi. 3), the heroic heart of Jonathan thrust through, the splendour of Israel eclipsed. "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field," etc. (Isa. xl. 6, 7; Jer. ix. 23, 24). 3. Their loss is a great calamity, and a source of bitter grief to those who form a proper estimate of their worth, and possess a genuine concern for the public good (ver. 12).

II. A DEPRECATION OF THE TRIUMPH OF THE ENEMY.

> "Tell it not in Gath,
> Publish not the tidings in the streets of Askelon;
> Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
> Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult."
>
> (Ver. 20.)

In imagination the poet sees the swift-footed messengers bearing the tidings to the nearest cities of the Philistines—to Gath and Askelon; hears their songs of victory; and, in sympathy with his people, he utters the wish, "Oh that it might not have been!" 1. The fall of men of eminence among the people of God causes exultation among their adversaries. 2. The triumph of the wicked (the "uncircumcised") increases the suffering and shame of the godly in their misfortunes (Ps. xliv. 9—26; cxxiii. 4). 3. Whatever contributes to this result should be earnestly deprecated by all who have a sincere regard for the reputation of the great, the welfare of the good, and the honour of God. That which makes the ungodly rejoice should often make the faithful weep.

III. AN IMPRECATION ON THE SCENE OF DISASTER.

"O mountains in Gilboa, nor dew nor rain (be) upon you,
Nor fields of sacred offerings!
For there lies rusting the shield of heroes,
The shield of Saul unanointed with oil."

(Ver. 21.)

"Over against the exultant joy of victory of Israel's enemies, which he would be gladly spared, David sets the attitude of mourning, in which he would behold the mountains of Gilboa, the scene of the heroes' death-struggle" (Erdmann). As that scene presents itself to his imagination, its beauty and fertility appear incongruous with the degradation of the slain, the misery of Israel, and his own absorbing grief. Has it no sympathy with them in their woe? He impatiently resents its indifference to his sorrow, and says in effect, "Oh that it might no more enjoy the favour of Heaven, nor produce the oblations by which its wrath is propitiated, but be a perpetual memorial of the mournful event!" (Ezek. xxxi. 15). 1. It is the tendency of grief to dwell upon the objects that are associated with its cause, and by the contemplation of them it becomes intensified. 2. Under the influence of strong emotion the mind seeks sympathy with itself even in material and inanimate objects, and is apt to indulge in wishes that are incapable of literal fulfilment. 3. The aspects of nature correspond in greater or less degree with the mental mood in which they are regarded. Sorrow projects its shadow over the external world, and clothes the fairest scenes with gloom. 4. The language of poetic inspiration must not be interpreted in its literal, prosaic sense, but in the light of the feeling and imagination of the poet. David's imprecation was no more intended to have an actual effect on the fields of Gilboa than Job's (Job iii. 1) on the day of his birth.

IV. A CELEBRATION OF THE VIRTUES OF THE FALLEN.

"From blood of slain,
From fat of heroes
The bow of Jonathan turned not backward,
And the sword of Saul returned not unsatisfied.
Saul and Jonathan! the beloved and lovely!
In their lives and in their death they were not parted;
Than eagles fleeter,
Than lions stronger."

(Vers. 22, 23.)

The poet turns away from the melancholy scene to contemplate the heroes as he had known them, and describes their warlike prowess, their amiable dispositions, their mutual affection and faithful companionship, their agility and strength. Sincere sorrow over the dead: 1. Imposes a becoming silence concerning their imperfections, is forgetful of personal injuries, and puts out of sight everything that is contrary to itself (vers. 11, 12). *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.* 2. Delights to dwell upon the special aspects of their character which are worthy of admiration. 3. Sees in their extraordinary virtues a measure of the loss that has been experienced. "The nobility of Jonathan's character cannot easily be over-estimated. The rival claims of friendship and of nature, of David and Saul, were adjusted with admirable delicacy. He strengthened his friend's hands (1 Sam. xxii. 16) and saved his life; but he clung to his father. The shadows were falling on Saul, yet he did not join David's party, though he knew that he would succeed to the throne. With a gallant loyalty and a true-hearted despair, he followed his doomed sire to Gilboa" (B. Kent).

V. AN ENUMERATION OF THE GIFTS OF A BENEFACTOR.

"O daughters of Israel, wail for Saul!
He clothed you in scarlet with loveliness;
He put jewels of gold upon your apparel.
Alas! fallen are the heroes
In the midst of the battle."

(Vers. 24, 25.)

"The stream of sorrow, which down to this point has been united, here divides." David calls upon the daughters of Israel to wail, while the daughters of the Philistines

triumph; and reminds them of the beneficence of Saul in distributing among them the spoils of war gained in his former victories. 1. The benefits conferred by an able and successful ruler upon his people are great, and deserve a grateful recognition. 2. The value of those benefits is seldom fully appreciated until they can be no longer bestowed. 3. Public mourning is as appropriate in its season as public rejoicing (1 Sam. xiii. 7). It expresses and deepens the general sorrow, and is a testimony to departed worth. The chorus is here repeated. "This recurrence of the same idea is perfectly congenial to the nature of elegy, since grief is fond of dwelling upon the particular objects of the passion, and frequently repeating them" (Lowth).

VI. A COMMEMORATION OF THE LOVE OF A FRIEND.

"O Jonathan, on thy high places slain!
Woe is me for thee, my brother Jonathan!
Lovely wast thou to me exceedingly,
Marvellous (was) thy love to me beyond the love of woman.
Alas! fallen are the heroes,
And perished the instruments of battle."

(Vers. 26, 27.)

"At this culmination of grief the lament again sounds the key-note of the whole, and returns in conclusion to its chief object, the sorrow for the hero-glory of Israel destroyed in Saul and Jonathan." David's expression of sorrow manifests his deep love to his friend; still more, commemorates the "wonderful" love of his friend to him. "And in that love which he had borne towards him, there was something 'separate from all beside,' 'miraculous,' like a special work of God (this is the force of the word), more singular, undivided, and devoted than the love of women—even of Michal, of Ahinoam, of Abigail" (Stanley). 1. Pure, fervent, self-denying love is the chief excellence of human character. It is the greatest of all great things (1 Cor. xiii. 13; Col. iii. 14; Jas. ii. 8; 1 Pet. i. 22). 2. It is exalted and glorified in our view by means of death. 3. The memory of those in whom it dwells in an eminent degree is worthy of being perpetuated to all ages. (For translations and paraphrases of this lament see Lowth; Horsley, 'Bibl. Crit.;' Geo. Sandys: 1636; J. Oldham: 1677.)—D.

Ver. 19.—"*How are the mighty fallen!*" This expression suggests numerous reflections on—

I. THE VANITY OF MAN in the glory of his might. He is proud of his exalted state, his wisdom, strength, or riches; and he is admired and envied by others. But: 1. How precarious his *position!* He stands on "slippery places." All his grandeur rests on life, than which nothing is more unsubstantial or uncertain. 2. How futile his *purposes!* Formed in ignorance, weakness, and presumption, they are defeated and "broken off." "There is no king saved by the multitude of a host," etc. (Ps. xxxiii. 16). 3. How unsatisfying his *possessions!* They afford no solid peace in life or death. "Vanity of vanities," etc. (Eccles. i. 1). 4. How transient his *duration!* "Man is like to vanity; his days are as a shadow that passeth away" (Ps. cxliv. 4). 5. How signal his *downfall!* "How are they brought into desolation as in a moment!" (Ps. lxxiii. 19). 6. How evanescent his *fame!*

"Your renown
Is as the herb, whose hue doth come and go;
And his might withers it, by whom it sprang
Crude from the lap of earth."

(Dante, 'Purg.,' xi.)

7. How complete his *humiliation!* The sword of Saul is cast away, his shield covered with blood and rust, his sceptre broken, his diadem and bracelet pilfered, his head placed in the temple of Dagon, his body fastened on the wall of Bethshan, his sons slain, and his dynasty destroyed. "Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish" (Ps. xlix. 20; xxxix. 5; Dan. iv. 31; Acts xii. 23). "The last act is sanguinary, beautiful as is all the rest of the play. Dust is cast upon the head, and there is an end and for ever" (Pascal).

"Farewell, a long farewell, to all my greatness!
This is the state of man: To-day he putteth forth

The tender leaves of hope; to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him:
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost;
And,—when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a-ripening,—nips his root,
And then he falls, as I do."

(Shakespeare, 'Henry VIII.')

II. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD in the fall of the mighty. "If there be a God, the world must be *governed* by Providence" (1 Sam. ii. 1—10; ix. 1—25). 1. How evident its *existence!* "The Lord reigneth." It is not only declared in the Scriptures, but also plainly shown by the facts of history and daily observation. Of Saul it is said, "The Lord slew him" (1 Chron. x. 14). 2. How great its *power!* "He bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity" (Isa. xl. 23; Dan. iv. 25). 3. How vast its *domain!* All space, all time, all orders of being and all events, the least as well as the greatest (Matt. x. 29). Even the actions of free and responsible creatures, of individuals and nations, the Philistines as well as the Israelites, the evil as well as the good, are encircled and pervaded by it; foreseen, permitted, directed, controlled, restrained, or overruled. The course of Saul was foreseen at his appointment; yet he was not thereby placed under the *necessity* of acting as he did

"Contingency, whose verge extendeth not
Beyond the tablet of your mortal mold,
Is all depictured in the eternal sight;
But hence deriveth not necessity,
More than the tall ship, hurried down the flood,
Is driven by the eye that looks on it."

('Par.,' xvii.)

4. How manifold its *operations!* What skilful adaptations it makes! What endless instrumentalities it employs! What varied issues it evolves! 5. How mysterious its *methods!* The fact is certain, the mode unknown. Its ways are obscure, perplexing, completely hidden for a while, and then made apparent and fully justified. "We know in part." 6. How righteous its *administration!* (Ps. xxxi. 23; xxxvii. 1—11; xcvii. 2). "Saul died for his transgression," and Israel (whose self-will he reflected) was chastised through the man of their own choice. 7. How beneficent its *aims!* The repression of sin, the salvation of men, the glory of God. The fall of Israel's first king was overruled for the good of the nation; the fall of Israel, in subsequent ages, was "the riches of the world." "Oh the depth," etc.! (Rom. xi. 33—36).

IMPROVEMENT. 1. Glory not in any earthly good, but only in the Lord. 2. Be ambitious to serve rather than to rule. 3. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." 4. Strive for the crown and kingdom that will endure for ever.—D.

Ver. 26.—*Wonderful love.* Human love is, in proportion to its purity and strength, a gift of Divine love. It also illustrates the love from which it proceeds, by reflecting its image as in a mirror. It is of a twofold nature—viz. benevolence or charity towards all, even the unworthy; and complacency towards those in whom it perceives the signs of excellence, or resemblance to itself. Of the latter kind was the love of Jonathan to David; and it was *wonderful*, considered in the light of (1) the selfishness that prevails among men, (2) the hindrances that stood in the way of its exercise, (3) the Divine grace by which it was produced and maintained, (4) the admirable qualities that distinguished it, and (5) the services and sacrifices in which it was evinced. It may be regarded as a representation of *the unspeakable love of Christ* towards his friends (John xv. 15) and brethren (John xx. 17); which is: 1. *Appreciative* of their worth (see 1 Sam. xviii. 1—4). It sets a special value upon them, however they may be despised by others; looks at them in relation not merely to what they actually are, but to what they may become; and singles them out as objects of its individual concern. "Thy love to *me* was wonderful." "He calleth his own sheep by name" (John x. 3). 2. *Sincere* and thoroughly disinterested (1 Sam. xix. 1—7). It seeks their welfare rather than its own; is trustful, unsuspecting, and watchful over their interests; freely communicates its thoughts and feelings; counsels and reproves; faithfully performs its promises; and affords protection and aid according to their need. 3. *Sympathetic*,

(1 Sam. xx. 1—9.) It finds delight in their society; holds familiar intercourse with them; desires a return of its affection; makes their joys and sorrows its own; and is considerate, gentle, tender, and kind. "Behold, how he loved him!" (John xi. 36). 4. *Intense.* (1 Sam. xx. 10—42.) "More wonderful than woman's love." "No less ardent, sincere, and sweet than the highest conjugal affection; which ought to be (as Strigelius here glosses) ardent without simulation, sincere without any suspicions, and sweet without morosity or disdain" (Patrick). Its intensity is shown in its utterances, efforts, tears; courage, forbearance, forgiveness, and unwearied patience. 5. *Self-denying* and self-sacrificing. Jonathan identified himself with his friend, whose life was in imminent peril; renounced a crown and suffered shame for his sake; but who shall tell what Christ renounced and suffered for us (Phil. ii. 7, 8)? 6. *Enduring.* "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John xiii. 1); and gave them, on the eve of his departure, a proof of his condescending, pure, undying affection. His love is still the same; and it "passeth knowledge" (Eph. iii. 19). 7. *Influential* (1 Sam. xxiii. 16—18) in attracting love and constraining devotion; strengthening, preserving, comforting, purifying those in whom it dwells; perfecting its image in them and preparing them to enter into its eternal joy. "Unto him that loved us," etc. (Rev. i. 5).—D.

Vers. 6—10.—*A sad end of a perverse life.* We have here an Amalekite's account of the death of Saul. Whether it presents the truth, and can therefore be harmonized with the account in 1 Sam. xxxi., is doubtful. Possibly Saul did not die at once when he fell upon his sword, and being in anguish, and fearing to fall into the hands of the Philistines, begged the Amalekite to despatch him. But it is more probable that the account was false. In either case Saul committed suicide. It was a tragic end of a tragic life—a life full of the interest which arises from remarkable events, contrasted characters, the working of powerful passions, etc. But we have to view it in the aspects which tend to our moral and spiritual profit.

I. IT WAS THE END OF A LIFE WHOSE BEGINNING WAS FULL OF PROMISE. Arising from: 1. *His personal qualities.* Those of body—tall and commanding, fitting him in such times to be a leader of men. Those of moral nature. Character is the most powerful factor in a life; and if we see a youth of good character we hope well of him. Saul comes before us as a modest, humble, unassuming youth, diligently discharging his duty as a son, and affectionately concerned not to give pain to his father (1 Sam. ix. 5, where "take thought" means "fear," "be anxious"). Still even then, judging from the silence of the narrative, he was without decided piety. 2. *Divine calls and gifts.* Chosen of God to be king, he was anointed by Samuel, and received unmistakable signs that the prophet was the representative of God in the matter. Chosen also by lot, although some were disaffected, he was soon able to secure general acceptance by his prowess and able leadership in war; and was solemnly set apart as sovereign. Moreover, a change passed over himself which fitted him for his post. "God gave him another heart" (1 Sam. x. 9). He became also a partaker of the spirit of prophecy. (1 Sam. x. 10.) 3. *Great opportunities.* The career opened to Saul was one of peculiar dignity and honour. Called to be the first king of God's nation, he might have been also the father of a race of such kings, and have thus occupied no mean place in the development of God's plans for the redemption of mankind. And his immediate work, that of leading the people to victory over their heathen oppressors and clearing the land of them, and then of drawing the tribes of Israel more closely into unity and framing them into a "kingdom of God," was worthy of the highest powers and the strenuous labours of a long life. 4. *Early achievements.* Those, for instance, recorded in 1 Sam. xi., in which he manifested both courage and capacity, and which obtained for him the general consent of the people to his appointment.

II. IT WAS THE END OF A LIFE WHICH HAD BEEN A CONSPICUOUS FAILURE. He lost his opportunity, forfeited his throne, and deprived his family of the honour of succeeding him. He was tried, found wanting, and rejected. He had shown that he possessed some kingly qualities. Did he possess the most essential quality for the king of such a people—a king under God as supreme Monarch—that of faith in God, showing itself by ready and hearty obedience even under difficulties? It was peculiarly important that the first king should not fail in such qualities. Twice especially he was put to

the proof and failed; in the first instance (1 Sam. xiii.) by doing what he ought not to have done, and in the second (1 Sam. xv.) by leaving undone what he ought to have done. Twice his doom was pronounced by Samuel, who then sorrowfully retired, and left him to his own self-will and certain fate. But though he thus failed in securing the great prize set before him, he had space and opportunity for repentance and its fruits. He became after a time aware who was to secure the honour which he had forfeited, and had he been humbled in spirit and penitent, he might have shown by his conduct to David that he acquiesced in the Divine will, and was prepared to be a co-worker with God in its accomplishment. He might have cherished the spirit of John the Baptist, and said with resignation, if not joy, "He must increase, but I must decrease." Instead of this he cherished envy, which ripened into hatred, and would have culminated in murder but for the special providence which guarded David's life. Baffled in his repeated attempts on his life, he sought to kill his own son, because he pleaded for David; and actually slew eighty-five priests, their wives, children, and cattle, because one of them had shown kindness to David, in ignorance of the real state of affairs. Meanwhile David acted towards him with the utmost forbearance, sparing him when once and again he could easily have taken his life; the subsequent knowledge of which softened the king, but only for a little while. Yet he was not without some zeal for the Law of God, and, besides his sacrificial offerings, "had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land" (1 Sam. xxviii. 3). In the extremity, however, of his distress and perplexity, he sought the help of a woman that had a familiar spirit, but only to have his doom once more pronounced.

III. IT WAS THE END OF A LIFE IN WHICH THE DISPLEASURE OF GOD HAD BEEN MADE SIGNALLY MANIFEST. 1. *By the sentences of rejection pronounced upon Saul by Samuel.* (1 Sam. xiii. 14; xv. 23.) 2. *By the sorrowful abandonment of him by Samuel.* (1 Sam. xv. 35.) 3. *By the departure of the Spirit of the Lord from him, and the entrance into him of "an evil spirit from the Lord."* The Spirit which had fitted him for the discharge of his duties forsook him, and an evil spirit troubled him—an habitual melancholy, most likely, and depression. He felt he was not the same man. He was continually haunted with the sense of his being condemned and rejected, of the inevitableness of his fate, the certainty that, however long he might continue sovereign, he could not transmit the dignity to his son. And this gloom sometimes passed over into frenzy. He was, as we should say, subject to fits of insanity. This, doubtless, furnishes some excuse for the madness of his conduct. 4. *By the refusal of God to answer his prayers in the depth of his distress.* (1 Sam. xxviii. 6.) That had come upon him which is described in Prov. i. 24—31. 5. *By his miserable end.* Nothing, surely, can be more affecting than the circumstances of his death, as recorded in 1 Sam. xxxi. 3—6, supplemented by our text.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Every man has a Divine mission.* Not only kings and great men. God has assigned us our post, and expects us to fill it as under him. In doing so he gives the opportunity of great distinction and honour, even the attainment of an everlasting crown of glory. 2. *Habitual regard to the Divine will is essential to the fulfilment of our mission.* And how shall we ascertain it? We have no inspired Samuel by our side. But we have a greater than he, even the Lord Jesus Christ—the Word he has given us, the Spirit he bestows, the principles of godliness, holiness, and love which he implants. We need not seriously err. 3. *Disobedience will be surely followed by punishment.* 4. *One serious failure in obedience to God may blight and ruin the whole life.* 5. *Persistent rebellion issues in utter rejection of God.* And the final doom may be foreshadowed by the withdrawment of God's Spirit, and entire abandonment to the spirit of evil. 6. *Let not the young trust to their good moral qualities.* Let them seek at once through Christ that change of heart which will turn their virtues into holiness, render them loving and loyal to God, and ensure for them his favour now and evermore.—G. W.

Ver. 14.—*A weighty question.* David could consistently ask this question, for he had throughout acted with devout regard to the Divine anointing which Saul had received. When the opportunity was afforded him of slaying Saul, and he was urged to do so, he again and again steadily refused, notwithstanding all the provocation he received, and although he knew that Saul would have no scruple in putting him to

death. Yet the person to whom this question was addressed could, perhaps, hardly appreciate its significance. Supposing his narrative truthful, he may have been actuated by compassion in what he did; and he hoped for reward from David, in whom he saw the coming king of Israel. But, however this may be, the question may be used as applicable to those who assail with deadly intention him who is pre-eminently the anointed (the Christ) of God. First, to those who actually slew him, or took part in his death; and then to all who become sharers in their guilt by endeavouring to destroy his authority and sway amongst men.

I. WHO MAY BE THUS ADDRESSED. 1. *Those who assail the gospel of Christ.* 2. *Those who endeavour to destroy his work in the souls of men.* Such as resolutely resist and suppress the thoughts and emotions he produces in themselves, resisting his Spirit. Such also as set themselves to prevent or destroy his influence over others; endeavouring to undermine their faith, to corrupt their morals, to entice them from the paths of piety and goodness (see Matt. xviii. 6, 7). 3. *Those who persecute his people.* "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me?*"

II. WHY THEY ARE NOT AFRAID. 1. *Ignorance, in some, of what they are doing.* As seems to have been the case with this Amalekite. This palliation of guilt is admitted in the case of those who put our Lord to death (Acts iii. 17; 1 Cor. ii. 8). And he told his disciples that their persecutors even unto death would think they were "doing God service" (John xvi. 2). But ignorance itself may be guiltiness, though not so great as sinning against the light, knowing it to be light and hating it on that account. 2. *Disbelief as to the truth of Christianity, as to God himself, or even as to the reality and worth of godliness and goodness.* 3. *Moral insensibility.* Which may spring from disbelief, or from habits of godlessness and wickedness, or of mere worldliness. 4. *Expectation of impunity.* Because of the seeming weakness of him whom they assail (Matt. xxvii. 42, 43), or his delay in punishing (Eccles. viii. 11), or from false notions of the goodness of God. All these reasons cannot exist in the same person; but some in one, some in another.

III. WHY THEY OUGHT TO BE AFRAID. 1. *Because Jesus is the Lord's Anointed—the Christ of God.* He comes to men with Divine authority, appointed to be their King and Saviour. There is sufficient proof of this. "This is my beloved Son" was not only uttered from heaven; it appears in the whole character, teaching, miracles, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; in the correspondence of prophecy and history; in the testimony of the apostles and the miracles which attested their mission; in the birth, growth, and perpetuation of the Church; in the mighty beneficial influence of Christianity in the world; in its effects on individual character and happiness, on family life and national life. It is echoed in the hearts and consciences of men; in the happy consciousness of every Christian. It is fashionable now to apologize for unbelief, and treat sceptics very tenderly, as if their love of truth made them sceptics. But compare the sayings of our Lord, "He that is of the truth heareth my voice," and "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God." If, then, Jesus be God's Anointed, to fight against him is to fight against God, which is both impious and perilous. 2. *Because of the penalties incurred by opposition to Christ.* The injury they do to themselves now, the judgment which will come upon them hereafter. Him whom they assail they will one day see coming in the clouds of heaven, to take vengeance on his foes. "Those mine enemies . . . bring hither and slay them before me." 3. *Because of the injury they do to others.* Men with any regard to the welfare of others may well be asked to pause before they endeavour to rob them of their faith, and all that springs out of it, in sound moral principles, right character, happiness, comfort under the troubles and burdens of life, and hope in death; especially as avowedly they have no adequate substitute to offer. They ought to be afraid of taking a course which, if successful, would deprive the lowly and the poor of their chief consolation, leave unrestrained by any sufficient check the passions of men, and so demoralize and disorganize society.

IV. THE EXPOSTULATIONS WHICH SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO THEM. "How is it that thou art not afraid," etc.? Christian speakers and writers sometimes oppose those who are opposing Christ in a style suitable to the discussion of some abstract question. The conflict is conducted as if it were one of mere opinion. But surely those to whom Christ is dear ought to make it felt that they regard the question of his position and

claims as one of life and death—one in which all that is most valued by them for the sake of themselves, their families, and society at large is involved. And it is due to the foes of Christ themselves that this should be done. Their consciences should be addressed as well as their reasoning faculty. Remonstrance should be employed, and warning, as well as argument. Only let the warmth shown be that of love and intense desire for the salvation of men.

Finally, let the Christian rejoice that all opposition to "the Lord's Anointed" is, and must be, vain. It cannot injure him; it cannot seriously or permanently injure his cause. It can only recoil on those who engage in it (see Ps. ii.; Luke xx. 17, 18).—G. W.

Ver. 20.—*Joy amongst the enemies of the Church.* "Tell it not in Gath," etc. A poetical deprecation; for already had it been told among the Philistines, and triumphed over; and yet would be. The language expresses David's sorrow at the joy of the Philistines, and its cause. The words have often been used to express the concern of good men when Christians give occasion to the enemies of Christ's kingdom to rejoice.

I. THE OCCASIONS OF SUCH JOY. 1. In general, *the misfortunes of the Church*, whatever hinders its advancement or causes reversal. 2. In particular, *the inconsistencies of professing Christians.* It is amazing how men will gloat over the occasional lapses of Christians into sins which they are themselves habitually committing. Still it is a serious enhancement of the guilt of such lapses that they cause "the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme" (ch. xii. 14). 3. *Contentions and divisions among Christians.* When these are rife, the world is apt to exclaim in scorn, "See how these Christians love one another!" 4. *Failures in their work.*

II. THE CAUSES OF SUCH JOY. 1. *Hatred of God and goodness.* To "rejoice in iniquity" is a sure sign of this; and to rejoice in the enfeebling of the power which most of all tends to its subjugation—the power of Christian life and teaching—is scarcely less so. It is a diabolical joy. 2. *The encouragement in sin which is derived from the faults of good men.* Sinners feel as if justified in their own sins when Christians fall into them; their guilty consciences are relieved. As if sin in themselves were less sinful because practised by those who profess to have renounced it; or as if the Law of God, which condemns the Christian's occasional sins, did not at least equally condemn the habitual sins of others. Rather should they remember that the knowledge of the evil of sin by which they condemn others is to their own condemnation (Rom. ii. 1, 3). They ought, therefore, to take warning instead of indulging satisfaction.

III. HOW CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE AFFECTED BY IT. 1. *They should be careful not needlessly to publish that which will produce it.* "Tell it not," etc. Not *needlessly*; for ofttimes secrecy is impossible, sometimes it would be injurious. We must not deny facts, nor palliate sin, to prevent the triumph of enemies. But we ought not to eagerly announce to the world the occurrences which tend to our humiliation and their exultation. (1) For the sake of those who would exult. That they may not add to their sins by their unholy joy, nor become more hardened in them. (2) Lest we should put stumbling-blocks in the way of feeble Christians; or (3) discourage our brethren in their conflicts with evil; or (4) lessen the power of the testimony of the Church on the side of Christ and holiness. 2. *They should be still more careful so to live as to give no occasion for such exultation.* "That by well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Pet. ii. 15). 3. *They should in no degree imitate it.* Which they do when they rejoice at any scandal which arises in another Church that they regard as a rival, or at failure on its part in efforts to do good. Christian love "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth," and will be grieved at sin wherever it may be found, and at the failure of Christian work by whomsoever it may be done.—G. W.

Ver. 26.—*A beloved friend's death lamented.* David's lamentation over Saul was genuine. He saw now the good in him, and passed over the evil. He remembered his early kindnesses to himself, and thought not of his later enmity. He associated him with Jonathan, and was softened towards him on that account. He mourned sincerely that his death should have been caused, though not directly inflicted, by the enemies

of his nation, the Philistines. He sympathized with the people in their loss, and in the troubles which would surely spring from his death. But his lament over Jonathan was of another order. It was the outburst of a passionate grief at the tragical death of an affectionate and faithful friend, whom he tenderly loved, whose life had been lovely, and to David most kind and helpful.

I. JONATHAN'S FRIENDSHIP WITH DAVID. 1. *It seems to have originated in admiration.* The qualities of David, as they were displayed in the conflict with Goliath, found an echo in Jonathan's own soul, which became "knit with the soul of David," so that "Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam. xviii. 1, 3). There were natural affinities—youth, courage, faith in God. But there was, doubtless, also that subtile something, undiscoverable by analysis, which specially adapts one soul for closest union with another. 2. *It was very warm and passionate.* See the above quotation, and David's words in the text, "Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." 3. *It was cemented and confirmed by pledges and compacts.* (1 Sam. xviii. 3, 4; xx. 16, 17, 41, 42; xxiii. 18.) Note especially 1 Sam. xx. 17, "Jonathan caused David to swear again," etc. His love was so strong and passionate that it was never weary of pouring itself out in vows and protests and covenants. 4. *It was more than disinterested.* For Jonathan soon saw that David would succeed his father on the throne, and the prospect was strongly represented to him by Saul (1 Sam. xx. 31). But no jealousy sprang up in his heart; he was content to be second where David was first (1 Sam. xxiii. 17). 5. *It was shown by practical services.* He interceded with his father repeatedly for David, and exposed himself thereby to death from his father's rage. He warned David of his father's deadly purpose, and repeated the warning when, contrary to his hope, he found how implacable that purpose was. He visited his friend when banished from court and pursued by his relentless enemy. He "strengthened his hands in God." In all ways he proved himself a "brother;" yea, "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. xviii. 24). 6. *It was associated with strict loyalty to his father.* He had a difficult part to play, but he played it well. He was loving and devoted to Saul, while maintaining so warm a friendship with him whose life the father sought. David would only the more admire and love him on this account, for he was equally loyal to the unhappy king, and would have served him as devotedly if he had been permitted; and so, when both were slain on one battle-field, he united their memories in his elegy. "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in death they were not divided."

II. HIS DEATH. The dearest friends must be parted by death; and the pleasure they have enjoyed in each other's love and society will make the pain the more severe.

"There is no union here of hearts
Which finds not here an end."

Yet this is not strictly true. Christian friendships are immortal.

III. DAVID'S LAMENTATION. A worthy tribute of friendship—tender, sublime, and sincere. David would feel his loss irreparable. No friendship equal to this was it possible to form. Happily, while lamenting his loss, his sorrow was not embittered by the memory of any unkindness or unfaithfulness on his part. It is, however, singular that even in such a composition no reference to future life and reunion should find place. The consolations so natural to a Christian are unnoticed. They were not ordinarily known with sufficient distinctness to be of much service. "Our Saviour Jesus Christ . . . brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. i. 10).

We may regard the friendship of Jonathan for David as a picture of—

I. THE FRIENDSHIP OF JESUS FOR US. This is "wonderful" indeed, in its condescension, its spontaneousness, its disinterestedness, its sacrifices, its services and bestowments. And it never ends. This Friend never dies, never changes in love or power.

II. WHAT OUR FRIENDSHIP TO HIM SHOULD BE. It cannot be purely disinterested; we owe so much to him, and expect so much from him. Yet may our love be far more than gratitude; we may love him for his own sake, and shall do so if we are his. Nor let us restrain our affection, but lavish it upon him—ardent, tender, even passionate. He requires and deserves to be loved more than our dearest earthly relatives and friends. But ever let us remember that he values most our obedient and self-denying

service, and our practical love for his sake of those whom he loves and for whom he gave his life.

III. WHAT OUR FRIENDSHIP WITH EACH OTHER SHOULD BE. Our Lord came to found in the world a sacred friendship, a brotherhood, based on faith in him and love to him, and kept alive by regard for his love to us all. In Jonathan, and still more in Jesus, we see what this friendship ought to be.—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1.—**Unto Hebron.** As soon as David had assuaged his grief, his thoughts would naturally turn towards his country. Fuller news would reach him every day respecting the movements of the Philistines, who, after so decisive a victory, would quickly overrun all the central districts of Palestine, where the battle had been fought. And very bitter must David's feelings have been. Had he continued in Israel, he and his six hundred men would now have hastened to the rescue, and all the braver warriors of the land would have gathered round them. As it was, he was too entangled with the Philistines, and too much distrusted by the northern tribes, to be of much use. Still, we learn from 1 Chron. xii., that brave men did continually swell the number of his followers. Detachments of the tribes of Gad and Manasseh, instead of joining Saul at Gilboa, went to David as he withdrew to Ziklag. And while he remained there a considerable body of men from Benjamin and Judah came to him under the command of Amasa, David's nephew. So numerous were they as to alarm David, who went out to meet them, fearing lest they had come to betray him; and glad was he to hear their answer, "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse." Thus even as it was, his forces daily grew more numerous; for "from day to day there came to David to help him, until it was a great host, like the host of God" (1 Chron. xii. 22). But there was no national acknowledgment. With his numbers thus continually increasing, David was encouraged to make some attempt for the deliverance of Israel; but his position was one of serious danger. Great was the risk, but he knew where to go for guidance, and determines, therefore, to put the matter into God's hand. He summons Abiathar with the ephod, and, in the presence of his captains, asks for permission to go up to some city of his own tribe. The answer is favourable, and Hebron is the city selected. It was a place of ancient sanctity, was well situated in the mountains of Judah for defence, and as the Philistines had not yet invaded that region, but probably would soon try to ravage it, the people would be sure to welcome the presence of one who brought with him a powerful body of trained men.

Ver. 3.—**They dwelt in the cities of Hebron.** Not only had David wives, whom he took with him to Hebron, but many of his warriors were married, and thus they and their households formed a numerous body of people, for whom Hebron could scarcely find accommodation. Moreover they had flocks and herds captured from the Amalekites, for which they needed pasturage. And therefore David dispersed them in the towns and villages of which Hebron was the capital, posting them in such a manner as to render it easy for him to summon them together, while taking care that they did not injure his tribesmen, or dispossess them of their lands. We may feel sure that he consulted the chief men of Hebron as to these arrangements, and obtained their approval.

Ver. 4.—**They anointed David.** Samuel's anointing (1 Sam. xvi. 13) had been private, and, if we may judge by the manner in which Eliab treated David (1 Sam. xvii. 28), even his own family had not attached much importance to it. It was nevertheless the indication of Jehovah's purpose, and now the anointing of David by the elders of Judah was the first step towards its accomplishment. And this was an independent act, though the knowledge of Samuel's anointing had prepared the way for it; and David thus acquired a legal right and authority by the nation's will, which Samuel could not have given him. So Saul's anointing by Samuel, and his election to be king at Gilgal, were independent acts; and while the former gave the king his sacredness, the latter conferred upon him jurisdiction and power. **King over the house of Judah.** How came the Philistines to allow this? When subsequently he was again anointed, and became King of all Israel, the Philistines gathered their hosts at once; not because he captured Jerusalem, which was then a mere hill-fort belonging to the Jebusites, but evidently because they thought him dangerous. But why did they not crush him now? One reason, probably, was that Judæa was a difficult country for military operations. The tribe, too, had stood aloof from Saul, and its strength was unbroken. But the chief reason apparently

was that David maintained friendly relations with Achish, and paid him tribute. This explains the curious fact that Ziklag continued to be the private property of the house of David (1 Sam. xxvii. 6). The doings of a vassal of the King of Gath were regarded as of little importance. Had he not even marched with them to Aphek, as one of the servants of Achish? But when he endeavoured to restore the kingdom of Saul, they first made a hasty rush upon him, and, when repelled, they gathered their forces for as formidable an invasion as that which had ended in their victory at Gilboa.

Ver. 5.—**David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-Gilead.** This was David's first act as king, and it was worthy of him. Some suppose that when David was told of their deed, it was with a view of prejudicing him against them. But this is not credible. By this time all men knew how loyal and affectionate were David's feelings towards his former king; and moreover the men of Jabesh were bound to Saul by no ordinary ties of gratitude (1 Sam. xi.). Nor could David wish that Saul's remains, and those of Jonathan, should be subject to indignity. We may well feel sure that information respecting Saul was eagerly welcomed at Hebron, and the valiant men there would all rejoice at finding that the high spirit of the nation was not quenched. But in sending to thank them, in promising to requite them, and in bidding them persevere in similar conduct, David was acting as the head of the nation; and, to justify his action, he informs them that the men of Judah had made him their king.

Ver. 8.—**Abner.** This hero had been present at the battle of Gilboa, and probably had rallied many of the defeated Israelites, and made as much resistance as was possible to the onward march of the Philistines. And as soon as he had effected his retreat into the region beyond the Jordan, his power would be supreme. There was no one there to oppose the commander-in-chief of what remained of Saul's army. Certainly all that remained of Saul's body-guard of three thousand men would gather round Abner, and as the Philistines did not push their pursuit further than the Jordan, he was free to do as he chose. Nor would there be any opposition. Abner was bound to do his best for Saul's family, and the people would feel this, and approve of his conduct in standing up for the children of their king. Moreover, David by his conduct had made himself an object of suspicion to all the valiant men who had formed Saul's army, and these would be the more embittered against him by their defeat. **Ishbosheth.** This name signifies "man of shame," that is, "man of the shameful thing," the idol. Originally he was named Eshbaal (1 Chron. viii. 33; ix. 39), that is, "man of Baal," the word *esh* being merely a dialectic variation for *ish*, equivalent to "man." At this early date Baal was not the specific name of any idol, but simply meant "lord," "master," "husband." In the earlier books of the Bible we find the word used of many local deities, who were lords of this or that, but had nothing in common with the Phœnician Baal, whose worship Ahab attempted to introduce into Israel. From that time Baal became a term of reproach, and Bosheth, "the shame," was substituted for it in the old names of which it had formed part. Thus Gideon is still called Jerubbaal in 1 Sam. xii. 11, but the title is transformed into Jerubbesheth, or more correctly, Jerubbosheth, "let the shame plead," in ch. xi. 21. Originally, therefore, the name Ishbaal had no discreditable meaning, but signified, "man of the Lord," or, as Ewald supposes, "lordly man." It was not till long afterwards, when Israel had been horrified by Jezebel's doings, that Baal, except in the sense of "husband," became an ill-omened word. Jonathan, whose own name, "Jehovah's gift," in Greek Theodore, is proof sufficient that Saul's family were worshippers of the true God, called his son's name Meribbaal, "the Lord's strife" (1 Chron. viii. 34). In some strange way this was altered into Mephibosheth, that is, "from the face of the shameful thing" (ch. iv. 4. etc.). Possibly it is a corruption of Meribbosheth, but it is remarkable that a son of Saul by his concubine Rizpah also bore the name (ch. xxi. 8). Among the ancestors of Saul, the simple name Baal, "Lord," occurs (1 Chron. viii. 30). **Mahanaim.** Abner chose this town because it was on the eastern side of the Jordan, and so beyond the range of the Philistines, who never seem to have crossed the river. It was situated on the borders of the tribe of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, from both of which valiant warriors had joined David; but the people generally were not ill affected to the house of Saul. As having been assigned to the Levites (Josh. xxi. 38), it had a quasi-religious character, inherited from the vision of angels seen there by Jacob (Gen. xxxii. 2). As a safe, out-of-the-way place, David subsequently took refuge there (ch. xvii. 24). (On its exact site, see Conder's 'Heth and Moab,' pp. 177—181.)

Ver. 9.—**Make him king over.** A different preposition is used with the first three names from that employed afterwards, as though Ishbosheth's reign over Gilead and Jezreel was a reality, but that he had only a shadowy claim to dominion over Ephraim, Benjamin, and all Israel. **Gilead.** As Ma-

hanaim lay upon the borders of Gad and Manasseh, Abner would easily control these two tribes, and Reuben, which was never an active or enterprising tribe, would follow their lead. Of the **Ashurites** nothing is known, and the reading is uncertain, as the LXX. has "Thasir," and the Vulgate and Syriac "Geshur." The Chaldee paraphrase boldly gives "the house of Asher;" but this tribe lay close to Phœnicia, on the extreme north-west. There are two places called Geshur (see on ch. iii. 3), but neither of them seems meant, and more probably it was some place the name of which was uncommon, and so was wrongly copied by scribes until the present confusion arose. **Jezreel.** The name of this place, as specially subject to Ishbosheth, is surprising; for the town, at this time of no importance, lay in the wide plain between the mountains of Gilboa and the little Hermon. But this district was the prize won by the Philistines, and was a region where their cavalry and chariots gave them a great advantage. For Ishbosheth to have had even a nominal dominion over Jezreel, he must either have become a tributary, or Abner must have maintained a not unsuccessful struggle there after the battle of Gilboa. The latter is the more probable. In safe possession of all the country east of the Jordan, Abner was not likely to consent to anything so humiliating as submission to the Philistines; while David's connection with Achish made it neither so galling to him nor so disadvantageous. As the Transjordanic tribes assembled at Hebron to make David king to the number of one hundred and twenty thousand men (1 Chron. xii. 37), Abner plainly had large resources at his command, and, though the people were not very earnest in the cause of Saul's house, yet they would probably assemble in considerable numbers after the battle of Gilboa, to prevent any irruption of the victors into their country. At their head Abner probably gained some advantages over the Philistines, and thus became powerful enough to proclaim Ishbosheth king, and as Ephraim and Benjamin acquiesced, he became nominally ruler over all Israel.

Vers. 10, 11.—**Ishbosheth . . . two years . . . David . . . seven years and six months.** Where are we to place the five years and a half of difference? The usual assumption is that David was made King of Israel immediately upon Ishbosheth's murder; but this is wrong. We cannot believe that Abner would allow so long a period as five years to elapse before asserting the claims of Saul's family, especially as David was already made King of Judah at Hebron. Still, as the war with the Philistines was the first object of his care, and as some form of popular ratification was necessary, some months may have passed before Ishbosheth was publicly installed as king, though Abner must have acted in his name from the first. The main interval of five years before David's accession must have been after Ishbosheth's death. That murder, and still more so the murder of Abner, must have made David an object of great suspicion to all Israel. Shimei, when he called him "a bloody man" (ch. xvi. 8), was but uttering a slander commonly current among the people. Gradually most of them would become convinced of his innocence; and all, as they contrasted the anarchy which prevailed in their country with the peace and security won by David for Judah, would regard his election as the best course under the circumstances. As the Philistines immediately resented their action, and endeavoured to crush the king before he could concentrate his power, it is probable that during these five years they had again obtained practical command of the more fertile districts of Palestine. **Ishbosheth . . . was forty years old.** In the previous narrative Jonathan always appears as the most important of Saul's sons, and naturally it is assumed that he was the firstborn; yet his child was but five years old at his father's death, while Ishbosheth, his uncle, a younger brother of Jonathan, is described as a man of forty. Some think that Ishbosheth was the eldest son, but in 1 Chron. viii. 33 he is placed last, and, though a weak man, was not so feeble as to have been set aside from the succession. But confessedly the chronology of Saul's reign is so full of difficulties, that it is impossible altogether to explain it (see note on 1 Sam. xiii. 1).

Ver. 12.—**Abner . . . went out.** This is a further proof of considerable success on Abner's side. Encouraged by the result of numerous skirmishes with the Philistines, and the gradual restoration of the king's authority in Ephraim and Benjamin, Abner determined to make the attempt to win back Judah also. There David had been content with protecting Judah, and establishing good order; and, following his constant custom, had taken no steps to obtain for himself the kingdom "over all Israel." The war was of Abner's choosing, and shows him to us in the character of an able but ambitious and restless man.

Ver. 13.—**The pool of Gibeon.** As Gibeon, which lay about six miles north-west from Jerusalem, was twenty-six miles distant from Hebron, and about the same distance from Mahanaim, it is plain that David knew of Abner's march. Possibly he had been summoned to yield his kingdom up to Ishbosheth as the rightful lord, but, while taking no measures to extend his rule, he felt himself

justified in defending his election to be king over Judah. *The pool of Gibeon* is described by Robinson ('Researches,' ii. 136) as "an open tank about a hundred and twenty feet in length and a hundred in breadth, surrounded by a grove of olive trees. Above it, excavated in the rock, is a subterranean reservoir, to receive the water from a copious spring, from which the overflow descends into the tank below." As neither party was willing to shed the first blood in a civil war, of which the Philistines would reap the benefit, they both halted in sight of one another on opposite sides of the hill, with the tank below them in the middle.

Ver. 14.—**Let the young men now arise.** "Now" is not an adverb of time, but is hortative, and therefore rightly translated in the Revised Version, "I pray thee." It is by no means certain that Abner meant that this single combat should decide the war; for similar preludes before a battle are not uncommon among the Arabians, and serve, as this did, to put an end to the mutual unwillingness to begin the onslaught. So, too, games often preceded outbreaks of Scandinavian blood-feuds. And this was probably Abner's object. He was the assailant, but now found that his men shrank from mortal combat with their brethren. There is thus no comparison between this combat and that of the Curiatii and Horatii described in Livy, i. x. 25. **Let them play.** The word is grim enough, though intended to gloss over the cruel reality. On each side twelve of the most skilful champions were to be selected, who were to fight in stern earnest with one another, while the rest gazed upon the fierce spectacle. The sight of the conflict would whet their appetite for blood, and their reluctance would give place to thirst for revenge. The request was too thoroughly in accordance with Joab's temper for him to refuse, and his immediate answer was, **Let them arise.**

Ver. 16.—**His sword in his fellow's side.** The absence of the verb in the original sets powerfully before us the rapidity of the whole action. But what an action! Twenty-four experienced men each take the other by the head, and, without any attempt at self-defence, thrust their swords into their opponents' side, and leave their own sides exposed to a similar thrust. Were they, then, unskilful in the use of weapons? Impossible. Were they blinded by hatred of one another? But no rancour would make a man forget his skill in defence. Here there is no variety, no checkered fortune of the combatants, but all twenty-four do and suffer just the same; and it is remarkable that they had swords only, and no shields. With shields on their arms, they could not have seized one another by the hair. It seems certain, therefore, that this mutual butchery was the "play;" nor can we conceive of a more murderous and savage proceeding. Abner, at the head of his fierce Benjamites, thought, perhaps, that Joab had no men among his followers willing to throw life away in so senseless a manner. But Joab was as ready as Abner, and possibly some code of false honour, such as used to make men practise duelling, required the acceptance of the challenge. And so, with their appetite for blood whetted by the sight of twenty-four murders, they hastened to begin the fight. **Helkath-hazzurim.** Literally this means "the field of flints;" but as the flint is constantly used for any hard rock (Ps. lxxviii. 20), the Authorized Version has admitted into the margin a paraphrase taken from the Vulgate, which supposes that by flints are meant "strong men," and renders, "the field of strong men." So in Isa. xxvi. 4 "the flint," or rock, "of ages," is even translated "everlasting strength." Flints, however, were constantly used by the Israelites for knives whenever extreme sharpness was required. Thus for the circumcising of Israel, Jehovah commanded Joshua to prepare knives of flint (Josh. v. 2); and in course of time the sharp or whetted edge of a weapon was called its flint. Thus in Ps. lxxxix. 43 we read, "Thou hast turned back the flint of his sword." The name therefore probably means "the field of the sharp knives" (see margin of the Revised Version), and refers to the short swords with which they murdered one another.

Ver. 17.—**A very sore battle.** The purpose of Abner was thus gained. Excited by the spectacle of merciless slaughter, the armies manœuvred no longer, but rushed fiercely to the attack, and fought with fury. But the mighty men of David were irresistible. Only nineteen of his warriors fell, while Abner lost three hundred and sixty, and was forced to flee.

Ver. 19.—**Asahel pursued after Abner.** This episode is fully narrated, both because of Asahel's rank as David's nephew, and also because of its tragical consequences to Abner himself. Asahel was a son of Zeruiah, David's sister, and, while his own brothers were of little use to him, his nephews, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, were the mainstays of David's throne. As their father's name is never mentioned, but only the mother's, Zeruiah was probably a woman of great ability, and her sons inherited it from her. Possibly she had married beneath her station, or her husband had died early; but certainly her sons, thinking more of her than of their father, had soon thrown in their lot with David her brother (but see note on ver. 32). The youngest of the

three, Asahel, was remarkable for his personal accomplishments, and especially for swiftness of foot, for which he was compared to the Zebi, the camp-name of Jonathan (ch. i. 19). It now caused his death. For conscious that Abner was the sole support of Ishbosheth's party, and indignant at his challenge to useless slaughter, he pursued after him, allowing nothing to divert him from his object, and hoping to end the war by slaying the veteran commander. But though he had the fleetness of an Achilles, he had not his robust strength, and Abner, knowing that the combat was unequal, remonstrated with him, and bade him turn aside, and be content with winning the spoils of some meaner warrior. It is evident from this that Abner saw in this defeat in a battle of his own choosing, the certainty of the near downfall of the house of Saul, and, as he would then be in Joab's power, he was unwilling to have a blood-feud with a man of such determined character. "How," he asks, "should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?" It would be his duty, as the avenger of blood, to slay me. Apparently, during this conference, he was standing with the butt end of his lance held towards Asahel, to ward off his blows, but, as the spear-head was turned the other way, Asahel forgot that even so it might be used for offence. For it was pointed, that it might be stuck in the ground at night (1 Sam. xxvi. 7), and possibly shod with iron, though it is more likely that it was only hardened by being thrust into the fire. So when he saw that his words had no avail, and that Asahel was not on his guard, he suddenly struck him with it so violent a blow that it pierced his body right through, and Asahel fell down dead. It is probable, from the merciless force used, that there was a sudden outburst of anger on Abner's part.

Ver. 23.—**The fifth rib.** This rendering here and in other places arises from the derivation of the word from the numeral *five*, but this notion has long been abandoned, and the word is now known to be formed from a verb signifying "to be fat or stout." Really it means the abdomen, and is so translated in the LXX. and Vulgate, while the Syriac gives only the general sense, and renders "the breast." **In the same place**; Hebrew, *under him;* that is, immediately. So violent was the blow that Asahel dropped down dead without a struggle. So tragic was his fate, and so great the affection of David's men for the young warrior, that the pursuit ceased, and all, as they came up, remained standing by the side of the corpse.

Ver. 24.—**Joab also and Abishai pursued after Abner**; really, *but Joab and Abishai pursued*, and so the Revised Version. The sight of their slaughtered brother made them only the more determined in the pursuit, and doubtless, at their command, the soldiers would leave Asahel and follow their commanders. Of the "hill of Ammah" and Giah we know nothing; but it is evident that no halt was made until sunset.

Ver. 25.—**The children of Benjamin . . . became one troop.** Benjamin was probably the only tribe that entered keenly into Ishbosheth's cause; for the maintenance of the kingdom in the family of Saul meant the continuance of that favouritism which had enriched them at the expense of the community (1 Sam. xxii. 7). They were, too, a very warlike tribe, and Abner was one of themselves, and probably, therefore, the main body of his army, and certainly his most trustworthy men, were Benjamites. Profiting by the delay caused by the halting of David's soldiers round the body of the fallen Asahel, Abner had rallied his men, and posted them on the top of the hill, where they were prepared now to fight on more equal terms.

Ver. 26.—**Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?** The Vulgate renders this, "Art thou not aware that desperation is dangerous?" This is a very obvious truth, but probably Abner had in his mind something more statesmanlike. The struggle was for the empire over all Israel, and whoever won would be king over both sides. But every man slain meant a blood-feud, which would continue even after the kingdom was united; and Abner probably felt that his own slaughter of Asahel that day would render his position in David's realm difficult and dangerous. Among the Arab tribes quarrels are very common, but bloodshed rare, because of the blood-feud which follows. Moderation was thus necessary on both sides, while cruelty and the immoderate use of victory would sow the seeds of future trouble.

Ver. 27.—**Unless thou hadst spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone up**; or as the Revised Version renders, *had gone away, nor followed every man his brother.* The Revised Version makes the sense more plain. Joab throws the whole blame, and rightly so, on Abner. David would under no circumstances have attacked Ishbosheth, and Joab with his men had marched to the tank of Gibeon simply to repel an invading force. When there, Joab, doubtless by David's orders, had remained strictly on the defensive, and so unwilling were both armies to fight, that Abner had to resort to a most cruel scene of butchery in order to inflame their passions and force them to begin a conflict of brother against brother. But for Abner's

challenge, both armies would have separated as friends. And Joab still acts upon the same principle of forbearance, and gives the signal for stopping the pursuit. He was not a man of a tender heart, but he was wise and sensible, and fully aware that the slaughter of Abner and his men, even if he could have destroyed them all, would only have rankled in the minds of all Israel, and set them against David and his rule.

Ver. 29.—**And Abner and his men walked all that night.** At the end of the chapter we learn that Joab did the same. Each army had about twenty-six miles to march, and the night was less exhausting for a long walk than the day. As soon, then, as Abner saw Joab and his men occupied with the removal of Asahel's body, he withdrew from the hill of Ammah, and, passing through the Arabah, or plain of Jordan, crossed the river by the same ford which he had used when starting on his unfortunate errand, and so returned home. The phrase, **all Bithron,** shows that this was a district, but nothing more of it is known.

Vers. 30, 31.—**Nineteen men . . . three hundred and three score men.** Though David's "mighties," as they were called, excelled in the use of arms, yet the disparity of numbers is remarkable; for the Benjamites were also famous warriors. We can only account for it by the superiority of the tactics of Joab, who was a man of consummate military skill, and who knew both how to gain a victory and how to use the advantage which the pursuers have over the pursued to the full. If we sometimes wonder that David endured Joab so long, we ought to remember how much he owed to his nephew's genius, and that Joab was always faithful to himself.

Ver. 32.—**The sepulchre of his father, which** was in **Bethlehem.** The name of Zeruiah's husband is never mentioned, but he was evidently of the same town as his wife, and at his death, when probably still young, he had received honourable sepulture. As Bethlehem is about eleven miles distant from Gibeon, Joab probably marched thither straight from the battle-field, and spent the next day in paying the last tribute of respect to his brother, and in refreshing his men. At nightfall he resumed his march to Hebron, which was fifteen miles further to the south, and where he would arrive on the morning following that on which Abner reached Mahanaim.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—The facts are: 1. David, knowing that time was come for action, and being in doubt as to what movement would further the end in view, seeks guidance of God. 2. Not only does he obtain sanction to enter Judah, but is even instructed to make Hebron his head-quarters. 3. Entering the district around Hebron with his family and attendants, he is anointed by the men of Judah over the tribe of Judah. 4. Being informed of the kind and valiant act of the men of Jabesh-Gilead (1 Sam. xxxi. 11—13), David sends them a message of thanks, and assures them of the Divine blessing and of his own grateful remembrance. 5. He also reminds them that the crisis in the affairs of the nation, in the death of Saul on the one hand, and his own elevation by the men of Judah on the other, required of them to be true to their reputation as men of courage. There are several themes suggested by these facts. Among them, consider—

The beginnings of prosperity. As the Second Book of Samuel introduces a turn of affairs in the national experience, so this second chapter introduces a turn in the personal experience of David. He passes from the bitter trials of the past, through the anguish depicted in the first chapter, into the more prosperous and easy circumstances of free public activity. Undoubtedly he was conscious of a sense of relief from burdens almost more than he could bear (1 Sam. xxvii. 1); and being naturally buoyant and hopeful in spirit, the hitherto restrained powers of his nature were now eager to manifest their energy. His day had come after a long night of waiting. The promises of the past were about to be fulfilled. Jonathan's dream of his beloved friend being a more worthy successor than himself ('Pulpit Commentary,' 1 Samuel, pp. 381, 382) was coming true. In one sense David had always, even during his exile and sufferings, been a prosperous man, for he was God's chosen servant, blessed with a good conscience and the favour of the Eternal; but now he was all that with the additional circumstance of being about to enter on a position of commanding influence among the people of God. We have a counterpart to David's position at this juncture in some of the circumstances of our life; for in youth, in business, in Church work, and in national

affairs we sometimes meet with a similar beginning of prosperity. In so far as the passage before us affords teaching on this subject, observe—

I. THE BEGINNING OF PROSPERITY IS A TIME OF PECULIAR DANGER. In reading the narrative of David's trials on the one side, and of his prosperous circumstances on the other, we feel at once that in so far as his religious life is concerned there was far more hope of him under the former. The spiritual uses of adversity are very valuable, while on the other hand the spiritual dangers of prosperity are subtile and manifold. And likewise the transition from the one to the other is a time of peculiar danger. For David the occasion for dependence on God was not so obvious; and the demand for action would lay him open to mistakes and sacrifices of principle new in his experience. The dangers of such a time may perhaps be summarized thus. There arises a new and fascinating diversion of thought and feeling from God; a corresponding absorption of mental energy in the externals of life. The self-culture which consists in the watchful and constrained subordination of every feeling and motive to the will of God becomes somewhat relaxed. The free play of a much greater variety of feeling, passing out toward the attractive objects present in an opening success, lays us open to the insinuating flatteries of events, and the consequent encouragement to substitute expediency for stern principle. The presence or the prospect of a more abundant supply of material comforts cannot but give vitality to whatever of latent power there may be in the lusts of the flesh. The conscious elevation which awaits us is sure to appeal to that deeply seated human pride which, when developed, looks on others with more or less of disdain, and in proportion as the human lot is now or prospectively free from care does the heart care less for the blessings of a future life. The youth passing from the restraints and discipline of years into the wider sphere of life, and so enjoying the first taste of freedom and of manly dignity, stands in a slippery place. Churches passing from the trials of persecution into the ease of toleration cannot be sure of the old fidelity. Nations springing into prominence may contract habits of indulgence and arrogance in strange contrast with their former self-control and devotion to duty. Private Christians when emerging from the struggles of their early convictions may cease to watch and pray as heretofore, and soon lose the vigour of their former faith.

II. THE MORAL STRENGTH ACQUIRED DURING SEASONS OF PREPARATION WILL SHOW ITSELF IN CONTINUED DEPENDENCE ON THE GUIDANCE AND BLESSING OF GOD. Unquestionably David was a much stronger man, as a consequence of the protracted trials of past years, than he would have been had there been no waiting for the realization of hopes enkindled by the promise of God (1 Sam. xvi. 13). In the spiritual sphere, as in the material, reserves of force are gathered, by the action of special laws, in view of a demand to be made at a later stage of development. David in the wilderness and caves, Paul in the retirement of Arabia (Gal. i. 17, 18), other good men during seasons of discipline and culture, fulfilled the Divine law of acquisition of moral power prior to expenditure. And the reality of this acquisition in the case of David appeared at once in the promptitude with which, under all the distracting and diverting influence of a sudden elevation to importance, he acknowledges his need of the guidance and blessing of God. There is a natural necessity, not identical with true godliness, which causes men to turn to God in their troubles. It is the instinct of a genuine piety alone which prompts towards God when troubles cease and success begins. It is a blessed omen when men, on the dawning of their prosperity, and when flushed with the prospect of realizing long-cherished hopes, go straight to God, and in prayer both acknowledge his goodness and seek his special help for the occasion. Thus the subtile temptations and perils of the new circumstances are met by a wise use of that spiritual strength which had been stored amidst the trying influences of adversity or deferred hope. No doubt the apostles during their early ministry, on and after the Day of Pentecost, were giving out some of the spiritual power gathered into their nature during the three years of discipline and restraint under their visible Lord; in like manner men who go forth to successful encounter with evil owe much to the spirit trained to honour God in all things.

III. THE HOPE OF COMING PROSPERITY, WHEN MODERATED BY PIETY, INDUCES CAUTION AND CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS. Not only is continuous prosperity very perilous to man's higher life, but the prospect of it, after a season of trial, is likely to be charged with elements of danger which only a well-nourished piety can neutralize. David

could not but think much of himself now as a free man, an object of public interest, on the high-road to affluence, and about to enter on activities that would render him the chief object of interest. There would thus arise a new and perilous self-consciousness. The sobrieties, caution, and self-restraint acquired in adversity might now seem to be virtues suited to a bygone time. A profound knowledge of the world and of self would correct this judgment; but still the risk would be considerable, for man at his best estate is morally weak. It is just here that a sincere, well-cultured godliness comes in as a support to the dictates of a purely moral judgment and the suggestions of expediency. The man after God's own heart, because of being such a man, looks out on his opening prospects with a careful eye, and moves with as much caution and deference to a higher will as in the former days of trouble; and the comfort of his household, as well as the advancement to comparative ease and plenty of the men who had shared his sufferings, engage his thought, and they become the first partakers of the fruits of his improving fortunes (vers. 2, 3). The same moderating influence of piety is seen in the life of Joseph. The principle involved is taught by our Lord in his perfect freedom, even amidst growing honours, from self-absorption. With the measured step of sobriety he marches on to full dominion, and with tender regard for the welfare of all who have known the "fellowship of his sufferings." The same mind in us will tone down the dangerous excitement of successes, and induce a broad and generous consideration of the claims and requirements of others.

The following GENERAL LESSONS naturally flow from this subject as exhibited in the life of David: 1. The consciousness of our being God's servants, living supremely to effect his purpose in the world, gives great moral power to our conduct. David lived and moved as a "man of God." Blessed is he who can go forth daily with that conviction! 2. The assurance that God has a definite will in reference to our daily movements is warranted, not only by philosophic considerations, but also by the record of his actual dealings with his servants. David, the "sparrow," and the "hairs" of our head are means of illustrating that nothing in our life is too insignificant for Divine care, and therefore for matter of supplication (Matt. x. 29—31). 3. The true policy of man is another name for what is the will of God. No doubt in this case it was humanly expedient to go first up to Hebron; and because God knew it was best under the circumstances, he willed David to go. In the higher moral sphere, God's will is not a judgment based on knowledge of circumstances; but, though absolute, yet it always coincides with true policy. 4. The means of ascertaining the main lines of right action are within reach of a good man. God speaks in providence, conscience, and his Word. 5. There is immense moral support to our action when we have deliberately sought and have learnt the will of God. Firm is the step of such men, steady is their eye.

The uses of partial success. David's advancement to the throne of Judah was a great step towards the realization of the ideal which, ever since the day of his anointing, had drawn him on in the path of patient endurance; but it was far from being all that he wished. As compared with the understanding arrived at, and encouraged by all that God had said and done during the past years of exile, it fell below what he had a right to expect, for he was chosen of God to be ruler over the whole of the people; but, at the same time, it so far was satisfying that it became a pledge of still further advances till the original promise should be literally and in its entirety fulfilled. There is no indication here or elsewhere in the Psalms that David was vexed and fretful because he did not all at once succeed Saul as king of the entire nation. There were doubtless in the circumstances of the case sufficient pleas for an unfilial spirit to indulge in the language of disappointment; but the past discipline of this true child of God had manifestly wrought in him such confidence in the order of Providence, and such breadth of view with respect to Divine methods, as to render him deaf and indifferent to unhallowed suggestions. His cheerful acceptance of an instalment of fulfilled promise is in keeping with his former patient endurance of deferred hope.

I. THERE ARE MANY CONVERGING LINES INVOLVED IN OUR SUCCESS IN THE SERVICE OF GOD. The true final success of David's career lay in his becoming the beloved and honoured ruler of the entire chosen race. But a fact of this kind means the adjustment, over a considerable period, of countless subtile human relationships, the kindling of apparently divergent interests, and the physical removal of barriers by the action of

natural causes directed by a controlling mind towards a single issue. Not only must Saul be put aside and Jonathan be rendered willing to give place to another, but the mass of the nation must be won. The hand that had won over Jonathan and removed Saul now operates silently on the hearts of the men of Judah—David's own kindred; and their recognition of him as king at Hebron was preliminary, in the order of Providence, to the acquisition on the part of David of the experience that would qualify for sovereignty over the entire nation, and to the gradual creation in the various tribes of confidence in his character and abilities, as also the gradual annihilation by a natural process of the interest which men very properly felt in surviving members of the family of Saul. As many lines converged on his reaching the throne of Judah, so this elevation was the opening up of new lines that would ultimately converge on the complete realization of the Divine purpose in his life. While absorbed in our own individual experience, we do not see how the line we have to follow is what it is because of being one of many terminating in a common issue. Later on we are able to take the position of a geographer, who surveying the watershed of a region, sees the convergence, after all the circuitous windings round rugged mountains and through wild gorges, of various water-courses into one calm and majestic stream. Thus we now interpret the lives of Jacob and Joseph, and, above all, the varied earthly experiences of our Saviour. We thus have warrant for believing that there are more forces working toward the goal of our life of godliness than we can at present trace. We ought to cherish faith in God's silent action on the spirits of men for the furtherance of the ends for which we, as his servants, live and strive. David could obey, be patient and step forward when occasion offered; but meanwhile God could dispose the minds of Judah towards him, and educate the rest to recognize in due time his fitness to be their king also. The courses of nature are on the side of good men. The social world is not a chaos; there is a Power which subdues all things unto itself. This should comfort and strengthen us in all our efforts to see Christ recognized as King of kings.

II. SUCCESS PARTIALLY ATTAINED IS BOTH A PLEDGE OF DIVINE FAITHFULNESS AND A CALL TO HIGHER AND MORE DIFFICULT SERVICE. The elevation to the throne at Hebron was certainly a great success in the long and weary, and, so far as David was concerned with Saul, bloodless conflict. It must have given to the act of anointing by Samuel a fulness of meaning hitherto not realized. The venerable records of God's faithfulness to Abraham and Jacob after many a severe trial, which doubtless he was accustomed, at this period of his history, to read and meditate upon (Ps. i. 2; cf. cxix. 97, 99), were seen to be but counterparts of what he now could write. He had waited long; he had abstained from violent means and forced providences, and so could take heart and believe that the Lord forsaketh not his saints, but bringeth to pass that for which they wait (Ps. xxxviii. 1—4). And yet this partial success was to him the starting-point from which he was to advance still further in the fulfilment of life's purpose; it demanded of him more skill, more watchfulness, more caution, than ever. A new set of qualities would find scope for development; different and more subtile temptations would arise; the final triumph would depend on present use of partial success. Now, the case of David reigning at Hebron over part of the nation is the case of all who, like him, are engaged in maintaining the honour of God in a sinful world. What they have attained to, either in personal self-conquest or in subduing men to the obedience of faith, may be taken as pledge of the faithfulness that remains yet to be proved, while it opens up wider reaches of exertion and exposes to new and very dangerous forms of temptation. The history of the Church up to the fourth century, and its subsequent career till it recovered its tone in the time of the Reformation, furnishes abundant illustration of this double aspect of partial success. Our modern missionary achievements furnish distinct pledges of God's faithfulness, but they impose further and very serious obligations with a view to consolidation, and at the same time expose us to peculiar temptations which find no room in the season of early enthusiasm and sturdy endurance. The same applies to our own personal religion and the bringing of our entire nature into subjection to Christ (Luke x. 17—20; 1 Cor. x. 11, 12).

III. SUCCESS PARTIALLY ATTAINED FURNISHES FACILITIES FOR GREATER ACHIEVEMENTS. The acquisition of Hebron as the seat of government, some twenty miles south of Jerusalem, and situated among hills that rendered both defence and administration more feasible, furnished solid ground for the expectation that some day the more

important city would become the centre of a greater kingdom. The memorable historic associations of the place (Gen. xxiii. 2—20; Josh. x. 36; xiv. 6—15; xv. 13, 14; xxi. 11—13) could not but create in the mind of David the feeling that he was succeeding men who were substantially engaged in the same cause as himself, and who prospered therein. The natural position of the city, and the wise measures which thence would go forth for the government of a compact tribe, would naturally consolidate his power, and, in due course, issue in a contrast between his judicious rule and that of rivals in Israel, which would tend to break down prejudices against him, and give force to his claim when an opening occurred for his assumption of sovereignty over the twelve tribes. Using well his moderate gains, he would convert them into agencies for complete triumph. Herein is the law of solid advance. In the organic world higher and more beautiful forms are built up by means of the powers latent in the lower forms already in being. Mental life becomes wide in range and profound in thought by conversion of partial knowledge acquired into means of further development. Social weal may proceed by stages, in which for a time progress may seem to be checked; but the institutions and habits consolidated soon become points from which other, and better, are formed. The growth of the spiritual life of the Christian means the successive attainment of points of advantage, which, though far from satisfying the earnest soul who seeks to subdue all to Christ, yet render the subjugation of the entire man to the Law of Christ more easy and certain. Christian enterprise often lays hold of some Hebron, in the heathen world, or in the midst of our non-Christian civilization, and working thence, with memories of past success to cheer and encourage, gets nearer to the goal of all prayer and effort—the bringing of the entire race into cheerful submission to Christ, the true King in Zion. Therefore, like David in Hebron, we all should gratefully accept what is vouchsafed as the reward of effort and patience, and apply our new resources and acquired position to higher issues.

An instructive episode. The sacred narrative is in the main concerned with the great national events which point on to the coming of the permanent King in Zion; but here and there it introduces a personal incident, which forms a pleasing and instructive episode amidst the public transactions which are the staple of the history. So here, while describing the important facts connected with David's elevation to the throne, and the consequent advance in the unfolding of the process by which at last the Christ should appear, the writer relates a circumstance of a more private character, and that both reveals noble qualities in David and sets forth truths of general interest. Observe, then—

I. THAT, IN A TRUE MAN, AFFAIRS OF STATE DO NOT EXTINGUISH THE MORE TENDER AND REFINED SENTIMENTS OF LIFE. To become monarch by a people's choice and in accordance with Divine purpose involves the pressure of heavy responsibilities, the absorption of energy in onerous duties, and the exposure of the spirit to manifold temptations to selfish aggrandizement. It is to the honour of David that he retained, amidst all these new and perilous conditions, his old tenderness of feeling and noble generosity. He found time and faculty for thinking lovingly of his once relentless but now buried foe, and for cherishing gratitude and respect for the men who had, at much personal risk, striven to pay honour to the dishonoured corpse (vers. 5, 6). He was not spoiled as a man of generous sentiments by becoming a king. He nourished private feelings amidst public cares. He would have the men of Jabesh-Gilead know how fondly he cherished the remembrance of their kindness to one now no more. How unlike many who have gained a throne through the disasters brought on rivals! How free, natural, and simple the expression of feeling as compared with the formal courtesies which sometimes society requires toward even the detested dead! In these respects David is a type of the greater One, who, amidst all the cares of life, cherished in his heart only pure, kindly, generous feelings towards even those who by others would have been forgotten. In like manner it is well that we strive to keep the heart fresh and warm when promotion comes, or public affairs absorb, or temptations arise to be indifferent to the minor claims of life.

II. THAT A TRUE MAN WILL EXHIBIT IN HIS CONDUCT THE SUPREMACY OF HIS LIFE'S SPIRITUAL PURPOSE. There is an obscurity in the exhortation sent to the men of Jabesh-Gilead arising from its laconic character (ver. 7). But, read in the light of what

we know to have been David's faith in the coming kingdom of God ever since the anointing by Samuel, it means this: "You are perplexed and anxious about the interests of the people of God and their future. Do not yield to that state of mind. Be true men; do your part as patriots in this time of change; for Saul, your master, is dead, and every man, therefore, should do his best for the common weal. I have been made king over one section of the people of God, and I, therefore, am in a position to do my part. Let us, then, work as brave men for the bringing on of the better time." Thus, in the but partial fulfilment of the prediction by Samuel, and amidst the private affairs of life, David cherishes clear and full faith in the onworking of the Divine purpose towards final realization. His destiny as king over all the chosen race, in God's Name, was still the predominant thought. All along during those bitter days of exile and persecution the thought was uppermost, and nerved him with patient courage; and even now, when more than half the people did not want him to be king, he keeps the thought clearly in view. So was it with our Saviour. He came knowing he was to be Lord of all—Head of a united people. "For the joy that was set before him"—in prospect of this—"he endured the cross, and despised the shame;" and when only partially recognized as Lord by a few, he still had faith in the outworking of Divine purposes, and believed that to him "the gathering of the people" would be, and that there would be "one flock and one Shepherd." Those, also, who enter into the Saviour's Passion likewise keep the spiritual purpose of life clear above all earthly things, and adjust the partial successes, the deferred hopes, and even the private intercourse of life to the one absorbing ideal. Blessed men, who thus see Christ's final triumph before it is realized! What tone, elevation, and patience does it give to life!

III. THAT TRUE MEN IN EXALTED POSITIONS GIVE TONE TO SOCIETY. During exile, David was at the head of a band of men, and now he became the ruler of a people with title of king. As leader and chief his spirit had influenced his followers. Now that he is king, the people told him of the men of Jabesh-Gilead burying Saul. Why? Was it that he might be revenged on men who had done honour to a persecuting enemy? Not thus had they learnt of their leader. They knew him of old as generous to Saul (1 Sam. xxvi. 9—12); they had heard his pathetic lament over Saul (ch. i. 17—27), and they were sure that he would be comforted in knowing how poor Saul's corpse had been cared for. Obviously, the leader had given a nobler, more generous tone to men beneath him. In ordinary life, such men would have rejoiced in the death of a foe. It is doubtless true that the tone of society proceeds largely from the higher to the lower in position. A good monarch affects the peasant and the peer. The lower grades of society get their tone very much from what prevails in ranks above them. If our rulers and persons of position display kindliness, temperance, and piety, they do much thereby to fashion the character of others. The same principle applies to thought. Ideas are wrought out by the highest minds, and gradually permeate the thinking of the undisciplined and uncultured. Hence the serious responsibilities of station!

Vers. 8—17.—*Fanatical patriotism.* The facts are: 1. By degrees, and with the aid of Abner, those parts of the country not subject to David, and which, during the decay of Saul's power, had come under the control of the Philistines, now became consolidated under the rule of Ishbosheth. 2. The jealousy between Israel and Judah, owing mostly to the hostility of Ishbosheth's adherents to David, assumes threatening form, and the leaders on each side, attended by a small army, come together face to face, probably to consider the points in dispute. 3. The political questions not being solved by discussion, Abner proposes (vers. 13, 14; cf. ver. 27) as alternative a settlement by a combat of twelve select men from each side. 4. The combat issuing in mutual destruction, the main forces come into conflict, and Abner suffers defeat. The men who entered into the strife here recorded doubtless prided themselves on the zeal they felt for their country, and were ready to justify in words the deeds of the sword. It is customary to credit people with patriotism, and to that extent condone their savage passions. But too often the plea of patriotism is only a cover for a lack of reason and a domination of inferior impulses.

I. ATTACHMENT TO KING AND COUNTRY IS SUBORDINATE TO A HIGHER LAW. Considered in the abstract, such attachment is worthy only of admiration, and it forms an element in a people's well-being. But human feelings, with their corresponding acts,

are parts of a great complex whole, and their worth in any particular concrete instance depends on antecedent and concomitant facts. There is a gradation of obligations, and virtues in name cease to be virtues in reality when they appear in isolation, or consequent on a disregard of a higher law. The men of Israel were bound to love their country, and to show love to it by asserting the rights of their ruler. But at the same time they were bound to follow the guidance of God; to submit to his supreme will; and, making this the standard of feeling and action, to modify the form of expressing love to country and ruler accordingly. Now, the men of Israel, especially the leaders, ought to have known, from the events and words of Samuel's life, and, indeed, from the manifest interposition in favour of David and against Saul, that it *was* the Divine will that they should not oppose David; that, in fact, love of country was to show itself in accepting whom God had chosen. Any personal interest, therefore, which they may have felt in a son of Saul, and any regard for what they deemed the good of their native land, should have shaped its form of expression in harmony with their primary and higher obligation. The principle is of wide range. Any passion for our country and sovereign must be exercised within the limits of a higher love. If so-called patriotism involves hatred of men as men, or injustice to them, or national selfishness, then it is a violation of the second great commandment. If upholding a ruler and seeking to subdue a neighbouring ruler involves a contravention of God's will, revealed in the order of manifest Providence or Scripture, then it is a spurious patriotism. Human feelings are not the tests of truth.

II. BLENDED IGNORANCE AND PASSION ENTAIL SUFFERING AND SLOW PROGRESS IN NATIONAL LIFE. Had Israel been alive to the lessons which God was teaching them all through the life of Saul, by means of Samuel and David and Jonathan, they would never have allowed the sentiment of interest in a monarch's son to have developed into a strong aversion to David and a passionate effort to expel him from Judah. Considering all the facts of the case, there is no valid excuse for their ignorance, and, therefore, none for their feelings, even though patriotism be pleaded. Thus we see how neglect to gather up and use the lessons of Providence, slight an evil as it may seem to be at the time, really is the seed-sowing of the innumerable miseries of a civil war. If, during those painful years of contention, the energies of men are diverted from industrial channels into the wasting channels of war, and if, consequently, national progress is retarded, the cause is to be found in the domination of ignorance and passion. So has it been again and again. That *vox populi* has always been *vox Dei* is little less than blasphemy. Generations looking back on their ancestors see how wars and strifes took their rise in stupidity; and yet, too often, there is an unwillingness to pause lest the same evil be repeated. The woes that have come upon nations in consequence of war are a dark foil, setting forth in wondrous light the wisdom and sweet reasonableness of the gospel of Christ. If peoples would find the clue to progressive national development, let them accept and put into practice the sober, generous precepts and principles of the New Testament. This harmony of Christ's religion with economic law is no feeble strand in the evidence of its Divine origin.

III. THE GREAT ERROR OF LEADERS TOO OFTEN LIES IN THEIR INDISPOSITION TO TRACE OUT THE LEADINGS OF THE HIGHER LAW. Abner's suggestion that the dispute should be settled by combat of twelve on each side was an appearance of humanity and sobriety as compared with the indiscriminate use of force. But in the light of reason it is absurd; for right cannot be constituted by chance superiority of might. The complication in which he found himself was simply the result of previous indisposition to find out the Divine meaning of Samuel's dealings with Saul and of Jonathan's compact with David (1 Sam. xiii. 11—16; xv. 24—31; xvi. 6—13; xx. 12—17; cf. xvi. 57; xxvi. 3—16). It had been easier to follow the family feeling and official impulse (1 Sam. xiv. 50; ch. ii. 8, 9) than to look at private and public interests in the light of such revelations of God's will as were then available. It is a good maxim in moral questions that first promptings are best. The voice of conscience is quick to speak, even though in low tone. Most probably Abner recognized that voice telling of God's will in David. But where there is an unwillingness, because of personal or other interests, to give heed to that voice, it soon becomes easier to follow the lower impulses; and when once on the slippery incline of lower impulse, every movement adds to the momentum downwards. Herein lies the danger of our public men. They especially

need the "light of the Lord." Expediency and wrong principles gain on them unconsciously in so far as they lose the primary sensitiveness of conscience. The contagion of their spirit and conduct affects the lower orders. They will have no difficulty in finding men willing, under the cover of patriotic sentiment, to enter the "field of sharp edges," and kill and be killed. Hence, it behoves preachers and all good men to bring the light of the higher law of life to bear with all its clearness and directness on the minds of those in authority.

Vers. 18—32.—The facts are: 1. Asahel, a younger brother of Joab, taking part in the pursuit, fixes his eye on Abner, and keeps on his track, and, being swift of foot, soon overtakes him. 2. Abner, conscious of superiority in arms, and remembering the high family connections of the rash youth, chivalrously urges Asahel to try his prowess on some one else. 3. The counsel being proudly disdained, Asahel falls under the spear of Abner. 4. At the close of the day the scattered men of Israel concentrate on one spot, and pause, while Abner, perceiving the folly and misery of the civil war, appeals to Joab for a cessation of hostilities. 5. Joab, reproaching Abner for his having brought on the conflict by his own acts and words in the morning, sounds the recall to his men, and henceforth they cease to fight their brethren. 6. Abner and his men retire to the east of Jordan, while Joab and his men bury Asahel, and proceed to David's seat of government.

Instructive youthful imprudence. The historian here gives considerable prominence to the rash conduct of Asahel and its sad consequences. Without at all straining the narrative, or indulging in fantastic methods of interpretation, we may call attention to the following considerations naturally suggested by the narrative.

I. THE PRINCIPLE ON WHICH THE MATERIALS ENTERING INTO THE SACRED HISTORY WERE SELECTED. The Bible is a history formed by a selection of a few materials out of many. The unwritten history of a people is more ample than the written. The question naturally arises—On what principle did the sacred historians proceed in accepting some items of fact, and rejecting others equally true? Many a noble youth besides Asahel must have fallen in the course of the ages traversed by the biblical story, but their name and deeds are unrecorded. The theory that the different writers of the historic fragments which from time to time appeared in Jewish life, and now make up the whole Bible, were literary artists or philosophical historians, is not tenable. There is in the narratives an entire absence of the art and the philosophy which may be traced in such writers as Thucydides, Niebuhr, Macaulay, and Froude; while, running through these fragments, there is a unity equal to anything found elsewhere. The case of Asahel is an illustration of the whole. The somewhat detailed reference to the occasion of his death is obviously connected with the subsequent reference to the occasion of the death of Abner, and the death of Abner is closely connected with the removal of the most influential barrier to David's consolidation of the entire kingdom, and David's life and reign are, we know, important in Hebrew history, because of their bearing on the line of providence by which "David's greater Son" at last came to reign in the true Zion. Here, then, we get a clue to the principle on which, by the unconscious guidance of the Spirit of God, facts were culled from Hebrew annals and incorporated in the sacred history. Direct or indirect bearing on the redemptive purpose in Christ was the criterion of incorporation. Not that everything related to that purpose is incorporated, but only such as is. The same doubtless applies to the principle on which the evangelists were, unconsciously perhaps, guided to select out of the mass of fact connected with the life of Christ such items as we have in the four Gospels.

II. THE WASTE INVOLVED IN THE USE OF VALUABLE POWERS TO UNSUITABLE ENDS. Asahel, the Hebrew Achilles without his skill in arms, was swift of foot—a valuable quality, and, in certain uses, likely to render great service to the state; but, as employed against the superior prowess of Abner in personal conflict, it only proved the occasion of premature unavoidable death. All the latent capacity for service in years to come, all the joys of domestic life, were thrown away by this rash encounter of the fleet-footed youth with a man of war. Looking at his conduct from a distance, we can see its essential folly. Physical and mental qualities, like limbs, are adapted to specific uses,

and when applied to cases in which their excellence can turn the scale of advantage, then the utmost zeal may be displayed; but apart from this they may involve us in great trouble. Judgment in the use of small gifts will often achieve better results than can be secured by an indiscreet use of greater gifts. Possibly Asahel remembered the youthful David, skilled with the sling, going forth to fight Goliath; and it may be, also, that he was fully conscious of being on the side of the Lord's anointed. But the case of David was not parallel. Then there was an imminent peril for all Israel, and no other means available for warding it off; while here, whatever peril had existed was gone. No conviction of being on the side of God is a justification for rashness. The fall of Abner as a foe of David was in wiser hands than those of the fleet-footed youth. We have all to learn the lesson of adaptation. The student of purely physical science renders great service where physical facts and conclusions embodying them are alone concerned; but, like Asahel, he applies his powers in a dangerous direction when he presumes to be an authority on super-physical questions. Much of the waste of Christian energy arises from individuals attempting to rid the world of evil by working along lines unsuited to their capacities; and we see daily instances of men and women wasting their mental and physical substance in occupations in which their specialities find no suitable objects. A little wisdom goes a long way in human affairs.

III. THE ENFORCED SUBJUGATION OF POWERFUL SENTIMENTS. With all his faults of lurking ambition and infidelity to conscience, Abner was not destitute of chivalrous qualities. Possibly the conviction that his ill-espoused cause was on the wane may have awakened the prudential desire to obviate as far as possible personal offence to Joab, the rising general; but with this there was evident pity for the rash youth, and a chivalrous wish to take no undue advantage over a noble though impetuous foe. His position was one of extreme difficulty. His own death, or that of his pursuer, seemed to him to be the only alternatives. The thought of surrender, or of simply disabling his foe, appears not to have occurred; and in the choice of death to Asahel there was consequently involved a subjugation of the kindly, generous sentiments, and also of minor expediencies, to the love of self-preservation. Junctures of a similar kind occur in the lives of most men. Contending considerations distress the spirit. Deeds have to be done which any way entail misfortune. Abraham had to part company with his kinsman Lot, or perpetuate painful strifes. Moscow was burnt by the hands of its inhabitants to save themselves from possible subjugation. Commercial men can point to instances in which they have had to subordinate strong impulses to one commanding call to safety and honour.

IV. PUBLIC HOMAGE TO ILL-FATED RANK. The general honours paid to Asahel were in accordance with the custom of the age, which made persons of superior birth the objects of unusual attention. In this case there was conjoined the sentiment of admiration for enthusiasm, rash but real. In so far as man can find a reward for self-sacrifice in the sorrowful attentions to mortal remains of survivors, this young man did not die in vain. The instinct of men which leads them to regard with tender sympathy the death of a young hero in a public cause is very sound; for it means a discernment of noble qualities, a charity toward weaknesses, an unspoken lament over promising gifts prematurely lost to the world, and sympathy with aspirations not realized. The addition of social rank intensifies these feelings, and at the same time infuses over them all the superiority derivable from rank being regarded as the symbol of an ideal life toward which human nature constantly aspires. The hard utilitarianism that would banish sentiment as a mystical superstitious nuisance, and the impossible democracy that would annihilate social differences, will ever find human nature too strong for them. It is a fair subject for study—What are the functions in life of the instincts which find an outlet in acts of homage? How much does society owe to their binding power? In what degrees do they tend to tone down the asperities of the struggle to live? How may they be made subservient to the cultivation of religious feeling?

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. We should endeavour carefully to trace analogies between the structure of the Word of God and the structure of the other works of his hand. 2. It is important to watch against the temptations arising from the possession of qualities developed in a high degree. 3. The more prominent our gifts are in a particular direction, the more need is there for the cultivation of a calm judgment, if we would

give the world the full benefit of their exercise. 4. In a choice of what seem to be opposing evils, we should endeavour to be guided by some clear and broad principle irrespective of consequences.

The alternations of passion and reason. The battle between the forces of Abner and Joab was a small affair as compared with many of the conflicts recorded in Jewish history; and this is probably to be ascribed to the conviction which both leaders entertained of the weakness of the cause of Ishbosheth. Abner evidently had not made preparations commensurate with an unchangeable determination to see right done to his nominal master. The gathering of his few broken forces on the brow of a hill, and his appeal in their presence to Joab, were the outward signs of his virtual surrender. In his plea of humanity, "Shall the sword devour for ever?" and in Joab's prompt answer, we get revelations of human character common to every age.

I. IT IS THE LOWER PASSIONS OF MEN THAT LEAD THEM TO SEEK TO ESTABLISH WHAT THEY CALL THE RIGHT BY VIOLENT MEANS. Ostensibly Abner was engaged in establishing the right of Ishbosheth to the rulership over the entire nation. As Joab reminds him, it was his will that led to war that day. In the eye of ordinary men, and judged by the customs of both ancient and modern peoples, Abner was justified in seeking to establish his right by force. But in his case, at least, the use of force was not the result of calm reason and conscience applied to the solution of a question of right. His past acquaintance with all the incidents connected with Samuel's recognition of David, and with the general evidence of the Divine rejection of the house of Saul, must have made him feel that however much personal ambition may have inclined him to identify himself with Ishbosheth, reason and conscience pointed the other way. In the depths of his heart, therefore, he knew that his was not the right side. The same may be said of most of the wars into which men have entered. However much they may have talked about their right, it has been passion—love of domination, selfishness, greed, jealousy, family feuds, or some other low-born feeling—that has darkened the eye of reason and drowned the voice of conscience. Let any one study the words and read the feelings of a people at war, and he will soon see how low and base are the passions that sway their conduct. As when an arm is stretched out to smite an individual, there is a flow of passion that dethrones reason for a while, so is it with communities when they enter into strife. As to the abstract question of right being enforced by might, it may suffice to say that while an orderly government is a terror to evil-doers (Rom. xiii. 2, 3), in the disputes of nations no might can make a right, and if rulers and people will but suppress passion of every kind, and give sole heed to the guidance of a calm reason and to the subtle dictates of conscience, they will not be long in doubt as to what the right is; and seeing it, they will not be able to do in the name of reason and conscience what can only come from the domination of low passions. The fact is Christianity is consistent. In so far as men are Christian they will not bring on war. The *war-spirit* is a disgrace to a people calling themselves Christian, and must be shocking to the Blessed One, whose acts were the outcome of light and love.

II. A DEFEAT OF PLANS AND PURPOSES AFFORDS A NEW CHANCE FOR THE DICTATES OF REASON. The inflaming of some of the worst of passions, which necessarily takes place in carrying on war, is a sad detriment to the finer susceptibilities of human nature. Abner was deaf to reason before and during the turmoil of conflict, when the lust of power and the passion of self-defence were at work within him. The frustration of his schemes by the defeat he encountered toned down these strong feelings, and gave some room for higher influence to come into action. The animal had spent its powers, and reason remained. On the brow of the hill, among his exhausted men, he thinks of peace, and recognizes the barbarity and folly of human slaughter. How truly is he a type of others! How often have nations slain and inflicted miseries, and when the fierce passion has spent itself have begun to speak of peace, and the need of staying the devouring sword! That the defeated are the first to do this makes no difference to the bearing of the fact on the moral question, since before defeat they were as much the slaves of passion as the victors. It is sad to think how little human life is governed by high and holy principle. A similar reassertion of the authority of reason and conscience on the occasion of defeat of purpose is seen in individuals who, having

followed in their private life the heat of passion, are at last brought low by disaster or sickness, and constrained, as the fires of passion become slack, to give heed to the higher authority within. Though life may have been wasted, and, as in Abner's case, may have caused much misery, there is hope of a better end. The prodigal son is an extreme case of the kind.

III. IN SEASONS OF FAILURE MEN ARE GLAD TO AVAIL THEMSELVES OF THE HIGHER CONSIDERATIONS THEY ONCE SET ASIDE. Both fools and every man of sense must have admitted the force of Abner's appeal (ver. 26). Now in his defeat he pleaded considerations of humanity, of common tribal interests, and of general expediency. One might have thought that the possibility of the death of three hundred and seventy men and the general miseries of a battle would have been of force with Abner in the morning of the day; but it is only when failure had come that he can use the higher reasons for saving himself and followers from still greater calamities. So is it that men can use moral reasons when it answers their purpose. They pay homage to the superiority of moral reasons by pleading them with emphasis when they have anything to gain thereby. France could appeal to Europe against what were termed hard and ruthless conditions when in defeat, but no question of humanity or common European interests was raised when she entered on the war against Germany. Many an evil-doer, overtaken with the consequences of his deeds, speaks of the desirability of mitigating suffering and remembering the innocent that share the consequences of his actions, who, while in the path of his wrong-doing, was heedless of the pleadings of humanity. In these facts have we not an intimation of the more comprehensive truth that the day will come, the day of the defeat of all the enemies of Zion's King, when every soul shall recognize the righteousness and expediency of the great principles which once they rejected as the spring of conduct and which enter into the essence of Christ's government?

IV. AMIDST THE DIN OF LIFE MEN SOMETIMES OBTAIN A GLIMPSE OF A BETTER ORDER OF THINGS THAN THAT THEY ARE IN. Abner was painfully impressed with the miseries consequent on that day's conflict, and by a stretch of imagination he pictured to himself what would be the issue to his nation if the spirit of war which then prevailed in men's hearts were to move on unrestrained. He saw only "bitterness in the latter end." Then, by a reversion of the picture, he could not but think of the comparative blessedness that would ensue should the sword not continue to devour. Human life as we see it is a spoiled thing. Nationally and personally it is often laid waste. Neither individuals nor communities have attained to the development, physical, intellectual, and moral, which is the ideal of life, and which may, if men will, become real. Artists sometimes have depicted in contrast "War" and "Peace," and so have given form to the ideal, which often steals before the imagination, of a more blessed state of things than that familiar to us. The representations of the Bible encourage us to dwell on the beautiful image of a time when the sword shall no more devour—when men shall learn the art of war no more. Also, out of the dull and beclouded life of many a poor victim of sin there arises, consequent on the revived teaching of early years, a lovely and apparently unattainable image of a pure and blessed life, strangely in contrast with the defiled and restless past. Such a "heavenly vision" has a message to which it behoves us not to be disobedient.

V. A CONVICTION OF BEING ENGAGED IN A RIGHTEOUS CAUSE ENABLES MEN TO ABSTAIN FROM STRIFE. Joab did not seek to carry on the conflict. He contented himself with reminding Abner that had he been wiser in the morning he would not have had occasion to lament the evils of the evening. Most probably he knew the aversion of David to a civil war, and was simply carrying out the wishes of his king when he ordered his men back to Hebron. Moreover, his presence with David during the exile gave him abundant opportunities of knowing the validity of his claim. Subsequent facts show that Joab was not of the highest type of character, but he was sagacious, and could, as a Hebrew, recognize the force of the supernatural claims of David. It was doubtless the assurance that he was on the right side, which so often had been vindicated by God's providence, that induced him to cease from war and abide the issue of events. History proves that too often it is the men who are least conscious of rectitude of motive and justice of claim that press on with the sword, as though time, the healer of strifes, would be sure to work against them. David's calm waiting during

all the years of provocation, when Saul was eager for conflict, was here showing itself again in the moderate conduct of his general. In the highest sphere, that of Christ's life and kingdom, we see how assurance of right was conjoined with a spirit that would not strive. It is along the same line that the Church should move to moral conquests, and kings and private persons may also do well to act in the same spirit.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—(ZIKLAG, HEBRON.) *Divine guidance.* "David inquired of the Lord" (ver. 1). A new chapter in the life of David now opens. By the death of Saul and Jonathan the obstacles to his accession were, in part, removed. The time of patient waiting was gone, and the time for decisive action come. As he had not run before he was sent, so he did not expect, without running, to attain. But he would not take a step without the approval and direction of God. His inquiry pertained to the Divine purpose he was chosen to fulfil, and the Divine guidance he needed for its accomplishment. In this inquiry, as in his subsequent conduct and experience, he was a pattern to us; since *there is for every man a Divine plan and purpose of life*, which he should seek to ascertain and strive to realize. Consider Divine guidance (in the way to a crown) as—

I. URGENTLY NEEDED. We are liable (like travellers in a strange country) to go astray from the right path and fall into danger. 1. This liability arises from *many erroneous paths* presented to our view; their attractive appearance and strong temptations. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. xiv. 12). 2. And from the *imperfection of our own nature;* our ignorance, and our disposition to please ourselves rather than deny ourselves and please God. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself," etc. (Jer. x. 23). 3. It is evident from *experience of past failures.* David had taken many false steps. And there is no man but has reason to feel, in looking back over departed years, that his greatest folly has been to walk in the light of his own wisdom, and his greatest wisdom to depend upon the wisdom of God. 4. The need of it is *specially felt* by us when about to enter upon a new enterprise, or a course of action to which we are impelled by outward circumstances or inward conviction, but the exact nature of which is uncertain, or which is dependent for its success upon the disposition and co-operation of other persons.

II. DILIGENTLY SOUGHT. Although the Urim and Thummim are gone (see 1 Sam. xiv. 16—23; xxiii. 1—12), yet: 1. There are *certain means* which must be employed for a similar purpose—such as considering our own capacities and condition; listening to the voice of conscience; seeking the advice of good men; observing the ways of Providence; studying "the Scriptures of truth;" and, above all, offering prayer to the Father "in the Name" of Christ. 2. And to their proper employment a *right spirit* is essential; viz. sincerity, docility, trustfulness, perseverance. Such was the spirit of David, as it appears in his psalms; and therefore, while Saul exclaimed, "God answereth me no more" (1 Sam. xxviii. 15), he could say, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me" (Ps. xxxiv. 4).

III. GRACIOUSLY AFFORDED. 1. In *various ways*, in accordance with the means just mentioned, and especially by the Holy Spirit, who prepares the heart, teaches the meaning and application of the written Word, and produces impressions and impulses in harmony therewith. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things" (1 John ii. 20; John xvi. 13). 2. *Individually*, and in a measure fully adequate to the requirements of the case and the capacity of profiting by it. 3. *Certainly.* As of old, so now. God is as desirous as he is able to lead us in the way wherein we should go, and he has given many faithful promises to this effect. "I will guide thee with mine eye" (Ps. xxxii. 8; xxxvii. 23; xlviii. 14). "Thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee," etc. (Isa. xxx. 21; xlii. 16; Prov. iii. 6).

IV. FAITHFULLY FOLLOWED. "And David went up thither" (ver. 2). 1. With humble obedience and entire dependence, as a child relying on the superior wisdom of his father. 2. Without hesitation, questioning, or delay. 3. With cheerfulness, zeal, and energy. It is always given with a practical end in view.

V. GRADUALLY CONFIRMED in the experience of him who obeys. "And his men . . . and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron" (ver. 3). God went before them and prepared their way, so that they met with a peaceable reception and found "a city of habitation." 1. The operations of Providence concur with the teachings of the Word and the Spirit. 2. A stronger assurance of the Divine leading is possessed. "If any man willeth to do his will," etc. (John vii. 17). 3. More light is given for further advancement. "Then shall we know, shall follow on to know the Lord. His going forth is fixed like the morning dawn" (Hos. vi. 3); and it will brighten on our path into the radiance of perfect day.

VI. WIDELY BENEFICIAL. More especially it contributes to the good of those who are associated with him, and who, having shared his perplexity and distress, now share his prosperity. Those who are guided by God are thereby enabled and disposed to guide and bless others (Numb. x. 39).

VII. GLORIOUSLY TERMINATING. "They anointed David king" (ver. 4). And all who truly fulfil the Divine plan and purpose as David did (Acts xiii. 22) are made "kings unto God," and receive exalted honour among men, increased power over them, and at length a crown of life, of righteousness, and of glory. But, alas! how many go stumbling through life without an aim, or only with one which is unworthy, and contrary to the will of God, and then sink into "the blackness of darkness for ever"! "The wise shall inherit glory; but shame shall be the promotion of fools" (Prov. iii. 35).—D.

Ver. 4.—(HEBRON.) *David anointed King of Judah. Course of events:* 1. David's message to the men of Jabesh (vers. 5—7). 2. Ishbosheth made King of Israel by Abner (vers. 8—11). 3. Civil war, and the death of Asahel (vers. 12—32). 4. Increasing strength of the house of David (ch. iii. 1—5). 5. Dissension between Ishbosheth and Abner. 6. Abner's negotiations with David, restoration of Michal, communication with the tribes, and formal league (ch. iii. 12—21). 7. Abner slain by Joab (ch. iii. 22—28). 8. Lamented by David (ch. iii. 31—39). 9. Ishbosheth murdered (ch. iv. 1—8). 10. His assassins executed (ch. iv. 9—12). It was a great day in Hebron. The ancient city among the hills of Judah (where the remains of the patriarchs had slumbered for centuries) was stirred by the assembling of the elders for the coronation of David. His presence among them, at the head of his six hundred heroes, had been virtually a "public assertion of his claims to sovereignty" on the ground of his Divine consecration by Samuel. His first anointing was essentially of a private nature. "This second one, performed by the elders of Judah, was his public solemn installation (based on that anointment) into the royal office." Then followed the acclamation of the people (1 Sam. x. 24; xi. 15). "Now doth David find the comfort that his extremity sought in the Lord his God; now are the clouds for a time passed over, and the sun breaks forth; David shall reign after his sufferings" (Hall). It has been supposed that he wrote about this time Ps. xxvii. (inscription, "Before the anointing," LXX.).

> "Jehovah is my Light and my Salvation;
> Whom shall I fear?
> Jehovah is the Strength of my life;
> Of whom shall I be afraid?"

"It is not likely that David's muse went to sleep when the death of Saul at Gilboa opened his way to the throne, or that it produced nothing but such comparatively secular songs as the lament for Saul and Jonathan. It is rather remarkable, however, that there is not a single psalm of which one can affirm with confidence that it was written during the seven years and a half that David reigned at Hebron over the tribe of Judah" (Binnie). Those who took part in his inauguration acted in fulfilment, not only of the Divine purpose concerning him, but also of the Divine predictions concerning themselves; for *the pre-eminence of Judah* had been long foretold (Gen. xlix. 8). "In all great questions the men of Judah are the foremost and the strongest. From the time of David's establishment on the throne, the greatness of the tribe follows in some measure that of his family (1 Chron. v. 2; xxxviii. 4)" (Davison). "And as they had the right to choose their own prince, they might reasonably have expected that

the other tribes would have followed their example, and, by uniting in David, have quietly submitted to the appointment of God, as they themselves had done" (Chandler). In their conduct we see—

I. AN EXALTED ESTIMATE OF HIS PERSONAL WORTH. One of themselves (Deut. xvii. 15), "chosen out of the people" (Ps. lxxxix. 19), he could understand and sympathize with them. He possessed eminent military abilities and noble moral qualities; and he had rendered invaluable services to his country, and shown special kindness to the elders of his own tribe (1 Sam. xxx. 26). His previous career was well known to them, and had won their confidence and affection. The character of a people is commonly manifested in that of its chosen ruler. As Saul embodied and reflected the prevailing spirit of Benjamin and Ephraim, so David embodied and reflected what was best in Judah; its independent spirit, lion-like courage, and religious devotion.

II. LOYAL ACCEPTANCE OF HIS DIVINE APPOINTMENT. With that appointment they were familiar. They recognized Jehovah as their King; the Source of authority and of the endowments which were needful for the kingly office. Their condition isolated them in feeling, to some extent, from the other tribes (as afterwards more fully appears); but in acting independently of them they rebelled against no existing and legitimate authority, and they neither aimed at dominion over them nor separation from them. They displayed a truly theocratic spirit. And, in the election of a ruler, a people should always recognize the authority and obey the will of God. "Kings derive their kingly majesty immediately from God, but also mediately from their subjects" (J. Lange).

III. VOLUNTARY SUBMISSION TO HIS ROYAL AUTHORITY. He was to them "a minister of God." Their obedience to God required their submission to the king of his choice; whose authority, however, great as it was, was not absolute. It is not said, as on a subsequent occasion (ch. v. 3), that "he made a league with them;" but they doubtless submitted to him on the understanding that he would rule according to the Divine will. The efficiency of a ruler depends upon the free submission of his people; and there is not a nobler exercise of freedom than submission to the highest order.

IV. UNBOUNDED CONFIDENCE IN HIS BENEFICENT RULE. They expected, under the government of "the man worthy of the sceptre," deliverance from their enemies, by whom they were now threatened; the establishment of justice, from the want of which they had long suffered; and the attainment of power and prosperity. Nor were they disappointed. The pre-eminence of this tribe was ordained with reference to the advent and exaltation of Christ, the promised Shiloh, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. v. 5); and the conduct of the men of Judah may be taken as illustrating the free acceptance of "him whom God hath anointed with his Holy Spirit" on the part of his people; their humble obedience to his rule, and their fervent desire for his universal reign. "Thou art worthy."

> "Come, then, and, added to thy many crowns,
> Receive yet one, the crown of all the earth,
> Thou who alone art worthy! It was thine
> By ancient covenant, ere Nature's birth;
> And thou hast made it thine by purchase since,
> And overpaid its value with thy blood.
> Thy saints proclaim thee King; and in their hearts
> Thy title is engraven with a pen
> Dipped in the fountain of eternal love."
>
> (Cowper.)

D.

Vers. 4—7.—(HEBRON.) *Commendation.* The first recorded act of David after he became king was of a kingly character. It is not improbable that the persons who informed him of what the men of Jabesh had done supposed that he had little love for the memory of Saul, and was apprehensive of opposition from his "house" (ver. 8), and wished to excite his jealousy against them; seeking to insinuate themselves into his confidence by detraction from the good name of others. But, instead of yielding to suspicion, he sent a message of peace and good will. His commendation was—

I. WELL DESERVED by men who had performed a noble deed (see 1 Sam. xxxi.

11—13). Their conduct displayed: 1. *Gratitude* toward their benefactor, whose kindness they returned with kindness. 2. *Fidelity* toward their king, whose faithfulness they repaid with faithfulness. 3. *Reverence* toward their God. "To bury the dead with the Jews was always reckoned an instance of humanity and kindness, and, indeed, of *piety;* an act done in imitation of God, who buried Moses; and so it might be expected the Divine blessing would attend it" (Gill).

II. WORTHILY BESTOWED by a king of royal disposition. 1. *Unsuspecting.* Others might find reason for suspecting their intentions, but he could see only what was deserving of praise. 2. *Generous,* with respect to Saul; appreciating and sympathizing with their kindness to their master, even though he had been his enemy. "Use the memory of thy predecessor fairly and tenderly; for if thou dost not, it is a debt will sure be paid when thou art gone" (Bacon). 3. *Practical.* "David sent messengers," etc. 4. *Devout.* "Blessed be ye of Jehovah," etc. Recognizing God as the Observer and Rewarder of men, he invoked for them his commendation and blessing—kindness for kindness, faithfulness for faithfulness—as the highest good (Ps. xl. 11; lxxxvi. 15; Matt. v. 7; Heb. vi. 10). 5. *Becoming.* "And I also"—as one whose office it becomes to observe and recompense good as well as evil—"requite you this kindness" (send you this message), "because," etc. 6. *Encouraging* and stimulating. "And now," as heretofore, "let your hands be strong, and be ye valiant" in the new circumstances which have arisen through the death of your master. 7. *Candid,* considerate, and dignified. "For me have the house of Judah anointed king over them." He indicated delicately, but not obscurely, his claims to their allegiance, and assured them of his protection and help. "To act nobly is always the best policy."

"Where'er a noble deed is wrought,
Where'er is spoken a noble thought,
Our hearts in glad surprise
To higher levels rise.
The tidal wave of deeper souls
Into our inmost being rolls,
And lifts us unawares
Out of all meaner cares.
Honour to those whose words or deeds
Thus help us in our daily needs;
And by their overflow
Raise us from what is low!"

(Longfellow.)

III. WISELY ADAPTED to effect a laudable end. 1. To confirm good men in a virtuous and praiseworthy course. 2. To win the confidence and support of such men. 3. To secure the benefit of their services to the nation and the kingdom of God. 4. To manifest to all the spirit of a just and generous rule.

OBSERVATIONS. 1. One good action tends to produce another; in performing it one knows not how far its influence may reach, or what blessings it may bring upon himself. 2. Although we ought not to do good simply for the sake of reward, yet the desire of the approval of the good is a proper motive of action. 3. We should be as ready to give commendation as to receive it. 4. We should desire, above all things, the approbation of God.—D.

Vers. 8—12.—(MAHANAIM.) *Opposition to the Divine purpose.* The purpose of God, to make David king over his people, was as yet only in part accomplished; and its fulfilment was opposed by Abner (1 Sam. xiv. 50; xvii. 55; xx. 25; xxvi. 5) on behalf of "the house of Saul." Having escaped from the battle of Gilboa, he "took Ishbosheth, the son of Saul" (a man of feeble character, and fitted to become a tool in his hands), "and brought him over to Mahanaim, and made him king over Gilead," etc. After five years of great exertions (while David reigned peacefully at Hebron) he drove the Philistines out of the country, openly proclaimed Ishbosheth (now forty years old) "king over all Israel," and "went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon" with the view of subjecting Judah to his sway. His principal motive was the desire of maintaining and increasing his own power. "He was angry that this tribe had set up David for their king" (Josephus). His conduct was "not only a continuation of the hostility of Saul

towards David, but also an open act of rebellion against Jehovah" (Keil), whose purpose, as well as the wish of the elders of Israel, he well knew, as he afterwards acknowledged (ch. iii. 17, 18). His opposition represents and illustrates that of men to the purposes of God generally, and more especially to *his purpose that Christ shall reign* over them and all mankind; of which observe that—

I. IT IS PLAINLY REVEALED. By the testimony of: 1. The Divine *Word* (1 Sam. xvi. 1). "To him give all the prophets witness," etc. (Acts x. 43; 1 Pet. i. 11). 2. Significant *events*, in confirmation of the Word; the overthrow of adversaries, the exaltation of "his Chosen," the growth of his power (Acts ii. 22—24). 3. The irresistible *convictions* of reason and conscience, and the confessions which even opponents have been constrained to make. Abner was present when Saul said, "Thou shalt both do great things and shalt also still prevail" (1 Sam. xxvi. 25). His opposition was therefore inexcusable. "While men go on in their sins, apparently without concern, they are often conscious that they are fighting against God" (Scott).

II. IT MAY BE WICKEDLY OPPOSED (in virtue of the freedom which, within certain limits, men possess) because of: 1. The delusions of *unbelief*. The tempter whispers as of old, "Yea, hath God said?" (Gen. iii. 1); they "wilfully forget" what has taken place (2 Pet. iii. 5); "neither will they be persuaded" of the truth and obligation of the Word of God (Luke xvi. 31). 2. The plea of present *expediency*, and the expectation that, if they must submit, there will come a "more convenient season" for doing so. Abner thought "that he might be able, upon better terms, to make his peace with David when the time should come that the Lord was to advance him to be ruler over all Israel" (Chandler). 3. *Selfishness*, pride, and ambition; the love of pleasure and power, the habit of self-will, the self-confidence engendered by success, "the mind of the flesh," which "is enmity against God." "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost" (Acts vii. 51).

III. IT CANNOT BE EFFECTUALLY DEFEATED. "He must reign," in fulfilment of the Divine decree (Ps. ii. 7; cx. 1), which: 1. Changes not. "The Strength of Israel will not lie, nor repent" (1 Sam. xv. 29). 2. Is effected by infinite wisdom and might, against which the skill and strength of men contend in vain. 3. Comes to pass either with or without their will, in mercy or in judgment, in the salvation of the penitent or the destruction of the persistently rebellious. "These mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them bring hither and slay them before me" (Luke xix. 27).—D.

Vers. 13—17.—(GIBEON.) *Fratricidal strife.* "And that place was called Helkath-Hazzurim" (ver. 16). The hostile attitude assumed by Abner appeared to David to render necessary active measures in self-defence. It is not said that he inquired of the Lord. If he had done so the conflict which ensued between brethren might possibly have been averted. As it was, he sent an army of observation under the command of Joab, who (although not mentioned before) had doubtless accompanied him in his exile (1 Sam. xxii. 1), and was now general of his forces. And Joab and "the servants of David" marched to Gibeon and encamped opposite Abner "and the servants of Ishbosheth" (ver. 13). At length Abner, impatient of delay, challenged a conflict between certain picked men on each side, not merely "to see which were best" (Josephus), but either to decide the day by the issue or to draw on a general engagement. Joab readily accepted the challenge, and the conflict commenced. It was—

I. BEGUN RECKLESSLY. "Let the young men arise and play [fight] before us." "Let them arise" (ver. 14). 1. Self-interest, ambition, and envy often quench the love of brethren (vers. 26, 27), and indispose them to seek reconciliation with each other. 2. The indulgence of evil passion blinds men to the consequences of their words and actions. 3. Familiarity with scenes of strife and war tends to produce insensibility to human suffering and slaughter. That a deadly struggle could be spoken of as a pastime shows how lightly life was estimated and how heartlessly it was sacrificed. "Ambitious and bloody men often consider the dire trade of war and the slaughter of their fellow-creatures as a mere diversion" (Scott).

> "Some seek diversion in the tented field,
> And make the sorrows of mankind their sport.
> But war's a game which, were their subjects wise,
> Kings should not play at."
>
> (Cowper.)

II. WAGED FEROCIOUSLY. "And they caught each other by the head," etc. (ver. 16). 1. When the love which should prevail among brethren gives place to wrath, that wrath is generally most intense and cruel. Civil wars are proverbially more bitter than any other. 2. Men are sometimes so intent upon injuring their opponents as to forget to defend themselves, and rush upon their own destruction. 3. The attempt to end strife by means of strife is commonly vain; "it is rather a spur to further effusion of blood than a bridle to hinder the same." "What can war but endless war still breed?" 4. The issue of the conflict does not necessarily prove the justice of the cause. 5. Mutual strife tends to mutual extermination. "All they that take the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matt. xxvi. 52). The "field of sharp blades" was a lasting memorial of destructiveness rather than of courage; a warning rather than a pattern.

III. EXTENDED RAPIDLY. "And there was a very sore battle that day," etc. (ver. 17). 1. The strife of a few excites the wrathful passions of many, by whom it is witnessed. 2. Every injurious word and act furnishes an additional impulse to wrath and retaliation; and the conflict goes on increasing. 3. That which at first may be easily checked passes entirely beyond control. "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water," etc. (Prov. xvii. 14; xxvi. 21).

IV. ENDED LAMENTABLY. "Abner was beaten," and three hundred and sixty of his men died; Joab's brother Asahel was slain, with nineteen of David's servants. "In war God punishes the sins of both parties." 1. He who gave the challenge and commenced the conflict was the first to complain of the result (ver. 26), and was bitterly reproached as the cause thereof (ver. 27). 2. He who accepted the challenge was filled with grief and revenge. 3. Both sides experienced heavy loss and sorrow. 4. Even David could not but regret the weakening of the nation in presence of the common foe; or fail to see in the strife of brethren the consequences of his own faithlessness (1 Sam. xxvii. 1, 10, 11). If he had not taken up his abode with the Philistines the conflict would probably never have occurred.

REMARKS. 1. When men commence a quarrel they little know where it will end. 2. Strife should be diligently checked at the beginning. 3. "Let us fight that good fight only whereof the apostle speaks, which is between the flesh and the spirit, which only hath the profitable end, the glorious theatre, the godly armour, and the blessed reward of assured triumph" (Guild).—D.

VERS. 18—23.—(GIBEON.) *The untimely fate of Asahel: to young men.* Asahel was the youngest of three brothers; the others being Joab and Abishai. They were the sons of Zeruiah (half-sister of David) and a Bethlehemite (ver. 32) whose name has not been recorded; and they had much in common. When Asahel fled to David at the cave of Adullam (some ten or twelve years before the events here mentioned) he was probably a mere lad; he shared his uncle's hardships and participated in his exaltation. He was one of the famous thirty (ch. xxiii. 24), "valiant men of the armies" (1 Chron. xi. 26); accompanied Joab and Abishai in their march to Gibeon, and took part in the battle with Abner and "the servants [soldiers] of Ishbosheth." He was: 1. *Possessed of eminent gifts.* "Asahel was as light of foot as a gazelle" (ver. 18); like "swift-footed Achilles," and like Harold I. (son of Canute), surnamed *Hare-foot*, "because he was light and swift of foot" (Rapin). He was also distinguished by enterprise, courage, perseverance, and other admirable qualities. Mental endowments are incomparably superior to physical; but both are gifts of God, and should be recognized as such; they enable those who possess them to render valuable service to his people; and they should be employed in humble obedience to his will. Yet not unfrequently they become an occasion of vain-glory, and are perverted from their proper exercise and end. 2. *Actuated by an unwise ambition.* "And Asahel pursued after Abner," etc. (ver. 19). He sought to take him prisoner or put him to death, and so end the conflict; and doubtless, also, to display his own superior speed and strength, and obtain the glory of the achievement. He was on the right side, and, considering the circumstances of the case, there was something laudable in his attempt. But it is possible, even in connection with the kingdom of God, to entertain an improper desire of worldly honour and power (Matt. xx. 20—23). Those who do so generally set an inordinate value upon the object at which they aim, exhibit an undue confidence in their own abilities, depreciate the difficulties

of its attainment, and expose themselves to great risk and peril (Titus ii. 6; 1 Tim. vi. 9).

"Ah! who can tell how hard it is to climb
The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar?"
(Beattie.)

3. *Heedless of salutary warning.* "And Abner looked behind him, and said," etc. (vers. 20—23). "Turn thee aside," etc. "Slay one of the common soldiers and take his accoutrements as booty, if thou art seeking for that kind of fame" (Keil). He cared little about the safety of his men, and was chiefly concerned about his own; but his advice was considerate, wise, and once and again repeated. Asahel, though swifter of foot, was not his equal in experience and skill; and (like many other young men) he despised the warning of the old warrior, was headstrong and over-confident of success, and rushed rashly and blindly upon his fate. "Heat of zeal sometimes, in the indiscreet pursuit of a just adversary, proves mortal to the agent, prejudicial to the service" (Hall). 4. *Struck down in youthful prime.* "And Abner with the hinder end of the spear smote him," etc.; suddenly, unexpectedly, and when he seemed on the point of accomplishing his purpose. With one blow his life was cut short, his hope disappointed, his promise of a brilliant future extinguished. "Often do men fancy themselves about to seize upon happiness, when death stops their career and lays them in the dust. And if they will rush forward in the road to destruction, though plainly warned of their danger, they can blame none but themselves" (Scott).

"Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days;
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life."
(Milton, 'Lycidas.')

5. *Regarded with mournful pity.* "As many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still" (see ch. xx. 12), overcome with surprise, compassion, and grief; "and they took up Asahel, and buried him," etc. (ver. 32). 6. *Remembered with mischievous resentment.* (Ch. iii. 30.) He left behind him a legacy, not of peace and good will, but of wrath and revenge. Pause at his tomb in Bethlehem, and lay to heart the lessons taught by his untimely fate (Jer. ix. 23). Let your ambition be different from his; to overcome carnal and selfish ambition in your own heart, to save life rather than to destroy it, to follow in the steps of him who was servant of all (Matt. xx. 28). Here is scope for your noblest aspirations and most strenuous efforts. And your hope will not be destroyed, but crowned by death.

"Fool not; for all may have,
If they dare try, a glorious life, or grave."
(Herbert.)

D.

Vers. 24—29.—(GIDEON.) *War.* "Shall the sword devour for ever?" (ver. 26; ch. xi. 25). The sword is more destructive than ravenous beasts, famine, pestilence (ch. xxiv. 13; Lev. xxvi. 26), earthquake, tempest, or fire. The history of its ravages constitutes a considerable portion of the history of mankind. Of these we have here a slight but noteworthy instance. Twenty-four brave men of the same nation (half of them chosen from each of the opposing forces) fell, pierced by each other's weapons. In the succeeding battle and flight several hundreds were slain (ver. 31). At sunset the defeated general rallied his scattered troops on the hill of Ammah, and appealed to the commander of the pursuing forces to withdraw them and avert the bitter consequences that would otherwise ensue. "Now the battle is going against him he complains of the devouring sword; and, though it had been employed but a few hours, it seemed long to him—a sort of eternity" (Gill). Joab answered that but for his challenge in the morning there would have been no conflict at all; but (probably as yet unacquainted with the death of his brother Asahel) he sounded a retreat (ver. 28); and Abner and his men

forthwith departed, not to Gibeon, but across the Jordan to Mahanaim (ver. 29). Regarding the question not merely as the utterance of Abner, nor from an Old Testament point of view, we may take it as expressive of—

I. A CONVICTION OF THE EVILS OF WAR. "Shall the sword *devour* for ever?" By it: 1. *Numberless lives are consumed.* The immediate and avowed object of war is the destruction of men's lives; and its most effective instruments (to the construction of which the utmost ingenuity is devoted) are those that destroy the greatest number in the shortest possible time. "War is the work, the element, or rather the sport and triumph, of death, who glories not only in the extent of his conquest, but in the richness of his spoil" (R. Hall, 'Reflections on War'). Since its ravages began many times more than the whole number of the present population of the globe have probably been its victims. 2. *Incalculable sufferings are inflicted;* on those who are left to die on the field, or are borne to hospitals and linger out a miserable existence; on the non-combatant population among whom the devourer pursues his way; on whole nations and multitudes of desolate and sorrowing homes far distant from the scene of strife. 3. *Enormous cost is incurred;* in the maintenance of armies and the provision of *materiel*, besides the withdrawal of great numbers from the operations of productive industry and serious interference with commerce; immense national debts are accumulated and burdensome taxes imposed on present and succeeding generations. There are nearly thirteen millions of men in Europe who have been trained for arms, and between four and five millions actually under arms, costing in all ways about five hundred millions sterling a year. The sum total of the national debts of the European nations amounts to nearly five thousand millions of pounds ('Statesman's Year-Book'). 4. *A pernicious influence is exerted, with respect to morality and religion.* "War does more harm to the morals of men than even their property and their persons" (Erasmus). It has its origin in unregulated desire (Jas. iv. 1; 1 John ii. 16), which it excites, manifests, and intensifies. "The causes of all wars may be reduced to five heads: ambition, avarice, revenge, providence (precaution), and defence" (Owen Feltham, 'Resolves'). "If the existence of war always *implies* injustice in one at least of the parties concerned, it is also the fruitful parent of crimes. It reverses, with respect to its objects, all the rules of morality. It is nothing less than a temporary repeal of the principles of virtue. It is a system out of which almost all the virtues are excluded and on which nearly all the vices are incorporated" (R. Hall). What angry feelings does it stir up between nations whom "God hath made of one blood"! What infuriated passions does it arouse in contending armies! What cruel deeds does it commend! What iniquitous courses of conduct does it indnce! What false views of glory does it inculcate! What bitter and lasting enmities does it leave behind!

> "One murder makes a villain,
> Millions a hero! Princes were privileged to kill,
> And numbers sanctified the crime!
> Ah! why will kings forget that they are men,
> And men that they are brethren? Why delight
> In human sacrifice? Why burst the ties
> Of nature, that should knit their souls together
> In one soft bond of amity and love?"
>
> (Bishop Porteus.)

Is war, then, under all circumstances, inexpedient and wrong? It is maintained that: (1) The state, like the individual, has a natural right of self-defence, and is bound (in fulfilment of the purpose for which it exists) to protect its citizens by repelling external invasion as well as repressing internal violence (Whewell, 'Elements of Morality;' Paley; Gisborne; Mozley, 'University Sermons'). (2) By means of war national subjection is sometimes prevented, national grievances are redressed, national honour is upheld, aggression checked, pride abased, liberty, peace, and prosperity secured, patriotism kindled, powerful energies and heroic virtues developed. (3) It has often received the Divine sanction (Exod. xvii. 14; Josh. viii. 1; 1 Sam. xi. 6). "Perpetual peace is a dream, and it is not even a beautiful dream. War is an element in the order of the world ordained by God. In it the noblest virtues of mankind are developed—courage and the abnegation of self, faithfulness to duty, and the spirit of sacrifice; the soldier gives his life. Without war the world would stagnate and lose itself in

materialism" (Von Moltke). But this is the view of one who has been "a man of war from his youth" and "shed much blood" (1 Chron. xxii. 8). And it may be said that: (1) War is not ordained by God like tempests and earthquakes or even pestilence, but is directly due to the wickedness of men. That which is in itself evil, however, often becomes an occasion of good. (2) "There is at least equal scope for courage and magnanimity in blessing as in destroying mankind. The condition of the human race offers inexhaustible objects for enterprise and fortitude and magnanimity. In relieving the countless wants and sorrows of the world, in exploring unknown regions, in carrying the arts and virtues of civilization to unimproved communities, in extending the bounds of knowledge, in diffusing the spirit of freedom, and especially in spreading the light and influence of Christianity, how much may be dared, how much endured!" (Channing). (3) The right of resistance to evil is limited, and does not justify the taking away of life (Wayland, 'Elements of Moral Science;' Dymond, 'Essays'). (4) No advantages gained by war are an adequate compensation for the miseries inflicted by it; less suffering is experienced and higher honour acquired by enduring wrong than avenging it; the exercise of justice, forbearance, and active benevolence is the most effectual means of averting injury and securing safety and happiness. (5) The Divine sanction given to specific wars in the Old Testament was not given to war in general, and it does not justify the wars which are waged, without the like authority, at the present time. (6) War is virtually forbidden by numerous precepts and the whole spirit of the New Testament (Matt. v. 9, 39, 44; xxvi. 52; Rom. xii. 18—21; 1 Thess. v. 15; 1 Pet. ii. 23; iii. 9—13). The most that can be said is that "any principles upon which the Christian casuist would justify war in certain circumstances would not justify perhaps one in ten of the wars that have been waged" (J. Foster, 'Lectures,' vol. ii.).

II. AN APPEAL FOR THE CESSATION OF STRIFE. "*Shall* the sword devour for ever?" Its ravages may be stayed; and means must be employed for that end, such as: 1. The consideration of the real nature and terrible consequences of war; and the education of the people, especially the young, so that they may cease to admire military glory and to be beguiled by "the pomp and circumstance of war"—may feel an intense aversion to it, and seek in other ways their common interest and true elevation. 2. The adoption of political measures for the settlement of international disputes and the removal of causes of strife; viz. arbitration by friendly powers, the reduction and disbandment of standing armies, etc. 3. The repression of evil passions in ourselves and others. 4. The practice and diffusion of Christian principles; which indispose all in whom they dwell to break the peace themselves, and dispose them to make peace among others. "The sons of peace are the sons of God."

III. AN ANTICIPATION OF THE PREVALENCE OF PEACE. "Shall the sword devour *for ever?*" Surely not. The hope of universal peace is warranted from: 1. The advancing intelligence of men, the growth of popular government (making war less dependent than heretofore on the arbitrary will of rulers), the possession of "nobler modes of life, with sweeter manners, purer laws." 2. The better understanding and more perfect realization of the spirit of Christianity. 3. The overruling Providence and quickening Spirit of "the God of peace." 4. The express predictions of his Word concerning the effects of the reign of "the Prince of Peace" (Isa. ix. 7; Micah iv. 3; v. 2, 5; Ps. lxxii. 7). "It is in war that the power of the beast culminates in the history of the world. This beast will then be destroyed. The true humanity which sin has choked up will gain the mastery, and the world's history will keep sabbath. What the prophetic words affirm is a moral postulate, the goal of sacred history, the predicted counsel of God" (Delitzsch, on Isa. ii. 4).

> "O scenes surpassing fable and yet true;
> Scenes of accomplished bliss; which who can see
> (Though but in distant prospect) and not feel
> His soul refreshed with foretaste and with joy?"
>
> (Cowper.)

D.

Vers. 30—32.—(GIBEON, BETHLEHEM, HEBRON.) *The sorrows of victory.* "What a glorious thing must be a victory, sir!" it was remarked to the Duke of Wellington. "The greatest tragedy in the world," he replied, "except a defeat" ('Recollections,' by

S. Rogers). The rejoicing by which it is attended is usually mingled with weeping and sometimes swallowed up of grief. Various persons are thus affected for various reasons. Think of the sorrows endured: 1. *At the fall of fellow-soldiers.* "Nineteen men and Asahel" (vers. 23, 30) who come not to the muster after sunset (vers. 24, 30), nor answer to the roll-call, but lie in the chill embrace of death. "Alas! fallen are the heroes." 2. *In the burial of the dead.* (Ver. 32.) No opportunity is afforded for seeking out and burying all the slain; but the remains of Asahel are carried across the hills by night (ver. 29) and laid in the tomb of his father in Bethlehem, where the sorrow of the preceding day is renewed. It reminds us of a pathetic scene of recent times described in the familiar lines—

"We buried him darkly at dead of night,
The sod with our bayonets turning;
By the struggling moonbeam's misty light,
And our lanterns dimly burning."

(Wolfe.)

3. *When the news is conveyed to their homes.* "They came to Hebron at break of day;" a day of bitter grief to many bereaved hearts. "By the slaughter of a war there are thousands who weep in unpitied and unnoticed secrecy whom the world does not see; and thousands who retire in silence to hopeless poverty for whom the world does not care" (Dymond). 4. *For the miseries of fellow-sufferers;* the enemy—defeated, bereaved, and mourning—for they too are "brethren," and cannot but be remembered with sympathy and pity. 5. *Concerning the state of the departed.* A soldier's life is not favourable to piety and preparation for heaven, and the passions by which he is commonly swayed when his earthly probation is suddenly terminated are such that we can seldom contemplate his entrance into the eternal world with feelings of cheerfulness and hope. "After death the judgment." 6. *On account of the animosities of the living,* which are increased by conflict and victory, and are certain to be a source of future trouble (ch. iii. 1, 30, 33). 7. *Because of the dishonour done to the cause of the Lord's Anointed.* Religion suffers, the progress of the kingdom is hindered, and the King himself is "grieved for the misery of Israel." "The victory that day was turned into mourning" (ch. xix. 2). So is every victory gained by "the devouring sword." But there are victories which are bloodless and tearless, sources of unmingled joy; spiritual victories over ignorance and sin won by and through the might of him at whose birth the angels sang upon those hills of Bethlehem, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."—D.

Ver. 1.—*Inquiring of God.* David had now arrived at a very important point in his career. Saul being dead, his way to the throne was cleared; but the next step to take was doubtful. Under these circumstances he adopted the course usual to him when in difficulty. He "inquired of the Lord," sought directions from him as to what he should do. The high priest, Abiathar, was with him with the ephod (1 Sam. xxx. 7), and by means of the Urim and Thummim could ascertain for him the Divine will. By this method, doubtless, he received directions to go into Judah and settle at Hebron; "and the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah." We cannot ask direction from God in the same manner as David, but, using the means available for us, we should imitate him in this respect.

I. UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES WE SHOULD INQUIRE OF GOD. 1. *It should be a constant practice.* Part of our devotions every day should consist of endeavours to ascertain more fully and accurately the will of God concerning us, seeking of him guidance in all our ways, that we may know what the general commands of God mean for us in our position, in the practical details of our individual life. 2. *The practice should be made special under special doubts and difficulties.* (1) When like David we have to make a choice on which much depends, and there is difficulty in choosing. When proposing to enter on a new enterprise, to form new connections (especially a lifelong alliance), to change our place of abode, etc. There will be reasons for and against, promises of good, possibilities of evil, in each direction. What shall be done? Inquire of the Lord. (2) When we meet with perplexities in the inquiry after truth. It is not by mere logical processes that spiritual truth can be ascertained; from first to last we need guidance from above, and should earnestly seek it.

II. How such inquiry should be conducted. 1. *By what methods.* Where shall we find a Divine oracle to answer our inquiries? (1) Reason and conscience will often (if we allow them free speech) give a response which at once commends itself as a Divine reply. If one course be morally right and the other morally wrong, one in manifest accordance with the laws of Christ, the other in plain opposition to them, there is no room for further question. (2) Holy Scripture is to be consulted. Not in the way of bibliomancy, but by study of its revelations and precepts. The New Testament is especially the Christian's *vade-mecum*, from whence he may obtain all needful instruction as to the will of God. (3) The providence of God. Courses to which we are prompted by the best desires may be seen not to be our duty, because ability and opportunity are wanting to pursue them. (4) The counsels of wise and good men. Consulting them, our course will often become clear. Yet we may not submit blindly and slavishly to our fellow-men. (5) The commands of superiors. For children at home the will of their parents is the will of God; for servants, the commands of their employers; always supposing in both cases that what is enjoined is not clearly sinful. (6) Withal and always, prayer for Divine guidance should be resorted to. "Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths" (Ps. xxv. 4). By direct influence on the minds and hearts of those who seek him, God becomes their Guide. His Spirit leads those who are willing to be led by him. 2. *In what spirit.* A simple and sincere desire to know and do the will of God. In opposition to pride and self-will, and double-mindedness. Many seek counsel of God as the advice of men is often sought. They virtually make up their minds before they inquire, and "make it a matter of prayer" in order that they may obtain a feeling of the Divine approval of the course they have chosen. Not avowedly, not consciously, is this done. But "the heart is deceitful," and never shows its deceitfulness more than in such cases (comp. Ezek. xiv. 1—5; 2 Thess. ii. 10—14).

III. Motives to such inquiry. 1. *Our ignorance.* "The way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. x. 23). Human affairs are so complex, appearances so deceitful, men often so untrustworthy, our vision so limited, that we may well desire and shall wisely yield ourselves to the guidance of God. 2. *The right and power of God to direct us.* As supreme Ruler, as perfect in knowledge, wisdom, and goodness. 3. *His promises.* (See Ps. xxv. 12, 14; Jas. i. 5.) Especially the great promise of the Holy Spirit to all who ask of God this unspeakably great and precious gift (Luke xi. 13). 4. *The blessedness of being divinely led.* In present wisdom, holiness, and happiness, and in eternal life. 5. *The certainty of fatal darkness and stumbling to those who do not inquire of God.* (See Jer. xiii. 16; John xii. 35.)—G. W.

Vers. 5—7.—*Gratitude and policy.* David was now king of the tribe of Judah by their own choice, but the rest of the tribes had not declared themselves. Amongst these the tribes beyond the Jordan were of special importance and influence; and David took an opportunity of reminding them of his position and claims. The chief city amongst those tribes was Jabesh-Gilead. Brave men from that city had rescued the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and, after burning them, had buried their bones under the tamarisk tree (Revised Version) at Jabesh. David, being made acquainted with what they had done, sends messengers to assure them of his appreciation of their conduct, and at the same time to hint that, Saul being dead, and he having been appointed king over Judah, the way was clear for them to aid, if so disposed, in promoting his election as king by the other tribes. The message was at once a suitable expression of his gratitude and a politic endeavour to ingratiate himself with them.

I. David's gratitude. 1. *On what account.* Their burial of Saul. He speaks of this as kindness to him. We can show kindness to the dead by suitably interring them. Other ways of doing this would be upholding their reputation, caring for those they leave behind, promoting for their sakes any cause in which they were deeply interested. David could not but highly appreciate the brave deed of these men. His own marvellous courage would impel him to admire theirs. But it was the respect they had thus shown to their departed sovereign which especially moved him to send a message to them. His gratitude for this was quite in accordance with his usual

feelings towards Saul, both during his life and after his death. 2. *How he expresses his gratitude.* (1) By sending the messengers and message. "I also will requite," etc., should be (according to Otto Thenius and the 'Speaker's Commentary') "I also show you this goodness," viz. sending the messengers with a kind message. They would value David's message as soldiers distinguishing themselves in the field value a message from the queen. (2) By the terms of the message. In which he invokes upon them the blessing of God, his "kindness and truth," his true, faithful, constant kindness. A phrase common in the Old Testament (Ps. xxv. 10; xl. 11, etc.; Gen. xxiv. 49; xlvii. 29, etc.), and reproduced in the New with some additional meaning (John i. 14). To pray for God's blessing on those to whom we feel grateful is always suitable. When we can do nothing else, we can do this; and when we can show gratitude in other ways, we do well to show it thus also. For God's blessing far surpasses ours, and will render ours more valuable and effectual. Only we should be careful not to substitute prayers for deeds when these are possible. But in some way or other we ought to express as well as cherish gratitude and other kindly feelings to others. It is good for ourselves and good for others. It encourages good and noble deeds. It tends to bind men together in the best bonds. It promotes happiness of a high order. We may enlarge the thought. We are required to confess God and our Saviour, as in other ways so by thanksgiving and praise. It is meet and right so to do. It promotes our own spiritual good and that of others. It glorifies God.

II. DAVID'S POLICY. He intended by this message not only to give to brave men their due, but to win their favour towards himself. He justly thought that those who had at such hazards honoured their deceased king would be fitting helpers of himself, and likely to become loyal subjects. There was nothing unworthy in the course he took, for there was no flattery in his expressed appreciation of their conduct, and his endeavour to gain their co-operation was not an act of mere selfishness or ambition, but of regard to the will of God who had chosen him to be King of Israel, and to the welfare of the people, which was bound up with his speedy and peaceful recognition as king. We have here an illustration of mixed motives; and we learn that: 1. *We should not hesitate to do what is right because we see that it will also be beneficial to ourselves.* All piety, rectitude, and benevolence tend, and are usually seen to tend, to the good of those who practise them. The promises of God are promises of blessing to those who serve him and their brethren, and are to be received as encouragements in doing so. 2. *We may even in some cases aim to do good to ourselves by doing what is right.* Only we must place first that which is first, or our good deeds will cease to be good, and become only another form of selfishness. Where motives are mixed, we need carefully to guard our hearts lest the lower predominate. 3. *We should be glad of opportunities of showing pure, disinterested kindness.* We thus most closely resemble our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, and secure the best evidence of our being the children of God (Luke vi. 32—36; John xiii. 34, 35; Eph. v. 1, 2). 4. *We ought not, without clearest evidence, to suspect of selfish motives those who in doing good secure for themselves present reward.* It is to be hoped that only few are like the contributor to some charity who, being asked whether he wished his gift to be published, replied, "Why do you suppose I gave it to you?" And when the motives are not clearly revealed, it is often as just as it is charitable to give credit for the best.—G. W.

Ver. 26.—*Longing for the cessation of wars.* "Shall the sword devour for ever?" This exclamation of Abner respecting the pursuit of his discomfited troops by the conquering troops of Joab, has often been uttered in respect to war in general. As so employed it expresses horror of war, and impatient longing for its final termination.

I. THE QUESTION. The feelings which it indicates are excited in view of: 1. *The nature of war.* The mutual slaughter of each other by those who are "brethren." This aspect of the slaughter of one part of the chosen people by another presented itself to Abner. But in the light of Christianity all men are brothers, and war is a species of fratricide. They are all children of God, brethren of Christ, redeemed by his blood, and capable of sharing his eternal glory and blessedness. In this view of war, not only the actual conflicts, but all the elaborate preparations made for them, appear very dreadful. 2. *Its causes.* "Whence come wars and fightings among you? come they

not hence, even of your lusts?" (Jas. iv. 1). The evil passions of men are their cause—lust of territory, of dominion, of glory, of money; the spirit of revenge and retaliation; even the love of excitement and adventure. Not less, but if possible more hideous, is the cool, calculating policy of rulers, which sets armies in motion with no regard to the lives which it sacrifices or the misery it occasions; or, again, the desire for active service, with its opportunities of distinction, promotion, and other rewards, which springs up amongst the officers, if not the rank-and-file, of standing armies, and which takes no thought of the dreadful evil which "active service" inflicts. 3. *Its effects.* "Shall the sword *devour* for ever?" War is like a huge wild beast which "devours." It eats up human beings by thousands or tens of thousands at a time. It was a small consumption of men which took place in the battle and pursuit of which this question was first used. Only twenty men had fallen on the one side, and three hundred and sixty on the other. Modern wars "devour" on a far greater scale, partly in actual battle, more from wounds received in battle, and from the diseases which the hardships of war produce. War not only devours *men* in vast numbers, and thus occasions incalculable sorrow and misery; it consumes the *substance* of nations, the creation of peaceful industry; it wastes their mental and physical energies. And still more sad to contemplate are the moral effects both on the actual combatants and on those who employ them; the hateful passions excited and strengthened, the deterioration of national character produced. 4. *Its universal prevalence.* Among peoples in every part of the world, in every stage of civilization, and down through every age. However men differ in other respects, they are alike in this practice. Whatever changes take place, this survives. The progress of science and art, of discovery and invention, and of mechanical skill, seems to have no other effect in regard to war than to increase the power of mutual destruction. War lays them all under tribute to enlarge its ability to "devour" and destroy more easily and rapidly, and on a larger scale. In view of all these considerations good men may well sigh and cry, "Shall the sword devour for ever?" There have doubtless been wars on which, in spite of all the evils they occasion, lovers of their kind could look with sympathy and satisfaction so far as one party was concerned. Such are wars of defence against unjust aggression, wars undertaken by a people to obtain liberty as against some crushing tyranny, wars against hordes of barbarians who threaten devastation and destruction to hearths and homes, and all that civilized men value. But even in such cases we may well ask—Will it ever be necessary to use so dreadful an instrument as war in the endeavour to obtain rights or abolish wrongs? Will men never be amenable to reason? Must there ever be retained the power to resort to the violent methods of war?

"The cause of truth and human weal,
O God above!
Transfer it from the sword's appeal
To peace and love."

(Campbell.)

II. THE REPLY WHICH MAY BE GIVEN TO THIS QUESTION. *No.* The sword shall not devour for ever. Wars will at length come to a final end. 1. *Divine prophecy assures us of this.* (Isa. ii. 4; xi. 6—9; Micah iv. 3, 4; see also Ps. lxxii. 3, 7; Zech. ix. 10.) Not only shall wars cease, but there shall be such a feeling of universal security that the arts of war shall cease to be learnt. 2. *An adequate power for effecting this change is in the world.* Christianity—the gospel of Jesus Christ, with the accompanying might of the Holy Spirit. The revelation of God in Christ, especially of the relation of God to all men and his love to all; the redemption effected for all; the precepts of the gospel, inculcating love even to enemies, and the doing good to all; the example of him who was Love Incarnate; the dignity and worth of men, and their relation to each other, as seen in the light of the gospel; the sacred brotherhood into which faith in Christ brings men of all lands; the prospect of a heaven where all Christians will be united in service and blessedness;—these truths go to the root of the evil in the hearts of men. They cannot be truly received without subduing the passions which lead to war, and implanting the affections which insure peace. 3. *Experience justifies the hope that this peace-producing power will at length be triumphant.* That it will be in operation everywhere, and everywhere effectual.

So far as it has been experienced, it has made its subjects gentle, loving, peaceful, more willing to suffer than to inflict suffering. Multitudes exist in the world so ruled by the gospel and the Spirit of Christ, that it is simply impossible they should on any account take to killing each other. What has transformed them can transform others. Let vital Christianity become universal, and peace must be universal too. It is on the way to become universal, though its advance is slow to our view. The effect of Christianity, so far as it has prevailed, on war itself encourages hope. It has become humane in comparison with wars recorded in this Book and in the pages of general history. And amongst civilized nations there is a growing indisposition to resort to war, an increasing willingness to settle their differences by peaceful methods. This is doubtless partly the result of the tremendous costliness and destructiveness of modern warfare, but partly also of the growth of a spirit of reasonableness, equity, and humanity.

In conclusion: 1. Cherish the spirit and principles of peace, *i.e.* of Christ and Christianity. 2. Endeavour to diffuse them. And do this earnestly and hopefully, with the assurance of a final success in which you will participate joyfully. 3. Use your influence as citizens to discourage war. "And the God of peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. xiii. 11).—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1.—There was long war. As Ish-bosheth reigned only two years, and as "the house of Saul" is the phrase used, it seems probable that after Ishbosheth's murder, during the five years before David's election to the throne of all Israel, the house of Saul had some puppet representative at Mahanaim, and some commander in Abner's place. But after the death of this able man matters would go from bad to worse, and, though David probably remained on the defensive, yet the contrast between the peace and good government of Judah and the misery in Israel made all the tribes wish to put an end to a harassing civil war. It is plain, too, that the Philistines, repelled at first by Abner's skill, had again gained the ascendant, and regarded themselves so completely as the rulers of the country, that they resented immediately with summary violence the bold act of the northern tribes in choosing David to be their common king.

Ver. 2.—Unto David were sons born. This increase of his wives is mentioned as a proof of David's prosperity. For though contrary to the Law (Deut. xvii. 17), it was yet looked upon as part of the state of a king, and as such had been practised by Gideon (Judg. viii. 30), who approached more nearly to the royal dignity than any other of the judges. But it is the rule of the Books of Samuel that they generally abstain alike from praise and blame, and allow facts to speak for themselves. But never did a history more clearly deserve the title of 'A Vindication of the Justice of God.' Alike in Eli, in Saul, and in David, their sufferings were the result of their sins, and to the polygamy and lust of the last are due both the crimes which stained his character and the distress of the last twenty years of his life. (For **Amnon**, his first-born, see ch. xiii.)

Vers. 3—5.—Chileab. The Midrash explains Chileab as meaning "Quite like the father." He is called Daniel in the parallel genealogy in 1 Chron. iii. 1, and this was probably his real name, and Chileab a name of affection. He must have died young, for Adonijah appears as David's eldest son after the death of Amnon and Absalom; and it is thus natural that he should still be known by the name he bore as a child. **Geshur.** The word signifies "Bridgeland," and is the name of two districts, one of which formed the northern part of the tribe of Manasseh, and extended on both sides of the Jordan, from the little Hermon to the sea of Gennesareth (Deut. iii. 14; Josh. xii. 5; xiii. 13). The other was in Syria (ch. xv. 8), and probably was situated upon some river, though its exact position is not yet known. Talmai, its king, now gave his daughter to be one of David's wives, and though he was probably only a petty prince, still it is a proof of David's growing power that a potentate living at so great a distance was willing to make an alliance with him. Of the other wives and their sons nothing is known except of Adonijah, who inherited, on the death of Absalom, the dangerous position of firstborn; and who, after trying to make his rights good, was put to death by Solomon (1 Kings ii. 25). As **Eglah** is especially called **David's wife**, the Jewish interpreters hold that she was the highest in rank in his household, and therefore identical with Michal, who was restored to David while at Hebron. But she was childless; and more probably the words are to be taken as simply closing the narrative, and

as belonging, therefore, equally to each of the six.

Ver. 6.—**Abner made himself strong for the house of Saul.** The Hebrew really means that until this miserable quarrel about Rizpah, Abner had been the mainstay of Ishbosheth's throne and dynasty. She is proved to have been a noble woman, with a warm and devoted heart, by the narrative in ch. xxi. 8—11. But the harem of a deceased king was looked upon as the special inheritance of his successor; and Absalom, by taking David's concubines (ch. xvi. 21, 22), treated his father as a dead man, and committed so overt an act of treason as made reconciliation impossible. So Solomon put his brother Adonijah to death for asking Abishag to wife (1 Kings ii. 23—25). Still, as Bathsheba there saw no impropriety in Adonijah's request, and as Solomon deposed Abiathar and put Joab to death for complicity, as we must conclude, in Adonijah's request, it was probably part of some scheme of conspiracy, and that, if granted, it would have been used by Adonijah as a proof that the kingdom really was his. Here there was no plot, and as Rizpah had probably always lived apart from Ishbosheth, Abner may have expected that the king would see no difficulty in the matter.

Ver. 8.—**Then was Abner very wroth.** This extreme indignation on Abner's part is not easy to understand; for he could scarcely have expected Ishbosheth to endure quietly what at least was a great insult. But probably the question, **Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father's concubine?** does not mean a mild expostulation on the king's part, but the purpose to degrade Abner and strip him of his office. Probably after the defeat by Joab at Gibeon, the army was less satisfied with its leader, and his detractors may gladly have encouraged the king to use this opportunity for bringing Abner down to his proper place. Weak kings often try to play the strong man; but the attempt here only drove the imperious soldier to put the matter to the proof, and show that the strength was his. We know that David groaned all his life through under Joab's iron will, and, though he tried, yet that he never succeeded in throwing off the yoke. But Joab never behaved unfaithfully to his sovereign as Abner did here, and his crimes were deeds of violence committed in David's cause. **Am I a dog's head, which against Judah,** etc.? The words literally are, *Am I a dog's head that is for Judah?* and are rightly rendered in the Revised Version, *Am I a dog's head that belongeth to Judah?* Am I at once worthless and a traitor, a thing of no account, and on the side of thy enemies? In the words that follow he protests, not so much his innocence as his great deserts. **This day**—that is, at this very time—**I am showing kindness unto the house of Saul . . . and this day thou wouldest visit upon me**—that is, punish me for—**the fault about this woman.** I make and maintain thee as king, and thou wouldst play the king upon me, the kingmaker!

Ver. 9.—**As the Lord hath sworn to David.** This not only shows that the prophetic promise of the kingdom to David was generally known (see note on ch. i. 2), but that Abner regarded it as solemnly ratified. There is no express mention of any such oath, but Abner was a man of strong words, and possibly only meant that Jehovah's purpose was becoming evident by the course of events.

Ver. 11.—**He could not answer Abner.** Though the reply was one of open treason, and was spoken with violence, yet Ishbosheth did not venture to bring the matter to an issue. Perhaps he looked round upon his officers to see if any would take his side, and, when all were silent, he was too feeble to dare to order the arrest and trial of his too-powerful captain.

Ver. 12.—**Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf;** Hebrew, *under him.* The Revised Version renders this "where he was;" but the phrase really means "immediately" (see note on ch. ii. 23). And this agrees with the haughty temper of Abner. Without waiting for advice, or allowing his anger to cool, he at once sent trusty envoys to open negotiations with David. **Whose is the land?** Abner's meaning in these words is plain. You, David, he seems to say, will answer that the land is mine; for Jehovah has promised it to me. But, as a matter of fact, much of the land is mine (Abner's), or at least belongs to the house of Saul, whose prime minister I am. Yours is an abstract right; mine is actual possession. Come, let us make the two agree. Give me fitting assurances of safety and reward, and I will make your claim a reality.

Ver. 13.—**Except thou first bring Michal.** Besides David's affection for Michal, there were political reasons for demanding her restoration. Saul's despotic act in giving her in marriage to another man (1 Sam. xxv. 44) had been a public disavowal of David as the son-in-law of the royal house, and equivalent to a proclamation of outlawry. David's rights were all declared null by such an act. But now Ishbosheth must with equal publicity reverse his father's deed, and restore to David his lost position. It must have been a most painful humiliation to him to be driven thus to cancel his father's decree, and declare thereby to all Israel that he was unable to refuse his assent to whatever his rival demanded.

And for this reason David sent his messengers directly to Ishbosheth, because the importance of Michal's surrender to him lay in its being a public act of the state. For *Michal*, in ch. xxi. 8, we ought to read *Merab* (see note there).

Ver. 14.—**A hundred foreskins.** This was the number which Saul had required (1 Sam. xviii. 25), and David acted rightly in not boasting that he had really given twice as many (1 Sam. xviii. 27). As he had paid her father the stipulated price, Michal, by Oriental law, was David's property.

Ver. 15.—**Phaltiel the son of Laish.** In 1 Sam. xxv. 44 he is called Phalti. This word, in Hebrew lexicons, is usually regarded as a contraction for Phaltiyah, "Jehovah is deliverance," while Phaltiel means "El is deliverance." The substitution of *El* for *Yah* is one of those changes which arose out of the superstitious reverence for the sacred name which to this day causes the word LORD to be read in our Bibles where in the Hebrew are the four consonants Y, H, V, H, which, by attaching to them the vowels belonging to the Hebrew word *edonay* (or, *adonay*, lord) we make into "Jehovah" (*Yehovah*).

Ver. 16.—**Her husband went with her along weeping behind her.** "Along weeping" is a very awkward rendering of the Hebrew phrase, "going and weeping." The Revised Version is far better, "weeping as he went and followed her." Phaltiel had been Michal's husband for eight or nine years, and his sorrow at losing her excites sympathy for them both. They had evidently loved one another, and she was now going to be but one of many wives; and though David may have desired her restoration because he valued her and cherished the remembrance of their youthful affection, yet there was a large admixture of political motive in his conduct. At Gallim she had been Phaltiel's one jewel, and had been loved for her own sake; at Hebron she would have many rivals. But women of royal rank have often to pay the price of sacrificed affections for the ends of statecraft. Near **Bahurim**, on the road from Jerusalem to Gilgal, in the valley of the Jordan, the convoy approached the borders of Judah, and Abner will not allow the weeping husband to enter David's dominions. Painful as was his fate, he had himself done wrong in marrying another man's wife; and if he was weeping now, we may well believe that David had felt equal anguish when Michal was torn from him and sold to another,—for fathers in those days received instead of giving a dowry upon the marriage of their daughters. Saul in this matter was most to blame, and if he had not committed this wrong, David might never have sought an evil solace in multiplying to himself other wives.

Ver. 17.—**And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel.** Most probably this had taken place before Abner escorted Michal to Hebron, and that he paid David but one visit—that recorded in ver. 20. He would probably not take so decided a step as the surrender of Michal without sounding the elders, that is, the local sheikhs, and finding out how far they were inclined to support David as king of all Israel. When everything was ready he would take Michal to Hebron, and so have the opportunity of arranging with David for future action; and though Ishbosheth would dislike the matter and suspect Abner of ulterior purposes, yet he could not refuse so specious a plea as the escorting of his sister. His previous failure, too, had taught him that Abner was master. We may further be sure that David had everywhere many adherents. All Israel knew that he was marked out by prophecy to be their king, and, moreover, "all Israel and Judah loved him" (1 Sam. xviii. 16). But when Abner says, **Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you**, he makes it probable that, at some time after the defeat at Gilboa, the attempt had even been made to elect David king. But Abner had then opposed it, and his success in resisting the Philistines, and David's unfortunate entanglement with those inveterate enemies of Israel, had made the attempt fail. And now Abner's attempt was to be equally unsuccessful.

Ver. 18.—**The Lord hath spoken.** Here again Abner's statements go far beyond the text of anything recorded in Holy Scripture, but probably they give the popular interpretation of the prophecies respecting David. It will be noticed also that Abner endeavours to meet the general prejudice against David by asserting that he was Israel's destined deliverer from Philistine oppression. As Abner's speech is virtually an acknowledgment of failure, we may also be sure that he had found himself unable any longer to make head against the Philistines on the western side of the Jordan, and that Judah was the only tribe there that enjoyed tranquillity. Everywhere else they had once again established their supremacy. Though a brave soldier, Abner was inferior, not only to David, but also to Joab, both as statesman and general; and the weak Ishbosheth was no help to him, but the contrary.

Ver. 19.—**In the ears of Benjamin.** This tribe alone, probably, was really loyal to the house of Saul, their kinsman. But since the withdrawal of the court to Mahanaim, they got but little good from it.

and were left to resist the predatory bands of the Philistines as best they could. So warlike a tribe too would despise Ishbosheth, and long for a braver man to aid them in fighting their enemies.

Ver. 20.—**Twenty men with him.** These, we may feel sure, were not common soldiers, but chieftains selected from those elders who were on David's side; and, though the honourable escort of Michal was the pretext, yet Ishbosheth must have felt sure that more was intended. Most of them, however, would join Abner on the road, especially those who represented Benjamin and the western tribes. On arriving at Hebron they were honourably received, and, after a feast, they settled the conditions on which David was to be made king of all Israel; and Abner then departed in peace, after giving the assurance that all the tribes would now gladly assemble, and by solemn compact and covenant make David their king. The terms of the league, and the conditions agreed upon for Ishbosheth, are not mentioned, because upon Abner's death the whole plan fell to the ground, and David had to wait for many years before his hopes were fulfilled. But we gather from this covenant and ch. v. 3 (where see note) that the early kings of Israel were not absolute monarchs.

Ver. 22.—**From pursuing a troop.** This gives a wrong idea, as though Joab had been repelling an attack. The Revised Version is right in rendering "came from a foray," *the troop* being a company of men sent out on a predatory excursion. It is not unlikely that David had arranged this expedition in order that his interview with Abner might take place in Joab's absence; and as he returned with "great spoil," he had probably been away for some nine or ten days, during which he had penetrated far into the country of the Amalekites. Had David acted frankly and honourably, Joab would not have stood in the way of his master's exaltation, and the blood-feud between him and Abner might have been arranged. But it is evident that David secretly disliked and chafed under the control of his strong-willed and too-able nephew.

Vers. 24, 25.—**What hast thou done?** David's secret dealing makes Joab see a personal wrong to himself in the negotiation with Abner. There could be no room, he feels, for both of them in David's army, and David meant, he supposes, to sacrifice himself. In hot haste, therefore, he rushes into the king's presence, and reproaches him for what he has done, but covers his personal feelings with professed zeal for his master's interests. Abner is a mere spy, who has come on a false pretext, and with the real intention of learning David's going **out and coming in**, that is, his present manner of life and undertakings. **All that thou doest**; literally, *all that thou art doing*; all that is now going on, and thy plans and purposes. Abner would not only judge by what he saw, but in his interview with David would lead him on to talk of his hopes and prospects. David had little time to explain the real object of Abner's coming, nor was Joab in a mood to listen to anything he said. He had detected his master in secret negotiations, and would regard his excuses as tainted with deceit. And after giving vent to his anger in reproaches, he hurried away to thwart David's plans by a deed of most base villainy. Had David acted openly, all would have been done with Joab's consent and approval.

Ver. 26.—**The well**—Hebrew, *cistern*—**of Sirah.** Josephus ('Ant.,' viii. 1, 5) says that this cistern was situated about two miles and a half north of Hebron. There was probably a caravanserai there, at which Abner halted, intending to continue his march homewards as soon as the coolness of evening set in. Here Joab's messengers overtook him, and, speaking in David's name—for otherwise Abner would not have fallen into the trap—asked him to return for further conference, mentioning, perhaps, Joab's arrival as the reason. In this way Abner's suspicions would be set at rest, and it would seem quite natural for him to find Joab waiting for him at the gate.

Ver. 27.—**Joab took him aside in the gate.** As we read in ch. xviii. 24 of David sitting "between the two gates," and of "the roof over the gate," and in ver. 33 of "the chamber over the gate," Ewald's idea of there being a roofed inner space, with a guard-room over it, as in the mediæval gate-towers in German towns, is probably right. As the "two gates" would make the space between them gloomy, the spot would just suit Joab's purpose. He meets Abner, therefore, in a friendly manner, and drawing him aside, as if to converse with him apart from the people going in and out, there assassinates him. The place was so public that the deed must have been witnessed by multitudes, though the gloom, felt the more by them from the contrast with the bright glare of sunshine outside, had given Joab the opportunity of drawing his sword without Abner's observing it. **For the blood of Asahel his brother.** Joab's act was in accordance with Oriental feeling; and the duties of the avenger of blood might with some straining be made to cover his retaliation for an act done by Abner in self-defence (Numb. xxxv. 26, 27). It is remarkable that Hebron was itself a city of refuge (Josh. xx. 7), and this may have led Joab to murder him in the gate, before he had actually entered.

Still, Abner did not expect any such retribution, and supposing that Joab knew of the purpose that had brought him to Hebron, he could not suppose that he would be so indifferent to his master's interests as to put a summary stop to the negotiations for uniting the tribes under David. As it was, this deed brought upon David an evil name, and four or five years had to elapse before the tribes could be induced to take him for their king. Even then his hold over them was far less than it would otherwise have been; for though the shock was gradually got over, yet the suspicion still clung to him. And if the deed was Joab's own act, still David had contributed to it by underhand dealings. His very fear of Joab had caused him to wrong his able general, and given him just cause for resentment.

Ver. 28.—**I and my kingdom are guiltless.** By this David means, not his royal house, but the people generally, who too often have to pay the penalty for the sins of their rulers (see ch. xxi. 1). Necessarily this is the case, wherever the crime is a state crime; but David protests that Abner's murder was a private crime, for which Joab and Abishai alone ought to suffer.

Ver. 29.—**Let it rest on the head of Joab.** The Hebrew word is very strong, "Let it roll itself," or throw itself upon Joab's head. The force of the expression thus indicates the great excitement under which David was labouring; yet even so it was no slight matter to utter so bitter a curse upon a man so powerful, and whose military skill was so essential to the maintenance of his throne. To a man of David's strong sense of justice, it was a small matter that by Abner's murder the kingdom of the ten tribes was lost perhaps for ever; what he hated was the wickedness of this mean act of personal revenge. And thus his imprecations are all such as would be humiliating to a family so distinguished for great physical as well as mental gifts, as the house of Zeruiah. Nor was David content with this; for we gather from 1 Chron. xi. 6 that during the intervening years Joab was deprived of his office, and that he regained it only by an act of daring bravery. (For the miserable condition of one suffering with an issue, see Lev. xv. 2, etc.; and for that of a leper, Lev., xiii. xiv.) Instead of **one that leaneth on a staff**, some translate "a distaff-holder," that is, a poor effeminate creature, fit only for woman's work. The true sense is probably a cripple—one who needs a crutch. **That falleth on the sword**; more correctly the Revised Version, *that falleth by the sword*. The two last imprecations mean that if any of the race of Joab and Abishai escape these personal blemishes, yet that his fate shall be, in war an inglorious death, and in peace a life of poverty. This curse of David is regarded in the Talmud ('Sanhedr.,' 48. 2) as very sinful. Undeniably it was uttered in violent anger, and while Joab's act was utterly base and perfidious, yet he had tho excuse for it of Asahel's death and David's double-dealing. Tho latter made him conclude that the man who had killed his brother was also to usurp his place. Possibly this suspicion was not without reason. As David was strong enough to deprive Joab of his command, it is plain that he had nothing to fear from telling him his plans. Joab would have assented, the blood-feud have been appeased by a money payment, and all gone well. But David, it seems, wished to hold Joab in check by giving at least a share in the command to the veteran Abner.

Ver. 30.—**Joab and Abishai his brother.** Nothing is said of Abishai having taken part in the murder, but the words suggest that it was a premeditated act, and that Abishai was privy to it.

Ver. 31.—**David said to Joab.** The excuse of the blood-feud made it impossible for David to punish Joab further than by depriving him of his command; but he made him condemn his own deed by taking part in the public mourning for the man he had murdered. This mourning consisted in going in solemn procession, clad in sackcloth, before Abner's body, carried on a bier to the grave, while David followed as chief mourner; and the emphatic way in which he is called **King David** suggests the thought that he went in royal state, so as to give all possible dignity to the funeral. His tears and lamentations with uplifted voice were so genuine and hearty as to move the people to a similar outburst of grief. But while all those at Hebron had proof that David was innocent, the people generally would know only that, when Abner was escorting the king's wife back to him, and arranging for his election to rule over all Israel, he was treacherously murdered at the gate of Hebron by one who was chief over David's army and also his nephew.

Ver. 33.—**The king lamented.** The word is the same as that used in ch. i. 17. The word rendered "fool" is *nabal* (for which see 1 Sam. xxv. 25). The idea contained in the word is not that of mere silliness, but of worthlessness also; and thus in Ps. xiv. 1 we find that the *nabal* is also an atheist.

Ver. 34.—**Thy hands were not bound.** Abner had been put to death by Joab for killing Asahel. But there had been no legal process. He had not been brought in fetters before a judge to be tried for the crime alleged, but murdered for private ends. And thus, "As a man falleth before the children of iniquity, so had he fallen," that

is, by crime, and not by law. These words are probably the refrain of the dirge, like those in ch. i. 19, 25, 27, and were followed by the celebration of Abner's bravery, but they alone are recorded, because they contain the main point. Abner's death was not, like the sentence upon Baanah and Rechab, an act of justice, but one of lawless revenge; and by this poem David proclaimed, not only his innocence, but also his abhorrence of the crime.

Ver. 35.—**The people came to cause David to eat meat.** The Jewish commentators, Philippson, Cahen, etc., consider that the occasion for this was given by the custom of taking food after a funeral (Jer. xvi. 7; Ezek. xxiv. 17), which in time degenerated into the giving of a costly banquet (Josephus, 'Bell. Jud.,' 2. 1). To this day, at a Jewish funeral in Germany, the bearers are regaled with eggs, bread, and wine. While, then, others were partaking of the food that had been provided, David remained apart, and when urged by the assembled multitude to join them in their meal, he protested that he would continue fasting until sunset. He thus proved that his sorrow was genuine, and the people were convinced of his innocence, and pleased at the honour which he thus did to the fallen soldier.

Ver. 36.—**Whatsoever the king did pleased all the people.** This is a tribute to the king's conduct generally. The people would have been grieved and astonished if David had been guilty of this mean murder; but his indignant disavowal of it was in accordance with his usual justice and uprightness, and so it confirmed their high opinion of him. Thus while the more distant tribes condemned David, those who had the best opportunity for forming a judgment gave their verdict in his favour.

Ver. 37.—**All Israel understood.** The twenty men who had accompanied Abner would be witnesses of all that David did, and would carry their report of it home, and of the high estimation in which his character was held at Hebron. And this gradually would be told throughout the tribes, and the final verdict of all well-disposed people would be in David's favour.

Ver. 38.—**A prince and a great man.** David pronounces this high estimate of Abner's worth to **his servants**, that is, to his officers, and especially to the six hundred mighty men. His conduct is bold and open, and must have greatly humiliated Joab and Abishai. But though the six hundred approved of David's conduct, and respected him for it, yet probably, as Abner had killed Asahel, they would not have consented to any further punishment than the disgrace inflicted on Joab by his being deprived of the command of David's warriors.

Ver. 39.—**I am this day weak . . . the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me.** David would gladly have had Abner as a counterpoise to Joab's too-great power. As it was, though an anointed king, he had but one tribe loyal to him; the rest were the subjects of a rival; and the Philistines were oppressing all alike. Had Abner's enterprise been carried out, all the tribes would have been united under his sway. He could thus have made head against the Philistines, and Abner, in command of the Benjamites and other tribes, would have curbed the fierce self-will of Joab. As it was, the sons of Zeruiah might be reprimanded, and could not treat David as Abner had treated Ishbosheth; but they were indispensable. David had a strange set of men around him in those outlaws (1 Sam. xxii. 2); and Joab, brave, skilful, and unscrupulous, was a man after their own heart. They had just returned with great booty from a foray under his command; and it was a brave and manly thing in David to reprove him so openly, and dismiss him from his command. Had he attempted more, and Joab had stood upon the defence, there were plenty of "men of Belial" (1 Sam. xxx. 22) to side with him, and David might have met with the fate threatened him at Ziklag (1 Sam. xxx. 6). As it was, he proved himself to be king, and Joab, in spite of everything, remained a most faithful officer, and the right-hand man in his kingdom, and one even trusted with perilous and disgraceful secrets (ch. xi. 14).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—11.—*Rival interests.* The facts are: 1. A desultory war is carried on between the house of Saul and the house of David, in which the latter has the advantage. 2. David has six sons born to him while at Hebron. 3. A quarrel arises between Abner and Ishbosheth, consequent on an accusation resented by Abner. 4. Abner charges his master with ingratitude, and threatens to transfer his allegiance to David. 5. In seeking to give emphasis to his threat, Abner indicates his knowledge of the Divine will concerning David. The object of the historian in vers. 1—5 is obviously to

give a representation, from a political point of view, of David prior to the action of Abner in his favour; and in vers. 6—11 to state the circumstance that led to a transfer of Abner's support from one side to the other. The general effect of the war between the two royal houses and the growth of David's domestic establishment are the two prominent items of the situation prior to Abner's change of policy. Judged solely by the standard of the age, they pointed in the direction of advancing influence, but looked at in the light of a higher standard they suggest a qualified prosperity. The general truths embodied in this account of rival interests may be set forth as follows.

I. DEFENSIVE ACTION IN A JUST CAUSE IS SOMETIMES THE BEST POLICY. That the cause of David was just is evident to every believer in the truth of the First Book of Samuel, and, as seen there and in the Psalms, the conviction of this governed his conduct. From a purely human point of view it might seem contrary to natural justice to set aside the son of the late king; and the effort of Ishbosheth to urge, by force of arms, his own claim may be a natural sequence of thought and feeling. But kings have no rights apart from the will of God; and, as the sequel shows (ver. 10), both the young king and his general were not unacquainted with the Divine purpose. The right being with David, it might seem strange that he did not press his claim to entire dominion by aggressive war. His skill and valour, the coherence of his following, and the enthusiasm created by his personality, to say nothing of the demoralizing effect on Abner of his own infidelity to conscience, could not but have speedily made him master of all Israel. Instead of that, we find David simply authorizing such conflict as would suffice to hold his own and check the aggressive efforts of the house of Saul. It is interesting to see here the same David as of old, who had such faith in God and the gradual unfolding of his purposes that he would never raise a hand against Saul, or do anything, except in necessary self-defence, that could be construed into hostility. Had not Abner's evil counsels prevailed with Ishbosheth, David would have lived in peace at Hebron till a mightier hand than his own cleared the way to the throne of a united people. Statesmen would do well to take such an example in many of the painful contingencies that arise. To a just man it is half the victory to be calm and strong in the conviction of his rectitude and the righteousness of his position. There is a watchful Providence cherishing the good and frustrating the evil. Forces under the direction of an evil genius are sure to wear themselves out if only the objects of their hate can hold their own; and the wasting of their strength means the final triumph of the cause of truth and justice. There are seasons in Church life when this policy of pure defence is wise; for at such times God has ends to effect which work in with the scope of more aggressive endeavours.

II. A RIGHT CONTENTION WILL COME TO A RIGHT ISSUE. "David waxed stronger and stronger." Of course he did. It could not but be so, for he was a chosen servant, not seeking or doing his own will, but simply placing his life in the hands of God, to work out for his people and for future ages, purposes the precise nature of which he could not understand. No weapon formed against him could prosper. He who contended against him fought against God. The forces of nature were on his side. Never did mortal more vainly contend against fate than did Ishbosheth contend against David. The principle involved in this instance is of wide range. Right is sure to prevail in the issue. The disturbing element introduced by sin into the universe causes strife of the most grave character. The whole line of Divine government, so far as we can trace it, seems to be a line of conflict between right and wrong, holiness and sin. The antagonism taken up in Eden runs on and becomes more acute on Calvary, and is apparent now in a "long war" between the children of light and the kingdom of darkness. Time is in favour of righteousness. There is an endurance in truth which cannot be affirmed of error. As perhaps the friends of David thought those years of war very tedious and dispiriting, and sometimes even inconsistent with rightness of claim and purpose, so we may be weary in the greater strife and become disturbed by cruel questionings; yet the issue is sure. "Stronger and stronger" may be affirmed of the kingdom of righteousness on earth. For even the seeming failures and delays only become, in the hands of Providence, the means of acquiring the hardier and more enduring virtues by which at last the final victory shall be won. The same is true of any conflicts in which character is at stake. Our "righteousness shall be brought forth as the light," and our "judgment as the noonday." The parallel may be seen also in

the conflict of the "old" and the "new man." The one is on the way to perish; the other is "renewed day by day."

III. THE UNEXPRESSED WOES OF LIFE ARE VERY REAL. "There was long war." The sentence is brief, and understandable by a child. It is repeated with careless ease. As a rule, it connotes to the ordinary reader only a general idea of men seeking to slay one another. But to read history aright we ought to bring the faculty of imagination into full play; and it is only as we exercise the historic imagination that we get a glimpse of the sad facts embodied in this simple form of expression. Subjected to the vitalizing power of this faculty, what unexpressed woes rise up to view! What harsh and fierce dispositions! What weary marchings and watchings! What murderous blows and bleeding wounds and agonizing deaths! What widows' wailings and orphans' tears! What losses to homes and nation of strong men and productive toil! This, which applies to the brief statement of the sacred narrative, is equally true of greater woes. Men read of great battles very much as they read algebraic symbols. The real items indicated are not vivid to the mind. Men read also of the banishment of the wicked to outer darkness in the same mechanical way. The hurry of life leaves no time for the imagination to lay hold of the actual facts connoted. Hence the power over the will of mere visible, present realities. Hence the difficulty of getting the "powers of the world to come" to influence motive. Hence, also, the necessity of each man making an effort to bring his mind into actual view of the facts covered by language, and of the preacher and teacher rendering the aid of well-chosen speech to further this effort.

IV. CONVENTIONAL STRENGTH MAY BE AN OCCASION OF MORAL WEAKNESS. The historian tells us of the growth of David's domestic establishment at Hebron. Estimated by the customs prevalent in the East at that time, this acquisition by David of wives and sons was supposed to add to the splendour and stateliness of his regal position. All the paraphernalia of a court, the wide-reaching influence of family connections, and the imposing show of a large household would lead ordinary men to regard him as among the great ones of the earth. The accidental surroundings of life form a delusively important part of what is deemed to be human greatness. We are all children in so far as we are influenced in our judgments on social position and weight of character by the circumstantials of life. Even the more educated are prone to either identify or associate greatness with large establishments. This kind of conventionalism plays an important part in human affairs; but it is not God's standard. David's polygamous habits were consistent with the conventional morality of the age, and his domestic establishment projected his public position before the eye of the people in a form accordant to princely fashion; but we know that beneath all the signs of wealth and greatness there were influences at work which could not but weaken his moral force and mar the beauty and sweetness of his private life. Oriental splendour and conventional moralities were indulged in at great moral cost. David in Hebron with many wives and their accompaniments could not be as morally robust as was David in earlier days. The same danger attends all who conform to customs not based on strict principles of purity and godliness. Fashion cannot make righteousness. Goodness may live amidst habits essentially alien to the welfare of the individual and to saints, as surely as life may continue in an atmosphere charged with malarious poisons; but the enervation of the one will be as certain as of the other. The insensibility of the man to the subtle action of the evil is only an aggravation of its action and in no wise a palliation. Modern Christians should severely scrutinize the moral quality of the circumstances and habits in which conventional usage allows them to live. This can only be done by making use of tests absolutely given by God apart from the colouring which custom is apt to give even to Divine laws.

V. UNRIGHTEOUS MEN PAY HOMAGE TO RIGHTEOUSNESS. There can be no question but that Ishbosheth knew well the nature and validity of David's claims; for the theocratic rule was a reality in Israel during and subsequent to the life of Samuel. It was, therefore, wrong for him to put forth any personal claim of his own. Jonathan's example had been lost upon him; and yet this man recognized the evil done by Abner in lustful indulgence, and even ventured to protest against it. On the other hand, Abner, while being unrighteous enough to indulge in sinful lust and to abet the invalid claim of Ishbosheth, nevertheless is fired with indignation that the love of

gratitude should have been violated by the young monarch. Thus men, pursuing a course which they know to be contrary to the will of God, become, when personal and family matters are involved, zealous, each in his own fashion, for what is right and proper. Truly, man is a strange compound of moral light and darkness. The psychological explanation is a study. It is the habituation to the wrong which renders men so dull to appeals, so insensible to the real demerit of their actions, and it is the latent force of conscience which saves them from being parties to a course on which they have not taken the initial step. Hence our Lord's reference to the "gnat" and the "camel." The prevalence of this state of moral confusion is very wide even in Christian society. In the same individual may be found great sensitiveness and great obtuseness. The holding of slaves and gain by the sale of them has coexisted with a profound regard for religious worship. Licentious men have had a dread of dishonesty. Multitudes who rob God of the love and obedience due to him are indignant if an ordinary business debt is not paid. The Pharisees could conspire to kill Jesus Christ, and yet feel very unhappy if they omitted any of the ceremonials of religion. It is a common thing for men and women to indulge in envy, jealousy, and ill will, while extremely careful to keep up an external conduct conformable to the requirements of the Decalogue. There is much scope for searching of heart on this subject; and in dealing with it the preacher needs to exercise great discrimination and delicacy of reference. Abner must be made to see himself as Ishbosheth sees him, and *vice versâ*. "Man, know thyself," is a maxim of immense importance to every one.

VI. PASSING EVENTS MAY SERVE TO UNVEIL THE WORKINGS OF CONSCIENCE. Viewed from a distance by the people, Abner seemed to be a man who all along was conscientiously and faithfully subordinating his life to the maintenance of a just cause. So far as we can see from the narrative, he had been reticent concerning the mental processes of which he was daily conscious. But the incident of Ishbosheth's accusation of immorality was as the removing of a veil whereby the actual thoughts of Abner stood revealed. "So do God to Abner, and more also, except, as the Lord hath sworn to David, even so I do to him." Thus Abner had known all along that it was God's will to give the kingdom to David. The ideas and compunctions connected with this central fact had evidently been covered up and suppressed. The real inner life of struggle against right and God was now exposed by his own act. In the case of every man there is always an inner life necessarily hidden by himself from ordinary view. It is a necessity of social existence that each man should be more unknown than known to his fellows. Only where there is perfect holiness would perfect knowledge of others be helpful to love and confidence. But in the case of men pursuing a deliberate course which seems to others to be conscientious, but is known to themselves to be contrary to right, there is a rigid and designed concealment of their self-condemnation. They gain the reputation of being upright, though perhaps misguided, men, while their own conscience gives the lie to this public judgment. An incidental reference, an unguarded hasty admission of fact, an effort to justify an action, may be as a sudden rent in the covering of the real life within, exposing to the view of others a guilty violation of truth, a perpetual conflict against the well-ascertained will of God. This frequent concealment of an inner guilty life and its possible unveiling by incidental events should be a guide in forming an estimate of conduct, and a warning to evil-doers. The self-exposure, also, however incidental, is to be taken as a preintimation of the final exposure when God shall bring hidden things into judgment.

Vers. 12—21.—The facts are: 1. Abner, disgusted with Ishbosheth's conduct, opens negotiation with David for the transfer of the kingdom to him. 2. David consents to discuss the question on condition that Abner first of all undertakes to restore unto him Michal, Saul's daughter. 3. Concurrent with Abner's efforts to bring this to pass, David makes a demand on Ishbosheth for the restoration of Michal. 4. Abner, taking charge of Michal on her return to David, effects the final separation from her weeping husband. 5. Reminding Israel and Benjamin of their former preference of David, Abner seeks to bring them over to his cause. 6. Charged with instructions from the people, he proceeds to Hebron as a legate to arrange the business with David. 7. As a result of the interview, it was left to Abner to complete the formal submission of all the people to the authority of David.

Faithfulness in small things. The passage here in reference to David and Michal brings out a feature in the character of the king which was prominent from first to last. According to the common estimate of things, the *a priori* belief would be that, when a ruler desires the subjugation of a kingdom, he will readily accept offers of submission and of all powerful aids to bring it to pass. To obtain supremacy over Israel was the one thing above all others on which David's mind was set, and the co-operation of so influential a man as Abner was a virtual realization of the king's purpose. To an astute unprincipled man like Abner it was doubtless a cause of amazement that, when the kingdom was within the king's grasp, he should practically refuse to have it unless a certain private affair was first arranged. The great affairs of the nation were made to wait on the settlement of what seemed to be a mere matter of sentiment and personal interest. Few monarchs in the East would thus have dealt with the chance of gaining the ends of long-cherished political ambition. In David's case the stipulation was consistent with his character. He was ever generously careful of maintaining the rights of individuals and of sacrificing his own ambition to the justice due to others. He was faithful in that which is least.

I. THE CLAIMS OF THAT WHICH IS LEAST ARE VALID AND ARE SUBSTANTIAL PARTS OF A VAST SYSTEM OF OBLIGATIONS. Michal was David's wife, bound to his heart and life by ties sacred and memorable (1 Sam. xviii. 17—30). To political schemers it would seem absurd to set a woman, not seen for many years, and known to be living in forced matrimony with another man, over against a whole kingdom. But wrong done to her (1 Sam. xxv. 44) had not invalidated her claim on David's affection. It was due to her, due to the memory of her father in spite of his follies, due to the force of his own character on others, and due to the old love (1 Sam. xviii. 20—28) which changing fortunes had not changed, that she should have justice done her on the very first opportunity of enforcing it. David's vision was clear enough to see that, if his claim to be king over all Israel was valid because of the appointment of God, so equally the claim of this banished woman on his love and care was also valid, because based on principles which God had ordained for the regulation of domestic life. The same Divine will was in both; and, moreover, they were equally parts of the great system of obligations which covers the whole area of human activity, and which is productive of highest good to man when the different parts are equally held as sacred and are rigidly observed. In human affairs there is often an apparent collision of what are called small and great obligations. In reality there is no such thing. There may be a question of order in which actions shall be done; but obligation, in the moral sense, can never clash with obligation. To love the Lord with all the heart is the prime, the chief duty, but it does not destroy the duty of love to our neighbour. To take part in public affairs may be an obligation, but the care of home is a valid claim which cannot be ignored. There are duties which, entering into the minutiæ of life or pertaining to the home rather than to public affairs, may be regarded as relatively small, but inasmuch as they are not the creation of custom but proceed from the will of God and form parts of the great scheme of life, they are to be regarded as sacred and binding as those which figure more largely before the public eye.

II. THE BRINGING ABOUT OF GREAT EVENTS INVOLVES MORE CHANGES THAN LIE WITHIN OUR OWN ACTION, AND PROVIDENCE TAKES CARE OF THEM. The event of all Israel submitting to David would imply manifold influences brought to bear on the elders of the people, and through them on the masses, and in such a process of change there might arise many a circumstance adverse to the desired issue. It was not in David's power to effect this by any personal action. All he could do was to set agencies at work through Abner, and trust in Providence for disposing the hearts of men aright. It was right doubtless for the people to own him as king, but it was not in his power to establish this right. On the other hand, it was in his power to do justice to a banished woman, and demand, as a prior step, that she be restored to his heart and home. There is always an uncertainty attending our efforts to bring about great issues in the world's affairs, even though those issues be predicted and included in the Divine purpose; for our actions are but a few among myriads of forces for and against the end for which we strive, and for ages the goal may not be reached. It is our duty to do what we can, just as it was David's to use means for winning Israel over to the allegiance which had been predicted and was part of the theocratic purpose; but we have to

act in faith that an overruling Providence is at work above us and above all forces, and that the great issue will in some unknown way and time be brought to pass. The statesman cannot make the nation great and strong; he can only set in motion social and material forces which in due course may accomplish the purpose in view. The missionary can but contribute an item of force towards rendering the whole earth submissive to Christ. The parent can contribute but some of the elements which in the end will tend to form the final character of his children. The far-reaching aims of life are binding on us, but their realization is not all in our power. It is absolutely within our power to perform single acts of justice and consideration as occasion offers. As the products of will, they may fill but a small place in the world in comparison with the realization of those other wider aims which are products of many wills; yet they afford opportunities for proving our fidelity to truth and righteousness as surely as do the great events to bring about which we can only contribute our part. David's profound regard for what was right shone forth in his care for a single individual, just as truly as his faith in Providence appeared in subordinating the attainment of his political ambition to this act of justice.

III. HUMAN DUTY IS PLEDGED TO THAT WHICH IS KNOWN AND DISTINCT. David knew that Michal was his wife, that she had been forcibly separated from him in the day of adversity, and that as a good man he was bound to amend her wrongs as soon as occasion offered. Though a king, he saw that domestic were prior to political obligations. There may have been, as a matter of fact, policy in showing his regard in this way for the house of Saul, but the evident motive was to do a right deed as soon as it was seen to be right and scope offered for its performance. In morals, prompt action is homage to righteousness. A known duty and scope for its performance should never be deferred. As air, in obedience to the law of its action, rushes in to fill a vacuum, so does a just mind at once seize opportunity for doing what is clearly known to be right. If men linger and hesitate to do specific acts discerned to be just, it is clear evidence that they are defective in righteousness of principle. Their inner life is *pro tanto* alien to that of God. This explains, in one way at least, how it is that some men do not at once turn from positive sins and surrender themselves to Christ. They see what is the right thing to do, but defer it till some great scheme of their life is completed.

IV. FAITHFULNESS IN THAT WHICH IS LEAST GIVES MORAL POWER FOR OTHER ACTS. Having discharged this more private domestic duty, and so satisfied his conscience in reference to an obvious obligation in which a sufferer was concerned, David was a stronger man for carrying through whatever might be useful for realizing the great purposes of Providence. A good conscience is a moral tonic. The impression produced on Abner and others by this regard for what is right in the more private sphere of life, could not but be favourable to the public interests of the king. Evil men are awed by pronounced goodness, and the halting are won to allegiance. History presents many instances of influence augmented by conscientious attention to duties in private and domestic life. The habit formed by such carefulness to do the right thing in minor matters gives momentum to the action of the will when it is called to act in reference to great questions in the face of strong opposition. Many men become morally enervated by careless inattention to obligations of a private nature, yet lying close at hand and clear as daylight. Their influence on great public questions is weakened by their consciousness of neglect, and by the disgust with which men regard public separated from private righteousness.

Policy without principle. The Bible narratives do not enter into details concerning the inner motives of those whose actions are recorded; they rather state outward facts, and leave them to produce their natural impressions. The strange and apparently irreconcilable procedures of Abner are no doubt resolvable into some one governing feeling which, with unvarying consistency though in varying form, shaped his entire public actions. The whole facts from first to last reveal the operation at the base of his conduct of one master-passion—the love of pre-eminence; and it is in the working out of this powerful feeling that we find a remarkable illustration of a policy in life apart from principle.

I. A LOVE OF PRE-EMINENCE IS OFTEN A CLUE TO MUCH IN LIFE THAT IS OTHER-

WISE UNACCOUNTABLE. It certainly does seem strange that a man of Abner's abilities, brought up in full knowledge of the special relation of David to Samuel and Jonathan, and therefore fully aware of the reason why, after the exile from Palestine, David should assume royal state at Hebron and claim dominion also over the entire house of Israel, should give up his services in favour of David's rival. In the light of mere custom and regal order it would seem to be patriotic and manly on his part to identify his life with the interests of a son of the reigning house, and probably he flattered himself that ordinary men would put this interpretation on his conduct. But the best solution of all the facts of his life is to be found in the hypothesis of his passionate love of pre-eminence. With so strong a man as Joab on David's side, and the reputed zeal of the other sons of Zeruiah, there was little chance of his rising to the position of power which alone would satisfy his ambition. Although his ordinary sense must have assured him, to say nothing of the latent truth recognized by the conscience (vers. 9, 10), that Ishbosheth could never successfully compete with so brave and active a rival as David, yet, on the principle that it is "better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven," he found it more congenial to throw in his lot with a man over whom he could exercise chief influence and in whose cause he would be the principal figure. This policy void of principle ran through, as we shall soon see, the actions of his entire course. There lies, also, at the spring of every man's conduct, be he a public character or only a private individual, some master-passion to which all other feelings and aims are subordinate, and it is good for each one, and necessary to the true interpreter of life, to find out what it is. In public affairs there can be no question that in very many instances it is not fear of God, not pure patriotism, not regard for human interests as such, but open or disguised love of pre-eminence which furnishes the main incentive to conduct. The form of conduct may be such as would result from the action of higher and better feelings, but that is simply the result of policy. This feeling, which finds its scope in the rivalry and struggle of individuals, is but the social form of the generic feeling known as selfishness, or, as modern theologians term it, selfism, which in its essence is sin and probably the metaphysical explanation of sin itself, and which, moreover, is the solution of the fact that men do not recognize the eternal King, but prefer to belong to an inferior order of things. To please self, men will even consent to lose moral rank, and become foes rather than friends of the Righteous One.

II. MORAL HUMILIATIONS MAY MODIFY THE FORM OF POLICY, BUT THEY WILL NOT DESTROY THE MASTER-PASSION. To an aspiring man, as was Abner, it was intensely mortifying to be charged with wrong-doing by one nominally his superior, and the moral sting of the charge probably lay in its truth. This was, on the part of Ishbosheth, a virtual assumption of both moral and legal superiority; and, as such, was a blow at that secret, unexpressed sense of superiority which Abner had all along felt in relation to the weak young man whose cause he had patronizingly advocated. In even bad men the moral sense is strong, if not in leading to right courses, yet in making them wretched for wrong-doing. Inwardly and morally Abner was now weak in the presence of his royal master. The soul that is humiliated does not like to be reminded of its humiliation, and, if possible, the occasions of such reminders must be avoided and punished. The change wrought in Abner lay in the deep region of unexpressed and inexpressible feelings. The old love of pre-eminence was untouched by the collision with Ishbosheth. The masterful springs of human life are not easily dried up or supplanted. The immediate effect was simply to raise up a minor yet strong personal feeling, which came as a dam between the old love of pre-eminence and the interests of Ishbosheth, and caused it to flow with widened channel in another direction. Emotions stimulate thinkings, and personal feelings arouse ingenuity. Swift as lightning Abner saw that he could be a yet more important personage than ever, and, at the same time, qualify his moral humiliation by the sweets of revenge. In spite of Joab and the other son of Zeruiah, he would figure as the means of placing the crown of a united people on David's head. It should be seen that what war could not do Abner had the power to do. The names of David, Israel, and Abner would henceforth be indissolubly associated in the annals of the time. Instead of pre-eminence at the court of Ishbosheth, there would be pre-eminence at the court of David, and in the judgment of a compact nation. There have been other instances of statesmen, under the influence of resentment, changing their course, and apparently, but not in reality, their principles.

The policy in all such cases has been to subordinate public interests to certain cherished feelings. A form of sound principles may be adopted for the very same reason as previously it was rejected. Evil men are prone to do the same in ecclesiastical affairs. In private life men have been known even to assume a form of godliness—to quote the Divine truth (vers. 9, 10)—as a means of better subserving their purpose. It were well if rebuke of sin (vers. 7, 8) always produced the godly sorrow that leads to genuine repentance, and then the adoption of the true principles of the kingdom would be, not as a policy, but as a matter of conviction. The case of Saul of Tarsus in relation to the spiritual kingdom stands out in sharp contrast to that of Abner in relation to the temporal kingdom (cf. Acts ix. 5—20).

III. DURING THE WORKING OUT OF THE MASTER-PASSION THE TRUTH OF GOD ABIDES AS A PERMANENT WITNESS. That Abner should have so explicitly referred to the Divine purpose (ver. 9) cannot be ascribed to information recently received, but must be accounted for on the ground that he had all along had the truth suppressed in his own mind. He here unwittingly unveils his own conscience and condemns his past course as a violation of solemn obligations rising far above social considerations and personal preferences. To the people he, perhaps, seemed to be a man upheld by a sense of right, but to himself he was known as a rebel against God. The Divine truth asserted inwardly its own reality. Its light revealed to himself, whenever he calmly reflected on his conduct, the dark and damaging characters of his public career. And though he was now adopting right principles, and so would in future escape the pain of knowing that his actions were not running counter to their direction, yet, being conscious of adopting them for unprincipled reasons, he could not avoid the conviction that he was doing the right thing for David, not because of a love of God, but for personal ends. The sense of right would thus reveal to him the essential crookedness of ways that were ostensibly straight. The man who does right things from bad motives never knows the blessedness of the just. Probably there is no determinate course of wrong-doing in which the light of truth does not bear some witness more or less distinct. Even those who, following lower passions, change the glory of the incorruptible God into images after their own likeness (Rom. i. 23), at times find within a protest against their conduct (Rom. ii. 15). No man who has heard the claims of Christ to universal dominion as clearly and authoritatively set forth as ever Abner had heard of the Divine right of David, can live opposed to him, or, as a mere matter of policy, fall in formally with his rights, without being sensible at times of a voice which tells him of his dangerous position and worthless character. Many a converted man has borne testimony that, for years previous to his conversion, the truth of God bore faithful witness as to what was the will of God concerning him in his relation to the Anointed One.

IV. THE WORKING OUT OF A POLICY CHANGED IN OUTWARD FORM BUT NOT IN NATURE NECESSITATES AND ENSURES MUCH ZEAL AND INGENUITY. The change of allegiance was, for Abner, a momentous step. For onlookers it meant on his part a judgment, and self-respect demanded that that judgment should be justified by every possible means. His policy being the same along an altered course, he must so act as to make it appear that he had come into the possession of new and true principles, and so get the credit of acting on principle and not on policy void of principle. Of course, a man who sincerely came to the belief that God had purposed David to be king, and loved the doing of the will of God, would at once go and offer his services to David. Abner did this. Of course, he would be eager to fulfil all conditions that might be specified by David in bringing to pass the will of God (vers. 13—16). This was true of Abner. And as to gaining over others to his new view of things, no pains would be spared to show the reasonableness of the course now to be taken. Abner made out a case before the elders of Israel and the more sturdy Benjamites, and was able to report to David complete success (vers. 17—21). What zeal and ingenuity were implied in all this may be imagined by those only who know how hard it is to justify sudden changes of conduct and get one's followers to entertain new ideas. But Abner's love of pre-eminence in national affairs must perish if these efforts were not forthcoming. The same will apply to any one who changes sides in public affairs, and at the same time desires to attain to the distinction formerly obtained or secretly longed for. In fact, fully to gratify the cravings of selfish ambition means toil upon toil.

However gratifying the completion of one's aims may seem, it is a vain and miserable issue when regarded in the clear light of pure principle. In the real moral world—the sphere in which God alone awards the prizes of life—he is not crowned who does not "strive lawfully" (2 Tim. ii. 5), that is, is not observant of all the great and holy principles on which alone God would have men act. It is certain, therefore, that men of the Abner stamp, who are doing the right things, not because they are right and of God, but for personal ends, will one day find that their efforts will, while being used up by God in furtherance of the dominion of Zion's King, bring to themselves none of the glory and honour which alone fall to those who persist in "well-doing" (Rom. ii. 6, 7).

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. It becomes us now and then to search into the mainsprings of life, to ascertain what really are the principles or feelings which dominate our conduct. 2. We may rest assured, in our appeals to men on behalf of Christ, that there is in their conscience, confronting their actual life of rebellion, a witness for him the Divine authority of which they must secretly recognize. 3. Any change from an externally wrong to an externally right course is to be tested by its being or not being the outcome of pure love of what is pleasing to God. 4. There is a day coming when the actions which seem to lie in the direction of the kingdom of Christ, and, in fact, as right actions, are due to him, will be unveiled so as to be seen in their relation to the actual feelings in which they originated, and then those, who during a part of their life were regarded as good workers, will be known as "workers of iniquity" (Matt. vii. 21—23). 5. In the lives of some men one portion is spent in endeavouring to undo the deeds of former misspent days, and not always with clean hands in the sight of God. 6. The secret of every life is to be found in the heart, and hence the need constantly of the prayer that God would create within us a clean heart. 7. It is a right thing for men of influence, when the force of truth is openly admitted by themselves, to do what lies within their power to bring others over to its practical recognition. 8. The great mass of the people are very much influenced in the course they take in public affairs by the reasonings of able leaders; hence the responsibilities of leaderships in the government of God.

Policy with principle. A careful examination of facts will show that David's conduct in this narrative, and indeed all through his early career, was the very reverse of Abner's. His entire course, from the day of his call from the sheepfold to the proffered allegiance of Abner, was one of simple honest desire to do the will of God. Again and again had he resisted temptations to grasp at power; and his conduct in the interview with Abner, and use of his services, proceeded from the same principle, that, in its very nature, excluded selfish motive.

I. ACTION GOVERNED BY DIVINE PURPOSE IS THE NORMAL COURSE FOR A RATIONAL CREATURE. In inanimate and irrational things the Divine purpose is so stamped upon their being or wrought into the texture of their nature that as a matter of course they, in their movements, follow in the line appointed. Their action is necessarily normal. In creatures endowed with a rational will there comes in the prerogative of option. The possibility of an abnormal course belongs to such beings as an essential element of their constitution. The angels that have kept their first estate, and fallen angels and man, illustrate the two sides of the case. In the affairs of ancient Israel the revealed purpose of God was that David should be king (ver. 9). This was the will of the Eternal, by which every man, from Samuel and Saul in the highest ranks to the lowliest descendant of Jacob, was to be guided in his political life. How Samuel and Jonathan conformed to this law is beautifully seen in their respective careers. How David was governed by it is to be seen in the strong faith in his own destiny which ran through his patient endurance of exile; in his firm but restrained opposition to Ishbosheth; and also in his negotiations with Abner. It is this conscious conformity of action with the Divine purpose in relation to public affairs that raises the strong assertions of integrity in the Psalms above the suspicion of being the outgoings of a self-righteous spirit that claims perfect internal holiness in the sight of God. As a rule, our private conduct is normal in so far only as it is the carrying out in action of the definite purpose of God that we should govern self for him. Hence sin is properly said to be a fall (Hos. xiv. 1). Hence our Saviour's was the only true life. He was man

as man should be. It was his meat and drink to do his Father's will. The goal of redemption is to raise us to the full stature of men in Christ Jesus. This view of human life, inwrought as a principle into all the operations of heart and mind, will do much to bring about the final harmony of our own lives, and indeed of all things, for discords will cease in proportion as rational created wills move in unison with the Divine.

II. THE PRINCIPLE ON WHICH LIFE SHOULD BE CONDUCTED BEING CLEARLY RECOGNIZED, IT SERVES AS A LIGHT TO THE CHOICE AND REJECTION OF MEANS BY WHICH THE ATTAINMENT OF THE END MAY BE SECURED. Between David's revealed predestination to be king over the chosen race, and the realization of the Divine will in the actual facts of history, many acts on his part had to be performed. It would be perplexing to an ordinary mind to prestate the agencies and methods by which the shepherd-boy and exile should at last peacefully ascend the throne and reign over a united people. Had human passion, or bare calculation, or mere politic balancing of advantages been taken as guide and governor of action, there would doubtless have been, in his case, a reproduction of the tragic struggles so often recorded in the history of public affairs. But conformity of self to the holy will of God being the root-principle of life, conjoined with the never-absent conviction that Providence was sure to be on his side in seeking to conform self to the revealed will, this illumined his pathway even amidst the darkest of earth's shadows, and enabled him to see what courses should be avoided and what pursued. Clearly he must not give scope to mere lust of power; for where the need and what the use of that when the Holy One had sworn that he should reign? Clearly, also, he must not use force and conquer the people over whom as king he is to rule; for had not God chosen him to be king over a chosen race, for the realization of high spiritual issues stretching far into a glorious future? Equally plain was it that there is no need to have recourse to the cunning and craft and falsehoods—the policy void of moral principle—which a godless spirit might suggest; for was he not the chosen servant of the Holy One of Israel, who has no need of low-born policies to establish his dominion over men? Hence David's patience in exile, his tender regard for Saul even when others suggested revenge, his merely defensive action at Hebron, and his manifest unwillingness to force Ishbosheth from the throne and to compel Israel to submit to himself. He had faith in God and in God's supremacy over the hearts and destinies of men. In so far as he had a policy it was suggested by his fundamental principle, and embraced three things: (1) Use of peaceful means. (2) Waiting on Providence for some free movement on the part of Israel. (3) A regard for the susceptibilities of the house of Saul and the natural interest of the people in that house. Hence: (1) His abstention from hostilities during Saul's lifetime, and his subsequent non-aggressive action against Ishbosheth, as also his willingness to accept the services of Abner with the elders of the people. (2) His acceptance of the allegiance of Abner, viewing it as simply a fact brought about apart from any bribe or effort on his part, and being in its outward form, with which he was alone concerned, conformable to the revealed purpose (ver. 9), and consistent with his belief in an overruling Providence which reaches to the spirits of men. (3) His laying down the condition (vers. 13—16) on which he would accept the services of Abner; for while personal affection and conjugal duty alike suggested the restoration of Michal from her enforced banishment (1 Sam. xxv. 44), such a course would prove to Ishbosheth and Israel that he still cherished his old regard for the house of Saul, and thus tend to win all parties over to a peaceful settlement. Here, then, was a sound and wise policy grounded on, and in fact issuing out of, the abiding recognition of the main principle that God had a will concerning his life, to effect which was at once his glory and delight. The facts suggest their own application and lessons. They find their highest and truest counterpart in the life of the Son of David, whose advance to universal supremacy proceeds from the declared will of God (Ps. lxxii.), and is secured in patience, by means in nature pure and peaceful, by an unseen action on the spirits of men making them willing, and by a kind and considerate regard for the varied susceptibilities of human nature. They also furnish illustrations of how the Church may combine policy and principle, displaying the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove. We furthermore learn that, in pursuing our individual course through the world, we may, by keeping the main principle of having a holy Divine purpose to work out clearly before the mind, ever have at hand a pure, bright light by which we shall see

what means and methods in detail may be safely and honourably used for seeking the end we have in view.

III. A POLICY THUS FOUNDED ON PRINCIPLE IS SURE IN THE COURSE OF TIME TO ISSUE IN THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE. There is evidence in David's early career that he had to endure the blame of eager and less conscientious men for being so very scrupulous in the use of means. The sons of Zeruiah were, also, not satisfied with what they would call his timorous policy (vers. 24, 25, 39). Those years spent in Hebron, merely keeping in check the assaults of Ishbosheth's men (vers. 1, 22), seemed to give a doubtful meaning to the Divine promise which had become the property of both David and the true sections of the nation (vers. 9, 10, 17, 18). But the man of God held on, and would not swerve from the policy founded on clear principle. Events proved that he was right and the over-eager men wrong. In due course, Providence so governed the action of leading forces, that the entire people were brought (vers. 17—21) under influences which at last issued in his realizing the end on which his heart had been so long set. In fact, he allowed God to work where man cannot work, *i.e.* on the spirits of men beyond the reach of our own hand and voice. Once more we see it illustrated that God's time and methods are best. The same peaceful issue is coming on as the result of "the patience of the saints," and their undying faith in the action of the Spirit of God on the spirits of men. It is when professing Christians lose their faith in God, and have recourse to questionable devices, that, in seeking to hasten on, they really retard the progress of that which they have at heart. Taking a wide view of the government of God in the unfolding of the moral order, we see the same attainment of remote ends by means of righteous and quiet acting through long epochs. What is thus true on a large scale will be found true also of the individual life—the effort to realize the holy will of God in our personal experience. In public and private affairs, in working out our lines of policy founded on principle, we should not forget to leave a very broad margin for the action of God beyond anything we can do or attempt. This has ever been the case with the best men. There are springs which God's hand alone can touch. He can govern the free actions of leaders of men, so that the actual course they freely take, though not most pure in motive, shall, in its form, harmonize with the main purpose of the Eternal. Would that man had more faith in God as the *living* God!

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. The sincere satisfaction of those who, like David, restrain feeling and bad impulse, and wait for God to open the way and change the course of events. 2. The important contribution to the realizing of the purposes of Christ the Anointed One sometimes made by men whose acts are not pervaded by his Spirit. As Abner's acts accelerated God's purposes, so the gains of commerce, of science and art, though not always made in the name of God, become means of advancing his kingdom. 3. The survival of sacred feelings amidst and in spite of the turmoil and commotions of life. The old love for Michal was still alive, as many an old affection cherished in early days reappears and asserts itself when occasion offers. 4. The deep wounds and secret sorrows induced by harsh and arbitrary acts. As the cruel deed of Saul (1 Sam. xxv. 44) left its traces in the lives of David, Michal, and Phaltiel (ver. 15), so it is with other deeds of the same spirit but different in form. 5. The apparent subordination of great public interests to private is, in the case of men of principle, only on the surface; the reverse is really the truth. David's promotion of the unification of the nation, on condition of getting back his wife (ver. 13), was, as seen above, in the real interests of the unification under himself; and so when the acts of really good men are traced down to their principles, they only, in outward form, appear to be too personal. 6. The great extent to which the mass of men are biased even against what is plain truth (vers. 9, 17, 18) by prejudice, and are swayed by able leadership. 7. The completeness with which, in the course of providence, influence slowly gathered and widely exercised against the cause of God, may be suddenly turned to work round in promotion of it (cf. Saul of Tarsus and Abner, vers. 17—21).

Vers. 22—27.—The facts are: 1. Joab, returning from an expedition, finds David at Hebron after Abner's departure. 2. Hearing from the people a general statement of what had transpired between the king and Abner, Joab reproaches David for his peaceful conduct, and insinuates that Abner was simply playing the spy. 3. Sending

a messenger, unknown to David, after Abner, he induces him to return to Hebron, and, under pretence of a quiet conference, he leads him aside and assassinates him. 4. Hearing of the affair, David at once repudiates it, and in strong terms desires that heavy judgments may fall on the head of Joab and his house. 5. David orders a general mourning for Abner, attends his funeral, and utters a pathetic lamentation over him. 6. The king's sorrow assumes a solemn and impressive form throughout the day, so as to convince the people of his utter abhorrence of the crime and his sense of the national loss. 7. David causes his servants to know that he cherished a regard for the great abilities and possible services to Israel of Abner, and was pained and enfeebled in his action as anointed king by the perverse conduct of the sons of Zeruiah.

Defective sympathy. The first impression, on reading the account of the conduct of Joab, is that of the most villainous treachery, and one at once enters into the anger and vexation of David. But the treacherous act professedly in the service of David was the outcome of a permanent condition of mind. Ostensibly it is to be ascribed to the resentment cherished on account of the death of Asahel; but the action of a man occupying a responsible position in a great undertaking is not governed merely by the presence of a feeling of this kind. The resentment would have had no positive power to issue in this deed had not the mind of Joab been out of harmony with the mind of David in the views taken of the kingdom, its principles, and methods of consolidation. A public servant will govern his private passions if his mind is in full sympathy with his master's, so as to see that the indulgence of them would be uncongenial to him and injurious to his interests. Joab was deficient in sympathy with the higher qualities and aims of his great master, and consequently the bad qualities found an outlet which otherwise would have either had no existence or would have been suppressed for his sake.

I. THE EMPLOYMENT OF MEN OF DEFECTIVE SYMPATHIES IS, IN THE PRESENT STATE OF THE WORLD, UNAVOIDABLE. That Joab was not in full sympathy with David's pure and lofty aspirations is seen both in this account and also in the pressure previously put upon David in exile by his chief men to take away the life of Saul, as, again, in the subsequent allusions to his conduct (ch. xix. 7). That such a man should have been at the head of military affairs in David's service is not surprising, for David had from the first to take such men as were disposed to follow his fortunes, and when he set up regal authority in Hebron it was in the nature of things for the man of greatest will-power to push his way to the front. Kings cannot make their ministers; they can only use what the age produces. It was not David's fault; it was the natural condition of things, arising from myriads of concurrent causes, that there was not one man since the death of Samuel and Jonathan that was so spiritual and far-seeing as to enter with full enthusiastic sympathy into his conceptions of the kingdom of God and the holy principles on which it should be established and governed. The evil of having to work out great and glorious issues in conjunction with men who do not enter into the inner spirit of the enterprise is remarkably illustrated in the case of our Saviour. There was not one who could enter into the full depth and breadth of his work in the world. Relatively his blundering disciples, often paining his heart by their worldly notions, were as far removed from him as was Joab, with his crude ideas and low feelings, from David. Nor could it be otherwise unless men were supernaturally transformed. The same holds good now in the instruments Christ has to use in carrying on his work in the world. How defective many labourers and followers are in sympathy with his holy aspirations and methods! Indeed, it is the same in every secular employment. Seldom, if ever, does the servant enter fully into the mind of the master. Ideas and feelings cherished by the directing and originating mind are, of necessity, inadequately appreciated by instrumentalities not perfectly charged with them. The servant, in this sense, is not equal to his lord.

II. THE EXISTENCE OF THIS DEFECTIVE SYMPATHY BETWEEN SERVANT AND MASTER IS THE OCCASION OF VARIOUS EVILS. Because Joab did not really understand the pure and generous spirit of David, his very zeal for him assumed forms not only opposed to the king's wishes, but fraught with evil tendencies for the kingdom. It is obvious from ver. 24 that Joab misapprehended the peaceful, generous policy of David, and ver. 25 reveals the fact that he was in his heart actually opposed to the course which

had been taken; for he actually dares to rebuke him for not perceiving the cunning spy in the man of peace. So far was he out of sympathy with the principles and policy of the king, that he stealthily, and with the aid of his brother (ver. 30), even allowed the personal resentment of his heart to issue in an act which was not only unjust and base in itself, but also in direct opposition to the will and measures of David. Here we have, as the outcome of his worldly spirit, displeasure with his king, assumption of superior wisdom, indulgence in personal revenge, murder, and practically assertion, for the time being and in a particular instance, of supreme power. Not one of these evils would have come to the surface of life, but would have been crushed in their most incipient stage, had his nature been more in sympathy with that of his master. Inasmuch as by full sympathy we alone can really understand, appreciate, fall in with, delight in, and surrender every faculty and subdue every errant feeling to the prompt carrying out of our Lord's designs, so, conversely, a lack of sympathy cannot but result in the evils of misapprehension of designs, non-appreciation of motives and methods, discontent with actual deeds, withholding of services, and free scope to passions, in nature and consequences at variance with his superior will. The lives of the apostles during our Saviour's ministry on earth abundantly illustrate this. Bred in an atmosphere of formalism and religious exclusiveness, they entered not into the perfect mind of Christ, and consequently wondered at his methods (Luke ix. 44, 45), desired what was contrary to his Spirit (vers. 46—56), and, in the case of Peter, actually rebuked him for arranging to establish his kingdom by a method which seemed to them to be unnecessary and unbecoming (Matt. xvi. 21—23). The persecutions authorized by the Church in dark ages, the methods introduced by Ignatius Loyola and subsequently adopted by his followers, the bitter spirit cherished towards men differing in minor matters of faith or practice, and the sundry base deeds which grow out of a professedly Christian life because it is not well nourished in fellowship with Christ himself,—these are some of the evils appearing in the course of the establishment of the kingdom of heaven as a consequence of the servants of the Lord not being in full harmony of spirit with him they profess to serve.

III. THIS DEFECTIVE SYMPATHY, IF NOT GRADUALLY REMEDIED, MAY INVOLVE ACTIONS PERMANENTLY DAMAGING TO THE MOST POWERFUL OF MEN. It is probable that Joab was with David in exile, and, like many others, he may have been drawn over to his side partly because of the intimation given by Samuel and recognized by Jonathan of the Divine choice of David, and partly because of disgust at the misgovernment of Saul. However much he might have failed in the first instance to comprehend and appreciate the holy aims and principles of his leader, he could not have shared so long in David's fortunes and misfortunes without having many opportunities of learning what manner of person he was, and how decidedly spiritual were his aims and purposes. He appears not to have profited by these privileges, and consequently, by the action of a well-known psychological law, the original secularity of his nature gained in power, so that when a contest arose between a private passion and acquiescence in his master's arrangements, there was not sufficient moral force to restrain and destroy the passion, and hence the dark deed which disgraced his name and caused him to be in the future a man distrusted and abhorred (ver. 39). The reverse is seen in the case of the apostles, excepting Judas, who all grew out of their imperfect sympathy with the innermost heart of Christ, and brought forth fruit accordingly. In private life there can be no question but that, when opportunities for getting nearer and nearer to the mind of Christ are neglected, the lower tendencies of human nature gain force, and when temptation to exercise them arises, sad deeds are done and reputations are damaged. Probably, if all things were explained, it would come out that many of the sad crimes perpetrated by persons professedly in the kingdom and service of Christ are connected with failure to maintain and deepen the sympathy of the heart with all that is in Christ and his work. "Without me ye can do nothing;" "Abide in me."

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. The incidental evils arising from imperfect sympathy with the holy and far-reaching purposes of God may be found in course of the historic revelation which God has given us, and should be ascribed to their proper human source, and allowed for in our estimate of the form, matter, and incidents of the revelation. 2. A critical estimate of the degree of the triumphs of early Christianity should be formed on a consideration of the degree, more or less, to which the leading and sub-

ordinate servants of Christ understood and entered into his spirit. 3. In a selection of men for any form of Christian work, great stress should be laid on their quick and eager perception of the purely spiritual aspects of his kingdom. Intellectual and other qualities are very subordinate to this. 4. It becomes us to be on our guard lest mere private feelings of the lower order should gain ascendency over the more general considerations that pertain to the kingdom of God. 5. It will be useful if we now and then calmly reflect on the degree to which the cause of God may have suffered through our own defective sympathy with its more spiritual interests. 6. The great need of each one is to cultivate close fellowship with Christ, so as more fully to enter into his mind.

The incidence of guilt. When a great crime has been committed, the first question in the public mind is—Who is guilty? In national affairs, where personal actions are supposed to be connected with public interests, it is not always clear at first whether one or another party is to be charged with blame for what has been done. It was impossible, even judged by the low standard that too often governed the conduct and opinions of Eastern people, but that the death of Abner would be regarded with consternation, and men would be swift in their judgment. It was, therefore, only natural that David should take steps to let it be known that, although Joab was a public servant, the guilt in this case must rest on the individual himself, and not in any sense on the government under which he served.

I. IN EVERY CASE, AS TO THE ACTUAL INCIDENCE OF GUILT, THERE IS NO UNCERTAINTY IN THE MINDS OF THE PARTIES CONCERNED. To men of low moral type in Judah, who may have suspected Abner's zeal and who were disposed to judge of David as they would of themselves, it might be an open question as to whether he did not really connive at the treachery of Joab. To men in Israel, who were mindful of Abner's former antagonism to David and who were themselves of implacable temper, it might be conceivable that David was an inactive partner in the crime. In the absence of any superior court of inquiry, or of any statement from David, disquieting rumours may have gained temporary currency. Meanwhile the real fact would stand clear before the conscience of both Joab and the king. Popular discussion never avails to alter the facts of conscience. Joab knew himself to be solely guilty, with consent of his brother (ver. 30); David knew himself to be entirely innocent. Each carried within himself the judgment of God. It is here that we see the dividing line between the opinions and discussions of the world and the invisible moral sphere, where actual facts are registered in clear and ineffaceable lines so as to admit of no shadow of doubt. What though outsiders cannot ascertain reality, it is there, and it is only a question of time as to its being seen by others besides those now familiar with it. The secrecy of the guilty is only a play with an advantage for a short time. Men charged with public crimes, and men who live in sin against God, know that there is no mistake in the incidence of guilt. They possess exclusive knowledge, perhaps, but there is no consolation in that. Likewise those wrongly charged with complicity in evil are possessors of a secret knowledge which enables them to see that the permanent moral order is on their side, and that it is only a question of time, more or less, when their "righteousness shall be brought forth as the light," and their "judgment as the noonday."

II. A SACRED CAUSE IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEEDS OF ITS PROFESSED SUPPORTERS. A hasty judgment would conclude that, as Joab was a prominent supporter of the Davidic cause, it must bear the shame and guilt of his murderous deed; but the only warrant for that being a true view of the case would be that the general spirit of David's administration favoured treachery, and that the master and servant were in secret collusion,—neither of which suppositions can be for a moment entertained. Kings and their officers, masters and their servants, are to be held jointly responsible only when the service generates the wrong. As a fact, governments and employers do suffer temporary loss of prestige when those in positions of trust act out their own individual wickedness; but in due course men will distinguish the manifestation of the individual baseness from the public interests with which it was associated. The separation of these is important in many relationships of life. The divinely appointed kingdom and just rule of David must not be confounded with Joab's malice. The government of a country should not bear the guilt of men whose position enables them to violate

moral laws with impunity. Private vice is not one with public crime. The evil deeds and imperfect character of men whose names are in the records of revelation must not be charged on the revelation of God or his method of educating the world for something better. The foul deeds done during the dark days of the Church's life by some of the leaders of Christianity are not to be ascribed to the holy cause with which they were identified. The personal vices of professors of religion do not really compromise Christ. In all these cases it is the Joab-spirit, and not the spirit of the king, which expresses itself, and it is condemned by the very cause in the interests of which it may at first seem to be manifested. Christ's kingdom is one of unchangeable righteousness and love, in spite of all the injustice and hate of men bearing the blessed Name.

III. WHEN OCCASION OFFERS, DEEDS ALIEN TO THE SPIRIT OF A GOOD CAUSE SHOULD BE DISTINCTLY REPUDIATED. As a matter of duty and policy, David felt bound to take an early opportunity of repudiating any association, either in spirit or action, with the crime of Joab. It was due to himself as an individual and as prospective king of a united Israel, and to that better system of government which on the death of Saul he was called to inaugurate. Suspicions cannot be prevented, the odium of connection with a wrong-doer cannot but arise, malicious foes will be sure to turn every possible event to his detriment; but as soon as the ear of the nation can be reached self-vindication becomes imperative. It is a question of opportunity. Sometimes good men may have to pass years "under a cloud," and even go down to the grave trusting only to the vindication of the just in the day of judgment. David escaped that sorrow. His declaration, his daring to denounce so powerful a man, the severity of his curse on the evil-doer, the evident sincerity of his sorrow for Abner, and the suspension of public duties for an elaborate funeral ceremonial,—all made known as distinctly as possible how alien was the spirit of his life and government from the cruel treachery of Joab. The same course is open to us when individually our fair fame may be compromised by others. Modern governments often have to disown deeds of their officials. Our Lord himself has laid down principles in the New Testament by which he may in all ages have wherewith to repudiate the evil deeds and spirit of some of his professed friends; and in course of history, when danger arises of confounding his holy kingdom with vile actions, his providence brings out the true spirit inculcated in sharp contrast with the evil. As occasion offers, we in our age should be careful to let men see that he is not responsible for the abuses which have sprung out of the imperfections of some of his servants. Never did the world more need to see clearly Christ and his kingdom as they are in contrast with much that is done and maintained in his Name.

IV. TIME FAVOURS THE RIGHT ASSIGNMENT OF GUILT. If any were disposed to doubt the sincerity of David's disclaimer—and there are such suspicious, unfriendly men in every age—he could afford to wait. The true interpreter of our actions in the past is to be found in the tenor of our life. The years to come would reveal the true David and the true Joab. The pure feeling that prompted this quick repudiation would reappear in a life of kindliness and generosity and justice, and every good deed and generous sentiment would only make more clear his freedom from complicity in this crime; and, on the other hand, the hard, stern, vindictive feeling which continued to hold and fashion the life of Joab would only render more clear and emphatic the judgment against him. So of much past Church history; time will only tend to bring out more distinctly the separation between Christianity, as it is in Christ and his teaching, and those actions and feelings which too often were identified with his service. Individual deserts also will become manifest, however obscure the facts may be to present observers. The future is against the wicked and on the side of the just. Evil men may well dread the coming of the day when the hidden things of darkness shall be made manifest, when the exact incidence of guilt will be seen; good men, those who have made their peace with God and have received the Spirit of the kindgom, may lift up their heads in confidence in prospect of that same great day.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. It adds to the guilt of a man when, knowing that he is solely responsible for certain deeds, he allows others with whom he has been associated to fall under suspicion. Joab ought to have voluntarily cleared David. 2. Good men unavoidably under suspicion may find consolation in that some of the best—Joseph, David, and even *the best*, Christ (Luke xxiii. 2; John xix. 12)—were suspected of wrong. 3. Although the "peace of God" is the heritage of the just as a personal boon, yet it is due to the

cause dear to their hearts to seek self-vindication, as in the case of David and Paul, and this will be the chief motive for a disclaimer. 4. It behoves Christian people especially to exercise a very calm and sober judgment when any one known as a servant of Christ is accused of or imagined to be in complicity with evil transactions. 5. The general character of a man under suspicion ought to give great weight to any disclaimer he may make, and be to us a set-off against all *primâ facie* evidence.

Deferred punishment. It is natural to ask—If Joab's crime was so base, and David's repudiation of complicity with it so emphatic, why was he not punished as an offender against morality and the principles of the new administration? The answer is nigh at hand. David was averse to signalize the establishment of his supremacy over all the tribes of Israel by the shedding of blood, and a less punishment than death in those times would have been misinterpreted to his injury. His cause at that juncture was in a critical position, and to have cleared off so competent and influential a man would have been perilous. Moreover, the execution of Joab would have tallied best with complicity in his guilt; the sparing of his life and abiding the issue of events was most favourable to the establishment of his own innocence. But most of all he was desirous of leaving the judgment in the hands of God, having in most scathing language stated his own sense of the evil desert of the man (ver. 29). Herein we may trace analogies.

I. THE PRESENT STAGE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR THE IMMEDIATE PUNISHMENT OF ALL SIN. Many a modern Joab does not at once suffer for his sin as conscience and public opinion would demand. There are vile deeds performed, horrible vices indulged, characters and fortunes ruined, and widespread miseries induced, by persons whose actions are not discovered, or, if discovered, are such as civil authority does not touch. The common judgment of men is that severe punishment is due to such, but it comes not in their life. The betrayer of purity, the licentious liver who hides his vices, the forger who escapes discovery, are but instances of many. They seem to escape any open and public infliction of punishment, and carry no more on their conscience than Joab did on his, which would be little, just in proportion as it was debased. The solution of this apparent anomaly is really to be found in the consideration that the government of God extends over an area wider than this present life, and that for profound reasons, not all revealed, it is not best for judgment to fall all at once and at the time of the committal or even discovery of the sin. Bishop Butler has dwelt on this aspect of the Divine government with great wisdom and sobriety of judgment. With God a thousand years are as one day. His methods of ruling men here evidently proceed on the fact that there is a future and a great day of account, when men shall receive according to the deeds done in the body.

II. ALTHOUGH PUNISHMENT IS DEFERRED, THE PERPETRATORS OF EVIL ARE UNDER THE PERSONAL DISPLEASURE OF GOD. David's mind was averse to Joab. He cherished distrust and displeasure toward him. He had scope for action, and possibly for true repentance, but in his monarch's estimation he was a base and condemned man. No easy, jaunty spirit on the part of Joab could alter this serious fact. There existed in the mind of his king the condition of feeling which was prophetic of a doom one day to be actualized. In like manner "God is angry with the wicked every day." Those who seem to escape present punishment are already condemned in the sure, infallible judgment of God. Merciful and pitiful as he is, and not willing that any should perish, he cannot but regard their secret sins with abhorrence, and see in them, unless they repent and seek newness of life and forgiveness in Christ, a debased form of humanity gradually maturing to receive into themselves the wrath treasured up against the day of wrath (Rom. ii. 4—6). The prosperous wicked seldom reflect on how the Holiest and Wisest of all looks on them. Men great and esteemed in the world are often despised by God because he knows what their true character is.

III. THE MIND OF GOD IS REVEALED TO HIS SERVANTS AS TO THE DESERT OF THE WICKED, AND SOME INTIMATION IS GIVEN OF WHAT WILL COME UPON THEM. The imprecation (ver. 29) of David the king was his way of revealing to all offended by the crime of Joab his sense of desert; and, considering how a distinguished posterity was regarded in the East as the crowning good of a long life, and how evidently ambitious Joab was to figure in history, it was not easy for the king to select terms more indicative of a terrible punishment. The utterance was not that of vindictive-

ness or malice, but of a mind anxious to show its sense of the desert of the evil-doer; and no doubt it intimated his belief that some such terrible issue would in the course of providence be the reward of the crime. This is analogous to what God has been pleased to do. To remove the fears and perplexities arising from the fact that sin is often long unpunished in this world, he has distinctly made known how he regards it, what terrible issues will come of it, and how just is the outcome of all crime on the perpetrator. The words of David concerning Joab's desert are mild compared with those of Christ and his apostles concerning the desert of those who deliberately reject Christ, pierce him with their sins, and trample on the blood of the everlasting covenant (Matt. xi. 20—24; Heb. x. 26—31).

IV. MEANTIME, GOD DOES MANIFEST MUCH SYMPATHY WITH THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM WRONG-DOING. David's lament over Abner as one noble in position and in some aspects of character, and yet brought to a premature end as though he were a mean, weak, and inferior person; his taking upon his own heart the anguish which he knew must afflict multitudes; his abstention from food and present comforts because of the common calamity; his revulsion of feeling from the "men too hard" for him; and his use of authority for securing for Abner the highest funeral honours;—all this, so natural and beautiful in Israel's king, so soothing to the hearts of the troubled people, is strikingly suggestive of the wonderful way in which God, while denouncing sin and foretelling its punishment, manifests his sympathy with a world afflicted with the deeds of evil-doers. This is largely the meaning of our Saviour's life among men. This is one element which enters even into the great transaction on Calvary. This is the explanation of the manifold ministries of comfort and encouragement raised up by the Head of the Church for the relief of those who are bowed down, and the mitigation of many of the calamities which come in consequence of the sins of others.

V. WHILE PROVIDING THUS FOR THE DUE PUNISHMENT OF SIN AND THE MITIGATION OF THE CALAMITIES IT ENTAILS, GOD ALSO EXERCISES A RESTRAINING POWER OVER EVIL TENDENCIES. The continued presence of David, asserting his rightful authority and infusing his own generous spirit into the administration of affairs, could not but have the effect of lessening the influence of Joab and setting a limit to the range of evil he otherwise might do. The king was among his people for their good and the restraint of one who, in spirit, was their calamity. Here, again, do we not get a glimpse of what is true in the spiritual sphere? God does not leave evil men entirely unrestrained to carry out their designs and to afflict the world with their base spirit. As responsible beings, they have their freedom to act for a while, but he "restrains the wrath of man;" he is present in our human affairs, checking and controlling so that other influences less powerful in appearance shall be brought to bear and find full and free scope. It is never to be forgotten that, though there are Joabs amongst us, "hard" in spirit and cruel of purpose, and bearing on their conscience the blood of others, there is amongst us the eternal King, whose love, generous sympathy, and determination to care for the faithful never fail.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. It is characteristic of a just man that, free from personal ill-will, he will have faith in the retribution of wrong-doing, and will even forecast and acquiesce in its form. 2. A righteous indignation will induce a denunciation of men in power in spite of any resentment that may arise. 3. The guilty conscience is so cowardly that righteous denunciation may even increase the moral power of the just over the unjust man. 4. It is important to cherish strong faith in God's methods of government if we would be calm and strong in assertion of right and awaiting a proper adjustment of rewards. 5. It will be a matter of sincere grief to a generous mind to see men of great abilities come to an ignoble end, even though in the past those abilities have not been used in the desired direction—allowance being made for the strong temptations to which such men are liable. 6. A manifestation of sympathy with the sorrows of a people, and an effort to draw out their more tender feelings, is a sure way to the exercise of a moral influence more potent than the assertion of authority. 7. A man proves his capacity for ruling others when, without sacrifice of principle, he can by generous sentiments win their good will and awaken a prevailing kindly sentiment towards himself.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—(HEBRON.) "*The house of David.*" 1. The theocracy had its chief support in David and his house. On him also rested the Messianic hope (ch. vii. 13). Hence the importance which attaches to events of his life that would otherwise have been left unrecorded. 2. "The summary narrative of these seven years presents the still youthful king in a very lovable light. The same temper which had marked his first acts after Saul's death is here strikingly brought out. He seems to have left the conduct of the war altogether with Joab, as if he shrank from striking a single blow for his own advancement. When he does interfere, it is on the side of peace, to curb and chastise ferocious vengeance and dastardly assassination. The incidents recorded all go to make up a picture of rare generosity, of patient waiting for God to fulfil his purposes, of longing that the miserable strife between the tribes of God's inheritance should end" (A. Maclaren). 3. In the house of David, at war with the house of Saul, we see an embodiment of the great conflict between good and evil; a representation of "the household of faith" as opposed to the *world*, and the *spirit* as opposed to the *flesh* (Gal. v. 17). Notice—

I. ITS PROTRACTED ANTAGONISM. "And *there was long war*," etc. It: 1. Is rendered necessary by the opposite nature and aims of the contending parties. "These are contrary the one to the other." 2. Implies a state of constant warfare, and involves many a painful struggle. "What grievous tales of distress are folded up in these brief words!" 3. Is permitted by God for wise and beneficent purposes: to test the principles of his servants; to exercise their faith and patience; to strengthen, purify, and perfect their character. 4. And must go on to the end. "This is a battle, from which, as it ends only with life, there is no escape; and he who fights not in it is of necessity either taken captive or slain" (Scupoli).

II. ITS INCREASING STRENGTH. "David waxed stronger and stronger," in the number of his followers, the amount of his resources, the unity and vigour of their employment, the stability of his position, the extent of his influence, the assurance of his success. And all who "strive against sin" within and without also "go from strength to strength:" 1. In patiently waiting upon God and faithfully doing his will. "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart" (Ps. xxvii. 14). 2. By the bestowment of his grace and the co-operation of his providence, directing, protecting, and prospering them, in accordance with his promises. Their strength is not self-derived, but "cometh from the Lord." "And he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and *the house of David* shall be as God," etc. (Zech. xii. 8); "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John iv. 4); "I have all strength in him that giveth me power" (Phil. iv. 13). 3. And thereby they show that God is with them, and that his righteous purposes concerning them will be accomplished.

III. ITS DECLINING OPPONENTS. "And the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker," relatively and proportionately to the growth of David's, and in consequence of the protracted antagonism and increasing strength of the latter. 1. In wilful separation from God, and seeking their own selfish ends in opposition to his will (see ch. ii. 8—12). Those who fall away from God fall into self-division and self-contention (ver. 8); "and a house divided against itself cannot stand." 2. By the immovable might of God against whom they set themselves (Ps. ii. 4), and his wrath, which is "revealed from heaven against all ungodliness," etc. (Rom. i. 18). They are like a wave that dashes against a rock and is broken and scattered in foam. "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Pet. iii. 12). 3. And thereby they prove that God *is* against them, and are taught that their purposes will assuredly fail and they themselves be overthrown. From the time of his defeat (ch. ii. 17), if not from the very first, Abner probably felt that the cause in which he had embarked was hopeless. "He recognized now most distinctly in David the rising star in Israel; and, however haughtily his words might sound, he only sought to conceal behind them his despair of Ish-bosheth" (Krummacher).

IV. ITS PERILOUS RELATIONSHIPS. (Vers. 2—5.) "The increasing political strength of David was shown, as usual among Eastern monarchs, by the fresh alliances through

marriage into which he now entered" (Edersheim). In addition to his three wives, Michal, Ahinoam (mother of Amnon), and Abigail (mother of Chileab, who appears to have died early), he had "Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur" (mother of Absalom and Tamar), Haggith (mother of Adonijah), Abital, and Eglah; and he afterwards still further enlarged the royal household (ch. iv. 13—16). "None of his sons here mentioned were eminent for virtue, and some of them were notorious for their sins." *Polygamy* was tolerated by the Law of Moses (1 Sam. i. 2), although the king was forbidden (Deut. xvii. 17) to "*multiply* wives to himself;" and it was practised by David in conformity with ancient and prevalent custom, from political considerations and natural inclinations, without reproof (ch. xii. 8); but (as his subsequent history shows) it fostered in him a sensual tendency, undermined his moral strength, and produced innumerable enmities and other evils in his family. "One deadly element of future woe mingled itself with the establishment of the kingdom of David—he brought into his family the curse of the harem. An utter lack of discipline was one of its first fruits; and it brought yet deeper ill even than that; for it poisoned all the springs of family life, and tainted it with ever-recurring impurity; working in him and all around him its universal fruits of impurity, jealousy, hatred, incest, and blood" ('Heroes of Heb. Hist.'). "It was the immemorial custom in all those countries for the magnificence and power of a ruler to display itself in the multiplication of his establishment, that is, of his wives; for every wife involved a separate establishment. It shows the utmost depravity when Christians seek to shelter their own unjust and shameless lives under an appeal to that of David, and that, too, although none of their other proceedings show the smallest trace of David's noble spirit, and although they are by no means ready to bear as David did the consequences of their shame" (Ewald). "If we want exemplifications of all the miseries and curses which spring from the mixture of families and the degradation of woman in the court and country where polygamy exists, David's history supplies them. No maxims of morality can be half so effectual as a faithful record of terrible effects like these" (Maurice). In view of these effects we learn that no strength or prosperity can be lasting where "the friendship of the *world*" is cherished, and "the lusts of the *flesh*" are suffered to prevail; and that victory over some opponents may be followed by defeat by other more subtle and dangerous foes.—D.

Ver. 6.—(MAHANAIM.) *The character of Abner.* Abner, son of Ner, was first cousin of Saul, probably about the same age, commander-in-chief of his army (1 Sam. xiv. 50), and contributed greatly to his early successes. He introduced David to the king after his victory over Goliath, sat at the royal table (1 Sam. xx. 25), was well acquainted with their relations to each other, took part in the persecution (1 Sam. xxvi. 14), and, after the battle of Gilboa, became the main support of the house of Saul (ch. ii. 8). "'Abner made himself strong for the house of Saul,' but God strengthened David, whom Abner knew to have been designed for the kingdom by God" (Wordsworth). Notice: 1. *His eminent abilities*—military skill, prudence, energy, courage, and perseverance; as shown by the honourable position he so long held in the service of Saul, and his successful efforts after his death (ch. ii. 8—12). "Abner's act was *not an ordinary act of rebellion against the person of David* and his rightful claim to the throne; because Jehovah had not yet caused David to be set before the nation as its king by Samuel or any other prophet, and David had not yet asserted the right to reign over all Israel, which had been secured to him by the Lord, and guaranteed by his anointing as one whom the nation was bound to recognize" (Keil). Nor was he destitute of generous sentiments. If he could not be called a *good* man, he was "a prince and a *great* man" (ver. 38). 2. *His worldly ambition* and carnal selfishness. This was probably the main, if not the only, motive of his opposition to the Divine purpose; and to it Ishbosheth evidently attributed the conduct with which he charged him, regarding his act as an assertion of royal rights (ver. 7). His pride and self-esteem are also apparent in his haughty answer (ver. 8).

> "Ambition's like a circle on the water,
> Which never ceases to enlarge itself,
> Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought."

3. *His passionate resentment*, which, as is commonly the case, was an indication of the truth of the charge brought against him; nor did he deny it, but contemptuously declared that he was too great a man and had rendered too many services to be accused of such a "fault;" and then took an oath to avenge the insult by translating the kingdom to David, "as the Lord had sworn" to him (vers. 9, 10). "This was Abner's arrogancy to boast such great things of himself, as if he had carried a king in his pocket, as that great Earl of Warwick in Edward IV.'s time, is said to have done" (Trapp). "No man ever heard Abner godly till now; neither had he been so at this time if he had not intended a revengeful departure from Ishbosheth. Nothing is more odious than to make religion a stalking-horse to policy" (Hall). 4. *His altered purposes.* The change, although right and good in itself, was due to a passionate impulse and probably the desire of personal advantage; and, in its announcement, Abner betrayed his previous ungodliness and present hypocrisy. "Alas! how eloquently can hypocrites employ the Name of God, and take the sanction of religion, when by such means they think to advance their present interests!" (Lindsay). But, on the other hand, it may be said that his sudden wrath was only the occasion of his open avowal of an irrepressible and growing conviction of duty, and of his taking the decisive step which he had been long contemplating; and that he henceforth faithfully endeavoured to make amends for his former errors and sincerely sought the welfare of the nation. "When an opposer of God's Word honestly turns, we should, without reluctance, give him the hand, without undertaking to pass judgment on the motives that are hidden in his heart" (Erdmann). David, unlike Joab (ver. 25), put the best construction on Abner's conduct. 5. *His energetic action* and extensive influence. He sent messengers "immediately" (LXX.) to David, recognizing his authority, etc. (ver. 12); had communication with the elders of Israel (ver. 18); spake in the ears of Benjamin (ver. 19), who might be jealous of the transfer of sovereignty to Judah; and, having obtained their consent, came himself to Hebron with twenty men, "representatives of Israel, to confirm his overtures by their presence," partook of an entertainment "of the nature of a league," and went away in peace. "David believed that in this offer of Abner a Divine providence was to be observed which would make, as he hoped, a full end to the unhappy civil war" (Krummacher). 6. *His cruel fate.* "Now is Ishbosheth's wrong avenged by an enemy" (Hall). Even though his present course was in fulfilment of the Divine purpose, it averted not the consequences of his former conduct; and retribution came upon him suddenly, unexpectedly, and by a wicked hand. "One wicked man is made to be another's scourge." "Human sin must serve the purposes of God's kingdom" (Ps. lxxvi. 10). "David's kingdom is not promoted by Abner's treason, as David so expected, but rather by the taking away of Abner; thus the Lord, in the promotion of his kingdom, chooseth not the instruments nor alloweth even the means which appear good to men; but, by the contrary, he taketh away the same instruments and means in which men have most confidence, and by others more unlikely, and without men's expectation, he advanceth the cause of the Church and worketh great things" (Guild).—D.

Vers. 7—11.—(MAHANAIM.) *The dissensions of the wicked.* 1. The *union* of wicked men rests only upon regard for their own interests. It is not founded on mutual esteem, and does not constitute true friendship (1 Sam. xviii. 1—4).

> "The friendships of the world are oft
> Confederacies in vice, or leagues in pleasure."
> (Addison.)

2. When their interests come into collision, their *dissensions* begin. And occasions of such collision are sure to arise. "Let us mark the inherent weakness of a bad cause. Godless men banded together for selfish ends have no firm bond of union. The very passions which they are united to gratify may begin to rage against one another. They fall into the pit which they have dug for others" (Blaikie). 3. Wicked men, engaged in a common enterprise against God, are not indifferent to their *reputation* in the sight of one another. "Am I a dog's head," etc. (ver. 8)? Their conscience, though perverted, is not dead; their self-esteem and love of approbation are fully alive; and they estimate to the full their claims upon the gratitude of others. They would even have

their crimes connived at for the sake of the benefits which they confer. 4. Nothing more surely tests and manifests the character of the wicked than being *reproved* by each other for their faults. "Proud men will not bear to be reproved, especially by those to whom they have been obliged" (M. Henry). It is otherwise with the good (Ps. cxli. 5). 5. The *strong* despise the weak, and passionately resent their complaints, however reasonable and just. 6. The *weak* suspect the strong, and, although they may feel justified in speaking, are put to silence by their fears. "And he could not answer Abner a word again, because he feared him." 7. The dissensions of the wicked are the most effectual means of their *common overthrow*, usually turn out to the advantage of the righteous, and promote the extension of the kingdom of God.—D.

Vers. 12—16.—(BAHURIM.) *A domestic episode.* Michal was the first wife of David (1 Sam. xix. 11—17). Of her he had been deprived when he fled from the court of Saul; she was given to Phaltiel (Phalti), the son of Laish, of Gallim (1 Sam. xxv. 44), by her father, perhaps as a piece of policy, to attach him to his house, and they lived together for many years, apparently in much domestic comfort. We have here—

I. AN INJURED HUSBAND DEMANDING HIS JUST RIGHT. "Well; I will make a league with thee: but one thing I require," etc. (ver. 13). The demand was: 1. Founded upon *justice;* David having been unjustly and contemptuously treated. 2. Reverential toward the *Law*, which had been flagrantly violated. It does not appear that Michal was ever legally divorced from David. 3. Incited by *affection* toward her and the memory of her early love to him. 4. Adapted to *test* the sincerity and fidelity of Abner, and prepare the way for further negotiations. 5. Consistent with his *honour.* He could not suffer his wife to live as the wife of another man without shame. 6. Calculated to *remind* the northern tribes of his former services against the Philistines (vers. 15, 18). 7. And to increase his *influence* over them by the maintenance of his family alliance with the house of Saul and the public recognition of his power. There was policy as well as principle in the condition imposed.

II. A FEEBLE RULER ENFORCING A HUMILIATING REQUIREMENT. "And David sent messengers to Ishbosheth, Saul's son," etc. (ver. 14). "Not to Abner, but to Ishbosheth (for the league between David and Abner was a profound secret), whom David knew must act feebly, as he was at Abner's dictation" ('Speaker's Commentary'), "to demand the restoration of Michal, that her return might take place in duly legal form" (Keil), and that it might be apparent that he "had not taken her by force from her husband." Nothing is said of Ishbosheth's feelings on receiving the message. Like other incapable monarchs, he never exhibited any spirit except on the point of his royal dignity; and, even on this, his wrath was extinguished before the frown of Abner. Under constraint, he sent Abner himself, and took his sister from her husband. And the effect of this concession must have been to discredit him in the eyes of the people and hasten his downfall. Henceforth it was hardly necessary that Abner should disguise his intentions (ver. 17). There is no more pitiful sight than that of a man who holds the royal office without adorning it with royal qualities.

III. A HELPLESS SUBJECT SUBMITTING TO A PAINFUL NECESSITY. (Vers. 15, 16.) The scene is a pathetic one. Michal conducted forth, attended by her husband, "weeping behind her" to Bahurim (ch. xix. 17), on the borders of Judah, where he was compelled to part from her, with the contemptuous order, "Go, return." "And he returned" in bitter disappointment, grief, and shame. Yet he had brought his trouble on himself. How fruitful in domestic misery are imprudence, ambition, and sinful expediency! It may be long delayed, but it surely comes. Men reap as they sow. "Wherefore all Phaltiel's tears move no pity of mine. *Caveat raptor*, let him beware who violently takes another man's wife, seeing shame and sorrow are the issue of such ungodly marriages" (T. Fuller). "His tears ought to have been tears of repentance for his sin against God and against David" (Wordsworth). Perchance there lay hid in the evil he now suffered the seed of future good. But here his history ends.

IV. A HAUGHTY PRINCESS RESTORED TO HER LEGITIMATE LORD. Nothing is said of their meeting. This silence is ominous; and it is to be feared that the reunion was not one of unmingled satisfaction. Time and circumstances may have changed her feelings toward David (1 Sam. xviii. 20), separated her more widely from him in

spiritual sympathy, and developed in her heart her father's pride. She was now only one of many wives. At a subsequent meeting (ch. vi. 20) she was scornful, jealous, and unspiritual. And that which David anticipated with pleasure became an occasion of pain and lasting trouble.—D.

Vers. 17, 18.—*An urgent appeal: an evangelistic address.* "Now then do it" (ver. 18). Having resolved to transfer his allegiance, Abner here persuades the elders of Israel *to make David king* over the whole land; as they afterwards did (ch. v. 1—3). A similar appeal may be addressed to others, urging them to submit to the royal authority of Christ, of whom David was a type (1 Sam. ii. 10). Translated into New Testament language, it is, "We beseech you, on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. v. 20). Consider—

I. WHAT YOU SHOULD DO. Jesus Christ is King, anointed and exalted to the right hand of God; he reigns in grace and righteousness in many hearts; but his kingdom is not yet fully revealed and universally extended on earth, and it cannot be set up "within you" except by your own consent. You must: 1. *Receive him heartily* as your King and Lord, your absolute Owner and supreme Ruler, as well as your Redeemer and Saviour; by a personal, inward, voluntary act; in the renunciation of whatever is opposed to his will, and the submission and surrender of your whole being to his direction and control. "Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord" (2 Chron. xxx. 8; Rom. vi. 13).

"Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Our wills are ours to make them thine."

2. *Confess him openly*, by uniting with his people, testifying your faith in him, and proclaiming his Name before men. "With the heart man believeth," etc. (Rom. x. 10; 2 Cor. viii. 5). "Whosoever therefore shall confess me," etc. (Matt. x. 32). 3. *Serve him loyally*, by obeying his commandments, assisting his friends, resisting his foes, seeking his honour and the spread of his kingdom. "It is not enough that I should love the Lord myself alone; every heart must love him, and every tongue speak forth his praise."

II. WHY YOU SHOULD DO IT. "Now then do it: *for* Jehovah hath spoken," etc. 1. It is *the purpose of God* that he should reign over you. "He must reign," either in mercy or in judgment. 2. It is the *promise of God* that through him you may be saved from your enemies—sin, Satan, death, and hell. "There is none other Name." 3. It has been *your own desire* in times past that he might be your King. "Ye sought for David both yesterday and the day before to be king over you: now then do it." Under the bitter oppression of the ruler chosen by yourselves, in view of the superior worth of "the man of God's choice," in weakness, fear, and misery, you have often said. "Oh for one glorious hour of him who, in the Name of the Lord of hosts, smote Israel's most formidable foe!" But your wishes led to no practical result. "Your goodness was as the morning cloud." And now your reason, conscience, and all that is best within you urge you to accept Christ as your King. Let your feelings be translated into definite and decisive action, without which they are worse than useless. "Now then *do* it." "Crown him Lord of all."

III. WHEN YOU SHOULD DO IT. Whatever reason exists for doing it at all should induce you to do it *now*. There are not a few who are persuaded of their duty, yet break the force of every appeal by delay and the intention of doing it at a future time. But: 1. The present is *a most favourable opportunity*. The King "waits to be gracious," and sends you the message of reconciliation. "Men and brethren, to you is the word of this salvation sent." "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. ii. 1, 2). 2. If you do it to-day, to-morrow and *all your future days* will be days of peace and happiness. 3. If you wait till to-morrow, it is *probable that you will never do it*. Your susceptibility to Divine influences will be lessened, your indisposition, which is the real cause of delay, will be increased; life is uncertain, probation is brief, the end is nigh. "Our gracious Ahasuerus (Esth. iv. 11) reacheth out the golden sceptre to all that have a hand of faith to lay hold of it; but then he shall take his iron mace or rod in his hand to bruise his enemies and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Say not, with the procrastinator, "To-morrow" (Exod.

viii. 10); "Go thy way for this time" (Acts xxiv. 25); for "the Holy Ghost saith, To-day" (Heb. iii. 7). "'Cras! cras!' (To-morrow! to-morrow!) is the cry of the raven. This is the thing that destroys many; while they are saying, 'Cras! cras!' suddenly the door is shut" (Augustine). "The man that procrastinates struggles ever with ruin" (Epictetus). "There is a circumscribed space of time appointed thee, which if thou dost not employ in making all calm and serene within, it will pass away and thou wilt pass away, and it never will return" (Marcus Antoninus, ii. 4).

"Defer not till to-morrow to be wise;
To-morrow's sun to thee may never rise."

D.

Vers. 22—30.—(HEBRON.) *The vengeance of Joab.* [*References:* (1) Early life (1 Sam. xxii. 1); (2) conflict with Abner (ch. ii. 13, 24, 30); (3) capture of the stronghold of Zion (1 Chron. xi. 6); (4) captain of the host (ch. viii. 16; xx. 23); (5) conflicts with the Ammonites and Syrians (ch. x. 7); (6) reduction of the Edomites (1 Kings xi. 15, 16); (7) complicity in the murder of Uriah (ch. xi. 14); (8) capture of Rabbah (ch. xi. 1; xii. 26); (9) relations with Absalom (ch. xiv. 1, 29); (10) defeat and murder of Absalom (ch. xviii. 2, 14); (11) upbraiding the king (ch. xix. 5); (12) replaced by Amasa (ch. xx. 4); (13) murder of Amasa (ch. xx. 10); (14) defeat of Sheba (ch. xx. 22); (15) remonstrance with David (ch. xxiv. 3); (16) defection to Adonijah (1 Kings i. 7); (17) denounced by David (1 Kings ii. 5); (18) put to death by Benaiah at the command of Solomon (1 Kings ii. 28, 34).] 1. Among those who played a prominent part in David's reign the *foremost man* was his nephew Joab. He was possessed of great physical strength and daring, clear judgment and strong will, eminent military skill, and immense power over others; "a bold captain in bad times." With the ruder qualities of activity, courage, and implacable revenge, "he combined something of a more statesmanlike character, which brings him more nearly to a level with his youthful uncle; and unquestionably gives him the second place in the whole history of David's reign. In consequence of his successful attempt at the siege of Jebus, he became commander-in-chief, the highest office in the state after the king. In this post he was content, and served the king with undeviating fidelity. In the wide range of wars which David undertook, Joab was the acting general, and he therefore may be considered as the founder, as far as military prowess was concerned, the Marlborough, the Belisarius, of the Jewish empire" (Stanley). His patriotism was unquestionable; nor was he without piety (ch. x. 12). 2. His natural gifts, good qualities, and invaluable services were more than counterbalanced by his *moral defects* and numerous vices. "He ever appears wily, politic, and unscrupulous" ('Speaker's Commentary'). "He is the impersonation of worldly policy, secular expediency, and temporal ambition, eager for his own personal aggrandizement, and especially for the maintenance of his own political ascendency, and practising on the weaknesses of princes for his own interests; but at last the victim of his own Machiavellian shrewdness" (Wordsworth). 3. "Joab was a *type* of the national aspect of Judaism. He was intensely Jewish, in the tribal meaning of the word, not in its higher, world-wide bearing; only Judæan in everything that outwardly marked Judaism, though not regarded in its inward and spiritual reality. Nor is it without deep symbolical meaning, as we have the higher teaching of history, that Joab, the typical Eastern Judæan—may we not say, the type of Israel after the flesh?—should, in carrying out his own purposes and views, have at last compassed his own destruction" (Edersheim).

I. EVIL DEEDS ARE SELDOM WROUGHT WITHOUT PLAUSIBLE PRETEXTS. It is uncertain whether Joab was aware of former negotiations between David and Abner; but on returning to Hebron from a military expedition (against marauding troops, ch. iv. 2), being informed of the league that had just been made, his suspicion was aroused; he hastened to the king with the view of inducing him to share it, probably believing that Abner was not to be trusted; and finding the result doubtful or contrary to his expectation, resolved to take the matter into his own hands, on the ground of: 1. *Guilt* incurred by a public enemy. 2. *Zeal* inspired for the king's safety (ver. 25). 3. *Obligation* imposed by personal injury, according to the custom of *blood-revenge* (Exod. xxi. 13; Numb. xxxv. 9—35; Deut. xix. 1—13). This is twice mentioned by the historian

(vers. 27, 30) as the ostensible ground, and was perhaps popularly regarded as a sufficient justification of his deed. "The act of Abner was justifiable homicide; but it was precisely to such cases that the rule applied, not to those of murder, against the penalties of which no sanctuary afforded protection. Besides, unless the right of avengement for blood did apply to such cases as this, whence the deep necessity of Abner to avoid slaying Asahel (ch. ii. 22)? It may be admittted that a case of this nature may have involved some doubt as to the application of the rule to it, and very likely it was not in such cases often enforced. But where any room for doubt existed, Joab and Abishai might interpret it in their own favour as their justification for an act the true motives of which durst not be alleged, and as a ground on which they might claim exemption from the punishment due to murder" (Kitto, 'Daily Bible Illus.').

II. PLAUSIBLE PRETEXTS OFTEN COVER THE BASEST MOTIVES, though they cannot entirely conceal them. 1. *Vindictiveness.* Joab's act, even if it fell within the letter of the Law, which allowed punishment for homicide under certain circumstances (Numb. xxxv. 22), was shown, by the place, the time, and the manner of it, to have been done, not from regard for justice, but from deliberate, unwarrantable, malicious revenge. So David regarded it (ver. 28); denouncing it as the "shedding of the blood of war in peace" (1 Kings ii. 5), and joining it with the murder of Amasa. 2. *Jealousy* and ambition (1 Sam. xviii. 6—16). This was his main motive. He was "afraid of losing his command of the army and his dignity with the king, and lest he should be deprived of those advantages and Abner should obtain the first rank in David's court" (Josephus). Hence his suspicion and slander of Abner (ver. 25). "Through envy of the devil came death into the world" (Wisd. of Sol. ii. 24).

> "Envy at others' good is evermore
> Malignant poison setting on the soul;
> A double woe to him infected by it—
> Of *inward* pain the heavy load he bears,
> At sight of joy *without* he ever mourns."
> (Æschylus.)

3. *Presumption.* He rudely remonstrated with the king (ver. 24), presuming upon his position; and afterwards, without the king's authority, whilst seeming to act under it, recalled the man who had been sent away under the king's protection; and gratified his private revenge, regardless of the effect of his conduct on the king's dignity and reputation. 4. *Treachery.* Under the pretence of speaking with him in a friendly and confidential manner, he drew his victim aside in the middle of the gate, and smote him there. Possibly Abishai alone was witness of the act. "Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbour *secretly*. And all the people shall say, Amen" (Deut. xxvii. 24).

III. IMPUNITY IN CRIME IS COMMONLY PRODUCTIVE OF DISASTROUS EFFECTS. Under the circumstances, it would hardly have been possible for David to punish Joab and Abishai. "Probably public feeling would not have supported the king, nor could he, at this crisis of his affairs, have afforded the loss of such generals, or brave the people and the army" (Edersheim). Great men often owe their exemption from punishment to their position. But crime, although unpunished by man: 1. *Incurs the righteous displeasure of God.* (Vers. 29, 39.) Human punishment does not and cannot always accord with the Divine. Although David could not punish, he durst not forgive. His words "express his moral horror at this evil deed, and at the same time the everlasting law of God's requiting justice." "The extension of the curse to the descendants clearly refers to the threatenings of the Law; and in both cases the offensive character disappears if we only remember that whoever by true repentance freed himself from connection with the guilt, was also exempted from participation in the punishment" (Hengstenberg). 2. *Incites other men to similar crimes.* It is not improbable that Baanah and Rechab were induced to assassinate Ishbosheth (ch. iv. 6) by the unavenged death of Abner. 3. *Encourages the criminal* to continue his evil course, increases his obduracy, and causes him to "wax worse and worse." "Joab prospered even after his sin. God gave him time for repentance. But he hardened his heart by sin. And in the end he was cut off." "Successful crime is splendid misery." 4. *Escapes not for ever* the retribution which it deserves. "Evil pursueth sinners" (Prov. xiii. 21;

xxix. 1). Joab sinned with a strong and violent hand, and by a strong and violent : and he at length perished (1 Kings ii. 34; Ps. lviii. 11).

"O blind lust!
O foolish wrath! who so dost goad us on
In the brief life, and in the eternal then
Thus miserably overwhelm us!"
(Dante, 'Purg.,' xii.)

D.

Vers. 31—35.—(HEBRON.) *David's lament over Abner.*

"As a fool dies should Abner die?—
Thy hands unbound,
Thy feet not set in fetters:
As one falls before the wicked, thou didst fall!"

On hearing of the death of Abner, David exhibited the same generous spirit as formerly at the death of Saul (ch. i. 11, 12). 1. He *disclaimed* (before his trusted servants, as afterwards, ver. 38) against having had *any part therein*; declaring, "I and my kingdom are guiltless before the Lord," etc. Malicious persons, judging others by themselves, might accuse him of it; and if it had been instigated by him, he would have brought guilt upon his people as well as himself (ch. xxi. 1; xxiv. 1, 17). 2. He *invoked a curse* on the head of the author of the deed; not from a feeling of personal hatred and vindictiveness, but of righteous indignation (1 Sam. xxvi. 19). 3. He ordered a *public mourning* in honour of the deceased. "And David said to Joab," etc. (ver. 38). Although he durst not arrest him, he clearly indicated what he thought of his conduct, and sought to remove the odium which it cast on his own good name. 4. He followed in the procession as chief mourner, *wept at the grave* (John xi. 35), and fasted until sunset. "There is no more beautiful picture in his life than that of his following the bier where lay the bloody corpse of the man who had been his enemy ever since he had known him, and sealing the reconciliation which death ever makes in noble souls by the pathetic dirge he chanted over Abner's grave" (A. Maclaren). "This short poem is not only a dirge; it is also an apology for David and for Abner himself" (Wordsworth). It expresses—

I. ADMIRATION OF EMINENT WORTH. Abner was not a villain (fool) or murderer, deserving of being put in fetters and dying a felon's death; but brave, capable, noble-minded, "great in council, great in war," and worthy of respect and honour. A generous man sees and appreciates what is best in other men. "The generous spirit of David kept down all base and selfish feeling, and added another to those glorious conquests over his own heart which were far higher distinctions than his other victories, and in which he has left us an example which all, from the least to the greatest, should try to emulate" (Blaikie).

II. AFFLICTION FOR A PUBLIC LOSS. A light was quenched "*in Israel*" (ver. 38). His presence and influence would have contributed to the reconciliation of the tribes and the welfare of the nation (ver. 21). David's sorrow was sincere; his tears (in confirmation of his words) evinced the tenderness and sympathy of his heart, moved the people also to tears, and (in contrast with the bearing of Joab) convinced them of his innocence and uprightness.

III. ASTONISHMENT AT AN EXTRAORDINARY FATE. "The point of this indignant, more than sorrowful, lament lies in the *mode* in which Abner was slain" (Kitto, 'Cyc.'). How strange that Abner should have fallen in the full possession of strength to defend himself and liberty to flee from danger; neither as a prisoner taken in battle nor (in allusion to the right of blood-revenge which Joab claimed) as a murderer delivered up in bonds to the avenger by lawful authority, as he would have been if he were guilty! His fall—so different from what might have been expected and from what he merited—could be accounted for only by its having been caused by the treacherous malice and murderous violence of "sons of wickedness."

IV. ABHORRENCE OF A WICKED DEED. (Vers. 29, 39.) The death of Abner was, even more than his life would have been, conducive to David's interests. "It must have seemed to him, from a prudential point of view, that it was a piece of good fortune.

But the strength of his moral indignation does not suffer itself to be assuaged by worldly considerations" (Delitzsch). Hatred of wrong is a sign and measure of the love of right. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil" (Ps. xcvii. 10). David was as severe toward evil-doers as he was tender and pitiful toward the victims of their wickedness. "He was a man extreme in all his excellences—a man of the highest strain, whether for counsel, for expression, or for action, in peace and in war, in exile and on the throne" (E. Irving).—D.

Vers. 36—38.—(HEBRON.) *Acceptance with the people.* "And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them," etc. (ver. 36). David's conduct not only freed him from suspicion, but also won the confidence and affection of "all the people" (1 Sam. xii. 3—5).

I. THE CONDUCT OF ONE IN AUTHORITY IS CAREFULLY OBSERVED BY THE PEOPLE. Because of: 1. His *elevated* position, which (like a mountain-peak) attracts their attention, and exposes him to their constant gaze. 2. His *responsible* position, which leads them to compare his actions with the principles according to which he ought to rule. 3. His *influential* position, which makes them watchful of his course, out of concern for their own interests.

II. ACCEPTANCE WITH THE PEOPLE IS AN OBJECT WORTHY OF BEING DILIGENTLY SOUGHT. It is not the highest object, and ought not to be sought supremely. Truth and justice are of greater worth than popularity. The praise of God must be loved more than the praise of men (John xii. 43). But it should not be neglected or despised, because: 1. It conduces to his safety and happiness. 2. It renders his measures less likely to be suspected and opposed; enables him to effect his purposes for their good; increases the measure of his usefulness. 3. It aids him in his endeavours to promote the glory of the supreme Ruler.

III. THERE IS NO WAY TO SECURE IT MORE EFFECTUAL THAN THE EXHIBITION OF AN UPRIGHT AND GENEROUS SPIRIT. 1. Other ways are uncertain and variable, like the changing moods of the people. 2. This appeals to what is noblest and most permanent in them, and secures the sympathies of the most reliable men. 3. It also obtains the favour and help of God, who disposes their hearts to approve, submit, and obey.

IV. ITS ATTAINMENT IS HONOURABLE AND BENEFICIAL TO THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES. 1. It shows a readiness to be pleased, and a disposition to admire genuine excellence. 2. It confirms his devotion to their welfare, and encourages him to persevere in well-doing. 3. It tends to their improvement in virtue, and thus contributes to their peace and unity, power and prosperity.

CONCLUSION. What has been said applies to other relations besides that of ruler and subject. "A good name is better than precious ointment" (Eccles. vii. 1) or "great riches" (Prov. xxii. 1); "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification" (Rom. xv. 2; 1 Cor. x. 33; Titus ii. 9); "Whatsoever things are of *good report*, think on these things" (Phil. iv. 8).—D.

Ver. 38.—(HEBRON.) *The fall of a prince and a great man.* The world is sometimes startled by the fall of an eminent man in a sudden and violent manner—like that of the Czar of Russia or the President of the United States. Here is the *epitaph* of such a man. Reflect: 1. How uncertain is the continuance of human life! This familiar but little-heeded truth is set forth in an impressive manner by such an event, teaching that no station is exempt from the approach of death, no safeguards effectual against it. "Death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces" (Jer. ix. 24). 2. How unstable is the foundation of earthly greatness! It is built upon the sand, and in a moment crumbles into dust. Goodness alone (the essence of true greatness) endures and goes with the soul into "everlasting habitations." 3. How deplorable is the loss of superior excellence! The world is made poorer by its removal. 4. How dreadful is the prevalence of diabolical wickedness! One assassination begets another. And at times there is abroad in society a spirit of lawlessness, recklessness, and ungodliness, which is full of peril, and calls for the earnest efforts and prayers of good men that it may be overcome. 5. How mysterious are the ways of Divine Providence, in permitting the innocent to perish, the godless to succeed, the guilty to be spared! 6. How often is evil overruled for the promotion of beneficent

ends (ch. iv. 1; v. 1)! 7. How profitable is the remembrance of a noble-minded man! "*Know* ye not," etc.? "He being dead, yet speaketh."—D.

Ver. 39.—(HEBRON.) *The sons of Zeruiah.* The mental and moral qualities of men are largely traceable to hereditary tendencies. If Joab and Abishai resembled their mother, she must have been a woman of strong mind, and of a suspicious, irascible, and intolerant temper, rather than noted for her simplicity, meekness, and forbearance. And so much may be inferred from the manner in which David associates the name of his sister with her sons (ch. xvi. 10; xix. 22; 1 Kings ii. 5). Their spirit and conduct were different from his, obnoxious to him, and constrained him to make this confession to his confidential servants on the evening of the day of Abner's funeral. "It was one of those moments in which a king, even with the best intentions, must feel to his own heavy cost the weakness of everything human, and the limits of human supremacy" (Ewald).

I. NO MAN, HOWEVER HIGHLY EXALTED, IS EXEMPT FROM WEAKNESS. "I am this day weak [tender, infirm], and an anointed king." The most absolute monarch cannot do all he would. Truly good men, though anointed and endued with spiritual power, are by no means perfect, but are "compassed with infirmity." The weakness of a strong man is felt: 1. *In contending against the evil* that surrounds him and presses in upon him like "the proud waves." 2. *In performing the duties* that rest upon him, and attaining the ideal of character at which he aims. "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart," etc. (Ps. ci. 2—8). 3. *In effecting the purposes* which he may have formed for the good of others.

II. THE WEAKNESS OF A STRONG MAN IS OFTEN OCCASIONED BY HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER MEN. "And these men, sons of Zeruiah, are too hard [rough, obstinate, powerful] for me." His relationships with them (formed, it may be, independently of his choice, and conducive, in some respects, to his good) not unfrequently: 1. Enable them to acquire *undue power*, and incite them to pursue a presumptuous, obstinate, unjustifiable course. "A man's foes are they of his own household" (Matt. x. 36; Numb. xii. 1). 2. Bring him into *intimate association* with those who have little sympathy with his noblest feelings, and expose him to the influence of their adverse principles (Luke ix. 54; Matt. xvi. 22, 23). 3. Become an *occasion of hindrance, temptation, and peril.* For, unlike him in whom the prince of this world "had nothing" (John xiv. 30), every man possesses an inward, carnal propensity on which outward evil may take hold, and thereby cause him to stumble.

III. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF HIS CONDITION FILLS HIM WITH DEEP DISTRESS. "I am this day weak," etc., which is a complaint of: 1. *Painful restraint* imposed upon him with respect to conduct he cannot approve. 2. *Necessary endurance* of men whom he cannot punish, and with whom he may not, out of regard to his own position and the common good, enter into open conflict. 3. *Partial and not altogether blameless failure* in the fulfilment of the obligations of his high calling. David has been severely condemned for not punishing the sons of Zeruiah; but in order to justify such condemnation, we should have a better acquaintance with all the circumstances of the case. He was not without sinful infirmity. Yet whose conviction of what is absolutely right exactly corresponds with his consciousness of actual performance? "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

IV. THE CHIEF ALLEVIATION OF HIS TROUBLE IS CONFIDENCE IN THE RIGHTEOUS RETRIBUTION OF GOD. "Jehovah reward the doer of wickedness according to his wickedness." This is expressive of: 1. *Dependence* on the Divine power to accomplish what he himself cannot do. 2. *Faith* in the Divine permission of unrequited evil for a time, for wise and beneficent ends. 3. *Desire* for the maintenance, vindication, and triumph of eternal righteousness in the earth (vers. 22—30). "The Lord will render to him according to his works" (2 Tim. iv. 14). "Jehovah shall reward," etc. This was the text to which Lady F. Cavendish directed attention on the occasion of the lamented death of her husband, Lord Frederic Cavendish; and which was so remarkably fulfilled in the fate that afterwards overtook his assassins. "It is the hope of the oppressed and the patience of the saints."—D.

Vers. 9—12.—*Doing right wrongly.* Abner knew well that David was appointed

by God to be king over all Israel. Yet he set up Ishbosheth as king over the eleven tribes in opposition to David, and thus caused much unnecessary and useless delay and bloodshed. When, however, Ishbosheth (whether rightly or wrongly) remonstrated with him for his conduct towards Rizpah, he calls to mind the purpose and promise of God, and resolves to co-operate with him (l) in placing David over all the nation (ver. 9); and he opens communications with David with this view. The known will of God thus becomes a convenient pretext for the gratification at once of his revenge and his ambition. His own lips convicted him of insincerity and hypocrisy. His tardy obedience to the truth he knew was unreal and unacceptable to God, however useful to David. It was self, and not God, that ruled him throughout. Abner has many imitators—men who, instead of simply and sincerely obeying the truth they know, make it wait on their ambition or covetousness, now neglecting it, now acting according to it, and professing great regard for it, as their selfish aims may prompt. They choose their side in religion or politics, not according to conviction, but according to their supposed interests; and if they change sides it is not because of changed convictions, but because their ambition or avarice has been disappointed—they have not been made enough of, or they have quarrelled with some one, or their pride has been mortified, or they see that they have been on the side of a decaying cause which cannot be of much more service to them. Such men may be *welcomed* to the side they join, and may be of some service; but they will not be *trusted*, and their service will be of doubtful value. In religion especially the adherence of such persons is to be deprecated as wanting in the right spirit, and likely to be injurious rather than beneficial. They tend to corrupt the society in which they are active and influential, and deprive it of its true strength—that of sincere, spiritual, consistent character. Observe: 1. *The importance of simple and uniform obedience to the known will of God.* To obey as it suits our worldly aims is not to obey at all, and the pretence of obedience is hypocritical and hateful to God. Such obedience may have its uses to others; God may overrule it for good; but it will bring no blessing to the doer. 2. *The language of Abner may be adopted by us in relation to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.* "As Jehovah has sworn to his beloved Son, even so I do to him." Our knowledge of the purpose and promise of God to establish Christ's rule over all men should stimulate us to devoted service in his cause. It assures us that to be on his side is to be on God's side, on the side that must succeed. In being thus workers with God we cannot labour in vain; and labouring not in pretence, but in truth, we shall ultimately share in the glory and power of the great King whose cause we espouse (Rev. iii. 21). —G. W.

Ver. 38.—*Death of a great man.* Abner had great qualities, filled a high position, seemed likely to be of great service to David, who sincerely lamented his untimely end, and the wicked treachery and violence by which he fell.

I. GREAT MEN SHOULD BE HIGHLY VALUED. Great generals and naval commanders. If war must be, it is of vast importance that it should be conducted by able captains. But not only these, men great in the arts of peace,—great statesmen, philosophers, historians, scientists, poets, artists, preachers, etc. Especially when distinguished ability is combined with unselfish devotion to the good of the nation or the race. For selfish ambition belittles the great, and moral corruption renders them powerful for evil instead of good. Abner's greatness was marred by his unscrupulous ambition, and Joab was worse than he. The multitude are very dependent on great leaders, whether in war or peace, and can do little without them. "Thou art worth ten thousand of us" (ch. xviii. 3). Leading and inspiring the many, they make them partners in their own greatness. The influence of their deeds, or (in the case of intellectual leaders) their thoughts, raises others towards their own level. The character as well as the progress of a people depends a good deal on its great men.

II. GREAT MEN MUST DIE. In some conditions of society their lives are more exposed to peril than the lives of others—whether from the assassin, or from fickle monarchs or ambitious rivals, using the forms of law to put them out of their way; or the cares incident to greatness may shorten their days. "I have said, Ye are gods . . . but ye shall die like men" (Ps. lxxxii. 6, 7)—a truth they should bear in mind to keep them sober and humble, to stimulate their diligence, and preserve in them a sense

of responsibility to God; a truth which others should remember, that they may not idolize the great, nor unduly confide in them (see Ps. cxlvi. 3, 4) or dread their anger (Isa. li. 12), nor, to secure their favour, sin against him who lives for ever; and that they may be themselves the more content to die.

III. GREAT MEN SHOULD BE HONOURED AFTER DEATH. By general mourning; by honourable burial; by commemoration of their virtues and services, in elegies (as here), or biographies, or monuments to their memory; by carrying out their unaccomplished purposes for the public good; and withal by praise to God for them and their services. Such honour is due to the men themselves, and tends to the good of society by exciting emulation, etc.

In conclusion: 1. Let Britons bless God for the large number and long succession of great men who have adorned and served their country in all departments; and pray that the succession may be maintained to the latest times. Not only are such men invaluable while they live; their works and memories survive them as a perpetual treasure. The truly great do not die altogether.

"But strew his ashes to the wind
Whose sword or voice has served mankind—
And is he dead whose glorious mind
Lifts thine on high?
To live in hearts we leave behind,
Is not to die."

(Campbell.)

2. Let us be thankful that it is not necessary to be great in order to be either happy or useful. Goodness is the essential thing. A comfort to the many who can never be distinguished. 3. Yet real greatness is possible to all. Through faith in Christ we become children of God, "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," to be "glorified together" with him (Rom. viii. 17). In the kingdom of heaven greatness is secured by conscientious obedience to the Divine commandments (Matt. v. 19), humility (Matt. xviii. 4; Luke ix. 48), and self-abasing, self-denying service of others (Mark x. 42—45). Such greatness is substantial and immortal (1 John ii. 17). 4. Let us rejoice that the great "Captain of our salvation" lives for ever, in fulness of power to save and bless all who trust in him.—G. W.

Ver. 39.—*A weak king.* "I am this day weak, though anointed king." David, indignant and distressed on account of the murder of Abner, could not venture to attempt to punish the murderers. They were too powerful for even him. Hence this lamentation. It was hardly wise to express his feeling—it would help to confirm the power of Joab and his brother. Many a monarch has been similarly weak, owing to the power of those who are nominally his servants. This is injurious when it prevents the execution of justice; but as to measures of government it is often best, the servant being wiser and abler than the sovereign. We may take the words as a picture of what has place in human nature. Man has over him rightful kings, which too often are not, in fact, his rulers.

I. THE EVIL. 1. *Objectively. Truth*, the expressed will of God, is rightful sovereign of men, but it very partially rules. Many "sons of Zeruiah" are "too hard for" it, silence its utterances, oppose its power, prevent its sway. But it *is* king notwithstanding, and, by the Divine judgments it expresses, will determine men's destiny, though they may refuse to let its precepts regulate their conduct. 2. *Subjectively. Conscience*, enlightened by truth, is anointed by God as king. "Had it strength as it had right, had it power as it had manifest authority, it would absolutely govern the world" (Bishop Butler). But in actual government it is often "weak." The lower part of human nature is in rebellion against the higher. Appetite and passion and ill-regulated lawful affections, and all these hardened into habits, are "too hard" for it. Hence come degradation, ruin, misery, now and hereafter.

II. THE REMEDY. The redemption effected by the death of our Lord, realized in the heart by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit, is the only effectual remedy. "Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye

are not under law, but under grace" (Rom. vi. 6, 14). The revelation of God and man, of sin and holiness, in the cross of Christ; the deliverance from condemnation secured thereby; the new Divine power which is imparted to the believer; the love to his Redeemer which is planted in his heart; the filial relation into which he is brought to God; the new hopes by which he is inspired;—these rescue him from slavery to sin, and give him freedom and will and power to serve God and righteousness (see Rom. vi. and vii., and viii. 1—4). The rightful Sovereign is replaced on the throne, strong to govern, not yet with absolutely universal and perfect sway, but with the assured prospect of it. Let, then, those who groan under the consciousness of their moral weakness accept the great Deliverer, and submit themselves to his methods of imparting strength to the soul.

III. THE SEEMING RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN DAVID AND HIS DIVINE SON. It might seem as if our Lord Jesus, like David, might say, "I am . . . weak, though anointed King." Long has he been exalted to his throne at the right hand of God, as Lord of all; "from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool" (Heb. x. 13). Yet how small a portion of mankind is actually under his moral and spiritual sway! and these how imperfectly! How much power have his foes, even where he does really rule! And his open foes and false friends seem to speak and act as they please with impunity. It is not, however, that he is "weak," or that any are "too hard for" him. He is long-suffering, and delays to execute judgment; but let his enemies continue impenitent and incorrigible, and they will learn by experience that he is strong to punish them. "Vengeance has leaden feet, but iron hands." "The mill of God grinds late, but it grinds to powder." Meanwhile he uses his foes as slaves to aid in working out his purposes. And as to the limits of his moral and spiritual rule, we must remember that, in extending and perfecting it, he pays respect to the freedom of men. It is not a matter of mere power, but of instruction and persuasion. He counsels, warns, invites, manifests his own yearning pity and love, stirs the conscience, moves the heart; but he does not *compel*—cannot do so consistently with his own purpose or the nature of man and of the rule he would establish. But let us yield ourselves heartily to him, and we shall find that he is as strong as ever to save and make strong those who trust in him.—G. W.

Ver. 39.—*Sure retribution.* "The Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness." In the Revised Version the words are rendered as a wish: "The Lord reward the wicked doer according to his wickedness." The substantial meaning is the same in both translations. "In his impotence to punish Joab himself, David remits him to the just judgment of God" ('Speaker's Commentary'). The words may be taken in respect to all evil-doers. None can escape the judgment of God, even if they escape punishment from men.

I. THE CERTAINTY OF THE DIVINE PUNISHMENT OF EVIL-DOERS. This follows from: 1. *The relations of God to men.* As Ruler, Lawgiver, Judge. He will certainly not fail in the exercise of the functions which belong to these relations. Even if we think of him as Father, we may be equally certain that impenitent sinners will not go unpunished. What would a father be worth who should allow a depraved son to defy himself, and seriously injure other children of the family, with impunity? If he can by any means, gentle or severe, reform him, well,—this he will prefer; but if not, he must banish and abandon him. And to say that Omnipotent love need not and cannot resort to this extremity of punishment is to go beyond our knowledge, and contrary to the plain statements of Holy Writ, where the chastisement which reforms and the punishment which crushes are clearly distinguished. To make Gehenna a purgatory is certainly to add to the teaching of our Lord respecting it. 2. *His threatenings.* Those of conscience and those of Holy Writ. They abound throughout the Bible, and are nowhere more frequent and awful than in the teaching of the tender and loving Christ. 3. *His character.* As holy and just, loving righteousness and hating iniquity; truthful in regard to his threatenings as well as his promises. 4. *His omniscience.* Men often succeed in hiding their evil deeds or themselves from their fellow-men; but it is impossible thus to escape Divine judgments (see Job xxxiv. 21, 22). 5. *His omnipotence.* Criminals may in some states of society be, like Joab, too strong to be punished by those in authority; but God is mightier than the mightiest.

There is, therefore, no possibility of resisting his judgments. 6. *The teachings of experience.* The penalties which follow violations of natural law. The results of wrong-doing upon body, mind, circumstances. The penalties inflicted by society on those who practise certain forms of wickedness.

II. THE SATISFACTION WITH WHICH THIS CERTAINTY IS SOMETIMES REGARDED BY THE RIGHTEOUS. According to the Revised Version the words are a wish, a prayer; but even according to the Authorized Version they are uttered with evident satisfaction. David desired that justice should be executed on Joab; and, feeling his own inability to execute it, was relieved by the assurance he felt that it would not therefore fail of execution. Would such a feeling be wrong in a Christian? St. Paul did not think so. "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward [or, 'will reward'] him according to his works" (2 Tim. iv. 14, where there are two readings, as here two renderings). In the case of powerful villains injuring and trampling down the weak, but who cannot be reached by human justice, can any one doubt that the feeling of confidence that the justice of God can and will reach them is a proper feeling to cherish, although it should be associated with the desire that they may, if possible, be converted? In the case of impenitent sinners in general, it is the known purpose of God to punish them according to their works. Shall his children disapprove his conduct, or only silently submit; or not rather acquiesce, approve, and, at times at least, cherish complacency? Does not the prayer divinely taught to them, "Thy will be done," apply to this part of his will? They bear the image of God's righteousness as well as loving-kindness. They have strong regard for his character and honour, as well as for the happiness of his creatures. They cannot but desire that all rebellion against him should be put down by the power of his love on the hearts of the rebels, if it may be; if not, by the severe measures of his justice. In the case of serious wrong done to ourselves, we are doubtless to suppress all emotions of revenge, and to pray for and be ready to forgive the wrong-doer; yet the above-cited expression of St. Paul shows that, in certain circumstances, we may remit the offender to Divine justice; and in another place (Rom. xii. 19) he gives this as a reason for not avenging ourselves: "It is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." The love which is so characteristic of Christianity is not, then, incompatible with hatred of sin and the desire that sin should be punished. The two are identical when the punishment is desired that the sinner may be led thereby to repentance. They are not incompatible, when, the persistence and impenitence of the sinner being supposed, love for others and zeal for the law and government of God produce at least acquiescence in his judgments. It should be observed, however, that such emotions as we have been speaking of are to form but a small part of the inner life of the Christian. Indignation against evil, and desire for its punishment, need rather to be restrained and guided, than inculcated and cherished. The sentiments towards others which should ordinarily predominate are those of pure and direct benevolence. Yet let sinners lay to heart that, unless they repent and seek salvation through Christ, God will certainly render to them according to their wickedness. "Be sure your sin will find you out." "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1.—When Saul's son heard that Abner was dead. The news of Abner's death must have had a doubly depressing effect upon Ishbosheth; for he learned, not only that the mainstay of his kingdom was slain, but that even he, in despair of a successful issue, had been engaged in treasonable negotiations with his rival. **All the Israelites were troubled.** Their trouble was caused rather by uncertainty than by fear. Abner's plans had fallen through, and the fact of his murder threw grave suspicions on David. Had he now attacked Israel, the chiefs would most probably have stood loyally by Saul's house. But he did nothing, and his innocence slowly but gradually was made clear. They were thus in a state of suspense, and waiting till some brave man arose to lead them to a decision. Unfortunately, a fresh crime threw everything back into hopeless confusion.

Ver. 2.—**Saul's son had two men captains of bands.** The bands mentioned were light-armed troops, used in forays, such as that

mentioned in ch. iii. 22. Their captains would be men of importance with Ishbosheth, who is here described somewhat contemptuously, not as king, nor by his own name, but as "Saul's son." **Beeroth.** This place, literally *the Wells*, was one of the four towns reserved for the Gibeonites (Josh. ix. 17), though nominally belonging to Benjamin (Josh. xviii. 25). The note, that it **was reckoned to Benjamin**, suggests that it had until quite lately been occupied by the Canaanites, whose flight to Gittaim had no doubt been caused by Saul's cruel attack upon them referred to in ch. xxi. 1, 2. It was thus remarkable that the destruction of Saul's dynasty was the work of the Gibeonites of Beeroth. As we find another of these Beerothites, Naharai, holding the office of armour-bearer to Joab (1 Chron. xi. 39), it seems probable that many of them saved themselves from expulsion by becoming soldiers. But among David's worthies a large number were strangers, and some even men of foreign extraction. Beeroth, however, was probably seized in Saul's reign by the Benjamites, by force, and occupied by them, as its citizens returned in large numbers from the exile (Ezra ii. 25), and are counted as genuine Israelites. Moreover, by thus dispossessing the natives, Saul was able to give his tribesmen "fields and vineyards" (1 Sam. xxii. 7), which otherwise would have been in violation of the Mosaic Law.

Ver. 3.—**Gittaim.** This word is a dual, and means "the two Gaths;" the one being, probably, the acropolis, or upper town, at the foot of which nestled a new Gath, protected by the ancient stronghold. It is mentioned as belonging to Benjamin in Neh. xi. 33; but could not have been an Israelite town at this time, as the Beerothites are described as *sojourners*, that is, dwellers in a foreign country. When expelled from Beeroth, they probably seized Gittaim by force, and, on the reconciliation effected by the execution of Saul's sons, returned to their allegiance to Israel.

Ver. 4.—**Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son.** This is mentioned to show that Saul's lineage virtually became extinct on Ishbosheth's death. Mephibosheth, the heir, was a cripple, and physically incapable of reigning. Saul had, indeed, sons by a concubine, and grandchildren by his daughter Merab (ch. xxi. 8). But throughout the history there is no hint that any of these were regarded as the representatives of Saul's house. (For the name Mephibosheth, see note on ch. ii. 8.)

Vers. 6, 7.—**As though they would have fetched wheat.** Not only is the narrative confused, but the versions offer extraordinary varieties of reading. The murder of Ishbosheth is fully described in ver. 7, and is there in its place, while it is out of place in ver. 6. And that the captains would themselves fetch wheat, instead of having it carried from the granary by their men; and that they would go through the king's chamber to obtain it; are both improbable. The very act of going to get wheat at midday, when everybody was having his siesta, would itself be suspicious. The Syriac says nothing about wheat, but that these "wicked men took and smote him." The Vulgate and LXX. lay the blame on the woman who kept the door, the narrative of the latter being as follows: "They entered into the house of Ishbosheth in the heat of the day, and he was asleep in his midday chamber. And behold, the woman that kept the door of the house had been winnowing wheat, and she slumbered and slept. And the brothers Rechab and Baanah entered the house without being noticed, and Ishbosheth was asleep on his bed in his chamber, and they smote him," etc. There is, confessedly, considerable confusion in the text, but the versions do not altogether clear it up; and until we have better materials for forming a judgment, we must be content to wait. In ver. 5, instead of "who lay on a bed at noon," the Hebrew has "as he was taking his noonday rest." In ver. 7 the *bed* is the divan, or raised bank, which in an Oriental house runs along the wall, and is supplied with pieces of carpet, or cushions, on which to sit cross-legged or recline. For sleep, the corners were the favourite places. Even the public rooms had these divans. But Ishbosheth had probably retired for his siesta into a private chamber, where the captains knew that he would be alone. **The plain** through which they fled was the Arabah, or Jordan valley, as in ch. ii. 29.

Ver. 8.—**Which sought thy life.** Saul had sought David's life, but Ishbosheth was innocent of any such attempts. Still, had he been victorious, David, as his rival, would certainly have been put to death. **Jehovah hath avenged my lord the king.** The ordinary language of the East is so religious that these words imply nothing more than that these wicked men saw in their base act a step towards the carrying out of a Divine purpose. But in thus referring to the common belief that David's kingdom was assured to him by Jehovah, they evidently intended to commend their deed to the really devout mind of the king.

Vers. 9, 10.—**And David answered.** David's answer is worthy of him. His appeal to Jehovah, as One that had saved him in all time of adversity, was a declaration that he had no need of criminals. And throughout he had carefully abstained from taking any steps to bring about the accomplishment of God's will, and had been upright

and forbearing alike to Ishbosheth and Saul. How noble his conduct was we see by the contrast with Macbeth, whose better nature was poisoned and spoiled by the hope that he should be king hereafter. At the end of the verse the force is weakened in the Authorized Version by the insertion of irrelevant words. What David said is, "I slew him in Ziklag, and that was the reward I gave him for his tidings."

Ver. 11.—**A righteous person.** Ishbosheth was probably a weak rather than a wicked man; but David is not speaking of him generally, and, as regards Rechab and Baanah, he was quite guiltless, and their crime was not in revenge for any wrong done them.

Ver. 12.—**They cut off their hands and their feet.** This was not intended for the purpose of mutilation, but to carry out an Eastern idea of retaliation. The hands were cut off because they had committed the murder; the feet, because they had brought the head to Hebron. Still, David was violating the spirit of the Mosaic Law. It ordered that the body of a man who had been put to death should be buried the same day (Deut. xxi. 23). In the face of this humane enactment, it is wonderful that the laws of Christian countries should have allowed the mutilation of the bodies of traitors, and the hanging on gibbets of criminals convicted of smaller crimes. Remembering, therefore, the customs of our fathers, we must not blame David much for suspending the hands and feet of these murderers at the pool of Hebron, that all, when coming for water, might know of their punishment. The head of Ishbosheth was honourably buried in Abner's grave (see ch. iii. 32).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—12.—The facts are: 1. On the death of Abner, consternation seizes Ishbosheth and his friends. 2. The only other representative of the house of Saul was a mere boy, whose age and bodily infirmity rendered his coming to the front out of the question. 3. Two of Ishbosheth's officers, forming a secret design, visit Ishbosheth as though on business connected with their duties, and slay him. 4. Stealing away by night, they carry the head of Ishbosheth to David at Hebron, and think to satisfy thereby his love of revenge. 5. David, eagerly reminding himself that God had always delivered him without his having recourse to bloodshed, reminds his visitors also of the punishment he had inflicted on others in a similar case at Ziklag, and denounces their deed as even more atrocious. 6. Thereupon David causes the murderers to be executed, and their limbs to be exhibited in Hebron as a warning to the wicked, and meanwhile he bestows funereal honours on the head of Ishbosheth.

Worldly blindness the parent of sorrow and wrong. The whole of the events of this chapter proceed from the inability of men to read the high principles that governed the conduct of David. The general truth may be developed as follows.

I. THE BODINGS OF IGNORANCE FILL A LARGE SPACE IN THE LIVES OF SOME MEN. When it is said that Ishbosheth and his people were paralyzed and troubled by the news of the death of Abner, the question comes—Why? Was it because now the healing policy of Abner and David (ch. iii. 17—21) would yield to the more fierce policy of Joab? Did the young king and his followers imagine that now it was simply a question of best terms, and that submission was inevitable? Or were they apprehensive that, although David made terms with Abner for the sake of securing his aid, now, when that aid was no longer available for the consolidation of his power, he would take revenge on all who had supported the cause of Ishbosheth? In any case, their fears were not warranted by the governing facts of the situation. Their safety and welfare rested with David, and had they known him, had they read his principles aright, they might have been quite at ease in allowing events to take their course in his supremacy. Their forebodings of trouble sprang from ignorance of the man they had to deal with. They formed their estimate of his possible future conduct on the standards familiar amongst themselves. His life was too lofty in tone and aspiration for them to understand. How much of human life is spoiled, is charged with sorrows and fears, which would have no place were our vision clearer and our estimate of others more just and true! Men too often judge of the thoughts and ways of God by their own standard, and so apprehend what never need have troubled them. Our ignorance of coming events exercises a larger influence over our feelings than is proper; for though we do

not know exactly what will occur, we ought to know that all things are in the wisest and kindest of hands. In human relationships men make troubles by supposing their fellow-men, often, to be otherwise affected than they actually are. Even the disciples were troubled in consequence of their blameworthy ignorance of the wisdom and power of their Master, and they were challenged to get rid of the sorrows bred of ignorance by reposing in him a trust as absolute as they, pious Hebrews, were wont to repose in the Eternal (John xiv. 1, 2).

II. THE ATTACHMENT OF MEN NOT SPIRITUALLY ENLIGHTENED IS OF DOUBTFUL PERMANENCE. The attachment of the sons of Rimmon and others to the cause of Ishbosheth was based on anything but enlightened views of the theocracy, or a clear interpretation of the events of the life of Saul and David, which must have been well known. Indeed, as in the days of "David's greater Son" the mark of distinction among men lay in the spiritual recognition of him as Divine amidst his sorrows and trials, so in David's time only true unworldly men, whose eyes were open to see the spiritual element in his life, formed political attachments on superior knowledge. That which is earthly partakes of the instability of earth, and, however outwardly zealous the supporters of Ishbosheth may have been and even sincere according to their light, they were open to the influences to change which are sure to arise in times of trouble, but which could never move a mind that saw the higher principles involved in David's claim. The historian seems to imply this in his reference to the age and infirmity of Mephibosheth, as much as to say there was no one else of the house of Saul around whom men might rally in case Ishbosheth's cause should fail. No resort was left but to abandon the young king in his troubles, and form new and more promising attachments. Imagine a Jonathan slackening his attachment to David in his time of stress! or a Paul losing interest in Christ when persecutions arose! On the other hand, there are many instances in which the *weakened attachment* of the sons of Rimmon, proceeding as that attachment did from low and mere conventional views, finds a counterpart in human life. Companionships based on community of sensual enjoyments are held by bonds which perish in adversity. Friendships are perishable in so far as they are pervaded by a worldly element. Whatever ties are formed on any feelings, interests, or considerations than those which make us all one in Christ, cannot but vanish as we pass from the earthly scene into the world where alone the spiritual bond endures. And in the Church militant the adherence of numbers lacks a permanence to be counted on in proportion as it is based on custom, convenience, fashion, superstition, defective knowledge of Scripture, and dimness of spiritual apprehension. Plato was not far from the truth in saying that knowledge and reality were one. Scripture everywhere gives prominence to the unifying, ennobling power of spiritual perception. The distinction of children of light and of darkness proceeds thereon. The "spiritual man judgeth all things." The rejection of Christ was connected with blindness to the higher and more spiritual qualities of his life (1 Cor. ii. 8—16).

III. MEN OF UNSPIRITUAL VIEWS ARE, BY REASON OF THEIR BLINDNESS, OPEN TO TERRIBLE TEMPTATIONS, AND MAY BE CARRIED AWAY TO EVIL BY THE LOWER PASSIONS OF THEIR NATURE. These sons of Rimmon, like others, began to consider what course would be most advantageous to themselves, now that the cause of Ishbosheth seemed to be on the wane. Looking on the position of the two kings as simply the consequence of purely worldly forces coming into competition, and caring most of all to be on the winning side, they asked themselves what conduct on their part would be sure to win the favour of David, the stronger of the two. Had they at that juncture in the process of thought conceived of David as a man of God, of high spiritual aims, destined to work out a Divine purpose on principles of righteousness, and ambitious to translate the purest principles of private life into the affairs of his kingdom, they would only have thought of doing some deed of justice and mercy, such as a man of that character would delight in. But being destitute of these spiritual perceptions, regarding all things on the low base level of a worldly expediency, and judging David to be much such a man as themselves, there arose in their process of thought fair opportunity for the cruellest and basest propensities of their nature, to put forth their strength and suggest the murder of the unfortunate king as an act of present wisdom. It takes many impulses and thoughts of advantage and disadvantage to bring about a great crime, and it is difficult, in analyzing the mental antecedents of the crime, to assign to

each its exact influence; but it is obvious in this case that worldliness of view, lack of spiritual apprehension, undue estimate of a lofty character, rendered the crime possible, and even cleared away the barriers of reason against its accomplishment. They judged David to be as themselves, and they acted accordingly. The belief that he would be glad inspired the concoction of the plot, and gave tone of exultation in their approach to him with the head of the murdered man. Their darkness was dense, and in this sense theirs was a deed of darkness. It is often that men fall into the snare of the devil in consequence of their lack of spiritual perception. The false is glossed, the true is veiled. Even disciples, not clearly perceiving the purely spiritual character of their Lord's mission, desired fire from heaven to destroy the unbelieving. During the "dark ages" men perpetrated dreadful deeds to please Christ, not rising to a true appreciation of his character and methods. Low conceptions of the nature of the kingdom of Christ as it is in the world, now induce men professing an interest in it to render service in forms that would never be entertained were his kingdom regarded as he regards it—one of purity, of love, and of righteousness. And as this worldly mindedness was a sore cause of sorrow and trouble to David, and hindered the establishment of his authority, so the same evil militates much against the final triumph of our Lord. Hence the need of teaching and the power of the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of the blind, that they may appreciate and regulate their actions by the high principles embodied in the character and kingdom of Christ.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. Destitution of the power of spiritual apprehension and appreciation is a radical evil of human nature, and can never be removed by any other means than those which God has provided in his truth and the grace of the Holy Spirit. 2. If we would have men knit in imperishable bonds of affection and common interest, we must seek to get them to see Christ as he is, and enter into relationships on the basis of his kingdom. 3. In all our dealings with men we should be careful not to put forward our own feelings and aims as a standard by which to judge them.

Clustered truths. It is not easy to weave all the teaching of this chapter on one line, and yet the various incidents recorded all centre in the disaster which befell the King of Israel consequent on the secession and death of Abner. It may thus be advantageous, for the sake of securing unity of form, to look at the remaining leading truths of the chapter as clustering around this sad event.

I. THE SMALLER FIGURES OF HISTORY. Mephibosheth here figures as an insignificant person in the narrative of persons and events connected with the gradual unfolding of the purposes of God. A mere boy, lamed by a careless nurse, a son of one who had renounced all claim to the throne! His name and misfortune are mentioned, and the tide of events moves on. Now and then we meet with such incidental references in the Bible history. They are but specimens of multitudes equally insignificant who played a small part in the affairs of the world, and are unknown for ever. Their selection for brief allusion is doubtless part of a vast providential method by which the historians were unconsciously guided to refer to whatever might illustrate the process of elimination by which God at last accomplished his purpose in first raising up David to supreme dominion of his people, and afterwards the true David of the present dispensation. The poor lad little knew that he was an element in the working out of a great purpose, and that, small as was his figure in life, it served as a foil to God's greater characters. Modern science teaches us that nothing is really lost, that all small items are used up in the great development of things towards a future higher condition. So the humbler forms of human life are not all lost. They play their part, and to some extent modify all that comes after them. In the Church of Christ, the little ones, feeble and uninfluential in a worldly sense, have some part to perform in the great spiritual development which God is working out. Our Mephibosheths are not lost to mankind. The smaller figures of life render the totality of life more varied, and develop qualities which uniform greatness could never originate.

II. NOTORIOUS IMMORTALITY. These sons of Rimmon have won for themselves a notorious immortality. Had it not been for their base and cruel deed, their names would never have appeared on the page of history. Their crime has given them a prominent place as compared with wiser and better men. In this case, the reason of it is doubtless to be found in the circumstance that their deed served to bring out into

more distinctness the character of the kingdom which God was then establishing by means of David, and so, incidentally, it forms one of the links in that singular chain of events by which at last the Christ found a way prepared for him to dwell among men. There is a base passion in some men for this kind of notoriety. Some criminals have gloried in it, and have seemed to derive some satisfaction from the thought that, at all events, they have created a sensation, and will for a time, and perhaps for ever, figure in history. Miserable consolations of sin! The utter delusiveness of sinful reasoning! The charm and delight could only be for a few days; the anguish and shame would come when the eye saw the world no more and the ear ceased to listen to the hum of the people, and then abide for ever. The curse of the righteous rests on the notoriety, and so it becomes a very occasion of deep and recurring disgrace. In modern times incalculable injury is done by a low literature that feeds this morbid love of notoriety of evil, and in the education of youth too much care cannot be given to secure them from the infection.

III. IMPLICIT ASPERSION OF CHARACTER. When these sons of Rimmon went to David with the head of Ishbosheth, no doubt openly and even boasting before they reached his presence, they by that act implicitly cast on his character the foulest and most painful aspersions. It was in act a declaration to men that David was a man of blood, that he looked on the son of Saul as a foe to be got rid of by any means, and that if only supremacy could be obtained over all the people, he cared not particularly as to the means. To David this was the interpretation of the act, and the people about him could not but regard it in that light. Character may be aspersed by deeds in various forms, and by people who do not see that there is aspersion in their conduct. The flatteries of some men are virtually reflections on purity of life. The requests of some men for a certain line of action are founded sometimes on a supposition of character that would be repudiated and scorned.

IV. RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION. David at once saw the varied bearings of the conduct of these sons of Rimmon; its base treachery, its cold cruelty, its political treason, its disregard of the claims of misfortune, its foolish policy, and, not least, its false and wicked misrepresentations of his own character. To the man called of God, who had in all his adversities trusted in God, whose mission was to establish a rule more wise and just than that of Saul, and to raise the ideas of the people to a higher level and prepare them to perform a part in opening the way for the great Messiah, this insult must have been agonizing. His quick spiritual sensibilities were at once stirred, and yet his indignation was the more strong and impressive in that he selected words wherewith to show to them the enormity of their guilt, and then delivered them to the execution they deserved. Apart from his natural aversion to "bloody men," and his regard for the sacredness of human life even in the case of those who injured him, he could not but dwell in his own private reflections on the shameful insult offered to himself in the supposition that he could glory in such a deed. A fire burned in his soul. All good men, who regard purity and righteousness of life as above all things, will fully sympathize with David. Have we not here a clue to the Saviour's anguish when evil men supposed that he performed miracles by means of the power of Beelzebub? And was not this, perhaps, the deadly sin against the Holy Ghost (Matt. xii. 24—32)?

V. GENEROSITY TO UNFORTUNATE MEN. David was a man rich in noble feelings. His proud indignation at the insult paid to him was accompanied with immediate regard for the unfortunate king whose life had been brought to so untimely an end. For him he cherished true pity. He regarded him as the son of Saul the anointed of the Lord, a man forced probably into a position of danger by stronger wills, and at least mistaken in his views as to what was best for the tribes on the death of his father; and hence, with the generosity so characteristic of him, he had his few remains buried with all honour in the sepulchre of his distinguished captain. Here comes out the unworldliness of David's character. Success in life and rise to a high position too often render men indifferent to those on whom fortune has not smiled. There are many like Ishbosheth—men who have been pushed into positions for which they were unfitted, or have been swayed by feeble reasons of their own into a course of life not useful, or have striven in vain against great social obstacles, and so have come to disappointment and grief. As our Lord was compassionate and considerate of the lowly, so all who cherish his spirit will find out means of showing kindness to the unfortunate, even though they may have been in the position of opponents.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—(MAHANAIM.) *The unhappy lot of Ishbosheth.* Of the varied types of character which these chapters furnish, that which appears in Ishbosheth (Eshbaal, 1 Chron. viii. 33) is a most pitiable one. The last surviving son of Saul, he bore little resemblance to his heroic father; owed his life to his incapacity for military enterprise; was the legitimate successor of Saul according to the law of Oriental succession; after the brief suspense in which the elders of Israel seemed disposed to accept David as king (ch. ii. 7; iii. 17), was taken under the patronage of Abner; at the end of five years was fully recognized, being forty years old; and reigned two years (ch. ii. 10). It is uncertain how far he was aware of David's Divine designation to the throne, and consciously opposed its fulfilment; and, since the latter was not chosen by the elders, he was not guilty of usurpation. Although David could not speak of him as king, he called him "a righteous person" (ver. 11)—"a man who had done no one any harm" (Josephus)—in the same magnanimous spirit as he always exhibited toward the house of Saul. He was: 1. *Raised to a position for which he was unfit.* "The Scripture presents in him a living example of how the sacredly held right of legitimate inheritance has no root when it is not ennobled by vigorous personality. When the Divine calling is lacking, no legitimate pretensions help" (Cassel). He was destitute of mental force, courage, and energy; ambitious of royal honour and ease; not of royal service and beneficence. The highest offices should be held by the best men. In an ideal state of society it cannot be otherwise; but in its actual condition we often see "servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth" (Eccles. x. 7). He who seeks or consents to occupy a position of influence and responsibility for which he is unfit, and those who seek or accept his appointment to it, inflict a serious injury upon themselves and one another. The rule of the "bramble" results in the destruction of all the trees of the forest (Judg. x. 15). 2. *Deprived of the support on which he relied.* "Abner was dead;" by whom he had been exalted and sustained, and to whom, rather than to God, he looked for counsel and help. Although he had alienated him by imprudent remonstrance (ch. iii. 7), yet "he may have hoped to obtain an honourable satisfaction by his mediation" (Hengstenberg). This hope was now cut off. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man," etc. (Jer. xvii. 5; Ps. cxliii. 3, 4). 3. *Reduced to a condition of extreme weakness.* "His hands became feeble." Nothing remained but unconditional submission or ineffectual and hopeless resistance. He was prepared for neither, and surrendered himself to despair; suffering the consequences of his own "foolishness" (Prov. xix. 3). 4. *Contributory to the distress of a whole people.* "And all Israel was troubled"—agitated, alarmed, confounded, desponding; having no confidence in his ability, participating in his fears, and, like him, experiencing the effects of former errors. "By his death the treaty with David was broken off; or there was no one to manage it with such authority and prudence as Abner had done" (Patrick). 5. *Exposed to the villainy of unfaithful servants.* "And Saul's son had two men," etc. They belonged to his own tribe, and should have been his protectors; served him in prosperity, when he could reward them; but turned against him in adversity, when he could no longer serve their interests; and, although they had suffered no wrong at his hands (ver. 11), acted toward him unjustly and with "treasonous malice," craft, and cruelty. 6. *Smitten at a season of apparent security.* "At noon, in his own house, upon his bed;" where he sought a brief repose, and slept to wake no more. He was left unguarded, and perished "unawares" (Luke xxi. 34). His head was buried "in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron;" and the opposition to "the house of David" was at an end. None survived of "the house of Saul" save an afflicted son of Jonathan (ver. 4), who could be supposed to have any claim to the crown. 7. *Removed as the last obstacle to the accession of a worthier man.* And herein the overruling providence of God again appears in bringing to pass "the word of the Lord by Samuel" (ch. i. 1, 2). "It is significant that the destruction of Saul's house and kingdom should have issued from Beeroth, the Gibeonite city (ch. xxi. 1, 2)" ('Speaker's Commentary').—D.

Ver. 4.—(GIBEAH.) *An unfortunate prince: a sermon to children.* Mephibosheth was the only son of Jonathan, the friend of David and eldest son of King Saul. When

he was five years old the country was invaded by the Philistines (1 Sam. xxix. 1), his father went forth with the king from Gibeah to fight against them in Jezreel, and he was left at home in the care of a nurse (his mother probably being dead). They waited anxiously for news of the conflict; and at length there came a messenger saying that the battle was lost, the king and Jonathan were dead, and the terrible Philistines were coming to plunder and burn the place. The nurse caught up the child, and carried him away on her shoulder; but in her flight across the hills she stumbled, and the little prince fell, was hurt in both his feet, and became a helpless cripple for the rest of his days.

I. CHILDHOOD IS BESET BY MANY PERILS. No other creature on earth is weaker, more helpless or dependent at the commencement of life, than a child. He is peculiarly liable to accident and susceptible to disease; incapable of defending himself from harm or preserving his own life; and is cast entirely upon the care of others. A little neglect on their part may prove fatal. More than a fourth of all the children that are born die before they are five years old. There is the still greater danger to your souls of being allowed to grow up in ignorance and led into "the way of transgressors," stumbling and perishing therein (Matt. xviii. 6). Be *thankful* to your parents, nurses, and teachers for their care over you; still more to your heavenly Father who has taught them such care, appointed his holy angels to be your guardians, sent his Son to bless you, and himself loves, preserves, watches over you, and seeks your salvation (Matt. xviii. 10—14).

II. EVEN A PRINCE IS NOT FREE FROM MISFORTUNE. You may sometimes wish that you belonged to a royal or wealthy family, lived in a palace, and had numerous servants to wait upon you; supposing that you would be happier than you are. Well, here is a prince; yet motherless, fatherless, homeless, helpless, and hopeless. How much better is your condition than that of this poor little orphan cripple! No condition of life is above the reach of trouble; none beneath the possession of enjoyment. Envy not the lot of others, nor fret and be dissatisfied with your own. Hear a fable of *three little fishes* that dwelt in a beautiful stream. On being asked what they wished for, one said, "Wings," and when these grew he flew away so high and so far that he could not get back, sank exhausted, and breathed his last; another said, "Knowledge," and when he obtained it, became anxious and fearful, and durst not touch a fly or a worm or eat any food, lest it should contain a fatal bait, pined away and died; the third said, "I wish for nothing, but am contented with my lot," and this little fish had a long and happy life. Have you not heard of the apostle who was a prisoner for Jesus' sake, and said, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be *content*" (Phil. iv. 11)?

"There is a cross in every lot,
And an earnest need for prayer;
But a lowly heart that leans on thee
Is happy anywhere."

When a little blind girl was asked the reason of her affliction, she replied, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."

III. THE UNFORTUNATE ARE NEVER LEFT WITHOUT A FRIEND. And "a friend in need is a friend indeed." What became of Mephibosheth? He was carried beyond the river Jordan, out of the reach of the Philistines; found a home "in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar" (ch. ix. 4; xvii. 27), in the neighbourhood of Mahanaim, among the mountains of Gilead; was treated with kindness; and dwelt in a place of safety until he became a man. Only a few persons knew where he lived, or whether he were alive; and when King David heard of him, he invited him to Jerusalem, that he might show him kindness "for Jonathan's sake." Affliction appeals to our pity, and tends to call forth our sympathy and help. We should never despise the unfortunate nor mock at their misfortune; but always try to do them good. Above all, in our trouble we should *trust in God*, in whom "the fatherless findeth mercy" (Hos. xiv. 3). "When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up" (Ps. xxvii. 10).

IV. A GREAT MISFORTUNE OFTEN PROVES A GREAT BLESSING. If Mephibosheth had not been made lame by the accident of his childhood, he would have been tempted to aim at the crown, and might have rushed into ambitious and godless enterprises as others did, and perished in like manner. As it was, he spent his days in quietness and

peace. His affliction was the means of making him humble, thankful, patient, and devout. His father's property was restored to him by his father's friend; and he had an honourable place assigned to him at the royal table (ch. ix. 13). How often is an orphan taught by the loss of his father to seek his father's God! The hand of God overrules evil for good. And all earthly trouble, when endured in a right spirit, is a preparation for a heavenly home.—D.

Vers. 5—8.—(MAHANAIM.) *Assassins.* "And they brought the head of Ishbosheth unto David to Hebron" (ver. 8). 1. What useful *purpose* can the record of the atrocious deeds of such men serve? To throw light upon the condition of the age in which they occurred. To confirm inspired testimony concerning human depravity (Ps. xiv.). To exhibit the tendency of the evil principles and passions by which these men were actuated, and incite hatred and abhorrence of them. To show that the wickedness of the wicked is subject to restraint and returns upon their own heads in significant punishment. To make us grateful for our preservation from crime and from calamity; thankful for the improved condition of society, and zealous for its further advancement. 2. The crime of the two brothers, Baanah and Rechab, which has given them an infamous immortality, was *not an ordinary murder.* What their former course had been, and whether they were influenced by any other motive besides the love of gain, we know not. But in taking away the life of the head of their tribe, the ruler under whom they held their position, and in their subsequent conduct, they acted disloyally, ungratefully, deceitfully, basely. Notice their—

I. DELIBERATE TREASON. Having lost the feeling of reverence and obligation, they marked the helplessness of Ishbosheth, and resolved to take advantage of it; consulted together as to the time and means of effecting their design; "went, and came about the heat of the day," etc. (ver. 5); "and behold, the woman who kept the door of the house winnowed wheat, and she slumbered and slept. And the brothers Rechab and Baanah got through unobserved," etc. (LXX.). 1. In proportion to the duty of men to do good to others is their guilt in doing them evil. 2. Premeditated sin greatly aggravates its guilt. 3. Those whose hearts are set on crime are lured on by circumstances to its commission.

II. HEARTLESS CRUELTY. "He lay on his bed in his bed-chamber," taking his midday siesta, "and they smote him" etc. (ver. 7). Men of violence, with more than the ordinary fierceness of their tribe, they "murdered sleep, the innocent sleep," without pity and without compunction, being "past feeling;" escaped with their ghastly trophy; and "gat them away through the plain [of the Jordan] all night" to Hebron (a distance of sixty miles), knowing not that they were swiftly pursued by *nemesis* with unerring aim, and hurrying to their doom (Acts xxviii. 4).

III. HYPOCRITICAL MEANNESS. "Behold the head of Ishbosheth thine enemy," etc. (ver. 8). In order to gain the favour of David they hesitated not to blacken the character of their former master by attributing to him feelings of personal revenge; called him their lord the king; and represented their crime as an act of judgment performed by them under the sanction of Jehovah. How often do ungodly men profanely and hypocritically use the name of God when it suits their purpose; and even paint their shameful villainies as praiseworthy virtues! "Hypocrisy is the homage which vice pays to virtue."

IV. MERCENARY SELFISHNESS. Like the Amalekite (ch. i. 2), they sought, not David's welfare, but their own interest (ver. 10). Hence "their feet were swift to shed blood" (Isa. lix. 7; Rom. iii. 9—18), and "their mouth was full of deceit" (Ps. x. 3—10). "Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person" (Deut. xxvii. 26). For thirty pieces of silver Judas betrayed the Lord.

V. SELF-BLINDED MISJUDGMENT. They were probably acquainted with the manner in which Abner had been treated (ch. iii. 20) and with the impunity of his murderer; and not unnaturally supposed that whatever promoted the interests of David would be pleasing to him. The nature of the wicked is ever to measure others by themselves. Their ruling motive gives its colouring to their views of everything, and leads them to attribute to the same motive actions which are due to one entirely different. Their delusion is sometimes suddenly dispelled, and they fall into the pit which they have digged (Ps. vii. 15; xxxvii. 15). "Hell is truth discovered too late."

VI. JUSTLY DESERVED DOOM. (Ver. 12.) "David acted with strict justice in this case also, not only to prove to the people that he had neither commanded nor approved the murder, but from heartfelt abhorrence of such crimes and to keep his conscience void of offence toward God and toward man" (Keil). "Indeed, in a war of five years' continuance, which followed upon Saul's death, David never lifted up his sword against a subject; and at the end of it he punished no rebel; he remembered no offence but the murder of his rival." "Though Mephibosheth (the next avenger of blood) was lame and could not overtake them, yet God's justice followed and punished them when they little expected" (Wordsworth).—D.

Vers. 9—11.—(HEBRON.) *A good man's motto.* "As Jehovah liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity," etc. 1. An *oath*, such as David took, is properly an act of worship—a direct and solemn appeal to God as a witness, in confirmation of an assertion or of a promise or expressed obligation. There is implied an imprecation of Divine displeasure if the truth be not spoken or the engagement be not fulfilled. It was customary from ancient times (Gen. xiv. 22; xxi. 23); often enjoined in the Law (Deut. vi. 13; Exod. xxii. 10); and served important purposes (Heb. vi. 16). Nor is it absolutely prohibited under the Christian dispensation (Matt. xxvi. 63; Rom. i. 9; 2 Cor. i. 23; Phil. i. 8). "The Saviour forbids absolutely such oaths only as are hostile to the reverence that is due to God" (Tholuck, 'Serm. on the Mount;' Hodge, 'Syst. Theology,' iii. 307; Paley; Dymond, 'Essays'). 2. Baanah and Rechab virtually claimed the Divine sanction to their deed, which, they said, was an act of judgment on David's enemies, and a means of preserving his life. But David could not admit their claim, and would have no part in their crime, however it might seem to promote his interest; and (lifting up his right hand toward heaven, Deut. xxxii. 40) he appealed to the *living God*, on whom, and not on man, least of all on man's wickedness, the preservation of his life depended, in confirmation of his purpose to inflict upon them the punishment of death, which was more richly deserved by them than by one on whom he formerly inflicted it when he confessed to a similar deed. 3. His appeal, considered with reference to the principles and feelings it involved, may be regarded as a statement of the *motto of his life* and expressive of—

I. BELIEF IN THE LIVING GOD. "Living (is) Jehovah," equivalent to "as surely as Jehovah liveth" (Judg. viii. 19; Ruth iii. 13; 1 Sam. xx. 3; xxv. 34; xxix. 6; Jer. xxxviii. 16, "who has made for us this soul"). "Along with the name of God, the person swearing would at the same time designate his other attributes, his power and greatness, or whatever else of the essence of this God appeared to him at the moment of swearing of special significance" (Ewald, 'Antiquities'). "Jehovah liveth" (ch. xxii. 47; 1 Sam. xvii. 26). A godly man believes in: 1. His actual *existence* and self-originated, personal, independent life. With him "is the fountain of life" (Ps. xxxvi. 9). He "hath life in himself" (John v. 26). He "only hath immortality" (1 Tim. vi. 16). The life of all creatures he gives, sustains, or takes away as it pleases him. 2. His immediate *presence* and accurate observation of everything as it really is, every thought, word, and action; and his approbation or disapprobation of it, according to its moral character. He is "a true and faithful Witness" (Jer. xlii. 3; Isa. lxv. 16). 3. His active *intervention* in human affairs, with wisdom and might, justice and mercy. "He is the living God, and an everlasting King" (Jer. x. 10), and gives to every man his due reward (Heb. xi. 6). Faith is not merely a general persuasion of these sublime truths, but also an intense realization of them, and a personal surrender to their influence. It is "an intelligent conviction of the truth, a hearty affection for the truth, and a practical submission to the truth."

II. GRATITUDE FOR PAST DELIVERANCE. "Who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity"—an expression often on the lips of David (1 Kings i. 29; Ps. xxv. 22; xxxiv. 22; ciii. 4; cxvi. 8), and never uttered without thankfulness to God. 1. The path of even a good man is beset by many *dangers*. What a scene of peril was David's life from his youth upwards (ch. xix. 7)! 2. He traces his *deliverance* from them to the hand of God, and sees therein an evidence of his loving, constant, and distinguishing care for his "soul." 3. He is wont to cherish the *recollection* of such deliverance; and is incited thereby to "speak the praise of the Lord." Nothing is more becoming or beneficial than a thankful spirit; but it is by no means a common possession.

"Some murmur when their sky is clear
And wholly bright to view,
If one small speck of dark appear
In their great heaven of blue;
And some with thankful love are filled,
If but one streak of light,
One ray of God's good mercy, gild
The darkness of their night."

(Trench.)

III. CONSCIOUSNESS OF PRESENT RESPONSIBILITY. A good man feels that he is accountable to God; not impelled by forces over which he has no control, nor liberated from moral law; but, whilst free to act, bound by the highest motives to obey. His faith in the living God quickens his conscience, and shows him plainly the way of duty; his gratitude for past deliverance incites him to walk therein. 1. By abhorring that which is evil, and avoiding it. 2. By sincerity of heart, speaking the truth, and doing what is just and right. 3. By using the authority and power entrusted to him, not according to his own will and for selfish ends, but according to the will of God, and for his honour and the welfare of men. His motto is *Ich dien* ("I serve"). He ever lives under a sense of obligation, and finds in faithful service his strength and joy (John iv. 34). "I *must* work" (John ix. 4). "Remember now and always that life is no idle dream, but a solemn reality; based upon eternity, and encompassed by eternity. Find out your task: stand to it: the night cometh when no man can work" (Carlyle).

IV. CONFIDENCE IN FUTURE PRESERVATION. The path of peril is not yet past. But a good man looks to God rather than to men to protect him against the wrath of men and deliver him from all evil. And his confidence is strong, because of: 1. His conviction of the Divine faithfulness. "Jehovah liveth," to fulfil both his promises and his threatenings. 2. His experience of the Divine favour (see 1 Sam. xvii. 32—37). 3. His obedience to the Divine will, and express assurances of safety and of a "crown of life" to every faithful servant. "The righteous hath hope in his death." "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth" (Ps. xxxi. 5). "The foundation of David's character is a firm unshaken trust in Jehovah, a bright and most spiritual view of creation and the government of the world, a sensitive awe of the Holy One of Israel, a striving ever to be true to him, and a strong desire to return after errors and transgressions" (Ewald).—D.

Ver. 12.—(HEBRON.) *The reward of the wicked.* This book contains an account of many sudden and violent deaths (in addition to those that took place in battle) by assassination, suicide (ch. xvii. 23), the direct judgment of God (ch. vi. 7), the judicial sentence of man. Capital punishment for murder was of old deemed right and necessary and divinely sanctioned (see ch. i. 13—16). In this *execution*, we see that: 1. The *agents* by whom the purposes of God are effected (ver. 8) without his commission and from selfish motives are not entitled to the reward of faithful service, although they sometimes expect to obtain it, being turned aside by "a deceived heart." 2. The *reward* which wicked men obtain for their wickedness is the opposite of that which they expect (ver. 10). Even if they gain their immediate object, they fail to find therein the happiness they anticipated, and sooner or later suffer loss and woe. 3. The *guilt* of the crime which such men commit against a fellow-man is aggravated by his innocence and the circumstances under which the crime is committed. "A righteous person in his own house upon his bed." 4. The *authority* to which they vainly appeal in justification of their conduct surely requires their condemnation. "He will by no means clear the guilty" (Exod. xxxiv. 7). What they did as private persons to Ish-bosheth without Divine commission, David, as king and "minister of God," was commissioned to do to them, and "take them away from the land" which the Lord had given, but which they had polluted and were unworthy to enjoy. "Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men" (Ps. xxvi. 9). 5. The *example* afforded by a severe and signal punishment is sometimes necessary to maintain public justice; to manifest the evil of sin and the certainty of retribution; to deter others from wrong-doing. The hands that did the deed and the feet that "ran eagerly for reward" were cut off, and their bodies exposed to open shame.

"He that's merciful
Unto the bad is cruel to the good."

6. The *termination* of strife in a land is usually attended with melancholy circumstances. "And they took the head of Ishbosheth," etc. 7. The saddest events are often succeeded by a season of gladness (1 Chron. xii. 40) and *prosperity*, and even directly conducive to it. With the death of Ishbosheth "the whole resistance to David's power collapses;" and "thus at last, not by his own act, but through circumstances over which he had no control—allowed by him who gives liberty to each man, though he overrules the darkest deeds of the wicked for the evolving of good—David was left undisputed claimant to the throne of Israel. Faith, patience, and integrity were vindicated; the Divine promise to David had come true in the course of natural events; and all this was better far than even if Saul had voluntarily resigned his place or Abner succeeded in his plans" (Edersheim). "Thus God will make all the sins of evil men to be one day ministerial to the extension and final settlement of the universal dominion of Christ" (Wordsworth).—D.

Ver. 4.—*A lifelong affliction.* Wars inflict innumerable evils which find no place in the history of them. This verse affords an illustration. When news reached the household of Saul that he and his sons had been slain in battle, a grandson, a boy of five years, was hurriedly borne away by his nurse, and, falling, was lamed in both feet. His lameness continued throughout life, and involved him in serious disadvantages and troubles. There are many who, like Mephibosheth, are weak and suffering from childhood to death. Either inheriting weakness of constitution, or deriving it from some early attack of disease, or injured through accident or the carelessness of those in charge of them when children, they are permanently disabled more or less. With reference to such troubles, notice—

I. THE EVILS THEY INVOLVE. 1. *Sometimes constant bodily suffering.* 2. *Always many privations.* Incapacity for active *employments* and their emoluments. Yet it is wonderful how far this may be conquered. The writer knew a lady who was one of many pupils who learnt drawing from a teacher born without arms or legs, but who, by indomitable perseverance, became proficient in the art. Such affliction also involves inability to share in many *enjoyments.* 3. *Much dependence on others.* And hence liability to be neglected, ill treated, imposed upon, robbed, etc. Ziba's conduct to Mephibosheth is an instance (ch. xvi. 3, 4; xix. 24—27). 4. *Various temptations.* To despondency, spiritlessness, indolence; to discontent, murmuring, fretfulness; to resentment against those who may have occasioned the affliction; to envy of such as are free from similar trial.

II. THE DUTIES THEY IMPOSE. 1. *Trustful resignation and patience.* However they may have arisen, they are the appointment of the infinitely wise and good Father, who thereby calls for and exercises faith and submission. If active service of God be impossible, the service of patient endurance is not, and may be equally acceptable and useful. 2. *Thankfulness.* For the blessings which remain, and those of which the affliction is a channel; and for the affliction itself, as a sign of God's fatherly love and care. 3. *Watchfulness against the peculiar temptations of such a condition.* 4. *Endeavours after the good which is attainable notwithstanding, or by means of, the affliction.*

III. THE ALLEVIATIONS AND COMPENSATIONS BY WHICH THEY ARE OFTEN ATTENDED. 1. *Larger enjoyment of spiritual blessings.* If the earthly is a good deal closed by such a trouble, the heavenly is all the more open and accessible. The needs of the soul may be the more constantly felt, and their supply the more habitually sought. Reading, reflection, and prayer may be more practised. The grace of God may be more abundantly enjoyed. Constant affliction brings the Christian into fuller communion with the sufferings of Christ, and larger participation of his Spirit and realization of his love and salvation. The consolation received may outweigh the suffering. 2. Hence *a higher Christian life and more beautiful Christian character* are often attained by those who are so afflicted. They become more fully "partakers of God's holiness." 3. *Human sympathy and kindness are usually enjoyed in greater measure and continuance.* A source both of pleasure and profit. 4. Even *the power for good over others is often increased.* The increased Christian intelligence and force and beauty of character, the

patience, cheerfulness, and thankfulness displayed, move the hearts of others towards him who is their source. The habitual sufferer might often adopt St. Paul's words in 2 Cor. iv. 10—12; xii. 9, 10. His weakness may be made the occasion of the more powerful manifestation of the living energy of Christ through him for the spiritual profit of relatives and friends.

IV. How they should be regarded and treated by others. 1. *With pity and sympathy.* 2. *With practical assistance.* The weak and suffering are especially commended by our Lord to the care and kindness of the strong. His example enforces his words. To minister consolation, and, where necessary and practicable, material assistance, blesses him that gives as well as him that receives. The lifelong affliction of one may thus become a lifelong discipline and blessing to his benefactors. But to treat the feeble with hardness or contempt, or to take advantage of their weakness for our own selfish purposes, is peculiarly base, and will not be forgotten by him who will condemn, in the day of judgment, even the *neglect* of the poor and suffering (Matt. xxv. 41—46).

Finally: 1. *If we enjoy freedom from lifelong afflictions, or at least serious ones* (for few, perhaps, are quite free from them), *thankfulness should impel us to care the more for those who are burdened with them;* and if we suffer from them, our sympathies should be the keener with fellow-sufferers, and such help as we can render be all the more cheerfully given. 2. *Let those who suffer much and long in this life make sure that their life hereafter shall be free from suffering,* and that their afflictions shall work out for them an eternal greater glory (2 Cor. iv. 17). These unspeakable blessings are the portion of those who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, receive his teaching, and follow his directions.—G. W.

Ver. 9.—*Redemption from all adversity.* "As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity." An expansion of the form of oath common with the Hebrews, "As the Lord liveth." By adding the words, "who hath redeemed," etc., David reminded himself of the goodness of God to him, and kept alive and expressed his gratitude. The same form of oath as used by him occurs in 1 Kings i. 29 (where the words of the original are precisely the same). Occurring thus at the beginning and the end of his reign, we may reasonably conclude that it was employed in the intervening years, reminding him, in the height of his prosperity and power, of the days of adversity which had preceded them, and of him who had rescued and exalted him. This representation of God would probably be more helpful to the piety of David than grander but more general conceptions of him. So shall we find it well to include in our thought of God what he has been to us and done for us individually (comp. Gen. xlviii. 15, 16). As to the words: "redeemed" is not to be taken here in the signification suggested by its etymology, "bought back," "ransomed," but simply "delivered." The use of the words, "my soul," must not lead us to suppose that David is thinking of the "redemption of the soul" in the spiritual sense. He refers to his deliverance from the perils, hardships, and anxieties of his previous life, through the enmity of Saul and his attempts to destroy him. The phrase is substantially equivalent to "me," though it may suggest that the seat of all the "distress" that attends adversity is the soul. The words are suitable to be used—

I. In view of actual deliverance from varied or prolonged troubles. As David used them. They recognize and call to mind: 1. *The extent of the deliverance.* "From *all* adversity." The reference is to the past. David did not mean that he had done with adversity. Nor can we in this world use the words in that sense; but as from time to time troubles arise out of which we are delivered, be they adversities in the ordinary sense, or troubles of the soul strictly (temptations, conflicts, falls, pangs of remorse, fears, insensibility, gloom), let us mark and record our deliverance. 2. *The Deliverer.* "The Lord," Jehovah, the God who "liveth." Not self, not men, but God. David had employed his own great powers of thought and action, and had been well served by human helpers, but he does not ascribe his deliverance to the one or the other, but to God. He well knew that all power for self-help, and all human helpers, are the gift of God; that they are effectual through his working with them; and that apart from them God operates in ways transcendental and inexplicable. The greatness and variety of his troubles, the imminence of his perils, the wondrous special

incidents which had contributed to his deliverance, all rendered conspicuous the hand of God. To him, therefore, he gave the glory. Most of our lives will, if carefully reviewed, furnish similar proofs of the operation of the living God, not merely of matter and dead laws, and of friends. And we should gratefully recognize and confess his goodness. Hence will spring humility, continuance and increase of thankfulness, and also confidence and hope in respect to future adversities (see 2 Cor. i. 10; 2 Tim. iv. 17, 18).

II. IN VIEW OF THE REDEMPTION FROM ALL EVIL EFFECTED FOR US BY OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. The word "redeem" will in this case have the full signification of "ransom by payment of a price." We have "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." In redeeming us from our sins, he redeemed us from all kinds and degrees of evil. All who accept him as their Redeemer and Lord are thus assured of complete deliverance from all that now distresses them, and from all in the future world that would have distressed them but for his redeeming work; and, in the certainty that the purposes of his death will be accomplished, may speak of their deliverance as already effected. Nor can they fail to remember with unutterable thankfulness and perpetual thanksgiving the redemption thus wrought for them.

III. BY THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED FINAL AND COMPLETE DELIVERANCE FROM ALL THE EVILS OF THIS PRESENT WORLD. What a blessed thing it will be to look back on all the evils of this present state, including death itself, as actually *past!* and to look forward to an eternity of complete freedom from evil, of full enjoyment of good! No sin, no want, no sickness, no pain, no sorrow, no peril; but perfect peace, perfect service of God, perfect communion with him, "fulness of joy" and "pleasures for evermore" (Ps. xvi. 11; Rev. vii. 14—17; xxi. 4). And evermore will the "redeemed from the earth" be mindful of their Deliverer, and unite in praise of God and the Lamb. In view of this glorious and complete redemption: 1. Let Christians be patient and thankful while enduring the adversities which belong to their condition on earth. 2. Take heed lest, redemption being effected, you fail to attain to its actual experience. To reject Christ is to reject deliverance from death and misery.—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1.—**Then came all the tribes of Israel.** As Ishbosheth reigned only two years, and David's reign at Hebron lasted for seven years and a half, there is an interval of more than five years to be accounted for; and we have given reason for believing (see note on ch. ii. 10) that it must be placed after the death of Ishbosheth. The treacherous murder of Abner, and the tragic fate of Ishbosheth following upon it so rapidly, must have filled all Israel with horror, and made them look upon David as "a bloody man" (ch. xvi. 8). But gradually his innocence became clear to all except inveterate partisans, and as the prejudice against him passed away, the evident advantage of union under so able a ruler would force itself upon their attention, and their decision would be hastened by the advantage which the Philistines would be sure to take of their anarchy. How much they had profited by it we gather from the haste with which they endeavoured to crush David's kingdom. The enormous gathering at Hebron to anoint David king proves not merely the unanimity of the tribes, but that his election was the result of long preparation and arrangement. We have fuller details of it in 1 Chron. xii. 23—40, where we learn that the people assembled in large numbers, the total being computed in the 'Speaker's Commentary' at 348,222; and it is remarkable that of this vast array only sixteen thousand nine hundred came from the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin, which were situated in the neighbourhood of Hebron. On the other hand, the two and a half trans-Jordanic tribes sent no less than a hundred and twenty thousand men, and the three unimportant tribes of Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali mustered a hundred and eighteen thousand; while Issachar was content to send only two hundred, who were all, however, "men that had understanding . . . and their brethren were at their commandment." These words suggest the probable explanation of the disparity in the numbers, which to many seems so strange that they think they must be corrupt. Each tribe settled for itself in what way it would be represented, and the more distant sent a large proportion of their men of military age on what would be an enjoyable holiday. As they spent three days at Hebron, the expedition would

occupy, even for those most remote, little more than a week; and it was well worth the while of the tribes thus to come together. It made them feel the value of unity, and gave them a knowledge of their strength. Their tribal independence during the time of the judges had made them too weak even to maintain their liberty; but now, welded by the kingly power into a nation, they soon, not only won freedom for themselves, but placed their yoke upon the shoulders of their neighbours. As for the difficulty of supplying them with food, all would bring victuals from home; and the neighbouring tribes showed great hospitality. Especially we read that those who were nigh unto Hebron, "even as far as Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, brought bread on asses, and on camels, and on mules, and on oxen, victual of meal, cakes of figs, and clusters of raisins, and wine, and oil, and oxen, and sheep in abundance: for there was joy in Israel" (1 Chron. xii. 40). It was a grand national festival, joyously kept because the people saw in the election of David an end to all their troubles; and so vast a gathering overbore all opposition, and gave both to them and their king the consciousness of their might. But while we find in the Book of Chronicles the account of this mighty multitude, it is here (ver. 3) expressly said that it was the elders who made a league with David, and anointed him king. The people by their presence testified their joyful assent to what was done; but David's election was made legitimate by the decision of the constituted authorities in each tribe. It would be most interesting to know the various steps taken, and how the agitation grew and spread from tribe to tribe, until all hesitation and resistance were overcome. But the object of this book is to show us the great qualities, the sin, the repentance, and the punishment of the man who added to the old routine of sacrifice bright services of song, and who was the author of that book of devotion which to this day best expresses the feelings of the heart, as well in the joys as in the sorrows of life. The manner of his election throws no light upon his character, and is passed over. Enough to know that in those five years after Ishbosheth's murder David won the approval of all Israel, and that his appointment to the kingdom was by the free choice of the tribes, acting in a legitimate manner, and sending each their elders to Hebron to notify to David their consent; and that their decision was ratified by this joyful gathering of a mighty multitude from all parts of the land. Three reasons are given by the elders for David's election, and we may be sure that they represent the arguments used in their popular assemblies. The first, that they were David's bone and flesh. In other words, the tribes were all of one race, and united by the closest ties of relationship. For the descendants of a common ancestor to be at war with one another was both morally and politically wrong. The second, that David had been their actual leader in war even in Saul's time. His personal qualities, therefore, justified their choice of him to be their deliverer from the evils which had overwhelmed the land after the disastrous defeat at Gilboa, when Saul had no longer the aid of David's presence. The third, that Jehovah had by the mouth of his prophet given the throne to David. It is remarkable that the elders place this last. Their view probably was that the Divine command must be proved by outward circumstances, that so reason might confirm faith. So Saul's public appointment by Samuel was ratified by the people only after he had shown himself worthy to be a king by the defeat of the Ammonites.

Ver. 2.—**Thou shalt feed.** In biblical language the pastoral office is that of the civil and not of the spiritual ruler. Captain; Hebrew, *nagid*, prince; so the Revised Version (and see note on 1 Sam. ix. 16). The word refers not to military matters, but to the civil administration. David had proved himself a competent leader in war when Saul was king. What Jehovah now gives is the government of Israel in time of peace. The Authorized Version renders "captain" from not perceiving that the Divine promise ensured to David far more than a military chieftainship.

Ver. 3.—**A league.** The early kings of Israel were not invested with despotic power. Thus, on Saul's appointment, "Samuel wrote in a book the manner of the kingdom" (1 Sam. x. 25, made most emphatic in the Revised Version by the note in the margin, that the Hebrew is "the book"). The revolt against Rehoboam was the result of the too great extension of the royal power in the days of Solomon (1 Kings xii. 4). Though subsequently the kings seemed to have retained their supremacy, yet when the good and patriotic Jehoiada restored the family of David to the throne, he reverted to the old ways, and "made a covenant between the king and the people" (2 Kings xi. 17). Besides personal rights, the tribes, accustomed to their own leaders, and unused to yield obedience to a central authority, would certainly stipulate for a large measure of tribal independence, and the management of local matters by themselves. **They anointed David king.** This was the public ratification of Samuel's anointing, and by it David became *de facto*, as well as *de jure*, king. The prophets could

not give any right over the people without the consent of the people themselves. But all religious men would see in the Divine command an obligation upon their conscience to accept as their king the man whom the prophet had anointed; and Saul acted in an irreligious manner in seeking to frustrate God's will. And this impiety culminated in his murder of the priests at Nob, which was the open avowal that he would trample all scruples of conscience underfoot.

Ver. 4.—**David was thirty years old.** As David was probably about eighteen or nineteen years of age at the time of his combat with Goliath, the events recorded in 1 Sam. xvii.—xxxi. must have occupied about ten or eleven years.

Ver. 6.—**The king and his men went to Jerusalem.** This expedition took place immediately after David's coronation, and probably he was moved to it by the presence of so large a number of the warriors of Israel. He had long foreseen the arrival of the time when he would be king of all the tribes, and must have debated in his mind the problem of his future capital. He could not remain in Hebron, as it was too far to the south, nor would haughty tribes such as Ephraim have consented to be merged into Judah. On the other hand, he could not move far away, as Judah was his main strength. But living in its neighbourhood, he must often have noticed the remarkable position of the city of Jebus, and admired its rock-girt strength (Ps. xlviii. 2). Though the Jebusites had been conquered by Joshua (Josh. xi. 3), and Jerusalem captured (Judg. i. 8), yet, as the children of Judah did not occupy it, but "set the city on fire," it seems to have been soon repeopled by its old inhabitants, who there maintained their independence, and, owing to the impregnable nature of its site, could not be treated as Saul treated the Gibeonite inhabitants of Beeroth. Even subsequently, the Jebusite chief who possessed what probably was Mount Moriah, still bore the titular rank of king; for the words in ch. xxiv. 23 literally are, "All this did Araunah the king give unto the king." The explanation of this long independence of the Jebusites is to be found not only in the feebleness of the tribes during the troubled times of the judges, but even more in the conformation of the site of their stronghold. Jerusalem is situated on the edge of the precipitous wall which forms the western boundary of the valley of the Jordan, and occupies a promontory, on three sides of which are ravines so abrupt and steep that, were it not for their vast depth, they might seem to have been the work of man. On the north side alone it is open to attack, but even there, when the besieger has obtained an entrance, he finds the city divided by another ravine into two parts; whereof the western portion contains the strong citadel of Mount Zion, while the eastern and smaller portion contains the less elevated mountain of Moriah. Though actually raised above the sea-level several hundred feet less than Hebron, it seems to the eye more emphatically a mountain-city; and being well-nigh encircled by the valleys of Ben-Hinnom and Jehoshaphat, it seems to sit enthroned above the Jordan valley, compared with which it enjoys a cool and refreshing climate. To its inhabitants it was "beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth" (Ps. xlviii. 2, Revised Version); to the exiles it was "the city of God," to which their hearts ever turned; to us Christians it is the type of Christ's Church on earth, and of his kingdom in heaven. It was an act worthy of David's genius to foresee the great future of the place, and to inaugurate his kingdom by its capture. We gather from Ezek. xvi. 45 that at the time when the Hittites were the dominant race in Syria, Jerusalem was one of their fortresses. The name is a dual, literally *Yerushalaïm*, and probably the town was so called because it consisted of two parts—the upper and the lower city. *Shalaïm* means the "two Salems," thus carrying our minds back to the city of Melchizedek (Gen. xiv. 18). In Ps. lxxvi. 2 Salem is apparently contrasted with Zion, and so would be the lower town, containing Mount Moriah. Of the other part of the word, *Yeru*, numerous derivations are given, of which the only probable one is that which connects it with "Yehovah-yireh"—"God will see to it," the name given to the spot where Abraham on this mountain offered a vicarious sacrifice for his son. We must, however, bear in mind that towns retain the names which they bore in primitive times, and that the name of a Hittite fortress belongs probably to the language of that people. **Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither.** These words have been a sore puzzle to commentators, and many strange explanations have been given. Rashi says that the *blind* meant Isaac, and the *lame* Jacob, and that the words referred to an old compact by which Abraham gave Jerusalem to the Jebusites, and that Isaac and Jacob had confirmed this agreement. Unless, then, David was prepared to violate this covenant, he must abstain from the attack. We get no help from 1 Chron. xi. 5, as the words are there omitted, probably because they were not supposed to have any important meaning. The Orientals delighted in dark sayings, and possibly there was here some local reference which the people of Jerusalem would understand, but which is

lost for us. But evidently it was a boastful defiance, and may mean that the Jebusites pretended that it would be enough to post only their feeblest men, the blind and the lame, for defence, and that David would try in vain to break through them. **Thinking**; Hebrew, *to say*; answering to our phrase "that is." It should be translated, "meaning."

Ver. 7.—**The stronghold of Zion: the same is the city of David.** Zion was the hill on the south-western side of the city; but we learn from ver. 9 that the Jebusites had not occupied the whole of it, but a part only, which was their *stronghold*, round which there would be scattered dwellings, as the whole tribe dwelt there. The total area of the hill-top was about sixty acres, and it was now quickly covered with houses, and called "the city of David," after its captor. The view of Dr. Birch and others, that the stronghold of Zion was Ophel, is rendered untenable by the fact that this southern tongue of Mount Moriah is completely commanded by other parts of the hill. According to Gesenius, *Zion* means "sunny;" others render it "the dry hill;" others, "lofty;" and Fürst, "the castle." None of these derivations is of any real value, as the word is probably Hittite.

Ver. 8.—**Whosoever getteth up to the gutter.** The word rendered "gutter" occurs elsewhere only in Ps. xlii. 7, where it is translated "waterspout." Josephus thinks that it was an underground passage or drain. Ewald argues that it was a precipice, and others that it was a dent or hollow in the rocky face of the ravine, which David had noticed and thought practicable. The view of Josephus, suggested to him probably by his knowledge of the way in which the site of Jerusalem is honeycombed by tunnels, has been wonderfully confirmed by the discoveries made by Sir C. Warren ('Recovery of Jerusalem,' pp. 240, *sqq.*). At the northern end of the Pool of Siloam he found an arched passage gradually narrowing down from a considerable height, till finally there was a passage of only fourteen inches, and as there was a depth of ten inches of water, there were left but four inches of space for breathing. But through this his men struggled, and, at the end of four hours' labour, they reached the light of day at the spring called the Virgin's Fount. Beginning here on a subsequent day, they went along a passage sixty-seven feet in length, and came to a perpendicular shaft leading up through the solid stone of the hill; and, having scaled this, they next came upon a sloping passage, which finally conducted them to a spot on the hill of Ophel within the fortifications. Now, there are reasons for believing that this passage is older than the wall built by Solomon, and through it, or some such tunnel, Joab and a few men may have worked their way, and so have effected an entrance into the city, which otherwise was impregnable. It was probably the entrance near the Virgin's Fountain which they had observed, and David's words mean, "Whoever will undertake this dangerous enterprise, let him try this underground passage, and when he has entered the fortifications by its means, let him smite the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul," because of the boast of the Jebusites, that their cripples were a match for his heroes. It must be noticed, however, that the K'tib, or written text, has "who hate David's soul;" and as this is what the Jewish Massorites found in the manuscripts, it has more authority than their correction. These Jebusites had probably, in their boastful insult, spoken of David with contempt, and even said, like Goliath, that they would give his flesh to the vultures (1 Sam. xvii. 44). We learn from 1 Chron. xi. 6 that David promised the office of commander of the host to the man who undertook this exploit; and when Joab had volunteered and succeeded, he regained thereby the post which he had forfeited by the murder of Abner. **The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.** The proverb is one of contempt for these poor cripples, and forbids the exercise of hospitality to them. Such people, if they took to mendicancy, were to meet with refusal, though at their own homes they were fit objects of charity. This way of describing tramps as "the blind and lame" arose, we are here told, from this Jebusite taunt.

Ver. 9.—**David dwelt in the fort.** It was the stronghold or citadel of Zion which David took for his abode; but as he needed space for the dwellings of his mighty men, and for those who would soon flock for trade and security to the capital, David proceeded to fortify the whole of the summit. His works began from "the Millo," rendered "the citadel" by the LXX. Many, deriving the name from a Hebrew root signifying "to fill," think that it was a mound, but Nature had herself supplied fit heights for defence, and it is evident that the place was called "the Millo" when David captured the city. We find "Beth-Millo" also in Judg. ix. 6, 20, where it signifies those who held the citadel of Shechem; and this Millo at Jerusalem was without doubt the old Jebusite keep, and the explanation of its name must be sought in the Jebusite language. As it formed one of the strongest defences of the city, it was rebuilt by Solomon (1 Kings ix. 24; xi. 27), and repaired by Hezekiah (2 Chron. xxxii. 5) in preparation for the Assyrian

attack. Probably it stood at a corner, whence the phrase, "round about from the Millo and inward," or, as it is expressed in 1 Chron. xi. 8, "from the Millo inward," that is, starting from the Millo, the walls enclosed the space behind it. In the parallel place (1 Chron. xi. 8) we find an interesting addition to the narrative, namely, that "Joab repaired the rest of the city." It appears from this that the Jebusites had occupied a good deal of the ground with their habitations, though probably the number of the tribe was not great; or possibly there remained old buildings which were the remains of the Hittite city, and which, being of massive construction, were easily made fit once again for human habitation. We see also proof of Joab's great ability in peace as well as in war. He it was who had captured the stronghold, and it was now his office to arrange the streets and plan of the city, and to assign dwellings to David's mighty men. This would be a work sure to cause jealousy and heart-burnings, and no one but Joab, their old commander, could have satisfied them. We find that he assigned to one of them, Uriah the Hittite, a space of ground for a dwelling close to the royal palace. We may suppose, then, that David was now fully reconciled to the "hard sons of Zeruiah" (ch. iii. 39), and in the stern wars which followed David's election, he needed and had the full benefit of their vigour and ability.

Ver. 10.—**David went on, and grew great.** This is the Hebrew phrase for "David grew greater and greater." In this and the six following verses (10—16) we have a summary of David's reign, telling us how he increased in prosperity because of the blessing of "Jehovah God of hosts." The birth of Solomon even is recorded in it, though it took place long afterwards. The insertion in this summary of Hiram's acknowledgment of David proves that this event made a great impression upon the minds of the people.

Ver. 11.—**Hiram King of Tyre.** At first sight it seems as if the Hiram who so greatly aided Solomon in the building of the temple was the same person as David's friend (1 Kings v. 10; 2 Chron. ii. 3), but this identification is disproved by the express statement in 2 Chron. ii. 13, and by the chronology. For granting that this account of Hiram's embassy occurs in a general summary, yet David would not long defer the erection of a palace, and in the history of Bathsheba we find, as a matter of fact, that it was then already built (ch. xi. 2). But as Solomon was grown to manhood at his father's death, David's sin must have been committed not more than nine or ten years after he became king of all Israel. Now, we are told by Josephus ('Contr. Apion,' i. 18), on the authority of Menander of Ephesus, that Hiram reigned in all thirty years. But in 1 Kings ix. 10—13 we have an account of a transaction with Hiram in Solomon's twentieth year. In another place ('Ant.,' viii. 3. 1) Josephus tells us that Hiram had been King of Tyre eleven years when Solomon, in the fourth year of his reign, began the building of the temple. He would thus have been a contemporary of David for only the last seven or eight years of his reign. But the history of this embassy is given as a proof of David's establishment in his kingdom, and cannot therefore be referred to so late a period in his lifetime, when it would have lost its interest. The improbability of two successive kings having the same name is not, after all, so very great, especially as we do not know what the word *Hiram*, or *Haram*, exactly means. Nor is Menander's statement conclusive against it, where he says that Hiram's father was named Abibal—"Baal is my father." This would probably be an official name, borne by Hiram as the defender of the national religion, or as a priest-king. There is, therefore, no real reason for rejecting the statement in 2 Chron. ii. 13 that Hiram, or as he is there called Huram, David's friend, was the father of the Huram who was Solomon's ally. **Cedar trees.** Cedar wood was greatly valued both for its fragrance and durability, owing to the resin which it contains preserving it from the attacks of insects. Its colour also is soft and pleasing to the eye, as may be seen in the Jerusalem Chamber in Westminster Abbey, the panels of which are of cedar. It did not grow in the Antilibanus, or eastern part of Lebanon, which belonged to Israel, but only in the western part, which belonged to Tyre. Cedar from the time of David became the favourite material at Jerusalem for the interior of houses (Jer. xxii. 14), and Isaiah charges the people of Samaria with pride for not being content with the native sycomores which had satisfied their fathers, but substituting for it this costly foreign timber (Isa. ix. 10). **Carpenters and masons.** The necessity of importing "workers of wood, and workers of stone for walls," as the words literally mean, proves how miserable was the social state of Israel in David's time. Though they had been slaves in Egypt, yet at the Exodus the Israelites had men capable of working in the precious metals and jewellery, in weaving and embroidery, in wood-carving, and even in the cutting of gems (Exod. xxxv. 30—35). During the long anarchy of the judges they had degenerated into a race of agricultural drudges, whom the

Philistines had debarred from the use of even the simplest tools (1 Sam. xiii. 19). Possibly in Saul's time there was a faint restoration of the arts of civilized life (ch. i. 24); but when we find Joab killing Absalom, not with darts, but with pointed stakes (ch. xviii. 14), the weapons probably of most of the foot-soldiers, we see that not much had been done even then in metallurgy; and here earlier in his reign David has to send to Tyre for men who could saw a plank or build a wall. When, then, we call to mind the high state of culture and the magnificence of Solomon's reign, we can form some idea of the vigour with which David raised his subjects from a state of semi-barbarism.

Ver. 12.—**And David perceived.** We may well believe that David had many seasons of despondency and misgiving after he became king. His subjects were brave and energetic, but turbulent, unwilling to obey, and but half-civilized. His election had put an end to civil war at home, but only to arouse the hatred of the enemies who had long oppressed them. The tragical fate, too, of Saul, who, after so many heroic struggles, had seen the earlier glories of his reign fade away, and had sought deliverance from his misery by suicide; all this must have often depressed his spirits. But gradually his fears passed away; and when he had twice defeated the Philistines, and been able to establish his rule, and with it some degree of orderly government throughout the twelve tribes, David saw in all this, and in the embassies from foreign nations, the proof, not of his own ability, but of Jehovah's purpose to exalt **his kingdom for his people Israel's sake.** In this David was still a man after God's own heart, in that he felt himself to be only an instrument for the doing, not his own will, but the purpose of his Divine Master.

Ver. 13.—**David took him more concubines.** Thus with increase of power came also the increased gratification of David's weakness and sin. Well for him would it have been if, like Saul, he had been content with one wife. But this enlargement of his harem was gradual, and the list includes all the sons born at Jerusalem. Of these four, namely, Shammuah, Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon, were his children by Bathsheba (see 1 Chron. iii. 5, where the names are differently spelt). Besides a variation in the spelling, two sons are mentioned in Chronicles, Nogah and an earlier Eliphelet, whose names are not given here, perhaps because they died young. From 1 Chron. iii. 9 we learn that only the names of the sons of wives are given in these tables.

Ver. 17.—**But when the Philistines heard.** After the battle of Gilboa the Philistines became the virtual rulers of much of the country west of the Jordan, and probably even David and Judah paid them tribute. On its eastern bank, though Abner kept them from molesting Ishbosheth's kingdom, yet the rule of Saul's house in Ephraim and Benjamin must have been nominal only, and the Philistines would have seen him with pleasure wasting his strength in civil war. After Ishbosheth's death they had tightened their grasp over the central districts of Palestine, though probably content with exacting tribute. They must now have seen with displeasure the consolidation of the tribes under one able ruler. Even in their divided state, the natural strength of the country and the bravery of the people had made it a task too great for the Philistine power entirely to crush Israel's independence. But if they could destroy David before he had had time to establish himself in his kingdom, they would at least prolong indefinitely that feebleness of Israel which had made it so long subject to their dominion. Of this supremacy the Philistines have handed down a token for ever in giving to the whole country the name of Palestine, the Philistines' land. **David . . . went down to the hold.** Many commentators identify *the hold* with the cave of Adullam, and certainly the account of the brave deed of three of David's heroes, in breaking through the Philistine garrison of Bethlehem to bring him water thence, gives great probability to this view. For we read there that "the Philistines were encamped in the valley of Rephaim, and that David was then in the hold" (ch. xxiii. 13, 14, where note that the word "hold" has the definite article). There are, however, many difficulties connected with this view; for the cave of Adullam was in the valley of Elah, on the road from Hebron to Philistia (1 Sam. xxii. 1), but the valley of Rephaim is close to Jerusalem (Josh. xv. 8), abutting, in fact, upon the valley of Ben-Hinnom. Baal-Perazim also is in the same neighbourhood, being the rocky height which forms the border of Ben-Hinnom, and bounds the valley of Rephaim on the north. Still, the passage in ch. xxiii. 13, 14 seems too precise to be lightly set aside, and we must suppose, therefore, that the Philistines, alarmed by the gathering of half a million of men and women at Hebron, sent messengers throughout their country to assemble their warriors. It was the weakness of ancient warfare that its vast hosts of people melted away as rapidly as they had gathered. For provisions were soon spent, and the men had to return to their farms and their cattle. Thus David, having used some of that large concourse of strong men for the capture of Jerusalem, was left immediately afterwards

with no other protection than that of his "mighty men." Saul had endeavoured to have always round him three thousand trained men (1 Sam. xiii. 2), and David subsequently had probably quite as many (ch. xv. 18); but at this early stage he had probably not many more than he had brought with him from Ziklag to Hebron. He could not, therefore, make head against the Philistines coming with all the militia of their land; but, leaving his wives and the wives of his mighty men in the Jebusite stronghold of Jerusalem, we may well believe that he sped away to gather the warriors of Israel. But what seems strange is that he should have gone to the rear of the Philistines, especially as they had come in such vast numbers as to occupy the whole country—a garrison, for instance, being posted at Bethlehem, and doubtless at other fit spots. Still, this country was well known to David, and he could gather there old friends, whose bravery he had often tried before. And while thus waiting for the mustering of such as God would move to help him, in deep distress at so terrible a reversal following so quickly upon his exaltation, a strange longing for water from the well of his native town seized him. He was suffering apparently from fever of body as well as from distress of mind, and soon there was relief from both. For three of his heroes heard the words burst from his parched lips, and, hastening to Bethlehem, broke through the Philistine garrison, and filled a waterskin from the well at the gate of the city. Such an act naturally made a great impression upon David. What room was there for despair when he had such men around him? Pouring out, then, the water as a drink offering to Jehovah, his heart was now filled with hope, and inquiring of the Lord whether he might attack the Philistines, he received the assurance which he had already gathered from the exploit of his heroes, that God would deliver them into his hand.

Ver. 18.—**The valley of Rephaim.** This fruitful valley (Isa. xvii. 5) is about three miles in length, and two in breadth. Occupying it in vast numbers, the Philistines sent out bodies of men to plunder the whole country, while a sufficient force watched Jerusalem, intending to take it by famine. The Rephaim were an aboriginal race, first mentioned in Gen. xiv. 5, and evidently in early times very widely spread in Palestine. The idea that they were giants has no more to be said in its favour than that they were ghosts—the meaning of the word in Isa. xxvi. 14. 19. No sensible philologist will endeavour to explain the names of these primitive races and of their towns by Hebrew roots, though there has been too much of this craze in past times. The Rephaim seem, however, to have been physically a well-developed people, and several races of Canaan of great stature are described in Deut. ii. 11 as having belonged to them, as did Og, who was a man of extraordinary dimensions (Deut. iii. 11).

Ver. 20.—**Baal-Perazim**; literally, *possessor of breaches*, that is, the place where the attack burst forth. It is called Mount Perazim, "the hill of breaches," in Ps. xxviii. 21, and as we have seen, it was the rocky height on the north of the valley of Rephaim. David must, therefore, have stolen round the army of the Philistines, creeping, probably by night, up to this ridge of Ben-Hinnom, and thence at the dawn of day have rushed down upon the camp. And his onset was sudden and irresistible, like the rush of the waters of some mountain lake when, swollen with rains, it bursts through the opposing dam, and carries hasty destruction to everything that lies in its way.

Ver. 21.—**They left their images.** This is a further proof of the suddenness of the attack, and the completeness of the Philistine discomfiture. For *images* we find "gods" in the parallel place in 1 Chron. xiv. 12, and the word used here is rendered "idols" in 1 Sam. xxxi. 9. As the Philistines supposed that these images of their deities would ensure their victory, they would set great store by them, as the Israelites did by the ark (1 Sam. iv. 4), and the French by the oriflamme. Their capture, therefore, was a feat as great as the winning of the eagle of a Roman legion. **David and his men burned them**; Hebrew, *took them away*. This translation of the Authorized Version, made to force the words into verbal agreement with 1 Chron. xiv. 12, is utterly indefensible; and, like most wrong things, it is absurd. The Bible cannot be improved by frauds, and really the two narratives complete one another. David and his men carried off these images as trophies, just as the Philistines carried off the ark (1 Sam. iv. 11). But the ark proved mightier than the Philistine gods, and in terror the people restored it to Israel. But no avenging hand interfered to rescue these gods, and, after being paraded in triumph, they were made into a bonfire.

Ver. 22.—**The Philistines came up yet again.** Their first defeat had probably not been accompanied by much slaughter; for David's men were few in number, though brave as lions. Retreating then to some distance, the Philistines called in their garrisons, and waited also for reinforcements from home, and then advanced again to the same spot. And as David was prepared to attack them in front, he also must now

have gathered round him the chivalry of Israel.

Ver. 23.—**Thou shalt not go up.** The attack in front is forbidden, and the answer shows that the priest with the ephod did more than give a mere affirmative or negative reply. For David receives full instructions. Taking advantage of the valleys, he is to creep round into the rear of the Philistines, and approach them under cover of a thicket of baca trees. **Mulberry trees;** Hebrew, *baca trees.* This suggests the idea that David's place of attack was the Baca valley (Ps. lxxxiv. 6), and that there was such a valley, though this is not certain. For the Revised Version translates "valley of weeping," concluding that *baca* is not there a proper name. By baca trees the LXX. and Vulgate understand "pear trees," but as *bacah* means "to weep," it is probably some balsamic shrub, from which a resin exudes. The Revised Version puts here in the margin, "balsam trees." Dr. Tristram thinks it was a sort of aspen, but the authority of the Vulgate is great in such matters, as Jerome obtained his information in Palestine itself.

Ver. 24.—**The sound of a going;** Hebrew, *a marching.* Under the cover of this thicket David was to wait until he heard the sound as of the regular tramp of an army in the tops of the baca trees. It would be in the morning that the wind would shake the tree-tops, but the sound was to be something more than the soft whispers of a gentle breeze. A gale was to put them into sudden motion, and then the soldiers would know that their Jehovah had gone forth to battle, and David must immediately *bestir* himself. The enthusiasm of his men must not cool down, but as soon as the wind rustled he must charge the enemy, and his warriors, feeling that they were going with the host of God, would break down all resistance by their impetuous onset.

Ver. 25.—**From Geba until thou come to Gazer.** In 1 Chron. xiv. 16 "Gibeon" is substituted for "Geba," and it is one of those corrections which a commentator is inclined to adopt, because it makes all things easy. For Gibeon lay directly on the road from the Rephaim valley towards Gazer, and the armies must have passed it in the fight. But if "Geba" be the right reading here, then the battle must have been most sternly contested. For it is the "Gibeah of Benjamin," Hebrew, "Geba of Benjamin," described in 1 Sam. xiii. 16. The Philistines had a garrison there in Saul's time (1 Sam. xiii. 3), and had probably again occupied it as a military post after their victory at Gilboa. To reach it the line of retreat would go nine miles northward over difficult ground; but this was not disadvantageous to a retreating army as long as it remained unbroken, and the Philistines would expect to be able to make a successful defence at a strong citadel like Geba, held by a garrison of their own troops. But when driven by David's "mighty men" from this fortified hill, being hemmed in by the defile of Michmash on the east, they would have no choice but to hurry down the valleys to the west, and, still passing by Gibeon, so flee to Gazer. Thus the reading "Geba" implies a stout and long resistance ending in a most complete victory. And confessedly this was a decisive battle, fought with larger forces, and causing far larger loss to the Philistines than that at Baal-Perazim, where, attacked by only a few men, they were seized with panic, and saved themselves by a headlong flight. *Gazer* lay upon the border of Ephraim, and was one of the royal cities of the Canaanites, and so strong that it was left in the hands of its old possessors (Josh. xvi. 3, 10; Judg. i. 19). Subsequently Solomon fortified it (1 Kings ix. 17), as being the key of the defiles which led from Ekron and the plain of Philistia up to Jerusalem. We also find it mentioned as an important military post in the days of the Maccabees (1 Macc. ix. 52). The pursuit would naturally stop here, as the fugitives would now be in their own country, and succour would be close at hand. Probably, too, the Canaanites who held the fortress were friendly to them, and gave them shelter.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—The facts are: 1. The tribes of Israel come to Hebron to formally acknowledge David as rightful king. 2. They assign three reasons for their united action. (1) That David was of their kindred. (2) That he had rendered valuable services in times of need. (3) That God had expressed his will. 3. A solemn league being made between David and the tribes, they anoint him king over Israel. 4. The question of the crown being settled, David applies himself to the acquisition of Jerusalem as the seat of government. 5. Being proudly defied by the Jebusites, on account of the strength of their position, he challenges his officers to take the lead in the subjugation of the fortress. 6. Acquiring possession, he calls the place after his

name, and extends the fortifications. 7. The continued favour of God ensures to him great prosperity.

The triumph of patient fidelity. The first three verses bring into view the realization of David's most cherished desires, the ripe consummation of all his wearying toils and cares. The goal on which Samuel had directed his eye (1 Sam. x. 1; xvi. 1—13) was now attained. The wisdom of his self-restraint when persecuted, and of his trusting more to Divine care than to human weapons, was now fully justified. The historian places together the human popular view of the situation, and the Divine purpose that had to be effected. The being bone of their bone, and the great services rendered to Israel in days of trial, were the natural and political facts which warranted the great gathering at Hebron on that day; and the treasured-up saying of the Lord that this very man should feed his people and be their captain, was the Divine declaration now seen by them to harmonize with the natural and political facts. There is here the language of expediency, and a kind of apology for past opposition to David; for the fact that God had so spoken ought from the first to have prevented all controversy and rendered the nation one in enthusiasm for the divinely chosen man. The acceptance of the authority of the declaration is not absolute, but because they now see what they profess not hitherto to have seen—that by nature and services he is fit to be the shepherd and captain of Israel.

I. GOD'S APPOINTMENTS ARE BASED ON NATURAL PRINCIPLES. The selection of David out of the sons of Jesse was not a mere arbitrary act warranted by no considerations of propriety and fitness. He was the best of the family and of the nation for the specific purpose to be wrought out. His qualities were not bestowed after the call to the position—though grace would abound for development of what was already possessed; they were in him by nature. God uses up what he has prepared in the working out of ordinary natural processes. When the people said, "We are thy bone and thy flesh," they were referring to one prominent instance of natural fitness for the position of authority then assigned to David; his common kinship with them would ensure the sympathy which ought ever to exist between ruler and ruled. The Divine appointment rested, among other fitnesses, on this natural basis. The formal fitness lay in the fact of kinship; but God saw also that in the case of this man the sympathies natural to the fact of kinship were exceptionally strong and deep and broad. There was also a Divine recognition of those other natural qualities of statesmanship and valour and generosity, which would render a decree that he should be king but the formulation of a natural adaptation *plus* the information to men that the Supreme Being will so regulate affairs that this natural adaptation shall manifest itself. We may be sure that the same holds good of all that God ordains. He uses up what is best in nature for the ends in view. Abraham was the fittest man to be commissioned to found a family through which Messiah should come. The choice of Moses to lead the people out of Egypt, and administer law among a people hitherto without law, was evidently based on his natural and acquired qualities. That which may seem to be an exception to this rule is no exception, namely, the appointment of plain and unlettered men to first establish the kingdom of Christ after his ascension. For looking at the spiritual nature of the kingdom, that it is diffused by the spiritual renovation of men by the power of the Holy Spirit, it was befitting that men who had no brilliant gifts wherewith to dazzle others, and so induce the impression that the new cause was one in which human wisdom prevailed, should become the channels through which the power of God might assert itself (1 Cor. i. 23—31; ii. 4, 5). The most illustrious instance of the truth before us is that in the case of our Saviour. By condescending to become bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, made like unto his brethren, there is laid a natural fitness for his becoming the Feeder of his people and the Captain of our salvation. The sympathy of nature thus rendered possible sets forth the wisdom which appointed him to be a Prince and a Saviour. History reveals no exceptions to the rule.

II. THE EVIDENCE TO MEN OF DIVINE APPOINTMENT WILL LIE IN SERVICES ACTUALLY RENDERED. The original Divine appointment of David was prior even to his appearance before Goliath; for God's purposes are not the product of changes in time, and the declaration by Samuel to David was only for his guidance and encouragement in view

of the troubles that were coming. David had to act so as to render the words of Samuel credible to the people; he had to make his "calling and election sure" by a line of conduct that would destroy the supposition that possibly Samuel the prophet, in this instance, was mistaking the surmisings of his own mind for the purpose of God. Those long years from the day he left the sheepfold to the death of Ishbosheth, formed the period in which he was to bring out before men the great wisdom of God in his selection. As the other Anointed One later on lived among men in such a way as to show to them that he was from the Father, that he had a work to do for the people of God, and was, in fact, appointed to be the Redeemer of the race, so David had to justify all that Samuel had said, and all that was implied in the prior Divine choice. It is a noble thing when a man believes that God has ordained him to a work in the world, and strives to so regulate his life that every act shall be a demonstration of the wisdom and fitness of the Divine appointment. How David did this, by sympathy with all classes, by carrying on his heart the sorrows of his people, by deeds of valour which broke asunder the chains of Philistine oppression, by gentle forbearance toward those who sought his life, by abstention from pride and acts of violence to further his interests, also by patient trust in the covenant-keeping God during days of terrible suffering, as by wise administration among his own followers,—the history of his early life fully records. However obstinate, for personal and political reasons, men were in refusing him as successor to Saul, they could not but yield at last to the force of evidence that he was the man for the position, and so far demonstrated to be the chosen of God. By a similar method, Christ is creating history which will be the vindication of his claim to be Lord of all. Likewise the Church, as the body of Christ, answers to her calling and duty only so far as she does deeds and manifests a spirit that will furnish unanswerable evidence of the Divinity of the Christian religion. "By their fruits ye shall know them." The test of salt lies in the presence of its peculiar savour.

III. THE REALIZATION OF GOD'S PURPOSE THROUGH THE LOYALTY OF HIS SERVANTS IS ONLY A QUESTION OF TIME. It would have seemed that when Samuel made known the will of God it would have been enough at once to have secured the abdication of Saul and the hearty concurrence of the chosen race. But there was the same free way of dealing with Divine declarations, the same perversity of understanding, as in the days of Christ; so that men did not thoroughly accept and act upon what was said. Jonathan and a few elect souls read aright the Divine intent, and rejoiced therein; but the rest found reasons for doubt, as men always can when the spirit is not thoroughly humble and devout. Occasionally, as we have seen in the case of Abner (ch. iii. 9, 10), there was a recognition of truth generally suppressed. A man of less faith than David would have despaired of witnessing the day when the whole nation would, by a solemn act of coronation, fall in with the purpose of God. But through the loyalty of David and the few devout men who were the companions of his heart, the issue was brought to pass. It was not a question of truth or falsehood, of national policy or individual striving; the word of God had gone forth, true and unchangeable, that so it was to be; whether scheming politicians fell in with it or not, the course of nature was the course of God. Time would prove to be the element for solving all. Faithfulness to God has the power, in a mysterious way, of winning over the forces of nature and society to its side. The hour came when all Israel simply met to do what God all along intended should be done. Herein do we see, on a small scale, what is yet to be illustrated on the grandest scale. It is a question of time. The hour is coming when every knee shall bow to the Anointed of the Lord, and every tongue confess that he is the Christ, to the glory of God the Father. The world will then simply recognize, as a whole, what now the faithful followers of Christ know to be true. In spiritual things the world does not acquire truth; it simply comes to admit to be true what Christ's people all along have affirmed is true. The Church is not outstripped; its conclusions are accepted.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. We cannot fully estimate the cumulative force of Christian consistency in bringing about the final triumph of Christianity. 2. There is a parallel between our modern religious conflicts with unbelief and the struggle of many in Israel against the revealed purpose of God, and we may rest assured that the truth with us, long resisted, will in the end be accepted. 3. It behoves every Church and private Christian to consider how much the solution of our modern difficulties depends

on our own faithfulness in daily life. 4. It is helpful to the observance of obligations that we recognize them with the solemn sanctions of religion, "before the Lord" (ver. 3).

The acquisition and building-up of Zion. This narrative exhibits David as a new man—free from the old trials and embarrassments, and with a clear course before him to raise up the government which should embody the religious principles of the theocracy, and be prospective of a grand spiritual development in the distant future. As one relieved from great cares and conscious of vast unexpended energy, he at once applies himself to the adoption of the means which at that stage of affairs seemed most conducive to the attainment of ulterior issues. The principles on which he acted, while excellent for the circumstances of the time, admit of a wider application to human affairs, and with this in view we may indicate the wisdom of his conduct and the bearing of the narrative on other matters by a succession of single terms suggestive of both facts and principles.

I. INITIATION. All along, even in exile, David had learnt to regard his life as linked in the providence of God with some great events in the far-distant future. His mission to the world and his own nation was understood to be the raising of his own people to such a position of social order and righteousness as should fit them to be most perfectly instrumental in hastening on the latter-day glory. Now that he was made king, and had the confidence of the people, he devises those initiatory measures which, being well planned and executed, will render the attainment of remoter ends more probable. The record tells us of the facts, and we have to fill in the mental processes by which David was led to the particular course recorded. His work was great, far-reaching, and, full of energy and faith and confidence, he makes a beginning in the work of consolidation and administration. The first movement was *born of faith in his call* to service—faith in the bearing of his life's work on the destinies of men, faith in the existence of a Divine purpose which had to be wrought out in connection with the chosen race, faith in the value of human labour in relation to Divine purposes, and faith in the presence and help of God in all undertaken in his service. How wisely and broadly the foundation was now about to be laid we may notice further on; the fact here to be noted is the laying of a foundation in deeds for subsequent efforts. All wise rulers and governments, when entering into recognized power, take initiatory measures as their wisdom may suggest. The first stages of action bear an important relation to what follows. The same holds good of other departments of human activity. This reminds us of the initiatory work of the kingdom of Christ; how his life, sufferings, death, and resurrection may be regarded as the initiation of that long course of activity by which the king in Zion will wondrously affect the destinies of the world. We know with what clear prevision, what sense of being sent of God, what faith in the value of human effort and in the presence and blessing of the Eternal, all that was done which constituted the beginning of the reign of the Anointed of the Lord.

II. CLEARANCE. In making a survey of the inheritance into which, as king, he had come, David saw that the presence of alien Jebusites, defiant of himself and worshippers of blind and lame idols, was an evil which ought at once to be got rid of. For such an alien element to occupy a stronghold in the very heart of the country was a most galling thought to one intensely patriotic and brave, and could not but have suggested to him the defective courage and faith of his ancestors in Israel, who allowed such a thing to be possible. It was no mere love of fighting, no desire to create a diversion on acceding to power, that induced him to challenge his best men to seize the position; it was statesmanship, regard for the purity of the national life, and the honour of him who originally gave the land to Israel for an inheritance. The people of God must be separate from the heathen. Powers of darkness must not dwell in the land of light. A beautiful example this to all who have an inheritance to hold for Christ. Our *nature is a holy land,* in which he alone is to be honoured, and it is a prime duty that we take strenuous measures—call upon the co-operation of our best powers—to cast out the evil elements from the centre of our nature, so that there may be nothing within that defileth, or is an abomination, or that maketh a lie. The work may be difficult, the forces strong and defiant, and faint-hearted rulers may suffer the evils to remain from sheer lack of courage and confidence; but their removal at an early stage of life is a condition of a prosperous government, in the name and service of God, of the powers

that make up our human nature. In one respect also we see an analogy in our Lord's work. His mission in its widest reach is to gather into one all things in himself (Eph. i. 10), to sway a blessed sceptre over a perfected humanity, to maintain a kingdom of peace and righteousness that shall never end (Ps. lxxii.); and his first work on ascending the throne is to seek the casting out from the heart and life of humanity of the alien spirit, the Jebusite, that so long has usurped the place of influence, and done serious injury to all. The work is now going on, and the Jebusite will be cast down from his stronghold, and the entire world won at last to the Prince of Peace.

III. CONSTRUCTION. In reformation and restoration there is a negative and a positive side. David had to clear out the foe of his people, and so secure free scope for their activities and their happiness. But a positive work had to follow the removal of the evil forces. Hence, in his sagacity, he resolved to construct on the site cleared of the alien a stronghold that should serve the important ends of commanding the entire country from an impregnable position, of giving local prominence to his seat of government, and of facilitating the administration of affairs. The possession of Zion, and the immediate development of its military advantages, were positive advances in the rearing of the stable state which was to stand out so markedly in contrast with the disintegration and weakness of Saul's time. True wisdom is constructive. Evil is destructive and disintegrating. Men prove their capacity to lead and govern by what they can gradually build up. The aim and effort of David all through his reign evidently was to form a national life on solid foundations, and richly developed in all that constitutes true greatness. How truly typical of the Son of David, who, by supremely wise acts in the establishment of his kingdom, laid the foundation for a superstructure of human good which is ever going on toward perfection! How suggestive of the true wisdom of missionary enterprise—laying solid foundations, in central positions, with a view to bless whole lands with the peace and blessedness of the gospel, and then gradually adding to the first work by positive developments of the same stable character! Likewise in education and in individual self-culture in godliness, construction should be ever aimed at, ever going on, proceeding upon definite solid foundations of success, laid with care in the very centre of the heart and intellect. Hereby also do we learn the extreme importance of getting supreme mastery of those powerful central forces of our nature which are to the details and outward aspects of our personal life what the stronghold of Jebus was to the varied hills and valleys of the land of Israel.

IV. INSPIRATION. The step taken by David was the natural outflow of his own enthusiasm. The force was latent in him, and now came the occasion for its manifestation. It was a new thing for the tribes to see a man of spirit, conscious of a high destiny to work out and urged, as by a Divine inspiration, to dare deeds not dreamt of for many generations (Josh. xv. 63; Judg. xix. 10—12). The man rose with his position. The consciousness of new and heavy responsibilities developed heroism. Even the barbarous occupants of the stronghold (ver. 8) seemed surprised that any one should dream of touching them. The strong expression, "hated of David's soul," only reveals the high and all-commanding spirit that could not brook the defilement of the holy land by idolatrous feet. But the infection of an enthusiastic spirit is rapid, and this action of the king at once raised the national tone. It made men feel that, as a people, they were entering on a new era; the possibilities of a great future opened before them; an ambition of a lofty kind was enkindled; the dismemberment of the nation, the low political status of Saul's time, when they could scarcely hold their own against heathen tribes, must cease to be imagined, and the great ideas of Abraham and of Moses once more must become regnant in their minds. Possibly on that day of coronation, when the elders of the tribes would come into close conference with David, he would speak out from his own clearer vision of their function in the world as the people of God and his own strong faith in the presence of Jehovah, so that the deeds on Mount Zion would illustrate in impressive form words of power (Ps. xl. 9, 10). Likewise the inspiration given to the Church in days of the founding of the kingdom of Christ has raised the tone and put a strong and masterful confidence in the heart of man. None can fully estimate the widespread and mighty influence exerted by the lofty spirit displayed by our Lord. It has raised new hopes, developed a bolder courage, fixed men's eyes more steadily on the glorious future, and produced the feeling that the faithful are engaged in an enterprise not only sanctioned by God, but pervaded by the very life-

giving presence of the Lord of all power and glory. In so far as we each enter on our appointed work for Christ in the same spirit, we carry on the inspiration and swell the moral forces that are to win the world for God.

V. MEMORIES. David, as we know from his early experience and from the Psalms, was a man of much meditation—one who was well versed in the memorials of his nation and deeply imbued with the spirit of devotion. Was it nothing to him that the seat of Melchizedek's reign as King of Salem was possibly this spot where now the impious Jebusites dwelt? Could he forget that here it was Abraham displayed the marvellous faith which, more than anything, won for him the name ever to be cherished, "father of the faithful"? It was creditable to his religious instincts and to his sagacity that one of the first acts of his reign was to recover a place so sacred to the memory, and to gather the associations of the place around his own seat of government. Piety, poetry, and statesmanship are here combined. Great and hallowed associations tend to beget corresponding deeds; and doubtless it was with the fond hope that as king he might still further consecrate that sacred spot, that he made it the centre of his administration. History tells us how age after age memories clustered more and more richly and often sadly, yet instructively, around that holy hill, until the name of Zion has become, perhaps, more rich in pathetic story and suggestive splendour and bliss than any word in human language—next, of course, to the one "Name that is above every name."

"Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God;
He whose Word cannot be broken
Formed thee for his own abode."

Vers. 11—25.—The facts are: 1. The King of Tyre, being friendly with David, supplies him with means of building his house on Mount Zion. 2. David regards the varied successes of his enterprises as confirmation of his belief that he was indeed appointed by God to reign over Israel. 3. He establishes a court on a larger scale, after Oriental style. 4. The Philistines, hearing of his accession to the throne, prepare for an attack upon him, whereupon he seeks guidance of God, defeats them at Baal-Perazim, and destroys their images. 5. Subsequently the Philistines come to a second attack, but on inquiring of God, David is not allowed to assail them in front. 6. Adopting the strategy recommended him, David secures the overthrow of the enemy unto Gazer.

Divine favour vouchsafed to imperfect men. The Bible teaches that the hearts of kings and people are in the hands of the Lord, and that he turns them so as to advance the great purpose he is working out. The friendly attitude of so important a personage as Hiram must be regarded as a mark of God's favour to David. To us the record makes clear that David was indeed called of God, and had the special help of the Almighty, and yet ver. 12 suggests that there were hours when he himself felt the need of confirmatory signs. Some of the Psalms indicate the same. He is here represented as overcoming any doubts and fears arising from his own deep consciousness of moral imperfection, by considering the unmistakable blessings wherewith his efforts so far were crowned. It was all of the Lord. He was not in error in supposing that he was in the path of duty. And yet the very next verses of the narrative (vers. 13—16) tell us of a weakness in David's character—an inferiority to much that later on was attained to by others—so that we cannot but note this conjunction of great and manifold favours conferred on one whose standard of moral and social life was, relatively to ours, very inferior. To the right understanding of this we have to observe—

I. DOMESTIC RELATIONSHIPS ARE MATTERS OF POSITIVE ENACTMENT. Moralists distinguish rightly between obligations moral in their own nature and obligations created by precept. Obviously there is not the same kind of obligation for a man to have only one wife as there is to love God with all his heart. The one depends on considerations subsequent to the existence of more than one person; the other holds from the very nature of the feeling, and cannot but be the right thing. That it is wisest, best, most conducive to personal moral perfection and to social welfare that men should not have plurality of wives, is certain; but that arises from the constitution of society and the particular purposes God intends to work out by means of the domestic institution, and

consequently the prohibition to have more than one wife partakes of the nature of a positive precept. Had man not been told what he should do, he would not have felt and known absolutely that only one wife must be taken. Had he not been told what he should do, he would nevertheless have felt and known that to love not God, to disobey God, to prefer vileness to purity, was wrong. David, left to himself, would see evil in aversion to God, but he would not so distinctly and certainly see evil in having many wives.

II. THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF LIFE IN ANCIENT TIMES WERE INHERITED. Inheritance does not make wrong right, but being over a long series of generations it tends to prevent those who are the subjects of it from seeing the evils which others fresh to the facts might soon discover. This applies especially to those forms of evil which are so in a secondary sense, being the opposite of what is termed good by positive precept. Polygamy was a custom very ancient, running through long generations of good men, and among sheiks and heads of nations it became one of the marks of distinction and an inevitable appendage of wealth. That, of course, does not make it useful or morally right, but it accounts for good men adopting it with as little compunction of conscience as others, in modern times, have bought and sold slaves, or sold drink, which are known to be the occasion of great evils.

III. THE MEANS OF EDUCATING MEN TO MORE PERFECT FORMS OF SOCIAL LIFE ARE GRADUAL IN OPERATION, AND THE FORCE OF PRECEPTS CONCERNING THEM IS NOT AT ONCE RECOGNIZED. No doubt monogamy was the will of God—the common law from the beginning (Matt. xix. 4, 5). The subsequent practice of polygamy by good men was tolerated, but it was the evident design of the Mosaic regulations to moderate and minimize it (Deut. xvii. 17; Exod. xxi. 10, 11; Deut. xxi. 11—17). The elevation of the people above the degrading practice was a slow process, and, according to the Talmudists, even the distinct precept (Deut. xvii. 17) was understood in a non-literal sense. It is possible, therefore, that David, inheriting practices straight from Abraham, should be disposed to anticipate the Talmudic interpretation, and understand "multiply" to refer to an "inordinate number," and the reason assigned to be a matter of discretion. The same difficulty in educating men to rise to the full recognition, in social relations, of some of our Saviour's precepts set forth in Matt. v. and vi., is obvious to us even now. In the case of Oriental polygamy in Old Testament times the difficulty was greater from the circumstance that the wife in chief held her place, and others improperly called in English "concubines" were secondary, and often served in court as "maids of honour" do now.

IV. IT IS THE METHOD OF GOD TO WORK BY IMPERFECT AGENTS UP TO A HIGHER FORM OF LIFE. All things in the earlier stages of constructive work are in an elementary condition, and in that sense inferior. Out of the elemental forms organisms arise, and from the lower organisms higher types have appeared. Out of our own imperfect mental condition there arises, by use of that imperfect condition, a superior form of mental life. The same holds good of our moral habits. By use of the weak and inferior, with a tendency upwards, there comes to pass a moral elevation that can never descend to the old conditions out of which it sprang. Likewise, in constructing a perfect human society on the purest and noblest gospel principles, it is God's way to use men as he finds them, with their inherited notions and tendencies, and by precept and inspiration gradually raise them above themselves, and so make them instruments of raising others to a higher level of life. Had God waited till men became as clear in their conceptions of social proprieties and utilities and as strong in purity as Christ, nothing would have been done for the world. He is a Father who pitieth his children. He remembereth that we are but dust. It is, therefore, in unison with general principles of government that David, though a polygamist, was blessed, and for the same reason many a slave-owner's life has been attended with spiritual blessing. Were it not so, who of us dare hope for favour?

V. THE BLESSING OF GOD IS RESTRICTED BY OUR IMPERFECTIONS. Had David risen to the dignity of true monogamy, and, with clear vision and firm spirit, entered on a domestic life in keeping with gospel principles, he would doubtless have exerted a wider and more powerful spiritual influence. But as it was, the kind and measure of prosperity vouchsafed to him were proportionate to his imperfect domestic life. God's blessing is only restrained by the channel through which it has to flow. The more we can

anticipate the more holy and consecrated and enlightened future by our present elevation of life, the more surely will the blessing rest on us and our deeds. According to our faith and love, as seen in perfect conformity of feeling, perception, and action to the blessed life of Christ, so may we expect the favour and blessing of God.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. It becomes us every now and then to make careful scrutiny of our lives, to see what elements there are in them derived from an ungodly inheritance and resting on mere fashion and custom. 2. The best light by which we may discover what is merely traditional and perhaps morally defective in our characters is that derived from a close study of the spirit that animated our Saviour and the ideal he set up for our model. 3. In our anxiety to know whether we are really accepted of God and are enjoying his favour, we may safely reckon prosperity in our calling, if only, like David, we are conscious of going forth in his Name and not for personal ends. 4. We may, like David, after seasons of long trial for the sake of Christ, well take courage when the tide of success flows freely in, and should be careful at such times to ascribe all to God. 5. We see how the essence of religion, namely, trust in God, desire to know and do his will, and maintenance of righteousness in all affairs according to the measure of light obtained, is distinguishable from the form of social morality which custom or tradition may have generated.

The renunciation of human strength and wisdom before God. The historian is here fragmentary in his records. Having noted David's first efforts towards consolidation of his power and his general prosperity, he refers to the troubles that arose in consequence of the assaults of the Philistines. These natural enemies of Israel had doubtless observed with satisfaction the gradual decay of Israel's power during the reign of Saul, and probably were hopeful that the threatened civil war between the adherents of David at Hebron and the friends of Ishbosheth would still further place the people at their mercy. The seizure of Jebus was, however, so startling an event as to awaken the fear that the near settlement at Hebron and removal of the court to Jerusalem might be the beginning of trouble for themselves. The remembrance of the prowess of David in years gone by must have intensified this fear. It was therefore in accordance with the best human policy that they should bring all their forces together and seek to crush him by a single blow. It is interesting to observe the conduct of David under those circumstances.

I. THE STRONG AND SAGACIOUS MAN SEEKS THE GUIDANCE AND HELP OF GOD. That David was a man of courage, brave, hardy, and capable of great endurance, is the record of his life. Naturally he was capable of great things. Also his whole conduct revealed a remarkable sagacity, such as fitted him for military leadership and statesmanship. If there was one in Israel who, reckoning on personal qualities and acquired renown, was justified in facing the Philistines in sole dependence on his own gifts, David was the man, and yet, instead of that, he turns at once to his God, and seeks guidance and help of him. This was not an act of superstition; not the result of sudden change of character, in which fear took the place of courage and mental confusion the place of calmness. It was the product of enlightened piety—a policy of profound wisdom, a sagacious estimate of all the facts and probabilities of the case. He was the servant of Jehovah, bound to carry out his purposes and cause his great Name to be reverenced in all human affairs. Therefore it was due to the ever-present and ruling Lord to honour him by seeking to know his will and trusting in his aid. Past successes in his Name suggested the same. It was true then as now that the Eternal Spirit could act on masses of men and their leaders so as to change the course of events; and for aught David knew to the contrary, it might have been the Divine will to force them back by some other agency than by his arms. Prudence, reason, piety, all sound principles and sentiments, concurred in renunciation of all human powers before the Eternal, that his power might be manifest. This is the course pursued by every strong and wise man in whom piety is a force. The Apostle Paul was a notable instance of strong will and great general ability laid prostrate before Christ, that his power might work through human channels (2 Cor. iv. 6, 7). The more distinguished the man in natural gifts and in grace, the more thoroughly is God sought, as in the case of Augustine. Men of strong will and great force of intellect who refuse to depend on God are not strong and wise all round; they are morally weak and spiritually blind.

The more perfectly the whole man is developed the more complete will be the turning to God for guidance and help.

II. THE STRONG AND SAGACIOUS MAN FOLLOWS THE LIGHT GIVEN. David learnt that it was God's will that the national foe should be smitten, not by pestilence or sudden terror subjectively produced, but by the national arm; and in the two cases by different methods of procedure. Whatever was the method of learning the will of God, and whatever degree of distinctness the revelation, the fact to be noted is that David was not "disobedient to the heavenly vision." His generalship was regulated thereby. We have no Urim to consult, no high priest to receive special communication for specific emergencies; but in our times of danger to business, domestic interests, Church affairs, and personal religious life—to say nothing of national events—we can seek God by prayer, by reading his will in the pure conscience, in the steady lines of providence, and in the principles of his written Word. It should be a cardinal truth with us that God is interested in our affairs, and has ways of making himself known to the earnest spirit. Especially does it behove each Christian and the Church as a body to seek guidance and help when assaults are being made on our holy faith, and the enemy threatens to deprive us of our goodly heritage. There are ways and methods of meeting the foe which God can reveal, and our success will depend on the care with which we adopt the methods approved of God. Infidelity and atheism are to be confronted or attacked in the rear on principles Divine, not on maxims of human expediency.

III. THE STRONG AND SAGACIOUS MAN IS WILLING TO LET GOD WORK, SO THAT THE HAND OF MAN SHALL NOT BE MOST CONSPICUOUS. David acquiesced in the front attack when enjoined, and equally in the restrained action of himself when (vers. 23, 24) an unseen influence was brought to bear on the foe. In this lies the beauty of true godliness, that it is content, when God wills it, that man should not be seen if only the purposes of God are carried through. David cared not for military distinction if the finger of God could only be seen. His strategy in this case was Divine. He stood aside for Providence to work till the hour for human action arrived. This was the apostolic spirit in the early days of Christianity, based in its exercise on the truth that the living God was the great Worker on the souls of men. The same feeling and belief should ever actuate us in all our endeavours to subdue enemies to the cross. We are only instruments, and a true estimate of ourselves will lead us to rejoice in our being counted as nothing and lost sight of in the display of saving power straight from God. Perhaps there is less success because we want to appear in front of the "mulberry trees."

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. We have to hold our own heart and our Church life against the inroads of our natural enemies, "the world, the flesh, and the devil," and the remembrance of this should always make us watchful. 2. In times of great stress in this conflict we should make special requests to God, and not simply proceed on the prestige of former achievements. 3. In dealing with modern forms of attack on Christianity, we have need to ponder well the methods and principles of procedure; and the entire Church should make it a matter of special thought and prayer.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3 (1 Chron. xi. 1—3).—(HEBRON.) *David anointed king of all Israel.* 1. About twenty years had elapsed since David was anointed by Samuel, seven years and a half since he was anointed King of Judah; and at length, at the age of thirty-seven, his faith and patience were rewarded, every obstacle was removed out of his path, and the Divine purpose concerning his royal destination fulfilled. "In the fulness of time, at the right moment, in perfect vigour of mind and body, he grasped the supremacy which was offered to him, having passed through every outward stage of power and honour, and every inward test of heavy trial and varied strife" (Ewald). 2. His anointing (performed by prophet or priest) took place at the instance of the *elders* (ver. 3) as the representatives of all the tribes (ver. 1), in accordance with the former summons of Abner (ch. iii. 17, 19, 21), and doubtless after consultation in their national assembly (1 Sam. viii. 4); now desirous and even eager (after long resistance)

to accomplish the purpose of God, having "learnt by experience" the kind of king they needed, and being constrained by the pressure of circumstances. 3. "By his anointing by Samuel he acquired *jus ad regnum*, a right to the kingdom; and by his present anointing he had a *jus in regno*, authority over the kingdom" (A. Clarke). It was not merely a designation, but an inauguration to his office; a recognition and acceptance of his Divine appointment, as well as a symbol of his Divine endowment with all needful gifts (see 1 Sam. x. 1, 10; xvi. 12); and it distinguished his person as sacred (1 Sam. xxiv. 6; xxvi. 11), inasmuch as he represented the authority and power of the Divine King of Israel. His anointing for the third time marks one of the greatest days of Israel's history (ch. ii. 4; 1 Sam. ix. 28; x. 24; xi. 15); and, in connection with it, observe—

I. THE REASONS ASSIGNED BY THE ELDERS FOR THEIR PROPOSAL. 1. *His personal relationship.* "Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh" (Gen. xxix. 14), expressive of their claims upon him, and of his qualification to rule over them; to understand their wants, sympathize with their aspirations, and promote their welfare (Deut. xvii. 15). "The elders speak as if they had not been very sure whether they were to regard David as a Hebrew, or as a naturalized Philistine; but now their doubts are gone, they dwell on his blood-relationship to them as a conclusive evidence that he would be out and out a Hebrew—that, therefore, he was worthy of the Hebrew crown" (Blaikie). So "in all things it behoved" the Captain of our salvation "to be made like unto his brethren" (Heb. ii. 17). 2. *His proved ability and eminent services* (ver. 2), indicative of his proper calling and the general esteem in which he was held (1 Sam. xvi. 5); "the bond of fellowship and love which had bound him to them, even under Saul, as leader in their military undertakings." 3. *His previous designation.* "According to the word of the Lord by Samuel" (1 Chron. xi. 3); making it their duty to seek his leadership as well as his to undertake it. "Why should they refer to God's choice of David? (1) Because, although they had known all along that David had been fore-appointed to the throne, they had yet been struggling against that arrangement; and so it was fitting now that they should express their repentance and declare their readiness to receive him in God's name, and as from God's hand. (2) Because they wished to remind him and themselves that the royal king of their nation was Jehovah, and that he and they were in allegiance to him" (W. M. Taylor). He did not "take this honour unto himself" without being "called of God" and desired by the people. It sought him rather than he it. And the grounds of his acceptance of it were (as is not always the case with those who assume royal office) unselfish, patriotic, and devout.

II. THE COVENANT MADE BY THE KING WITH THE ELDERS. "And King David made a covenant with [to] them before the Lord" (ver. 3). This covenant, agreement, or promise (whatever may have been its precise terms): 1. Expressed directly and chiefly an engagement, *on his part*, to rule over them according to the Divine will (Deut. xvii. 16—20; 1 Sam. x. 25). He was by no means to be an absolute and irresponsible monarch, or "a king ruling arbitrarily as in heathen kingdoms, where at most a few nobles, the populace, or an imperfect oracular system limited his power;" but to be subject to the Law and to the voice of prophecy. 2. Involved the obligation, *on their part*, to obey him according to the same will (ch. iii. 21). "The Law of God was the rule and square of his government, whereunto both prince and people are sworn; which was a bridle against his absolute power or their rebellious manners" (Guild). 3. Was ratified *in the most solemn manner*—"in a form in which the theocratic principle is distinctly recognized." "The end and cause why God imprints in the weak and feeble flesh of man the image of his own power and majesty is not to puff up flesh in the opinion of itself; neither yet that he that is exalted above others should be lifted up by presumption and pride, and so despise others; but that he should consider he is appointed lieutenant of One whose eyes continually watch upon him and see and examine how he behaves himself in his office" (John Knox).

III. THE SPIRIT DISPLAYED BY THE PEOPLE, not only by the presence of the elders but also by that of the armed hosts, the flower of the nation, who marched to Hebron from all parts of the country, numbering (in addition to his "mighty men," 1 Chron. xi. 10—47; ch. xxiii. 8—39; and those who had come to him during his exile, 1 Chron. xii. 1—22) 339,600, with two hundred chiefs of Issachar "and all their brethren," one thousand chiefs of Naphtali, and Zadok and twenty-two chiefs (1 Chron. xii.

23—40). "All these men of war that could keep rank came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel; and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king." 1. *Voluntary submission.* "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" (Ps. cx. 3). 2. *National unanimity;* such as is celebrated in Ps. cxxxiii. (written subsequently), 'Brotherly love'—

> "Behold! how good and lovely it is
> That (those who are) brethren should also dwell together!"

3. *Enthusiastic devotion.* "And there they were with David three days, eating and drinking; for their brethren had prepared for them," etc. 4. *Abounding joy.* "For there was joy in Israel." This "gathering of the people" (Gen. xlix. 10) was a most memorable one (vers. 4, 5). In it the good hidden in their reprehensible desire for a king (1 Sam. viii. 4—22) becomes apparent; we see the fruit of past labour, conflict, chastisement, and the seeds of future enterprise, success, advancement. "The kingship, as administered by David, appears neither as a necessary evil nor an improved constitution, but as a new ethic potency" (Oehler, 'Theology of the Old Testament,' sec. 165). "His career constitutes the culmination of that general advancement towards which the people of Israel had been aspiring with increasing energy for more than a century" (Ewald).—D.

Vers. 2, 10, 12 (1 Chron. xi. 2, 9; xiv. 2).—(HEBRON.) *The shepherd-king.* This is the first occasion on which we find the occupation of a shepherd made use of to describe the office of a king. Jacob, who had "fed Laban's flocks," spoke of "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel" (Gen. xlix. 24; xlviii. 15); Moses, who had "kept the flock of Jethro," prayed that Jehovah would "set a man over the congregation" as his successor, so that they might not be "as sheep having no shepherd" (Numb. xxvii. 7); here the elders declare that Jehovah said (through Samuel) to David, who "fed his father's sheep at Bethlehem," concerning his royal destination, "Thou shalt feed [*raah*, equivalent to 'tend,' 'act as shepherd towards'] my people Israel" (ch. vii. 7; Ps. lxxviii. 70—72; Isa. xliv. 28; Jer. xxiii.; l. 5; Ezek. xxxiv. 1, 23; Micah v. 4; Zech. xiii. 7, etc.). "The business of a shepherd is a preparation for the office of a king to any one who is destined to preside over that most manageable of all flocks, mankind; for which reason kings are called shepherds of their people, not by way of reproach, but as a most especial and pre-eminent honour" (Philo, 'Life of Moses'). "Shepherds are not owners of the sheep; but their office is to feed and govern: no more are kings proprietaries or owners of the people. 'The nations,' as the Scriptures saith, are 'his inheritance;' but the office of kings is to govern, maintain, and protect people. And that is not without a mystery that the first king that was instituted by God, David (for Saul was but an untimely fruit), was translated from a shepherd" (Bacon). What was said to David applies to every king, ruler, magistrate, master, in the sphere over which he has legitimate authority. Consider—

I. THE DIVINE IDEA OF HIS OFFICE. It is an office in which authority and power: 1. *Are entrusted by the ordination of God,* the Proprietor, Ruler, Chief Shepherd of the people; not self-derived nor unlimited; yet investing every under-shepherd with dignity. 2. *Should be exercised according to the will of God* (Ps. ci.), in affectionate interest in the people; intimate acquaintance with them, guiding them, providing for them, defending them, restoring them, and, generally, seeking their welfare with diligence, considerateness, tenderness, patience, self-denial, and self-sacrifice. "Chrysostom writeth that the shepherds in Cappadocia have such love unto their flock, that sometimes for three days together, in following them, they are overwhelmed with snow, and yet they endure it; and in Lydia, how far they travel with the sheep for a month together in the waste deserts and parching heat of the sun; who herein do teach such as are shepherds of men that they should even not spare their own lives for the common good" (Willet). 3. *Must be accounted for, as to their use, before the presence of God.* "These sheep, what have they done?" (ch. xxiv. 17). "A king is a mortal god on earth, unto whom the living God hath lent his own name as a great honour; but withal told him he should die like a man, lest he should be proud and flatter himself that God hath with his name imparted unto him his nature also" (Bacon).

II. THE DIVINE SOURCE OF HIS PROSPERITY. "And David went on going and

growing" after the conquest of the stronghold of Zion, etc. (vers. 6—10), which he achieved as captain, "leader and commander of the people" (as well as their shepherd) "waxed greater and greater" (ch. vii. 9) in power and fame; "and Jehovah the God of hosts" (1 Sam. i. 3) "was with him" (as his Shepherd, Ps. xxiii. 1, and Captain, ch. xxii. 35—37). 1. *Approving of the manner in which he devoted himself to his calling.* Fidelity is the necessary condition of the special favour of God; which is ever testified in the heart and conscience, and often shown by outward events (Gen. xxxix. 2, 21). 2. *Assisting him in the performance of the duties of his calling;* strengthening, upholding, directing, protecting him. 3. *Accomplishing the aim of his endeavours in his calling;* for no skill nor effort, without Divine co-operation, can ensure success. "Except the Lord build the house," etc. (Ps. cxxvii. 1). While God was with him (1 Sam. x. 11) Saul prospered; when left to himself he lost his kingdom and his life.

III. THE DIVINE PURPOSE OF HIS EXALTATION AND ESTABLISHMENT IN HIS OFFICE. "And David perceived," from the friendly aid of Hiram, the erection of his palace (ver. 11), which he appears to have regarded as a pledge of the stability of his kingdom (Ps. xxx., inscription), and his continued prosperity, "that Jehovah had established him," in accordance with his former choice, "king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom" (1 Chron. xiv. 2, 17) "for his people Israel's sake;" because he had chosen them to be his people, "the sheep of his pasture" (Ps. c. 3), and sought their prosperity and exaltation, according to his faithful promises (ch. vii. 23) that through them all nations might be blessed, and the whole earth filled with his glory. A faithful servant recognizes in his successes: 1. *An immediate purpose of good toward himself;* beholding therein the hand of God and "the kindness and truth" by which it is directed; ascribing his prosperity, not to himself, but to the Lord. 2. *An ulterior and larger purpose of good toward others,* for whose benefit rather than his own he is exalted (ch. vii. 8, 16). 3. *A powerful incentive to thankfulness, hopefulness,* and fresh *consecration* to the service of God and his people. "It was the successiveness, the continuity of the steps, in his history, which assured him that God's hand had been directing the whole of it. Had David, instead of maintaining the crown, which circumstances pointed out to him as his, seized violently that which was not his, he would not have perceived that the Lord had made him King of Israel; he would have felt that he had made himself so, and would have acted upon that persuasion. The government which a man wins for himself he uses for himself; that which he inwardly and practically acknowledges as conferred upon him by a righteous Being cannot be intended for himself. And thus it is that the early and mysterious teaching of David while he was in the sheepfold bore so mightily upon his life after he became king. The deepest lesson which he had learnt was that he himself was under government; that his heart and will was the inmost circle of that authority which the winds and the sea, the moon and the stars, obeyed" (Maurice).

REMARKS. 1. The lowliest occupation is often a preparation for the highest; and he who shows fidelity in the least is rewarded with opportunity for its exercise in the greatest. 2. The possession of authority and power severely tests men's characters, and sometimes proves their destruction. 3. It is a good sign when one who is exalted shows more concern about performing the duties than enjoying the honours of his position. 4. God sends good rulers out of his regard for the welfare of the people. 5. The best rulers are those who sympathize most with the Divine purposes, and most humbly and faithfully "serve their generation." 6. Even the best are imperfect, and often fail to attain their loftiest aims or fulfil their early promise. 7. In *One* alone do we behold the perfect Shepherd-King (John x. 14; Heb. xiii. 20; 1 Pet. v. 4; Rev. vii. 17).—D.

Vers. 6—9 (1 Chron. xi. 4—9).—*Jerusalem.* David's first act after his anointing amidst the assembled tribes (1 Chron. xii. 38—40) was to place himself at the head of his army, and march against *Jebus,* the capital of the Jebusites. With this place he was familiar from his boyhood, and often, perhaps, wondered why it was suffered to remain so long unsubdued (Josh. i. 3, 4). He perceived its advantages as a site for the capital of his kingdom, and the necessity of its reduction in order to the establishment and extension thereof. His enterprise, whatever may have been its immediate cause, was completely successful. Henceforth supreme interest centres in Zion, the city of

David, *Jerusalem* ("foundation of peace"), beyond any other city mentioned in sacred history, poetry, or prophecy. "Jerusalem was destined to become the seat of the Hebrew government, and the scene of the most extraordinary events, and more strange and awful vicissitudes, than any other city of the universe, not excepting Rome" (Milman). Note—

I. ITS PECULIAR SITUATION. In the heart of the country, remote from the great roads of communication with the East; on a mountainous table-land, and entrenched on a cluster of hills, the highest of which was crowned with the stronghold, rock-fortress, or acropolis of Zion (ver. 7); on the border-line between Benjamin and Judah, belonging equally to both parts of the now united kingdom. Its selection was a striking proof of David's military ability and political insight, and was probably determined by a higher wisdom (Deut. xii. 5; 2 Chron. vi. 6). "God intended not Jerusalem for a staple of trade, but for a royal exchange of religion, chiefly holding correspondency with heaven itself, daily receiving blessings thence, duly returning praises thither; besides, God would not have his virgin people the Jews wooed with, much less wedded to, outlandish fashions" (Thos. Fuller).

II. ITS PREVIOUS HISTORY. As the city of Melchizedek (Gen. xiv. 18; Ps. lxxvii. 2; Josephus, 'Wars,' vi. 10), traditions of whose ancient greatness may have lingered around the spot, and fired the poet's imagination (Ps. cx. 4); of Adonizedec the Amorite (Josh. x. 1), a man of different character, like Adonibezek (Judg. i. 7); smitten by Judah, occupied by Benjamin conjointly with the Jebusites (not, perhaps, driven out of their citadel), and afterwards entirely by the latter (Josh. xv. 63; Judg. i. 8, 21; iii. 5—7; xix. 10—12). "Joshua, and Deborah, and Samuel, and Saul, and David must have passed and repassed the hills, and gazed on the tower of the city, unconscious of the fate reserved for her in all subsequent time" (Stanley, 'Sinai and Palestine').

III. ITS HEROIC CONQUEST. David found little resistance in taking the lower city, in contrast with the upper city or citadel (Josephus), the defenders of which, relying on the strength of their position, said, derisively, that "blind and lame" were sufficient to repel his attack. But: 1. *Self-confidence is fraught with danger.* (1 Sam. xiv. 22.) "The enemies of God's people are often very confident of their own strength, and most secure when their day to fall draws nigh" (Matthew Henry). 2. *Scorn is a spur to a resolute spirit.* "And David said on that day—

> "'Whoso smiteth a Jebusite (first),
> Let him hurl down the precipice (watercourse)
> Both the lame and blind,
> Who are hateful to David's soul.'"

And "he shall be chief and captain" (1 Chron. xi. 6). 3. *Great inducements procure great achievements.* 4. *The prize is sometimes won by those for whom it is least intended.* "So Joab the son of Zeruiah went first up, and was chief," his power, of which David bitterly complained (ch. iii. 39), being thereby confirmed. 5. *The language of contempt comes back on those who employ it, to their lasting humiliation.* It became a proverb: "The blind and lame [ironically applied to the over-confident] shall not come into the house [succeed in anything]." 6. *Severity should be joined with mercy.* Although a hard fate befell some, yet most of the Jebusite inhabitants were incorporated into Israel (Zech. ix. 7), and one of them (ch. xxiv. 18) dwelt peacefully on an adjacent hill (2 Chron. iii. 1). 7. *One victory is often followed by many.* The capture of a fortress by national and world-wide consequences.

IV. ITS PERMANENT OCCUPATION, STRENGTHENING, AND EXTENSION. "And David dwelt in the stronghold [of Zion], and called it the city of David" (see Conder, 'Handbook,' p. 337). "And David built round about from Millo ['the citadel,' LXX.] and inward" (ver. 9). "And Joab restored the rest of the city" (1 Chron. xi. 9). "The erection of the new capital at Jerusalem introduces us to a new era, not only in the inward hopes of the prophet-king, but in the external history of the monarchy" (Stanley, 'Jewish Church;' Ewald).

V. ITS THEOCRATIC RELATION, WHICH WAS ITS CHIEF DISTINCTION. As the metropolis of the chosen people, the residence of the Lord's Anointed (Messiah), the seat of govern-

ment, the centre of religion and Divine service, the source of far-reaching influence, it was "the city of the great King" (Matt. v. 35), where he dwelt, reigned, manifested his glory, and "commanded his blessing, even life for evermore." So Jerusalem was described by psalmists and prophets, and won the passionate attachment of her children, in which love of country and home, devotion to God, and hope for the world were inseparably blended. "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God" (Ps. lxxxvi. 3; xlviii.; cxxii.; cxxv. 1, 2; cxxxvii.).

VI. ITS EXTRAORDINARY VICISSITUDES. "In the fifteen centuries which elapsed between those two points (Judg. i. 8; Luke xxi. 20), the city was besieged no fewer than seventeen times; twice it was razed to the ground; and on two occasions its walls were levelled. In this respect it stands without a parallel in any city, ancient or modern" (Smith's 'Dictionary'). What a scene did it present during these ages of military, political, religious strife, of prophetic activity and demoniacal wickedness, of mercy and of judgment (Amos iii. 2)! With its rejection of "the Son of David" its lingering theocratic glory departed, and its walls became a desolate heap. "O Jerusalem!" (Luke xiii. 34; xx. 41—44).

VII. ITS SPIRITUAL FORESHADOWING. "In the progress of the city of God through the ages, David first reigned in the earthly Jerusalem as a shadow of that which was to come" (Augustine, 'City of God,' xvii. 14. 20); "Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. xii. 22); the spiritual kingdom of which Christ is King, the general assembly and Church of which he is the Head; the lofty, free, mother-city of us all (Gal. iv. 25, 26); "the holy city, new Jerusalem" (Rev. xxi. 1); glorious, unchanging, everlasting (Heb. xi. 10; xiii. 14). "O holy Zion! where all is abiding, and nothing passes away!"

"O happy harbour of the saints!
O sweet and pleasant soil!
In thee no sorrow may be found,
No grief, no care, no toil."

D.

Ver. 12 (1 Chron. xiv. 1).—*Hiram, King of Tyre.* Hiram was another of those heathen princes with whom David stood in friendly relation (Achish of Gath; the King of Moab, 1 Sam. xxii. 3; Talmai of Geshur, ch. iii. 3; Toi, or Tou, of Hamath, ch. viii. 9; Joram, or Hadoram, his son, 1 Chron. xviii. 10; Nahash, the Ammonite king of Rabbah, ch. x. 1, 2; Shobi, his son, ch. xvii. 27). He was king of "the strong (fortified) city, Tyre" (Josh. xix. 29); chief of those Phœnician cities "whose flag waved at once in Britain and the Indian Ocean" (Humboldt); celebrated alike for its maritime enterprise, commercial activity, and mechanical arts (Isa. xxiii. 8; Ezek. xxvii.). "Hiram, like David, had just established his throne securely upon the ruins of the rule of the *shophetim*, or judges, and raised the country to a position of power and independence which it had not previously enjoyed" (A. S. Wilkins, 'Phœnicia and Israel'). Notice: 1. *His political sagacity.* In seeking to secure a "commercial treaty" with the King of Israel, by means of which his people might receive corn, oil, etc. (Acts xii. 20), in exchange for manufactured goods, Tyrian purple, articles of tin and bronze, weapons of war, jewellery, etc., and might not be prevented from continuing their commercial pursuits along the great caravan lines of traffic with Egypt, Arabia, Babylon, and Assyria, that ran through the country. 2. *His peaceable disposition.* In sending "messengers" with friendly communications, either of his own accord, or in response to an embassy. "How little David resembled the later Assyrian, Chaldean, and Persian disturbers of the world is most immediately and clearly shown by the fact that he did not, like these great conquerors, seize upon the Phœnician maritime towns, but always remained on the best terms with the little Phœnician states, which were entirely occupied in commerce and the productive arts, and readily sought peace with him" (Ewald). 3. *His generous appreciation.* Without jealousy or suspicion of David, of whom, doubtless, he had heard much, on account of his ability, energy, and integrity, confirmed by personal intercourse. "God knows how to incline toward pious rulers the minds of neighbouring princes and kings, that they may show them all friendly good will" (Starke). 4. *His valuable assistance.* With "cedar trees" (from Lebanon, as subsequently,

1 Kings v.), "and carpenters, and masons," in building a "house of cedar" (ch. vii. 2; vi. 16; ix. 13; xi. 2), or stately palace in Zion, the city of David; perhaps in erecting and adorning other houses in the city, and generally promoting the arts and industries of Israel (1 Chron. xxii. 2). The intercourse thus commenced was immensely beneficial, though it ultimately proved an occasion of evil. "Many have excelled in arts and sciences that were strangers to the covenants of promise; yet David's house was never the worse nor the less fitting to be dedicated to God for its being built by the sons of the stranger" (Matthew Henry). 5. *His steadfast friendship* with David during his life, afterwards with Solomon, contributing to the maintenance of peace and the increase of prosperity among both peoples. "Hiram was ever a lover of David" (1 Kings v. 1). 6. *His reverential spirit.* "Blessed be Jehovah," etc. (1 Kings v. 7). Without entirely renouncing the worship of "the Lord Melkarth [king of the city], Baal of Tyre," he was drawn to the faith of Israel; and, to that extent, represented the gathering of the Gentiles to "the Desire of all nations" (Ps. xlv. 12; Matt. xv. 27; Acts xxi. 3—6). He was an extraordinary man, eminent in life, honoured in death (by the erection of "the tomb of Hiram," Robinson, ii. 456); and he will "rise in the judgment and condemn" the unfaithful under higher privileges (Matt. xi. 21).—D.

Vers. 17—20 (1 Chron. xiv. 8—11).—(THE VALLEY OF REPHAIM.) *Victory over the Philistines.* (*References:* ch. viii. 1, 12; xxi. 15, 18, 19; xxiii. 9, 11, 13; 1 Kings ii. 39.) "Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-Perazim" (ver. 20). So long as David reigned over a single tribe and was at war with the house of Saul, he was left unmolested by the Philistines (1 Sam. xxix. 1—11), whose suzerainty he, perhaps, acknowledged; but when they heard that he was chosen king over all Israel, that an immense army had gathered around him not far from their own border, and that the Jebusite "stronghold of Zion" had fallen before him, they took alarm, mustered all their forces, marched up "to seek [attack] David" (the chief object of their suspicion and fear), and "spread themselves in the Valley of Rephaim" (near Jerusalem). In the condition and conduct of David (as representing the servants of God in conflict with their adversaries) we observe—

I. PERILOUS EMERGENCY, which: 1. Often occurs *after unusual success and honour;* being adapted to check undue self-confidence and self-security. "Lest I should be exalted above measure," etc. (2 Cor. xii. 7). 2. Clearly *manifests the spirit* which men possess, whether of faith and courage, or of fear and cowardice (1 Sam. xvii. 11). 3. Makes personal effort *indispensable.* The conflict was forced upon David. It could not be avoided without disobedience (ch. iii. 18), dishonour, and destruction. And it is the same in other cases. "Ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies," etc. (Deut. xx. 3).

II. PRUDENTIAL ACTIVITY. "And David heard of it, and went down to the hold," the stronghold of Zion (ver. 7), from his residence on the highest and safest part of the mountain ridge; or more probably the stronghold in the desert of Judah, where he had formerly found refuge (1 Sam. xxii. 5; xxiv. 22; ch. xxiii. 14). It may be sometimes necessary to "sit still" and quietly wait for Divine deliverance; but we should: 1. Not remain inactive through *sloth,* vain-confidence, or presumption. 2. Nor rush into conflict *rashly,* or enter upon new courses unadvisedly. 3. But after due *consideration* adopt those measures which afford the fairest prospects of safety and success. "A prudent man," etc. (Prov. xxii. 3).

III. PRAYERFUL INQUIRY. "And David inquired of the Lord," etc. (ch. ii. 1; xvi. 23; xxi. 1). 1. After the utmost thought and endeavour of our own, we often find ourselves in *perplexity* as to the course we should pursue. 2. Our best resource in perplexity is to seek *Divine counsel;* and those who have had experience of its efficacy will not fail to do so (1 Sam. xiv. 16—23; xxiii. 1—12). 3. Nor shall we fail to find *adequate directions* and encouraging promises if we seek it in a right manner. "Go up," etc. "David did not seek Divine counsel (by consulting the Urim) whether to attack Jebus, apparently, because his mind was clear that the enterprise was advantageous. But when Ziklag had been burned by the Amalekites, and now when a dangerous army is at hand, he is glad of such advice. It would appear that he regarded it as a Divine aid in times of perplexity, but only to be sought for in such times. He had no idea of abdicating his duties as a military leader, and putting the movements of his army into

the control of the priest. Hence, perhaps, it is that, as his confidence in his troops and in his own warlike experience increased, he ceased altogether to consult the sacred Urim, for we hear no more of it in his later wars" (F. W. Newman).

IV. PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF THE LORD. "And David came," etc. When the path of duty is made plain, nothing remains but to walk therein with: 1. *Humility*, simplicity, alacrity; as a soldier at the word of command. The habit of immediate and absolute obedience to the will of God is essential to "a good soldier of Jesus Christ." 2. *Dependence* on Divine strength and confidence in Divine promises. 3. *Courage*, concentration of purpose and energy in performance. "Do it with thy might." David's attack was made with such impetuosity that it was like the breaking forth of water, a torrent or inundation which bursts through, disperses and sweeps away whatever opposes its course.

V. PUBLIC THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE. "Jehovah hath broken forth upon mine enemies . . . Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-Perazim," *i.e.* properly, lord, master, *possessor*, and, tropically, *place* (which possesses or is distinguished by something) of breaches, inundations, dispersions, defeats (Gesenius). 1. The spirit in which success is really sought appears in the manner in which it is used. When sought by and for God it will be ascribed to him. "Not unto us," etc. "His right hand and his holy arm hath gotten him the victory" (Ps. xcviii. 1). 2. The help which is graciously and openly vouchsafed by God should be gratefully and openly acknowledged by men (Ps. l. 14, 15). 3. Of Divine benefits a record should be made by those who receive them, for the instruction of "the generation to come" (Ps. lxxviii. 4); and the place which is distinguished by them should become a permanent memorial of Divine power and goodness. This victory was long remembered. "For Jehovah will rise up as on the mountain of Perazim," etc. (Isa. xxviii. 21). "The *military stamp* of the first part of David's reign is the preindication of the military character of the whole of it. In the Psalms of David we hear the echo of this warlike and victorious theocracy. They are mostly songs of conflict and victory in praise of the God who saved his people from their enemies" (Erdmann).—D.

Ver. 21 (1 Chron. xiv. 12).—(BAAL-PERAZIM.) *The destruction of images.* The religion of the Canaanite people was "an apotheosis of the forces and laws of nature; an adoration of the objects in which those forces were seen and where they appeared most active" (Movers). The Philistines carried (probably on sacred carts) their *images* or *gods* (commonly regarded as identical) into battle, expecting victory by their aid; but so sudden was their defeat, and so hasty their flight, that they were compelled to leave them behind, and "David and his men took them away;" and "David gave a commandment, and they were burned with fire." "When the ark fell into the Philistines' hands it consumed them; but when these images fell into the hands of Israel they could not save themselves from being consumed" (Patrick). In their destruction we see: 1. *A proof of the vanity of idols.* These images (*atsabim*, equivalent to "things fashioned with labour") were only "the work of men's hands" (Ps. cxv. 4—8), and "profitable for nothing" (Isa. xl. 19; xli. 7; xliv. 9—20; xlvi. 6, 7), disappointing completely the confidence reposed in them. Who could henceforth regard them or others with fear or respect? 2. *A testimony to the power of Jehovah*, the living and true God, the Holy One of Israel. It was against him that the Philistines fought in attacking his people; and by him they and their idols were overthrown, as aforetime (1 Sam. v. 3; vii. 7; xvii. 38—54). Yet how persistent was their opposition (ver. 22)! 3. *An expression of abhorrence of idolatry*, and zeal for the worship of God alone; the *personal fidelity* of David to the fundamental principle of the theocracy (Ps. xvi. 4). During his reign idolatry found no place in Israel. 4. *A fulfilment of the injunctions of the Law.* "Thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images" (Exod. xxiii. 24), "and burn their graven images with fire" (Deut. vii. 5). Idolatry was a direct crime against the state, high treason against the Divine King of Israel, and might not be tolerated in any form. 5. *A precaution against exposure to temptation*, by the influence of their presence, forms, names, associations, on hearts always too prone to go astray. "Thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein," etc. (Deut. vii. 25, 26). No sacrifice was too great to avoid such a snare (Acts xix. 19). "Here, perhaps, the admirer of ancient sculpture

will be ready to drop a tear of regret over the fine statues and other monuments of antiquity that must have been destroyed in consequence of the Mosaic mandate; but he may safely dry it up, for the *chef d'œuvres* of this period were not worth sparing" (Michaelis). Even if they had been the finest specimens of art, their preservation from the flames would have been an ill compensation for the moral evil which it would have induced. 6. *A representation of the design of the true religion.* "To destroy the works of the devil" (1 John iii. 8), and to maintain and extend the knowledge, love, and service of God; not, indeed, by force, but by the truth (2 Cor. x. 4; see 1 Sam. v. 3). 7. *A prophecy and an earnest of the complete demolition of idols* (Isa. ii. 18—20), and the earth being "filled with the glory of the Lord" (Numb. xiv. 21). "Thou hast kept me to be head of the heathen," etc. (ch. xxii. 44, 50).

> "All nations whom thou hast made,
> Shall come and bow themselves down before thee, O Lord;
> And shall give glory to thy Name."
> (Ps. lxxxvi. 9; xxii. 27; xcvii. 7; xcvi. 3, 5, 10.)

Conclusion. Those who are zealous in destroying the idols of others should not spare their own. What is an idol? That object (whatever it may be) which a man sets up before his face or *in his heart*, and which he thinks about, delights in, and relies upon, more than God. "Flee from idolatry!" (1 Cor. x. 14; Col. iii. 5; Phil. iii. 19; 1 John v. 21).—D.

Vers. 22, 23 (1 Chron. xiv. 13, 14).—(THE VALLEY OF REPHAIM.) *Renewed conflict.* 1. The life of a godly man on earth is a warfare which is *perpetually renewed.* Hardly has one conflict been passed through before another awaits him with old or new and more formidable foes: the world, the flesh, the devil; ignorance, idolatries, oppressions, sin and misery of all kinds (1 Sam. xvii. 1—11). Yea, each day the "good warfare" begins afresh. "The approach of duty is as a battle-field" (Essenian maxim). "On awaking in the morning, the first thing to be observed by thine inward sight is the listed field in which thou art enclosed; the law of the combat being that he who fights not must there lie dead for ever" (Scupoli). 2. *Signal success* in one conflict does not ensure the like in the next; and it ought, therefore, to be always associated with humility, watchfulness, and prayer; from lack of which many a victory has been turned into a defeat. It was a motto of King Alfred ("Si modo victor eras," etc.)—

> "If to-day thou be conqueror, beware of the fight of to-morrow;
> If to-day thou be conquered, prepare for the fight of to-morrow."

3. One victory affords ground for the *confident expectation* of another, when the latter is looked for in the same spirit as the former, with dependence on the strength of God, submission to his will, devotion to his glory and the good of his people. "David inquired of the Lord *again*." 4. The *special means* to be employed in every new conflict must be adapted to the special circumstances of the case; and both the wisdom to perceive them and the might to make them effectual are from the Lord. "Thou shalt *not* go up" (directly, in front of them, as in the former conflict, and as he was about to do again); "go round about them to their rear, and come upon them opposite the mulberry trees" (a spot, probably well known to David and his men, where a cluster or grove of baca trees would favour their attack), etc. "The words teach us that in our own strength, and merely with the human weapons of reason and science, we are not to make war against the adversary. Success can only be calculated upon when the conflict is undertaken under the *influence* of the Holy Spirit of God breathed forth, and in the immediate blessed experience of the gracious presence of the Lord and of the truth of his Word" (Krummacher).—D.

Vers. 24, 25 (1 Chron. xiv. 15—17).—(THE VALLEY OF REPHAIM.) *Signs.* "The sound of a going" (as of footsteps, Judg. v. 4; ch. vi. 13) "in the beginnings" (on the tops or at the entrance of the grove) "of the baca trees," which David heard, was a *sign* appointed by God, occurring, either by his extraordinary and miraculous operation for a special purpose; or by his ordinary operation in nature and providence (the rustling of the leaves in a still season by a fresh breeze, such as, in the East, usually springs

up about day-dawn), and made use of by him for that purpose. It is not stated that it was intended for or perceived by any one else but David. To him it was "the sound of his Master's feet" (2 Kings vi. 32); the "going out before him" of "the Captain of the Lord's host" (Josh. v. 14) at the head of legions of angels "to smite the Philistines," and summoning him to follow. And the enemy, wrapped in slumber, and attacked at an unexpected time and place, was surprised and routed. Are there now no signs of a similar nature? 1. They are *needed* at certain seasons—in order to the proper understanding, enforcement, and application of the truths and duties contained in the written Word; especially when iniquity abounds, love waxes cold, labour is vain, and fear and perplexity prevail; when "we see not our signs" (Ps. lxxiv. 9), nor receive "a token for good" (Ps. lxxxvi. 17). 2. They are *afforded* in various ways—by a striking concurrence of events with the Word (1 Sam. x. 7) or their peculiar combination; by manifest tendencies, vivid impressions, spiritual suggestions, or an unusual expectancy; sometimes with "a still small voice," sometimes with "the sound of a trumpet," "thunder and rain" (1 Sam. xii. 17), or "a rushing mighty wind." They are never wholly absent; but do we hear or see them?

"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes."
(Mrs. Browning.)

Consider them as—

I. PERCEIVED BY A VIGILANT OBSERVER. "When thou *hearest* the sound of a going," etc. Having "inquired of the Lord," and received the promise of aid, David watched for the sign thereof. "I will stand upon my watch," etc. (Hab. ii. 1). Such a watchman: 1. Fixes his *attention* on the spiritual realities by which the world of sense is surrounded, supported, pervaded; and becomes conscious of what is hidden from others, whose attention is wholly absorbed in earthly things; hearing a voice they cannot hear, and seeing a hand they cannot see. 2. Relies upon the *promises* which have been graciously spoken by "him who is invisible." 3. Looks for their *fulfilment* with fervent desire and unwearied patience, "more than they that watch for the morning" (Ps. cxxx. 5, 6), until at length the sign and then the reality which it denotes are fully revealed. Everything depends upon a thoughtful, believing, waiting spirit!

"Signs summon not Faith: but they wait for her call;
For in her own right she holds nature in thrall.
Where sense sees a blank space, with nought to inspire;
She, seer-like, finds horses and chariots of fire.
Sense ransacks all space for the proofs of a God;
Faith finds them at home, at the end of her rod.
And he who complains of no God-prints below
Will find nothing but sense-prints where'er he may go."

"There are chemical experiments, in which, if a certain condition be wanting, the element sought for cannot be elicited. It is present, waiting, ready to leap into activity the moment the condition is present. But as long as that is wanting, the element is imprisoned, separated by an impassable barrier, and might almost be said to be non-existent. Similarly, the preoccupied mind might sleep at the very gate of heaven—no celestial dreams would visit it. The worldly mind might find itself in the house of God, in the holiest of all; but the cloud of glory would sweep by it unnoticed. A mind keen after earthly objects, and engrossed by the interests of time, might live here three score years and ten, with the powers of the world to come all the time surrounding it, soliciting it, pressing in upon it; and yet never once recognize a single indication of the Divine presence. And he who finds nothing of heaven on earth would find nothing but earth in heaven" (J. Harris).

II. POSSESSING INVALUABLE SIGNIFICANCE. "Then will Jehovah go out before thee," etc. The sign in itself is little; the thing signified, as it is revealed to the waiting soul, is great, inasmuch as it relates to the Lord of hosts, and includes: 1. His *presence* with us in a very special manner (2 Chron. xiv. 11; xx. 12; xxxii. 6—8). If a soldier is inspired with courage and strength by knowing that his commander is near and his eye upon him, much more should we be similarly inspired by the conviction of the Divine

presence. 2. His *working* for us and in us. "The Lord is my Helper," etc. (Heb. xiii. 6). 3. His *will* concerning us, with respect, not only to our welfare, but also to our duty, the spirit we should cherish, the conduct we should pursue, the manner, place, and time of our activity. There is no greater joy to a faithful servant of God than to feel assured that he is where God would have him to be, and doing what God would have him to do. And this joy is his strength.

III. REQUIRING PERSONAL EXERTION. "Then bestir thyself; go out to battle. And David did so as Jehovah commanded him." There is a time to work and fight as well as to pray and watch. As it is presumptuous and vain to stir before the signal for action is given, so it is slothful and ruinous to wait after it is received. "Wherefore criest thou unto me? . . . Go forward" (Exod. xiv. 15; Josh. vii. 10). Divine assistance is not meant to supersede our exertion, but to quicken it. Because God works we must work, with a feeling of grateful obligation, reverence, and confidence (Phil. ii. 12). "The Captain of our salvation" goes out before us that we may follow him (Rev. xix. 14) with: 1. Implicit *obedience* to his every direction and movement (see 1 Sam. xiii. 1—7). 2. Strenuous *effort* and whole-hearted devotion. 3. The utmost *promptitude*. Now or never. The opportunity, if allowed to slip, returns no more. "Consider that this day ne'er dawns again" (Dante).

"'Charge!' was the captain's cry.
Theirs not to make reply;
Theirs not to reason why;
Theirs but to do or die."

IV. CONDUCTING TO IMPORTANT ISSUES. "And he smote the Philistines," etc. By such a victory: 1. The imminent danger that threatened is removed. 2. The final overthrow of the enemy is assured (ch. viii. 1). 3. The firm establishment and wide extension of the kingdom are promoted. It became possible to bring up the ark to Zion (ch. vi. 2) and to subdue surrounding adversaries. "And the fame of David went out into all lands," etc. (1 Chron. xiv. 17). God fails not to fulfil his promises; disappoints not the trust that is placed in him; but makes the faithful "more than conquerors."

APPLICATION. With reference to: 1. The individual. 2. The family. 3. The Church. 4. The nation. "Can ye not discern the *signs* of the times?"—D.

Vers. 1—3.—*Tardy acceptance of a divinely appointed ruler.* Abner and Ishbosheth being dead, and Mephibosheth incapable from his lameness, the eleven tribes that for upwards of seven years had not only held aloof from David, but waged war with him, now come to the conclusion that it is best to become his subjects, and again be united with Judah in one kingdom. They accordingly make their submission to him and solemnly accept him as their sovereign.

I. THE GROUNDS OF THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF HIM. 1. *Close relationship.* "Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh" (comp. Eph. v. 30). God has given to us a King who is one with us in nature. The Ruler of the Church, yea, of all things, is *a Man;* the throne of the universe is filled by a human form (see Heb. ii. 5, *et seq.*)—a fact which endears the Christ to his willing subjects. 2. *Previous service.* (Ver. 2.) "In time past," etc. In which service David had both displayed and increased his capacities for ruling men. With this may be compared Christ's period of service when on earth, especially during his public ministry and last sufferings. By these he was trained and prepared for his throne (made "perfect through sufferings," Heb. ii. 10); and it is in and by these that he reveals himself and attracts the hearts of men. 3. *Divine appointment.* (Ver. 2.) "The Lord said to thee, Thou shalt feed ['shepherd,' 'be the shepherd of'] my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain [literally, 'foremost man, leader'] over Israel." A king is to be as a shepherd to his subjects, not only ruling them, but caring for, watching over, protecting, guiding, uniting them; guarding and preserving the weak from violence and oppression, as a shepherd his lambs. The image was natural to the Hebrews, and runs through the Scriptures, extending even to the visions of heaven (Rev. vii. 17). The king was also to be leader in peace or war, ever "to the front," worthy to be followed, first and foremost in all noble deeds, accepting courageously the perils of such a position. David was such a king, imperfectly; Christ is such a King, perfectly. Both were divinely designated to the office of Ruler

of God's people, Kings by Divine right in the strictest sense. As such David is here recognized at length by the tribes of Israel, as before by the tribe of Judah. As such the Lord Jesus is recognized by his followers. These reasons had existed and should have been as powerful immediately after Saul's death; but they had not been allowed to operate. But the experience of these tribes whilst holding aloof from David, their present disorganized condition, possibly also their knowledge of the benefits of David's rule to Judah, combined to open their eyes, and so impress these considerations on their hearts as to produce a general willingness to accept him whom they had been rejecting. And thus it is with many in respect to the great King. His claims are known, but other lords are preferred, until, after delay more or less protracted, they become convinced of their sin and folly, and surrender themselves to him. Let those who are thus procrastinating beware lest they become convinced too late.

II. THE SOLEMNITIES BY WHICH THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF DAVID, AND HIS OF THEM, WERE SIGNIFIED. 1. *A mutual covenant.* He engaging to rule them, and they to serve him according to the Law of God (Deut. xvii. 14—20). In like manner, when men receive Christ as their King, promising loyalty and obedience, he on his part promises to be to them all that his gospel represents him. These Israelites, indeed, may have imposed special stipulations not expressed in the Law; but we, in accepting Christ, have simply to submit to the terms of the Divine covenant, as we are not in any degree independent parties. 2. *The anointing of David as king.* The third time he was anointed—once by Samuel, once by the tribe of Judah, and now by the rest of the tribes. For the people could in a measure give him authority over them. But our King Jesus can receive no authority from us. He is the Christ (the Anointed) of God; we have simply to recognize his Divine authority. 3. *The presence of God was recognized.* "Before the Lord." This was fitting, as he was supreme Monarch, to whom both king and people were bound to submit, whose blessing was necessary to render the union happy; and an engagement made as in his sight would be felt as peculiarly binding. So should we, in accepting Christ, place ourselves in the presence of God, first in secret, then in his house, and at the Lord's Table. 4. *A joyful feast concluded the proceedings.* (See 1 Chron. xii. 39, 40.) It was to the whole people a suitable occasion for rejoicing. They were again one nation. Their union would be cemented by eating and drinking together. They would the better retain the feeling of union when they had separated to their various localities and homes, and would be the better prepared to perform their common duties to the king and the nation. Thus also our Lord enjoins his subjects to eat and drink together in his Name, that they may recognize each other as his, rejoice together in their privileges, and be more closely united to him and the whole "Israel of God."

In conclusion: 1. Happy is the nation whose rulers and subjects alike recognize God as the supreme Ruler over them, and his will as their supreme law; act as in his sight, and invoke his blessing. 2. Closer union amongst Christians must spring from more thorough acceptance of the royal authority of Christ. They *are* one in him, and they will become more completely, more consciously, and more manifestly one in proportion as they, all alike, renouncing merely human authorities, come to Christ himself, listen to him, and submit to his authority in all things.—G. W.

Ver. 10.—*Desirable greatness.* "And David went on, and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him." The growing greatness of David was owing to the presence and favour of God, and was accompanied with them. It was, then—

I. GREATNESS WELL-DERIVED. All greatness is in some sense from God; but all does not spring from his favour. "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction" (Ps. lxxiii. 18). He that becomes "a great man" through unjust violence, the oppression and swallowing up of the weak, low cunning, unscrupulous ambition, insatiable avarice, or an absorbing activity of mind and body which excludes God from thought and life, cannot rightly attribute his success to the blessing of God. Such greatness is disastrous, and carries a curse with it. It is reached by serving Satan, and accompanied with slavery to him and participation of his doom. He was not altogether lying when he said (Luke iv. 6, 7) that the power and glory of the world were given by him to those who would worship him. The world abounds in instances of greatness so won. But the greatness which is a gift of God's favour

is reached by paths of truth and uprightness and piety; by the strenuous employment of all the powers, indeed, but in harmony with the Divine will; not so much, therefore, with the purpose to grow great as to be of service to others. It is rather accepted as a gift of God than sought; and is accepted "with fear and trembling," lest the strong temptations which accompany all worldly greatness should become victorious. Such greatness is accompanied with a good conscience, and may be without serious peril to the soul. It may foster principles of godliness and benevolence. It qualifies for high service of others, and, so employed, enlarges the heart and elevates instead of degrading the character. It thus ministers to the truest greatness—that which is spiritual and eternal.

II. GREATNESS WELL-ACCOMPANIED. Some, the greater they grow the less of God they enjoy; they gradually forsake him, and he at length abandons them. But there are those of whom it may be said, as they grow great in this world, still "the Lord God of hosts is with them." 1. *How the great may secure this blessing.* By: (1) Humility (Deut. viii. 13, 14; Ps. cxxxviii. 6; Jas. iv. 6). (2) Devotion of their enlarged powers to the service of God and of man. (3) Constant prayer. On the other hand, pride, selfishness, and prayerlessness will separate them from God. 2. *The benefits they will derive from it.* (1) The highest and purest enjoyment to which worldly honours and resources can minister. (2) Preservation from the perils of their position. (3) The power to gain the best kind of good from it. (4) And to do the most good by it. (5) Greatness thus accompanied is likely to be lasting.

Finally, spiritual greatness combines in a pre-eminent degree the two excellences of being God-derived and God-accompanied. It springs from the favour of God, and secures its constant enjoyment. It consists in abundance of spiritual wisdom, holiness, and love, and consequent power for good; in the honour which these bring from God, and in the confidence, affection, and respect with which they inspire men. It has the advantage of being accessible to all, its conditions being, first, faith in Christ and God; and then the fruits of faith, such as love, humility (Matt. xviii. 4), obedience to God (Matt. v. 19), self-control (Prov. xvi. 32), self-denying service (Matt. xx. 20—28). Such greatness is intrinsic and essential. It is best for ourselves and best for others. It is inseparable from the man himself, and, surviving all worldly distinctions, goes with him into eternity, and abides for ever (see 1 John ii. 17).—G. W.

Ver. 12.—*Perception of Divine agency and purpose.* These words are introduced after the narration of the taking of the fortress of Zion, the erection of additional buildings around it, and especially the building of a royal residence for David. It was the establishment of a metropolis for the whole kingdom, and both evidenced and promoted a settled state of things. David's thoughts upon the matter are given in the text. He recognized that it was God who made him king, and that his exaltation was for the sake of God's people Israel.

I. THE FACTS PERCEIVED. 1. *The Divine operation.* God had raised David to the throne and settled him on it. At every step the hand of God was clear; especially clear was that hand as the whole series of steps, their connection and issue, were regarded. 2. *The Divine purpose.* All was "for his people Israel's sake." Not for the sake of David and his family, that they might be rich, luxurious, and honoured; but for the good of others. That the tribes might be united and consolidated as one nation, free, settled, safe, prosperous, and glorious. That the people might be elevated in their moral and religious life; and that they might be better fitted to fulfil the great end of their election as God's people, witnessing for him, maintaining his worship, preserving his truth, showing forth his praise, and promoting his kingdom in the world; and that ultimately from them might come the Saviour and salvation. Similarly, the Son of David is exalted, not for himself alone, but that he may deliver, "gather together in one" (John xi. 52), teach, sanctify, elevate, and eternally save, the people of God. He is "Head over all things to the Church" (Eph. i. 22). In like manner, all power, elevation, authority, etc., with which men are endowed are given to them for the sake of others, and ultimately for the sake of God's people, to whom in Christ all things belong (1 Cor. iii. 21—23), that they may be blessed and be made a blessing to mankind.

II. DAVID'S PERCEPTION OF THESE FACTS. 1. *He recognized that his exaltation was*

from God. This would check pride and produce humility and gratitude. 2. *He recognized that his exaltation was for the sake of the people.* This would check selfish ambition and produce cordial devotement to the good of the nation. And thus should we seek to have a clear perception and deep impression of the agency and purpose of God in our lives. We should regard all we have of being, faculty, position, or possessions, temporal and spiritual alike, as from him; and all as given us, not merely or chiefly for ourselves, but for the sake of others, especially for their salvation—that they may become, if they are not, God's people, and that as God's people they may prosper, be united, victorious over all the foes of God and man, and powerful to bless mankind. For this is the Divine purpose, and as we make it our own we become intelligent co-workers with God, and our lives are filled with meaning, dignity, and worth, and a fitting preparation for the world where all are consciously, willingly, and habitually engaged in doing the will of God (Matt. vi. 10).—G. W.

Ver. 19.—*Divine assurance of victory.* The enlargement and establishment of David's kingdom, while a joy to Israel, was a grief to their old and formidable enemies, the Philistines. These came in great numbers into the territory of Israel, hoping to seize David himself (ver. 17), as the shortest way of putting an end to the newly united state. So formidable was the invasion that the king found it desirable to leave his new city and go "down to the hold," the fortress probably of Adullam, with such forces as he could collect; and when the enemy "spread themselves in the Valley of Rephaim," he sought direction and promise of victory from God before attacking them, and received the answer, "Go up," etc. Christians are called to a warfare with powerful enemies, who are the enemies of Christ and his kingdom; and it is their satisfaction that they have received Divine assurance of victory. They have to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil, as they assail themselves and endanger their salvation, and as they prevail in the world and even invade the Church. They are powerful foes, with many resources at command, and their onset is at times alarming. As the Philistines with David, they may be expected to make specially violent assaults when special prosperity has been attained, but the results are not yet fully established. But it is the joy of Christ's warriors that victory is certain. Each faithful soul shall successfully fight his own way to heaven, and the Church shall gain final and complete success in the battle with evil.

I. HOW THE ASSURANCE OF VICTORY IS IMPARTED. How does God assure us that we shall be successful in the Christian war? 1. *By the intuitions of the soul.* When we distinctly place before our minds the combatants, we cannot doubt which will ultimately be victorious. It is a conflict between good and evil, truth and error, right and wrong, holiness and sin, God and Satan. Evil is mighty, but good is almighty, because the living, true, and holy God is almighty. 2. *By the promises and prophecies of his Word.* These assure victory to every faithful soul in his own personal contest (see 1 Cor. x. 13; Eph. vi. 10—13; Jas. iv. 7; Matt. xxiv. 13), and triumph to the Church in the conflict with error and sin in the world, notwithstanding the deep and firm hold they have upon men, their extensive prevalence, their long reign. These assurances abound throughout the Scriptures, culminating in the descriptions of the conflict in the Apocalypse, and of the victories of the great Leader and his forces, and summed up in the triumphant shout of the great voices in heaven: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. xi. 15). 3. *By the mission and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.* He came as our "Leader and Commander" (Isa. lv. 4), and, by his personal conflict, endurance, and conquests, not only led the way for his followers, but secured victory for them. "Be of good cheer," he says, "I have overcome the world" (John xvi. 33; see also Heb. ii. 9, 10, 14—18; 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25). 4. *By the victories already won.* The gift of the Holy Spirit and his mighty operations in apostolic times and all through the Christian centuries. The victories over the old paganism; the Reformation; the revivals of religion at various periods; the successes of modern missions. Every true-hearted Christian has in his own experience not only a pledge of final victory for himself, but an encouragement to seek the salvation of others.

II. THE EFFECT WHICH SUCH ASSURANCE SHOULD HAVE UPON US. "Go up." Engage in the battle with evil; and do so with: 1. *Confidence and courage.* 2. *Resolute zeal*

and determination. 3. *Persistency, notwithstanding all delays, discouragements, and partial failures.* 4. *Songs of victory.* Not only for every advantage gained, but for the final and complete victory already to faith as good as won. If the hope of victory in other conflicts produces such effects, much more should the absolute certainty which the soldiers of Christ have. An altogether ill effect is that which the Divine assurances produce on some. They say that, as the battle is the Lord's, and he is sure to conquer, their efforts are needless. As relates to a man's own salvation, such a persuasion is fatal; for victory is promised only to the earnest combatant, and the assurance of Divine operation is made a reason why we should "work out our own salvation" (Luke xiii. 24; 1 Tim. vi. 12; Phil. ii. 12, 13). And as respects the spread and triumph of the kingdom of Christ, such a feeling indicates ignorance, indifference, indolence, and unfaithfulness, rather than faith in God. It is quite inconsistent with both Scripture and reason, and will deprive those who cherish it of all share in the joy of final victory, even if they are not utterly cast away as "wicked, slothful, and unprofitable" (Matt. xxv. 26, 30).—G. W.

Ver. 24.—*Divine omens of coming victory.* "When thou hearest the sound of marching . . . then is the Lord gone out before thee," etc. (Revised Version). The Philistines were a brave and determined people, not easily beaten. Repulsed and scattered "as the breach of waters," they reunite and return. David, inquiring of God, receives directions differing from those given him on the former occasion. He is instructed not to "go up" to the higher ground occupied by the Philistines, but to make a circuit to their rear, where was a plantation, and when he hears a sound as of marching on the tops of the trees, then to attack the foe with spirit and energy, knowing that God was gone before to give him certain victory. The enemies of the Christian and the Church are similarly persistent, and must be assailed and defeated over and over again. Indeed, the conflict is continuous. There are, however, certain times when we are specially to "bestir" ourselves, with assurance of conquest; and these are often indicated by special signs that the supernatural powers are "marching" on to lead us and give us success.

I. IN RESPECT TO THE WHOLE CHRISTIAN WARFARE AND WORK, THE SUPERNATURAL EVENTS BY WHICH OUR RELIGION WAS INAUGURATED MAY BE THUS REGARDED. In the incarnation of the Son of God, his supernatural revelations, the miracles of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, in the all-sufficient sacrifice he offered for sin, and in the descent and operations of the Holy Spirit, God went before his people to lead them on to victory. They were not for the men of that age only, but for all ages. We, recalling them to mind, may ever take courage in the assurance that we are following where God has led and still leads. Evermore they remain as calls to us to "bestir" ourselves with confidence of success; the eternal motives to energy and hope; the eternal armoury, too, from which we draw the offensive and defensive arms we need in the war.

II. IN RESPECT TO OUR OWN PERSONAL SALVATION, THERE ARE AT TIMES SPECIAL INDICATIONS THAT GOD IS GOING BEFORE US TO GIVE US SPECIAL HELP AND BLESSING. We ought not, indeed, to wait for these. The knowledge of our duty, the memory of Christ, the promise of Divine aid, the experiences of the past, constitute sufficient reasons for habitual diligence, prayer, and hope; and special inspirations may be most confidently expected by such as are thus ever "exercising themselves unto godliness," ever striving against evil and for the attainment of greater good. But there are moments of peculiar sensibility which afford peculiarly favourable opportunities and special calls to "bestir" ourselves that we may secure the blessings which they promise. Startling events which deeply move the conscience and heart; personal afflictions which compel retirement and produce impressions favourable to religious exercises; bereavements which bring face to face with death; losses which make the uncertainty and insufficiency of earthly good felt; sermons which unusually touch the heart; earnest appeals of a friend which produce deep emotion; whatever, in a word, brings God and eternity, Christ and salvation, nearer, and creates a sense of their supreme importance, whatever excites a craving for a higher good, are signs that God is working for us, and calls to "bestir" ourselves by special meditation, prayer, etc. We may at such seasons obtain more spiritual blessing in an hour than at others in a month.

III. IN RESPECT TO THE WARFARE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH FOR THE ADVANCE-

MENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD, THERE ARE SIMILAR SIGNS FROM HEAVEN ADAPTED TO STIMULATE AND ENCOURAGE. Such are: 1. *Remarkable openings made for the entrance of the gospel.* The operations of Divine providence preparing a way for the operations of Divine grace. These may be on a small scale, laying open to Christian effort an individual, a family, or a neighbourhood; or on a large scale, opening a continent crowded with scores of millions of the human race. The discoveries of travellers, and the removal of barriers and obstacles by military conquests, are thus to be regarded. India, China, Japan, and Africa furnish instances of God going before his people, and calling on them to "bestir" themselves and follow whither he leads. 2. *Impressions favourable to religion.* In one person, or in a family, a congregation, a town, or a nation. Impressions by sickness, by war, pestilence, or other calamities; or by signal displays of the Divine goodness. By these God goes before, and prepares the way for his people to publish more diligently and earnestly the gospel, with good assurance of success. 3. *Unusual religious earnestness in Christians themselves.* Extraordinary emotions of love and zeal towards God and Christ and the souls of men, and of longing to rescue the perishing and enlarge the Church, however they may have been excited, are to be regarded as the yearnings of God's Spirit in the Christian heart, and as calls and encouragements to exertion. The sign that God is working and leading his people to victory is more conspicuous when these emotions are shared by many. 4. *Successes in the Christian war summon to new efforts and encourage the hope of new successes.* They show that God is working, and assure us that he will continue to work with his faithful servants.—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1.—**And David gathered together.** The long subjection to the Philistines was at an end, and David's first care is to bring the ark of Jehovah from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem. In this he had a twofold object. For, first, it was an act of piety, testifying David's gratitude to God, who had so quickly raised him from the condition of a despairing fugitive hiding away in the cave of Adullam to that of a victorious king reigning over an independent and free people. But David had also a political purpose. The weakness of Israel in the past was the result of its divisions. He would heal this by giving it a capital, whither the tribes would come up for worship, and where they would feel that they formed one nation. David had seen the evils of a divided sovereignty, when he and Ishbosheth were wasting the strength of Israel in civil war. For more than half a century he remedied this, but before there had been time for the union of the tribes to be cemented by the gradual influence of religion, Solomon's oppressive levies of unpaid workmen, forced to labour in his costly buildings, and the despotic stupidity of Rehoboam, broke up united Israel into two feeble states, which henceforward had to struggle hard for a mere existence. The condition of Israel was very similar to that of the United States of North America before their great civil war; except that their president, elected by all the people, and their Congress at Washington, were far stronger bonds of union than any that were possessed by the Israelites. But when there was danger of even these failing to keep them together as one people, the statesmen of the north put forth their utmost powers, and spared neither life nor treasure, because they saw clearly that the victory of the south meant the breaking up of their empire into a multitude of feeble governments, which, by their mutual jealousies, would paralyze and thwart one another. With equal discernment David endeavoured to counteract the jealousy and separate action of the tribes, which was bringing about the disintegration of Israel, by giving them a point of union. Had he gone further north for his capital, he might, perhaps, have overawed the stubborn tribe of Ephraim, which was always the most unmanageable of the sections of Israel. But the situation of Jerusalem upon the borders of Benjamin and Judah, on a hill-top which neither had really possessed, and which was marked out for noble use by its wonderful natural conformation, fully justified David's choice; and it has had the assent of mankind ever since. David then made this unrivalled spot his capital, and placed there, first of all, his royal residence, whereby it became the centre of all public business and of the administration of law; and, secondly, as a matter of still higher importance, he made it the head-quarters of their national religion and the abode of their God. We see the weight of this religious influence in the anxiety of Jeroboam to counteract it, and in the strength given to Rehoboam by the migration into Judah of those who valued

the temple services more than their worldly prosperity. Even Saul had valued the national religion, and had established its head-quarters at Nob; but, giving way to the ungoverned anger of a despot, he had destroyed his own work. It was left to one who to the bravery of a soldier added the discernment of a statesman to consolidate the tribes into a nation by establishing their religion upon a sure and influential basis. For this reason also he made their services full of delight and enjoyment by the institution of choral chants and the use of instruments of music; while the psalms which his singers recited were so spiritual and ennobling that we to this day use them in our solemn worship. Granting that there are expressions in them harsher and more intolerant than a disciple of the loving Jesus would now apply to any earthly enemy, yet, as a whole, the Psalms, written in these rough far-off times, still form our best book of devotion! In the parallel place in the First Book of Chronicles we have the narrative of this re-establishment of the Mosaic Law given as looked at on the Levitical side, and with many interesting additions. Here the narrator looks at it with the eye of a statesman. We must not, however, suppose that the history there given is arranged in chronological order, as, if so, the two victories in the Valley of Rephaim would have both taken place in the three months during which the ark was resting in the house of Obed-Edom. If this were so, then David would first have had more than three hundred and forty thousand warriors with him at Hebron to anoint him, and with their aid would have captured Jerusalem. He would next have assembled thirty thousand picked men to bring the ark up to Zion; and yet would have had only his body-guard of "mighty men" wherewith to fight Israel's battles and win its independence. Most probably the order, both here and in Chronicles, is not chronological, and the course of events was as follows. With the help of the men gathered at Hebron David captures Jerusalem. As soon as it is made safe they withdraw, and leave him occupied with planning out and building his city. Alarmed at the vast concourse at Hebron, and made angry by David's seizure of a strong fortress, the Philistines hastily pounce upon him in numbers too vast for him to resist. He escapes, leaving but a few men to defend Jerusalem, and hides in his old fastness. Encouraged there by finding three of his mighties more than a match for the garrison at Bethlehem, he gathers the more valiant spirits, and makes a sudden attack upon the Philistines, who were engaged in ravaging the country as a punishment for its rebellion. They are defeated, but with no great loss; and so with unbroken strength they again invade the country, and march up once more to Jerusalem, prepared to fight a pitched battle, and seize that fortress as the prize of victory. Again, David, with far larger forces, surprises them, and, driving them from ridge to ridge, so utterly vanquishes them that the power of Philistia was destroyed for ever. It was after this double victory that Hiram, King of Tyre, whose dominions bordered upon the Philistines', and who had found them disagreeable neighbours, made a close alliance with David; and so at length, free from all fear at home, and honoured abroad, he was able to turn his thoughts to the consolidation of his kingdom and the establishment of Jehovah's worship. And in the Book of Chronicles we have the details of that spiritual service of psalmody which David added to the Levitical routine of sacrifice, and which bears the significant name of "prophecy," as being the expression of the moral and spiritual side of the Mosaic Law (1 Chron. xxv. 1). Instead of "Again David gathered," the words of the Hebrew are "And David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel." The first gathering was at Hebron (ch. v. 1), and before they came David must have given his consent to their wishes, and invited their presence at his anointing. They soon gather together a second time to endow their new kingdom with the safeguards necessary for their spiritual welfare, and the maintenance among them of morality and virtue and the fear of God. **Chosen men.** This usually means picked men fit for war. But doubtless on this occasion the elders and all good men possessed of power and influence would be present to strengthen the king's hand. **Thirty thousand.** A large number, but not too large. David probably chose one of the great feasts for the occasion, and by the presence of a large number of warriors, and the display of much military pomp, he would impress upon the minds of the people the value of religion. They would thus learn also to respect their new capital as being the place where was the presence of their Deity, and where they were to come to worship him.

Ver. 2.—**From Baale of Judah.** We learn from Josh. xv. 9, 60 that Baalah, or Kirjath-Baal, "the city of Baal," was the old Canaanite name of Kirjath-jearim, the "city of woods." It lay about eight miles westward from Jerusalem (see 1 Sam. vi. 21; vii. 1, 2). The preposition "from" is very startling, as really David went *to* Baale. Yet all the versions have it, but they put on Baale an incorrect meaning. Baal means "lord," "master," and they render, "David went with all the people that were

with him *from* [or, *of*] the citizens of Judah," understanding by "master" a householder, one who was master of a family. The real explanation probably is that the narrator wrote according to the sense, and not according to the grammar. The thought in his mind was the bringing up of the ark from its long resting-place, and not the prior physical necessity of going down to the place where it was. **With all the people.** David had consulted with "the captains of thousands and hundreds, and every leader" (1 Chron. xiii. 1), and it was with their good will that he drew the ark of God out of its long concealment. A select body of these nobles, or sheiks, would accompany the king, while the rest, with their attendants, would be posted along the eight miles of road. **Whose name is called by the name.** In the Hebrew, the word "name" is twice repeated, the words literally being, *the ark of Elohim, whereon is called the Name, the Name of Jehovah of Sabaoth.* Most of the versions omit the second *Name*, and the translators of the Authorized Version also felt it to be a difficulty, which they have tried to escape by inserting words between the two. Really it is a most interesting sign of the existence at this early date of a special reverence for the name "with four consonants" which we call "Jehovah." Subsequently it was never pronounced, but the word "Lord" was read instead. In the Revised Version, the importance of the passage is well brought out by the first Name being written with a capital, of the use of which the Revisers are very chary. With their usual inconsecutiveness, they retain LORD for *Jehovah*, though this is "the Name," and though they have restored the word *Jehovah* in several less important places.

Ver. 3.—**And they set the ark of God** (Hebrew, *made it ride*) **upon a new cart.** This was contrary to the Levitical Law, which required that only Levites should bear the ark, and that it should be veiled even from their eyes (Numb. iv. 15). But this mistake is not surprising. It is easy enough for us to turn to our Bibles, and see what the exact letter of a command was. But such reference was no easy matter when the Law was contained in manuscripts which were rare and costly. We cannot imagine that David or even Abiathar carried a manuscript about with them in their wanderings. David very probably had a considerable knowledge of the Pentateuch, gained in Samuel's schools, and stored up in his memory, as was the custom in old days when books were scarce. But this knowledge would be chiefly of its narratives and doctrines, and would comprise such portions as Samuel thought most fitting to influence the lives of his scholars. Abiathar probably added to this a knowledge of all such ritual as was in daily use in the sanctuary at Nob. He had fled thence in terror, escaping alone from the cruel destruction of the priests by Saul's decree; but even there the restoration of the Levitical services had been too recent to have given time for much study of the old Law. We can quite believe that the murder of the priests at Nob, following upon the catastrophe at Shiloh, had reduced the knowledge of the priests to a very low ebb. Now, the exact way of bearing the ark was a matter that had long been dismissed from their memories, but they would call to mind that it had been brought to Abinadab's house in a new cart drawn by oxen; and they would take this as a precedent, which would justify them in acting in the same manner a second time. But in so solemn a matter the priests ought to have made diligent search, and have gone for instruction to the copies which they possessed of the Divine Law. David did so subsequently (1 Chron. xv. 2), but possibly there was no such copy at present in Jerusalem, and they would have to go to Ramah, where Samuel would deposit whatever records he had saved from the ruin of Shiloh, and where the great work of the prophets was to study the sacred books, and even copy them. But this want of inquiry and easy assumption, that as the ark was brought in a cart to Abinadab's house, so in a cart it should be carried away, was an act of great irreverence, and all the guilty were punished. The heaviest blow fell on the house of Abinadab, which lost a dear son. Entrusted for seventy years with the care of so sacred a symbol of Jehovah's presence, Abinadab and his family ought to have made a special study of the laws concerning it. Apparently they left it very much to itself; for it is never said that God blessed them for their care of it as he did Obed-Edom. And David also was in fault; for he ought to have commanded the priests to make diligent search. His punishment was the breaking out of the Divine wrath, terrifying the people, and turning the joy of the day to mourning. **The house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah**; really, *that was upon the hill.* **Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab.** "Sons" in Hebrew is used in a large sense, and these two men were probably the grandsons of Eleazar, the son of Abinadab, who had been set apart to keep the ark. For seventy years, as it seems, had passed since the ark was hurriedly put in Abinadab's house, namely, twenty during the Philistine supremacy up to the battle of Ebenezer, forty during the reign of Saul, and about ten since. As Eleazar must have been thirty years of age for his consecration to be legal, he must have died long ago, and his sons would be old and decrepit

men. His grandsons would be in the prime of life.

Ver. 4.—**Accompanying** (Hebrew, *with*) **the ark.** The verse is evidently corrupt, and we have no aid from the parallel place in Chronicles, except the fact that it is omitted there. The most probable explanation is that the first half of the verse has been repeated from ver. 3 by the error of some copyist, and that the original words were "Uzzah and Ahio drove the new cart with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark." While Uzzah walked at the side, Ahio went before the oxen to guide and manage them, as the Basques may be seen at the present day doing in the south of France.

Ver. 5.—**Played.** The word does not mean "played on a musical instrument," but "danced and rejoiced." **On all manner . . . of fir wood.** The Hebrew literally is, *with all cypress-woods.* In 1 Chron. xiii. 8 we find "with all their might, even with songs," etc. Gesenius, in his 'History of the Hebrew Language,' describes this as a mere guess at a misunderstood text, and Maurer ridicules it as a stupid emendation. More sensibly Thenius regards it as the right reading, and the words here as a corruption of it, caused by some scribe misspelling the words, which are nearly identical. In our version the ambiguous meaning of the word "played" makes the passage less startling. For "they danced with all cypress-woods" is unintelligible. The musical instruments mentioned here are the **harp,** Hebrew *chinnor,* a guitar; the **psaltery,** Hebrew *nebel,* a kind of harp of a triangular shape, with the point downwards; the **timbrel,** Hebrew *tof,* a tambourine or small drum; the **cornet,** Hebrew *mena'na',* a bar on which were a number of loose metal rings, which were shaken in time to the music, but others think that "castanets" are meant, which are pieces of wood beaten in time. The Revised Version adopts this rendering. And finally **cymbals.** For "cornets" we find in the parallel place "trumpets," whence the translators of the Authorized Version took their rendering; but the Hebrew word means "things to shake."

Ver. 6.—**Nachon's threshing-floor.** In the parallel place (1 Chron. xiii. 9) we find "the threshing-floor of Chidon," and "Chidon" is proved to have been a proper name by the feebleness of the attempts made to find for it a meaning. We therefore gather that "Nachon" is also a proper name, but otherwise we should certainly have translated it "a fixed threshing-floor." The people did indeed thresh or trample out their corn often on summer threshing-floors (Dan. ii. 35), that is, on fitting spots in the fields themselves. But as a large quantity of earth was sure in this case to be mixed with the corn, they preferred to use places with solid floors or pavements, which lasted for many generations, and often became well-known spots (Gen. l. 10). Even if "Nachon" be a proper name, this would be a permanent floor, paved with stones, the approaches to which would be worn and made rough by the tracks of the carts bringing the corn. Here the **oxen shook** it; Hebrew, *stumbled,* and so the Revised Version. Nothing is said of the ark being in danger. Uzzah's act was one of precaution. The ground was rough, the oxen stumbled, and he put forth his hand to hold the ark till the cart had reached level ground. If the threshing-floor was formed in the natural rock, those who have been in Spain, and seen how the tracks in the Pyrenees are worn by the native carts into deep ruts in the solid stone, can well understand that the neighbourhood of this much-frequented spot would need very careful driving.

Ver. 7.—**Error.** The word so translated is one quite unknown, and Ewald renders it "unexpectedly." The Revised Version puts "rashness" in the margin. But all three alike are mere guesses, of which "error" is that approved by Keil and others. The Syriac has the same reading here as that found in 1 Chron. xiii. 10, namely, "because he put his hand to the ark." This would require the insertion of four or five letters in the Hebrew. **By the ark.** The word translated "accompanying the ark" in ver. 4.

Ver. 8.—**David was displeased;** Hebrew, *David was angry.* Neither David nor his people had intended any disrespect, and so severe a punishment for what was at most a thoughtless act seemed to him unjust. Uzzah's death was probably caused by apoplexy, and the sudden effort of stretching forth his hand and seizing the ark had been its immediate cause. So tragic an event spoiled the happiness of the day, filled all present with disappointment, made them break off in haste from the grand ceremonial, and placed David before his subjects in the position of a malefactor. He had prepared a great religious festival, and Jehovah had broken in upon them as an enemy. In his first burst of displeasure he called the place Perez-Uzzah, the word "Perez," or "Breach," conveying to the Hebrews the idea of a great calamity (Judg xxi. 15) or of a sudden attack upon a foe (ch. v. 20). The historian adds that the place bore this name unto his day; but we cannot tell whether these are the words of the original compiler of the Book of Samuel, or, as is more probably the case, those of some subsequent editor or scribe. Many such remarks are supposed to have been inserted by Ezra and the men of the great synagogue.

Ver. 9.—**David was afraid.** This was his next feeling. Neither he nor Uzzah had offended wilfully, and so severe a punishment for an "error" made him dread the presence of so dangerous a thing as the ark seemed to be. Instead, therefore, of taking it into "the city of David," he turns aside and leaves it in the house of the nearest Levite. In both his anger and his dread David manifests himself to us as one whose ideas about God were somewhat childish. He regards Jehovah as a powerful and capricious Being, who must be appeased. He had attained to juster views in Ps. xvi. and other such trustful hymns.

Ver. 10.—**Obed-Edom.** We find two Levites of this name among David's officials—one belonging to the family of Merari, a singer and doorkeeper for the ark (1 Chron. xv. 18, 21, 24); the other of the family of Korah (1 Chron. xxvi. 4, 5). And as it is there said that "God blessed him," he probably it was into whose house the ark was taken. He is called a Gittite, because he belonged to Gath-Rimmon, a Levitical city in the tribe of Dan (Josh. xix. 45; xxi. 24).

Ver. 11.—**Jehovah blessed Obed-Edom.** So far from there being anything unlucky in the ark, its presence brings with it a manifest blessing, and thus David's fears are allayed. But before he returns to his purpose, he commands that proper inquiry be made. The priests must examine the holy book, and, having learned from it where his former conduct was wrong, he assembles the people once again to carry the ark to its home (1 Chron. xv. 2, 12—15).

Ver. 12.—**With gladness.** The words mean, "in a joyful procession with music and dancing."

Ver. 13.—**When they that bare the ark of Jehovah had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings;** Hebrew, *an ox and a fatling.* Many suppose that David sacrificed an ox and a fatling every six paces along the whole way from the house of Obed-Edom, which was probably near or even in Jerusalem, unto the tent prepared for the ark in Zion. "Evidently the way to the holy city was a way of blood. The stained streets of Zion, the rivers of blood, the slaughtered heaps and the blaze of altar-fires formed a strange contrast to the dancing, the singing, and the harping of the multitudes who crowded the city" (Sime, 'Kingdom of All Israel,' p. 288). It is not necessary to suppose, with some objectors, that the ark waited till each sacrifice was completed, or that the road thus lined with victims was many miles in length. The ark did not remain at Perez-Uzzah, but was carried in silent awe to the house of a Levite; and such a house probably was not to be found until they were inside the city walls. There were no country houses in a region lately twice ravaged by the Philistines. But there is an objection to this view, namely, that it is not the sense of the Hebrew. What is there said is that at starting, after stepping six paces, David sacrificed an ox and a fatling (by the hands, of course, of the priests), to ask a blessing upon the removal of the ark, and avert all misfortune. In Chronicles we read nothing of this, but of a sacrifice of seven bullocks and seven rams offered by the Levites. The one was David's offering made at the beginning, to consecrate the removal; the other was made at the end, and was a thank offering of the Levites, because they had carried the ark safely (1 Chron. xv. 26). The Vulgate has a remarkable addition to ver. 12, taken doubtless by Jerome from manuscripts which existed in his day. It is as follows: "There were with David seven choruses and a calf as victim." The fact is not in itself improbable, and means that the musicians and dancers were divided into bands which mutually relieved one another. And as a sacrifice was also a feast, each band had a calf provided for it. The LXX. omits the thirteenth verse altogether, and substitutes for it, "And seven choruses accompanied him, bearing the ark, and a calf and lambs as a sacrifice."

Ver. 14.—**And David danced.** The word used means the springing round in half-circles to the sound of music. Conder has given a very interesting account of the dancing of the Malawiyeh, which consisted in turning round in whole circles, resting on the heel of the left foot ('Heth and Moab,' p. 65, etc.). As David danced with all his might, he was evidently strongly excited with religious fervour. We have the expression of his feelings in the psalm composed for this occasion (1 Chron. xvi. 7—36); subsequently it seems to have been rearranged for the temple service, as it is broken up into Ps. xcvi. and cv. 1—15. Dancing was usually the office of the women (Exod. xv. 20; Judg. xi. 34; xxi. 21; 1 Sam. xviii. 6); but men may also have often taken part in it, as Michal's objection was that it was unbefitting a king. **David was girded with a linen ephod.** David wore this as a tightly fitting garment, which left him free to exert himself in the dance. So far from the use of it being an assumption of the priestly office, it was regarded by Michal as an act of humiliation, as it was a dress worn even by a child when admitted to service in a priest's family (1 Sam. ii. 18). Probably David did mean to rank himself for the time among the inferior servitors of the ark. He might have claimed more. In the theocracy he was the representative of Jehovah,

and his anointing was a solemn consecration to a religious office. To have burned incense or offered sacrifice would have been to invade the priestly office, an office parallel to "the administration of the Word and the sacraments," denied, in the Thirty-Seventh Article of the Church of England, to princes. To wear the garb of a servitor was to do honour both to Jehovah and to his priests.

Ver. 16.—**Michal Saul's daughter.** Possibly these words are merely to identify Michal, but they suggest the thought that, as a king's daughter, she valued her royal dignity. The procession evidently passed near David's palace, and his wives and children would be eager spectators.

Ver. 17.—**In the midst of the tabernacle** (*i.e.* tent). This tent would be arranged as nearly as possible like that erected by Moses in the wilderness. The ark would be placed in the holy of holies, a shrine probably of cedar-wood, and the burnt offerings and peace offerings would then be offered and would consecrate the whole. When it is said that **David offered** them, it means that the sacrifices were at his cost and by his command.

Ver. 18.—**David . . . blessed the people in the name of Jehovah of hosts.** Blessing the people was an important priestly function, for which a special formula was provided (Numb. vi. 22—26). But this did not deprive the king, who was Jehovah's anointed representative, of the right of also blessing them, and Solomon, at the consecration of the temple, followed his father's example in a very solemn manner (2 Chron. vi. 3).

Ver. 19.—**A cake of bread, and a good piece . . . and a flagon.** Of the first of the three gifts there is no doubt. It was the round dough cake baked for sacrificial meals (Lev. viii. 26). So, too, there is no doubt of the third; it means "a cake of raisins" (see Cant. ii. 5; Hos. iii. 1, in which latter place raisins, or dried grapes, are expressly mentioned, boldly rendered in the Authorized Version "wine"). The Revised Version has given the correct rendering of the passage. The second word occurs only here, but the rendering of the Authorized Version is that of the Jews; and as it is some common domestic term not likely to be found in literature, but well known in every kitchen, they are most probably right. On the same sort of local authority Jerome renders it in the Vulgate "a piece of beef for roasting." As it is coupled with the bread and the raisin-cake, we may feel sure that it was a portion of the flesh of the animals which had been killed in sacrifice, and which the people were now permitted to take to their homes.

Ver. 20.—**To bless his household.** David, in the midst of his public duties, was not forgetful of the nearer claims of his own family. Doubtless there also a joyful feast would be prepared, and all be gathered together to praise God and rejoice with one consent. **Who uncovered himself . . . as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!** David's offence in the eyes of Michal was, not his dancing, but his divesting himself of his royal robes, and appearing before his subjects clad in the dress of an inferior class. The Levites were to occupy a humble social position (see Deut. xiv. 29; xxvi. 12), and Michal's words are a proof that such was in David's time the case. The language of Michal is that of a woman vexed and irritated. After reminding David of his high office as "King of Israel," she reproaches him for appearing on a grand public occasion without the upper and becoming robe in which an Oriental enwraps himself. And this he had done before the female slaves of his own servants, with no more self-respect than that shown by the "vain fellows." "Vain" is the "raca" of Matt. v. 22, and means "empty," void of virtue, void of reputation, and void of worldly means. The Hebrews, when expressing the greatest possible contempt for a man, called him an "empty," and no word could be found better conveying the meaning of thorough worthlessness.

Ver. 21.—**It was before the Lord.** The Hebrew is much more forcible than the confused rendering of our version. "Before Jehovah, who chose me above thy father, and above all his house, to appoint me prince over Jehovah's people, over Israel, yea, before Jehovah I have rejoiced" (Authorized Version, "played;" but see notes on ver. 5). The preference of David over Saul was proof that that king's affectation of royal state, and his self-importance, were not pleasing in God's eyes.

Ver. 22.—**And of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour.** These words have been variously interpreted, but their simplest meaning is also the best; that even the most uneducated women, though surprised at first at David's want of stateliness, would, on reflection, be led to a right understanding of the greatness of God; and would then feel that even a king was right in owning himself to be nothing in God's presence.

Ver. 23.—**Therefore Michal.** The Hebrew is, *and Michal had no child.* Michal's barrenness was long antecedent to this outburst of pride, and was not a punishment for it. It is noticed as a proof that the blessing of God did not rest upon her; and as such it was regarded by the people, and doubtless it lessened David's affection for her. We must not, however, suppose that he imposed upon

her any punishment further than this verbal reproof. Nor does the interest lie in Michal's conduct, but in the glimpse which the narrative gives us of David's tender piety towards God, so exactly in agreement with the feelings which animate very many of the psalms. To unite with this a harsh bitterness to the woman who was his first love, who had so protected him in old time, and whom he had summoned back at the first opportunity because of his affection for her, is a thing abhorrent in itself, and contrary to David's character. His fault in domestic matters rather was that he was over-fond, not that he was unfeeling. A little more sternness towards Amnon and Absalom would have saved him much sorrow. As for Michal, the story sets her before us as caring a great deal for David, and not much for Jehovah. She could not have approved of such a number of rivals in David's household, but she had not lost her love for him. And the narrative represents her as not having Jehovah's blessing in a matter so greatly thought of by Hebrew women, and as valuing too highly royal state, and forgetting that above the king was God. But she did David no great wrong, and received from him nothing worse than a scolding. In the parallel place (1 Chron. xv. 29) the matter is very lightly passed over; and the reason why it holds an important place in this book is that we have here a history of David's piety, of his sin and his punishment. In itself a slight matter, it yet makes us clearly understand the nature of David's feelings towards Jehovah. It is also most interesting in itself. For David is the type of a noble character under the influence of grace. Michal, too, is a noble character, but she lacked one thing, and that was "the one thing needful."

The removal of the ark is a matter so important as to call for careful consideration. For the time it established two centres of worship—one with the ark at Zion, the other at Gibeon. The ark in Saul's days had been forgotten (1 Chron. xiii. 3). It had long lain in the house of a simple Levite in the city of woods, and Saul's religious ideas were too feeble for him to be capable of understanding the importance of establishing a national religion. Still, such as they were, they made him summon Ahiah, the grandson of Eli, to be his domestic priest (1 Sam. xiv. 3); and subsequently he even set up at Nob the tabernacle with its table of shewbread, and other holy furniture, saved somehow from the ruin of Shiloh, with Ahimelech as high priest (1 Sam. xxi. 1). But when in a fit of senseless jealousy he destroyed his own work, the nation was left for a time without an established religion. Gradually, however, this primary necessity for good government and national morality was supplied—how we know not; but we find a tabernacle at Gibeon, with the altar of burnt offerings, and the morning and evening sacrifice, and apparently the same service as that erewhile set up at Nob; only Zadok of the line of Eleazar is high priest (1 Chron. xvi. 39, 40). He thus belonged to the senior line, while the last survivor of the race of Ithamar, Abiathar, Eli's great-grandson, was with David. Gibeon was in the centre of the tribe of Benjamin, some few miles from Jerusalem, with Nob lying half-way between; and probably Saul had permitted this restoration of Jehovah's worship at Gibeon, both because he half repented of his deed, and because the worship there was ministered by priests not allied to Ahimelech and Abiathar. But now the ark, which was Jehovah's throne, had been brought out of its obscurity, and solemnly placed in a tabernacle in Zion, with Abiathar, David's friend, the representative of the junior line, as high priest; and probably the only difference in the service was that David's psalms were sung to music at Zion, while the Mosaic ritual, with no additions, was closely followed at Gibeon. There was thus the spectacle of two high priests (ch. viii. 17), and two rival services, and yet no thought of schism. Zadok had been one of those foremost in making David king of all Israel (1 Chron. xii. 28); he and Abiathar were the two who moved Judah to bring David back after Absalom's revolt (ch. xix. 11). The whole matter had grown out of historical facts, and probably David always intended that Zion should absorb Gibeon, and be the one centre required by the Levitical Law. But he was content to wait. Had he acted otherwise a conflict would necessarily have arisen between the rival lines of the priesthood, and between Abiathar and Zadok, the two men who represented them, and who were both his true friends. We find even Solomon doing great honour to the tabernacle at Gibeon (2 Chron. i. 3, etc.), but after the temple was built it passed away; and the race of Ithamar, weakened by the calamity

at Shiloh, and still more by the cutting off of so many of its leading members at Nob, never recovered itself after Abiathar was set aside by Solomon for taking part with Adonijah. The line continued to exist, for members of it returned from Babylon (Ezra viii. 2); but though it produced a prophet, Jeremiah, it never again produced a high priest, and therefore only the line of Eleazar, to which Ezra himself belonged, is given in 1 Chron. vi.

Thus Abiathar's misconduct and the growing fame of Jerusalem put an end to all fear of schism. We easily trace in the Psalms the increase of the nation's regard for Zion. In Ps. xxiv., written probably by David to celebrate the entry of the ark thither, it is simply "the hill of Jehovah . . . his holy place." In Ps. ix. it is "his dwelling," but in Ps. xx. a higher note is struck. Zion is "the sanctuary" whence Jehovah sends "help" and "strength;" and in Ps. xlviii., written at a later date, Zion is found installed in the very heart of the people's love. Thus the Divine blessing rested fully upon David's work. To Jehovah's worship he gave a grand and noble centre, which from his day has had no rival, unless it be in some respects Rome. The city of David's choice has been, and continues to this hour to be, the most holy spot upon earth alike to the Jew and to the Christian, though to the latter it is so because of David's Son. At Zion, moreover, David's spiritual addition to the Mosaic ritual has given the Church its best book of devotion and the brightest part of its services; for every hymn sung to God's glory, and every instrument of music played in God's house, is but the continuance of the prophesying with harp, psaltery, and cymbal (1 Chron. xxv. 1), first instituted by David, though, like all that was best in David personally and in his institutions, it grew out of Samuel's influence and the practices of his schools (1 Sam. xix. 20). Finally, the temple services were doing much to weld the discordant tribes into one nation, and would have succeeded in so doing but for the unhappy degeneracy of Solomon's latter years, and the obstinacy of his son. Yet even so, Jerusalem remains for ever a memorial of the genius and piety of this extraordinary man, and the symbol of "Jerusalem the golden, the home of God's elect."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—11.—The facts are: 1. David, deeming the time to be come for reorganizing the religious services, raises a select force wherewith to bring the ark from its obscurity at Kirjath-jearim. 2. Providing a new cart, the ark is set thereon, and brought out of the house of Abinadab under charge of his two sons. 3. David and the people move in joyous procession before the ark to music from all manner of instruments. 4. Arriving at a certain place, Uzzah, putting forth his hand to steady the ark, is smitten for his rashness, and dies before the ark. 5. Thereupon David's spirit is much troubled, and is filled with dread at the thought of taking charge of so sacred and terrible a treasure. 6. David is restrained by this apprehension from his purpose, and meanwhile leaves the ark in the house of Obed-Edom. 7. The sojourn of the ark in the house of Obed-Edom for three months proves an occasion of great blessing to him and his family. The remarkable events of this section naturally arrange themselves in a threefold order—the bringing up of the ark; the judgment on Uzzah; and the suspension of the undertaking. We here find three topics, which we will take in succession.

Religious restorations. I. RELIGION IS THE FOUNDATION OF NATIONAL PROSPERITY. This is the interpretation of David's action in seeking to bring the ark out of its obscurity to the central seat of government. From the time when the ark was captured by the Philistines (1 Sam. iv.) and its deposit at Kirjath-jearim (1 Sam. vi. 21), all through the reign of Saul, with the exception of the brief revival at Ebenezer, the religion of the nation had been at a low ebb. That so sacred a treasure should have been left in obscurity, without the forms and order of worship enjoined in the Law of Moses, was an indication of spiritual decadence, and goes far to account for the

political weakness of the nation during the life of Saul. David saw clearly that the elevation of his people depended chiefly on two things—vigorous, enlightened statesmanship, and fidelity in all things to their covenanted God. The establishment of a strong centre of government at Jerusalem was one step; but he saw that, if the nation was to fulfil its highest destiny, the prosperity he desired must also rest on a strictly religious foundation. Hence the effort to restore religious life by bringing up the ark of the covenant. Leaving out of view the particular form of religion, and the symbolism appropriate to that stage in the development of God's revelation, we can see how profoundly wise David's judgment was. The human activities developed in national civilized life can only be counted on to run into right and safe channels, and to avoid mutual destruction, when they are pervaded by the spirit of true godliness. Wealth, art, science, commerce, military display, free and easy interchange of thought,—these are not self-preservative, these do not give rest to the heart, these do not check the tendencies that carry in themselves the germs of decay and death. Only when the national mind is purified, rendered calm, self-restrained, and God-like in feeling by knowledge and worship of the Holy One is there a guarantee that all will go well and endure. This is taught in the history of Greece, Rome, and other lands where God was not honoured by proper worship, and his Spirit not cherished in daily life; and it is the strenuous teaching of prophets and apostles, and especially of the Saviour, who makes clear what is the light of the world and the healing of the nations.

II. THE RESTORATION OF RELIGION IS AN EVENT OF GREAT JOY. The very idea of a restoration of the piety of former days was to David an inspiration. His calling the chief men from all quarters of the land, his expounding to them his sense of what was due to the symbol of God's presence, his grand processional march, and the exuberant delight with which he sang and danced,—reveal the high appreciation he had of the great turn now coming in the religious life of the nation. The awakening of a new enthusiasm by his influence certainly was a remarkable incident in the national life regarded in contrast with the stolid indifference of the age of Saul. The power of a new and healthy religious emotion over all the faculties, and consequently over all departments of activity, is very great, giving elevation, spring, and purpose to all that is done or attempted. In this case there were special elements entering into the joy. The ark was the symbol of God's presence; it contained the overshadowed mercy-seat, which told of forgiveness and communion; it was the exponent of covenant relationship, and the prophetic indicator to the devout mind of a glory yet to be revealed, and of a covenant on wider basis and embracing vaster blessings. Ezra knew something of this joy of restoration of religion to its proper position. There was joy also when, after centuries of error and wrong, the attention of men was directed once more by Luther and his coadjutors to the mercy-seat where men could find a new and living way of access to the Father. No greater occasion for joy could arise for our own land than a full national enthusiasm for those sacred deposits of truth and holy influence which God has given us in his revelation and in the institutions of his Church. What is thus true of restorations on a large scale holds of our own lives, when, after seasons of dreary separation from our God and cold miserable observance of occasional acts of worship, we go forth with all our soul after the living God, and welcome him afresh to our love and trust as the God of our salvation.

III. INDIRECT PERSONAL INFLUENCE CONDUCES TO A RESTORATION OF RELIGION. It is instructive to see how, in the providence of God, great movements have sprung out of individual consecrations. The soul of David, purified, elevated, and aroused to grasp spiritual realities, was the human spring of this great change. Of course his official position would secure attention to his requests and commands; but it depended on the bent of his mind as to the form and scope of his commands. This reformation proceeded from him, but not entirely by direct personal influence. His tone and manner, his habits of devotion and strict regard for God's will, would tell on those in direct contact with him; but that was not enough. Hence in his sagacity he summoned select men from all parts of the land, and through them sought to act on the thousands who could not leave their homes. This call from all towns and villages would awaken thought there, would lead to explanations, would quicken conscience, would disseminate his ideas and the enthusiasm of his spirit, would create the feeling that a holier and wiser time was at hand; and when, subsequently, the thirty thousand returned home,

they would further diffuse the influence caught by contact with the godly king, and contribute elements of good to their respective localities. The great reformations of the world have all been effected thus. Few come into direct personal contact with the originators. The multitude get the secondary influences. Nor can we tell how far our influence may thus be diffused. The wave moves on in proportion to the susceptibility of those who first receive its impact. The question of indirect influence deserves much consideration on the part of Churches and individuals.

IV. A TIME OF REFORMATION IN RELIGION DEVELOPS MUCH FEELING NOT PURELY SPIRITUAL. Although a great interest was awakened by David's zeal in the restoration of the more regular worship of God, yet we must discriminate between such devout feelings and clear views of spiritual things as were true of him, and the vague sentiments of the multitude. If Ps. lxviii. and cxxxii. may be taken as indicative of his real state of mind, we are not to suppose that all the rest who joined in the procession or were stirred to excitement in their homes rose to the same height in the religious life. Men cannot help being roused when powerful religious minds put forth their energies; and in some instances they are awakened to a really new spiritual life; but contagion of thought and sentiment and fervid interest in a great public movement are not the same as vital godliness. They may be better than dull indifference, and may even serve as a step to a higher and more permanent elevation, yet if they be all the reformation is very superficial. Forming an estimate on the general rules that govern human action, we may be sure that many who sang and danced before the ark were only nominal worshippers, and had but slight sympathy with the deep meaning of the words of the psalmist. The same was true of the Protestant Reformation. Multitudes took an interest in doctrinal discussions and in the freedom from priestly domination who knew little of that inner spiritual life which, in the case of Luther and the leaders, found its core in personal union with Christ. Our modern revivals are to be estimated in the same way. We may be thankful that crowds flock to sing and hear and welcome ostensibly the true Ark of the covenant, and many, no doubt, sing with the understanding and rejoice in spirit, but the mass have still to be regarded as relatively strangers to the new and deeper life.

Human judgments on Divine acts of judgment. The part of the narrative referring to the conduct of Uzzah and the consequences to himself always awaken in the reader a feeling of surprise at the apparent disproportion of the punishment to the offence. Sympathy is felt with the feeling of David, who was "displeased," and could no further carry out his project of conveying the ark to Jerusalem. Evil-minded men have not been alone in pointing to this record as an evidence of what they would call the unworthy representations of the Divine Being contained in the Old Testament. It is well to look this difficulty fully in the face, and see, if possible, how far man is warranted to express a judgment at all upon an event so terrible and seemingly inexplicable, on such principles at least as govern human acts of justice. Note here—

I. THE REASONS FOR DIVINE JUDGMENTS ARE NOT ALWAYS APPARENT TO MAN, AND YET MAY BE MOST VALID. It is a first principle that the "Judge of all the earth" cannot but do right. That is the solid rock on which to rest when events occur in providence that do not admit of explanation. It is, further, a sound position that God looks at the inner life of men, and knows exactly the tone and spirit concealed from human view; and it is this condition of the inner man, and not the bare outward act, which constitutes the real character and determines the moral value of the action in the sight of God. Also, incidental actions are incidental in their form because of passing circumstances; but the state of mind out of which they spring is permanent; for given two minds of different spiritual tone and bias, they will, when placed under pressure of the same external circumstances, produce totally different actions. Now, we have a right to assume, *primâ facie*, that, if there are no adequate reasons for the sudden terrible punishment discoverable in the bare and apparently well-disposed act of Uzzah, there must have been, in his habitual state of feeling towards the symbol of God's presence and the whole events of the day, something determinately evil, and of which that which seemed to others to be an innocent act was known by God to be the natural outcome. That was the case in the destruction of Dathan and Abiram. The falsehood of Ananias was outwardly only like other falsehoods, but we are told that

God saw something more than the ordinary antecedent of a lie in common life. There have been judgments on nations and families and individuals, and are still, which do come in the providence of God, but the hidden reasons of which only eternity will reveal. As our Saviour during his earthly life often spoke to the unuttered thoughts of men, and not to meet definite words, so here and in other cases the Divine act was doubtless to meet an unuttered, a permanent, not fully expressed state of mind, of which Uzzah was conscious, but of which men knew little. The same will be true of future judgments of God; they will be based, not on the ostensible act merely, but on the tenor of the whole life (Matt. vii. 22, 23; xxv. 40—46).

II. THE GUILT OF ACTIONS IS DEPENDENT VERY MUCH ON PRIVILEGES ENJOYED. The Philistines had handled the ark (1 Sam. v. 1, 2), and no immediate evil came to them for so doing. Their subsequent affliction seems to have been owing to their detention and mockery of the ark (1 Sam. v. 3—7), not to the fact of touching it. But it was a positive injunction that the Levites should not touch the sacred thing (Numb. iv. 15); and the particular injunction was illustrated and rendered more significant by the regulation that the ark should always be carried on staves, thus not needing the touch of any hand. The Philistines were men "without law;" Uzzah was a man "under law." The whole history of his people in relation to ceremonial had been full of instruction of the same kind. The guilt of a deed depends on previous knowledge or means of obtaining knowledge. Capernaum is not judged by the same rule as the people of Sodom. The Jew is pronounced inexcusable because of his superior light (Rom. ii.). Severer punishment comes on those who, possessing gospel light, do deeds worthy of darkness (John iii. 19; Heb. x. 29). Judgment may fall on the "house of God" which would not come on those not in the house (1 Pet. iv. 17).

III. INDIFFERENCE TO DIVINE LAWS IS PROGRESSIVE. The disregard of the well-known injunction in this case was probably the culmination of an indifference which had been growing for a long time. An evil tendency or mental habit may be in process of formation, and may constitute a state of actual spiritual degeneracy, a long time before an occasion occurs for its manifestation in any overt act that is distinctly in violation of positive law. The degeneracy which was far too common during the reign of Saul doubtless had penetrated to the home of Uzzah, and the neglect of honour paid to the ark during those long years of its stay in his father's abode, together with the kind of familiarity with it bred of its presence as a relic of a former elaborate ritual, could not but have resulted in a rather decided insensibility to the sacredness of minute regulations. The act of touching the ark may have been a consequence of this condition, and the "error," or "rashness," spoken of (ver. 8) may indicate that there was not in him that quickness of spiritual sensibility which would at once have seen that no casual circumstance can set aside a command based on a great and Divine order of things. There is not a more subtle evil of our life than this gradual deepening of indifference arising from neglect of spiritual culture and encouraged by unthoughtful familiarity with sacred things. The conscience passes through stages of degeneration till we come to do things without compunction which once would have caused us anguish of spirit. How far our children are in danger from constant familiarity with religious phrases and usages is a serious question. The same applies also to ordinary worshippers in our sanctuaries.

IV. THERE IS POSITIVE IMPIETY IN DISTRUSTING GOD'S PROVISION FOR THE SAFETY OF HIS OWN GLORY. The ark was the visible symbol of God's presence. His glory was there, so far as it could be manifested in visible form to man at that stage of his religious education. The command that no Levite should ever touch it was among the arrangements made for its stay among the people. All such arrangements of God are made on full prevision of every possibility. To say that circumstances might arise when the command would be inadequate to the maintenance of the ark in its integrity among men, would be an impeachment of the Divine wisdom and power. The command had reference solely to human action, and did not reveal what reserve of power and appliance there might be for securing the safety of the ark at all times. Common sense, to say nothing of religious faith, ought to have taught that the Eternal would take care of his own if he declined the aid of man, or at least that it was his will that his own should suffer temporary injury now and then. It was irrational and impious, therefore, to distrust his provision for securing his own ends. The putting forth of the

hand in contravention of the command may have been the expression of this. The same applies equally to the New Testament manifestation of the glory of God in Christ. For times of danger and of seeming safety he has enjoined on us certain conduct in relation to the kingdom of Christ, which proceeds on the presupposition that he has means of securing the integrity of that kingdom on the basis of our restricting our conduct to that prescribed order. By prayer, by truthfulness, by spirituality of mind, by love, by persuasive words, by blameless, meek lives, by quiet faith in the invisible power of the Spirit, we are to do our part in relation to the preservation of the integrity of the kingdom, and to its processional march to final triumph. If, when supposing it liable to suffer, or when observing a great shock arising from the circumstances of its position in our time, we depart from the order laid down, and trim to the world and become unspiritual and untruthful, or depend less on faith in the invisible power of the Holy Spirit than on mere human science and social influences, then we virtually fall into this view of the sin of Uzzah, we distrust God's provision for securing in the world those interests that are bound up with the work and Person of Christ. Man is responsible for the observance of what is enjoined, not for imaginary temporary consequences that will ensue from an observance of what is enjoined. Here is the clue to hosts of failures of duty and wretched expediencies.

V. PROFOUND REVERENCE AS AN ELEMENT OF CHARACTER IS OF PRIME IMPORTANCE IN PERSONAL AND NATIONAL LIFE. No great character is formed without profound reverence as a chief feature. Men are mean, weak, morally low, in so far as they are trifling and destitute of awe. The spirit of levity, which treats all things as common and fit subjects for free and thoughtless handling, never reads the great lessons of existence, and never wins respect. A reverent man alone forms a true estimate of himself in relation to the vast order of things of which he is but a part. An irreverent nation lacks the strong, sober qualities which alone grow out of reverence as their root, and which alone can produce noble, strenuous actions. Now, the whole drift of the Mosaic ritual and commands was to develop and foster reverence in the people. The solemnities and details in reference to the ark, the sanctuary, the altars, the sacrifices, the cleansings, and assemblies were rational in their specific relations. The great gathering at the foot of Sinai, and the solemn restrictions there laid down (Exod. xix.), were evidently designed to develop a becoming "fear of the Lord" and profound regard for sacred things. The judgment on Dathan and Abiram was a check on a tendency to irreverence. The very hope of the people depended on the due maintenance of this reverent spirit. All had understood the command not to touch the ark in that light, and the judgment on Uzzah for the violation of that command was only another solemn way of impressing the people with the prime importance of this feeling. Hence, also, our care to encourage such forms of worship as best foster reverence of spirit, and such styles of teaching as exhibit the facts and principles from the recognition of which reverence will naturally arise. Hence, again, our appreciation of those providential events, such as sickness, bereavement, and stupendous manifestations of untraceable wisdom and power, which awaken or strengthen the feeling, "Great and holy is the Lord: who shall stand in his presence?"

VI. THERE IS AN EDUCATIONAL CHARACTER IN JUDGMENTS. The dull heart of man often needs something more than the still small voice and quiet order of events to arouse it to a sense of what is due to God and what is wisest and best for man. In every judgment—say of Sodom, of Pharaoh, of Dathan, of Ananias—there is pure justice; no wrong is done to the individuals concerned; but the acts have a reference beyond the persons affected thereby. The contemporaries of Abraham, the Egyptians, Israel in the desert, and the primitive Church, were instructed by what occurred in their midst. Many judgments are connected with the explicit statement that "the nations may know." The judgment on Uzzah formed part of the educational process by which God was bringing the people out of their low spiritual condition to the elevation in tone which would render them more effective in carrying out Divine purposes in the world. We cannot fully estimate how much we owe to the influence over us of the record of God's judgments contained in his Word. Nor is it enough to say that they are repressive in their influence, and not conducive to the developing of love and filial trust and the free joy of a superior life; for the repression and restraint of evil tendencies is requisite in creatures strongly under their influence, and, while checking from what

would soon be utter, hopeless ruin, they open the way for the action of other gentle, tender influences which do develop the free joyous spirit of the obedient child.

VII. THE SEVERITY AND GOODNESS OF GOD ARE PERFECTLY CONSISTENT AND OFTEN COEXIST. It is bad theology based on defective knowledge of Scripture to represent God in an exclusive aspect of mildness. Though we need not become material in our conceptions, and think of contrary attributes in him as so many quasi-physical forces contending one against the other or finding an outlet at the expense of one another, yet the very conception of love, when just, implies a rigid, severe guardianship of the order of things on which the welfare of the holy depends. This combination shines forth in the death of Uzzah. In case he was a really devout man, and simply in an unguarded moment of unwatchfulness put forth his hand, then his sudden death—though necessary to the maintenance of the ritual which we have seen was based on the principle of inculcating reverence, and useful, as an educational act, for the people—would not include, necessarily, loss and ruin in the next life. He might be saved, though as by fire. This combination of severity and goodness shines forth most conspicuously in the work of our Saviour, in whose life and death the reprobation of sin and the outflow of mercy to sinners form the two elements which render the cross a mystery of justice and mercy.

Distrust a foil to faith and love. It is said that David was displeased, and in his displeasure there arose a fear hitherto unknown to him, and, as a consequence of these, the enterprise on which he had entered with so much joy and confidence was abandoned till, as we shall see further on, the reward which came to Obed-Edom's faith and love, standing in contrast with David's gloomy imaginings, brought him round to a better mind.

I. DISCONTENT WITH THE ORDER OF PROVIDENCE PROCEEDS FROM A COMBINATION OF SELF-WILL AND IGNORANCE. David was dissatisfied and vexed in spirit with what had occurred to interrupt the joyous carrying out of his programme. It was not so much dissatisfaction with what Uzzah had done, or pain that he was dead, but annoyance that for such a deed the great terror of death should have come on them all. Had he spoken out all his feelings and thoughts, he would have said that such an event was undesirable, out of proportion to the deed, and an intrusive disturbance of a great and important ceremonial. Had he been at the head of authority, no such calamity as that should have interfered with a grand national undertaking. Possibly, apart from frustration of his own immediate plans for festivity, he may have been apprehensive of the effect of such a dreadful doom upon the mass of the people whom he was anxious to interest in the restoration of religion. But we can now see how all this was the outcome of self-will and ignorance. He wanted things to go on in his own way; he did not know, as he might have known on more profound reflection, that to maintain the authority of law and inculcate reverence and check national tendencies to levity were for the highest good of the people, and that these could be most assuredly promoted by this sad event. We have here an instance, in conspicuous form, of the very common circumstance of men secretly complaining of the order of events which Providence chooses. A rainy season, a sweeping earthquake, a transmission of evil consequences from parent to child, the destiny of the wicked, and many other things which do come in consequence of the constitution of the physical and moral worlds, often raise within the heart the feeling that some other arrangement would surely have been better, and that had we our way such things would not be possible. This is really self-assertion, love of our own way, ignorance of the innumerable ramifications of single events and acts, and inability to penetrate into the conditions on which alone a permanent and generally beneficial order of things can be secured. The psalmist rose to wiser thoughts and holier feelings (Ps. lxxiii. 13—22; xcii. 4—6; cf. Matt. xi. 25, 26; Rom. xi. 33, 34).

II. STRONG UNHOLY FEELING IMPAIRS THE CONCEPTION OF TRUTH AND DUTY. That David's annoyance with the order of Providence was a decidedly unholy feeling is obvious—it was the opposite of that meek, loving acquiescence in the ways and acts of God, even when they are most painful, which characterizes the truly filial spirit; and that it was strong is seen in the fact that from that moment he failed, under its action, to see the glorious truth enshrined in the symbol before him, and was moved to abandon

the work to which he had committed himself and the people. Psychologically it can be proved that all emotion affects more or less the steadiness of intellectual perception. Morally it is a matter of experience that an emotion of anger, distrust, or annoyance always interferes with a clear perception of spiritual truth. Plato was right in affirming that the νοῦς unaffected by the storms of passion and sense alone can see reality. The god of this world, by engaging and exciting feelings, blinds the minds of men, so that they see not the glory which shines in the face of Christ. David's fear of the ark, his dread lest something should happen (ver. 9), was contrary to all he had felt before. Hitherto the ark had been to him the symbol of that blessed presence which had brought joy and comfort to his heart—a reminder of the mercy which endureth for ever. It was not possible to see this precious truth through the mists of unholy feeling that had been permitted to rise in his soul. And this shrinking from what had once been reverently regarded as the spring of purest joy and satisfaction at once weakened the resolve he had formed to bring the blessed symbol to his seat of government and give it there the honour due. Duty gave way to the disgust and disappointment and foolish apprehensions generated by his own proud will. The correlative truths are clear, namely, in so far as we are lowly and absolutely acquiescent in the Divine will is our spirit calm and clear and strong in its recognition of highest spiritual truth, and in so far as this truth is perceived the path of duty is steadily followed. None knew the truth and pursued the path of duty as Christ, because none were so pure and calm and one in will with the Father. Herein is a lesson to teachers and taught; to those who meet with trouble and those who move on in joyful procession.

III. FAITH AND LOVE EXERCISED IN A TIME OF RELIGIOUS BACKSLIDING ARE ABUNDANTLY REWARDED. David's piety was now at fault; he had slipped backwards in the path of godliness; his conduct was an unjust reflection on Providence and on the holy symbol that shadowed forth the presence of the people's real Protector and Friend. Had men followed his example or caught his temper, they would have shrunk from the ark as from the source of death; and it would have been left in an obscurity and neglect equal to that of Kirjath-jearim. But all this serves as a foil to set forth, in striking beauty, the conduct of Obed-Edom, who, not dreading with slavish fear the Holy One of Israel, but, doubtless, in a quiet way, proud of the privilege, welcomed the ark to his house. Whether he first sought the honour, or whether this was the nearest Levite's house, we know not. In any case we can imagine, from the tenor of the narrative, how with careful haste the house was cleansed and prepared for its holy guest; the best and fairest chamber made, if it might be, yet more meet for such high honour; the Levite and his sons purified, that they might fitly bear in the ark to its destined place, venturing, perhaps, as they bore it along, to utter or think of the ancient words, "Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel!" Honoured, happy Obed-Edom! What faith in God! what love for the blessed presence! Did sleep fall upon him that first night? Was there not a joy that would make "songs in the night"? The bliss, later on, of Zacchæus was in a sense forestalled by Obed-Edom. The reality of the faith and love, and its continued manifestation in various forms of reverential interest, is proved by the rich blessing that came upon him and all belonging to him. The house became the abode of the higher forms of religious sentiment which in themselves are choicest treasures. Honour fell upon parents, and children felt the blessed charm. Servants began to feel, as never before, that their services were more than attentions paid to man. Providence smiled on field and vineyard. Men saw that somehow this home was now blessed above all homes. What lessons here for all! Who would dread with slavish fear the Christ, the Manifestation of the glory of the Father? Who would not welcome him as chief, most cherished Guest? Who would not subordinate all the arrangements of home life that he may be duly honoured there? Who would not rejoice that the Holy One does condescend to dwell thus with man, and brighten the fairest scenes of home life? Blessings abound where he is welcome Guest. No fear of flashing fire to destroy. To faith and love there is only mercy and peace.

"O happy house, O home supremely blest,
Where thou, Lord Jesus Christ, art entertained
As the most welcome and beloved Guest,
With true devotion and with love unfeigned;

Where all hearts beat in unison with thine;
Where eyes grow brighter as they look on thee;
Where all are ready, at the slightest sign,
To do thy will, and do it heartily!"

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. Times of religious excitement may arise in the natural progress of religion, but they obviously are not to be regarded as a normal condition of thought and feeling, and they may, by their absorption of one class of feelings, lay us open to peculiar temptations. 2. In every season of apparent and real prosperity in religion we ought to exercise self-control in prospect of the possibility of events arising through the imperfection of men which, from their nature, mar our joy. 3. Secret murmuring against what Providence ordains is a sin to which all are very prone, and therefore it is important to watch against it very closely, especially as it does more damage to our inner life than is often supposed. 4. We ought to ponder carefully the enormous injury done, both by our loss of personal influence and the force of example, when we, out of a feeling of sudden disappointment, throw aside solemn duties. 5. Those who render service to the cause of God in times of urgency may be sure that a rich blessing will come that will cause them to forget any temporary inconvenience experienced.

Vers. 12—23.—The facts are: 1. David, learning the blessing that had come upon the house of Obed-Edom, resolves to bring up the ark to Jerusalem. 2. Having made arrangements in accordance with the Law for the proper bearing of the ark, he inaugurates the procession by a sacrifice. 3. Girded with a linen ephod, he dances before the ark, and with music and shouting it enters Jerusalem. 4. Placing the ark in the tabernacle he had provided for it, he offers burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord, pronounces a blessing on the people, and distributes to them meat and drink. 5. Returning to his house, he is met by his wife Michal, who, having witnessed his dancing before the ark, now reproaches him with having demeaned himself in the eyes of the people. 6. With mildness of temper, but great firmness, he not only admits the fact, but glories in it as due unto God, and affirms his readiness to again debase himself in the same manner, being sure of winning the esteem of others less prejudiced. 7. Michal his wife remains childless. We have here a great change in David's religious condition; an event of supreme national interest; and the domestic sorrows of a devout man. The topics suggested may be taken in succession.

Joy restored. There is a marked change in the David mentioned in vers. 13—15 as compared with the David of vers. 8—10, and in general terms it may be expressed as a restoration to the joy of his life. But it is well to notice the process implied.

I. THE SINS AND ERRORS OF A REALLY GOOD MAN CAUSE HIM GREAT SUFFERING. In general terms, all sin entails suffering; but facts prove that the degree of personal suffering consequent on particular sins depends on the actual goodness of the man who sins. David was truly a "man after God's own heart," a man of pure sensitive nature, of enlightened conscience and intense sincerity. In some respect his very sin (ver. 8) was consequent on his noble ambition to see God glorified in a great national demonstration. We may be sure, although the historian says nothing of it, that the days immediately after his return to Jerusalem were full of bitterness. The fact that a great project, in which the nation was concerned, had come to a sudden collapse, that elders and common people throughout the land would be talking of his chagrin, that strange impressions would be conveyed as to the stability of his purposes, and the consciousness that his God was not to him now as he had been in days past, must have robbed him of former peace and embittered all the relationships of life. Peter's life was anguish after his fall, because he was so good a man. Dark days and painful sense of solitariness are the lot of many of the faithful after having turned their heart in distrust from their God.

II. REFLECTION ARISES AND GRADUALLY TONES DOWN THE TUMULT OF FEELING. For a time the passion of discontent and distrust, like a storm, would rage, and, while making David wretched by virtue of their own nature, would throw the reflective powers into confusion. No sinner is perfectly sane when under the stormy influence of his sin. In the case of a really bad man the confusion becomes worse by deliberate

indulgence in fresh sins in order to get rid of what slight uneasiness is experienced; but with David the disturbing force of sin would gradually expend itself, and the reflective powers would begin to review the situation and gradually allow the influence of truth and fact to reveal the folly and shame of what had been done. The monarch retired from the cares and toils of the day, and, though fretted and vexed by the bad impression his people might entertain as to his persistency of purpose, he could not but ponder the recent path of his feet, and the great truths on which he had formerly been wont to "meditate day and night" (Ps. i. 2). In good men, though fallen and wretched, the intellectual faculties, as under the action of a magnet, will be sure to concentrate on the truths that help to recovery.

III. THE MIND COMES IN DUE COURSE INTO DIRECT CONTACT WITH ACTUAL FACTS AND THE WORD OF GOD. Reflection would clear away the mists of passion, and David would see in the light of the written Word the error of setting out with the ark on a cart; the exposure, therefore, by his own arrangement or connivance, of the man to the temptation to violate the Law, and the justice of the blow which fell, as also its use in checking a spirit of indifference and inculcating reverence for sacred things. The piety of his nature, thus brought into direct contact with truth, would at once recognize its force, the shamefulness and folly of the discontent and distrust, and the desirability of placing the life once more in its proper relation to the general interests of religion. Penitents and backsliders are not far from restoration when once they gaze with calm and steadfast eye on the actual facts as illumined by the light of God's Word. The revealed truth of God is the material on which the reflective powers act, and so the truly sorrowful spirit does not become the victim of false imaginings.

IV. THERE IS BROUGHT ABOUT A VIVID RECOGNITION OF THE MERCY OF GOD IN CHRIST. As long as the passions engendered by indulgence in sin darken the soul, there is a loss of that clear and restful view of God which is the peculiar privilege of the pure in heart. David's sin (ver. 8) had transformed the all-merciful, covenanted God into an object of dread (ver. 9). But now that passion was subsiding, and the Word was allowed once more to shed its light on the facts of the case, the true character of God, as set forth in the sacred symbol, reappeared; and love, and mercy, and faithfulness, and care were seen to be concentrated in the glory over the mercy-seat. The memory of all that the ark had been to Israel, in the passage of the Jordan and elsewhere, also confirmed the returning conviction of the most precious of all truths. Once more the ark of the covenant of the Lord was, as of old, the revelation of Divine love and mercy. The same spiritual change occurs in men now when, on the subsidence of the passions, the full light of Scripture falls on the soul. God ceases to be full of terrors—an object of dread and avoidance. Christ is seen to be the express Image of the Father's Person, full of grace and truth. The old relation to him as God manifest in the flesh is restored; and the vastness and freeness of the mercy in him outshine all other truth, and shed a radiance on every thought and feeling. There is another transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 2).

V. THE FACTS OF HISTORY ARE SEEN TO ILLUSTRATE THE TRUTH RECOGNIZED. It was told David how the Lord was blessing the house of Obed-Edom. The experience of the godly who loved and trusted the ark as a symbol of the true character of God was thus in accord with the conviction arising from the exercise of reflection and the subsidence of sinful passion. History was in accord with the best thought concerning God, and furnished striking instances of the reality of a love and mercy by no means to be dreaded. Thus wonderfully does God interweave the experiences of his people for the common good of the Church and for the special help and cheer of those who have fallen into the snare of the evil one. Many a lowly Obed-Edom, by means of a love and trust simple and strong, and the blessedness resulting therefrom, has been the instrument of restoring to right views and feelings others whose position and powers were far more distinguished. Nothing is lost in the kingdom of God; small and obscure persons and things are employed for great ends. The bearing of the actual experiences of sincere and humble Christians in the common walks of life upon the formation, by the more gifted and influential, of just conceptions of the revelation of God in Christ, is a subject worthy of much consideration.

VI. THE TRUTH BEING FULLY RECOGNIZED, THE OLD JOY RETURNS. The narrative sets forth the strong abounding joy of David exhibiting itself in forms which, judged

by the cool feelings and conventional standards of Western life, seem almost fanatical. The question of form and degree is here really one of naturalness, and of this there can be no doubt. The king gave himself up to the full dominion of the present joy. The spring of that joy lay in his restored perception of what the ark of the covenant really was to himself and his people. It was not now the seat of flaming fire and source of destruction, but was the visible sign of the presence and favour of the God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in redemption. It told of protection, and guidance, and pardon, and holy communion. It was the reconciling meeting-place, where the trembling sinner became the loving, trustful child once more. The Jordan, the walls of Jericho, the restfulness of pious souls on the great Day of Atonement, all told of what a blessed heritage is theirs whose God is the Lord; and could he as a man and a king feel other than boundless joy now that the Refuge and Dwelling-place of all generations was coming to make a permanent abode in the very midst of his people? So it is with us all when, having known the oppression and darkness of sin, we come to see in Christ the Manifestation of the reconciling God, who forgiveth our iniquities, shelters us from condemnation, comes into close sympathetic fellowship with our spirits, and abides with us as Guardian and Friend. There are seasons when this restored joy is so pure and strong that all song and music seem too meagre for its due expression—when the spirit exults inexpressibly in the God of salvation. If dancing, when natural, is the gesticulated expression of what cannot be put into word or tone, then it might be an outlet for a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Wise religious leadership. The narrative from vers. 13—19 describes David's conduct throughout the great processional march to Jerusalem. He was here acting the part of leader of a great religious movement, and in his spirit and deeds we see the conditions of a wise religious leadership.

I. ABSOLUTE DEFERENCE TO THE AUTHORITY OF GOD. By comparing this account with the fuller record in 1 Chron. xv., it will be seen that David was most anxious that every step taken should be in accordance with the will of God. On the former occasion he seems to have left the people to follow the precedent set by the Philistines (1 Sam. vi. 7—9; cf. ver. 3), and we have seen with what sad consequences. The bitter experience of the past few months had, at all events, issued in the desire to pay deference to the revealed will of God in everything, and no longer adopt the questionable methods of men. This feeling is the first prerequisite to all spiritual success. Leaders whose minds are charged with the feeling that God is supreme, and that his will enters into all things and is first of all to be considered, carry with their own actions and words a force of the highest character. Their work is Divine, and God should fill the whole area of their vision. In so far as the thought of God as supreme dominates our mental life do we ensure action on sound principles, and put force and determination into our words and deeds.

II. MANIFESTATION OF A SPIRIT SUITABLE TO THE OCCASION. Whether the wearing of the linen ephod meant the assumption, by inspiration of God, of priestly functions in combination with the kingly and prophetic—typical of him who is our Prophet, Priest, and King—or whether it was but a garment of royalty used on special sacred occasions, this is clear: that by it David manifested a spirit appropriate to a very holy and blessed occasion. He would have people see that this was a time of consecration to the Lord, a time for purity to be the clothing of all, a time of exceptional sacredness. The impression on the people could not but be serious and elevating. Men who lead others have much in their power by virtue of the general spirit they manifest. It should always be in harmony with the occasion, indicating its special character, and bringing other minds into holy sympathy with the end in view.

III. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF GRATITUDE AND DEPENDENCE. There must have been among the people some trepidation on the first movement of the ark, and it was a wise arrangement that, on clearing the house of Obed-Edom, sacrifice should be offered expressing gratitude for mercies vouchsafed, and a sense of dependence on God for pardon and all needful good. The same is true of the offerings at the end of the journey. It was characteristic of the leadership of Moses that he sought to cultivate these sentiments in the minds of Israel all through the desert. We do wrong to ourselves and to God when we fail to recognize our obligations to him on every stage of

our life's course. Thankfulness of heart for the past, and trustful submission for all things needed, are the two elements of a cheery, earnest, and lowly service. The preacher, the missionary leader, the teacher, and parent, who knows how to foster these sentiments in others, is in a fair way of carrying through any spiritual work that may be in hand (Phil. iv. 6, 7).

IV. PREVISION FOR COMPLETENESS OF WORK. David not only sought to bring up the ark in a manner agreeable to the will of God, and by such personal bearing and special arrangements as should impress and elevate the people, but he looked on, and, by preparing a tabernacle beforehand, secured a completion of the work befitting its nature. Many a good undertaking is left incomplete for want of this prevision. It is true each man should be intent on the work of the hour, but the work of each hour is to be regarded as having relations to all future time; and so far as lies in our power we may anticipate the success of the succeeding hours and prepare the crowning work. The architect provides for the cupola while careful of the foundations. The statesman arranges for participation in wider privileges while educating the people up to them. The religious reformer looks on to the need of positive instruction and formation of new institutions on newly recognized principles even before releasing the people from the supposed errors of the past. The evangelist who seeks to arouse the people and bring them up to a better life, if wise, will anticipate the result of his efforts by providing solid instruction. Church leaders who seek to conduct the Church through phases of faith and practice, will forecast what is necessary when the present discipline has done its work.

V. HELPFUL WORDS AND BROAD SYMPATHIES. The people must have felt, when David stood up and blessed them in the name of the Lord, and then sent them home with substantial tokens of his sympathy, that he was indeed a leader of whom they might well be proud. The right choice of words, and the deeds which express a personal interest, are things which give a just and beneficial power over men. Human life is very dependent for its highest welfare on words fitly spoken and on deeds which symbolize affection and interest. A master of words that really convey blessing to human hearts is indeed a great man, a worthy leader. It is not by mere assertion of official authority, or performance of deeds strictly in accord with propriety and law, that hearts are won and characters moulded to a nobler type. The leader who can send his people home thankful for his existence and satisfied with the largeness of his heart, is wise in that he not only blesses men, but also renders them accessible in future to his influence.

Domestic hindrances to piety. A day of high festivities and holy gladness was closed by an event which must have made David feel how imperfect is the best estate at which man can arrive in this world. The reviling of his wife Michal was indeed a bitter element in the cup, and suggests to us a sad subject, too frequently illustrated in the lives of good men, namely, the hindrances to piety in domestic life.

I. THE MOST PERFECT HUMAN CONDITION IS MARRED BY SOME BLEMISH. To an ordinary observer David would seem to have been on that day the happiest and most honoured of men—monarch of the chosen race, in the flush of health and fulness of power and intellect, beloved by his people, and filled with joy in having brought to pass an event of great religious significance. But even for him there was a bitterness most bitter. In his home, where love and joy and full sympathy with all his noble aspirations ought to abound, there awaited him scorn, distrust, and the venom of spite. Truly, royal personages are not free from common woes. The fairest, most beautiful life is shaded by some sorrow. Every heart knoweth its own bitterness. In this we have, doubtless, an illustration of what has been true in all ages of all men. Behind all grandeur there is some destroying moth. The most charming prosperity is attended with some defect. There is "a crook in every lot." Even the great apostle knew the "thorn in the flesh."

II. DOMESTIC OPPOSITION TO PERSONAL PIETY IS AMONG THE MOST BITTER OF TRIALS. Though, as king amongst men of stubborn will and perverse disposition, David carried on his heart many a care, there was, doubtless, no trouble of his life comparable to that of the opposition of his favourite wife to the conduct which he, as a pious man, felt bound to adopt. Such sorrow presses heavily in the home where only joy ought to be found, and attends, as a dark, unwelcome shadow, the pathway of daily duty out of

the home. In so far as we believe godliness to be the best of all things, and the particular expression of it we may adopt as the tribute due to God, so must the antagonism of those we love most of all embitter the spirit. This wearies and worries when, after the toil of day, the domestic circle is sought for repose and refreshment of heart. Apart from the pain of being opposed in what is most sacred and binding and precious, there is the oppressive feeling that two human beings abiding under the same roof, and pledged to mutual love and confidence, are pressing towards eternity with no assurance of being one there. This is a tender subject, the very mention of which may open the floodgates of weeping.

III. THE FORMS OF ANTAGONISM MAY VARY, BUT THE AIM IS ONE—TO WIN OR DRIVE FROM HIGH-TONED SERVICE. The sharp tongue of Michal was employed to reproach David for a form of service in which he rejoiced, and which he believed to be due to God and for the good of the people; and the ulterior aim was to hinder his adopting such courses in future. Others may meet with smiles and persuasions and all the engaging arts of the charmer, which in themselves do not assume the form of antagonism, but are designed for the same end. The manifestation of earnest piety is too earnest, too spiritual, too elevated, for the carnal mind; and hence must be brought down to a lower level. There are unspiritual wives who thus strive to despiritualize their husbands, and sometimes, but not so often, husbands strive to despiritualize their wives. Through unfortunate alliances many a godly soul has to experience this dreadful evil.

IV. THE TRUE WAY OF MEETING THIS TRIAL IS BY COMBINED MEEKNESS AND FIRMNESS. The rasping tongue of Michal and her base insinuations only provoked a gentle reply in a firm spirit. David would not increase the trouble by bitter, cutting words. Referring to God's choice of him and the consequent obligations to do all he could to raise the tone of religion, he calmly informed his wife that his purpose was unchangeable, and expressed the belief that some at least would see honour and not disgrace in his conduct. It is a hard fight to hold one's own in such a contest, and many, it is to be feared, gradually yield for the sake of what is called "peace," only to sink down to a formality in religion congenial to the unspiritual companion of the domestic hearth. Those thus tried have need to lift up their hearts to God for the wisdom and grace by which they shall know how to be true to their God and disarm the opposition or else neutralize its power. They have this encouragement, that, while the favour of the world can only tend to spiritual death, fidelity to God is sure to win the respect of all the good, command the silent reverence of even the hostile mind, and gather up daily strength wherewith to bear the burden of sorrow, and at last end one's course as a "good and faithful servant."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2 (1 Chron. xiii. 1—6).—(JEBUSALEM.) *The ark sought after long neglect.* 1. The ark was the central point of the religion of Israel. In this sacred chest were deposited the two tables of the *Law* (the testimony, the great document of the covenant); on it rested the *covering* (*kapporeth*) propitiatory (LXX.), expiatory (Vulgate), or mercy-seat (Authorized Version), "above it cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat," whereon the invisible King of Israel, the Lord of hosts, was enthroned; and there atonement was made, by the sprinkling of blood, for the sins of the people (Exod. xxv. 10—22). It was a symbol of Jehovah's presence and fellowship, his righteousness and mercy, his protection and blessing; a type of heavenly things. 2. Of the ark nothing is recorded since it was placed, about seventy years previously, on its return from the land of the Philistines, in the house of Abinadab, on the hill, at Kirjath-jearim; and Eleazar, his son, was consecrated to keep it (1 Sam. vi. 21, 22). During this long period it continued there, separated from the tabernacle (in Nob, 1 Sam. xxi. 6; xxii. 13, 19; and afterwards in Gibeon, 1 Chron. xxi. 29), unsought and neglected (1 Chron. xiii. 3), "buried in darkness and solitude." The worship and service of God were necessarily incomplete—an effect and evidence of the imperfect relations subsisting between the nation and its Divine King, and of its divided and distracted condition. 3. The time had now come for the restoration of the ark to its proper place as the

centre of national worship. The union of all the tribes under "the man of God's choice," the conquest of Jerusalem, the defeat of the Philistines, prepared the way for the great enterprise; and to it David was impelled by a truly theocratic spirit. "This act had its root in David's truly pious feeling, was the living expression of his gratitude to the Lord for his favour, and aimed at the elevation and concentration of the religious life of Israel" (Erdmann). 4. The truths and principles symbolized by the ark are fully embodied in Christ and Christianity (Heb. ix. 11). It may, therefore, be regarded, generally, as representing the true *religion;* and its restoration from "captivity" a *religious reformation* (see 1 Sam. vii. 2—6). In the going forth of the king at the head of "all Israel" from Jerusalem "to Baale, that is, to Kirjath-jearim, which belonged to Judah (twelve miles distant), to bring up thence the ark of God," we observe—

I. AN EXALTED AIM. 1. *The rendering to God of the honour which is his due,* by open acknowledgment of his supremacy, proper reverence for his great Name, cheerful obedience to his requirements. The religious life of a people is not only expressed in a proper regard for the ordinances of *public worship* (1 Sam. i. 3), but also greatly promoted thereby. When these are neglected, corrupted, or negligently performed, there can hardly be a higher aim than to make them attractive and pure, and induce a worthy performance of them. "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!" (Ps. xcvi. 9). 2. *The realization of closer communion with God,* and the reception of the blessings that flow from such communion—mercy and grace, righteousness and strength, safety and peace. "True religion can never be the affair of the individual alone. A right religious relation to God must include a relation to our fellow-men in God, and solitary acts of devotion can never satisfy the wants of healthy spiritual life, which calls for a visible expression of the fact that we worship God together in the common faith which binds us into a religious community. The necessity for acts of public and united worship is instinctively felt, wherever religion has a social influence, and in Israel it was felt the more strongly because Jehovah was primarily the God and King of the nation, who had to do with the individual Israelite only in virtue of his place in the commonwealth" (J. Robertson Smith, 'The Prophets of Israel'). 3. *The fulfilment of the purpose of God concerning his people*—that they may be holy, united, prosperous, mighty, and "show forth his praise" (Isa. xliii. 21). "O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity" (Ps. cxviii. 25). "The next great step of David (after the conquest of Jerusalem) was the re-establishment of the national religion, the worship of Jehovah, with suitable dignity and magnificence. Had David acted solely from political motives, this measure had been the wisest he could adopt. The solemn assembling of the tribes would not only cement the political union of the monarchy, but also increase the opulence of his capital and promote the internal commerce of the country; while it brought the heads of the tribes, and indeed the whole people, under the cognizance and personal knowledge of the sovereign, it fixed the residence of the more eminent of the priesthood in the metropolis" (Milman).

II. AN ENERGETIC LEADER. The enterprise was initiated, inspired, accomplished, by David, whose anxious thought on the matter is alluded to in Ps. cxxxii. (written subsequently), 'Jehovah's resting-place.'

"Remember, O Jehovah, to David
All his harassing cares,
Who sware to Jehovah,
Vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob:
'I will not come into the tent of my house,
I will not go up to the couch of my bed,
I will not give sleep to mine eyes,
Nor slumber to mine eyelids,
Until I find a place for Jehovah,
A dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob.'
Lo! we heard of it at Ephratah,
We found it in the fields of the wood.
Let us go into his dwelling,
Let us bow ourselves before his footstool.
Arise, O Jehovah, to thy rest,
Thou and the ark of thy strength."

(Ps. cxxxii. 1—8.)

"At Ephratah, at Bethlehem, the idea of making this great transference" (Acts vii. 46) may have first "occurred to David's mind" (Stanley; but see Commentaries on this psalm). "And David consulted with the captains of thousands," etc. (1 Chron. xiii. 1—4); "gathered together all the chosen men [warriors] of Israel;" and "arose and went." 1. Eminent piety in the individual manifests itself in deep and tender concern with respect to a common neglect of Divine worship, and in *wise and diligent effort to repair it*. "David's ruling passion was zeal for the house and worship of God" (Ps. xxvi. 8). 2. Men in *authority* should make use of their position for that purpose; not, indeed, in the way of compulsion, but of example and persuasion. "Where shall we find to-day men whose first concern is for the honour of God; who really believe that the favour of the Highest is the true palladium of their country's welfare?" (Blaikie). 3. Thus *one man* sometimes effects a general and lasting reformation. It was so with Samuel and David, and it has been so with others. How much may be accomplished by one man who is thoroughly in earnest! 4. In this manner such a man fulfils the will of God concerning him, and proves his *Divine calling* (see 1 Sam. xiii. 14). "These things show David to be 'a man after God's own heart,' every way fitted for the purpose for which he was exalted, a prince of the largest capacities and noblest views; and the extensiveness and national utility of the scheme he formed, in which the honour of God and the welfare and advantage of his people were equally consulted, demonstrate the piety and goodness of his heart, and clothe him with a glory in which no prince could ever rival or equal him" (Chandler, 'Life of David,' pp. 236, 320).

III. A SYMPATHETIC PEOPLE. In response to David's appeal, "all the congregation said that they would do so," etc. (1 Chron. xiii. 4). He "went with all the people that were with him," etc. 1. A leader of men, however great, stands in *need* of their sympathy and support, and can do nothing without them. 2. It is by their means that he *achieves success*. The age contributes as much to him as he to it. 3. The union and co-operation of the people with him are a sign of *the favour and blessing of God*, and a condition of further prosperity. "The new enthusiasm and elevation of the community was not the creation of David. It met him as his noblest incentive; but it is the completeness with which he suffered it to take possession of him . . . that constitutes the secret of his peculiar greatness, and the charm which never failed to attach to his struggles and triumphs all the strongest and purest spirits of his age" (Ewald).

IV. A UNITED AND ZEALOUS ENDEAVOUR. Captains of thousands, every leader, brethren everywhere, all Israel from Shihor of Egypt even unto the entering of Hamath, priests and Levites, chosen warriors, numbering thirty thousand (seventy thousand, LXX.), went "to find the lost relic of the ancient religion." They felt the value of the object of their search; were intent on its possession; "of one heart and one soul;" rested not in wishes and prayers merely, but exhibited their concord in practical, appropriate, persevering activity. It was a fresh starting-point for the nation, the commencement of a new religious era. Be it ours now to seek and strive after a still more glorious time!

"Oh, may the hour
Soon come when all false gods, false creeds, false prophets,
Allowed in thy good purpose for a time,
Demolished,—the great world shall be at last
The mercy-seat of God, the heritage
Of Christ, and the possession of the Spirit,
The Comforter, the Wisdom! shall all be
One land, one home, one friend, one faith, one law,
Its ruler God, its practice righteousness,
Its life peace!"

(Bailey, 'Festus.'

D.

Vers. 3—5 (1 Chron. xiii. 7, 8).—(KIRJATH-JEARIM.) *The ark brought out of deep obscurity.* The enterprise was marked by—

I. A GREAT DISCOVERY. "We found it in the fields of the wood" (Ps. cxxxii. 6). 1. An invaluable *treasure*, long hidden from view; like the "treasure hid in a field,"

and the "pearl of great price" (Matt. xiii. 44—46). 2. A significant *memorial* of God's mercies in times past. What manifold and mighty events would be brought to remembrance by the sight of the sacred, venerable, and mysterious coffer, when it came forth, as from its grave, into the light of day! 3. A sure *pledge* of the continued favour of God in time to come. "The ark was, as it were, the palladium of Israel, the *moving sacrament* of that rude people; not itself Divine any more than our sacramental bread is Christ's body, or our symbolic water God's grace, but the visible symbol of a presence supposed to be local, or of a power manifested in answer to prayer" (Rowland Williams). Yet it was "not a mere dead, idle shadow to look upon, but what certainly declared God's nearness to his Church" (Calvin).

II. A JOYFUL PROCESSION. "And they set [carried] the ark of God upon a new cart [waggon]; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons [grandsons] of Abinadab, drave the cart; and Ahio went before [Uzzah going alongside] the ark. And David and all Israel played [sported] before Jehovah with all their might, with songs, and with harps," etc. (1 Sam. x. 10; xix. 20). Already commenced the higher order of Divine service, to be afterwards more fully organized and established. For this occasion (as some have supposed) David wrote Ps. lxviii. 'The ark setting forward in victorious might.'

> "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered,
> And let them that hate him flee before his face."

Such language was historically appropriate (Numb. x. 35). The sacred procession served: 1. To express their gratitude, gladness, and triumph. 2. To deepen their devotion, union, and joy. 3. To produce a beneficial and lasting impression on the nation. 4. To exalt the Name of Jehovah among surrounding peoples. "No less than eleven psalms, either in their traditional titles, or in the irresistible evidence of their contents, bear traces of this great festival. The twenty-ninth psalm (by its title in the LXX.), is said to be on the 'going forth of the tabernacle.' The thirtieth (by its title), the fifteenth, and the hundred and first (by their contents), express the feelings of David on his occupation of his new home. The sixty-eighth, at least in part, and the twenty-fourth, seem to have been actually composed for the entrance of the ark into the ancient gates of the heathen fortress (Ps. xcvi., cv., cvi., vi., xlvi., cxxxii.)" (Smith's 'Dictionary'). "The hymns of David excel no less in sublimity and tenderness of expression than in loftiness and purity of religious sentiment. In comparison with them, the sacred poetry of all other nations sinks into mediocrity. They have embodied so exquisitely the universal language of religious emotion, that (a few fierce and vindictive passages excepted, natural in the warrior-poet of a sterner age) they have entered, with unquestioned propriety, into the ritual of the holier and more perfect religion of Christ . . . How many human hearts have they softened, purified, and exalted! Of how many wretched beings have they been the secret of consolation! On how many communities have they drawn down the blessings of Divine providence, by bringing the affections into unison with their deep devotional fervour!" (Milman).

III. AN INEXCUSABLE TRANSGRESSION. "The act of David and of Israel was evidently intended as a return to the Lord and submission to his revealed ordinances; but, if so, obedience must be complete in every particular" (Edersheim). It was ordained that the ark should be borne with staves on the shoulders of *men*, the elect men of the nation (Numb. vii. 9), and, in placing it on a new cart drawn by oxen, after the manner of the heathen (1 Sam. vi. 10, 12), they acted contrary to the Divine ordinance, as David subsequently recognized (1 Chron. xv. 13). Were they fully aware of the nature and importance of that ordinance? Perhaps not; especially after it had been so long in abeyance. Were they altogether ignorant of its existence? This could hardly have been the case with the priests and Levites. Such ignorance, moreover, would have been highly culpable. They were doubtless acquainted with it; but they were forgetful, careless, negligent, and adopted the method which seemed most expedient and to have been previously sanctioned. 1. "All religious reformations which are wrought by men, are blemished by human infirmities" (Wordsworth). 2. Long neglect of Divine ordinances commonly renders the renewed performance of them exceedingly defective. 3. Fresh and fervid zeal is often inconsiderate, self-confident, and rash. 4. Example is apt to mislead; and should be imitated only in so far as it accords with the Word of God. 5. The end sought may be in accordance with the

Divine will, whilst the means employed for the attainment thereof are contrary to it. 6. Good intentions do not justify forbidden actions. "Two things make a good Christian—good actions and good aims. A good aim maketh not a bad action good, as here; and yet a bad aim maketh a good action bad, as we see in Jehu" (Trapp). 7. The conduct which is blameless in some may be sinful in others who have received higher privileges. 8. Although the transgression of God's Law may be borne with for a time, it is sure to be followed by deserved chastisement. 9. If negligence and disobedience in relation to the material symbol were displeasing to God, much more must they be so in relation to the spiritual truth of which it was a shadow (Heb. x. 29). 10. The noblest agents should be chosen for the performance of the noblest services.—D.

Vers. 6—8 (1 Chron. xiii. 9—11).—(GOREN NACHON.) *The ark upheld with irreverent hands.*

"Read who the Church would cleanse, and mark
How stern the warning runs:
There are two ways to guard her ark—
As patrons and as sons."

('Lyra Apostolica.')

The fair prospects of a great enterprise are sometimes darkened, as by a *thunderstorm*, in consequence of the improper manner in which it is conducted. The forbearance of God toward those who transgress his ordinances is often unheeded, and becomes an occasion of further transgression, until the occurrence of a signal disaster fills them with fear and trembling. The act of one man, it may be, gives definite expression to the spirit which influences many, and on him falls the lightning-stroke of Heaven, as a punishment for his sin and a chastisement of all who are associated with him; a solemn call to consideration and amendment.

"Give unto Jehovah, O ye sons of God,
Give unto Jehovah glory and strength;
Give unto Jehovah the glory of his Name;
Worship Jehovah in holy attire.
The voice of Jehovah is upon the waters.
The God of glory thundereth."

(Ps. xxix. 1—3.)

I. A SEEMING EXIGENCY. The ark in danger! "For [at the threshing-floor of Nachon, or Chidon] the oxen shook it [kicked, broke loose, or stumbled]," so that the support of Uzzah was apparently needful to arrest its fall. In like manner religion—the Church, its worship, sacraments, doctrines—sometimes appears in perilous need of human help. But the apparent exigency: 1. Is commonly the result of *previous negligence* and disobedience on the part of those to whom its interests are entrusted, and the false position in which it is placed. If the "due order" (1 Chron. xv. 13) had been observed, the danger would never have arisen. 2. Serves the purpose of testing and *manifesting the character* of men. Will it lead them to consider, perceive their error, and amend; or occasion further aberrations? 3. Can never warrant an interference which is *expressly prohibited*, however great the danger or sincere the desire to avert it. "You must rather leave the ark to shake, if it so please God, than put unworthy hands to hold it up" (Bacon). 4. Is not so great as it appears; for God is able to *prevent* its fall or overrule it for good. "The special moral of this warning is that no one, on the plea of zeal for the ark of God's Church, should resort to doubtful expedients and unlawful means for the attainment of his end" (Wordsworth).

II. A SERIOUS ERROR. "Uzzah reached forth to the ark of God, and took hold of it." The Levites (of whom Uzzah was one) were to carry it on staves; but "not touch any holy thing, lest they die" (Numb. iv. 15). His error was *practical;* though in itself trivial, a direct breach of the legal requirement; and (as is often the case with an apparently insignificant act) indicated an unsanctified mind. He was "a type of all who, with *good intentions*, humanly speaking, yet with unsanctified minds, interfere in the affairs of the kingdom of God from the notion that they are in danger and with the hope of saving them" (O. von Gerlach). 1. He acted "unnecessarily, and from the precipitate *impulse* of human nature" (Ewald), unregulated and unrestrained by

proper thought and a higher will. 2. With rashness, *irreverence*, and profanity; begotten of long familiarity with the venerable relic (see 1 Sam. vi. 19). He looked upon it as little other than a piece of sacred furniture. 3. In a spirit of official *pride and presumption*, as its hereditary guardian and immediate conductor. "Perhaps he affected to show before this great assembly how bold he could make with the ark, having been so long acquainted with it" (Matthew Henry). Men of high position, great possessions, and eminent gifts in the Church, sometimes display a similar spirit, and even affect to patronize the worship of God! 4. With improper anxiety about the means of progress and success, and *want of faith* in the Divine presence and might. "In our own days there are not awanting men like Uzzah, who act as if it were all over with Christianity if they did not maintain it against the power of modern negations." Their *zeal* is shown in various ways. But "this zeal, notwithstanding its good intention, is yet unholy, because it is as faint-hearted as it is presumptuous. The Lord needs not such helpers" (Krummacher).

III. A STARTLING JUDGMENT. "And the anger of Jehovah was kindled, . . . and he died there by the ark of God." A flash of lightning, an apoplectic stroke, or other secondary cause, was the instrument thereof; in the presence of all Israel, and even before the mercy-seat, he suffered the penalty of his error ("rashness," ver. 7); and the spot where he fell became a monument of the wrath of God and his power to protect his "holy things" (Ezek. xxii. 8). 1. On those who continue to break the Divine Law "the fiery indignation," though long delayed, breaks forth *suddenly* and "without remedy" (Heb. x. 31). 2. Punishment is most *severe* on those who are most honoured, and who ought to be a pattern to others of reverence and obedience (Numb. iii. 4; 1 Sam. v. 6; vi. 19; 2 Chron. xxvi. 21; Acts v. 5; xii. 23). 3. The consequences of sin reveal the *measure* of its sinfulness. 4. The judgment inflicted on one affects *many*, and represents their desert. The procession was stopped, the enterprise hindered, rejoicing turned into mourning, "and great fear came upon all" (Acts v. 11). "When many have sinned God commonly punishes one or two of the leaders, in order that others may remember their sin and beg forgiveness" (Osiander). Judgment is mingled with mercy. The punishment of one is for the good of many.

IV. A SALUTARY ADMONITION. 1. To consider the awful holiness and majesty of the great King (Mal. i. 11, 14); "for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 29). 2. To learn the spiritual meaning and sanctity of his ordinances. 3. To cherish a spirit of profound humility and reverence in his service. 4. To exercise repentance and trust, and new and faithful obedience to his will in all things. Then—

> "Jehovah will give strength to his people;
> Jehovah will bless his people with peace."
> (Ps. xxix. 11.)

D.

Vers. 9, 10 (1 Chron. xiii. 12, 13).—(PEREZ-UZZAH.) *The ark regarded with a fearful heart.* "And David was afraid of the Lord that day" (ver. 9). By none was "the disaster of Uzzah" more keenly felt than by the king. He was disappointed, grieved, and displeased at the interruption of the enterprise on which he had set his heart; and, clearly perceiving the primary offence that had been committed, he was *angry* with all who were responsible for it, not least with himself (2 Cor. vii. 11). "The burning of David's anger was not directed against God, but referred to the calamity which had befallen Uzzah, or, speaking more correctly, to the cause of the calamity which David attributed to himself or to his undertaking" (Keil). His attitude of soul toward Jehovah "that day" was not, indeed, altogether what it should have been. Conscious of sinfulness and liability to err, he was full of apprehension of a similar judgment on himself, if he should receive the ark; and his *fear* (though springing up in a devout heart) was an oppressive, paralyzing, superstitious terror, like that of the men of Beth-shemesh (1 Sam. vi. 20), rather than an enlightened, submissive, and becoming reverence. "This was his infirmity; though some will have it to be his humility" (Trapp). We thus see wherein *fear* is—

I. NEEDFUL. It is as natural and proper a motive as gratitude, hope, or love; is often enjoined; and, in the sense of unbounded reverence, it constitutes "the religious feeling in its fundamental form" (Martensen). To men in their present condition it is

specially needful in order to: 1. *Arrest heedless footsteps* and constrain to serious reflection and self-examination. "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (Ps. ii. 11; iv. 4). 2. *Convince of sin*, restrain pride and presumption, and lead to godly sorrow. 3. *Deter from disobedience*, and induce circumspection and diligence (Ps. lxxxix. 7; Prov. xvi. 6; 1 Cor. x. 12; 2 Cor. vii. 1; Phil. ii. 12; 1 Pet. i. 17). "Fear is a great bridle of intemperance, the modesty of the spirit, and the restraint of gaieties and dissolutions; it is the girdle to the soul and the handmaid to repentance; the mother of consideration and the nurse of sober counsels. But this so excellent grace is soon abused in the best and most tender spirits. When it is inordinate, it is never a good counsellor, nor makes a good friend; and he that fears God as his enemy is the most completely miserable person in the world" (Jeremy Taylor, 'Of Godly Fear').

II. SINFUL. It is so when associated with: 1. *Misinterpretation* and false judgments of God's dealings; such false judgments being themselves due to personal disappointment or other self-blinding influence. "In his first excitement and dismay David may not have perceived the real and deeper ground of this Divine judgment;" and thought that God had dealt hardly with him. 2. Suspicion, *distrust*, and "the evil heart of unbelief departing from the living God;" from which even the best of men are not exempt, especially when impressed with his severity and forgetful of his goodness (Rom. xi. 22). 3. *Servile* thoughts of the service of God, as a restraint upon freedom and a source of trouble and danger. "How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" 4. *Immoderate* and morbid indulgence of the feeling, instead of immediate return to God at "the throne of grace," in penitence, hope, and renewed devotion (1 Sam. xvi. 2; xxviii. 1).

III. HURTFUL. By: 1. Producing inward distraction and despondency. 2. Estranging from the fellowship and service of God, and preventing the accomplishment of holy purposes. How many excellent enterprises are abandoned through unworthy fears! 3. Depriving of invaluable blessings. The loss of David appears by the gain of Obed-Edom (ver. 11), into whose dwelling the ark brought sunshine and prosperity. But with time and reflection his misjudgments were corrected, his faith revived, his fear was sanctified (Ps. ci. 2) and associated with holy and ardent aspiration after the presence of God in his tabernacle, and he wrote Ps. xv., 'The character of the true worshipper and friend of God.'

> "Jehovah, who may sojourn in thy tabernacle?
> Who may dwell in thy holy mountain?
> He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness,
> And speaketh truth in his heart. . . .
> He that doeth these things shall never be moved."
>
> (Ps. xv. 1—5.)

D.

Vers. 10, 11 (1 Chron. xiii. 13, 14).—(THE HOUSE OF OBED-EDOM.) *The ark received with a right spirit.* By means of the ark "the thoughts of many hearts" were "revealed." Whilst Uzzah treated it with irreverence, and David regarded it with dread, Obed-Edom the Gittite (of *Gath*-rimmon) received it "with reverence and godly fear." He was a Levite, and (like Samuel) of the sons of Korah, a branch of the Kohathites, whose office it was to "bear upon their shoulders" (Numb. vii. 9); and is subsequently mentioned as porter (musician), and doorkeeper of the ark (1 Chron. xv. 18, 21, 24; xvi. 5, 38; perhaps "the son of Jeduthun"). He did not seek to have the ark placed under his care; but, when requested by the king, he was not afraid to receive it, well knowing "that, although God is a consuming fire to those who treat him with irreverence, he is infinite in mercy to those who obey him." "Oh, the courage of an honest and faithful heart!" (Hall). The ark in the house of Obed-Edom may be considered as representing *religion in the home;* and wherever it truly dwells there is: 1. *A consciousness of the presence of God;* of which the ark was the divinely ordained symbol. As often as he and his household looked upon the sacred vessel, mysteriously veiled with its blue covering, they would be the more deeply impressed with the conviction of that presence. We have no longer the symbol; but we have the spiritual reality which it signified; the one is taken away that the other may be

more fully recognized, and its recognition cannot but produce in the home thoughtfulness, reverence, and self-restraint. 2. *Obedience to his commandments;* which were deposited in the ark (2 Chron. ii. 10). The Law must be written on the fleshy tablets of the heart; made the rule of life; and diligently taught to the children (Deut. vi. 4—9). The sins which it forbids will thus be avoided, the virtues which it enjoins practised; "righteousness, goodness, and truth," the foundation on which the home is built; and the will of God being recognized as supreme, order and harmony will prevail. 3. *Confidence in his mercy;* according to the appointed method of reconciliation set forth by the mercy-seat, and fulfilled in Christ (Rom. iii. 25; 2 Cor. v. 19; 1 John ii. 1). The fatherly love of God, being "known and believed," becomes a perpetual incentive to love God and one another (Eph. iv. 32; Rom. xiii. 10). The pervading element of the home should be love. "Jesus Christ—Love; the same." 4. *The enjoyment of his fellowship;* which was assured at the mercy-seat. "There will I commune with thee" (Exod. xxv. 22). "Communion with God is the very innermost essence of all true Christian life;" and it is maintained and perfected in the home by family prayer (ver. 20). 5. *Repose under his protection;* represented by the overshadowing cherubim. While Obed-Edom guarded the ark of God, he was himself guarded by the God of the ark. "The Lord is thy Keeper" (Ps. cxxi. 5). "He shall give his angels charge over thee," etc. (Ps. xci. 1, 11). 6. *The reception of his blessing.* "And Jehovah blessed Obed-Edom, and all his household" (ver. 11), "all that he had" (1 Chron. xiii. 14)—blessed him with spiritual, providential, enduring benefits (1 Chron. xxvi. 4—8). "It paid well for its entertainment. The same hand that punished Uzzah's proud presumption rewarded Obed-Edom's humble boldness, and made the ark to him 'a savour of life unto life'" (Matthew Henry). "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children" (Prov. xiii. 22; Ps. cii. 28). 7. *The promotion of his honour and glory.* "And it was told King David," etc. Religion in the home "cannot be hid;" the fame thereof goes abroad and incites many—perchance a whole nation—to render to God the honour which is his due, "so that glory may dwell in our land."—D.

Vers. 12—15 (1 Chron. xv.).—(JERUSALEM.) *The ark led forth with devout enthusiasm.* A man's ruling passion, although repressed for a season, surely reappears. It was thus with David's affection for the ark of God, and his desire to bring it up to Zion, where he had prepared a new tent, tabernacle, or pavilion (Ps. xxvii. 5), for its reception (ver. 17), in or adjoining his own palace (1 Chron. xiv. 1; xv. 1). His zeal, which had been checked by fear, now revived

> "As florets, by the frosty air of night
> Bent down and closed, when day has blanched their leaves,
> Rise all unfolded on their spiry stems."
>
> (Dante.)

I. A RENEWED PURPOSE is ofttimes: 1. Incited by the *example* of another, and the manifest success attending his conduct. "And it was told King David," etc. (ver. 12); "And David said, I will go and bring back the ark with blessing to my house" (Vulgate). To this also his study of the Law, meditation and prayer, during the preceding three months contributed. 2. Accompanied with the conviction and confession of the *cause* of previous failure (ver. 13; 1 Chron. xv. 2, 13, 15). "Pious men will profit by their own errors, stand the stronger for their falls, and not abate in their zeal and affections, but learn to connect them with humility, and to regulate them according to the precepts of the sacred Scripture" (Scott). 3. Carried out with more careful and diligent *preparation* than before. "David gathered all Israel together"—the priests (Abiathar, 1 Sam. xxx. 7; Zadok, 1 Chron. xii. 28) and the *Levites* (mentioned only once in 2 Samuel, viz. ch. xv. 24); charged them to sanctify themselves to bring up the ark, and directed the chiefs of the latter to appoint singers with musical instruments for the procession (1 Chron. xv. 12—16), among whom he seems to have "found a faculty of song and music already in existence" (Hengstenberg).

II. AN AUSPICIOUS COMMENCEMENT. "When they had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings" ("seven bullocks and seven rams," 1 Chron. xv. 26)—"a thank offering for the happy beginning, and a petition for the prosperous continuation of the under-

taking" (Böttcher). 1. The *first steps* of an enterprise are of high importance, and, until they are actually taken, even the best prepared are seldom without misgiving. 2. When taken with the manifest *approval* of Heaven, they afford strong confidence and hope of a successful issue. 3. The *gladness* (ver. 12) of successful effort is all the greater because of previous anxiety and grief (Ps. cxxvi. 6). The procession was led by eight hundred and sixty-two Levites clad in white, in three choirs, playing respectively on cymbals, psalteries, and harps; over the first of which were Heman (grandson of Samuel), Asaph, and Ethan, or Jeduthun. Then followed Chenaiah, "chief" or marshal "of the Levites for bearing;" two doorkeepers; *the ark*, attended by seven priests blowing silver trumpets (Numb. x. 1—10); and two other doorkeepers (of whom Obed-Edom was one). Last of all came the king, with the elders and captains of thousands, and the whole body of the people.

> "Before went the singers, behind the players on stringed instruments;
> In the midst of damsels striking timbrels.
> There is Benjamin the youngest, their ruler;
> The princes of Judah—their motley band,
> The princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali."
>
> (Ps. lxviii. 26, 28.)

III. A FESTAL AND TRIUMPHAL PROGRESS. "With shouting and sound of trumpet" (ver. 15). Again arose the well-known shout, "Let God arise," etc.! (Ps. lxviii.; cxxxii. 8). The king may have composed the hymns sung by the Levites, and himself carried a harp in his hand. His clothing "had a priestly character, and not only the ephod of white, but also the *meil* of white byssos, distinguished him as the head of a priestly people" (Keil, on 1 Chron. xv. 27). And David, having laid aside his royal garment, which would impede his movements, "danced before Jehovah with all his might" (ver. 14).

> "The same who sang
> The Holy Spirit's song, and bare about
> The ark from town to town; now doth he know
> The merit of his soul-impassioned strains
> By their well-fitted guerdon."
>
> (Dante, 'Par.,' xx.)

"Simonides used to say of dancing that it was silent poetry, and of poetry that it was eloquent dancing" (Delany, from Plutarch). There is "a time to dance" (Eccles. iii. 4). David's dancing was a *religious* act (ver. 21); customary among a people of simple and demonstrative habits, on a return from *victory* and in public worship (Exod. xv. 20; Judg. xi. 34; 1 Sam. xviii. 6); rendered familiar to him in the school of the *prophets* (1 Sam. xix. 24); practised only on an extraordinary occasion; a natural expression of personal gratitude and joy (Ps. xxx. 11) in a man of ardent temperament; a sign of humble, avowed, and unreserved devotion to Jehovah (Ps. cl. 4); a means of identifying himself with the people, and of infusing his own spirit into them. Those persons who condemn him as deficient in modesty and dignity should remember these things: those who commend dancing as a social amusement or recreation by his example must find other grounds for their commendation; and those who justify the unseasonable, vain, and indelicate manner in which it is ordinarily performed, by his conduct, either misunderstand or shamelessly pervert it (Job xxi. 7—15).

Of *religious excitement* it may be said that: 1. It does not prevail to such an *extent* as might have been expected from the glorious truths set forth in the Word of God. 2. It is of great *value* in inducing the performance of duty, overcoming obstacles, and leading to a decisive course of action. Reason and conscience are often insufficient of themselves to influence the will effectually. 3. It is fraught with serious *danger*—of not being properly regulated by intelligence, of running into imprudence and excess, of being superficial and transient, and perverted to an unworthy and sinful end. 4. It requires to be *controlled* by an enlightened conscience, transformed into fixed principles, and translated into holy and useful deeds. Unless it be immediately acted upon it is injurious rather than beneficial.—D.

Vers. 17—19 (1 Chron. xvi.).—(ZION.) *The ark established in its chosen resting-*

place. The ascent of the ark into "the city of David" may be regarded as: 1. A *termination* of a state of things that had long prevailed, in which the relation of the people of Israel to their Divine King was interrupted, his service neglected, their power impaired. Even the early military successes of Saul were followed by disaster, dissension, and civil strife, which had been only recently healed. Once more there was rest (1 Chron. xxiii. 25). 2. An *inauguration* of a new era: the more manifest and abiding presence of Jehovah among his people, the more general recognition of his sovereignty, the organization of a worthier and more attractive form of worship, the more complete union of the tribes under the Lord's Anointed (Messiah), and the victorious expansion of his kingdom. "It was the greatest day of David's life. . . . It was felt to be the turning-point in the history of the nation. It recalled the great epoch of the passage through the wilderness. David was on that day the founder, not of freedom only, not of religion only, but of a Church, a commonwealth" (Stanley). 3. A *representation* (a type, or at least an emblem) of the coming of "Messiah the Prince" in his kingdom; either, more generally, in his whole mediatorial course from his first advent to his final triumph, or, more specially, at his ascension "far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things" (Eph. iv. 8—10).

> "Thou hast ascended up on high,
> Thou hast led captives captive," etc.
> (Ps. lxviii. 18.)

I. A GLORIOUS CONSUMMATION. "And they brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place," etc. "This is my rest for ever," etc. (Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14). To this occasion may be referred Ps. xxiv., 'The King of glory entering his sanctuary.'

> "The earth is Jehovah's, and the fulness thereof;
> The world, and they that dwell therein. . . .
> Who shall ascend into the hill of Jehovah?
> And who shall stand in his holy place?"
> (Ps. xxiv. 1—6.)

It is here declared that the proper preparation for communion with God is moral purity, not merely external pomp (vers. 9, 11; Ps. xv.; Isa. xxxiii. 15, 16). The former part of this grand choral hymn was probably sung on the way to Zion; the latter on entering the gates of the venerable fortress and city of Melchizedek.

> "Lift up your heads, O ye gates,
> And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
> That the King of glory may come in.
> *Who is, then, the King of glory?*
> Jehovah strong and mighty,
> Jehovah mighty in battle.
>
> "Lift up your heads, O ye gates . . .
> *Who is, then, that King of glory?*
> Jehovah of hosts;
> He is the King of glory."
> (Ps. xxiv. 7—10.)

"Amidst the glorious wave of song and praise, the ark was placed in the tabernacle." So Christ (in whom the Divine and human king are one) has entered the heavenly Zion, dwells with men, and prepares those who receive him, in faith and love, to dwell with him for ever (Heb. x. 12, 22).

II. AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE. "And David" (as head and representative of a priestly nation, Exod. xix. 6) "offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before Jehovah;" the former expressive of self-dedication, the latter of thanksgiving, praise, and joyous fellowship with God and one another. At the close of the service of dedication he instituted a regular "service of song in the house of the Lord" (see Hengstenberg, 'On the History of the Psalmodic Poetry'), due in part to the influence of Samuel and his prophet-associates (1 Sam. xix. 20), but having him for its real author, and receiving its mightiest impulse from his sublime compositions. He was a *prophet* as

truly as Samuel or Moses (Acts ii. 30). "David, as well as Moses, was made like to Christ the Son of David in this respect, that by him God gave a new ecclesiastical establishment and new ordinances of worship" (Jon. Edwards). "*On that day* then David ordered for the first time to thank the Lord by Asaph and his brethren" (1 Chron. xvi. 7).

> "Thank ye the Lord, call on his Name,
> Make known his deeds among the people," etc.
> (1 Chron. xvi. 8—22; Ps. cv. 1—15.)
>
> "Sing ye to the Lord, all the earth,
> Proclaim from day to day his salvation," etc.
> (1 Chron. xvi. 23—36; Ps. xcvi. 2—13; cvi. 1, 47, 48.)

"A day to be remembered for all time! Then 'the sweet singer of Israel' first gave the suggestions of his inspiration, and the product of his pen, to embody and guide the praises of the Church. What effects have followed that first hymn! What streams of praise . . . what clouds of incense have gushed and risen and are ever rising and gushing the world over at this moment, from the immortal impulse of that Divine act!" (Binney). Yet it is Christ himself "in the midst of the Church" (Heb. ii. 12) who inspires its noblest praises, and by whom the sacrifice is rendered acceptable to God (Heb. xiii. 15).

III. A GRACIOUS BENEDICTION. "And he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts;" recognizing him as "the God of omnipotent power in heaven, who victoriously accomplishes his work of salvation" (1 Sam. i. 3), and solemnly invoking a blessing on his people in accordance with his Name and covenant. His act, although not strictly an assumption of the office of the Levitical priesthood, was of a *priestly* character (even more so than the patriarchal blessing); "and thus, though but in a passing and temporary manner, he prefigured in his own person the union of the kingly and priestly offices" (Perowne), alluded to in Ps. cx. (written after this event), 'The victorious king and priest.'

> "Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent:
> Thou art a priest for ever
> After the order of Melchizedek."
> (Ps. cx. 4.)

It was while the Lord Jesus "lifted up his hands and blessed them" that "he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven" (Luke xxiv. 51)—a sign of his continual intercession and benediction. "Wherefore also he is able to save," etc. (Heb. vii. 25).

IV. A GENEROUS BENEFACTION. "And he distributed to all the people, even to the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as to the men, to every one a cake of bread, and a measure [of wine], and a raisin-cake," that they might feast together before the Lord (according to custom in the case of peace offerings, 1 Sam. i. 4; ix. 13) as a nation, with thankfulness, gladness, and charity. "It is a good thing when *benedicere* and *benefacere* go together, and when in a prince is seen, not only piety toward God, but love and liberality toward his people" (Guild). How much greater are the benefits bestowed by the exalted Redeemer than those conferred by any earthly monarch (Mark xvi. 20; Acts ii. 33)! "Christ has risen bodily into heaven that he may be spiritually present in the earthly heaven of the Church; the bodily ascension and the spiritual indwelling are two aspects of the same act. . . . The mystical David, from his own high home, dispenses his own flesh for the life of the world, and that spiritual bread which he that hungers after righteousness shall eat of and be satisfied, and that 'fruit of the vine' which is even now to be drunk in the earthly 'kingdom of the Father'" (W. Archer Butler).—D.

Ver. 17.—*The ark and the Bible.* The ark of the covenant has been taken as representative of religion, of Christ, of the Church, or of the sacraments and means of grace. It may also be compared with the *Bible* (or Scriptures of the old and new covenants), which is of even greater value to us than the ark was to Israel. The resemblance appears in their: 1. *Supernatural origin.* The ark was made according to the pattern shown (in vision) by God to Moses in the mount (Exod. xxv. 9), by Bezaleel, who was "filled with the Spirit of God" (Exod. xxxi. 3), and other wise-hearted men; and the tables of stone which it contained were "written with the

finger of God" (Exod. xxxiv. 1). The Bible is the product of Divine inspiration (2 Tim. iii. 16), though, like the ark, in connection with the (literary) skill of man. "It is a Divine-human book." 2. *External characteristics*, such as choice and precious materials (acacia wood and pure gold), durability, painstaking workmanship ("beaten work"), simplicity, compactness, beauty ("a crown of gold round about"), practical utility (rings and staves), which are all apparent in the Scriptures. 3. *Spiritual significance*—the presence of God, the Law (as a testimony against sin and a rule of life), atoning mercy, Divine fellowship and favour. "In the words of God we have the heart of God." The ark was a sign of these sublime realities, "not the very things themselves." With the Bible, wherein they are so much more clearly and fully set forth, it is the same. 4. *Wondrous achievements*; not, indeed, by their inherent virtue, but by the Divine might of which they were appointed instruments; in blessing or bane according to the diverse moral relationships of men. By the ark the Israelites were led through the wilderness, their enemies scattered, the waves of the Jordan arrested, the walls of Jericho demolished, the land subdued, Dagon destroyed, the rebellious punished, the irreverent smitten, the obedient blessed. Who shall describe the achievements of the Word of God? What enemies it has overcome! what reformations effected! what blessings conferred! 5. *Varied fortunes*: after long wanderings finding rest; misunderstood and superstitiously perverted, lost for a season to its appointed guardians, persistently striven against, treated with irreverent curiosity, buried in obscurity and neglect, eagerly sought after and found, cherished in private dwellings, exalted to the highest honour. 6. *Transcendent claims* on human regard—attention, reverence, faith, love, and obedience. 7. *Preparatory purpose* and temporary duration. At the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians the ark perished or was lost beyond recovery; in the new dispensation there is no place for it (Jer. iii. 16); but the mercy and judgment which it symbolized cannot fail (Rev. xi. 19). The Bible is necessary only in a state where "we see by means of a mirror obscurely" (1 Cor. xiii. 12, 13), not where we see "face to face." But, though in its outward form it vanish away, yet in the spiritual realities of which it testifies, the effects which it produces, the fulfilment of its promises and threatenings, "the Word of the Lord endureth for ever."—D.

Ver. 20 (1 Chron. xvi. 43).—(ZION.) *Family worship.* "And David returned to bless his household." A benediction or blessing is essentially a prayer to God that his blessing may be bestowed upon others; and, being uttered in their presence by one who (like the head of a household) holds a position of authority in relation to them, it is also, to some extent, an assurance of the blessing. Of family worship notice—

I. ITS OBLIGATION; which (although it is not expressly enjoined) is evident from: 1. The *relation* of the family to God: its Founder, Preserver, Ruler, Benefactor, "the God of all the families of the earth" (Ps. lxviii. 6; Jer. xxxi. 1; Eph. iii. 15). Out of this relation arises the duty of honouring him (Mal. i. 6); acknowledging the dependence of the family, confessing its sins, seeking his mercy, and praising him for his benefits; nor, without family worship, can its spiritual end be fulfilled (Mal. ii. 15). 2. The *responsibility* of the head of the household to order it in the fear of God (Gen. xviii. 18; Prov. xxii. 6; Eph. vi. 4; 1 Tim. iii. 4), which involves this obligation. 3. *Precepts*, promises, etc., with reference to prayer, which have a manifest application to social worship in the family (1 Chron. xvi. 11; Jer. x. 25; Matt. vi. 9; Rom. xvi. 5; 1 Tim. ii. 8; iv. 5). 4. The *conduct* of good men, approved of God, and therefore indicative of his will and recorded for imitation. Abraham (Gen. xii. 7, 8), Jacob (Gen. xxxv. 2, 3), Job (i. 5), Joshua (xxiv. 15), David, Daniel (vi. 10), Cornelius (Acts x. 1), and others. "Wherever I have a tent, there God shall have an altar" (John Howard).

II. ITS MANNER. It should be performed: 1. With *regularity* and constancy; other family duties being arranged with reference to it, and public worship made, not a substitute, but a preparation for it or an adjunct to it. 2. In such a way as is *suitable* and profitable to those who take part in it. 3. Always with thoughtfulness, *reverence*, and cheerfulness. 4. Accompanied by the reading of the Scriptures, by instruction, discipline, and consistent practice, and by holy *purposes*, such as are expressed in Ps. ci. (written shortly before this time), 'David's mirror of a monarch' (Luther).

"Of mercy and judgment will I sing,
Unto thee, O Jehovah, will I harp.
I will give heed to a perfect way—
When wilt thou come unto me?—
I will walk with a perfect heart within my house," etc.

III. ITS BENEFITS. 1. The sure approbation and rich blessing of God (Prov. x. 22), temporal and spiritual. By its means, perchance, a parent effects "the saving of his house" (Heb. xi. 7; Luke xix. 9). 2. The worthy performance of all the duties of life. 3. Abounding affection, harmony, peace, happiness, and hope that

"When soon or late they reach that coast
O'er life's rough ocean driven,
They may rejoice, no wand'rer lost,
A family in heaven!"

4. Holy influences, not only on all the household—parents, children, domestics—but also on the neighbourhood and society. What a mighty reformation would be implied in the general adoption of family worship! And to what a moral and spiritual height would it exalt our land!—D.

Vers. 20—23.—(ZION.) *Unholy scorn.* The greatest day of David's life did not end without a cloud. His wife Michal, "Saul's daughter" (ver. 16; ch. iii. 13; 1 Sam. xix. 11—17), had not, from whatever cause, gone forth to meet him with the other women (ver. 19) on his return to Jerusalem with the sacred ark; on beholding from a window of the palace, as the procession swept past, the enthusiasm which he displayed, "she despised him in her heart;" and when, after he had blessed the people, he returned to bless his household, she met him with sarcastic reproaches. "When at a distance she scorned him, when he came home she scolded him" (Matthew Henry). "Whereas David came to bless his house, she, through her foolishness, turneth his blessing into a curse" (Willet). Her scorn (like that of others) was—

I. INDULGED IMPROPERLY. 1. *Without adequate cause;* and even on account of what should have had an opposite effect. Fervent piety is not understood by those who do not possess it, and is therefore wrongly and uncharitably judged of by them (1 Sam. i. 13—18). "In Saul's time public worship was neglected, and the soul for vital religion had died out of the family of the king" (Keil). 2. *From want of spiritual sympathy;* in love to God and joy in his service. Her religion (like her father's) was marked by superstition, formality, and cold conventional propriety. She "knew nothing of the impulse of Divine love" (Theodoret). "The life from and in God remains a mystery to every one until, through the Spirit of God himself, it is unsealed to his experience" (Krummacher). 3. *With a sinful mind*—vain, proud, discontented, unwifely, irreverent (Eph. v. 33), and resentful. "Probably she bitterly resented her violent separation from the household joys that had grown up around him in her second home. Probably the woman who had teraphim among her furniture cared nothing for the ark of God. Probably, as she grew older, her character had hardened in its lines, and become like her father's in its measureless pride, and in its half-dread, half-hatred, of David. And all these motives together pour their venom into her sarcasm" (Maclaren). She had not "a meek and quiet spirit" (1 Pet. iii. 4).

II. EXPRESSED OFFENSIVELY. "How glorious the King of Israel made himself to-day," etc.! 1. At an *unseasonable time;* when, full of devotional feeling, he was returning from public worship "to bless his household," and when such language was calculated to be a cause of pain and of stumbling. But scoffers are inconsiderate, and reckless of the mischief their words may occasion. 2. With exaggerated statements and *misrepresentation* of motives. David had neither committed any impropriety, nor been desirous of vain display in the eyes of others, nor careless of affording occasion for their contempt. Mockers often ridicule in others what is really the creation of their own imagination or suspicion, and the reflection of the evil that is in their own hearts. 3. With *bitter irony* and derision. How keenly it was felt by the sensitive spirit of David may be learnt from what he says of an evil tongue (Ps. lii. 2; lvii. 4; cxx. 3). "Scoffing at religion is irrational; rude and uncivil; a most cruel and unhuman sin;

a most hardening vice; its impiety in the sight of God surpasses all description; it is a contagious and injurious vice" (J. A. James).

III. ANSWERED CONCLUSIVELY. By: 1. A sufficient *explanation* and defence. "It was before Jehovah" that he had "played;" conscious of his presence and desirous of giving him honour. He was not insensible to his own royal dignity; but recognized the surpassing greatness and goodness of Jehovah, from whom it was derived, and acted only in accordance therewith by giving free expression to his humble gratitude and abounding joy. His language was restrained (Ps. xxxix. 1; cxli. 3); though not without rebuke of the proud daughter of the king in preference to whom, and all his house, himself had been chosen. 2. An expression of his *resolve* to proceed still further in his course of self-humiliation (Ps. cxxxi. 1). 3. And of his *expectation* of finding honour instead of reproach among others. In the affectionate regard of those who sympathize with fervent piety, there is abundant compensation for the contempt of those who despise it. "In this incident we have the clue to that spiritual conception of his duties and position which distinguished David from Saul. It was, in fact, his spiritual conception of the true Israel, of the high privileges and duties of worshippers in the holy place, and above all of the privileges and duties of a king, as one who should carry out Jehovah's counsels upon earth, which distinguished David's reign, not only from that of Saul, but from that of any subsequent Jewish monarch" ('The Psalms chronologically arranged,' by Four Friends).

IV. PUNISHED DESERVEDLY. "Michal's childlessness is specially mentioned as a punishment of her pride. This was the deepest humiliation for an Oriental woman" (Erdmann). The scorner: 1. Inflicts a *self-injury*, by hardening the heart and rendering it less capable of faith, love, hope, sympathy, and joy; more solitary, discontented, useless, and unhappy. 2. Becomes unamiable and odious in the sight of *others*. 3. Incurs the displeasure of *God;* for "surely he scorneth the scorners" (Prov. iii. 34). "Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong" (Isa. xxviii. 22).

EXHORTATION. 1. Expect to meet with opposition and contempt in your zeal for God. Even Christ himself was despised and mocked. 2. Count it no strange thing, if in your household, which you desire to bless, there should be those who deprive themselves of the blessing and dislike your devotion. 3. Suffer not their scorn to quench your zeal for God and your love for their souls. 4. Seek in Divine fellowship consolation amidst human reproach.—D.

Vers. 6, 7.—*The death of Uzzah.* A startling event. Startling to us to read of. How much more to witness, in the midst of all the pomp and joy with which David was bringing the ark to consecrate his newly founded capital, to inaugurate a revival of religion amongst the people, and thus make some fitting return to God for all his goodness to monarch and subjects, and promote in the best and surest way the welfare of all! It is by sudden, startling, and terrible events that God very commonly calls attention to his laws, and avenges the breach of them. By such means the laws of nature come to be known, reverenced, and obeyed; and are thus brought into subjection to man, and made to promote his well-being. And by similar means men are made to reflect upon the laws of God with respect to religion and morals, and so the spiritual good of men is promoted. With reference to the sudden death of Uzzah, we remark—

I. IT WAS THE PUNISHMENT OF HIS SIN. "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah." Every sudden death is not a judgment, even when the result of disobedience of some law. Instances: a child killed while playing with fire or deadly weapons; a man struck dead by the electric fluid while experimenting with it. But the phrase we have quoted compels us to regard Uzzah's death as a punishment of sin. At first it seems difficult to discover in what the sin consisted. His conduct, in reaching out his hand to the ark and laying hold of it, seems to have been at least well-meaning: he desired to preserve it from falling to the ground. But well-meaning acts may be wrong and severely punished. In this case there were: 1. *Disobedience to a plain law, with the penalty of death attached.* (See Numb. iv. 15.) Indeed, the method of bearing the ark on this occasion was altogether contrary to the Law (Exod. xxv. 14; Numb. vii. 9), as David learned by this event (see 1 Chron. xv. 13—15). There appears to have been at this period a general neglect of the Law of Moses, and ignorance of its requirements. How, otherwise, can we account for the ark itself

lying so long neglected (1 Chron. xiii. 3)? But, surely, those who had the care of the ark ought to have known the law of God respecting it, or searched it out diligently when a new departure was contemplated, that they might both act rightly themselves and prevent the king from copying the Philistines (1 Sam. vi. 7) instead of obeying the Divine Law. In the swift punishment that followed Uzzah's act, the memorable maxim was again, and most impressively, proclaimed, "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. xv. 22)—better than the most splendid pageant in honour of religion from which obedience is absent. 2. *Irreverence.* The ark was one of the most sacred things in the religion of Israel. It was a symbol of God's presence, his local dwelling-place, "called by the Name, even the Name of the LORD of hosts, that sitteth upon the cherubim" (ver. 2, Revised Version); a witness, therefore, for him: an assurance that he was with them while they were loyal and obedient; the central point of worship and national life. It was, therefore, to be treated with utmost reverence. In the services of religion it was, as a witness for the invisible God, to be itself invisible, concealed by the second veil; it was to be approached only by the high priest, and by him only once a year, and with incense, the smoke of which should prevent his beholding it (Lev. xvi. 13). But it had long been separated from its proper place in the tabernacle, and kept in a private house, the inmates of which had probably become so familiar with it that they ceased to cherish due reverence for it. Hence the rash act of Uzzah. True, the temptation was sudden and strong. But so are many temptations. All the more need to cherish such habitual piety, self-control, and watchfulness, as shall preserve us in the hour of peril. The recollection of the circumstances under which the ark had been brought into the house of Abinadab should have been sufficient to arrest the impulse to lay hold of it (1 Sam. vi. 19—21). 3. *Presumption.* In pushing himself forward without warrant, and against the law, to preserve the ark from injury. Better to have left it to the care of him to whom it belonged, and who had shown in former days his care for it and his power to protect it (1 Sam. v.). It was an instance of zeal without knowledge and faith, and in which self was prominent rather than God.

II. THE DEATH OF UZZAH WAS FOR THE INSTRUCTION AND WARNING OF DAVID AND HIS PEOPLE. David was seeking to revive and re-establish religion, and this act of God appeared to be a hindrance to his good design; but in fact it tended to promote it more effectually than all the measures of the king. 1. *It was an impressive demonstration that Jehovah their God was still among them, the living God, the Almighty, the Holy One, observing and punishing sin.* It showed that his laws were still living laws, not obsolete, though forgotten; that the sacred things which he had appointed were still sacred in his eyes, however neglected, and were to be so esteemed by the people; that, in particular, the ark was still the symbol and pledge of his living presence, as a God to be approached and worshipped with reverence, yet also with confidence in the covenant of which it was the sign. Thus the impression produced by the terrible event would tend to the revival of religious faith and feeling, and secure that David's endeavours should not end in the establishment of a mere ritual, however orderly and stately, but in sincere worship and corresponding life. It was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that the revival of religion began with terrible judgments. We also need a living faith in the living God—faith in his relation to us and presence with us; faith in his love, awakening our confidence and affection; faith also in his majesty, holiness, and justice, awakening our "reverence and godly fear." To this end we should meditate on the awe-inspiring aspects of the Divine character and government, as they appear in nature and providence and in the inspired book. Otherwise our religion is likely to become a weak, superficial, and sentimental thing, without depth and power. 2. *It was a warning that was adapted to guide and restrain the religious zeal of the king.* There was danger that, in his ardent desire for the re-establishment of the national worship with fitting circumstances of splendour and orderliness, he should not pay due attention to the instructions of the Law, but should violate the will of God in the endeavour to pay to him and secure for him due honour. Uzzah's death would teach him that the Divine will must be first regarded. He learnt this lesson so far as the mode of removing the ark was concerned. He could scarcely fail to keep it in mind in all his subsequent proceedings. Great zeal for religion has ever a similar peril. Under its influence there is danger of adopting, with the best intentions, means and methods which are not according to the Divine Word. The most powerful persons

are the most likely to feel as if their own will might be their law. Thus carnality and worldliness come to regulate the affairs of the Church, and the Law of God is violated in letter or in spirit. Hence the "will-worship, the volunteered, self-imposed, officious, supererogatory service" (Lightfoot on Col. ii. 23), which has so extensively prevailed in Christendom, and which has originated or fostered errors of doctrine; hence also the terrible crimes against Christian liberty and love which have been committed *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, and thought to be sanctified thereby. 3. *There remain the common lessons taught by every death, especially by sudden deaths*, and yet more especially by sudden deaths in the midst of displays of human power and glory. The uncertainty of life, the certainty of death, the awfulness of death in sin (John viii. 21, 24), the vanity of earthly pomp and splendour, the necessity of habitual preparedness, the value of sincere and spiritual worship and service of God, the appropriateness of the admonition, "Be ye also ready," and of the prayer, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."—G. W.

Ver. 9.—*Dread of God.* The death of Uzzah made David "afraid of the Lord," and deterred him from fulfilling his purpose to bear the ark into the place which he had prepared for it in his newly founded metropolis. He seems for the time to have dreaded lest it should bring evil with it instead of good—a curse instead of a blessing. So the vast assembly was dispersed, and the day which was to have been so glorious and auspicious ended in disappointment and gloom. David's feeling is an illustration of religious terror, or the dread of God.

I. ITS NATURE. 1. *It is to be distinguished from that "fear of the Lord" which is so often inculcated in the Word of God*, and which is especially characteristic of the piety of the Old Testament. This is *reverence* of God, of his nature, authority, and laws. It includes, indeed, a dread of offending him, because of the certainty and terribleness of punishment; but it includes also veneration, esteem, and love. The feeling which is described in the text is simply alarm, terror. 2. *It may be awakened by various causes.* (1) Terrible acts of God: sudden deaths, as that of Uzzah, those of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts v. 5, 10, 11); violent tempests; earthquakes; deadly pestilence. (2) Terrible aspects of his nature. Holiness and hatred of sin; justice, displeasure against sinners; together with his perfect knowledge and unbounded power. (3) His threatenings. (4) The consciousness of sin. This is the secret of the dread which springs from the thought of God. A solemn awe is compatible with innocence, but the holy would not be "afraid of God," or if for a moment, at some startling and threatening event, only for a moment.

II. ITS VALUE. In itself and standing alone, it is of no religious worth at all. It is compatible with enmity to God, which is the opposite of true religion. When it springs into the heart of a good man it may be associated with very wrong feeling. David was "displeased" with God, while "afraid" of him (ver. 8). It tends to drive men from God rather than draw them to him (comp. Luke v. 8; viii. 37). It may drive them from him while seeming to draw them to him; for it is apt to generate a religion without love, without even reverence—an obedience which is slavish and destitute of true virtue. It is favourable to superstition, indeed, and may stimulate to great liberality; but, while acting alone, it cannot produce genuine godliness and true holiness. It is the feeling on which priestcraft in all lands flourishes. Yet it is good as a first step in those that need it, and a preparation for what is better; and some measure of it, blended with other emotions, is always of value to many, if not all. In Ps. cxix., where every feeling of a pious soul finds expression, this is included (ver. 120). And our Lord enjoins it as a safeguard against the fear of man (Luke xii. 4, 5). This fear is of great value: 1. To arouse the conscience and prepare for better things. Many are so hardened that they are incapable of being, in the first instance, drawn by love; their fears must be excited. 2. To make the gospel welcome; which, revealing the love of God and the redemption which is by Jesus Christ, is fitted and intended to allay the dread of God and awaken confidence and affection. 3. To stimulate in obedience to God and deter from sin. It is true that love is the noblest stimulus, and that perfect love casts out fear (1 John iv. 18); but love is not perfect in this world, and fear is needed when temptation is strong and the better feelings are for the time dormant.—G. W.

Ver. 11.—*God's blessing abiding with the ark.* Divine chastisements and Divine benedictions have in this world the same end in view—the promotion of true religion. The judgment on Uzzah and the blessing on the house of Obed-Edom were alike intended to reawaken a living faith and piety in the nation, by showing that Jehovah, the living God, was amongst them, and was still prepared to honour his own institutions and bless those who honoured them, whilst those who dishonoured them would incur his displeasure. Obed-Edom honoured God by receiving the ark into his house and caring for it; and, in return, God's blessing rested on him and all his. They act a similar part who receive into their homes and honour there God's book, God's servants, God's poor; those also who establish in their houses the practice of family worship, and keep alive in their families a warm interest in all that concerns the Church and kingdom of God. They and theirs enjoy the abiding presence and blessing of him who has said, "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. ii. 30). Notice—

I. THE INTRODUCTION OF THE ARK INTO THE HOUSE OF OBED-EDOM. It was owing to the panic occasioned by the death of Uzzah. May illustrate the apparently accidental circumstances which have sometimes introduced religion and the practice of family worship into families.

II. THE WELCOME IT RECEIVED. Obed-Edom, in this instance, excelled David. The alarm excited by Uzzah's death did not deter him from receiving the ark into his house. Faith subdued fear. He may well have felt that the act would be well-pleasing to God; that it would bring him and his nearer to God; that the ark would sanctify his home and turn it as into a temple; and that it could and would occasion no harm to those who honoured it for God's sake. So should the things, persons, and practices that bring God nearer to a household be welcomed; and so will they be welcomed by such as have begun to reverence and love him.

III. THE BLESSING WHICH ACCOMPANIED IT. "The Lord blessed Obed-Edom, and all his household." What form God's blessing took in this case, so that in the course of three months it could become manifest to others, we are not told; perhaps some marked increase of worldly prosperity. And such an indication of God's blessing is not uncommon in households where piety rules. But there are other blessings of God which to his children are more precious, and which are to be confidently expected by families which honour him. 1. *A pervading sense of God's presence and love.* This would surely result from having the ark in the house; and not less is it the result of having a Bible which is really valued and consulted, and a family altar. 2. *The enjoyment of the Divine Spirit.* The actual living operation of the present God on the conscience, heart, and life. He "gives his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." As the result of these: 3. *A new sacredness given to family life and duty.* The presence of the ark in the house would sanctify everything there, making the relationships sacred, and turning common duties into holy rites. Hence: 4. *Higher and more steadfast family affections.* Love to each other sanctified and elevated by common love to the heavenly Father and Divine Brother and Friend; unselfishness; unity; mutual helpfulness. 5. *More cheerful and free, and therefore stricter, obedience to the Divine laws.* The will of God as to the duties of parents, children, and servants, and of all towards those without, shining in a diviner light, better understood, and better practised. Hence the virtues which promote material and social welfare. 6. *Family happiness.* Springing naturally, as we say, but none the less as the result of the Divine appointment and active blessing, from such living. Happiness in and from the daily round of duty and affection. Happiness in the enjoyment together of God's gifts. Peace in trouble. Hope when one departs to the better home; a sense of union still ("We are seven"), and assurance of reunion in due time. 7. *Moral and spiritual fruitfulness.* Such a family dwells in an atmosphere highly favourable for the production and growth of piety and all moral excellence in those connected with it. It is a nursery for the Church. From such the best Christians and Christian workers go forth. Similar family life is multiplied and perpetuated in the subsequent homes of sons and daughters.

IV. THE EFFECT OF THE BLESSING ON DAVID. He was reassured, and took measures, at once more according to the Law and more successful, for fulfilling his purpose to bring the ark to Zion. Similarly, the aspect presented by families which serve God and manifestly enjoy his blessing is adapted to incite, and has often incited, others to

go and do likewise. Finally, families which regard not God may have many desirable things, but cannot really enjoy the Divine blessing. "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked," while "he blesseth the habitation of the just" (Prov. iii. 33).—G. W.

Vers. 12—19.—*The ark brought to Zion.* A grand day for Israel, and indeed for the world; the beginning of the religious significance of "Zion" and "Jerusalem," and the mighty spiritual influence which has gone forth far and wide from that centre. With respect to the bringing of the ark "into the city of David," we remark—

I. IT WAS THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF A DELAYED PURPOSE. Although David was shocked and alarmed by the event which compelled him to desist from his first endeavour, he did not give up his purpose, but evidently set himself to prepare for a more imposing and appropriate introduction of the sacred symbol into his metropolis than he at first contemplated. The narrative in 1 Chron. xv. and xvi. shows this; for such elaborate arrangements could not have been made in a short time. Delay tests the resolutions and purposes of men, reveals their quality, intensifies those which spring from true and reasonable zeal, and issues in their fuller execution.

II. IT WAS MARKED BY STRICT OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW OF GOD. The death of Uzzah had led to careful study of the Divine directions, which were now rigidly obeyed (1 Chron. xv. 12—15, with which corresponds ver. 13 of our text, "they that *bare* the ark of the Lord"). It is well when painful experience of the penalties of disregard to God's laws leads to inquiry and improvement. Unhappily, multitudes who suffer the penalties fail to profit by them.

III. IT WAS ACCOMPANIED WITH MUCH WORSHIP. Sacrifices were offered when a successful start had been made. Others, in greater number, when the ark had been placed in the tent prepared for it. The praises of God were sung as the procession moved on; and at the close of the ceremonies David "blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts." The suitableness of all this to the occasion is obvious.

IV. IT WAS A SEASON OF GREAT GLADNESS. Indicated by David's dance "before the Lord with all his might." Also by the shouting and the noise of musical instruments; and the royal gifts to the people at large, that all might feast.

V. IT WAS A NATIONAL TRANSACTION. All the tribes, by their representatives in great numbers, and all classes of the people—the king, the priests and Levites, the nobles, the officers of the army and their forces, the rich and the poor—united in the celebration. It was an act of national homage to the supreme Sovereign of the people—a kind of enthronement of him in his metropolis. It was intended and well adapted to make the people realize afresh that they were one nation, and to bind them in a closer unity hereafter, religious as well as civil.

VI. IT WAS THE INAUGURATION OF A NEW AND BETTER ERA IN RELIGION. The ark was not thus brought to Jerusalem to remain solitary and neglected, as it had so long been, but that before it Divine worship might be conducted daily in a manner becoming the new circumstances of the people. For this David had made careful preparation, organizing part of the priests and Levites for the purpose, while others were appointed to minister at Gibeon, where the tabernacle proper and the altars were (1 Chron. xvi. 4—42). For the national worship was not even now conducted in strict accordance with the Mosaic Law, since that required the ark and the altars, and the priestly and Levitical ministrations, to be all in one place. On account of circumstances which are not explained, though they may be surmised, the king could not do all that he would, but he did what he could; and this prepared the way for the more exact obedience to the Law which was rendered when the temple was built.

VII. IT MADE MANIFEST THE CHARACTER OF THE KING. His convictions as to the claims of God over him and his people; his zeal for the worship of God, and desire to infuse a similar spirit into the nation; his humility in descending from his elevation and fraternizing with, whilst he led, the people.

By the whole narrative we are reminded of: 1. The necessity and worth to a nation of true religion. To elevate its life, unite its various parts and classes, promote mutual justice and a spirit of brotherhood, regulate its conduct towards other peoples, and withal secure the blessing of God. 2. The worth of godly rulers. From their position, rulers necessarily exercise a wide influence, and it is a happy circumstance when their example is in favour of religion and virtue. 3. The difference between national

religious pageants and ceremonies, and true national religion. Many will unite in the former who have no part in the latter. The former are often more brilliant and imposing as the latter decays. National Christianity can exist only as the individuals who compose the nation are sincere Christians. 4. The lessons which the proceedings here recorded suggest to those engaged in opening a new Christian sanctuary. Concern to secure the abiding presence and blessing of God. Much praise and prayer: praise for all the mercies which have led up to the day, and all the revelations and promises that give hope to its proceedings; prayer for the help of God in all, his acceptance of the work done in his Name, his use of it for the promotion of his kingdom, the good of his Church, and the salvation of those without. Much gladness and mutual congratulation on account of the work accomplished, and the good that may be hoped for from it to individuals, families, the neighbourhood, etc. A hearty union of all classes in the services, introductory to permanent union in mutual love and combined effort.—G. W.

Ver. 16.—*Religious zeal despised.* "She despised him in her heart." A graphic picture here. A numerous and joyous procession marching into the city with the ark of God, with sacred music and singing and dancing; the king at the head of all, more joyous and enthusiastic than all the crowd besides; and Michal, behind her window, cool and collected, without sympathy with the object or spirit of the proceeding, yea, looking on with contempt, especially for her husband, who was so demonstrative in his display of zeal and gladness. She has many imitators. There are many who regard fervid zeal in religion with contempt.

I. WHY FERVENT RELIGIOUS ZEAL IS DESPISED. 1. *Alleged reasons;* as (1) that it is fanatical; or (2) unintellectual, a sign of weak mind; a style of religion fit only for women and weak-minded men; or (3) hypocritical; or (4) not respectable. The better sort of people, it is alleged, keep their religion within due bounds; certainly will eschew forms of religious earnestness which associate closely the upper classes with the common people. 2. *Secret causes.* May be: (1) Ignorance. Want of knowledge of Christianity. Acquaintance with its great facts, doctrines, and precepts, and the exemplification of them in the lives of our Lord and his apostles, would make it clear that they demand and justify the utmost warmth of love and zeal; so that for Christians to be zealous in holding, practising, and propagating their religion is simply to be consistent. (2) Irreligion, with or without knowledge. Unbelief or disbelief. The absence of religious faith and feeling. Possibly a settled hatred of religion and goodness. Men of this class cannot possibly understand or appreciate the operations of religion in the heart. The sincerely religious may disapprove of certain forms in which others display their zeal, but they will not indulge contempt of them. (3) Formalism or superficiality in religion. To which ardent devotion and self-consecration are unintelligible. (4) Pride of intellect, taste, or station. "Hath any of the rulers believed on him, or of the Pharisees? But this multitude which knoweth not the Law are accursed" (John vii. 48, 49, Revised Version). (5) Sometimes would be found secret uneasiness. Zeal in others awakens conscience, which utters condemnation; and conscience is relieved (or attempted to be) by fixing attention on what is regarded as objectionable in the religious zeal of others, and cherishing contempt for them. (6) Religious bigotry, which has no tolerance for forms of religion, however sincere and good those who adopt them may be, that differ from those of the bigot himself. The piety of many good men is sadly marred by this spirit, and its earnestness feeds something very like hatred of fellow-Christians. In this case also contempt springs largely from ignorance, as well as from a lack of that principle of religion which is supereminent, viz. love.

II. WHY SUCH ZEAL OUGHT NOT TO BE DESPISED. 1. *It is in harmony with right reason.* In view of the nature and works of God and our obligations to him, especially the redeeming love of God in Christ, the evils from which we are redeemed, the blessings which are brought within our reach, the cost of our redemption. It is not zeal, but indifference and coldness, which are irrational. Nothing but the willing devotement of heart and life to Christ is suitable as a return for his love. Devotion without warmth, service which is ever measured and stinted, are absurd. 2. *It is required by Holy Scripture.* The great duties of Christianity, love to God and man, necessarily include warmth and earnestness. And the terms in which we are exhorted to seek our own

salvation and the good of others all imply zeal; the production of which is represented as one great end of the offering of himself by Christ (Titus ii. 14). 3. *It is countenanced by the highest and best society.* By cherubim and seraphim, angels and archangels, apostles, prophets, martyrs, saints in heaven and on earth, and him who is higher than them all, the Lord Jesus Christ, to whose burning zeal we owe everything. The grandest intellects in the universe may be appealed to by the zealous Christian. 4. *It is productive of the greatest good.* Christianity has conferred and is conferring the greatest blessings on mankind, and is ever extending the area of its beneficial influence. But it is its zealous, not its cold-hearted, adherents to whom men owe its extension and powerful operation. 5. *It secures the approbation of God, and final acceptance and reward.* He who zealously uses his talents is to be received into the joy of his Lord, while the slothful servant is rejected and punished. The highly respectable and self-complacent Church at Laodicea is severely reproved and threatened on account of its lukewarmness (Rev. iii. 15, 16). Only religion in earnest fits for heaven. There are no lukewarm Christians there.

Finally: 1. Let despisers of zealous Christians beware lest they be found despising Christ and God (Luke x. 16). 2. Let zealous Christians take heed of needlessly exposing their religion to contempt. As by associating it with things unworthy of it, such as narrowness of mind, cant, eccentricity, worldly policy, excessive ceremonialism, great ardour about small matters, little ardour about great matters, uncharitableness. 3. Some zeal in religion deserves to be despised. That, in particular, which is dissociated from truth, uprightness, holiness, or love. True religious zeal includes zeal for these; and no ardour of professed religion can be a substitute for them.—G. W.

Ver. 20.—*Domestic religion.* "Then David returned to bless his household." An interesting contrast with what precedes. Would have been a pleasing close of the narrative but for what follows. Presents David in an attractive light. His piety did not shine merely in public before a crowd; it illuminated and blessed his home. He did not regard his high station and the weight of the cares of state as raising him above, or releasing him from, his duties as head of a household. Nor did he, after that busy and exciting day, think himself excused from family duty. He had blessed the people in the name of the Lord; he now returns to bless his household, *i.e.* to invoke God's blessing on them.

I. How a man may bless his household. 1. *By maintaining and conducting family worship.* Praising God with his family. Praying with and for them. Giving the worship a family character by the mention of family blessings, needs, sorrows, joys; the especial mention of special circumstances and events which affect the family, as they arise. Doing this regularly and perseveringly. 2. *By the religious instruction of his family.* Reading the Word of God as part of the daily worship. Teaching the children the truths and duties of Christianity, formally and informally. The latter as important, to say the least, as the former. Let the New Testament be the recognized guide of the house, to which everything is brought for judgment. Let its teaching be instilled insensibly as occasions arise in family life. 3. *By family discipline.* "Ruling well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" (1 Tim. iii. 4); encouraging right, forbidding and suppressing wrong conduct; regulating the companionships and occupations of his children. Family government on Christian principles and in a Christian spirit is itself a mode of instruction, and blesses a household. 4. *By leading and accompanying his family to the house of God.* 5 *By setting a good example.* The head of a household cannot perform his duties aright without personal piety. He cannot teach what he does not value and practise; his instructions and prayers will lack the reality which impresses; his character will deprive his words of their proper force. But a good life is a constant lesson. Children will learn from the spirit and conduct of a good father how to think of their Father in heaven, and how they may serve and please him. The unconscious influence of the parent's life will be a perpetually operating power for good.

II. Why he should do so. 1. *It is his manifest duty.* Seen as we contemplate: (1) The relation of the family to God, as its Founder, the Originator of each household, the Lord of family life, the Source of all its peculiar affections, the Bestower of all its blessings, the Guardian of its weaker members (Christ's "little ones"). (2) The

relation to God of the head of a household. His servant, his representative, appointed for this very service. (3) The promptings of parental affection and godly principles, which are from God. (4) The express injunctions of Holy Writ. (5) The just claims of society, which has a right to expect that in the household good citizens should be trained and good members of the Church. The character and welfare of a people depend more on family life than on public law and force; and most fathers can best serve their country by training well their children. Let them render more public services if they are capable of them, but ever let them "return to bless their households." 2. *He will thus best promote the welfare and happiness of his household.* (See division III. of homily on ver. 11.) 3. *His own happiness in his family will be greatly increased.* If his desires for their good are granted, he will be a necessary partaker of their happiness, will rejoice that he has so largely contributed to it, and will receive a constant reward for his endeavours in their love and gratitude. If, through untoward circumstances, or counteracting influences against which he had no power to defend them, or through their own perversity, his efforts should fail, he will at least have the satisfaction of a good conscience.

In conclusion, what has been said of the duty of fathers applies equally to mothers, who have more influence than fathers over the younger children, and often over the elder also, and always have most to do with the order and comfort and moral atmosphere of the home.—G. W.

Vers. 20—22.—*A despiser rebuked.* The history of Michal is rather an unhappy one. In early life she became enamoured of David, to whom she was reluctantly given by her father. Afterwards, when Saul became the enemy of David, she was given to another, from whom, after many years, she was torn by her first husband, more, probably, from policy than affection. It is likely she had no warm affection for him now. She may have resented his succeeding to her father's throne. She had no sympathy with his religious zeal. Probably she originally admired the hero rather than loved the saint; and now that his fervour in religion has so strangely displayed itself, she can contain herself no longer. She felt herself—a king's daughter—disgraced by his vulgar conduct; and she resolves to tell him her mind about it; and so, as he returns to his house in joyous religious excitement, eager to bless his family, as he had just blessed the people, she meets him with bitter reproaches, to which he, surprised and mortified, returns a bitter answer, in which are, nevertheless, good reasons for his conduct.

I. HER REPROACH. It was in substance that his conduct had been undignified and indecent. The charge was plausible, but unjust. Her anger and want of sympathy with her husband's zeal led her to misrepresentation of proceedings which were innocent and praiseworthy. Similar lack of sympathy with ardent piety often leads to similar unjust judgment. Many are ready to condemn modes of expressing or promoting religion which are foreign to their own habits. But what would be unsuitable and unprofitable to one class of persons may be the reverse to another; and what would not be suitable as an ordinary practice may be allowable and commendable under special circumstances. In times of general excitement men will do what would be ridiculous at other times. Zacchæus climbed a tree to get a good view of Jesus, regardless of dignity and the possible ridicule of the crowd; and he was rewarded for it. David would not have displayed his zeal by leading the multitude in music and singing and dancing under ordinary circumstances. Reproach and condemnation are to be estimated partly according to the persons who utter them. Many who are ready to do so are incapable of passing just judgment, on account of a total or partial want of religion. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. ii. 14). And some who are not destitute of religion are so contracted in their views and feelings that they are unable to estimate rightly the religion of others. John the Baptist practised abstinence, and was said to have a demon. Jesus lived as ordinary men, and was condemned as a glutton and winebibber. The apostles on the Day of Pentecost were said to be "full of new wine." Those who are fond of orderliness and dignity in religion are prone to condemn all kinds of excitement and the freedom of form and expression which it favours. But it is possible to sacrifice

efficiency to order. While the lovers of order and good taste are exclusively indulging their preferences, multitudes may be left uncared for and untouched. When, therefore, by means which are thought objectionable, they are attracted and benefited, the objectors may properly be asked to find and employ better methods *which shall answer the same end*; and meanwhile to bear with, yea, thank God for, those who are doing a good work in a manner which they cannot wholly approve. On the other hand, those who love and employ excitement and freedom may well be warned lest they frustrate their aim to save men by using means inconsistent with that reverence and thoughtfulness which are essential to true religion, and lest they unjustly condemn their fellow-Christians who pursue their ends by calmer methods. There are room and need for variety of modes of worship and activity with one spirit and aim. Let us not condemn those who, in the Name of Jesus, are really casting out evil spirits, and bringing men to a right mind, though they do not follow with us (Luke ix. 49, 50).

II. DAVID'S REPLY. It was severe, and likely, as it was doubtless meant, to sting. Notice: 1. *His defence.* That what he had done he had done for Jehovah. (1) Him who in himself was worthy of all possible honour and public praise and confession. (2) Him who had chosen and exalted him, in the place of Saul and his house, to be ruler over his people. Piety and gratitude combined to impel him to rejoice before the Lord on an occasion so remarkable and auspicious. All of us have similar reasons for honouring God to the utmost of our power. In view of them, the most ardent zeal for the worship of God and the promotion of his kingdom is justified, and cold and measured service stands condemned. 2. *His determined resolve.* To do as he had done. Yea, to surpass his recent displays of zeal for the Lord. If this was accounted vile, he would be viler still; if this were to lower himself, he would sink lower still. Similar should be the effect upon us of the reproach which fervent piety may subject us to. If, indeed, objection be made to some of the ways by which we show it, we should reconsider them, especially when the objection comes from Christian brethren; but undeserved reproach should stimulate us to greater devotedness and more resolute determination. 3. *His assurance of honour.* From "the maidservants" of whom Michal had spoken so disparagingly. He virtually appealed from her judgment to theirs. What just foundation is there for satisfaction in the approval of the humbler classes? (1) They may be more capable of right judgment in matters of religion than many who are above them in worldly condition, and even in general education and intelligence. They may have more spiritual susceptibility and fewer prejudices. They may feel more their ignorance, and be more humble and teachable. They at least know what does them good, which is the end of all religious ministrations. Hence they are often right when their scorners are wrong. Our Lord was accepted and listened to gladly by many of the common people, while few of the upper and the learned classes received him; and he rejoiced and thanked his Father that, while the truths he taught were hidden from "the wise and understanding," they were revealed unto "babes" (Luke x. 21). And in the early Churches St. Paul tells us that there were "not many wise after the flesh, or mighty, or noble;" but that these were put to shame by the weak and despised (1 Cor. i. 26—28). (2) The good of the humbler classes is to be sought. To secure this end they must be interested, and their approval won; and he who can, without unworthy arts, succeed in winning them so as to lead them to Christ, may well rejoice and be thankful. David's language may be in substance adopted by preachers who are despised because approved and followed by the common people; while the ministry or Church which fails to lay hold of them ought to mourn and reconsider its spirit and methods.

To conclude: 1. It is an unhappy thing when man and wife differ radically in matters of religion. It deprives them of the unspeakable benefits of mutual sympathy and helpfulness. It is the occasion of dispute and unhappiness, if not settled alienation. It hinders very seriously the religious and moral education of the children. Let these things be thought of before the irrevocable steps are taken which bind two lives together. 2. There are worse faults in relation to religion than vulgarity, undue excitement, or eccentricity. These may be in some degree injurious, but indifference or hostility is fatal.—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VII

Ver. 1.—**When the king sat in his house.** The order is not chronological; for the words, **Jehovah had given him rest from all his enemies round about** (so the Revised Version, rightly), imply the successful termination, not of all wars necessarily, but certainly of something more than that with the Philistine invaders in the Rephaim valley. A general summary of all David's wars is given in ch. viii., and it was probably after he had subdued the Philistines and Moab, and his throne was now fully established, that in some time of peace, possibly before Hanun forced him into wars which won for him an empire, David sent for Nathan, and told him his full desire. Its position here immediately after the account of the bringing of the ark to Zion has a higher unity than that of chronology. It shows that David had always a larger purpose than the mere placing of the ark in its tent; and, as soon as a period of tranquillity arrived, he confided his thoughts to the prophet. Thus, with only one step taken towards his whole plan, David exercised a wise moderation in leaving the service at Gibeon unmolested. As regards the word "rest," we have to distinguish between the first series of wars, which established David firmly on his throne, and the second series, which gave him widespread dominion.

Ver. 2.—**A house of cedar**; Hebrew, ***cedars***. As these trees were sent by Hiram, and as the house was built, and David now settled in it, some considerable time must have elapsed since his accession. Moreover, the league with Hiram would be the result of David's successes recorded in ch. viii. 1; for the bond of union between the two was their mutual fear of the Philistines. As we have seen before, the alliance with Tyre had a very civilizing effect upon the Hebrews, who were far inferior to the Tyrians in the mechanical arts; and David's house of hewn cedar logs was marvellous in the eyes of a people who still dwelt chiefly in tents. David purposed to build even a more sumptuous palace for Jehovah, and advised with Nathan as his chief counsellor, and the person to whom subsequently the education of Solomon was confided. **Within curtains**; Hebrew, *the curtain;* that is, the tent. The tabernacle prepared by Moses for the ark was formed of ten curtains (Exod. xxvi. 1), but the significance lay, not in their number, but in the dwelling of Jehovah still being a mere temporary lodging, though his people had received from him a settled land.

Ver. 3.—**Go, do all that is in thine heart.** Nathan rashly approves. The king's purpose seems so pious that he does not doubt its acceptance by God.

Ver. 4.—**The word of Jehovah came unto Nathan.** Not every word of a prophet was inspired, and only a very few of the prophets, and those only upon great and solemn occasions, spake under the direct influence of the Spirit of God. In his usual relations with the king, Nathan was simply a wise, thoughtful, and God-fearing man. In giving his approval he probably meant no more than that a permanent dwelling for Jehovah was what all pious men were hoping for. But from the days of Samuel to those of Ezra, there was never wanting one or even more holy men who were, on fit occasions, commissioned to bear a message from God to man; and as these generally belonged to the prophetic order, men too often now confound prophecy with prediction. So inveterate is this confusion that even in the Revised Version Amos is made to say, "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son," whereas the Hebrew distinctly is, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son [that is, one trained in the prophetic schools], but I am a herdsman" (Amos vii. 16). But though not a prophet by profession, yet Amos was discharging a prophet's higher duty in testifying against wickedness and impiety, and was acting under a special Divine call. Still, he did not belong to the prophetic order, nor wear the garment of black camel's hair, which was their professional dress. On the present occasion, Nathan, in approving, had spoken as a man, but now a Divine message comes to him. How we know not, but in ver. 17 it is called a "vision;" and it is also said that it came "that night."

Ver. 5.—**Shalt thou**, etc.? The question implies an answer in the negative; but there is no disapproval of David's purpose as such, but only the deferring of its full execution unto the days of his son. There is more than this. The idea which runs through the Divine message is that the dwelling of Jehovah in a tent was a fitting symbol of Israel's unquiet possession of the land. It was David's mission to give them tranquillity and security in the region which they had conquered long ago, but wherein they had never hitherto been able to maintain their liberty unimpaired. Then, upon the accomplishment of David's special duty, his son, Shelomo, *i.e.* the peaceful, was to build the solid temple, as the proof that Jehovah had now taken permanent possession of the land. We find also a further thought, namely, that the building of the temple

signified "the making for David of a house." In its full significance this means that the tribe of Judah and the lineage of David were now chosen by God as the ancestors of the Messiah.

Ver. 6.—**I have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle**; literally, *I have walked continually*; that is, I have ever been a wanderer, first, in the wilderness, and subsequently at Gilgal, Shiloh, Nob, and Gibeon. Instead of a "tabernacle," the Hebrew has a "dwelling." This may refer to the houses of Abinadab and Obed-Edom, but the words more probably signify "a tent that was my dwelling."

Ver. 7.—**In all the places wherein I have walked**; Hebrew, *in all wherein I continued walking*; that is, in all my walking, in all the whole time wherein I have been a wanderer. Instead of *tribes*, the Chronicler (1 Chron. xvii. 6) reads "judges," the words in the Hebrew being almost identical. "Judges" is, of course, the more easy and natural reading, but "tribes" gives a fuller sense, and is supported by all the versions. For in the troubled anarchy which lasted until Saul's reign, first one tribe and then another was called to the front, and had a temporary ascendancy; but neither did Jehovah give it any command to provide a settled place for his worship, nor did any one of the judges conceive the thought of making his tribe permanently the chief, by providing a fixed abode for the ark and for God's worship within its borders. **To feed my people Israel.** The shepherd, in biblical language, is the ruler, and *to feed* is to govern, yet in a kindly way, going in front as the shepherd before his flock, to bear the brunt of danger, to clear the road, and to guide into the safe pastures. So tribe after tribe had been called to hear the brunt of war, and, after winning deliverance, it became its duty to guide and lead the people. In 1 Kings viii. 16, 18, 25, and still more remarkably in 1 Chron. xxii. 8, 9, we find large additions made to the account here given. It follows that we have in this place only a brief summary of the message brought by Nathan, but one containing all the chief points.

Ver. 8.—**I took thee from the sheepcote.** There is in Nathan's message a marked advance upon the words of all previous prophecies. Hitherto God's promises had been general, and no tribe, and much less any special person, had been chosen as the progenitor of the Messiah. The nearest approach to the selection of a tribe had been the prediction of Judah's supremacy until Shiloh came (Gen. xlix. 10); but it was not even there expressly declared that Shiloh should be of Judah's race. But now David is clearly chosen. Jehovah takes him from the sheepcote; Hebrew, "the meadow" (see Ps. lxxviii. 70). It was in the meadows, the Naioth, round Ramah, that Samuel had gathered the young men of Israel to study their ancient records, and raise their country to a sense of its high calling. In those meadows David had been formed for his high vocation; but he had returned from them to Bethlehem, to feed his father's sheep. And now, "from following the ewes that gave suck," Jehovah takes him to be "his servant," a word of high dignity, applied to but few persons in the Old Testament. It signifies the prime minister, or vicegerent of Jehovah, as the theocratic king, and is the special title of Moses among God's people, and, among the heathen, of Nebuchadnezzar, as one summoned to do a great work for God. But it is in the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah that the title reaches its full grandeur. For there, first of all, Israel is called Jehovah's servant, because it was Israel's office to be the witness for the oneness of God amidst the debasing polytheism of all the nations round. And then, finally, the servant is Messiah, as being the personal Representative of God upon earth. The title is now given to David as the type of Christ's kingly office, and also as the sweet singer, who added a new service to the worship of God, and made it more spiritual, and more like the service of angels round God's throne.

Ver. 9.—**I have made thee a great name.** The widespread conquests of David, and his great empire, were not for the sake of mere earthly dominion. It was, first of all, a type of Messiah's reign, to whom God has promised the heathen for his inheritance, and that his gospel shall be carried to the ends of the earth. But, secondly, if Messiah was to be "David's Son," it was necessary that that king should hold a special place in the hearts of all Israelites. In the fables and tales of the Arabs, it is Solomon who holds the foremost place. Just as our forefathers showed the native qualities of the race by making Arthur's court the abode of prowess and chivalrous bravery; so the Arabs made Solomon's court the representative of that dazzling splendour and magnificence which they so admired; and invested him with superhuman knowledge and magical power, such as made jauns and ifreets the humble slaves of his will. In the Old Testament no king is "Jehovah's servant" but David; no king is ever connected with Messiah but David. The religious fervour of the people may gather round a Hezekiah or a Josiah, and prophets may encourage them in their work; but no prophet sees in either of them the ancestor of Christ. It is, however, in the Psalms that we learn the full meaning of

Nathan's words. Here a veil is partly drawn over them. But it would be a wilful closing of the eyes to read this message and not bear in mind the clear light with which every word is illumined by the inspired outpouring of David's own heart. He thoroughly understood the fulness and blessedness of God's revelation, and has taught us that it all looked onward to Christ.

Vers. 10, 11.—**Moreover I will appoint . . . will plant.** For "moreover," the Hebrew has "and." The tenses also continue the same: "And I have appointed . . . and have planted." It is all part of the same act. As regards the second verb, the past tense alone makes sense. Jehovah was not about to plant Israel in a place of their own, but had just done so completely. For David's kingdom had given them security, and with it the power of doing for God that duty which was Israel's special office in the world. Had the anarchy of the times of the judges continued, and the energies of the nation been spent in a hard struggle for existence, that rapid advance in literature which followed upon the institution of Samuel's schools, and which filled David's court with poets and chroniclers, never could have existed, and prophecy would have been impossible. The age of Hezekiah was apparently the culminating period of Hebrew civilization, after which came the depressing influences of the Assyrian invasions, and then long exile, followed by a second weary struggle for existence. If writing was at first a mystery and an art known only to priests, it became throughout the monarchy the possession especially of the prophets, who were Israel's learned men. At the head of their roll stands the matchless Isaiah, and to render it possible for his genius to display itself, not only Samuel's schools, but the security of David's era of conquest, and the long peace and magnificence of Solomon's reign, were all necessary. When "God had given David rest from his enemies round about," he had thereby finally appointed a place for Israel and had planted them there. There is, perhaps, some difficulty in the verb-forms at the end of ver. 11, but none in the meaning. The reign of David marks an era in the national life. Under him Israel obtained secure possession of the place appointed for it; and now, having no longer to waste its energies in perpetual fighting, the national life grows upwards, and attains to culture, to thought, and civilization. Canaan is now their own, and instead of being mere warriors, they develop national institutions and a national character. What could men do that belongs to a higher and nobler life who were in daily fear of being swept away by Canaanites and Midianites, by Philistines and Ammonites? This miserable period is described as "beforetime," and as "since the day that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel." And here a colon should be placed; and the Hebrew will then proceed, "But now I have caused thee to rest from thine enemies:" the anarchy and its attendant weakness is over; "and Jehovah telleth thee that Jehovah will make thee a house." Rest has been given; the establishment of David's family as the Messianic lineage is to follow (see on this promise, 1 Sam. ii. 35).

Ver. 12.—**Thy seed . . . which shall proceed.** As the son is to be established in the kingdom and to build the house, he must be Solomon, who plainly, therefore, was not as yet born (see note on ver. 1).

Ver. 13.—**I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.** The temple which Solomon was to build was the symbol of the new development of Israel, and naturally these words suggest a meaning not unworthy of so great an advance in the accomplishment of the nation's mission. Had we, indeed, only this passage, we might be content to take it in a popular sense, as signifying that, whereas Saul's throne (and subsequently that of the many usurpers in Samaria) had but a brief existence, Solomon's descendants should hold for many centuries undisputed possession of the kingdom of Jerusalem. But in Ps. lxxxix. 29 we read, "His (David's) seed will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven." And again in vers. 36, 37 a continuance is assured to it as lasting as that of the sun and moon. We can scarcely, therefore, be wrong in the conviction that these promises pointed onwards to the establishment of Christ's kingdom, and that the great importance attached to the building of the temple finds its explanation in its relation to him. This full establishment after so long a delay of the Mosaic typical ritual, the addition to it of psalmody, giving it a spiritual side, and making the worship that of the heart, the bestowal of empire, and the rapid development of the people under David and Solomon, were all steps in that wonderful series of special providences which made the Jews fit to be the progenitors of the Messiah, which surrounded him during his ministry with companions capable of understanding and recording his teaching, and provided for him, after his death, missionaries, not merely with zeal enough, but with intellectual gifts sufficient to enable them to persuade both Greece and Rome to listen to tidings so wonderful and mysterious as that God for our salvation had become man. Keil also well points out that the temple was a symbol of Christ's

incarnation; for it meant the dwelling of God on earth. "I have surely," says Solomon, "built thee a house of habitation, a place for thee to dwell in for ever" (1 Kings viii. 13). The same thought was in St. John's mind when he said, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt as in a tabernacle among us" (John i. 14). For the verb used by him, literally "tabernacled," is a comparison between Christ's life on earth, and the dwelling of God in "the tent of meeting." But there is more than this. Christ himself calls his body "the temple" (John ii. 19, 21). At the Resurrection he raised up again the temple of his body which the Jews had destroyed, and at the Ascension it was removed from the earth, to be reserved in heaven until his second advent. His reign now is spiritual, and his temple is not a building made with hands, but is the heart of the renewed believer (1 Cor. vi. 19). And this indwelling of Christ in the heart will continue unto the end of the present dispensation. For Christ's indwelling is that also of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. iii. 16); and the gift of the Spirit continues unto the end of the world. "The Father shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John xiv. 16).

Ver. 14.—**I will be his Father, and he shall be my son.** Between father and son there is not only love, but oneness. Whatsoever the father hath, that belongs also to the son by natural right. But this sonship is magnified in the Psalms beyond the measure of Solomon or any natural limits. The Son there is "the Firstborn," which Solomon was not, "higher than the kings of the earth" (Ps. lxxxix. 27); and he must have "the nations for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession" (Ps. ii. 8). Psalms like the second and seventy-second belong, not to Solomon personally, but to him as the type of the Prince of Peace; and they help to show us what is the true meaning and fulfilment of the words here. **The rod of men**; that is, such punishment as men fitly receive for their faults. David's natural posterity was to be exempt neither from human depravity, nor from punishment, nor from the changes and chances of mortal life. With them, as with men generally, there would be a tangled skein, of virtue and sin, of folly and wisdom, of terrible fall and penitent recovery. But there was to be no blotting out of David's lineage. Great earthly houses, in the long course of events, one after another become extinct, and even the tabernacle of David was to fall (Amos ix. 11), but not for ever. God would "raise up its ruins" in Christ, and "build it as in the days of old." So in Isa. ix. 1 there is the same thought of the complete down-hewing of David's earthly lineage, yet only to rise again to nobler life and vigour, in the Branch, or Sucker, that was to spring from the fallen trunk.

Vers. 15, 16.—**Before thee.** This does not refer to time, but means "in thy presence," or "before thy face," that is, "as thou hast thyself been witness." There is a strong contrast between the fate of Saul's house and this eternal endurance promised to that of David. The lineage of Saul might have made a new start in Jonathan, and even when he died at Gilboa, he left a son behind him. Still, no one ever looked upon Mephibosheth as having any title to the throne; and though Shimei (ch. xvi. 5) may have conceived the hope that, if David were overthrown, the kingdom might return to Saul's family, yet, as a matter of fact, among the many vicissitudes of the ten tribes, the attempt never was made to search for a descendant of Saul to be Israel's king. Saul's was a royalty for one generation; David's throne was to be established for ever. Not because David was sinless. His character is sullied by crimes of the darkest hue. But he never sank into a mere tyrant, such as Saul was towards David and towards the priests at Nob. Nor did David ever become an irreligious man (1 Sam. xxii. 18, 19; xxviii. 15), though there is in him a strange and painful mixture of great good and great evil. The salt that preserves his character is his genuine sincerity and earnestness both towards God and man; and these qualities make him not unworthy of the high place he holds among God's people. Still, the promise was not because of David's deserts, but because from him was to come the Christ, who is blessed for evermore.

Ver. 17.—**Vision.** This word does not imply that Nathan saw anything with the natural eye, but signifies that sort of prophecy which was vouchsafed to a "seer." Thus the prophecies of Isaiah, of Nahum, and of Obadiah are called "visions." Probably the word is taken from the fixed gaze, with which the seer looked into the far-off world with unmoved eyes, yet seeing not with them, but with the spiritual sight within. It would thus be an intellectual process accompanied by a rigidity of the natural organs, caused partly by intensity of feeling, but chiefly by mental preoccupation, which left no faculty at liberty to discharge its ordinary function.

Ver. 18.—**David . . . sat before the Lord.** The word "sat" is usually explained by commentators as meaning "tarried." The rabbins give the word its ordinary meaning, and say that it was the privilege of kings to pray in a sitting posture. But we cannot possibly believe that kings at this early stage had established a special etiquette for observance in prayer, and the difficulty is

merely imaginary. Because the Jews prayed standing, and we moderns pray kneeling, we both assume that to pray sitting was an irreverent act. It was not so, nor are we to think of David as sitting at ease in a chair. He sat upon the ground, as was the Oriental custom, with his feet doubled under him, and his head bent forward; and in this posture meditated upon Jehovah's message, and then poured out his thoughts. As it is expressly said that "he sat before Jehovah," the place must have been the outer court of the tabernacle. **Who am I, O Lord Jehovah?** In the Authorized Version *Jehovah* is rendered "God," because it has the vowels of the word *Elohim;* usually it is rendered "Lord," because the Massorites attached to it the vowels of *Adonai*, "lord," equivalent to *Dominus*. As *Adonai* here precedes *Jehovah*, the Massorites were driven from their usual practice, and were so superstitious as to suppose it more reverent to pronounce the name *Elohim* than that of *Jehovah*, to which the Jews attached magical powers. David's words are not so much a prayer as a meditation, full of thanksgiving, and even of wonder at the greatness of God's mercies to him. In it he first acknowledges his own unworthiness and the meanness of his father's house compared with the high dignity which God is bestowing upon him. For not only has he raised him to the kingly office, but promised him the continuance of his house "for a great while to come." Whether David understood as yet that he was now placed in the same position as Abraham of old, in that "in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed," is uncertain, and depends upon the interpretation put upon the following words. This only we may affirm, that what he says in this place of his house remaining until a distant future falls far short of the meaning of the passages quoted above from the Psalms.

Ver. 19.—**And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?** Hebrew, *and this is the law of man, O Lord Jehovah.* In the parallel passage (1 Chron. xvii. 17) the Hebrew has, "And thou hast regarded me according to the law of a man of high degree." The rendering of the Authorized Version here, which, by making the clause interrogative, implies a negative, gives absolutely no sense; but some commentators render, "And this is the manner of men, O Lord Jehovah," understanding thereby that God was acting towards David in a human manner, that is, as an earthly friend and benefactor would do. But though the Revised Version favours this rendering, the Hebrew word *torah* never has this meaning, and, unless, the attempt be made to amend the text, for which the versions give no help, we must take *torah* in its usual sense, and understand that this continuance of David's house into the distant future has now become a human law, that is, a divinely constituted ordinance, which must now take its place among the laws which govern human affairs. The words are undoubtedly difficult, and we feel that David was speaking in an ejaculatory manner, in sentences but half expressed, breaking forth from him bit by bit, under the pressure of deep excitement within. We notice too that, while there is no direct reference to the Messiah in David's words, yet that the Psalms indicate that he did connect the duration of his house with the Messiah's advent; and this ejaculation may have sprung forth, if not from a fully formed conviction, yet from the feeling that the permanence of his house was for the purpose of a higher kingdom than that of Jerusalem; and so the promise was a "law of man," and the promulgation of a decree which affected the whole human race. This may be the meaning of the Vulgate, which renders "a law of Adam," that is, one embracing within its scope all Adam's race.

Ver. 20.—**Thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant.** The Hebrew throughout has *Lord Jehovah*, except in vers. 22, 25, where it has "Jehovah God," the title of Deity used in Gen. ii. The repeated use of this covenant and personal name of God is very emphatic; and the appeal to Jehovah's knowledge of his heart reminds us of similar outpourings of David's consciousness of his sincere devotion to his Maker, as for instance in Ps. xvii. 3.

Ver. 21.—**For thy word's sake.** In 1 Chron. xvii. 19 we read, "For thy servant's sake." The phrase seemed, perhaps, to the Chronicler difficult, but it does not mean "because of thy previous promise," for no such promise had been given, but "because thou hast now said it." Nor does it imply pre-existing merit in David, but that God had now chosen to declare his will, and what was according to his own heart. It thus makes God's own good will and pleasure the cause of the great honours bestowed upon David. Instead of **these great things**, the Hebrew has *this great thing;* that is, the lasting continuance of David's family.

Ver. 22.—**Wherefore thou art great.** God's goodness is to David a proof of his greatness, and he sees it displayed, not only in his dealings with himself, but also in the past history of the Jewish nation. There is in this a depth of evangelic piety. An unconverted heart would see the greatness of God in the majesty of creation, or in severe dealings with the impenitent. David saw it in acts of mercy and kindness.

We look upon Elijah as the very type of sternness, yet he too recognized the presence of God in "the still small voice" of gentleness and love (1 Kings xix. 13).

Ver. 23.—**And what one nation**, etc.? The translation should be, *And who is like thy people, like Israel, the one nation upon earth which God went to redeem for himself to be his people, and to make for him a name*, etc.? Israel both was and remains to this day a nation unique in its history, both in those early dealings of God with it, and also in its later history and its marvellous preservation unto this day. It is remarkable that in this place the word for "God," *Elohim*, is followed by a verb plural, the almost invariable rule in Hebrew being that, though *Elohim* is itself plural, it takes a verb singular whenever it refers to the true God. In the corresponding passage (1 Chron. xvii. 21) the verb is in the singular. No adequate reason has been given for this deviation, but probably the usage in these early times was not so strict as it became subsequently. It is the influence of writing, and of the eye becoming conversant with writing, that makes men correct in their use of language and in the spelling of words. In the Syriac Church, God the Word and God the Holy Ghost were at first spoken of in the feminine gender, because "Word" and "Spirit" are both feminine nouns; but grammar soon gave way to soundness of thought and feeling. So probably in colloquial language *Elohim* was often used with a verb plural, but correct thinking forbade and overruled grammar. We may regard this, then, as one of the few passages in which the colloquial usage has escaped correction, and attach no further importance to it. **For you.** "You" is plural, and refers to the people. The Vulgate has "for them," which is in accordance with the greater exactness of modern grammar. But sudden changes of person are very common in Hebrew, which follows the rules of thought rather than of written composition; and so David speaks of Israel as *you*, because they seemed to him to be present. We must note, however, that in the words that follow, **for thy land, and thy people**, the pronoun is singular, and refers to God. **From the nations and their gods.** Both the Authorized Version and the Revised Version, by inserting "from," which is not in the Hebrew, take "nations" as in apposition with "Egypt;" but a moment's consideration shows that this is untenable, as "nations" is plural. But the whole verse is so full of grammatical difficulties as to make it extremely probable that the text is corrupt, and that we ought to supply the verb "to drive out," which is actually read in 1 Chron. xvii. 21, or even to substitute it in the place of "for thy land," which is omitted in the parallel passage. The nations which God drove out had nothing to do with Egypt, but were the seven dominant tribes of Canaan; and the bestowal upon Israel of their territories was as essential a part of Jehovah's dealings with his people as the Exodus itself. Thus the reading will be, *To drive out before thy people, whom thou purchasedst for thee from Egypt, nations and their gods.*

Ver. 24.—**For thou hast confirmed.** The word means "thou hast firmly and securely established Israel to be thy people." This plainly refers to the settlement in Canaan, now at last completed by David's victories, and not to the deliverance from Egypt. In the words that follow David recognizes the spiritual importance, not only of the permanent continuance of his house, but also of the empire given unto him. **For Israel is now to be a people for ever: and thou, Jehovah, art become their God.** It is very necessary to retain here the personal name, Jehovah, as it is in the Hebrew, and not dilute it down to the *Lord* of the Septuagint. For now, to David's mind, the covenant seemed complete, and ratified for ever. Israel is to have an everlasting existence—a promise belonging to it in its full sense only spiritually. For as long as the world lasts, it is against the spiritual Israel that the gates of hell shall never prevail. And next, first as the theocratic people, and then as the Church, it is to hold a unique relation to Jehovah, who is to be its God. For Israel, that is, the Jewish and the Christian Church, worships, not the God of nature, *Elohim*, but *Jehovah*, the God of grace; and they learn his attributes, not from philosophy, nor by metaphysical inquiry, but from his own revealed will, in which he teaches us what he is, what we are, and how we are to become one with him.

Vers. 25, 26.—**And now, O Lord God**; Hebrew, *Jehovah God*. Similarly, in ver. 26 the Hebrew is "Let thy Name be magnified for ever, saying, Jehovah Sabaoth is God over Israel." The special relation of Jehovah to Israel is throughout kept constantly in view; for Jehovah is the Name of Deity in covenant with his people, and it is in the confirmation and permanence of the covenant that David sees the true value of the lasting continuance of his own house.

Ver. 27.—**Thou hast revealed to thy servant**; Hebrew, *thou hast uncovered the ear of thy servant.* (see note on 1 Sam. ix. 15). **Hath thy servant found in his heart**; Hebrew, *hath found his heart.* The word "heart" has a wide meaning in Hebrew, embracing both our intellectual and our moral powers. Here it simply means "courage," as in

1 Sam. xvii. 32. The Revised Version puts this in the margin: "Therefore hath thy servant been bold to pray this prayer."

Ver. 28.—**And now, O Lord God, thou art that God.** The pronoun rendered "that" is really a personal pronoun used as the copula, which the Authorized Version inserts in italics. As this grammatical usage, which is common to all the Semitic languages, was not understood at the time when our version was made, we find all the parts of the verb "to be" constantly printed in italics, as though absent, while really they are expressed in the Oriental way. This has the advantage, however, of reminding the reader that wherever the verb "to be" is printed in Roman characters it has a much stronger meaning than the mere union of subject and predicate. Thus in Gen. i. 2 the first "was," in Roman type, means "existed," or possibly "became;" the second "was," in italics, is simply the copula. Here the correct translation is, *And now, O Lord Jehovah, thou art the God;* i.e. the one real, true God.

Ver. 29.—**Let it please thee to bless**; or, *begin and bless.* Literally, the verb signifies to make up the mind and set about the doing of the thing purposed. Thus David prays that the blessing may now at once begin to take effect. It is often rendered "please" in our version, because the verb is one used only of a determination resolved upon of the free-will of the purposer. Its force is well seen in Job vi. 9, where what Job prays for is that God would deliberate no longer, but decide the matter and set about destroying him. The Authorized Version was led, by the use of this verse "please," to adopt the optative form. Really, it is the language of firm faith, and should be rendered, *And now* [there is no "therefore"] *begin of thy own good will, and bless the house of thy servant.*

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—11.—The facts are: 1. David, being settled in his kingdom and furnished with a permanent place of abode, is dissatisfied that the ark of the Lord should remain in a frail tent. 2. He sends for Nathan, and intimates his desire to build a fitting house for the Lord, and receives encouragement from the prophet. 3. During a vision of the night Nathan is directed to inform David that his desire cannot be realized; that all along it had been God's will to move from place to place in a tent (ver. 6); that it was never his purpose to have any other abode while Israel was unsettled (ver. 7). 4. He is further to inform David that the dwelling in a tent, and his own call from the sheepcote (ver. 8) to be a leader of Israel, were both parts of one design, and that the success vouchsafed to him (ver. 9) was evidence of this. 5. Also, David is to know that, in pursuance of the same purpose, God gave his people a land of their own, and planted (these verbs to be taken as perfects, not as converted into futures) them in a permanent abode, free from the embarrassment of such powerful assailants as annoyed them in the time of the judges, and from which they now have rest. 6. The good desire of David, though not to be now realized, is acknowledged by the assurance that God has further purposed to establish his house in Israel.

Commendable but unseasonable zeal. Every reader of the narrative at once feels how natural and beautiful it was in David to desire, for the symbol of God's presence among his people, an abode somewhat commensurate with its glory and suggestive of permanence. It was in keeping with all the antecedents of his life, and there was manifested an exquisite spiritual sensibility in mentioning first of all so important a subject as a change in the abode of the ark to the prophet who represented the Divine source of guidance as distinguished from civil authority. What are the elements which render such zeal commendable and at the same time unseasonable?

I. THERE IS A PERSONAL ABSORPTION IN THE INTERESTS OF GOD'S KINGDOM AMONG MEN. God's kingdom among men was the great fact to be emphasized and illustrated in the life of the chosen race, suggestive of a more developed kingdom in later times. This fact had absorbed the energies of Moses, but was somewhat obscured when the people, weary of the existing form of the theocracy, asked for and obtained a king in Saul. From the first David had, in his own life, restored the idea of the Divine kingdom to the distinctness of Mosaic times, and counted himself to have no function in the world apart from seeking to realize it in the national experience. For it he lived and ruled; for it he prayed, and of it he sang. This was the fountain-head of all his zeal, and the key to the communication made to Nathan. Herein also is the

secret of all acceptable Christian zeal. We are right in feeling and purpose only in so far as our entire life is one with Christ's. Human life rises to its highest level only when it causes all its strength to flow in with the great stream of spiritual force which one day is to cover the earth. It is not patronage of institutions, study or criticism of Christian forms of thought and action, friendly feeling towards workers in mission fields, but personal identification with the interests of Christ's kingdom as the most vital and precious of all interests. This is a practical illustration of the phrase, "We have the mind of Christ."

II. THERE IS A WHOLESOME FEAR LEST PRIVATE AND SECULAR PROSPERITY SHOULD GENERATE SELFISHNESS. David was blessed with great prosperity in home and in state. In clearer, more reflective moods, he saw that this was connected with the furtherance of the great purpose of God in the world; but amidst the hurry of life and inevitable weaknesses of the moral nature, it was liable to produce a feeling of selfish content with his own condition. The dangers of prosperity are proverbial. His words to Nathan, contrasting his own permanent dwelling with the slender covering of the ark, revealed the thoughts and feelings of a man sensible of a grave spiritual danger, and anxious not to fall into it. It is sometimes, in the course of doing God's work, or what may be called secular work in a Christly spirit, that Providence grants men secular prosperity. Then comes the testing-time of the religious life. Many fall under the spell, and undue absorption in temporal personal comfort robs the kingdom of Christ of much thought and energy it otherwise would have received. The pleasures of the "house of cedar" shut out the condition of the spiritual kingdom. But where zeal is sound, watchfulness is maintained, and spiritual growth keeps pace with worldly prosperity, there will be cherished a wholesome dread lest the blessings which come from God should in any measure wean the heart from him and the supreme interests of his kingdom.

III. THERE IS A PERCEPTION OF THE TEMPORARY CHARACTER OF EXISTING RELIGIOUS APPLIANCES. Spiritual instinct led David to feel that the tent was not suited as the abode in perpetuity of the eternal, unchangeable God. There was an incongruity between the nature of the occupant and the frailty and transitoriness of the dwelling-place. Apart, then, from the contrast with his own "cedar house," he saw that the arrangement which had received Divine sanction through many generations was not to be considered as perfect and unalterable. This was confirmed by the faith he cherished that the presence of God among his people was in pursuance of the great historic promise made to Abraham (Gen. xxii. 17, 18), and preparatory to some further unfolding of the plan which embraced within its scope all the nations of the earth. So far his zeal in seeking a permanent abode for the ark was enlightened. And this is a characteristic of all true zeal. It does not merely proceed from impulse and strong feeling; it has respect to the nature of the kingdom of Christ and the variability of its outward appliances according to the stages of its development. The visible forms and arrangements adapted to one state of society may need revision and change more or less radical to render the deposit of truth more effective in its influence on a different state of society. A mere love of change is not identical with commendable zeal; a bare feeling that simple variation in outward forms will strengthen the power of religion is no sure guide; but a distinction between the permanent truth centring in Christ, and the transitoriness of the setting of that truth, will lead to a desire, when occasion offers, to make such modifications in the circumstantials of religion as may best accord with the nature of the truth on the one side and the development of human society on the other.

IV. THE IMPERFECTION OF THE ZEAL MAY LIE IN THE ERROR AS TO SEASONABLENESS. In this case all seemed right and sound, in accordance with the purest love and devotion, both to David and to Nathan. Subsequent light from God himself showed that here feeling was right and thought also up to a given point, but that the zeal was inappropriate by reason of a defective knowledge of the specific purposes of God. There were reasons in the Divine mind why David, at this juncture, should not build a house for the Lord. Probably his work of consolidation was not sufficiently advanced, and either then or later on he was reminded that a man of peace was alone suited for such work (1 Chron. xxii. 8; xxviii. 3). The defectiveness of the judgment even of good men is cause of much mistake in altering the institutions and visible agencies of the

Church. There are times when neither David nor Nathan may depend on their present feelings and knowledge, but more light must be sought from the Head of the Church. However sound the principle that forms and circumstantials do not possess the permanence belonging to the central truth they cover, still a busy zeal eager to introduce something new as more suited to a later development, even though shown by the most sincere of men, must be regarded with distrust unless Providence, by some means as good to us as was Nathan's vision to David, makes it quite clear that the time has come when the old should give place to the new. Holy desire, even when conjoined with knowledge of a limited experience, may not be fitly realized because God's time is not quite come.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. Where there is sincere piety there will be jealousy lest the cause of God should not receive its due consideration. 2. It will be a mark of prosperous piety amidst prosperous circumstances when men deliberately study how they may more worthily serve God and give him the honour due to his Name. 3. We should always anticipate that, as time advances, there will be fresh opportunities for manifesting our devotion, even though our specific methods be not wisest. 4. It is a noble ambition to seek to render the house of God as perfect as human means can make it, and in this often we see contrasts in character (vers. 1—3; cf. Hag. i. 2, 5). A good man's life's work attains completion in so far as he combines, with advancing secular prosperity, regard for the prosperity of religion.

The historic development of God's purpose concerning man. In vers. 4—11 we have an exposition of the grounds on which God declined to accept David's proposal to build a house for him. The motive was good, and there was a certain perception of propriety in the design, but as its unseasonableness resulted from imperfect knowledge of the Divine will, that will is here made known.

I. GOD HAS A PURPOSE CONCERNING MAN. This is the basis of the declaration to David. It may, indeed, be said that there is a Divine purpose in the existence of every atom and form of force, since each is what it is by the will of God, and is related to all the rest of the universe in a definite way, so as to issue in a progressive order. Every change is thus the working out in the material world of a purpose of the eternal mind. But while this is true of man also considered as an organized creature in the world, it is further true of him that there is a purpose in the eternal mind of which he is the object, and to work out which all other things are means and agents. God has something to effect for man as well as by man. The New Testament informs us that it is spiritual in its nature, and abounding with good to man and glory to God.

II. GOD'S PURPOSE CONCERNING MAN IS INCORPORATED WITH HUMAN AFFAIRS. It is pointed out to David that the history of his ancestors in Egypt and under the judges, and also his own personal history, have been the vehicle through which this purpose has been gradually working. God's thoughts for man assume concrete forms. They enter as the golden thread into the rough web of human life. Human wills work in their own free way, but another will works with them, and uses them in their free course for the manifestation of itself. Abraham's domestic life, Israel's sojourn in Egypt and the desert, the struggle for existence during the period of the judges, and the raising up and fall of Saul, and the exploits of David, were occasions and forms by which that redemptive purpose revealed itself which later on in Judæa, in Pilate's hall and in the ages of Christendom, became more distinct and yet more one with human interests.

III. IN THE OUTWORKING OF THE PURPOSE TEMPORARY INSTITUTIONS ARE CREATED. The ark and the tabernacle were the creation of the Divine purpose working along the line of human history. They were the product of two things—the purpose and the incidents of Israel's existence. David was right in viewing the tabernacle as essentially temporary; but he is reminded (ver. 6) that it expressed the Divine will for the time because of the human element through which that will was working onwards. A succession of temporary expedients is traceable from the first to the second Adam. One by one they disappeared before the approach of the true Light. Many of the modern expedients of the Church will prove their temporary character in so far as Christ's holy will works its way into the heart of the world, and men, possessing this life, become in the best sense a law to themselves (1 Cor. xiii. 8—10).

IV. THE DIRECT CONTROL OF GOD SECURES TRANSITION FROM STAGE TO STAGE. The words to David were, "I brought up the children of Israel;" "I have walked in a tent;" "I commanded to feed;" "I took thee from the sheepcote;" "I have appointed a place." Thus men were free, and history was formed by the free action of man; but, still, in pursuance of the Divine purpose, an unseen hand so fashioned the sum of human free action that captivity in Egypt yielded to a settled home, and a good shepherd appeared to care for the flock in that settled home. It was this recognition of the actual control of God so as to shape the items of human history and secure a succession of transitions towards a definite goal that distinguished the teaching of the prophets. It is this which gave such assurance to apostles (Rom. viii. 22, 28, 31). The contending forces of each age are subject to him who by his mighty working can subdue all things unto himself (Phil. iii. 21).

V. THE VALUE OF MEANS IN THE WORKING OUT OF THE PURPOSE IS RELATIVE. David's pious dissatisfaction with the tabernacle as an abode for the ark was met by the assurance (vers. 6, 7) that God was not dissatisfied, but had shown his approval of his servants who were identified with its maintenance. The tabernacle may have been inadequate to the later stage, but it was perfect in its adaptation to the early stage of God's method of working. He never complained of disrespect to his Name; he even honoured his servants who served him with such humble means. This applies to the methods by which, in different ages, revelations came to men—agencies for diffusing and preserving the truth, the condition of the Churches by which his will is still done and the individual efforts of Christians to bring on the final triumph of Christ. Those who will not approve of action and appliances and methods till they meet with what is absolutely perfect, do not know history, or else, knowing it, are unwilling to accept its lessons. In an imperfect world where perfect holiness has to be attained through means inferior, and out of perfect relation to the end in view, we have to estimate each method and agency by its fitness to raise us to a stage above the present, and in which it may be dispensed with for something that will be a stepping-stone to a still higher point.

VI. THE WHOLE OF THE SUCCESSIVE STAGES TEND TO THE PERMANENT DWELLING OF GOD WITH MAN. David was right in his ambition and faith. To have God permanently among Israel was the perfection of holy desire. All hitherto had pointed in that direction; and though in the visible sense in which David desired it his wishes were not to be granted, yet he was pointed on to the reality of a "house" (ver. 11), which we know involved the raising up of Immanuel. This is the goal of all Old Testament revelations and ancient forms of instruction and discipline. And now that God has been visibly manifest in the flesh, the process is going on by which spiritually the dwelling of God with man in permanent union is to be realized (2 Cor. iii. 7—11; cf. Eph. ii. 18—22).

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. Life should be conducted on the principle that God is with man and working with and for him. 2. The comparison of events illustrated by the Bible teaching will enable us to trace out the line of God's working. 3. Although occasions may arise, as during periods of Israel's history, when the signs of God's working are obscured (Isa. xlv. 15), our faith should rest on the general revelation. 4. However unable we may be sometimes to see the unity of God's working, Providence will throw light upon it, and by some explicit "I have walked," "I took thee," our confidence will be confirmed. 5. All our desires and efforts and methods should, in their nature, have reference to the great issue—God's habitation of the Church through the Spirit.

Consolation in disappointment. Although vers. 11, 12 of Ps. cxxxii. make it clear that the psalm was written after the date of Nathan's visit to David, it is highly probable that the sentiments expressed in vers. 3—5 of that psalm were cherished before the king unbosomed himself to the prophet. In the fallibility characteristic of prophets when not authorized to speak by God, Nathan piously encouraged his king in his cherished wishes, and it is certain that that night David went to rest believing that now, with the concurrence of so good a man, the great ambition of his heart would soon be realized. The authorized revelation of the prophet on the following day must have brought with it a disappointment corresponding in bitterness to the previous

elevation of feeling. But the gentle, kindly way in which it is allowed to fall is a beautiful instance of God's tenderness toward his people.

I. GOD RECOGNIZES US AS HIS OWN. There was balm in the words, "tell *my servant* David." In the beginning of his career David knew that he was called of God, but many a year had passed, and many a sore spiritual conflict with varied success had been endured. It was then refreshing to his spirit to be thus distinctly acknowledged to be the servant of the Most High—one honoured in heaven and identified with the carrying out of God's will on earth. To be owned of God, to have the witness of his Spirit with ours that we are his, to know on good evidence that our life is moving along the lines of his purpose,—what more satisfying and comforting when some cherished desire is denied? Paul's thorn in the flesh and consequent disappointment of holy ambition was even welcome when the Lord sent a message assuring that he was his "servant"—to do some work in the world, though not in the form desired. It is much in life if, amidst many failures of character and frustration of cherished desires, a man is permitted to know that God is not ashamed of him, and still honours him with a place among the great body of co-workers with himself.

II. PROVIDENCE GRADUALLY MAKES CLEAR, IN PART AT LEAST, THE WISDOM OF THE DISAPPOINTMENT. The first note of Nathan's message brought sorrow and even anguish of spirit. Fond hopes of joyous activity in a blessed cause were crushed. The dream of holy hours vanished. Loving toil was rejected. The heart sank. But by degrees, as the message unfolded and the course of Providence in reference to the tabernacle and settlement of Israel were unfolded, and probably reference made to wars yet impending (vers. 6—10; cf. ch. viii. 1—8; 1 Kings v. 3, 4; viii. 19), the reasons of the Divine conduct became manifest, and the troubled heart could rest in an unerring wisdom alone. A similar course was taken with the apostles when their Lord soothed their disappointment at his expected departure by partially expounding the reason of his conduct (John xiv. 1—4). Sometimes Christian workers who have, through sickness, failing opportunities, temporal disasters, and defective holiness of life, been denied the privilege of accomplishing all that was in their heart for Christ, have had to dwell in dense darkness for a while; but gradually events have occurred and light from God's Word has come which have shown how just and even kind it was that, under all the circumstances of the case, the disappointment came. The day will come when the bitter experiences of life will be so seen in their varied relations to ourselves and others as to give occasion for thankfulness.

III. THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT GOD WILL USE US IN OTHER WAYS. "My servant" meant to David that there was yet noble work to do for God. Human choice of the old form of work is not always best. In the great kingdom that is being established there is scope for many energies in manifold forms; and as the kingdom is one, every worker is honourable and every work essential. To keep the door of the sanctuary, to wash the feet of weary pilgrims, to give a cup of cold water, to feed the hungry, to place a mite in the treasury, and visit the widow and fatherless, are services honoured as truly as erecting a temple and as necessary to the perfection of the kingdom of God on earth. The Apostle Paul could not charm men by unfettered eloquence, but he could bless the universal Church by his example of loving acquiescence in the Lord's will (2 Cor. xii. 8—10). Even the very ambitions that have not been gratified may be used up by God as means to inspire others with generous aims and lofty aspirations.

IV. GOD REVEALS TO THE SPIRIT A CROWNING BLESSING. It was a repayment of David's loving devotion in his own kind when the prophet was instructed to reveal to him that God would "make *him* a house." To an Oriental monarch, especially after the sad failure of Saul, there could not have been a more coveted distinction than being blessed with a posterity that should hold his place in the kingdom. The blessing in this case, we know, carried with it also a spiritual significance embodied in the expression applied to Christ, "the Son of David." This cannot be regarded simply as a reward for the design to build a house for the Lord—it was part of a great purpose from the beginning; but it was clearly brought in here as a matter revealed for the soothing of David's spirit in a season of disappointment. In this way the future blessedness of the faithful is revealed in order that they may have abundant consolation. Good men do not live and labour for future rewards, but from love of Christ and passionate sympathy with the purposes of his heart; nevertheless, the pastor, missionary,

and parent whose hopes sometimes seem blighted, rejoice to be able to think of an issue of their life which, in spite of all appearances, redounds to the glory of God. "Here am I, and the souls thou hast given me," is to be true of multitudes. God will give a godly seed, "a house" better and more enduring than any we could build for him (Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6; Matt. xix. 29).

Vers. 12—29.—The facts are: 1. The prophet declares to David (1) that he shall have a seed who shall build a house for the Lord; (2) that this successor shall be regarded as a son, and, while the subject of discipline, if needed, shall not be cast off as was Saul; and (3) that the house and kingdom thus established shall endure for ever. 2. David, in response to the message, acknowledges the condescension and bounty of God in what he had done and promised. 3. He confesses that all is of the free unmerited loving-kindness of God, and regards this wonderful superhuman goodness as being an illustration of the existence of a love transcending all that is known to man. 4. He recognizes the blessedness of Israel in being under the care and guidance of One so supremely good, and in being honoured to be distinctively his people. 5. He prays that the good and glorious things said of his house and of Israel may come to pass, and so bring out into public view and for ever the glory of God. 6. He concludes with a prayer, based on the faithfulness and goodness of God, that grace may be bestowed on the house of David, so that it may fulfil the purpose so graciously formed and now more explicitly revealed.

The testing period, and its rewards. We have here brought out a contrast between Saul and David. Both were accepted of God (1 Sam. ix. 15—17; xvi. 7—12, 13). A period of testing was assigned to each of them, and Saul failed in his (1 Sam. xiii. 13, 14), while David succeeded (ch. vii. 8—12, 15). The whole facts show that for each of them, in his official capacity, there was a probation or testing-time, which was not coextensive with the duration of life, but sufficient to prove fitness for being the instrument for the furtherance of the Divine purpose of redemption through the Messiah. David was found fit for Divine use, and hence, in the prime of his days, he was assured of the completion of his life's work and of issues most glorious.

I. THE EARLY STAGES OF A CAREER DETERMINE ITS ISSUE. From his call and anointing up to his desire to build a house for the Lord, David had been taking the first steps of his public life; on the whole, he had been wise, devout, loyal to God, zealous for the Divine kingdom among men. The great work of his entire life was thereby virtually ensured. All future successes were now germinal. Saul's future was blasted because the early testing years were unimproved; David's future was made sure because his trial had proved his sterling qualities. The years of early manhood carry in them the future of the man. A Christian "found faithful" enters on a wider ministry (1 Tim. i. 12). The Church that has kept true in trial is safe in view of future perils (Rev. iii. 10—12). The proper use of five talents carries with it the promise of use of ten talents. According to the development of Christian character in the early stages of religious life will be its power and victories unto the very end. The beginnings of things are the ends of things in miniature. Character is a prophecy. Ultimate successes lie hidden in first adjustments.

II. THE BLESSED ISSUES OF A PROBATION ARE IN THE ORDER OF NATURE. The bestowment of the honour of being founder of a great line of kings on David was an act of Divine favour, marking approval of his fidelity during the testing-time of life; but it was not a mere artificial, arbitrary arrangement. It was the announcement of the fact that God had so ordered things that he, by faithfulness, thus far had acquired the qualities which a holy God could and would use up in bringing to pass his great purposes. Saul was proved naturally unfit to inaugurate a permanent line; David was proved naturally suited for that end. This runs through all things. A sapling that has, in spite of storms, passed well through the ordeals of early life contains within itself the vital qualities which will develop into a perfect tree. It is by force of the virtues and acquirements of the testing-time of early manhood that subsequent achievements are won. The spiritual characteristics of the man "counted worthy" of a ministry explain the triumph of his life's work; for, though the blessing of God is essential, yet it is the order of nature in the religious sphere that the blessing comes

where those characteristics find exercise. The future blessedness of the saints is the outgrowth of the individual character acquired during the earthly period of trial. Continuity, order, and, in proper sense of the term, nature, characterize the succession of events in individual and Church experience from first to last.

III. THE ASSURANCE OF FINAL SUCCESS HELPS A TRUE MAN TO ITS REALIZATION. The promise of a "house" and a permanent "kingdom" would not excite vanity and presumption in David, because he was a true man of God. There is an adaptation in the assurance given to the tested character of the man. It was to David as the warm sun and gentle dew to the good seed hidden in good ground. A true heart responds to God's love and bounteous gifts by increased devotion. Thus the assurance has a natural tendency in a true heart to fulfil itself. Wherever other tendencies appear, it is evidence that the heart is not right, and that the assurance is not intended for the individual. The free grace of God and abounding assurances that he will keep his people from falling are never abused except by those who are not children of God (Rom. vi. 14, 15; 2 Cor. v. 14, 15).

The blending of the temporal and the eternal. The prophecy in vers. 12—16 is not to be regarded as a sudden and isolated revelation of the purpose of God, which burst upon the mind of one who had no previous conceptions of a great purpose being wrought out in the line of human history. All along David was aware of his being used for more than ordinary issues in relation to the great promise made to Abraham. The Aurora Borealis seems, to ignorant men, a disconnected unaccountable phenomenon, but others know it to be a natural occurrence in a beautiful order of things correlated to all else in the material world. In like manner, we now know that this prophecy is part of an order of revelation, coming in at just the right time, and interpretable on principles well ascertained. The temporal and eternal are blended—

I. IN THE MATERIAL ORDER. The results of research into the constitution and order of material things show that the visible, changeable forms of matter coexist with a permanent something which works in and through them. They vary; it abides. They prepare the way for others of kindred nature and form; it uses up the old and the new and marks out its eternal course by means of them. Men call it force. Possibly, probably, there is a persistent something answering to that name—the correlative of our exertion of will-power—but it, at all events, is only the mode in which the Divine purpose works itself out into visible forms and changes. The temporal and eternal are ever blended.

II. IN THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN. The changeful form, the visible appearance, is ever associated with the permanent invisible spirit; the one exists for the other, and is used by the other for expressing its thoughts and purposes. "Mortal and immortal" may be written of man. He comes forth and passes away: he abideth for ever. Paradox is true, because the perishable and imperishable coexist and work one through the other.

III. IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST. Our Saviour was frail, subject to death; and yet the strong, unchangeable, deathless Son of God. The temporal and eternal were most mysteriously united in him, and the visible and perishable were the vehicle through which the unseen and eternal worked out our redemption. There is language by which men, if they will, can prove his simple humanity, and other language by which they can prove his true Divinity. It is the ignoring of this blending of the temporal and eternal which accounts for certain heresies and perversities of thought.

IV. IN THE PROGRESS OF REVELATION. The revelation which God is pleased to give of his will concerning our redemption is intended for the entire race, and adapted in matter and form to the progressive character of the race. It was not given once for all in concise abstract form; nor was its matter and form given to suit the later ages of the world only; it ran along the line of history from the very first, and was suited as time went on to men of diverse ideas and conditions. But from first to last the Divine imperishable truth was blended with the temporal history of men. The natural development of families and nations was the vehicle through or along which, as occasion required, the one unchangeable purpose gradually marked itself out into the clear light that shone in the face of Christ.

V. IN THE PROPHETIC REFERENCES TO THE MESSIAH. The duality of temporal and

eternal thus seen to run through all things, becomes, therefore, *a priori* natural in any predictions concerning him whose throne is from everlasting to everlasting. That in vers. 12—16 we have reference to a mortal Solomon, who should build a perishable temple, sit on a visible throne, and hand down to a terminable though long succession of kings an earthly kingdom, is the interpretation required by subsequent facts. That the "seed" refers also to Christ the "Son of David," the house to a spiritual temple, the "throne" and "kingdom" to the absolutely everlasting dominion of Christ over the redeemed people of God, is the sense put on this and kindred passages by the New Testament (Ps. lxxii. 17; lxxxix. 35—37; cf. Luke i. 31—33, 68—79; Heb. i. 5—13). That the two references should be couched in one form of expression is natural when we consider (1) that the temporal and eternal are blended, as just seen, in one form of nature, in one human being, in the one Christ Jesus, and in the one historic revelation: (2) that this harmonizes with the twofold sense of the prediction made to Abraham (Gen. xxi. 12; xxii. 17—19; cf. Rom. ix. 7—9; Acts iii. 25; Gal. iii. 26), and with the twofold meaning of our Lord's words in reference to "the end" (Matt. xxiv. 9—14, 29—44). The human relationship, the human throne, the possible human frailty, and the human relative permanence, are the lower earthly vehicle by which the Divine and absolutely enduring are set forth and inaugurated.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. God secures to all his truly faithful ones the realization of their highest and holiest ambitions, as surely as he secured to David the realization of his desire for a *seed*, and the completion of his life's work in the establishment of his throne; for he makes life here to issue in the glory of the kingdom of Christ. 2. It behoves us to remember that there is an eternal element interwoven with common life, and to subordinate everything temporal to its action. 3. The fact that chosen instruments are used in working out eternal purposes does not exempt them from the frailties of their nature and the corrections necessary to their preservation for the service of God (ver. 14). 4. The chastisement due to the literal son of David for sins of his own foreshadows dimly the spiritual fact that *the great* Son of David took upon himself the iniquities of us all, and experienced the "chastisement of our peace." 5. The strong and repeated assurances of the universality and permanence of Christ's reign should inspire us with calm confidence and untiring zeal. 5. Human fidelity in God's service is a condition of the progressive bringing into clearer view and nearer realization the glorious end for which all things consist.

The educational influence of God's great love. In vers. 18—29 we have described, in broken sentences, the effect on the spirit of David of the marvellous loving-kindness of God in having guaranteed unto him such a glorious completion of life's work, and the unspeakable honour of being associated in name and work with the Redeemer of the world. The real nature of a man is tested in seasons of great prosperity as well as in adversity. David bears the strain. Never in the past history of the world had God spoken so distinctly and emphatically to any of his people of the personal honour he would confer. In the effect of this on David we may see an illustration of the general educational influence of God's love on his people.

I. IT INDUCES INEXPRESSIBLE WONDER. When David had heard the strange words he at once went and "sat" before the Lord! The first impulse was to get near to the visible symbol of the Divine presence, and simply sit still in amazement. That silence held his tongue for a while seems indicated in the embarrassment (ver. 20). What *could* a devout man do but muse and wonder at the largeness of the grace? There was a marvel in what God had done in the past (ver. 18), in what was to be in the future, and in the ordination or law, תּוֹרָה, in respect of the man, or otherwise in the superhuman bearing towards one so unworthy (cf. Isa. lv. 8). This is the general effect of a recognition of God's love to us, whether seen in the unspeakable gift of Christ, in the greatness of his long-suffering, in the tenderness of his pity, in the provision for our temporal and eternal good, in the use he makes of us in his service, or in the blessed inheritance promised in the future. There is a devotion of feeling which consists in a permanent silent wonder that God should have dealt so with us. This tones our spirit into quiet gentleness, and we can in some measure understand why seraphim and cherubim should be absorbed in wonder at his ways.

II. IT INDUCES DEEP HUMILITY. It was not because of any good in himself that all

these things were done to David, but because God was pleased out of his own heart so to deal with him (ver. 21). Nothing tends more to develop humility than a survey of the wonderful love of God. The contrast of our deserts with his grace bows the spirit down, not to abjectness and loss of heart, but to the tender feeling of self-depreciation and self-abnegation which ever becomes a sinful creature in the presence of the Eternal. Great grace bestowed is an educator in what most befits one who was lost but is now found (Ps. cxv. 1; Rom. iii. 27; 1 Cor. xv. 10; 1 John iii. 1).

III. IT FEEDS THE SPIRIT OF ADORATION. The word "wherefore" (ver. 22) seems to complete the silent reasoning which must have gone on in the mind of David for many a year. The general care of man (Ps. viii.), the heavens (Ps. xix.), and the terrible works of God among the nations (Ps. xlviii. 4—7, 10, 11), had ever furnished occasion for adoration; but all this is surpassed by the great love wherewith he has now loved his servant, and in this lies the moral greatness which most of all wins the adoring love of the soul. It is a well-known psychological truth that the feelings are not under the direct control of the will, and especially not obedient to a bare command. Nor are they developed in noblest form by mere externals. It is when the actual love of God, as seen in deeds done for us and blessings freely showered on us, is manifest to the eye of the soul, that true worship arises. The greatness of love draws forth the homage of the redeemed (Rev. i. 5, 6; v. 9, 10).

IV. IT STRENGTHENS INTEREST IN OTHERS. Some who do not know what personal piety is imagine that it consists in selfish delight in one's own favoured condition—a continuous self-congratulation that we are snatched as brands from the burning. David's deep interest in others, as seen in vers. 23, 24, establishes the reverse. The love we share in is a love embracing others, and it awakens and nourishes a joy in them and their happy lot. It is an unspeakable delight to a true Christian that a multitude that no man can number are the people of God, "redeemed" by the wondrous grace which amazes while it blesses himself.

V. IT LEADS TO EVER-INCREASING CONSECRATION. Such is the meaning of David in vers. 24—27. He surrenders his heart and life afresh to the one great purpose which has been graciously revealed. It is not mere acquiescence that so it should be, but intense desire, self-identification afresh with the work and ways of God. He wants to be used in the accomplishment of the great design. This was the secret of the Apostle Paul's ever-deepening consecration. The love of God to him and others was a constant subject of thought, and hence he was daily "constrained" to live for him who had died to make him what he was (2 Cor. v. 14—16). The love of God contemplated and felt renders every yoke welcome and easy.

VI. IT DRAWS OUT A SPIRIT OF TRUSTFUL DEPENDENCE. To be the instrument of this working in the line of the great purpose required distinguished qualities, and a revelation of it (ver. 27) very naturally made David sensible of the insufficiency of himself and successors, and called forth the prayer for a blessing on his house (vers. 28, 29). The blessing of God is necessary to man's successful working-out of the Divine will; and the heart that appreciates the honour of being so employed will earnestly plead the promises in seeking the grace required.

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS. 1. It is one of the sweetest joys of life granted by God when, in his providence, he gives intimation to parents that their immediate posterity are likely to take up the religious work they love, and carry it on towards the completion of God's will on earth (ver. 12). 2. What parents need is that God would "set up," in positions of righteousness and true honour, their offspring, and "establish" whatever work or interest they may have in hand (ver. 12). 3. To "build a house" for God is an unspeakable privilege (ver. 13). It may be done variously: (1) by rearing up a personal character of our own on the One Foundation (1 Pet. ii. 6), so that it may be a fit habitation of God through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. iii. 16; vi. 19); (2) by teaching the cardinal truths of the gospel among men, so that on the One Foundation (1 Cor. iii. 9—11) there may be reared a Christian Church, as is still often done by missionaries in heathen lands; (3) by devoting money to the erection of a sanctuary where needed (Luke vii. 5). A more noble use of wealth can scarcely be conceived. 4. God's purposes are unfolded and wrought out in human history with full prevision of the imperfections and sins of his people, and with providential provision for their correction (ver. 14). Not one of the distinguished men who prepared

the way for Christ was perfect. The Antitype alone is free from sin. It was in the *occupying of a throne*, not in the details of private conduct, that Solomon the son of David prefigured the true Son of David. 5. There are fundamental errors and failures in the lives of some men which disqualify them utterly from sharing in the highest and noblest work. Saul's obstinacy, self-will, and inability to rise to the conception of the purpose and scope of the theocracy, rendered it unfit that he should found the line by which the Christ should come (ver. 15). Solomon's imperfections were those of another character, springing more from unwatchfulness against certain snares of his position. These imperfect workers suffer loss and shame, but the substantial part of their work abides (1 Cor. iii. 12—15). 6. It is a great consolation to a Christian that God *knows* him (ver. 20). He knows our unexpressed thoughts and feelings, our depth of love and gratitude, our sorrow over sin, our most secret motives, and the path we take. Our ease of mind in remembrance of this is one of the marks of true sonship and service. 7. A review of the gradual revelation of God's purposes will surely induce a profound conviction of his greatness and glory (ver. 22). Men who study only the physical aspects of nature lose much. The moral universe is the grandest arena on which the power and blessedness of the Eternal shines forth. 8. It was ancient Israel's being chosen and used as the people of God (ver. 23) which conferred on them the most enduring distinction. As a fact, Israel has done more than either Egypt, Greece, or Rome for the true elevation of mankind; for Israel was the means of bringing into universal operation the mighty renovating principles of the kingdom of God, which alone can secure the permanence of civilization, and also educate the higher nature of man for time and eternity. "Blessed is that people whose God is the Lord!" 9. The whole question of the final triumph of Christ rests on the word of God, "Thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it" (ver. 29). Modern speculations are beside the mark. The first question covers all. Have we historically the declaration of God? Then, if he has said a thing, it must be so. Difficulties are relative to man's ignorance and weakness, and have no place with the Eternal. Faith in God is a rational exercise of the human mind; it is not blind superstition.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2 (1 Chron. xvii. 1).—(THE KING'S PALACE IN ZION.) *David's purpose to build a house for the Lord.* (*References:* 1 Kings v. 3; vi. 12; viii. 17—19; 1 Chron. xxii. 7—10; xxviii. 2—7; xxix. 1—3; 2 Chron. vi. 7—9.) The king's palace of cedar on Mount Zion had been completed. In the adjacent tabernacle or dwelling-place of Jehovah (ver. 6) the ark had found rest, and a regular order of public worship had been instituted. Surrounding enemies had been subdued, and there was at least a temporary cessation from war. Jerusalem was the civil, military, and ecclesiastical centre of the kingdom. And now another step in advance was taken. Whilst contemplating the lowly abode of the ark of the Lord in comparison with his own palace, the thought arose in David's mind of building a splendid and durable temple "for the Name of the Lord God of Israel" (1 Kings viii. 17), "a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God" (1 Chron. xxviii. 2), "exceeding magnifical of fame and of glory throughout all countries" (1 Chron. xxii. 5); and "when the king sat in his house" he intimated his wish (for it scarcely amounted to a distinct and definite resolution) to Nathan the prophet, doubtless in order to obtain his advice concerning its propriety and accomplishment. What followed was of the highest importance in relation to the permanence of his dynasty, the prosperity of his people, the worship of God, and the development of Messianic purposes. "The word of the Prophet Nathan and the thanksgiving of David mark the culmination of David's history" (Baumgarten). This chapter affords a glimpse into his innermost heart, and reveals the devotional feelings, patriotic desires, and lofty aspirations and hopes that dwelt therein. In him we here see an example of—

I. DEVOUT OCCUPATION IN THE RETIREMENT OF HOME. Such retirement, necessary for all, is not always spent wisely and well; but often in sensuous indulgence, frivolous amusement, self-adulation (Dan. iv. 29, 30), envious discontent (1 Kings xxi. 4), or meditating secular and selfish schemes (Luke xi. 17, 18). The godly man not only

"returns to bless his household," but also: 1. *Meditates on the best things:* the Name of the Lord, his greatness and goodness, his works, his ways, his Word, his worship, and the welfare of men. He considers "the days of old," and "communes with his own heart" (Ps. lxxvii. 5, 6) of his benefits, obligations, condition, and prospects (Ps. lv. 17; Matt. vi. 5; John i. 48). 2. *Talks of these things in a right manner.* 3. *Cultivates social intercourse with good men,* "the excellent, in whom is all his delight" (Ps. xvi. 3; cxix. 63). He prefers their society to any other, befriends them, and makes them his friends (Luke xvi. 9). Nor is there any greater treasure on earth than a faithful friend, such as David had in Nathan. The manner in which men spend their leisure hours is a sure indication of their real character.

II. ARDENT GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR SUCCESS in his undertakings, labours, conflicts (ver. 1), and whatever rest and prosperity he enjoys. 1. These he *ascribes,* not to his own skill or power (Deut. vii. 17), but *to the Divine hand;* and, in considering what God "hath done for his soul" (Ps. lxvi. 16): 2. He is *deeply affected* by his exceeding kindness, so condescending, undeserved, and inexpressible (vers. 8, 9, 20)! While he muses the fire burns (Ps. xxxix. 3). 3. And he is constrained to *testify* his thankfulness in word and deed. "Those who stretch themselves upon beds of ivory (Amos vi. 4—6), and were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph, though they had David's music had not David's spirit" (Matthew Henry). "Though the Prophet David was guilty of many of the most deadly sins, yet he was said to be a man after God's own heart, because he abounded more with thankfulness than any other that is mentioned in Holy Scripture" (Isaac Walton).

III. TENDER CONCERN FOR THE DIVINE HONOUR. "See now I dwell in a house of cedar," etc. The devout and grateful heart feels: 1. That with the honour of God *the house of God* is intimately connected. No material fabric, however stately, can now possess the same significance or relative importance as the tabernacle or temple (1 Sam. i. 3, 9). But wherever God's children meet for Divine worship and spiritual fellowship (thus constituting the true temple and Church), the place is "hallowed ground." Standing amidst other dwellings, the house of God is a constant witness for him; and, by its sacred associations, religious exercises, and the holy influences therein received and thence diffused, it greatly conduces to his glory, as well as to the good of men. 2. That it ought to *correspond with its declared purpose,* and the circumstances and abilities of those by whom it is erected and attended. All "temples made with hands" fall infinitely beneath the dignity of the Eternal (1 Kings viii. 27; Acts xvii. 24); yet it is becoming that "strength and beauty should be in his sanctuary," that men should offer their best in his service (ch. xxiv. 24), and that, while they dwell in "ceiled houses," his house should not "lie waste" (Hag. i. 4). 3. That it is a *duty and a privilege* to employ the gifts bestowed by God for the improvement of his house and the promotion of his honour. When he has done much for us we should do much for him. "Four great means for administering the religion of Christ have been divinely appointed: the Book of God, the day of God, the worship of God, and the house of God. This last is for the sake of the former three. Without it they cannot be upheld. In *the house of God* the truth of God is proclaimed, the day of God is hallowed, and the worship of God is solemnized. All good gathers into and around God's house. 'I will make,' saith he, 'the places round about my hill a blessing.' There gather pious families. There arise schools for neglected children. There benevolent activities prevail. There spring up fountains of missionary liberality. And from humble sanctuaries in England, gospel light streams forth to distant regions of the earth—the wilds of Southern Africa, or the populous hives of Chinese idolatry" (Algernon Wells).

IV. HIGH ESTIMATION OF FRIENDLY COUNSEL. Unlike some successful and powerful men, who take counsel of their own hearts and despise the advice of others, David valued, sought, and received the advice of Nathan as the counsel of God himself. "The first great office of a friend is (1) *to try our thoughts* by the measure of his judgment, and to taste the wholesomeness of our designs and purposes by the feelings of his heart. As this office of a good friend is to guard us against the imperfections of our own nature, and protect the world from the effects and ourselves from the responsibility of our folly, the next office of a friend is (2) *to protect us* from the selfish and wilful and malicious part of our nature. A third great office of friendship is (3) *to awaken us and lift us up,* and set us on nobler deeds. The fourth good office of a friend

is (4) *to rally us when we are defeated* or overtaken with adversity. And so much is the world alive to this office as to have chosen it out as the true test; it being one of our best proverbs that 'a friend in need is a friend indeed'" (E. Irving).—D.

Ver. 3.—*The Prophet Nathan.* (*References:* ch. xii. 1, 25; 1 Kings i. 10, 22; iv. 5; 1 Chron. xvii. 1; xxix. 29; 2 Chron. ix. 29; xxix. 25; Zech. xii. 12.) This is the first mention of his name. He may have been trained by Samuel at Naioth, and become acquainted with David there; was now the confidential friend and spiritual adviser of the king; subsequently reproved him for his sin; gave him counsel concerning the accession of Solomon; aided him in the reorganization of public worship; and wrote annals of his reign. It was his vocation to interpret and announce the Divine mind to others (see 1 Sam. iv. 1). "The calling of a prophet was that of a preacher or pastor with reference to the congregation as a whole and its individual members; but was distinct from our modern ideas with reference to the calling as thus explained in his drawing directly from Divine revelation. The prophets have been rightly called 'the conscience of the Israelitish state.' . . . They held intercourse with God by means of prayer. They questioned God (Hab. ii. 1), and he answered; but they did not receive Divine disclosures until they had first occupied an attitude of waiting and praying" (Delitzsch; Oehler, 'Theology of the Old Testament;' Riehm). 1. *All men, and especially those who are in authority, have need of wise and faithful counsel.* The king himself is only a man; his position is apt to blind his judgment and corrupt his heart; whilst his responsibilities and the consequences of his actions are very great. 2. *Even the wisest of counsellors are liable to err in judgment.* (Job xxxii. 9.) "All that is in thine heart go, do." But herein Nathan spoke "out of his own mind, and not by Divine revelation" (J. H. Michaelis). The prophet, like the king, was only a man (Acts x. 26), imperfect and fallible, and often mistaken, when giving counsel according to his natural judgment and first impressions, without seeking and obtaining the counsel of God. It is not said that he spoke by "the word of the Lord," as he did afterwards (ver. 4). "Ofttimes our thoughts, although springing from motives of real religion, are not God's thoughts; and the lesson here conveyed is most important—not taking our own impressions, however earnestly and piously derived, as necessarily in accordance with the will of God, but testing them by his revealed Word" (Edersheim). 3. *The errors of human judgment are rectified by Divine communications.* Such communications have been actually made; and they are unspeakably precious. The prophet clearly distinguished them from his own thoughts, and had an inward assurance and overpowering conviction that he was the organ of God. It is the privilege of all Christians to be "taught of God," and "led by the Spirit;" but unless their convictions and impulses accord with the revealed Word, they must be rejected. 4. *The Word of Divine revelation admits of no questioning or contradiction;* but should be received "with meekness," uttered with simplicity and fidelity (Deut. xii. 32), and obeyed humbly, cheerfully, and fully. The prophet hesitated not to acknowledge his mistake, nor the king to lay aside his purpose in obedience to the will of the Lord (vers. 17, 18).—D.

Ver. 3.—"*The Lord is with thee.*" This brief and significant language has often been addressed to good men. And what can be more encouraging! 1. It describes *an invaluable privilege.* "Jehovah," the Eternal, the Unchangeable, the Faithful, the Covenant-God of Israel, "is with thee;" not simply in his special presence, but also in his effectual grace, approving, directing, protecting, qualifying, helping, prospering thee. "I am with thee" (Gen. xxvi. 24; Exod. xx. 24). 2. It expresses *a personal assurance.* "With *thee.*" Such assurance is given by the word of the prophet, the covenant of God, the argument of experience (ver. 9; 1 Sam. xviii. 32—37), and the conviction of the heart in the way of faith and obedience. 3. It furnishes *a powerful incitement* to thanksgiving, prayer, conflict, labour, perseverance, hope (Hag. ii. 4; 1 Cor. xv. 58). "Lo, I am with you always." The spiritual presence and fellowship of Christ are the secret of all spiritual strength and success.—D.

Vers. 4—11 (1 Chron. xvii. 3—10).—(ZION.) *A forbidden purpose.* "Shalt thou build me a house for me to dwell in?" On reflection, the prophet, perhaps, felt some mis-

giving as to the wisdom of the counsel he had given to the king; and (in prayer) the same night (before any steps could be taken to carry it into effect) he received a Divine communication which he faithfully announced. The chief significance of this communication lies in the promise it contained with respect to "the house of David." But it was primarily and directly a prohibition of the king's resolve. "Thus saith the Lord, *Thou* shalt not build me a house to dwell in" (1 Chron. xvii. 4). The purpose of a good man is often "broken off" (Job xvii. 11; xxix. 18); not always, however, because of the clearer knowledge of the mind of God vouchsafed to him, but more commonly because of the difficulty and opposition he meets with in seeking its accomplishment, and his inability to overcome them. Of the purpose of David (as illustrative of that of others) observe that—

I. ALTHOUGH FORBIDDEN, IT WAS NOT ALTOGETHER DISAPPROVED. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart" (1 Kings viii. 18); spoken of: 1. The *spirit* in which his purpose was formed—grateful devotion and sincere desire of honouring God and benefiting men. This is always the chief thing "in the sight of God, who searches the heart." 2. And the *object* toward which it was directed. It was not *in itself* displeasing to God, but received his sanction (Deut. xii. 10, 11; ver. 13). Yet: 3. How seldom is a human purpose, though in the main good, entirely unmingled with human imperfection! The language in which the purpose of David was forbidden seems to indicate that "his generous impulse was outrunning God's commandment, and that his ardour to serve was in some danger of forgetting his entire dependence on God, and of fancying that God would be the better for him" (A. Maclaren).

II. IT WAS NOT FORBIDDEN WITHOUT SUFFICIENT REASON (vers. 7, 8), viz.: 1. *The dealings of God with his people* in past time; showing that it was his pleasure that his dwelling-place should be *adapted* to their unsettled condition; and that "a house of cedar" was not indispensable to his presence and blessing. He was satisfied to share their wanderings. 2. *The absence of a Divine direction* to build a permanent house. "It was not because of any negligence on the part of the former leaders of the people that they had not thought of erecting a temple" (Keil). Until the "word" should be spoken, no one might enter upon such an undertaking. 3. *The unsuitableness of the present time*—the still disturbed and warlike state of the kingdom (ver. 11). "Inasmuch as these wars were necessary and inevitable, they were practical proofs that David's kingdom and government were not yet established; and therefore that the time for the building of the temple had not yet come, and the rest of peace was not yet secured." 4. *The incongruity of his career* with the nature and design of the building. An abode of peace should be erected by a man of peace. "Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build a house to my Name," etc. (1 Chron. xxii. 8; xxviii. 3; 1 Kings v. 3). "From whence could so sublime a precept descend, amidst a people constituted as the Jews were, unless from the Father of love and mercy?" (Milman). "War, however necessary it may be in certain circumstances for the kingdom of God, is only something accidental, the result of human corruption. The true nature of the kingdom of God is peace" (Hengstenberg). Still other reasons appear in what was promised to David (vers. 11, 12), without which the accomplishment of what he purposed in his heart was impossible.

III. IT WAS FORBIDDEN IN THE MOST GRACIOUS MANNER. (Vers. 8—11.) For God: 1. Assured him of the *regard* in which he was held by him. "David is here called God's servant, who is King of kings—the fairest flower in any king's crown, and highest title he can claim" (Guild). 2. Reminded him of the great things which he had *already done* for him; and which were an earnest of "still greater things than these" (Ps. lxxviii. 70—72). 3. Informed him of the safety and stability, the peace and prosperity, which (in continuance of his former mercies) he was about to grant to *his people* under his rule. 4. Promised to him rest from all his enemies, and an *enduring dynasty* (ch. i. 1, 2). "Jehovah telleth thee that Jehovah will make thee a house" (Ps. cxxxii. 11). What an abundant compensation was thus afforded for any disappointment that might be at first experienced! "Our own plans, though well intended, are often fit for nothing but to be laid aside to make way for the Lord's purposes respecting us, of which perhaps we had no conception" (Scott).

IV. IT WAS FORBIDDEN ONLY THAT IT MIGHT BE MORE EFFECTUALLY FULFILLED. (Vers. 12, 13.) "'Thou shalt not build a house for me' (vers. 5—7); but I, who have

from the beginning till now glorified myself in thee and my people (vers. 8—11), will build a house for thee (ver. 11); and then thy son shall erect a house for me" (Thenius). 1. The purpose of man depends for its fulfilment upon the purpose of God. 2. The purpose which one man is unable to accomplish is often wrought out by another, who comes after him, under more favourable circumstances. 3. Although the former is not permitted to see the execution of his purpose, he may contribute greatly towards it, and does not go unrewarded. 4. Many a seeming failure is a real and glorious success; and "heaven is made for those who fail in this world."—D.

Ver. 9.—(JERUSALEM.) *A great name.* Among the great things which God did for David, he gave him a great name, like that of others, statesmen, warriors, kings, who, on account of their abilities, successes, power, and influence, were renowned "in the earth." "The fame of David went out into all lands" (1 Chron. xiv. 17). "Glory consists in the honourable and widespread reputation of numerous and important services rendered to one's friends, his country, or the whole human race" (Cicero). It is: 1. *A desired possession.* The love of human esteem, praise, and honour is natural, universal, beneficial, though often perverted to unworthy ends, and not subordinated to the voice of conscience and of God. "That characteristic of man which is at once the most unworthy and the most exalted is his desire of glory. It is the last passion that becomes extinct in the heart of man. There is such a charm in glory that, whatever we connect with it, even death itself, we love it still" (Pascal). "Desire of glory is the last garment that even wise men lay aside" (O. Felltham). 2. *A Divine gift.* "And in thine hand it is to make great" (1 Chron. xxix. 12). Although it necessitates, in most instances, strenuous human endeavour, it is never attained apart from or in opposition to the working of Divine providence; which in this, as in other things, is frequently mysterious, but always wise and just and good. How many strive after it in vain!

"Some sink outright;
O'er them, and o'er their names, the billows close;
To-morrow knows not they were ever born.
Others a short memorial leave behind,
Like a flag floating when the bark's engulf'd—
It floats a moment, and is seen no more:
One Cæsar lives, a thousand are forgot."

(Young, 'Night Thoughts,' viii.)

3. *A weighty responsibility.* As it is given by God, so it should be ascribed to him and used for him, according to his will, not for selfish but beneficent ends (ch. v. 12). Even when righteously gained, it is not always righteously maintained. Some of "the great men that are on the earth" have, by its abuse, fallen from their nest among the stars (Obad. 4), like "Lucifer, son of the morning" (Isa. xiv. 12). 4. *An unsatisfying portion.* In the midst of its enjoyment the soul craves something higher, and can find rest only in the approbation and fellowship of God (Ps. iv. 6; lxxiii. 25; cxix. 57). It cannot impart inward peace; it endures but for a season, and then passes away. "Where are those rulers of the earth gone, with their guards, armies, and carriages, of whose departure the earth stands a witness unto the present day?" ('The Hitopadesa').

"The noise
Of worldly fame is but a blast of wind,
That blows from diverse points, and shifts its name—
Shifting the point it blows from. Shalt thou more
Live in the mouths of mankind, if thy flesh
Part shrivel'd from thee, than if thou hadst died
Before the coral and the pap were left;
Or ere some thousand years have past? and that
Is, to eternity compared, a space
Briefer than is the twinkling of an eye
To the heaven's slowest orb."

(Dante, 'Purg.')

Remarks. (1) A great name is not always a good name. (2) A good name may be

possessed, though a great name may be unattainable. (3) To some men (like David) it is given to possess both. (4) True greatness consists in Christ-like goodness (Matt. xx. 25—28), and true glory in "the honour which cometh from God only" (John v. 44).—D.

Ver. 12.—(JERUSALEM.) *The prospect of death.* The view of earthly glory is apt to suggest, by contrast, the thought of its transitory duration, and no one can look forward to the days to come without having "the shadow of death" presented before his mind. Of its unavoidable approach, the message which David received, telling of his present prosperity and future prospects, reminded him. It is: 1. *An event of inevitable occurrence.* "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?" (Ps. lxxxix. 48). "The small and great are there" (Job iii. 19). "The path of glory leads but to the grave."

"Death comes with irrespective feet,
And beats upon the door
That shuts the palace of the great,
The cabin of the poor."

(Horace.)

2. *An end of allotted time.* "When thy days be fulfilled." There is "an appointed time to man upon earth" (Job vii. 1; xiv. 5; Ps. xxxi. 15), in which to pass his probation, form his character, and perform his work. Unknown to him, it is determined by God, and, however brief, it is sufficient for that purpose. Happy is he who therein "serves his own generation by the will of God" (Acts xiii. 36). 3. *An exit from earthly cares,* labours, conflicts, and sorrows. "Thou shalt sleep," and be at rest (Job iii. 17; John xi. 11; 1 Thess. iv. 14); not necessarily in absolute unconsciousness and inactivity. Death is a "decease" (2 Pet. i. 15), departure, exodus of the spirit from "this tabernacle" to an eternal home (2 Cor. v. 1, 8). 4. *An entrance into heavenly fellowship.* "With thy fathers;" in the possession of conscious, personal, immortal life, of a common heritage in God, and happy communion with each other (ch. xii. 23; Ps. xvi. 11; xvii. 15). David's hope of this, indeed, was dim, in comparison with the Christian hope, as the morning twilight compared with the perfect day (2 Tim. i. 10; Matt. viii. 11). 5. *An enlargement of beneficent influence.* "I will set up thy seed after thee," etc. He lives in his children; his words; his works; the manifold influences which he exerted on others, and which continue operating after his decease, and contribute to the building up of the temple and kingdom of God. His departure is even expedient and necessary in order to the activities of others; and, instead of becoming extinct, his power for good is thereby extended and exalted. His name "liveth for evermore" (Ecclus. xliv. 14). 6. *An object of profitable contemplation.* By meditating on it, especially in its moral and spiritual aspects, he learns to moderate earthly attachments, sanctify earthly relationships, to be humble in prosperity, patient in trial, and diligent in duty. "Thou must shortly die! O man, set thy house in order. There is a house of thy conscience, a house of thy body, a house of thy family, a house of eternity. All these must be set in order" (Christopher Sutton, 'Disce Mori'). Learn to die. Learn to live. Learn to pray.—D.

Vers. 12—16 (1 Chron. xvii. 11—15).—(JERUSALEM.) *The promise of an everlasting kingdom.*

"And thy house and thy kingdom shall be permanent;
Thy throne shall be established for ever."

(Ver. 16.)

1. The position of David was a very exalted one. He was the chosen earthly head of the theocracy, or kingdom of God; and on him rested the hope of its glorious consummation. He was the Lord's messiah—"the mediator through whom Jehovah dispensed help, safety, and blessing" (Riehm). 2. But was the hope of Israel to be completely realized in him? And were his dynasty and kingdom to be permanent, or to pass away, like others? 3. To these questions the promise now given furnished an adequate answer. David would be succeeded in the theocratic throne by his posterity, and his dynasty and kingdom would endure for ever. 4. This promise, *the great charter*

of the house of David, was "the foundation of all Messianic prophecies and hopes in the prophets concerning the completion of the kingdom of God, its revelations of grace and its blessings of salvation" (Erdmann). It was—

I. AN EXPRESSION OF ABOUNDING GRACE. The free, condescending, unspeakable favour of God toward David, this it was which so deeply affected him (vers. 19—21). The good pleasure of the Lord had been shown in "the word of the Lord by Samuel," in David's exaltation to the throne after long suffering and trial (ver. 8), and in his subsequent prosperity (ver. 9); and it was further manifested in this great promise of *continued* grace to his house, "for a great while to come;" whereby his noblest aspirations would be fulfilled (ch. xxiii. 5), and through him and for his sake blessings would abound unto many. In like manner "the exceeding riches of his grace" are apparent in all the promises pertaining to eternal life and salvation, and the whole history of the progress of the kingdom of God from its commencement to its consummation. "The progress of God's kingdom, or of true religion, should be the progress of David's line. This point constituted the Messianic element in the prophecy. It limited the hopes of the world's redemption to David's line, as Jacob's prophecy had long ago limited it to the tribe of Judah" (P. Thomson).

II. AN ASSURANCE OF EXTRAORDINARY GOOD. To the view of David the future was, by means of the promise, lighted up with glory. He beheld: 1. *The existence of the royal house*, of which he was the founder, made sure by the Divine oath. "Jehovah telleth thee that Jehovah will build thee a house" (ver. 11; Ps. cxxxii. 11; lxxxix. 3, 4). This was the general substance of the promise. "The royal office was elevated to the position of being the controlling and centralizing point of all the theocratic main elements of the national life." 2. *The elevation of his posterity*, and especially of one of his sons, to the royal dignity. "I will set up thy seed after thee" (ver. 12; 1 Chron. xvii. 11). "Behold, a son shall be born to thee . . . Solomon," etc. (1 Chron. xxii. 9; xxxviii. 10; 1 Kings v. 5; viii. 19). 3. *The establishment of the kingdom* in security, peace, and happiness, all enemies being subdued; "and I will establish his kingdom;" which was necessary to the fulfilment of David's purpose. 4. *The erection of the temple* and the dwelling of the Divine King in the midst of his people. "He shall build a house for my Name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (ver. 13). "The building of the house here goes hand-in-hand with the eternity of the kingdom. . . . The essence of the temple consists in its being a symbol—an outward representation of the kingdom of God under Israel. The real import of our passage, then, is that henceforth the kingdom of David and the kingdom of God should be closely and inseparably linked together" (Hengstenberg, 'Christology'). "The idea of a number of descendants following one another (a line of kings) is evidently contained in the promise" (Keil); and in this sense David must have understood it. "The collective *he* (vers. 13, 14) includes in itself (like Gen. iii. 15) the Son of David in the highest sense and the Founder of the true temple of God, which is his Church." 5. *The relation of Father and son* subsisting between God and the theocratic king. "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a son." Such was the relationship between Jehovah and Israel (Exod. iv. 22; Deut. xiv. 1; xxxii. 6; 1 Chron. xxix. 10; Isa. lxiv. 8; Jer. xxxi. 9; Hos. xi. 1), and it would be made specially manifest in the head and representative of the chosen people. A son (1) derives his being from his father, bears a close resemblance to him, stands near him, represents him, and shares his possessions; (2) is an object of his tender affection, under his protecting care, and subject to his merciful discipline; and (3) is bound to reciprocate his affection, to honour him, and obey his commandments. *The fatherly love of God* is here more particularly presented to view; and "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Heb. xii. 6). "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him," etc. (ver. 14). 6. *The unchanging mercy of God*, founded on this relation. "But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul," etc. (ver. 15). If, indeed, the individual king should forsake the Lord, he would be "cast off for ever" (1 Chron. xxviii. 9). "The contrast is that between the punishment of sin in individuals and the favour that remains permanently with the family, whereby the promise becomes an *unconditional* one" ('Christology'). The kingdom of God is a kingdom of righteousness. 7. *The eternal duration* of his dynasty and kingdom once more assured, with all the advantages of a government faithfully exercised according to the will of God. This was "the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and

sure;" and these were the "sure mercies of David" (Isa. lv. 3). "This revelation was an epoch-making one for his inner life. It brought an entirely new element into his consciousness, which, as his psalms show, moved him powerfully. He received the promise of the perpetual ascendency of his tribe, of the establishment of his kingdom amid the changing of all earthly things" ('History of the Kingdom of God under the Old Testament'). "This promise, like that made to Abraham, has a twofold aspect. One points to David's natural posterity and temporal kingdom; the other to the Messiah and the kingdom of Jehovah, which respected the former only as types and pledges of the latter."

III. A FOUNDATION OF IMPERISHABLE HOPE. The promise was one of an eternal monarchy rather than directly of an eternal Monarch, "the King Messiah;" but it could only be completely fulfilled in such a Person, "since the eternity of a purely human kingdom is inconceivable;" and it became the basis of a hope of "his power and coming," which, notwithstanding repeated failure and disappointment, was to be renewed with undying strength. David was himself the centre of the Messianic *idea* and hope. "He regarded himself as the messiah of God; although, through his experience and words, he was only a means for representing the future One before his coming" (Delitzsch, 'Messianic Prophecies'). And, amidst the glorious prospect which the promise presented before him, he perceived (all the more clearly because of his own conscious infirmities) the ideal theocratic monarch; "a kingly image, in which all that the present manifests is far surpassed, and the kingship of David and Solomon seen in typical perfection" (Oehler, 'Theology of the Old Testament.' See ch. xxiii. 4; Ps. ii.; cx.; lxxii.; xlv.). The promise "refers neither only to Solomon nor only to Christ; nor has it a twofold application; but it is a covenant promise, which, extending along the whole line (of David's posterity), culminates in the Son of David, and in all its fulness applies only to him" (Edersheim). "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end," etc. (Isa. ix. 6; Luke i. 32, 33; Acts ii. 25—36).

Observe that: 1. *Men's views of the glory of the future age* are naturally and necessarily formed according to the facts and ideas with which they are already familiar. 2. *The Word of God, in promise and prophecy* (being the gradual unfolding of his eternal purpose), had a larger signification than was understood by those to whom it at first came (1 Pet. i. 11). "Divine prophecies are of the nature of their Author, with whom a thousand years are but as one day; and therefore are not fulfilled punctually at once, but have a springing and germinant accomplishment throughout many ages, though the height or fulness of them may refer to one age" (Bacon, 'Advancement of Learning'). 3. *The promises of God* are faithful and true; his covenant is a sure foundation of hope amidst human failures and earthly changes (Ps. lxxxix. 1—37; 2 Cor. i. 20; Heb. vi. 18). 4. *The hope of humanity* is in "the Root and the Offspring of David, and the Bright and Morning Star!" (Rev. xxii. 16).—D.

Ver. 16.—*Glimpses of the King Messiah.* Looked at in the light of the development of the Divine purpose, rather than of the conscious knowledge of the time, (1) the royal office of David and Solomon (in its typical significance), and (2) the promises and prophecies uttered more or less directly in connection therewith, especially as recorded in the last words of David (ch. xxiii.) and in the Psalms, clearly pointed to the coming of an extraordinary, theocratic, Divine *King*. They indicate that he would be: 1. *The Anointed of Jehovah.* His Servant, chosen and beloved (ver. 8; ch. v. 3; Acts iv. 27; x. 28). Ps. lxxxix., 'The faithfulness of the Lord.'

> "Once thou spakest in vision to thy beloved and saidst:
> I have laid help upon a mighty one,
> I have exalted one chosen out of the people.
> I have found David my servant,
> With my holy oil have I anointed him."
> (Ps. lxxxix. 19, 20.)

2. *The Son of David* "according to the flesh" (ver. 12; Acts ii. 29—31; xiii. 22—23).

> "Jehovah hath sworn unto David
> In truth that which he will not recall:
> Of the fruit of thy body
> Do I appoint a possessor of thy throne."
> (Ps. cxxxii. 11.)

3. *The Son of God.* (Ver. 14; Ps. xvi. 10; Luke i. 35; Acts iv. 25—27; Rom. i. 4.) Ps. ii., 'The triumph of the Lord's Anointed.'

"Jehovah saith unto me: Thou art my Son:
I have this day begotten thee."
(Ps. ii. 7.)

"He shall cry unto me: My Father art thou,
My God, and the Rock of my salvation!
Also I will make him my Firstborn,
Highest of the kings of the earth."
(Ps. lxxxix. 26, 27.)

"In the Old Testament the relation between father and son denotes the deepest intimacy of love; and love is perfected in unity of nature, in the communication to the son of all that the father hath. 'The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand' (John iii. 35). Sonship, therefore, includes the government of the world" (Keil). 4. *The King of righteousness and peace;* Prophet and Priest; the Conqueror of all opposing powers (through conflict and suffering); the Saviour and Benefactor of those who trust in him; the supreme Lord (ver. 13; Ps. xxii.; xl. 6; Matt. xxii. 45; Heb. i. 8).

"The oracle of Jehovah unto my Lord:
Sit thou at my right hand
Until I make thine enemies thy footstool."
(Ps. cx. 1.)

"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever;
A sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom."
(Ps. xlv. 6.)

5. *The Builder of the temple.* (Ver. 13; Zech. vi. 12, 13; John i. 14; ii. 19; xiv. 23; 1 Cor. vi. 19; Eph. i. 20—23; ii. 20—22; 1 Pet. ii. 5; Rev. xxi. 1—3.)

"Thou hast received gifts among men,
Yea, even the rebellious, that the Lord Jehovah might dwell among them."
(Ps. lxviii. 18.)

6. *The Possessor of universal dominion.* (1 Sam. ii. 10; ch. xxii. 44; Ps. xxii. 27.)

"He shall have dominion from sea to sea,
And from the river to the ends of the earth."
(Ps. lxxii. 8.)

7. *The King who should reign for ever.* (Ver. 16; Ps. lxi. 6, 7; lxxxix. 36, 37.)

"His Name shall endure for ever;
His Name shall be continued as long as the sun."
(Ps. lxxii. 17.)

"An allegory may serve to illustrate the way in which the Old Testament proclamation of salvation unfolds itself. The Old Testament in relation to the day of the New Testament is night. In this night there rise in opposite directions two stars of promise. The one describes its fall from above downwards; it is the promise of Jehovah who is about to come [Ps. xcvi. 13; xcviii. 9]. The other describes its path from below upwards; it is the hope which rests on the seed of David, the prophecy of the Son of David, which at the outset assumes a thoroughly human and merely earthly character. These two stars meet at last, they blend together in one star; the night vanishes, and it is day. This one star is Jesus Christ, Jehovah and the Son of David in one Person; the King of Israel and at the same time the Redeemer of the world; in one word, the God-Man" (Delitzsch, in Ps. lxxii.).—D.

Vers. 18—24 (1 Chron. xvii. 16—22).—(THE TABERNACLE ON ZION.) *Thanksgiving and praise.* The duty of rendering thanksgiving and praise to God is seldom disputed, though its performance is often neglected. It is beneficial to the offerer himself, as well as to others. The conduct and language of David, on receiving the

Divine communication here recorded, furnish an admirable example of the *spirit* in which "the sacrifice of thanksgiving" should be presented.

I. DEEP HUMILITY before the presence of God. "Then went King David in" from his palace of cedar to the lowly tent (the palace of the Divine King of Israel), "and sat" on the ground in a lowly posture, according to Eastern custom (expressive of his lowly state of mind), "before Jehovah," the symbol of whose presence stood veiled before him. "And (after devout thought on the communication) he said, Who am I, O Lord God?" etc. (ver. 18). Although in comparison with other men he "might have whereof to glory," yet in the conscious presence of God he had a profound sense of his weakness, insignificance, dependence, and unworthiness (Gen. xxxii. 10; Job xlii. 5, 6; Isa. lvii. 15; Eph. iii. 8; 1 Pet. v. 5, 6). The proud heart is never a thankful heart. The poorer we are in our own estimation the more disposed we are to "praise the Lord for his goodness." Humility is the first step of a ladder whose top reaches heaven (Matt. v. 3).

II. CALM REFLECTION on his benefits. "And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God," etc. "And this [which thou hast graciously promised concerning my house] is the law [established order or decree] of [or pertaining to a mortal] man, O Lord God!" (ver. 19). "Is this the law of one who is a mere man created from the dust as I am, that I should be elevated to such a glorious altitude as this?" (Wordsworth). "Thou hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree" (1 Chron. xvii. 17). An expression of humble astonishment. The more he pondered it in his heart, the more he was humbled, surprised, and filled with thankfulness. We have not less cause for gratitude (Ps. viii. 4, 5; 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10). "Forget not all his benefits," past, present, or to come. We are apt to forget them, and therefore should contemplate them frequently, enumerate them one by one, and endeavour to estimate their exceeding worth. Meditation is like a lens, by which the rays of the sun are collected into a focus and produce so intense a heat that coals of fire are kindled by it (Ps. xxxix. 3; xlviii. 9; lxxvii. 11, 12; Luke ii. 19).

III. INTENSE CONVICTION of his claims. "And what can David say more unto thee? for thou knowest thy servant, O Lord God!" (ver. 20). The great things which had been promised, the obligations under which they laid him, and his conviction and impression thereof, were all indescribable. Words failed him; and he could only appeal to Omniscience to witness the sincerity and depth of his grateful feeling (John xxi. 17). Every additional benefit conferred upon us increases the claims of our Divine Benefactor on our love and devotion. His mercies are "new every morning" (Lam. iii. 23); and the debt we owe is ever accumulating.

> "How can I repay to Jehovah
> All his benefits toward me?"
> (Ps. cxvi. 12.)

IV. FERVENT GRATITUDE for his grace. "For thy Word's sake;" in fulfilment of thy purpose and promise formerly expressed, "and according to thine own heart," of thy spontaneous, sovereign, unmerited favour, "hast thou done all these great things to make thy servant know them," for his consolation and encouragement (ver. 21). It is the disinterested love and abounding grace of God, displayed in his gifts, that more than anything else touches the heart and constrains it to fervent gratitude. "To my eye the workings of a heart oppressed and overflowing with gratitude are painted stronger in this prayer than I ever observed them in any other instance. It is easy to see that his heart was wholly possessed with a subject which he did not know how to quit, because he did not know how to do justice to the inestimable blessings poured down upon himself and promised to his posterity; much less to the infinite bounty of his Benefactor" (Delany).

V. LOWLY ADORATION of his perfections. "Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God," etc. (ver. 22). The greatness of Jehovah, the incomparable One, the only God, was manifested in his dealings with his servant, as in the whole history of Israel, "according to all that we have heard with our ears." David had the most exalted views of his character as the All-wise and All-powerful, the Condescending, Faithful, Gracious, Merciful, and Just (1 Sam. ii. 2; Ps. cxiii. 6); and he delighted in the contemplation and praise of his infinite excellence. God himself is greater than anything he has done

or promised to do; but by means of his doings and revelations we are enabled to know him and draw nigh to him in worship and adoration, wherein the soul finds its noblest activity, rest, and joy.

VI. GENEROUS SYMPATHY with his people. "And what one nation in the earth is like thy people," etc. (vers. 23, 24)? An incomparable people! 1. Redeemed by mighty acts. 2. Designed for a special purpose—to be his possession or property, and to "show forth his praise." 3. Established in covenant relationship for ever (ver. 16; Rev. xxi. 3, 7). David "glorified God" in them; and in doing so he showed his love for them, his sympathy and identity with them (ch. v. 12). His thanksgiving and praise were large-hearted and disinterested. The selfish heart (like the proud heart) is never a thankful heart. The more we esteem others the more numerous the occasions we find for gratitude to God, and the more we abound therein.

VII. ENTIRE CONSECRATION to his service and glory. He avowed himself the servan of God (ver. 21), freely and gladly surrendered his will to him, sought what he promised, and desired that his Name might be "magnified for ever" (ver. 26). This is the essence of the sacrifice of praise. "Father, glorify thy Name" (John xii. 28; Phil. i. 20).

> "As of their will, the angels unto thee
> Tender meet sacrifice, circling thy throne
> With loud hosannas; so of theirs be done
> By saintly men on earth."
>
> (Dante, 'Purg.,' xi.)

D.

Vers. 25—29 (1 Chron. xvii. 23—27).—(ZION.) *Promise and prayer.* "Do as thou hast said" (ver. 25). 1. God has *spoken* to men. "His greatness is unsearchable" (ver. 22; Ps. cxlv. 3); nevertheless, he has surely spoken to them in his Word (ver. 4; Heb. i. 1). 2. He has spoken in the way of *promise* (ver. 28). A large portion of Divine revelation consists of promises, "exceeding great and precious" (2 Pet. i. 4), pertaining to the life that now is, and that which is to come. 3. And as God has spoken to men in the way of promise, so they should speak to him in the way of *prayer* (1 Sam. i. 9; viii. 6; xiv. 16, 36).

> "A breath that fleets beyond this iron world,
> And touches him who made it."
>
> (Tennyson.)

I. PROMISE SUPERSEDES NOT THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER; inasmuch as the latter is commonly the expressed or implied condition of its fulfilment. As a bank-note must be presented that we may obtain the gold which it represents, so the Divine promise must be sought in prayer that we may receive the good of which it gives assurance. A child does not refrain from asking his father for what he wants because it has been promised, but rather asks him all the more. David prayed for what he had been promised. "I will yet for this be inquired of," etc. (Ezek. xxxvi. 37). "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matt. vii. 7; Ps. l. 15; Zech. x. 1). "The prayer that prevails is a reflected promise."

II. PROMISE CONFIRMS THE DUTY OF PRAYER; by indicating the will of God concerning us. To neglect the condition of receiving the blessing, or to refuse to comply with it, is to despise the blessing itself. Why such a condition? 1. To give to God the honour which is his due. 2. To teach a spirit of dependence. 3. To promote personal and direct intercourse with God. 4. To call into exercise the noblest principles of our nature. 5. To incite co-operation towards the attainment of what is promised. 6. To make its bestowment more beneficial to the recipient. Some things may be beneficial in connection with prayer that would not be so without it.

III. PROMISE AUTHORIZES THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER. What greater privilege can there be than that of "making known our requests unto God"? But who, without his promise, could venture to believe that these requests would be heard; especially when made for the "great things" contained in it? Even now, how doubtful and timid are we in claiming the privilege! The promise gives encouragement and confidence; and should, therefore, be pondered in the heart, as it was by David; who was thereby

emboldened (Authorized Version, "found in his heart") "to pray this prayer" (ver. 27). "Thy words are truth" (ver. 28). "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, O Lord, will I seek" (Ps. xxvii. 8; cxix. 49; Gen. xxxii. 12).

IV. PROMISE TEACHES THE MATTER OF PRAYER. "We know not *what* we should pray for as we ought," and are apt, in this respect, to "ask amiss." But the promises constitute an invaluable "directory of prayer," teaching us: 1. The things for which we ought to ask, both temporal and spiritual. 2. Their relative importance. 3. Their application to others as well as to ourselves (vers. 25, 29). 4. Their chief design (ver. 26). "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you," etc. (John xv. 7; Rev. xxii. 20). "Pause over each promise, and let your faith in it blossom into a prayer for it. This will be the true, responsive reading of the sacred Scriptures, wherein there shall be not simply the answering of voice to voice as among men, but the responding of your heart to God. Happy are they in whose souls there is thus a continual recurring 'Amen' to the benedictions of the Lord" (W. M. Taylor).

V. PROMISE INCITES THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER. 1. A reverent regard for God. 2. A lowly estimate of ourselves. 3. Fervent desire for the blessing of God. 4. Childlike confidence in his Word. 5. Unreserved submission to his will. 6. Patience and perseverance. "Wait on the Lord," etc. (Ps. xxvii. 14; Luke xi. 1—13; xviii. 1). "Prayer is nothing else but the language of faith, love, and hope: of *faith*, a believing of God's being and bounty, that he is willing and able to succour us; of *love*, which directeth us to the prime Fountain of all the good we have and would have, and to the end and glory of God, and regulateth all our choices by it, and to those means which conduce to the enjoying of God; and of *hope*, which is a desirous expectation of the promised blessing" (T. Manton, 'Works,' xviii. 72).

VI. PROMISE ENSURES THE ANSWER OF PRAYER; not always in the immediate and conscious experience of the petitioner, but always at the proper time (Dan. x. 12), the delay being needful and beneficial; not always in the literal terms of the promise, but often in a more spiritual and glorious manner; and never wholly withheld (1 John v. 14, 15). "He is faithful that promised" (Heb. x. 23). "The promises of God are the free expressions of his goodness and beneficence; but then their *meaning* has in it something of that Divine attribute. Nothing that he says can be in the mere narrow proportions of man. The words are necessarily those used by man, but the meaning is that of God; and we may be confident that what will be given in fulfilment of them will be according to the magnitude of the Divine goodness; as far, at least, as the faculties of the recipients will admit, and *these* can be enlarged. The Divine goodness being transcendently above all other goodness, the gifts of it will be according to its own manner, and not limited to the human import of the words, as if merely preserving the bare truth of the words. So that he will surprise his servants, as they find the earthly terms of his promises translated as it were into celestial language, when they arrive in his presence and have those promises acknowledged" (John Foster, 'Literary Remains').—D.

Ver. 27.—(ZION.) *A prayer found in the heart.* When a prayer such as David's is found in the heart, it is: 1. *Found in the right place.* If only on the tongue it is not really found at all. Its proper abode is the heart; yet it is not always found there, even when renewed, as the heart must be for its dwelling. 2. *Possessed of priceless worth*; in contrast with other things that are often found in the heart (Matt. xv. 19). A rare flower among weeds, a fountain in the desert, a treasure in poverty, a friend in need! "I have no earthly friend," said one; "but I have a praying heart." 3. *Derived from a Divine source.* It is not indigenous. Its origin is in "the Father of lights," from whom comes "every good gift and every perfect boon;" its production is due to the teaching of his Word and the operation of his Spirit (Zech. xii. 10). 4. *Designed for a proper use.* Not to be neglected, repressed, or restrained (Job xv. 4); but appreciated, guarded, cherished, freely and fully "poured out" at the feet of the Giver, that he may be glorified.—D.

Vers. 1, 2.—*David's desire to build a temple.* After the conquest of Jebus by David and his appointment of the spot to be the capital of the united kingdom of which he

was now the ruler, it soon became his earnest purpose to bring thither the long-neglected ark of the covenant, that the city might be the sacred as well as the civil metropolis. This purpose was at length fulfilled. The ark was settled on Zion in a tent prepared for it, and a daily service established in connection with it. But the king was not long satisfied with what he had done. Larger and more generous thoughts took possession of his mind, and stirred within him eager desire.

I. WHAT WAS THE KING'S DESIRE? To erect a solid, permanent building, of suitable magnificence—a temple—in which the ark should be placed, and where the services of worship should be constantly maintained. Most likely he contemplated what was afterwards effected, the reunion on one spot of the ark and the altars; and the presentation of the daily and other sacrifices and offerings at their proper place before the symbol of the Divine presence—the revival, in fact, of the Mosaic ritual under circumstances and with accompaniments adapted to the existing condition of the nation. The purpose was good and tended to good. It was time that the irregularity and negligence which had prevailed should come to an end, and the requirements of the Law should be obeyed. It was fitting that the unity of the people should be fully symbolized, expressed, and promoted by such a united worship as the Law enjoined. It was also suitable to the more settled state which, under David, the people had reached, that a solid fixed building should supersede the tent which was adapted to the time of wandering and unsettlement; and, as the nation's resources had increased, it was right that the building to be reared should be proportionately costly.

II. HOW IT ORIGINATED. 1. *A time of peace favoured it.* (Ver. 1.) Giving the king leisure for thought as to how he could further promote the nation's welfare; awakening gratitude; affording means and opportunity. Times of war are greatly unfavourable to such enterprises, forcing minds and hearts into other channels, and swallowing up the resources which might otherwise be expended on them. 2. *The solidity, beauty, and comforts of David's own house suggested it.* "I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." David had known for years what it was to have no settled abode, but to wander about the land, taking refuge in woods and caves; and afterwards he was much away from home, engaged in wars. Lately he had built himself a handsome palace, and now for a time he was able to sit quietly in it and meditate; and as he did so, it one day struck him that his abode was superior to that of the ark of God, and the desire was kindled to put an end to the incongruity. Not every one would have been thus moved. How differently the rich man of whom our Lord speaks in Luke xii. 16, *et seq.*, "thought within himself"! And how many prosperous people there are, professing to have given themselves to God, who, as they increase in wealth and enjoy comfort and luxury, never turn a thought towards God's house or cause, or inquire what they can do for them! They reflect much, it may be, on the question how best to invest their increasing gains; but it never seems to occur to them that the most suitable and profitable investment might be in the cause of religion or charity. A more fervent piety would suggest such thoughts. Gratitude for the abundance bestowed on them; the contrast presented (see Hag. i. 4) between their residences and their churches, between what they spend on their establishments and what they spend in the promotion of the kingdom of God; the witness which their mansions and surroundings bear to the ample means with which God has endowed them—the large trust he has committed to them;—all would be fruitful of thoughts and emotions to which they are now strangers, and of a style of giving which they have never allowed themselves. It was David's piety more than the surrounding circumstances that originated his generous purpose.

III. HOW IT WAS TESTED. As to its propriety and probable acceptance with God. He consulted his friend and adviser, Nathan the prophet. The more important the steps we contemplate, the more needful is it, before we are openly and irrevocably committed to them, that we should ascertain how they appear to others, especially to the wisest and best whom we know. Feeling is not a sufficient guide, not even pious feeling; and our own judgment may not be of the soundest. Another may put the matter in a new light, which shall convince ourselves that, however good our motives, our purpose is not wise or not practicable. We cannot directly consult a prophet, but we may find good and enlightened and trustworthy men who will be glad to aid us to a right conclusion. And what joy it gives to Christian ministers to be consulted by

such as come saying, "God has prospered me, I have done well for myself and my family, and I should like to do something proportionate for my God and Saviour: advise me as to how I may best fulfil my desire"! Such applicants are few and far between; such a style of thought and purpose is rare. But it ought not to be. It is a sin and shame that God's work should be hindered for want of money in a thriving community which can spend freely in all other directions.

IV. How IT WAS REGARDED BY NATHAN. He approved and encouraged the desire, assuring David of the Divine approval and co-operation (ver. 3). He spoke on the impulse of the moment, with the feeling natural to a pious Israelite and prophet, thankful that his king should cherish such a design. He did well, but had he paused and proposed to "sleep upon" the matter, he would have done better, as appeared next day. We should ever be ready to encourage others in good thoughts and purposes, yet in important matters it is well to take time to consider before we advise as to definite proposals.

V. How IT WAS REGARDED BY GOD. The proposal was approved, commended, rewarded, and—rejected. The refusal was softened by the terms in which it was conveyed, and the representations and promises by which it was accompanied (vers. 4—17; 2 Chron. vi. 8); declaring that it was well that it was in his heart to build a house for God's Name, although it was a matter of indifference to the Most High what sort of dwelling-places men provided for him; reminding David of what he had done for him; assuring him that he would continue to favour the nation, that he would build a house for him as he had sought to build one for himself, and that his son should fulfil the father's desire, and the throne should continue in his family for ever. This was the greatest promise David had received, greater than he himself could then understand, for it looked forward to the everlasting kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. But though his knowledge of its purport was imperfect, his pain at the rejection of his proposal was more than soothed; his heart was filled with adoring gratitude and joy.

VI. How ITS SINCERITY WAS PROVED. If he might not do all he desired, he would do all he might and could. He, therefore, prepared plans for the building, accumulated materials for its erection, and urged the work on his son Solomon and the chief men of the nation. An example for us if, setting our hearts on some particular work for God, our purpose is frustrated. Let the diverted energies be employed all the more in such services as are within our reach. A contrast to the conduct of many who, disappointed in reference to some cherished desire (*e.g.* to become clergymen or missionaries), allow their zeal to decline to the common level, if it do not pass away altogether.

In conclusion: 1. *Christian piety will kindle earnest desires to do the greatest possible work for God.* Such desires should be cherished in subordination to the Divine will. For though approved of God, they may be denied (Prov. x. 24 notwithstanding). If denied, we should be content, assured of the perfect wisdom and goodness of the purpose of God which has frustrated ours, and that for us and others he has some better thing in store than we had thought of. Though denied, our desire may be fulfilled (as David's by Solomon). Whether denied or gratified, good desires (such as are really good, and not mere idle wishes) are always valuable, for what they indicate in ourselves, for the Divine approval they elicit, for their influence on ourselves, and their influence on others (as David's on his successor and on the chiefs of the nation). 2. *The desire to build or aid in building a house for the worship of God is good.* 3. *We may all assist in the erection and adornment of a nobler temple than that which David sought to build.* "The house of God is the Church of the living God" (1 Tim. iii. 15), and all who labour for the conversion and spiritual improvement of men are helping in the glorious work of building and adorning this spiritual house. Let all Christian workers realize the dignity and glory of their work. Let us all ask ourselves whether we have any heart for it, are doing anything towards it; whether we are capable of doing anything in it that shall be acceptable to God, having first given our own selves to him, and received his Spirit.—G. W.

VERS. 12—16.—*David's everlasting kingdom.* These words relate, first, to Solomon; then to successive generations of David's posterity; and, finally, to the Christ. They promise that David's son should be God's son, and should build the house for God which David had desired to build. They promise also that the rule over Israel should

continue in the line of David's posterity, and that his house and kingdom should be established for ever. They were partly fulfilled in the long continuance of the reign of David's descendants. They receive their most ample and splendid fulfilment in the eternal kingdom of the greatest Son of David, our Lord and Saviour—a fulfilment beyond all that David could ask or think.

I. THE GREAT KING. 1. *Is David's son.* He is much more than this; but he *is* this. *A man* is at the head of God's kingdom! 2. *Is God's Son.* (Ver. 14; comp. Heb. i. 5 and Rom. i. 3, 4.) Both as to his human and his Divine natures, Jesus Christ is the Son of God as none other—"the only begotten Son of God." This shows his greatness, and accounts for his triumphs. The Eternal and Almighty Father recognizes and proclaims him as his Son; declares by the miracles accompanying the personal mission of Jesus, by his Word, Spirit, providence, through the ages, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him." 3. *And this illustrious person is King.* King over God's people, his true Israel; King of men; "King of kings, Lord of lords;" King of angels, King over all things in heaven and earth. The kingdom of David has expanded till it extends over the universe.

II. THE PERPETUITY OF HIS REIGN. It shall be literally eternal. "He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. xi. 15). It is surely more than a coincidence that a system of dominion over men, originating in a Man who had sprung from the reduced family of David, and was accepted by many of his fellow-Jews as the Son of David, the Messiah foretold by the prophets—a system proclaimed at the first as the kingdom of God—should have taken root in the world, have spread so widely and lasted so long; that it should have proved to be the system in and through which especially the best influences of Heaven operate, and the divinest principles rule the hearts and lives of those who receive it; and that it should to-day be more extensively prevalent than ever, and *that* amongst the most enlightened and powerful nations (to whose enlightenment and power it has so largely contributed), and giving promise of becoming the ruling power everywhere. It is a veritable kingdom, uniting all who belong to it as one "holy nation" which acknowledges Jesus of Nazareth as its King, and submits to his rule. It has continued nearly nineteen centuries, and gives no sign of decay. In all this the Christian recognizes the fulfilment of the promise made to David and repeated so frequently afterwards by the prophets; and through his faith in that promise he anticipates the everlasting duration of the reign of Christ, the eternity of the King, and the eternity of his reign. We are sure that he must reign for ever; and our assurance rests on: 1. *The promises of God.* The "God who cannot lie," and who has power to fulfil all his Word, and subdue all that opposes. 2. *The nature of the kingdom.* "A kingdom which cannot be moved" (Heb. xii. 28). It is spiritual, and cannot be put down by the material forces which destroy other reigns. It is the reign of Divine truth, righteousness, and love; and we cannot doubt but that these will triumph and be perpetuated. 3. *The nature of the King.* "The First, and the Last, and the Living One," who, though he "was dead," is "alive for evermore" (Rev. i. 17, 18, Revised Version). This King literally "lives for ever." He is Divine as well as human. His reign is the reign of the Almighty God, which cannot be destroyed. 4. *Past experience.* The kingdom of Jesus Christ has survived in spite of all opposition. All possible hostile powers have done their utmost, and have failed. Christianity has outlived many kingdoms, which to human appearance promised to survive it. It has been assailed by brute force in a variety of forms, and by the forces of intellectual subtlety, of political power, and of spiritual error, and it has conquered. It has seemed to be seriously endangered by the folly and wickedness of its professed friends, but still it survives and flourishes. In a word, the prince of this world has used all arts and energies at his command to crush the power of Christ, but in vain. "He that sitteth in the heavens laughs" at all that opposes his Son, saying, "Yet have I set my King on my holy hill of Zion" (Ps. ii. 4, 6). And in the everlasting future this kingdom will continue. A great change is, indeed, predicted in 1 Cor. xv. 24. But as the kingdom of the Son is the kingdom of the Father, so the kingdom of the Father will still be that of the Son. Let, then, all the loyal subjects of Christ cast away fear for his kingdom, whatever forms opposition to it may take, and however formidable they may appear. And let all be concerned to *be* his loyal subjects.

III. THE GREAT WORK HE WOULD EFFECT. "He shall build a house for my Name"

(ver. 13). The words may be taken as applicable not only to the temple which Solomon built, but to the nobler structure which our Lord is rearing, of which he is the chief Corner-stone (1 Pet. ii. 4—6)—"the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. vi. 16), built of "living stones" quickened and consecrated by the Holy Spirit—"the habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 20—22). From age to age the work of erecting this spiritual temple goes on in the conversion of men to Christ, and their addition to his Church; and, when completed, the building will be for the everlasting honour of the Builder. May we all have a place in it!—G. W.

Ver. 18.—*Meditation before the Lord.* David, with a heart filled with wonder and gratitude by the message from heaven commmunicated to him by Nathan, "went in and sat before the Lord," and poured forth his thoughts and feelings in the words which follow. He probably went into the tent in which he had placed the ark, and there meditated and prayed. But the phrase, "before the Lord," is very frequently employed without any reference to the ark, the tabernacle, or the temple. God is everywhere, and everywhere we may place ourselves as in his special presence, and with acceptance and profit offer him our thoughts and worship; and we do well often to imitate David in this respect.

I. THE CONDITIONS FAVOURABLE, AND INDEED ESSENTIAL, TO RIGHT THOUGHT AND WORSHIP WHICH ARE FOUND IN THE FELT PRESENCE OF GOD. 1. *The exclusion of the world and its influences.* "Before the Lord," the world, with its gains, pleasures, opinions, applause, or disapproval, vanishes from view, or appears as nothing; and thus we are delivered from its blinding and perverting influence. 2. *Intense consciousness of God.* He is for the time our *All.* His character, works, relation to us, dealings with us, claims upon us, judgment respecting us, stand forth glorious and impressive. 3. *Intense consciousness of ourselves, our real nature, relationships, responsibilities to God and man.* In the light of the Divine presence these things appear quite otherwise than when we regard only the material and the human. 4. *Greater susceptibility to Divine influences, and receptivity of Divine gifts.* Our hearts are prepared to receive more of the Holy Spirit; and we do receive more.

II. THE SPIRITUAL PROFIT THUS SECURED. 1. *Fuller and truer knowledge.* "In thy light shall we see light" (Ps. xxxvi. 9), which includes knowledge and much besides. "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end" (Ps. lxxiii. 17). In the presence of God we obtain deeper insight into his nature and character, understand better his plans and methods. Our thoughts of him are enlarged and quickened. And in knowing him we come to know ourselves; his greatness reveals our littleness; his holiness, our sinfulness; and his fatherly love and redeeming grace, the true worth and dignity of our souls. Coming to him, as the disciples to Christ, to tell him what we have been doing and teaching, the poverty and imperfections of our lives become manifest to us. In his presence, too, we learn the relative values of holiness and sin, time and eternity, this world and the next. 2. *Richer and deeper emotions and affections.* Penitence and humility, gratitude and love, confidence and hope, peace and joy, are all nourished best in the presence of God. Coming to him to confess our sins and failures, we shall, as we look into his face, be inspired with new and more hopeful resolve. Bringing our cares and fears to him, as Hezekiah the letter of Sennacherib (Isa. xxxvii. 14), we shall be relieved of them, and gain new courage and patience. 3. *Ever-better worship.* Which will naturally spring from an enriched and spiritual life. Worship which is not offered "before the Lord" is not worship at all; and the more his presence is felt the worthier will our worship be. 4. *Ever-growing power to live according to our convictions and resolutions.* "Before the Lord," his children grow brave and strong to do and endure. His eye felt to be upon them, they act nobly; his love realized by them, their hearts are filled with a love mighty to serve him and their brethren, and to conquer the evil powers. Finally: *The measure of our disposition to go before God for converse with him, instruction, stimulus, consolation, etc., is the measure of our actual piety.* We lose much of the highest happiness and profit through negligence in this respect. All that occupies our minds and moves our hearts becomes sanctified and elevated as we go aside and bring it "before the Lord." On the other hand, the greatest attention to religious observances which are not, through faith and love, done in the presence of God, is worthless, dishonouring to God, and useless, yea, worse than useless, to the worshipper.—G. W.

Vers. 18, 19.—*Effects of God's goodness on the heart.* (Suitable for a birthday or the new year.) David, having retired into the presence of God, pours out before him the feelings of his heart, in view of what God had done for him, and what he had just promised to do.

I. THE MERCIES CONTEMPLATED. 1. *Past leading.* "Thou hast brought me hitherto." How much this included in David's case! How much in the case of every one of us! Each should recall in God's presence the particulars of his own life. Life itself, reason, health, preservation, supply of wants, home surroundings and comforts, the love of parents, etc., education, advancement in life, deliverances from perils and sicknesses, honours, the advantages of living in a country civilized, free, Christian; the Word and ordinances of God, connection with his Church and ministers, and all that has flowed therefrom—the life of God in the soul, pardon, peace, hope, the Spirit of adoption, love to God and men, access to God, the communion of saints, growth in grace, victory over temptations, opportunity and will to do good, success in Christian labours, support in troubles and benefit from them. Also the blessings of one's "house"—wife, children, good children especially, and their happiness. It is an endless task to remember and recount all the mercies of God; but the attempt is always salutary. 2. *Promises as to the future.* "This was yet a small thing in thy sight, but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come." Astonished and grateful as David was in view of his past experience of God's goodness, the promises he had now received respecting the perpetuation of his kingdom into the distant future still more affected him. We also have "given unto us exceeding great and precious promises," stretching onward into the eternal future. The kindness of God in the past is but "a small thing." Even his spiritual gifts, great as they are, and the necessary preparation for the eternal, are but a slight foretaste and pledge of the exaltation, perfection, glory, and bliss which he will bestow upon his children in increasing abundance for ever and ever.

II. THEIR GIVER. The contemplation of our history and prospects will have a beneficial or injurious effect as we do or do not recognize God as the Giver of all. Some men regard themselves as the architects of their own fortunes, and are correspondingly filled with self-satisfaction. David ascribed all to God; and we ought to be like him in this. For if we have done much for ourselves, the power, opportunity, and will to do so came from him; if friends have greatly aided us, these also were God's gifts. In spiritual things it is especially obvious that "by the grace of God" we are what we are.

III. THEIR RECEIVER. "Who am I," etc.? The thought of David's insignificance and that of his family rendered the Divine goodness to him more conspicuous and impressive. So we shall more duly estimate the goodness of God to us, if we think rightly of ourselves; and a due impression of the greatness of his goodness will lead us to a just estimate of ourselves. At every step of our review of the past and anticipation of the future shall we be reminded of the many exhibitions of our own unworthiness. "Who am I?"—a frail and insignificant creature, a sinner, a great and persistent sinner; at best, a very imperfect Christian; proved to be such by innumerable instances—that I should be so favoured now, and should have such hopes of everlasting blessing set before me?

IV. THE EMOTIONS AWAKENED BY THEM. 1. *Astonishment.* At the Divine goodness, sovereign, free, unbounded, condescending. At the return made, which would appear incredible were it not for the sure testimony of memory and consciousness. 2. *Gratitude and love.* Expressed in praise and self-consecration (Rom. xii. 1). 3. *Humility.* The mercies of God revealing the more our unworthiness. The perception of his hand in our lives making our own part in the good they have contained seem insignificant. "Not unto us," etc. (Ps. cxv. 1). "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Cor. iv. 7). 4. *Benevolence.* His loving-kindness producing loving-kindness in our hearts, as we contemplate it; and prompting to a return of benefits, which, as they cannot be conferred on God himself, we bestow on his representatives. "Be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love" (Eph. v. 1, 2, Revised Version). "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John iv. 11).—G. W.

Ver. 20.—*Unutterable thoughts and feelings known to God.* God's knowledge of the heart, which is a terror to evil men who think upon it, is often a joy to his servants.

"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" (John xxi. 17). So David, with his heart too full for adequate utterance, finds satisfaction in the thought that God knew what his thoughts and feelings were.

I. THE FELT INADEQUACY OF LANGUAGE TO EXPRESS THE DEEPEST THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS OF THE GODLY SOUL. In our ordinary condition we feel not this difficulty. Our expressions are more likely to go beyond our thoughts and feelings, especially when we use forms of devotion prepared by others. But when the soul is deeply stirred, as David's at this time, we struggle in vain to express fully what is within. It is thus with 1. *Our sense of the value of God's gifts.* Christ, God's "unspeakable Gift" (2 Cor. ix. 15). Salvation. Everlasting life. Gifts of God associated with these which are from time to time bestowed—special help in temptation, comfort in trouble, guidance in perplexities as to truth or duty, etc. 2. *Our sense of the love which bestows them.* We can only say, "How great is thy goodness!" "How excellent is thy loving-kindness!" "God *so* loved the world;" "The love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Ps. xxxi. 19; xxxvi. 7; John iii. 16; Eph. iii. 19). Or, as David (ver. 22), "Thou art great, O Lord God; for there is none like unto thee." 3. *The emotions excited by them.* Our gratitude, affection, penitence, humility, confidence, joy ("unspeakable," 1 Pet. i. 8), longing for fuller experience of them ("groanings which cannot be uttered," Rom. viii. 26), anticipations of their perfect enjoyment (2 Cor. v. 2—4). In our times of intense devotion we feel how utterly impossible it is fully to express what is in our hearts.

II. THE SATISFACTION WHICH ARISES FROM GOD'S PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF US. "What can David say more unto thee?" I cannot express what I feel; and I need not labour to do so, "For thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant." It is the same thought which St. Paul expresses, when, speaking of the unutterable groanings with which the Holy Spirit intercedes in the Christian soul, he says, "He that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit" (Rom. viii. 27). God knows much more about us than our words express; is not dependent for his knowledge of us on our own account of ourselves. As we cannot by any words conceal from him the evil which is in us, so our deficiencies of expression will not hinder his discernment of the good. Even earthly parents see the meaning which their children try to express in stammering words and broken sentences; how much more does the heavenly Father, who is not at all dependent for his knowledge of us on our words, see beyond the poor utterances of his children, into their hearts! This is (1) a comfort under the consciousness of imperfect and unworthy utterance in our addresses to God; and (2) a reason for not labouring too much to express ourselves fully and worthily. But it is not a reason for either (1) declining to speak to God at all,—David did not actually sink into silence because he felt that he could not adequately express himself, and that God knew him (see what follows); or (2) accustoming ourselves to careless expression before him. Since (1) the endeavour to speak aright aids right thought and feeling, these grow in the endeavour to utter them; (2) in family and social worship our language aids or hinders others; and (3) we should ever offer to God our best, poor as we may feel it to be. And we may indefinitely improve both in thought and expression by the careful employment of the helps presented in Holy Scripture and uninspired devotional books. Christian poets, too, may much assist us to find suitable, though it may be still inadequate, utterance for our deepest thoughts and emotions.

Finally: 1. *David's emotions on this occasion are at once an example and a reproach to us.* For the gifts and promises of God to us, if not greater than those to him, are greater than his understanding of them could be. They stand out to us in the light which streams from Jesus Christ, unfolding into all the precious revelations and assurances of the gospel, and all the happy experiences which the Holy Spirit produces. Yet how seldom are we so affected as to feel language too poor for the expression of the wonder, love, and gratitude which we feel! 2. *How sad to be utterly insensible to the goodness of God and the greatness of his gifts to us!*—G. W.

Ver. 21.—*God's works and God's heart and words.* David looks on those great things which God had promised him as if already accomplished, so great confidence had he in the power and faithfulness of the Promiser; and, conscious that they were due to no worthiness or power of his own, he acknowledges that all originated in the heart

of God and were simply in fulfilment of his word, by which they had become known to himself. For the will and the work and the word he praises God.

I. GOD DOES GREAT THINGS ON BEHALF OF HIS PEOPLE. The works of creation are great and according to his own heart, originating in himself, and on a scale proportionate to his own greatness. So with the works of his providence. But we will apply the words to redemption. The works included in this are indeed great. They are on a scale of grandeur worthy of God. 1. *The methods employed are great.* The Incarnation—the union of God and man in one Person. The display of the glory of God in the earthly life of Christ, and at his death, resurrection, and ascension. His exaltation to be "Lord of all." The descent and operations of the Holy Spirit. 2. *The work effected on behalf of man is great.* The atonement especially, and all involved in it. The conquest over sin and Satan and death. The opening of the way to God and heaven. 3. *The work wrought in and towards men is great.* (1) In respect to each believer. Illumination, regeneration, pardon, peace, holiness, perfection, glory everlasting, together with the special guidance and government of God's providence tending to and issuing in these great results. (2) In respect to the multitude redeemed and saved. (3) In respect to the final deliverance and exaltation with the Church of the whole creation (Rom. viii. 19—22; Eph. i. 10).

II. GOD DOES THESE GREAT THINGS "ACCORDING TO HIS OWN HEART." 1. *They spring from his heart.* They are done spontaneously, of his own free grace and will—"his own good pleasure." Not at the prompting of others, for none other could have conceived them. Not under a sense of obligation, for we had no claim upon him, except that our sin and misery appealed to his compassion. They originated in the Divine mind, sprang from the Divine love. 2. *They befit his heart.* They bear the stamp of the Divine nature; are worthy of his infinite wisdom, righteousness, benevolence, and power; are the grandest display of them. "It *became* him," etc. (Heb. ii. 10).

"All thy ways
Are worthy of thyself—Divine;
But the bright glories of thy grace
Beyond thine other wonders shine."

III. GOD DOES THESE GREAT THINGS IN FULFILMENT OF HIS OWN WORD. "For thy Word's sake." 1. *He announces them by his Word.* "To make thy servant know them." The things which God has done and will do he makes known. It is thus they become available to each and all to whom the Word is communicated. For the knowledge is the chief part of the means by which salvation is wrought. "The gospel . . . is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. i. 16; see also Rom. x. 13, 14; 1 Cor. i. 17, 18, 23; Jas. i. 18; 1 Pet. i. 22, 23). Thus also we are assured of the completion of the work of redemption. For by the promises our God lays himself under obligation to perfect the salvation of all believers. It is, therefore, a great privilege to *know* these great things which God works. 2. *He accomplishes them according to his Word.* He cannot do otherwise. He "cannot lie" (Titus i. 2). "He abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. ii. 13). Moreover, "what he hath promised, he is *able* also to perform" (Rom. iv. 21). Now that he has given his Word, "for his Word's sake," if there were no other reason, he will do "all these great things."

Then: 1. *Let us, like David, adore and praise our God for his wondrous works, and for making them known to us.* How glorious he appears in these works! Let us ascribe glory to him. 2. *Let believers rest assured of the complete accomplishment of the work of their own redemption.* They have the Word and the heart of God, and his actual works for them and in them, to give them assurance. 3. *Let us fear, lest we should fail, through negligence and unbelief, to appropriate the redemption so wondrously wrought for us, notwithstanding our knowledge of it.* (See Heb. ii. 1—4.)—G. W.

Ver. 22.—*God surpassingly great and ever the same.* "Wherefore," because thou doest these great things, extending on through the ages, and because thou canst and dost foresee and predict them, "thou art" manifestly "great" thyself, surpassing all others; the very God our fathers worshipped and have told us of. David's knowledge of God becomes to a greater degree personal insight and conviction through the new

revelation with which he is favoured. It is well when living conviction as to God is wrought through experience of his kindness rather than his severity.

I. THE SURPASSING GREATNESS OF GOD. 1. *God is great.* (1) In his nature. Infinite in all his perfections. Great, not only in power and knowledge, but in righteousness and love. "His greatness is unsearchable" (Ps. cxlv. 3). (2) In his operations. In these his greatness is exercised and displayed. In his works of creation, preservation, redemption, and government, we see how great he is. David saw it in his dealings towards himself and his posterity. In the nature of his plans and purposes; in his ability to rule a free world through successive ages, so as to effect their accomplishment; and in the power to predict and promise the result with certainty, God appears unspeakably great. Thus prophecy as well as creative energy manifests the greatness of God, both in the Divine plan itself—a grand scheme of justice and love stretching from the beginning to the end of time, and on throughout eternity—and in the revelation of it to man. 2. *God is great beyond all others.* "There is none like unto thee, neither is there any God beside thee." He has no equal, none that approaches him in majesty. (1) No creature. All are at an infinite distance beneath him. He has made some creatures to resemble him in a measure in their intelligence, goodness, and position over other creatures; but their resemblance is like that of the image of the sun in a dewdrop to the sun itself. Whatever his creatures may be, they and their capacities are derived and dependent; he is underived and independent ("from everlasting"); their powers are very limited, his unbounded; none of them can create or give life; he is the "Fountain of life" (Ps. xxxvi. 9); they are mutable, he immutable; they mortal, he "only hath immortality" (1 Tim. vi. 16). (2) No god. David would think of the divinities worshipped by the peoples around; we may think of all the objects of worship in idolatrous nations, ancient and modern. Regarding them as they exist in the minds of men, producing certain effects upon them, how utterly unlike our God! We feel it almost profane to compare them with him. But in reality they are nonentities, "vanities," as they are so frequently called in Holy Scripture. There is no God beside our God.

II. HIS IDENTITY WITH THE GOD MADE KNOWN TO US FROM FORMER TIMES. "According to all that we have heard with our ears" (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 3, 4). David recognizes that the God who was so wondrously and graciously revealing himself to him was the same God whom he had been taught to revere and trust on account of the great things he had done for Israel in former days. The form of manifestation was different; the things done were different; but there were the same Divine perfections apparent, the same care for the people whom he had chosen. It was a joy to the king to discern that Jehovah, the God of the fathers, was communicating with him; and that what he was doing and promising corresponded with what he had heard of him. The revelation which God has given of himself in Christ differs in many respects from the old revelations; the operations of God under the new covenant differ from those under the old. But as we come into living communion with God in Christ, and become ourselves the subjects of his grace; as also we learn the great things which God has done and is doing under the gospel, and the promises he makes to those who receive it; —we too shall rejoice to discern that our God is the same as was worshipped by the faithful of old, and all through the ages—Jehovah, the living God, still righteous and merciful and almighty; still doing wonders of power and grace; and doing them on a vastly wider scale, no longer chiefly in Israel, but amongst all nations. One God unites all generations, is to unite all peoples. The God of our fathers is our God, and our experience of him corresponds with theirs. Thus the records of his revelations and proceedings in all the past become available for instruction, and the encouragement of faith and hope, in the present and the future.

From the whole subject let us learn: 1. *To rejoice in and praise God.* It is matter for just thankfulness that we have a God so great and glorious to worship and confide in, One who lives and works evermore, and is throughout all ages the same God. 2. *To expect great things from One so great, for ourselves and the whole Church.* He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which worketh in us" (Eph. iii. 20); and which has ever wrought among and on behalf of his people "according to all that we have heard with our ears." 3. *To realize conscious communion with the saints of all ages.* And so with all saints in earth and

heaven. 4. *To abjure the folly, sin, and peril of declining the friendship of this great Being, and living in enmity with him.*—G. W.

Vers. 23, 24.—*The blessedness of God's people.* The thought of the greatness of God, in contrast with other objects of worship, naturally leads to that of the happiness of the people to whom he has revealed himself, and on whose behalf he has shown his greatness by his works. Israel was thus blessed above all other nations; Christians inherit the same blessedness with large increase. The people of God are distinguished above all others by—

I. THEIR REDEMPTION. (Ver. 23.) 1. *The nature of it.* Israel was redeemed from bondage in Egypt, and afterwards from the Canaanite "nations and their gods." A wonderful and happy deliverance. Christians are the subjects of a higher redemption. They are delivered from sin, from a bondage more cruel and degrading than that of Egypt. They are redeemed "from all iniquity" (Titus ii. 14), "from this present evil world" (Gal. i. 4); "from their vain manner of life handed down from their fathers" (1 Pet. i. 18, Revised Version). They are redeemed from the consequences of sin. They have "redemption, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col. i. 14); they are redeemed "from the curse of the Law" (Gal. iii. 13); from the power of the devil, and so from the power and the dread of death (Heb. ii. 14, 15); they await "the redemption of their body" (Rom. viii. 23); they are delivered "from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. i. 10). Such are some of the statements of Scripture respecting the "redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. iii. 24). 2. *The manner of it.* The deliverance from Egypt was effected by marvels of Divine power. God "went" forth to their rescue, doing "great things and terrible," in which the people themselves had and could have no part. In the destruction of the Canaanitish peoples they did take part, but their deliverances were by the power of God as really as their redemption from Egypt. For the spiritual and eternal redemption God has interposed in ways yet more marvellous. By wonders of love and righteousness and power combined, he delivers men from sin and death and hell. "He sent his Son to be the Propitiation for our sins" (1 John iv. 10). "We have redemption through his blood" (Eph. i. 7); and so the saints on earth and those in heaven unite in praise of him who, by his blood, washed them from their sins, and redeemed them to God (Rev. i. 5; v. 9). Mere power could not effect this redemption. (1) God must, in redeeming men, "declare his righteousness . . . that he might be just," as well as "the Justifier" (Rom. iii. 26); and this is effected by the death of Jesus, "the Just for the unjust" (1 Pet. iii. 18). (2) Men are to be delivered from sin by moral suasion; and this also is effected by the manifestation at once of the evil of sin, and the greatness of the Divine love, in the sacrifice of Christ. Thus the great redemptive act is the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus. But this is rendered effectual in the experience of men by (3) the power of the Holy Spirit, revealing to the heart the gospel of redemption, which then becomes "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. i. 16). To have thus realized redemption is the greatest blessedness and honour, and those who have this experience are the true "Israel of God" (Gal. vi. 16). 3. *The glory which this Redemption brings to the Redeemer.* "God went to redeem, . . . and to make him a Name." This aspect of the deliverance of Israel is not unfrequently presented in Holy Writ (see Exod. ix. 16; Isa. lxiii. 12, 14). Similarly, the Christian redemption is said to be "to the praise of the glory of his grace" (Eph. i. 6, 12; ii. 7; 2 Cor. iv. 15). It is not that, like some ambitious human hero, he cares for a great name for his own sake; but by his Name he is known, and men are drawn to him and saved (see John xvii. 26). In like manner, our Lord is said to have acquired through his humiliation and obedience unto death "a Name which is above every name," even "the Name of Jesus," and this also "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii. 9—11).

II. THE RELATION ESTABLISHED BETWEEN THEM AND GOD. (Ver. 24.) This also distinguishes them above all others. They are constituted the people of God; he becomes their God. It is for this purpose they are redeemed. This representation of the relation between God and his people appears first in a promise made to Abraham (Gen. xvii. 7, 8), is repeated in promises given through Moses (Exod. vi. 7, etc.), is adopted by David here, reappears in the prophets (*e.g.* Jer. xxxi. 33), is applied in the New Testament to Christians (2 Cor. vi. 16, etc.), and is finally used in a descrip-

tion of the perfect blessedness of the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem (Rev. xxi. 3). It comprehends all that the most enlightened and holy can desire. 1. *They are constituted the people of God.* Thus to Israel it is said by Moses, "Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth" (Deut. xiv. 2; see also xxvi. 18). St. Peter employs similar language to describe the position of Christians (1 Pet. ii. 9); and St. Paul says (Titus ii. 14) that our Lord "gave himself for us, that he might . . . purify unto himself a peculiar people ['a people for his own possession,' Revised Version]." The representation includes: (1) Ownership. They are his by right of creation and of purchase. "I gave Egypt for thy ransom" (Isa. xliii. 3); "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). (2) Appropriation. God takes possession of the people who are his; in the case of Christians, by his Spirit. (3) Self-consecration. (4) Homage, including trust, love, worship (while other peoples worship other gods, the people of God worship him), and obedience. (5) Glorification. They "show forth his praise" (Isa. xliii. 21; 1 Pet. ii. 9). They promote his kingdom. 2. *He is their God.* All that men expect from their God he is to his people, and far more. He is theirs by covenant and promise. He gives himself to them. He exercises authority over them. They enjoy his love, his presence, the employment of his power to teach and guide, to purify, to comfort, to chastise, to protect, to employ, to perfect, to honour, to save. 3. *The relation is eternal.* "For ever." This is true in a sense of the relation between Israel and God. Although no longer a nation, they still are used to witness for him as no other people; and by their inspired men, and especially by him who is of them "according to the flesh," they have become the chief religious teachers and benefactors of mankind. And the day is coming when they will accept their Messiah, and, "with the fulness of the Gentiles," form one people of God. The real, spiritual Israel of all ages and lands are God's, and he is theirs for ever and ever.

Then: 1. *Happy are the people thus favoured by the Most High!* He confers on them greater honour and blessing than on any others. This is true of Israel; of any nation who have the Word and ordinances of God amongst them; of the visible Church of Christ; and emphatically of the true spiritual Church. The distinction and glory become more marked as the reality of what is included in the title, "people of God," increases. To have a Divine revelation is a great privilege; but greater to receive and be renewed by it, and thus be heirs of all its promises. 2. *Be concerned to be one of the true people of God, who have Jehovah for their God for ever.* 3. *Take heed to live in a manner becoming your relation to him whom you acknowledge as your God.* (See Lev. xix., *passim.*) The people of a God of holiness and love should be distinguished by these qualities. Only thus can they prove themselves to be his. Only such people are his in any lastingly happy sense. Would that it were possible to point to every Christian Church, and challenge the world to produce any communities equal to them in all that is pure, righteous, and benevolent!—G. W.

Ver. 25.—*God's promises and our prayers.* "Do as thou hast said." The words are used by David of the promises given to him respecting himself and his house. They are applicable to all the promises.

I. THEY FURNISH A GUIDE TO OUR PRAYERS. What God has said shows us what we should ask. His promises indicate: 1. *The kind of blessings which we should most earnestly seek.* The promises of God—those given us in Christ especially—assure us of temporal good so far as is needful; but relate chiefly to spiritual and eternal blessings. The "good things" of Matt. vii. 11 are interpreted for us by Luke xi. 13 to be mainly "the Holy Spirit," which comprehends all good for our spirits, all the best things for time and eternity. While, therefore, we may pray for things temporal with moderated and submissive desire, we should most earnestly and constantly pray for things spiritual. In praying according to what God "has said," we are guided by infinite wisdom and love; we are asking "according to his will" (1 John v. 14). To permit ourselves to be prompted in prayer by our own worldly, carnal inclinations, is to turn our worship into sin, and to ask for evil instead of good. 2. *The degree of these blessings which we should seek.* The promises of God encourage us to open our mouths wide for him to fill (Ps. lxxxi. 10). They are without limit in extent and duration of blessing. Let

us not limit ourselves in our desires, nor limit in our thoughts the bounty or power of God (Ps. lxxviii. 41). What he "has said" includes all we can need, but no more than we need for our highest blessedness; let us not be content with less. Let us study the promises, stretch our minds to grasp them, and then turn them into prayer; and, certain that our thoughts have not attained to the full extent of their meaning, let us yield ourselves to the influences of the Holy Spirit, that he may intercede within and "for us with groanings which cannot be uttered," but which "he that searcheth the hearts" can interpret and respond to (Rom. viii. 26, 27).

II. THEY FURNISH AN ALL-POWERFUL PLEA IN OUR PRAYERS. "Do as thou hast said" is an appeal to the faithfulness and kindness of him to whom we pray. "Thou canst not break thy word ('Thy words be true,' ver. 28); thou art too kind to trifle with those who confide in it. For thy Name's sake, therefore, fulfil thy promises."

III. THEY ASSURE US OF A FAVOURABLE ANSWER TO OUR PRAYERS. When our prayers are according to the Divine promises, we should be absolutely certain of their success. For: 1. God is able to do as he has said. 2. He is most willing. His promises spring from his love to us, and express what he is most desirous of conferring upon us, and which only our indifference, unwillingness, unbelief, and consequent unfitness prevent our receiving. 3. His word binds him. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Numb. xxiii. 19). 4. He has given confirmations of his promises and pledges for their fulfilment, especially in the gift of his Son (2 Cor. i. 20; Rom. viii. 32). Therefore "let us ask in faith, nothing doubting" (Jas. i. 6, Revised Version). Were it not for what he has said, we might reasonably hesitate to ask for such great things as we are taught to pray for; but, having his word, there is no room for hesitation (ver. 27). However conscious of sinfulness and unworthiness, we may and should "come boldly unto the throne of grace" (Heb. iv. 16; also x. 19, 22).

Let us, then: 1. *Familiarize ourselves with the promises of God, that we may pray with understanding and largeness of heart, and with confidence, importunity, and perseverance.* 2. *Use the promises when we pray, whether for ourselves, our families, our country, the Church, or the world.* 3. *Abandon whatever would turn the words, "Do as thou hast said," into a fearful imprecation.* For think of what God has said as to what he will do with the impenitent, the unbelieving, the disobedient, the unforgiving, etc., even if they offer prayers to him (see *e.g.* Matt. vi. 12, 14, 15).—G. W.

Ver. 26.—*God's Name magnified in his people.* Any name of God is magnified when it is made to appear great in the eyes of his intelligent creatures, and they esteem and declare it great. This is done when he himself adds to the significance of the name by yet more glorious works or revelations; and when they come to larger conceptions of its significance, and consequently use the name with greater fulness of meaning. Thus as "the sons of God" watched the various stages of creation, the name of "Creator" would acquire greater significance and glory. The name "Jehovah of hosts" would become more glorious as the hosts themselves in the heavens and on earth grew more numerous. But David here assumes that additional glory to this great name of God might and would arise from his relation to Israel; that to say, "Jehovah of hosts is the God over Israel," would be to add lustre to the name. And rightly, for his Name has been magnified by what he did amongst and for that people, by the revelations of himself which he gave them, and by the results in their national history, in the character and deeds of many of them, and in the history of the world. He made through them such manifestations of his greatness and goodness, righteousness and mercy, as befitted himself; and for which vast multitudes have magnified and do magnify him in their thoughts and thanksgivings. Until the Christ came, no name of God was more illustrious than this, "Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel." In fact, the coming of Christ and all that has grown out of it was included in that name. Hence another name of God greater still, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and "the God and Father of Christ's people." Yea, the whole Name of God, his whole character, all the terms and declarations by which he is made known, is magnified by what he has said and done in Christ. The great threefold name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is as never before declared and glorified in the work of salvation.

I. HOW GOD'S NAME IS MAGNIFIED IN AND BY HIS PEOPLE. This is effected by: 1. *The work wrought for them.*

"'Twas great to speak a world from nought;
'Twas greater to redeem."

2. *The revelations made to them.* In the Person, teaching, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus; and by the teaching of the Holy Spirit through the evangelists and apostles. In these God is manifested more fully and clearly than by all his works besides. Never before did his Name appear so great and glorious. 3. *The work wrought in them.* The regeneration and sanctification of souls is a more interesting and illustrious display of Divine power than the creation of suns and stars, and reveals more of the Divine nature. The spiritual beauty and glory thus produced surpass all the beauty and glory of the natural world, and in them more of God appears. In "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. v. 22) God is magnified more than in all other products of his power. 4. *The works done by them.* The witness they bear for God by their worship and teaching, and sometimes their sufferings as confessors and martyrs; their godly and loving endeavours for the good of others; the courage and self-sacrifice, faith and patience, with which many of them labour for the spread of the gospel; and the good thus effected;—all magnify the Name of God, from whom all proceed, and to the fulfilment of whose gracious purposes all conduce. The changes wrought by the labours of Christians—the whole influence and results of Christianity, notwithstanding all drawbacks (serious as these are), are of such a nature and magnitude as to exalt the Name of God more than anything else in the world. 5. *The condition they at length attain.* Their ultimate moral and spiritual perfection, their perfect happiness, their vast number. "He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. i. 10). 6. *The praises which are given to him on their account.* From themselves, from the angelic hosts; on earth, in heaven; for ever. In these ways God appears great and ever greater because of his relation to Christ and the Church.

II. THE PRAYER OF GOOD MEN RESPECTING IT. "Let thy Name be magnified;" let it become greater and greater in the sight of the intelligent universe, and become more and more admired and praised, through what is done in and for and by thy people. 1. *Such a prayer is natural to good men.* Because they love God, because they have received so much from him, and because they desire the welfare of others, which is involved in the magnifying of the Name of God. 2. *There is much to intensify such a prayer.* (1) The condition of the Church. In which there is so much that does not glorify the Name of God, so little comparatively that does. To say that the Lord of hosts is God of such a people does not tend to honour him so greatly as his zealous servants desire. The prayer from their hearts and lips will mean, "Let Christ's people become so Christ-like as to make it manifest that their religion is from God, that they themselves are specially his, and that he is indeed a Being glorious in holiness and loving-kindness." (2) The condition of the world. In which God is so little thought of, his Name so little esteemed; in which idols and all manner of vain and even wicked things are magnified more than God; in which men give to themselves and their fellow-men the honour which should be his; and whose salvation and whole well-being would be ensured by those changes which would magnify the Name of God. (3) The slow progress of the kingdom of God. The apparent weakness of the Church in reference to her great work, and her real insufficiency for it, should lead all Christians to pray that God would so "arise" and "let his work appear" in the spread and establishment of his kingdom that his Name may be magnified in the earth as it has never yet been. 3. *Let the prayer be accompanied by practice.* Let each of us who pray, "Hallowed be thy Name," so live as to aid in fulfilling our prayer; first, in our general character and conduct, and then by faithful endeavours to promote the honour of God amongst professing Christians and throughout the world. Also by hearty praise to God for all he has done in connection with Christ and Christianity to make his Name great and glorious.

Observe, finally, that the Name of God is magnified in the punishment of his enemies. Let us beware lest we be made in this manner to glorify him. Let us rather honour his Name as it appears in Jesus Christ by our faith and obedience; then he will honour it in our salvation.—G. W.

Ver. 27.—*Prayer induced and encouraged by promise.* David gives the promise of God to him as a reason for praying that his house might be established for ever. He intimates that otherwise he would not have found it in his heart to do so. In like manner, the promises of God to Christians incite and encourage them to pray for bestowments that they would not have otherwise ventured to ask for.

I. THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S PROMISES. They set before us blessings so precious, vast, and enduring, that, apart from the declarations of God, we should never have dared to think of them as possible for us, or to pray for them. From the goodness and power of God in general we might have ventured to hope and pray for some blessings, but not such as are now the common subjects of Christian prayer. Look in this view at some of the Divine promises, or declarations which are equivalent to promises. 1. *As to the believer himself.* Promises as to: (1) Pardon of great and numerous sins, long practised. Repeated pardons. (2) Renewal of nature and character. Deliverance from slavery to sins the most natural, the most habitual. "A new heart," etc. (3) Adoption into the family of God. The Spirit of adoption. Participation of the Divine nature. Free access to God. Fellowship with him. (4) Victory over the mightiest enemies. (5) "Grace sufficient" for all circumstances, and highest good from them. (6) Fulness of spiritual life, of knowledge, holiness, strength, joy. "Filled unto the fulness of God;" "Filled with the Spirit." The indwelling in the heart of Christ, of God, by the Holy Spirit. Truly there are heights of godliness, goodness, and blessedness attainable in this life, to which most of us are strangers. (7) Heaven. Seeing God face to face; being with Christ, being like him in body, soul, condition; reigning with him as kings; experiencing "fulness of joy, pleasures for evermore." Let any one examine the statements of Holy Scripture on these subjects, and consider what they mean; and he must perceive that they set forth blessings which, apart from the assurances thus given, men could not have conceived of, much less imagined that they could ever be their own. 2. *As to the future of the kingdom of God on earth.* The attraction of all men to Christ; the universal spread of the knowledge, worship, and service of God; and consequently of peace, union, and brotherhood; obedience on earth to God's will as it is obeyed in heaven. In opposition to such a prospect is the whole history and experience of the world, with the exception of a small fraction; the depravity of mankind, the power of error, superstition, idolatry, priestcraft, old habits of wickedness, etc. Such a vision could never have appeared to men; or, if it had occurred to an active imagination, could never have been regarded as a matter for serious prayer and endeavour, if God had not given it by his prophets and by his Son.

II. THE EFFECT WHICH THESE PROMISES SHOULD HAVE ON OUR PRAYERS. They should: 1. *Impel us to pray.* Not lead us to neglect prayer, as if the Divine purpose and promise superseded all need for prayer. "Thus saith the Lord God: I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them" (Ezek. xxxvi. 37). The blessings promised are for those who seek them. 2. *Enrich and enlarge our prayers.* The measure in which we receive is according to the measure in which we desire and ask (Luke xi. 5—13; 2 Kings xiii. 18, 19). 3. *Greatly encourage them.* Leading us to pray with confidence and importunity. Petitions that would have been presumptuous without the promises are now sober and reasonable. We need not and ought not to be deterred either by: (1) Our sinfulness and God's holiness and threatenings. (2) Our insignificance and God's majesty. (3) The greatness of the blessings promised, and our incapacity to receive them; or (4) the difficulties in the way of the fulfilment of the promises. Sufficient that they are the promises of God, and he (1) "Jehovah of hosts," having all things under his control, unchanging and eternal and; (2) "God of Israel," our God, our covenant God, who has taken us to be his, and given himself to be ours in Christ Jesus. All that he has promised appears only to befit such a sublime relationship. (See further in homily on ver. 25.)—G. W.

Ver. 28.—*Truth of God's words.* "Thou art God, and thy words are truth" (Revised Version). David may be thinking only of the promises of God, and expressing his own confidence in their fulfilment to himself and his family. But his assertion applies to all the words of God, declarations and threatenings as well as promises; and, as his language is general, his thought may be general also; and his faith in the truth of all the words of God might then be regarded as the ground of his faith in the promise made to

himself. The words, "Thou art God," give the reason of his confidence in the Divine words. "Because thou art God, we know that 'thy words are truth,' and only truth."

I. THE GROUNDS OF OUR ASSURANCE OF THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORDS. "Thou art God." 1. *His nature and character.* (1) His universal knowledge. He cannot, like men, be mistaken, and honestly assert that for truth which is untrue. (2) His essential truthfulness. Because he is God we are intuitively sure of this. As he cannot be mistaken, so he "cannot lie." (3) His goodness. Which of itself would prevent him from misleading and deceiving his dependent creatures. (4) His unbounded power. Men who are not untrue to their promises may be unable to fulfil them. Not so God. (5) His unchangeableness. As well in faithfulness as in goodness and power. He can never become either unable or unwilling to fulfil his Word. 2. *His doings.* The actual fulfilment of his words. (1) In the history of the world; especially the promises respecting the Christ, the blessings he would bestow, and the changes he would effect. The faithfulness of God to his Word, as shown in the previous history of Israel, would assure David of the fulfilment of the promises to himself. (2) Within the range of our own observation and experience. The words of God as to the results of faith and unbelief, of holiness and sin, of prayerfulness and prayerlessness, are continually being accomplished. Our personal experience testifies to their truth, and we can witness their fulfilment in others.

II. THE WORDS RESPECTING WHICH WE HAVE THIS ASSURANCE. All declarations that can be traced to God, whether ascertained by unaided reason (as we say, though the living God through the eternal Word is ever working in the human reason) or by the inspired Book. God speaks in nature as well as in the Bible. Scientific truth, and moral truth known by the conscience, are from him as well as religious. But as Christians we have to do with the words of God in Holy Scripture, and especially with the "truth which is in Jesus." As he declared in language almost identical with David's, "Thy Word is truth" (John xvii. 17), so he said of himself, "I am the Truth" (John xiv. 6). And it is of unspeakable importance to be assured that he is and gives the revelation of God; that all that he is and says is the truth. And as he declares of the Old Testament that "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John x. 35), we have his warrant for full confidence also in the more ancient revelation. God's words as thus ascertained relate to: 1. *Existences.* God himself, his Son, his Spirit. Inhabitants of the invisible world—angels, Satan, demons. Mankind—the nature of man, purposes of his creation, the relations he sustains, his fallen condition, etc. For our knowledge of the invisible beings and things we depend on the Word of God, mainly the Scriptures; and the knowledge thus acquired is, we may be sure, truth. 2. *Moral laws.* Known partly by reason, partly by Scripture. However ascertained, we know them to be truth. 3. *Spiritual truths and laws.* The redeeming love and works of God and our Saviour; the way in which they become effectual for ourselves; the duties thence arising. 4. *The results of our conduct in respect to these truths and laws.* That is, the promises and the threatenings of God, as to both the present life and the eternal future.

Observe, that it is the words of God about these things which are the truth; not necessarily the assertions of men—individuals or Churches—respecting them. It is for human teachers, not to require of their brethren unquestioning faith in their statements, but to lead them up to where they may hear the utterances of God himself. And this is to be done, not merely by proving their assertions by the letter of Scripture, but by cherishing themselves, and fostering in others, the spirit which enables communion with "the Father of spirits" (Heb. xii. 9). If God's words be truth: 1. *We should seek full knowledge of them.* 2. *We should exercise undoubting faith in them.* (1) The faith which realizes the invisible and eternal; apprehends and feels them to be as God says. (2) The faith which is full confidence in the Divine promises and threatenings, assurance that our own future and that of others will be according to them. We have such a faith only when our belief sways and rules our hearts and lives. 3. *We should imitate God as to our truthfulness and the actual truth of our words.* Being true and sincere in our character and utterances, and taking care that what we truly say shall be truth.—G. W.

Ver. 29.—*A good man's prayer for his family.* David's prayer has especial reference to the promise given him that his family should continue for ever to rule Israel. We

may take the prayer as suitable to be used by any godly father for his children and children's children.

I. THE PRAYER. That God would bless the family. A Christian father offering this prayer would have regard to: 1. *Temporal blessings.* Prolonged life, good health of body and mind, success in worldly pursuits, competence. Asking for these as a blessing from God implies the desire that they should be granted only so far as they will be blessings; that they should come as the result of God's blessing on upright means (not from fraud, injustice, or violence; see Prov. x. 22); and that they should be accompanied with God's blessing, so that they may not ensnare and injure the soul, but promote its prosperity and highest happiness. Thus regarded, such a prayer is not unbecoming the heart and lips of any good man. 2. *Spiritual blessings.* That the family may be worthy the name of a Christian household, all being truly the children of God, worshipping and serving him faithfully and to the end. A Christian parent will be more desirous that his house should be good than great—"rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom" (Jas. ii. 5) rather than possessed of material wealth. For such blessings he need not restrain his desires, as they are good in and for themselves, good always and for ever. The poorest may seek these for his children, who may enjoy them equally with the wealthiest: they are open to all. 3. *Eternal blessings.* That he and his may "continue for ever before God" (comp. Gen. xvii. 18), and "be blessed for ever"—numbered with the saints in the glory everlasting. The words translated, "let it please thee to bless," may be more literally rendered "begin and bless" (Revised Version, margin). As if David's thoughts reverted from the distant future to the present; and he became acutely alive to the fact that, for the accomplishment of the promise in the future, it was necessary that God should be with him and his at once and all along. In the heart of a Christian the meaning may well be, "Let thy blessing come at once, without any delay, on my house, to correct what is wrong, to increase what is right, to produce those conditions which are most favourable to all good, as they most fully ensure thy constant favour."

II. WHENCE IT ARISES. 1. *Godliness.* Sense of the value of God's blessing; preference of it over all else; confidence in God's fatherly love and sympathy with the love of earthly parents for their children; and faith in his promises. 2. *Parental feeling.* Love for his family; longing for their true and lasting happiness and well-being. 3. *Regard for his own happiness.* Which is necessarily bound up with the goodness and happiness of his children.

Finally: 1. *Such prayer, when real, will be accompanied by Christian instruction and training.* (Eph. vi. 4.) 2. *Let children thank God for praying parents.* Let them keep before them the image of their fathers and mothers daily kneeling before God, and imploring his blessing on them. Let them, however, not trust to their prayers as sufficient to ensure their salvation; but pray for themselves. (See more on ch. vi. 20.)—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 1.—David smote the Philistines. In the previous chapter we have seen that the empire of David not only marked an era in the development of Israel nationally, but was also the reaching of a new stage in the preparation for the advent of the Messiah; and we saw that without this the development of prophecy would have been impossible, and the people have remained unfit for the high mission to which they were called as the witnesses to the unity of God. We have in this chapter a brief summary of the wars which raised Israel from the position of a struggling and oppressed race to the possession of widespread empire. With this narrative the first history of David ends, and in the subsequent narratives many of the events referred to here are more fully detailed, and given with additional incidents. **David took Metheg-ammah out of the hand of the Philistines.** Metheg-ammah means "the bridle of the mother-city." We learn from the parallel place (1 Chron. xviii. 1) that the city of Gath is meant by this phrase. Gath was at this time the metropolis of Philistia, and had reduced the other four chief towns to a state of vassalage. Thus by taking Gath, his old city of refuge (1 Sam. xxvii. 2), David acquired also the supremacy which she had previously exercised over the whole country, and by placing a strong garrison there, as previously

the Philistines had done in the towns of Israel, he kept that martial race in awe. It denotes great progress in the arts of war that David could besiege and capture a town so strong as Gath.

Ver. 2.—**He smote Moab.** In the previous history we find David and Moab on such friendly terms that he entrusted his father and mother into their king's keeping (1 Sam. xxii. 3, 4). Now he not only subjugates them, but puts two-thirds or, according to the ancient versions, half of the captured combatants to death. Compared with the custom of the Romans, and with the attempt to destroy all the males in Edom, this was mild treatment; for we find Cæsar in his Gallic wars putting all his prisoners to death, and using for their execution the mere phrase, "he counted them in the number of enemies," as if the killing of enemies was a matter of course. The customs of the Israelites in war were not so cruel, and this treatment of the Moabites seems to be mentioned as showing that they received exceptionally severe treatment. The justification of this is found by Jewish commentators, on the authority of the Midrash, in the supposed fact that the King of Moab had put David's father and mother to death. But as Philippson adds, even so it was an instance of the extreme barbarity of ancient warfare. **Casting them down to the ground**; Hebrew, *making them to lie down on the ground*; and so the Revised Version. It is plain that those who were made to lie on the ground were combatants who had been made prisoners, and the Hebrew seems to mean that, while they were thus prostrate, they were measured off into three divisions, whereof two were put to the sword, and one permitted to live. All the versions, however, understand that only half were put to death, making the sense to be that he measured them with two cords, one to kill, and one full cord—one, that is, of larger size, to save alive. We get no help from 1 Chron. xviii. 2, where this treatment of the Moabites is omitted. It is probable that it was in this war that Benaiah slew "two lion-like men of Moab" (1 Chron. xi. 22), who were its champions and perhaps members of the royal house. **They brought gifts** means that they paid an annual tribute; but the phrase shows that, though now they were **David's servants**, that is, *subjects*, yet that they were left in possession of their independence, and that their internal affairs were managed by native authorities.

Ver. 3.—**Hadadezer.** The name is spelt Hadarezer in ch. x. 16 and in 1 Chron. xviii. 3, and such is the reading of the versions here and of many Hebrew manuscripts. The other reading has been defended on the ground that Hadad is the name of the Syrian sun-god, but the cuneiform inscriptions show that his real name was Hadar. The King of Syria, mentioned in 1 Kings xx. 1, is called in Assyrian Ben-Hidri. **Zobah.** Ewald identifies Zobah with the "Sabo" mentioned by Ptolemy. This is uncertain, but evidently Zobah lay north-east of Damascus and south of Hamath, in the region between the rivers Orontes and Euphrates. In 1 Sam. xiv. 47 it appears as a powerless country governed by a multitude of petty kings; but evidently now Hadarezer had made himself supreme, and become a powerful monarch whose authority extended even across the river into Mesopotamia (ch. x. 16). Having crushed his rivals at home, he had next endeavoured to extend his dominion abroad. **As he went to recover his border at the river Euphrates.** The word "Euphrates" is inserted in the Authorized Version, because the margin says, "Euphrates read but not written." In the Revised Version it is omitted, because the unauthoritative nature of these directions to read something not in the text has been demonstrated. Technically these readings are called *K'ri*, and the written text *K'tib*. In 1 Chron. xviii. 3 the reading is, "as he went to stablish his dominion by the river"—a change which involves the alteration of only one letter, as the word rendered here "his border," and in 1 Chron. xviii. 3 "his dominion," is the same, signifying literally, "his hand." For this reason the Revised Version renders it correctly in both places "his dominion. Now, David never had possessed up to this time any dominion upon the Euphrates, but in the fuller narrative in ch. x. we learn that these Syrians of Zobah had sent powerful reinforcements to the Ammonites in their war with David; and he might reasonably, therefore, determine to follow up his victory over them by extending his power up to the river, so as to guard the fords, and prevent all future invasions. And this Hadarezer would resent. As an able and enterprising man, he had succeeded in making Zobah a powerful realm, and was not likely to submit to having a bridle put upon his adventurous spirit by the posting of an Israelitish garrison on the borders. We learn from ch. x. 19 that David's object was to prevent aid coming to Ammon from Zobah, and that he succeeded in putting a barrier in Hadarezer's way. We can scarcely doubt, therefore, that the reading in the Chronicles is to be preferred. In 1 Sam. xiv. 47 we read that Saul had waged war with Zobah, and as David had probably served in it, he would have thereby acquired both a knowledge of the country, very useful in this present more serious expedition, and also have learned the necessity of guarding his dominions against perpetual invasions from that quarter.

Ver. 4.—**David took from him a thousand chariots, and seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen.** The word "chariots" is inserted in the Authorized Version after "thousand," from the parallel place in 1 Chron. xviii. 4, where also it is said that David captured seven thousand horsemen. The numbers of the Chronicler are more in proportion to one another than those mentioned here, provided we assume that the word "chariots" ought to be supplied, which, as it is not the only difference, is uncertain. Until the Arabs invented our present system of notation, the ancient methods of representing numbers were so liable to error that little dependence can be placed upon them. The Hebrews used their letters for numerals, but after 400 their system breaks down. Any number higher than 400 can be represented only by long sums in arithmetic, or by an intricate system of points above and below, which were sure to get into confusion. **David houghed all the chariot horses.** There is good reason for concluding that the word used here, *recheb*, is a collective, and signifies animals used either for riding or driving. What David reserved was not a hundred chariots, but a hundred riding-horses, which would be useful to him for rapid communication, and could scarcely be regarded as a violation of the command in Deut. xvii. 16. Both the Authorized and Revised Versions are wrong, but the Authorized Version at least makes the word *recheb* have the same meaning in both clauses, whereas the Revised Version makes it signify chariot-horses in the first clause, and the chariots themselves in the second. The defeat by David, with infantry only, of an army provided with so powerful a force of cavalry and chariots, proves his great military skill, and their capture bears even more emphatic testimony to his generalship. In the Psalms we find horses often referred to as objects regarded with terror, and which gave a great advantage to their enemies (Ps. xx. 7; xxxiii. 17; lxxvi. 6; cxlvii. 10), but over which they had triumphed by Jehovah's aid. This method, however, of rendering them useless, though practised by Joshua (Josh. xi. 6), was most cruel; as the poor things, unable to move about with the sinews of their hind legs severed, would perish of hunger.

Ver. 5.—**The Syrians of Damascus**; Hebrew, *Aram-Dammeseḳ*; that is, Aram-Damascus. The inhabitants of these regions and of Mesopotamia were descended from Aram, the son of Shem (Gen. x. 22), and bore his name. Thus Zobah is called Aram-Zobah in the title of Ps. lx. As members of a kindred race, and speaking the same language, all the clans of the Aramean family would naturally combine to check the growing power of Israel.

Ver. 6.—**Garrisons.** This is the word used in 1 Sam. x. 5 and xiii. 3. The Arameans were left free to manage their internal affairs themselves, but they had to pay tribute (see on ver. 2); and to prevent the assembling of troops to contest David's authority and shake off his yoke, garrisons were stationed in such places as commanded the country. The Philistines had done the same in Israel when they were masters there.

Ver. 7.—**Shields of gold.** Probably they were plated with gold, and were borne by Hadarezer's body-guard. But it is very uncertain whether shields are really meant. The word in Syriac means "quivers." Jerome evidently could not at first find out what it signified, as he in this place translates in the Vulgate "arms," but subsequently he became better informed. The LXX. renders "bracelets," and adds that they were carried away from Jerusalem by Shishak in the days of Rehoboam. There is no contradiction in this with what is said in 1 Kings xiv. 26, as what Solomon made were undoubtedly shields, such being the certain meaning of the word in the Hebrew, and its rendering in all the versions. No version renders the word used here "shield." In the parallel place (1 Chron. xviii. 7) the Syriac and Vulgate render it "quivers," the LXX. "collars," and the Arabic "plates of gold hung on the trappings of the horses." As they were captured from a Syrian king, they probably retained their Syriac name, and if so they were "quivers."

Ver. 8.—**Betah . . . Berothai.** Of these cities nothing certain is known, and in 1 Chron. xviii. 8 the names are changed to *Tibhath* and *Chun*. An interesting addition is made there, inserted also by the LXX. in this place, that it was from this brass (that is, copper) that Solomon made the great laver, the pillars, and many other vessels for the temple service.

Ver. 9.—**Toi,** called in Chronicles Tou, **King of Hamath.** This was a famous city upon the river Orontes, afterwards called by the Greeks Epiphania, and was situated upon the northernmost boundary of Palestine. Its interest in the present day lies in its having been the capital of the Hittites—a race whose very existence was doubted a few years ago, in spite of the testimony of Holy Scripture; but whose marvellous empire has been lately proved to be historical by Egyptian records on the one side, and cuneiform inscriptions on the other. Unfortunately, inscriptions which they have themselves left behind have not yet found any one capable of deciphering them. In the twelfth century B.C. they were the paramount power from the Euphrates to the Lebanon. For many centuries they contended with the Pharaohs

for the possession of Egypt, and while Rameses II. had to make an inglorious peace with the Kheta, as they are called, and marry the king's daughter, Rameses III. won a great victory over them, and saved Egypt from thraldom. In the cuneiform inscriptions we find the record of a struggle between Assyria and the Hittites, lasting for four hundred years, during which Shalmaneser made thirty campaigns against them, but they were not finally conquered until B.C. 717, during the reign of Sargon. Fuller details will be found in Dr. Wright's 'Empire of the Hittites,' published by Messrs. Nisbet.

Ver. 10.—**Joram.** In 1 Chron. xviii. 10 he is called Hadoram, and this was apparently his real name, Joram being merely the substitution of the nearest Hebrew word for something foreign and therefore unintelligible. So among the descendants of the French refugees settled in England similar changes are common. Thus Pillons becomes Pillow; Chevallier, Shoveller; St. Amour, Stammers. As Hamath bordered upon Zobah, and apparently had waged unsuccessful war with the vigorous Hadarezer, Toi was grateful to David for smiting his rival, and sent this embassy of congratulation for the purpose of ensuring the conqueror's friendship. For this end he also sent rich presents; and as a present is called in the Hebrew a *blessing* (1 Sam. xxv. 27; xxx. 26, margin), the phrase used here, **to bless him**, contains the idea, not only of congratulation, but of offerings. There is something admirable in this high Oriental courtesy. The material value of the gifts is left in the background. Their worth lies in their being the acknowledgment of the Divine favour resting upon David, and in the prayer that that favour may continue. In Ps. xviii. 43, 44 we have proof of the great pleasure which this embassy from so great a nation gave to David.

Ver. 11.—**Which also King David did dedicate.** The blessing became more blessed by this use of it, and it shows how strong were David's feelings, that he thus gave to God's house, not only the spoils of war, but also gifts of friendship. It was in this way that he accumulated those large stores of the precious metals enumerated in 1 Chron. xxix., and employed in making the sacred vessels of the temple. Their vast amount is the more remarkable because Palestine previously was almost destitute of them. Wherever the armies of Israel went, they made diligent search after everything that would serve towards the building of their sanctuary.

Ver. 12.—**Of Syria**; Hebrew, *Aram*. The reading in 1 Chron. xviii. 11 is *Edom*, which differs from Aram in only one letter. The two words are constantly confused in manuscripts, and "Edom" is probably right here, first, because it is coupled with Moab and Ammon, which were its neighbours; but chiefly because the spoil of Hadarezor, mentioned at the end of the verse, is the spoil of Aram. It would not be enumerated twice.

Ver. 13.—**From smiting of the Syrians**; Hebrew, *of Aram*. Here "Edom" is certainly right (see 1 Chron. xviii. 12), unless we accept Keil's conjecture, and suppose that "he smote Edom" has dropped out of the text, and must be inserted. In the superscription of Ps. lx. we find the wars with Aram-Naharaim (Mesopotamia) and Aram-Zobah coupled with this smiting of Edom in the valley of salt, which lay to the south of the Dead Sea, and was a fatal place to the Edomites in their war subsequently with Amaziah (2 Kings xiv. 7). Such a double victory over the Arameans first, and immediately afterwards over Edom, would account for the "name," that is, the reputation, which David gained. The course of events seems to have been as follows. The Edomites, believing that David was engaged in a struggle beyond his powers with the Syrians, took the opportunity to invade Israel. But the campaign in Aram was quickly decided, and David was able to send Abishai with a detachment of his forces to repel the Edomites. On hearing of his approach, they retired before him, and, making a stand in their own territories, were defeated in the valley of salt, with the loss of eighteen thousand men (1 Chron. xviii. 12). In this place the victory is ascribed to David, because it was won by his general acting under his orders. For some unexplained reason, the feelings of the Israelites against Edom were very vindictive, and Joab followed with larger forces, and not only slew twelve thousand in a second battle (Ps. lx., title), but remained six months in the country, ruthlessly putting every male to death (1 Kings xi. 15, 16). From this time the Edomites and Israelites were implacable foes, and in later Jewish literature the Jews gave vent to their intense hatred of the Roman empire by giving it the name of Edom.

Ver. 14.—**Throughout all Edom put he garrisons.** In a country naturally so strong as Edom, and with neighbouring states ready to give shelter to their fugitives, Joab's attempt would cause great misery, but only a moderate loss of life. And as soon as he withdrew, the exiles would return to their old homes. To keep them, therefore, in entire subjection, the country was held by strong garrisons, and the Edomites became David's servants, being apparently deprived for the present of any form of in-

dependent government. We have, then, in this chapter, a brief summary of David's wars, whereby he established his supremacy over the extensive region from Hamath on the north to the salt plains on the south of the Dead Sea, and from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates.

Ver. 15.—**David executed judgment and justice.** There was very little real truth in Absalom's fault-finding with the administration of justice (ch. xv. 3, 4), unless we suppose—what is only too probable—that David, after his terrible crimes of murder and adultery, became lax in the discharge of his judicial duties. Here, at this period of his life, he was a zealous judge at home, as well as a brave and skilful general. He was one of those many-sided characters who are great in a multitude of ways. Like Julius Cæsar and our own Alfred, he was as distinguished in the arts of peace as in those of war. And thus, while his first care was for the establishment of religion, and while even the singing in the sanctuary was not beneath his notice, he also, even in the midst of dangerous wars, gave careful attention to the orderly government of his kingdom and the maintenance of right and law. We have already seen with what consummate skill he selected a capital immediately that he was made king of all Israel. Saul had done much in war. Though finally defeated at Gilboa, he had taught the Israelites their strength, and laid the foundations of David's empire; but he had done nothing to consolidate the tribes, or provide tribunals for the settlement of disputed legal rights or the punishment of crimes. Israel was as loose an aggregate of discordant atoms at his death as it was at his appointment; and the maintenance of order was left to the caprice of local sheiks. Samuel had done far more for the internal development and consolidation of the people than Saul; but it was David who made them into a nation. The continuance of his work was frustrated by the extravagance of Solomon, the folly of Rehoboam, and the ambition of the restless tribe of Ephraim; but the two parts into which his realm was broken at least held together, and there never again was danger of such anarchy and threatened disintegration as existed in the times of the judges.

Ver. 16.—**Joab . . . was over the host.** Twice in this book we have lists of David's chief officers—here and at the end of ch. xx. The present list belongs to the period of David's greatest prosperity, when all went well with him in peace and war, and when Jehovah had elevated him to the unique rank of Messianic king—a distinction which belonged to him personally, and was inherited by none of his successors. Between it and the second list there lies a tragic tale of sin and shame, of crime and merited punishment, of the realm rising in rebellion against the adulterous king, and of his own family breaking away from the bonds of godly discipline, and giving way to licentiousness, to bloodshed, and to parricidal ambition. But probably David's character had then gained in spirituality and singleness of heart; whereas now prosperity must already have begun its work of sapping the foundations of his moral nature. Joab, who had been stripped of his command for the murder of Abner, had regained it by his bravery at the capture of Jerusalem. We have seen also that David entrusted to him the building of Jerusalem, and apparently he was prime minister in all matters except probably the king's judicial functions. **Jehoshaphat . . . was recorder**; literally, *remembrancer*. It was his office to reduce the king's decrees to writing, and also to see that they were carried into execution. Probably after they had been committed to writing, they were laid before the king for his approval, and, when confirmed by his hand or seal, were entered in the book of remembrance.

Ver. 17.—**Zadok . . . and Ahimelech . . . were the priests.** We have already seen that this was contrary to the letter of the Mosaic Law, and yet that there was no schism, and that by patience matters came back to the right groove. Zadok, of the elder line of Eleazar (1 Chron. vi. 4—8, 50—53), was high priest at Gibeon, and Ahimelech, of the junior line of Ithamar, was the high priest at Jerusalem. Instead of *Ahimelech the son of Abiathar*, the Syriac transposes the names, and reads, "Abiathar the son of Ahimelech." This agrees with the list in ch. xx. 25, and it is certain that Abiathar outlived David (1 Kings ii. 26), and that he was David's high priest throughout his reign, though Zadok is not only constantly associated with him, but is placed first, as the man of higher rank (ch. xv. 24—35; xvii. 15; xix. 11; xx. 25). It is also remarkable that our Lord makes Abiathar the person who gave David the shewbread (Mark ii. 26), whereas in 1 Sam. xxi. he is repeatedly called Ahimelech. As both the LXX. and the Vulgate support the Hebrew against the Syriac, and as the reading "Ahimelech" is confirmed by 1 Chron. xviii. 16 and xxiv. 3, 6, 31, we must reject the emendation of the Syriac, and conclude that there was a double tradition respecting these names, some manuscripts making Abiathar the father, and others giving the seniority to Ahimelech. Our Lord made Abiathar the father, but the scribes, in their editing of the Hebrew text, gave that place to Ahimelech, yet did not carry out their restoration so thoroughly as not to

leave proof that the names probably ought to be reversed. **Seraiah** was **scribe**. His office was similar to that of a secretary of state with us. For *Seraiah* we have *Shavsha* in 1 Chron. xviii. 16, *Shisha* in 1 Kings iv. 3, and *Sheva* in ch. xx. 25. This illustrates what has just been said as to the uncertainty about proper names. They are always most difficult to read, as the sense gives no aid, and these various forms of a name that does not occur elsewhere really bear witness to the high antiquity of the manuscripts used by the scribes in settling the text of the Old Testament; and also to their self-restraint in not making them all forcibly agree.

Ver. 18.—**The Cherethites and the Pelethites.** As we have already seen (1 Sam. xxx. 14). the Cherethim were an insignificant tribe inhabiting the southern part of the country of the Philistines. Nor is that place the only proof of this fact; for they are connected with the Philistines also in Ezek. xxv. 16 and Zeph. ii. 5. David made their acquaintance when at Ziklag; and probably the Pelethim dwelt in the same neighbourhood, and were a still more unimportant clan or family. Much ingenuity has been expended in finding for their names a Hebrew derivation, and Gesenius explains them as meaning "cutters and runners," though for the latter signification he has to go to the Arabic, where he finds a verb *falata*, "to run away," "flee." But this craze of explaining the names of aboriginal tribes and their towns by Hebrew words is not only absurd in itself, but bars the way to sounder knowledge. For it is possible that, by the study of names not belonging to the Hebrew language, we might arrive at some correct ideas about the races who had previously occupied Palestine. Instead of this, the whole system of derivation is corrupted, and philology made ridiculous. What can be more ludicrous than to explain these Pelethim as "runners away," unless it be the notion that the Rephaim took their name from the Hebrew word for "a ghost"? In his "mighties" David had a powerful body-guard of native Israelites, and Saul previously had formed a similar force of three thousand men, not merely for the protection of his own person, but to guard the land from marauding incursions of Amalekites and other free-booting tribes. Such a body of men was of primary importance for police purposes and the safety of the frontiers. How useful such a force would be we can well understand from the history of the marches between England and Scotland (see also note on ch. iii. 22); but I imagine that the Cherethites and Pelethites were used for humbler purposes. While "the mighties" guarded the frontiers, and kept the peace of the kingdom, these men would be used about the court and in Jerusalem, to execute the commands of the king and his great officers. Native Israelites would refuse such servile work, and the conquered Canaanites might become dangerous if trained and armed; while these foreigners, like the Swiss Guard in France, would be trustworthy and efficient. As for the true-born Israelites, they probably did not form the mass of the population, but, like the Franks in France, were the privileged and dominant race. We read that even from Egypt, besides their own dependents, there went up with Israel "a great mixture" (Exod. xii. 38, margin). In Numb. xi. 4 these are even contemptuously designated by a word which answers to our "omnium gatherum;" yet even they, after the conquest of Palestine, would be higher in rank than the subjugated Canaanites, from whom, together with another "mixed multitude" spoken of in Neh. xiii. 3, are descended the felahin of the present day. David's armies would be drawn from the Israelites, among whom were now reckoned the mixed multitude which went up from Egypt, and which was ennobled by taking part in the conquest of Canaan. In the army "the mighties" would hold the chief place; while the mercenaries, recruited from Ziklag and its neighbourhood, which continued to be David's private property (1 Sam. xxvii. 6), would be most useful in the discharge of all kinds of administrative duty, and would also guard the king's person. In ch. xx. 23 for *Cherethi* we find *Cheri*, which word also occurs in 2 Kings xi. 4, 19. In the former passage the spelling is a mistake, the letter *t* having dropped out, and it is so regarded by the Jews, who read "Cherethi." The versions also translate there just as they do here, namely the Vulgate and LXX., "Cherethi and Pelethi;" and the Syriac by two nouns of somewhat similar sound to the Hebrew, and which signify "freemen and soldiers." In the latter place in Kings it is probable that some other tribe supplied the body-guard in Queen Athaliah's time. **David's sons were chief rulers**; Hebrew and Revised Version, *priests*. Similarly, in ch. xx. 26, "Ira the Jairite was David's priest," Hebrew, *cohen;* and in 1 Kings iv. 5, "Zabud was Solomon's priest." Gesenius and others suppose that they were domestic chaplains, not ministering according to the Levitical law, but invested with a sort of sacerdotal sacredness in honour of their birth. But if we look again at 1 Kings iv. 5 we find "Zabud was priest, the king's friend;" and the latter words seem to be an explanation of the title *cohen*, added because the word in this sense was already becoming obsolete.

In 1 Chron. xviii. 17 the language is completely changed, and we read, "and David's sons were chief at the king's hand." We may feel sure that the Chronicler knew what was the meaning of the phrase in the Books of Samuel, and that he was also aware that it had gone out of use, and therefore gave instead the right sense. Evidently the word *cohen* had at first a wider significance, and meant a "minister and confidant." He was the officer who stood next to his master, and knew his purpose and saw to its execution. And this was the meaning of the term when applied to the confidential minister of Jehovah, whose duty it was to execute his will according to the commands given in the Law; but when so used it gradually became too sacred for ordinary employment. Still, there is a divinity about a king, and so his confidants and the officers nearest to his person were still called cohens; and we find the phrase lingering on for another century and a half. For Jehu puts to death, not only Ahab's great men and kinsfolk, but also "his cohens," the men who had been his intimate friends (2 Kings x. 11).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—18.—*The historic mirror.* The narrative relates a succession of victories and conquests over the Philistines, the Moabites, the Zobahites, the Syrians, the Ammonites, the Amalekites, and the Edomites; the placing of garrisons in Syria and Edom; the voluntary recognition of David's supremacy by the King of Hamath; the military, ecclesiastical, and civil appointments of the kingdom; the dedication of treasure won in conquest and diplomacy to the service of God; the maintenance of a righteous administration throughout Israel; and the safe keeping of David in all his undertakings. History is a record of human acts. Sacred history is a record of human acts in some special relation to the working out of the spiritual issues of the kingdom of God. In all history we see mirrored human thought and feeling. It gives us a glimpse of an invisible world of energy, that is ever seeking to find full expression for itself. In this portion of sacred history we see mirrored not only the strivings of the inner nature of men, but also outlines of truth pertaining to the invisible kingdom which is ever being extended over men. The early and lower developments in Davidic times indicate permanent truths for all Christian times.

I. THERE ARE GRADES OF SERVICE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD. The conquest of these alien peoples, the rough and thorough crippling of their powers (vers. 2, 4, 8, 14), and the distribution of office among competent men (vers. 16—18), was a form of service far below, in the feelings involved, in the tone running through it, the other service rendered by David in the form of a holy, just life amidst his people, and a contribution by speech and song to the spiritual education of Israel. Yet this lower form of service was necessary, and had its proper place in the great scheme of government whereby God was preparing the world for the Prince of Peace. The actual state of mankind, and not some hypothetical state of perfection, conditioned the means by which gradually the final blessing should come. God is not responsible for the imperfect feelings with which David and others may have done certain work. He allows men in his service to apply themselves to the actual circumstances of their position according to the light they have, and then makes their general course of action subservient to the development of his own gracious purposes. The same is true now. In the Church there are higher and lower forms of service. In consequence of the imperfection of some of the workers and of their surroundings, the service draws out, not the highest feelings of which man is capable. There are rough men for rough work. Superior men may do such work, but they are not so much at ease in it as when engaged in purely spiritual efforts. It was more congenial to David to write psalms than to hough horses. The actual state of the world required both just then.

II. THE SUBJUGATION OF EXTERNAL EVILS SHOULD GO ALONG WITH INTERNAL RENOVATION. The first aim of David was, as we have seen, to restore unity, justice, peace, and religion to Israel. He worked on the central spring of national life. But the heathen and restless foes around were an incessant trouble as long as the political and military strength of Israel under the new *régime* were untested. Their subjugation was therefore the necessary complement of the internal consolidation. Taking the Davidic kingdom as representing in general features the kingdom of Christ, we see

the same truth. Its settlement among men means internal change, reformation, and consolidation of all that is good; but it is bound, for its own peace and extension, to make war on all that is alien to the mind of Christ. Hence his Church is militant. He is our Captain. We are soldiers sworn to preserve our heritage and extend his domain by actual destruction of the forces of evil that lie around. The same applies to our own life viewed as a domain over which Christ rules. Internal harmony should be accompanied by an effort to overcome everything in our daily circumstances which, if not overcome, may mar our peace, and possibly gain an unhallowed influence over us.

III. THE DEDICATION OF MATERIAL WEALTH TO THE SERVICE OF GOD IS AN EVIDENCE OF GODLY WISDOM. The prohibition to apply the spoils of war to private uses (Josh. vi. 19; cf. 1 Sam. xv. 23) was a wholesome restraint on a low class of human feelings. There was a strong temptation for David to enrich himself by conquest, and, reasoning as an ordinary man, he could have made out a good case for himself. But he was a man of God; he saw things, as it were, with the eyes of God, and therefore, apart from specific injunction for each case, acted in harmony with the mind of God. It was godly wisdom thus to devote to the service of God what had been acquired by his own strong arm; for very great wealth brings very great spiritual dangers (Matt. xix. 23, 24). The blessed temporal condition does not lie in abundance (Prov. xxx. 8, 9; Luke xii. 15). The possession of great wealth, combined with slender gifts to the cause of Christ, reveals a lack of spiritual perception and of sympathy with the heart and purpose of Christ. The devotion of wealth to Christ is the safest investment, for it brings blessings on the donor and on others through all ages. The spiritual results of material wealth, well employed, are beyond calculation. It is said of the true King in Zion, "To him shall be given of the gold of Sheba" (Ps. lxii. 15). He also is "worthy to receive riches" (Rev. v. 12). There are thousands of ways in which wealth may now be dedicated to God. The earnest heart will find out the right channel for its devotion. The demand for sanctuaries, labourers, and the claims of Christ's poor, are ever before the rich (cf. Hag. i. 4—6; Matt. ix. 36, 37; Rom. x. 14, 15; Matt. xxv. 35—40). In so far as Christians enter into the spirit of their Lord will they rejoice in consecrating wealth to him (2 Cor. viii. 9; cf. v. 13—15).

IV. THE BLESSING OF GOD IN OUR ENDEAVOURS IS THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF SUCCESS. It is said twice (vers. 6, 14) that God "preserved David whithersoever he went." It is obvious that these various enterprises were full of danger to a man like David—danger to his life, his spirituality of mind, his moral conduct, his political reputation. His natural qualities of courage, thoroughness, and his laudable ambition as a monarch, might urge him on to positions of extreme peril; and the incidents of warfare are proverbially prejudicial to piety. The secret of his success lay in his being kept of God. The servant of God, doing rough, dangerous work, not for self-aggrandizement, but for God and his people, is surrounded by an unseen shield which no dart can penetrate. Here we see a truth ever being realized in private and public life—a true man of God, a man of undivided heart, setting himself to necessary but undesirable work, pressing on every day amidst dangers to life and religion, keeping the one thought of pleasing God clear before him, and ever everywhere guarded by him whom he serves. Till our work is done no "arrow that flieth by day" can touch us. It is a fact which should be much insisted on, that God does preserve his saints (Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24, 28). No outward sign was visible, yet God was with David. The absence of visible signs with us is no evidence that God is not our Shield and Helper. The chief thing for us is to see that we are his, that we do his will and not our own, and that we have a holy method in our enterprises, be they strictly spiritual or related to ordinary affairs.

V. THE GLORY OF AN ACTIVE MAN LIES IN HIS BEING TRUE TO HIS CALLING. David was a king, bound by virtue of his position to rule in equity and righteousness. A greater distinction could not have been awarded to him in that office than that conveyed in the declaration that "he executed judgment and justice unto all his people" (ver. 15). He was true to his vocation. No man can rise higher than that. The glory of a man does not lie in being or doing as others have been and done, for talents, opportunities, and occupations differ; but in performing the part to which Providence has called him thoroughly well. Every star is perfect in its own full lustre. Every man is noble when his whole nature is developed in harmony with the purpose of his Maker. "Well done, good and faithful servant," is said of the lowliest of Christ's servants who

has been faithful in "a few things" (Matt. xxv. 22, 23). A monarch, a bishop, a pastor, a Sunday school teacher, a pious domestic servant, and a day-labourer, may each be distinguished by faithfulness to the work in hand. True spiritual honour lies more in the spirit of loyalty to our divinely appointed calling than in the specific deeds transacted. Hence the moral prospects of all Christ's servants. It is extremely important to impress this on the young, and on those who are prone to be discouraged by reason of the lowliness of their position in society and in Christian endeavour.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. The disorganization produced in the world by the action of sin renders it inevitable that much human suffering, much collision of man against man, be endured even in the historical processes of Providence, by which the blessings of redemption are finally brought into full operation. The woes of the Moabites (ver. 2) and of others were humanly necessitated incidents in the ages, giving birth to the promised Christ; and much suffering will yet be endured ere the full triumph of good over evil is achieved (Rom. viii. 18—22). 2. The most certain of the promises of God should be embraced in full confidence, and yet the most strenuous exertion on our part to bring about their fulfilment is reasonable. David's kingdom had been assured (ch. vii. 27). But, nevertheless, he set garrisons in defence of his heritage, and took pains to organize his administration on a judicious basis (vers. 16—18). Fatalism or presumption is irreligious as truly as is unbelief. 3. Resources obtained from men not religious may be used in the service of God (vers. 9—11). The deference paid by Toi to David is similar to that paid by many men destitute of vital godliness to Christians, and their gifts, though not in the most enlightened spirit, may be employed for the holiest of purposes. 4. There is a prophetic truth in the turning of the golden shields and other instruments of the heathen into the peaceful uses of the sanctuary (vers. 7, 9, 10). As a fact, the weapons and splendour of kings will some day be turned into uses subservient to the reign of Christ, the Prince of Peace (Isa. ii. 2—5; lx. 5—11).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—14 (1 Chron. xviii. 1—13).—(JERUSALEM.) *David's wars and victories. Summary*: (1) The Philistines (ver. 1). (2) The Moabites (ver. 2; Numb. xxiv. 17). (3) The Ammonites (ver. 12; ch. x.). (4) The Syrians of Zobah, under Hadadezer (ver. 3; ch. x. 15, 16). The point here touched (ver. 4) in the struggle appears to have been *after* the Ammonites had commenced hostilities, aided by Hadadezer, (5) the Syrians of Beth-Rehob, (6) the King of Maachah, and (7) the men of Tob; and had been defeated (in a *first* campaign) by Joab and Abishai at Medeba (ch. x. 1—14). Hadadezer now recruited his forces in Mesopotamia, and made immense preparations; but he was defeated by David, who took the field in person (in a *second* campaign), at Helam; his general, Shobach, being slain (ch. x. 15—19). (8) The Syrians of Damascus (vers. 5, 6). (9) Toi, King of Hamath (vers. 9, 10). "Thus the Aramean supremacy, which had in previous centuries become so formidable to the Hebrews, and even to the Ammonites, was now broken once more by the heroic arm of David" (Ewald). (10) The Edomites, in league with (11) the Amalekites (ver. 12) and others, threatening to render previous victories fruitless, overcome (in a *third* campaign) by Abishai and by Joab (vers. 13, 14; 1 Chron. xviii. 12; 1 Kings xi. 15; Ps. lx., inscription). "David himself came at the close of the campaign to arrange the conquered territory" (Stanley). (12) The siege of Rabbah, the capital of the Ammonites, which still held out, by Joab (in a *fourth* campaign), while the king remained at Jerusalem (ch. xi. 1); and its capture by David (ch. xii. 26—31; 1 Chron. xx. 1—3). These wars of Israel with surrounding nations were not ordinary wars (ch. ii. 24—29). They were a special embodiment of the great conflict which was ordained from the beginning (Gen. iii. 15), and of which the sacred history is a record. They involved principles and issues of vast importance; and they must be considered in the light of the peculiar position of the people of Israel, the measure of Divine revelation vouchsafed to them, and the "ruling ideas in early ages," in order that they may be judged of correctly, and just inferences drawn from them in relation to the conduct of Christian nations. They were waged—

I. WITH POWERFUL ADVERSARIES. Numerous, varied, confederated, selfish, proud, and "delighting in war" (Ps. lxviii. 30). The Ammonites (1 Sam. xi. 1—15) first attacked

Israel (as the Philistines and others had previously done), assisted by the Syrians, "for reward." "The first recorded example of mercenary warfare" (Kitto). They "succeeded in girdling the whole eastern frontier with steel." They were idolaters, fought against Jehovah, sought to exterminate his people, and would have been satisfied with nothing short of their entire subjugation. Never had their peril been more imminent. It was such as is described by the psalmist—

"Why do the nations rage,
And the people imagine a vain thing?
Kings of the earth set themselves up,
And rulers take counsel together
Against Jehovah, and against his anointed:
Let us burst their bonds asunder,
And cast away their cords from us!"

(Ps. ii. 1—3.)

II. ON JUSTIFIABLE GROUNDS. For: 1. *The defence of person and property*, and the preservation of the worship of Jehovah (ch. x. 12). The right of self-defence is a law of nature, extending to the relations of states and kingdoms, as well as of individuals. Without its exercise the destruction of Israel by their fierce and powerful enemies could have been averted only by a continuous miracle. 2. *The punishment of evil-doers*, and the execution of a Divine judgment upon the heathen and their gods. Of this David deemed himself an appointed agent, fulfilling a Divine commission, like that given to Saul concerning Amalek, and the command under which Joshua acted in the conquest of the land. 3. *The attainment of the destination* of the chosen people to rule over the nations according to former promises and predictions. "The chief aim of the writer is to show the growth of God's kingdom" (see the martial Psalms, ix., x., xviii., xx., xxi., xliv., lx., lxviii., cx.). Ps. ix., 'The righteous Judge of the heathen'—

"I will praise thee, O Jehovah, with my whole heart;
I will recount all thy wonderful works.
Arise, O Jehovah, let not mortal man be defiant;
Let the heathen be judged in thy sight.
Put them in fear, O Jehovah;
Let the heathen know that they are but mortal men!"

(Ps. ix. 1, 19, 20.)

III. IN A DEVOUT SPIRIT. Faith in the immediate presence of God, reverence for his righteous laws, dependence upon his mighty arm, zeal for his universal honour; prayerfulness, confidence, thankfulness. "The whole nation was at once a nation of soldiers and a nation of priests. They were the soldiers of God, pledged to a crusade—a holy war; pledged to the extermination of all idolatry and all wickedness wherever existing" (Perowne, in Ps. cx.). Ps. xx., 'Going forth to battle'—

"Jehovah answer thee in the day of distress;
The Name of the God of Jacob set thee up on high.
We will shout for joy because of thy salvation,
And in the Name of our God will we raise our banners.
O Jehovah, save the king!
May he hear us in the day we call."

(Ps. xx. 1, 5, 9.)

In a reverse, such as may have taken place just before the overthrow of the Edomites, they turned to God in supplication, and girded themselves afresh for the conflict. Ps. lx., 'Confidence in disaster'—"the most martial of all the Psalms"—partially repeated in Ps. cviii. 7—14.

"O God, thou hast cast us off, thou hast broken us;
Thou hast been angry, restore us again.
Thou hast given to them that fear thee a banner,
That they may muster (around it) from before the bow.
Who will conduct me into the fortified city?
Who will bring me into Edom?
Through God shall we do valiantly;
And he will tread down our adversaries."

(Ps. lx. 1, 4, 9, 12.)

IV. WITH EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS; in which the hand of God was manifested, especially in the preservation of David "whithersoever he went" (vers. 6, 14), and was recognized in the dedication to Jehovah of the spoils of war (vers. 7, 10—12) amidst general thanksgiving and praise. One victory rapidly succeeded another until the whole region from the Nile to the Euphrates (Gen. xv. 18) was subdued, peace was established, and Israel occupied a position of unrivalled power and glory. "David erected, on Joab's return (ver. 13), a monument of thanksgiving for his victory; and we may imagine how brilliant was the triumphant procession in Jerusalem when we recollect the hundred war-chariots with their horses which were spared when Hadarezer was conquered" (Ewald). Ps. xxi., 'Returning in triumph'—

> "O Jehovah, in thy strength shall the king be glad,
> And in thy saving help how greatly shall he exult!
> Be thou exalted, O Jehovah, in thy strength;
> So will we celebrate with voice and harp thy might."
> (Ps. xxi. 1, 13.)

V. NOT WITHOUT DEPLORABLE CONSEQUENCES. Even when waged on justifiable grounds and from religious motives, war is associated with manifold evils. It was not the loss of life that occurred, nor the cruel severities that were practised (ver. 2; ch. xii. 31), characteristic of the age, in the wars of David, which wrought the mischief, so much as the fierce passions, the pride, ambition, luxury, and vice they engendered, the heavy burdens they imposed, and the neglect of the humbler pursuits and more orderly virtues they involved. "The one blot upon the time is David's lust of war, bringing men like Joab to the front, and debasing David's own character. . . . If ever God wrote his verdict plainly upon ambition and aggressive war, he wrote it upon the wars of David. They brought the stain of two foul crimes on David himself; ruined his own domestic peace and happiness; ruined, by the possession of too-great power, the one of his sons who started so wisely and well; and ruined the kingdom, which broke asunder of its own weight" ('Prophecy a Preparation for Christ,' p. 216). Yet these effects have not always been considered in later times; while the record of his successes has sometimes been regarded as affording a sanction and an incentive to the martial spirit under different circumstances and a better dispensation. "It was among the Teutonic race that the Church first manifested warlike propensities. They were emphatically men of blood. The chief difficulty of the Church was to teach them to love peace. According to a well-known story, the Gothic bishop, Ulphilas, showed his special sense of the special weakness of his Teuton converts by refraining from translating the Books of Samuel and Kings into their language, as he did the rest of the Scripture. His reason, we are told, was that they contained 'the history of wars;' and the nation was already very fond of war, and needed the bit rather than the spur so far as fighting was concerned" (*British Quarterly Review*, January, 1881). Nevertheless, the wars and victories of David (allowed for "the hardness of men's hearts" until "the times of reformation")—

VI. FORESHADOWED NOBLER CONFLICTS AND TRIUMPHS by One greater than David—the Prince of Peace, and his faithful followers (1 Sam. xiii. 1—7; xvii. 47); in which the elements of good that existed therein are retained and perfected, and those of evil set aside; "the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but" spiritual (truth, righteousness, love) and "mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds" of error and unrighteousness (2 Cor. x. 4; Luke ix. 56; John xviii. 36); and the effects, enduring peace, security, and happiness (Isa. ix. 5, 6). "Since the time that Jesus Christ said, 'Put up thy sword into its scabbard,' Christians ought not to go to war, unless it be in that most honourable warfare with the vilest enemies of the Church—the inordinate love of money, anger, and ambition. These are our Philistines, these our Nebuchadnezzars, these our Moabites and Ammonites, with whom we ought never to make a truce; with these we must engage without intermission till, the enemy being utterly extirpated, peace may be firmly established. Unless we subdue such enemies as these, we can neither have peace with ourselves nor peace with any one else. This is the only war which tends to produce a real and lasting peace" (Erasmus).—D.

Ver. 11.—(JERUSALEM.) *Dedication of property to God.* According to the custom

of the time, the most valuable of the spoils of war became the property of David; and these, along with the presents brought to him, he devoted to a sacred use—in preparation for the building of the temple (1 Chron. xviii. 8). The spirit which he displayed had been shown at the erection of the tabernacle (Exod. xxxv. 29); and it was participated in by many (1 Chron. xxvi. 26—28; xxix. 5—9). Other instances occurred at a much earlier period (Gen. xiv. 30; xxviii. 22). David's act was: 1. *Unselfish.* The evil of selfishness specially appears in undue attachment to earthly possessions; "which is idolatry," and "a root of all evil." It ofttimes increases with the increase of worldly good, "like the Indian fig tree connecting itself vitally at a hundred spots, with the soil over which it spreads." Hence the injunction, "If riches increase," etc. (Ps. lxii. 10). A good man receives that he may give, and feels that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." 2. *Grateful.* David recognized the hand of God in his victories; and herein testified his thankfulness to his Divine Helper and Benefactor. Wealth is his gift; so is the power to acquire it (Deut. viii. 17, 18). But how often are its possessors forgetful of this, proud, and unthankful! "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. xxix. 14). 3. *Faithful.* Earthly good is not an absolute gift, but a trust; it is put into our power only for a brief season; its possession involves the responsibility of its employment according to the will of the Owner; and its faithful use is conducive to the possession of "the true riches" (Luke xvi. 9—12). Whilst it should be altogether employed according to his will, a due proportion of it should be set apart as sacred to the claims of the needy, the support of Divine worship, and the spread of the gospel. It would appear that every Jewish family in ancient times devoted as much as a fourth part of its income to religious and charitable purposes. But inasmuch as no definite rule is now enjoined, every man must determine the proportion for himself by earnest thought and prayer, without reference to what others may do, and with a view to giving, not as *little*, but as *much* as possible. It has been stated that more wealth has been made in England during the last fifty years than during the preceding eighteen centuries. But notwithstanding numerous examples of noble beneficence, how small a part of it comparatively has been devoted to the highest ends (Deut. xvi. 17; Prov. iii. 9, 10; Luke xix. 13; 1 Cor. iv. 2; xvi. 1; 2 Cor. viii., ix.; 1 Tim. vi. 17—19)! 4. *Devotional.* David's offering was religious; in it he offered himself to God; and sought to fulfil his purposes concerning the welfare of his people and the promotion of his honour and glory in the earth. This is the highest motive; and those who are actuated by it obtain an unspeakable blessing both here and hereafter (Mal. iii. 10; Matt. xxv. 21).

"Largely thou givest, gracious Lord,
Largely thy gifts should be restored;
Freely thou givest, and thy word
Is, 'Freely give.'
He only, who forgets to hoard,
Has learnt to live."

(Keble.)

Ver. 14.—*God's preserving care.* "And the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went" (ver. 6; 1 Chron. xviii. 6, 13). The providence of God (his preservation and government of all things), which embraces the creation in *general* (Ps. xxxvi. 6; Neh. ix. 6) and man in *particular* (Ps. viii. 4, 5; Luke xii. 7), is exercised with *special* regard to the good of those that love him (Matt. vi. 32; x. 29, 30). This is evident from his relation and love to them (Deut. xxxii. 9; Luke xii. 32), the promises and declarations of his Word (Ps. xxxvii. 28; cxxi. 8), and the facts of observation and experience (Gen. xlv. 5; Esth. vi. 1). The life of David is full of illustrations thereof (1 Sam. xix. 10; xxiii. 28). "The Lord preserveth the faithful" (Ps. xxxi. 23)—

I. IN LOYAL OBEDIENCE to his will, such as David exhibited.

"For he will give his angels charge over thee,
To keep thee *in all thy ways.*"

(Ps. xci. 11.)

i.e. the ways of duty; not of presumption, like those which the tempter (omitting

these words in his quotation) sought to induce the Son of man to pursue (Matt. iv. 6). "He that walketh uprightly walketh surely" (Prov. x. 9), and "shall be saved; but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once" (Prov. xxviii. 18). We must keep the commandments of God if we would be "kept by the power of God." "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" (1 Pet. iii. 13; iv. 19).

II. AMIDST IMMINENT PERIL, arising from attacks of numerous foes; which must often be met in the path of duty, and cannot be avoided without sin (ch. iv. 9—11). "And, indeed, there is a great deal of reason why we should respect him that, with an untainted valour, has grown old in arms and hearing the drum beat. When every minute death seems to pass by and shun him, he is one that the supreme God cared for, and, by a particular guard, defended in the hail of death" (O. Fellthan). There is a holy strife (Phil. i. 27; Jude 3; Eph. vi. 12), and in it we may sometimes be exposed to as great danger as David was (ch. xxi. 16); but the eye of God sees it and his hand wards it off. "No weapon," etc. (Isa. liv. 17).

> "O Jehovah Lord, thou Strength of my salvation,
> Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle."
> (Ps. cxl. 7.)

III. BY MANIFOLD MEANS. Not without prudence and effort on the part of men; not by direct, extraordinary and miraculous interposition; but by: 1. The salutary influence of a devout spirit on conditions favourable to safety. 2. Special impressions on the minds both of the good and of the bad, conducive to the preservation of the former. 3. A peculiar concurrence of circumstances having the same effect; and other ways, still more wonderful, and not less effectual (Prov. xxi. 31). Nothing is more mysterious to our partial comprehension of them than the methods of providence by which God accomplishes his designs. "A mighty maze! but not without a plan."

IV. FOR BENEFICENT ENDS. Not only "the good of his chosen" (Ps. cvi. 5), whom he preserves; but also the good which they may effect on behalf of others, the manifestation of his great Name, the complete establishment of his kingdom. "We know that all things work together for good," etc. (Rom. viii. 28). "This is the sun in the heaven of all the promises."—D.

Vers. 15—18 (1 Chron. xviii. 14—17).—(JERUSALEM.) *David's administration.* From the wars and victories of David we turn to contemplate his administration of the internal affairs of the kingdom. By his skill and energy, united with the services of many eminent men, and aided by the favour of Heaven, he raised the nation, in an incredibly short period, to a position of extraordinary power and glory. "More than Charlemagne did for Europe, or Alfred for England, David accomplished for the tribes of Israel" (W. M. Taylor). What is here recorded (taken along with what is elsewhere stated) affords an illustration of—

I. A JUST REIGN. "And David executed judgment and justice unto all the people" (1 Sam. vii. 15—17; x. 24). It was as important a part of his office to judge them as to lead them forth to battle (ch. xv. 2—4); and, in its fulfilment, he acted: 1. According to *the laws of Jehovah*, the supreme King and Judge, whose servant he was. 2. With proper discernment, *strict equity and impartiality*, and great diligence. 3. So that, either by his own decisions or those of judges appointed and superintended by him, right was done to *all his subjects*, wrongs redressed, and wrong-doers punished. He was a king who

> "In the royal palace gave
> Example to the meanest of the fear
> Of God and all integrity of life
> And manners; who, august yet lowly; who,
> Severe yet gracious; in his very heart
> Detesting all oppression, all intent
> Of private aggrandizement; and, the first
> In every public duty, held the scales
> Of justice, and, as the law which reigned in him
> Commanded, gave rewards; or with the edge
> Vindictive smote now light, now heavily,
> According to the stature of the crime."
> (Pollok, 'The Course of Time.')

II. A SKILFUL ORGANIZATION, indicated by the mention of the chief officers of state, who formed the king's council and acted as his confidential advisers, along with his sons (ver. 18), the prophets, and others (see for later enumeration, ch. xx. 13—26; 1 Chron. xxvii. 32—34). 1. *Military.* (1) The host (1 Chron. xxvii. 1—15), or national militia (under Joab), consisting of all the males capable of bearing arms, and arranged in twelve bodies of twenty-four thousand each, whose turn of service came every month. (2) The body-guard (under Benaiah), Krethi and Plethi (lictors and couriers; Cretans or Carians, and Philistines), "formed at Ziklag, and afterwards recruited from foreigners (ch. xv. 18; xx. 23), having their quarters in Jerusalem, not far from the royal castle" (Ewald). (3) The heroes (Gibborim), mighty men or veterans (under Abishai); the old guard, who had gathered to David in his wanderings, constituting "the first standing army of which we have any special knowledge," the number six hundred being maintained, "divided into three large bands of two hundred each, and small bands of twenty each; the small bands commanded by thirty officers, one for each band, who together formed 'the thirty,' and the three large bands by three officers, who together formed 'the three'" (Stanley). 2. *Civil;* pertaining to the registering and publication of the royal edicts, the regulation of judicial, financial, and other matters, the management of the royal demesnes, etc. (1 Chron. xxvii. 25—31), from which the revenue was largely derived. "Each tribe had still its *prince* or ruler, and continued under a general superintendence from the king to conduct its local affairs (1 Chron. xxvii. 16—22). The supreme council of the nation continued to assemble on occasions of great national importance; and, though its influence could not have been so great as it was before the institution of royalty, it remained an integral part of the constitution. Without superseding the tribal governments, David greatly strengthened them by a systematic distribution through the country of a large number of Levites (six thousand) as officers and judges (1 Chron. xxvi. 20—32). It is extremely probable that this large and able body of Levites were not limited to strictly judicial duties, but that they performed important functions also in the education, the healing, and the general elevation of the people" (Blaikie). 3. *Ecclesiastical;* the Levites (1 Chron. xxiii.); the priests, in twenty-four classes, and their attendants (1 Chron. xxiv.); the choristers, in twenty-four courses (1 Chron. xxv.); the porters and officers (1 Chron. xxvi.). "Order is Heaven's first law." It is an essential condition of peace, safety, and power. "The solemn transfer of the ark of the covenant, at which almost all the people were present, had made a deep impression on their minds, and had awakened them to a sincere adoration of Jehovah. These favourable dispositions David wished to strengthen by suitable regulations in the service of the priests and Levites, especially by the instructive and animating psalms, which were composed partly by himself, and partly by other poets and prophets. By such instructive means, David, without using any coercive measures, brought the whole nation to forget their idols, and to worship Jehovah alone" (Jahn, 'Heb. Com.').

III. AN ABLE EXECUTIVE. The best organization avails little unless there be men of ability to carry it into practical effect. David's reign was singularly rich in such men. 1. *Warriors* like Joab, Abishai, Benaiah, and other "heroes who had vied with him in valour and self-sacrifice for the community of Israel and the religion of Jehovah," and "whose names lived on, linked for ever with his memory" (ch. xxiii. 8—39). 2. *Ministers* like Jehoshaphat, Sheva, Adoram, Ira the Jairite; counsellors like Ahithophel and Hushai. 3. *Priests* like Zadok and Abiathar; "masters of the song" like Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun; prophets like Nathan and Gad. "All is now in full movement and almost in its original life, while around the chief hero a crowd of other figures are woven into the mighty drama, and even these are illumined by the bright rays of his sun; nay, even what would be insignificant elsewhere acquires importance here from the conspicuous eminence of Israel's greatest king" (Ewald). A wise ruler discerns the ablest men, attaches them to him, and profits by their wisdom, appoints them to offices in which they can most effectually promote the common good, and upholds and encourages them in their faithful endeavours to that end. It has been said that "a ruler who appoints any man to an office when there is in his dominions another man better qualified for it, sins against God and against the state" (Koran).

IV. A MIGHTY NATION; united, prosperous, powerful, imbued with lofty principles

and aims, "as an eaglo muing her mighty youth and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam" (Milton). To this many influences contributed, one of which was a just, wise, and strong administration (Ps. lxxii.). "David's own moral exaltation, and still more the spirit of fearless justice in which he ruled, had its effect on the nation at large. The theocracy became real to them in a sense in which it had never been before. They saw that an organized system, which was based upon religion and built up of justice, was more truly the embodiment of the Divine government than the fitful inspiration of the judges. Thus they won the might that comes from right: they felt that a war in defence of this new organization was most truly a holy war, and that if David was at the head of it, he was not only the king but the high priest of the people. Animated by this feeling, they forgot all the old 'divisions and searchings of heart,' and flocked around the standard of their king in such numbers and with such a spirit that they crushed the greatest coalition that ever threatened to destroy their religion and their nation" ('The Psalms chronologically arranged'). "The enlargement of territory, the amplification of power and state, leads to a corresponding enlargement of ideas, of imagery, of sympathies; and thus (humanly speaking) the magnificent forebodings of a wider dispensation in the prophetic writings first became possible through the court and empire of David" (Stanley).—D.

Ver. 6.—*Divine preservation.* The Revised Version translates, "The Lord gave victory to David;" but in the margin, "saved David," which is equivalent to the translation in the Authorized Version, and is the more literal meaning of the original, from which there is no necessity to depart. In the Psalms, in which David praises God for his help against his enemies, he speaks as much of the protection he experienced as of the victories he won. His preservation in so many perils of war was worthy of special mention. The record is one that might be made in an account of the lives of most of us; in some respects, of all.

I. THE PRESERVATION EXPERIENCED. 1. *Physical.* That of bodily life and health and of the senses. Protection in perils by land or water. Preservation from serious illnesses, or deliverance from them. The uniformity of good health and wholeness of limbs is a greater blessing than restoration from sickness or repair of fractures, although it does not usually excite so much notice or call forth so much gratitude. 2. *Mental.* That of the soundness of the mind, of perception, memory, reason. It might be salutary for each of us to pay one visit to a lunatic asylum. Such impressions of the value of our reason may be obtained there as can be obtained nowhere else. 3. *Moral and spiritual.* That of faith and a good conscience, of principles and habits of religion and virtue. Protection from specially powerful temptations which, yielded to, would have been our ruin. 4. *Of reputation.* From slander or misunderstanding. A good name is conducive, not only to our comfort, but to our success in life, and to our usefulness. To some, owing to peculiar circumstances, its continuance is marvellous. 5. *Prolonged.* In many cases for very many years, in which dangers numerous, various, repeated, and imminent, have been met with. The greater the perils and the longer the period, so much the more noteworthy the preservation.

II. TO WHOM IT IS TO BE ASCRIBED. "The Lord." David owed much to faithful friends and brave soldiers, who regarded his life as their special care, and defended it at the peril of their own (see ch. xxi. 15—17); but the historian ascribes all to God; and David, when he reviews his life, or any part of it, does the same. In like manner, as we look back, we may remember many who have in various ways ministered to our preservation, and towards whom we rightly cherish gratitude; but these, and all else that has contributed to our well-being, we rightly ascribe to God (comp. 2 Tim. iii. 11; iv. 16, 17).

III. THE EMOTIONS IT SHOULD AWAKEN. 1. *Gratitude.* Expressed in praise and renewed self-dedication.

> "My life, which thou hast made thy care,
> Lord, I devote to thee."

Also in zealous endeavours to preserve others from evil, especially the young and inexperienced (see Ps. cxvi., cxvii.) 2. *Confidence and hope.* As to future physical and mental preservation, so far as seems good to the infinite wisdom and goodness; but

especially as to the moral and spiritual (see Ps. xci. and cxxi.; 2 Cor. i. 9, 10; 2 Tim. iv. 18).

"We'll praise him for all that is past,
And trust him for all that's to come."

G. W.

Ver. 11.—*Dedication of treasure to God.* The dedication in this instance doubtless consisted in placing the spoils of war and other valuables named in the sacred treasury, whether for present use, or, as is probable, with a view to their employment in the erection or services of the future temple. The king presents in this act of piety an example which all should follow.

I. WHAT WE SHOULD DEDICATE TO GOD. 1. *Ourselves.* We must begin with this. All true godliness does begin with the surrender of self, with all its powers of soul and body, to God, to be saved and sanctified by him, and devoted to his service. No other gift can be truly presented while this is withheld; none can be a substitute for it; none acceptable without it. True offerings to God are the offerings of his true servants. 2. *Our material treasures.* Gold and silver, houses and lands. All are to be dedicated to God. What we have inherited, what we have gained by industry and enterprise, and what may have been given to us, as the vessels of gold and silver and brass which the King of Hamath sent to David. But if we have gained aught by fraud, injustice or other iniquity, we may not present this to God, but return it to its rightful owners (see Luke xix. 8). 3. *Our mental gifts and acquisitions.* Spoils won from the heathen, it may be, by victorious study. All our abilities and culture; all our knowledge. 4. *Our spiritual acquirements.* All we have of spiritual life and power; all the grace given to us. These are bestowed, not to be merely enjoyed, but used for God and the good of our brethren. 5. *Our influence.* Whether obtained through our abilities, or wealth, or station, or character, all is to be exercised for God. In a word, whatever we are, and whatever we have, are to be devoted to God. Nothing can be rightly withheld.

II. IN WHAT MANNER. 1. *In our ordinary life.* By employing our powers and possessions according to God's will, in uprightness and kindness. By enjoying God's gifts with thankfulness and temperance. By "setting the Lord always before us," and doing and enjoying all as his children and servants. Thus the whole of life becomes religion, and common actions are as acceptable to God as prayers. "HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD" is written upon everything (see Zech. xiv. 20, 21). But no greater mistake can be made than to think that, in giving a portion of our substance and time to religion, we are set free to use the rest as we please. 2. *By devoting a due portion of our powers and possessions to religious and charitable uses.* First, to the support of the worship of God in the congregation to which we belong; then to the relief of the poor with whom we are personally acquainted, and the education of the young in our own locality; and then to such religious and charitable institutions as commend themselves to our judgment, and appear to have a just claim upon our liberality. What proportion of our income should be given away must be left to each person's conscience as in the sight of God. Only we must let conscience decide, not mere inclination. Certainly we ought not to give what belongs to creditors, or the reasonable wants of our families. Our aim should be to ascertain the will of God; and this will vary according to the various circumstances of individuals, and of the same individual at different times. "As he may prosper" (1 Cor. xvi. 2, Revised Version) is the general rule; and any special increase of prosperity (as with David at the time spoken of in the text) justly calls for special liberality. In general, our danger does not lie in the direction of excessive generosity. Few give away as much as they ought, on any just interpretation of our Lord's precepts. "The liberal," who "deviseth liberal things" (Isa. xxxii. 8), is an exceptional person, although there are, thank God, many such.

III. MOTIVES TO SUCH DEDICATION. 1. *The claims of God.* As our Proprietor and the Proprietor of all we possess; by right of creation and redemption. "Ye are not your own" (1 Cor. vi. 19). "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. xxix. 14). As our liberal Benefactor, who gave us his Son, and is ever bestowing good upon us (2 Cor. ix. 15). As our supreme Ruler, who by innumerable commandments enjoins upon us devotement to his service and kindness to our

brethren, and to whom we must give account of our use of what he has entrusted to us. As our Father, who desires that we should resemble him, and thus at once prove our sonship and do honour to his Name (Eph. v. 1, 2). 2. *The love of Jesus Christ to us, and the example he has given us.* (2 Cor. v. 14, 15; viii. 9.) 3. *Our professions of self-devotement.* 4. *The good of others.* 5. *Our own good.* A life of self-dedication is the true, the noblest, the happiest life. We grow in all that is good by the practice of good. Our being is enriched, our happiness increased. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts xx. 35). We have now the testimony of a good conscience, which is the witness of God's approval. We shall hereafter be acknowledged and rewarded by him. In devoting ourselves and our substance to him, we are laying up treasures in heaven (Matt. vi. 20), which will reappear transfigured, for our everlasting enrichment. Good done to others as unto the Lord will be reckoned and rewarded as done to himself; good withheld from them, as withheld from him (Matt. xxv. 34—45). Faithful service now will issue in larger and higher service hereafter (Luke xix. 17, 19). Those to whom we have ministered on earth will welcome us into heaven (Luke xvi. 9), and our eternal glory and joy will be increased by knowing how much we have contributed to theirs (1 Thess. ii. 19).—G. W.

Ver. 13.—*Getting a name.* "David gat him a name." There appears to have been something special in the campaign against the Syrians (or rather Edomites, 1 Chron. xviii. 12), and in David's part therein, which rendered his victory peculiarly signal and memorable. Hence he obtained an honourable "name;" his reputation and fame were greatly increased. A large proportion of the names that men have won have been gained in war. But others more honourable have been obtained by the arts and victories of peace. Most to be valued are those acquired by eminence in goodness and usefulness.

I. NAMES WORTH GETTING. 1. *A good name—a reputation for what is good.* Better than a merely great name. Some names, widely known and for centuries, are so much infamy. Better be totally unknown than have a name for ill-doing. All may have some reputation, though in a small circle and for a brief period, for sincere piety and Christian excellence; for unselfishness, benevolence, activity in doing good, liberality, self-denial in helping others, meekness, humility, long-suffering, patience, and the like. And such a name is more to be desired than riches (Prov. xxii. 1), infinitely more than a great name which has been obtained by unscrupulous ambition. 2. *A good name which arises from and represents reality.* A *mere* name conferred through ignorance or flattery, or assumed and pushed into notice to gratify vanity or secure gain, is utterly worthless, and worse than worthless. So it is with a mere name for wisdom, or learning, or liberality (Isa. xxxii. 5), or public spirit, or philanthropy; worst of all the name which a hypocrite sometimes gets for sanctity. How withering the reproach addressed to the Church at Sardis, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev. iii. 1)!

II. THE VALUE OF A GOOD NAME. 1. *It is a just source of satisfaction to ourselves,* when our own consciousness testifies to its substantial truth. The good opinion of others, especially of the good and discerning, is part of the reward of goodness. It is one of the ways by which God expresses his favourable judgment of us. 2. *It sustains and stimulates in the course of conduct from which it has arisen.* We are influenced by it to strive more and more to be worthy of it. 3. *It is adapted to do good to others.* It attracts attention to the excellence it designates, and may lead to imitation. It awakens confidence in those who have won it, which gives force to their instructions or admonitions, and it gives them in other ways greater influence for good. On all these accounts it is a heinous sin to injure or destroy another's deserved good name by slander.

III. HOW IT SHOULD BE SOUGHT. It should scarcely be sought at all. The way to obtain it is, not to seek it, but to practise the virtues from which it arises. To seek it is to set our hearts on the approval of men, which is perilous. Let us labour to be accepted of God, and he will take care of our reputation among men, so far as it is good for us and adapted to honour him and benefit our fellow-men. "It is a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment. . . . He that judgeth us is the Lord" (1 Cor. iv. 3, 4). At the same time, for the reasons given under division II., we should not needlessly defy

or sacrifice the good opinion of others, though we should willingly do so when fidelity to truth and God requires the sacrifice.

In conclusion. The grandest instance of getting a name is that of our Lord and Saviour. By his self-humiliation and self-sacrifice, in love to us and obedience "unto death, even the death of the cross," he obtained "a Name which is above every name," as well in its significance as in its power with God and men (Phil. ii. 5—11).—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1.—**Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul?** As Mephibosheth was five years old at his father's death (ch. iv. 4), but now had a son (ver. 12), a sufficient time must have elapsed for him to grow up and marry; so that probably the events of this chapter occurred seventeen or eighteen years after the battle of Gilboa. As David was king at Hebron for seven years and a half, he had been king now of all Israel for about nine years. But during this long period he had been engaged in a weary struggle, which had left him little repose, and during which it might have been dangerous to draw the house of Saul out of obscurity. But he was at last firmly established on the throne, and had peace all around; and the time was come to act upon the promise made to Jonathan (1 Sam. xx. 14, 15), and which we may be sure David had never forgotten.

Ver. 2.—**A servant whose name was Ziba.** It is evident from this that David was not certain that Jonathan had left behind him a son; but not because of the change of name from Meribbaal (1 Chron. viii. 34); for *Baal* retained its innocent meaning of "lord" until the time of Jezebel. It then became the title of the Phœnician sun-god; and Jezebel's shameless worship of this deity, and her cruelty to Jehovah's prophets, made the people henceforth change the name Baal into Bosheth, "the shameful thing" (see note on ch. ii. 8). Mephibosheth had not changed his name, but had lived in obscurity in the wild region beyond Mahanaim. Meanwhile Ziba had probably taken care of Saul's property in the tribe of Benjamin. There is no reason to doubt that he had been steward there for Saul, and after his master's death had continued in possession of the estate. David, we may feel sure, would not interfere with it, and Ziba would hold it for Saul's heirs, who could not themselves take possession. To him David now sends, not because he expected to hear of a son of his dear friend Jonathan, but because he was ready to show kindness to any representative of the fallen monarch.

Ver. 3.—**The kindness of God.** That is, extraordinary kindness. The devout mind of the Orientals saw in everything that was more than common a manifestation of God, and thus the epithet "of God" came to be applied to anything that was very great (comp. Gen. xxx. 8, margin; xxxv. 5; Ps. lxv. 9; Jonah iii. 3, margin). David would show Saul's seed kindness as wonderful as are God's dealings with man.

Ver. 4.—**Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar.** Of Lo-debar nothing is known, but it must have been east of the Jordan, near Mahanaim. Of Ammiel we read again in ch. xvii. 27, where we find that he was a man of wealth, who helped to supply the wants of David and his men during the rebellion of Absalom. Possibly this kindness of David towards one for whom he had feelings of loyalty, as representing a royal house to which he had remained faithful, won his heart. There was a magnanimity about it which would commend it to a man who was himself generous and true.

Ver. 6.—**He fell on his face.** Mephibosheth probably expected the fate which in the East usually befalls the members of a dethroned dynasty. Subsequently in Israel each new line of usurpers put to death every male relative of its predecessor, and it was with difficulty in Judah that one babe was rescued from the hands of its own grandmother, Athaliah, when she usurped the throne. Looked at, then, in the light of Oriental policy, David's conduct was most generous.

Ver. 7.—**All the land of Saul thy father.** David probably restored to Mephibosheth not only the lands at Gibeah, which Ziba had managed to hold, but Saul's estates generally. There seems, nevertheless, to have been on Ziba's part a grudge against Mephibosheth for thus getting back from the king what he had hoped to keep as his own. The privilege of being the king's friend, and eating at his table, was an honour that would be more highly prized than even the possession of the estates.

Ver. 8.—**A dead dog.** At first sight this extreme self-humiliation makes us look on Mephibosheth as a poor creature, whom early misfortune and personal deformity had combined to depress. But really this is to impose on an Oriental hyperbole a Western exactness of meaning. When in the East

your entertainer assures you that everything he has to his last dirhem is yours, he nevertheless expects you to pay twice the value for everything you consume; but he makes his exaction pleasant by his extreme courtliness. So Ephron offered his cave at Machpelah to Abraham as a free gift, but he took care to obtain for it an exorbitant price (Gen. xxiii. 11, 15). Mephibosheth described himself in terms similar to those used by David of himself to Saul (1 Sam. xxiv. 14); but he meant no more than to express great gratitude, and also to acknowledge the disparity of rank between him and the king.

Ver. 9.—**Thy master's son.** Strictly Mephibosheth was Saul's grandson, but words of relationship are used in a very general way in Hebrew.

Ver. 10.—**That thy master's son may have food to eat.** Instead of "son," Hebrew *ben*, some commentators prefer the reading of a few Greek versions, namely, "house," Hebrew, *beth*. But the difficulty which they seek to avoid arises only from extreme literalness of interpretation. Though Mephibosheth ate at the king's table, he would have a household to maintain—for he had a wife and son—and other expenses; and his having "food to eat" includes everything necessary, as does our prayer for "daily bread." He would live at Jerusalem as a nobleman and Ziba would cultivate his estates, paying, as is usual in the East, a fixed proportion of the value of the produce to his master. **Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants** (slaves). He had evidently thriven; for, beginning as a slave in Saul's household, he had now several wives and many slaves of his own, and had become a person of considerable importance. He would still remain so, though somewhat shorn both of wealth and dignity in becoming only Mephibosheth's farmer.

Ver. 11.—**As for Mephibosheth,** said the king, **he,** etc. These words are difficult, because they make David say the same thing thrice. The text is probably corrupt, as it requires the insertion of some such phrase as the "said the king" of the Authorized Version to make it intelligible. Of the many emendations proposed, the most probable is that of the LXX. and Syriac, which make this clause an observation of the historian pointing out the high honour done to Mephibosheth in placing him on an equality with David's own sons. It would then run as follows: *So Mephibosheth ate at the king's table as one of the king's sons.*

Ver. 12.—**Micha.** This son of Mephibosheth became the representative of the house of Saul, and had a numerous offspring, who were leading men in the tribe of Benjamin until the Captivity (see 1 Chron. viii. 35—40; ix. 40—44).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—13.—The facts are: 1. David, remembering his love for Jonathan, inquires whether there were any survivors of the house of Saul; and being informed of the proximity of Ziba, an old servant, he sends for him. 2. He is told that a son of Jonathan, lame of foot, is a sojourner in the house of Machir. 3. Being sent for, Mephibosheth, on appearing before the king, falls on his face and pays reverence, but is spoken to kindly. 4. Being assured by David that there was no need for fear, that kindness for his father's sake was in store, and that all his grandfather's property should be restored, he expresses by deed and word his sense of unworthiness. 5. David informs Ziba of his decision as to the property, and orders him to act as steward for the benefit of Mephibosheth, who was to be henceforth a guest at the royal table. 6. The arrangements are carried out, and so is explained the fact of Mephibosheth's residence in Jerusalem.

The power of hallowed associations. Scripture, in common with all history, usually gives us the outward facts of life, leaving to be inferred the private mental and moral processes which must have lain in their rear. There is an abruptness in the transition of the historian from an account of David's victories and general administration to this record of an act of personal kindness. But if the laws of the human mind were the same then as now, we may be sure there was no such disconnection in the inner course of David's experience. During the few years of public activity in seeking the consolidation of his power, covered by the preceding chapters, there had often risen up in his mind memories of former days of trial, and of names of friends and foes now no longer among the living; and if thought breeds emotion, he would, on these occasions, experience feelings corresponding to the subject-matter of his thoughts. Among these thoughts, with their corresponding feelings, were doubtless those relating to his beloved

Jonathan; and what the historian here places before us in the narrative concerning Mephibosheth is simply the ultimate welling up, from the depths of the memory, of the old associations clustering around the name of Jonathan in such strength as to issue in the deeds here recorded.

I. HALLOWED ASSOCIATIONS ARE A GREAT POWER IN LIFE. Human life is not determined in its condition or conduct at any particular hour by what is purely new in thought, in feeling, or in circumstance. The past furnishes the seed on which the present acts as new environment, and the nature of that past is a more potent element in determining the conduct than is the new environment. The chief clue to David's later character is to be sought in his earlier experiences. The mightiest inner forces that thus influence life are those which centre in strong and sacred associations. The memory of Jonathan's love worked unconsciously as a spell throughout David's career. Every man is subject to this law of life. As a rule, the early mental associations of our life give tone and colour to all that comes after. The power lying in the memory of a mother's love over even the vagaries of later years is proverbial. The mention of a name may suffice to flood the eyes with tears and break down the stoutest heart. David never knew how much of restraint, of tenderness, of noble aspiration, and of fidelity to truth and honour he owed to the associations carried in his memory with the name of his friend Jonathan. So to us the "Name that is above every name" is the centre of associations as powerful as they are blessed; and the more we can enrich our nature with kindred associations, the richer and more Christlike will our lives become.

II. THERE ARE OCCASIONS WHEN HALLOWED ASSOCIATIONS CAN EXERT THEIR PROPER INFLUENCE. During the first few years of his reign David seems to have been utterly absorbed with the work of restoring the civil and religious order of his kingdom, and of securing it against the pressure of surrounding foes. A consideration of the actual state of things consequent on the misgovernment of Saul, and of the enormous labours involved in an absolute monarchy when its obligations are faithfully carried out, will account for the apparent neglect of Jonathan's house till the present date. It is only reasonable to suppose that David had sometimes thought of this matter, and the manner in which it is introduced in ver. 1 suggests that now was the time to give effect to his own previously cherished desires. It might have been politically unwise, and to Saul's descendants personally injurious by placing them in the way of temptation to conspiracies, had he sought to reinstate any of them during the rebellion of Ishbosheth and immediately on his decease. The safe and full establishment of his authority was evidently the occasion for the old and piously cherished associations with the name of Jonathan to put forth their strength. We all have within us a reserve power in the hallowed associations we cherish. They are never without an unconscious influence; but there may come seasons when we may do well to open the doors and let them come forth in full force to sway our conduct. Thus at Easter and Christmas do Christians give free scope to blessed memories. Thus our family birthdays, and days sacred to the memory of those now more blessed than ourselves, are times when our nature becomes enriched with holy feelings, and our vows become more influential. Sometimes, apart from our will and special seasons, by the spontaneous force of mental laws, sacred memories pour forth into our barren experience streams of blessing; and if by pressure of secular business the channels of thought and emotion are clogged, it is well now and then to pause, and, by an effort in quiet solitude, to open some sacred spring within our nature, so that it shall send forth its blessed streams to quicken and beautify our spiritual life.

III. A TRUE HEART WILL SEIZE OCCASION FOR REVIVING THE POWER OF HALLOWED ASSOCIATIONS. The occasion arose in the course of David's public life, and because his heart was still true to God and man, he seized it. The cares of official life and the attractions of exalted position had not yet done him spiritual damage. The David that swore love and fidelity to his friend (1 Sam. xx. 13—17, 42) was still alive. The man was not lost in the king. There are sad instances of the reverse. Old friends, former vows, are forgotten in the satiety of wealth or power, or, if not entirely forgotten, no occasion is sought to let the love of former days assert itself. Much of our power over our future lies in the use we are disposed to make of the fountains of holy thought and feeling which have been formed within by the experiences of former days.

The pressure of business may cause them to lie unnoticed for months and years; but now and then opportunities will occur which an uncorrupted heart will gladly use for bringing them into the current of daily life. There may be an abuse of "days and seasons;" but a well-regulated life will not, on that account, be hindered from taking pains to sweeten and subdue the present, and prepare for a better future, by a distinct and deliberate revival of the most sacred and tender experiences of the past.

IV. THIS DELIBERATE USE OF HALLOWED ASSOCIATIONS SECURES A CONTINUITY OF GOODNESS. There was a native force in David's generous sentiments toward Jonathan in early days which would tend to their continuous assertion. The main elements of a man's moral life will abide in spite of counteracting evils. Yet as limbs maintain their muscular power by exertion, so the special qualities of David's character, as seen in his early friendship for Jonathan, would form a continuous feature of his life only in so far as he availed himself of passing opportunities for reviving the sentiments associated with the name of his departed friend. To this habit of allowing the feelings peculiar to such associations to act again and again, as occasion permitted, upon his life, in combination, of course, with other forms and methods of spiritual culture, we may ascribe the freshness and force of the kindly, generous sentiments which were a distinctive feature of his character to the very end. The characters of some men are disjointed. The main qualities of one part of their life are not conspicuous later on. The good has been overlaid, crushed down, by an enormous pressure of thought and sentiment of an adverse kind, and no care has been taken to give new force to latent memories. Their later good qualities are not of the same order as their earlier. This is not true growth. The true continuity of goodness is that seen in David's case, and is promoted by the same careful use of the power that lies in the best associations of our earlier life.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. Let us see to the storing of the mind in early years with facts and experiences that will be as fountains of blessing to freshen life amidst the carking cares of a busy life. 2. We should be careful to cast out low thoughts, lest they occupy, in the mental and moral area, ground on which holy and generous feelings may take root and flourish. 3. It is desirable to make seasons when the best memories of the past are allowed to exercise their full power over us. This seems to be one reason, at least, for the institution of the Lord's Supper. 4. It is by cultivating the memories of departed friends, and cherishing the sentiments associated with their name, that the communion of the saints on earth and in heaven is promoted. 5. It is by the deliberate cultivation of sacred memories that we shall be able to conserve the more gentle virtues of life, and so give tone and purity to the otherwise hard and unsympathetic life of the world. 6. It behoves us to consider well what sacred vows of our earlier years are yet waiting to be redeemed. 7. In the remembrance of former friendships we may do well to inquire whether there are any in trouble and need on whom the spirit of the old friendship may exercise itself.

A spiritual parallel. Great mischief may arise from the endeavour to trace spiritual analogies in the ordinary historical narratives of Scripture, in consequence of the licence of an over-active imagination. It is not a safe canon of interpretation to say that sacred history is throughout an allegory. That an apostle saw an allegory in one or two cases is not proof of a general rule (Gal. iv. 24). But, under limitations, we are warranted in tracing parallels between the temporal and spiritual, the earthly and the heavenly: the one may exhibit features which serve to illustrate the other. Much of our Saviour's teaching partook of this character. In this lies the essence of parable. In this light we may regard the story of David's conduct toward Mephibosheth: it serves to illustrate the bearing and action of the true King of Zion toward the weak and lowly. Naaman's cleansing and Mephibosheth's elevation are historic facts shedding light on spiritual realities. Note—

I. A PLEDGE TO BE KEPT. The events here recorded have their root in the free pledge given by David many years before that he would care for the seed of Jonathan (1 Sam. xx. 15). He had undertaken to bless when need should arise. In a deeper sense the whole merciful transactions recorded in New Testament history are the outcome of a "covenant ordered in all things." Christ's interposition on behalf of the fallen was not a casual act called forth by a passing incident in human history.

Before the mountains were set fast his "delights were with the sons of men." The purpose and, speaking in human phrase, the plan of redemption were in the original order; and hence Christ's coming was, as it were, to redeem his own pledge, to keep his own vow, to fulfil the covenant. "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me." Virtually he was "slain before the foundation of the world;" for all that happened was consequent on "the eternal purpose" (Eph. iii. 11), though not in violation of human freedom (Acts ii. 23).

II. A DEFERRED FULFILMENT. We have seen that some years elapsed, not only after the vow, before any ostensible steps were taken to fulfil it, but also after David came to the kingdom. In this there is no cause for reflection on his sincerity. Providence has many things to bring about in a monarch's wise policy, and he may have to wait till events are ripe for certain lines of action. Here, on a small scale, we have an illustration of the apparently deferred fulfilment of the merciful undertaking of our Saviour. Generations passed ere the set time had come when he could, consistently with the working out of other issues, subordinate or co-ordinate, come to "perform the mercy promised" in the past (Luke ii. 72). Now that we have the complete history of David, we can see the propriety of his not taking measures for the elevation of the seed of Jonathan while his work of consolidation was incomplete; and so now that we have the full record of the Old and New Testaments, we can see the wisdom of the manifestation of the covenanted grace being deferred till the "fulness of time" (Gal. iv. 4). Many threads were being woven by the hand of Providence to meet in the revelation of Christ.

III. A SEARCH FOR THE FALLEN. David inquired after the seed of Jonathan and Saul. The sons of the distinguished were in obscurity and, in a social and political point of view, lost. As compared with the position once held by their father and grandfather, they were indeed degraded and outcast. Their splendid inheritance had vanished. They had to be sought out. How truly their relative social condition represents our spiritual condition is obvious. We have fallen far below the original state of our great ancestor. The effect of sin on man, in so far as it touches his relative social position in the enduring spiritual world, is to lower him, to render him inferior to the holy beings who constitute the members of the eternal kingdom of God. "Thou hast *fallen* by thine iniquity" (Hos. xiv. 1). The mission of Christ, in one aspect of it, is said to be a search for that which is lost—an effort to find and rescue from degradation and shame those who are living below their proper position in the spiritual life (Luke xv. 3—10, 32; xix. 10). This is true of the race; and his work considered as "finished" on Calvary is an effort to find out and save mankind. It is also true of us as individuals that Christ does, like the good shepherd (John x. 16; cf. Luke xv. 4), search for us. He follows us in our wanderings, comes near to our loneliness, and calls us by his Word, his providence, and his Spirit.

IV. A YEARNING COMPASSION. "Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?" (ver. 3). How this reveals the deep longings of the [heart]! David is not satisfied with the desire to show ordinary attentions to the fallen house; he must show such kindness as God would show. The thought of Jonathan evidently brought up again the old love; and it must, if possible, pour itself forth in some unwonted form. There can be no question that, in the regal and better qualities of his life, David illustrates the more perfect King who comes to reign in righteousness and save the poor and needy. This strong yearning compassion was conspicuous in our Lord in the days of his flesh, when he was seeking a lost race. In this he is unapproachable. It appears in his deeply pathetic tone whenever referring to sin and sorrow, in his patient unwearying toil, in his pleadings with the weary and heavy laden, in his looking with compassion on the people as sheep without a shepherd, in his tears over Jerusalem, and in the sweet and gentle submission with which he drank the cup in Gethsemane, and poured out his life on the cross. Overflowing love! And he is the same now (Heb. xiii. 8). His life, sufferings, and death were the revelation of a permanent character, and therefore of an ever-yearning compassion for the fallen.

V. A GRACIOUS BEARING. Mephibosheth trembled in the presence of David, and was overcome by the sense of his own unworthiness (vers. 6—8). No doubt he was surprised at such wondrous conduct on the part of the king as to send for him. But

the king in a tone which no written words can indicate, said, "Mephibosheth!" We all know what volumes of meaning may be conveyed by addressing an individual by his name in a certain tone. And, lest this should not suffice, there came the words, "Fear not!" As a brother and friend, on the same level, he speaks to the heart of the weak and troubled one. Foreshadow is this of him who was "meek and lowly in heart;" who would not "break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax;" who touched the outcast leper and inspired the fallen one with hope. No reproach, no coldness of heart, no imposition of impossible burdens, but the gentleness and grace that banish fear and cause the poor outcast to feel that in him there is a tender, loving Friend!

VI. AN ELEVATION TO HONOUR. David would be content with nothing less than that Mephibosheth should be a free and constant guest at his table. He was to be raised from social degradation and obscurity to a position of greatest distinction. No mere pension, no formal expression of personal interest, no delegation to others of attention to be paid to him, would suit the largeness of the king's heart. His idea of "the kindness of God" (ver. 3) far transcended the best human conceptions of generosity, and this unwonted elevation to honour was but the index of it. What a marvellous change in the condition of this poor, feeble outcast! How contrary to all the usages of monarchs, to the offspring of the fallen, was this overflow of "the kindness of God"! Than this there is not in the Bible a more apt illustration of the exceeding grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who condescends to our low estate, seeks us out, bows us down in wondering submission by his matchless gentleness, and then raises us to the honour of being members of his household, of free access to his Person and closest fellowship with himself and those most dear to him. "Neither do I condemn thee" (John viii. 11; cf. Rom. viii. 1). He gives "power to become the sons of God" (John i. 12, 16; 1 John iii. 1, 2). The "far-off" are made "nigh" (Eph. ii. 13), and are called "friends" (John xv. 15), blessed with constant fellowship (1 John i. 3), and even made heirs of "the glory" given to himself (John xvii. 22—24). It is in the Antitype alone that we find the full and true expression of "the kindness of God" (ver. 3). "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. ii. 9).

VII. A PERSONAL GUARANTEE. A personal guarantee, involving the king's honour, and backed by all the resources at his command, was given that Mephibosheth should henceforth be regarded "as one of the king's sons" (ver. 11), and that ample provision should be made for all his wants (ver. 10). Whatever demands came on him for the sustenance of his dependents, they were met by the arrangement, under royal warrant, with Ziba. Thus all his interests, present and future, personal and relative, social and material, were provided for. The king guaranteed all. Now, this is beautifully illustrative of what Christ does for those whom he raises from degradation to be his friends. He cares for all their interests. He so orders providence that they shall "want no good thing." It is said of them, "All things are yours" (1 Cor. iii. 22); and, to scatter all fear and afford abundant consolation, the King has said, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John xiv. 19). Mephibosheth rested under the care of a faithful David. All the power and all the high moral qualities of David were pledged to secure to him all his life long the blessings now enjoyed; so all the power and all the ineffable qualities of Christ are pledged to secure to us the possession and enjoyment of glorious heritage as Christians as long as we live, *i.e.* for ever.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. It becomes us to follow the example of David and of Christ, and seek out those who may be in need of blessing, and who may have a special claim on our sympathy. 2. We should make the Divine character and conduct the model of our bearing towards those in trouble. "The kindness of God" is the ideal to be converted into the realities of our life. 3. The lowly and despised may take encouragement from all that is recorded of Christ's gracious bearing and deeds of kindness. 4. We may trace, in every instance of Christ's mercy to the fallen, the permanently elevating tendency of Christianity. It is the one element which alone lastingly raises mankind in material and social good. 5. The resources of Christ for securing the fulfilment of his promises are so vast as to remove all fear. He is more to the universe at large than David was to his kingdom. 6. We see the dignity of bearing that becomes those who are honoured with the royal friendship of Christ.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—(JERUSALEM.) *For Jonathan's sake.* David had sworn to his friend Jonathan that he would "not cut off his kindness from his house for ever" (1 Sam. xx. 15). He had been probably unaware of his leaving a son behind him (for Mephibosheth was born while he was in exile, five years before the battle of Gilboa); or, if acquainted with the fact, supposed that he perished in the destruction of the house of Saul. But surmising, perhaps, from something he heard, that a son of his friend survived, he made the inquiry, "Is there yet any that is left," etc.? It was a practice only too common in the East, on a change of dynasty, for the reigning monarch to put to death the surviving members of the family of his predecessor, in order to make his own position more secure. And the conduct of David, in contrast therewith, evinced his gratitude, fidelity, piety, and noble generosity. "Neither the splendour of victories, nor the pleasures of prosperity, nor the lustre of his crown, could make him unmindful of his covenant and oath to his former friend. A suspicious, faithless tyrant would at least have kept the family that imagined they had a right to his kingdom low enough to have prevented the possibility of their ever disputing it with him; or at least have shut up the heir of it in close imprisonment, or got rid of his fears upon his account by totally destroying him; thinking he might reasonably dispense with his oath to his deceased friend through the necessity of self-preservation, and securing to his own family the peaceable succession to his crown" (Chandler). The words "for Jonathan's sake"—

I. EXPRESS A PRINCIPLE OF HUMAN CONDUCT. It is not unusual for one person to show kindness to another for the sake of *some one else*, for whom, whether living or dead, he entertains a high regard, on account of his excellent character or eminent services; with whom the object of his kindness is closely connected, and without whom he would not have shown it. How often has a king exercised his prerogative of mercy toward an offender, or bestowed riches and honour on a subject, for the sake of the faithful service of his father! "The fruit of well-doing lives longer than himself who is the doer, and thereby he leaves a blessing and good treasure behind him to his posterity" (Guild). "There are thousands of young men and women who are daily receiving kindness for their fathers' and mothers' sakes. And this is, in fact, one of the incidental blessings connected with having parents who, though now dead, were, when living, persons of worthy and estimable life. Their children inherit the advantages which the love of others for their memory can bestow, and many an applicant for some office of trust and emolument would be turned away from the door were it not that his face bears the lineaments of a departed and cherished friend, or his tones call back to memory the voice which will speak no more" (E. Mellor).

II. ILLUSTRATE A METHOD OF DIVINE DEALINGS. God deals with men, not merely in their separate individuality, but also in their relationship to one another; spares and blesses them, not only directly and immediately, but also indirectly and mediately, through and on account of each other; and shows kindness to many for the sake of one. This: 1. *Occurs in various ways.* By means of the hereditary influence of a good man on his descendants, and the moral influence on others of his example, utterances, labours, and sufferings; and (with more special reference to the case under consideration) by granting his intercessory requests, fulfilling the promises made to him on their behalf, and doing them good out of regard to him, or because of something he has done which was necessary to that end. 2. *Appears in numerous instances.* With respect to individuals, "The Lord hath blessed me for thy sake" (Gen. xxx. 27; xix. 29; 1 Kings xi. 12); families (Gen. xxxix. 5; Ps. lxix. 26; Prov. xiii. 22); Churches, cities, and nations (Gen. xviii. 26; Exod. xxxii. 14; 1 Kings viii. 19); "beloved for the fathers' sakes" (Rom. xi. 28); "As the new wine is found in the cluster," etc. (Isa. lxv. 8; i. 9). So God testifies his love of righteousness, teaches the worth of a good man in relation to the unworthy, and causes his sovereign mercy to abound toward them. 3. *Has its highest application in Christ,* "the one Mediator between God and man," (1) who is very dear to God (Matt. iii. 17; Eph. i. 6); (2) who is closely allied to men (Heb. ii. 16); (3) who has laboured, interceded, and suffered for us (1 Pet. iii. 18); and (4) to whom many promises have been made on behalf of those who are in him

(Gal. iii. 20; 2 Cor. i. 20). The nature, grounds, and extent of his mediation cannot be fully explained; but the fact is certain, that it is "for Christ's sake" (Eph. iv. 32), "in Christ" (Revised Version), and "for his Name's sake" (1 John ii. 12), we are forgiven, have access to the Father, and are "blessed with every spiritual blessing" (Eph. i. 3). "He comprises in his own Person all and everything that is most desirable" (Gregory Nazianzen).

III. SUGGEST A GROUND OF DEVOUT CONFIDENCE. When Mephibosheth appeared before the king, "he doubtless was in fear for his life (vers. 6. 7). Such generosity to a fallen rival as David showed in restoring him to his paternal property, seemed to him scarcely credible" ('Speaker's Commentary'). But the assurance that it was "for Jonathan's sake" must have inspired him with confidence. And similarly, "for Jesus' sake" affords a (1) needful, (2) effectual, and (3) abiding ground of hope, and

"Provides for those who come to God
An all-prevailing plea."

"Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my Name, he will give it you" (John xvi. 23; xiv. 13).

IV. INDICATE A MOTIVE TO PRACTICAL BENEVOLENCE, after the example of David and from love to our Divine Friend (ch. i. 26); in: 1. Forgiving each other (Eph. iv. 32). 2. Kind and comforting speech. "Fear not" (ver. 7). 3. Generous gifts. 4. Self-denial. 5. Suffering (Matt. v. 11; Phil. i. 29). 6. Prayers (Rom. xv. 30). 7. Personal, diligent, and constant service on behalf of "the Church which is his body," and of all "for whom Christ died" (2 Cor. iv. 5; 3 John 7). "For his Name's sake;" "For my sake." This is the Christian's peculiar, highest, and mightiest motive; implying not only supreme affection toward him who "alone is worthy," but also sincere sympathy with his spirit and purposes; and producing most beneficent effects.—D.

Ver. 3.—(JERUSALEM.) *Showing the kindness of God.* David remembered the request of Jonathan to show him "the kindness of Jehovah" (1 Sam. xx. 14, 15); felt the obligation of his former promises and covenants (1 Sam. xxiv. 21, 22; xxiii. 18); and now purposed, in accordance therewith, to "show the kindness of God," *i.e.* "love from religious motives, or as God shows it" (Thenius); "in God and for his sake" (Keil); "in the Lord's sight, and according to the Lord's example, pure, perpetual love, and not such love as arises from mere human respects and is shown in the eye of man" (Wordsworth); and not simply "great and eminent kindness" (Poole, Patrick). There are benevolent affections in our nature; but they must be imbued with religious motives and principles in order that their exercise may be of the highest kind. "The kindness of God" is such as is shown: 1. *Out of reverence for his Name.* Holy, just, and true; merciful and gracious; delighting in loving-kindness. "God is love;" and the eternal Fountain of love in his creatures. 2. *In obedience to his will,* as expressed in numerous injunctions to the faithful performance of what has been promised; in "the royal law" (Jas. ii. 8); and in manifold exhortations to compassionate love. 3. *From gratitude for his benefits.* These had been bestowed on David in abundant measure (ch. vii. 18; viii. 6). The acts of kindness which God performs toward men both enable and incite them to perform acts of kindness toward their fellow-men. "What goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee" (Numb. x. 32). "Freely ye have received, freely give." 4. *In imitation of his example;* of faithfulness, goodness, unsought, abounding, unfailing, and everlasting love. David was specially called, as king, to exhibit in his character and conduct an image of the moral excellences of the Divine King of Israel; and to this Christians are likewise called. "Be ye therefore perfect," etc. (Matt. v. 43—48), "merciful" (Luke vi. 36), "imitators of God as beloved children," etc. (Eph. v. 1). 5. *Under the inspiration of his grace,* his love, his Spirit; and, indeed, "it is the merciful love of God himself that dwells in the heart of the truly pious, and works therefrom; for he that lives in fellowship with God receives into his heart, through the Holy Ghost, the love that is in God, and lives and moves in that love" (Erdmann). "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John iv. 16). He not only reflects the Divine love on others, but is also the medium of its communication to them. 6. *With the desire of his approval,* of pleasing him rather than men, and of partaking more fully of his

loving-kindness, which "is better than life." 7. *For the promotion of his glory*; "that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."—D.

Ver. 4.—(GILEAD.) *The kindness of Machir Ben-Ammiel.* One of the obscure characters of Scripture. He dwelt at Lo-debar, among the mountains of Gilead, "a favourite asylum for refugees;" was, probably, a descendant of Machir the son of Manasseh; and "the principal man of Gilead" (Josephus). Of his generosity two notable instances are recorded (ch. iv. 4; xvii. 27). From these it may be inferred that he was *rich* in earthly possessions, and (what is of much greater importance) in: 1. *Grateful memories.* Like the men of Jabesh-Gilead, he remembered the heroic enterprise of Saul on behalf of his people (1 Sam. xi. 9; xxxi. 11; ch. ii. 4—7).

"But, O Saul, do not fail us.
Saul. Fail ye?
Let the morn fail to break; I will not break
My word. Haste, or I'm there before you.
Fail?
Let the morn fail in the east; I'll not fail you;
But swift and silent as the streaming wind,
Unseen approach, then gathering up my force
At dawning, sweep on Amnon, as night's blast
Sweeps down from Carmel on the dusky sea."
(C. Heavysege, 'Saul: a Drama.')

Hence he afforded ready shelter and hospitality to his grandson, and may have assisted the revival of his house at Mahanaim (ch. ii. 8); and when, subsequently, David was in exile at the same place, remembering his kindness to Mephibosheth, rendered him generous aid. 2. *Tender compassion* toward the orphan, unfortunate and friendless. The sight of human distress drew forth his sympathy; and (like the good Samaritan) he suffered no other considerations to hinder its practical expression. 3. *Constant friendship.* During many years (ver. 12), with all their changes, he provided, apparently "without fee or reward," a peaceful home for the crippled prince, and continued his steadfast protector. 4. *Active benevolence.* He was "rich in good works" (2 Tim. vi. 18). "Sensibility, as the word is generally used, is a mere animal instinct, useless when it does not immediately lead to active benevolence; and in such cases not only useless, but pernicious, because it has a tendency to produce a resting satisfied with the emotion and a neglect of the action" (W. Cooke Taylor). 5. *Beneficent influence.* His conduct could not but produce a good effect on the rude, warlike tribe of which he was chief; and possibly incited others (Shobi and Barzillai) to the like.

"Great deeds cannot die:
They with the sun and moon renew their light
For ever, blessing those that look on them."
(Tennyson.)

6. *Noble recompense.* "The blessing of him that was ready to perish" (Job xxix. 13), the approval of his own conscience, the enduring memorial of a good name. Although (like that of Abou Ben-Adhem) his name has not been written in the sacred record among "the names of those who love the Lord," but only "as one that loves his fellow-men," it could not fail of being divinely honoured.

'The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again, with a great wakening light,
And show'd the names whom love of God had bless'd,
And lo! Ben-Adhem's name led all the rest."
(Leigh Hunt.)

D.

Vers. 5—13.—(THE KING'S PALACE.) *Mephibosheth before the king.* We have here a picture of—

I. EXTRAORDINARY VICISSITUDES IN LIFE. A prince by birth, deprived of his father, crippled by a heedless footstep, carried into exile and poverty, recently a helpless

dependent in a remote district, is conducted into the presence of one who was once a shepherd-boy, afterwards a wandering outlaw, and now the greatest monarch on earth! Such changes: 1. May be largely, though not entirely, traced to moral causes, personal character, hereditary relationships. 2. Are wrought by Divine providence (1 Sam. ii. 7, 8; Ps. cxiii. 7, 8). 3. Are designed for human welfare; being not only corrective, but also tentative and disciplinary (Ps. lv. 19; Job xxiii. 10; Heb. xii. 6). 4. And should be regarded in an appropriate spirit (Jas. i. 9, 10).

II. THE DEPRESSING INFLUENCE OF MISFORTUNE. "He fell on his face, and did reverence" (ver. 6); "And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a *dead dog* as I am?" (ver. 8). His physical infirmity, combined with long-continued dependence, made him not merely humble, but timid, anxious, abject, and self-depreciatory. Hence his language (due in part to Oriental exaggeration) is excusable, though scarcely to be commended (Kitto, 'Daily Bible Illus.'). The natural tendency of heavy affliction to enfeeble and crush the spirit is effectually overcome only by the aid of Divine grace.

III. AN ADMIRABLE EXHIBITION OF KINDNESS; spontaneous, faithful, considerate, magnanimous, practical, enduring, Divine. 1. In gracious and encouraging *words*. "Mephibosheth!" (ver. 6). "Fear not!" etc. (ver. 7). To David himself, in a time of dejection, Jonathan had said, "Fear not!" (1 Sam. xxiii. 17); and how often has the Lord spoken the same comforting word to his servants (Gen. xv. 1; Luke xii. 32; Rev. i. 17)! 2. In becoming and beneficent *acts*; fulfilling what had been promised (vers. 9—11), restoring an alienated inheritance, and making a sure, permanent, and abundant provision (ver. 12). 3. In honoured, intimate, and abiding *friendship*. "Mephibosheth, thy master's son, shall eat bread alway at my table" (vers. 10, 11, 13). Such kindness, like sunshine after rain, and as a visit of "the angel of God" (ch. xix. 27, 28), dispersed his fear, alleviated his misfortune, and filled him with grateful devotion; whilst his presence at the royal table would daily remind the king of his deceased friend, and incite him to renewed generosity.

IV. THE IRREMEDIABLE DEFECTS OF THE MOST FAVOURED EARTHLY CONDITION. "And he was lame on both his feet" (ver. 13). His deformity was incurable; his infirmity became an occasion of complaint and slander (ch. xvi. 2—4); and his dejection and distress returned "as the clouds after the rain" (ch. xix. 24—30). The king himself often longed to flee away and be at rest (Ps. lv. 6). And it is vain to expect perfection in character or condition except in the heavenly mansions.

"There is a spot in every flower,
A sigh in every gale,
A shadow in the brightest hour,
Thorns in the smoothest vale.

"To smile and weep, and weep and smile,
To man alternate given;
To cling to earth permitted while
We learn to long for heaven."

Ver. 13.—*Lost and found: a sermon to young people.* The story of Mephibosheth may be used as a little *parable* of the spiritual history of every one who is restored to God. He was: 1. *A prince.* To you belongs a more than princely dignity; for you are all "the offspring of God," and bear on you traces of "the image and glory" of "the Father of spirits." 2. *Lost.* You belong to a sinful and fallen race; and your condition is one of deprivation, helplessness, obscurity, and misery. "A true religion ought to instruct man both in his greatness and his misery" (Pascal). 3. *Sought.* Infinite piety has sought and is still seeking every one of you, and employs many means to find and save you (Matt. xviii. 10—14; Luke xv.). 4. *Found;* unexpectedly to himself and to the joy of the seeker. So is it when the gracious message of the gospel comes to you, "not in word only, but in power." 5. *Self-abased;* in the presence of the king. When you see the height of Divine greatness and goodness, you also see the depth of your own unworthiness and shame. 6. *Comforted.* "Fear not; only believe." 7. *Exalted;* endowed with more than had been lost; and adopted as "one of the king's sons" (ver. 11). The gifts of God are worthy of himself. When one, to

whom Alexander gave a city, declined to accept it, on the ground that it was unsuitable to his condition, he said, "I do not ask what is becoming in you to receive, but what is becoming in me to give" (Seneca, 'De Beneficiis').—D.

Ver. 8.—"*The kindness of God.*" David, settled on the throne and in his new metropolis, recalls to mind the fallen house of Saul, not to destroy them, as was usual with Eastern monarchs, but to show them kindness for Jonathan's sake. In his inquiry after them he uses substantially the same phrase which Jonathan had used (1 Sam. xx. 14) when he took an oath of him that he would be kind to himself and his family. "The kindness of the Lord," or "the kindness of God," is an expression descriptive of the highest and best kindness possible to man or angel. It is kindness which—

I. FLOWS FROM GOD. This is true of all the kindness which exists amongst men. "Love is of God." All the love of men towards each other streams forth from the fountain of Divine love, and should be thus regarded by those who are the objects of it, he being praised for all. But this is emphatically true of Christian kindness. It originates in, and is a manifestation of, the love of God in Christ. It is produced by the Holy Spirit as given to the disciples of Christ, and by means of the truth respecting him (1 Pet. i. 22, 23). It is a product of regeneration. It is God's love dwelling in human hearts and revealing itself in human lives. It is an element of "the Divine nature" of which Christians are "partakers" (2 Pet. i. 4).

II. IS EXERCISED FROM REGARD TO GOD. 1. It has its root, like all Christian graces, in faith towards God (Gal. v. 6). 2. It springs from gratitude and love to him for all his goodness, especially for his redeeming love (1 John iv. 11). 3. It is practised in obedience to his commandments (1 John iv. 21). 4. It aims at his approval. 5. It imitates him (Luke vi. 36; Eph. iv. 32). Hence it—

III. IS GOD-LIKE. As it is: 1. *Disinterested.* "Seeketh not her own" (1 Cor. xiii. 5). Kindness which is exercised with a view to personal advantage is not kindness but policy and commercial subtlety. 2. *Expansive.* Ready to help all who need, as far as power permits. Not restricting itself to the good and worthy, but "kind unto the unthankful and the evil" (Luke vi. 35); nor yet to friends, but extending to enemies (Matt. v. 44, 45, 48); nor to one's own sect in religion, but regarding with love all Christian brethren (1 John v. 1; Eph. vi. 24). Yet it is: 3. *Discriminating.* The Divine love is united with righteousness, and seeks righteous ends. Hence it cannot be the same thing, and displayed in the same manner, towards the righteous and the unrighteous, the obedient and the disobedient; and it mainly seeks to promote righteousness and salvation in all, and varies its methods accordingly. Christian love and kindness will be exercised with similar discrimination as far as is possible to men; and will seek supremely the moral and spiritual benefit of its objects. Indiscriminate benevolence does more harm than good. 4. *Unsparing.* "He spared not his own Son" (Rom. viii. 32), and in him the love of God appears as self-sacrificing (1 John iii. 16) and bountiful (Eph. i. 3). Christian love possesses the same qualities of bountifulness (2 Cor. viii. 2, 3, 9—11), self-denial, and self-sacrifice. It "endureth all things" (1 Cor. xiii. 7). 5. *Constant.* The love of God is long-suffering, persistent, and eternal (Ps. ciii. 17; CXXXVI., *passim*). His children are like him in this respect also (1 Cor. xiii. 4, 8, 13).

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Ver. 13.—*Eating at the king's table.* David, out of regard to the memory of his dear friend Jonathan, and mindful of his oath to him, not only restores to his son Mephibosheth the forfeited property of Saul, and arranges for its cultivation by Ziba and his sons, but exalts Mephibosheth to the position of a constant guest at his own table, "as one of the king's sons." So Mephibosheth "did eat continually at the king's table." The circumstance may serve to remind us of the greater honour which good men enjoy: it is theirs to eat continually at the table of the King of kings.

I. THIS IS TRUE AS RESPECTS THEIR PARTICIPATION OF THE GIFTS OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE. All creatures depend upon him, and he supplies their wants (Ps. civ. 27, 28; cxlv. 15, 16). But the lower creatures partake of his bounty unconscious of the hand which feeds them. They are, in relation to God, rather like the horses in the stable, or the cattle and sheep in the fields, than the children at the table. And what these are through incapacity, ungodly people are through unbelief and forgetfulness. They live on the bounty of God, unmindful of him and unthankful. His children, however, even in the enjoyment of their daily food, "sit at his table." As he provides, so they recognize his care and bounty, and give him thanks. As he is present, so they are conscious of his presence. They regard him as presiding at their meals, and are glad to discern him so near. They ask for his blessing, and receive it. They "eat to the Lord, and give God thanks" (Rom. xiv. 6). They satisfy their appetites and gratify their tastes as in his sight. They aim "to eat and drink . . . to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x. 31). They not only enjoy his gifts, but commune with himself. They talk with him, and he with them. Common meals thus enjoyed become as sacraments and means of grace. Let it be our endeavour to enjoy them thus more than we have done.

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spiritual gifts. To "eat continually at the King's table" here is the necessary condition of our doing so hereafter, as it is also the preparation for that happiness and the evidence that we shall enjoy it.—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER X.

Ver. 1.—**The king of the children of Ammon died.** This war is very briefly referred to in ch. viii. 12; but we have now entered upon a narrative, the interest of which is altogether unlike all that has gone before. There we saw David crowned with earthly glory, and made the monarch of a vast empire; he is also a prophet, and, as such, not only restores, but enriches and enlarges, the worship of the sanctuary; and, as prophet and king, he becomes not only the type, but the ancestor of the Messiah. In this narrative he is a sinner, punished with terrible, though merited, severity, and must henceforth walk humbly and sorrowfully as a penitent before God. From 1 Chron. xix. 1 we learn that the king's name was Nahash; but whether he was the same as the Nahash mentioned in 1 Sam. xi. 1 is uncertain. There was an interval of more than forty years between, but Nahash was probably a young man, just seated on the throne, when he attacked Jabesh-Gilead; and Saul, who repelled him, might have been still alive but for the battle of Gilboa. The name means a "serpent," and is used in Job xxvi. 13 of the constellation Draco. It may thus have been a name assumed by several Ammonite kings, the dragon representing majesty and power, and being the symbol on their seal, just as it is the Chinese imperial emblem now. The phrase, "It came to pass after this," has no chronological significance either here or in ch. viii. 1. It is simply a form of transition from one subject to another.

Ver. 2.—**His father showed kindness unto me.** This makes it probable that it was the same Nahash as Saul's enemy. The smart of the defeat caused by Saul's energy would make him regard with friendship any one who was a thorn in the side of the man who had so unexpectedly stopped him in his career, and hence his kindness to David.

Ver. 3.—**Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father?** This insinuation arose probably from ill will, stirred up by David's success in war; and, with that distrust with which neighbouring nations too often regard one another, they see in his embassy only a purpose of spying into their defences with a view to future attack. Rabbah, their city, was a place strong both naturally and by reason of its fortifications.

Ver. 4.—**Hanun . . . shaved off the one half of their beards.** To an Oriental the beard was the mark of his being a free man, and to cut it off on one side was not merely an insult to David's ambassadors, but the treating them like slaves. Moreover, as only the priests wore underclothing, and as the ordinary dress of men consisted of a tunic and a loose flowing robe thrown over it, the cutting of this robe short up to the hip was a vile and abominable affront. Of course, Hanun intended this as a challenge to war, whereas David had meant peace and friendship.

Ver. 6.—**That they stank** (see notes on 1 Sam. xiii. 4; xxvii. 12). As the Hebrew literally means, *had made themselves stink*, the Revised Version rightly translates, "had made themselves odious." **The children of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians.** From 1 Chron. xix. 6 we learn that his mercenaries from Aram cost Hanun a thousand talents of silver, or nearly five hundred thousand pounds — a vast sum, especially considering the great relative value of silver in those days. The mercenaries, moreover, were gathered out of numerous districts of Aram—from Rehob, Zoba, Beth-Maacah, and Tob; the margin being right in rendering "the men of Tob," instead of "Ish-tob." So, too, the Revised Version, "The men of Tob twelve thousand men." It was to this land that Jephthah fled (Judg. xi. 3). The whole number of the allies was thirty-three thousand, with which total the parallel place agrees, as they are described there as "thirty-two thousand, and the King of Maacah and his people," who are here said to have been a thousand strong. The text, however, there must be corrupt, as it describes them all as horsemen (Authorized Version, "chariots;" 1 Chron. xix. 7); here footmen only are mentioned, with which the narrative agrees (see note on ver. 18).

Ver. 7.—**And all the host of the mighty men.** The Hebrew is, *and all the host, even mighty men.* By this is meant, not "the mighties," but that the Israelites had now become practised in war, and veterans.

Ver. 8.—**The Syrians . . . were by themselves in the field.** We learn from 1 Chron. xix. 7 that the rendezvous of the Arameans was at Medeba, a small town situated upon a hill in the Mishor, or treeless prairie-land, called "the plain" in Josh. xiii. 16. As it was four miles south-east of Heshbon, and more than twenty miles distant from Rabbah, it

is plain that they were marching northward, and that Joab was only just in time to prevent a junction of the two armies. The Ammonites, who were expecting their allies, and knew of their approach, had come outside of Rabbah, but had only posted themselves in fighting order "at the entering in of the gate."

Ver. 9.—**The front of the battle.** The object of Joab was to prevent at all hazards the junction of the Syrians with the Ammonites, and he was only just in time to throw himself between them. This was resolute but dangerous policy, as, in case of defeat, he would have a powerful enemy in his rear. Apparently, however, he was aware that his real work lay with the Syrian mercenaries, who were dangerous enough by themselves, and would become more than a match for him if they were reinforced by the men of Rabbah. He therefore leaves Abishai with such troops as he could spare to watch the Ammonites, feeling sure that they would not hazard an attack unless they saw matters going ill with him; and, taking with him all his bravest men, "the choice men of Israel," he prepares with them to give battle to the Syrians.

Ver. 11.—**And he said, etc.** Thenius remarks, "We have here the briefest of war-like exhortations, but one most full of point and meaning." Joab recognized the full danger of their situation; for should he meet with any check in his attack on this vast host of mercenaries, he was well aware that the Ammonites, watching the battle with eager interest, would, on the first news of victory, rush upon Abishai with exulting fury; and the men with him, being only ordinary troops, would be disheartened by Joab's failure, so that without extraordinary bravery on their leader's part, they would give way, and all would be lost.

Ver. 12.—**Be of good courage, and let us play the men.** The Hebrew employs two conjugations of the same verb, literally, *be strong, and let us show ourselves strong.* And need there was for bravery; for the welfare, as he went on to show, of all Israel, and the honour of Israel's God, were in jeopardy. Finally he adds, **The Lord do that which seemeth him good.** They are the words not so much of confidence as of determined resolution. Come good or ill, he and Abishai would do their utmost.

Ver. 14.—**So Joab returned.** It seems strange to us that Joab should have made no attempt to follow up his victory. But as the Ammonites were posted close to the gate of their city, they would withdraw into it without loss as soon as they learned that their allies were defeated. There was thus the certainty of a long siege before Rabbah could be taken. We gather from ch. xi. 1 that it was late in the year when Joab won this victory, and it was part of the weakness of ancient warfare that a long campaign was beyond the power of either side.

Ver. 16.—**Hadarezer** (see note on ch. viii. 3). Hadarezer probably had been well content to let his subjects receive the pay of the Ammonites, and extend his empire at their cost. But as paramount king in Aram, the defeat of the mercenaries obliged him to make the war a national affair, and undertake the management of it himself. He therefore summons troops from all the Aramean states on both sides of the Euphrates, and places his own general, Shobach, in command, and makes Helam the place of gathering. **Helam.** No such place is known, and the word might mean "their army," in which case the translation would be, "and they came in full force." The Vulgate takes it in this way, but makes the verb the causative singular, and translates, "and he brought their army." On the other hand, the LXX., the Syriac, and the Chaldee make it a proper name here, as even the Vulgate necessarily does in ver. 17, where there can be no doubt. In the parallel place (1 Chron. xix. 16, 17) it is omitted in the first place, and in the second we find in its stead, "upon them." Either, therefore, the chronicler did not know of such a place, or the text is corrupt. Ewald and others suppose that Helam may be identified with Alamata; but we learn from 1 Chron. xviii. 3 that the battle was fought near Hamath, and Alamata is on the Euphrates, too far away for David to have made his attack there.

Ver. 17.—**David . . . gathered all Israel together.** Some commentators see in this an indication of dissatisfaction with Joab. Really it was a matter of course that in so great a war the king should place himself at the head of his levies. For not only was he possessed of great military genius, but his personal presence would make the men of Israel, a race of sturdy free men, assemble in greater numbers, and would give them confidence. If David himself went there would be no shirking the war and finding excuses to stay at home, and in the camp there would be prompt alacrity and zeal.

Ver. 18.—**David slew,** etc. (see note on ch. viii. 4). We have seen there that the word translated "chariots" means any vehicle or animal for riding. The numbers here are seven hundred chariots with their charioteers, and forty thousand horsemen; in ch. viii. 4 we have seventeen hundred horsemen and twenty thousand footmen; finally, in 1 Chron. xix. 18 we find seven thousand chariots and charioteers, and forty thousand footmen. It is impossible to re-

concile these conflicting numbers, but as David had no cavalry, the numbers in ch. viii. 4 are the more probable, namely, seventeen hundred cavalry and chariots, and twenty thousand infantry. The Syriac Version gives us here very reasonable numbers, namely, "seven hundred chariots, four thousand cavalry, and much people."

Ver. 19.—**The kings . . . served them.** It is evident from this that the petty kings of Rehob, Tob, and Maacah had been subject to Hadarezer; they now acknowledged the supremacy of David, and paid to him the tribute which they had previously paid to Zobah, and would be bound to supply him with a contingent of men in case of a war in their neighbourhood. The wars with Damascus and Edom, mentioned in ch. viii. 5, 13, probably followed immediately upon Hadarezer's defeat, but are not referred to here, as the interest now centres in David's personal conduct.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Rejected friendliness.* The facts are: 1. On the death of the King of Ammon, David resolves to send a kindly message to Hanun, in remembrance of favours received from his father Nahash. 2. On the arrival of David's servants, the chief men of Ammon suggest to the new king that their message of condolence is a piece of trickery on the part of David for political ends. 3. Listening to these insinuations, Hanun shows his contempt for David by cutting off one side of the beard of his ambassadors, and exposing the lower part of their person. 4. On hearing of this humiliation, David sends a message to them on their way home, directing them to remain at Jericho till their beards were grown again. The question as to the chronological order of the events mentioned in this chapter as compared with ch. viii. does not affect the character of the facts or the lessons conveyed. The supposition that David deserved the insult he met with at the hand of Hanun, in consequence of showing friendliness to one of Israel's traditional foes, is not justified, because of the explicit reference to David's remembrance of acts of kindness. As in the case of Mephibosheth remembrance of Jonathan's kindness is referred to by way of explaining the conduct described, so here it is evidently regarded as a corresponding excellence in David that he was mindful also of the kindness of aliens. The object of the historian is obviously to bring out into view the king's broad generosity. In this light, then, we may regard the narrative as showing—

I. THE EXISTENCE IN HUMAN INTERCOURSE OF UNREQUITED AND UNRECORDED ACTS OF KINDNESS. Had not this ver. 2 been written we might never have known that the pagan Nahash had showed kindness to the Lord's anointed. Possibly few in Israel knew of the actual service rendered by Nahash to David at some period of his exile. No record of it existed save in the king's memory; and Nahash died before his consideration for one in trouble was acknowledged in regal form. Possibly he may have felt it strange that no notice was taken of the past when David came into power. The fact that we have this incidental reference to the kindness suggests what we often observe to be true, that many kindly deeds are done of which history takes no note, and which in the hurry and strife of life are lost to sight and mind. There is more good in the world than is tabulated. Thousands of considerate friendly deeds, revealing the true brotherhood of man and the latent worth of human nature, are being daily performed, but of which the mass of mankind will know nothing, and which, perhaps, will lie for a long time, through unavoidable circumstances, unrequited. We ought to bear this in mind when we strive to form an estimate of the state of the world, and it should set us at ease if our own generous acts do not figure in the annals of our time, and are to all appearance disregarded and unproductive of reciprocal conduct. It is the course of life; and yet nothing is lost, nothing is in vain.

II. THE GENEROSITY OF A TRUE HEART PASSES BEYOND CONVENTIONAL BOUNDS. To some it would seem strange that the King of Israel should cherish kindly sentiments towards an alien monarch, and even go out of the ordinary course to express those sentiments. Bigotry and a narrow interpretation of fidelity to the theocratic principle on which David's government was based would restrict generous feelings to one's own nationality. But David saw that man was before citizen, and the law of love before political expediency; and, as the Saviour later on saw a man and brother in the Samaritan and in every human creature, so now David saw in a kindly Nahash a kinship prior to and

more radical than even the bonds which held him to his own nation. It is in these goings out of the best hearts of ancient times in kindliness towards the politically alien that we see a prefigurement of the broad evangelical charity which would embrace in its consideration every child of Adam. It is the delight of the good to recognize good in all men. The restrictive influences of sect and party, of nationality and race, are to be guarded against. The conventional is transitory; nature is permanent. The sentiments proper to nature must, if possible, rise above the accidental sentiments springing from the casual and fleeting forms of life.

III. IT IS SOMETIMES THE MISFORTUNE OF THE BEST CONDUCT TO BE MISJUDGED. David's conduct was pure in motive, correct in form, and beneficial in tendency; yet it was regarded by astute men with suspicion, and repaid by the most malicious insult. This was no new thing in his experience. We have seen how again and again, during his early trials, he was misunderstood by Saul, and his very deeds of kindness returned by more bitter persecution. This is the portion of not a few in all ages. The world is dark, and men cannot or will not see the colours of good. It is one of the sad forms of confusion brought about by sin. The merciful Redeemer blessed men, but he was despised and rejected of them. The most lovely character that ever adorned the earth was clothed by the foul imagination of men with the horrible attributes of Satan (Luke xi. 15—18). The same treatment in a milder form was to be expected by his disciples (Matt. v. 11; x. 17, 18). We may be comforted, when the like experience happens to us, that it is all foreseen and provided for. The clouds that pass over the sky are not endued with permanence. They are incident to a changeful atmosphere.

IV. THE SOURCE OF THE MISJUDGMENT IS INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL. The men who persuaded Hanun to scorn David's friendliness did not know David. It was ignorance of the actual intentions and the inner character of the king that gave scope for the base moral element to come in and impute to him vile motives (ver. 3). They really supposed him to be a man like unto themselves, and, cherishing ill will, they found no difficulty in tracing his conduct to such considerations as would have influenced themselves had they been in his position. There is in all men affected by what is called the spirit of the world, a primary suspicion and distrust of others. It is a sort of first principle in business, in diplomacy, in casual intercourse. In the absence of perfect knowledge of the heart, the imagination is set to work to find out the possible motives at work. The existence of the slightest dislike will assuredly cause the imagination to see something evil, and hence the deeds most worthy in origin and design may be treated as base and deceitful. Ignorance and dislike combined to slay the Lord of glory (John viii. 37—45; 1 Cor. ii. 8). If such things happened to the Master, the servants may be patient and trustful should they also happen to them.

V. WICKEDNESS AND FOLLY, BY THEIR MISJUDGMENT, TURN AN ACT OF FRIENDLINESS INTO AN OCCASION OF DESTRUCTION. The conceit and ill will of these Ammonites, acting on Hanun, first misjudged David's conduct, and then, by a natural process of evil, gave rise to a deed which proved the occasion of turning the friendliness of David into retributive anger which issued in their ruin. The men capable of reasoning and feeling as these did were certainly capable of the deed of shameful insult to David in the persons of his ambassadors (ver. 4). When men allow an ill-informed mind to be swayed by a malicious spirit, there is no telling to what lengths they may go in sin. Evil deeds are blind deeds. Their folly is parallel with their depravity. The most conspicuous instance of this is in the case of the people who misjudged Christ and rejected his friendliness. That which was to have been a rock on which they could build a great and blessed future became a stone to grind them to powder (Matt. xxi. 40—44; xxiii. 37; 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8). It is also the wanton rejection of Christ's kindness which will prove the occasion of the bitterest woe to individuals (Matt. x. 14, 15; xi. 20—24; cf. Prov. i. 24—27). All rejections of friendliness involve ultimate loss; rejection of Christ's friendliness involves loss proportionate to his greatness and glory.

Vers. 6—19.—*International quarrels.* The facts are: 1. The Ammonites, discovering the displeasure of David, hire mercenaries of the neighbouring peoples. 2. As a counter-movement, David sends out a strong force under Joab. 3. The opposing forces coming into contact, Joab arranges that he should confront the Syrians, while Abishai deals with the Ammonites. 4. Joab, exhorting Abishai to courage, in dependence on God,

arranges also for mutual support, in case of need, in their respective attacks. 5. On the Syrians yielding to the assault of Joab, the Ammonites also flee from before Abishai, whereupon Joab returns to Jerusalem. 6. Another effort of the Syrians under Hadarezer, aided by others from beyond the Euphrates, draws out David at the head of a large army to the eastern side of Jordan. 7. A great battle, issuing in the complete defeat of the Syrians; the tributary kings under Hadarezer make peace with Israel and serve them. We have here a record of quarrels and entanglements, which to the eye of a sacred historian have a bearing on the development of the kingdom of Israel, and consequently on the ultimate advent of the "Prince of the kings of the earth." In that respect the events form a section of the intricate movements of Providence for the furtherance of spiritual interests, and they have their natural place in the Divine moral order, allowing for human freedom, as truly as the formation of the igneous and sedimentary rocks have in the physical order. The narrative may thus be taken as typical of a class. But we may regard the record as suggesting, or illustrating, truths which, while prominent in international quarrels, have also a wider application to human life in general. These chiefly are as follows.

I. THE MAINTENANCE OF HONOUR IS A DUTY. It was right for David to resent the indignity and insult. Meekness and gentleness are qualities consistent with assertion of what is due to self as a man, as a ruler, as a representative of a people and of a Divine institution. A king's honour is his strength, because of the trust of his people, the sentiment of loyalty, the force of his decrees, his silent restraint of the turbulent, and, in David's case, also because of the Divine institution of his government. How kings and individuals may best maintain their honour is a question to be decided by the circumstances of the case; in some way the holiest and kindest may do it and ought to do it.

II. THE REPROACH AND DISPLEASURE OF THE JUST IS ITSELF THE BEGINNING OF PUNISHMENT. That the Ammonites "stank before David"—a monarch so wise, just, and generous—was a brand on them of demerit, and the natural forerunner of chastisement to come. Whoever by his deeds falls righteously under the displeasure of a just man, is *ipso facto* branded as base, is classed by his own conscience and all honourable observers as a criminal. This changing of the face of the just towards the wicked is the primary social punishment of sin ordained by God, and, as the gathering clouds precede the storm, it is the token of further providential chastisements. The course of nature in the long run follows in the course of moral right.

III. SINFUL FOLLY IS SURE TO BRING ON PERPLEXITIES AND PERILS. No doubt there was great mirth in the court of Hanun when the Hebrew ambassadors were half shorn of their beards and apparel. But the mirth was as "the crackling of thorns under a pot" (Eccles. vii. 6). It was soon found that this cheap mirth was, in fact, dearly bought; for the displeasure of so mighty a king as David was soon discovered to mean for them great perplexity and peril. So is it with all sin, which is a sort of moral madness. It may give passing gratification, and all may seem secure, but it leads to perplexities and perils from which there is no escape as long as a Righteous One sits on his throne. The irony of the preacher is painfully true (Eccles. xi. 9).

IV. ONE EVIL DEED REQUIRES OTHER DEVICES TO SUSTAIN IT. The sinful folly of the Ammonites necessitated the device of hiring mercenary troops to ward off the blow that was impending as a consequence of their sin. It is quite true that in any progressive life action must be sustained by action, but in the case of evil-doing the device is to stave off something which ought not to come, and which would not be feared but for the previous wrong. Sin cannot remain sole. If there is not immediate repentance there will be an effort to get out of the self-caused difficulties by other questionable means. The liar has to take ceaseless precautions because of his lie. The man who rejects Christ is conscious of much uneasiness, and has to exercise ingenuity to escape this consequence. Troops of mercenaries are hired.

V. WELL-STORED RESOURCES ADMIT OF PROMPT ACTION IN EMERGENCIES. David had during the five years of his reign paid great attention to the administration of the affairs of his kingdom, and, as a consequence, he was now able at once to avail himself of the resources that had been treasured up. He sent "Joab, and all the host of mighty men" (ver. 7). The fruits of prescience and care were now available without confusion or delay. In kingdoms, as in homes and in business, providence and orderly

arrangement give great advantages for action when unexpected and trying events transpire. The same is true of early education and culture, of Church organization, of the personal spiritual life. The world is evil; events at cross-purposes with our plans and adverse to our peace will arise; it is "impossible but that offences come." The moral is, lay up in store continuously, and so be ready for action, and therefore ready for victory.

VI. SOUND PRINCIPLES PERTAINING TO CONDUCT AFFORD MORAL SUPPORT IN TIMES OF GREAT STRESS AND DANGER. Joab showed the better side of his nature when he exhorted Abishai, in face of the foe, to act as a man for the honour and safety of his people and cities, leaving the consequences in the hands of God (ver. 12). Not for military display, not for aggrandizement, not for personal gain, but to vindicate a people whose head had been insulted,—this was the principle on which the battle should be fought. In this was duty; consequences were with God, who cares for the just. History reveals instances in which men have been made strong by the just principle for which they contended. A righteous cause is itself equivalent to an armed force, both in the moral tone it gives to those engaged in it, and in the secret depression of those on the other side. It would be interesting to trace out the physical bearings of moral influences. Let us see to it that our great efforts are under the guidance of clear moral principles.

VII. IN THE CONFLICTS OF LIFE AN ASSURANCE OF MUTUAL HELPFULNESS IS A HELP AGAINST DISASTER. The arrangement for mutual help in case of pressure (ver. 11) was helpful, in that it anticipated a possible evil, and it inspired each with the courage that comes of sympathy and support. In human affairs, secular and religious, the possibility of disaster must be taken into account, because of personal imperfection and of the unascertained forces against us. We do not possess the knowledge by which we can always dispose of our strength in the right quarter, and, even when we do possess it, there may be sudden moral paralysis. None of us contend alone, or for self only. Hence we can be mutually helpful, as were Joab and Abishai. More of this in things sacred and secular would save from many a disaster.

VIII. UNWISE ALLIANCES LEAD ON TO SERIOUS ENTANGLEMENTS. The Syrians lent themselves for gain (ver. 6) to an alliance with the Ammonites. This compact, destitute of sound principle, involved the Syrians in what appeared to them to be the necessity of maintaining their reputation in spite of defeat; and hence further arrangements were made with Syrians "beyond the river." A Syrian war, with the whole of Israel's army under the leadership of the invincible David, was the consequence. Such difficulties arise when men make unholy alliances against a just cause. If men cannot unite without evil it is better to stand aloof. Nature has formed certain elements to combine, and others to keep apart. Whoever tries to put together what is contrary to nature will get into difficulty. Whoever forms an unholy alliance in human affairs, national or personal, is seeking to bring about advantages which it is in the course of moral order to prevent; and sooner or later greater embarrassments will arise. In moral matters simplicity and direct submission to the moral order are true wisdom.

IX. ADVERSE BEGINNINGS MAY, FOR THE JUST, ISSUE IN GOOD ENDINGS. It is a pain and annoyance to David to have his friendliness so wantonly rejected (ver. 4), but the event issued in the extension of his power and the surer peace of his people (vers. 18, 19). Man has the beginnings of things in his hand, but a Mightier One works them up towards issues of his own. The persecution of the early Church resulted in the wider diffusion of the gospel. The rejection of Christ by the Jewish nation is to issue in a greater glory. Many things in our personal experience may pain and injure us, but by stirring up our strength, by awakening more trust in God and leading to greater caution and courage, we may in the end achieve conquests once never thought of.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4 (1 Chron. xix. 1—4).—(RABBAH.) *Requiting evil for good.* The Ammonites appear to have remained quiet since their defeat by Saul, nearly half a century before (1 Sam. xi.). Nahash their king (perhaps a son of the former Nahash) had rendered friendly service to David. But on the accession of Hanun, his son, the old hostility of the children of Ammon revived, and showed itself in a way that made

conflict inevitable. To this the growing power of David and his recent subjugation of their kindred, the Moabites (ch. viii. 2), doubtless contributed. Their deliberate, wanton, and shameless *treatment of his messengers* was the occasion of "the fiercest struggle, and, so far as the Israelitish kingdom of God was concerned, the most dangerous, that it ever had to sustain during the reign of David." In it we see—

I. A PERSONAL CONTRAST. David requited the kindness of Nahash with kindness to his son; condolence on his bereavement, congratulation on his accession (ver. 2); but Hanun requited the kindness of David with insult and injury to his servants (ver. 4; Isa. xx. 4). The conduct of the one displayed gratitude, sympathy, confidence, and benevolence; that of the other ingratitude, contempt, distrust, and malignity. 1. How different in *character* the men who hold similar positions! David and Hanun were both kings, their heads were pressed by the same "crown of pure gold" (ch. xii. 30; Ps. xxi. 3); but in spirit they were wholly unlike. 2. How different the *construction* put on similar actions! Such actions are regarded by men as good or evil, according to their ruling disposition; just as the same objects appear of different hue according to the colour of the medium through which they are viewed. Hence what is well meant is often ill interpreted. 3. How different the *consequences* that flow from similar influences! *Kindness* is like sunshine, that melts the ice and hardens the clay; causes pleasure to the healthy and torture to the diseased eye. It tests, manifests, and intensifies the good or evil in the heart, and leads to opposite courses of conduct. Its proper tendency is to produce its like; but its actual effect is often the contrary (John xiii. 27). Even the kindness of God is perverted by hardness of heart to more abounding wickedness (Isa. xxvi. 10; Rom. ii. 4, 5). If it be sinful to "recompense evil for evil" (Rom. xii. 17), how much more to recompense evil for good (1 Sam. xxv. 21)!

II. A PUBLIC DISHONOUR. It was not a private and personal indignity put on these ambassadors, but an open and national insult offered to their king and people, by Hanun and his court (ver. 3), who probably expressed therein the prevalent suspicion and hatred of the children of Ammon. 1. How prejudicial the indulgence of jealousy and *suspicion* to the maintenance of peace and good will among nations! 2. How pernicious the influence of *evil counsel* and calumny on the political principles and policy of rulers! "We see in this the bitter fruits which evil counsel to princes, especially to those who are young and inexperienced, produces" (Guild). "The slanderer inflicts a threefold wound at one stroke. He wounds himself by his breach of charity; he wounds his victim by injuring his good name; he wounds his hearers by poisoning their minds against the accused" (St. Bernard). 3. How provocative the exhibition of *ingratitude, injustice, and contempt* to resentment and retaliation (ver. 6)! It turns kindness into wrath, seems to justify the drawing of the sword, and inspires the hope of victory (ver. 12). "Thou knowest not what may show itself when thy contempt awakes the lion of a sleeping mind."

III. A PRESUMPTUOUS AND FATAL DEFIANCE. It was a challenge by the worshippers of Moloch, confident in their strength and success, to the people of Jehovah; the first step of a renewed attack "against Jehovah and against his Anointed" (Ps. ii.). The opposition of the ungodly to the kingdom of God, though it slumber for a season, ever breaks forth afresh. 1. How infatuated their hostility! They are heedless of the warnings afforded by the past. 2. How groundless their confidence! "They trust in vanity." 3. How certain their overthrow!

> "He that sitteth in the heavens laughs,
> The Lord hath them in derision," etc.
> (Ps. ii. 4—9.)

The evil which they do returns on their own heads (ver. 14); and "their end is destruction" (ch. xii. 31). "These shall make war with the Lamb," etc. (Rev. xvii. 14).

CONCLUSION. 1. We should not be deterred from doing good by the fear that it may be requited with evil. 2. Although others may render evil for good, we should render good for evil (1 Sam. xi. 12, 13). 3. The noblest victories are those which are gained by patience, forbearance, and all-conquering love (Rom. xii. 21).—D.

Vers. 4, 5 (1 Chron. xix. 4, 5).—(JERICHO.) *Ridicule.* "Tarry at Jericho until

your beards be grown, and then return" (ver. 5). It has been the endeavour of men in all ages to make the objects of their aversion appear contemptible and ridiculous. Few things are more painful and humiliating than exposure to popular derision. The fear of it, no doubt, sometimes exerts a salutary influence in restraining from what is unseemly and wrong; but it also frequently exercises an opposite influence in deterring from what is becoming and right. Of *ridicule*, together with the sense of dishonour (ver. 5, former part) which it naturally produces, observe that it is often—

I. INCURRED BY FIDELITY. Like the servants of David, the servants of Christ are made the object of scornful raillery (a common and effective instrument of persecution): 1. In the faithful performance of *duty*, in obedience to the will of their Lord; conveying his message of kindness, acting as his representatives. "For righteousness' sake;" "For my sake" (Matt. v. 10, 11; x. 22). It is not the suffering, but the cause, that makes the martyr (1 Pet. ii. 20; iv. 15). 2. By those who hate and *misrepresent* them and him whom they serve, and whose hostility is due to their diverse character and principles. "If ye were of the world," etc. (John xv. 19). 3. After the *example* of the faithful in past time. "Others had trial of mockings" (Heb. xi. 36). "Herod with his soldiers set him at nought, and mocked him," etc. (Luke xxiii. 11, 35, 36).

II. MODERATED BY SYMPATHY. "And they told it unto David, and he sent to meet them," etc. Those who, in the way of duty, suffer the reproach of the bad, enjoy the sympathy of the good; and especially of the *Master* himself: 1. Whose sympathy is inexpressibly precious. 2. Who has suffered the same, and is therefore able to *feel with them* and for them (ch. vi. 20). 3. Who also *expresses it* in the most appropriate and effectual manner. He regards what is done to them as done to himself, affords them wise and friendly counsel, takes them under his protection, and stands ready to defend and avenge them. "They departed, . . . rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name" (Acts v. 41; xvi. 25; 1 Thess. ii. 2).

III. REMEDIED BY PATIENCE. "Tarry," etc. They were probably disposed to go up at once to Jerusalem, and proclaim their wrongs; but David, out of consideration for their position in public estimation, bade them remain in obscurity, and "bide their time"—a piece of advice sometimes given (though not always in a like spirit) to persons who are about to attempt something for which they are unfit, on account of their immaturity or want of due preparation; or in which they have already failed. 1. Those who would attain success and honour in any position or enterprise should *consider well their ability* to accomplish what is necessary for their purpose (Luke xiv. 28). 2. Inconsiderate and *rash endeavours* are likely to issue in a result which those who make them neither expect nor desire. 3. The *lapse of time* soothes many a smart; and the wise and patient employment of it qualifies for and ensures honourable achievements. "Ye have need of patience" (Heb. x. 36). "Let us learn not to lay too much to heart unjust reproaches; after a while they will wear off of themselves, and turn only to the shame of their authors; while the injured reputation in a little time grows again, as these beards did" (Matthew Henry).

IV. SUCCEEDED BY HONOUR. "And then return" to the holy city, where they would be honoured (instead of being despised) with: 1. The public commendation of the king. 2. The general admiration of the people. 3. All the more because of the indignity and ridicule which they had previously endured. "If ye are reproached for the Name of Christ, blessed are ye," etc. (1 Pet. iv. 14); "great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. v. 12).—D.

Vers. 6—11 (1 Chron. xix. 6—12).—(MEDEBA.) *An agreement of mutual help.* "If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee" (ver. 11). 1. On perceiving the effect of their treatment of David's ambassadors (ver. 6; "That they had made themselves odious," 1 Chron. xix. 6), *the Ammonites* obtained, for "a thousand talents of silver," the aid of *the Syrians* of Beth-rehob and of Zobah (under Hadarezer, the most powerful of David's adversaries), the King of Maacah and the men of Tob; "who came and pitched before Medeba" (1 Chron. xix. 7), twenty miles south-west of Rabbah, with their infantry, cavalry, and war-chariots. "And the children of Ammon gathered themselves together from their cities" to the capital (Rabbah), and put themselves in battle array before the gate. 2. Hearing of their warlike preparations,

David had sent forth "all the host, the mighty men," under *Joab* (ch. iii. 22—30), who now found himself between the two hostile forces; and, selecting a portion of the army, placed himself opposite to the Syrians, whilst he left the rest, under Abishai, to cover his rear and hold the Ammonites in check. He doubtless hoped to defeat the enemy in successive engagements. 3. But fearing a simultaneous attack, he made an agreement with his brother, that if either of them were worsted, the other should hasten to his relief. Such an agreement is prudent, needful, and beneficial among those also who are engaged in spiritual warfare against the enemies of the kingdom of God. It—

I. CONFIRMS AN OBVIOUS DUTY. For it is plainly the duty of *brethren*: 1. To *consider* each other's condition, to sympathize with each other's weakness and distress, and not to be concerned about themselves alone. "Not looking each of you to his own things," etc. (Phil. ii. 4; 1 Cor. x. 24). 2. To make use of their *power*, to "strengthen their brethren," especially when taking part in the same conflict as themselves. The strong should help the weak. 3. To afford them *help*, opportunely, promptly, with all their might, and even at much sacrifice and hazard to themselves. If the ungodly "helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage" (Isa. xli. 6), much more ought the godly to do the same. "But if ye will not do so, behold ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out" (Numb. xxxii. 23). And the agreement to render mutual help in time of need makes the obligation to do so more distinct, impressive, and effective.

II. CONTEMPLATES A POSSIBLE REVERSE. "If the Syrians be too strong for me," etc.; indicating a conviction of: 1. The great power of the *enemy* and the serious nature of the struggle (1 Sam. xiii. 1—7). It would be madness to despise them. 2. The possibility of *failure* in the wisest plans and disappointment in the most sanguine expectations. "We do not hinder our successes by preparing for disappointment." Although those who "contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints" cannot be generally and permanently defeated, yet particular organizations, methods, and hopes may be overthrown. None, however strong, can be certain of never needing help; whilst the promise of help furnishes the weak with a special claim to it. 3. The necessity of taking every *precaution* for repairing defect in the weakest part, lest it should issue in disaster to the whole. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the Law of Christ" (Gal. vi. 2).

III. CONDUCES TO SIGNAL SUCCESS. By: 1. Giving them to feel their mutual dependence, and bringing them into closer *union* in the spirit of a common enterprise. 2. Affording assurance of the advantages arising from *co-operation* toward a common end. These advantages are inestimable. "Two are better than one . . . And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccles. iv. 9—12). 3. Inspiring them with increased confidence arising therefrom; and inciting them to greater *individual effort* than they might otherwise have put forth on behalf of each other and their common safety, welfare, and honour. Both the Syrians and Ammonites were routed (vers. 13, 14). "It was, perhaps, the first time in his life that Hadarezer suffered defeat" (Ewald); and this defeat was followed ere long by another (by David at Helam) still more overwhelming; so that "all the kings that were servants to Hadarezer made peace with Israel, and served them," etc. (vers. 15—19; ch. viii. 3, 4).—D.

Ver. 12 (1 Chron. xix. 13).—(MEDEBA.) *Martial courage.* "Be of good courage," etc. Human life is a warfare, unavoidable, arduous, enduring; and spiritual life, more especially, is a warfare of a similar kind. In this conflict nothing is more needful than manly or martial courage ("virtue," 1 Pet. i. 5). It is that quality of mind which meets difficulty, danger, pain, or death, calmly and fearlessly. It has been reckoned by moralists among the four cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, fortitude, justice), and, in its highest form, it is often enjoined in the Scriptures. "As it is necessarily requisite to the susception of all other virtues, so it is their main support, guardian, and establishment. Without this, every other virtue is precarious, and lies at the mercy of every cross accident" (J. Norris). "All the noble deeds that have beat their marches through succeeding ages have proceeded from men of courage" (O. Felltham). This brief and significant warlike exhortation of Joab was pitched in a higher key than we might have expected; but the devout feeling which it expressed, though

genuine, was probably superficial and transient, passing away with the critical occasion which called it forth. We have now to consider, not the character of the speaker, but the import of his words. They indicate the nature, motive, and pervading principle of godly martial *courage*; that it should be displayed—

I. IN STRENUOUS OPPOSITION TO THE ENEMIES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. "Be strong" (in spirit), "and show yourselves strong" (in action) in your struggle with numerous and powerful foes; not private, but public enemies; not men as such, but as imbued with principles and devoted to practices which are antagonistic to the righteous and beneficent purposes of God; "principalities and powers," etc. (Eph. vi. 12). "Who will rise up for *me* against the evil-doers?" etc. (Ps. xcvi. 16). There must be: 1. *Firm resistance* to their attack. "Whom resist steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet. v. 9). 2. *Patient endurance* of the sufferings which such resistance involves. "Here is the patience of the saints." 3. *Active endeavour* for their defeat and subjection. "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits" (Dan. xi. 32). "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1 Cor. xvi. 13). The chief instrument of this opposition is "the sword of the Spirit." "A humble Christian battling against the world, the flesh, and the devil, is a greater hero than Alexander the Great."

II. FROM SINCERE DESIRE FOR THE WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. Not for pay and plunder (like the mercenary Syrians), nor for glory, nor even for personal safety or life; but "for our people" (to whom we are bound by the closest ties), "and for the cities of our God" (his chosen property and possession, the many separate centres where his people dwell and his worship is maintained), imperilled by the attack of his enemies and ours. *Pro aris et focis.* "Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just." This, however, is an appeal, not merely to a sense of *justice*, but also and chiefly to *patriotism* and *piety*, which, in the men of Israel, were inseparably blended. There is a place for patriotism in the heart of a Christian (1 Sam. xxiii. 1—6). But his love for his country must be held in harmony with and subordination to his love for the Christian brotherhood, united in spiritual fellowship and confined to no nation; "the people of God" (1 Pet. ii. 9, 10), "his inheritance" (Eph. i. 18), "the Church which is his body" (Eph. i. 22; v. 25; Acts xx. 28), the light of the world, and the salt of the earth. "I endure all things for the elect's sakes" (2 Tim. ii. 10; Col. i. 24). 1. The preservation of their faith and holiness, their unity and peace, from corrupting and destructive influences. 2. The maintenance of their privileges and services, their freedom and independence. 3. The promotion of their prosperity and progress. 4. The fulfilment of their purposes, aims, and hopes. "They shall prosper that love thee" (Ps. cxxii. 4—9; cxxxvii. 7).

III. WITH STRONG CONFIDENCE IN THE RECEPTION OF THE HELP OF GOD. "And the Lord do that which seemeth him good" (Authorized Version); expressive of humble submission to the Divine will. "It may be understood as the language of: (1) Uncertainty and modesty. (2) A firm persuasion that the event of war entirely depends upon the providence of God. (3) A humble submission to the disposal of Providence, let the event turn out as it would. (4) And it may intimate that, let the event be what it will, it will afford us satisfaction to think that we have done the best we could" (Samuel Davies). But the proper reading is, "And Jehovah will do that which is good in his sight," really good for his people. The root of Christian courage, as of every Christian excellence, is faith in God. 1. In his *readiness* to co-operate with us, when we strive against the enemies of his kingdom and for the welfare of his people. "The Lord is on my side, I will not fear." 2. In the *sufficiency* of his might to strengthen the weakest and overthrow the strongest. "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings vi. 16; 1 Sam. xiv. 1—15). 3. In the *certainty* of his affording to his faithful servants all the help they need. Even though he should permit a temporary reverse, he will surely give them the victory over all their adversaries. Such confidence is warranted by his relation to them, his regard for them, his express promises, and his past achievements. "The battle is the Lord's." "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. ix. 31—39).—D.

Vers. 2—4.—*Kindness misinterpreted and ill-requited.* "I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war" (Ps. cxx. 7). It is not probable that these words were

written by David, but they might have been with truth. It does not appear that he desired war with the neighbouring peoples; but for a time he was continually at war with one or other of them. Jealous of the growing greatness and power of Israel under his rule, they sought to humble them, but only to their own discomfiture and subjugation. And as the kingdom extended, more distant nations feared for themselves, and were ready to combine against what seemed the common foe. This is probably the real explanation of the transactions recorded in this chapter, including the most serious struggle which the rising kingdom had had to maintain. Nahash, "the king of the children of Ammon," having died, David, to whom Nahash had in some way shown kindness, sent ambassadors to Hanun, his son and successor, with a message of condolence. But the young king, induced by the princes to regard the ambassadors as spies, who had been sent to obtain such knowledge of the city as might facilitate its overthrow, treated them with the grossest contumely and indecency, and so dismissed them. Hence sprang a deadly war, in which the Ammonites were aided by other and more powerful peoples—a war which taxed to the utmost the strength of Israel, and issued in the complete overthrow of their enemies. The first step in all this commotion and destruction was the false interpretation put upon the kind act of David; and, regarding it as an illustration of a too-common evil, we take occasion to remark upon the evil itself—misinterpretation of good deeds.

I. THE CAUSES OF IT. 1. *Knowledge of the world.* There is so much evil in it, so much evil which conceals itself under the pretence of good; the actions which at first appear good are so often, on closer acquaintance, discovered to be evil; that experience of the world tends to produce a suspicious spirit, which is slow to believe in the reality of goodness in any particular instance, quick to think the worst of the conduct of others, especially of strangers. 2. *Evil in one's self.* Which may be conscious or unconscious. We are indisposed to believe others to be better than we know ourselves to be; and prone to suspect others of motives we are conscious of indulging ourselves. And, without distinct consciousness, we are influenced in our judgments of others by our own character; and may be so far under the influence of evil as to be blind to the good in others. The cold, selfish, illiberal, cannot credit others with the opposite virtues; but suspect the appearance of them to be only a semblance adopted for some unworthy purpose. 3. *Enmity.* If on any account we cherish ill will towards another, we are ever ready to think evil rather than good of him; and specially slow to think he can intend good to us. If another has failed to show as high an esteem for ourselves as we think we deserve, our mortified pride is apt to vent itself in depreciation of him. Prejudice is one kind of enmity, more or less virulent. It commonly exists in those of one party in religion or politics towards those of the opposite party, and predisposes them to misinterpret whatever they do. 4. *Fear.* Which was one of the motives that prompted Hanun and his advisers. 5. *Conceit of sagacity.* A cheap and easy way of appearing very wise, and of obtaining from some a reputation for wisdom, is to affect to discover unworthy motives in good actions. 6. *Bad advisers.* Such as those of Hanun. Those who might be otherwise disposed to a just estimate of good deeds will seldom want advisers to poison their minds, if they will listen to them.

II. THE EVIL OF IT. 1. *In itself.* It is inherently base. It is contrary to: (1) Charity, which "believeth all things, hopeth all things" (1 Cor. xiii. 7), whenever it is not manifestly impossible. (2) Justice. Judgments which seem to be only charitable will often be simply just. (3) Gratitude, in the case of actions kind to ourselves. Better to waste a little gratitude than indulge needless suspicion. (4) The plain commands of our Lord. Such as "Judge not;" "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matt. vii. 1, 12). It involves, further, an assumption of knowledge such as men do not possess, and a usurpation of the office of him who alone searches the heart (1 Cor. iv. 5). We are not, however, required to cherish a blind credulity, nor to trust men with important interests without positive knowledge of their moral worth, still less against plain evidence of the contrary. Prudence is a virtue as well as charity. The Ammonites might have rightly exercised such caution towards David's messengers as would have prevented their obtaining so much knowledge of the city as would facilitate hostile measures against it, if these were really contemplated. They did wrong in concluding that the seeming kindness was covert

hostility. To have returned civility for civility could have done them no harm, and would have prevented the severe retribution for their barbarity which followed. 2. *In its effects.* (1) On those who are guilty of it. It deprives them of the happiness and other good which they would gain from kindness exercised towards them, were it duly appreciated and acknowledged; and of the benefit which it would impart in the way of example and influence. It strengthens the bad dispositions and habits from which it springs. It prompts to conduct (as in this case) which may work incalculable mischief. (2) On those towards whom it is indulged. Inflicting pain, producing resentment, and perhaps active revenge, and discouraging them in the practice of virtues which are liable to be so maligned. (3) On others. Infecting with unjust suspicions some who would not otherwise cherish them; encouraging disbelief in genuine goodness, and thus loosening the bonds of mutual confidence by which society is held together; disinclining also from good deeds, and so lessening the amount of goodness in the world.

III. How it should affect us. 1. *It should not surprise us.* Considering what men are, we should regard it as quite possible that any good we may do will be misrepresented, or at least fail to be duly appreciated and acknowledged even by those whose benefit we seek. 2. *It should not deter us from doing good.* The great motives for good deeds abide the same. They are quite independent of human appreciation. They should be our chief motives, the hope of approval or suitable return from men occupying a very subordinate position. Let us study and labour to be accepted of God (2 Cor. v. 9), and be content with his approval, let men think what they may. 3. *If men misrepresent our conduct, let us exercise charity towards them,* hoping, if we cannot confidently believe, that they have sinned through ignorance or inconsideration rather than ill will. If compelled to vindicate ourselves, let us do it with meekness. We should also reflect whether we have given any occasion in the manner of our conduct for misunderstanding of its real quality; and avoid the error in future. And, if we are really reproached for that which is good, without just occasion, let us be mindful that we are fellow-sufferers with our Lord and many of the best men of all ages. 4. *Let us be watchful against every temptation to depreciate and misrepresent the good which is practised by others.*—G. W.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Co-operation, courage, and resignation.* Joab here appears at his best. A great occasion, involving great peril for the army and the kingdom, calls forth, not only his eminent military qualities, but sentiments of piety and religious patriotism worthy of David himself. He presents an example worthy of imitation by commanders of armies; but we take his words as adapted to guide and animate the soldiers of Christ in their warfare against error and sin. They call attention to three duties incumbent upon individual Christians, the several bands of each division of the Christian army, and the several divisions themselves.

I. Mutual help. (Ver. 11.) The servants of Christ are engaged in the endeavour to conquer the world for him, and, in pursuing it, have to fight against enemies of various kinds. In this warfare they ought to cheerfully co-operate, and, as opportunity may arise, help each other. Much mutual assistance they cannot but render, however any might desire to confine the benefits of their activity to their own party. Every hymn-book testifies to this. No individual or section can do good work without helping others. But there should be more of conscious and hearty co-operation. 1. *Why it should be so.* (1) The cause is one—the cause of Christ our King, the defence and extension of his kingdom, the cause of truth and righteousness and human salvation. (2) Christians are comrades in the same army. They should cherish the feeling of brotherhood, realize that they are fighting against common foes, and be glad to encourage and help each other. The success of any is the success of all, and should be so regarded; the failure of any should be a trouble to all; and, if any can aid their brethren to turn threatening defeat into victory, their aid should be cheerfully afforded and joyfully accepted. (3) The need is urgent. The spiritual necessities of men, the special needs in particular cases. The field is extensive; the opposing forces numerous, powerful, and incessantly vigilant and active. The utmost exertions of all are required. To hold back, to refuse co-operation with fellow-soldiers because they belong not to our regiment or division of the army, to observe with pleasure the failure of any of them,

or to waste energies and resources in fierce conflicts with one another, is to be disloyal to their Sovereign, unbrotherly to each other, and unfaithful to the souls of men. 2. *Why it often is not so.* (1) Deficiency of spiritual insight. Incapacity, voluntary or involuntary, to discern: (*a*) The real nature of the kingdom of Christ. That it is essentially spiritual, consisting in "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost;" that "he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men" (Rom. xiv. 17, 18); and that in Christ Jesus nothing avails but "a new creature," "faith which worketh by love," and "the keeping of the commandments of God" (Gal. vi. 15; v. 6; 1 Cor. vii. 19). (*b*) The essential qualities of Christ's soldiers, which are not the dress they wear, nor the particular drill to which they are accustomed, but love and loyalty to Christ. (2) Deficiency of spiritual affections. Want of supreme and ardent love for Christ and his kingdom, and for his servants as such. These deficiencies of mind and heart act and react on each other, and they open the way for all kinds of blundering and perversity. Fellow-soldiers are mistaken for enemies, and treated as such. The great cause is made practically subordinate to matters infinitely small in comparison. Sectarian rivalry takes the place of Christian co-operation; or a worse thing happens—petty personal ambition and selfishness, or likings and dislikings, dominate, separating those who should be acting together, and introducing low, worldly principles into a region where the spiritual should alone reign. Pride, jealousy, envy, uncharitableness, perhaps the merest avarice, reduce to a fraction, if they do not altogether extinguish, those noble Christian feelings which Christianity inspires, and which would impel brothers to own brothers, cordially to render or receive help in the common work, to rejoice in each other's successes, and sorrow for each other's reverses. 3. *Who should take the lead in effecting co-operation?* Joab addresses Abishai, his fellow-commander; and it is just the leaders and commanders in Christ's army who should be foremost in promoting a good understanding between its various bands, and inducing them to work together. But, alas! they are often foremost in promoting alienation and separation. The people are frequently more disposed to be friendly towards each other than the clergy.

II. COURAGE. (Ver. 12.) In war this is essential to success. In the Christian warfare it is not so obviously or universally required. It is, however, still required in many cases. When unpopular truth has to be proclaimed, when strongholds of sin or superstition have to be assailed, when the evangelization of barbarous tribes is attempted, or perilous climates have to be encountered, the Christian soldier must be prepared to endure hardship, suffering, or death. Even the ridicule which not unfrequently assails the earnest Christian calls for a good deal of courage. Joab sought to inspire his brother, and through him the soldiers under his command, with courage, by reminding him that it was "for our people, and for the cities of our God," that they were about to fight. In like manner Christians may be exhorted to "be of good courage" and "play the men" for the Church of God, and for the sake of the world which they aim to conquer for Christ. Joab might have added, "for our king;" and the strongest and most animating consideration for us is that we are witnessing and working and fighting for our great King, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is worth living for, suffering for, dying for. He has gone before us in the labour and the suffering. He is present with us. His eye is upon each of us. He will overlook no true-hearted soldier of his when he distributes the rewards of victory. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. ii. 12).

III. RESIGNATION. Those who engage in war, though they may hope for victory, must be prepared for defeat. "The battle" is not always "to the strong" (Eccles. ix. 11) or the brave. Nor in the better warfare can we "command success" in this or that particular encounter, however faithful or brave or zealous we may be. We are to recognize, like Joab, that "the Lord" is over all, and be content that he should "do that which seemeth him good." Not that we are required to be resigned to ultimate failure, for we are assured of final and complete victory.

> "The saints in all this glorious war
> Shall conquer, though they're slain."

Nor are the courage and devotedness of any single soldier lost. All the faithful con-

tribute to the final triumph, and all shall unite in the song of victory, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ." "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" "And he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. xi. 15; xix. 6).—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XI.

Ver. 1.—**After the year was expired**; Hebrew and Revised Version, *at the return of the year*; that is, as Josephus paraphrases it, "the next spring." It seems quite certain that the war with Hadarezer did not take place in the same year as the defeat of the Syrians at Medeba. For the gathering of his mercenaries by Nahash would occupy a long time, and it was done so leisurely, that not only did news of it reach Jerusalem, but David was able to collect his forces, and instead of awaiting the invasion, could deliver his attack on the enemy's ground. The battle at Medeba took place in the autumn, and, as it was impossible to keep the field with winter so near, Joab marched back to Jerusalem, intending in the spring to return to the siege of Rabbah. But David quickly had information that a more serious war was impending, and, instead of sending Joab, he now gathers "all Israel," and, after gaining a victory, it is plain that he marched into the Syrian territories, and compelled by his presence the allies of Hadarezer to transfer their allegiance to him. Simultaneously with this war he had to meet the attack of the Edomites, for which purpose he detached Abishai with a portion of his army; and it was necessary also to post garrisons in their country, and in Aram of Damascus. It was while he was thus occupied in the Aramean states that he gathered the "much brass" spoken of in ch. viii. 8. The Ammonites would necessarily be left to themselves while these great events were going on, but now, after a respite of a year and a half, David **sent Joab, and his servants**, that is, his officers—the word "servant" in Oriental courts being constantly used to designate those high in rank near the king's person—**and all Israel**; that is, an army gathered from all the tribes. In accordance with the cruel customs of ancient warfare, they began by laying the whole country waste, and putting all whom they found to the sword, and thus **destroyed the children of Ammon** before laying siege to the capital, into which all the people by these harsh measures had been forced to go for refuge. In the Hebrew there is a curious spelling, the word "kings" being written *melâkim*, with an *aleph* to represent the long *â*. It is a mistake to suppose that a different word, *malâkim*, "angels" or "ambassadors," is meant, as it is nothing more than an archaic method of spelling, instances of which have been made rare by the extreme fastidiousness of Hebrew scribes. There is, however, another example not far off, where the Hebrew word for "poor" is also written with an inserted *aleph*.

Ver. 2.—**David arose from off his bed.** It was usual in Palestine, and remains so in all hot countries, to take a siesta in the heat of the day (ch. iv. 5); and, on awaking, David walked backward and forward on the flat roof of his house (1 Sam. ix. 25), to enjoy the cool breezes of the evening. In so doing he was probably following his usual habits; but temptation came upon him, as so often is the case, unexpectedly. We are told that it is regarded in the East as improper for one neighbour to look over the battlement of his house into the inner court of the next dwelling (Philippson). Considering the jealousy with which Orientals guard the female members of their family from intrusion, it was a wrong act on the king's part to spy into what was going on in the recesses of the adjoining house. But he did so, and suffered for it years of disgrace and misery. For he saw a beautiful woman, the wife of one of his high officers, bathing, probably to purify herself from some legal uncleanness, such as those mentioned in Lev. xv. No blame, so far, must be attached to her. The place was regarded as perfectly secluded, and probably neither she nor Uriah had ever suspected that what went on there could be observed from the roof of the king's palace.

Ver. 3.—**Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam.** In ch. xxiii. 34 Eliam is said to be the son of Ahithophel, and thus Bathsheba would be his granddaughter. Mr. Blunt, in his 'Undesigned Coincidences,' p. 143, *et seq.*, sees in this the explanation of the adherence to the side of Absalom of a man so high in King David's service. It was the result of his indignation at David's profligate treatment of so near a relative. In 1 Chron. iii. 5 she is called "Bathshua, the daughter of Ammiel." The latter is a transposition of Eliam, both names being compounded of *Am*, people, and *El*, God. **Uriah the Hittite.** We read in ch. xxiii. 39 that he was one of David's "mighties," and it is remarkable that we should thus find high in rank in David's army a member of that grand race who had disputed with Egypt and Assyria the empire of the East. Their head now was Toi, King of Hamath.

Ver. 4.—**David sent messengers, and took**

her. David's fall seems as sudden as it was complete; but we may feel sure that there had been gradual preparation for it during the previous period of great prosperity. David had always been a man of strong passions, and the large harem he had set up at Jerusalem, so far from satisfying him, only intensified his lust. And now he who had previously shown himself so chivalrous and noble stoops to robbing one of his own officers of his honour. And stern and terrible was the punishment. When he sent those messengers, who were some of the vile people who hang about great personages, ready to minister to their sins, he was preparing the way for his daughter's disgrace, for the murder of Amnon, for Absalom's rebellion and death, and for the death of Adonijah. From that day his own house was the scene of horrible crimes, feuds, scandals, and miseries of every kind; and the long interval after his repentance, between the birth of Solomon and David's death, is passed over in gloomy silence. No act of the penitent king after his restoration to the throne is deemed worthy of record. He was pardoned, but his place henceforward was not in the light of God's favour, but in shadow and retirement. Men who fall so grievously must be content to be removed into the outer court. Of Bathsheba it must be said that she remained a faithful wife, and bare David four sons besides the one who was the fruit of their adultery, and that she retained her influence over him to the last (1 Chron. iii. 5; 1 Kings i. 15—31). **For she was purified from her uncleanness**; Hebrew, *and she purified herself from her uncleanness*; that is, having committed an act of gross immorality, she nevertheless carefully observed the ceremonial enactment commanded in Lev. xv. 18. She went home unrepentant, and with her conscience defiled, but was all the more scrupulous in performing the rite that purified her outwardly.

Ver. 5.—**The woman . . . told David.** Her crime was one that made her liable to the penalty of death (Lev. xx. 10), and Uriah was a man likely to exact it; consequently she was in great alarm, and the king shared her anxiety. Already was the punishment beginning to be required from both the guilty sharers in the wickedness.

Ver. 8.—**A mess** (of meat); really, *a royal present* (see Esth. ii. 18; Jer. xl. 5; Amos v. 11, where it is translated *burdens of wheat*, but really means *presents of wheat*, forced from the poor); though originally a portion of food sent to a guest from the table of the giver of a feast (Gen. xliii. 34). Uriah, as one of David's thirty-seven heroes, would hold a high rank in the army, though the statement given by Josephus, that he was Joab's armour-bearer, is probably a mere conjecture, made with the view of explaining what seemed to him strange, that a foreigner should hold so distinguished a place among the captains of Israel. David sends for him, on the pretext that he wanted full information of Joab's plans, and the state of the army, and the progress of the siege of Rabbah. And so prompt is Uriah, that he goes to the king still soiled with travel, and without calling at his house. And David makes his inquiries, listens with apparent interest to the narrative of the war, and, after receiving a full report, bids Uriah go home and rest and refresh himself after the journey. He sends him, moreover, a present, such probably as was usual after special service, but large and liberal, so as to put Uriah in good humour. But the old soldier cared for war more than for pleasure, and, instead of going to his house, spent the night in the guard-room with the soldiers and others who were in attendance upon the king (see 1 Kings xiv. 27, 28). All would be eager for news of friends and relatives, and it was a far greater delight to Uriah to chat with his old comrades than to be resting luxuriously in his own home.

Ver. 11.—**The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents.** The presence of the ark with the army in the field is puzzling, and shows us how little we know of the religious practices of the Jews, as, but for this chance mention of it, we should have affirmed that it was never taken out of its place in Zion, and that in previous times the conduct of Eli's sons in carrying it out of the sanctuary to war was an irregular act. The Jews themselves feel the difficulty, and some of their rabbins affirm that this was not the ark of the covenant, but a chest containing the ephod whereby inquiries were made of Jehovah. Certainly in 1 Sam. iv. 3, 4 it is expressly called "the ark of the covenant;" and in ch. vi. 2 "the ark of God." The use in our version of the special word "ark" obliges us to think of the ark of the covenant, whereas really it is a general word, rendered "chest" in 2 Kings xii. 9, 10. It is said, too, that the war with Ammon was not a holy war, nor was it of such importance as to call for David's presence at the head of his troops. But, on the other hand, if it was not the ark of God, why did Uriah lay so great stress upon its presence in the field? Moreover, we find the ark with Saul in his war with the Philistines (1 Sam. xiv. 18), where it is expressly called "the ark of God," and is used for the purpose of inquiring the will of Jehovah. On comparing 1 Sam. vii. 2 with ch. vi. 3, we should have imagined that the ark abode uncared for at the house of Abinadab at Kirjath-jearim, did we not plainly find it in attendance upon Saul. We

are thus compelled to conclude that David sent it, with its attendant priests, with Joab, that he might consult the Deity by its means. In the Talmud ('Shek. Jerus.,' 9. 2) the idea of there being an inferior or second ark used for this purpose is condemned. David, in his remonstrance with Uriah, shows signs of displeasure, and the conduct of the latter suggests the idea that his suspicions had been aroused. The war was going on prosperously; he had been summoned home on an honourable pretext to give the king a report of it; and it is, to say the least, strange that he should have cared so little for a wife, to whom apparently he had not long been married, and for his domestic affairs, as not even to go to his house, which was close by. The tone, too, of Uriah's answer is excited, and his military ardour too warm. David had assumed that, as a matter of course, he would hasten to visit his wife, and Uriah's unexpected refusal upsets his devices, and leaves him with all his difficulties increased rather than done away with. Very probably, in the conversation in the guard-room, Uriah had received hints that his wife was too high in the royal favour. For "tents" the Hebrew has "booths," and so the Revised Version; and for "fields" the singular, "field." The Israelites still lived mostly in tents, and in war were content with very slight and temporary shelter, and if there were any parks, or enclosures, they were called Naioth, while "the field" was the open unenclosed land, which formed the mass of the country. The separate mention of "Israel and Judah" is no indication of the book having been written after the disruption of the kingdom. Uriah had been in David's service when he was king only at Hebron, and had taken part in the long war between Judah and the house of Saul.

Ver. 13.—**He made him drunk.** David thus adds sin to sin, and, in order to accomplish his vile end, he degrades the brave soldier whom already he had dishonoured. But even when intoxicated Uriah kept to his determination; and though on this second night there would not be the same pleasure in chatting with old comrades seen again after long absence, he still sleeps in the guard-room. And thus there were witnesses that he had not gone to his house.

Ver. 14.—**David wrote a letter.** David now uses the knowledge he had acquired in the schools of the prophets for vicious purposes. For it to be a blessing, knowledge must be sanctified to holy use. The letter would conceal from Joab the truth, and only let him know that Uriah, during his visit to Jerusalem, had incurred the king's serious displeasure; and we may be quite sure that Joab would be very indignant when he learned, as he certainly soon would, that David had made him his tool, and caused him to murder one of "the mighties" in order to cover the shame of his adultery. The only fair side of the picture is that it shows the high state of morality among the people. The crimes of kings and great men are usually lightly pardoned, and especially that of adultery. Even in our own and other Christian countries this is the case; but David has to resort to extreme measures rather than face the indignation of his subjects. Unfortunately, the shedding of blood was not looked upon with equal horror. Possibly the leaving it to the relatives to requite it made the suppression of murder the business, not of the state, but of "the avenger of blood." At all events, Joab without much compunction carries out David's orders, caring to know no more than that Uriah was out of favour. And what is more extraordinary, David remains utterly callous for a whole twelvemonth (see ch. xii. 15), and his conscience does not even smite him for the additional meanness of sending the order for Uriah's murder by the hand of the injured man himself.

Ver. 16.—**When Joab observed the city;** Revised Version, *kept watch upon the city.* This does not mean, as some suppose, that Joab sent a body of men to examine the fortifications with a view to an assault, and so provoked a sally. The verb simply refers to the ordinary operations of a siege, which usually resolved itself into a long blockade, continued until starvation compelled a surrender; and to hasten this the people of the villages were forced into the town, by the rule that all left outside were put to the sword. To maintain the blockade, men were posted at all fit points round the city, and these were constantly assailed by the besieged. Joab then placed Uriah at a post which was especially the object of attack; and when the usual sally took place and was repulsed, Joab seems to have ordered Uriah to pursue them up to the very gate, where they would be exposed to a shower of arrows from the walls. Others fell besides Uriah, and that the loss was considerable, and the result of bad generalship, though designedly such, seems probable from the deprecation of the king's anger in ver. 20.

Ver. 18.—**Then Joab sent.** Joab now performs another act in this iniquitous drama, and goes through the form of sending the king a report of the disaster which had followed upon his approaching too near the walls. With well-feigned hypocrisy, he makes the messenger believe that David will be displeased at the loss of life, and will blame him for his want of caution. But it is curious that the messenger is instructed

to mention the death of Uriah only after the king has given utterance to his anger. Possibly the meaning of this is that the loss of one so high in rank, and the king's near neighbour, is so serious a matter that it must be gradually broken to him, lest his indignation at Joab should be too violent. Probably there was also the suggestion that Uriah had been himself too rash, and had incurred his fate by his own fault. The reference to the fate of Abimelech (Judg. ix. 53) proves that the history of the times of the judges was generally known. Very probably not only records of the several events existed, but the Book of Judges was already written. In Samuel's schools the youth of Israel were instructed in the annals of their country, and men like Nathan and Gad, and others who aided Samuel in his work, would be sure quickly to turn their attention to the orderly arrangement and digest of the records in their possession.

Ver. 21.—**Jerubbesheth**; in Judg. vi. 32 called *Jerubbaal*, that is, Gideon. (On the substitution of Besheth, or more correctly Bosheth, for Baal, see notes on ch. ii. 8; ix. 6.) It is remarkable that the LXX., Vulgate, and Syriac all read here Jerubbaal, though, like the Hebrew, they have Ishbosheth and Mephibosheth. Probably the change, which was not made until after the days of Jezebel, was only gradually carried out by the scribes.

Ver. 23.—**The men prevailed against us.** The real meaning is "the men made a sortie against us in force, and came even to the open field; but we were upon them (and drove them back) unto the entry of the gate, and the archers from off the wall shot at thy servants," etc.

Ver. 25.—**Let not this thing displease thee.** David professes to be satisfied with Joab's apology, and bids him, if the war is in the main going on prosperously, not to be too much distressed at a temporary reverse. As for Uriah's death, of course it is to be regretted, but such is the fortune of war, and the sword devours now one and now another. The last words, **encourage thou him**, have provoked comment, as though the messenger was to aid and abet Joab. They simply mean "Give him a message of encouragement from me," the exact form of which is left to the messenger, but of which his report would be that the king wished Joab to take courage.

Ver. 26.—**And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband.** There is something pathetic in this repetition of the name of the murdered man, and his close relationship with Bathsheba is dwelt upon by his being twice called "her husband," and she "Uriah's wife." Having been the cause of his murder, she is careful to make for him the customary mourning. How long it lasted is uncertain. The mourning for Aaron (Numb. xx. 29) and that for Moses (Deut. xxxiv. 8) were each for thirty days; while that for Jacob at Atad (Gen. l. 10) and that of the men of Jabesh-Gilead for Saul (1 Sam. xxxi. 13) lasted only for seven days. Both these, however, were under such exceptional circumstances as made them no rule; but in Ecclus. xxii. 12 we read, "Seven days do men mourn for him that is dead," and the national lamentation for Judith lasted the same time (Judith xvi. 24). Probably, however, the mourning of a widow for her husband would last a month.

Ver. 27.—**She . . . bare him a son.** This would be the child whose death is recorded in the next chapter. Afterwards she bare David four sons (1 Chron. iii. 5), of whom one was Solomon, and another Nathan, the ancestor of our Lord. **The thing . . . displeased the Lord.** It was probably during the time of David's victories that success began to work in him its usual results. Too commonly men who have conquered kingdoms have been vanquished by their own strong passions; and David had always evinced a keen appetite for sensuous pleasures. Even at Hebron he had multiplied unto himself wives, and now, raised by repeated victory to be the lord of a vast empire, he ceased to be "base in his own sight" (ch. vi. 22), and lost his self-control. And, as was to be expected in a man of such strong qualities, his fall was terrible. But this declaration of the inspired narrator is not made solely for ethical reasons, but is the key to all that follows up to the end of ch. xx. In this chapter we have had the history of David's sin; a year's respite succeeds, as if God would wait and see whether the sinner's own conscience would waken up, and bring him to repentance; but it slumbers on. Then comes the message of reproof, followed by earnest penitence, and severe punishment. It was, perhaps, during this year of hardened persistence in crime that Amnon and his cousin Jonadab also gave the reins to their passions, and prepared the way for the first of the series of crimes that polluted David's home. An early repentance might have saved the son; but the absence of paternal discipline, the loss of respect for his father, and the evil influence of that father's bad example, all urged on the son to the commission of his abominable crime.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—17.—The facts are: 1. During the prosecution of the war against Ammon in the spring, David remains in Jerusalem. 2. Walking one evening on his house-top, he sees a woman washing herself, and observes her beauty. 3. Curiosity being awakened, he sends to inquire after her, and learns that she is the wife of Uriah. 4. Sending a royal message to her, she, as a loyal subject, waits upon him, whereupon he commits adultery. 5. Discovering in the course of a little time that the fact would come to light, he sends for Uriah from the war, under pretext of gleaning information concerning it, but really that, by Uriah's sojourn with his wife, the fact may be concealed. 6. Uriah, possibly suspicious of wrong, excuses himself from doing as David desires, on the plea that military duty and patriotism required of him absolute abstention from domestic pleasures. 7. Failing in the first attempt, David makes him drunk, in hopes that, when stupid, he would go to his home; but in this also he fails. 8. Subsequently he sends him back to Joab, with a secret instruction that he would set him in such a position as to ensure his death, which instruction Joab faithfully carries out.

The beginnings of great sins. By universal consent the deed of David here recorded is regarded as a great sin—a *very* great sin, because it was a breach of the commandment which guards the purity of human life, and because committed by one blessed with more than ordinary privileges, and in an abuse of regal authority over a probably unsuspicious subject. The deed is ever base and criminal, but that such a man should commit the crime when God was prospering him in all his affairs, when his people were bravely risking their lives in defence of their country, and after he had spent so long and blessed a life in fellowship with God, is one of the marvels and mysteries of human nature. In the narrative we have set forth the origin and progress of the sin, so far as relates to its ostensible character. Scripture gives us outward facts in their natural order. But we know that in one outward fact of human life there are involved many mental and moral movements, and these are connected in the continuity of life with antecedents which, in part at least, account for their occurrence. It is not difficult, by bringing our knowledge of the laws of mental and moral movement to bear on the facts here recorded, to get a clue to the real beginnings of this great sin, and of great sins in general.

I. INTENSE ABSORPTION IN PROSPEROUS AFFAIRS DIMINISHES THE ENERGY THAT OTHERWISE WOULD GO TO SPIRITUAL CULTURE. Man, considered physiologically and physically, is a store of energy, and he can give out only what he possesses. The totality of his thoughts and acts is the outcome, and generally speaking the measure, of his store. What portion of it is spent in excess in one direction is just so much taken from another direction. The usual law of forces here applies. For some time David had been intensely absorbed in consolidating his power. The amount of work involved in all the changes he initiated and brought to completion must have been far in excess of what falls to an ordinary monarch, and this in proportion to the utter disorganization of affairs under Saul and Ishbosheth. Such an absorption most probably trenched upon the nervous and moral energy he had at one time concentrated directly on the culture of the spiritual life. Some few men seem gifted with the faculty of sudden transitions of energy, so that, while intensely absorbed in business or secular studies at one moment, they can, by an act of will, become equally absorbed at once in religious pursuits. Possibly David was one of these; but even in their case they cannot escape the weakening effect on the finer sensibilities of a protracted absorption in purely temporal affairs, especially if they are very prosperous. We see many instances of this in the lives of professedly religious men.

II. HABITS OF LIFE MAY UNCONSCIOUSLY BE FORMED WHICH GENERATE A CLASS OF FEELINGS PROVOCATIVE OF TEMPTATION. Habits grow in silence and too slowly to be noted, and every unconsciously formed habit brings with it its corresponding class of feelings, which also, rising gradually, are apt to obtain an unobserved permanence in life. The usages of Eastern courts in reference to polygamy acted in a subtle way on David's life, so that he gradually formed the habits peculiar to that abnormal form of domestic life, and we need no Divine revelation to inform us of the class of inferior feelings that would thereby be surely though slowly engendered. The man in modern

times who, by reason of his affluence, combined with a certain habit of body, fares sumptuously every day, does not, while he is getting into the practice of so doing, reflect on the possible effect of all this, in days not far distant, upon his animal tendencies in a certain direction, and his corresponding moral safeguards. There can be no question that the physical, mental, and moral habits of life of a polygamous household are such as would furnish good soil for a sensual temptation, which, in the case of a man unduly absorbed and preoccupied in mere secularities, would be still more perilous. Many a religious man is weak from sources similar to this. Our Lord even warned his apostles, after they had had the benefit of his teaching for two years, to take heed lest at any time their hearts be "overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life" (Luke xxi. 34).

III. LEISURE SUPERVENING ON GREAT ACTIVITY BRINGS THE WEAKER SIDE OF NATURE INTO PROMINENCE. The protracted exertions of years had now issued in a compact kingdom and internal order. Saul's family was cared for. Administration was organized and labour divided (ch. viii. 14—18). The war against the Syrians was in the hands of a powerful force, under a skilful general. David, in Jerusalem, had leisure unknown in former years. Now it is a fact in the history of human nature that, when great energies cease to be in demand, and the force of life no longer goes out in its wonted volume in its ordinary course, then the feelings and tendencies which, meanwhile, have been unconsciously generated by slowly formed habits of social life, are apt to take more prominence, and find less resistance, in consequence of the probably impaired power of the spiritual element (see division I). It is well known among young men that more moral falls occur during seasons of leisure than at any other time. Leisure following on great prosperity requires for its safe use more than ordinary wisdom and spiritual health. Adversity, though taxing energy to the utmost, tends to draw the heart nearer to God, so that when there is leisure from it the soul is in a better condition to guard against the evils incident to such a season.

IV. AN UNCONSCIOUS DECLINE OF REALITY IN COMMUNION WITH GOD MAY SET IN ON A MAN'S OBTAINING A RECOGNIZED POSITION IN THE RELIGIOUS WORLD. The subtlety with which spiritual declension sets in is admitted by all who know anything of religious experience. The best of men are the objects of assault from the powers of darkness, clothed, it may be, as angels of light (2 Cor. xi. 14). Once let a man, by some subtle insinuation, begin to think that now, having served God so many years and written such useful and sincere utterances of his experience, he has a distinctly recognized position,—then, in that very thought, there is an element of danger. From that hour watchfulness may be less keen, routine may set in, and grey hairs may come "here and there upon him" while he "knoweth it not" (Hos. vii. 9). Undoubtedly David had attained such a recognized position in the religious world. His people would accord it; and, in the cessation of strain in civil and political exertions, he might, in an unguarded hour, especially if the lower feelings (see division II.) began to put forth their force, indulge in self-complacence. Communion with God might continue in full form, but its original intense reality would have passed away. Herein, perhaps, is the secret of the decline of religion in many a *quondam* professor. There are in the Church not a few who have left to them only "the form of godliness."

V. UNDER THE CONDITIONS THUS FAR CONSIDERED DISTINCT SUGGESTIONS COME THROUGH THE SENSES WITH DOUBLE FORCE. There are conditions under which suggestions through the eye, ear, or animal passions fall as powerless as snow on the solid rock. The real power of a temptation through the senses lies in the state of mind which we are in at the time. David had probably seen beautiful women many a time during his exile, and while king in Jerusalem; but the healthy, well-guarded spirit was unhurt by the sight. Beauty anywhere is, to a healthy spiritual nature, an object of pure admiration as a work of God. It was because David was not his old self that this sight was as fuel to a smouldering flame. It takes but little to create radical changes and commotions, as seen in chemistry, when the primary elements of things are brought into contact; and so is it when certain elemental conditions of the moral man and his surroundings are concerned. Joseph was pure and spiritually healthy when the suggestion of evil came upon him, and it only produced a recoil (Gen. xxxix. 8, 9). Great stress is laid on this in the Bible. "To the pure all things are pure," "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

VI. THERE IS A DISTURBING FORCE IN CERTAIN PASSIONS BY WHICH REASON, THE WILL, AND SPIRITUAL INSTINCTS ARE WEAKENED. It is a psychological fact that all emotion affects the exercise of the pure reason for the worse. It is in the experience of men that such passions as were aroused in David by the sight he witnessed from the roof of his house, more than any—except, perhaps, those involved in drunkenness—disturb or cripple the action of reason and of the will. Of course, they weaken the spiritual instincts in proportion as they find scope. Thus the powers which may be considered as the guardians of purity, the foes of evil, are not in their normal condition, and consequently the chances are, unless something happens to prevent such an issue, that the unhallowed feelings will gain further ascendency. In this we see that the perfect man is attainable only in Christ. The triumph of spiritual religion in our nature is coincident with the most perfect development of that nature. Hence, also, spiritual power among men is dependent on inner purity.

VII. WHEN ONCE THE REIN IS GIVEN TO SUCH PASSIONS, THE FALL HAS TAKEN PLACE IN ESSENCE. When David saw and looked on her, with a certain thought in his mind and feeling in his heart, he had virtually done the deed of which we have a record. In the spiritual sphere, thought and desire are tantamount to deed. The one is but the fuller form of the other. Sin lies in intent and purpose, whether it be actualized in outward fact or not. Hence our Lord's strong words (Matt. v. 27, 28). The mystery of David's sin really lies in the creation within himself of the base feeling indicated in the terms of ver. 2. All that followed was a development of this (Jas. i. 14, 15). It is a question whether Christian people have, as a rule, recognized the solemn truth taught by Christ and seen in David's case. The seventh commandment has a bearing on the daily mental life.

VIII. AN INWARD FALL BRINGS ON SPIRITUAL DARKNESS, LOSS OF SELF-RESPECT, WITH FURTHER ENFEEBLED REASON AND WILL-POWER. Such an inward fall as David's on the roof of his house at once brought a cloud between him and his God, caused him to feel that he was a degraded man, and placed him, in that abandoned mood, under weaker safeguards against the growth of the evil passion. Unless a sudden and sharp repentance—a shocked cry to God for special help—came forth, there was no hope of his being the same man as formerly. Every hour during which the intrusive evil passion retained ascendency only hastened his final overthrow. Men so circumstanced become blind and stupid; they know their degradation, but are under a spell by which it becomes greater; consequences suggested in feeble or strong tones by the reason are not considered; the will, lately crippled for good, now goes over in full strength to the side of evil. *Facilis descensus Averni.* The particular passion may vary in the different deeds of evil which occasionally shock the religious world, but in every case there is a gradual decline, and it is only the last few stages of it which form the subject of surprise among men. Not murder as seen in Shakespeare's 'Macbeth,' nor fraud as seen in occasional modern revelations, nor youthful excesses as when the parent's heart is broken, are sudden in origin. A series of mental and moral changes precede that which attracts the notice of men and forms the occasion of a social condemnation.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. The fidelity of Scripture writers may be referred to as evidence of Divine inspiration. The cool impartiality with which the best king of Israel is represented as having fallen into the vilest of sins, and this without note or comment, is certainly not of man. 2. Moral causes are deepest and most wide-reaching in the sphere of human life; the change here indicated in David's moral condition was of pernicious influence ever after on his rule, his court, his private life, and the general prosperity of the kingdom. 3. The season of great prosperity in temporal affairs, and of elevation in religious privilege, should, on account of the peril it brings, be a season of keenest and most earnest watchfulness. 4. So powerful are the inferior propensities of human nature, even in the case of most favoured men, that it is possible for them to sweep away in their outburst the reputation built up on the best purposes and actions; and hence the importance of a most jealous guard against everything in appetite, sight, and sound, that may develop their power. 5. Seeing the extraordinary extremes of human experience in the life of David, we may note and weigh well the undeveloped possibilities for good or evil, for joy or pain, for usefulness or harm, that lie within the scope of every human being in the future state, even more than in this. 6. Feminine obtrusiveness, even when no danger is actually perceived in it, may all the time be

operating on some one for evil; and hence the duty of the most guarded modesty of manner and personal appearance. We do not fully estimate the harm done to human thought and feeling by the ocular impressions produced by certain forms of dress and bearing. 7. It is good to have leisure from toil, but much grace is needed to use leisure so that in it the tempter may not gain power over us. 8. The dangers of eventide leisure are conspicuous, especially to the young and to the ardent. 9. It adds to the guilt of a man if, being in a position of authority or influence, he exercises his official influence to gain power over others for purposes of evil.

The crooked ways of sin. We have in vers. 6—13 an account of the devices by which David sought to escape the human discovery of his guilt. The perhaps sleepless nights spent in painful thought as to what could be safely done are not alluded to—only the product of his thinking. After what was said in ver. 5, it was certain that exposure in the most palpable form would ensue if the woman's husband remained away at the war. To bring him home, and get him in an apparently natural way to spend a little time with his wife, at once seemed most feasible. The failure of this scheme, either through the patriotism or the awakened suspicions of Uriah, caused another night of thought and scheming, and, as the case was urgent, he was made drunk, in hope thereby his patriotism or suspicions would yield to natural propensities. Once more the force of events is against the scheme; and, as a last resort, seeing that Uriah could not be made out to be the father of the coming child, he must, with as good an appearance as possible, be put out of the way so that the king, in accordance with the rights of Eastern monarchs, might take his wife, and the expected one thus appear to be prematurely born in wedlock. Concerning these crooked ways of sin observe—

I. THE FIRST STEP OF THE IMPENITENT SINNER IS TO CLING TO HIS SIN. When such a sin as David's is committed, God is offended, conscience outraged, self-respect disregarded, and human condemnation rendered imminent. The whole of this disruption and confusion in the moral sphere is recognized at once as being a consequence of the deed done. Now, it is obvious that these consequences are not only to be dreaded, and, if possible, to be avoided, but also that the first act of a sound mind would be to abominate and seek to get dissociated, in every sense of the term, from the sin which entailed them. The sin, and not the consequences, is the evil thing—the most terrible and hurtful thing. And the first step of a truly penitent mind would be to shrink from it, to loathe it, to seek to cut it off if possible from self as the accursed thing. But note here that David shows no sign of this. The evil nature adopts the deed, identifies itself with it, seeks to live on in association of thought, feeling, and interest with it. God, purity, conscience, self-respect,—all may go; the soul will have its sin, and, by cherishing this sentiment towards it, virtually persists in its repetition. So did Adam, Achan, and Ananias; and so do all the poor debased souls that sink into iniquity without the grace of true repentance.

II. THE SECOND STEP IS TO RECOGNIZE THE POSSIBILITY OF EXPOSURE BEFORE MEN. The guilty man knows that God is aware of his crime. His action in this respect is a very singular phenomenon. There may be secret dread of God's coming judgment; the certainty of God's knowledge and power to punish may be so strong as even to render life inwardly wretched, and to produce the passivity and helplessness proper to an unavoidable fate. Possibly this sort of desperation urges to a warding off of such consequences as would come did men but know as much of the sin as God. At any rate, what the narrative sets before us is not an endeavour to escape from God and his anger; it shows us rather that, as soon as the mind can collect itself after the indulgence in sin, it recognizes the possibility of men becoming acquainted with the deed done. That was the thought which lay at the basis of Achan's covering up his spoils; that is the thought which starts in the mind of the thief, the liar, the adulterer, the false professor. The fear of man is a very potent influence. The fear of God is real, but it carries with it a hopelessness of effort. This induces gloomy desperation, but not thought and action to prevent discovery.

III. THE NEXT STEP IS TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBLE MEANS OF ESCAPE FROM HUMAN EXPOSURE. A guilty man pays unconscious homage to holiness in that he begins to think how he can prevent men knowing what he has done. David the hero, who

trembled not before Goliath, now spends hours in thinking how he may escape the consequences of his own people knowing what he has done in private. Is it simply fear of civil and social loss? Is it merely dread of physical pain? No; even the guilty testify that sin is abominable; that sin is deepest personal disgrace; that sin is too black and ugly to bear even the gaze of imperfect men. No doubt David saw that he would suffer loss of respect among the best of the land; that the force of law would be weakened; that turbulence might arise in his kingdom by reason of others following his example; and that he would no longer be able to figure before the nation as the illustrious reformer of religion. The thousands who daily live in dread of, and consider how they may escape, human exposure! What restless nights! what deep-laid plans! what feverish concern!—all to cover up sin from feeble man! And yet God knows all, and will bring to judgment. Truly sin renders the operation of the mind very perverse. God knows all and judges all, and yet all effort is to keep man from knowing! Nothing is done Godward, except to harden the heart against him, and go on in sullen desperation. This is sin!—this the accursed evil of the universe!

IV. IN SEEKING TO ESCAPE HUMAN EXPOSURE, THE FIRST CONTRIVANCE IS TO SIMULATE THE ORDER OF PROVIDENCE; *i.e.* to create, by innocent natural means, an order of events that shall have in them and their results an appearance of providential succession. David does not commit another positive sin to cover up the first. The sin-stained soul again, notwithstanding its degradation, pays homage to righteousness, in its deliberate effort to hide its past deed by deeds that are within the province of right; for David had a right to send for any officer to give him information as to the progress of the war (vers. 6, 7), and it was only generous to allow him to go and rest at home (ver. 8). Lord Bacon has taught us that, by carefully studying the processes of Nature to see how she works, we, on submitting to her ways, become her conquerors, by being able to set her at work in circumstances of our own creation. The scheme of an impenitent sinner, when wishing to hide his sin from the knowledge of man, is very much of that kind. He knows the order of providential events, and he tries to create circumstances by which, in the judgment of men, Providence shall be credited with the deed he himself has done. Uriah, not David, shall be made to appear as the father of the child. How this perverse ingenuity works still is familiar to all who know only a little of mankind. The cleverness with which trains of events are set in motion so as to assuredly direct attention from the doer of evil, is amazing. The devil was always a great schemer, and his dupes catch his spirit.

V. THE FAILURE OF SCHEMES INVOLVING NO POSITIVE SIN IN THE DETAILS IS SOON FOLLOWED BY DEEDS DISTINCTLY EVIL. If Providence cannot be simulated, because of the uncontrollable nature of its agents (vers. 9—11), then homage to righteousness must cease, and positive evil must be done (vers. 13—15). The one desired end—escape from human exposure—must, by good or evil means, be secured. The knowledge that God knows and is angry counts for nothing. The despair of escaping God, combined with a mad identification of one's interests with the evil committed and still cherished in the heart, seems to operate on the mind in such a way as practically to banish him from thought or care. All thought is on man, and at any cost man must be kept in ignorance. It is against even the conscience, stained and hardened as it is, to do definite evil, if possible—so mighty is the moral law in the worst of men—but preservation of self from exposure is now the first law, to which right, generosity, every true and holy sentiment and obligation, must bow.

VI. IN HAVING RECOURSE TO DESPERATE MEASURES OF EVIL, THERE IS SOME REGARD TO APPEARANCES. It is only the very uttermost moral degradation—that, perhaps, of fiends in hell—that can perpetrate fresh evils with utter freedom, and without any reserve of decency or tacit recognition of the majesty of law. Every hour spent by David in elaborating his scheme brought him more within the coil of iniquity, and gradually reduced his moral sensibilities towards zero; but even when in his despair he meditated the death of the man whose life might lead to exposure of his sin, he could not slay him with his own hand, he could not say even to Joab, "Slay him." Appearances must be saved, and some homage paid, by the lingering sense of right, to the Law of God, by a contest being created in the interests of the kingdom, so that in fighting for his country the doomed man might die by the hand of the enemy. Of course, David did not kill him! Of course, it was an incident in the natural order of warlike events!

It was not the King of Israel that raised the arm to slay, but the wicked Ammonites! Such is the crooked logic of sin. Our Saviour has described Satan as a liar as well as a murderer (John viii. 44). It is evidently very difficult to crush out all light from the conscience. There is a continuous protest in the performance of guilty deeds; but so obstinate and desperate in alliance with sin is the heart of an impenitent man, that this protest, this remnant of light, is only used to grace the performance of positive evil with a semblance of naturalness and innocence. The crooked ways of sin are traversed by all men who in any measure hug their iniquities, and try to avoid the consequences which it is feared would come were the deeds of darkness exposed to view. There are many acting in this way every day.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. Men in positions of power have many means at hand for hiding their sins from public view (ver. 6); but they should be warned of their corresponding peril and increased guilt if they use those means. 2. Real hypocrisy lies in doing things with the appearance of right and to give an impression of right conduct, when the real aim is evil, and the present motive is subordinate to that aim (vers. 6—11); consequently, just pains should be taken in exposing to men the horrible wickedness of their course, and in getting them to recognize more distinctly, as a governing power in life, the perfect knowledge of God. 3. There are always forces working unconsciously against the designs of hypocritical men, rendering, as the action of Uriah did (vers. 11—13), the way of transgressors hard. It is vain to fight against God. 4. The man who, in the day of success and real goodness, scorns the unprincipled and hard-hearted (ch. iii. 29—39), may so fall as to be glad of such men to carry out his evil designs (ver. 15)—a warning this to him "who thinketh that he standeth." 5. He who makes use of another as his instrument of evil henceforth becomes weak in all his relations to him. Masters who employ their servants to carry on evil transactions lose influence over them, and virtually place themselves in their power.

Vers. 18—27.—*Complicity in evil.* The facts are: 1. Joab, having executed the wicked commission, sends word to David as to the progress of the war. 2. He furnishes the messenger with a means of appeasing the probable wrath of David on his learning that the conflict was more serious than either he or Joab looked for, namely, an announcement of Uriah's death. 3. The messenger carefully describes the seriousness of the engagement with the enemy, and concludes by referring to the death of Uriah. 4. David sends back an encouraging message to Joab, and professes to acknowledge the inevitable losses and chances of war. 5. On suitable sorrow being shown by the widow for the loss of her husband, David takes her to himself as a wife. 6. The deed of David is displeasing to God. The narrative here gives us the maturing of David's scheme, and the general character of the secret negotiations carried on with Joab in order to bring his purpose to pass. We have, then, an instance of accomplices in crime, revealing to us truth, and illustrating facts in connection with human life in all ages.

I. MEN INTENT ON A GREAT EVIL ARE FORCED TO BRING OTHERS INTO THEIR WICKED SECRETS. Providence kindly frustrated David's attempt to cover his sin by means of Uriah's free action; and it therefore became necessary, in his desperate wickedness, to seek the end in view by means of Uriah's death. But unless David committed murder with his own hand, which his conscience would not allow, he must find some one whose ingenuity, with his own, would bring it to pass, and save appearances. Such is the logic of evil. God in his mercy has filled the world with obstacles to the committal of sin and to persistence in it when once committed; but such is the baseness of the human heart that this, instead of being regarded as a help in the warfare with evil propensity, is turned into a reason for seeking the aid of another's wits and agency. It is a further fall in evil when men are thus impelled to drag others into the meshes of their sin. So hardened does the heart become by dalliance with sin and indulgence in it, that even the character and souls of others are to be ruined in order to gratify self and hide iniquity for a few years from human view.

II. THERE ARE GENERALLY MEN TO BE FOUND READY TO CARRY OUT THE EVIL PURPOSES OF THEIR SUPERIORS. Even in the chosen nation a Joab was to be found, cruel, hard of heart, habituated to acts of severity, and glad to have the opportunity of retorting in spirit, if not in words, the former reproaches of his master (ch. iii. 29, 39). It is a sign of the marvellous change that had come over David, that he, who had so bitterly

reproached this man for cruelty and hard-heartedness, now turns to him for the purpose of using those very qualities for accomplishing his own cruel design. The presence of such a man in Israel for doing the evil work of his superior is typical of a universal fact. There is a vast amount of reserve evil in the world, waiting only for some influential will to draw it out into activity. The power of superiors over subordinates sometimes extends to the moral sphere. In strict fact, a king has only power, in virtue of his office, over the legal actions of his subjects, and a master over the legal actions of his servants; but when a king or a master, in excess of his right, extends his authority into the moral sphere, it too often happens that the subordinate whose conscience is not sensitive allows the authority due to the legal position to pass over to the moral sphere and break down the defences of conscience. This is an abuse of influence on the one side, and an abandonment of most sacred duties on the other. The wicked heart is apt to find excuses in the fact that a superior leads the way, and that, if guilt lies anywhere, it is on him.

III. MEN BENT ON AN EVIL DESIGN WILL EVEN RISK THE RUIN OF THE INNOCENT IN CARRYING OUT THEIR SCHEMES. David knew very well that Joab could not carry out his instructions without, not only exposing Uriah to the certain risk of death, but also placing other men, not concerned in this domestic trouble, in positions of peril: for the meaning of the instructions was plainly to create a position of extreme peril, which in war can only be done by engaging a troop. What if several innocent men fell in this "hottest battle"! Uriah, at all events, would be amongst them! The more the progressive conduct of the king is scrutinized, the more base and abominable does it appear. This dreadful sin is not confined to David. Monarchs and diplomatists, who from motives of vanity or mere love of power bring on war, really cause the death of innocent men and the wailings of widows in carrying out their designs. What if thousands of men fall! Some regal or other obstacle to ambition or pride will at least be got rid of! That is the moral side of too many wars. The same in a measure applies to men who will be rich, though it cost the health, the poverty, and often lives of workmen. What of all that? Wealth must be secured! Other instances are to be found in modern life.

IV. MEN IN CARRYING OUT NEFARIOUS DESIGNS ARE CAREFUL TO CONFORM TO THE DECENCIES OF OUTWARD LIFE. Bad men understand one another. There is a freemasonry in evil. Joab knew what he was about when he anticipated that David would manifest signs of wrath on hearing of his fruitless attack on the city. Each evil-doer played his part with skill. The messenger was to remind David of historic parallels (ver. 21), and to tell him that the rash man Uriah, who led the bootless assault, had been punished for his rashness by death. No court-martial would be necessary, lamentable as the affair certainly was! Heart answers to heart. The anger ceases; maxims concerning the chances of war come to one's aid (ver. 25); the lessons of failure must be laid to heart; the general at the head of the army must not be discouraged. All this was very proper—in harmony with the proprieties of life. Men doing evil are inwardly ashamed of it, and are compelled to keep up the appearance of doing and being good. It is the outward conformity with the decencies of life that enables wicked men to go on in their evil ways for years. They follow the teaching and example of their chief, who is a liar in deed and word, and who, to perfect his schemes, assumes, if necessary, the form of an "angel of light."

V. EVIL MEN BRING THEIR DEVICES TO A SUCCESSFUL ISSUE WITH ONE NOTABLE EXCEPTION. The success of David was complete. Uriah was safely put away; Bathsheba was the king's wife within a date to prevent convincing exposure; the army and the people were kept in ignorance of actual facts; the future was hopeful; but there was one fact on which the infatuated king did not reflect—*the Lord was displeased.* The brethren of Joseph seemed to succeed in getting rid of a troublesome brother, but God saw their wickedness, and this counted for more than they then imagined. The wicked husbandmen succeeded in freeing themselves from annoyance when they killed the heir (Matt. xxi. 38); but there was One to reckon with of whom they did not think. The conspiring scribes and Pharisees doubtless congratulated themselves that their plans for getting rid of the "babbler" who caused them so much trouble were wonderfully successful; but there was One whose "power" was not secured to their side (Acts ii. 23, 24). Kings and diplomatists and exactors of unjust labour, and secret

defrauders, and evil livers may succeed in keeping up appearances, in passing as honourable men, and in securing their heart's desire; but there will always be one factor in the case with which they some day will have to reckon—*the displeasure of the Lord.*

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. It is a disgrace to a master to be in league with a servant, and it puts the master within the servant's power. Many a subordinate is in possession of secrets which, if used, would blast character and ruin earthly prospects. The coils of iniquity! 2. Every new device to hide sin, and every effort to keep up appearances, only blinds the mind the more to the actual state of the soul in its relation to God. 3. In all our affairs, and especially when tempted to persist in courses of sin, we should endeavour to remember that we shall have to reckon with One who knows all and is already displeased. 4. That a man professing religion can go on in a secret course of sin without giving due heed to the knowledge which he must possess of God's knowledge of himself and deeds, is a striking sign of the utter deterioration of his spiritual sensibilities and his being nigh unto perdition.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—(THE KING'S PALACE.) *David's fall into sin.* "But David tarried still at Jerusalem" (ver. 1; 1 Chron. xx. 1). 1. He was about fifty years of age; had been reigning in Jerusalem upwards of twelve years; dwelt in a stately palace on Mount Zion; and possessed numerous sons and daughters, a splendid court and a powerful army. He had been "preserved whithersoever he went," subdued his enemies, and returned in triumph. His natural gifts and fervent piety (Ps. xxiv. 4; ci. 7) were even more extraordinary than his material prosperity; and he now stood on the pinnacle of human greatness and glory. 2. "We might well wish, in our human fashion, that, as he stood at this elevation, he had closed a life hitherto (as far as was possible before Christianity) almost entirely spotless, and bequeathed to posterity a wholly unclouded memory, and the purest type of true royalty. But the ascent of the dizzy height is always attended by the possibility of a slip and then of a headlong fall" (Ewald). 3. "Rising from the couch where he had indulged in his noonday siesta to an undue length, David forthwith ascended to the roof of his house. So ambition commonly follows excess; nor do they whom the contagion of luxury once corrupts readily seek after moderate and lowly ways. But that ascent of David, alas! was a prelude to his deplorable downfall. For he ascended only that he might fall, beholding thence, as from a watch-tower, Bathsheba the wife of Uriah, and immediately becoming passionately enamoured of her" (J. Doughty, 'Analecta Sacra:' 1658). 4. It was the turning-point of his career, which was henceforth marked by a long series of calamities. And "it is sad to think that the cup of life, after being filled for him by God and made pure and sweet by previous suffering and self-restraint, should have been recklessly poisoned by his own hand" (Binney).

> "His steps were turn'd into deceitful ways,
> Following false images of good, that make
> No promise perfect."
>
> (Dante.)

His fall occurred (serving as an instructive warning to others)—

I. AT A SEASON OF SLOTHFUL RELAXATION. In the spring of the year, "when kings go forth to war," instead of going forth with his army to complete the subjugation of Ammon, "David sent Joab," etc., and abode in Jerusalem. Formerly, when "the Lord had given him rest" (ch. vii. 1), he spent his leisure in a worthy manner, and displayed an ardent and even excessive zeal; but now, in choosing rest for himself, he showed a lack of zeal, and his unhappy choice was followed by disastrous consequences. "His actual fall into sin seems to have begun by the abdication of his functions as captain of Israel" (Maclaren); which was itself the effect of "previous relaxation of the girded loins and negligence of the untrimmed lamp." *Inactivity* (voluntarily chosen, without adequate reason, and regardless of opportunities of useful service) is commonly: 1. *Induced by a course of successful enterprise*, and the attainment of great prosperity. If adversity has slain its thousands, prosperity has slain its tens of thousands. "When

his pillow was the rock and his curtain the cave; when his sword, under Providence, procured him his daily bread from the foes of his country, and the means of existence formed the object and pursuit of life,—he was pious and immovable; he must have been active or he must have resigned his life. But now the case was widely different. He had not only all the necessaries, but all the luxuries which the most refined voluptuousness could devise, attending in rich profusion around him. He had certainly the duty of his charge to impress its importance on his mind; but then he had the opportunity of neglecting it, and even David, it appears, was not proof against the solicitations of this opportunity" (Thompson, 'Davidica'). 2. *Indicative of a state of spiritual declension.* (1) Of a gradual decay of faith and neglect of watchfulness and prayer, and so leaving his hold of God; (2) of a defective sense of responsibility to God; (3) of pride and security, "mortal's chief enemy," so that the self-denying labours and hardships of the battle-field seemed no longer necessary; and (4) of undue love of ease and sensuous pleasure, fostered in David's case by polygamy. "The sense of delicacy and chastity, which has such a purifying and preserving influence on the life, could not flourish side by side with the polygamy in which he permitted himself" (W. M. Taylor). The majestic forest tree falling suddenly beneath the blast excites our surprise; but, on examination, it will be found to have been undergoing at heart a gradual process of decay, which at length brought the giant to the ground. 3. *Conducive to the indulgence of sinful propensities;* exposing to the peril of falling into "the snare of the devil." Want of proper occupation tends to develop the hidden evil of the heart. "Standing waters gather filth" (Matthew Henry). "Idle hours bring forth idle thoughts, and idle thoughts are nothing but dry kindling wood that waits only for a spark to be suddenly ablaze" (Disselhoff). "The industrious man hath no leisure to sin; the idle hath no leisure or power to avoid sin" (Hall). David "may have been quite unconscious of bad habits of mind; but they must have been there growing in secret. The tyrannous *self-will*, which is too often developed by long successes and command; the unscrupulous *craft*, which is too often developed by long adversity and the necessity of sustaining one's self in a difficult position;—these must have been there. But even they could not have led David to do the deed he did had there not been in him likewise that fearful moral weakness which comes from long indulgence of the *passions*—a weakness which is reckless of conscience, of public opinion, and of danger either to earthly welfare or everlasting salvation" (C. Kingsley). "This single act can only be regarded as the expression of his whole disposition of mind" (Hengstenberg).

II. UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF STRONG TEMPTATION; or the desire of self-gratification. For "each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust [desire], and enticed," etc. (Jas. i. 13—15). "Lust is egoistic desire under the incitement of impulse. But the action is not yet performed; it still lies with the man to combat the lust, or by the free choice of his will to yield himself to it" (Martensen, 'Christian Ethics'). It: 1. *Arises in most cases from impressions made upon the senses by external objects.* "And it came to pass in an eventide," etc. (ver. 2). The eye is the most common inlet of temptation. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food," etc. (Gen. iii. 6). Achan first saw, then coveted and took (Josh. vii. 21). "David at this time had forgotten the prayer, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.' We see, therefore, how dangerous a thing it is to suffer the eyes to wander. Job made a covenant with his eyes" (Willet). "They who abuse the eye deserve to have the inward eye darkened" (Gregory). 2. *Derives its force from various circumstances;* such as (1) the unexpected, sudden, and deceitful manner of its occurrence; (2) the power and opportunity of its gratification; (3) the temperament, predisposition, and besetting sins of its subject; (4) the entertainment of it in the fancy, which forms false images of good, and invests them with a perilous fascination; and (5) the delay of endeavour to overcome it, wherein there always lies peculiar and most imminent danger (Gen. xxxix. 9). 3. *Becomes by such means an absorbing passion* (Matt. vi. 28, 29); blinding the mental vision, perverting the moral judgment, and influencing (though not absolutely compelling) the choice of the personal will, by which sin comes into actual existence. "There is a black spot, though it be no bigger than a bean's eye, in every soul, which, if once set a-working, will overcloud the whole man in darkness, and something very like madness, and will hurry him into the night of destruction" (Arabic saying). To escape this fatal issue there is need, not merely of resolute resist-

ance and fervent prayer, but also of instant flight. "The temptation of the flesh is overcome and impure passion mortified by flight, and not by fighting face to face. He then who flies fastest and furthest is most sure of victory. Once more I say to thee, Fly! for thou art as stubble. Therefore fly, fly, if indeed thou wouldest not be overtaken, led captive, and slain!" (Scupoli).

III. AGAINST THE RESTRAINTS OF RECOGNIZED OBLIGATION. "And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba," etc.? (ver. 3). Whilst he knew not who she was, there might be at least some excuse (considering the position of an Oriental monarch, and the common practices of the age) for his passion (ch. iii. 1—5); but now that he was informed that she was "the wife of Uriah," the claims of a higher law than his own inclination must have risen up distinctly before him; and he had to choose between renouncing his evil desire or breaking through the numerous restraints placed in his path. These restraints are: 1. Set up by the *express commandments* of the Divine Law, which says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife;" "Thou shalt not commit adultery;" "Thou shalt not steal" (ch. xii. 4—6). 2. Strengthened by the *special responsibilities* of peculiar position and relationship; such as David held, as King of Israel, under Jehovah, with respect to his subjects, and more particularly his faithful servant Uriah. 3. Enforced by the *terrible consequences* threatened against transgressors (Lev. xx. 10; Deut. xxviii. 15). It is nevertheless possible to burst through all such restraints. And in the exercise of his freedom and the abuse of his power, David set them at nought, and "despised the commandment of the Lord" (ch. xii. 9). "When lust has conceived, every restraint generally increases its vehemence, the thoughts of future consequences and the consideration of the presence, purity, and justice of God are excluded; his Law and authority are disregarded; faith and fear and love are out of exercise; and the enhanced imagination of the satisfaction to be found in indulgence possesses and engrosses the soul" (Scott).

IV. WITH THE PERSISTENCY OF WILFUL PRESUMPTION. "And David sent messengers, and took her," etc. (vers. 4, 5). Regarding himself as a special favourite of Heaven, he perhaps imagined (as others have done) that he might leave the ways of lowly obedience and self-denial, and go whithersoever he pleased, and yet be preserved from harm (Deut. xxix. 19; Ps. xix. 13; Matt. iv. 6); and under this delusion he persisted in his purpose, and fell from his moral elevation into the depths of sin and to the verge of destruction. "How are the mighty fallen!" By such persistency: 1. The sinful purpose of the heart is confirmed and completed in outward action. 2. The guilt incurred is aggravated. 3. The natural consequences of sin become more serious and extensive; and, in some respects, they cannot possibly be averted (ch. xii. 11—14).

OBSERVATIONS. 1. No man, however holy, is exempt from the liability of falling into sin. "Be not highminded, but fear;" "Let him that thinketh he standeth," etc. "If such a strong and tall cedar as David fall, how ought weaker Christians to fear and to pray that God would deliver them from temptation!" (Guild). 2. Material prosperity and outward show are frequently associated with moral failure and secret iniquity. Whilst the conquest of Rabbah went forward, David became the victim of his own unfaithfulness. 3. The fall of men into sin is to be attributed to themselves—their voluntary choice of evil; and not to their circumstances, or constitution, or the withholding from them of the help of God. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God," etc. 4. It is of unspeakable importance to maintain the exercise of the spiritual life in full vigour, and to watch against the first approach of evil. "The narrow way has precipices on both sides; let us walk it awake and watchful, for we are not more exact than David, who by a moment's neglect was precipitated into the very gulf of sin" (Chrysostom). 5. By the record of the sins of good men (1 Sam. xxi. 2), the truth and worth of the Word of God are plainly shown. "If such a story does not give one a view of the unfathomable depths of sin and of its power, he will never learn what sin is" (Schmid). 6. In the whole course of history One alone has appeared "without sin;" he was tempted and overcame, and he is the Succourer of them that are tempted.—D.

Ver. 4.—*Bathsheba.* The Books of Samuel furnish abundant materials for instructive studies of female character, in (1) the praying Hannah, (2) the provoking Peninnah, (3) the broken-hearted wife of Phineas, (4) the proud Michal, (5) the persuasive Abigail,

(6) the beautiful Bathsheba, (7) the unfortunate Tamar, (8) the wily woman of Tekoah, (9) the devoted Rizpah, (10) the peaceable woman of Abel, and (in a minor degree) (11) the terrified nurse of Mephibosheth (ch. iv. 3), (12) the faithful maidservant at En-rogel, (13) the sympathizing woman of Bahurim (ch. xvii. 17, 18). Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam (Ammiel, 1 Chron. iii. 5), the granddaughter of Ahithophel the king's counsellor (ch. xxiii. 34), and well known (ver. 3) as the wife of Uriah the Hittite. "Eliam and Uriah must have been thrown much together, being both of the same rank, and being each one of the thirty-seven officers of the king's guard" (Blunt, 'Undesigned Coincidences'). She was: 1. *Endowed with perilous gifts*—extraordinary beauty (ver. 2), ardent temperament, quick perceptions, ambitious aims. Something of her natural character may be inferred from 1 Kings i. 15—21 and 1 Kings ii. 13—21, "a woman ignorant of ruling, but skilled in love-matters." 2. *Destitute of adequate safeguards*, such as would have been afforded by the presence of her husband, who was away at the siege of Rabbah; careful moral training; and firm religious principles (Prov. xi. 22). 3. *Overcome by a great temptation.* "And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came," etc. "There is no intimation whatever" (as Delany endeavours to show) "that David brought Bathsheba into the palace through craft or violence; but rather that she came at his request, without any hesitation, and offered no resistance to his desires. Consequently, she is not to be regarded as free from blame" (Keil). "One is even disposed to suspect that she was a designing, ambitious woman, who laid a snare for the king. Nothing is told us concerning her in order that the iniquity of David might not be relieved" (R. Tuck, 'The First Three Kings of Israel'). She, like others, admired the king, felt flattered by his attentions, and had not sufficient moral strength to resist his wishes or control her own inordinate vanity. "Had she been mindful of her matrimonial fidelity, perhaps David had been soon checked in his inordinate desire" (Hall). Yet she was a woman "more sinned against than sinning" (ver. 27; ch. xii. 4). 4. *Observant of customary ceremonies.* "And she was purified," etc. "More scrupulous about the ceremonial law than the moral" (Lev. xv. 18). "She also mourned for her husband when she heard of his death (ver. 26), but not for her sin which caused it" (Guild); being chiefly concerned about appearances; for her sin had been kept, as far as possible, a profound secret. 5. *Visited by deserved chastisement.* Beset by tormenting anxieties and terrible fears, knowing the penalty due to her transgression; and, subsequently, overwhelmed with grief on account of the affliction and death of her child; nor was this the only retribution she experienced. 6. *Treated with merciful consideration.* (Ver. 27.) As David himself, the supreme administrator on earth of the Divine Law, did not suffer death, "and it is easy to perceive that, to leave this single act of criminality unpunished in a great king, was for the advantage of the people" (Michaelis, 'Laws of Moses,' i. 37), as he was expressly exempted from it by the word of the prophet (ch. xii. 13); so, in the exercise of his royal prerogative, he very properly dispensed with the penalty in the case of the partner of his guilt. Like him, also, she probably repented of her sin; and "mercy glorieth against judgment" (Jas. ii. 13). Evil was even overruled for good (ch. xii. 24; 1 Chron. iii. 5; Matt. i. 6; Luke iii. 31). It has been thought (though without sufficient reason) that the counsels contained in Prov. xxxi. were given by her to her son Solomon. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."—D.

Vers. 5—15.—(JERUSALEM, RABBAH.) *Entanglements of sin.* He who once leaves the right path little knows how far he may go astray or how great will be his perplexities and perils. Possibly he may never return; certainly he will not return without overcoming immense difficulties, and finding out by bitter experience his folly and perversity.

> "The gates of hell are open night and day;
> Smooth the descent, and easy is the way;
> But to return and view the cheerful skies,
> In this the task and mighty labour lies."
>
> (Dryden's 'Virgil.')

Sin is commonly attended (as in the case of David) by—

I. GUILTY FEARS. After his sudden fall he probably felt some measure of compunction; but repressed the reproaches of conscience, and continued, in the view of men, the same as he had ever been. It is evident that, when the message (ver. 5) came to him, he was not truly penitent. 1. It awakened his fears concerning the possible *exposure* of his sin. Would not the wife of Uriah, on the return of her husband, be constrained to declare the author of her shame? 2. His fears were intensified by the probable *consequences* of such exposure. Even if he should be able to save Bathsheba, and himself escape legal punishment, by virtue of his high position as the Lord's anointed, how could he avert the private vengeance of Uriah, or maintain the confidence, affection, and allegiance of his army and people? What other Eastern monarchs did with impunity, could not be done by him in Israel without incurring the moral indignation of the people, and causing the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. 3. He was impelled by his fears to use his utmost efforts with a view to the *concealment* of his sin. "And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite" (ver. 6). His endeavour to hide his transgression "as Adam" (Job xxxi. 33) was itself a tacit acknowledgment of its disreputable character. And "he that covereth his sins shall not prosper," etc. (Prov. xxviii. 13). Would that men, after their first wrong step, immediately confessed their error, made reparation, and returned to the way of truth and righteousness!

II. FRUSTRATED DEVICES. 1. In their attempts at concealment men are wont to employ extraordinary *ingenuity* (1 Sam. xviii. 17—30), and to hide their base designs under the cover of kindness (vers. 7—9). 2. Their crafty purposes are often *defeated* by simplicity and sincerity, beyond their calculation. "The ark," etc. (vers. 9—12). "This answer expressed the feelings and the consciousness of duty which ought to animate one who was fighting for the cause of God, in such plain and unmistakable terms, that it was well adapted to prick the king to the heart. But David's soul was so beclouded by the wish to keep clear of the consequences of his sin in the eyes of the world, that he did not feel the sting, but simply made a still further attempt to attain his purpose with Uriah" (Keil). 3. Although defeated, their attempts are usually repeated (ver. 13), but only to issue in greater *disappointment*, perplexity, and anxiety. The devices of sin are like a labyrinth, in which the sinner becomes more and more inextricably involved. They are like the meshes of a net, in which he becomes more and more hopelessly entangled.

III. INCREASING CRIMINALITY. (Vers. 14, 15.) "He sent back the unsuspicious warrior to Rabbah, to Joab, with a letter, which, under the name of 'Uriah's letter,' has become notorious throughout the world. It was written with the same pen with which the sweet psalmist had written his psalms" (Krummacher). 1. The course of sin is *downward* into ever deeper moral abasement. "It is the nature of sin to multiply itself, and to draw the wretched sinner on to greater and greater enormities." Adultery was followed by (1) deception, (2) ingratitude, (3) injustice, (4) meanness, (5) temptation (ver. 13; Hab. ii. 15), (6) treachery, (7) murder.

"One sin another doth provoke;
Murder's as near to lust, as flame to smoke."

2. It is so because of its blinding, hardening, and *enslaving power* (2 Pet. ii. 19; Prov. vi. 22), its delusive promises of good, its specious pleas of necessity, its urgent impulses to desperate expedients. "Such are the accursed entanglements of sin; such the workings and gradations of it in the distracted, bewildered breast that admits it. Millions have been lost in these labyrinths of guilt; but none, sure, in any more intricate and perplexing than this!" (Delany). 3. Although it may be followed by apparent and temporary success, it *cannot ultimately prosper*. "The Lord shall reward," etc. (ch. iii. 39; Prov. xi. 21; Isa. v. 18). "The means which David took to extricate himself from the complications in which his adultery involved him appeared well chosen; but there was one thing he had not taken into consideration—that he could not here, as in former embarassments, confidently expect the assistance of God. It was God's design that David's sin should be fully manifested, for only in this way was perfect cure possible, and therefore he suffered the means to fail" (Hengstenberg). —D.

Ver. 6.—*Uriah the Hittite.* Like Ahimelech (1 Sam. xxvi. 6), he belonged to

a notable people (Gen. xxiii. 3; Ezek. xvi. 3; 1 Kings x. 29; 2 Kings vii. 6), had adopted the faith of Israel, and joined David in exile; he was one of the famous "thirty" (1 Chron. xi. 41; ch. xxiii. 39), married Bathsheba (the young and beautiful daughter of a brother officer), to whom he was fondly attached (ch. xii. 3), and had a house overlooked by the king's palace. The story of this man, "immortal by his wrongs," constitutes a little tragedy. He was: 1. *Greatly distinguished for his heroic courage.* For more than twenty years he had taken part in the conflicts of David, and contributed to his victories; and, by the valour which he displayed, gained and kept an honourable position. 2. *Grievously wronged by his royal master.* Having been secretly dishonoured by the king, he was specially sent for, treated with guile, and tempted to become an unconscious agent in concealing the crime. "Were honour driven out of the world, it should find a refuge in the breast of kings." 3. *A noble example of patriotic devotion.* "The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents," etc. (ver. 11). He "may be regarded from a moral standpoint as a type of the marvellous power and self-control for which those troops, then in their prime, must have been distinguished" (Ewald). In contrast with the indulgent habit (ver. 1) of the king, he exhibited sympathy, self-denial, zeal, and determination: "I will not do this thing."

"The ark of God is in the field,
Like clouds around the alien armies sweep;
Each by his spear, beneath his shield,
In cold and dew the anointed warriors sleep.

"And can it be? thou liest awake,
Sworn watchman, tossing on thy couch of down;
And doth thy recreant heart not ache
To hear the sentries round the leaguered town?

"Oh, dream no more of quiet life;
Care finds the careless out; more wise to vow
Thine heart entire to faith's pure strife;
So peace will come, thou knowest not when or how."

('Lyra Apostolica.')

4. *A pitiable instance of a common failing.* (Ver. 13.) He was susceptible to the power of temptation, even as others. Though proof against indulgence in one form, he was overcome by it in another. But he did not entirely lose his self-control. And the guilt of the tempted is far surpassed by that of the tempter. Intoxication weakens the sense of duty, strengthens the force of the passions, is often used as an incitement to vice, and is a fruitful source of incalculable moral, and physical evil in the individual, the family, and society (1 Sam. xxv. 37, 38; ch. xiii. 38). 5. *The unsuspecting bearer of his own death-warrant.* "And David wrote a letter to Joab," etc.—the first letter mentioned in the Bible—telling him "that he had offended him," etc. (Josephus). And without suspecting its contents, he delivered the treacherous missive. 6. *The hapless victim of his unswerving fidelity.* "He assigned Uriah a place where he knew that valiant men were" (ver. 16). "Honour is pretended to poor Uriah; death is meant. He was not the first or last that perished by his friends" (Hall). "He fell unconscious of his wife's dishonour" (Stanley). "Thus fell this brave man, a sacrifice to his own heroic virtue and his prince's guilt. He fell, but not alone; some of his brave companions in arms stood by him to the last, nor deserted him in death" (Delany). The report of his fate was received by the king with the cold and commonplace reflection, "The sword devoureth one as well as another" (ver. 25). "That the sin of David was fulfilling some righteous judgment of God against Uriah and his house, I doubt not—for God often makes his enemies his instruments and, without sanctifying the means, strikes out of them good. Still, a sin it was, great and grievous and offensive to that God to whom the blood of Uriah cried from the ground" (Blunt).—D.

Vers. 16—21.—(RABBAH.) *Complicity in sin.* Here are three men: David, a great but sinful king, bent on the destruction of a faithful servant; Uriah, a brave but injured soldier, sent unconsciously to his doom; and Joab, an able but unscrupulous general (ch. iii. 22—30), become a willing agent and ready accomplice in his execution

"with the sword of the children of Ammon" (ch. xii. 9). 1. *There is seldom wanting a suitable accomplice in effecting a sinful purpose*, however iniquitous it may be. The character of Joab was well known to David. "It was his very wickedness that commended him to the king as the most fitting instrument for carrying out his infamous design." He had formerly deprecated his wickedness (ch. iii. 29, 39); but now that he had himself fallen into sin, he associated himself with it, and made use of it for his own ends, although, as he afterwards found, to his own cost. "How Joab must have rejoiced when David sank down to his own level!" 2. *In serving another, such an accomplice is chiefly concerned about serving himself.* He seeks supremely his own advantage. Joab acted not from loyalty, but self-love. "To make himself great, powerful, indispensable, was the object of his life" (Plumptre). "Possibly he had some information that Bathsheba had been with David" ('Speaker's Commentary'). Anyhow, perceiving the design of the king against Uriah, he served him, in order that he might gain complete power over him; and in this he succeeded. "When David made him a partner and secret agent of his guilty purpose touching Uriah, he sold himself into his hands, and in that fatal letter he sealed away his liberty and surrendered himself up to this his unscrupulous accomplice" (Blunt). "All fellowship in sin begets despotism." Henceforth Joab did with the king very much as he pleased. 3. *No authority of man can justify the violation of the Law of God.* How often have men imagined that the command or sanction of one in authority has been a sufficient warrant for doing what their own consciences condemned, and laid the blame of their conduct on the instigator thereof rather than on themselves! Joab probably needed little self-excuse; but if ever he should want a defence, he might plead the king's letter. He was reckless of human life; to effect his purpose made a greater sacrifice of it than the king intended (ver. 17), and became more hardened than ever in wickedness. "We ought to obey God rather than men." 4. *There may be exemption from punishment when there is no exoneration from blame.* "How must this example needs harden Joab against the conscience of Abner's blood! while he cannot but think, 'David cannot avenge that in me which he acteth himself'" (Hall). Nevertheless, his guilt, in the sight of God, remains; and judgment comes at last (Eccles. xii. 14).—D.

Ver. 21.—(JERUSALEM, RABBAH.) *Warnings from history.* "Who smote Abimelech," etc.? "History is philosophy teaching by example." It is full of doctrines, principles, examples, warnings (1 Sam. xii. 8—12). This event, which had taken place two hundred and thirty years before, was familiar to Joab and others; and, viewed as a warning, likely to be recalled by the king to point his reproof (Judg. ix. 53). Of such warnings observe that they—

I. ARE OF IMMENSE SERVICE; in making general lessons concerning danger and duty: 1. More distinct. 2. More impressive. 3. More beneficial. They are beacon-lights, danger-signals, startling voices; and teach that in the way of inconsideration, rashness, and presumption, there is imminent peril; that destruction may come unexpectedly, suddenly, and by a feeble hand—"a woman slew him;" and that (although neither Joab nor David laid it to heart) every violation of God's Law is surely followed by retribution (Judg. ix. 56, 57). They are "written for our admonition" (1 Cor. x. 11).

II. SHOULD BE DULY HEEDED. 1. Intelligently studied. 2. Constantly remembered. 3. Practically observed. They are "written for our learning" (Rom. xv. 4). "The world exists for the education of each man. There is no age or state of society or mode of action in history to which there is not something corresponding in his life. Everything tends in a most wonderful manner to abbreviate itself and yield its whole nature to him" (Emerson).

III. MAY BE DELIBERATELY SLIGHTED. 1. For some immediate personal advantage. 2. From the persuasion of immunity, though others perish (ver. 17). 3. With a plausible excuse, when remonstrated with. "Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also." "Joab quoted God's Word, but was not careful to keep it" (Wordsworth).

IV. WILL BE ASSUREDLY VINDICATED. 1. By the occurrence of similar events (1 Kings ii. 34). "The history of the past is a prophecy of the future." 2. In the bitter experience of the obdurate. 3. With ever-increasing clearness and force to successive generations. "Remember the days of old," etc. (Deut. xxxii. 7).—D.

Vers. 22—27.—(JERUSALEM, RABBAH.) *Concealment of sin. Order of events:* 1. Report of Uriah's death (vers. 22—25). 2. Bathsheba mourns (seven days, 1 Sam. xxxi. 13) for her husband (ver. 26), being probably unacquainted with the manner in which it was brought about. 3. David makes her his wife. 4. Joab takes Rabbah, except the citadel (ch. xii. 26). 5. David, on receiving Joab's message, goes to Rabbah and conquers the city (ch. xii. 27—31). 6. David and all the people return to Jerusalem. 7. Bathsheba bears a son (ver. 27).

"When I kept silence my bones waxed old
Whilst I continually groaned;
For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me:
My moisture was turned into the drought of summer."
(Ps. xxxii. 3, 4.)

The life of David has an *outward* and an *inward* aspect: the one described in the history, the other by himself in his psalms; each the necessary complement of the other. They are, in general, closely connected and correspond, the outward being the expression of the inward, and explained by it. But sometimes they appear at variance, and in some respects present a melancholy contrast; as in the period that followed his transgression. He had succeeded in hiding it from public view; but he could not hide it altogether from himself. Consider concealment of sin in relation to—

I. THE OUTWARD LIFE. Many a man carries in his breast a guilty secret, unsuspected by others. He may be the object of their admiration and envy, and distinguished (as David was) by: 1. *Apparent sincerity* in public and in private life. He judges offenders in the gate, or receives news (from the battle-field) with words of resignation or encouragement (ver. 25). "Alas! how often do men hide baseness and satisfaction at successful plotting under the commonplace of resignation to the inevitable, of submission to the conditions of existence!" He goes to the house of God (ch. vii. 8), "returns to bless his household" (ch. vi. 20), and maintains the form of private devotion. Yet he is inwardly "like the troubled sea when it cannot rest," etc. (Isa. lvii. 20). 2. *Restless activity* (ch. xii. 29), which, though it appear to be a display of admirable energy, is really pursued as a welcome diversion from disquieting thoughts. "The enterprise promised an opportunity of escaping from himself; and he probably went thither in the maddest of all attempts, that, namely, of outrunning a guilty conscience" (W. M. Taylor). 3. *Earthly prosperity.* "And he took the king's crown," etc. (ch. xii. 30). In this there was, probably, something of vain-glory (1 John ii. 16). It was the culmination of his victories over the heathen. But the honour of wearing the crown of "their king" (or Milcom, Moloch) was a poor compensation for the dishonour he had done to his own, and the loss of uprightness of heart; his triumph over idolatry a miserable set-off against his overthrow by Satan. 4. *Unusual severity.* (Ch. xii. 31.) The effect of sin is to harden the heart.

"I waive the quantum o' the sin,
The hazard of concealing;
But och! it hardens a' within,
And petrifies the feeling!"
(Burns.)

It also perverts the judgment. He who is wanting in a due sense of his own sinfulness is apt to be a severe judge of others (ch. xii. 5; Matt. xviii. 28; xxi. 41; Rom. ii. 21). A conscience ill at ease makes the temper sullen and irritable; and a repressed feeling of justice in relation to a man himself sometimes finds relief in the infliction of cruel vengeance on other men. "An evil conscience is the concealed root of bitterness from which spring a thousand poisonous plants, to shed their baleful influence upon the possessor and upon society at large" (McCosh).

II. THE INWARD LIFE. The experience of David was marked by: 1. *Obstinate silence.* (Ps. xxxii. 3.) He not only sought to conceal his transgression from men, but also sullenly refused to admit "the iniquity of his sin" to himself, or acknowledge it before God. The impulse to confession in such a man must have been strong; but he struggled against it with all his might (Ps. xxxii. 9), as others have done. 2. *Self-deceiving guile.* "The deceit of the impenitent heart consists in its seeking to excuse

and justify itself despite the condemnation of conscience, while it obtains no relief from the feeling of guilt, but rather brings about a sharper *reaction of conscience*, and increases the pains that come from the conflict of mutually accusing and excusing thoughts" (Erdmann). "The roots of this deceit, which makes its appearance immediately after a fall into sin, are pride, lack of trust in God, and love of sin" (Hengstenberg). 3. *Spiritual deprivation.* For during these long, weary months of silence the light of God's countenance was hidden, the joy of his salvation lost (Ps. li. 8, 12). "His harp was out of tune, and his soul like a tree in winter, with the life in the root only" (Matthew Henry). "We are not to conceive of him as one who had quite fallen, nor as one spiritually dead, but as sick unto death. It is certain that he had not quite lost all desire after God, that he had not entirely given up prayer; doubtless there were still many fruits of faith perceptible in him; but his soul was checked in its flight toward God, a curse rested upon him, which made solitary communion with the Divine Being for any length of time intolerable, and moved him to seek distractions in order to escape the torment of conscience and keep it from attaining to full life." 4. *Inexpressible misery;* consisting of "the burden of the heart weighing on itself, the burden of a secret, the sense of hypocrisy, the knowledge of inward depravity, while all without looks pure as snow to men" (F. W. Robertson); the remembrance of sin that cannot be forgotten (Ps. li. 3), the remorse of conscience that cannot be quieted, the sense of Divine displeasure, the dread of approaching woes (Ps. li. 11); continuing without cessation; consuming the vital energies, and exhausting the physical strength (Ps. xxxviii. 6). "Whithersoever the sinner may turn himself, or however he may be mentally affected, his malady is in no degree lightened nor his welfare in any degree promoted until he is restored to God" (Calvin, in Ps. xxxii.). "I will reprove thee" etc. (Ps. l. 21). Although for a season concealed, it will be in due time revealed (Matt. x. 26). "Not only was the fruit of the sin to be first of all brought to light (ver. 27), and the hardened sinner to be deprived of the possibility of either denying or concealing his crimes; God would first of all break his unbroken heart by the torture of his own conscience, and prepare it to feel the reproaches of the prophet. . . . Nathan's reproof could not possibly have borne its saving fruit if David had been still living in utter blindness as to the character of his sin at the time the prophet went to him" (Keil). "No language ever described so vividly the sense of a weight at the heart—a weight that cannot be uplifted; and it was the weight of God's own presence, of that presence which he had once spoken of as the fulness of joy. With this oppression, like that of the air before the thunderstorm, came the drying up of all the moisture and freshness of life, the parching heat of fever. Did the Prophet Nathan bring all this to his consciousness? No, surely. The Prophet Nathan came at the appointed time to tell him in clear words, by a living instance, that which he had been hearing in muttered accents within his heart for months before. He came to tell him that the God of righteousness and mercy, who cared for Uriah, the poor man with the single ewe lamb, was calling him, the king, to account for an act of unrighteousness and unmercifulness. Nathan brought him to face steadily the light at which he had been winking, and to own that the light was good, that it was the darkness which was horrible and hateful, so that he might turn to the light and crave that it should once more penetrate into the depths of his being, and take possession of him" (Maurice). —D.

Ver. 27.—(JERUSALEM.) *God's displeasure at sin.* "And the thing that David had done displeased Jehovah" (1 Chron. xxi. 7). This is the only remark which the sacred historian makes on the conduct of David. It reveals its true nature as with a sunbeam; "contains the moral decision from a theocratic point of view, and is, as it were, a superscription of the following history of the Divine judgments on David and his house on account of this sin" (Erdmann). The Divine displeasure (indignation, anger, wrath) is—

I. REAL. Jehovah is the living, personal, supreme Ruler of men, and to him each man is responsible for his actions. As he is capable of being pleased, so he is of being displeased. His wrath is no less real than his love, wisdom, or power; like, yet unlike, that of man, being above all human imperfection. The Scriptures declare that he is displeased with men when they do evil (Ps. ii. 5; vi. 1; vii. 11; Mark iii. 5).

"The wrath of God is revealed," etc. (Rom. ii. 18). This is confirmed by conscience, in which his displeasure is reflected as a clouded sky in the surface of a lake.

II. DESERVED. Sin is rebellion against his authority, disobedience to his Law, opposition to his holiness, ingratitude toward his goodness; a transgression of the covenant, "a coming short of the mark," iniquity (Ps. xxxii. 1). Every wrong done to man is a dishonouring of God (Ps. li. 4). In the sin of David there were elements of peculiar and aggravated guilt (ch. xii. 7—9). But in every case it is "exceeding sinful," "the abominable thing which he hates" (Jer. xliv. 4). It is the one real evil in man.

"Sin alone is that
Which doth disfranchise him, and make unlike
To the chief good; for that its light in him
Is darken'd."

(Dante.)

III. IMPARTIAL. The Holy One of Israel is unaffected by any of those influences that make human displeasure at wrong-doing partial and defective. He is neither blind nor indifferent to the sins of his children (ch. vii. 14). They have not, any more than others, a licence to sin. David, "his chosen," is not above the Law, nor exempt from due punishment. "For there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. ii. 11). "Without respect of persons, the Father judgeth according to every man's work," etc. (1 Pet. i. 17; Amos iii. 2); estimating it according to its exact moral "weight" (1 Sam. ii. 3).

IV. UNAVOIDABLE. However men may conceal it from others, or endeavour to hide it from themselves, they cannot hide it from God (Job xxii. 13). What pleases men may displease him (1 Thess. ii. 4). His knowledge is infinite; his righteousness and justice essential, unchangeable, and eternal. Wherever and whenever sin exists, the holy energy of his wrath must burn against it; "for our God is a consuming fire," an "almighty foe to ill." Although delayed, it is not extinct. "A year had passed since his fall. The child of his sin had been born. And all this time God was silent. Yet like a dark cloud on a summer's day hung this sentence over him, 'But the thing that David did,' etc. Soon it would burst in a storm of judgment."

V. EFFICENT AND DREADFUL. As "in the king's favour there is life," so in his displeasure there is death. It is manifested in the punishment of the sinner, both inwardly and outwardly; as in the case of David (ch. xii. 10, 11). Every future moment must answer for the present. The penalties of transgression in this life are numerous and terrible. And who shall tell what will follow hereafter, when the wind becomes a whirlwind?

VI. MINGLED WITH MERCY. God is displeased with *sin* rather than with the *sinner* (except in so far as he voluntarily identifies himself with it); whom, in his essential nature, he loves; who possesses the capacity of restoration; whose salvation he seeks; and to whom, on his repentance, punishment becomes chastisement, a means of purification and blessing (ch. vii. 15). "There is no more terrible, there is no more instructive, portion of the Word of God than this whole record. The long death-sleep of that once living soul; its awakening under the prophet's voice; its deep repentance; its free forgiveness; its long, heavy, repeated, almost incessant chastisement;—speak to every ear which is not altogether deaf lessons of the holiness and truth, of the severity and love, of the justice and mercy, of the Lord our God, which is borne perhaps with equal force in no other record of his ways with man" ('Heroes of Hebrew History'). "O God, thou hadst never suffered so dear a favourite of thine to fall so fearfully, if thou hadst not meant to make him a universal example to mankind, of not presuming, of not despairing. How can we presume of not sinning, or despair for sinning, when we find so great a saint thus fallen, thus risen?" (Hall).—D.

Ver. 27.—*David's fall.* "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." One guarantee, even to the most unlettered, of the truthfulness of sacred history is the impartiality of its accounts of its greatest heroes, whose sins and follies are faithfully recorded as well as their virtues. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Peter, are cases in point. David is another instance, whose fearful sins are recorded in this most distressing chapter, ending with the significant words of our text, "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

I. THE WICKEDNESS WHICH DISPLEASED GOD. Many things done by good men of old times which appear to us very culpable, were in them innocent or excusable, on account of the different standard by which their conduct was regulated, and the different public opinion of their days. But the sins of David recorded in this chapter were not of such a description. The law of nature everywhere and in all times, as well as the laws of the revelation known to David, are clear and emphatic in condemning them. 1. *The sins themselves.* (1) *Adultery;* and, growing out of this, (2) *deceit.* Pretences to Uriah of concern about the war, and about Uriah's comfort while in Jerusalem (vers. 7—10); and to Joab's messenger, of regarding the deaths of Uriah and other brave soldiers whose lives had been sacrificed through his directions, as being ordinary casualties of war (ver. 25). (3) Murder of Uriah and the soldiers who fell with him. (4) Leading others into crime: Uriah into drunkenness, Joab into murder. 2. *Their aggravations.* (1) His age, position, knowledge, experiences, and reputation. He was between fifty and sixty years old. As king, he was the highest guardian of justice and protector of innocence. He knew well the wickedness of his conduct. He had been marvellously guided, advanced, and blessed by God, with whom he had been accustomed to maintain the closest converse. He was well known as a devout man, professing himself a devoted servant of God. He had thus a reputation to sustain. (2) The difficulties in his way. The necessity of sending messengers (ver. 4) to Bathsheba. Think of his stooping to that! Difficulties, necessitating some consideration and calling for determined resolution to conquer them, increase the guilt of sin. (3) His abundant harem, as contrasted with Uriah's one wife; hinted at in ch. xii. 2, 3. (4) Uriah's position and conduct. His relation to David, as one of his chief military officers, and distinguished for his valour (ch. xxiii. 39; 1 Chron. xi. 41). He was at the time with the army in the field, and might justly look to the king to be the protector (if necessary) of his wife from evil. He cherished noble sentiments (ver. 11) of duty and honour as a soldier. (Did he, however, know or suspect how matters stood; and frame his language to the king as a subterfuge?) (5) The deliberateness of the later crimes. (6) The time consumed, giving ample opportunity for reflection. When these things are considered, the wickedness of David assumes proportions which are appalling. 3. *How they were possible.* (1) There must have been secret and very serious declension in piety. Had he been in the state of mind and heart which is revealed in ch. vii., it is impossible that he could have so sinned. The height of prosperity and power which he had reached had corrupted him. (2) There is much in what Dean Stanley says of "that abyss which yawns by the side of lofty genius and strong passions," which "opened and closed over him." (3) His position as an Eastern monarch, accustomed to polygamy, accustomed also to act in many things according to his own will. (4) Some think that his being in the way of temptation arose from a self-indulgent neglect of duty in remaining at Jerusalem instead of leading his army in the field. (5) He found in Bathsheba a ready consent to his will. (6) The later sins and crimes seemed necessary, after the first step, to save himself and his companion in guilt from utter disgrace and ruin. Such considerations may help to explain, but cannot be accepted as excusing, his wickedness.

II. HOW THE DISPLEASURE OF GOD WAS MANIFESTED. 1. *The message by Nathan* (ch. xii. 1—12); who boldly reproved David in the name of the Lord, and announced the punishments which would fall upon him. 2. *The death of the child.* 3. *Family scandals, sins, and sorrows.* 4. *Absalom's rebellion, and all the humiliations and troubles it involved.* 5. *Joab's increased ascendency.* "There was a guilty secret between the two" (Trench). The worst part of his punishment sprang from sins like his own, and was probably occasioned by them, at least in part.

LESSONS. 1. *Do nothing, however pleasant, or gainful, or common among men, or seemingly safe, to the account of which may be appended the terrible words,* "The thing . . . displeased the Lord." 2. *Let none presume on their security against even disgraceful sin.* "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. x. 12); "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt. xxvi. 41). 3. *Guard against the beginnings of evil.* "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. iv. 23). David had already committed adultery when he gazed lustfully on Bathsheba (comp. Matt. v. 28). Pray, as David did afterwards, "Create in me a clean heart" (Ps. li. 10). The beginning of sin is, like that

of strife, "as when one letteth out water" (Prov. xvii. 14). The trickling of water through a small crevice in an embankment may seem inconsiderable; but, unless stopped, it may issue in widespread devastation and misery. One sin leads to another and another, and all to pain and sorrow. Gehazi's covetousness led him to falsehood and robbery, and then to lifelong leprosy, transmitted to his children's children (2 Kings v. 20—27). Peter's self-confidence prepared the way for cowardice, falsehood, and profanity, followed by bitter anguish. The pilferings of Judas from "the bag" issued in the betrayal of his Lord; and then remorse and suicide. 4. *How vain are all attempts to conceal sin and prevent punishment!* God is looking on all the time the sinner is cunningly endeavouring to hide his sin (see Job xxxiv. 21, 22). "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numb. xxxii. 23).—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1.—**Jehovah sent Nathan unto David.** Though David had remained unrepentant for nearly a year, for we read in ver. 14 that the child was born, yet we are not to suppose that there had been no compunctions of conscience. A man could scarcely pass from utter callousness to a state of mind so tender as that depicted in Ps. li. without some preparation. Assuredly David had suffered much mental distress, but he had given no outward sign of contrition, and possibly, but for Nathan's message, he might have overpowered his conscience, and his self-reproaches have become less frequent and agitating. More probably he was slowly ripening for repentance, and Nathan's words let loose the agonizing feelings which had more and more struggled within him against his baser lusts. And the prophet's apologue was exactly suited to rouse up that strong sense of justice which was so noble an element in David's character. Doubtless it was framed for this purpose, and Nathan knew what was the right chord to touch. But we must not, because he was wise and skilful, refuse Nathan our fullest admiration for his manly courage. It is a very dangerous thing to tell princes of their sins, and especially when that prince is an absolute monarch, and his sins adultery and murder. But the position which Nathan held in David's court made it his duty so to do, and there is no stronger testimony to the power of religion and of God's grace than that it makes men so brave in doing their duty. We may feel sure that Nathan had long grieved over David's fall, and reflected upon the steps which ought to be taken for his admonition. And now, in answer to prayer, the command came from Jehovah bidding him go and bear his testimony. Nathan's parable is admirably adapted for its purpose. While making no direct reference to adultery or murder, it puts very strongly the injustice and heartlessness of the oppression of the weak by the strong, as exemplified in the deed of the rich man. On many occasions David had shown a warm and generous indignation at injustice, and a righteous pity for those wronged. Would such a feeling be called out now? David's conduct was bad enough, and if there was no outburst of anger at the base deed reported to him, and no welling-up of pity for the poor man robbed of his one joy, then was his case hopeless, and Nathan must withdraw in despair, and leave David to his fate. But his better feelings were not destroyed, and when Nathan saw them deeply stirred, he broke in with the stern application to the king's own sin, "Thou art the man!" The courage and the skill of the prophet are alike admirable.

Ver. 3.—**Was unto him as a daughter.** The Orientals are excessively fond of pet animals, and, as the dog is with them unclean, its place is taken by fawns, kids, or lambs. The description, therefore, is not overcharged, for in many an English home the dog or cat takes its place as one of the family. The Revised Version preserves the tenderness of the original in translating "it did eat of his own morsel."

Ver. 4.—**A traveller, . . . wayfaring man, . . . man that was come to him.** Nathan probably used these three terms chiefly to diversify his language, but it has served as a handle for much allegorizing. Thus Rashi explains it of covetousness, which comes at first as a mere "passer-by," the literal meaning of the word rendered "traveller." But, if admitted, it grows into "a wayfaring man," who comes and goes on business, and stays a longer time. Finally it changes into "one who has come to him," and remains permanently. Such allegorical interpretations are common in the Fathers, and thus Augustine compares the three stages of sin to our Lord's three miracles of raising the dead. The sinner is at first like Jairus's daughter, just dead, and repentance can restore him immediately to life; but, if sin be persisted in, he becomes like the son of the widow of Nain, carried away

to burial; and finally like Lazarus, given over to corruption.

Ver. 5.—**Shall surely die.** It is strange language to declare that a man shall be put to death and then fined four lambs. But David says nothing of the sort, but that the man is "a son of death," that is, a wretch who deserves to die. The Revised Version correctly renders, "is worthy to die." The sentence actually passed, of fourfold restitution, is exactly in accordance with the Mosaic Law (Exod. xxii. 1), but the moral turpitude of the offence was far greater than could be atoned for by the legal penalty. Rightly, therefore, David expressed his indignation, and regretted that the sentence was so light; but a judge must not strain the law, which necessarily has regard chiefly to the outward offence.

Ver. 7.—**Thou art the man!** Abruptly and with sudden vehemence comes the application to David himself. So skilfully had the parable been contrived, that up to this point David had had no suspicion that he was the rich man who had acted so meanly by his poorer neighbour Uriah. And now he stood self-condemned. Yet even so self-love might have made his indignation break forth against Nathan; but probably the reproof only completed a work that had long been secretly in progress, and brushed away the last obstacles to repentance. **I anointed thee.** The solemn anointing made David the representative of Jehovah, and thus his sin was aggravated by the degradation in the eyes of the people, both of the kingly office and also of Jehovah himself. Rank and authority are given to men that they may lead others to do right; it is a fearful misuse of them when they give prestige to sin.

Ver. 8.—**I gave . . . thy master's wives into thy bosom.** These words probably mean that, as the whole possessions of his predecessor belonged, by Oriental custom, to the next occupant of the throne, David might have claimed the entire household and the wives both of Saul and Ishbosheth as his own, though apparently he had not done so. As far as we know, Saul had but one wife (1 Sam. xiv. 50) and one concubine, Rizpah (ch. iii. 7). Of Ishbosheth's family arrangements we know little, but his harem, if he had one, would become the property of David. But independently of this, the permission of polygamy had made it possible for him to take any of the daughters of Israel and Judah to wife, and he had freely availed himself of this licence. Yet, not content, he had lusted after a married woman, and had got rid of her husband by murder, meanly using the sword of the Ammonites to accomplish his own criminal purpose. The word used in this clause, and rendered "thou hast slain him," is a very strong one, and literally means "thou hast murdered him," though the sword was that of the enemy.

Ver. 10.—**The sword shall never depart from thine house**; that is, thy crime shall not be expiated by one slaughter, but by many, so that thy punishment shall cease only at thine own death. This sentence was fulfilled in Amnon's murder (ch. xiii. 28), who had been encouraged in his crime by his father's example. Upon this followed Absalom's rebellion and death (ch. xviii. 14); and finally, when in his last hours David made Solomon his successor, he knew that he was virtually passing sentence on Adonijah, the eldest of his surviving sons. But what a fearful choice! for had he not done so, then Bathsheba and her four sons would doubtless have been slain, whereas there was some hope that Solomon might spare his brother. That Adonijah was unworthy we gather from the fact that he had ceased to be cohen, and that this office was conferred, after Absalom's rebellion, on Ira the Jairite (ch. xx. 26), Solomon being then too young to hold such a position. Until he committed this crime, David's family had probably dwelt in concord, and it was his own wickedness which broke up their unity, and introduced among them strife, mutual hatred, and the shedding of blood.

Ver. 11.—**He shall lie with thy wives.** Fulfilled for political purposes by Absalom, under the advice of Bathsheba's grandfather (ch. xvi. 22). The punishment was thus complete. For the murdered Uriah there was fourfold restitution, according to David's own sentence. First there was Bathsheba's child lately born, then Amnon, thirdly Absalom, and lastly Adonijah. For the adultery there was open disgrace wrought upon his royal dignity "before the sun," in open daylight. As he had brought shame and dishonour upon the family relations of his neighbour, so were his own family rights violated by his rebellious son. And, as is often the case, the sins which followed were worse than those which prepared the way. Vice begins as a small stream trickling through the opposing dam, but it quickly breaks down all moral restraints, and rushes along like a destroying flood.

Ver. 13.—**I have sinned against Jehovah.** Saul had used the same words, and had meant very little by them; nor had he added "against Jehovah," because his purpose was to appease Samuel, and prevail upon him not to disgrace him before the people. David's confession came from the heart. There is no excuse-making, no attempt at lessening his fault, no desire to evade punishment. Ps. li. is the lasting testimony, not only to the reality, but to the tenderness

of his repentance, and we may even feel here that confession was to him a relief. The deep internal wound was at length disclosed, and healing had become possible. Up to this time he had shut God away from his heart, and so there had been no remedy for a soul diseased. It was because his sorrow was genuine that comfort was not delayed. **Jehovah also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.** Now, death was the legal penalty for adultery (Lev. xx. 10), and though it might not be easy to exact it of a king, yet, until it was remitted, David would be in the eyes of all "a son of death" (see on ver. 5); and how could he administer justice to others while the death-sentence for a capital crime was hanging over himself? Had not the prophet been authorized to use his dispensing power as the mouthpiece of Jehovah, David could not have remained king. And we can see no reason for supposing, with Ewald and others, that a substantial interval of time elapsed between David's confession and Nathan's absolution. The sole conceivable reason for such a view would be the supposition that David's repentance began and was completed with the one stab of shame which pierced through him when he heard Nathan's sudden reproach. Such a mere thrill, following upon such persistent callousness, would have merited little attention. But if months of brooding sorrow and secret shame had been humbling David, then his open confession was the proof that the Spirit's work had reached the goal, and was now complete. And we gather from Ps. li. 3 that such was the case. "My sin," he says, "is ever before me." It had long haunted him; had long occupied his thoughts by day, and broken his rest at night. Like a flood, his iniquities had gone over his head, and threatened to drown him; like a heavy burden, they had pressed upon him so as to break him down (Ps. xxxviii. 4). Both these psalms tell of long-continued sorrow of heart; but with confession had come relief. He had offered to God the sacrifice of a broken spirit, and knew that it had not been despised. We shall see subsequently that his time and attention had been much occupied with the Ammonite war, and this had probably helped him in evading the secret pleadings of his own conscience.

Ver. 14.—**Thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme;** Hebrow, *thou hast made the enemies of Jehovah to despise;* that is, to despise Jehovah's government, the theocracy, of which David was the visible head and earthly representative. Jehovah's enemies are not the heathen, but Israelitish unbelievers, who would scoff at all religion when one in David's position fell into terrible open sin. But the death of the adulterous offspring of David and Bathsheba would prove to these irreligious men that Jehovah's righteous rule could reach and punish the king himself, and would thus vindicate his justice from their reproach.

Ver. 16.—**David . . . went in.** He went, not into the sanctuary, which he did not enter until after the child's death, but into some private room in his own house. There he remained, passing his nights stretched on the ground, and fasting until the seventh day. His fasting does not imply that he took no food during this long interval, but that he abstained from the royal table, and ate so much only as was necessary to maintain life. Now, what was the meaning of this privacy and abstinence? Evidently it was David's acknowledgment, before all his subjects, of his iniquity, and of his sorrow for it. The sickness of the child followed immediately upon Nathan's visit, and we may feel sure that news of his rebuke, and of all that passed between him and the king, ran quickly throughout Jerusalem. And David at once takes the position of a condemned criminal, and humbles himself with that thoroughness which forms so noble a part of his character. Grieved as he was at the child's sickness, and at the mother's sorrow, yet his grief was mainly for his sin; and he was willing that all should know how intense was his shame and self-reproach. And even when the most honourable of the rulers of his household (Gen. xxiv. 2), or, as Ewald thinks, his uncles and elder brethren, came to comfort him, he persists in maintaining an attitude of heart-stricken penitence.

Ver. 20.—**Then David arose from the earth.** If David's grief had been occasioned by love for the child, then its death and the consciousness that, while his guilt had caused its sickness, his prayers had not availed to save it, would have aggravated his anguish. There was much personal regard for the child, which had been made the more precious by these very events. But David's sorrow was, as we have seen, that of penitence, and not that of natural affection. When, therefore, the threatened penalty had been paid by the death of the child, David felt it to be his duty to show his resignation, and therefore he went into the sanctuary and worshipped, in proof that he acknowledged the justice of God's dealings, and was content to bear the punishment as his righteous desert.

Ver. 22.—**God**; Hebrew, *Jehovah*, usually rendered "Lord." Similarly in Gen. vi. 5 in the Authorized Version we find *God* in capital letters, as here, for the Hebrew *Jehovah*.

Ver. 23.—**I shall go to him, but he shall**

not return to me. These words indicate, first of all, much personal feeling for the child. Hence some have supposed that, as Solomon is placed last of Bathsheba's four sons in ch. v. 14 and 1 Chron. iii. 5, three other sons had already been borne by her, and that consequently this child, the fruit of their adultery, would now have been seven or eight years of age. It is certainly remarkable that in ver. 16 David calls him "the lad" (so the Hebrew), though in every other place he is styled "the child." On the other hand, we gather from ver. 14 that probably he was as yet the only child, and this is the more reasonable view, even if Solomon was the youngest son (but see note on ver. 24). But secondly, the words indicate a belief in the continued existence of the child, and even that David would recognize and know him in the future world. Less than this would have given no comfort to the father for his loss. Now, it is true that we can find no clear dogmatic teaching in the early Scriptures upon the immortality of the soul. Job could give expression to no such hope in vii. 6—10, and the belief in a world to come would have solved the difficulties of himself and his friends, which really are left unsolved. Even in the Psalms there are words that border on despair (see vi. 5; xxx. 9; lxxxviii. 11; cxv. 17); nor had Hezekiah any such belief in continued existence as could solace him in the expectation of an early death (Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19). This hopelessness was not unnatural at a time when the doctrine had not been as yet clearly taught. On the other hand, in Ps. xvii. 15 and xvi. 9—11 we find proof that David did believe in his own immortality. For though the latter words have a second and higher meaning, yet the primary sense of Ps. xvi. 10 is that David's own soul (or self) would not always remain in Sheol, the abode of the departed, nor would he, Jehovah's anointed one, see such corruption as would end in annihilation.

Ver. 24.—**He called his name Solomon.** It is rashly assumed that Solomon's birth followed next in order after that of the deceased child. More probably there was a long interval of time, and son after son was born, with little increase of happiness to the family polluted by Amnon's sin and troubled by its miserable consequences. While we must not lay too great stress upon Solomon calling himself "a little child" (1 Kings iii. 7) after his accession, yet it forbids our believing that he was more than just grown up. It was the remarkable ability of Solomon, his goodness and precocious talent, which made him so great a comfort to his parents, and which received Jehovah's seal of approval in the name *Jedidiah*. This name would scarcely be given him until his good and great qualities were developing; and as it was a sort of indication that he was the chosen and elect son of David, and therefore the next king, we shall probably be right in believing that this second mission of Nathan, and this mark of Divine favour to David's youngest child, did not take place until after Absalom's death, possibly not until Solomon was ten or twelve years of age. The name *Solomon* means "the peaceful," and answers to the German *Friedrich*. It was given to the child in recognition that David's wars were now over, and that the era of quiet had begun, which was to be consecrated to the building of Jehovah's temple. It was the name given to the infant at his birth, and was a name of hope. Alas! this peace was to be rudely broken by the rebellion of the son whom David, in vain expectation and with all a father's pride, had named *Ab-salom*, "his father's peace."

Ver. 25.—**He sent.** Some commentators make David the subject of the sentence, and translate, "And he, David, sent in the hand of Nathan, and called," etc. They suppose that this means that Nathan was entrusted with Solomon's education; but "in the hand" is the ordinary Hebrew preposition, meaning "by," and the sense plainly is that God sent a message by Nathan. David had already called the child Solomon, and now Jehovah, some years afterwards, gives him an indication of his special favour by naming him Yedidyah. The word is formed from the same root as *David*, that is, "lovely," with the addition of the Divine name. As we have already pointed out, this was no slight matter, but the virtual selection of Solomon to be David's successor, and probably, therefore, was delayed until he had given indica- of his great intellectual gifts. His elder brothers would not be passed over without valid reasons.

Ver. 26.—**Joab . . . took the royal city.** As the siege of Rabbah would be conducted by the slow process of blockade, it might easily be prolonged into the second year, and so give ample space for David's sin and its punishment by the death of the child. But more probably the narrator, having commenced the history of David's sin, completes the story before returning to his account of the war. Thus the capture of Rabbah would occupy some of the interval between David's adultery and Nathan's visit of rebuke, and would lessen the difficulty, which we cannot help feeling, of David remaining for nine or ten months with the guilt of adultery and murder resting upon him, and no open act of repentance. Some short time, then, after Uriah's death, Joab captured "the city of waters." This is not a poetical name for Rabbah, but means

the "water-city," that is, the town upon the Jabbok, whence the supply of water was obtained. The citadel, which occupied a high rock on the north-western side, must, therefore, soon be starved into submission, and the whole of "the royal city," that is, of the metropolis of the Ammonites, be in Joab's power. He therefore urges David to come in person, both that the honour of the conquest may be his, and also because probably the blockading force had been reduced to as small a body of men as was safe, and the presence of a large army was necessary for completing the subjugation of the country, which would follow upon the capture of the capital.

Ver. 30.—**Their king**; Hebrew, *Malcam*. This is another mode of spelling Milcom, the god of the Ammonites, and is found also in Zeph. i. 5, and probably in Jer. xlix. 1, 3; Amos i. 15. Strictly, Milcom or Malcom is a proper name for the supreme deity, formed from the word *melec*, a king, or, as it was pronounced in other Semitic dialects, Moloch. Grammatically, *Malcam* also means "their king," and even so belongs to Milcom. For the crown weighed a hundred pounds, a ponderous mass, which no man could possibly bear, and, least of all, when making, as was the case with the Ammonite king, his last stand for his life. But after the capture of the city, it was lifted from the head of the idol, and placed formally upon David's head, and held there for a few moments, as a sign of victory and of rejoicing over the fall of the false god. There is no reason for supposing that there is any exaggeration in the weight, nor will the Hebrew allow us to understand the talent of gold as referring to its value.

Ver. 31.—**The people that were therein.** The cruel treatment described in this verse was inflicted, first of all, upon those who had defended Rabbah, now reduced to a small number by the long siege; but David next proceeded through all the cities, that is, the fortified towns of the Ammonites, inflicting similar barbarities. They were confined probably to the fighting men, and most of these would make their escape as soon as resistance became hopeless. The general population would, of course, scatter themselves in every direction, but the misery caused by such a breaking up of civil life, as well as by the cruel bloodshed, must have been terrible. Instead of "he put them in a saw," we find, in 1 Chron. xx. 3, "he sawed them with a saw." This reading differs from what we have here only in one letter, and is plainly right, as the translation, "under saws," "under harrows of iron," etc., found both in the Authorized and Revised Versions, is simply an expedient, rendered necessary by the corruption of the text. If we restore the passage by the help of the parallel place, it runs on thus: "He sawed with a saw, and with threshing-sledges of iron, and with cutting instruments of iron." What exactly the second were we do not know, as the word does not occur elsewhere. The Vulgate renders it "wains shod with iron," meaning, apparently, those driven over the corn for threshing purposes, and now driven over these unfortunate people. The barbarity is not more horrible than that of sawing prisoners asunder. **He made them pass through the brick-kiln.** Both the Septuagint and Vulgate have "brick-kiln," Hebrew, *malban*, which the Massorites have adopted, but the Hebrew text has *malchan*. No commentator has given any satisfactory explanation of what can be meant by making the Ammonites pass through a brick-kiln; but Kimchi gives a very probable interpretation of the word really found in the Hebrew, and which, not being intelligible, has been corrupted. For the Malchan was, he says, the place where the Ammonites made their children pass through the fire to Moloch. He thinks, therefore, that David put some of the people to death in this way. We cannot defend these cruelties, but they unhappily were the rule in Oriental warfare, and would have been inflicted on their enemies by the Ammonites. We have proof in 1 Sam. xi. 2 and Amos i. 13 that they were a barbarous race; but this did not justify barbarous retaliation.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—14.—The facts are: 1. God sends Nathan the prophet to David, who tells him a story of the greed of a wicked rich man, who, to satisfy his avarice, took away and slew the pet ewe lamb of a poor man. 2. David, accepting the story as a matter of fact, is very angry with this man, and swears that for his deed and lack of compassion he ought to die and restore fourfold. 3. Nathan thereupon reveals the parabolic character of his narrative, by saying unto David, "Thou art the *man!*" 4. He then proceeds to state (1) the goodness of God to him in anointing him king, in delivering him from Saul, in giving him the royal succession, and in guaranteeing all else that might be needed; (2) his despite to the commands of God—his murder of Uriah, and his taking

possession of Uriah's wife. 5. He also declares, by way of punishment, that war would arise in his own house; that the purity and safety of his domestic life would be invaded; and that the punishment of his secret sin would be open. 6. On David confessing his guilt, Nathan assures him that the Lord had so far put away his sin that he should not die, but that the child of his guilt should.

Nathan's parable. This remarkable parable is, perhaps, the most exquisite gem of the kind in the Old Testament. Its beauty and pathos are enhanced by the plain matter-of-fact way in which the historian narrates, in ch. xi., the fall of David and his subsequent crime. Apart from its specific purpose, it indicates to us the occasional functions of the prophets in those times as admonishers of kings and rulers, and consequently as representatives of the Divine element in the history of Israel. The great variety of teaching in this parable may be briefly indicated thus—

I. A DOUBLE LIFE. At least ten months had elapsed from the date of David's fall to the visit of Nathan. During that period many public and private acts had been performed by the king in the ordinary course of life, in addition to those referred to in ch. xi. 14—27. It was his policy to keep up a good appearance—to be in administration, in public worship, in regard for religious ordinances, and in general morality all that he had ever been. He passed still as the pious, just ruler and exemplary man. That was one life. But inwardly there was another. The conscience was dull, or, if it spoke plainly, was constantly being suppressed. The uncomfortableness of secret sin induced self-reproach and loss of self-respect. He was an instance of a man "holding the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. i. 18). This double life is the experience of every good man who falls into sin and seeks to cover it up. He knows too much to be really happy, but he is too enslaved by his sin to be truly godly. The outside is fair; within is desolation.

II. FELLOWSHIP IN SIN. David and Bathsheba shared in a fellowship of sin. They, most probably without words, communed with each other over their guilt, and so far strengthened the chains of iniquity. Two individuals in possession of a dreadful secret do not, dare not, speak about it. There is simply a common understanding and a mutual support in keeping up the appearance necessary to social reputation. It is a pitiable sight before God and holy angels! It is a case of the fallen, the defiled, the inwardly wretched, and the prospectively condemned, seeking to find comfort and strength in each other's sympathy. The channels of sympathetic feeling are filled by a polluted stream of affection and interest.

III. A LOST CHARM. It is well known that a pure disposition and a clear conscience lend a charm to personal life; much more does such deep and strong piety as once characterized the "man after God's own heart." If we, in reading the historic narrative of David's early years, and the psalms, in which his best thoughts are embodied, feel the spell of his spirit, we may be sure that those in daily converse with him recognized a charm of the most exalted kind. But all that was now gone, because the honesty and the purity from which it sprang were no more. In vain did he strive to maintain the form of godliness; in vain his careful discharge of official duties and kindly bearing towards his friends. The "secret of the Lord" was lost. The salt had lost its savour. To truly spiritual men he would not be as in former times. This loss of a spiritual charm always takes place when good men fall into sin and cover it up. The light of the spiritual eye is dim. The pure ring of the voice is gone. The "form of godliness" is left, but the "power" is no more.

IV. THE DIVINE RESERVE. At least ten months elapsed before Nathan was commissioned by God to speak to David. The lustful look, the secret deed, the scheme for concealment and for the death of Uriah, were allowed to pass and issue in seeming success without one act of a decidedly positive character, as far as we know, on the part of God either to smite with punishment or bring to penitence. The "workers of iniquity" flourished, and the innocent perished unavenged (Ps. xcii. 7; cf. xii. 5; Prov. i. 11—19). That conscience uttered its protest, and that the laws of mind as constituted by God worked misery from the first in the inner life of David, is no doubt true; but there was no open justice, no obvious interposition on behalf of the oppressed, no distinct and proportionate chastisement, no special call to repentance. Human nature took its course, and human society remained in relation to the sinner unchanged.

Yet God is not indifferent. He slumbereth not. Government does not relax its hold on each man. The explanation is that God is in no haste in what he does; he reserves his action for a while for reasons more complicate and far-reaching than we can trace. The very reserve only renders the judgment, when it comes, more impressive. Human nature is evidently favoured as a free power, which must have certain scope both for origination of evil, maturing of evil, and filling up its own measure of chastisement. There is a patience, a goodness, in the reserve which need to be studied (Rom. ii. 4—9; 1 Pet. iii. 20; 2 Pet. iii. 9. 15). This reserve attends many a modern sinner's cause.

V. THE DIVINE BEGINNING OF SALVATION. Had David been left to himself the probability is that the coils of iniquity would have been formed around him more and more as time advanced; for the law of habit here holds good. It is instructive to observe that the first step towards a change in his condition was on the Divine side. God sent his prophet Nathan, charged with a merciful purpose, though mercy was to be tempered with judgment. Certainly David might well say in days subsequent, "My salvation cometh from him" (Ps. lxii. 1, 7). Here we have an illustration of the great truth that God is the Author of our salvation. He seeks us. He comes to us in our low estate. This is true of mankind as a whole (John iii. 16, 17; 1 John iv. 9, 10), of each one brought from the ways of sin (1 John iv. 19), and of the backslider (Ps. xxiii. 3). It is all of grace. Our Saviour's earthly life of pleading and seeking was a visible and audible illustration of the outgoing of the heart of the Father towards the fallen.

VI. THE DEFENSIVE ATTITUDE OF IMPENITENCE. The elaborate simplicity of Nathan's parable, in order to reach the conscience and heart of David, suggest to us the fact of a certain defensive attitude of David's mind, which had to be broken down. It is a special weapon in a "holy war," designed to attack a peculiar line of defence. It is well known how men, when they have done a wrong, are on the *qui vive* lest the wrong should be detected and brought home to them; and the resources of reason, ingenuity, and cunning are employed to ward off any approach to the inner life. Any attempt to touch the springs of penitence or remorse, or to arouse the fears which attend conviction, is neutralized by some counter-move of thought or resolve. Hearers of the gospel know, if they would only testify honestly, how they too often fortify themselves against statements, arguments, and appeals. The failure of some ministers and teachers lies in their not knowing enough of human nature to direct their statements so as to meet the actual mental attitude of those who live in sin. A study of this subject is of extreme importance to all who seek to convince and to save men. There are various avenues to the conscience and heart. Some are so utterly closed and guarded that it is a waste of power to seek to penetrate through them. A fortress should be attacked in its weakest point, and only a very special survey can find out where it is. Nathan had reconnoitred the position, and assailed David along the best line.

VII. THE USE OF THE GOOD ELEMENT IN MAN. Nathan approached David in friendliness, recognizing him as a man generally mindful of his people, pitiful towards the poor and weak, and a lover of justice. He knew that there were still elements of good in the fallen saint. The great transgression had not obliterated all trace of the noble qualities of former days. Where these did not come in the way of the one selfish lust which had for the time gained dominion, they were not only cherished, but were at hand for expression when occasion required. In proportion as these could be strengthened and utilized, there would be hope of bringing them to bear, by a reflected light, on the one deed in which they had been suppressed. By a flank movement, and using a piece of history as the instrument, he hoped to turn the whole force of David's better qualities on the cherished secret sin. It was an instance of a wise setting of one part of a man's nature against another part, so that, by a sort of moral dynamic, the worse should be forced out. In dealing with men we ought to avail ourselves of their good qualities and bring them to bear on the removal of the bad. When Christ dealt with publicans and sinners he did not make a direct attack on their sins. There was a something in them which he made the ground of appeal. In the vilest sinner there is some human love, or kindliness, or sense of right. Who is wise to *win* souls? What are the methods, according to varying temperaments, education, habits, and indulgences?

VIII. GOD'S JUDGMENT FORESTALLED BY CONSCIENCE. History is a mental reflector. In Nathan's story, which was not a parable to David when he heard it, David saw a sin

and a judgment. He was true to his better qualities when he denounced the sin and pronounced sentence of death. The story became to David a parable the moment the prophet said to him, "Thou art the *man!*" The whole figures then become specific, and he was the one most conspicuous against whom the judgment was pronounced. The psychological and moral changes involved in this we cannot now deal with; the point is that, when David's aroused righteous indignation pronounced judgment on the evil man, the human conscience really forestalled the judgment of God on David's sin by declaring its deserts. God does not, in providence or on the day of judgment, declare anything really new to the impenitent sinner. Conscience some time or other has virtually given the sentence of condemnation. Those who worked themselves up to a state of self-delusion (Matt. vii. 22, 23) knew a time when the conscience witnessed against the formalities which issued in its being seared (Eph. iv. 19; 1 Tim. iv. 2). It is this assent of conscience which will render the sense of injustice impossible in the future judgments God may see fit to bring on those who "hold the truth in unrighteousness."

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. We should take warning from the instances in the Bible, and not presume on God's silence, or think that, because we are left to pursue our own courses, it will always be so. 2. There are always in existence agents or agencies by which in due time sin will be rebuked and exposed either in this life or in the life to come (Matt. x. 26; 2 Cor. v. 10). 3. In dealing with the lapsed we should not act on the same rule in all cases, but deal with each according to his peculiar character. 4. It will repay parents, teachers, and evangelists to study human nature and the records of biography and sacred history to find out the best methods of reaching the conscience of the impenitent. 5. We should be ready, as was Nathan, to carry through the most painful duties when God calls us in his providence to them.

The convicted sinner. The fitness of the parable is revealed in its sequel. Nathan, laying aside the character of a friendly visitor relating a story of wrong, now assumes the functions of the prophet of God, and turns the whole light and force of David's just indignation in upon himself, and, with an incisiveness most irresistible, brings an accusation of guilt without naming the actual deed done; states the aggravating circumstances arising out of the exceeding goodness of God in the past; declares the retribution about to come; and, on witnessing the true penitence of the sinner, announces the fact of forgiveness, but qualifies the announcement by foretelling an event of blended justice and mercy. The commission of sin is unhappily common enough, and also, we may thankfully admit, the conviction of sinners is an event of frequent occurrence. Few sins exhibit the peculiar aggravations of this one of David, and few convictions are more sudden and thorough than his; but as there are common qualities in all sins and true convictions of sin, we may regard this case of David's as setting forth features in human experience and Divine procedure universally true.

I. THE FACT OF SIN IS BROUGHT HOME TO THE CONSCIENCE. David all along knew of the existence of the sin, but had conducted himself as though it were not. In general terms he would doubtless speak of sin as an evil of deepest dye, and desire its banishment from mankind. Such sentiments were at the base of his deep interest in Nathan's story, and gave rise to the outburst of indignation. Sin was evil, the sinner ought to be punished, the doer of this deed must come under the ban of law. All this was quite correct. It was orthodoxy. The friendly visitor could not but admit its force. But it was just here, when David was dealing with generalities, and was eager to see general principles applied to a particular case, that Nathan brought him away from the general to the particular, from others to himself. "Thou art the *man!*" This was a straight charge. Nathan held a twofold position—he was a man in Israel, a subject and neighbour, a pious friend of David's; he was also a prophet, a representative of God, and in that capacity a superior to David. When, then, the friendly visitor said, with an unrecordable tone and gesture, "Thou art the *man!*" it was evident to David (1) that his deed, long kept secret, was known to his most influential and incorruptible subject and friend; and (2) that God was speaking straight to his conscience. Even so far as related to Nathan as a good man in Israel, the revelation of his acquaintance with the deed was startling and astounding; but the most potent element in the utterance was the direct charge of God. A sinner cannot look on the Holy One—he

dare not. The conscience knows the awful voice of God, and, when that voice speaks straight to it, all thought of men and opinions vanishes, and the soul in its solemn individuality feels itself in the actual presence of the Eternal. In true conviction the man "comes to himself." The deed of evil is brought home. In a light not of earth, self is seen to be undone, because the sin, hitherto professedly not a reality, is now forced on self as its own offspring.

II. THE AGGRAVATION OF SIN IS SET FORTH. As soon as the charge is brought home, and before the paralyzed man can speak, the prophet, in the name of God, with swift words reminds him of his privileges and the manifold blessings and honours God had showered on him or was ready to grant if needed. He was a chosen servant of the Eternal, called to perform a part in the working out of a great future for the world; he had filled a position of honour and influence; he had been charged with high and holy duties; he had been blessed with plenty, and more than ordinary provision for the necessary cravings of nature (vers. 7, 8). Yet, "Thou art the *man!*" None can doubt that here was sin of the most aggravated character. No sin is excusable or free from Divine condemnation; otherwise it were not *sin*, but weakness or fault. But some sins are worthy of being punished with "many stripes" because of being committed under special circumstances, *e.g.* the possession of religious light and feeling; the occupation of a position of power, and the being recipient of manifold tokens of Divine care and love. But be the privileges many or few, when God brings home the guilt to the conscience, the sin is revealed in the light of past mercies. The swift review of David's advantages by Nathan finds its analogue in the swift floating before the mind of the circumstances of one's position which render the sin so utterly inexcusable. Men see in a few moments the reasons for their utter shame and self-abasement. This is a feature in all true conviction, and tends to the proper prostration of the soul before God. Saul of Tarsus knew this. It is an unspeakable mercy that God does set our sins in the light of his great goodness.

III. THE HEART IS PROBED TO REVEAL THE CAUSE OF SIN. "*Wherefore* hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord?" (ver. 9). No sooner did the light flash on the conscience to set forth the aggravated character of the sin, than with unrelenting incisiveness the "wherefore" followed to probe those depths of the heart from whence the evil sprang. The question really contains an inquiry and a statement. Why? "Thou didst *despise*." The eye of the sinner is turned in upon himself, to search out and behold those vile feelings and false principles out of which issued the preference of self-will over the holy will of God, which had been so clearly expressed in the Law of the Lord and in the special intimations of Providence. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" The time of conviction is a time of probing and searching. It is well for men under conviction to face the real facts, and get at the causes that lie out of sight. There must be some dreadfully subtle evils lurking within to induce a man to "despise" the august majesty of God's will by setting it aside. Was it not in reference to this probing, and probably in reference to this very deed, that the psalmist said, "Search me, O God" (Ps. cxxxix. 23; cf. li. 5, 6, 10)?

IV. THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN IS BROUGHT TO MIND. The prophet ceases not; without giving the convicted man time to speak, he passes on to tell of the retribution that is sure to come by the will of God. The man of whom Nathan once spoke such good things (ch. vii. 12—17) is now informed of coming trouble in life; that this trouble will be the same in kind with that of his sin—murder and adultery; that it will not be secret, as was his, in performance, but open, to his disgrace; that it will arise out of his own house, consequent in a measure on the mischief wrought by his own sin on his domestic life. Had David not fallen, he would have been a different man, and consequently his private influence at home among his children would have been more holy and powerful; his relation to his kingdom would have been more satisfactory, and therefore moral and political circumstances would probably arise of so important a character as to have prevented the creation of the conditions out of which the troubles now recorded in his later history arose. He was to reap according to his sowing. In the conviction of sin, the recognition of personal guilt is the chief element, as we have seen (division I.); but just as here the messenger revealed the aggravation of the guilt, probed the heart for causes, and referred to coming retribution, so in the simple processes of mind attending true conviction there is an anticipation of punishment—an assurance

that evil is coming on the soul as a consequence of sin done. Sin is transgression of law; law involves authority to vindicate its righteousness; and, as soon as the conviction of sin is real, the logic of conscience points to coming judgment. Whether it be a temporal judgment, as in Old Testament references, or eternal, as in New Testament references, the experience is virtually the same.

V. THE CONFESSION OF GUILT IS ABSOLUTE. The guilty king sat in silence till the prophet had delivered his charge. The time was brief, but the power accompanying the words was Divine. Swifter than lightning the spell of hypocritical concealment was broken. The bonds in which the unholy passion had long held the soul were snapped asunder. The eye of conscience, turning in upon self, gave fresh life to the old suppressed loyalty to righteousness and God, and, as a consequence, the confession came, "I have sinned against the Lord." The question as to whether the historian here simply gives a summary of what passed, and intended to include also the fifty-first psalm, or whether literally this is all that was said and done, does not affect our purpose. There is here a *recognition* prompt, unqualified, *of sin*, not as a fault, a weakness, but of *sin* as known by conscience and stamped with the curse of God and man. It is also a recognition of sin as *against God*, not as a wrong done to Uriah, Bathsheba, or Israel, or his own family. The conscience is not indifferent to the injuries done to men, but when fully aroused, and face to face with *sin* as sin, it seems to see only God. Hence the expression in Ps. li. 4. Again, there is *pain and shame*, not because of what men may say or do, not because personal influence will now be weakened, but because it is *sin*. It is the *sin* which troubles and appals the truly convicted soul. Moreover, there is *abstention* from all *claim to consideration*; no excuse, no palliation. The convicted one can only say, "I have sinned." There is obviously an inward bowing of the spirit before the holy God; an absolute surrender as undone, condemned, helpless, lost. The very brevity of the confession bespeaks the depth of penitential woe. Contrast the wordy confession (1 Sam. xv. 17—25; cf. Luke xv. 18, 19; xviii. 13).

VI. FORGIVENESS IS FREE, FULL, BUT QUALIFIED. How long Nathan stood by the prostrate silent king, and whether this confession was the literal whole or not, we do not know; but he saw enough to enable him to say in the name of God, "The Lord hath put away thy sin"—a statement clear and unreserved, intended to go home to the smitten heart. The forgiveness of sin has to do with a personal relation of God to man. It is the restoration of the personal relation of favour and fellowship which had been interrupted by sin. It is conditional on true repentance, the objective ground being the sacrificial death of Christ—under the Old Testament dispensation by anticipation (Rom. iii. 25), and under the New by retrospective reference. God is the sole Judge of the reality of repentance. He looketh at the heart. He knew that David's conviction had issued in the state of mind known as true repentance, and foreseeing this before it occurred, he commissioned the prophet to "declare and pronounce" to David, "being penitent," the remission of his sin. "Thy sins are forgiven thee!" Blessed words! How often brought to penitents since our Lord uttered them! But the pardon left untouched the natural consequences of sin referred to in vers. 19, 20, because a personal relation does not alter the course of the forces which a man sets in motion on earth by his sin. Also, the child born must die, not to its injury, but gain, yet in judgment, so that the father should not find comfort in the fruit of his sin, and in mercy, lest there should be a living memorial of his guilt and shame to which men might point and further blaspheme the Name of the Lord. The same holds good of our forgiveness; it is free, full, but qualified by the continuance of some ill consequences which chastise us all our days. The sinner never entirely gets rid of all the earthly effects of his sin while on earth; they work in his flow of thought and feeling, and often in the checks on his influence, and possibly on the character and health of others. The full redemption comes with the glorified body and the new heavens and earth.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. The first thing to be sought in men in order to their salvation is a due recognition of themselves as sinners in the sight of God. A general recognition of the evil of sin as distinct from consciousness of personal guilt may really be a cover for unpardoned sin. 2. The tendency and drift of God's messages to men living in sin is to bring them to a right mind in reference to their personal position in his sight, as a preliminary to their seeking forgiveness. 3. Much will be found to depend, in respect to religious views and action, on the apprehension men have of what sin really is and

their own guilt. A prepared state of mind is necessary to get good out of gospel statements. 4. The Christian religion especially lays stress on intense individuality in our relationships to God and to good and evil, and aims to bring us to a true self-knowledge. 5. It is an astonishing illustration of the tremendous power of our lower tendencies that they may even gain ascendency over men of most exalted privileges and whose very position would suggest superiority to them. 6. It behoves Christian people living in the enjoyment of many advantages to consider well their conduct in comparison with that of others less favoured. 7. The essence of sin abides in all times, though the form may vary; for as Adam preferred the suggestion of the evil one and so despised the word of the Lord, so did David; and on this method did Satan seek to win over Christ in the wilderness. 8. It is of extreme importance to remember that we may carry about with us deep-laid and subtle tendencies which may assert their power in an unguarded hour; and hence we should often probe our heart, and search and see by the help of God whether there be any evil way within us. 9. It should operate as a deterrent to know that our sins will entail unavoidable social and physical troubles as long as life lasts. 10. We are authorized in speaking to the truly penitent of the free and full forgiveness which God has in store for them, and which through his abounding grace they may have at once. 11. In the fuller sense of the words it may be declared to the penitent that they shall not die (John iii. 16). 12. The evil deeds of professors are a stumbling-block to other men, and give occasion to them to blaspheme, and as this must be a most bitter element in the life of the restored backslider, so it is a warning to all Christians to take heed lest they fall, and so bring occasion for reproach on the Name which is above every name.

Vers. 15—31.—The facts are: 1. The child born to David becoming very sick, he entreats God for its life by prayer and fasting. 2. He persists in refusing the consolations which the elders of his household offer him. 3. The child dying on the seventh day, and David observing the whisperings of his servants, at once ascertains by direct inquiry the certainty of it. 4. His servants noticing that, on ascertaining the fact of the child's death, he lays aside the tokens of grief and resumes his wonted manner, are amazed at his conduct. 5. Whereupon he justifies his conduct, and intimates his expectation of some day going to the child. 6. Bathsheba is comforted by David, and bears to him another son, Solomon. 7. Joab, carrying on war against Rabbah of the Ammonites, and being about to bring the war to a conclusion, urges on David that he should come and enjoy the honour of taking the city. 8. David, complying with this request, takes possession of Rabbah, and acquires the king's crown with much spoil. 9. He completes his conquest of the Ammonites by causing some of them to endure great sufferings.

Providence and natural affection. The mercy of God to David was immediate, and it continued throughout his life; the judgment with which it was tempered was chiefly to come in days hence, but it began in the severe sickness of Bathsheba's child. It is not an unusual thing for a father to have to face the loss of an infant; in such cases natural affection will manifest itself in unmistakable forms. The extraordinary way in which David's feelings were excited by the apprehended death of this child is to be accounted for by reasons springing out of the peculiar circumstances of his position. These will appear as we proceed to consider the struggle between natural affection and the order of Providence.

I. THERE IS A CERTAIN REASONABLENESS IN THE PLEADING OF NATURAL AFFECTION AGAINST WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE ORDINATION OF GOD. The declaration of the prophet (ver. 14), that the child should die, was accepted by David as an ordination of God, and the severe sickness which came on soon after Nathan's departure was interpreted by the king as the first stage in the execution of it. But David was not conscious of a rebellious spirit in the exhibition of such distress, and in such earnest entreaty that the intended cause of providential judgment might be averted. Human affection is as much a part of the order of Nature as is the law of gravity, and its spontaneous action is as natural as is the falling of a weight to the earth. Affection is nothing if it does not feel. There is no law requiring it to be annihilated, if that were possible, in presence of the inevitable. To the pious Hebrew all changes in

nature were brought about by God; they were the outcome of his will, as surely as would be the death of this child according to the word of the prophet. Divine ordinations were silent and spoken. Yet the silent ordinations in daily providence were modified by prayer and to meet new conditions; and why, then, might not this spoken one be modified at the entreaty of an agonized parent? As a father, he could not help thinking of this infant as a severe sufferer in being deprived of the blessing of life through no fault of its own. If spared, the child might be a perpetual memorial of befitting sorrow and shame, and so would help to keep him lowly and penitent. Nor could he but feel for the poor woman cruelly sinned against, and whose grief would be consequent on her husband's sin. Moreover, precedents were not wanting in the case of Abraham (Gen. xviii. 20—33) and of Moses (Exod. xxxii. 30—35), in which men pleaded against what seemed to be inevitable. Subsequent to David's time, we know that men were permitted to pray against the apparently inevitable (Joel ii. 12—14). Our Saviour gave utterance to human sensibility when he prayed that, if possible, the cup might pass from him. God has never expressed displeasure at the utterance of the sorrows which spring from natural affection, for feelings often struggle thus with the course of providence. Stoicism has no place in Christianity. The physical order is subordinate to the moral.

II. INTENSE FEELING IS REASONABLE WHERE OUR SINS HAVE TO DO WITH THE ANTICIPATED DISASTER. The intensity of David's anguish arose, not from the fact that he was a father, but from the knowledge he had that the providence that was bringing death to his child was connected with his own sin. That another should suffer for his sin, and this other a little child, was indeed a bitter reason for pleading with God. Although the course of providence, which connects the suffering of offspring with the sins of parents, is in the widest moral bearings of the fact, both just and merciful, yet it is not always seen to be so. Nevertheless, the great anguish of the evil-doer on that account is not a protest so much as a lament over his own sin, and a prayer that, if possible, this organic issue of sin may, by some intervention, be prevented or modified. The educational value of that feeling on the life of a repentant sinner is of great worth in itself, and really leads to the formation of a character that shall, in the order of providence, do much to lessen the evils that otherwise would arise.

III. THE RESORT OF NATURAL AFFECTION WHEN STRUGGLING AGAINST THE ORDER OF PROVIDENCE IS TO GOD. A great change had recently come over David. The alienation of the backsliding heart was gone. As of old, so he now brings his sorrows and troubles to his God. The overwhelmed heart flies to the Rock that is high. He sits not with the scornful, mocking at the ways of Providence, and seeing evil where only there is mysterious judgment. The best and tenderest feelings of human nature, where sanctified by the spirit of piety, turn instinctively to God for help, and they find prayer as the form in which their yearnings are expressed. Some men fancy that they only see and feel the apparent severities of the providential order, and that sullen vexation and displeasure are the only appropriate conditions of mind in relation to it. Christians see and feel quite as much, but their bruised spirit finds refuge in him who ordains all in justice and mercy, and implores him, so far as may be wise and good, to let the penitent, entreating heart count for something among the elements which determine the ultimate issues.

IV. WHEN THE COURSE OF PROVIDENCE IS FOUND TO BE UNALTERABLE, NATURAL AFFECTION IS SUBORDINATED TO THE HIGHER PRINCIPLE OF ACQUIESCENCE IN THE WILL OF GOD. David was right in feeling as he did, in expressing his feeling in earnest prayer, in waiting as long as there was hope of reversal of the sentence. He acted as a father, as a husband, as a penitent. But when once the human desire and human view of wisdom and kindness were proved, by accomplished fact, not to be in accord with Divine wisdom, then, as became a trustful, restored child of God, David ceased to plead and to be in anguish. "Not my will, but thine be done!" was the spirit of his action. It was his duty and privilege now to rest in the Lord, and believe that he will bring to pass the kindest and wisest issue. The death of the child is accepted as the best thing, and the evils once supposed to issue from the event are now believed to be qualified by a love which maketh all things work together for good. It is the sign of an enlightened mind when a man can thus rise from his griefs, and conform his mental and moral and social life to the unalterable will of God. It takes

time for a good man to recover from the natural, and, therefore, reasonable, outflow of his feelings; but when he does recover, he retains all the sanctity and softening influence of his anguish in combination with a calm spirit, concerned now in ministering to the consolation of others (ver. 24), and cheered by the hope of a time when the breaches caused by sin will be healed (ver. 23).

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. It becomes us to regard all death in our homes as connected with sin, and we should always give due weight to its moral causes in our consideration of the course of providence. 2. There may exist high moral reasons why intense earnestness in prayer is not always successful; and yet it may be true that God does answer fervent prayer. 3. Men not familiar with the secret life of a Christian are not in a position to understand his conduct on special occasions, just as David's servants could not understand his conduct in relation to the death of the child. 4. We should avail ourselves of such light concerning the future as may be vouchsafed, in order to obtain consolation amidst the bereavements of life (ver. 23). 5. The doctrine of recognition in heaven is certainly in accord with sanctified instincts, and may be held as variously hinted at in Scripture (ver. 23; cf. Matt. xvii. 3, 4; 1 Thess. ii. 19).

Tokens of restoration. In vers. 23, 24 we have two statements which incidentally reveal the reality and completeness of the restoration of the fallen king to the favour and care of God. (1) The name (Solomon) given by himself, probably at circumcision, to his son; (2) the name (Jedidiah) which the prophet was instructed to give to the son, not as a substitute, but as a supplement. The one indicated David's sense of *peace* with God and in himself, the other God's abiding favour. Here, then, we may observe—

I. THAT RESTORATION TO GOD AFTER A FALL IS A REALITY. It is not a state rendered problematical by the observance of conditions extending over a long period. David *was* at peace with God, and God did regard him with unqualified favour. Old things had passed away—the displeasure of God, the fear and apprehension of the man; the relation of complacent delight and tender care on the one side, and filial love and trust on the other, was now complete. It is important to keep this truth clear. It is bound up with the great doctrine of justification. God once accepting and forgiving a sinner becomes and remains to him a gracious God, forgetting all the past and cherishing only love and tender interest. It is a misreading of the gospel, and implies an ignorance of the most blessed Christian experience to imagine that a really forgiven one is kept in suspense and dread, or that God is holding back the fulness of his favour till we have repented a little more, or more fully perfected our general life. We are accepted in Christ. When he "restoreth" our "soul" (Ps. xxiii. 3), it is actual, not possible, germinal restoration.

II. THAT THE TOKENS OF RESTORATION VARY ACCORDING TO CIRCUMSTANCES. The inward token in David's case was the assured peace of a conscience purged by the grace of God (Ps. li. 7—10, 12), which came in answer to his penitential cry. The outward token was the life of another child, the peaceful order of the kingdom, and especially this welcome message of the prophet (ver. 25). The reality of restoration was known as soon as the almighty word of pardon was spoken, the confirmatory signs of it—to strengthen the heart and ward off subtle temptations of the evil one—came in process of time. No doubt fallen Peter found pardon during the dark night of his penitence; but the outward token, which was also an instruction to the other disciples not to distrust and shun him, came in the gracious message of the angel of the Lord, "Tell his disciples, *and Peter*" (Mark xvi. 7), and again in the exhortation and encouragement given in the presence of those who might otherwise have distrusted him, "Feed my sheep" (John xxi. 15—17). The ordinary sign of full restoration is in the "witness of the Spirit" (Rom. viii. 14—16), and the outward care and blessing vouchsafed to our work of faith and labour of love (John xv. 7, 8). God will be sure to give his people some "token for good" (Ps. lxxxvi. 17).

III. THAT SIGNS OF GOD'S FAVOUR SHOULD BE GIVEN IS AN ILLUSTRATION OF HIS WONDERFUL CONSIDERATION FOR HIS PEOPLE. There is something truly wonderful in this grace shown to David. Not only is he forgiven and treated in all things spiritual as though he had not sinned; not only permitted to reign over Israel, and enter into close, though it may be very subdued, fellowship with God; but God goes, as it were, out of the ordinary course of providence, and sends a messenger to give him, in this other

name for his child, a special sign of full restoration. Thus the occasional doubts suggested by the evil one, the possible distrust of the prophet in Israel and those under him, and the sneers of the profane, are all anticipated by the love that slumbers not and that cares most tenderly and minutely for all the need of the reconciled ones. "How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God!" (Ps. xxxvi. 7); "He is rich in mercy, and plenteous in redemption."

Rabbah's lesson to mankind. The fall of David occurred while the war was going on under Joab (ch. xi. 1, 7, 25). It is probable that, as the historian began to tell the story of the fall, he thought well to finish it, with the account of the restoration, before he took up again the account of the campaign being carried on against the Ammonites. We shall assume, therefore, that the fall of Rabbah referred to in vers. 26—31 took place in the interval between the sin of David and the birth of Solomon (ver. 24). The narrative is inserted here doubtless with the primary design of completing the history of David's wars, and thus keeping up the continuity of his exploits. But as all Scripture is written for our learning, we may notice a few incidental lessons suggested by the capture of the city of Rabbah.

I. A GOOD MAN'S FALL INTO SIN UNFITS HIM FOR MANY OF THE DUTIES OF HIS DAILY LIFE. Joab was not only left to carry on the war alone, but he even felt it to be right (ver. 28) to stir up the king that he might come and take part, and so share in the honour about to be won. The secret of this most probably lay in the fact that, during and after David's entanglement with Bathsheba and crime against Uriah, he was not in a mind to enter upon the perils of war. A woman's spell was on him; his conscience was secretly troubled; he who feared not the lion or the giant now fears lest, if he go to the war, he should be slain. Therefore he tarries in Jerusalem (ch. xi. 1—25). His sins rendered him incompetent to do what otherwise he would have done, and it required even an urgent request from his general, coupled with an assurance that the city was virtually captured already (vers. 27—29), to induce him to move. There are sins which sometimes drive men to desperate deeds and perilous places, and give apparently more zest to life; but in the case of good men, a known habit of sin impairs their energy in life; it creates an abiding fear; it paralyzes certain incumbent moral actions; it keeps from entering on work which otherwise would be cheerfully undertaken; it makes him less a man.

II. THOSE WHO DO DELIBERATE DEEDS OF WRONG TO OTHERS COURT AN INFLICTION ON THEMSELVES OF SIMILAR EVILS. This account of the infliction of tortures on the Ammonites (ver. 31) is the first instance in Hebrew history of such a deed, and it seems strange that David should have ordered it. But without justifying the retaliation, the point here to be noted is that the Ammonites laid themselves open to such treatment by their own actions. They had proposed barbarous conditions of servitude to men of Israel in the time of trouble (1 Sam. xi. 1, 2), and they had cruelly insulted David's ambassadors (ch. x. 1—6). It is also probable that in this protracted war they may have carried out these barbarous tendencies towards prisoners taken in war. They thus, by deeds of cruelty, sought for deeds of cruelty to themselves in their day of defeat. There is doubtless a principle of retaliation in kind recognizable in the law of nature. As a man soweth so he reapeth. What they do to others they so far justify others to do to them, that they have set an example and are incapable of protest. In some guarded form this principle enters into human law, national and international. In the Mosaic code it received specific illustration (Exod. xxi. 22—25). Whether David was right or wrong, the Ammonites courted torture by evil deeds, as men now court evil from their imperfect fellow-men by evil deeds to them. The harsh employer courts distrust and injury from the *employés*. Tyrannical rulers court plots, conspiracies, and possibly assassinations, from oppressed subjects.

III. THERE ARE PROPHETIC SYMBOLS OF HONOUR FALLING ON THE RIGHT HEAD. It was, perhaps, on the part of Joab and the army, a mere feat of military triumph to place the heavy crown of the Ammonite god (for so we take it to be) on the head of David; but it was suggestive at the time to all spectators of the honours that ought to come, and in course of years were coming, on One who was the Anointed of the Lord. And to us it seems to suggest the ultimate passing of all highest honours, long usurped, to him whose right it is to reign, and who is not only said to be worthy of all honours

(Rev. iv. 11; v. 12, 13), but is so gradually acquiring them that he at last shall be crowned with many crowns (Heb. ii. 9; Rev. iv. 10; xix. 12). In the triumph of every good man over evil, we see a symbolic intimation of the final triumph of the Son of man over all enemies (1 Cor. xv. 25). In the distinction awarded to any of Christ's servants, who are really his representatives in the world, because of the destruction of some monstrous evil, we have a symbolic representation of the glory and honour that will come on the head of the great Deliverer, when to him every knee shall bow, and the last enemy shall have been destroyed. Faith can see coming victories in passing events.

IV. THE EDUCATION OF THE CONSCIENCE IN HUMAN RELATIONS IS VERY SLOW. The principle of retaliation is in all legal punishments (division I.), but the application of the principle is a matter of judgment, and the judgment depends on the culture of the conscience. There are co-ordinate powers in human nature. The feeling of benevolence has a place as truly as a sense of justice. It depends on the degree in which conscience is cultivated as to whether the rigid carrying out of what justice may seem to demand, *i.e.* the spirit of retaliation in the name of love, not of self, should be tempered by kindly consideration, and to what extent. Probably David at this time was in the degenerate mood of mind brought on by his fall, and therefore restive and harsh, as men are when the heart is corroded by guilt. But at all events, in those times there was not that fine sense of delicacy in regard to human suffering as now. The same mental and moral condition prevailed during the ages of persecution for religion. Romanists and Protestants did once what now their descendants would be shocked at. It is a defective education of conscience which enables men to live in careless ease and luxury while thousands are lacking food. Christ only was perfect Man. If all were like him, every consideration would be paid to human feeling in the administration of justice, and in the private relations of life.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

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and the mind of the wrong-doer is duly prepared. It is not probable that Nathan came immediately after he first heard of David's transgression. "His task was not to gain a confession, but only to facilitate it. He was appointed by God to await the time of the internal crisis of David" (Hengstenberg). 2. When the offender is *alone* (Matt. xviii. 15), and is likely to pay greater heed to it and to be less influenced by what others think. Sometimes, however, sinners must be "rebuked before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim. v. 20). 3. In a *manner* adapted to produce the most salutary effect; with harmless wisdom (Matt. x. 16) and holy and beneficent "guile" (2 Cor. xii. 16) displayed in; (1) A respectful, courteous, and conciliatory bearing. To begin with rude reproaches is to ensure failure. (2) An ingenious invention of a "form of speech" (ch. xiv. 20) and illustration suitable to the case. (3) A generous recognition of the better qualities in men. "David's goodness is not denied because of his sin, nor is David's sin denied because of his goodness." (4) A clear statement of the truth, avoiding exaggeration and everything that may hinder its illuminating force. (5) A strong appeal to the conscience, so as to quicken its action as a witness and judge. (6) A dexterous application of admitted principles and expressed judgments and emotions. (7) An effectual removal of the mists of self-deception, so as to enable the evil-doer to see his actual character and conduct, and constrain him to reprove and condemn himself. The wisdom of the prophet in fulfilling his mission to the king was "inimitably admirable." "Observing that this direct road (the recommendation of self-knowledge) which led to it (the reformation of mankind) was guarded on all sides by self-love, and consequently very difficult to open access, public instructors soon found out that a different and more artful course was requisite. As they had not strength to remove this flattering passion which stood in their way and blocked up the passages to the heart, they endeavoured by stratagem to get beyond it, and, by a skilful address, if possible to deceive it. This gave rise to the only manner of conveying their instructions in parables, fables, and such sort of indirect applications; which, though they could not conquer this principle of self-love, yet often laid it asleep, or at least overreached it for a few moments, till a just judgment could be procured. The Prophet Nathan seems to have been a great master in this art of address" (Laurence Sterne).

III. HIS HOLY COURAGE. His mission was as perilous as it was painful; and might, if it failed, have cost him his life. But he feared not "the wrath of the king" (Prov. xvi. 14; xix. 12; Heb. xi. 27). Such moral courage as he exhibited: 1. Is inspired by *faith in God*, whose face it beholds, and on whose might it relies. 2. Consists in the *fearless fulfilment of duty*, whatever consequences it may involve—the loss of friendship or other earthly good; the endurance of bonds, suffering, and death. "None of these things move me," etc. (Acts xx. 24). 3. Appears in simple, bold, direct, and unreserved *utterance* of God's Word (Ezek. xxxiii. 7). At the proper moment the prophet changed his style of address; gave it a particular application, "the very life of doctrine;" and, in the name of the supreme King and Judge, arraigned the offender, declared his guilt, and pronounced his sentence. "His example is especially to be noted by all whose office is to 'rebuke with all authority'" ('Speaker's Commentary').

IV. HIS BENEVOLENT AIM. He came not only to testify against sin, to maintain the authority of the Law, etc.; but also (in connection therewith) to benefit the sinner, by: 1. Leading him to repentance. 2. Assuring him of forgiveness. 3. Restoring him to righteousness, peace, and joy (ver. 13; Ps. li. 12). "Reproofs of instruction are the way of life" (Prov. vi. 23; xiii. 18; xvii. 10). Sympathy with the holy love of God toward sinners is an essential qualification of a faithful reprover of sin; and as it is God's mercy that employs agents and means for their restoration, so it is his grace alone that makes them effectual (John xvi. 8).

"And so wide arms
Hath goodness infinite, that it receives
All who turn to it."

(Dante.)

D.

VERS. 1—4.—(THE KING'S PALACE.) *The parable of the rich oppressor; or, the poor man's lamb.* 1. This is the first and almost the only *parable* contained in the Old Testa-

ment. There is one instance of a *fable* of earlier date (Judg. ix. 8—15). The former belongs to a higher order of teaching than the latter (Smith's 'Dict. of the Bible,' art. "Fable;" Trench, 'Notes on the Parables'); and it was employed most perfectly by the great Teacher. Compare his parables of the unmerciful servant, the rich fool, the rich man and Lazarus. 2. It was in part an *acted* parable (like ch. xiv. 5—7; 1 Kings xx. 35—43); and was at first regarded by the king as the simple, literal statement of a case in which one of his subjects, a poor man, had suffered wrong at the hands of another, a rich man; and with reference to which the prophet appeared as an advocate on behalf of the former against the latter, seeking justice and judgment. "Nathan, it is likely, used to come to him on such errands, which made this the less suspected. It becomes those who have interest in princes and free access to them to intercede for those that are wronged, that they may have right done them" (Matthew Henry). 3. Its moral and spiritual *aim* (which is always the chief thing to be considered in the interpretation of a parable) was to set forth *the guilt of a rich oppressor*, and thereby to awaken the general sense of outraged justice in the king concerning his own conduct. 4. "It is one of those little gems of Divinity that are scattered so plentifully through the sacred Scriptures, that sparkle with a lustre, pure and brilliant as the light of heaven, and attest the sacred origin of the wonderful book that contains them" (Blaikie). Consider the guilt of this rich man in the light of—

I. His POSITION compared with that of the poor man, and his relation to him. "There were two men in one city," etc. (vers. 1—3). 1. He had much possessions, "exceeding many flocks and herds." Providence had been very kind to him. He had abundance for personal gratification and princely hospitality and liberality. But the poor man had nothing "save one little ewe lamb," which he valued all the more on that account, and reared amidst his family with the utmost care and tenderness. 2. He had great power, which he might use for good or evil; in fulfilment of the Law or in frustration of it; to protect and benefit "the poor and needy" or to oppress and rob them. 3. He dwelt in the same city with the poor man, and was well acquainted with his circumstances. He knew the story of the little lamb. The picture is exquisitely drawn by one who was familiar with many such scenes in humble life, and adapted to excite sympathy and pity. The obligations of the rich man toward his "neighbour" are manifest; and they shadow forth the greater obligations of others in a still higher position (vers. 7, 8). Although the king had well-nigh absolute power over the property and lives of his subjects, it belonged to the true idea of his office to "reign, command, and punish, as though it were not he that reigned, commanded, and punished, but the One to whom he never ceases to be responsible, and as though he might himself be in the position of any other member of the community and the latter in his own" (Ewald, 'Antiquities').

II. His DISPOSITION. "And there came a traveller," etc. (ver. 4). "The Jewish doctors say it represents that which they call 'the evil disposition,' or desire that is in us, which must be diligently watched and observed when we feel its motions. 'In the beginning it is but a traveller, but in time it becomes a guest, and in conclusion is the master of the house'" (Patrick). This is pressing the imagery of the parable too far. Nevertheless, "the sin is traced to its root, viz. insatiable *covetousness;* this hidden background of all sins" (Keil); sinful, selfish, inordinate *desire* (ch. xi. 1—5). It is a "root of bitterness." And in the case supposed what evils it involved! 1. Discontentment with a man's own possessions, notwithstanding their abundance. "Nature is content with little, grace with less, sin with nothing." 2. Ingratitude toward the Giver of them. 3. Envy of another man on account of some imaginary advantage he possesses, notwithstanding its comparative insignificance —"One little ewe lamb." 4. Avarice. 5. Voluptuousness. 6. Pride in the possession of power; and its irresponsible exercise. There was no sense of personal accountability to God. 7. Vanity or love of display, though at the expense of another; an undue regard for outward appearance. 8. Deceitfulness. Did the guest who enjoyed the rich man's hospitality dream at whose cost it was provided? 9. Pitilessness and obduracy. "Because he had *no pity*" (ver. 6). 10. Idolatry (Col. iii. 5). It is only when sin is viewed in the light of the spirituality of the commandment, that its "exceeding sinfulness" becomes manifest (Rom. vii. 13). "Covetousness is a subtle sin, a dangerous sin, a mother sin, a radical vice, a breach of all the ten commandments" (T. Watson).

III. HIS CONDUCT. "And he spared to take of his own flock," etc. It was: 1. Unjust. 2. Tyrannical. 3. Cruel; "a wanton aggravation of the evils of poverty, humbling the poor man with a sense of injustice and inability to protect himself, deriving a momentary gratification from seeing his neighbour laid low at his feet, as if no lamb was so savoury as that which had been torn from the poor man's bosom amidst the tears of his children." 4. Lawless and reckless; "a despising of the commandment of the Lord" (ver 9). The poor man's complaint is unheard. But is there not in Israel a just God, who notices and punishes such acts as these? "It was a cruel and wicked deed. It was! Who says so? Speak not hastily, lest in so speaking you condemn yourself. This is a parable; and I would have you consider whether under another name it is not spoken concerning you. Reserve your rebuke, lest it come back upon yourself" (R. Halley).—D.

Vers. 5, 6.—(JERUSALEM.) *The blinding influence of sin.* "David's anger was greatly kindled against the man;" he declared with a solemn oath (ch. iv. 9—11) that he deserved to die (literally, "was a son of death," 1 Sam. xxvi. 16; 1 Kings ii. 26), and ordered restitution according to the Law (Exod. xxii. 1). His severity displayed the fiery temper of the man, and the arbitrary power of the monarch, rather than the calm deliberation of the judge; and (like the treatment of the Ammonites, ver. 31) indicated a mind ill at ease (ch. xi. 22—27; Ps. xxxii. 3, 4); for he was not *totally* blind to his sin, nor "past feeling" (Eph. iv. 19); though he had no thought of the application of the case to himself. We have here an illustration of—

I. AN ASTONISHING FACT; viz. the self-ignorance, self-deception, internal hypocrisy, of men. Nothing is more important than self-knowledge. It is often enjoined. "From heaven came the precept, 'Know thyself.'" And it might naturally appear to be easily attained, seeing that it lies so near home. Yet how certain, how common, and how surprising its absence! "There is not anything relating to men's characters more surprising and unaccountable than this partiality to themselves which is observable in many; as there is nothing of more melancholy reflection respecting morality and religion" (Butler, 'Upon Self-Deceit'). They are blind (at least *partially*) and deceived as to their sin; notwithstanding: 1. Their perception of the evil of sin in general or in the *abstract*. Ingratitude, selfishness, oppression, pitilessness; who is not ready to denounce these vices? 2. Their sinfulness in the sight of other people. Although David had sought to conceal his sin from others, perhaps still flattered himself that it was known only to a few, and justified or palliated its guilt to himself, many others besides Nathan saw and abhorred it (Ps. xxxvi. 2).

> "O wad some power the giftie gie us
> To see oursels as others see us!
> It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
> And foolish notion."

3. Their condemnation of sin in others, of the very same kind as that which they tolerate in themselves. The resemblance between the rich oppressor and David was so close that it is astonishing it was not detected. 4. Their abhorrence at another time and under other circumstances of its guilt when thought of in relation to themselves (1 Sam. xxiv. 5). "What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" (2 Kings viii. 13). "Yet the dog did it" (Matthew Henry). "Next to these instances of self-deceit of our true disposition and character, which appear in not seeing *that* in ourselves which shocks us in another man, there is another species still more dangerous and delusive, and which the more guarded perpetually fall into, from the judgments they make of different vices according to their age and complexion, and the various ebbs and flows of their passions and desires" (L. Sterne, 'Self-Knowledge'). 5. Their culpability beyond that of those whom they condemn. It was not a little lamb of which he had robbed the poor man, but his dearly loved wife, his one earthly treasure. It was not a lamb that he had killed, but a man, his neighbour and faithful defender. His superior position and possessions aggravated his guilt. Was he not himself "a son of death"? "What a sad proof of the blinding influence of self-love, that men are ready to form so different an estimate of their conduct when it is not seen to be their own! How ignorant are we of ourselves, and how true it is that even when our own hearts

condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things!" (Blaikie). For this fact let us seek—

II. AN ADEQUATE CAUSE. It is seldom due to insufficiency of light or means of knowing sin. Is it, then, due to men's inconsideration of themselves? or to the perversion of their moral judgment? Doubtless to both; but still more to *sin itself*, which is essentially selfishness—a false and inordinate love of self. "For consider: nothing is more manifest than that affection and passion of all kinds influence the judgment" (Butler); prejudicing its decisions in their own favour. Even when there is more than a suspicion that all is not well, it stifles further inquiry and prevents full conviction by: 1. Producing a general persuasion in men that their moral condition is better than it really is. 2. Directing exclusive attention to those dispositions and actions of which conscience can approve. 3. Inducing unwillingness to consider the opposite, and to know the worst of themselves. The glimpse of the truth which they perceive is painful, and (as in the case of diseased vision) it causes them to shut their eyes against perceiving the whole truth (John iii. 20). 4. Inventing specious arguments in justification of the course to which they are disposed. 5. Dwelling upon supposed compensations for injury done or guilt incurred. Self-love is wondrously fertile in devising such excuses and palliatives. David may have thought that the standard by which others were judged was not applicable to him. "Perhaps, as power is intoxicating, he conceived of himself as not subjected to the ordinary rules of society. In sending an order to his general to put Uriah 'in the hottest of the battle,' he probably found a palliative for his conscience; for what was it but to give to a brave soldier a post of honour? No doubt the victim considered himself honoured by the appointment, while it gave occasion to the king to solace himself with the thought that it was an enemy and not he who put an end to the life of his subject" (W. White). His marrying Bathsheba, also, he may have supposed, made amends for the wrong he had done to her. But the means which he adopted to conceal his sin from others, and deemed a palliative of his guilt, were a special aggravation of it (vers. 9, 10).

OBSERVATIONS. 1. Nothing is more ruinous than self-deception (Heb. iii. 13; Jas. i. 12; 1 John i. 8). 2. To avoid it there must be honest self-examination (Ps. iv. 4; 2 Cor. xiii. 5). 3. We should especially guard against the blinding influence of undue self-love (Ps. xix. 12; Jer. xvii. 9). 4. There should also be earnest prayer to him who searcheth the hearts, for true self-knowledge (Ps. cxxxix. 23; Job xiii. 23; xxxiv. 32).—D.

VERS. 7—10.—(THE PALACE.) "*Thou art the man!*" The proper purpose of reproof is *conviction of sin*. This purpose was accomplished by the words of the prophet. They were like a "two-edged sword" (Heb. iv. 12), the point of which was, "Thou art the man!" "If ever a word from human lips fell with crushing weight and with the illuminating power of a gleam of lightning, it was this" (Krummacher). "His indignation against the rich man of the parable showed that the moral sense was not wholly extinguished. The instant recollection of guilt breaks up the illusion of months" (Stanley). Observe that: 1. One of the most effectual means of convincing a man of sin is by setting it before him *as existing in another person*. "Thou art *the man!*" the story of whose crime has stirred thine indignation and called forth the sentence of death from thy lips. Self-interest, passion, and prejudice, that darken a man's view of his own sin, have comparatively little influence upon him when looking at the sin of another. Here the veil is removed; he sees clearly and judges impartially. For this reason (among others) our Lord "spake many things unto them in parables." 2. The force of truth depends upon the *particular application* which is made of it. "*Thou* art the man who hast done this!" (LXX.); against thyself thine indignation should be directed; upon thyself the sentence has been pronounced. It is as if hitherto only the back of the offender was seen, when, suddenly turning round, his face appeared, and David beheld *himself!* "Men often correctly understand a message of God without observing its personal application to them." Hence the preacher, like the prophet of old (1 Kings xiv. 7; xviii. 18; xxi. 19; 2 Kings v. 26; Dan. v. 22; Matt. xiv. 4), must directly, wisely, and faithfully apply the truth to his hearers. "'Thou art the man!' is or ought to be the conclusion, expressed or unexpressed, of every practical sermon." What is a sword without a point? "Here also is a lesson to hearers. David

listened to a sermon from Nathan, which exactly suited his own case, and yet he did not *apply it to himself*. He turned the edge of it from himself to another. The benefit of sermons depends more upon the hearer than the preacher. The best sermon is that which is *best applied* by those to whom it is preached" (Wordsworth). "Application is the life of preaching; and self-application is the life of hearing." "They profit most, not who hear most, but who apply most what they hear to their own hearts." 3. Every man is *responsible to God* for the sin which he has committed. "Thou art inexcusable, O man" (Rom. ii. 1), however thou mayest have persuaded thyself to the contrary. Is the man whom thou judgest accountable for his conduct; and art not thou for thine? Is he accountable to thee? How much more art thou to God? No position, however exalted, can release from responsibility to him or exempt from obedience to his commandment; no constitutional tendency, no temptation, expediency, or necessity be an adequate reason for despising it (Ezek. xviii. 4; Rom. iii. 6).

"And self to take or leave is *free*,
Feeling its own sufficiency:
In spite of science, spite of fate,
The judge within thee, soon or late,
Will blame but thee, O man!

"Say not, 'I would, but *could not*. He
Should bear the blame who fashioned me.
Call a mere change of motive choice?'
Scorning such pleas, the inner voice
Cries, 'Thine the deed, O man!'"

(J. A. Symonds.)

4. A *messenger of Heaven* is always in readiness to single out the sinner, bring his sin to remembrance, and call him to account. "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel," etc. (ver. 7), "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?" etc. (ver. 9). Every wrong done to man, yea, every sin, is a factual contempt of his commandment (Ps. li. 4). Whilst the supreme King and Judge observes it, and is long-suffering towards the doer of it, he provides many witnesses, holds them in reserve, and sends them with his word at the proper moment to declare all its enormity—its ingratitude (ver. 8), presumption (ver. 9), disloyalty before him, its "intense and brutal selfishness," sensuality, cruelty, and craft. Conscience also awakes to confirm their testimony, with "a thousand several tongues, and every tongue" crying, "Thou art the man!" 5. The *less expected the charge* preferred against the sinner, the more overwhelming his conviction of guilt. "The further David was from thinking of a reference to himself, the greater the force with which the word must have struck him" (Erdmann). There could be no defence, no extenuation, no answer (Acts xxiv. 25; Matt. xxii. 12). 6. The *condemnation* which one man pronounces on another sometimes recoils upon himself with increased severity. "Out of thine own mouth," etc. (Luke xix. 22). "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house," etc. "For a single moment the features of the king are charged with the expression of astonishment. He gazes eagerly at the prophet like one at a loss to divine his meaning. But, almost instantly, as if an inward light had burst upon his soul, the expression changes to one of agony and horror. The deeds of the last twelve months glare in all their infamous baseness upon him, and outraged justice, with a hundred glittering swords, seems all impatient to devour him" (Blaikie). "O wicked man, thou shalt surely die!" (Ezek. xxxiii. 8). 7. The conviction of sin is the first step in the way of *restoration* to righteousness. The sense of sin is the beginning of salvation. "He that humbleth himself," etc. (Luke xiv. 11; 1 John i. 9). "If we would judge ourselves," etc. (1 Cor. xi. 31, 32). Every man must be revealed to himself in the light of God's righteous judgment here or hereafter (Eccles. xi. 9; xii. 14).—D.

Vers. 10—12.—(THE PALACE.) *The penalties of sin.* "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house," etc. 1. Sin is *connected with* suffering. The connection is real, intimate, inevitable. Nothing is more clearly manifest or more generally admitted; yet nothing is more practically disregarded. Men commit sin under the delusion that they can do so with impunity. But "they that plough iniquity,

and sow wickedness, reap the same" (Job iv. 8; Gal. vi. 7). 2. Sin serves to *account for* suffering; explains and justifies its existence under the righteous and beneficent government of God. The subsequent sufferings of David would have been inexplicable if his great transgression had not been recorded. "The remainder of David's life was as disastrous as the beginning had been prosperous" (Hale). Personal suffering, however, often appears disproportionate to personal transgression (1 Sam. iv. 3); and its reason in such cases must be sought in hereditary or other relationships, and in the purposes to which it is subservient. The penalties of sin (such as David suffered) take place—

I. By Divine infliction. "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee," etc. (ver. 11; ch. ix. 27). They are: 1. Necessitated by the *justice* of God. "Justice is that causality in God which connects suffering with actual sin" (Schleiermacher). He who "despises the commandment of the Lord" *ought* to be punished. 2. Declared by the *Word* of God, both in the Law and the prophets. The word of Nathan was a sentence, as well as a prediction of judgment. 3. Effectuated by the *power* of God, which operates, not only by extraordinary agencies, but also, and most commonly, in the ordinary course of things, and by way of natural consequence; directs and controls the actions of men to the accomplishment of special results; and often makes use of the sins of one man to punish those of another. Natural law is the regular method of Divine activity. In accordance therewith the violation of moral law is followed by internal misery and external calamity, which are closely associated (Isa. xlv. 7; Amos iii. 4). "Vengeance is mine," etc.

II. With significant severity; which appears in: 1. The *peculiarity* of their form. Not only do they follow sin by way of natural consequence, but also the manner of their infliction corresponds with that of its commission; as that which is reaped resembles that which is sown (1 Sam. iv. 1—11). "The seeds of our own punishment are sown at the same time we commit sin" (Hesiod). Having sinned with the sword, his house would be ravaged with the sword; and having sinned by the indulgence of impure passion, he would be troubled in like manner. "Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah! Amnon thought, 'Has my father indulged in it?—Absalom relied on the resentment of the people on account of the double crime. Adonijah fell because he wished to make the best of the precedence of his birth in opposition to him who had been begotten with Bathsheba" (Thenius).

> "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us."

There is a tendency in the sin of one to perpetuate itself in others over whom his influence extends, and so to recoil upon himself. 2. The *publicity* of their exhibition. "For thou didst it secretly," etc. (ver. 12). Falsehood and injustice seek darkness; truth and justice seek light. The evil, which is concealed for the sake of public honour, is followed by public shame. 3. The *extent* and *perpetuity* of their infliction. "The sword shall never depart from thine house." "The fortunes of David turned upon this one sin, which, according to Scripture, itself eclipsed every other" (Blunt). "One sin led to another; the bitter spring of sin grew in time to a river of destruction that flowed over the whole land, and even endangered his throne and life" (Baumgarten). Who can tell the far-reaching effects of one transgression (Eccles. ix. 18)?

III. For manifold purposes. 1. To manifest the justice of God and uphold the authority of his Law. 2. To exhibit the evil of sin, and deter the sinner himself and others from its commission. 3. To humble, prove, chastise, instruct, purify, and confirm the sufferer. "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him," etc. (ch. vii. 14; Deut. viii. 3, 5; Job v. 17; Ps. xciv. 12; Heb. xii. 6). This last effect is wrought only on those who turn to God in penitence and trust. The forgiveness of sin and restoration to righteousness do not counteract, except in a limited degree, the natural consequences of past transgression; but they transform punishment into chastisement, and alleviate the pressure of suffering and sorrow by Divine fellowship, and the inward peace, strength, and hope which it imparts. "In general the forgiveness of sin has only this result—punishment is changed into fatherly chastisement, the rod into the correction of love. Outwardly the consequences of sin remain the same; their internal character is changed. If it were otherwise, the forgiveness of sins might too readily be

attributed to caprice" (Hengstenberg). "The personal forgiveness indulged to the King of Israel, in consideration of his penitence, did not break the connection between causes and their effects. This connection is stamped on the unchanging laws of God in nature; and it becomes every man, instead of arraigning the appointment, to bring support to his domestic happiness by the instrumentality of a good example" (W. White). His family, his kingdom, and even his own character, were permanently affected by his sin. "Broken in spirit by the consciousness of how deeply he had sinned against God and against men; humbled in the eyes of his subjects, and his influence with them weakened by the knowledge of his crimes; and even his authority in his own household, and his claim to the reverence of his sons, relaxed by the loss of character; David appears henceforth a much-altered man. He is as one who goes down to the grave mourning. His active history is past—henceforth he is passive merely. All that was high and firm and noble in his character goes out of view, and all that is weak and low and wayward comes out in strong relief. The balance of his character is broken. Alas for him! The bird which once rose to heights unattained before by mortal wing, filling the air with its joyful songs, now lies with maimed wing upon the ground, pouring forth its doleful cries to God" (Kitto, 'Daily Bible Illust.').—D.

Ver. 13.—(THE PALACE.) *The acknowledgment of sin.* "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord." 1. The words of the prophet were a decisive *test* of the character of David. Had he treated the messenger and his message as others have done (1 Sam. xv. 12—21; 1 Kings xiii. 4; xxi. 20; xxii. 8; Jer. xxxvi. 23; Luke iii. 10; Acts xxiv. 25), his partial blindness to his sin would have become total, and he would have fallen to a still lower depth, perhaps never to rise again. But his genuine piety, as well as the exceeding grace of God (ch. vii. 15), ensured a better issue; and the confidence in his recovery, which Nathan probably felt in coming to him, was fully justified. 2. Hardly was the sentence pronounced, "Thou art the man!" before the long-repressed *confession* broke from his lips (1 Sam. vii. 6; xv. 24—31), "*I* am the man! Who says this of me? Yet—God knows all—yes, I *am* the man. I have sinned against the Lord."

> "Never so fast, in silent April shower,
> Flushed into green the dry and leafless bower,
> As Israel's crowned mourner felt
> The dull hard stone within him melt"
>
> (Keble.)

The ruling principle of his nature was like a spring of water which, though choked and buried beneath a heap of rubbish, at length finds its way again to the surface. "The fundamental trait in David's character is a deep and tender susceptibility, which, although even for a time it may yield to lust or the pressure of the world, yet always quickly rises again in repentance and faith" ('Old Test. Hist. of Redemption'). "If in this matter Nathan shows himself great, David is no less so. The cutting truth of the prophetic word shakes him out of the hollow passion in which he has lived since first he saw this woman, and rouses him again to the consciousness of his better self. His greatness, however, is shown in the fact that, king as he was, he soon humbled himself, like the lowliest, before the higher truth; and, although his penitence was as deep and sincere as possible, it did not cause him either to lose his dignity or to forget his royal duties" (Ewald). 3. There is no part of his life for the proper understanding of which it is so necessary to read the history in connection with what he himself has written—"the songs of sore repentance," which he "sang in sorrowful mood" (Dante). Ps. li. (see inscription), 'The prayer of the penitent;' the germ of which lay in this confession, but which was composed after the utterance of the word, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin;" for "the promise of forgiveness did not take immediate possession of his soul, but simply kept him from despair at first, and gave him strength to attain to a thorough knowledge of his guilt through prayer and supplication, and to pray for its entire removal that the heart might be renewed and fortified through the Holy Ghost" (Keil). "It is a generally acknowledged experience that there is often a great gulf between the objective word of forgiveness, presented from without, and its subjective appropriation by man, which hesitating conscience is unable

to bridge without great struggles" (Tholuck). Ps. xxxii., 'The blessedness of forgiveness;' written subsequently. Other psalms have been sometimes associated with his confession, viz. Ps. vi., xxxviii.; three others, viz. Ps. cii., cxxx., cxliii., make up "the seven penitential psalms." 4. David is here set before us as "the model and ideal of and the encouragement to true penitence." Consider his acknowledgment of sin as to—

I. ITS MATTER; or the conviction, contrition, change of mind and will, which is expressed. For words alone are not properly confession in the view of him who "looketh at the heart." Having, by means of the prophetic word, been led to enter into himself (Luke xv. 17), and had his sin brought to remembrance ("the twin-brother of repentance"), its aggravation described and its punishment declared, he not only recognizes the fact of his sin; but also: 1. Looks at it as committed *against the Lord*; the living God, the Holy One of Israel; and not simply against man. "Thou hast despised me" (ver. 10).

> "For my transgressions do I know,
> And my sin is ever before me.
> Against thee only have I sinned,
> And done that which is evil in thine eyes," etc.
> (Ps. li. 3, 4.)

2. Takes the blame of it entirely to *himself*, as individually responsible, inexcusable, and guilty; thus accepting the judgment of conscience, without indulging vain and misleading thoughts. 3. Feels sorrow, shame, and self-condemnation on account of its *nature and enormity*; transgression, iniquity, sin (Ps. xxxii. 1, 2); rebellion against the supreme King, disobedience to his Law; debt, pollution, guile, leprosy, bloodguiltiness (Ps. li. 14). He expresses no *fear* of consequences, and deprecates them only in so far as they include separation from God and loss of the blessings of his fellowship. 4. Puts it away from him with *aversion and hatred*, and purposes to forsake it completely (Prov. xxviii. 13); which confession implies and testifies.

> "For mine iniquity will I confess;
> I will be sorry for my sin."
> (Ps. xxxviii. 18.)

II. ITS MANNER; or the evidence afforded of its sincerity by the language employed and the attendant circumstances. Observe: 1. Its *promptness*, readiness, and spontaneity. As soon as he became fully alive to his sin, he said, "I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah" (Ps. xxxii. 5). 2. Its *brevity*. Two words only: "I-have-sinned against-Jehovah." "There is in the Bible no confession so unconditional, no expression of repentance so short, but also none so thoroughly true" (Disselhoff). "Saul confessed his sin more largely, less effectually. God cares not for phrases, but for affections" (Hall). 3. Its frankness and *fulness*, without prevarication or extenuation. "The plain and simple confession, 'I have sinned against God,' is a great thing, if we remember how rich the corrupt heart is in the discovery of excuses and apparent justification, and that the king was assailed by one of his subjects with hard, unsparing rebuke" (Hengstenberg). 4. Its *publicity*. He had sought to hide his sin, but he did not seek to hide his penitence. He would have it set "in the sight of this sun," even as his chastisement would be; in order that the ways of God might be justified before men, and the evil effects of transgression upon them in some measure repaired. It is for this purpose, among others, that confession is made a condition of forgiveness (Job xxxiii. 27, 28; 1 John i. 9). "The necessity of confession (to God) arises from the *load* of unacknowledged guilt. By confession we sever ourselves from our sin and we disown it. Confession relieves by giving a sense of honesty. So long as we retain sin unconfessed, we are conscious of a secret insincerity" (F. W. Robertson, vol. v.).

III. ITS ACCOMPANIMENT; or the further thoughts, feelings, and purposes which should be present in every penitential confession. 1. Faith in the "loving-kindness and tender mercies" of God (Ps. li. 1).

> "But with thee is forgiveness,
> That thou mayest be feared."
> (Ps. cxxx. 4, 7.)

2. Prayer for pardon, purity, the Holy Spirit (1 Sam. xvi. 4—13); steadfastness, freedom, joy, and salvation (Ps. li. 7—12). 3. Submission to the will of God (Ps. xxxii. 9; xxxviii. 13). 4. Consecration to his service (Ps. li. 13—17). "They were not many words which he spoke, but in them he owned two realities—*sin* and *God*. But to own them in their true meaning—sin as against God, and God as the Holy One, and yet God as merciful and gracious—was to return to the way of peace. Lower than this penitence could not descend, higher than this faith could not rise; and God was Jehovah, and David's sin was put away" (Edersheim). "It was not his sin, but his struggle with sin, which makes his history remarkable" (D. Macleod). "David experienced in a greater degree than any other Old Testament character the restlessness and desolation of a soul burdened with the consciousness of guilt, the desire for reconciliation with God, the struggle after purity and renovation of heart, the joy of fellowship, the heroic, the all-conquering power of confidence in God, the ardent love of a gracious heart for God; and has given in his psalms the imperishable testimony as to what is the fruit of the Law and what the fruit of the Spirit in man" (Oehler, 'Theology of the Old Test.,' ii. 159). "The charm of his great name is broken. Our reverence for David is shaken, not destroyed. He is not what he was before; but he is far nobler and greater than many a just man who never fell and never repented. He is far more closely bound up with the sympathies of mankind than if he had never fallen" (Stanley). Even *Bayle* is constrained to say, "His amour with the wife of Uriah and the order he gave to destroy her husband are two most enormous crimes. But he was so grieved for them, and expiated them by so admirable a repentance, that this is not the passage in his life wherein he contributes the least to the instruction and edification of the faithful. We therein learn the frailty of saints, and it is a precept of vigilance; we therein learn in what manner we ought to lament our sins, and it is an excellent model."—D.

Ver. 13.—(THE PALACE.) *The forgiveness of sin.* "And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die."

"The absolver saw the mighty grief,
And hastened with relief;—
'The Lord forgives; thou shalt not die:
'Twas gently spoke, yet heard on high,
And all the band of angels, us'd to sing
In heaven, accordant to his raptured string,
Who many a month had turned away
With veiled eyes, nor own'd his lay,

"Now spread their wings and throng around
To the glad mournful sound,
And welcome with bright, open face
The broken heart to love's embrace.
The rock is smitten, and to future years
Springs ever fresh the tide of holy tears
And holy music, whispering peace
Till time and sin together cease."
(Keble, 'Sixth Sunday after Trinity.')

In the interview of Nathan with David much may have passed which is not recorded. But it is improbable that (as some have supposed) there was a long interval between the confession of sin and the assurance of forgiveness, or that the latter was given at a second interview (ver. 15). Perceiving the sincerity of the king's repentance, the prophet forthwith declared that Jehovah also put away (literally, "caused to pass over," ch. xxiv. 10; Zech. iii. 4) his sin, remitting the penalty of death, which the Law appointed and himself had pronounced (ver. 5); and became a messenger of mercy, "one of a thousand" (Job xxxiii. 23), as well as of judgment. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Consider remission, pardon, forgiveness of sin, as—

I. NEEDED BY A SINFUL MAN. Forgiveness of sin is a change of personal relation between God and man; in which there is: 1. *Release from condemnation* incurred by the latter, through his violation of Divine Law; the removal of the displeasure (ch. x.

27) and wrath (Ps. xxxviii. 1) of God; the blotting out of transgressions (Ps. li. 1; xxxii. 1, 2; Isa. xliii. 25; Rom. viii. 1); deliverance from death (Ezek. xviii. 21). Since "all have sinned," all have need of it; but only those who are convinced of sin value, desire, and seek it. It also involves: 2. *Restoration of communion* with God; which is hindered by sin, as the light of the sun is intercepted by a cloud. "It is the foundation of all our communion with God here, and of all undeceiving expectations of our enjoyment of him hereafter" (Owen, in Ps. cxxx.). 3. *Renewal of the heart* in righteousness; which, though separate from it in thought, is never so in reality, and which was longed for by David with the same intensity and prayed for in the same breath (Ps. li. 9, 10). How lamentable is the condition of that man on whom the wrath of eternal, holy love "abideth" (John iii. 36)!

II. GRANTED BY A MERCIFUL GOD. Forgiveness of sin is an act or gift, which: 1. *God alone can perform* or bestow; the prerogative of the supreme Ruler, against whom it has been committed (Dan. ix. 9; Mark ii. 7). "*The Lord* hath put away thy sin." "To pardon sin is one of the *jura regalia*, the flowers of God's crown" (T. Watson). 2. *Proceeds from his abounding mercy* and grace (Exod. xxxiv. 7). "It is impossible this flower should spring from any other root" (Ps. li. 1). 3. *Rests upon an adequate ground* or moral cause; which, although little known to David, was always present to the mind of God (1 Pet. i. 20), shadowed forth in the "mediatorial sovereignty" of former ages and manifested in Jesus Christ, "in whom we have forgiveness of sins" (Acts xiii. 38; Eph. i. 7).

> "Here is the might,
> And here the wisdom, which did open lay
> The path, that had been yearned for so long,
> Betwixt the heaven and earth."
>
> (Dante, 'Par.,' xxiii.)

III. ANNOUNCED BY A FAITHFUL MINISTER. The prophet said not, "I forgive;" he simply *declared* what God had done or purposed to do (1 Sam. xv. 28); and in this sense only can there be *absolution* by man. "To forgive sins is the part and inalienable prerogative of God. To absolve is to dispense and convey forgiveness to those who have the right dispositions of heart for receiving it; and this is the part of God's messengers and representatives, whether under the Old or New dispensations" (E. M. Goulburn). The claim of any other power is a groundless assumption. The language employed in the New Testament refers either to cases of discipline in the Church, or to the declaration of the forgiving love of God, the reconciliation of God in Christ, and the assurance of its reality (Matt. xviii. 15—20; John xx. 23; 2 Cor. ii. 10); this assurance depending, for its beneficial influence, on: 1. Its accordance with the *revealed Word of God* (Jer. xxiii. 28; Gal. i. 8). 2. Its utterance by a faithful, holy, merciful *servant of God*, in his ministerial and representative character. "The power of absolution belonged to the Church, and to the apostle through the Church. It was a power belonging to *all* Christians: to the apostle, because he was a Christian, not because he was an apostle. A priestly power, no doubt, because Christ has made all Christians kings and priests" (F. W. Robertson, vol. iii.). 3. Its communication to and reception by such as are *truly penitent*. "The poet said with a great deal of justice, that no sinner is absolved by himself; yet, in another sense, the sinner is absolved by that very self-accusation; and, sorrowing for his sins, is freed from the guilt of them" (Leighton).

IV. APPROPRIATED BY A BELIEVING HEART. The inward assurance of the blessing of forgiveness: 1. Is usually gained through many struggles and fervent *prayers*. David prayed for pardon after the prophet's assurance of it. "Ps. li. shows us how David struggles to gain an inward and conscious certainty of the forgiveness of sin, which was announced to him by Nathan" (Delitzsch). "Under the Old Testament none loved God more than he, none was loved by God more than he. The paths of faith and love wherein he walked are unto the most of us like the way of an eagle in the air—too high and hard for us. Yet to this day do the cries of this man after God's own heart sound in our ears" (Owen). 2. Is personally realized through *faith* in the Word inspired by God and declaring his mercy. "They that really believe forgiveness in God do thereby obtain forgiveness." 3. Is commonly attended with

peace, refreshment, and gladness, "sweet as the living stream to summer thirst." Happy is he who can say from the heart, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins!"

> "Blessed is he whose transgression is taken away,
> Whose sin is covered;
> Blessed is the man to whom Jehovah doth not reckon iniquity,
> And in whose spirit there is no guile."
>
> (Ps. xxxii. 1, 2; Rom. iv. 7.)
>
> D.

Ver. 14.—(THE PALACE.) *Giving occasion to blaspheme.* "Nevertheless, because by this deed thou hast surely caused [literally, 'causing,' etc., 'hast caused,' etc.] the enemies of Jehovah to speak evil ['despise,' 'contemn,' 'abhor,' 'provoke,' 'blaspheme']," etc. A scorner, being in company with a devout man, took occasion to speak contemptuously of those whom he called "the Old Testament saints," and especially of David as "a man after God's own heart," asking, "And what did *he* do?" "He wrote the fifty-first psalm and the thirty-second," was the reply; "and if you cherish such feelings as he there expresses, you will be a man after God's own heart." "But," he persisted, "tell me what he did besides." "He did that which the Prophet Nathan said would 'cause the enemies of God to blaspheme.'" The scorner felt the rebuke, and was silent. Even to this day the pernicious influence of his sin appears; but, on the other hand, the fact of its having been recorded is an evidence of, at least, the truthfulness of Scripture; whilst the invaluable lessons taught by it more than compensate for the evil effects it produces. "The sacred writer is perfectly aware of the tendency of this passage of David's history, and yet he is not directed by the Holy Spirit to suppress it. It might have been suppressed. The failings of David are not less useful than his virtues, if we will only faithfully improve the warnings they afford us. It is only to the enemies of the Lord that they afford occasion of blasphemy. They, indeed, will never want occasion; and we are not to be denied the salutary examples which the Scriptures hold forth to us because there are those who wrest them to their own destruction. But it is chiefly in the failings of the good that the enemies of the Lord find cause of triumph" (Thompson, 'Davidica'). Concerning the *sin* of David and other godly men, observe that—

I. IT IS RENDERED ALL THE MORE CULPABLE AND CONSPICUOUS BY THEIR PREVIOUS EXALTATION. *Culpable*, inasmuch as their profession of godliness, especially when united with eminent position, increases their responsibility, and furnishes special motives to a consistent course of conduct; *conspicuous*, inasmuch as their apparent superiority to others: 1. Attracts the *attention* of men to them more than others, and makes it impossible that their failings should pass unnoticed. 2. Naturally leads men to *expect* more from them than others. 3. Produces a deeper impression by the *contrast* exhibited between what is expected from them and what is actually done by them. The transgression of David was in itself great; but it was all the greater, in the view of men, because committed by one of his acknowledged piety, and "in the fierce light that beats upon the throne, and blackens every blot."

II. IT IS CALCULATED TO EXERT A MOST INJURIOUS INFLUENCE ON OTHER MEN. The sin of every man has a baneful effect on his fellow-men; but that of a godly man, in an eminent degree, by: 1. Causing them not only to despise him, but also others, who are *associated* and identified with him in religious faith and service, as (like him) unworthy of respect, insincere, and hypocritical. 2. Inciting them to contemn *religion* itself; doubt the Word of God, distrust the reality of piety everywhere, and even speak evil of God himself; wherein it is commonly implied that sin is sanctioned by religion, or at least is not prevented by it because of its essential weakness. A false impression of the requirements and character of God is given. 3. Lessening the restraints of holy example, hindering the acceptance of the truth, multiplying excuses for neglect, encouraging *indulgence in sin*. 4. Affording means of *opposition to the faith*, whereby others still are made to stumble. "This observation gives us a deep insight into the whole position of David. In him the good principle had attained to supremacy; the *godless party* had seen this with terror, and now they mocked piety in its representative, who, because he held this position, ought to have kept watch over his heart the more carefully, and afterwards made use of the first opportunity of throwing off the burdensome yoke"

(Hengstenberg). "Towards the *heathen* Israel's duty was, by obedience to God's Word and commands, to set forth the theocracy, and bring it to honour and recognition. Transgressions of God's command by the king himself must lead the heathen to heap shame and reproach on Israel and on Israel's God" (Erdmann).

III. ITS INJURIOUS EFFECT ON OTHERS DEPENDS UPON THEIR OWN CHARACTER. It is only "the enemies of the Lord" who despise the Lord, his Word, or his people. 1. Their enmity disposes them to make use of the sin of another as a reason in favour of the course upon which their heart is already set; thus silencing the voice of conscience, increasing their pride and self-deception, and confirming themselves in unbelief and disobedience. 2. It also indisposes them to regard it in a proper manner; to consider the strength of his temptation, the depth of his penitence, the earnestness of his aspirations after righteousness; that the conduct of one man does not prove the character of all with whom he is associated, still less the truth of the religion they profess, or the character of the God they serve; that it may not be sanctioned by God, but forbidden, reproved, and punished by him; that it is not the standard of practice, which is found in the Law of God alone; and that "every man must give account of himself to God." Those who stand may be led by it to take heed lest they fall, and those who fall to hope to rise again; but the enemies of the Lord see in it nothing but an excuse for persisting in the evil of their way. "Bees will collect honey and spiders poison from the same plant, according to their different natures" (Scott). 3. Their sin is not lessened by the sin of another, but rather increased by the use they make of it. Nevertheless, "all conduct of ours which tends in the slightest degree to strengthen that system of false reasoning, by which sinners confirm themselves in their sins, and undermine the faith and practice of others, is sin of the deepest dye" (Thompson).

IV. ALTHOUGH IT MAY BE PARDONED, IT CANNOT GO UNPUNISHED. "The child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." 1. To manifest the justice and righteousness of God. The penalty of death which he had incurred was transferred from the guilty father to the innocent son. 2. To humble him more deeply on account of his sin, and to produce in him "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. xii. 11). "For the most grievous sins a provision of mercy is so made as to secure long and humbling recollections of the aggravated guilt" (Halley). 3. To counteract the evil effects of his sin, and "that the visible occasion of any further blasphemy should be taken away." "God in his wisdom did take away this child, because he should have lived but to be a shame unto David" (Willet). This was only the beginning of a long course of chastisement in his family (ch. xiii.), his person (Ps. xli., lv., xxxix.), and his kingdom (ch. xiv.). Judgment was mingled with mercy; yea, it was itself the chastisement of love. "What was the answer to his prayer? First, the death of Bathsheba's child. Next, the discovery of hateful crimes in his household. Finally, the revolt of the beloved Absalom. These answers to a prayer for forgiveness? Yes, if forgiveness be what David took it to mean—having truth in the inward parts, knowing wisdom secretly" (Maurice).—D.

Vers. 15—23.—(THE PALACE AND THE TABERNACLE.) *David's behaviour in affliction.* In one of the chambers of David's palace his little child lies smitten with a fatal malady. In another the king, divested of his royal robes and clothed in sackcloth, prostrates himself in profound sorrow and abasement. He prays, weeps, fasts, and lies all night upon the ground. His oldest and most confidential servants endeavour to comfort him, and beseech him to take food, in vain. At length the blow falls; and his servants fear to communicate the intelligence, lest it should plunge him into a dangerous paroxysm of grief. But their reserved demeanour and soft whispering among themselves indicate what has happened; and their answer to his question, "Is the child dead?" confirms his conclusion. Contrary to their expectation, however, he rises up, washes and anoints himself, puts on becoming garments, goes into the house of the Lord (the tabernacle adjoining the palace), and pours forth his heart in lowly adoration. Then, returning, he asks for bread, and eats. Astonished at his conduct, they inquire the reason of it; and he replies (in effect) that he has acted, not from thoughtlessness or indifference, but from a due regard to the will of God and the altered circumstances of the case. Whilst the life of the child hung in suspense, he might hope, by prayer and humiliation (since

God deals with men according to their moral attitude toward him), to avert the threatening calamity; but now he is gone it is useless to indulge in lamentation; the will of God must be submitted to without repining (1 Sam. iii. 18). "Those who are ignorant of the Divine life cannot comprehend the reasons of a believer's conduct in his varied experiences" (Scott). "How little can any one of us understand another! The element of conscious sin gave to David thoughts and feelings other than the ordinary ones, and beyond the appreciation of those who looked for the usual signs of grief" (R. Tuck). "In the case of a man whose penitence was so earnest and so deep, the prayer for the preservation of his child must have sprung from some other source than excessive love of any created object. His great desire was to avert the stroke, as a sign of the wrath of God, in the hope that he might be able to discern, in the preservation of the child, a proof of Divine favour consequent upon the restoration of his fellowship with God. But when the child was dead he humbled himself under the mighty hand of God, and rested satisfied with his grace, without giving himself up to fruitless pain" (O. von Gerlach). Consider—

I. HIS BELIEVING RECOGNITION OF THE HAND OF GOD. "David was a great lover of his children" (Patrick); and to such a father the sufferings of his child must have been *naturally* a severe affliction. But: 1. He also perceived therein a *just chastisement* of his transgression. It is a common fact of experience (no less than a solemn declaration of Scripture) that the sufferings of a child are often the immediate and inevitable fruit of the father's sin. This is, indeed, by no means always the case. In most instances no moral cause thereof can be discerned, save the sinfulness of the race to which he belongs, and which is subject to the universal law of sorrow and mortality. 2. He perceived therein, moreover, a *merciful administration* of such chastisement. "Thou shalt not die. Howbeit," etc. (ver. 14). His life was spared in mercy to himself and his people. He was afflicted in such a manner as would be most conducive to his benefit. His child was smitten to stop the mouths of blasphemers. The innocent suffers for the guilty; suffers—who shall say (believing in the perfect wisdom, righteousness, and love of God) either unjustly or to his own ultimate disadvantage? 3. And he believed in the *Divine susceptibility* to human entreaty; and that it might be possible for the impending blow to be turned aside. "Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me?" (ver. 22). He evidently regarded the prediction of the prophet, though absolute in form, as really conditional (Isa. xxxviii. 1; Jer. xviii. 7, 8). We have to do, not with an iron fate, but with a loving Father, "full of pity and merciful" (Jas. iv. 11; Ps. xxxiv. 15; ciii. 13).

II. HIS PRAYERFUL HUMILIATION IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD. 1. His grief was not merely natural, but spiritual; *penitential sorrow* for sin, exhibited in solitary, thoughtful, continued self-abasement, fasting, weeping, and genuine purposes of amendment (Ps. li. 3, 4, 13). This is the end of God's afflictive discipline; and, when attained, it may be hoped that the immediate occasion thereof will be removed. Even when affliction is not directly due to personal transgression, it should lead to reflection, humiliation, and "godly sorrow." 2. It was associated with *fervent supplication.* "And David besought God for the child" (ver. 16). "He herein only showed his natural affection, still subordinating his prayer to the will of God; as Christ did to show his human condition when he prayed that the cup might pass from him" (Willet). What evils does prayer avert, what blessings does it obtain, both for ourselves and others! 3. Although the immediate object in view was not gained, his prayer was *not unavailing.* He received light, strength, and comfort; was kept from despair and enabled to endure in a right spirit whatever might occur. God always hears the cries of his children; but he often withholds what they ask. He fulfils their requests in a higher way, transforms the curse into a blessing, and gives them abundant tokens of his favour (ver. 25). "If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us," etc. (1 John v. 14, 15).

III. HIS CHEERFUL ACQUIESCENCE IN THE WILL OF GOD. "And David arose from the ground," etc. (ver. 20). Deeming it vain to strive against and mourn over an event which could not be altered, and which he regarded as the expression of the settled determination of God (Deut. iii. 26), he acted accordingly: 1. With *loyal submission* to his sovereign, wise, and beneficent will; strengthened by the conviction that he himself would, ere long, "go the way of all the earth," and be at rest; and by the hope

of meeting his child again in God (ver. 23). "Religion," it has been remarked, "is summed up in one word—submission. The chief virtue of Christianity and the root of all the rest is readiness under all circumstances to fulfil the will of God in doing and suffering." 2. With *resolute restraint* upon his natural feelings of sorrow and regret. "The unprofitable and bad consequences, the sinful nature, of profuse sorrowing for the dead, are easily deduced from the former part of this reflection ('Wherefore should I fast?' etc.); in the latter ('I shall go to him') we have the strongest motives to enforce our striving against it—a remedy exactly suited to the disease" (John Wesley). 3. With *cheerful performance* of immediate, practical, appropriate duties; in due attention to personal appearance and needs, public worship in the house of God ("weeping must not hinder worship"), edifying conversation with friends, consoling counsel to the sorrowful (ver. 24). In this manner bereavement is most easily borne and most effectually sanctified, and God is most worthily served and glorified.—D.

Ver. 23.—(THE PALACE.) *The death of a child.* "I shall go to him." David had at least a *glimpse* of the future life. The expectation of going to his child in the grave would have afforded him little comfort. But whatever meaning may be attached to the words as uttered by him, they may be profitably considered by us in the light of the gospel. Reason sheds only *starlight* on the future; the revelations of the Old Testament only *twilight;* but Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, illumines it with *daylight.* The Christian parent, bereaved of his little child, has—

I. THE PERSUASION OF THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE DEPARTED, in the unseen, spiritual, eternal world, "the Father's house;" where he: 1. Retains his conscious *personality* (neither ceasing to be, nor "swallowed up in the general sea of being"). 2. Attains the highest *perfection* of which his nature is capable (his capacities of knowledge, holiness, and happiness being gradually developed). 3. Remains in permanent *security* (for ever freed from the temptations and sorrows of this life). On what grounds does such a persuasion rest? (1) The nature of a child—spiritual, immortal, blameless, "having no knowledge between good and evil" (Deut. i. 39). (2) The character of God; his justice and benevolence, and his fatherly relationship (Jer. xix. 4; Ezek. xvi. 21; Joel ii. 16; Jonah iv. 11), which, though consistent with the suffering of the innocent in this world (because of the beneficent purposes to which it is subservient), is not so with their final condemnation. (3) The teachings and actions of Christ, and his redemptive work (Matt. xviii. 1—14; xix. 13—15; xxi. 16; 1 Cor. xv. 22). "They belong to the kingdom of heaven." Whatever disadvantages they suffer from their relation to Adam are more than surpassed by the abounding grace of God in Christ. "He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom" (Isa. xl. 11).

II. THE ANTICIPATION OF FUTURE REUNION WITH THE DEPARTED; implying: 1. Hope of personal salvation on the part of him who cherishes it. 2. Belief in the individual recognition of those who are known on earth.

> "I have heard you say
> That we shall see and know our friends in heaven;
> If that be true, I shall see my boy again."
> ('King John,' act iii. sc. 4.)

3. Expectancy of common participation in the heavenly fellowship, service, and joy of the Lord.

> "Ah! thy merciless stern mercy hath chastised us,
> Goading us along the narrow road;
> Thy bird, who warmed and dazzled us a moment
> Hath returned to thine abode.
> Lord, when we are purged within the furnace,
> May we have our little child again?
> All thine anguish by the olives in the garden,
> All thy life and death are vain,
> If thou yield us not our own again!"
> (Roden Noel, 'A Little Child's Monument.')

III. CONSOLATION IN THE PAINFUL LOSS OF THE DEPARTED; derived from what has

been said, the fact that it comes from a Father's hand, and the *benefits* which it brings by (1) teaching patience in the trials of life; (2) moderating attachment to its blessings; (3) spiritualizing affection for those who are left; (4) intensifying desire for the heavenly home. "Let us consider to whom they have gone, from what they have been taken, for what they have been taken, and how this bereavement will appear to us when we come to die ourselves" (W. M. Taylor).

"'Tis sorrow builds the shining ladder up,
Whose golden rounds are our calamities."

D.

Vers. 24, 25.—(JERUSALEM.) *The birth of Solomon.* (*References:* 1 Kings i.—xi.; 1 Chron. xxii.—xxix.; 2 Chron. i.—ix.; Ps. lxxii.; Prov. i. 1; Eccles. i. 1; Cant. i. 1.) Where a while ago a dead child lay amidst signs of grief, there now lies a living child amidst signs of gladness. In him David sees a gift of God, an answer to prayer which seemed to be denied, "a pledge of pardon and a sign of hope." In him we see one who was destined to become the wisest of men, the most glorious of monarchs—*Solomon* (whose name occurs only here and ch. v. 14, in this book)—

"The lofty light, endow'd
With sapience so profound, if truth be truth,
That with a ken of such wide amplitude
No second hath arisen."

(Dante, 'Par.,' x.)

Notice: 1. *His parentage.* David, Bathsheba; from whom he inherited physical strength and beauty, mental and moral qualities, a piercing insight, large-heartedness, skill in ruling, sensuous susceptibilities, etc., royal rank and privileges. "The history of a man's childhood is the description of his parents' environment" (Carlyle). 2. *His birth.* After David's fall, repentance, and forgiveness, and the death of his unnamed infant (see, however, 1 Chron. iii. 5); when Rabbah had fallen, peace was established, and prosperity abounded. The time was propitious. 3. *His name.* (1 Sam. i. 20.) "And he called his name Solomon" (equivalent to "the man of peace," "pacific," *Friedrich*), "because he regarded his birth as a pledge that he should now become a partaker again of the peace of God" (Keil); or perhaps in allusion to the peaceful condition of the kingdom and "from the wish that peace might be allotted him as a gift of God, in contrast with the wars of his father's life" (Erdmann; ch. vii. 12; 1 Chron. xxii. 9). "And Jehovah loved him," and spared his life, in contrast with that of the dead child. "And he [Jehovah] sent by the hand [through] Nathan the prophet; and he [Nathan] called his name *Jedid-jah* [*Jedid* equivalent to 'David,' 'darling;' 'beloved of Jah,' his own name being combined with that of Jehovah], because of the Lord," who loved him; "a practical declaration on the part of Jehovah that the Lord loved Solomon, from which David could and was intended to discern that the Lord had blessed his marriage with Bathsheba. Jedidiah, therefore, was not actually adopted as Solomon's name" (Keil). "The pious father, in his happiness, entreated the oracle, through Nathan, to confer on the new-born child some name of lofty import, and Solomon, as his parents called him, received through the prophet the glorious additional name of Jedidiah. The sadness of the fate of his first child rendered the omens under which the second stepped into its place the more auspicious; and we can easily understand that of all his sons this one became the dearest" (Ewald). 4. *His education;* or the influences that went to form his character; of Nathan, to whom it may have been entrusted; of David, during his declining years; of Bathsheba (ch. xi. 3); of a home and court where polygamy prevailed; of all the learning of the age; of the revolt of Absalom, and other public events. "A shepherd-life, like his father's, furnished, we may believe, a better education for his kingly calling. Born to the purple, there was the inevitable risk of a selfish luxury. Cradled in liturgies, trained to think chiefly of the magnificent 'palace' of Jehovah, of which he was to be the builder, there was the danger first of an æsthetic formalism, and then of ultimate indifference" (Smith, 'Dict. of the Bible'). 5. *His prospects,* after the death of Absalom, if not even before (ch. vii. 12; 1 Chron. xxii. 9; 1 Kings i. 13); his accession and eminence. 6. *His closing years.* 7. *His prefigurement,* not in personal character but royal office, of "the Prince of Peace." "We

must not confine our view to David's personal life and reign. After we have seen him fallen and suffering for sin, we must see him rising again and reviving in a more glorious reign, in Solomon his son, who began to reign while David his father was still alive, in order that the continuity might be more clearly marked. And above all, we must contemplate him as culminating upward and attaining the climax of his glory, which God had revealed to him, and for which he yearned with devout aspiration, in Christ, the Divine David and the Son of David, the Solomon, the Jedidiah, the Builder of the Church visible on earth and glorified in heaven" (Wordsworth).—D.

Vers. 26—31 (1 Chron. xx. 1—3).—*The fall of Rabbah.* This event, which occurred after a two years' siege, between the fall of David and his repentance, presents several significant contrasts. 1. *Material success associated with moral failure.* His army victorious, his enterprise terminating in triumph; David himself overcome by temptation, and troubled with a guilty conscience. Worldly success and prosperity are no true measure of moral worth and inward peace and happiness. 2. *Praiseworthy conduct displayed by an unworthy character.* Having captured the lower city, Joab, before attacking the citadel, "sent messengers," etc. (ver. 27). The politic general may have wished to escape the envy and secure the favour of the king; apparently, however, his conduct exhibited consideration for the honour of his master, modesty, and humility. Even the worst men have some good qualities, and often perform excellent actions. "It is possible for a man to be faithful to some one person, and perfidious to others. I do not find Joab other than firm and loyal to David in the midst of all his private falsehoods" (Hall). 3. *A disastrous end following a presumptuous beginning.* (Ver. 29.) In this city the great conflict was commenced, wantonly, proudly, and contemptuously (ch. x. 1—4). On the king (slain in battle) and the people a terrible retribution fell; and their confidence in Moloch (Malcom) was disappointed. 4. *Excessive severity practised by a generous-minded ruler* (ver. 31); not sanctioned by God; but expressive of David's present temper (ch. xi. 22—27), and demanded by the excitement of popular indignation. (1) The cruel conduct of the Ammonites (1 Sam. xi. 2; Amos i. 8); (2) the common practices of the age; (3) an intense zeal against idolatry; (4) the strong conviction of being an appointed instrument of executing Divine vengeance (Ps. cxlix. 7);—may palliate the culpability, though they cannot justify the procedure of David; which, in the light of truth and righteousness, must be condemned and regarded as a blot upon his great renown. This proceeds on the assumption of the correctness of the explanation usually given of the text, which is by no means certain (see critical Commentaries).—D.

Vers. 5—7.—*Unconscious self-condemnation.* Great sinners are generally able to discern and condemn in others wickedness similar to their own. This gives an advantage to those who would convince them of their sins. Nathan made use of it in dealing with David, and with good effect.

I. NATHAN'S PARABLE. It presents a picture of conduct sufficiently like that of David to prepare the way for his self-condemnation, and yet so far different that its drift should not be at once detected. It is a picture of: 1. *Gross covetousness.* For a poor man to covet some part of a rich man's abundance is natural, though wrong; but for a rich man to covet the little of a poor man is monstrous wickedness. Such had been David's conduct towards Uriah. 2. *Robbery.* 3. *Oppression of the weak by the strong.* 4. *Violation of feelings which should have been tenderly respected.* The attachment of the poor man to his pet lamb. The counterpart was the affection of Uriah for his wife, and, till she was seduced, of the wife for her husband.

II. ITS EFFECT ON THE KING. It seems surprising that he did not at once see the prophet's meaning and intention. Perhaps Nathan had been accustomed to come to him to plead the cause of the injured who could obtain no redress otherwise, and David imagined this to be his errand now. Besides, it was a good while since David's sins were committed; yet the prophet had hitherto been silent about them, and would the less be suspected of coming to administer reproof for them now. Hence, all unconsciously, he: 1. *Displayed hot anger against the wrong-doer.* 2. *Passed a severe sentence upon him;* saying that he deserved death, and condemning him to the fourfold restitution which the Law required (Exod. xxii. 1)—a remarkable illustration

of Rom. ii. 1. Had he been aware that he was passing sentence upon himself, he would probably have been less severe. Or if he had remembered his own greater crimes, he would hardly so harshly have condemned a man whose crime was so much less heinous. But it is no uncommon thing for great offenders to be harsh in their judgment of others who are far less culpable than themselves.

III. NATHAN'S REJOINDER. 1. *He applied to David himself the judgment he had pronounced.* "*Thou art the man!*" With what terrific force this must have fallen upon the king's ears! He was self-convicted, self-condemned. To such self-condemnation it should be the aim of religious teachers to lead their hearers. It is not permissible, indeed, unless in very extreme cases, to address individuals in public in such words as Nathan's to David; but the preacher's work is not effectually done until each hearer whose sin is described is brought to say to himself, "I am the man!" To use the language of a great preacher of a former generation (Robert Hall), "Without descending to such a minute specification of circumstances as shall make our addresses personal, they ought unquestionably to be characteristic, that the conscience of the audience may feel the hand of the preacher searching it, and every individual know where to class himself. The preacher who aims at doing good will endeavour, above all things, to insulate his hearers, to place each of them apart, and render it impossible for him to escape by losing himself in the crowd. At the day of judgment, the attention excited by the surrounding scene, the strange aspect of nature, the dissolution of the elements, and the last trump, will have no other effect than to cause the reflections of the sinner to return with a more overwhelming tide on his own character, his sentence, his unchanging destiny; and amid the innumerable millions who surround him, he will *mourn apart.* It is thus the Christian minister should endeavour to prepare the tribunal of conscience, and turn the eyes of every one of his hearers on himself." Hearers should welcome such preaching, and thank God for the convictions it produces, as a necessary step in the process of their salvation. 2. *He faithfully delivered God's message to him.* (1) Reminding him of the great kindness of God to him. (2) Charging him distinctly with his crimes. (3) Pronouncing upon him the Divine sentence. In the whole interview, Nathan acted with singular courage, and fidelity to him who sent him.

IV. THE RESULT. David's frank and penitent confession of his sin; and his pardon. Had he been utterly hardened, he might have resented the prophet's faithfulness, dismissed him with anger, or even ordered him to prison or death. But the workings of his own conscience had prepared him to recognize the justice of Nathan's words; and these now melted into contrition the long-burdened yet stubborn heart, which at length found relief in the brief but sincere words, "I have sinned against the Lord;" to which the prophet was able to return the consoling reply, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (comp. Ps. xxxii. 3—5).

Learn: 1. *The duty of reproving sin in others.* (Lev. xix. 17.) 2. *The value of a minister or other friend faithful enough to administer reproof.* 3. *The responsibility which attaches to the power to discern and condemn sin in others.* (1) It should induce us to avoid the sins which we condemn, and others like them. (2) It increases our guilt if we commit such sins. (3) It ought to induce hearty self-condemnation and penitence when we fall into them. The indignation we feel against the sins of others should be turned on our own, in dealing with which there is more hope than in endeavouring to convince and reform our neighbours; besides which, when we have forsaken our own sins, we shall be better fitted to reprove and amend other offenders (see Matt. vii. 4, 5). 4. *The goodness of God in first sending reprovers to warn and convert, rather than inflicting swift punishment.*—G. W.

Ver. 9.—*Despising the commandments of God.* David, by his grievous sins, had virtually shown contempt for the well-known commandments of God against coveting the wife of another, and against adultery and murder. Hence the force of this remonstrance. It may be properly addressed to all who in any way show contempt for any of the Divine commandments; to all men, therefore, since all are in some respects and in some degree guilty of this sin.

I. WHO MAY BE SAID TO DESPISE THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD? 1. *Those who take no pains to know and understand them.* Who do not think it worth while to inquire,

in reference to their course of life, their duty to others, or any particular action, or even their religious faith and observances, what the will of God is; but are content to follow without question the customs of the world around them, or their own inclinations and habits. 2. *Those who refuse to give heed when their attention is called to them.* Which may be by their own consciences, or by other men. 3. *Those who disobey them.* And the degree of contempt shown by disobedience will be in proportion to (1) their knowledge; (2) their remembrance, at the time, of the commandment, its Author, and its sanctions; (3) the difficulties of disobedience which have to be overcome; and (4) the remonstrances of conscience, and of the Spirit of God, which are resisted and conquered.

II. THEIR SIN AND FOLLY. They may be addressed as the prophet addressed David, "Wherefore," etc. 1. *What rational ground have you for doing it?* Seeing the commandment (1) is "of the Lord," who has the highest right to the obedience of his creatures; (2) proceeds from the perfect reason and the infinite love; and therefore (3) is adapted to promote the good of each and all. "The Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good (Rom. vii. 12). Consider any particular commandment you have disregarded, and you will see that all this is true of it; and that, therefore, your conduct is foolish and wicked. 2. *How can "you" do it?* Who have been laid under obligations so weighty by the kindness of God; who know so well his character, claims, and laws; who have so often and in such various ways professed love and loyalty to him; who are bound by so many considerations to set a good example; or (as in David's case) are appointed to be an upholder of law, a guardian of innocence, a protector of the public morals. 3. *How "dare" you do it?* In view of the shame and moral injury you bring on yourself; the evil you do to others; the terrible threatenings of the Word of God against sinners; his knowledge of all you do; his awful holiness and justice; and his almighty power to execute his threatenings. In view also of death, and of the day of judgment, when your most secret sins will be brought to light and punished.—G. W.

Ver. 10.—*Despisers of God.* "Thou hast despised me." In the dreadful sins of which David had been guilty he had treated God with contempt. He had treated as of no account all the kindness of God to him; had disregarded his claims; shown contempt practically for his authority, his precepts, his observance of his conduct, his justice and its penalties, his favour, his voice in the conscience. The charge brought against David may be brought against many who are not guilty of gross and flagrant crimes like his.

I. WHO ARE GUILTY OF DESPISING GOD? 1. *All sin involves contempt of him.* It shows: (1) Indifference as to his Being and perfections. If the sinner does not boldly say, "no God," he practically ignores him, leaves him out of account in his conduct, and treats his presence and observation of him, his hatred to sin, his threatened judgments, as of no importance, not worthy of serious consideration (see Ps. x. 13). (2) Contempt for his authority. (3) Despisal of his kindness (Rom. ii. 4). (4) Contempt of his wisdom, as expressed in his laws. As if the sinner thought he could guide and govern himself better than God. (5) Disesteem of his favour and friendship. 2. *Certain kinds of sin may be mentioned as showing such contempt.* (1) Unthankfulness and discontent. As if God's gifts were not worth having. (2) Rejection of Christ and salvation—his best gifts, in which he appears more fully and manifestly than in aught else. "He that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me" (Luke x. 16). "Hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace" (Heb. x. 29). (3) Neglect of the Holy Scriptures. In them God comes to instruct us, to make us partakers of his own wisdom, to make known his will, etc. To neglect them is to show contempt of him. (4) Negligence as to his service. As to the hours and exercises of devotion. God invites us to converse with him, to make known our requests, with the promise of gracious answers. To disregard prayer, or offer unreal worship, is to treat him with contempt. He is most worthy to be praised. To decline to praise him, or to praise in words only, is to despise him. In the sacrament of the Lord's Supper he comes specially near to us, to commune with us in Christ, to feed us with the body and blood of his Son. To turn away from the holy feast, or come with hypocrisy, or with hearts or hands stained with unrepented sin, is to treat him

with contempt. And in more active life, to be slovenly, slothful, indifferent; to offer him a half-hearted service; to present him with niggard offerings; is to show grievous disrespect to him (see Mal. i. 6—8). (5) Contempt for his people, or any of them. As if the godly were necessarily fanatical. Or because they may be feeble, or inexperienced (Matt. xviii. 10), or poor (Jas. ii. 6). Or because they differ from us in judgment or observances (Rom. xiv. 3, 10). "He that despiseth you, despiseth me" (Luke x. 16).

II. THEIR FOLLY AND WICKEDNESS. Considering: 1. *Who is despised.* "*Me.*" The infinite Majesty, the Source and Sustainer of all beings, the Giver of all good, the Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor of those who despise him, without whom they have nothing and can do nothing; perfect in all that is good, and worthy of all esteem and love; who is reverenced, adored, loved, and served by the loftiest intelligences, by all the wise and good in all worlds; the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all that is glorious in holiness and love appears, revealing the glorious excellences of God. 2. *Who is the despiser.* "*Thou.*" So ignorant, so needy, so dependent, so greatly blessed, so sinful, so perverted in mind and heart, and incapable, while untaught of God, of judging aright as to the best things. It is the creature despising his Creator, folly despising wisdom, weakness despising Omnipotence, the lost despising his Deliverer, the destitute despising him who would enrich him with everlasting riches. 3. *The contrast between him who is despised and the things which are valued.* God is rejected and treated as of little or no account; while things which are worthless or injurious, or which if valuable have only a limited and transient worth, are highly prized and pursued as if of supreme worth and importance. 4. *What is involved in despising God.* It is to despise ourselves, our own souls and their salvation, the true riches and honour, our true and everlasting happiness, eternal life, all that most deserves to be valued.

III. THEIR DOOM. 1. *To be themselves despised.* "They that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. ii. 30). They shall rise "to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. xii. 2), exposed and regarded as fools, and treated as worthless. "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them" (Jer. vi. 30). 2. *To find by wretched experience how real and how essential to their happiness* is he whom they have slighted. To learn the value of his favour by the irreparable loss of it. The sin of *despising* him they will no longer be able to commit. But the doom may be averted by repentance, as David's case teaches (ver. 13).—G. W.

Ver. 13.—*Confession and pardon.* Two things are very surprising in this narrative—the awful wickedness of David, and the abounding mercy of God.

I. DAVID'S CONFESSION. It was: 1. *Very prompt.* The prophet's address awakened no resentment. There was no attempt at evasion, palliation, or self-justification. How could there be? He at once acknowledged his sin. This was the result, not only of Nathan's faithful reproof, but of the king's own previous mental exercises. The time which had elapsed since the commission of his sins, or some part of it, had been a sorrowful time for him. Burdened with conscious guilt, but not subdued to contrition, he had been wretched (see Ps. xxxii. 3, 4). Nathan's admonitions completed the work; the king's heart was melted to penitence, and he unburdened his soul by a frank confession. 2. *Very brief.* Like the prayer of the publican (Luke xviii. 13). When the heart is fullest, the words are fewest. Not the length of a confession, but its meaning and sincerity, are the important thing. It is so with confessions of men to each other: a word, a look, or an action without a word, is often sufficient, always better than a long speech. 3. *Very appropriate.* Acknowledged *sin*—sin "against the Lord." Nathan had laid stress on this point, and David responds accordingly. He had grievously wronged Uriah, Bathsheba too, and had sinned against the people under his rule; but most had he sinned against God. Hence his language in Ps. li. 4. Only as sin is thus viewed is "*godly* sorrow" possible.

II. HIS FORGIVENESS. Which was: 1. *Immediate.* It startles us that so great a sinner should have been so speedily pardoned, so soon assured of pardon. We might have deemed some delay more suitable. But God is ever ready to forgive; he waits only for the sinner's penitent confession. There is no reason for delay of forgiveness except the sinner's impenitence and unbelief. The moment these are subdued, pardon

is granted. This was assured by the promises of the Old Testament, such as Isa. lv. 7. In the New we have the same assurances, and the difficulties which arise from the penitent sinner's conviction of the rightness of the punishment threatened to transgressors (his conscience being on the side of the Divine justice) are removed by the atoning sacrifice of Christ. 2. *Free.* Burdened with no conditions, no demand for penances, or compensations, or sin offerings. The sin was too serious for these. So David felt (Ps. li. 16). Only a perfectly free pardon could meet the case. New love and service would follow; but these would spring from gratitude for forgiveness, not from the expectation of securing it. The attempt to merit or earn pardon for past transgressions by voluntary sufferings, by multiplied prayers or ceremonies, or by future obedience, is absurd on the face of it, and as contrary to the Old Testament as to the New. It was to the "multitude of God's tender mercies" (Ps. li. 1) that David appealed; and it is to the same abounding grace as shown in the gospel that we must trust. 3. *Declared.* Nathan pronounced the king's absolution: "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." Men would like a similar assurance to themselves individually; and the system of some Churches is constructed to meet this wish. On confession of sin to a priest, he pronounces absolution. But this practice is unwarranted and delusive. Confessedly the absolution is worthless unless the sinner be truly penitent; and if he be, it is useless; and in multitudes of cases it is most pernicious, fostering baseless hopes. If men could read the heart, or had, like Nathan, a special message of pardon from God in each case, they might safely pronounce absolution. But in ordinary cases none can know the reality of repentance until it is proved by the life; and therefore none can safely assure the sinner of his actual forgiveness until such assurance is needless. The repenting sinner, coming to God by faith in Jesus Christ, is assured of pardon (1) by the promises of God, and (2) by the Spirit of God in his heart applying the promises to the individual and enabling him to confide in them, and commencing in him the Christian life. A new heart is given with pardon; and this, with its fruit in the conduct, becomes a growing evidence of pardon. 4. *Yet with a reservation.* The penalty of death, to which David had virtually condemned himself, was remitted; but other penalties were not. One was specifically mentioned—the death of the child (ver. 14); and the others, denounced (vers. 10—12) before the confession and forgiveness, we know from the subsequent history were inflicted. And it is often the case that the painful consequences of sin continue long after pardon is granted, perhaps till death. Shall we say, then, that the forgiveness is not real and full? By no means. But because it is real and full the pardoned sinner must suffer. Suffering, however, changes its character. As from God, it is no longer penal infliction, but fatherly chastisement and discipline (1) to maintain a salutary remembrance of the sin, and produce constant gratitude and humility; (2) to preserve in obedience and promote holiness; (3) to vindicate to others the justice of God, and warn them against sin. And as to the penitent himself, his suffering produces no bitterness, abjectness, or sullenness. Love to him that chastises, kept alive by the sense of his forgiving and fatherly love, enables him to yield himself to the chastisement, thankful, resigned, acquiescent, and earnestly seeking to realize the intended profit.

In conclusion: 1. *Admire, adore, trust, and proclaim the pardoning love of God.* 2. *Let sinners repent of, confess, and forsake their sins, that they may obtain forgiveness.* For, notwithstanding the love of God and the sacrifice of Christ, no impenitent sinner shall be forgiven. 3. *Let no penitent despair.* Not even the backslider, and though his sins have been as bad as David's. 4. *Let none presume.* One of the worst and most persistent consequences of David's sin and pardon has been the encouragement to sin, which foolish and wicked persons have derived from them, or—shall we say?—pretended to derive. For so foolish and impious is it to turn the narrative to such a purpose that it is difficult to believe in the sincerity of those who do so. Rather they love their sins, and are glad of anything that may quiet somewhat their consciences in committing them. Let any such consider that the proper effect of the narrative is to render sin odious and to awaken a dread of it; and that the sins of those who read it and persist in sin are rendered doubly guilty. Such are hardening their hearts and promoting in themselves incapacity to repent, and so incapability of being forgiven. —G. W.

Ver. 14.—*Religion reproached through the conduct of the religious.* David's wickedness gave occasion for reproach of religion by the ungodly among his subjects, and by the heathen peoples around. Indeed, it occasions blasphemy and contempt of religion down to the present day.

I. CONDUCT WHICH OCCASIONS CONTEMPT AND REPROACH OF RELIGION. The conduct must be that of professedly religious men, and the more strict their profession, and the more prominent their position, so much the greater the mischief they do. 1. *Great inconsistency between profession and conduct.* Gross immorality, fraud, falsehood, avarice, intemperance, hasty temper, revenge, etc. 2. *Unworthy presentation of religion itself.* Ignorant rant, unctuous cant, too much insistence on mere doctrinal refinements which have little or no bearing on practical life, elaborate ceremonialism, fierce strife in a Church, sectarian bitterness and exclusiveness, indifference to the well-being of the general population, clerical pretensions, ambition, or avarice,—all in their various ways and degrees occasion "the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme."

II. THE CLASS OF PERSONS LED THEREBY TO DESPISE AND REPROACH RELIGION. "The enemies of the Lord." Not his friends; they know too well the value of religion; reverence and love it too much. The effect of such conduct on them is sorrow, self-examination, and greater watchfulness and prayer, lest they also should be overcome by temptation. Also prayer and effort (if possible) to restore those who have sinned. To take occasion from the inconsistencies of Christians to despise and revile their religion is a manifest sign of enmity to God. It is also a mark of great ignorance of the religion they revile; for, did they understand it, they would perceive its opposition to the sins and follies of its professed adherents; and that its truth and goodness remained the same, whatever their conduct. Or, if it be said that it is only the profession of religion that is spoken of with contempt, it is plainly unjust to cast a slur on all who make it because of the sins of a few of their number.

III. THE SERIOUS EVILS THUS WROUGHT. 1. *The slanderers are themselves injured.* To occasion them to blaspheme is to occasion the increase of their guilt, and the greater hardening of their hearts; whereas it should be the aim of good men to do all that is possible to bring them to the knowledge of the truth and the experience of salvation. 2. *Discredit is brought upon religion.* Hence some who might have been disposed to inquire into its claims, and others who were preparing to make an open profession of godliness, are deterred from doing so. In this view the inconsistencies of Christians are a serious matter. They help to promote in society a sentiment adverse to earnest godliness and the profession of it. 3. *The hearts of true-hearted and consistent Christians are wounded and distressed.* 4. *Above all, and including all, the Name of God is dishonoured, and the progress of his kingdom checked.*

Finally, let inconsistent professors of religion ponder the words of our Lord (Matt. xviii. 7, Revised Version), "Woe unto the world because of occasions of stumbling! for it must needs be that the occasions come; but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh!"—G. W.

Vers. 22, 23.—*An infant's illness and death.* This part of the narrative introduces us to a spectacle which, in its main features, is common enough. A child sickening and dying, a parent striving with God in prayer and fasting for its life, but striving in vain. But there are peculiar circumstances here which give the scene a special interest.

I. THE CHILD'S FATAL SICKNESS. 1. *The cause of it.* The sufferings and deaths of little children are painful to witness, and awaken many questionings. Why should these innocent lambs suffer? Why should the sinless die? To which we may reply, Why should they not, seeing that to them death is an escape from a world of sin and misery, with its awful possibilities of evil, into the world of perfect and eternal purity, safety, and bliss? Besides, he who gave life may take it at his pleasure. Holy Scripture throws some further light upon the mystery. It teaches us in general, that, death came into the world through sin. Children die because they belong to a sinful, dying race. Their deaths are part of the penalty of the sins of men. In them the innocent suffer for the guilty, because of their guilt, and to promote their deliverance from sin. Amongst the forces at work to promote repentance and holiness, not the least powerful are the deaths of little children. God thus finds a way to the

hearts of parents and their surviving children. In the case of David we have express Divine explanation of the death of the babe (ver. 14). It was inflicted on account of the sin to which it owed its existence, and to vindicate the justice of God as against the blasphemies of his enemies. And not unfrequently now the child's death is the direct consequence and penalty of the sins of its father or mother. But in such cases, as in David's, love is revealed as well as righteousness. "The Lord struck" David's child, not only to show his displeasure at David's sin, but to deepen his penitence, and promote his godliness and holiness. 2. *Its effect on David.* It might have seemed probable that, when the babe was taken ill, the father, while not actually desiring its death, would at least not have been much grieved at the prospect of it. For it was a child of shame, and as long as it lived would be a perpetual reminder of the dreadful past, and would keep alive the memory of it in the court and nation. And it is a striking proof of the tenderness and strength of the monarch's affections that the prospect of the death of his little boy was so distressing to him. Partly, however, his intense longing that the child's life should be spared sprang probably from the feeling that this would be a fresh assurance to him that his sins were forgiven. In his distress he resorted to prayer for the child's restoration. How could he do this, seeing Nathan had expressly told him that it should certainly die? It seems that Divine announcements of punishments were not regarded as irrevocable, however positive their terms. Compare the cases of Hezekiah (2 Kings xx. 1—6) and of Nineveh (Jonah iii. 4—10). So David said, "Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?" and he persevered in prayer and fasting and self-humiliation until the death of the child extinguished all hope. He "went in" to a retired part of his palace, and cast himself on the ground, beseeching God for the child, and fasting (ver. 16); and in these exercises he continued day and night, until on the seventh day the child died (ver. 18). Doubtless, during that period of solitary communion with God, not only did he pray for the child's life, but reflected much on his sins, indulged anew his penitential grief, prayed for forgiveness and a cleansed heart, surrendered himself and his babe to the Divine will, sought strength to endure whatever might be before him, and grace to derive lasting profit from all that he was passing through, whatever the issue might be. In all which we do well to take him as an example.

II. THE CHILD'S DEATH. The prayers offered for the restoration of the child were sincere, importunate, persevering; but they were offered in vain. "The child died." Yet not in vain. No true prayer is in vain. It brings blessing to him who offers it greater than that which is denied to him. God gives "more than we ask," better than we ask. The effect of his child's death on David astonished his servants. He "arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped," etc. (ver. 20). 1. *He laid aside all signs of mourning.* 2. *He went into the holy tent, and worshipped.* His worship would now be of a different character from that which he had offered in his own privacy. No longer entreaties for the life of the child, but expressions of submission to the will of God at length made plain; acknowledgment of God's righteousness and loving-kindness in what he had done; prayers for support and consolation and sanctifying grace, for himself and the sorrowing mother, and that God would, through this painful stroke, glorify his own Name. 3. *He explained and justified his conduct to his astonished servants.* They expressed their perplexity. He explains by reminding them of the utter uselessness of further fasting and weeping. The dead cannot be recalled to life. The living will go to the dead; the dead will not come back to the living. It is true that this consideration has often a terrible effect in increasing the anguish of bereavement. It adds despair to sorrow. The feeling that it is impossible to recall the departed; that no more will the loved one be seen, or heard, or embraced; that the rest of life must be spent without the society that was so dear and seemed so essential to happiness, is overpowering. Nevertheless, the sense of the unalterableness of the fact, and the utter uselessness of prolonged sorrow, has ultimately a calming effect. Men come at length to reconcile themselves to the unchangeable. But there is greater peace and consolation in the truth that the unchangeable is the expression of the will of the infinitely Wise and Good. Believing this, we reconcile our minds, not to a mere hard, stern fact, but to the will of our Father in heaven, who loves us, and pains us because he loves us. The second expression employed by David in reference to the impossibility

of regaining his child is worthy of notice. "He shall not return to me." It reminds us that when our friends are dead all opportunity, not only of enjoying their presence and society, but of benefiting them, and otherwise doing our duty to them, is gone. A cause for regret and penitential sorrow if we have failed in our duty to them; and a reason for greater care in doing our duty to those that remain, and for seeking their forgiveness while we may for any wrong we have done to them. There is consolation, too, in reference to those who have been taken from us, that they cannot return, when we have good assurance that they are in heaven. We cannot wish them to return from heaven to earth. We thank God for their complete deliverance from sin and sorrow, and all liability to those evils. 4. *He expressed his own expectations as to the future.* "I shall go to him" (ver. 23). Whither? To the grave? to Sheol (equivalent to Hades)? or to heaven? The precise thought of David in these words is hardly ascertainable. He may have intended to say only that he must join the child in the region of death. Probably, however, he expressed a hope of conscious reunion in the future world; and the Christian, taking up the words, can express by them a fuller and more confident hope of rejoining his little children and Christian relatives and friends in a state of blessedness than was possible to Old Testament believers, though glimpses of the glorious future were at times enjoyed by them. "Not lost, but gone before" is a thought that is daily comforting thousands. And it is felt how much better it is that the desire for reunion should be fulfilled yonder rather than here—that we should go to our departed friends into that world of perfection and joy, not they come back to us into this world of imperfection and trouble. Only let us take care so to live that such hopes may be reasonable. Think how terrible the thought, "I shall go to him," as cherished by one impenitent sinner in respect to another who has gone to his doom! How dreadful the reunions hereafter of those who have lived together in ungodliness and sin here, and encouraged and helped each other in the practice of them! Better to have died in infancy! Better not to have been born!—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1.—**After this.** This phrase, as we have seen on ch. x. 1, has little chronological force, but the date of the sad event which formed the second stage in David's punishment can be settled with considerable certainty. Tamar was the daughter of Maacah, a princess of Geshur, and David's marriage with her, while still at Hebron, is mentioned as a proof of his growing power, and consequently some time must have elapsed after his appointment as king before this alliance took place. As Absalom was apparently older than Tamar, if she were now fifteen or sixteen years of age, David would have been king of all Israel at least thirteen or fourteen years, and would have reached the summit of his glory. His wars would be over, Rabbah captured, and his empire firmly established. For twenty more years he must sit upon his throne, but as a culprit, and bear the many sorrows resulting from his sin. Amnon was David's firstborn, the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel; and probably he would never have committed his shameless crime had not David's own sin loosed the bonds of parental authority. As it was, he hesitated, but was encouraged to it by his cousin, who was too subtle a man not to weigh David's character well before coming to the conclusion that Amnon might safely gratify his lusts. The name Tamar means "palm tree," and both she and Absalom were remarkable for their personal beauty.

Ver. 2.—**Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick.** The Hebrew literally is, *and it was narrow to Amnon, even to becoming sick.* To an Oriental a feeling of narrowness means distress, while in joy there is a sense of largeness and expansion. Our words for distress have lost this picturesque force. That Amnon thought it hard does not mean that he had any feeling for his sister's disgrace, but that he knew that his attempt was difficult. He did not see how he could get Tamar into his power, and feared the consequences. The wives had each her own dwelling, and the daughters were kept in strict seclusion.

Ver. 3.—**Jonadab, the son of Shimeah.** He is called Shammah in 1 Sam. xvi. 9, and is there described as Jesse's third son. A brother of Jonadab, named Jonathan, is mentioned in ch. xxi. 21 as a valiant soldier who slew one of the Philistine giants. **Subtil** is not used in a bad sense, but means clever, ready in devising means.

Ver. 4.—**Why art thou, being the king's son, lean?** The Hebrew is, *Why, O son of the king, dost thou pine away morning by morning?* There was probably a gathering

of friends every morning at the young prince's house, and his cousin, attending this levee, noticed Amnon's melancholy, and, having forced a confession from him, is unscrupulous enough to suggest a plan that would make Tamar her brother's victim.

Ver. 5.—**When thy father cometh to see thee.** While the daughters lived in Oriental seclusion in the dwellings of their mothers, the sons seem to have had separate apartments assigned them in the palace. And David evidently was an affectionate father, who even went to the abodes of his sons in a loving and unceremonious way, to see how they fared. But Jonadab abused the king's affection, and made it the very means of removing the obstacles in the way of his daughter's disgrace. And like the whole tribe of flatterers and time-servers, he employed his cleverness to gratify his patron's momentary passion, indifferent to the miserable consequences which must inevitably follow. For the least punishment which Amnon would have to bear would be exclusion from the succession to the crown, besides disgrace and his father's anger. Absalom, who was three or four years younger than Amnon, he despised, and counted for nothing.

Ver. 9.—**She took a pan.** Many of the words are difficult because, being the names of ordinary domestic articles, they do not occur in literature. A man may be a good French scholar, and yet find it difficult in France to ask for things in common use. Here the Syriac is probably right in understanding, not a pan, but the delicacy Tamar had been cooking. In ver. 8 the word rendered "flour" is certainly "dough," and is so rendered in the Revised Version. The cakes were a kind of pancake, fitted to tempt the appetite of a sickly person. The picture is a very interesting one: the palace parcelled out into separate dwellings; the king kindly visiting all; the girls on friendly terms with their brothers, yet not allowed to go to their rooms without special permission; and finally Tamar's skill in cookery—an accomplishment by no means despised in an Oriental *ménage*, or thought unworthy of a king's daughter.

Ver. 12.—**Do not force me**; literally, *do not humble me.* It is to be regretted that the word should be changed, as it bears testimony to the nobleness of the Hebrew women, who regarded their chastity as their crown of honour. The word **folly** is used in the sense of unchastity in Gen. xxxiv. 7 and elsewhere, and it is noteworthy that the Jews thus connected crime with stupidity. Vain, that is, empty persons were the criminal part of the population (Judg. ix. 4), and to call a man "a fool" was to attribute to him every possible kind of wickedness (Matt. v. 22). The thought which lay at the root of this view of sin was that Israel was a peculiar people, sanctified to God's service; and all unholiness, therefore, was not merely criminal in itself, but a proof that the guilty person was incapable of rightly estimating his privileges. Tamar urges this upon her "empty" brother, and then pathetically dwells upon their mutual shame, and, finding all in vain, she even suggests that the king might permit their marriage. Such marriages between half-brothers and half-sisters were strictly forbidden, as tending to loosen the bonds of family purity (Lev. xviii. 9; Deut. xxvii. 22); but possibly the Levitical code was occasionally violated, or Tamar may have suggested it in the hope of escaping immediate violence.

Ver. 15.—**Amnon hated her exceedingly.** Amnon had not really ever loved Tamar; his passion had been mere animal desire, which, by a well-known psychological law, when gratified turned to hatred. Had he possessed any dignity of character or self-respect, he would have resisted this double wrong to one so near to him, and whom he had so terribly disgraced; but he can only remember the indignant words she had spoken—her comparison of him to "the fools in Israel," and her obstinate resistance to his wishes. With coarse violence he orders her away; and when, humbled and heart-broken, she begs for milder treatment, he adds insult to the wrong, and bids his manservant push her out, and bolt the door after her. By such an order the manservant and all Amnon's people would be led to believe that she was the guilty person, and Amnon the victim of her enticements.

Ver. 16.—**There is no cause.** This is certainly not a possible translation of the Hebrew, which is probably corrupt; and though Tamar's words may have been broken and hysterical, we cannot suppose that the narrator intended to represent her sobs. The text is rendered by Philippsohn, "And she said to him respecting the evil deed, Greater is this than the other." Similarly Cahen renders it, "au sujet de ce mal." Flat as this is, no better rendering is possible; but the Vatican copy of the Septuagint has a reading which suggests the line of probable emendation: "Nay, my brother, this evil is greater than the other." It was greater because it cast the reproach upon her, refused her the solace of his affection, and made her feel that she had been humbled, not because he loved her, but for mere phantasy. He has had his will, and, careless of her sorrow, he sends her contemptuously away, indifferent to the wrong he has done her, and piqued and mortified at her indignant resistance. However much we may disapprove of Absalom's conduct, Amnon richly deserved his punishment.

Ver. 18.—**A garment of divers colours.** This was probably a long tunic with sleeves, so woven as for the colours to form patterns like those of the Scottish tartans (see on Gen. xxxvii. 3). The next sentence is probably a note, which has crept from the margin into the text, and which literally is, "For so king's daughters, while unmarried, wore over-mantles" (*me'ils*; see note on 1 Sam. ii. 19). Both the Authorized Version and the Revised Version so render as if the coloured chetoneth and the me'il were the same; but the meaning of the note rather is to guard against the supposition that the princess, while wearing the close-fitting long tunic with sleeves, had dispensed with the comely mantle. It is, indeed, possible that, while busy in cooking, she had laid the me'il by, and now rushed away without it. But it was the tunic with its bright colours which made both Amnon's servitor and also the people aware that she was one of the king's daughters.

Ver. 19.—**Tamar put ashes.** There was no concealment of her wrong, but, thrust out of the inner chamber into which Amnon had enticed her (ver. 10), she cast ashes upon her head from the very fire which she had just used in cooking, and, rending her garment, hastened away with her hand on her head, and with cries of lamentation. If David had foreseen this sad sight when giving way to his passion for Bathsheba, he would have felt that sin is indeed "folly," and that its pleasure is followed by shame and bitter anguish.

Ver. 20.—**Hath Amnon?** The Hebrew has *Aminon*, a diminutive, which some authorities regard as expressive of contempt. More probably it is an accidental variety of spelling. **Hold now thy peace.** We must not suppose that Absalom did not comfort his sister, and make her conscious of his love. He was, in fact, so indignant at her treatment as to have purposed the sternest vengeance. But this he concealed from her, and counselled patience, not merely because she would have dissuaded him from a course so full of danger to himself, but because it was the duty of both to wait and see what course David would take. Where polygamy is permitted, it is the duty especially of the brothers to defend their sisters' honour (Gen. xxxiv. 31). But David was both her father and the chief magistrate; and, moreover, he had been made an instrument in his daughter's wrong. They must be patient, and only if David failed in his duty would Absalom's turn come. Meanwhile, Tamar dwelt in his house **desolate**, as one whose honour and happiness had been laid waste.

Ver. 21.—**David . . . was very wroth.** The legal punishment for Amnon's crime was "the being cut off in the sight of the people" (Lev. xx. 17). But how could David, who had himself committed crimes for which death was the appointed penalty, carry out the law against his firstborn for following his example? Still, he might have done more than merely give Amnon words of reproof. Eli had done as much, and been punished with the death of his sons for his neglect of duty (1 Sam. ii. 34). The sin of David's son had been even more heartless than theirs; and could David hope to escape the like penalty? It would have been wise to have given proof that his repentance included the suppression of the crime to which his previous conduct had given encouragement. But David was a man whose conduct was generally governed by his feelings. He was a creature of warm and often generous impulse, but his character lacked the steadiness of thoughtful and consistent purpose.

Ver. 22.—**Absalom spake . . . neither good nor bad.** (On this phrase, see Gen. xxiv. 50; xxxi. 24.) Absalom's outward demeanour was one of utter indifference, concealing a cruel determination. It is strange how unlike the son was to the father.

Ver. 23.—**Absalom had sheep-shearers in Baal-hazor.** The sheep-shearing was a usual occasion for feasting and holiday-keeping (see 1 Sam. xxv. 2, 8). Baal-hazor was apparently the name of Absalom's estate, situated near the town Ephraim (2 Chron. xiii. 19), which, according to Eusebius, lay about eight miles north of Jerusalem. As Ephraim was near the wilderness of Judah, it was probably the same town as that to which our Lord withdrew (John xi. 54). The phrase **beside**, literally, *near*, Ephraim, shows that it must be the town, and not the tribal territory, which is here meant. **Two full years**; Hebrew, *years of days*.

Ver. 25.—**But blessed him.** These words, in the courtly language of the East, not only mean that David parted from Absalom with kindly feelings and good wishes, but that he made him a rich present (see note on 1 Sam. xxv. 27, where the same word occurs; and observe the nature of Abigail's blessing described there). David's court had evidently become lavish, when thus a visit from him to his son's farm would be too costly for the young prince's means; but had he so increased his present as to have made it reasonable for himself and his chief officers to go, Absalom must have deferred his crime. As it was, the invitation put David off his guard, and, forgetting the fatal consequences of his good nature in permitting Tamar's visit to Amnon, he allowed his sons to go to the festival. Nor must we blame him for his compliance. He had probably at first been full of anxiety as to the course Absalom might pursue, but

his silence and forbearance made him suppose that Tamar's wrong had not caused her brother any deep sorrow. Himself a man of warm feelings, he had expected an immediate outburst of anger, but such stern rancour persevered in for so long a time with such feline calmness of manner was beyond the range of his suspicions; and the invitation, first to himself and then to all his sons, made him suppose that Absalom had nothing but affectionate feelings toward them all.

Ver. 28.—**Smite Amnon.** The order was given before the banquet began, and every arrangement made to render the attack successful. Though Tamar's wrong was the mainspring of Absalom's conduct, yet neither he nor his men would forget that Amnon stood between him and the crown; and Amnon, entirely off his guard, never very wise at his best, and with his senses made dull by wine, seems to have fallen an easy prey. And as soon as the murder was committed, the rest of the king's sons, though all had attendants with them, fled in dismay, not knowing what might be the extent of Absalom's purpose. It is said that they fled on mules, this being the first place in which this animal is mentioned, as the word so translated in Gen. xxxvi. 24 really means "hot springs," and is so translated in the Revised Version. The breeding of hybrids was forbidden in Lev. xix. 19, and probably they were procured, as were horses, by trade. Up to this time the ass had been used for riding; but now David had a favourite mule (1 Kings i. 33), and Solomon received mules as tribute (1 Kings x. 25). Horses seem to have been used chiefly for chariots.

Ver. 30.—**Tidings came.** Some of the servants seem to have fled immediately that the attack was made, and in their terror reported, not what had really happened, but what they assumed was Absalom's purpose. It shows, however, how thoroughly Absalom had dissembled when thus they entirely forgot that he had a grudge against Amnon. And David, in utter misery, tears his robes, and throws himself prostrate on the ground, while his courtiers, with rent garments, stand speechless round him. But the guilty Jonadab guesses more correctly the truth. He had probably watched Absalom closely, and distrusted his silence. Nothing, perhaps, had happened to justify his suspicions, but as soon as the tidings came he divined the real meaning. And, wicked as he was, he could never have supposed that Amnon would turn upon the woman he had wronged, and insult and disgrace her. He probably imagined that Amnon really loved her, and that the matter would be patched up. But when the wretched youth acted so shamelessly, Jonadab probably felt sure that Absalom would sooner or later take his revenge.

Ver. 32.—**By the appointment**; literally, *for upon the mouth of Absalom it was laid from the day he humbled Tamar his sister.* "Mouth" is not the word we should have expected here, and the Syriac instead has "mind," and the Chaldee "heart." But the month often expresses determination, and Jonadab may have noticed Absalom looking at his brother with compressed lips. More probably, however, it is a colloquial phrase, with no special application to Absalom; and the Syriac gives the true sense.

Ver. 34.—**But Absalom fled.** These words break the form of the narrative, but complete the sense. They briefly state that Jonadab was right; for, so far from molesting any of the rest of the king's sons, Absalom had no other thought than for his own safety. He had avenged his sister, but had at present no other sinister design. It was David's method of treating him which drove this youth, with a nature fit for treachery, into schemes of rebellion. **The way of the hillside behind him.** This may mean "from the west," as, in taking the points of the compass, the Hebrews looked to the east, which would thus be "before them." Compare "the backside of the desert," that is, "the western side," in Exod. iii. 1; and "the Syrians before and the Philistines behind," that is, on the east and west (Isa. ix. 12). But the versions differ so strangely in their renderings that they could scarcely have been made from our present text.

Ver. 36.—**The king also and all his servants wept very sore.** The narrative sets very clearly before us the great terror of the king, who at first supposes that all his sons are murdered; there is then suspense while Jonadab suggests that one only has been sacrificed to private vengeance; then quickly comes the watchman's report of the appearance of much people rapidly descending the hillside, and this is followed by the hasty rush of the fugitives into his presence, and the terrible certainty that one son has, with long-premeditated malice, murdered his brother. And as he wept, David, we may feel sure, thought of Uriah, murdered because of his own base passions, whereas Amnon had brought death upon himself by following, alas! the example of his own father. He would think, too, of the words of his sentence, that "the sword should never depart from his house." It had claimed one victim, and who could now stop the outburst of angry passions in a family which previously had dwelt in kindly friendship? Probably, too, he reproached himself for not punishing Amnon. Had he done so with sufficient severity to have satisfied Absalom, he would have saved the life of

his firstborn, and not have driven his second son into terrible crime. He had not done so because his own sins had tied his hands. Yes; David had good reason for weeping sore.

Vers. 37, 38.—**So Absalom fled.** The triple repetition of these words, and the fragmentary style, make it probable that we have here an abridgment of a longer narrative. So in ver. 34 the words probably are a summary of a more circumstantial account of Absalom's doings after his young men had slain Amnon. (On Talmai and Geshur, see notes on ch. iii. 3.)

Ver. 39.—**And** (*the soul of*) **king David longed to go forth unto Absalom.** This translation has the support of the Jewish Targum, and, as the verb is feminine, the insertion of the added word is possible, though the sense seems to require "anger" instead of "the soul." But the versions (Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate) all give the verb its ordinary meaning of "ceasing," and, though there is something harsh in taking it impersonally, yet their authority is too great for us to say that such a mode of rendering it must be wrong. And if the grammar be difficult, the sense put upon the words by the versions is excellent. Literally they are, *As to King David, there was a ceasing to go forth after Absalom; for he was comforted*, etc. At first he had demanded of Talmai the surrender of the offender, and, when Talmai refused, David tried other means; but in time, when his grief for Amnon was assuaged, he desisted from his efforts. But even so it required much subtlety on Joab's part to obtain Absalom's recall, which would scarcely have been the case if David's soul was longing for his son's return; and, even after his coming, David long maintained an unfriendly attitude. Amnon was his firstborn, and evidently dearly loved, but David's culpable leniency had borne bitter fruit. And again he acts without thoughtful sense of justice, and though at first he would have given Absalom merited punishment, yet gradually paternal feeling resumed its sway, unhappily only to be miserably abused.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—22.—*The firstfruits of iniquity.* The facts are: 1. Amnon entertains an improper affection for his half-sister Tamar, and meditates evil. 2. Making known his secret passion to Jonadab, he is prompted to a device for securing a personal interview with her. 3. The king, visiting Amnon in his pretended sickness, kindly arranges that Tamar should wait upon him with special food in his chamber. 4. Seizing an opportunity in the absence of attendants, he accomplishes his purpose in defiance of her protests and pretexts. 5. By a sudden revulsion of feeling, he now hates her, and causes her to be driven away in disgrace. 6. Her trouble becoming known to the king and to Absalom, the one is very wroth and does nothing, and the other conceals his cherished hatred and revenge. The rather long account given of the base sin of Amnon is no doubt intended to show how the chastisements pronounced by Nathan (ch. xii. 10, 11) were brought about. In this way the spiritual character of the narrative shines through all the details, which in themselves seem worthy of being for ever lost in oblivion. It is in connection with the evil, and often through the evil, of life that the righteousness of God is historically revealed. Those who object to such passages as these in the Bible know not the principle on which it, as a book, is constructed. It is not the deeds that are the object of thought and instruction, but the fulfilment of the righteous judgments of God, brought to pass in the fact and consequences of their occurrence. In the deeds here recorded we have a graphic description of the firstfruits of the dreadful sin of David.

I. ALL SIN SOONER OR LATER BEARS FRUIT IN HUMAN SOCIETY. "Sin" is a term descriptive of the moral quality of thought or action. It is a demonstrable fact in the sphere of mind and life, that every distinct thought and mental act, to say nothing of the outward expression of it, is a power or force contributed towards a modification of the existing forces at work in the world. No mental life is the same after a given thought has been formed as it would have been had some other been in its place. The law of dynamics, by which every wave of motion produces an effect for ever, holds good in the mental and moral sphere. Sin is a wave of evil, a force in an oblique direction, or as a seed to germinate and reproduce its kind. David's dreadful deed could not but be an instance of this inevitable law. Other counter-influences of good might arise, but they would not annihilate the fact of the evil influence, and social life would not be the same as it would have been in case his energy had all gone in the line

of good, and the energy of the counteraction had been, not counteractive, but supplementary to the force of his unbroken holy life. It is an awful fact that the universe, after sin, is a changed place, and that the trace of the curse in some form, though not necessarily active, will ever be found in the thought and constitution of society.

II. THE IMMEDIATE ACTION OF CONSPICUOUS SIN IS TO WEAKEN THE RESTRAINTS ON EXISTING EVIL TENDENCIES. There are always in the human heart propensities urgent for activity, and they are kept back very much by reason of the force of goodness in the good, as well as by the natural action of conscience. There can be no question that Amnon was, like many, prone to the lusts of the flesh, and that the fact of David's fall had lessened the restraints upon him. The secrecy encouraged by Jonadab might well be stimulated by the previous secrecy of David in his sin, so far as it was known to his family. The influence of David's sin on the mind of Joab could not fail to render court life more corrupt in its springs; for it is a mournful fact that, while we by our sins set a new force for evil at work which gives momentum to those already active, we do not convey to society the blessedness which subsequently may come to us in a free pardon. A notorious sin in high stations is the foster-parent of kindred sins. A parent by his known sin sheds influences around his children that tend to develop the worst elements of their nature. It is fuel to fire.

III. THOSE WHO HAVE COMMITTED OPEN SINS MUST ESPECIALLY FEEL THE PAIN OF WITNESSING THE FRUIT OF THEIR DEEDS. The enlarging family of David offered wider scope for the ill effects of his conduct to work upon. The addition of Bathsheba to the harem under the peculiar circumstances could not but awaken jealousies, and among the various children loosen the bonds of restraint on the lower tendencies of life. He who had so cleverly sought to cover sin in the case of Uriah and his wife, could not detect the secret plot covered by the sickness of his son, whom he with paternal kindness visited and comforted (ver. 6). The iniquity thus coming to maturity at last came to his knowledge in a form little suspected. Its distinctly incestuous character, and the cool cunning with which it was prepared for and perpetrated, must have given intense pain to David, apart from the evil of the act, inasmuch as it would forcibly remind him of days and nights of scheming to accomplish a horrid crime, and compel him to see that the son has learnt too well to imitate the deeds of the father. The more sincere his recent penitence, and the more perfect his restoration to God's favour, the more keen the anguish that now would fill his spirit; for he would see and feel as a holy reconciled man only can. A similar experience is that of parents who witness in their sons, it may be, bolder forms of the sin to which they were once the victims. There are such in Christian society. Their peace with God may be real through the merits of Christ, but their pathway is beclouded by a terrible sorrow. The terrible evils of sin in this life, even to the good! Bitter is the firstfruit!

IV. THOSE WHO HAVE COMMITTED OPEN SIN ARE PARALYZED IN THEIR ACTION TOWARDS SINS OF THE SAME CHARACTER. It is said that when David learnt the full facts of Amnon's conduct towards Tamar, he "was very wroth" (ver. 21). No doubt. Every kind and holy feeling of the restored man would be outraged by this vile conduct. But it is significant that nothing further is said. No action of a legal character was taken. The sentence of the Mosaic Law was not enforced. The remembrance of his own sin unfitted him to deal with Amnon as was due. Direct action on his part for his punishment would, he thought, be met by the reproach of his own deeds. "Physician, heal thyself," had a paralyzing meaning for him. The reference to Absalom nourishing revenge till occasion offered is an historical set-off to David's inactivity. There is nothing unusual in David's conduct. It is repeated every day. The liar's tongue is deprived of its power in reproving lies in others. The deceiver in business affairs cannot with energy and force warn others against fraud. Men who have openly indulged in the lusts of the flesh speak with bated breath and act with indecision when public questions concerning the suppression and punishment of licentiousness are discussed. They may be sincere in their expression of pain, and be intensely angry if any of their offspring fall into vile ways, but they are conscious of a secret force checking the action which otherwise would have been taken. None can speak and act on moral questions as the pure. Our Saviour's words on all moral subjects carry with them the force of his unsullied life. Herein is an example for teachers and taught.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. There should be an avoidance of all customs in society that

in any way tend to strengthen, and give occasion for the development of, the baser feelings of human nature. Oriental harems may have their counterparts in certain usages of Western life. Whatever weakens the feelings of purity and chastity is a positive evil. 2. Care should be taken to avoid the company and services of men clever in evil. There are Jonadabs in society, whose services are ready, but are fraught with woe. 3. The man who can make use of the kindly sympathies of others in order to encompass their ruin is already far gone towards perdition; and inasmuch as there are many such still in society, men who abuse the tenderest affections for lustful ends, their persons should be abhorred and shunned by all Christian people. 4. The selfishness and cruelty of sin is a universal quality (vers. 15—17), and as such it deserves the utmost detestation. All sin is self against God and God's holy order. The adulterer in his lust, the defrauder in his deceit, the extortioner in his greed, the rebellious son in his disobedience, know this too well. Their deeds are damage to the universe for sake of self. 5. There is always being treasured up somewhere retribution for those who seem to escape the punishment due to their sin. Absalom's self-control (ver. 22) is suggestive of restraint on the forces which at last cannot but overwhelm the wicked with destruction (2 Pet. ii. 3; Jude 15).

Vers. 23—39.—The facts are: 1. Absalom, holding a sheep-shearing festival at Baal-hazor, invites the king and his sons. 2. The king, declining to go on account of being unnecessarily burdensome, gets rid of Absalom's entreaty, and bestows on him a parting blessing. 3. After some persuasion, Absalom obtains permission for all the king's sons to accompany him. 4. During the festivities the servants of Absalom, in obedience to their master, smite Amnon, whereupon all the other of the king's sons flee. 5. A false report having reached the king that all his sons were slain, he gives vent to his grief in most distressing form, until Jonadab, who was in the secret of the affair, informs him of the actual facts of the case. 6. Absalom flees, and the rest of the sons return home, and join their father in lamentation over the event. 7. During Absalom's exile for three years, David, while recovering from his grief over Amnon, was in a mind to go out after him, were it possible.

Home troubles. The words of the prophet were being swiftly and terribly fulfilled in the experience of the king. His own crimes of adultery and murder by stealth were now bearing retributive fruit in his own family in the form of adultery and murder, with the increment of incest. That these young men acted as free agents and were responsible for their deeds makes no difference to the fact that, in relation to the previous conduct of their father, it was a terrible retribution in the order of providence. God does chastise his people with the human rod. The blessed covenant made with the chosen one was not broken—his soul was delivered from the mouth of destruction (Ps. lxxxix. 33—36); but a harvest of evil had to be reaped in the place where the dreadful seed had been sown—in the family. Never, perhaps, has this family trouble been paralleled in the experience of good men; but though its precise features are mercifully exceptional, we may see mirrored in this family trouble elements of evil found in some form or other in other domestic circles.

I. JEALOUSIES AND HATREDS CONSEQUENT ON DEEDS OF WRONG. There were signs of ill feeling in this home sprung from an Oriental harem, before the vile deed of Amnon was perpetrated; but this act developed and intensified whatever feeling of that character was in existence. In the most imperfect and unhappy homes a positive deed of wrong to a member of the family is sure to be resented by some other member whose temperament or sympathies flow in a certain direction. The world does not see the acts of harshness and even cruelty sometimes done within the sphere of home; these acts are the parents of a brood of ill feelings, which rankle and burn, waiting for occasion to vent their force on some marked object of hatred. And as the love of home is the tenderest and sweetest of all loves, so, when it is lost, there rises in its place the bitterest and most irreconcilable of hates. The best wine makes the sourest vinegar.

II. PARENTS CRITICIZED. Reading between the lines of this piece of domestic history, we can see that the past conduct of David was not only known, so far at least as Bathsheba was concerned, but that it had not escaped the critical observation of his sons. How could it? A father's domestic conduct is in open light to his children,

and, although natural reverence may sway their bearing toward him, they cannot help making critical observations on anything that undermines the respect due. A really pious son would have wept in solitude over the father's sin, and have tenderly covered his shame; but the base tendencies of such young men as Amnon, and the pride of an Absalom, would only have given keenness to the critical spirit. It is a sad prophecy of trouble when children begin to criticize a parent's conduct, and it is moral ruin in a home when a father does deeds which his children, even with their slight knowledge of things, cannot but deplore. Once break down respect for moral conduct, and the home is open to the invasion of numberless ills.

III. PARENTS' APPREHENSION. There is always some room for apprehension in connection with domestic life; for the powers of evil are active, and the best-guarded home may be occasionally invaded from without by a foul spirit. But, as a rule, where prudence in management is combined with correctness of conduct and a spirit of true practical godliness, confidence is in the ascendant. The blessing of God is on the abode of the faithful. In David's house at this time, consequent on the influence of his recent sin and the crime of Amnon, there was evident fear in the father's heart (vers. 26, 27). He had secret reasons for not going or wishing Amnon to go to the feast. Fears of business failures, and of possible changes in domestic material comforts, are common and not to be altogether avoided, yet they may carry with them no secret sting; but anticipations of possible moral disasters and complications in the home life are of all things most fearful burdens to bear, and their gravity is the greater when they are felt to be connected with one's own misconduct. Fathers and mothers should take care that they lay no foundation for painful apprehensions concerning the conduct of their children in deeds of their own performance.

IV. DEVELOPMENTS OF SUPPRESSED ANIMOSITIES. The spirit of David was evidently troubled by observing the strained relations between his sons Amnon and Absalom. The probability is that they were not on terms of familiarity, and seldom visited each other. The ill feeling created by the ruin of his sister had been secretly but steadily cherished for two years, and the treasured revenge at last broke forth in the murder at the festival of sheep-shearing. It is the pain of a father still sometimes to witness the development in violent and distressing forms of passions which he either, through loss of personal influence, could not or would not seek to remove or tone down. The first part of the prophet's prediction had now been fulfilled two years; the other part was on its way, and only awaited the maturity of the forces that were being secretly gathered. When domestic troubles, having a root in moral evil, begin in a home, it is hard to say how long it will be before the powers of evil assume a portentous development. David was fearful, but he scarcely looked for such an issue of a family festival. Literally, in this, as in other cases, sin when it is finished brought forth death (Jas. i. 15). The harvest came after the sowing and germinating of the seed.

V. A FATHER'S DEEDS THE JUSTIFICATION OF EVIL. The bitterest element in David's domestic trouble was not simply the death of an incestuous son, sad as the death of a firstborn always is, but the knowledge that his own conduct was, in the mind of Absalom, the justification of the murder. Absalom seems to have reasoned thus: "Amnon has done a guilty deed worthy of death; no severe punishment has been inflicted on him by my father, perhaps because of his own previous adultery with Bathsheba, or because this is his firstborn; shame has been brought by this crime on the entire family; as the brother of the disgraced and ruined woman, I am her legitimate avenger in the failure of law; and as the injury has been an open one in the centre of the family life, the doom shall be open, in the presence, if possible, of father and brothers." If David was the man of discernment now as formerly, he could scarcely have failed to see that there was something like this current of thought in the mind of his son Absalom, and that it formed a specious justification of his daring deed. Rightly or wrongly, some do reason in defence of their rash and evil deeds, and it is the most serious element of the domestic trouble when the foundation of their reasoning is found in the deeds or neglect of their parents. The devil encourages those who do wrong to get all possible support from the actions of those professing to be good.

VI. A FOMENTER OF MISCHIEF AND EVIL. One of the troubles in David's home life was the presence of an influential double-faced man, who, being in the secrets, entered as adviser into the schemes of some of the family, and was instrumental in

promoting incest, and then, on his own showing, knew that it was a settled thing to murder the incestuous man (vers. 3—5; cf. vers. 32, 33). This cunning man, who had not the courage or honesty to tell David of the design of Absalom, was a moral plague in David's family connection. It is an instance of how much evil may come to a home by cultivating the friendship and intimacy of unprincipled or cowardly relatives. Alas! for the home (and there are such in our country) that is invaded by the pestilential influence of men who trample under their feet chastity, love, and, if need be, life itself! There are vipers and dragons in the world still (Matt. iii. 7; cf. Ps. xci. 13).

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. We see the wonderful contrast in domestic life where piety is maintained in unfading beauty. Instead of jealousies and hatreds, parents blamed by sons and full of fear, evil feelings maturing into developed deeds of violence and cruelty, justified by reference to parental conduct, and stimulated or connived at by base friends, we shall see love and consideration, reverence for parents, confidence in children, generous sentiments ripening into holy deeds, encouragement for kind actions found in parental example, and friendships formed conducive to peace and harmony. 2. We learn the danger of deliberately nourishing feelings of revenge even when wrong has been done. It is for God to vindicate his own justice (Rom. xii. 9). Just sentiments of anger may, unless guard be kept over them, burn into more questionable forms. 3. The festive scenes of wicked men should be avoided, because of the evil communications which corrupt good manners, and the possible incidental evils arising therefrom. 4. When men are known to be proud and imperious and revengeful, they are likely to be credited with more evil than they have really done (ver. 30); hence avoid such a spirit. 5. It is a shame to a man to be in the secrets of those intent on evil (vers. 3—5; cf. ver. 32); and, though such may escape punishment in human society, God will visit their sins on their own head. 6. Rulers and parents who show an unwise partiality (vers. 21, 22) in not adequately chastising evil-doers, only defer the day of trouble and increase its sorrows (ver. 36).

Lost and exiled. The closing verses of this chapter are very obscure in their construction and meaning. The sense most probable, and which we here proceed upon, is that Absalom's asylum with the King of Geshur was a reason why David did not follow after him with a view to his apprehension and chastisement, and that while at first he mourned for Amnon every day, he was in process of time able to bear up under his loss. The calamity brought on by his own sins (ch. xii. 9—12) had now culminated in one son lost and another in exile.

I. THERE IS A NATURAL PROGRESSION IN THE TROUBLES CONSEQUENT ON SIN. The first temporal human trouble attendant on David's sin was dislike and aversion of his other wives, and this small beginning was followed by his being put under the power of Joab (ch. xi. 6, 18—21), his exposure to others, the incest of his children, the loss of influence by refraining from duty (vers. 21, 22), and now it came to a climax in the firstborn being in his grave, and the second son being banished as an exile. It is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against God, the more so according to the station and privileges of the sinner. A firstborn lost! A young man cut down with, so far as we can see, the vilest sins unforgiven on his head! The flower of the family, the man of spirit, and avenger in daring way of a sister's wrong, in a foreign land, finding refuge from a father's wrath with the heathen! Fathers and mothers, read the lesson well, and seek for grace to be in the home pure and wise and loving, like unto the holy Saviour.

II. THERE IS SHEER HELPLESSNESS IN FACE OF THE ACCUMULATED CALAMITIES CONSEQUENT ON SIN. David could only mourn over the lost one. And what bitterness in the mourning! The dire chain of moral causes ending in that wretched death could not be broken; for an inscrutable and just Providence had welded them to the first adulterous link of his own manufacture. Whatever anger was cherished against the brother-assassin, and whatever desire to vindicate the law against him, policy and other considerations prevented his going out after him to drag him from the asylum afforded by another king. It was a time of correction in righteousness when the bitter but wholesome lessons of his life were to be taken to heart. It is fortunate if men, having by a succession of faults and sins brought themselves face to face with hard unalterable facts, apply their hearts with all earnestness to God for his sanctifying grace.

III. THE DISCHARGE OF THE DUTIES OF LIFE BECOMES INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT WHEN THE JOYS OF HOME LIFE ARE DESTROYED. Though dwelling in distinct abodes in Jerusalem, the royal family had a common home life, and, under hallowed influences, this might have been to David a source of strength in the administration of affairs. Now, however, the joy of his heart was gone. Energy was spent in sorrowful memories and thoughts concerning the possible future efforts of the ambitious and now reckless exile, which otherwise would have gone in the direction of cheerful daily work for the nation. Fears of yet further troubles, and passionate desire to remove the public reproach of letting crime in his house go by default, were not helpful to calm effort for public good. Many a man loses energy for business consequent on the loss of domestic joys. Home is the proper place for weary men to find refreshment after toil, and cheer for new endeavours. We may truly pity the man whose domestic troubles come in such form as to impair his strength for the battle of life. If he has not the grace of God in his heart, it is not surprising if he yields to temptation and seeks relief in sinful pleasures.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—33.—(JERUSALEM.) *The crime of Amnon.* The chastisements which David experienced came upon him chiefly through his family. The misconduct of his sons was largely due to his own "in the matter of Uriah," and his defective discipline (1 Sam. iii. 13; 1 Kings i. 6) in connection with *polygamy* (ch. iii. 1—5). "This institution is the absolutely irrepressible source of numberless evils of this description. It ever furnishes a ready stimulus to unbounded sensual desire in the sovereign, and, should he be exalted above it, is likely to introduce a dissolute life among the very different children of different mothers, by bringing the pleasures of sense so prominently and so early before their eyes. The subsequent troubles with Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah were all connected with this fundamental wrong; and on the same thread hung many of the evils which were felt under David's successors" (Ewald). "Having grown up without strict paternal discipline, simply under the care of their different mothers, who were jealous of one another, his sons fancied that they might gratify their own fleshly lusts, and carry out their own ambitious plans" (Keil). Amnon his eldest son (by Ahinoam of Jezreel, whom David married during his exile, 1 Sam. xxv. 43; and born in Hebron, ch. iii. 2) was now about twenty years of age. "His character and conduct were doubtless affected by the fact that he was the firstborn son, and of a mother apparently not of the noblest birth." In him (regarded as a warning especially to *young men*) we notice—

I. IMPURE AFFECTION, springing up in the heart, and not repressed, but fondly cherished. His passion was contrary to the Divine Law, not merely because the object of it was his half-sister (ver. 13), but also because of its licentious nature (Matt. v. 28). His subsequent conduct indicates that it was not

> "True love, that ever shows itself as clear
> In kindness as loose appetite in wrong."
>
> (Dante.)

It is not improbable, from his ready entertainment of it, and the question of Absalom (ver. 20), that already he had given himself to unrestrained indulgence of his passions. When once "reason by lust is swayed," the heart becomes a congenial soil for all unholy affections. And the only sure safeguard is to "keep the heart with all diligence," by giving no place to an impure thought, avoiding every incentive to "fleshly lusts, which war against the soul," the exercise of habitual self-denial, and prayer for Divine grace (Matt. v. 29; xv. 19).

II. INWARD MISERY, proceeding from restless passion and fretful discontent at hindrances and restraints in the way of its gratification (ver. 2). It is well that such hindrances and restraints exist (in Divine Law, public opinion, providential circumstances); for they afford opportunity for reflection, conviction of its sinful nature, and the adoption of all proper means whereby it may be overcome. Where it is still cherished, its strength increases and its force is felt more powerfully, as that of a river appears when a rock opposes its progress (Rom. vii. 7). "There is no peace to

the wicked." "Amnon here neglected, indeed, the right means; viz. in time to have resisted his affections and not to have given way unto them; to have given himself to abstinence and some honest exercises which might have occupied his mind; then by some lawful matrimonial love to have overcome his unlawful lust; and to have prayed unto God for grace" (Willet).

III. DELIBERATE DISSIMULATION, displayed in crafty devices, adopted in accordance with evil suggestion, in order to selfish indulgence. He who suffers a sinful desire to reign within him is peculiarly susceptible to temptation, and readily yields to it; sometimes pursues a course of guile, and takes advantage of affection, kindness, and unsuspecting confidence. "The seducer is brother to the murderer." Blinded and infatuated, he resorts to the most subtle and contemptible expedients. And, alas! he too often succeeds.

IV. WILFUL PERSISTENCY in wickedness, notwithstanding the strongest inducements to the contrary (vers. 12, 13). "It is enough to suppose that the king had a dispensing power, which was conceived to cover even extreme cases." When persuasive craft is employed in vain to entice into sin, and the slave of passion meets with another merciful check by the opposition of virtue and piety ("in Israel"), he is driven on to more brutal, though less diabolical methods of accomplishing his base designs. The dishonour done to the highest claims (of God, religion, his people), the disgrace incurred, the misery inflicted, should be sufficient to deter from "foolish and hurtful lusts;" but with him they are of no avail. "The unjust knoweth no shame" (Zeph. iii. 5; Isa. xxvi. 10). Then one evil passion is replaced by another.

> "Sweet love, I see, changing his property,
> Turns to the sourest and most deadly hate."
>
> (Shakespeare.)

"He hated her, but did not hate his own sin. Thus he showed that the love he had professed to her was not love, but lust; that it was not of God, but of the evil one" (Wordsworth). "It is characteristic of human nature to hate whom you have injured" (Tacitus). "Such are the baits and allurements of sin, which have a pleasant taste at the first, but in the end bite like a serpent; therefore one saith that pleasures must be considered, not as they come, but as they go" (Willet). "He feedeth on ashes," etc. (Isa. xliv. 20). The victim of evil desire becomes an object of bitter aversion, is pitilessly thrust away, maliciously defamed, and thus more grievously wronged: the true picture of many a desolated life! "What men dignify with the name of love is commonly a base sensual inclination, entire selfishness, which triumphs over the conscience and the fear of God, and without pity consigns its object to irreparable disgrace and misery for the sake of a momentary gratification! How different from that love which the Law of God commands! yea, how contrary to it!" (Scott).

V. DELUSIVE SECURITY, arising from the persuasion that secret iniquity may escape retribution. The transgressor thinks, perhaps, that it cannot be proved, no one will venture to call him to account for it, and that it is not worse than other crimes that go unpunished. Whatever fears (ver. 21) or suspicions he may at first entertain, are laid asleep by the lapse of time (ver. 23). He is not led to repentance by the long-suffering of Heaven, and he heeds not its wrath. But "judgment lingereth not," etc. (2 Pet. ii. 3).

VI. SUDDEN DESTRUCTION, inflicted by an unexpected hand (vers. 20, 28, 32). Where public law fails to do justice, private hostility finds means to take vengeance. One sin produces another, and is punished by it; craft by craft, violence by violence, hatred by hatred. "The way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. xiii. 15; vi. 15; xxix. 1).—D.

Ver. 3.—(JERUSALEM.) *A false friend.* "And Jonadab was a very subtil man." Every virtue has its counterfeit. As there is a friendship which is true and beneficial, so there is what appears to be such but is false and injurious. Of the former we have an instance in David and Jonathan (1 Sam. xviii. 1—4), of the latter in Amnon and Jonadab (his cousin, a son of Shammah, 1 Sam. xvi. 9; ch. xxi. 21), "one of those characters who in great houses pride themselves on being acquainted and on dealing with all the secrets of the family" (Stanley). In Jonadab, the daily companion of

Amnon (ver. 4), we see the kind of friend that should *not* be chosen. 1. *He is distinguished for subtlety, not for virtue and piety.* "In the choice of a friend, let him be virtuous; for vice is contagious, and there is no trusting of the sound and the sick together" (Seneca). "Friendship is nothing else but benevolence or charity, under some modifications, viz. that it be in a special manner intense, that it be mutual, and that it be manifest or mutually known. It cannot be but between good men, because an ill man cannot have any true charity, much less such an intense degree of it as is requisite to friendship" (J. Norris, 'Miscellanies'). A companion is sometimes chosen solely for his cleverness and insinuating address; but his superior intelligence (however desirable in itself), unless it be combined with moral excellence, enables him to do all the greater mischief (Jer. iv. 22). 2. *In professing concern for another's welfare he seeks only to serve his own interests;* his own pleasure, gain, influence, and advancement (ver. 4). True friendship is disinterested. Jonadab appears to have cared only for himself. Hence (to avoid getting himself into trouble) he gave no warning to others of what he foresaw (ver. 32). "This young man, who probably desired to make himself of some importance as David's nephew, was clever enough to guess the truth from the first; but it is sad to think that his thought and his advice were never founded on anything but a knowledge of the devil in man" (Ewald). 3. *When he is acquainted with the secret thoughts of another, he fails to give him faithful counsel.* (Ver. 5.) Such acquaintance is often obtained by flattery—"thou a king's son"—and frequent questioning; but it is not followed, in the case of improper desires and purposes, by admonition. "No flatterer can be a true friend." "Had he been a true friend, he had bent all the forces of his dissuasion against the wicked motions of that sinful lust" (Hall). "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." 4. *Whilst he devises means for another's gratification, he smoothes his way to destruction.* His aim is only to please. He advises what is agreeable, but what is morally wrong; and thus incites to sin; for which, with all its consequences, he is, in part, responsible. "In wise counsel two things must be considered—that both the *end* be good, and the *means* honest and lawful. Jonadab's counsel failed in both." "The rapacious friend, the insincere friend, the friend who speaks only to please, and he who is a companion in vicious pleasures,—recognizing these four to be false friends, the wise man flies far from them, as he would from a road beset by danger" (*Contemporary Review*, xxvii. 421). "A companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Prov. xiii. 20; i. 10).—D.

Ver. 7.—*Tamar.* A princess; the daughter of David and Maacah (of Geshur), and sister of Absalom; distinguished for her beauty, modesty, domesticity, obedience (ver. 8), tender-heartedness, piety, and misfortunes. In her we see an illustration of (what has often occurred): 1. Purity pursued by licentious desire (ver. 2). 2. Simplicity beset by wily designs (ver. 5). 3. Kindness requited by selfish ingratitude (vers. 9, 10). 4. Confidence exposed to enticing persuasions and perilous temptation (ver. 11). 5. Virtue overpowered by brutal violence (ver. 14). 6. Innocence vilified by guilty aversion (ver. 17). "So fair had she gone forth on what seemed her errand of mercy, so foully had she been driven back" (Edersheim). "Let no one ever expect better treatment from those who are capable of attempting their seduction; but it is better to suffer the greatest wrong than to commit the least sin" (Matthew Henry). 7. Sorrow assuaged by brotherly sympathy (ver. 20). 8. Injury avenged with terrible severity (ver. 28).—D.

Ver. 21.—*Impunity.* "And King David heard of all these things, and was very wroth;" but "he did not grieve the spirit of his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn" (LXX.). And he did not punish him (1 Sam. iii. 13); which must be looked upon as—

I. AN OMISSION OF MANIFEST DUTY. If he had been only a father, he would have been bound to chastise his children for their misbehaviour; but, being also a king, he was under still stronger obligation to punish the guilty. To do this: 1. Properly belonged to the *authority* delegated to him. 2. Was expressly enjoined in the *Divine Law* (Lev. xx. 17). 3. Urgently demanded by *the sense of justice.* 4. Indispensably necessary to the *protection* of his subjects. "Kings, then, have not absolute power to do in their government what pleases them; their power is limited by God's Word; so

that if they strike not where God has commanded to strike, they and their throne are criminal and guilty of the wickedness which abounds upon the face of the earth for lack of punishment" (John Knox).

II. UNWARRANTED BY ADEQUATE REASONS. In Israel (as in Persia and other Eastern countries) the king, as vicegerent of heaven, had a large discretionary power of dispensing with the penalties of the Law; but it behoved him to exercise it without partiality and on sufficient grounds. Although David's omission to punish is not expressly condemned, yet the consequences by which it was followed show that it took place (not, as some have supposed, on "principle," or because it was "impossible" for him to do otherwise, but) without such grounds. 1. *The affection of a father.* This, however, ought not to have prevented punishment by a father or judge; as it did, being inordinate and blamable, in Eli (1 Sam. ii. 22, 30). 2. *The rank of the offender;* the king's son, his firstborn, heir to the crown. But he was not above the law; nor less guilty than another of inferior position would have been. "God is no respecter of persons." 3. *The transgression and forgiveness of the king himself.* Nevertheless, whilst both may have exerted a pernicious influence, Amnon was responsible for his own conduct; and David's exemption (only from legal punishment) rested on grounds which did not exist in the case of his ungodly and impenitent son. The king's wrath proves his full conviction of Amnon's guilt and his moral abhorrence of its enormity; his failure to "grieve," or inflict suffering upon him, indicates his own weakness and dereliction of duty. "Punishment is an effort of man to find a more exact relation between sin and suffering than this world affords us. A duty is laid upon us to make this relationship of sin to suffering as real, and as natural, and as exact in proportion as it is possible to be made. This is the moral root of the whole doctrine of punishment. But if the adjustment of pain to vice be the main ground of punishment, it must be admitted that there are other ends which society has in view in its infliction. These secondary elements in punishment appear to be (1) the reformation of the offender; (2) the prevention of further offences by the offender; (3) the repression of offences in others" (Edward Fry, *Nineteenth Century*, No. lxxix. p. 524).

III. PRODUCTIVE OF DISASTROUS EFFECTS. 1. It does not appear to have produced any other effect *on the offender* than to confirm him in recklessness and fancied security. "Punishment connected with sin operates towards reform in two ways: (1) by the association of ideas—the linking together of that from which our nature shrinks with that from which it ought to shrink, so that the temptation to sin recalls not only the pleasure of sin, but the pain of suffering; (2) by the shock to the habits of thought and of practice which suffering produces, by the solution of continuity in the man's life which it causes, by the opportunity for reflection and thought which it thus affords" (Lord Justice Fry). 2. *On others,* also, it was injurious; weakening respect for royal authority and public justice, causing the law to be despised, furnishing grounds for private revenge, leading to further impunity (ver. 39; ch. xiv. 24, 33), more daring crimes (ch. xv. 7; xvi. 21), widespread disaffection and rebellion. 3. *On the king himself.* Further impairing his personal, moral, kingly energy, and accumulating "sorrow upon sorrow" (vers. 31, 37; ch. xv. 13). It was another link in the chain of painful consequences resulting from his great transgression; naturally, slowly, effectually wrought out under the direction and control of the perfect justice of the supreme King; accomplishing a beneficent end, in purifying his heart, restoring him to God, averting his final condemnation, and teaching, warning, benefiting mankind. "The dark sin of which he had been guilty spoke of a character that had lost its self-control, its truthfulness, its generosity. His penitence was not able to undo all its consequences and to bring back the old energy and life. Over and above its direct results in alienating the hearts of his most trusted counsellors, and placing him at the mercy of a hard taskmaster, that dark hour left behind it the penalty of an enfeebled will, the cowardice of a hidden crime, the remorse which weeps for the past, yet cannot rouse itself to the duties of the present. He leaves the sin of Amnon unpunished in spite of the fearful promise it gave of a reign of brutal passion, 'because he loved him, for he was his firstborn.' Half suspecting, apparently, that Absalom had some scheme for revenging the wrong which he had failed to redress, he has no energy to stop its execution. He shrinks only from being present at a meeting the meaning and issues of which he does not comprehend, and yet dimly fears. When the

exaggerated report is brought back that Absalom had slain all his brothers—sure sign, if it had been so, that he was claiming the throne, and marching to it through the blood of his kindred—David's attitude is that of passive, panic-stricken submission" (E. H. Plumptre, 'Biblical Studies,' p. 89). Who can say that he sinned with *impunity*? "Thenceforward the days of his years became full of evil, and if he lived (for the Lord *caused death to pass* from himself to the child by a vicarious dispensation), it was to be a king, with more than kingly sorrows, but with little of kingly power; to be banished by his son; bearded by his servant; betrayed by his friends; deserted by his people; bereaved of his children; and to feel all, all these bitter griefs, bound, as it were, by a chain of complicated cause and effect, to this one great, original transgression". (Blunt, 'Undesigned Coincidences,' p. 146).

"It often falls, in course of common life,
That right long time is overborne of wrong;
Through avarice, or power, or guile, or strife,
That weakens her, and makes her party strong.
But justice, though her doom she do prolong,
Yet at the last she will her own cause right."
(Spenser.)

D.

Vers. 22—29.—(BAAL-HAZOR.) *The revenge of Absalom.* "Absalom hated Amnon." *References:* 1. Third son (Chileab, probably, being dead) of David, by Maacah, daughter of Talmai, King of Geshur; born at Hebron, his name ("father of peace") indicating, perhaps, the hope entertained at his birth (ch. iii. 1—5). "The young handsome hero must have been conspicuous among the soldiers of Israel, and taken his place among the sons of David, who were 'chief rulers.'" 2. Hatred (when about eighteen years old) and murder (after two years). 3. Flight to Geshur (ver. 38) and residence there (three years). 4. Return (ch. xiv. 23, 24) and partial reconciliation (during two years); married about this time, and father of three sons (dying in infancy, ch. xiv. 27; xviii. 18) and one daughter (Tamar, named after his sister). 5. Full reconciliation (ch. xiv. 33; xv. 1—11) and preparation for revolt (four years). 6. Conspiracy in Hebron (ch. xv. 12, 13). 7. Occupation of Jerusalem (ch. xv. 37; xvi. 15—19), possession of the palace (ch. xv. 20—23), anointed king (ch. xix. 10), consultations (ch. xvii. 1—14). 8. Pursuit of David, and defeat in battle (ch. xvii. 24—26; xviii. 1—8). 9. Slain by Joab (ch. xviii. 9—18). 10. Lamented by David (ch. xviii. 33; xix. 1—4). Revenge is sinful resentment. It is felt, on account of real or supposed injury, toward the person rather than the conduct of the offender; desires his suffering, not his improvement; and seeks it maliciously, deliberately, and unlawfully. "All pain occasioned to another in consequence of an offence or injury received from him, further than what is calculated to procure reparation or promote the just ends of punishment, is so much revenge" (Paley, 'Mor. Ph.'). It is "a kind of wild justice" (Bacon, 'Essays'). Of the spirit of revenge, which was embodied in Absalom, and too often finds a place in others, observe—

I. ITS SEEMING JUSTIFICATION; for he who indulges it commonly seeks to justify himself therein (ch. xiv. 32), it may be, on account of: 1. The *grievous wrong* suffered, directly or in the person of another with whom he is closely connected. The more this is brooded over, the greater it appears and the more it incites to wrath. 2. The *natural instinct* of anger and retaliation, which is

"Far, far too dear to every mortal breast,
Sweet to the soul as honey to the taste."
(Homer.)

But it must be directed, controlled, often completely repressed by justice and love. "The taking vengeance on a foe is honourable," it has been said, "rather than the being reconciled" (Aristotle, 'Rhetoric'). True wisdom teaches otherwise (1 Sam. xi. 12, 13; Prov. xx. 22; xxiv. 29). 3. The *culpable failure* of justice, on the part of the civil magistrate, "the minister of God," etc. (Rom. xiii. 4). It may be a temptation to private vengeance; but it does not warrant any one in taking the law into his own hands; whilst by doing so he becomes a breaker of the law and justly liable to its

penalty. "The revenge which he took for the foul wrong that his sister had suffered at the hands of Amnon did not shock the men of Israel as it shocks us. To him, by the feeling of all Oriental nations, belonged the special guardianship of her honour; and subtly as the punishment was inflicted, it was nothing more than the monstrous turpitude of the guilt deserved. Had David been true to his kingly calling, instead of passing the crime over with a weak sorrow and a yet weaker leniency, there would have been no occasion for the vengeance which Absalom felt himself bound to take. The two long years of waiting which followed on his revenge, must have been a time in which disappointment, irritation, bitterness against his father, were gaining, slowly but surely, the mastery over him" (Plumptre).

II. ITS SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS. 1. Enduring and implacable *hatred* (ver. 23); a malicious purpose formed from the first (as his intimate companion read in his countenance, ver. 32), but concealed that it might be the more effectually accomplished when opportunity served. "A man that studieth revenge keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal and do well" (Bacon). 2. Subtle and deceitful *scheming* (vers. 24, 26); under pretence of kindness; and taking a base advantage of affection, consideration, and confidence. Ver. 25 is "the first instance history offers of the ruinous cost of royal visits to those who are honoured with them" (Kitto). 3. Pitiless and treacherous *cruelty* (ver. 28; ch. xi. 13). Another instance of indulgence in intoxication (1 Sam. xxv. 36, 37; ch. xi. 13). "Absalom calls the execution of this base cruelty in his servants, courage and valour; being indeed but treacherous and cowardly murder; which shows that vices are ofttimes coloured with the name of virtues, as drunkenness is called good fellowship, avarice good husbandry, subtlety to deceive wisdom, and pride magnanimity" (Guild). It is not improbable that he wished to get rid of Amnon as an obstacle in the way to the throne. "The wild acts of Absalom's life may have been to some extent the results of maternal training; they were at least characteristic of the stock from which he sprang" (Smith, 'Dict.'). "From his father he inherited nothing but his regal pride" (Ewald). "He was a man who could scheme deeply, bide his time patiently, and then strike with decision and daring" (D. Macleod).

III. ITS EXCEEDING SINFULNESS. 1. Disbelief in the presence and justice of God, who, though man fails to punish, "will by no means clear the guilty." 2. Insensibility to his forbearance, which should teach the like (1 Sam. xxiv. 13; Matt. v. 48). 3. Disobedience to the Divine Law, which is "fulfilled in one word," etc. (Gal. v. 14), and to many special injunctions (Rom. xii. 9; Matt. vi. 15). 4. Fruitfulness in wickedness and crime (1 John iii. 15), with all their evil consequences to others and to a man himself (vers. 36, 37). "Absalom fled from man, who only could kill the body; but he could not fly from blood-guiltiness and an accusing conscience, nor yet from the hand of God's justice, which did reach him afterwards" (Guild). "It was asked of the sage, 'In what one virtue are all the rest comprised?' 'Patience,' was his answer. 'And in what single vice are all others concentrated?' 'Vindictiveness'" (Rabbi Salomon Ibn Gabirol). "Whereas some may be apt to suspect that the patient bearing of one injury may invite another, I believe it will be found quite otherwise, that the revenging of one injury brings on another; the one is like the withdrawing of fuel or combustible matter, which will soon put out the fire, and the other is continually furnishing fresh fuel, mixed with oil and gunpowder and such inflaming materials as are apt to spread the fire of contention, but not to extinguish it" (J. Blair: 1740).

CONCLUSION. How odious is the spirit of revenge! He who gives way to it might as well cherish a venomous serpent in his bosom. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. xii. 21).—D.

Vers. 30—39.—(JEBUSALEM.) *Parental sorrows.* "And the king also and all his servants wept very sore" (ver. 36). David's intense feeling appears in his affection (vers. 6, 25, 39), his wrath (ver. 21), and his grief (ver. 31). The delight which a father finds in his children is seldom unalloyed. His sorrows, on their account, are—

I. OFTTIMES PECULIARLY SEVERE. 1. Their misbehaviour. "A 'house-cross' is the heaviest of all earthly crosses. The gall which is mingled in our cup by those who are nearest to us surpasses all others in bitterness" (Krummacher).

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!"

('King Lear.')

2. Their misfortune (ver. 19). 3. Their disappointment of his hopes; his consternation, trembling anxieties, exaggerated fears (ver. 30); his bereavement by death (ver. 32) and by enforced exile through crime (ver. 34); his son a fratricide, like Cain, alive yet dead. What a heavy burden of trouble was thus laid upon David! It is not surprising that it was followed by serious and protracted *bodily affliction*, favourable to the designs of his enemies and conducive to still deeper distress (ch. xv. 4, 30), as several psalms seem to indicate (Ps. xxxviii., xxxix., xli., lv.).

O Jehovah, rebuke me not in thine anger,
Nor chasten me in thy hot displeasure.
For thine arrows stick fast in me,
And thy hand presseth me sore," etc.

(Ps. xxxviii. 1, 2.)

II. SOMETIMES DUE TO HIS OWN FAULT. 1. His sinful example. Children are more ready to imitate their father's vices than his virtues. 2. His defective discipline. "David's failure in the government of his family was due in part to the excessive, even morbid, tenderness of his feelings towards his children, especially some of them. He may also have thought of his family circle as too exclusively a scene for relaxation and enjoyment; he may have forgotten that even there there is a call for much vigilance and self-denial" (Blaikie). "By this example we see that children whom their parents spare to correct will in the end be a grief unto them" (Willet). "Chastisement without love is an outrage; no father is at liberty to plague or torture his child; but a love that cannot chastise is no love, and reaps a poor reward. A child that does not at the proper time feel the father's rod becomes at last a rod for his father" (Schlier). "Ofttimes the child whom the father loves most (as David did Amnon) becomes his greatest grief by too much indulgence" (Guild). 3. His culpable clemency in the case of a great crime (ver. 21). Even if David did inflict some punishment on Amnon, as it has been supposed (Chandler), yet it was altogether inadequate to the offence. The sorrows of a father over the sins and sufferings of his children are intensified by the knowledge that they are, in some degree, the result of his own errors and transgressions. "A parent can have no sharper pang than the sight of his own sin reappearing in his child. David saw the ghastly reflection of his unbridled passion in his eldest son's foul crime (and even a gleam of it in his unhappy daughter) and of his murderous craft in his second son's bloody revenge" (Maclaren).

III. NOT WITHOUT MERCIFUL ALLEVIATION. 1. The occasion of trouble is less calamitous than it might have been; less than it was feared to be (ver. 32). 2. Grief is assuaged by the lapse of time (vers. 37, 38). 3. It is vain to mourn over what is irreparable (ver. 39; ch. xii. 23; xiv. 14). 4. These afflictions are chastisements from the heavenly Father's hand, and should be endured with patience and hope (Ps. xxxix. 7, 9; xxxviii. 15). 5. They are mingled with tokens of Divine favour (ch. xii. 13, 25; Ps. xli. 1—3; Isa. xxvii. 8). 6. Their purpose is morally beneficial (Heb. xii. 11). "It may seem strange to say it, but it is most true, that the tears which flow from the eyelids of a man are as needful to the fruitfulness of his heart as the dews which descend from the eyelids of the morning are to the thirsty ground" (E. Irving).—D.

Ver. 3.—*A diabolical friend: a homily for young men.* This chapter contains a dreadful story. The unnatural lust of Amnon, the vile counsels of Jonadab, the unsuspiciousness of the king, the confiding innocence of Tamar, her unavailing remonstrances and resistance, the hardened villainy of her half-brother, his hatred and cruel expulsion of his innocent victim, her bitter anguish and lamentations, the unjust leniency of David towards the offender (although "very wroth"), the vengeance so quietly prepared and so sternly executed by Absalom, the king's lamentations over the death of Amnon, his subsequent longing after the fugitive Absalom,—present a picture of horrible wickedness, of helpless misery, of weak negligence, of fierce and deadly revenge, which moves us with alternate detestation and pity, as well as wonder that so

much depravity should have been found in the family of a man so godly and devout, until we remember the unfavourableness of polygamy to the right training of families, the foolish indulgence of David towards his children, and his own evil conduct, which weakened his authority. Passing by, however, all other particulars, let us consider awhile this statement, "Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab . . . a very subtil man."

I. A KIND OF FRIENDSHIP TO BE ABHORRED AND AVOIDED. At first view the friendship of Jonadab and Amnon seems natural and proper. They were first cousins; Jonadab was a man of intelligence ("subtil," equivalent to "wise," not necessarily "subtle" in the bad sense); he "showed himself friendly" by noticing his friend's doleful appearance and inquiring the cause. Not until we observe the advice he gave, and see how it was accepted and followed, do we discover how base he was, how base they both were. Amnon's vileness appears, indeed, earlier, in his indulgence of a passion for his beautiful half-sister, and that so violent, while so seemingly hopeless, that it affected his health. A case, surely, calling for pity and sympathy! No wonder that his dear friend so feelingly inquired after his health, and employed his subtlety to find a remedy! They must have known each other very well for one to acknowledge so disreputable a cause of his ill looks, and the other to suggest so infamous a restorative. What a real friend would have advised is obvious. He would have urged Amnon, by every consideration of morality and religion, of regard for the honour of his family and nation, the happiness of his father, and the duty he owed to his sister, to conquer his guilty passion. But Amnon knew well that he was in no peril of being troubled with such counsel, or he would not have acknowledged his shameful lust. Observe, too, how utterly this pair of friends, like all their tribe, disregarded the ruin and misery which they were plotting for the innocent Tamar. They seem to have been tolerably sure that the offence would not be thought very serious by "society," and that the law would not be put in force by David. His own sins of a similar kind would give them confidence of impunity. Even after committing the foul crime, Amnon does not seem to have thought it necessary, for the sake either of safety or decency, to retire for at least a time from Jerusalem until the affair had "blown over." What a contrast between this friendship and that of David and Jonathan! Many such friends, alas! are to be found in the world; men who are counselling and aiding and hardening each other in licentiousness, whose delight is to ruin the innocent, and bring dishonour and misery on their families; and who are preparing each other for well-merited damnation. Yet their debauchery is overlooked by "society," especially if they be of high rank, while their victims receive no pity. It would be of little use to address such wretches, even if we could gain access to them. But we may warn young men who have not yet come under their deadly influence, but who may be in danger of doing so. For in all classes of society persons are to be found who, corrupt themselves, delight in corrupting others. Young men coming from the country to great cities, where at present they have no friends, are in peril, not only from prostitutes or sometimes from loose married women, but from men of the class referred to. These will test them by using *double entendres*, advancing to outspoken ribaldry and freer conversation about sexual indulgences. If discouraged, they will laugh at the "innocence" and "squeamishness" of the youth they would corrupt. If he at all encourage them, they will introduce him to indecent books, or offer themselves as guides to the places where he may safely indulge his passions. To an inexperienced youth, not yet well grounded in Christian principles, such approaches present very powerful temptations. The assault from without meets with auxiliaries within, in the awakening passions themselves, and in a curiosity "to see a little life." The manner in which such temptations are met at the beginning is likely to determine the character of the youth's whole future life. To yield is to be undone; to resist and conquer is to gain new strength for future conflict and victory. Let, then, those who are thus tempted shrink back from their tempter as from a viper. At the first indication of such depravity let them "cut" those who display it, however related to them by blood, however agreeable as companions (the more agreeable the more dangerous), however able to help them in their worldly career. If their counsel be not followed, yet friendly association with them in any degree must exercise a debasing influence. It may not be possible to avoid them altogether; they may be employed in the same establishment, and indulge themselves in loose language in

the hearing of their fellows; but let a loathing of them be cherished, and every practicable effort be made to silence and suppress them.

II. THE SUREST SAFEGUARDS AGAINST SUCH FRIENDSHIP. 1. *Close and decided friendship with Christ.* Begun early, cultivated diligently by daily communion with him in secret, through devout study of his Word, believing meditation, fervent prayer. Thus the heart will become filled with the purest and noblest affections, leaving no room for the vile; and thus will the youth become "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," and "be able to withstand in the evil day" (Eph. vi. 10, 13). 2. *Friendship with the best Christians.* Union and communion with them in Church fellowship, in Divine ordinances, in Christian work, in social life and its pure enjoyments. Christian people should interest themselves in the young (especially young men from home), and welcome them to their confidence, their friendship, their homes. For the young must have friends; and if there be difficulty in associating with the good, they are in so much greater danger of contenting themselves with the evil or the doubtful. But if they form Christian friendships, these will be as an impassable barrier against the advances of such as would lead them astray. 3. *Constant watchfulness and prayer.* Against everything that, if indulged, would make the society of the wicked welcome. Guard the heart, for out of it springs the life (Prov. iv. 23). Seek of God a clean heart (Ps. li. 10). Suppress every impure thought and feeling (see Matt. v. 28), and every impulse to utter impure words (Eph. iv. 29; v. 3). Let the psalmist's prayers (Ps. cxli. 3, 4; cxxxix. 23, 24) be yours. Ever cherish the thought, "Thou God seest me" (Gen. xvi. 13). 4. *Consideration of the certain result of following evil counsellors.* "A companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Prov. xiii. 20). Amnon found it so. Let the young man think, when sinners entice him, "They are inviting me to misery, death, *hell!*"

Finally, it is not only those who are unchaste and the abettors of unchastity whose close acquaintance and counsel are to be avoided, but the irreligious and immoral in general; all who are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim. iii. 4, Revised Version); all who adopt, practice, and tempt to infidelity, sabbath-breaking, intemperance, gambling, untruthfulness, dishonesty, or any other form of evil. "Be not deceived: evil company" of any kind "doth corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. xv. 33, Revised Version).—G. W.

Ver. 12.—*Things that ought not to be done in Israel.* The plea of Tamar, "no such thing ought to be done in Israel," is interesting, as showing that the sentiment was prevalent amongst the Israelites, morally imperfect as they were, that they were not to be as the nations around them; that practices prevalent elsewhere were altogether out of keeping with their position and calling. "It may be so elsewhere; but it must not be so *in Israel.*" A similar sentiment as to what is suitable and becoming is appealed to in the New Testament. Christians are exhorted to act "as becometh saints" (Eph. v. 3; Rom. xvi. 2), to "walk worthy of the Lord," "worthy of their vocation," etc. (Col. i. 10; Eph. iv. 1).

I. THE GROUNDS OF SUCH A SENTIMENT. Why should the people of God regard themselves as under special obligations to live pure and holy lives? 1. *The character of their God.* "Ye shall be holy, for I am holy" was the language of God to Israel (Lev. xi. 44); and it was repeated to Christians (1 Pet. i. 15, 16). The injunction could not have been addressed—cannot now—to the worshippers of other gods. 2. *Their own consecration to God.* Israel was separated by God from other people to be his own people, devoted to the practice of purity and righteousness (Lev. xx. 24, 26). All their history, laws, and institutions had this for their aim, and were adapted to it. In like manner Christians are "called to be saints" (Rom. i. 7), chosen of God, "that they should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. i. 4). The Son of God is called Jesus, because he came to "save his people from their sins" (Matt. i. 21). The purpose of his love and self-sacrifice for them is to "redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works" (Titus ii. 14, Revised Version). This aim is expressed by the rite by which they are consecrated to God and introduced into his kingdom—it is a baptism, a washing from uncleanness. For this they are united into a holy fellowship, with sacred ministries and services, and godly discipline; and all the inspired instructions and admonitions

addressed to them, and expounded to them by their teachers, have manifestly the same end and tendency. With all and above all, the Spirit which dwells amongst them and gives life and reality to all their communion, worship, and service, is the *Holy Spirit*, and his work is to regenerate and sanctify their nature, and produce in them all goodness. 3. *The wonders by which they have been redeemed and consecrated.* Ancient Israel, by a long succession of supernatural revelations, marvellous miracles, and providential interpositions. The Church of Christ, by the incarnation of the Eternal Word, and all that followed in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord, and the miraculous bestowment and works of the Holy Ghost. Yea, every true Christian is himself, as such, a product of the Spirit's supernatural power, being "born again," "born of the Spirit" (John iii. 3, 6). Thus it is that this "holy nation" is perpetuated in the earth. 4. *Their privileges and hopes.* "The children of Israel" were "a people near unto God" (Ps. cxlviii. 14). He was their "Portion;" they enjoyed his special presence, guidance, government, and defence. In a yet more emphatic sense Christians have God as their God, enjoy constant union and communion with him, and are assured of his love and sympathy, care and protection. Moreover, to them is given, more clearly and fully than to the Old Testament Church, the hope of eternal life. And what is this hope? It is that of seeing God and being like him (1 John iii. 2), of becoming "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but . . . holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 27), presented "faultless before the presence of his glory" (Jude 24). It is to be admitted into the "New Jerusalem," into which nothing unholy can enter (Rev. xxi. 27). The condition of realizing this blessedness is purity of heart—that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord" (Matt. v. 8; Heb. xii. 14). It is clear that in such a community nothing unholy "ought to be done," however common elsewhere. Such things are utterly inconsistent with their position, their knowledge, their professions, and their prospects.

II. THE CONDUCT WHICH THIS SENTIMENT CONDEMNS. We need not dwell on gross sensuality, such as that against which the words of the text were first used. They were appropriate then, because the standard of morality "in Israel" was so much higher in respect to such practices than in the surrounding nations. But the respectable part of general society in our time and country recognizes "no such thing" as Amnon proposed as lawful. And as to many other departments of morality, the moral standard of society has been elevated by the influence of Christianity. In using the words, therefore, we do well to think of practices which are permitted or at least thought lightly of by others, but which are nevertheless contrary to the precepts or spirit of our religion. Amongst these may be named: 1. *Selfishness.* Including covetousness, worldly ambition, illiberality, etc., with the disregard or violation of the claims and rights of others that are allied to them. These are common enough in Christian countries, but ought not to exist amongst Christian people, whose religion is a product of Divine love, whose great Leader and Master is the incarnation of love, who have received numberless precepts enjoining the love of others as of themselves, and have been assured that love is greater than faith and hope (1 Cor. xiii. 13), much greater, then, than religious ceremonies, and ecclesiastical forms and observances. Covetousness in particular is closely associated in the New Testament with sensuality, as a vice not even to be named amongst Christians, and is declared to be idolatry (Eph. v. 3, 5; Col. iii. 5; 1 Cor. v. 10, 11). 2. *Pride.* Whether of rank, or wealth, or intellect. Holy Scripture, in both Testaments, abounds in precepts and examples against pride. The Lord Jesus "humbled himself" in becoming man, and in the whole of his life on earth, and frequently enjoined humility on his disciples, and reproved every indication of a proud spirit in them. Common, therefore, as pride is in the world, "no such thing ought to be" in the Church. 3. *Similar remarks may be made as to unkindness, the revengeful spirit, the unforgiving spirit, quarrelsomeness, uncharitableness, evil-speaking, and the like.* 4. To these may be added *frivolity, gaiety*—dissipation, a life of mere amusement, with no serious, worthy purpose or pursuit. These are not becoming in those who are enjoined to work out their salvation with fear and trembling; to be sober and vigilant because of the activity of Satan in seeking their destruction; to deny themselves, etc. (Phil. ii. 12; 1 Pet. v. 8; Luke ix. 23). 5. *Indifference* to the spiritual welfare of others. The gospel brings into prominence the claims which men

have upon Christians in this respect. Jesus very solemnly warns against "offending," others, even the least, by doing or saying what would lead them into sin or hinder their salvation (Matt. xviii. 6, 7). He repeatedly teaches his disciples that he gave them light in order that they might "shine before men," and so lead them to glorify God (Matt. v. 14—16; Mark iv. 21, 22). St. Paul commends the Philippians for their "fellowship in furtherance of the gospel," and urges them to "strive" on its behalf (Phil. i. 5, 27, Revised Version). St. Peter enjoins that "as every man hath received the gift" he should use it for the good of others, in teaching and ministering (1 Pet. iv. 10, 11). And in general, the cause of Christ is committed to his disciples, that they may sustain and extend it both by active service and by pecuniary gifts. To the discharge of this duty by others we owe our own Christian privileges and character. If we disregard it, we display ingratitude, unfaithfulness to our Lord, insensibility to his great love to ourselves. Unconcern as to the salvation of men is natural enough in men of the world, but "no such thing ought to be" found amongst Christians.

Finally, in the absence of specific precepts, we may settle many a doubt as to our duty by considering whether the act or habit in question is suitable and becoming in those who profess themselves earnest disciples of Jesus Christ; whether it is in harmony with his spirit and character, and conducive, or at least not hostile, to our spiritual benefit, or that of others.—G. W.

Ver. 13.—*Fools in Israel.* Sad as was the case of the injured Tamar, that of her wicked brother was sadder still. She was outraged, but innocent; he was "as one of the fools in Israel."

I. WICKED MEN ARE "FOOLS." The term is often used in Holy Scripture as synonymous with "godless," "lawless," "sinful;" especially in the Book of Proverbs, where piety and holiness are designated "wisdom." The folly of sinners appears in that: 1. *Their life is opposed to right reason.* To wisdom, as recognizable by the intellect and moral sense, and as revealed in the Sacred Word. They reject the guidance of "the only wise God"—the Infinite and All-perfect Wisdom. This is true, not only of gross and brutal sinners like Amnon, but of the most refined and intellectual. Either they know not how to live, or, worse, will not live according to their knowledge. Of many in our day we may use the words of St. Paul (Rom. i. 22), "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." 2. *They act contrary to their own well-being.* They reject the greatest blessings for this life and the next; and choose for themselves degradation, destruction, and misery. They sell their souls for transient gain or pleasure, or surrender them to destruction because they are too proud to learn or to accept salvation as a free gift of God to the undeserving. 3. *They are in many instances the subjects of strange and fatal delusions.* Believing themselves Christians, though destitute of the most essential characteristics of Christ's true disciples; imagining themselves safe for eternity because of their devotion to ritual observances and dutiful submission to their priests, although they continue in their sins.

II. SUCH FOOLS ARE TO BE FOUND EVEN "IN ISRAEL." In the most enlightened communities; in Christian congregations; in the purest Churches.

III. FOOLS "IN ISRAEL" ARE THE WORST FOOLS. The most guilty, the most hopeless of the class. Because of: 1. *The light which shines there.* Revealing God, truth, duty, sin and holiness, life and death. They "rebel against the light" (Job xxiv. 13), either by ignoring it, or hating and consciously rejecting it. 2. *The influences enjoyed there.* From the examples of good men; from the institutions and life of the Church; from the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit. 3. *The privileges accessible there.* The friendship of Christ and Christians; approach with assurance to the throne of grace in prayer for all needful Divine guidance and strength. 4. *The convictions produced there.* Living "in Israel," it is scarcely possible to escape impressions and convictions which especially bring wisdom within reach, and render continuance in folly and sin the more deplorable. They furnish opportunities of repentance and salvation which, being neglected, greatly increase guilt. 5. *The heavier doom incurred there.* By those, that is, to whom the advantages there enjoyed become occasions of greater sin. To them belong the "many stripes" (Luke xii. 47) and the "sorer punishment" (Heb. x. 29). Let each of us, then, be concerned not to be "as one of the fools in Israel."—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ver. 1.—**The king's heart was toward Absalom.** Again there is a diversity of view as to the right rendering. The preposition does not usually mean "toward," but "against," and is so rendered in ver. 13. The whole phrase occurs again only in Dan. xi. 28, and certainly there implies enmity. The whole attitude of David towards Absalom is one of persistent hostility, and, even when Joab had obtained his recall, for two full years he would not admit him into his presence. What has led most commentators to force the meaning here and in ch. xiii. 39 is the passionate burst of grief when news was brought of Absalom's death following upon the anxious orders given to the generals to be careful of the young man's life. But David was a man of very warm affections, and while this would make him feel intense sorrow for the death of a son by his brother's hand, and stern indignation towards the murderer, there would still lie deep in the father's heart true love towards his sinning child, and Absalom's fall was sad enough to cause a strong revulsion of feeling. David's grief would be not merely for the death of his son, but that he should have died so miserably, and in an attempt so shameful. Was not, too, the natural grief of a father made the more deep by the feeling that this was the third stage of the penalty denounced on his own sin, and that the son's death was the result of the father's crime?

Ver. 2.—**Tekoah.** This town, famous as the birthplace of the Prophet Amos, lay upon the borders of the great wilderness south-east of Jerusalem. As it was only five miles to the south of Bethlehem, Joab's birthplace, he had probably often heard tales of this woman's intelligence; and, though he contrived the parable himself, yet it would need tact and adroitness on the woman's part to give the tale with tragic effect, and answer the king's questions with all the signs of genuine emotion. If her acting was bad, the king would see through the plot, and only by great skill would his heart be so moved as to force him to some such expression of feeling as would serve Joab's purpose.

Ver. 4.—**When the woman of Tekoah spake.** All the versions and several manuscripts read, as the sense requires, "when the woman of Tekoah came." There is an interesting article in De Rossi, fixing with much probability the twelfth century as the date of this error. Though Absalom subsequently (ch. xv. 4) complained of the lax administration of justice in the realm, yet evidently this woman had the right of bringing her suit before the king; and we may be sure that Joab would take care that nothing unusual was done, lest it should awaken the king's suspicions. But possibly there was a want of method in judicial matters, and very much was left in the hands of the tribal officers, such as we find mentioned in Josh. xxiv. 1.

Ver. 7.—**The whole family.** This does not mean the kinsfolk, in whom such a disregard of the mother's feelings would have been cruel, but one of the great divisions of the tribe (see note on the *mishpachah*, in 1 Sam. xx. 6, and comp. 1 Sam. x. 21). In ver. 15 she rightly calls them "the people." We have thus a glimpse of the ordinary method of administering the criminal law, and find that each portion of a tribe exercised justice within its own district, being summoned to a general convention by its hereditary chief; and in this case the widow represents it as determined to punish the crime of fratricide with inflexible severity, and we may assume that such was the usual practice. The mother sets before David the other side of the matter—her own loneliness, the wiping out of the father's house, the utter ruin of her home if the last live coal on her hearth be extinguished. And in this way she moves his generous sympathies even to the point of overriding the legal rights of the mishpachah. In modern communities there is always some formal power of softening or entirely remitting penalties required by the letter of the law, and of taking into consideration matters of equity and even of feeling, which the judge must put aside; and in monarchies this is always the high prerogative of the crown. **And we will destroy the heir also.** The Syriac has the third person, "And they will destroy even the heir, and quench my coal that is left." This is more natural, but there is greater pungency in the widow putting into the mouth of the heads of the clan, not words which they had actually spoken, but words which showed what would be the real effect of their determination. There is great force and beauty also in the description of her son as the last live coal left to keep the family hearth burning. In another but allied sense David is called "the lamp of Israel" (ch. xxi. 17, marg.).

Ver. 9.—**The iniquity be on me.** The king had given a general promise to help the widow, but she wants to lead him on to a definite assurance that her son shall be pardoned. Less than this would not help Absalom's case. Instead, therefore, of with-

drawing, she represents herself as dissatisfied, and pleads for full forgiveness; and as this would be a violation of the letter of the Levitical Law, in order to remove David's supposed scruples, she takes upon herself the penalty.

Ver. 11.—**I pray thee, let the king remember,** etc. Thenius says that the woman plays well the part of a talkative gossip, but really she was using the skill for which Joab employed her in bringing the king to give her son a free pardon. Nothing short of this would serve Absalom, who already was so far forgiven as to be in no fear of actual punishment. It is remarkable that David does not hesitate finally to grant this without making further inquiry, though he must have known that a mother's pleas were not likely to be very impartial. Moreover, while in ver. 9 she had acknowledged that there might be a breach of the law in pardoning a murderer, she now appeals to the mercy of Jehovah, who had himself provided limits to the anger of the avenger of blood (see Numb. xxxv.). He had thus shown himself to be a God of equity, in whom mercy triumphed over the rigid enactments of law. The words which follow more exactly mean, "That the avenger of blood do not multiply destruction, and that they destroy not my son." Moved by this entreaty, the king grants her son full pardon, under the solemn guaranty of an oath.

Ver. 13.—**Against the people of God.** Very skilfully, and so as for the meaning only gradually to unfold itself to the king, she represents the people of Israel as the widowed mother, who has lost one son; and David as the stern clan-folk who will deprive her of a second though guilty child. But now he is bound by the solemn oath he has taken to her to remit the penalty; for literally the words are, *and by the king's speaking this word he is as one guilty, unless he fetch home again his banished one.* She claims to have spoken in the name of all Israel, and very probably she really did express their feelings, as Absalom was very popular, and the people saw in Tamar's wrong a sufficient reason for, and vindication of, his crime.

Ver. 14.—**Neither doth God,** etc. This translation is altogether wrong. What the woman says is, "God taketh not life [Hebrew, 'a soul'] away, but thinketh thoughts not to banish from him his banished one." Her argument is that death is the common lot, and that there is no way of bringing back the dead to life. But though death is thus a universal law, yet God does not kill. Death is not a penalty exacted as a punishment, but, on the contrary, he is merciful, and when a man has sinned, instead of putting him to death, he is ready to forgive and welcome back one rejected because of his wickedness. The application is plain. The king cannot restore Amnon to life, and neither must he kill the guilty Absalom, but must recall his banished son. The argument is full of poetry, and touching to the feelings, but is not very sound. For God requires repentance and change of heart; and there was no sign of contrition on Absalom's part. The power of the woman's appeal lay in what she says of God's nature. He is not intent on punishing, nor bent on carrying out the sentences of the Law in their stern literalness; but he is ready to forgive, and "deviseth devices" to bring home those now separate from him. There is also much that is worth pondering over in the distinction between death as a law of nature, and death as a penalty. The one is necessary, and often gentle and beneficial; but death as a penalty is stern and terrible.

Vers. 15—17.—**Now therefore that I am come,** etc. The woman now professes to return to her old story as the reason for her importunity, but she repeats it in so eager and indirect a manner as to indicate that it had another meaning. Instead, too, of thanking the king for fully granting her petition, she still flatters and coaxes as one whose purpose was as yet ungained. The king's word is, **for rest** (see margin): it puts an end to vexation, and, by deciding matters, sets the disputants at peace. He is **as an angel of God,** as God's messenger, whose words have Divine authority; and his office is, not to **discern,** but "to hear the good and the evil," unmoved, as the Vulgate renders it, by blessing and cursing. His mission is too high for him to be influenced either by good words or by evil, but having patiently heard both sides, and calmly thought over the reasons for and against, he will decide righteously. Finally, she ends with the prayer, **And may Jehovah thy God be with thee!** By such words she hoped to propitiate the king, who now could not fail to see that the errand of the woman was personal to himself.

Ver. 19.—**Is the hand of Joab with thee in all this?** The "not," inserted by the Authorized Version, must be omitted, as it alters the meaning. The king really was uncertain, and asked dubiously, whereas the Authorized Version admits only of an affirmative answer. David had seen the general drift of the woman's meaning, but she had involved it in too much obscurity for him to do more than suspect that she was the mouthpiece of Joab, who was standing by, and whose face may have given signs of a more than ordinary interest in the woman's narrative. She now frankly acknowledges the truth, but skilfully interweaves much flattery in her answer. And

her words are far more expressive than what is given in our versions. Literally they are. *By thy life, O my lord the king, there is nothing on the right or on the left of all that my lord the king has spoken.* His words had gone straight to the mark, without the slightest deviation on either side.

Ver. 20.—**To fetch about this form of speech**; correctly, as in the Revised Version, *to change the face of the matter hath thy servant Joab*, etc. The matter was that referred to in ver. 15, which the king now understands to refer to Absalom. For **in the earth**, translate *in the land*. The Hebrew has no means of distinguishing the wider and narrower significations of the word; but while the king would be flattered by the supposition that he knew all that happened in his dominions, the assertion that he knew all that was done in all the world was too broad and general to be agreeable. The Authorized Version has been misled by the thought of what an angel might know; but while it was a compliment to ascribe to the king an angel's intelligence in his own sphere, it would have been bad taste and unmeaning to ascribe to him omniscience. Nay, it is an assumption without proof that even an angel knows "all things that are in the earth."

Ver. 21.—I **have done this thing.** This is an Oriental form of assent, just as we say in English, "It is done," that is, as good as done, now that the order is given. A few manuscripts, nevertheless, support a Massoretic emendation (K'ri), namely, "Thou hast done this: go therefore," etc. But both the Septuagint and Vulgate agree with the written text (K'tib), and it is less flat and commonplace than the supposed emendation.

Ver. 22.—**In that the king hath fulfilled the request of his servant.** Keil concludes from this that Joab had often interceded for Absalom's pardon, and that this had made the king suspect him of being the prime mover in the affair. But this is to force the meaning. Joab now stood confessed as the person who had brought the woman before the king, and had employed her to gain a hearing. Had he been allowed to plead freely, her intervention would not have been necessary. We have seen, too, that the king's suspicions have been made in the Authorized Version much stronger than they really were. Many commentators also assume that Joab had a friendship for Absalom, but there are few traces of it in his conduct, and more probably Joab was chiefly influenced by politic motives. It was injurious to the well-being of the nation that there should be discord and enmity between the king and his eldest son, and that the latter should be living in exile. The K'ri, *thy* servant, placed in the margin, is to be decidedly rejected, with all other attempts of the Massorites to remove little roughnesses of grammar.

Ver. 24.—**Let him turn to his own house**, etc. This half-forgiveness was unwise, and led to unhappy results. It seems even as if Absalom was a prisoner in his house, as he could not leave it to visit Joab. Still, we must not assume that even kind treatment would have made Absalom a dutiful son, or weaned him from his ambitious purposes. The long-plotted revenge, carried out so determinately, gives us a low idea of his character, and probably during these two years of waiting, he had brooded over David's criminal leniency, and regarded it as a justification for his own foul deed. And now, when allowed to come home, but still treated unkindly, thoughts condemnatory of his father's conduct were cherished by him. It seems, too, as if a protracted punishment is always dangerous to the moral character of the criminal. And must we not add another reason? Absalom, we may feel sure, saw with indignation the growing influence of Bathsheba over the king. A granddaughter of Ahithophel, she was sure to be an adept in those intrigues in which the women of a harem pass their time; and even if, upon the whole, we form a favourable judgment upon her character, yet undoubtedly she was a very able woman, and could have no affection for Absalom.

Ver. 26.—**Two hundred shekels after the king's weight.** Unless the royal shekel was smaller than the shekel of the sanctuary, the weight of Absalom's hair would be six pounds. But we cannot believe that the king's shekel was not full weight; for to imagine this is to suppose that the king had tampered with the coinage; for the shekel was a coin as well as a weight, being originally a fixed quantity of silver. As a matter of fact, David had amassed too much silver to have need of resorting to what is the expedient of feeble and impoverished princes. Nor can we grant an error in the number; for the versions all agree with the Hebrew, so that any mistake must, at all events, be of great antiquity. Josephus says that Solomon's body-guard wore long hair powdered with gold dust, and undoubtedly Absalom's hair was something extraordinary (ch. xviii. 9). But six pounds is so enormous a weight that it is just possible that some ancient copyist has enlarged the number, to make it accord with a legend current among the people, in which this feature of Absalom's beauty had been exaggerated.

Ver. 27.—**Three sons.** Their names are not given, because they died early (see ch. xviii. 18). Of his daughter **Tamar**, named after her aunt, and, like her, possessed of great beauty, the Septuagint adds that she became the

wife of Rohoboam, and mother of Abijah. In 1 Kings xv. 2 we are told that Abijah's mother was "Maachah the daughter of Abishalom;" and in 2 Chron. xiii. 2 that her name was "Michaiah the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah." We thus gather that Tamar married Uriel, and that it was the granddaughter of Absalom who became Rehoboam's queen. It is strictly in accordance with Hebrew custom to call Absalom's granddaughter his daughter, and, as Uriel was a man of no political importance, he is passed over, as the narrator's object was to show that Abijah's mother was sprung from the handsome and notorious son of David (see also 2 Chron. xi. 20, 21).

Ver. 29.—**Absalom sent for Joab.** As Joab had been the means of bringing him back, Absalom naturally regarded him as a friend. But Joab had performed the former service for other reasons, and it does not seem as if he really had any affection for Absalom.

Ver. 30.—**Go, and set it on fire.** The Hebrew has, *Go, and I will set it on fire.* Absalom represents himself as doing in his own person what his servants were to be his instruments in accomplishing. The versions, however, agree with the Massorites in substituting the easy phrase in the text. But few languages are so indifferent to persons and numbers as the Hebrew.

Ver. 31.—**Then Joab arose.** This high-handed proceeding forced Joab to pay the wished-for visit. But, while we cannot acquit Absalom of petulance, we must not regard his act as one of angry revenge; had it been so, Joab would have openly resented it, and he was quite capable of making even the heir-apparent feel his anger. It was probably intended as a rough practical joke, which taught Joab better manners, and which he must laugh at, though with inward displeasure.

Ver. 32.—**If there be (any) iniquity in me, let him kill me.** The word "any," wrongly inserted in the Authorized Version, is omitted in the Revised Version. It would have been monstrous for Absalom to profess innocence, with the murder of Amnon fresh in his memory; but the phrase, "if there be iniquity in me," means, "if my offence is still unpardoned." If year after year he was to be treated as a criminal, then he would rather be put to death at once. And Absalom's plea succeeds. Joab, who had been unwilling to visit the prisoner, now consents to act as mediator, reports to David his son's vexation at such long-continued coldness, and obtains full pardon.

Ver. 33.—**The king kissed Absalom.** The father's kiss was, as in the case of the prodigal son (Luke xv. 20), the sign of perfect reconciliation, and of the restoration of Absalom to his place as a son, with all its privileges. But God's pardon was immediate (ch. xii. 13), while David's was unwilling, and wrung from him. The kiss, we may feel quite sure, was preceded by a conversation between David and his son, the record of which is omitted simply for the sake of brevity. Evidently it satisfied the king, and ended in the kiss which gave the son all he desired. But whatever may have been his professions, Absalom's subsequent conduct is proof that he still regarded Amnon's death as a just retribution for his conduct to Tamar, and secretly cherished a sullen anger against his father for not having punished the wrong-doer himself. It was the contrast between his own five years of punishment and the mere verbal reproof which was all that Amnon had to suffer for his shameless conduct, which rankled in Absalom's mind, and gave him an excuse for finally plotting his father's ruin.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—20.—The facts are: 1. Joab, observing that the king's heart was still adverse to Absalom, devised, in order to bring him round to a different feeling, that a wise woman from Tekoah should appear before him and plead a cause. 2. The woman appears before the king, and narrates as facts certain circumstances, namely, (1) that she was a widow, and that on two of her sons falling into strife, one slew the other; (2) that all the rest of the family connections were urging that the survivor should be put to death, much to her grief. 3. David, touched with her story, undertakes to grant her request, whereupon the woman, recognizing the usage in such cases, desires to exonerate the king from blame in this exercise of his clemency. 4. The king giving her a renewed assurance of safety, should any reproach her for thus trading on his clemency, she again, by a reference to God's presence and knowledge, dwells on the royal promise; whereupon he swears most solemnly that the son shall be spared. 5. The woman then ventures to bring the royal concession to her to bear on the case of Absalom, by suggesting that, in granting her request as a just one, he virtually brings blame on himself for cherishing revengeful feeling against a banished one, and he one

of the people of God. 6. She fortifies her argument by alluding to man's inevitable mortality and to God's way of dealing with wrong-doers, namely, that he devises means of restoring the exile. 7. Reverting to her own suit, she next pretends that the people's desire for vengeance has caused the fear which prompts this her request, believing, as she does, in the king's magnanimity and superior discrimination. 8. David, perceiving that she is presenting a parabolic case, now asks whether Joab is not at the origin of it, which, with an Oriental compliment to his discernment, she candidly admits.

Astuteness in human affairs. There are a few facts which, put together, seem to warrant the conclusion that David was hostile in mind to Absalom, and that therefore the expression in ver. 1, rendered "toward," should be "adverse to," עַל. These facts are, his evident sorrow for Amnon; the related flight of Absalom and absence for three years, but no mention of any messenger of peace being sent to him; the necessity of the device of the wise woman to awaken kindly interest in the king; and his unwillingness to see Absalom for two years after having yielded to the force of the argument for his restoration (ver. 28). It was in the endeavour to overcome the king's hostility that Joab manifested the remarkable astuteness of his nature. Taking Joab's conduct in this instance as our exemplar, we may get an insight as to what constitutes the astuteness in human affairs which then gave and always has given some men an advantage over others.

I. THERE IS A SHREWD OBSERVATION OF EVENTS. Joab was not a mere military man, whose range of observation was limited by his profession. He had his eyes wide open to notice, in their bearing one on the other, the various incidents in the history of Israel, embracing both the private and public life, king and people. The remark that he perceived that the king's heart was adverse to Absalom is but an index of the man's character. Some generals would simply have confined their attention to military duties, paying little or no heed to what passed in the mind of the king, and what was the effect of his attitude on the nation. The widely and minutely observant eye is a great blessing, and, when under the government of a holy purpose, is a means of personal and relative enrichment. All men astute in affairs have cultivated it with zeal, and its activity and range account in part for the superiority they have acquired over their fellow-creatures. Human life is a voluminous book, ever being laid, page by page, before us; and he who can with simple and steady glance note what is there written, and treasure up the record for future use, has procured an advantage, which, in days to come, will be converted into power. "The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness" (Eccles. ii. 14).

II. THERE IS A CONSTANT LOOKING AHEAD. This characteristic of Joab is seen in many instances (*e.g.* ch. xi. 16, 18—20; xii. 28; xiii. 19). He was a man who sought to forecast the issue of events at present transpiring, or conditions that might arise to modify his plans. He seemed to see the complications that might arise should Absalom be kept in perpetual exile, both on account of his fine manly bearing being popular with the people, and of the possible strife should the king die, and the exile then return to contend with a nominee of David's. The prophetic forecast is a vision of coming reality; the forecast of astuteness is the clever calculation of the bearings of passing events on what may be, the tracking out by anticipation the working on men and things of the various forces now in operation. In so far as a man possesses this quality, he certainly is a power in society, and his opinions with reference to contingencies, and the provision wherewith to meet them, should have weight. The degree to which some men injure themselves and others because they have no prevision, no power of anticipating events, is often very painful. In so far as this kind of prevision can be cultivated in early years, apart from the cunning with which it is sometimes allied, so will be the gain for the entire life.

III. THERE IS A SEEKING OF PERSONAL ENDS COMBINED WITH PUBLIC GOOD. Selfish cunning looks on, but looks only for self, and cares not for general interests. Astuteness looks on, but seeks deliberately to combine the personal and the general good. The former may be a prominent consideration, but the latter has a real place sincerely given. In Joab we have a striking example of this. Even in the killing of Abner Joab probably felt that the presence of such a rival might bring on troubles in Israel.

When, by complicity with David's sin (ch. xi. 17), he advanced his own ambition by gaining power over David, he had an idea that the country would be the stronger for king and general to be of one mind. His sending for David to conquer Rabbah (ch. xii. 26—30) promoted his own influence over the king, and at the same time gave the nation the advantage of a regal triumph. No doubt he foresaw that, as Absalom was now the eldest son, he might possibly come to the throne, and hence it was important to secure his favour by being the instrument of procuring his recall; at the same time, he saw it would be better for king and people that this family quarrel should be adjusted. There is no astuteness in pure benevolence, and there is no pure benevolence in astuteness. Its characteristic is that it uses a knowledge of men and things, and an anticipation of coming and possible events, in such a way as to secure personal interests in promoting public good. There is too much conscience for pure selfishness, and too little for pure benevolence. These children of the world are certainly wise in their generation (Luke xvi. 8).

IV. THERE IS A SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN NATURE, AND OF THE MEANS OF ACTING ON IT. Joab knew men—their foibles and their strength. He had acquired that kind of penetration which comes of having much to do with men of divers temperaments and preferences. He knew how to touch David's natural ambition at Rabbah (ch. xii. 28—30). He understood how he would feign displeasure and sorrow at the assault which brought about the death of Uriah, and how the courtiers could be put off suspicion (ch. xii. 20, 21). He knew that a story appealing to generous, magnanimous feelings would be sure to touch the king's heart (ver. 2). This knowledge of men is an inestimable treasure for practical purposes. Some persons never acquire it, and consequently are at a great disadvantage in the struggle for life. Others avail themselves of it for low, cunning purposes, which are more becoming fiends than men. The astute man, whose character is toned by a moral aim, uses his knowledge to avoid some and secure the favour of others, and also to bring men round to the furtherance of the objects he has in hand. There is not in such a quality the simplicity which sometimes passes for Christian guilelessness; it may even seem, in some cases, to savour of cunning; but there are instances in which it combines the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove. The Apostle Paul was certainly an astute Christian. He knew men, and how to deal with them on Christian principles. His addresses before his judges and his Epistles bear witness.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. All who wish to be effective in Christian service should endeavour to extend their knowledge of human nature; for it is said of Christ that he knew what was in man (John ii. 25). 2. In seeking a more thorough knowledge of human nature, we should avoid the risking the habitual feeling of distrust and suspicion which many of the sad facts of life may well suggest; for our Saviour, who knew all that is in man, the worst and the best, acted in his relations to them on the principle of generous consideration. 3. We should see to it that the intellectual qualities of astuteness are allied in us with Christian qualities that will save us from low cunning and mere utilitarian motive, and make duty the guide of action. 4. It behoves us to make use of all innocent means—"wise women," if need be—parables, or direct argument, to bring others to act in accordance with the will of God. 5. In dealing with men we should endeavour to touch the better springs of action in their nature, and assume that they are prepared to do justly and generously.

Means to bring back the banished. The woman of Tekoah showed her wisdom in very deftly blending the argument suggested by Joab with thoughts and pleadings designed to meet the successive replies of the king. To gain her point, she proceeded from the assumption of his natural sympathy with a distressed widow up to the overwhelming argument derived from a consideration of God's method in dealing with his children when they are, by reason of their sins, banished from his presence. There may seem to be a weakness in the parallel she implies between the case of her sons and the case of Absalom and Amnon, inasmuch as the death of Amnon was brought about by a deliberate design, while the death of the other was a consequence of a sudden strife; but in reality she was right. The strife of her sons was "in the field," but there may have been antecedents which led to that mortal conflict; and, so far as concerned the sons of David, it was to all intents and purposes a family quarrel, brought on by

the wrong done to Absalom in the ruin of his sister, and the wise woman evidently regarded the whole affair as a "strife in the field." Provocation had been given by Amnon, and the anger of Absalom, thus aroused, occasioned his death. Amnon would not have died, but for his attack on the honour of Absalom. Two things in the final argument come home to David. (1) The reference to *the ways of God*. David, as a pious man and as a righteous ruler, rejoiced in the ways of the Lord; to him they were just and true and wise; they were the professed model of his own conduct. This moral argument to a good man is perfectly irresistible. (2) The reference to *God's banished ones*. David had of late been a banished one. He had known the anguish of being far from his heavenly Father, a spiritual exile, no longer permitted or inclined to the close and blessed fellowship of former times. The widow's word "banished" brought back the sad remembrance, followed in a moment by the remembrance of the mercy that had blotted out all his sins and restored him to the joys of salvation. Wise woman, thus to touch the deepest and tenderest springs of the heart! Consider what is implied in the blessed words, "He doth devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him."

I. MAN'S CONDITION BY REASON OF SIN IS ONE OF BANISHMENT. As truly as Absalom was now banished from David as a consequence of his transgressions, so man is separated from God. The information given us of the fallen angels is slight, but it amounts to this—that they are banished because of sin (2 Pet. ii. 4; Jude 6). Our first parents were banished from Paradise because of sin. Those who are not welcomed at last to heaven will have to refer the banishment to sin (Matt. vii. 23; xxv. 45, 46; Rev. xxi. 27). The state of mankind, while sin is loved and followed, is one of alienation. The carnal mind is not subject to the Law of God. We are as sheep going astray. Apart from any positive decree, the fact of sin constitutes moral severance from God. The child wanders, heedless of the Father's love, and all the moral laws of the universe combine with psychological laws to keep him, while in that state, outside the blessed sphere of fellowship and rest. It was instinctive for Absalom to flee from the face of the king. He banished himself by his deed, and the king could not render it otherwise. It is instinctive for one in sin to flee from the face of the holy God, and the Eternal, though omnipotent, cannot render it otherwise. The constitution of nature renders it inevitable. To suppose that it is an arbitrary arrangement is to imagine an impossibility. No power can make sin equivalent to holiness, and consequently no power can confer on sin the blessedness of the Divine favour.

II. GOD NEVERTHELESS REGARDS THE BANISHED AS HIS. Absalom was the son of David, though an exiled wanderer. David felt for him the mingled sorrow and displeasure of a just and good parent. The change of character and position does not destroy natural relationship. Adam was God's wandering child when, with sad heart, he turned his back on Paradise. The prodigal son is represented as being a son, though wasting his substance with riotous living. Our Saviour, in teaching us how to pray, would have us think of God as our Father. The whole tenor of his life on earth was to cause sinful men to feel that God the Father looks on them as his, even while in rebellion against his will. Had he disowned us in this respect, there would indeed have been no hope. It is much to know, in our sins and errors and dreadful guilt, that we are God's offspring, that he has a proprietary right in us, and thinks of us as only a father can think of his children (Ezek. xxxiii. 11).

III. GOD MAKES PROVISION FOR BRINGING THE BANISHED BACK TO HIMSELF. "He doth devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him." Wonderful words for that age, and from a widow! The great and precious truth is the comfort of myriads all over the world, and the occasion of wonder and joy in heaven. Such an incidental statement reveals to us that the pious of Israel in those times possessed much fuller and clearer knowledge concerning God and his salvation than they sometimes get credit for, or would be inferred from the outlines of national history contained in the Bible. The history is designed to trace the great historic line along which Christ came, and the fact that God was, through the Jewish people, working out a great purpose to be gradually revealed in Christ. We are not told of all the detailed teaching of holy priests and prophets. We may fairly regard this wonderful statement of the widow as an index of truth widely possessed, distinct from the provision of such means of blessing as the brazen serpent and the cities of refuge. There is a twofold sense in which the expres-

sion may be understood. 1. God *provides means for the redemption of the world.* The Mosaic economy was, in some of its institutions, a shadow of the provision that centres in the cross of Christ. Our salvation is of God. If he does not find means to cover sin and influence our evil hearts, there is no hope. We cannot, and are unwilling. He deviseth means (John iii. 16). There is an intimation of the wisdom requisite. Sin produces such confusion in the moral sphere, and runs so against the order of government, and lays so strong a hold on the human heart, that only infinite wisdom could find out the way by which we might come back to God. Hence the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the appointment of faith as the condition and of preaching as the instrumentality, are all ascribed to the wisdom and goodness of God. It is by the Church thus saved that the wisdom of God is revealed to all ages (Rom. iii. 23—26; iv. 16; viii. 14; 1 Cor. i. 21—30; Eph. iii. 10). 2. *God provides means for the restoration of those who backslide from him.* By chastisements, by the voice of prophets and conscience, by the pleading of the Spirit, by the varied events of providence causing the erring child to feel how evil and bitter a thing it is to depart from God, he opens a way by which they are brought back again. David knew this. "He restoreth my soul" (Ps. xxiii. 3). How wonderfully wise and gentle these means often are is well known to many who once were as sheep going astray, and had lost the blessedness of fellowship formerly known.

"Return! . . . O chosen of my love!
Fear not to meet thy beckoning Saviour's view
Long ere I called thee by thy name, I knew
That very treacherously thou wouldst deal;
Now I have seen thy ways, yet I will heal.
Return! Wilt thou yet linger far from me?
My wrath is turned away, I have redeemed thee."
('Life Mosaic,' by F. R. Havergal, p. 72.)

IV. GOD'S WAYS IN DEALING WITH HIS BANISHED ONES ARE A MODEL FOR US. The wise woman had spoken of the ways of God with his banished ones in order to induce David to follow in the same course with respect to Absalom—the implication being that, when once a good man is reminded of the ways of God, he will without further urging act in the same manner. The parallel between the relation of Absalom to David and the relation of a sinner to God may not in every detail be perfect; but there being a resemblance in the substantial facts—banishment of a son because of high-handed deeds of wrong—it follows that there should be a resemblance, in the bearing of the earthly father-king to his son, to that of God to his sinful child. The two features of God's bearing toward his own are: (1) He does not take away life; but (2) devises means by which those who deserve to die are brought back to him (ver. 14). The reference evidently is not to the legal code, which in several cases recognizes capital punishment for certain offences, for ends civil and social, but to the general principle and method of God's dealing with sinful man in his highest relations to himself. He desireth not the death of the sinner, and therefore he, speaking after the manner of men, finds out some way of bringing about a restoration to favour consistent with his own honour and the claims of righteousness. In the New Testament this example is set forth in strong and varied terms (Matt. v. 43—48; vi. 14, 15; Eph. iv. 31, 32). The fact that there is a model in God's bearing toward us is only half the truth. It is our duty and privilege to act according to it. It is not enough to be kindly disposed. We are to "devise devices"—take the initiative—in seeking to restore those who may have done wrong and merited our displeasure. This is the hard lesson taught by Christ, which even his own people are so slow to learn. When will Christians be as Christ was and act as Christ did? It is often easier to sing hymns, hear sermons, and bow the knee in prayer.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. The proper course for the poor and sorrowful and oppressed is, after the example of this widow, to have recourse to him who sitteth as King in Zion; for his ear is ever open to their cry, and there is an open way of access to his throne. 2. In all our approaches to the supreme throne we may, with more confidence than was displayed by this widow in David, act on the assumption of a mercy and wisdom that never fail. 3. It is not only a solace to the weary heart, but a sure means of help in our domestic cares, if we bring them before the notice of our God. 4. We

see how often the best and most exalted of men, in their conduct and feelings, come far short of the character they should manifest, and how they may require even the teaching which comes from the spirit and deeds of the poor and troubled to raise them to a higher level of life. 5. It is possible for good men to be kind and generous towards others, and at the same time be unaware, till forced to see it, that there are features in their personal conduct day by day not in accord with the general generosity which they recognize and display. 6. We need to be reminded that the death of those we have cared for, should it come about while we are not acting kindly toward them (ver. 14), is an unalterable event, a change which renders acts of kindness impossible—as water spilt on the ground cannot be gathered up again; and consequently we should seize passing opportunities of blessing them. 7. The sinful state of man is as unnatural as is exile to a king's son, and should ever be so represented (Isa. i. 2, 3). 8. All thanks and praise are due to God, in that he needed not any one to procure our restoration; all is of his own eternal love and free grace. 9. We should distinguish between the human setting of a truth and the truth itself. To "devise a means" is a human way of expressing the truth that God, from the beginning, before the foundation of the world (Eph. i. 4; Rev. xiii. 8), ordained and arranged for our salvation, but that we see the pre-arrangement coming into form subsequent to the advent of sin, and think of it as being devised to meet that event after its occurrence. We say, "the sun rises," but it does not. Our forms of expression consequent on the appearance of things to us is not the exact utterance of absolute truth. 10. The force of a Divine example, when brought to bear on men who recognize the government of God, will often compel conviction when other means fail.

Vers. 21—33.—*Imperfect reconciliation.* The facts are: 1. David, referring to the promise he had made, sends Joab to bring Absalom from Geshur, Joab expressing in lowly form his thanks for the king's gracious attention to his request. 2. On Absalom's return he is ordered to abide in his own house, and not to see the king's face. 3. The personal beauty of Absalom is famous throughout Israel, and of his four children the only daughter is also reputed to be fair. 4. For two years Absalom remains in Jerusalem without seeing the king, whereupon he becomes dissatisfied, and sends to Joab, hoping to send him to the king. 5. Joab, for some unexpressed reason, declines to give heed to the message, and, as a consequence, Absalom orders his field of barley to be burnt. 6. This event bringing Joab to him, Absalom remonstrates with the king through him against this semi-imprisonment, and demands to see the king. 7. The king yielding to the request, Absalom presents himself, and receives his father's kiss. Whatever may have been the secret causes operating on both sides, the course of the narrative clearly shows us that, although Joab seemed to have gained his point through the wise woman of Tekoah, yet the restoration of Absalom to his father's love and confidence was not perfect. There are, in the account here given of the relation of David to his son, illustrations of several important truths or recurring incidents of human life.

I. CONCESSIONS WITH RESERVATIONS. In the interview with Joab (vers. 21, 22) David distinctly intimated to him that he had "done this thing"—consented to Absalom's return in consequence of having been caught within the coils of the parabolic pleadings of the wise woman whom he had employed for that purpose. Apart from the force of the argument, the king was no doubt willing in some degree to comply with the request of so influential a man, especially as he knew more of his own life than was comfortable to reflect upon. Joab regarded it as a work of special grace that his wishes were thus considered; and most probably he went to Geshur to fetch Absalom, with cheerful expectations of a speedy removal of family difficulties. But although the king kept the letter of his concession in Absalom's permitted return, it is evident that he either repented of his original decision or had made, when giving it, a private reservation that, though returned, he should not give him a hearty welcome. Both Joab and Absalom (ver. 24) appear to have reported themselves at the king's house, in expectation of full restoration, for he "returned to his own house." Such concessions as this are valuable in so far as they confer privileges otherwise not attainable, but they lose much value in being extracted by pressure and especially by the reservation which becomes subsequently known. It had been well, perhaps, had conditions been stated from the

first. If possible, our agreements and promises should be expressed in terms that cover all we think and intend. The mutual confidence of society depends on the cultivation of frankness and candour. The first inconvenience is the least. The promises of God are "yea and Amen." There is no disappointing reservation for us when we arrive at the palace of the great King.

II. EMBARRASSMENTS OF PATERNAL CONDUCT. Great consideration is due to David when we endeavour to form an estimate of his conduct. His position, brought on, it is true, by his own sad sin, was most perplexing. On the one side there was (1) the very natural and great displeasure against a son who could cherish revenge for two whole years, and then presume to take upon himself the vindication of justice, thus reflecting on royal authority; (2) the absolute need of chastisement for a young man of violent spirit and haughty temper; (3) the importance of maintaining influence over the people by not seeming to palliate the violence of his own family; (4) the temptation to which so handsome and attractive a young man would be exposed were he to be prematurely welcomed into society again; (5) the secret influence of his favourite wife, Bathsheba, who could not but remind him of the claims on the succession of the son specially named by the prophet as "beloved of the Lord" (ch. xii. 24, 25). Then on the other side there was (1) his natural yearning over a hitherto favourite son, the more so as he feared lest he should fall a victim to evil ways; (2) Joab's evident interest in Absalom, and the expediency of conciliating so powerful a man; (3) the near connection of Absalom with the tribe of Judah, and the danger of raising up a party should there be an appearance of harshness; (4) the remembrance of the unqualified promise virtually given to the wise woman of Tekoah, that he would regard God's mercy to his banished ones as his model; (5) the reflection that, after his own dreadful sin in the case of Uriah, God had restored him to personal favour. Under some such conflicting influence David could not grant all that was desired. Happily modern parents have not to decide on the doom of fratricides; but troubles do arise which place them in most embarrassing circumstances. Much charity is needed in our judgments on the action taken in cases of difficulty. There is much unknown to the outward observer. It is important, in all these times of perplexity, to cast our care on the Lord, and seek the special guidance which he has promised. Divine influence alone can keep us from being unduly biassed in either direction. Our decisions may mean perpetual weal or woe to children.

III. THE DISCIPLINE OF PARTIAL PRIVILEGE. It is a severe but wholesome discipline for Absalom to be kept two years without full restoration. Possibly David may have ascertained from others that his temper was not much improved, and that he did not show the signs of penitence or regret becoming one who looked for full restoration to paternal favour. Then, also, David could not but remember that, with his own restoration to God, there was attached a temporal chastisement, which, while it did not touch the reality of the Divine forgiveness, was designed for public good; and possibly he may have thought that the privilege of returning to Jerusalem only might be accepted as a sign of actual personal forgiveness, and at the same time put Absalom under wholesome restraints. This kind of discipline does exist in human affairs and in Church life. Children and men are caused to feel that some inconvenience has resulted from their conduct, even though they are no longer punished. In so far as we fall in with the natural or designed tendency of this discipline, we may turn its annoyances into a means of recovery from the moral failings which have been our bane.

IV. THE PERILS OF PERSONAL ATTRACTIONS. The beauty of Absalom is referred to in such a way as to suggest that he was not only aware of it, but that it exercised a fascinating influence over others, and tended to gather around him persons likely to be influenced by personal appearances, and therefore not the most helpful to one who needs the stimulus and support of high moral principles. Personal beauty is a gift of God, and, were not sin in the world as a disturbing element in the physical and moral development of the human race, the probability is that the average beauty of form and expression would equal or surpass what is now regarded as exceptional. Unfortunately, it is sometimes allied to a vain and frivolous spirit, and in that case it becomes a snare. There are instances in which beauty has been associated with the devout earnest spirit of religion, and has been made tributary to obtaining a hallowed influence over others. Special prayer and strong safeguards are required for our sons and daughters whose

personal attractions may lay them open to the flatteries and friendships of the unwise and unholy.

V. THE INTIMATIONS OF DANGEROUS TENDENCIES. It was natural for Absalom to be restless under the restraint of two years, though, had his spirit been very lowly and penitent, he would have kept it within due limits. The treatment of Joab was an intimation that the daring temper which slew Amnon was still there. He who could set a field of barley on fire in order to get his messages attended to was capable, unless the tendencies were checked, of producing a more serious conflagration. The presence within a young man of strong passions, a violent temper, a hatred of restraint or love of pleasure, is a sign of danger. It is in the nature of forces to work their way outward. If we say, "the child is father to the man," we may also say that the moral forces within are the creators of the life without. Unless strong counter-influences are brought to bear to neutralize their action or to extirpate them, they will gain power by being daily cherished, and a free, jovial, handsome Absalom may become the notorious rebel, whose hand turns against his own father. Human life exhibits such developments still. Young men should interrogate their own nature, and fairly face the moral dangers that may lie there, before their power renders introspection and suppression difficult if not impossible. Those who have charge of the young should note signs of struggling forces, and adapt the moral education according to the individual requirement.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—20.—(JERUSALEM.) *The woman of Tekoah.* 1. In *David* "the king" we here see that fatherly affection may come into conflict with regal justice. He must have perceived the ill effects of sparing Amnon, and felt constrained to punish Absalom. But his grief and resentment were mitigated by the lapse of time (ch. xiii. 39). Nevertheless, though prompted by natural affection to recall his son, he was deterred from doing so by political and judicial considerations. And to overcome his reluctance a stratagem was devised, which, as the sequel shows, was only too successful. For by his weakness towards Absalom "he became guilty of the further dissolution of the theocratic rule in his house and in his kingdom" (Erdmann). 2. In *Joab* "the son of Zeruiah" (ch. iii. 39) we see that a man may promote another's interest out of regard for his own (ch. iii. 22—30; xi. 16—21). "He may have been induced to take these steps by his personal attachment to Absalom, but the principal reason no doubt was that Absalom had the best prospect of succeeding to the throne, and Joab thought this the best way to secure himself from punishment for the murder which he had committed. But the issue of events frustrated all such hopes. Absalom did not succeed to the throne, Joab did not escape punishment, and David was severely chastised for his weakness and injustice" (Keil). "Joab formed a project by which the king, in his very capacity of chief judge, should find the glimmering fire of parental love suddenly fanned into a burning flame" (Ewald). 3. In *the "wise woman" of Tekoah* we see that skilful persuasion may so work upon natural feeling as to induce a course which is neither expedient nor just. The cleverness, insight, readiness of speech, tact, boldness mingled with caution, and perseverance, which she displayed (under the direction of Joab, who perhaps "stood by at some distance whilst she addressed herself to the king," ver. 21) are remarkable. Such qualities may be employed for a good or an evil purpose. In contrast with the reproof of Nathan, her persuasion (1) was inspired, not by God, but by man; (2) was addressed, not to conscience, but to pity and affection; (3) aimed, not to manifest the truth, but to obscure it; (4) and "to give effect, not to the convictions of duty, but to the promptings of inclination" (Blaikie); (5) sought to do this, not sincerely and openly, but insincerely and insidiously; (6) and not by proper motives alone, and honest, though unpleasant speech, but by improper motives and "with flattering lips;" and (7) produced, not a beneficial, but an injurious effect. In her persuasive address we notice, more particularly—

I. AN AFFECTING BUT FICTITIOUS APPEAL. (Vers. 4—11.) "And the woman of Tekoah came to the king," etc., making her appeal for help in an acted parable, like that of Nathan (ch. xii. 1—4). "Parables sped well with David; one drew him to repent of his own sin, another to remit Absalom's punishment" (Hall). This parable of *the*

hapless son, or the avengers of blood, was intended, adapted, and employed: 1. *To excite compassion toward the unfortunate:* a son who had slain his brother "unawares" (Numb. xxxv. 11) in the field, and whose life was imperilled by the avengers, "the whole family" (ver. 7); and his widowed mother, whose only stay and comfort he was, whose "live coal which is left" would be quenched, and whose husband's "name and posterity" would be destroyed. "The power of the discourse lies in the fact that they are represented as already doing what their words show to be their purpose." 2. *To procure protection against the avengers;* who, according to ancient custom, sought to take his life (ch. iii. 22—30); their conduct being portrayed as persistently pitiless (ver. 11), "and actuated, not so much by a wish to observe the Law, as by covetousness and a desire to share the inheritance among themselves" (Kirkpatrick); obscurely suggestive of the hostility exhibited toward Absalom. "Her circumstances (as a widow and living at some distance from Jerusalem, which rendered the case difficult to be readily inquired into), her mournful tale, her widow's weeds, her aged person, and her impressive manner, all combined to make one united impression on the king's heart" (A. Clarke). "In all this she intended to frame a case as like to David's as she could do; by determining which in her favour, he might judge how much more reasonable it was to preserve Absalom. But there was a wide difference between her case and his, however plausible soever their likeness might appear" (Patrick). 3. *To obtain assurance of preservation from the king;* which was given at first as an indefinite promise (ver. 8), afterwards (through her importunity) in a more definite engagement (ver. 10), and finally confirmed by an oath (ver. 11). "Had David first proved and inquired into the matter which with cunning and deceit was brought before him, he would not have given assurance with an oath" (Schlier). "We should learn from David's example to be more guarded over all our feelings and affections, even such as are in their proper degree essential to a religious character" (Lindsay). "Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause" (Exod. xxiii. 3).

II. AN EFFECTIVE BUT FALLACIOUS ARGUMENT (vers. 13, 14); based upon the assumed resemblance between the case of the hapless son, of whom she had spoken, and that of Absalom, to whom she alluded as fully as she might venture. For her appeal had "a double sense," or twofold purpose—one clear, immediate, feigned, subordinate; the other dark, ultimate, real, supreme; and to the latter she now comes. "And why dost thou think [devise] such a thing [as that of which I am now permitted to speak] against people of God? And by the king's speaking this word ['As Jehovah liveth,' etc., ver. 11] he is as one that is guilty [or, 'self-condemned'], in that the king does not bring back *his banished one*." "My banished one!" he must have thought, as the main object of the woman's appeal flashed upon him. But she went on: "For we must die ['shall surely die,' Gen. ii. 17], and are as water poured out on the ground that is not gathered up. And God takes not away a soul [*nephesh*, equivalent to 'individual life'], but thinks thoughts [devises devices] to the end that he may not banish from him [utterly] a banished one." She thus sought to persuade the king to recall his son by: 1. *The obligation of his oath*, in which "he had acknowledged the possibility of an exception to the general rule of punishment for murder;" sworn to save her son, who had killed his brother under severe provocation; and was consistently bound to spare and restore his own son in similar circumstances. But the difference between them, here kept out of view, was fatal to the argument. Absalom's crime was deliberately planned, executed by his servants under his order, and seen by many witnesses. 2. *The welfare of the people of God*, involved in the preservation and return of the heir to the throne. Although the king's sons and the whole court were against Absalom (ver. 7), a large party of the people was in his favour. But the general welfare would have been more promoted by his just punishment, or continuance in exile, than by his restoration, as the subsequent history shows. 3. *The mortality of men*—the inevitable and irreparable decease of Amnon, Absalom, the king himself; the consideration of which should induce compassion and speedy help, lest it should be too late. But "even compassion, amiable as it is, will not justify our violation of the Divine Law, or neglecting the important duties of our station" (Scott). 4. *The clemency of God*; in forbearance and long-suffering toward sinful men, and devising means for their restoration to his presence; such as David himself had experienced (ch. xii. 13; Ps. li. 11). His example should be imitated. But his forbearance is limited—he pardons only

those who repent, and punishes the guilty; and for the king to spare the guilty on insufficient grounds, or pardon the impenitent, would be to harden the wicked in their wickedness, and to act contrary to the purpose for which he is made "an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil." The reasons assigned, though excellent in themselves, were inapplicable and fallacious. The noblest truths may be perverted to a bad purpose. A weak argument appears strong to one who is already disposed to accept its conclusion; and is a sufficient excuse for a course which he is inclined to pursue. By the manner in which her words were received by the king, the "wise woman" perceived that her point was practically gained; enough had been said, and leaving it to work its effect on his mind, she returned to the ostensible occasion of her petition for help; and "now she would go home happy (she said), as if this reference to the king's behaviour had been only the casual chatter of a talkative woman" (P. Thomson).

III. AN APPROPRIATE BUT FLATTERING APOLOGY for intrusion on the king (vers. 15—20); expressive of: 1. The anxious *fear* and hope with which she had been impelled to make her request (ver. 15). 2. The joyful anticipation and grateful *assurance of rest* which she now felt (vers. 16, 17). 3. Devout admiration and *praise* of the king, on account of his wisdom in judgment; with a prayer for his prosperity: "May Jehovah thy God be with thee!" Fully acknowledging that, as the king surmised, she had acted under the direction of Joab, "in order to bring round the face [aspect] of the matter" (to alter Absalom's relation to his father), she again commends the discernment of the king: "My lord is wise," etc. (vers. 18—20). "When we are most commended for our discernment we generally act most foolishly; for those very praises cloud and pervert the judgment" (Scott). "And the king said unto Joab, Behold now, I have done this thing: go and bring the young man Absalom back" (ver. 21). "The feelings of the father triumphed over the duty of the king, who, as supreme magistrate, was bound to execute impartial justice on every murderer, by the express Law of God (Gen. ix. 9; Numb. xxxv. 30, 31), which he had no power to dispense with (Deut. xviii. 18; Josh. i. 8; 1 Sam. x. 25)" (Jamieson). Although neither the end of the woman's address nor some of the means she employed can be approved, yet much may be learnt from it concerning *the art of persuasion*; e.g. the importance of (1) knowing the character and sentiments of those who are addressed; (2) having a definite aim in view; (3) arresting attention and awakening interest and sympathy; (4) earnestness and fervency of manner; (5) using argument and illustration adapted to present the matter in the most attractive light; (6) saying enough and no more, especially on a difficult and delicate subject; (7) advancing step by step with a persistent determination to succeed.—D.

Ver. 14.—"*As water spilt upon the ground.*" Water is a gift of God, very precious, especially in lands where it is scarce, and often longed for as a means of quenching thirst, renewing strength, and preserving life (ch. xxiii. 15; Ps. lxiii. 1). But it may be thrown away, poured out and lost, by design or accident, through the overturning or fracture of the vessel in which it is contained. Human life, also, is a Divine gift, precious beyond all earthly possessions. But it is contained in "a body of fragile clay" (2 Cor. iv. 7), which is sooner or later destroyed like "the pitcher shattered at the well" (Eccles. xii. 6); and thus "we are as water," etc. We have here—

I. AN IMPRESSIVE ASPECT OF DEATH. 1. It *must* take place in all, without exception. "It is appointed," etc. (Gen. iii. 19; Rom. v. 12; Heb. ix. 27). 2. It *may* occur to each of us at any moment (1 Sam. x. 3). 3. It puts an *end* to the useful service which might have been rendered. Only while the water remains in the vessel can it be of immediate use. 4. It cannot by any possibility be *repaired*, or "gathered up again." "As the waters fail from the sea," etc. (Job xiv. 11; vii. 10); "as waters melt away," etc. (Ps. lviii. 7; xxxix. 13; xlix. 7—10; ciii. 16). "Death is of all things the most terrible, for it is the end" (Aristotle).

"What is your life? 'Tis a delicate shell,
Cast up by Eternity's flow;
On Time's bank of quicksand to dwell,
A moment its loveliness show.
Returned to its element grand
Is the billow that brought it on shore;
See, another is washing the strand,
And the beautiful shell is no more."

II. AN INSTRUCTIVE ADMONITION FOR LIFE. Is it so? Then: 1. Restrain immoderate indulgence in *sorrow*, "the grief that saps the mind, for those on earth we see no more." No weeping, anger, nor endeavour can bring back Amnon (ch. xii. 23). Accept calmly what cannot be altered. 2. Repress improper feelings of *resentment* toward others. Even though it be just, it should not be perpetual (Eph. iv. 26). They and you alike must die and pass away. "Be reconciled." 3. Regard all around you with sympathy and kindly affection. Before to-morrow they may be gone. 4. Redeem the rest of your time "in the flesh," by prompt, diligent, zealous use of every opportunity of serving God and doing good, according to the pattern of long-suffering and benevolence which he has set before you, in "not taking away a soul," etc. (latter part of the verse).

Consider: 1. The death of the body is not the end of the man. He disappears here only to appear elsewhere as water in the cloud; gathered "with sinners" (Ps. xxvi. 9; Matt. xiii. 30) or with saints (Gen. xxv. 8; 2 Kings xxii. 20; 2 Thess. ii. 1). 2. The life which a man leads "in the body" determines his condition in the unseen and eternal world. 3. The conviction of these things makes the view of death more impressive, and should make the course of life more just, merciful, and devout.—D.

Ver. 14.—*God's restoration of his banished.* It is hardly possible for a father to be so completely estranged from his child as to lose all affection for him. He may have just cause to feel angry with him; but, with absence and the lapse of time, his anger dies away, and his natural affection springs up afresh. It was thus with David in relation to his son Absalom. Yet he hesitated to give way to his parental feelings, to set aside the claims of public justice, and exercise his royal prerogative of showing mercy toward the guilty. And to induce him to do this it was urged (among the means devised for the purpose) that God, who has ordained that men should die, permits them to live, and even devises means for their restoration. Was not this an indication that Absalom should be spared? Was not this an example which the king should imitate? It has been supposed that there is allusion to the cities of refuge (Numb. xxxv. 9—34; Deut. xix. 6; Josh. xx.), where the manslayer, "though banished from his habitation for a time, was not quite expelled, but might return again after the death of the high priest" (Patrick). The argument used was not properly applicable to the particular instance, but the truth expressed is profound and striking. Notice—

I. THE ALIENATED CONDITION OF MAN. "Banished;" estranged, separated, "cast out of God's presence," away from his sanctuary, fellowship, and inheritance (ver. 16), in "a far country" (Luke xv. 13). That this is the moral and spiritual state of man (naturally and generally) is not only testified by the Scriptures, but also by his own heart and conscience; his aversion and dread with respect to God. It is: 1. *Voluntary.* By his own free act Absalom broke the Law, incurred the displeasure, fled from the face of his father, and continued in exile. So has it been with man from the first.

> "The nature with its Maker thus conjoin'd,
> Created first was blameless, pure, and good;
> But, through itself alone, was driven forth
> From Paradise, because it had eschew'd
> The way of truth and life, to evil turn'd."
>
> (Dante, 'Paradise,' vii.)

Of his own accord he departs from God and seeks to hide himself from him. 2. *Unhappy.* Absalom found friendly associates and material comforts in Geshur, but he could not have been at home there, and must have carried in his breast a restless and troubled heart. And it is impossible for him who departs from God, and tries to live without him, to possess inward rest and peace. The soul is made for God: how can it be satisfied with anything short of him? Oh the misery that multitudes at this moment endure because they have forsaken the "Fountain of living waters," and seek their happiness where it can never be found! 3. *Perilous.* The sinner is under condemnation. The "avengers of blood" are on his track. Life is precarious and must soon terminate, with all its alleviations, privileges, and possibilities; "and after that the judgment," when voluntary exile becomes involuntary, partial unhappiness

complete wretchedness, temporary estrangement "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. i. 9). 4. *Not hopeless.* Absalom was still a son, though a disobedient one; still "in the land of the living;" and might entertain the hope that, through his father's affection, his banishment would not be perpetual. However far man may have wandered from the Father's house, he is still an object of the Father's love. "Behold, all souls are mine," etc.; "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth," etc. (Ezek. xviii. 4, 32; xxiii. 11); "Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope" (Zech. ix. 12).

11. THE MERCIFUL MEANS DEVISED FOR HIS RESTORATION. Man's misery is from himself, but "salvation is of the Lord" (Ps. iii. 8; Jonah ii. 9). It is effected by and through: 1. *The long patience* and forbearance which he shows toward the transgressor; restraining the outgoings of wrath (Luke xiii. 7), sparing forfeited life, affording space for repentance, "making his sun to rise," etc. (Matt. v. 45). "The long-suffering of our Lord is salvation" (2 Pet. iii. 15; Rom. ii. 4). 2. *An extraordinary provision,* whereby the way of his return is opened, consistently with the requirements of eternal righteousness, and his fatherly love is revealed in the highest degree. By restoring Absalom without due regard to the demands of justice, and even without repentance, David weakened his own authority as king, contributed to a popular rebellion, and well-nigh lost his throne and life. But in the method which God in infinite wisdom has "devised" for the restoration of man, *justice and mercy* are alike manifested, an adequate ground or reason for forgiveness is furnished, sinners are "put in the capacity of salvation" (Butler), and the Law is magnified and "established" (Rom. iii. 19—31). "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8); "redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. iii. 13); "suffered for sins once, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. iii. 18).

"Man in himself had ever lacked the means
Of satisfaction. . . . Then behoved
That God should by his own ways lead him back
Unto the life from whence he fell, restored;
By both his ways, I mean, or one alone.
But since the deed is ever prized the more,
The more the doer's good intent appears;
Goodness celestial, whose broad signature
Is on the universe, of all its ways
To raise ye up, was fain to leave out none.
Nor aught so vast or so magnificent,
Either for him who gave or who received,
Between the last night and the primal day,
Was or can be. For God more bounty show'd,
Giving himself to make man capable
Of his return to life, then had the terms
Been mere and unconditional release.
And for his justice, every method else
Were all too scant, had not the Son of God
Humbled himself to put on mortal flesh."

(Dante, 'Paradise,' vii.)

3. *Numerous messages, efficient motives, and gracious influences,* in connection with that provision, to dispose him to avail himself thereof: the Word, with its invitations, warnings, appeals to reason, affection, conscience, hope and fear; messengers (ver. 31)—ministers and teachers of the Word; above all, the Holy Spirit, striving with sinners, convicting of sin, etc. (John xvi. 8), and renewing the heart in righteousness. 4. The end of all is reconciliation (ver. 33), filial fellowship, perfect holiness, and endless blessedness in God. "Return;" "Be ye reconciled to God."

CONCLUSION. 1. How wonderful is "the kindness of God our Saviour, and his love toward man" (Titus iii. 4)! 2. How entirely is man his own destroyer (Hos. xiii. 9)! 3. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another;" and to devise means in order that no "banished one" may be utterly banished from him.

"Oh let the dead now hear thy voice;
Now let thy banished ones rejoice."

D.

Ver. 20.—*Flattery.* "My lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God," etc. Commendation is often proper and beneficial (ch. ii. 5—7). But flattery (false, partial, or extravagant praise) is always improper and pernicious. This language was not mere Oriental compliment, but a flattering speech, intended to make the king pleased with himself in doing what he was urged to do. 1. It is *agreeable* to most persons when skilfully administered. "Flattery and the flatterer are pleasant; since the flatterer is a seeming admirer and a seeming friend" (Aristotle, 'Rhetoric').

"When I tell him he hates flatterers,
He says he does; being then most flattered."
(Shakespeare.)

"We believe that we hate flattery, when all which we hate is the awkwardness of the flatterer" (La Rochefoucault). 2. It assumes *various forms*, and is usually obsequious and disingenuous; is direct or indirect; is shown in praising personal qualities, advantages, achievements, etc., giving "flattering titles" (Job xxxii. 21—32), "good Master" (Mark x. 17; xii. 14), "my Lord," etc. Making or suggesting favourable comparisons, it may be, by detracting from the good name of others (ch. iv. 8). It is sometimes sincere; but "people generally despise where they flatter and cringe to those they would gladly surpass." 3. It is commonly designed by those who employ it to serve some *interest* of their own (ver. 22). Hence it is so frequently used to gain the favour of kings, and such as possess authority, influence, or wealth (Jude 16). When Alexander the Great was hit with an arrow in the siege of an Indian city, and the wound would not heal, he said to his flatterers, "You say that I am Jupiter's son, but this wound cries that I am but man." 4. It *blinds* those who listen to it to their defects, ministers to their vanity, and fills them with perilous self-complacency. "It's the death of virtue." 5. It also induces them to pursue erroneous and *sinful courses*, which they might otherwise have avoided. "A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet" (Prov. xxix. 5; xxvi. 28). "Ah! how good might many men have been who are now exceedingly bad had they not sold their ears to flatterers! Flatterers are soul-murderers. Flattery is the very spring and mother of all impiety. It put our first parent on tasting the forbidden fruit. It put Absalom upon dethroning his father. It blows the trumpet and draws poor souls into rebellion against God, as Sheba drew Israel to rebel against David. It makes men call evil good and good evil, darkness light and light darkness" (T. Brooks). 6. It is only less *culpable* in those who listen to it than in those who employ it. They are willing captives. "As a wolf resembles a dog, so doth a flatterer a friend. Take heed, therefore, that, instead of guardian dogs, you do not incautiously admit ravening wolves" (Epictetus). 7. Its folly and guilt are sometimes discovered too late; when its *ruinous consequences* cannot be repaired (ch. xv. 13; Ps. xii. 3; Acts xii. 23).—D.

Ver. 25.—*Physical beauty.* "And in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty," etc. (see 1 Sam. xvi. 7, 12; ch. xi. 2; xiii. 1; ver. 27).

"Of all God's works, which do this world adorn,
There is no one more fair and excellent
Than is man's body, both for power and form,
Whilst it is kept in sober government;
But none than it more foul and indecent,
Distempered through misrule and passions base;
It grows a monster, and incontinent
Doth lose its dignity and native grace:
Behold, who list, both one and other in this place"
(Spenser, 'The Faërie Queene,' canto IX.)

It is—

I. AN ADMIRED ENDOWMENT; involuntarily conferred, without personal effort and beyond human control (Matt. v. 36; vi. 27); yet one of the most personal and enviable

of human possessions. "Beauty is a thing of great recommendation in the correspondence amongst men; it is the principal means of acquiring the favour and good-liking of one another, and no man is so barbarous and morose that does not perceive himself in some sort struck with its attraction" (Montaigne). "Beauty is, indeed, a good gift of God; but that the good may not think it a great good, God dispenses it even to the wicked" (Augustine).

"A beautiful and fair young man is he;
In all his body is no blemish seen;
His hair is like the wire of David's harp,
That twines about his bright and ivory neck;
In Israel is not such a goodly man."
(Geo. Peele, 'The Tragedy of Absolon:' 1599.)

II. A SUPERFICIAL DISTINCTION; shadowing forth, indeed, beauty of mind and character; and heightened by the latter, when present; but often, in fact, disassociated from it; and covering, "skin-deep," dreadful moral deformity (Prov. xi. 22). Absalom was beautiful externally, but not "beautiful within." Wisdom, truth, humility, modesty, purity, patience, meekness, piety, mercy, charity,—these constitute inward, substantial, spiritual beauty, "the beauty of holiness," the product of the grace and the reflection of the beauty and glory of the Lord (Ps. xc. 17; cxlix. 4); in which he delights, and which all persons may acquire (Eph. iv. 24; Gal. v. 22; Phil. ii. 5). "Whatsoever things are lovely," etc. (Phil. iv. 8). "The graces of the Spirit are the richest ornaments of the reasonable creature."

III. A DANGEROUS INFLUENCE; on its *possessors*, making them vain and presumptuous, and exposing them to many temptations; on its *beholders*, directing undue attention to "the outward appearance," disposing to excuses for mental and moral defects, alluring to evil (ch. xv. 1—6). The beauty of Absalom was a snare to the people. "His hair was his halter" (ch. xviii. 9).

"Where is the virtue of thy beauty, Absolon?
Will any of us here now fear thy locks,
Or be in love with that thy golden hair,
Wherein was wrapt rebellion 'gainst thy sire,
And words prepared to stop thy father's breath?"
(Geo. Peele.)

IV. A TRANSIENT POSSESSION. Precarious, short-lived, inevitably turning to dust (ver. 14); "a fading flower" (Isa. xxviii. 4; xl. 8; Ps. xxxix. 11), whose "root is ever in its grave."

"A doubtful good, a gloss, a glass, a flower,
Lost, faded, broken, dead, within an hour."

"So have I seen a rose newly springing from the clefts of its hood, and at first it was fair as the morning, and full with the dew of heaven as a lamb's fleece; but when a ruder breath had forced open its virgin modesty, and dismantled its too youthful and unripe retirements, it began to put on darkness, and to decline to softness and the symptoms of a sickly age; it bowed the head, and broke its stalk, and at night, having lost some of its leaves and all its beauty, it fell into the portion of weeds and outworn faces. The same is the portion of every man and every woman" (Jeremy Taylor, 'Holy Dying'). But goodness is immortal; it "fadeth not away" (1 Pet. i. 4). "Beauty belongs to youth and dies with it, but the odours of piety survive death and perfume the tomb."

"Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in the dust."

D.

Vers. 28—33.—*Restored, but not reformed.* "Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it were better for me that I were there still; and now I will see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him put me to death" (ver. 31). While in Geshur Absalom showed no repentance for his crime; sought no forgiveness of it; rather

justified himself in its commission. On this account, perhaps, David would not permit him, when recalled, to see his face, but ordered him to remain at his own house (ver. 24); testifying his abhorrence of the crime, and desiring "to carry further the discipline of approval, to wait till his son was more manifestly penitent." If Absalom had been in a proper frame of mind, it might have been beneficial; as it was, "this half-forgiveness was an imprudent measure, really worse than no forgiveness at all, and bore very bitter fruit" (Keil). "The end showed how fatal the policy of expectation was, how terribly it added bitterness to the sense of alienation that had already been growing only too strong within him" (Plumptre). "A flash of his old kingliness blazes out for a moment in his refusal to see his son. But even that slight satisfaction to justice vanishes as soon as Joab chooses to insist that Absalom shall return to court. He seems to have no will of his own. He has become a mere tool in the hands of his fierce general; and Joab's hold upon him was his complicity in Uriah's murder. Thus at every step he was dogged by the consequences of his crime, even though it was pardoned sin" (Maclaren). Yet immediate and full forgiveness might have failed to subdue the heart of Absalom, and win filial confidence and affection. "Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness," etc. (Isa. xxvi. 10). In his spirit and conduct we observe: 1. *Ingratitude* for the favour shown toward him. He estimated it lightly (knowing little of the fatherly love from which it proceeded), save as a means to his own honour and advancement. Than ingratitude nothing is more odious. 2. *Impatience*, fretfulness, discontent under restraint and chastisement; which a true penitent would have endured humbly and cheerfully; increased as time passed away (two years) and no further sign of royal favour appeared. 3. *Presumption* on account of the privilege already granted to him, but which be repudiated as worthless, unless followed by other privileges, such as became his royal birth and involved his reinstatement in his former dignity. He looked upon himself as rightful heir to the throne. He may, however, have suspected a rival in the youthful Solomon (now six or eight years old), and feared the influence of Bathsheba on behalf of her son. 4. *Resentment* and revenge for the neglect, contempt, and wrong which (as he conceived) he suffered (ver. 29). "See, Joab's field is beside mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire" (ver. 30). This appears to have been an act of passion rather than of policy. Joab's slackness, in contrast with his former zeal (ver. 23), was doubtless due to his desire to make the most of his influence with the king, to constrain Absalom humbly to entreat his intercession, and so to increase his feeling of dependence and obligation; it was only when he perceived that he had to deal with "a character wild, impulsive, and passionate," that he deemed it necessary again to alter his tactics. 5. *Wilfulness* in seeking the attainment of his ambitious aims. "I *will* see the king's face." His presence at court was essential to the accomplishment of the daring design upon the crown, which he may have already formed; and he would brook no denial. Possibly his bereavement (ver. 27; ch. xviii. 18) intensified his determination. "The strongest yearning of an Israelite's heart was thrown back upon itself, after a short-lived joy, and his feelings towards his own father were turned to bitterness and hate." 6. *Defiance* of conviction of guilt. "If there be any iniquity in me," etc. "The manner in which he sought to obtain forgiveness by force manifested an evident spirit of defiance, by which, with the well-known mildness of David's temper, he hoped to attain his object, and in fact did attain it" (Keil). He also doubtless relied on the support of a party of the people, dissatisfied with the king's severity toward him, and favourable to his complete restoration. Even Joab yielded for the present to his imperious and resolute demand. 7. *Heartless formality.* "He bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom" (ver. 33). His heart was not humbled, but lifted up in pride; yet he openly received the pledge of reconciliation; and herein David's blindness and weakness reached their culmination. "He did not kiss the ill will out of the heart of his son" (Krummacher). "When parents and rulers countenance such imperious characters, they will soon experience the most fatal effects." (Here is another "meeting of three remarkable men," 1 Sam. xix. 22—24, Joab, Absalom, David.) *Remarks.* 1. No hard and impenitent heart is prepared to receive and profit by forgiveness. 2. Such a heart is capable of turning the greatest benefits into means of further and more daring rebellion; and "treasures up for itself wrath against the day of wrath." 3. Whilst "God is good and ready to forgive," he grants forgiveness only to those "who call upon

him" in humility and sincerity, confessing and forsaking their sins (Ps. lxxxvi. 5; cxxxviii. 6; xxxii. 5; li. 17).—D.

Ver. 11.—*Remembrance of God.* "Let the king remember the Lord thy God." This passage occurs in a singular bit of history, which illustrates, *inter alia*, the carefulness which even the most favoured and powerful of the subjects of an Eastern monarch must at times exercise in seeking to influence him; and, on the other hand, the accessibility of such a monarch to the meanest subject desirous of his interposition. Perhaps, however, this "wise woman" may have belonged to a class which, like prophets, could (or would) take special liberties with royal and other great persons (comp. ch. xx. 16—22, the only other passage in which the phrase, "wise woman," occurs in the same sense). This woman showed herself "wise" in her management of the case which Joab had entrusted to her. It was after she had succeeded in making a favourable impression upon David, that, desirous of a more solemn and specific assurance, she addressed him in the words of the text. This appeal had the desired effect: the king declared with an oath that no harm should be done to her son, whom she had represented as in danger of death from having killed his brother. The exhortation is ever suitable and seasonable.

I. THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD WHICH SHOULD BE PRACTISED. It includes mindfulness of: 1. His existence and perfections. 2. His relation to the universe and to ourselves—Creator, Sustainer, Ruler, Redeemer, Father of spirits, etc. 3. His revelations and commands. 4. His goodness to us. What he has done, is doing, and has promised to do.

II. WHEN WE SHOULD REMEMBER HIM. When should we not? The remembrance should be: 1. Habitual. "I have set the Lord always before me" (Ps. xvi. 8); "Be ye mindful always of his covenant" (1 Chron. xvi. 15). 2. At stated times. Without special remembrances the habitual will not be maintained. Hence the value of the hours of devotion, private and public. 3. At times of special need. When duty is hard, temptation urgent, trouble pressing.

III. WHO ARE REQUIRED TO REMEMBER HIM. All—kings as well as subjects. The higher men are raised above their fellow-men, the more they need to keep in mind him who is higher than they, and who will call them to account. The greater the trust God has committed to any, and the more they are independent of others in discharging it, the more they need to look to God for help in discerning and practising what is right. In an unlimited, or only partially limited, monarchy, the king has peculiar reason to keep the King of kings in mind, that he may be preserved from injustice, partiality, and oppression. But people of all classes are bound to remember God, and live as in his sight.

IV. WHY WE SHOULD CHERISH SUCH REMEMBRANCES. 1. *It is our plain duty.* From our relation to God, and from his commandments. And it is no less absurd than impious to forget him "with whom we have to do" (Heb. iv. 13) more than with any and all others. 2. *It is greatly for our profit.* It will be productive of: (1) Piety and holiness. These spring from the knowledge of God, but only as it is kept in mind. To have God in our creed, but not in our memory, is much the same as to have no God at all. It is thought which stirs emotion and nourishes moral principle. (2) Strength and safety under temptation. (3) Happiness. In ordinary life, and in times of trial and suffering. Remembrance of God will sanctify all things, heighten all innocent pleasures, turn duties into delights, afford consolation and support when all else fails. 3. *It will save from the pangs of too-late remembrances on earth or in hell.* (See Prov. v. 11—14; Luke xvi. 25, "Son, remember.") Mindfulness of God is universal in the eternal world, for joy or sorrow.

V. THE NEED THERE IS TO REMIND MEN OF THIS DUTY. "Let the king remember," etc. Men are apt to forget God, even when the memory of him is most desirable and incumbent. Such forgetfulness may spring from: 1. Negligence. 2. The pressure of other thoughts. The worldly. The anxious and troubled. It is often a great kindness to remind troubled Christians of their God. 3. Dislike of God. Unwillingness that he should interfere with life and action. 4. Love of sin. The pleasure of sin, if not sin itself, would be impossible if God were thought of. 5. Pride and self-satisfaction (Deut. viii. 10—19).

Finally: 1. *Remembrance of God, spontaneously and lovingly cherished, is a good evidence of sincere piety.* 2. *The compatibility or incompatibility of it with any act or habit furnishes a safe guide when distinct precepts are wanting.*—G. W.

Ver. 14.—*God fetching home his banished.* The "wise woman," having succeeded in that which she pretended to be her object in coming to David, skilfully approached the real purpose of her visit. She insinuates, in general and guarded language, that he was cherishing thoughts which were "against the people of God," and that the decision he had given in favour of her son was inconsistent with his not fetching home again his own banished one. Then, in our text, she presents, still in a general and indefinite way, reasons why the king should restore his banished one. 1. *The universal mortality of mankind.* "We must needs die," etc. This may contain a hint that it was useless longer to be grieved or angry about Amnon's death—nothing could restore him to life. Or, just as likely, it may be mentioned as a reason for doing rightly (in this case, exercising mercy) while we may, since we and those we can benefit will soon be alike in the grave; and for doing nothing to embitter this brief life to any while it lasts, or to shorten it needlessly by our conduct. Or it may be intended to soften the king's heart and prepare him to exercise compassion, as God is said to pity us because "he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. ciii. 13, 14). 2. *The long-suffering of God.* "Neither doth God take away life" (Revised Version); *i.e.* He does not usually strike down the sinner at once in his sins, but bears long with him, and gives him space for repentance. This may be a skilful allusion to the mercy shown to David himself (ch. xii. 13, "Thou shalt not die"). 3. *The provision which God makes for the return of sinners to himself.* "He deviseth means, that he that is banished be not an outcast from him" (Revised Version). In this also there may be an allusion to God's treatment of David, in sending to him Nathan to rouse his conscience, bring him to repentance, and then assure him of pardon. Or the woman may have in her mind the provisions of the Mosaic Law for restoring to the congregation and the temple services those who had been separated from them through contracting some uncleanness or committing some sin (see Lev. iv., v., vi. 1—7). Or she may, by a flash of inspiration, have had a glimpse of the great principles underlying these legal and ceremonial appointments, and which are more fully made manifest in Christ. We, at least, can hardly err in interpreting her words in the light of the gospel. Thus regarded, they suggest to us—

I. THE CONDITION OF SINNERS. That is, of mankind apart from Christ. They are "banished," and in danger of being "expelled," from God, and becoming utterly outcast. 1. "*Banished;*" *self-banished, like Absalom.* (1) Sin separates between man and God; severs from the Divine friendship and favour; from the Father's home, society, and blessing; from the family of God, its occupations, privileges, and joys. Men may be externally associated with the godly in worship and service, yet banished spiritually, cut off from real communion. Two persons may sit side by side in the same church, one holding converse with God and having fellowship with his people in their worship, the other having no real participation in these exercises, far from God even in his house. Of the banished there are two classes—those who have never known God, and those who, having known him, have turned away from him. The case of the latter is the saddest (2 Pet. ii. 20, 21). (2) Sin ever tends to produce increased separation from God. In heart, and also outwardly. When the heart is alienated from God, distaste for the forms of worship, and all that reminds of him, increases; and often ends in the entire abandonment of them. As the prodigal son went "into a far country" (Luke xv. 13). "Banished." It is a wretched condition. To depart from God is to commit great sin; to be destitute of the highest blessings and exposed to the worst miseries. To be without him is to be without true life, solid happiness, and well-grounded hope. 2. "*Banished,*" *but not yet utterly outcast.* (1) Although they have forsaken God, he has not quite forsaken them. He does the... good continually in his providence; and, by the blessings he bestows upon them, protests against their unnatural conduct, and urges them to return to him. (2) They are in constant peril of becoming entirely and hopelessly outcast; for the practice of sin hardens the heart increasingly, and threatens to obliterate in the sinner's nature whatever might leave a hope of repentance and reconciliation. And "the wrath of God" ever "abideth on him" (John iii. 36),

and may at any moment banish him "into the outer darkness" (Matt. viii. 12, Revised Version).

II. THE PURPOSE OF GOD. To secure "that his banished be not expelled from him;" but be brought back, reconciled, restored to himself, his family, and service. To "fetch home again his banished." Whence this purpose? 1. *The Divine knowledge of the nature and consequent worth of man.* That he is not as the brutes, but was "made after the similitude of God" (Jas. iii. 9). That, though he "must needs die" and become as spilt water, he must needs also live after death. Hence he is worthy of much Divine expenditure in order to his salvation. The spiritual nature and the immortality of man render him an object of intense interest to his Maker, and to all who recognize them. 2. *The desire of God that his purpose in the creation of mankind should not be frustrated.* 3. *The abounding love of God.* Though the sinner is banished from his favour, he is not from his heart. He yearns over him while he expresses his displeasure with his conduct. He expresses his displeasure as one step towards his restoration. He desires the happiness of the sinner, but knows he cannot be happy apart from himself. He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. iii. 9).

III. THE MEANS HE DEVISED FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF HIS PURPOSE. 1. *The incarnation and work of his Son Jesus Christ.* He came "to seek and save the lost" (Luke xix. 10). By his personal manifestation of God, his teaching, example, and especially his death, he became the Way to the Father (John xiv. 6). He "suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. iii. 18). 2. *The gospel.* Which is God's message to his banished ones, calling them back to him, and showing the way of return. 3. *The Church, its ordinances and ministries.* One main business of the Church, its ministers, yea, of all its members, is to labour to "fetch home again" God's banished ones. 4. *The events of life.* The providence of God is subservient to his grace. The Lord Jesus is "Head over all things," that all may further the accomplishment of the purposes for which he lived and died on earth, and lives and reigns in heaven. Hence providential events, on the wide scale and in individual life, are often rendered effectual unto salvation. 5. *The gift of the Holy Spirit.* To render all other means effectual in the hearts and lives of men. To convince, incline, persuade, convert, sanctify, save.

IV. THE IMITATION OF GOD IN THIS RESPECT TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED. The woman thus spoke that she might induce David to recall his banished son, Absalom. So we are called to imitate God: 1. *By a readiness to forgive and restore our own banished ones;* those who have forfeited our favour by misconduct. Some are implacable even toward their own children, however penitent they may be; but this is contrary to Christ, and quite unbecoming those who owe their own place in God's family to his forgiving mercy. 2. *By hearty co-operation with God in the work of restoring those who have departed from him.* This is the most glorious purpose for which we can live, the Divinest work in which we can engage. In this work we must bear in mind that to be successful we must conform to the methods which God has devised and furnished; as, in fact, in all departments of life, success springs from learning the Divine laws, and acting in harmony with them. There is no room for our own inventions, no possibility of independent action. In such imitation and co-operation we should be impelled to faithfulness and diligence by the consideration that both ourselves and those we are to benefit "must needs die" (see John ix. 4). And let the same consideration lead those who have departed from God to return with all speed (see John xii. 35; 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2). Let not all the Divine thoughts and methods of mercy be, in your case, in vain. For all had respect to you individually. This we may be aided to realize by the singular number used here, "his banished one." "It was for *me* that all this movement of Divine love took place, and all these wonderful means have been employed. For *me* the Saviour died; to *me* the Divine message is sent," etc. Let not your return, however, be like Absalom's, in outward act only, but in heart. "Let the wicked forsake his *way*, and the unrighteous man his *thoughts*: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. lv. 7).—G. W.

Ver. 17.—*An all-comprehensive blessing.* "The Lord thy God be with thee" (Re-

vised Version). The "wise woman," in closing her address to David and taking leave, as she thought, of him, pronounces this blessing upon him. It was a usual form of salutation amongst the Israelites; and, like our similar forms ("Adieu," equivalent to "to God [I commend thee];" "Good-bye," equivalent, perhaps, to "God be with thee"), was doubtless often employed without thought or feeling as to its significance. But in its full meaning it is the best blessing we can pronounce on our friends, the most comprehensive prayer we can offer for them. "The Lord Jesus be with thy spirit" (2 Tim. iv. 22) is a similar benediction.

I. IT IS A PRAYER OF TRUE FRIENDSHIP. We can desire nothing more or better for our friends than what these words express. For consider: 1. *What is included in God being "with" men.* Not simply his nearness, but: (1) His favour. His presence as a Friend with friends. Not merely as he is near to all men, the Upholder of their being and the Source of whatever they enjoy; but as he is near to those who are reconciled to him, whom he has forgiven and received into his spiritual family, who love him and delight in his love. (2) His constant help. To defend, uphold, guide, supply with all needed and real good, temporal and spiritual; to impart to them wisdom, holiness, strength, and happiness. (3) His converse with them. The manifestation of his presence and loving-kindness; so that they discern his nearness, are conscious of his love and care and co-operation. 2. *Whose friendship is thus invoked.* That of "Jehovah thy God." The living God, the Eternal, the Almighty, the All-wise, the All-good, etc. Better to have him with us than all the world, all the universe. In fact, if God is with us, all things are really with us (see Rom. viii. 28, 31—39; 1 Pet. iii. 13).

II. IT IS A PRAYER NATURAL TO A PIOUS MAN. Springing from his personal experience of the blessedness of those who have God with them, and his desire that all, and especially those in whom he feels the deepest interest, should be partakers of the same blessedness.

III. IT IS A PRAYER ESPECIALLY SUITABLE TO BE OFFERED ON CERTAIN OCCASIONS. To express feelings of friendship, gratitude, benevolence, affection: (1) To benefactors, whose kindness we feel we cannot requite. "I cannot repay you, but God can. May he be with you!" (2) To needy persons, whose necessities we feel we cannot meet. Whether the need be temporal or spiritual. The poor, the sick, the perplexed; friends engaged in difficult enterprises or going into perilous circumstances; such as are leaving home or country; friends from whom we are parting, not knowing what may befall them or us. (3) To dying friends, or those near us when we die. "I die, but God shall be with you" (Gen. xlviii. 21). It is a prayer that gives comfort and peace to him who presents it, quieting the tumult excited by the combination of strong desire with conscious helplessness.

IV. IT IS A PRAYER WHICH WILL BE FULFILLED TO THE RIGHTEOUS. The unrighteous can only secure the blessing for themselves by becoming righteous (see 2 Chron. xv. 2), through repentance and faith in Immanuel (equivalent to "God with us").—G. W.

Ver. 25.—*Absalom's beauty.* This remark, thrown in by the way, has more to do with the main course of the narrative than at first appears. The personal beauty of Absalom accounts in part for the excessive fondness of David for him, for his vanity and ambition, and for his powerful influence over others; and, so far as it consisted in abundance of fine hair, appears to have been the immediate occasion of his miserable end. It may serve us as the starting-point of some remarks on beauty of person.

I. ITS WORTH. 1. *It is in itself good as a fair work and gift of God.* A sober divine (Manton) calls it "a beam of the majesty of God." 2. *It is pleasant to look upon.* Beautiful people are so many pictures moving about in society for the innocent gratification of beholders, with this superiority to other pictures, that they are alive and present continual variety. 3. *It may be of great advantage to its possessor.* It attracts others; makes it easier to secure friends. A comely face and form are an introduction to notice and favour. 4. *It may be a power for good to others.* In a ruler, a preacher, any leader in society, it is an element of influence. Is not, therefore, to be despised either by its possessor or by others.

II. ITS PERILS. 1. *It is apt to excite vanity and pride—themselves the parents of many sins.* 2. *When overvalued, it leads to the neglect of higher things*—the culture

of mind, heart, and character. 3. *In children it may awaken in their parents a foolish fondness which hinders parental discipline.* (Comp. 1 Kings i. 6.) 4. *It attracts flatterers and seducers, and thus often occasions moral ruin.* It was Tamar's beauty that kindled Amnon's lust (ch. xiii. 1). It is a very perilous endowment to young women, especially among the poor. 5. *It may lead its possessor to become a tempter of others; and renders his (or her) temptations all the more seductive.* Lord Bacon (in his essay 'On Beauty') says, "For the most part it makes a dissolute youth, and an age a little out of countenance; but yet certainly again, if it light well, it maketh virtues shine and vices blush."

III. ITS INFERIORITY. In comparison with mental, moral, and spiritual beauty. 1. *In essential nature.* The latter belong to a far higher region, are a far more valuable product of the Divine hand. The beauties of holiness are the features of the Divine Father appearing in his children, and manifesting their parentage. 2. *In appearance.* Moral loveliness is far more beautiful than physical in the sight of God and the good (comp. 1 Sam. xvi. 7), and it has the power of rendering very plain faces interesting and attractive, if not beautiful. 3. *In value to its possessor and to others.* Beauty of character is a priceless treasure (1 Pet. iii. 4), indicating one still more precious—the character itself; it excites the deepest and best kind of admiration and commendation (Prov. xxxi. 30); and it gives those in whom it appears a power over others for their good which incalculably surpasses the influence of mere beauty of person; and which "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour" (Titus ii. 10)—the chief instrument of good to men—wins for it a readier acceptance. 4. *In facility of attainment.* Beauty of person, if not a gift of nature, cannot be acquired; but that of the soul can. The Lord Jesus came to earth to make it possible for the ugly and deformed to become lovely; he lives to effect this great transformation. Those who are in him become the subjects of a new creation: "Old things are passed away; all things are become new" (2 Cor. v. 17). The Holy Ghost adorns the soul with heavenly grace and attractiveness (Gal. v. 22, 23). And when the process is complete on the whole Church of Christ, he will "present it to himself" as his beauteous bride, "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but . . . holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 27). Faith in, and habitual converse with, him who is "altogether lovely," is the way to experience for ourselves this wondrous change. "Beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. iii. 18). Even the body will at length be beautified (Phil. iii. 21). 5. *In duration.* The beauty which is of earth fades and passes away, but that which is of heaven abides evermore. The former may vanish even in youth through the ravages of disease; will almost certainly in after-life, unless heightened and ripened by sense and goodness; and certainly will turn to corruption after death. But the latter will survive the decay and destruction of all things, and adorn the "Father's house" for ever.

In conclusion, this subject appeals especially to the young. Let them seek with all their heart the beauty which is spiritual and everlasting; and regard as of small account that which is in itself of little value, and at best of short duration; and which, if separate from moral excellence, is like the beauty of a sepulchre, covering death and corruption.—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XV.

Ver. 1.—**After this.** The Hebrew is a more precise phrase than that on which we have commented on ch. x. 1 and xiii. 1, and implies that Absalom began his devices soon after obtaining his liberty. **Chariots and horses;** Hebrew, *a chariot and horses;* that is, a chariot for state occasions, in which Absalom rode, while fifty footmen ran at his side. Probably his grandfather Talmai practised similar magnificence at Geshur. In India it is still common for men of rank to be attended by runners on foot, who will keep up with horses or elephants for an incredible distance.

Ver. 2.—**The way of the gate.** The gate would be that of the royal palace, where the king gave audience and administered justice. At the gate of the city the elders were the judges, and, though the higher authority of the king may have weakened the action of

this citizen court, yet passages such as Isa. 1, 23 and Jer. v. 28 imply, not only its continued existence, but also that it retained much importance. Probably all causes between citizens were tried by it, just as causes in the country were tried by the mishpachah (see note on ch. xiv. 7); but with an appeal in weighty matters to the king. It is a mistake to suppose that David altogether neglected his judicial functions. On the contrary, the woman of Tekoah obtained an audience, as a matter of course; and Absalom would not have risen up thus early unless David had also taken his seat in the early morning on the royal divan to administer justice. It was the suitors on their way to the king whom Absalom accosted, and made believe that he would be more assiduous in his duties than his father, and that he would have decided every suit in favour of the person to whom he was talking, whereas really one side alone can gain the cause. Still, we may well believe that, guilty himself of adultery and murder, and with his two elder sons stained with such terrible crimes, David's administration of justice had become half-hearted. And thus his sin again found him out, and brought stern punishment. For Absalom used this weakness against his father, and, intercepting the suitors on their way, would ask their city and tribe, and listen to their complaint, and assure them of the goodness of their cause, and lament that, as the king could not hear all causes easily himself, he did not appoint others to aid him in his duties. It was delay and procrastination of which Absalom complained; and as many of the litigants had probably come day after day, and not succeeded in getting a hearing, they were already in ill humour and prepared to find fault. Now, as David possessed great powers of organization, we may well believe that he would have taken measures for the adequate administration of law had it not been for the moral malady which enfeebled his will. In the appointment of Jehoshaphat and Seraiah (ch. viii. 16, 17) he had made a beginning, but soon his hands grew feeble, and he did no more.

Ver. 6.—**Absalom stole the hearts.** By professing anxiety to devote himself to the hearing and deciding of the people's causes, by flattering each one with the assurance that his case was so good that it needed only a hearing to be decided in his favour, and by his affability, made the more charming and irresistible by his personal beauty, he won the love of the people almost without their knowing how devoted they had become to him.

Ver. 7.—**After forty years.** As Absalom was born in Hebron after David was made king (ch. iii. 3), and as David's whole reign lasted only forty years and six months, the reading "forty" is evidently incorrect. Suggestions, such, for instance, as that the forty years are to be reckoned from the desire of the Israelites to have a king, or from the anointing of David by Samuel, are merely methods of evading a difficulty. The Syriac, however, and the Vulgate—except the Codex Amiatinus, which reads "forty," supported by Josephus and some manuscripts—have "four years," which would give ample, yet not too long, time for the growth of Absalom's popularity, and of dissatisfaction at David's tardy administration of justice. **In Hebron.** Absalom chose this town, both as being his birthplace, and also because it was on the road to Geshur (1 Sam. xxvii. 8), whither flight might be necessary should the enterprise fail. He hoped also to win to his cause some of the powerful tribe of Judah, though it generally was the mainstay of David's throne. Local sacrifices were still customary (see note on 1 Sam. xvi. 2), and the visit of the king's son for such a purpose would be celebrated by a general holiday and much feasting at Hebron. As Ewald remarks, David's confidence and want of suspicion were the results of a noble-minded generosity. And besides, there was no state police ever on the watch, and ready to put an unfavourable construction on all that was done; and probably David was even pleased at his son's popularity, and took his professions as proof that he would be a just and wise ruler on succeeding to his father's place. Perhaps, too, he was glad at this indication of religious feeling on Absalom's part; for a father is sure to look on the better side of his son's acts. He had been tardy enough in fulfilling his vow, but it seemed to David that conscience had at last prevailed, and that right was to be done.

Ver. 10.—**Absalom sent spies.** The word means "those who go hither and thither," and, as the object of such journeying would usually be to gather information, the right translation often is "spies." Here there was no such purpose, nor were they to report to Absalom, but to disperse themselves everywhere, and, when the signal was given at Hebron, they were to endeavour to gather the people to Absalom's standard. Some simple-minded commentators wonder how one trumpet could be heard throughout the land. It was heard only at Hebron, but the news of the proclamation would rapidly spread; and, though the rumour might be vague and confused, yet these emissaries, fully acquainted beforehand with its meaning, would turn it to Absalom's advantage, and urge the people to confirm the choice made, as they would affirm, by the whole tribe of Judah. In such attempts every-

thing depends upon gathering a powerful following at first; and usually a good deal of vigour and even force is necessary to make men take part in a revolt. But as the numbers swell, adherents readily flock in to what seems to be the winning side.

Ver. 11.—**Two hundred men.** These, doubtless, were courtiers and men of rank, who were so accustomed to Absalom's love of display, that, when **called**, that is, invited, they would go without suspicion. To Absalom their attendance was most important, not only because, being compromised, many would join him, and even all of them for a time be forced to yield obedience, but because they would make the people of Hebron suppose that Absalom had a powerful body of supporters at Jerusalem. It is quite possible that at Hebron, and generally in Judah, there was great discontent because David had left their tribe to choose a capital elsewhere, and because he did not show them any decided preference over the other tribes, whose good will he would rightly seek to conciliate. The existence of much jealousy between Judah and the ten tribes is plain from ch. xix. 41—43.

Ver. 12.—**Ahithophel the Gilonite.** The desertion of David by Ahithophel is in every way remarkable, even if he were Bathsheba's grandfather (see note on ch. xi. 3). For he was far too subtle a man to have joined the conspiracy unless he had felt reasonably sure that it would be successful. Successful it would have been had his advice been followed; but so correctly did he estimate the result if David were allowed time to gather his friends, that, when his counsel was rejected, he withdrew immediately to Giloh, and committed suicide. Still if the revolt had been successful, it would have involved, if not the death of Bathsheba, yet certainly that of her sons, and the exclusion of Ahithophel's great-grandchildren from the throne. In Ps. xli., written at this time, we learn what were David's feelings when he heard the news of this conspiracy, and Ahithophel is the familiar friend, in whom he had trusted, and who had eaten at his table, but now raised up his heel to kick at him. In John xiii. 18 the words are quoted of Judas Iscariot, of whom Ahithophel was a type in his treachery and in his death by his own hand. The translation, "sent for Ahithophel," cannot be maintained. The Hebrew is "sent Ahithophel," but for what purpose or on what embassy is not mentioned. As thus something must have dropped out of the Hebrew text, it possibly may be the preposition "for," as this gives a good sense. For Giloh, Ahithophel's town, was situated a few miles to the south of Hebron (Josh. xv. 51), and Ahithophel had probably been working there secretly for Absalom for some time. As David's counsellor, his proper place of residence would have been Jerusalem, but the conspiracy had been kept so secret that he had been able to get away without suspicion. He is now summoned to Absalom's side, and his presence there brings in so many adherents that a rapid march on Jerusalem might have put David into their power. The Revised Version is right in translating, **while he offered the sacrifices**; namely, those which he had vowed, and which were the reason given for his visit to Hebron.

Ver. 14.—**Arise, and let us flee.** The rebellion of Absalom, and David's humiliating flight, bring out all the better parts of the king's character, and set him once again before us as a man after God's own heart. For this period is richly illustrated by the psalms which were written under the pressure of this great affliction, and which are marked by firm confidence in God, and an assured sense of the Divine nearness and protection. Ps. xli. shows how poignant was his anguish at Ahithophel's treachery, but it inspired no fear: "As for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever" (Ps. xli. 12). It was a firm faith which prompted such words. In Ps. lxiii., written "in the wilderness of Judah," before David had reached the Jordan, he gives utterance to his grief at the loss of his religious privileges at Jerusalem; but Jehovah is still his strong Tower, and his dwelling will be in God's tabernacle for ever. Ps. iii. and iv. are his morning and evening hymns written "when he fled from Absalom his son." Ps. lv. is one more sad even than Ps. xli. He describes in it his panic-stricken feelings when the news reached him, his longing to escape from the turmoil of life, and flee into the wilderness and be at rest; and his grief at his desertion by men in whose company he had worshipped in the house of God. Upon this follows an outburst of vehement indignation, made the more bitter by the sense of the treachery whereby he had been duped into connivance with Absalom's plans (ver. 21); but amidst it all his confidence was unshaken that if he cast his burden upon God, "he would sustain him, and never suffer the righteous to be moved." Finally, in Ps. xxvii. we have the contrast between Jehovah's abiding goodness and the inconstancy of men; while Pss. lxi. and lxii. were probably written at Mahanaim, when David's anguish of mind was being assuaged, and a calm confidence was taking its place. Everywhere in all of them David speaks as one who had now given all his heart to God. As regards his terror and flight (Ps. lv. 5—8), it may seem strange that David should have withdrawn so hurriedly from a city so

strong as Jerusalem. But we must not suppose that he had a standing army, and his few Cherethites and Pelethites could have made no head against the nation. Probably, too, the fortifications of the city were incomplete (Ps. li. 18); and even if in good order, yet, cooped up in Jerusalem, David would have left the whole country in Absalom's power, and finally, after a long blockade, he must have been driven by famine to surrender. Away from Jerusalem he was the centre whither all who disliked Absalom's attempt would gather, and every day as it passed would make men reflect more and more upon what David had done for them, and the more steady and thoughtful of them would finally decide in his favour. There would be, moreover, the secret conviction that David, with such men round him as Joab and Abishai, if free to take his own course, would be more than a match for Absalom and his larger numbers. This was what Ahithophel foresaw, and was so convinced that, if David were not crushed at once, he would gain the day, that he did not even wait to see, but destroyed himself. Abarbanel thinks that the wish of the people had never been for more than the association of Absalom with David on the throne, according to what he had himself suggested (ver. 4); and that there was a great revulsion of feeling when they saw that they must choose absolutely between father and son, and that whoever lost the crown must lose his life as well. Some commentators consider that Ps. xxxi. also belongs to this period, though others ascribe it to Jeremiah. Parts of it are singularly applicable to the circumstances of David's flight, as where the psalmist speaks of Jehovah as being his Fortress in contrast with Jerusalem, and adds, "Thou hast not shut me up into the hands of the enemy, but hast set my feet in a large space," as though "the net which the conspirators had privily laid for him" had been the design to coop him up within the walls of the city. There are touching words, too, of distress at the slander and reproach breaking forth on every side, and at the completeness of his fall, so that whereas but a few days before he had been a king, now "he was clean forgotten, as a dead man out of mind; and cast aside as though he were now of no more account than the sherds of a broken vessel." But, with the calm strength of faith he adds, "My times are in thy hand;" "Thou shalt hide all who trust in thee in the secret of thy presence;" "Oh, then, love Jehovah, and be of good courage! for he shall strengthen the heart of all whose hope is fixed on him."

Ver. 15.—**The king's servants.** These were the officers of David's court and household, numerous enough to hamper his movements, but not enough to protect him. All David's wives, moreover, went, and his children, and some of his concubines (ch. xix. 5), ten, however, being left in charge of the palace.

Ver. 17.—**And tarried in a place that was far off**; Revised Version, *in Beth-merhak*. "The Far House"—so we may translate this proper name—was probably not a dwelling, but a pavilion overlooking the Kidron valley; and here David halted his household until all were assembled, and arrangements made for their journey. Here, too, the body-guard would gather, and they would cross the Kidron only when everything was ready for their orderly progress. Confusion at such a time would breed a panic and invite an attack.

Ver. 18.—**All the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath.** The Septuagint reads "Gibborim," and without doubt these are the persons meant; but while they were styled Gibborim, the "mighties," for honour's sake, because of their prowess, they probably were popularly called David's Gittites, because they were the six hundred men who had formed his little army when he sought refuge with Achish, King of Gath (1 Sam. xxvii. 2; xxx. 9). They were not Philistines, but Israelites of desperate fortune (1 Sam. xxii. 2); and it is a proof of David's great ability, and of the moral influence of his character, that he was successful, not only in controlling them and maintaining discipline, but also in forming them into as noble a set of heroes as ever existed, and who were faithful to him in all his fortunes. To their number belonged the thirty-seven champions enumerated in ch. xxiii., and possibly the title "Gibborim" strictly belonged to them only. As they are still called "the six hundred," it is probable that the corps was maintained at this number by new appointments, and that they had special privileges which made their position very desirable. Certainly David would never forget men who had shared all his fortunes, and been so true and so useful to him; and it is evident, from Hushai's counsel (ch. xvii. 8), that Absalom feared their resolute valour, and hesitated to attack without overwhelming numbers. Thenius compares these veterans to Napoleon's Old Guard.

Ver. 19.—**Ittai the Gittite.** Ittai was not one of the six hundred, though there was an Ittai among them, a Benjamite. He was a citizen of Gath, who had lately come ("yesterday," see ver. 20), with all his household of slaves and dependents, his clan, Hebrew, his *taf*—translated in ver. 22 his "little ones." He had evidently been a person of importance in his own country,

whence he had been driven, perhaps by political troubles, and was now, therefore, an exile and a foreigner (Authorized Version, "stranger") at Jerusalem. As David made him joint commander of his army with Joab and Abishai (ch. xviii. 2), he must also have been a general of recognized military skill. As he was thus not personally interested in the government of Israel, and, in fact, had only lately come thither, David recommends him to **return . . . and abide with the king**, that is, with the *de facto* king, Absalom. But so great was the fascination which David exercised upon those around him, that this foreigner boldly threw in his lot with him, and accompanied him in his flight. **Return to thy place.** This is a very daring transposition, as the Hebrew is, *Return and abide with the king; for thou art a foreigner, and also an exile art thou to thy place.* The Revised Version gives the same sense as the Authorized, though it shows more respect to the grammar. But the Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate, by "his own place" understand Gath, either taking the words as meaning "an exile as to thy own place," or having a different reading. The Hebrew then proceeds, *Yesterday was thy coming, and shall I to-day make thee wander to go with us, seeing I go whither I go?* that is, I go I know not whither. *Return thou, and take back thy brethren—in mercy and truth.* This gives a very good sense, but the Septuagint and Vulgate have a different reading: "Take back thy brethren with thee, and the Lord shew thee mercy and truth." The Syriac gives the general sense of the Hebrew, rendering, "Take back thy brethren well."

Ver. 22.—**All the little ones**; Hebrew, *all the taf*; in ver. 20 called "his brethren," that is, all the relatives and dependents who had accompanied him in his exile. Their presence with him proves that he had entirely broken with the Philistines, and left his country for good. He may have taken this step for religious reasons, though his swearing by Jehovah (ver. 21) does not prove it, as Achish did the same (1 Sam. xxix. 6); or Ittai, after the capture of Gath by David (ch. viii. 1), may have made himself unpopular by becoming the ally of the conqueror, and so finally have determined to leave the city, and find a home in Israel.

Ver. 23.—**All the country wept.** This general lamentation proves that David was not really unpopular in Jerusalem, though it was there that Absalom had dazzled the people by his magnificence, and sought to win favour by his gracious ways. By the *country* the inhabitants are meant, who watched the king's departure; while the *people* are David's followers—his retinue and attendants. **The brook Kidron.** This is a winter torrent, dry during most of the year, but serving at the rainy seasons to carry off the rainfall from the Valley of Jehoshaphat. It lay on the east of Jerusalem, and beyond it was Mount Olivet. The direction of David's flight was toward the wild country on the east of the Jordan, in which Ishbosheth had found a refuge after the defeat of Gilboa. To reach it he must pass by Jericho, and thence through the Arabah (Jer. xxxix. 4) to the ford of the Jordan, after crossing which he would be in comparative safety. Ahithophel would have followed that very night, and have attacked before David had placed the river between himself and his pursuers.

Ver. 24.—**And Abiathar went up.** This rendering, though confirmed by the versions, is very unintelligible. Whither did Abiathar go up? And moreover it is said that he continued going up until all David's followers had passed out of the city. Another possible rendering is, "And Abiathar offered (sacrifices) until all the people had done passing out of the city." Passages quoted in proof that the verb may be so rendered without the addition of the word "sacrifice" are 1 Sam. ii. 28 and ch. xxiv. 22; but in both these places the context makes the sense plain. Such a sacrifice would, of course, sanctify both king and people in their flight; but as none of the versions support this method of translating the text, it seems unsafe to adopt it, and the passage must remain obscure. On the one hand, it is unlikely that there would be time to offer sacrifices at so hasty a flight; but on the other hand, the removal of the ark was a solemn thing, which probably required some such religious ceremonial, and Cahen and other Jewish authorities translate, "Abiathar offered burnt offerings."

Ver. 26.—**Let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.** David's answer is full, not only of devout resignation and trust in God, but is remarkable also for the absence of superstition. He feels that God will not judge him by any mere outward sign or privilege, but in truth and equity. If he deserves condemnation, he will not escape it by carrying the ark about with him. If, on the contrary, God accepts him, he will restore him to the enjoyment of his spiritual privileges, and bring him back to worship at the place which he has chosen for his dwelling. We must notice that he addresses these words to Zadok, who had remained with the ark. This was natural if Abiathar was occupied in offering, but hard to understand if he had gone up, that is, in advance of the ark, to acquaint David with their purpose.

Ver. 27.—**Art thou (not) a seer?** Both the Authorized Version and the Revised Version evade the difficulty of this passage

by inserting the word "not." It is one of the merits of the Revised Version that usually it does not take those liberties. But "Art thou a seer?" is meaningless; and the attempts, moreover, to show that Zadok was a seer fail entirely in proof. The receiving revelations by Urim and Thummim was a priestly, and not a prophetic, function. Without altering the text, the words may be correctly translated, "Seest thou?" This was probably a colloquial phrase, of which the Septuagint gives the sense by rendering it in the imperative, "See;" while the Syriac, regarding it as an expletive, boldly omits it.

Ver. 28.—**In the plain of the wilderness.** The Revised Version has "at the fords of the wilderness," that is, it rightly keeps to the written Hebrew text (the K'tib), while the Authorized Version adopts a conjecture of the Massorites (the K'ri). This conjecture is the substitution of *arboth* for *abroth*, and they have made the same alteration at ch. xvii. 16. But the substitution is uncalled for and mischievous; for David would not halt indefinitely in the plain, the Arabah (of which Arboth is the plural), but would press on to the fords, where some delay must take place, and where the king's presence would be important in giving instructions for what was by no means an easy operation (comp. ch. xix. 18). At the river, moreover, David could be assailed only in front, where his "mighties" would make a strong defence, while in the Arabah they might be surrounded; and, encumbered as they were with women, their line must be so extended as to be weakened. We find, too, in Judg. iii. 28 that the fords of the Jordan formed a good military position. In ch. xvii. 22 it is expressly said that the fording of the river did not take place until Jonathan and Ahimaaz came with their report; and their words there, in ver. 21, show that David was on the bank when they arrived, with his preparations so complete, that, in the next few hours, all his company were safely carried over to the other side. Ahimaaz was a famous runner (see ch. xviii. 27), and, if David was ready, the time gained by him upon any body of troops leaving Jerusalem at the same hour, would have enabled the king to get his people across; but if he had still some miles to march, with a number of women and children, Ahimaaz's fleetness would have been rendered useless.

Ver. 30.—**The ascent of mount Olivet;** Hebrew, *the ascent of the olive trees.* The hill never was called Olivet, which is a word formed from the Latin *mons oliveti*, the mount of the olive grove. **David had his head covered.** This was a sign of grief among the Persians, Egyptians, and Romans, as well as the Hebrews (for whom see Ezek. xxiv. 17), it being originally a natural movement to conceal an outburst of tears. So we in great sorrow bury our faces in our hands. In this mark of mourning all joined, but David added the going barefoot as a sign of deeper humiliation. According to the Jewish Midrash, it was upon the Mount of Olives that David composed the third psalm. More probably it was at the fords of the Jordan, after David, wearied with the fatigues of the march, had enjoyed a short refreshing slumber, and while he was waiting for his two young friends, that he comforted himself by this outpouring of his heart to God.

Ver. 31.—**And one told David.** The Hebrew literally is, *and David told.* But we cannot suppose that David had previously known of Ahithophel's defection. The text is evidently corrupt, and the Authorized Version gives the right sense. On hearing of the defection of a man so famous for practical sound judgment, David prays to God to frustrate his counsel, and the opportunity for devising means for this end quickly follows.

Ver. 32.—**Where he worshipped God;** more correctly, *where God was worshipped*, and so the Revised Version. The summit of the Mount of Olives was one of the many bamoth, or high places, situated on the top of hills, where, in the old Canaanitish time, men had worshipped their heathenish deities. They were still regarded as consecrated places, but the worship had now been transferred to Elohim, the true God. They continued to be hallowed spots, with Levitical priests to minister at them, until the stricter times of Josiah (2 Kings xxiii. 8), when such worship was forbidden; but even then these priests seem to have retained considerable privileges, though their position was inferior to that held by the priests of the temple. It was at this hallowed spot that David's old friend and privy counsellor (ver. 37), Hushai, met him, **with his coat rent**—not the upper garment, but the *kuttoneth*, the under tunic, the rending of which was a sign of deeper sorrow. We read of "the border of the Archites" (so the Revised Version, rightly) in Josh. xvi. 2, near Bethel, in the tribe of Manasseh; and Hushai's birthplace was probably there.

Ver. 33.—**A burden unto me.** Most likely because Hushai was old and infirm. Others, with less probability, think that it was because of his rank, which would demand special attendance.

Ver. 34.—**Then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.** David was thus meeting treachery by treachery, and we cannot approve of it, even granting that Ahithophel's conduct was base and selfish,

while Hushai was risking his life for his master. Still, he was sent back to tell a falsehood, and his excuse was necessity; for Ahithophel was so sagacious that, if his counsel were not upset, David's cause was lost. It was not Christian morality, but yet it has a sort of nobleness about it in Hushai's devotion to his king. And even now, in war and diplomacy, such acts are not uncommon, and a distinction is unhappily drawn between political and social morality. Even in common life immoral doings are often sanctioned by use. Thus many customs of trade are frauds, considered legitimate because generally practised. Even among ourselves Christian morality is far below the level of our Master's teaching; and the Old Testament must not be taken as approving all that it records. Similar blame does not attach to Zadok and Abiathar. They were known to be David's friends, and had even tried to go with him, bearing with them the ark. They professed no friendship for Absalom, and returned for no covert purpose, looking for protection, not to guile, but to their sacred office. And Absalom would be glad to have them in his power, and would make them continue the customary sacrifices, and, if his rebellion proved successful, would force them to anoint him, and so give his usurpation a religious sanction. But he would tell them none of his plans, nor would they try to insinuate themselves into his confidence. They would have a perfect right to be useful in any way they could to their true master, but would do so at the risk of severe punishment. Hushai's way of defeating Ahithophel was treacherous; but there was no deceit in the young men carrying a message from him, for they were openly David's friends.

Ver. 37.—**Absalom came into Jerusalem.** Absalom had evidently pushed rapidly forward from Hebron, in hopes, perhaps, of surprising David in the city. Evidently he entered it on the day of David's flight (ch. xvii. 1), and Ahithophel's proposal to select twelve thousand men from Absalom's followers shows how very powerful the conspiracy was. Had this advice been followed, the decisive battle would have been fought that evening at the fords of the Jordan, a few miles only from Jerusalem.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—12.—*The shady side of human nature.* The facts are: 1. Absalom sets up a large domestic establishment with a semblance of royalty. 2. Rising early in the morning of each day, he is first to meet the suitors for judgment at the gate of the city, and seizes the occasion for insinuating that there is defect in the king's provision for the administration of justice. 3. He also professes to manifest sympathy with suitors by expressing the wish that he were in a position to do them justice, and gives outward evidence of his concern for them by taking each one by the hand and kissing him. 4. These plans being in progress, he next asks permission of David to go to Hebron, on the plea that he desired to redeem a vow which he had sacredly made to God while in exile; and David granting his request, he sets out for Hebron, with a company of men ignorant of his design. 5. Meanwhile he sends spies throughout Israel, so that on a given signal they might simultaneously make the announcement, "Absalom reigneth in Hebron." 6. He moreover gains to his side Ahithophel, David's counsellor, and so advances his cause among the people. The narrative gives us in brief form the scheme, the principles, the methods, and early form of Absalom's conspiracy. He knew his own mind, and was set on the overthrow of his father's authority, from sheer vanity and lust of power. The outline of his method was clearly defined: (1) to win over the people by criticizing the king's administration, and gratifying them by a showy establishment, professed zeal for justice, and marked personal attentions; (2) to secure a good centre for proclaiming his authority, and this by a hypocritical profession of religion which required him to go there; (3) by scattering agents through the land, and gaining to his side the king's most sagacious adviser. There is not one relieving feature to the dark picture of pride, ingratitude, filial alienation, low cunning, and religious hypocrisy. It is, however, our province to extract good out of evil, and in the early stages of Absalom's rebellion we may see illustrations of the shady side of human nature, which, if noted and applied to conduct, may warn against often-recurring evils, and put us on our guard against the same tendencies in other departments of life.

I. THE PRINCIPLES AND METHODS OF UNJUSTIFIABLE REBELLION. Rebellion against existing authority may perhaps be right under special circumstances. People do not exist for governments, but governments for the people; and it is possible that the

rights of the people may be so utterly trodden upon that it is the duty of self-preservation to rebel. Even parental authority must be resisted when it comes into direct collision with conscience and with Christ (Matt. x. 33—38). But rebellion is wicked when, as in this case, it springs from a blending of conceit, dislike of constituted authority, and lust for power. This may characterize rebellion originating in an individual or in a restless people. Talk of oppression, justice, kindness and consideration for the oppressed, may be but a cloak for a selfish aversion to restraint and a love of self-will. Even where there is justification for resistance to an evil rule, it is wicked to have recourse to flattery, deceit, hypocrisy, and low cunning to accomplish the end in view. In times of turbulence and agitation it is important that men scrutinize the secret motives of their actions. As a rule, injustice in rulers can be best resisted by the calm, sober protest and passive resistance of conscientious men. Faith in God, and in the force of true principles, with patient persistence, will in the end accomplish more than can be secured by violence; and where injustice exists only in the imagination of the restless, and the evils of life spring from their own habits and practices, then rebellion is one of the greatest crimes of which man is capable.

II. INCIDENTAL REVELATIONS OF CHARACTER. The character of a man lies primarily in the main principles and passions that are deep down in his nature, and which in course of years shape his outward conduct. Absalom's real character was in existence long before it came out to the eye of the public in the form of rebellion against his father's authority. Probably David discerned its incipient form, and hence his extreme slowness in recalling him to a position of prominence. The setting up by Absalom of a large princely establishment, with chariots and horses and runners, was really an incidental revelation in palpable form of a character internally maturing. It was a sign to such men as David and Nathan of what they had believed to exist—a vain, proud, ostentatious spirit. So in course of time men generally do something in their domestic arrangements or business developments which, if the world will only read aright, brings into public view tendencies and tastes which hitherto have been kept under restraint. Our visible acts and creations are the succcessive revelations of our condition. A man's dress, his handwriting, his domestic establishment, his bearing before the public, his mode of transacting business, is a manifestation of the hidden man —the indicator of the elements entering into the permanent character. The outward aspects of a man's life may be studied with a view to a knowledge of the habits and tastes of his mind.

III. EVIL TENDENCIES IN CONGENIAL ENVIRONMENT. The evil tendencies of Absalom were somewhat pronounced when he set up his pretentious establishment, but by his own act those tendencies were placed in the midst of circumstances eminently calculated to strengthen and develop them further. The heart of man can devise things out of its own tastes and propensities which become at once food on which those tastes and propensities grow to further power. A man of pleasure out of his own desires creates occupations and pursuits which become the nourishers of the passion for pleasure. The same holds of dreadful vices and blessed virtues. There is a self-promotive power in the forces that dwell within our moral nature. Intellectual and physical forces are not so recuperative of themselves by means of what they create as are the moral. We are to ponder the path of our feet, for every step increases the momentum in the road, be it good or bad.

IV. LUST OF POWER MINUS FITNESS FOR ITS EXERCISE. Absalom set his heart on being King of Israel. The vision of a throne and a submissive people had great attractions for him. The princely establishment, with chariots and horsemen, was only the first instalment of a splendour soon to be won. Like all such men, he had unlimited confidence in himself. He could administer justice! He could win the people and hold them in subjection! And yet this vanity, this low cunning, this love of outward show, and mean lying flattery of the people, disqualified him for ruling as a king. Morally speaking, he was a handsome fool, and knew it not. The lust for power is common, and often very strong in men. As manifested in bad men, it is an abnormal development of a love of mastery over what is not self. The possession of power over man is safe and good only when there coexist with it justice, generosity, considerateness, and honesty.

V. ALIENATION FROM A FATHER'S HEART THE CLIMAX OF EVIL. Absalom was no

longer a true son. No man could have entered on such a scheme and have devised such means unless he had lost all true natural affection. To find fault with a father's administration, to expose a father to ridicule, to seek to alienate men from attachment to a father, and, in short, crush a father's hopes and life's work, could only proceed from a heart utterly alienated. And such a father! Weak and erring as David in a notable instance had been, he was the most generous, and magnanimous of men, and had brought peace and plenty and honour to Israel. Absalom's crime was one of the basest ever recorded. And all alienation from a true father's heart is utterly base and deserving the strongest detestation. There is hope for sons when they still cherish love and reverence for parents; none when these are gone. Every feeling, and act, and companionship, and habit which tend towards this awful separation of heart, should be shunned as men shun the road to death. And yet this is the real state of the human heart in relation to God. The gulf is awful; and nothing but a new creation will lead to a reconciliation (John iii. 5; Rom. viii. 7).

VI. PSEUDO-PATRIOTISM AN ASSUMED VIRTUE. Patriotism is strong in men whose country has been associated in memory with great deeds. To care for one's land and people, to be more concerned for the maintenance of justice and adjustment of the claims of the poor than for the form and *personnel* of government,—this is always commendable; and so much is this virtue esteemed that it is assumed by Absalom for his own purposes. We cannot believe in the patriotism of any man who shuts his heart against a good father. Civil virtues cannot make amends for the absence of the domestic and primary virtues. It is easy to prate about justice and the oppressed, and to speak smoothly to the populace; to keep the heart pure, loving, true toward man and God, is not so easy. There is much pseudo-patriotism in political life. Men claim virtues they do not possess, and use the claim for gaining an influence that else would be unattainable.

VII. RELIGION A CLOAK FOR EVIL DESIGNS. Absalom knew his father to be a pious man, and therefore seeks to accomplish his purpose by a profession of piety. The heartless son finds no difficulty in taking the holy name of God in vain, and concocting a tissue of lies. To the populace he can be a critic of the government; to the pious king he can be a devout man, intent on keeping sacred vows. No clearer proof of a Satanic spirit than when men dare to lay hold of the most sacred things and use them for vile and selfish purposes. Righteous, indeed, was the indignation of Christ against such "hypocrites." "Woe" from the lips of love came upon them. Manifold are the forms and degrees in which this evil appears. To worship in order to be respectable, to profess religion for the sake of trade, to utter pious phrases in order to win popular applause, are but the less repulsive forms of the very crime of Absalom. How abominable such persons must appear in the sight of the all-searching God!

VIII. TAKING UNDUE ADVANTAGE OF ANOTHER'S DIFFICULTY. In consequence of the immense work thrown on an absolute monarch, the growing complications of a flourishing state, and the incompetence of subordinates, there would necessarily arise many difficulties in the administration of the affairs of the kingdom. In all lands people have to wait for justice when others are being served. But the evil heart of Absalom showed itself in using whatever incidental delays arose as an occasion of promoting its own wicked schemes. There is too much of this in the world. The rich have often taken advantage of the ignorance and helplessness of the poor to secure ends otherwise unattainable. In political life it is a maxim to seize the hour of weakness for a party triumph. It is the devil's opportunity with feeble souls to render more sure their destruction. Trouble in state, Church, or family affords opportunity for testing the qualities of men. Love or hate, sympathy or antagonism, will thereby be revealed. How different to others the blessed Saviour in presence of human infirmity!

IX. POPULARITY ON AN UNSTABLE AND HOLLOW BASIS. The people's hearts were won to Absalom. It seems a great triumph to win the hearts of multitudes; it is an indication of great power on the part of the conqueror or of fickleness on the part of the conquered. But in this, as in many instances, the conquest was a revelation of shallow thinking on the one side and basest cunning on the other. There is in most men a soil for receiving the seeds of discontent from the hand of a deft sower. People are easily caught by flatteries and personal attentions. A visible parade of splendour dazzles and pleases the crowd, who think modest, quiet bearing a sign of mediocrity. The dash and careless promises of a young and handsome man excite the imagination,

and raise up pictures of great possibilities. The mass of men do not think; they feel, and are led by the clever orator who can stir up their feelings. It is not always a credit to "go with the multitude," and fall in with an order of things because it is popular. The *vox populi* maxim is often false. Of One it was once true, "Of the people there was none with him." He was "despised and rejected of men."

X. AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE MOST DREADFUL OF CONSPIRACIES. It is not necessary to endeavour to trace resemblance in all details between antagonism to the mortal king in Zion and opposition to the immortal King in Zion. But there has been and still is a plot to destroy the authority of him whose right it is to reign. Fashion, wealth, power of speech, wit, and alliances with wise Ahithophels, continue to undermine and eventually overthrow the influence of Christ over the hearts of men. The "gates of hell" take counsel against the Lord and his Anointed. Another seat of supreme influence is being set up as a substitute for that occupied by the Anointed One, and "spies" are abroad seeking to create doubt and distrust in the hearts of the faithful. As we read the account of Absalom's ingratitude, daring, and baseness, and feel for his deeds the utmost detestation, so holy beings who look on the endeavour to destroy the authority of Christ over men cannot but regard the deed as the basest, most daring, and at the same time most fatal to the perpetrators, ever attempted. The wicked may seem to triumph, but their end is destruction.

Vers. 13—30.—The facts are: 1. David, being informed of the rising in favour of Absalom, calls upon his friends to flee from Jerusalem, in order to avoid its being smitten by a sudden attack. 2. His servants being willing to go with him, he leads out his entire household, with the exception of a few to take care of the house. 3. In his departure he is accompanied by his body-guard, and the six hundred men which followed him from Gath. 4. Observing Ittai in the company, he suggests that, being a stranger and exile, he should not risk his fortunes with his own; but, on receiving an assurance that it was his deliberate desire so to do, he permits him to pass on. 5. The people of the district weep with a loud noise as he crosses the brook Kidron, and passes on toward the wilderness. 6. The ark of the covenant being brought out into the procession, when the people have passed the brook, David urges on Zadok that the ark be conveyed back to the city, expressing his humble hope that it might please God to allow him to see it once more, and, in any case, he submits to the appointments of Providence. 7. David requests Zadok and others with the ark to return to the city, and to inform him in the wilderness should anything of great importance arise. 8. The king expresses his grief by passing up the Mount of Olives, with covered head and weeping, accompanied by a covered and weeping multitude.

Submission in the day of adversity. The order of the narrative of David's departure from Jerusalem is rather involved, as may be seen by comparing vers. 17, 19, 23, 30; but the actual facts are clear enough. As soon as he became aware of the extent of the rebellion, he resolved to leave the city, and we have a record of the fact and the incidents accompanying it. The first and most obvious impression produced on the mind of the reader is the prompt and quiet submission of the king to the force of circumstances, not because he was of cowardly spirit, but because he saw in what was happening the providence of God. If we analyze the conduct and words of David in their relation to the great fall and Nathan's prophecy (ch. xii. 9—13), we shall see the leading features characterizing his submission, and in so doing we shall get a view of the main characteristics of all true Christian submission in the day of adversity.

I. A RECOGNITION OF PERSONAL DESERT. The prompt action, the surrender of regal state, the broken spirit, the barefooted departure from the seat of authority, and the tender references to God doing with him as seemed him good (ver. 26), all point to more than a forced submission to mere military necessity. There may have been a deep inexpressible anguish on account of filial ingratitude, and the father's heart could not but weep in silence over an erring lost child; but the remembrance of his own great sin, and the words of the prophet of God, furnished the chief theme of reflection; for the son's ingratitude base as it was, had become the rod to chastise for the errors of the past. A forgiven man does not the less think of the sin as a disgrace and worthy of being branded as evil. Adversities come to us all—happily, few know the sorrow of

such filial ingratitude—and the enlightened mind sees in them more than physical sequence. The doctrine that every sorrow that falls is for a specific sin need not be held. Yet all trouble is connected with the fact that sin is in the world, and a consciousness of personal shortcomings makes us feel, when adversity in home, estate, or health falls, that we deserve every pain that enters the heart. There is no assertion of right to be free from the trouble; rather the true heart says, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (Lam. iii. 22).

II. ACQUIESCENCE IN GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS. To a human observer it might seem that it was a very unrighteous thing for the Supreme Ruler to allow so wise and good a king to be set aside and humiliated by a man so base and vain as Absalom, and many a man in his anguish might question the equity which allowed such sorrow to fall upon him when he had recovered from his special sins. David's spirit was the reverse of this. Not a word of complaint, not a murmur or a fret in trouble. During his long exile, when death encompassed him about, and he had washed his hands in innocency, and all the blame lay with Saul and Doeg the Edomite, he trusted in the justice of God; and this confidence, won in the days of comparative innocence, failed him not now, when, after his recovery from a fall, the storm burst upon him with more terrible violence. He knew and rested in the precious truth that the Lord reigned in righteousness and brought correction to his servants for their good. Yes; this is the faith of the faithful. Never do they, however terrible the disaster in this life, distrust the righteousness of God. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him," was true for Job and all of kindred spirit. Men who know not the new life cannot understand this. It is the alphabet of religious experience to all who are really born again and accepted in Christ. None of these things move them.

III. ACCOMMODATION TO NEW CIRCUMSTANCES. David does not yield to fretfulness and irresolution. He vacates his home, provides for his house, goes out to a place of safety, and, by his discreet arrangement with Zadok and Abiathar, keeps up means of connection with the city (vers. 27, 28). Utter prostration under calamity does not come where there is the counteractive element of recognition of personal unworthiness and of the righteousness of God. Whether this trouble would pass he knew not, but as a wise man he adapted himself to the storm. As Jacob to his exile (Gen. xxviii. 10—22), as Moses to his deprivation (Deut. iii. 25—27; cf. xxxiv. 1—6), so David makes the best of his position. Providential chastisements are not designed to paralyze action; their benefit is secured when, in a spirit of resignation and trust, we use our powers to bear them and to mitigate their incidence (Heb. xii. 5—12). Adversity becomes truly educational when we are stirred up to adjust our life to its conditions.

IV. CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS, THAT THEY BE NOT UNNECESSARILY DRAWN INTO OUR SORROWS. David's removal into the open country was partly from policy and partly from feelings of kindness. He probably had suspicions, seeing that his trusty counsellor had been drawn over to Absalom (ver. 12; cf. Ps. xli. 9; lv. 10—14), that Absalom had many friends in the city, and should he in concert with them come suddenly upon him and his friends, multitudes would fall victims to his malice. It was the same generous feeling that prompted him to suggest that Ittai, not being a Hebrew, should not embroil himself in this sad conflict, and so run a risk in case another king should reign. We see the same David as in earlier years, ever mindful of others, and magnanimous to the extreme. The dreadful sin had not destroyed his noble qualities, but had given a sadly tender form to their expression. There are beautiful instances in Christian life of this kindly consideration for others. Fathers and mothers strive to shield their children from the woes which they may connect with their own want of wisdom or goodness. The great Saviour himself, in his dire trouble, sought to shield his faithful followers (John xiv. 1, 27; xvii. 9—12; xviii. 8).

V. GRATEFUL ACCEPTANCE OF SYMPATHY AND AID. The voluntary sympathy and aid of the faithful body-guard, and the six hundred who had shared his fortunes prior and subsequent to his departure from Gath, was as cool water to a thirsty soul; and the free services of Ittai and Zadok were greatly valued. In the adversities which Providence permits to come for purposes of discipline there is the merciful admixture of some provision to meet the pressing need of the hour—some human channel for Divine sympathy and compassion to enter the heart. Submission to the inscrutable will always includes a grateful recognition of this relief. The love and presence of Ruth

was as balm to the desolate heart of Naomi as she mourned her forlorn condition, imparted a sweet gentleness to her, and enabled her to submit to the blow that had shattered her early joys. David and she had herein a common experience.

VI. A THOUGHTFUL SELF-SACRIFICING CARE FOR THE INTERESTS OF RELIGION. It was very beautiful conduct on the part of Zadok and Abiathar to bring out the ark of the covenant (ver. 24), to form a prominent object in the sad procession out of the city; it revealed a tender consideration for the man who in his prosperity had associated his purest joys and most glorious triumphs with that precious symbol of the Divine presence. The ark could not but remind David of the mercy that endureth for ever, and its presence with him would be regarded as a pledge of blessing in his wandering. But he desired the priests to take back the treasure, and he, meekly bowing to the chastisement, would go out and suffer the loss of the outward privileges of the sanctuary. The reason of this no doubt was that, as he had been the means of procuring a permanent resting-place for the ark (ch. vi. 17—19), and constituting Jerusalem the centre of religious influence for the nation, he would not now undo that work and serve his own personal advantage at the cost of the people. No; the religious institutions should remain intact, the blessings of public worship and spiritual comfort should abide for Jerusalem, though he a poor exile pine in solitude and peril for the "beauty of the Lord" (Ps. xlii. 1—4; xliii. 1, 2). How beautiful this tender care for the interests of religion appears in true submission to adverse providences is known to all acquainted with Christian biography. Not a deed, not a word, not a thought is allowed that might be prejudicial to the kingdom of God. Storms may come, hopes may be blasted, if only the Name that is above every name be still honoured.

VII. A DELIBERATE COMMITTAL OF PRESENT AND FUTURE INTERESTS INTO THE HANDS OF GOD. "If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it, and his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here I am, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him" (vers. 25, 26). O blessed trust! O sweet resignation! O modest yet unshaken hope! Truly the discipline was already bearing precious fruit. The spiritual barrenness of those hot days of prosperity (ch. xi.) was clean gone. The temporal chastisement was in process, but the wandering child was a wanderer no more. Enviable beyond expression is this surrender of all interests to the wise and gracious hands of the covenant-keeping God. Here comes out the essence of the true submission in the season of adversity. "He will," if he "delight" in me! "Let him do as seemeth him good!" No self-will, no boast of claim, no thought of shame; God is over all and can do all; all is in his care, and what he does shall be deemed the best and kindest and most just. Who does not see the purifying power of the grace of God? Holy David once fallen!

APPENDIX. The sorrowing king, passing over the ridge of the Mount of Olives, on bare feet and weeping, bearing on his heart a terrible woe, and full of pity for the people rejecting his authority, and at the same time entirely submissive to the sovereign will that so ordains, reminds us of the other King, greater, wiser, more holy, and bearing on his heart the woes of many sins not his own, pacing the slopes of that same mount, weeping bitter tears, lamenting for the rebellious people, bearing all for others' good, and submitting with unparalleled gentleness and trust to the sovereign will that ordained that so he must suffer.

Fidelity in misfortune. It is believed by many that more remarkable virtues are developed in seasons of adversity than in those of prosperity. Their precise form will depend on the individuals concerned and the stress of the time. The conduct of the Gittites, and Ittai, and Zadok, and Abiathar is in pleasing contrast with that of Ahithophel and his co-conspirators. In these men we may trace the characteristics of fidelity in misfortune.

I. IT IS ROOTED IN INTELLIGENT SYMPATHY. The six hundred had probably been with David and shared in his trials prior to his departure from Gath (1 Sam. xxvii. 2). They knew him better than any others; they had formed a sympathy for him based on true knowledge, and they stood the test of the evil time. Of Ittai we do not know so much, but the words of the man prove that he appreciated the real character of David in spite of the slanders which such men as Ahithophel may have insinuated. The priestly functions of Zadok and Abiathar account for their interest in so devout a

man as David. Their fidelity was not based on personal beauty, vague promises, and outward splendour (vers. 1—6), but on intelligence and the feeling which accompanies it in a pure heart. So Ruth was true to Naomi (Ruth i. 16, 17). Any promise of attachment not resting on this foundation is worth nothing.

II. IT IS NOURISHED BY REFLECTION ON THE PAST. There were probably hours when the voice of temptation would come to allure them from a course so perilous in appearance, to a course promising reputation, wealth, and honour; for these men were of like passions with us all, and had no love for poverty and exile in themselves. But they knew David's history, and when temptation to prefer the winning side came they would nourish their vow by thinking of what he had been, how God had befriended him before, and how he had risen from the fall which once was his shame. It is something to be attached to a man with a good history. When we have pledged ourselves to a just though suffering cause, we may ward off many a temptation by allowing the reflective powers to work on the antecedents of the cause to which we are pledged. Thus the early Christians, by reflecting on Christ, his words and work, and all he had been to them, could endorse the dying words of the aged Polycarp.

III. IT IS RESPONSIVE TO FRANKNESS AND MAGNANIMITY. The frank and magnanimous way in which David offered to release them from all risks only drew out into stronger and more pronounced form the attachment already cherished (vers. 19—21). Zadok could not but feel a profounder regard for the king after hearing his words concerning the ark (ver. 25). There is something so noble in this frankness and magnanimity in misfortune that a faithful heart recruits its strength by the very sight and sound of the nobleness. Holy sentiments grow in exchange. There is no sure bond between the wicked. Sin is morally a weakness. Holiness is a strength.

IV. IT IS CAPABLE OF RISKS. Whatever might befall the king in his trouble, these faithful ones were prepared to share in it. True affection is not blind, as some would say; it sees, but it fears not. The faithful mind is intent on being on the side of right and weakness, not on securing anything for self. There are risks in adherence to a righteous cause in the day of adversity. Christ points this out to his followers, and it is the sign of true as distinguished from professional fidelity that it can bear and is determined to bear whatever may come. The real clue to the determination is the conviction that right is supreme in its claims, and that present suffering is only an incident of a well-directed human existence (Matt. x. 16—18, 38; xx. 22; Phil. iii. 7—9).

Vers. 31—37.—*Prayer for Divine intervention.* The facts are: 1. David, hearing that Ahithophel was among the conspirators, prays that God would turn his counsel into foolishness. 2. On reaching the top of the Mount of Olives, the aged Hushai expresses his desire to go with David into exile, but David declines his offer on account of his infirmities. 3. On the other hand, David suggests that he can render him good service by returning to the city and living as a servant of Absalom, and he advises him to act in concert with Zadok and Abiathar. 4. Acting on this suggestion, Hushai returns to the city, and, some time after, Absalom also enters. There passed a pang through the heart of David as he heard of the treachery of his trusty counsellor Ahithophel, bitter because he had relied so much on this wise man's honesty and sagacity, and more bitter still as he remembered the cruel conspiracy which he once entered into with Joab against the life of Uriah. Yet the forgiven and renewed king, in the fulness of his anguish, was true to his revived religious instincts in at once raising his heart to God with the prayer that he would bring his own wisdom to bear so as to defeat the wisdom of this man. We see here—

I. THAT THERE IS IN THIS WORLD A CONFLICT BETWEEN HUMAN AND DIVINE WISDOM. David was well acquainted with two great facts: (1) that the wisdom of God had designed him to be king over Israel to the end of his days (ch. vii. 11—16, 28, 29); (2) that the wisest man in the land was devising means to frustrate this purpose, not perhaps consciously, yet practically. This is an epitome of the history of mankind. God has a purpose to carry out, and employs good men as his instruments,—all is arranged according to his infinite wisdom; but, on the other hand, there are men who bring their powers to bear so as to frustrate this purpose. They may not know that they are setting their wisdom against the wisdom of God, but the facts are to that effect. Adam and Eve went against wisdom in the exercise of their wisdom. Pharaoh

contrived to prevent what wisdom had ordained. The wisdom of scribes and Pharisees was arrayed against him who was the "Wisdom of God." In the antagonism of men to the gospel the apostle saw a case of the "wisdom of the world" striving against the wisdom which was so far above theirs that their wisdom was more properly folly (1 Cor. i. 18—25). Men who live in sin, who try to dispense with Christ, really set their wisdom against the great and blessed order which is founded on eternal wisdom. The attitude of the world to the Church may be expressed in the terms just stated. Oh that men *were* wise!

II. THAT A GOOD MAN BELIEVES IN GOD'S POWER TO COUNTERACT THE WISDOM OF MEN. This was the intellectual basis of David's prayer for intervention against the devices of Ahithophel. Faith in God's appointment of prayer is associated with a perception of the fact that God can and does so control human action as to restrain it within definite lines, and to secure in spite of it certain issues that are for the good of the world. A theism that renders God inactive, or bound in the unbreakable chains of a physical necessity, had better be frank and renounce the sacred name, and say once for all, "Force is in eternal motion along lines eternally fixed." God is a Spirit, and as such has free access to the spirits of men. His unseen and unconscious contact may paralyze or divert thought, and render possible ideas which, when carried out, will prove to be subversive of the very ends which the wicked thinker once had set his heart upon. We don't know how much we owe to this silent action of God on evil men. He also, as a free Spirit, is in contact with the ultimate elements of things, and can act on them without dislocation of the order of nature, more perfectly than we can in the effort of our will. Many Christian people do not, it is feared, half believe in this great truth, and do not sufficiently see its ample bearing on the great stress of life. God not only looks into men and sees them through and through; he is an Actor, and brings his wisdom to put to nought the wisdom of the wise.

III. THAT A GOOD MAN IN EXTREMITY NATURALLY PUTS THIS BELIEF INTO PRACTICE. David felt that he could not cope with the combination against him. His heart fainted at the thought of the sagacity of the counsellor uniting with the daring and dash of the ambitious usurper. His prayer was true to nature. We do not in ordinary circumstances allow our faith to have sufficient influence over our lives. Trouble brings us straight to God. Our vast resources are drawn upon when heart and flesh begin to fail. All prayer is a cry for God's help, or it is nothing; but the earnestness and intensity of the cry are proportioned to the perception of peril.

IV. THAT PRAYER FOR HELP, IN THE CASE OF A GOOD MAN, IS ATTENDED WITH A DISCREET USE OF MEANS TO SECURE THE END IN VIEW. The practical character of David's religion is seen in this—that, as soon as he had committed his desperate case to God, he took steps, through Hushai, to counteract the wisdom of Ahithophel. He knew that God worked on the minds of men partly by the agency of other men, to whom he secretly imparts wisdom and discretion. Not only would secret unconscious influences operate within Ahithophel to cause him to blunder in advice, but thoughts would be directed in the minds of Hushai and Zadok so that they would act at the right season and in the right way. This combination of trust in God and action among men is characteristic of all true religious life. "The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much," and his labour also "is not in vain in the Lord."

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. In all our dealings with men, and efforts to get them to act, we should remember that we can get at them through God. 2. The Church, in its conflict with the world, should rest in the consolation that the wisdom of God can never fail. 3. Much of our success in Christian work depends on our assigning men to duties suited to their character, age, and position. 4. Good men who are compelled by force of circumstances to live among men of evil purpose may use their knowledge of the world and its ways so as to promote the best interests of the kingdom of God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—12.—(JERUSALEM, HEBRON.) *The rebellion of Absalom.* About twelve years had elapsed since David's fall into sin. One of its effects was the rebellion of Absalom. The history of this event—most critical for the theocratic monarchy, and

"revealing the thoughts of many hearts"—sheds a clear light upon the condition of Israel. "We seem to know all the people; the natural manners and vivid outbursts of feeling make the scene stand out with a kind of homely poetry." In it we discern the presence and influence of: 1. *Divine chastisement*, announced by the prophet (ch. xii. 10), "The sword shall never depart from thine house," etc. Forgiveness of sin does not annul its natural consequences. Such consequences are sure, however they may appear to be delayed; and, though inflicted by the hand of man, they do not less really proceed from the hand of God. Already David had experienced the effects of his transgression in his family; he must now experience them, on a larger scale, in his kingdom. 2. *Defective administration* of judgment by the king (ver. 3); due, not so much to advancing age (over sixty), as to timidity, irresolution, and want of energy, consequent on what had taken place; and "a tendency to shrink into private life, with a preference for such duties as preparing materials for the future temple rather than those of active government;" perhaps also to serious illness, brought on by trouble of heart, and partially incapacitating him from performing the increasing duties of his office (Ps. xxxviii., xxxix., xli., lv.). 3. *Prevalent dissatisfaction* among the people. His sin "broke the powerful spell which had hitherto bound the whole nation to the name of David" (Ewald). "The imperfections and defects of his internal administration of the kingdom, when the time of his brilliant victories was past, became more and more perceptible to the people, and furnished occasion for dissatisfaction with his government" (Keil). "His pious actions, his attention to the public ordinances of worship, perhaps even his psalms, had for the time lost their credit and their sacredness. Not every one was capable of estimating aright the repentance of the fallen man, and his humiliation before the Almighty. It was almost forgotten that he was king by the grace of God" (Krummacher). "The infirm condition of the king, his eminent godliness and opposition to popular feelings, and the distance of age that now separated him from the sympathies of the younger portion of the people" (Blaikie); some discontent in his own tribe of Judah (ver. 10); "the still lingering hopes of the house of Saul and of the tribe of Benjamin (ch. xvi. 3, 8); and the deep-rooted feeling of Ephraim and the northern tribes (ch. xix. 41) against Judah" (Stanley);—all combined to make the people ripe for insurrection. 4. *Private animosity* on the part of its leaders: Absalom, on account of his long banishment in Geshur and exclusion from court; Ahithophel, the grandfather of Bathsheba (ver. 12; ch. xi. 3), on account of the dishonour done to his house; Amasa, son of Abigal, David's half-sister (ch. xvii. 25), possibly on account of some neglect or discourtesy shown toward him. "These four years (ver. 7) were for David a time of increasing care and anxiety, for that which was planned cannot have remained altogether concealed from him; but he had neither the courage nor the strength to smother the evil undertaking in the germ" (Delitzsch, in Ps. xli.). The course of Absalom (now twenty-seven years of age) was marked by—

I. AMBITION CRIMINALLY INDULGED. Sinful perversion of the natural desire of preeminence; unhallowed love of power and glory (as in the case of Adonijah, his brother, 1 Kings i. 5), the bait by which Satan seeks to allure men to a false worship (Matt. iv. 9; 1 Sam. xv. 1—9).

> "He showed him in a jewell'd wreath
> All crowns the earth bestows;
> But not the rankling thorns beneath,
> That pierce the wearer's brows."

Absalom's ambition was peculiarly culpable; because of his: 1. Self-conceit; his selfish, proud, and false estimate of his own worth. He was "the representative of vain-glory and self-conceit" (Wordsworth). "Those are commonly most ambitious of preferment that are least fit for it" (Matthew Henry). 2. Covetousness; the object of his desire belonging to another, and unattainable save by injustice. It is not likely that he wished simply to share the sovereignty of Israel. 3. Disaffection and unnatural envy toward his father. 4. Disloyalty toward the king. 5. Rebellion against God, the supreme King of Israel, by whose ordinance David had been appointed. He had, apparently, "no spark of religious principle in his breast." 6. Self-will; indisposition to submit to the will of Jehovah, to defer to the nomination of the king, or to wait for his decease. He resolved to anticipate all, and have his own way. "He that destroys

self-will, destroys hell." 7. Suspicion and jealousy of his brother. "It is our impression that David already knew that Solomon was, by the Lord's appointment, to be his successor to the throne. In the promise made to David through Nathan, it was clearly indicated that a son not yet born was to sit upon his throne, and when Solomon was born he could not but understand that this applied to him. If he had any doubt of this, it must have been removed by his knowledge that the 'Lord loved him,' and had, through Nathan, bestowed upon him the new name of Jedidiah (ch. xii. 24, 25). It is even probable that he had, long before the present time, if not from the first, received those more distinct intimations of the Lord's will in this matter, which he mentions in 1 Chron. xxviii. 5—7. . . . As the intimations we have traced were long before afforded, it is likely that the pledge (1 Kings i. 17) which was founded on them had not been so long delayed" (Kitto, 'Daily Bible Illust.'). "Absalom was a bold, valiant, revengeful, haughty, enterprising, magnificent, eloquent, and popular prince; he was also rich, ambitious, and vain of his personal accomplishments; and, after the death of Amnon and his reconciliation with his father, he saw no hindrance in his way to the throne. He despised Solomon because of the meanness of his birth and his tender years. He was himself of the blood-royal, not only by his father, but also by his mother; and doubtless in his own apprehension of sufficient age, authority, and wisdom to sustain the weight of government. He seemed to stand nearest to the throne; but his sin was that he sought it during his father's lifetime, and endeavoured to dethrone him in order to sit in his stead" (Calmet).

"O sacred hunger of ambitious minds,
And impotent desire of men to reign!
Whom neither dread of God, that devils binds,
Nor laws of men, that commonweals contain,
Nor bands of nature, that wild beasts restrain,
Can keep from outrage and from doing wrong,
Where they may hope a kingdom to obtain:
No faith so firm, no trust can be so strong,
No love so lasting then, that may endure long."
('The Faërie Queene,' canto xii.)

II. POPULARITY FRAUDULENTLY ACQUIRED. "Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (ver. 6); by methods which many a demagogue has since adopted. "David won their hearts by noble deeds of generosity, as well as by deeds of prowess;" but Absalom stole them by: 1. *Subtlety and guile.* 2. *Ostentation;* affecting royal state. "Absalom prepared him chariots," etc. (ver. 1; ch. xiii. 23, 27; 1 Sam. viii. 4—22). 3. *Assiduity,* in attending to public affairs. "Absalom rose up early," etc. (ver. 2). "Those who least understand the duties and could least endure the burdens of authority are commonly most desirous of it; but when ambition prompts, the most self-indulgent assume the appearance of diligence, and the most haughty that of affability and condescension; and while men aspire to the pinnacle of earthly grandeur, they, for the time, pay the most abject court to the meanest of the mob!" (Scott). 4. *Courtesy* and pretended sympathy. "Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou?" etc.; "He put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him" (ver. 6).

"And then I stole all courtesy from heaven,
And dressed myself in such humility,
That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,
Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,
Even in the presence of the crownèd king."
('King Henry IV.,' Part I. act iii. sc. 2.)

5. *Flattery.* "Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right" (ver. 3). 6. *Disparagement* of the existing administration, and insinuation of the king's incapability and neglect. "But there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee." 7. Fair and lavish *promises,* and holding out the prospect of a golden age under his reign. "And Absalom said, Oh that I were made judge in the land!" etc. (ver. 4). It is not to be wondered at that, by such arts as these, aided by his ready speech and attractive person and manners, he turned the hearts of the people, already prepared for change, from their rightful monarch. "After thus flattering the people, and ingratiating him-

self into their favour during four years, he decides upon the execution of his cunningly devised project" (Ewald). "The success of this godless rebel shows a lack of true theocratic feeling in the mass of the people, who, in abandoning the king's government, were guilty of opposition to the government of God" (Erdmann).

III. CONSPIRACY CRAFTILY CARRIED OUT (vers. 7—12); apparent in: 1. The selection of the place, Hebron (his birthplace), notable on many accounts, especially as the chief city of Judah, where sympathy could be calculated upon. "There may have been many persons there who had been displeased by the removal of the court to Jerusalem" (Keil). "Accustomed from the earliest times to independence and pre-eminence, Judah stood proudly apart under David even after Saul's death, and now probably offered some opposition to the growing unity of the kingdom" (Ewald). 2. The profession of a religious purpose—the fulfilment of a vow (vers. 7, 8; 1 Sam. i. 11). "With a subtle refinement of hypocrisy, he pretended that his thank-offering was for his return to Jerusalem" (Plumptre). "No villainy can be termed complete which is not disguised under the mask of religion, especially at those times when the profession of godliness is treated with general respect." 3. The obtaining of the king's sanction: "Go in peace" (ver. 9); thereby disarming suspicion and winning confidence. 4. The despatch of emissaries through all the tribes, to prepare for the simultaneous proclamation, "Absalom reigneth in Hebron!" (ver. 10). 5. The securing of the presence of numerous persons from Jerusalem; depriving the king of their aid, and making them unwittingly adherents of Absalom (ver. 11). 6. The gaining of the open support of Ahithophel, whose secret counsel had doubtless been long before afforded (vers. 12, 31). He was "the sinews of Absalom's cause" (Blunt). "While the sacrifices were proceeding, Absalom sent for him from Giloh, and the presence of this influential personage appears to have caused the final outbreak of a conspiracy which had been carefully prepared, and which immediately spread with amazing rapidity, and pouring like a wild mountain torrent from the ancient capital of Judah, soon threatened to flood the whole country" (Ewald).

IV. INSURRECTION SUCCESSFULLY INCITED, only to be disastrously defeated. "And the conspiracy was strong," etc. Its success was: 1. Great, swift, surprising. A few hours later, Jerusalem was in the hands of Absalom. 2. Temporary. The prosperity of the wicked is but for a moment. 3. Followed by signal retribution, whilst itself employed as an instrument thereof, by Divine providence, whose ways, though mysterious, are always just and right. The death of Absalom (ch. xviii. 14) was "the end of a bitter family history, whose every sorrow was linked to the father's blame." The people who shared his crime shared his punishment. The fatal spark of tribal enmity kindled under his influence, though quenched for the moment, soon burst forth again, and ultimately destroyed the unity, independence, and strength of the nation.—D.

Vers. 13—18.—*David's flight from Jerusalem.* "Arise! and let us flee" (ver. 14). *References:* 1. Leaving the palace, on receiving news from Hebron (after the harvest and vintage, ch. xvi. 1; xvii. 28; Ps. iv. 7). 2. At "the Far House" (Beth-hammerhak), on the outskirts of the city (ver. 17); and at "the olive tree in (on the road to) the wilderness of Judah" (LXX.); the procession formed; Ittai the Gittite. 3. Passing over the Kidron; the signal of flight; loud and general wailing (ver. 23). 4. Commencement of the ascent of Mount Olivet; Zadok and Abiathar (vers. 24—29). 5. Ascending the mountain amidst loud wailing (ver. 30); tidings concerning Ahithophel (ver. 31). 6. At the top (about noonday), "where God was worshipped" (ver. 32); Hushai the Archite (vers. 32—37). 7. Descending, on the other side; Ziba, with refreshments (ch. xvi. 1—4). 8. At Bahurim; Shimei (ch. xvi. 5—13). 9. Coming "weary" (or, to "Ayephim") (ch. xvi. 14); to the fords (Authorized Version, "plains") of the wilderness, or passages of the wilderness leading to the Jordan; and resting there for the night. 10. Crossing the river (after midnight), on the arrival of Ahimaaz and Jonathan with news from Jerusalem (ch. xvii. 21, 22); and marching onward "by the morning light" toward Mahanaim (ch. xvii. 24, 27—29). "There is no single day in the Jewish history of which so elaborate an account remains as of this memorable flight" (Stanley). It was probably the morning after Absalom's revolt when news came from Hebron. Of all the "evil tidings" that David ever received (ch.

xiii. 21, 30), none were more unexpected or alarming. He must determine at once whether to face the gathering storm or flee before it. With something of his former decision he chose the latter course; his servants (state officers, attendants, soldiers) declared themselves ready to do his bidding; and "he went forth and all his household" (wives, sons, daughters), "all the people" ("servants," LXX.) "after him," etc. At first, no doubt, struck with consternation, he yet speedily regained his composure (Ps. cxii. 12); and came to his decision not from abject fear, or personal cowardice (ch. xviii. 2), but (as others should do in similar critical and perilous positions) from motives of—

I. PIETY; or humble submission to the chastisement of God. Lest he "bring evil upon us;" or "drive over us the evil" or calamity which now threatens, and in which David sees the fulfilment of predicted judgment (ch. xii. 10, 11). 1. He discerns therein the operation of Divine justice on account of his sin (ch. xvi. 11). Trouble and danger bring sin to remembrance; and those who remember their sin are quick to perceive the chastening hand of God where others see only the wrathful hand of man. In the view of faith, wicked men are instruments employed by the supreme and righteous Judge. Resentment toward them is thereby moderated, the sense of sin deepened, and suffering borne in a different manner. "Wherefore doth a living man complain?" etc. (Lam. iii. 39; Micah vii. 9). 2. He is persuaded of the folly of resistance to the Divine power. Such resistance can be of no avail against the Almighty; it ought not to be attempted; and it can only result in defeat and ruin (as in the case of Saul). If he should remain and defend the city, David had no inward assurance, as in former conflicts, that God would be with him. He rather felt that in resisting Absalom at this moment he would be resisting God. He did not even deem it needful to consult the oracle (ver. 24). 3. He acquiesces without murmuring in the Divine will (ver. 26), "accepts the punishment of his iniquity" (Lev. xxvi. 41), and patiently endures the wrath of man, knowing that it is subject to Divine control. When a hurricane sweeps over the land, the things that cannot bend are broken; but those that bow beneath it are preserved, and rise up again when it has passed by. "Humble yourselves," etc. (Jas. iv. 10). 4. He hopes for deliverance in the Divine mercy (ver. 25; ch. xvi. 12). "But as for me, I trust in thee" (Ps. lv. 23). Herein lay the secret of David's passivity, tranquillity, and forbearance during his flight.

II. POLICY; or prudent counsel against the assaults of the wicked. Piety without policy is too simple to be safe. 1. He does not presume upon the protection of God, without, on his part, exercising proper caution and energy. A good man's submission to Divine chastisement does not require that he should always remain in the way of danger or voluntarily invite human hostility and cruelty. "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another" (Matt. x. 23). 2. He does not undertake an enterprise rashly, or without adequate means of success. David probably deemed the number of his "servants" present with him in Jerusalem insufficient for the defence of the city. If, indeed, he had the assurance of Divine help, he might have thought otherwise (ch. v. 19). "His departure was an admirable means of testing the real strength of both parties" (Ewald). 3. He does not place an undue confidence in man. "David was perhaps afraid that Jerusalem might fall into Absalom's power through treachery" (Keil). "Beware of men" (Matt. x. 17; John ii. 24; Ps. cxviii. 8, 9). 4. He makes use of the means which are most likely to ensure safety and success. "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself" (Prov. xxii. 3). If there must be conflict, delay appeared to him desirable; it would afford time for his faithful adherents to assemble; and, in the open field, the tried valour and discipline of his veterans would give them an advantage. Pious men are not unfrequently deficient in prudence (Luke xvi. 8); since, however, they are sometimes beset by ravening wolves, it is necessary that they should be "wise as serpents" (Matt. x. 16), taking care nevertheless to avoid guile, and to be "harmless as doves." "When he was reviled," etc. (1 Pet. ii. 23).

III. PITY; or generous concern for the preservation of the imperilled. Foreseeing the misery and bloodshed likely to ensue from awaiting the attack of Absalom, he sought by flight not merely to save his own life, but chiefly: 1. To secure the safety of his helpless household, and aid the escape of his faithful followers (vers. 19, 20). 2. To spare the city the horrors of a siege. "He preferred the safety of the people to

his own; and was thus also a figure of him who said, in the garden of Gethsemane, 'If ye seek me, let these go their way'" (Wordsworth). 3. To save the life of his rebellious son (ch. xviii. 12); for which he would have given his own (ch. xviii. 33). 4. To prevent the miseries of civil war (ch. ii. 26; iii. 1), and promote the welfare of the divided and misguided people. If collision could be now avoided, it might perchance be altogether averted (ver. 25), or at least occur with less injurious consequences. He was willing to sacrifice himself for the good of the "sheep" (ch. v. 2; xxiv. 17). "Let thy blessing be upon thy people" (Ps. iii. 8). His piety was honoured, his policy justified, his pity succeeded by renewed attachment (ch. xix. 14), and, in all, the overruling providence of God was displayed. He left Jerusalem in humiliation and grief; he returned (three months afterwards) in triumph (ch. xix. 39, 40). Having practically resigned his sceptre to God, from whom he received it, God gave it back into his hands. "As David falls away from Jehovah to be more firmly bound to him, so Israel turns away from David to be (as the close of the history shows) more devoutly attached to him. The prelude to this first clearing-up of the relations between king and people is given in the conduct of the faithful band who stand firmly by David in the general defection" (Baumgarten).—D.

Vers. 19—22.—(BETH-HAMMERHAK.) *The devotedness of Ittai.* "As Jehovah liveth," etc. (ver. 21). In his flight from Jerusalem: 1. *David experienced much alleviation of his trouble;* as in his flight from the court of Saul (nearly forty years before). He was not left alone (1 Sam. xxii. 1, 2). His "servants" gathered round him, and professed their readiness to follow him (ver. 15). Halting with his household at "the Far House," he found himself accompanied by his body-guard, the Cretans and Philistines (under Benaiah, ch. viii. 18); his six hundred veterans (under Abishai, ch. xxiii. 17—39) who had been with him in his early wanderings and followed him from Gath onward (Gittites, equivalent to "Gibborim," 1 Sam. xxiii. 13; xxvii. 2; xxx. 9; ch. ii. 3; v. 6); and a part at least of the regular soldiery—the host (under Joab, ch. viii. 16; xviii. 1, 2). His attention was arrested by the presence of Ittai the Gittite (who, from some unknown cause, had recently come from Gath) with his brethren (kinsfolk) and children. "The Lord has the hearts of all men in his hands, and if he be our friend, we shall not want friends" (Guild). "Our foremost friends are sometimes raised up among persons from whom we had the least expectations" (Scott). 2. *He exhibited noble generosity in his conduct.* "Wherefore goest thou with us?" etc. (vers. 19—21). "This unexpected meeting with Ittai appeared to the royal fugitive almost like a friendly greeting of his God, and dropped the first soothing balsam-drops into the painful wounds of his deeply lacerated heart" (Krummacher). But David, now himself a wanderer, had no desire to make the condition of this "stranger and exile" more homeless and distressing by dragging him into his own misfortunes; released him from whatever obligations of service he may have incurred; advised him to offer his services to the new king; and expressed the wish, "Mercy and truth [from God] be with thee" (ch. ii. 6).

> "I am a poor fallen man, unworthy now
> To be thy lord and master; seek the king . . .
> Neglect him not; make use now, and provide
> For thine own future safety."
>
> ('King Henry VIII.')

3. *He exerted a powerful attraction on his followers;* as aforetime. His language was really a pathetic appeal; not unlike that of Jesus, "Will ye also go away?" etc. (John vi. 66—69). "Ittai declared his resolution (with a fervour which almost inevitably recalls a like profession made almost on the same spot to the great Descendant of David, Matt. xxvi. 35, centuries afterwards) to follow him in life and death" (Stanley). It was "a beautiful instance of loyal constancy and faithful devotion in a Philistine soldier at a time of apostasy and defection. His truth and fidelity are brought out in a stronger and clearer light by the contrast with the treachery of Absalom, Ahithophel, and eventually of Joab and Abiathar" (Wordsworth). He may be regarded, in his *devotion* to David, as a pattern of devotion to Christ. It was—

I. SEVERELY TESTED. Like him, the follower of Christ is often tried and proved, by:

1. The prospect of *difficulties, privations, and perils* in his service. These are all known to the Lord, for he has himself endured them; and he forewarns his disciples of them (Luke ix. 57, 58; xiv. 25—33). He would not have them follow him from mere impulse. 2. The promise of *ease, safety, and advantage* in other service; worldly pleasure, treasure, power, honour, in devotion to the prince and "god of this world." 3. The *example and influence* of many persons; bound by stronger ties to serve their rightful king; but forsaking their allegiance to him, joining in revolt against his authority, seeking his life, and heaping reproaches on his head (ch. xvi. 11). "From that time many of his disciples went back," etc. (John vi. 66; Mark xiv. 50; 2 Tim. iv. 10; 2 Pet. iii. 17). 4. The *peculiar circumstances* in which he is placed, the special inducements suggested thereby, and the favourable opportunities afforded for the exercise of his freedom. There are times in which the Lord (however much he values and desires his aid) does not urge him to continue, but seems to do the opposite, and give him liberty, if he be disposed, to depart. So he tests his disciples, sifts the false from the true, and, though it cause the former to fall away, it makes the latter cling to him more closely than ever. The decision between Christ and antichrist has to be made, not only at first, but also often afterwards.

II. WORTHILY DISPLAYED, as it should be by every follower of "the Son of David," in: 1. The *deliberate preference* of his service to any other. "Just as in the great French Revolution, the famous Swiss Guard showed a brave, though mercenary fidelity, so Ittai, having eaten of the king's salt, determines that where his lord the king is, in life or death, he will be." 2. The *disinterested motives* by which he is actuated (Ruth i. 16). Ittai was not a mere mercenary, serving David for advantage (Job i. 9). He was influenced possibly by gratitude for the kind reception he met with on coming from Gath as "a stranger and an exile," by a sense of obligation imposed by friendship and previous engagements, by a conviction of the rectitude of the king's cause; certainly by admiration and affection for his person. Hence he wished to be *with him*, to share his sufferings and to aid in his defence. He was ready "to lay down his life for his sake." An intelligent, sincere, passionate love to the Person of Christ is essential to his service. "Lovest thou me?" 3. The open and *solemn pledge* of loyalty and fidelity. "As Jehovah liveth," etc. (1 Sam. xxix. 6; ch. iv. 9). Ittai was doubtless a convert to the faith of Israel. "Whosoever shall confess me before men," etc. (Matt. x. 32; Rom. x. 10). 4. The practical, unconditional, *whole-hearted consecration* of himself and all he possessed to the king's service. "And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the *little ones* that were with him." "Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day unto the Lord?" (1 Chron. xxix. 5).

III. GRACIOUSLY APPROVED. "And David said to Ittai, Go and pass over" (ver. 22), "with me" (LXX.). If he said no more, his look and manner would give peculiar significance to his words. The Lord testifies his reception and approval of every devoted servant by: 1. Giving him the assurance thereof in his heart. 2. Fulfilling his desire to be with him. "If any man serve me," etc. (John xii. 26). 3. Appointing him to his post of duty, and making his way plain (John xi. 9, 10). 4. Exalting him to a position of responsibility and honour (ch. xviii. 2), in which he aids the king in gaining a great victory, and shares the joy of a great triumph. The latter, like the former life of this Philistine, is wrapped in obscurity. But his devotion to "the Lord's anointed" shines like a star among the heathen, and condemns the lukewarmness, selfishness, and unfaithfulness of many "who profess and call themselves Christians."

"Lo! of those
Who call, 'Christ! Christ!' there shall be many found,
In judgment, further off from him by far
Than such to whom his Name was never known.
Christians like these the Ethiop shall condemn;
When that the two assemblages shall part—
One rich eternally, the other poor."
(Dante, 'Purg.,' xix.)

D.

Vers. 23—29.—(ACROSS THE KIDRON.) *The ark restored to its place.* "Carry back the ark of God to the city" (ver. 25). Having crossed the Kidron ravine amidst the

loud wailing of the people, and halted for a moment in the ascent of Olivet, David was met by Zadok (of the elder branch of the Aaronic family), with the Levites, carrying the ark (ch. vi.), and by Abiathar (a descendant of Eli, of the younger branch). The former had come to him at Hebron (about thirty years before), "a young man mighty of valour" (1 Chron. xii. 28); the latter was a still older friend of David (1 Sam. xxii. 23), occupying the highest official position (Zadok being his vicar only, or *sagan*, 1 Kings ii. 27, 35; 1 Chron. xvi. 39), but not taking the most prominent part in active service, and perhaps entertaining "jealousy of his rival" (Blunt). They doubtless intended to render valuable service to the king by bringing the ark. *Why, then, did he send it back?* Not from want of proper regard for it (ver. 25, latter part). He did not, indeed, put a superstitious confidence in it, like Hophni and Phinehas. He esteemed and reverenced it as an appointed symbol of the Divine presence and "favour," and a valuable means of Divine worship and service (1 Sam. iv. 11), just as highly as when he conducted it in triumph to its resting-place (ch. vi. 16). But "he would not use the ark as a charm; he had too much reverence for it to risk it in his personal peril" (Stanley). He looked upon it as belonging to God and to his people, not to himself; considered, not only that it would be of no advantage to him in present circumstances, but also that he was not justified in removing it from the city and depriving the people of its presence; that rather it was the will of God that he should himself be deprived of it, at least for a season; and thus he honoured God in *adversity* as he had formerly done in prosperity. "David is always great in affliction. His conduct throughout, his goodness, resignation, and patience, are clearly evinced in all these trying scenes" (Kitto). Consider him as an *example* of: 1. *Spiritual insight.* He perceived the true nature and worth of the ark; that the symbol was distinct from the reality of the Divine favour, did not necessarily ensure its possession, was not an essential condition of it; that its value depended upon the relation of men to God (1 Sam. vi. 1—9). Affliction often teaches us how to regard the outward privileges and ordinances of religion. "He was contented at this time to forbear the presence of the ark, having his confidence in God, and not relying altogether upon the external sacrament" (Willet). 2. *Deep humility.* Having acted unworthily of the ark of the "testimony," and disobeyed the commandments of God, he deemed himself unworthy of the honour of its presence. His deprivation of it was a just chastisement for his misuse and abuse of it. "I am not worthy," etc. (Gen. xxxii. 10; Luke v. 8; Matt. viii. 8). 3. *Holy affection* toward the "habitation" of God (Ps. xxvi. 8); toward God himself; and toward his people. Hence, although banished from the ark of God, he desired that the God of the ark should still be honoured by others, and do them good. "Observe his disinterested self-sacrifice for the good of the people. He would not punish his subjects for his son's sins" (Wordsworth). "It argues a good principle to be more concerned for the Church's prosperity than for our own, to prefer Jerusalem before our chief joy, the success of the gospel and the flourishing of the Church above our own wealth, credit, ease, safety, even when they are most at hazard" (Matthew Henry). "Let thy Name be magnified for ever" (ch. vii. 26). 4. *Lofty faith* in the presence of God in all places, his superintendence of all events, his acquaintance with all hearts, his righteousness and goodness, favour, guidance, mercy, and truth (ver. 20). It is "an instance of David's clear faith in the omnipresence of God and of his spiritual elevation from the outward symbols of the sanctuary to the Divine essence that was symbolized by them." "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord," etc. (Ps. iii. 8; iv. 3; v. 7). 5. *Unquenchable hope.* "If I find favour," etc. (ver. 26). So far from despairing of God's favour, he cherished the expectation of being delivered "out of all his troubles," brought back to Jerusalem, seeing the ark again, and worshipping in his tabernacle with joy. "My hope is in thee" (Ps. xxxix. 7; xlii. 5; lxxi. 14). 6. *Entire resignation.* "And if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him" (ver. 26; 1 Sam. iii. 18; ch. xii. 15—23). "He besought God, as Alexander Severus told his soldiers a generous and a wise man should; praying for the best things and bearing whatever should befall" (Delany). "This marks strongly his subdued and right spirit, partly induced, we doubt not, by the humility of his own conscious transgressions. He fell; but it was the fall of the upright, and he rose again; submitting himself meekly in the mean time to the will of God" (Chalmers). 7. *Practical wisdom.* "Art thou a seer? return to the city," etc.

(vers. 27—29); "Behold! return," etc. (LXX.). "The peculiar exercises of religion ought to precede, but not to exclude, the use of every prudent means of securing success in lawful undertakings" (Scott). When, in time of adversity, we decline the aid of our friends in one form, because it seems to us injudicious and improper, we should gladly avail ourselves of it in another; knowing that by such instrumentality the help for which we look to God is most commonly vouchsafed. "Among the few faithful amidst the faithless, the first place belongs to the priests, whom loyalty and interest alike bound to the throne. So they were ready if they had been permitted to have carried even the ark to share the exile of the king. They will have their loyalty crowned by seeing the ark, the tent of a once nomad worship, signifying by its flame a spiritual life, set up in Jerusalem; the younger amongst them may see a temple rise, the scene of as noble a worship as the world has yet known" (R. Williams).—D.

Ver. 30.—*David's tears on Olivet.* 1. What a scene of fallen greatness and bitter grief is here depicted! He who yesterday reigned in Jerusalem, as the anointed (Messiah) of Jehovah, is to-day a homeless fugitive (ver. 20), toiling up the ascent of Olivet, in deep humiliation and undisguised sorrow, with head covered (ch. iii. 31, 32; xix. 4) and feet bare; accompanied by stern warriors and tender women and children, all, like himself, with covered heads "going and weeping." It is "as one long funeral procession of men wailing over the fall of all their hopes" (Plumptre). 2. What an instance of moral excellence and overcoming faith is here afforded! "The greatness of David did not depend on his royal state; it was within his lofty soul and inseparable from his commanding character" (Milman). He is considerate, generous (ver. 19), submissive (ver. 26), prayerful (ver. 31), grateful (ch. xvi. 4), forbearing (ch. xvi. 10), and hopeful (ch. xvi. 12). His suffering manifests his sincerity, his outward shame his inward worth; and "out of the depths" of his trouble he rises to the loftiest elevation (Ps. cxxx. 1; lxxxiv. 6; ch. xxiii. 13, 14; Hos. ii. 15). 3. What an outline is here furnished of the *ideal* representation, given by psalmist and prophet, of the suffering Servant of Jehovah (Ps. xxii.; Isa. liii.), and fully realized in him who, on the same spot, a thousand years afterwards, wept over the sinning and perishing city! "And when he was come near," etc. (Luke xix. 41—44; xxiii. 27—31). Consider—

I. THE SORROWS OF DAVID. Why did he weep? Not so much on account of his exile, privation, etc., as on account of: 1. The *grievous transgressions* which he had formerly committed (Ps. xxxix. 12; vi. 6), and which were now brought afresh to remembrance. "My sin is ever before me." 2. The *ungrateful treatment* which he received, from his son whom he tenderly loved (ch. xvi. 11), from his subjects whom he faithfully served, from his adversaries who hated him "wrongfully" and "without a cause" (Ps. lxix. 3—5). Neither his former transgressions nor his recent defects justified rebellion against his authority as king. Indeed, his personal piety and theocratic policy made him to many an object of hatred and reproach; and in him the Divine King of Israel himself was despised (Ps. v. 10; xxii. 8; xlii. 3; lxix. 7, 9, 20). "Though David suffered for his many sins, he had yet through penitence already obtained forgiveness of sins. Thus he was the righteous sufferer, who could appeal to God for the purity of his heart and the holiness of his cause" (Erdmann). 3. The *national calamity* which he beheld—the distress of "all the people that was with him" (ver. 23), the distracted condition of the country, the ruin which thousands would bring upon themselves; filling him with commiseration (1 Sam. xv. 35; Ps. cxix. 136). 4. The *Divine displeasure* which he experienced against his sin and the sins of the people; regarding this calamity as a sign thereof, enduring it in common with them, and bearing it, as far as possible, in his own person (ch. xxiv. 17). "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow," etc. (Lam. i. 12; Jer. ix. 1). "When I fall I shall arise," etc. (Micah vii. 8, 9; Ps. xxxi. 5).

II. THE SORROWS OF CHRIST; arising from: 1. *His relation to a sinful race*, whose nature he assumed and among whom he dwelt, "yet without sin;" the suffering "which a pure and holy nature must feel from the mere contiguity of evil; and the reflected and borrowed shame and pain which noble natures feel for the sins of those with whom they are closely connected" (Caird). 2. *His rejection by the world*, which he came to save; being reproached, persecuted, betrayed, deserted, condemned, and crucified; and thus made the victim of human wickedness. His righteousness and

love, his Divine dignity, as the Son of God, the King Messiah (ch. vii. 16), rendered his treatment peculiarly sinful, and reveals the sin of men in its true light. 3. *His compassion for human misery*—loss, suffering, bondage, death, in the present and the future; the necessary fruit of human sin (Matt. viii. 17; John xi. 35; Luke xiii. 34, 35). 4. *His endurance of Divine abandonment* to the power of darkness and death (Ps. xxii. 1; Luke xxii. 44; Mark xv. 34; Heb. v. 7); wherein (without the sense of personal guilt and remorse) he gathered into his experience all the griefs endured by the servants of God in all ages from and for transgressors, and all the woes of humanity arising from alienation from God; and whereby, in unfaltering trust and entire self-devotion, he fulfilled the Father's will, overcame sin, death, and hell, and "became unto all them that obey him the Author of eternal salvation." "The chastisement was laid upon him for our peace; and through his stripes we were healed" (Isa. liii. 5, 10; Ps. xxii. 8, 16, 18, 24—31).

III. THE SORROWS OF THE CHRISTIAN. For every one who follows Christ must tread the path of sorrows (not only such as are natural, but such as are spiritual and Divine), on account of: 1. The *manifold sins* of which he has been guilty against the Lord (Matt. v. 4).

> "We have not time to mourn. The worse for us.
> He that lacks time to mourn lacks time to mend;
> Eternity mourns that."
>
> ('Philip van Artevelde.')

2. The *evil effects* wrought thereby in himself and others.

> "Weep not for broad lands lost;
> Weep not for fair hopes crost;
> Weep not when limbs wax old;
> Weep not when friends grow cold;
> Weep not that death must part
> Thine and the best-loved heart;
> Yet weep, weep all thou can—
> Weep, weep, because thou art
> A sin-defiled man."
>
> (Trench.)

3. The *sinful opposition* of men to Christ, his kingdom, and his people; unbelief, enmity, and persecution; the effects of which he shares with his Lord and for his sake (John xvi. 33; 1 Pet. iv. 13; Phil. i. 29; Col. i. 24). "For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping," etc. (Phil. iii. 18). 4. The *miserable condition* and gloomy prospects of the impenitent. He mourns over them "with many tears" (Acts xx. 19, 31) "in the tender mercies of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 8), and is willing to undergo the greatest sacrifice and suffering for their salvation (Rom. ix. 2, 3). "If we suffer we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. ii. 12).—D.

Ver. 31.—(MOUNT OLIVET.) *The counsel of Ahithophel.* "Turn, I pray thee, the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness, O Jehovah." (*References:* ch. xv. 12, 34; xvi. 15, 20—23; xvii. 1—7, 15, 23; 1 Chron. xxvii. 33.) While ascending the Mount of Olives, David received intelligence that his counsellor, Ahithophel the Gilonite, had gone over to Absalom. He was the wisest statesman in Israel, and nothing was more adapted than his counsel to ensure the success of the revolt. The effect which his defection produced upon David is evident from the prayer (suggested probably by his name, "brother of a fool") that forthwith broke from his lips. As he continued his journey, he, perhaps, reflected on the former course of Ahithophel (the Old Testament Judas) in the light of present knowledge, and indulged some such sentiments as are expressed in Ps. xli., 'The comfort of the afflicted and betrayed;' Ps. lv., 'Prayer against a treacherous friend;' Ps. lxix., cix. Observe that—

I. A FAMILIAR FRIEND MAY BECOME A DEADLY FOE.

> "Also my friend [literally, 'man of my peace'], whom I trusted,
> Who did eat of my bread,
> Hath lifted up his heel against me."
>
> (Ps. xli. 10; John xiii. 18.)

"For it is not an enemy, etc.
But thou wast a man on an equality with me,
My companion and familiar friend," etc.
(Ps. lv. 13—15.)

The motives of Ahithophel are not expressly stated; but they were probably: 1. *Dislike* of the religious earnestness and theocratic policy of David. 2. *Ambition* to be the sole adviser and prime minister of Absalom. "There may have been jealousy of Joab, or the natural tendency to worship the rising instead of the setting sun, or the impatience of a hypocrite at the round of religious services in which he was compelled to bear a part, affecting a devotion he did not feel, Ps. lv. 13, 14" (Plumptre). 3. *Revenge* "for the dishonour done to his family in the person of Bathsheba, which no subsequent marriage could repair or efface" (Delany). "He was urged by the desire of punishing David's greatest crime, if he were not at the bottom of the movement. It is but reasonable to trace in the conspiring Ahithophel one of the intricate methods by which the judicial providence of God works out its own ends; suffering a great offender, notwithstanding his penitence, to eat the fruit of his deeds; yet reserving for treachery in time its reward" (R. Williams). "This text is a glass wherein God's justice is plainly to be seen. David had formerly forsaken Uriah, and now God suffers Ahithophel to forsake David. (1) Let us learn, when our friends forsake us, to enter into a serious scrutiny with our own souls. (2) The most politic heads have not always the faithfullest hearts. (3) False friends will forsake thee in times of adversity" (T. Fuller). "My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook," etc. (Job vi. 15; Jacox, 'Stray Side-Lights on Scripture Texts').

II. GREAT GIFTS ARE SOMETIMES PERVERTED TO UNGODLY USES. "That oracular wisdom which made his house a kind of shrine (ch. xvi. 23) seems to move the spirit of the sacred writer with an involuntary admiration" (Stanley). "His great crimes were enhanced by his immense talents, of which God gave him the use and the devil the application." His criminality appears not only in (1) his sanctioning and promoting rebellion against the authority of the king; but also in (2) his lawless and shameless advice against his honour (ch. xvi. 21, 22), whereby he sought to make reconciliation and compromise impossible in the view of all, and to gratify his revenge in the most effective and significant manner (ch. xi. 2, 4, 11); becoming, consciously or unconsciously, an instrument of retribution. "This cursed policy showed him rather an oracle of the devil than of God" (Matthew Henry). (3) His malicious and cruel proposal to take away his life (ch. xvii. 2). None but a man devoid of all moral and religious principle could have given such counsel. A powerful intellect is, alas! too often united with a depraved heart. "It is often found true by experience that persons of superior penetration and wisdom are of bad intentions; they see further than other men, and are under a temptation to turn their minds to the overreaching of others, and effecting mischief; their ability in accomplishing wickedness is a snare and a temptation to them; they find they *can* do it, and therefore are ready and *willing* to do it" (W. Jones, of Nayland). "This man, while he was one of David's deep counsellors, was one of David's fools, that said in their hearts, 'There is no God;' else he could not have hoped to make good an evil with worse, to build the success of treason upon incest." "Oh the policy of this Machiavelli of Israel, no less deep than hell itself! Oh the wisdom of the Almighty, that can use the worst evils well, and most justly make the sins of man his executioners!" (Hall).

III. GOD IS ABLE TO FRUSTRATE THE CRAFTIEST COUNSELS. "Turn," etc., "either infatuate him, that he may give foolish counsel; or, let his counsel be rejected as foolish, or spoiled by the foolish execution of it" (Poole). "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness," etc. (Job v. 13; 1 Cor. iii. 19). Of this David was persuaded from: 1. His supreme and infinite wisdom, in comparison with which the highest human wisdom is foolishness. 2. His abundant and varied resources for the direction and control of men's purposes and actions, so that they are made of none effect, or turn out contrary to what was intended and expected. 3. His frequent and extraordinary interpositions for that end. History is full of such instances (Acts iv. 28). So are individual lives (1 Sam. xxiii. 24—28). "Though Ahithophel spoke as an oracle of God (as we often see statesmen wiser than priests), yet as he turned to treachery his counsel turned to foolishness."

IV. A GOOD MAN HAS AN UNFAILING RESOURCE IN EVERY TROUBLE, viz. sincere, believing, fervent prayer. "Call upon me," etc. (Ps. l. 15). 1. However beset by the craft and power of his adversaries, he cannot be deprived of this privilege, but has access to God in all circumstances, at all times, and in all places (ver. 32). "A Christian cannot always hear, or always read, or always communicate, but he may pray continually. If he be on the top of a house with Peter, he may pray; if he be in the bottom of the ocean with Jonah, he may pray; if he be walking in the field with Isaac, he may pray when no eye seeth him; if he be waiting at table with Nehemiah, he may pray when no ear heareth him; if he be in the mountains with our Saviour, he may pray; if he be in the prison with Paul, he may pray; wherever he is, prayer will help him to find God out. Every saint is God's temple; and he that carrieth his temple about him, saith Austin, may go to prayer when he pleaseth. Indeed, to a Christian every house is a house of prayer; every closet a chamber of presence; and every place he comes to an altar whereon he may offer the sacrifice of prayer" (Swinnock, 'The Christian Man's Calling'). 2. The depth of his helplessness and peril is an incentive to higher earnestness and an argument for the fulfilment of Divine promises. "Ejaculations are short prayers darted up to God on emergent occasions. When we are time-bound, place-bound, or person-bound, so that we cannot compose ourselves to make a large solemn prayer, this is the right instant for ejaculations, whether orally uttered or only poured forth inwardly in the heart" (T. Fuller). 3. And his prayer is not offered in vain. Sometimes while he is "yet speaking" (Isa. lxv. 24) the answer comes (ver. 32). "In answer to a single emphatical ejaculation the counsel of the prudent is carried headlong" (Scott).

"As for me—unto God will I cry,
And Jehovah will save me.
Evening and morning and at noon will I complain and groan,
And he will hear my voice.
Cast thy burden upon Jehovah,
He—he will sustain thee."

(Ps. lv. 16, 17, 22.)

D.

Vers. 32—37.—(THE TOP OF MOUNT OLIVET.) *The friendship of Hushai.* (*References:* Josh. xvi. 2; ch. xvi. 16—19; xvii. 5—15; 1 Chron. xxvii. 33; 1 Kings iv. 16.) Like Uriah and Ittai, he may have been of Gentile origin and a proselyte; was far advanced in life (ver. 33), "the king's friend" or confidential adviser, and doubtless, in disposition, more congenial with David than the cool and calculating Ahithophel. "In him David saw the first gleam of hope. For warlike purposes he was useless; but of political stratagem he was master. The moment before the tidings had come of the treason of Ahithophel. To frustrate his designs, he was sent back just in time to meet Absalom arriving from Hebron" (Stanley). Notice: 1. *His opportune presence;* in answer to prayer (ver. 31); at a time of need, when others were unfaithful, trouble oppressed, and danger threatened. A faithful friend is one of Heaven's best gifts. "When friends come to us just at the moment when we want them, and for a purpose which no one else could accomplish as well as they, and for a time which is precisely conterminous with our necessity, it is hard not to look on them as much sent from God as the angels who met Jacob at Mahanaim, or who stood by the open tomb to tell Mary of Christ" (Thorold, 'On the Use of Friends').

"When true friends meet in adverse hour,
'Tis like a sunbeam through a shower;
The watery ray an instant seen,
The darkly closing clouds between."

(Sir W. Scott.)

"A faithful friend is the medicine of life" (Ecclus. vi. 16, 14). "The Lord has the hearts of all men in his hands, and if he be our Friend he will not let us want friends; yea, will make our most cruel enemies to be our friends" (Guild). 2. *His genuine sympathy;* voluntarily and appropriately expressed; and adapted to cheer and strengthen. "There are eight chief uses in the gift of friendship—viz. counsel,

defence, appreciation, correction, society, intercession, aid, sympathy" (ch. vii. 1, 2; 1 Sam. xviii. 1—4). 3. *His tested loyalty.* Would he prove his fidelity, not by going into exile (ver. 21), but by returning to Jerusalem, professing allegiance to Absalom, endeavouring to frustrate the counsel of Ahithophel, and communicating secretly with David? "The boldness and originality of this step revealed the remarkable genius which, on former occasions, as in the contest with Goliath, had devised methods so original yet simple for the attainment of its object" (Blaikie). This deceptive policy is recorded, but not commended; it was not contrary to the ideas which prevailed among Eastern nations at the time on the subject of veracity; it has been since practised by Christian monarchs, statesmen, and warriors, toward their enemies, in perilous emergencies, as a justifiable stratagem; and often approved, like a skilful choice of weapons in conflict with an enemy, or like a clever move in a game of chess. It ought not, therefore, to be censured in David with undue severity; and "we must not think that the king's religion was a hypocrisy because it did not bear at once the fruit of the spotless honour and unswerving truth that mark the highest forms of Christian goodness" (Plumptre). But such duplicity cannot be justified on the ground of necessity; or that those against whom it is practised may have (like Absalom) "forfeited all the rights of society" (Delany); or that the end which is aimed at is good. In the light of revelation it must be condemned (Lev. xix. 11). "And in this respect we have (in David) a contrast with the Divine Antitype, the Son of David, who in all his sorrows and sufferings retained his holiness, purity, and truth unsullied and undefiled" (Wordsworth). 4. *His ready service.* (Ver. 37.) He at once complied with the wishes of the king, and evidently without any conception that what he was about to do was morally wrong. "We can hardly excuse his thrusting himself even upon a traitor's confidence in order to play the traitor; though the picture is characteristic of the East; and this is one of many drawbacks which remind us that the Bible embodies an experience and a tone of sentiment which are not always perfect models for the franker races of the West. At least let us remember, though a friend may ask many things of us, he should not ask us to sacrifice the truth and the right; for these are not ours to give him" (R. Williams). 5. *His daring courage.* Should his treachery be discovered, he might have to pay the penalty with his head. 6. *His skilful and prompt activity.* (Ch. xvi. 16; xvii. 7, 15.) 7. *His complete success.* (Ch. xvii. 14.) "In justifying the ways of God to men, and admiring the issues of his will, we are in no case obliged to approve actions which have nothing but their success to commend them" (Kitto, 'Cyc.').—D.

Vers. 7—9.—*Absalom's pious vow.* David and his ministers must have been singularly blind and negligent to have allowed Absalom so far to have prepared the way for the revolution he contemplated as he must have done before asking permission to go to Hebron. Nor does the permission itself show less blindness. David should have known his son better than to have so readily believed that he was likely to have made a pious vow, and to be burdened in conscience by its long non-fulfilment, especially as he had allowed four years (ver. 7, not "forty") to elapse before taking steps for its fulfilment. But David's foolish fondness prepared him to be easily imposed upon by favourite children. The purport of the pretended vow appears from what follows. It was to hold solemn sacrificial services at Hebron in thanksgiving for his return to his home and reconciliation with his father. Hebron was chosen because it was the place of his birth and early life, where he would have many friends; and the first capital of the kingdom, where many may have been still disaffected to David on account of his transfer of the court to Jerusalem. Sacrificial services were chosen as furnishing a plausible pretext for a large gathering of leading men who either were already disaffected, or, if going to the festival (like the two hundred from Jerusalem, ver. 11) "in their simplicity," knowing nothing, might be won over by Absalom's representations. In his representations to his father we have a glaring instance of—

I. HYPOCRITICAL PRETENCES IN RELIGION. 1. *Their nature.* They are imitations of real piety; and the closer the imitation the more likely are they to deceive and be successful in their object. Hypocrites are actors of a part, and the more skilful the actor the stronger the impression of reality. What more natural than the vow Absalom said he had made, and the language in which he describes it? A good

Hebrew prince, banished from home and kingdom, and with his prospects for the future darkened thereby, might well have longed to return, prayed to God to restore him, and vowed that, if his prayer were answered, he would make some singular demonstration of his gratitude. Absalom most likely lied when he said he had so vowed, as well as offered the sacrifices only as a cloak of wickedness. The counterfeit, however, illustrates the genuine; and in this case suggests that in great trouble we should seek relief and deliverance from God; that earnest prayer may be accompanied by promises of special acts of thanksgiving, and that, when deliverance comes, we should scrupulously perform the vows we have uttered (see Ps. lxvi. 13, *et seq.*). 2. *The motives from which they proceed.* These are as various as the objects which men pursue, and the attainment of which they think may be furthered by the appearance of piety. In Absalom the ultimate aim was the throne; the intermediate were the concealment from David of his purposes, the obtaining of leave of absence from Jerusalem, and opportunity for assembling his partisans and others around him, and maturing his plans with them, before striking the decisive blow. Hypocrites sometimes pretend to piety in order to conceal their wickedness and practise it without suspicion; sometimes with a view to gain (Matt. xxiii. 14); sometimes to obtain credit for virtues they do not possess (Acts v. 1—8), and secure praise from men (Matt. vi. 2). In times of persecution the object may be to avoid penalties; and any measure of favour shown to the professors of a particular creed, or of disability imposed on others, is a direct incentive to hypocrisy. How much do they promote hypocrisy amongst the poor who administer their charity in the form of "doles" given away after public worship, or carefully limited to those who attend particular religious services! Again, the hypocrite may pretend to a religion he does not possess, in order to obtain customers in his business from religious people, or to ingratiate himself with his piously disposed fellow-citizens, in order to obtain a seat in the town council, or in parliament, or other position in public life. How many large gifts to churches and chapels might be thus accounted for! Or the motive may be to secure the favour of parents, uncles, or aunts, with a view to a good place in their wills. Or, again, the forms of religion may be kept up because it is the habit of respectable society, without any real attachment to religion. Nor must we omit another motive. Piety may be seen to be necessary to secure deliverance from hell and admission to heaven; and, in total ignorance of the nature of piety, its forms may be adopted with that view. But this is rather formalism than deliberate hypocrisy. The two run into each other. It follows that hypocrisy is a sin most likely to be committed where real religion is prevalent and honoured. Absalom would not have pretended to piety if his father had not been religious; and when and where religion is disregarded, no one would think of professing it from unworthy motives. Though, to be sure, the general prevalence of formal religion may present the same temptation as that of real godliness. When, however, ungodliness and vice prevail in the neighbourhood or the circle in which a man moves, he may pretend to be worse than he is from motives similar to those which induce others to pretend to be better than they are.

II. THEIR ENORMOUS WICKEDNESS AND SURE DOOM. 1. *They evince such knowledge of the nature, grounds, and obligations of piety as enhances the guilt of their impiety.* 2. *They insult God.* By offering him what is worthless as if it were precious; and treating him as if he were unable to distinguish between the real and the unreal, or did not care, so long as his creatures pay homage to him, whether it be with the heart or not. 3. *They deceive and defraud men.* Imposing upon them with a mere appearance of goodness; inducing them to honour what is detestable and reward the unworthy; and diverting from genuine goodness its due notice and reward. 4. *They seriously injure those who are guilty of them.* They eat like a canker into the moral nature. A single act of hypocrisy affects injuriously the whole character, and throws suspicion on all that looks good. Habitual hypocrisy tends to destroy the possibility of sincere goodness, and to render salvation impossible. 5. *They deserve and ensure "the greater damnation"* (Matt. xxiii. 14). It is impossible that the imposition can last or ultimately be successful. It will be exploded, exposed, and punished in the great day of revelation and judgment (1 Cor. iv. 5).—G. W.

Ver. 20.—*A farewell blessing.* "Mercy and truth be with thee." Times of adversity

are testing-times. They try and make manifest the character both of the sufferer and of his friends. The base and the noble in men, their selfishness and their disinterestedness, their faithlessness and their fidelity, are revealed and heightened. David never appeared in better light (in all but, perhaps, courage) than at the fearful crisis when his son was usurping his throne and ready to take his life, and he himself became for a time an exile from home and metropolis and sanctuary; and while some of his servants made manifest their inherent baseness, the virtues of others shone forth in new lustre. The conversation between David and Ittai illustrates these remarks. It is a contest of nobleness, in which both appear to great advantage. The words of the text were intended by David as a farewell. Ittai would not, however, accept them as such, but persisted in accompanying him whithersoever he might go. They contain a prayer suitable for all in addressing their friends in parting, or indeed at any time. "Mercy and truth" are, of course, those of God. "May God exercise towards thee his mercy and truth."

I. "MERCY:" HERE EQUIVALENT TO GRACE, KINDNESS, LOVE. Man is entirely dependent on the kindness of God both as a creature and as a sinner. All in some degree are its objects; but in desiring that it may be with any, we wish that they may enjoy it to the fullest extent, both in body and soul, in time and in eternity. It thus includes all manifestations and exercises of Divine grace. 1. Providential. 2. Pardoning. 3. Sanctifying. 4. Defending and preserving. 5. Comforting and gladdening. 6. Eternally saving.

II. "TRUTH:" EQUIVALENT TO TRUTHFULNESS, FAITHFULNESS. That perfection of the Divine nature which assures us that God will ever act in a manner true to himself as he reveals himself in his Word, and to the promises he has given us. In desiring that the truth of God may be with any, we pray that they may to the fullest extent experience how trustworthy are the revelations he has made of himself, how faithfully his promises are fulfilled, how happy they are who confide in him.

III. THE "MERCY AND TRUTH" OF GOD ARE OFTEN PRESENTED TOGETHER IN THE HOLY WRITINGS, ESPECIALLY IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS. They exhibit the two aspects of the nature of God with which we are chiefly concerned; and, taken comprehensively, include his whole moral character. To desire, therefore, that they may be with any one is to pray that God may be with him in the fulness of his Being, as his God; that he may experience for himself all that he can be to one of his creatures—his kindness in the utmost meaning of his faithful representations; his truth, not in the accomplishment of his threatenings, but in the amplest fulfilment of his gracious promises.

IV. THESE DIVINE PERFECTIONS ARE "WITH US" WHEN THEY ARE EXERCISED FOR OUR GOOD. This often takes place when they are not present to our consciousness. But the highest blessedness is to enjoy their exercise in the full consciousness that it is the "mercy and truth" of God that are blessing our lives. The crowning bliss is to enjoy their uninterrupted exercise towards us, and that for ever.

V. FOR TO HAVE GOD'S "MERCY AND TRUTH" WITH US IS TO ENJOY ALL REAL GOOD, AND TO BE SURE OF ITS ENJOYMENT FOR EVER. Hence these words express all that the wisest, kindest, and best can address to their friends in parting with them, or on birthdays, new year's days, etc. We cannot be so certain that we are pronouncing a blessing on them when we wish them health, wealth, long life, abundance of friends, etc.

VI. ONE OF THE BEST EFFECTS OF GOD'S "MERCY AND TRUTH" is to produce their own likeness in those with whom they dwell, making them kind and loving, true and faithful. The possession and cultivation of these qualities are a necessary part of the evidence that we have savingly experienced the Divine grace and faithfulness, and a necessary condition of our continuing to enjoy them (see Prov. iii. 3, 4).—G. W.

Ver. 21.—*Ittai an example to Christians.* It is interesting to find a Gentile, and he a Gittite, so attached to David, so devoted in duty to him, and so honoured as to have (ch. xviii. 2) been entrusted with the command of one-third of the army in the battle with Absalom and his forces. The proposal of David (vers. 19, 20) was generous and reasonable; but to Ittai's loyal spirit was quite inadmissible. He expresses his determination to cleave to David whether for life or for death; and swears to do so by the life of God and the life of the king. His devotedness presents an example to subjects and soldiers, to servants and friends. His language is worthy of adoption by us in

addressing our glorious King, the Divine Son of David. It reminds us of the words of Peter, when speaking for all the twelve (John vi. 68) and when speaking only for himself (John xiii. 17), and which expressed his genuine determination, notwithstanding his subsequent fall. It reminds us also of the exhortation of Barnabas to the new converts at Antioch, "that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts xi. 23)—an exhortation which meets with a cordial response in every Christian's heart. His resolve, his vow, is to cleave unto Christ for life and death; to follow him whithersoever he may lead.

I. WHENCE THIS DETERMINATION ARISES. Primarily from the marvellous power of Christ to attract and attach to himself the hearts of men. David had a similar power, of an inferior kind and on a smaller scale. Christ draws and influences, not only by his character and works, but by his Spirit working directly in the heart. But regarded as springing from the Christian's heart, the resolve and vow are the result of: 1. *Faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Saviour and King of men.* Who has, therefore, a right to supreme homage and service (John vi. 69). 2. *Ardent love to him.* In return for his love (2 Cor. v. 14, 15); and as the result of knowledge and experience, perception of his Divine and human excellences, delight in his society and service. 3. *Desire and hope to make him some suitable return for his love and self-sacrifice,* and the invaluable blessings he has secured and conferred. The ardent Christian will pant for, and delight in, opportunities for serving Christ at the cost of peril, loss, suffering, disgrace with the world, or even sacrifice of life; and for showing his fidelity when others forsake him. 4. *Conviction that safety, happiness, and life everlasting are to be found only with Christ.*

"Whither, ah! whither should I go,
A wretched wanderer from my Lord?
Can this dark world of sin and woe
One glimpse of happiness afford?
Depart from thee! 'Tis death; 'tis more—
'Tis endless ruin, deep despair!"

5. *Memory of past vows.* "I have sworn, and I will perform it" (Ps. cxix. 106).

II. HOW IT IS TO BE FULFILLED. Not merely by warm feelings at times of special devotion, or by words of endearment, or promise, or lavish praise; but by: 1. *Bold confession of Christ before men.* Wearing his uniform, marching under his banner, acknowledging him openly as King and Captain. 2. *Union and communion with his people.* In profession of his Name, in worship, at the Lord's table, in social life, etc. Christ is in his Church; they are his visible representatives; openly with them all should be who wish to be "in what place their Lord the King may be." 3. *Visiting constantly the places where Christ is specially to be found, and avoiding those which he avoids.* Frequenting the closet, the sanctuary, the houses of poor, sick, and dying brethren. Avoiding the haunts of dissipation and iniquity. Going nowhere where we cannot think with satisfaction that Christ is near and approving. 4. *Active and zealous co-operation with him.* Doing, daring, enduring, in promoting his kingdom and the welfare of mankind. "Always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. xv. 58). "Enduring hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. ii. 3). Pressing eagerly to the front with Christ where his battles are to be fought, as Ittai with David, regardless of difficulties, danger, or death. 5. *Perseverance in all.* Which is the crowning proof of the deep sincerity of the determination.

III. THE REWARDS OF SUCH DEVOTEDNESS. 1. *Now.* Further opportunities of, calls to, and fitness for, service, suffering, and honour.

"What his guerdon here?
Many a sorrow, many a labour,
Many a tear."

But with these, the manifested presence of Christ, and his smile and words of approval; the pleasures which accompany the exercise of the powers in the noblest possible employment, and those which arise from association with the noblest of God's creatures in earth and heaven. 2. *Hereafter.* To be with Christ and share his glory and bliss evermore. "Enter into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. xxv. 21). "If we endure, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. ii. 12, Revised Version).—G. W.

Vers. 25, 26.—*David's resignation to the will of God.* David's character shone most brightly amid the darkness of adversity—in the early struggles and perils, and in these later ones. In these verses we see his superiority to a superstitious dependence on the presence of the ark as ensuring the presence and aid of God. He was thus much in advance of the Israelites, elders and people alike, in the days of Eli (1 Sam. iv. 3—5). We take the verses, however, as evidencing David's profound submission to the will of God, and illustrating the nature and excellence of godly resignation.

I. TO WHAT HE WAS RESIGNED. To whatever might be the will of God. To the enjoyment of the Divine favour, or the experience of the Divine displeasure. In particular: 1. *To defeat or victory in the contest with his unnatural son;* and, as results of one or the other: 2. *To the permanent loss or the regaining of his throne.* 3. *To exile from Jerusalem or return to it.* 4. *To banishment from the ark and house of God or restoration to them.* This is specially referred to in ver. 25. 5. *To death or life.*

II. THE NATURE OF HIS RESIGNATION. 1. *It was not insensibility or indifference.* How much he felt the position in which he was placed is evident from his language here, and his tears and other signs of mourning referred to in ver. 30. Those who do not feel their troubles cannot cherish resignation to them. Troubles which do not trouble require no exercise of submission. Resignation may be most eminently displayed by those who are most susceptible of suffering. 2. *It was not a stoical submission to the inevitable.* This is better than vain struggles and useless murmurs, but is not godly resignation. 3. *Nor did it involve abandonment of all prayer and effort to secure what was felt to be desirable.* David, while surrendering himself to the disposal of the Most High, carefully planned and laboured, and was prepared to fight, that he might obtain the victory. Christian resignation is not fatalism. 4. *It was trustful, loving submission to whatever might prove to be the will of God.* David recognized the hand of God in his adversities, saw that the issue of events would be according to the Divine appointment, and on this account was prepared to acquiesce in it. "Let him do to me as seemeth good unto him."

III. MOTIVES TO SUCH RESIGNATION. 1. *The rightful sovereignty of God.* He does rule over all, whether we will or no; and the recognition of his right to rule will much aid in producing willing submission to his will. "You know, my dear," said a poor man to his wife, when they were mourning the loss of a peculiarly interesting and affectionate child, "this family is God's garden, and he has a right to come into it and pluck any flower that pleases him best." 2. *His omnipotence.* "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God" (1 Pet. v. 6). Because he is almighty, his will must be accomplished; resistance is futile. At the same time, he is almighty to support, to bring good out of evil, and to "exalt in due time" (1 Pet. v. 6). 3. *His wisdom and goodness.* Which assure us that he does not act according to arbitrary choice, but that what "seemeth good unto him" is really good; so that in submitting to him we are acquiescing in our own ultimate well-being. 4. *Our sinfulness and unworthiness.* David was doubtless aided in resigning himself to the will of God by the memory of his heinous sins (comp. Judg. x. 15; Neh. ix. 33; Lam. i. 18; iii. 39; Dan. ix. 14; Micah vii. 9). We deserve more suffering than is inflicted upon us; we merit no good thing; the more readily, therefore, should we resign ourselves to whatever may be appointed for us. 5. *The blessings enjoyed by us or assured to us.* The memory of past enjoyments, which tends to embitter present griefs, should nevertheless awaken a gratitude which tends to reconcile us to them. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job ii. 10). The mercies still remaining to us, duly appreciated and acknowledged, will have a similar beneficial effect. The way in which God has led us through past difficulties should strengthen confidence in him, and render us willing to trust him with our future. Specially, if we are Christians indeed, let us keep in mind: (1) The relation in which we stand towards God, as his children, redeemed, reconciled, renewed; and the childlike spirit which becomes us. (2) The unspeakable blessings which as Christians we enjoy. Pardon, peace with God, access to him, assurance of his fatherly pity and love, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, with his special guidance, support, and consolation. (3) The promises made to us of all needful good (Ps. lxxxiv. 11; Matt. vi. 33); the co-operation of all things for our good (Rom. viii. 28); the Divine care, sympathy, and support (Ps. lv. 22; Heb. xiii. 5, 6);

and final deliverance from all affliction, and enjoyment of eternal glory—glory far outweighing all present trouble, and prepared for and increased through its right endurance (Rev. xxi. 4; Rom. viii. 18; 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18). 6. *The cross of Christ illustrates and enhances all other motives.* The love of God in Christ assures us in the darkest hours that he is love, and his ways are love. The sufferings of Jesus as our atoning Saviour make sure to us all spiritual and eternal blessings. His greater sufferings are adapted to reconcile us to our so much lesser ones. In his resignation we have the brightest and most powerful example, and reasons for imitation of it. As our fellow-Sufferer we know that he can, and are assured that he does, sympathize with us; and that he is the better able to succour us. 7. *The benefits* which flow from resignation. (1) "The peace of God" (Phil. iv. 7), and with it strength to endure: power also to do whatever may be possible towards deliverance. (2) Evidence to our own consciousness that we are the children of God. (3) Good influence over others. Proof to them of the worth of religion.

In conclusion, let us lay to heart that in any case we must suffer affliction. The only question is how and with what results? Shall we suffer in faith and hope and submission, and thus secure Divine approval, support, and blessing? or shall we suffer impatiently and rebelliously, thus adding to our sufferings, and gaining no blessing from them? "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!" (Isa. xlv. 9).—G. W.

Ver. 32.—*The place of worship.* "The top of the mount where God was worshipped" (Revised Version). This "top of the mount" is one of the most sacred spots in the world—the universe. For here the Son of God wept over Jerusalem, which lay full in view at his feet, as he thought of its coming destruction, and declared the cause of it (Luke xix. 41). In David's time there appears to have been a "high place" there, where men were accustomed to worship God. It seems strange that so near to the tabernacle such a place should have been tolerated, however difficult it was to abolish such separate worship elsewhere. Perhaps, however, this was simply "a place of prayer" (Acts xvi. 13), not of sacrifice or incense-burning, in which case it would not come under the condemnation of the Mosaic Law. One can hardly doubt that such places of worship must have been scattered over the land long before the known existence of synagogues. How otherwise could social religion, or religion at all, have been maintained? Three visits a year to the tabernacle or temple, and those of the men only, could not have been sufficient. How also could the sabbaths have been kept as days holy to the Lord? But without attempting to settle such questions, this Scripture may be used as suggesting some thoughts on places of worship.

I. THEIR SANCTITY. 1. *Because specially set apart and used for the worship of God.* Consecrated in the purpose of men, and by their devotions; by the prayers by which they are dedicated, and the worship constantly offered afterwards. 2. *Because they are scenes of Divine manifestation and gracious operation.* (Exod. xx. 24; Ps. lxiii. 2; Matt. xviii. 20.) They are meeting-places, not only between men and men, but between God and men, heaven and earth, consecrated by the presence and blessing of God.

II. THEIR VALUE. 1. *As witnesses.* (1) For God; reminding men of him, and calling on them to worship and serve him. (2) Of the nature of men; as spiritual, fitted and designed for worship, and immortal. 2. *As inviting to rest from ordinary occupations and employment in spiritual exercises.* 3. *As furnishing valuable opportunities for the exercise of gifts for the good of others.* Gifts of teaching, singing, organization, etc. 4. *In uniting men to each other in sacred bonds, and fostering mutual love and service.* 5. *In promoting piety, holiness, and happiness.* The moral virtues, as well as the godliness, of a people depend to a large extent on their places of worship.

III. THEIR BLESSED ASSOCIATIONS AND MEMORIES. There "our fathers praised" God (Isa. lxiv. 11); thither "we walked in company" with our own parents and best friends (Ps. lv. 14); there many of our most happy and profitable hours have been spent. There, it may be, we were first led to Christ; there we have often met with God, and consciously received his blessing; there we have received instructions and influences which have moulded our character and elevated our lives. There we have been relieved of anxieties, calmed when agitated, comforted when sorrowful, revived when languid, recalled to duty when we have wandered, strengthened in faith and courage when we have become enfeebled. There many a glimpse of heaven has been gained, and many a

foretaste of its bliss enjoyed. Many have attended their place of worship from childhood to old age; and esteem it one of the chief blessings of their life. "Planted in the house of the Lord," they "flourish in the courts of our God," and still "bring forth fruit in old age" (Ps. xcii. 13, 14), waiting to be transplanted to "the paradise of God" (Rev. ii. 7).

IV. OUR CONSEQUENT DUTY IN RESPECT TO THEM. 1. *To be thankful for them.* 2. *To take our part in establishing and maintaining them.* 3. *To attend them.* Frequently, regularly, punctually. To be negligent in these respects is to dishonour God, and to rob ourselves of blessing. 4. *To induce others to do so.* Happy the city, happy the land, in which places where men worship God abound, and are attended by crowds of true worshippers!—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVI.

Ver. 1.—Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth. It is the misfortune of troubled times like those in which David found himself, that unscrupulous men use them for selfish purposes. For those in danger have no time for careful examination, nor are their minds sufficiently calm for impartial judgment, but they act on first impressions, and catch at every straw. Ziba's present would naturally raise everybody's spirits, and be taken as a good omen; for it showed that David had adherents in unlikely quarters, when thus a servant of the house of Saul of his own accord brought so timely an offering. The asses saddled for riding contradict the idea that Ziba met David by chance as he was bringing the produce of the farm for the use of Mephibosheth's household. More probably the asses had been saddled for Mephibosheth's own use (comp. ch. xix. 26), and the provisions had been prepared as a contribution to the king's needs: but at the last moment the cunning Ziba managed to hurry away with his men, leaving his master in the lurch, and unable to get anything to ride upon in the short interval between David's escape and Absalom's entry. Moreover, possibly from being a cripple, and from the distressing circumstances of his early life, Mephibosheth always seems deficient in energy, and perhaps David's conduct in mulcting him of half his property may not really have been so unjust as it looks, supposing that it was his dilatoriness which gave Ziba the chance of going away with the whole convoy while he was wasting time. It was this apparent desertion of him by one whom he had so befriended which may have made David say, "All men are liars" (Ps. cxvi. 11), though subsequently he learned that the lie was Ziba's. The food consisted of two hundred loaves, or rather flat cakes of bread, a hundred bunches of dried grapes, a hundred cakes of pressed dates, and a skin of wine. Instead of "date-cakes," some of the versions render "fig-cakes;" but for this there is a special Hebrew word (see 1 Sam. xxx. 12).

Ver. 3.—**Thy master's son**; that is, the son of Jonathan, or even of Saul, as the word "son" is used very indefinitely in Hebrew. Mephibosheth held the property as their representative. **To-day shall the house**, etc. Ziba's slander was absurd. Mephibosheth was likely to meet with no kind treatment from Absalom; but perhaps he was a visionary, and David may have thought that he was holding back for any chance that might turn up. But upon this slander David acts with blamable impetuosity, and, indignant that the son of his old friend should so desert him, he gives Ziba all his lands. The grant would be valid only if David's cause prevailed, and Ziba so far deserves credit in that he attached himself to a ruined man; but his motive was not love to David, but selfish calculation.

Ver. 4.—**I humbly beseech thee** that, etc. The words are really a form of grateful acceptance. "I do obeisance" (see margin), that is, "I make my humble bow: may I find favour," etc.; may the king continue to look favourably upon me.

Ver. 5.—**Bahurim.** The exact site of this place is unknown (see note on ch. iii. 16). Lieut. Conder, following a Jewish tradition, identifies it with *Almit*, a village about four miles north-east of Jerusalem. If so it lay, not on the direct road to the fords, but on a side route. **A man of the family of the house of Saul.** The words do not mean that he was a near relative of Saul, but that he was a member of the mishpachah, the larger division of the tribe of Benjamin, to which the house of Saul, a much smaller subdivision of the family, belonged (see note on ch. xiv. 7). But he was a strong partisan, and so fanatical as to care little for his life, if only he could annoy the usurper. For besides "all the people," David had with him "the mighty men," a few of whom could easily have punished him.

Ver. 7.—**Come out**; rather, *out, out;* that is, "get out; begone, begone, thou mur-

derer and worthless man." Shimei could scarcely have referred to the murders of Ishbosheth and Abner, which were too remote to have so rankled in his memory; but as ch. xxi. is not in its chronological order, what probably called forth his anger was the surrender of Saul's sons and grandsons into the hands of the Gibeonites. Shimei, probably, even resented David's taking the side of the Gibeonites, and treating as a crime to be severely punished what he and all Saul's partisans regarded as righteous zeal for Israel. The three years' famine, followed by the execution of Saul's sons, made more tragic by the noble conduct of Rizpah, contributed largely to the revolt of the nation from David, and helps to explain that abandonment of him by the people, which otherwise seems so hard to understand (on the date of the famine, see note on ch. xxi.).

Ver. 9.—**Then said Abishai.** Abishai's indignation was natural, and it is evident, from ver. 10, that Joab shared it. Shimei's conduct was abominable, and David finally condemned him to death for it (1 Kings ii. 8, 9), having probably found that, even after his pardon, he was an implacable enemy. His revilings now must not only have been painful to David, but depressing to all the people that were with him, and there must have been many a murmur in the ranks at the king allowing such conduct to go unpunished. But he was in a state of great mental distress and self-condemnation. He had borne sorrow after sorrow since the day when, by his own great sin, he had opened the floodgates of wickedness; and now the son whom he dearly loved, and who had first been put wrong by a crime which might never have been committed but for his own example, was seeking both his crown and his life, and had made his cup of sorrow full to the brim and running over. At such a time of agony it was even a relief to have outward affliction to bear; for it brought the consoling thought that the Divine chastisement had its merciful limit. Jehovah had bidden Shimei revile him, and he would bear it because it was Jehovah's doing. "It may be that Jehovah will look upon my wrong, and that he will requite me good for his cursing of me this day." **Go over.** Abishai's word is explained by ver. 13. David's route seems to have lain in a narrow valley, and Shimei, running along the ridge on one side, was near enough for his words to be heard, and for his stones to come near the king's retinue. Abishai, therefore, asked permission to cross over to Shimei's side of the steep ravine with a few men, who would seize him and put him to death.

Ver. 12.—**Mine affliction.** This reading is supported by the Septuagint and Vulgate. The Syriac has "my subjection," possibly a free translation of the same reading. But the written text (K'tib) has "my wrong," either the wrong I have done, and of which I am bearing the punishment, or, as in the Revised Version, "the wrong done unto me." The correction of the Massorites (K'ri), is literally "my eye," that is, "my tears."

Ver. 14.—**Weary.** Evidently the name of a place; for David "refreshed himself there." It was probably a caravanserai, the full name of which was, "Rest for the weary," but gradually the title was shortened down to the last word, "Weary," Hebrew *Ayêphim*, which the Revised Version puts as a proper name in the margin.

Ver. 17.—**Is this thy kindness to thy friend?** After carrying the king to Ayêphim, on the banks of the Jordan, the narrator now turns back to Absalom, because David was to wait at the caravanserai for news from Jerusalem. And immediately on his arrival, Hushai hastens into Absalom's presence, loudly exclaiming, "Long live the king!" for such is the meaning of the Hebrew. The young man is surprised; for Hushai was David's friend and trusted confidant. Yet he does not suspect this sudden breaking of old ties, but, looking at the bright side only, sees in it a proof that his party was looked upon as sure of success, and David's cause as hopeless. He welcomes, therefore, so notable an adherent, and Hushai's pretences confirm his self-deceit; for he professes to regard Absalom as king, not by fraud and violence, but by the formal choice of both Jehovah and the people. On this assumption, obedience to the nation's choice became a religious duty, and Hushai's love to the father was a pledge of love to the son. We must not, however, condemn Absalom for too easy credulity. The nation was in his favour, and, had he acted with promptitude, David's cause would have been lost.

Ver. 18.—**The men of Israel.** Here and in ver. 15 the men of Israel are not contrasted with the men of Judah, but include them (see ch. xv. 10). Absalom's rebellion began at Hebron, in Judæa, and the selection of Amasa, a first cousin both of David and Joab, as commander-in-chief, suggests the conclusion that Absalom's chief strength lay in David's own tribe, though men from all the tribes on the west of the Jordan had also flocked to his standard. Besides them, Hushai speaks of **this people**, that is, the citizens of Jerusalem. For, while there had been general lamentation at David's departure (ch. xv. 23), yet the citizens had admitted Absalom without a struggle, and submitted to him. David's adherents are also constantly called "the people," because they did not belong to any special tribe,

but were drawn indifferently from them all.

Ver. 20. — **Give counsel among you**; Hebrew, *for you;* but we have no way in English of expressing the force of this phrase. In Greek it is called the ethic dative, and is supposed to give character to the address, and indicate that those to whom the words are spoken have also an interest in the matter.

Ver. 21.—**Ahithophel said.** Ahithophel's counsel was utterly abominable, even though the deed would not be regarded by any of the Israelites as incestuous. A king inherited his predecessor's harem, and Absalom's act was a coarse and rude assertion that David's rights were at an end, and that crown and lands and property, even to his wives, now all belonged to the usurper. But, while polygamy had thus degraded the wives and concubines into mere chattels, the harem was the property most jealously guarded by its owner (ch. iii. 7; 1 Kings ii. 22); and Absalom's act was an outrage which David could never have pardoned. And this was what Ahithophel wanted. He was afraid that if Absalom's cause began to decline, he might come to terms with his father, who would readily forgive a son if he submitted, but would certainly punish Ahithophel. For his own selfish purposes, therefore, he led Absalom on to a crime which rendered a reconciliation with David impossible, and pledged all the conspirators to carry out the matter to the bitter end; and that end could only be the death of David if the conspiracy succeeded. But this bitterness to David would vex all moderate men, and weaken Absalom's cause. It was of advantage only to such as were deeply committed to the rebellion, and bent on killing David. To him it was terrible sorrow; for he knew that this open shame was the punishment of his own secret infamy (ch. xii. 11, 12); and in it, again, he saw the meshes of the avenger's net tightening around him.

Ver. 22.—**A tent**; Hebrew, *the tent;* that constantly used by David and his family for the enjoyment of the cool evening breeze, and which the citizens of Jerusalem had frequently seen erected on the flat roof of David's house. It was when walking on this roof that David had given way to guilty passion, and now it is the scene of his dishonour.

Ver. 23.—**The counsel of Ahithophel**, etc. These words form a sort of apology for Absalom. He ought to have had more respect for his father than to offer him so grievous an insult, and aggravate by so terrible a deed the quarrel between them. But his conduct from first to last was utterly mean and selfish, and his only excuse here is that there was such a glamour round Ahithophel, that men yielded up their own judgment to him without an effort, and did what he advised as if it had a religious sanction. **At the oracle of God**; Hebrew, *had asked the Word of God;* that is, had consulted God by Urim and Thummim. When a man went to the priest to inquire in this way, he did whatever he was told; and the word of Ahithophel was accepted with equal deference.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—14.—The facts are: 1. David, passing on his way, is met by Ziba with a present for the king and his servants. 2. On inquiring after Mephibosheth, David is told by Ziba that he was staying in Jerusalem in expectation that, as a result of the present revolt, the kingdom would be restored to him as representative of the house of Saul. 3. Accepting this statement as correct, David assigns Mephibosheth's property (ch. ix. 9—12) to Ziba, who thereupon makes obeisance. 4. Proceeding to Bahurim, David is assailed by Shimei, who curses him, casts stones at him, reproaches him with deeds of evil, and avers that, as a punishment, God had taken the kingdom from him and given it to Absalom. 5. Astonished at the insolence, Abishai seeks permission to slay the man; but David, piously recognizing a providential chastisement in the event, will not have it so, and points out further to his people that this was but a small trouble in comparison with Absalom's conduct, and that probably God would have compassion and vouchsafe a compensating blessing. 6. David and his company proceed on their way, still insulted by Shimei, till they come to a place where they can refresh themselves.

The cruelty of avarice. In this chapter the historian gives us a foil to the loyalty and devotion of the men referred to hitherto. Ittai, Zadok, Abiathar, and Hushai have their opposites in Ziba and Shimei and Ahithophel. It is said that the beasts of prey and creeping things come forth in the night; and so in this dark and sad time for David, the foul creatures come forth and manifest their full strength. Good men

are always encompassed by evils, but they are kept in check by the very force of the prosperity of the good. When once that begins to wane, they revive and put forth their destructive powers. The time had now come for their appearance. In the case of Ziba we see avarice in its most hideous form.

I. IT CAREFULLY FRAMES ITS SCHEMES. An avaricious man is usually endowed with a good measure of prevision, and his success lies very much in the wicked perversion of this gift. The elaborate present of Ziba to David (vers. 1, 2), and the meeting with him just when a token of kindness would be most acceptable, was the result of hours and days of scheming. The end in view is so precious to the greedy soul that trouble and toil to attain to it go for nothing. There is a spontaneous avarice, as when men suddenly seek to grasp what is apparently within their reach, for the evil principle, like a slumbering hungry dog, is ever quick to discern and to act; but the great achievements of avarice, by which men become rich or gain some swift advantage, are the result of the prostitution of the gifts of foresight and skill in arrangement to low cunning and selfishness. There is many a scheme being concocted at this hour, in commercial and political circles, for the circumvention of others to the enrichment of self.

II. IT CONFORMS ITS PLANS TO THE NATURE OF MEN AND CUSTOMS OF THE AGE. Ziba knew what David had done for Mephibosheth (ch. ix. 1—10), how generous was the king's heart, how he would appreciate fidelity in the time of trouble and scorn ungrateful conduct, how his associates in trial would approve any favour conferred on the loyal at the cost of the disloyal, and how it was within the prerogative of a monarch to confiscate the property of a traitor. Avarice is a careful student of human nature and of the usages of the world. Its success often depends on quickness of discernment, and a practical application of the knowledge of men and things to the purposes of a base, greedy heart. A good and generous man may be as quick in discernment, and may in the intercourse of life gather as much knowledge of human nature, but he differs from the avaricious man in that he scorns to turn all this to the sole promotion of purely selfish interests.

III. IT TAKES SPECIAL ADVANTAGE OF THE TROUBLES AND WEAKNESS OF OTHERS. There is a fiendish sagacity in avarice. Ziba saw that the sorrows of David furnished a choice opportunity for making an impression on his generous sympathetic nature by a manifestation of loyal interest and kindly consideration for his comfort; and he saw also that the bodily infirmity of Mephibosheth (ch. ix. 13; xix. 25, 26) would prevent his going out to David to express his own loyalty. How splendid the opportunity of so representing matters as to secure the confiscation of Mephibosheth's inheritance to himself as a reward for his personal faithfulness! How this is too often illustrated, in the eager rush after wealth, in the conduct of certain nations towards others, is well known. There are hard-hearted men who rejoice in the commercial calamities of others, because they see their chance of turning them to their own advantage, and not a few are willing to profit by the incapacity, physical, social, and intellectual, of others, by not providing them with the means by which they can rise above it, and act their own part in the world's affairs. The curse of God surely rests on such evil-doers.

IV. IT IS HEEDLESS OF THE PAIN IT INFLICTS. David's heart was sad enough. Trouble in most fearful form had come on him. His anguish is seen in the comfort he felt in the fidelity of the high priests and in the presence of the ark. But what though his heart was smitten! Avarice can rive it the more by concocting a lie most suited for such a purpose. Ziba knew that the story about Mephibosheth would rend further the sore wounds of the much-riven heart. What of that? Property would be acquired. What of blasting the reputation and scattering the fortunes of an innocent cripple? His property would become Ziba's. Such things do occur still in the earth. There may be degrees in avarice, but in every case there is a heedless infliction of pain and a positive injury to the innocent. Is there a God to avenge wrong? Is there a future retribution? Seeing that many avaricious men escape positive punishment in this life (Ps. xlix. 16—20; lxxiii. 1—17), a righteous moral order must either be denied or we must look on to the day when God shall give to every man according to the deeds done in the body (2 Cor. v. 10).

V. IT ASSUMES THE FORM OF NOBLEST VIRTUES. Ziba comes to David as a kindly, faithful, generous subject, sorrowful for his affliction, ready to minister to his comfort,

and even prepared to break the ties which for years had held him to Mephibosheth. Loyalty and religion are publicly professed. The assembled friends of the king are witnesses to his noble conduct. Wolves may come in sheep's clothing, Satan may assume the appearance of an angel of light, and, in the same way, avarice may, if occasion requires it, hide its hateful form under the guise of the two most reputable of all qualities—loyalty and religion. This is done in varying degrees. There is a conformity to prevalent political opinion, to social customs, to decency of bearing, and to the observances of the sanctuary, not because of a thorough conviction of right founded on knowledge and principle, but because it will contribute to swell the amount of one's gains and elevate one's position in the world. God desireth *truth* in the inward parts (Ps. li. 6). The whited sepulchre is no screen from his eye (Matt. xxii. 27; cf. Ps. cxxxix.).

The reproaches of the wicked. A more graphic account of insult and personal wrong than this is not found in the Bible. The language of the sixty-ninth psalm is fitly descriptive of the events of this sad day, as also of Ps. iii. and iv. The harsh voice of Shimei, it is to be feared, was but the index of a feeling in many hearts towards the unfortunate man of God. The political element enters into the attack (ver. 8), but there was a deeper sentiment of hostility in which the ungodly of Jerusalem would be predisposed to share. Everything seems intense in David's life, as a consequence of the natural force of his character, the depth of his feelings, and the corresponding strength of emotion, whether of love or hate, which his conduct aroused. Except in seasons of fierce persecution, and most of all in the instance of our Redeemer, the reproaches of the wicked do not assume the violent form here indicated, but in every instance of their occurrence we may trace features in common with this.

I. THEY PROCEED FROM RELIGIOUS AVERSION. David was a religious man. His kingly position was won by virtue of his being a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. xv. 28; xvi. 7—13). In spite of his great fall, he was a lowly, devout servant of God, intent on the spiritual welfare of the people. When Shimei assailed David as a usurper (ver. 8), and so made a political allusion, he revealed his own intense aversion both to David's piety and the religious reason for his elevation to the throne in the place of Saul. He evidently did not enter into the theocratic views of Samuel (1 Sam. xv., xvi.). He was a man who preferred the unspiritual order of Saul's government to the Divine order of David's. Here lay the real secret of the reproaches heaped upon the unfortunate king. No godly man, no man of elevated views or of spiritual sympathies, could originate such malicious words. This was the secret also of the reproaches heaped on Christ. He was better than his haters liked him to be. Intense aversion to his superior spirituality was the spring of their conduct. They hated him without a cause, *i.e.* a valid reason. In looking at the reproaches against the persecuted Christians, we find the same to be true. The evil words spoken nowadays against good men have their root in a dislike of the holy life which, by contrast, is a reminder of sin and guilt.

II. THEY ARE PROFESSEDLY BASED ON DEFECTS OF CHARACTER. It might be inferred from the words of Shimei (ver. 7) that he was a very righteous, peaceful, God-fearing man, for he comes forth as the accuser of the king, and pleader for what is just to man and God. But we know that this was only a cover for the real feeling. Those who are not holy are obliged, by compulsion of conscience, to find a plea for deeds of shame. The failure of David in one period of his life was most probably known to Shimei, and it is seized with eagerness and made the justification of a reproach bearing on his entire life, and imputing deeds of which David was innocent. Saving the case of Bathsheba and Uriah, David's life was anything but one of blood and worthlessness (Belial). To Saul and his sons he had been unusually kind. The elevation of his character had given dignity and power to the kingdom. These tactics of wicked men are constant; the occasional weaknesses of life are laid hold of, and magnified so as to be representative of the entire life. The free and frank words of Christ, true as they were, not long before his death, were laid hold of and used as though blasphemy and evil works were his general characteristics (Matt. xii. 24; John x. 32—36). Our failings in Christian life doubtless are a reproach to us, and give occasion to the enemy to blaspheme; but the malice of the wicked is seen in that they gladly lay hold of these as a plea for gratifying the feeling of aversion they cherish towards the religion we profess.

III. THEY ARE ESPECIALLY DEVELOPED IN THE DAY OF ADVERSITY. The slumbering aversion of Shimei found expression in form of outrageous insult when David's fortunes began to wane. Malice is associated with cowardice, and it is only when fear of punishment passes away that the malice puts forth its vigour. Malice is cruel, and therefore it adds wound to wound. The history of Christian persecution illustrates this. The very sorrows which ordinarily would draw forth sympathy only induce the feeling expressed in "There is no help for him in God." The natural tendency of the multitude to adhere to the prosperous and stand aloof from the failing cause, becomes intensified into active opposition when a lurking aversion to the individual and his cause has been cherished (Ps. xxxv. 15; xlix. 18). Even the patience and sorrow displayed in the season of providential trial are turned against the sufferer by the keenness of an evil ingenuity. So much freedom does the evil spirit find in the day of calamity that the whole life is charged with the faults that belong only to a portion of it. No consideration is given to repentance and amendment. To crush and ruin are the sole aim of the reproach.

IV. THEY ARE CHARACTERIZED BY THE DARING ENCOURAGED BY A SENSE OF SECURITY. Shimei knew his victim well enough to believe that he would not have the heart to allow the sword to smite him down; for all the antecedents of David's life were in the direction of leniency and gentleness towards those who sought his hurt, though he spared not the man who sought or professed to take away the life of Saul. He was shrewd enough to notice that the grief of the king was so intense, as barefooted and in silence he passed out of the city, as not to allow of his finding room for thoughts of vengeance, and thus, being secure, the reproaches poured forth. The same conclusion was arrived at by the vindictive Pharisees, who loaded the Saviour with reproach. They knew, from all they had seen and heard, that he would not use force against them, and would not avail himself of the Roman authority in self-defence, and hence, secure in these directions, they were very daring, and spared not words and deeds to crush still further the spirit of the illustrious Man of sorrows. In daily life young Christians are often loaded with reproaches by wicked young men, with a boldness that gains strength from the fact that there is no one present to rebuke them, and that the assailed youth is prohibited by the principles he professes from using reproach and violence in return (Matt. v. 39, 43, 44).

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. In the providential discipline of life, we may look for a combination of sorrows from independent sources, but yet all subservient to good for the children of God. 2. We should be so careful of our life every day that we give no apparent occasion for any one to bring charges against us when the failure of our earthly prosperity arouses attention. 3. The freedom exercised by wicked men in pouring forth their hatred against the good is of short duration, and cannot really hurt those who bear their reproaches in a right spirit. 4. We ought to discount largely the accusations brought against good men by those whose life and conduct reveal an absence of sympathy with the kingdom of God.

The waves and billows of God. The events narrated in vers. 5—13 have an aspect towards man and towards God. The scene of a rejected monarch leaving his seat of government, and, while so doing, assailed by an enemy, is a vicissitude in human affairs which, though special in its colouring, is frequent in the annals of the world. It is a case of human ingratitude and violence on the one side, and human suffering on the other. But to the mind of David the sufferer, and to the sacred historian, the vicissitude is seen to stand in direct relation to the government of God, and is invested with its deepest interest in that aspect. The expression of the psalmist here finds exemplification: "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (Ps. xlii. 7). The troubles are earthly; they roll on according to fixed laws, and are raised by agencies that seem to act by virtue of their own nature; and yet they are God's. The Hebrew discernment of the Divine element in the bitterest trials is clear and sure. We learn here the following truths.

I. THERE ARE GRADATIONS OF TROUBLE IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GODLY. There are distinct troubles in David's experience as here described, and they are graduated in weight. It was something to leave the city and worship he loved; it was more to break up a home; it was worse to lose regal authority; it was worse still to pass out

in sight of the thousands of Israel, poor and powerless; it was a greater wave to have to listen to the reproaches and cursings of the wicked; but the greatest billow of all was the knowledge that his now eldest son, his former pride and delight, was in rebellion against him, and was seeking his life (ver. 11). Fathers, kind and loving, only can estimate the greatness of this swelling billow. Compared with this, all else in form of loss of property and home and friends, must be expressed by the inferior term "waves." And, as we shall see, the magnitude of this is the greater still, because perceived to be in some sort the consequent of the former errors of the sufferer. There are many tribulations for the righteous, in many instances arising out of their own conduct, and it may seem a truism to say that some are greater than others; but the fact deserves noting, inasmuch as material and social troubles, which to an observer seem to press most heavily, are often slight compared with others that enter more into the depths of the soul.

II. THE REAL GRADATION OF TROUBLE IS OFTEN NOT DISCERNIBLE BY ANY BUT THE SUFFERER. To Joab and men of his character it would seem to be the climax of all calamity that a "dead dog" should curse and throw stones at a king. It was a climax in the sense of coming upon other calamities, but only David could perceive its relative weight in the storm then passing over him. His fatherly heart alone could feel the full crushing force of the son's ingratitude and cruelty. He alone could discern with agonizing feeling the relation between his own sin and this dire evil. He only knew the rebound in this dreadful form of the recent alienation of his own heart from purity and God. We often spend our pity on suffering men and women when visible disasters fall, and perhaps fix on some loss of property, or health, or children, or some terrible blasting of a life's hopes, as the item most oppressive to the smitten one. Possibly, in the unrevealed record of their own personal experience in relation to God, there is a fact which does more to bow down the spirit than all else beside. The heart of each man knoweth its own bitterness. There are secrets never to be unravelled here below, or, if made known in words, fully realized in their sorrow-causing power only by those whose past experience is bound up with their existence.

III. THEY ARE ASSOCIATED IN THE MIND OF THE SUFFERER WITH A SENSE OF PERSONAL DEMERIT. The connection of the events of this period of David's life with his past life was not simply discerned to be organic, but in that discernment there was a distinct recognition of his own unworthiness in the sight of God, yea, of his richly deserving these troubles of varying gravity. Probably not one man in that strange procession, except Nathan, divined the real thoughts and feelings of David. The curses of Shimei were as the echo of his own conscience on that dark and dreadful day when love to God yielded to unchastity and design to slay. The horrible sin came forth, and, though truly forgiven, was now "ever before" him (Ps. li. 3). No curses of the wicked were too bad for him! No rebellion of cherished son was too severe a chastisement for him! The "waves and billows" rolled on. Were they not fitly framed to swallow up one so self-condemned, so unworthy of pity? Yes; here lies the meaning of those bared feet, that bowed head, that silence under the curse, that moral inability to raise a finger to stay the swelling flood of troubles. Nor are we to wonder that this should be so in the case of a forgiven and restored soul (ch. xii. 13); for the more pure the heart of the restored one, the more blessed the sense of actual forgiveness, the keener will be the feeing of demerit when the old sin is brought to the memory by calamitous events which it set in train. It takes a very holy nature to appreciate properly what sin really is. In the instance of all who experience the "waves and billows" of God, there is, with a clearness more or less full, an association of the trouble with their own past demerit. Whether they can, as David did, actually trace the lines, they know that all trouble is in some way connected with the presence of sin in the world, and that their own past relation to God was at one time such that no earthly disaster could be too great as a chastisement. Irreligious men don't know what this is; but it is a real fact in Christian life. "I am not worthy of the least of thy mercies;" "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (Gen. xxxii. 10; Lam. iii. 22).

IV. THERE IS A DISTINCT RECOGNITION OF THE WILL OF GOD IN THEM. There is an instructive difference in the conduct of Abishai and David. The man of the world saw the passion and heard the voice of Shimei, and his anger was roused accordingly; the sorrowing man of God saw only the will of God. He seemed deaf to the torrent

of curses; with head bowed to the earth, he saw not the man, and the thud of the stones made no impression. "The Lord hath said unto him, Curse David." Yes; it was the Lord. The words of the prophet were true (ch. xii. 10—14). Spiritual perception is spontaneous, and, to the godly man, infallible. It passes by the visible to the invisible. Second causes are lost in the efficient Cause. Speculative questions as to human freedom and consecution of events are left behind. The solution of the actual experience in the passing events is found. It is God. This is the significance of all to David. The "waves and billows" are *his*. They roll to do his will. The force of almightiness is in them. This spiritual discernment plays an important part in the lives of all true Christians. It is not ignorance, it is not a disregard of philosophy on their part, it is not a violation of the sequences of scientific law, when, with an intuition clear and irresistible, they see God in the troubles that fall upon themselves. For spiritual intuition is a higher faculty than logical judgment, and relates to a sphere above all physical sequences. There is no more possibility of men setting this aside by reasonings and discussions concerning physical laws, than the perception of an external world by vision can be set aside by the proof of the existence of a physiological structure of the eye. If commercial disaster falls, if health fails, if friends die, if children become rebellious, if the seeds of former sins bear their bitter fruit,—in all God is seen. Nothing comes in form of trouble to his children but that he has a will in it. There may be a human, even physical side, but the child will discern the Father's will (Heb. xii. 5—10).

V. THE SENSE OF PERSONAL DEMERIT AND DISCERNMENT OF THE WILL OF GOD TONE DOWN THE HARDER TENDENCIES OF HUMAN NATURE. Abishai was true to his nature in wishing to cut off the head of the "dead dog;" and David was true to the chastening effect on his nature of these terrible trials when he resisted the suggestion (ver. 10). The heart becomes tender and gentle when under the chastening hand of God, provided, as in David's case, there is a due discernment of personal unworthiness, and of the gracious though just purpose of God in the trouble. We are reminded of One who also endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; who when reviled, reviled not again, and even when bearing more than David could here was pitiful and kind to his foes (Heb. xii. 2, 3; 1 Pet. ii. 23; Luke xxiii. 34). It is the mark of a true endurance of the righteous will of God, and conformity of self to the scope of the Divine purpose, that there is in time of trouble no fretting and chafing against the instruments which he may use, be they men or things. Who can curse when the holy will is doing its work? Who can be in wrath and find time for antagonisms when the soul is absorbed in contrite recognition of sin and humble prostration before a storm designed to purify the heart? What gratitude is due to God for the softening influences of calamity! How much richer in meekness and gentleness and the milder and more Christly virtues are many for the poverty and pain they have experienced! The sons of Zeruiah, still so strong and fierce in the world, little know the blessedness of being like unto him who was "meek and lowly in heart."

VI. WITH SILENT HOMAGE TO THE MAJESTY OF GOD THERE IS BLENDED TRUST IN HIS MERCY. David was not playing a part before the eye of man. There was nothing histrionic in his conduct. The profound homage to the Holy One which underlay his confession before Nathan, "I have sinned" (ch. xii. 13), was now again rendered in the secrecy of his own soul. The head bowed in submission to the fierceness of the storm indicated an acknowledgment of the righteousness of God. Much rather would the humbled king have been free from the necessity of speaking with the "sons of Zeruiah," and have borne the terrible storm without a thought of protest or feeling of complaint. It is in the most critical moments of life that the soul shrinks from the outward strife of tongues, and in the solemn silence of its own thoughts renders to God a sinful creature's homage. But with this utter surrender to the rights and punitive appointments of the Eternal there is blended a quiet, modest trust in his great mercy. "It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction" (ver. 12). "It may be." Note the content of the words: "He is merciful and gracious. It is inherent in the nature of the Author of the covenant with Israel to be so. The words of the past are evidence of this. I am undone and have no claim; all that comes to crush me comes justly; what he does he does for his Name's sake. Other poor sinners have waited not in vain; the hour may come when he will see his glory to be one with

my deliverance, and then the storm will cease. 'He will requite me.' Mercy will find a way of enriching my poor troubled soul out of the very ills which so justly have come upon me." The true heart in its deepest sorrows never loses faith in God's goodness and care. It holds to the possibility of a turn in the tide. It rests not on its merits, not on speculations upon what is unknown, but upon the assured character of God as revealed in Christ. It assumes and presumes nothing, but leaves all with him, and so finds comfort in the hope that through his free unmerited grace all things shall be found to work together for good (Rom. viii. 28).

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. It is an illustration of the dreadful nature of sin that it deposits seeds of trouble which may be inactive during a season of prosperity, but which put forth their strength when adversity falls upon us (vers. 5, 6). 2. The children of God may do well to remember that there are watchful foes, human and Satanic, ready to take advantage of any circumstance that may bring reproach on them as servants of the living God (vers. 5, 6). 3. Our faithful attachment to those bearing sorrow because of their shortcomings is a duty, when they bear it in a submissive spirit, even though it cause us to be sharers in their sufferings (vers. 6, 13, 14). 4. In seeking to alleviate the sufferings of the oppressed, we should abstain from vindictive passions (ver. 10). 5. The most tender consideration and sympathy should be extended towards those whose hearts are crushed by the ingratitude and cruelty of their own children (ver. 11). 6. The most effective way of ministering to those whose spirits are broken down by providential chastisements is to foster in their hearts simple trust in God's great mercy (ver. 12). We obtain evidence of our being true children of God when, in the time of our calamity and amidst persecutions, we are followers to those who, when "reviled, reviled not again" (ver. 11; cf. 1 Pet. ii. 23).

Vers. 15—23.—*Illustrations of facts and principles.* The facts are: 1. Absalom enters Jerusalem with his adherents and Ahithophel. 2. Hushai presents himself before Absalom, with a salutation in ambiguous language. 3. On Absalom expressing surprise that he had not gone with David, he, with studied caution, expresses his readiness to serve whom the Lord and all the men of Israel might choose, and further declares his intention to "serve" in the son's presence as he had in the father's. 4. Absalom, seeking counsel, is advised by Ahithophel to strengthen his position by taking possession of his father's concubines. 5. Whereupon Absalom, in the view of the people, conforms to the advice. 6. Ahithophel is represented as a man whose reputation as a counsellor was of the highest character. The historian passes from the sorrows of David to the aspirations and first measures of Absalom, and reveals another line of providential events apparently working in another direction, and yet, in the light of Nathan's words (ch. xii. 7—12), clearly tending to the realization of one purpose. It is only the religious man that can discern the mind of God in occurrences utterly dissimilar in their bearing. The good are crushed and the vile are exalted, but the crushing and the elevation are but products of free human instrumentality, taken hold of by an unseen Power, to bring about the ends of a righteous administration of justice. In the opening accounts of Absalom's entrance on political power we have instructive illustrations of facts and principles.

I. DEFERENCE WON BY AGE AND CHARACTER. The rash and reckless Absalom treats the aged Hushai with unwonted respect, even while regarding him as a "friend" of David (vers. 16, 17). The violence usually accompanying a bold revolt was evidently restrained by the will of God acting through the natural influence of years combined with reputation for moral worth. Occasionally wicked men have been heedless of infancy and age, and the better the men associated with their opponents, the more readily have they cut them off. But as a rule it is not so. History records cases of the kind here narrated. The reason is plain: sin is ashamed in presence of goodness, and the sinner's arm is weak to smite down what is its own condemnation. Conscience revives and restrains action in the presence of goodness; and the heart must be brutal beyond all relief if hoary hairs do not touch it. They speak of the coming grave, and the voice is not in vain. *Integer vitæ scelerisque purus*, man wields a silent power, not only over the fabled wolf, but over wolf-like men (Horace, I. ode xxii.).

II. THE PART OF SAGACIOUS MEN IN HUMAN AFFAIRS. Hushai and Ahithophel differed much in moral character, but they were similar in their position as advisers in the

affairs of state. Their acts show them to have been men of sagacious mind, able to apply the results of extended observation and insight into character to the changing circumstances of the day. As a matter of fact, they played the most important part, by means of their sagacity, in the events of this part of David's life; and their action suggests to us how much of human life in its social and political relations is connected with the thoughts and plans of men of this class. As in a ship a few really control the fate of the many, so in nations a few regulate affairs that involve the weal or woe of millions. No system of government can avoid this fact. Mental power is supreme in the state. Moral influences from the mass may set limits to its action, and open lines along which it must work, but its mighty force is manifest. It is a case of mind rising above mind. Hence the need of prayer that our mentally gifted men may be good men. Hence, also, their solemn responsibilities before God.

III. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A POST OF EXTREME DELICACY AND DANGER. Hushai was just now entering on his perilous duties as friend of David in the court of Absalom, and the utmost care was requisite that he might both save his own head and serve his beloved king. Had he not been sustained by the confidence that God would bring to nought the devices of the wicked, he must have often been overwhelmed by the pressure of his responsibilities. There are analogous positions still in life. Diplomacy knows them; commerce is not a stranger to them; the Church furnishes them; benevolent men have often to work in secrecy, though not by deceit; peacemakers find that they may mar their work for lack of discretion, and run the risk of losing reputation with one or both parties. In all such instances the consciousness of being in the right, that wit and wisdom are devoted to unselfish ends, and that God may be asked to give his help, will sustain the heart, give penetration to moral perceptions, and ensure self-possession. All honour to the men who for a good cause assume such responsibilities!

IV. THE COEXISTENCE WITH EVIL OF NEUTRALIZING FORCES. Ahithophel had a great reputation, and devoted the force of his sagacity to the evil cause of a rebel. The forces of evil at work against David were strong, and, to ordinary men in Israel, invincible. Yet we who know more than Absalom and his friends then knew, can see that all this time there were, coexisting with and working secretly and silently against all the forces of evil, other forces which could not but tend to neutralize their action. In this we have on a small scale an illustration of the fact that, though there are in the world many pronounced forms of evil at work against the good of man and the rightful authority of Christ over mankind, there is also a silent, and in its operation a secret, force at work, through the agency of the faithful few, which all the time tends to check the evil, and must in the end overcome it. It has been so from the day when the Seed of the woman was promised to bruise the serpent's head. This fact should inspire the hearts of the faithful in every land in spite of outward appearances.

V. THE CITY OF GOD IS SOMETIMES THE SCENE OF CONTENDING POWERS. The holy city, the joy of the whole earth, the chosen abode of the Eternal, and the natural abode of peace, was now the scene of a strife between adverse powers of good and evil. The happy days when the people sang for joy and felt secure in the presence of the symbol of the Divine favour (ch. vi. 12—19) were no more. As in some great historic wars the conflict becomes concentrated on the seat of government and influence, so now the great question which involved the welfare of Israel and the Gentiles was being fought out in Jerusalem. Here we certainly find an analogue to times of trouble when the city of God—the Jerusalem of the Christian dispensation—has been the scene of conflict between the powers that would get rid of the Divine authority and set up an order of things not of God. Men have contended within the Church to rob Christ of his Divine rights, and the faithful few have striven to render service for him according to the measure of their wisdom and goodness. The apostles seem to have anticipated such seasons (2 Pet. ii. 1, 2). As this trouble in Jerusalem was connected with the failings of David as well as the vices of Absalom, so the contentions and sorrows that have been experienced in the Church have not been unconnected with the shortcomings of the elect of God.

VI. AMBIGUOUS FIDELITY IS A PURELY HUMAN EXPEDIENT. The words of Hushai to Absalom were understood by the latter to be the expression of his loyalty to himself; and, on the surface of them, the words doubtless had that meaning. But as a

matter of fact, Hushai's heart was with David, and his language was capable of being interpreted in accordance with his true feelings. It is a question of casuistry as to whether, under the circumstances, he was warranted in devising means for deluding Absalom. The Bible does not commit itself to all the acts of its characters; and in our judgment on men we ought to have some regard to the moral atmosphere of their daily lives. But in this ambiguous expression of fidelity we have an instance of what largely prevails in the world. Men still coin phrases to afford satisfaction to others while keeping peace with their own convictions. Forms are adopted which are unimpeachable; but the real feeling is kept secret. In some countries there are current forms for expressing loyalty to the "powers that be," freely employed to the satisfaction of rulers and the safety of those who use them. Attachment to certain political principles is announced while the particular application of them is a matter of private reservation. In commercial houses a form of loyalty to employers' interests often passes with a purpose to sacrifice them to a rival interest. In Church affairs it is possible to accept standards in form and empty them of essential content. The practice is to be condemned in every case. Strong faith in God can dispense with such expedients. He who was chastising David through Absalom knew how to restore the chastened one in due time, without the expedients of human duplicity. The example of Christ and his apostles is better than that of Abraham, Jacob, and Hushai (cf. Gen. xii. 13—20; xxvii. 20—27; John xviii. 33—37; Acts iv. 7—12).

VII. GREAT PRINCIPLES ARE LIABLE TO ABUSE. Hushai evidently laid down a great and sound principle as the rule of his conduct when he declared that, as for himself, he was prepared to serve him whom the "Lord, and this people, and all the men of Israel" might choose. Had Absalom been as keen as he was ambitious, he would have seen that this was a principle which so far could not ensure attachments to himself, because two of the conditions were not fulfilled at present. No doubt he hoped that, in some strange way, his choice by "this people" would be supplemented by the choice of God and all Israel. There was here an abuse of a principle, commonly recognized in those times, by both Hushai and Absalom. Hushai took it as a mere cover for saving his conscience, while getting Absalom to believe in his fidelity. The same twofold object was sought by the following question and the very safe assertion, "As when (בַּאֲשֶׁר) I served in thy father's presence, so will I *be* (כֵּן אֶהְיֶה) in thy presence." He would *be* the same man while professing to serve Absalom. On the other hand, Absalom evidently thought the principle laid down very pious and patriotic, and to be respected because it was a principle, and in his superstitious and superficial deference to an orthodox utterance, he detected not the purpose for which it was stated. In the one case a principle was subordinated to cunning in a good cause; and in the other it was simply admired as a platitude by a bad man. The trade in important principles of action is very common. They are made to subserve ends by no means good. Advantage is taken of their natural influence over men, by reason of their clearness and moral force, to hoodwink them for carrying out special designs. Platform and press too frequently have dealt with great truths for no special love of the truths, but for party purposes, and to save credit for intelligence and good sense. Also there is a superstitious regard for a certain class of religious, moral, and political principles which causes many persons to think well of those who proclaim them, simply because of proclaiming them. This unreality in both public and private life should be discountenanced.

VIII. GREAT POWERS CONCENTRATE AGAINST THE LORD'S ANOINTED. The followers of Absalom, under the guidance of Ahithophel, confer with him as to the best course to pursue in order to effectually establish the position of the usurper, and cut off the fugitive king. In a measure, the second psalm is now fulfilled, substituting "counsellors" for "kings" (Ps. ii. 2). The fact that David had been anointed by God must have been familiar to them all. This evidence of his right to reign was clear enough, and no counter-deposition had come from God; and yet such is the blindness and desperate nature of men when alienated from God, that they meditate the destruction of a rule guaranteed from on high. Sin is madness as well as vileness. Our Saviour reminds his disciples that the same combination will take place against his authority (Ps. ii.; Matt. xvi. 18). The conspiracy was formed when keen and crafty men sought his death (Matt. xii. 14; xxvii. 7; John xviii. 14); it was revived when they sought to

crush his disciples (Acts v. 33); and it is in force now when men presume to dispense with his teaching and saving power. It is the old antagonism of the serpent and the Seed. Let every Christian brace himself to the conflict.

IX. THERE IS AN UNCONSCIOUS FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY. It is not likely that either Nathan or David proclaimed to the world the terrible prediction that was to be fulfilled within a few years (ch. xii. 7—12). Ahithophel was, therefore, an unconscious instrument in fulfilling the Word of God when he gave the desperate advice to Absalom (vers. 21, 22). It is thus that, in the perfectly free action of men, God's purposes are realized. He chastises his children by using men who at the same time are unconscious of being so used. This wonderful foreknowledge of what free men will do, and the execution of moral ends by the action of responsible agents, is possible alone to the Infinite One. There is involved in it a mystery before which we do well to bow with all humility. Men little think how their very deeds of evil are being worked into the warp and woof of the world's life, so as at last to bring out to view the wisdom and righteousness of God.

X. PUBLIC MEN HAVE IT IN THEIR POWER TO DEBASE PUBLIC MORALS. By the counsel given to Absalom, Ahithophel no doubt widened the breach between father and son beyond the point of reconciliation, and by a bold stroke inspired confidence in the minds of waverers; but he did it at the cost of public morality. The tone of public life was lowered. Vice became familiar. A blow was struck in an ostentatious way at purity of thought and feeling. A voluptuous throne meant a sensual people. There is always a temptation to public men to strike for power by deeds of doubtful and sometimes immoral character. Political ends may be secured at the cost of loss of moral tone to the community. Those who do this may be great and wise in the eye of the world, but they are the real enemies of the people, and deserve, as they will experience, the retribution of God.

XI. REPUTATIONS GREAT IN THE WORLD ARE NOT, THEREFORE, GREAT WITH GOD. Ahithophel was a man in great repute as a counsellor (ver. 23), but he was not in honour with God. The clever head was associated with a base and treacherous heart. The standard of distinction on earth is not the same as that in heaven. Intellectual powers are often grand in their range, but the excellence of the man lies in the subordination of them to high and holy moral principles. The greater the abilities, the greater the sin of not using them for God and his kingdom. There are many "first" in this life who will some day be "last" (Matt. xix. 30). The worship of intellect is one of the banes of modern times. Conformity to the sermon on the mount is more honourable than cleverness in human affairs.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. It is a safe rule of life to commit ourselves to an undertaking only on the condition that God approves as well as "all the men." 2. It is of immense advantage in times of perplexity to have in the mind a few clear and well-defined principles of conduct to which we may refer for guidance. 3. It is legitimate to bring the force of first principles to bear on those who are bent on evil ways, though it is not right to use them as a cloak for double-facedness. 4. In the midst of contending claims on our allegiance, we should give due force to the inquiry as to whom we are under the most binding obligations to serve, and it will be seen that Christ has the prior claim.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—(OLIVET.) *The benefaction of Ziba.* (*References:* ch. ix. 3, 9—13; xix. 24—30.) David had taken his last look at Jerusalem, and was "a little past the top" of Mount Olivet in his descent on the other side, when he was met by Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, with an apparently thoughtful and generous present. This man was originally a slave of the house of Saul; became a freed-man at its downfall; made his fortune out of its ruins; and had fifteen sons and twenty slaves. About seventeen years before, when inquiry was made for "any of the house of Saul," he gave information concerning the son of Jonathan. By the restoration of Mephibosheth to his patrimony, Ziba was reduced to his former status, and thenceforward cultivated the land for his master. And now, foreseeing the issue of the conflict, he sought to ingra-

tiate himself with the king, regain his position, and obtain his master's estate. Such appears to be the key to his conduct. We have here an illustration of a benefaction: 1. Occurring at a *seasonable moment;* when most needed and least expected; valuable in itself, and still more for the faithfulness and kindness it seemed to manifest. A man of David's generosity could not but be greatly affected by it. But an admirable gift does not always express a commendable purpose (Deut. xvi. 19; Eccles. vii. 7). "Whatever Ziba intended in this present, God's providence sent it to David for his support" (Matthew Henry). 2. Proceeding from *unworthy motives:* selfishness, covetousness, cunning craftiness (ch. i. 2—10), hidden under an ostentatious display of loyalty, sympathy, and benevolence. Ziba was well acquainted with the character of David, and shrewdly calculated upon the means of improving his present necessities to secure his own advantage. Impure motives often lurk, sometimes unconsciously, beneath imposing benefactions. 3. Conferred at *another's expense;* and by the employment of deceit, treachery, and robbery. "The whole, though offered as Ziba's, is the property of Mephibosheth: the asses are his, one of them his own riding animal: the fruits are from his gardens and orchards" (Smith, 'Dictionary'). Poor Mephibosheth! He was at this moment waiting for the return of his faithless and pitiless slave with the ass, to enable him to follow the king. His own account of his absence was consistent with his actions (ch. xix. 24); and the treachery of Ziba could not be denied. "Treacherous servants are a curse to their masters." It is no uncommon thing for one man to seek the credit which is due to another, and obtain it by deceiving, disappointing, and injuring him. 4. Accompanied with a *false accusation.* "And Ziba said," etc. (ver. 3). It was not improbable that the adherents of the fallen dynasty might seize the opportunity to attempt its restoration (ver. 5; ch. xx. 1); and already, perhaps, David entertained some suspicion of the loyalty of Mephibosheth. Hence Ziba might calculate on finding a ready hearing for his calumny. But "every tie, both of interest and gratitude, combined to keep Mephibosheth faithful to David's cause." Innocent men are often suspected and accused groundlessly. "When much treachery and ingratitude have been experienced, men are apt to become too suspicious, and to listen to every plausible tale of calumny" (Scott). "I cannot but pity the condition of this good son of Jonathan; into ill hands did honest Mephibosheth fall, first of a careless nurse, then of a treacherous servant; she maimed his body, he would have overthrown his estate" (Hall). "A false witness will utter lies" (Prov. xiv. 5). 5. Receiving an *undeserved recompense.* "Behold, thine is all that belonged to Mephibosheth" (ver. 4). "David, in the excitement of a momentary misfortune, is here guilty of a double wrong—first in treating the faithful Mephibosheth as a traitor, and then in royally rewarding the false and slanderous Ziba" (Erdmann). "Hearsay is no safe ground of any judgment. Ziba slanders, David believes, and Mephibosheth suffers" (Hall). 6. Followed by *flattering servility.* "I humbly beseech thee," etc. "He pretends to value the king's favour more than the gift he had bestowed" (Patrick). 7. Revealed at length in its *true character* (ch. xix. 27), as a selfish, deceitful, and base procedure; though even then the wrong done to the master is not fully repaired, nor the wickedness of the servant adequately punished.

APPLICATION. 1. Look beneath the outward appearance (John vii. 24). 2. Guard against plausible detractors. 3. Avoid hasty judgments (Ps. cxvi. 11; Prov. xiv. 15): and hear the other side. 4. Wait for the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.—D.

Vers. 5—13.—(BAHURIM.) *The reviling of Shimei.* (*References:* ch. xix. 16; 1 Kings ii. 8, 9, 36—46.) On pursuing his flight until he reached the Benjamite village of Bahurim (ch. iii. 6), David was encountered by another man connected with the house of Saul, who, instead of bringing flatteries and presents, flung "grievous curses" and stones; and (from a safe distance) gave vent to the long-repressed rage which, in common with other partisans of the fallen dynasty, he felt on account of David's exaltation (ver. 8). "Along the ridge he ran, throwing stones, as if for the adulterer's punishment, or when he came to a patch of dust on the dried hillside, taking up and scattering it over the royal party below, with the elaborate curses of which only Eastern partisans are fully masters—curses which David never forgot, and of which, according to Jewish tradition, every letter was significant" (Stanley). Abishai returned reviling

for reviling, and wished to take instant vengeance. But David said, "Let him alone," etc.; presenting an instructive contrast to both. "He strikes the same string of nobleness as before." We have here—

I. AN INSTANCE OF RAILING ACCUSATION. "Out, out [of the kingdom], thou man of blood," etc.! The language and conduct of Shimei were: 1. *Cruel.* He rails against David in the day of his calamity, and has "no pity." 2. *Cowardly.* Fear had kept him silent all these years; but "he that smiled on David on his throne curseth him in his flight" (Hall). Seeing that he is not pursued, he is encouraged to continue his imprecations, and becomes more furious (ver. 13). 3. *Malicious;* imbued with personal hatred. "The ungodly are always selfish. They judge of others, not by the laws of impartial justice, but by the standard of self-interest. David was called a usurper, a man of Belial, a murderer; and why? Because he had made himself the slave of lust, and had cruelly slain the noble Uriah? No; because he had been elevated by God to the throne of Israel, and had thus marred the prospects of the ambitious Shimei" (C. Bradley). 4. *Unfounded* and unjust. "Every word of Shimei was a slander." His accusations of wickedness in general, and of "the blood of the house of Saul" in particular (ch. iv. 11; xxi. 6), are the offspring of a wicked heart. "Shimei curses and stones at David, and barks like a live dog, though Abishai calls him a dead one. The only unjust act that ever David had done against the house of Saul he had newly done; that was, giving Mephibosheth's land; and here a man of the house of Saul is soon upon him" (Lightfoot). 5. *Misinterpretive.* (Ver. 8.) Whilst recognizing the judgment of God, he makes a wrong application of it. "We may here learn how falsely and wickedly men sometimes wrest the providence of God, to justify their unjust surmises and gratify their malignant passions" (Lindsay). 6. *Criminal.* He is guilty of high treason and blasphemy, and might justly suffer the penalty of the Law (Exod. xxii. 28; ch. xix. 21; 1 Kings xxi. 13); and if David had put him to death at the time, he would not have been condemned for injustice. 7. *Provocative* of wrath. Surely no man might more reasonably feel resentment than David; no man was ever more strongly incited to inflict punishment; and nothing but "a spirit of meekness" could have restrained him. It is not improbable that Ps. cix. records "the very words of Shimei, and the curses which he threw out against David, and which, as they could not but make a deep impression on his memory, he here repeats and then condemns. They are directly contrary to that temper and disposition shown by David in the other parts of the psalm; and they run all along in the singular number, whereas David speaks of his enemies in the plural" (C. Peters, 'Sermons:' 1776; see 1 Sam. xxii. 18, 19; xxvi. 13—25; *Expositor*, ii. 325).

> "O God of my praise, be not silent!
> For a wicked mouth and a deceitful mouth have they opened against me;
> They have spoken against me with a lying tongue," etc.
>
> (Ps. cix. 1—5.)

> "And they have requited me with evil for good,
> And with hatred for my love (saying):
> Set thou a wicked man over him,
> And let an adversary stand at his right hand;
> When he is judged, let him go forth guilty,
> And let his prayer become sin," etc.
>
> (Ps. cix. 6—19.)

> "This will be the reward of mine adversaries from Jehovah,
> And of those who speak evil against my soul.
> But thou, O Jehovah Lord, deal with me for thy Name's sake;
> Because thy loving-kindness is good, deliver thou me!
> They curse, but thou blessest;
> They arise and are ashamed, and thy servant is glad," etc.
>
> (Ps. cix. 20—31.)

II. AN EXAMPLE OF PATIENCE AND FORBEARANCE. "Let him curse," etc. (vers. 10—12). The manner in which David endured it was: 1. *Uncomplaining.* He does not retaliate; does not even vindicate himself; but is *silent* (1 Sam. x. 26, 27; Isa. liii.

5; Luke xxiii. 9). "When Shimei railed on him, he held his peace, and, though he had many armed men about him, yet did he not retort aught savouring of revenge, yea, repelled with the high courage of a patient spirit the instigation of the son of Gera. He went, therefore, as one dumb and humbled to the dust; he went as one mute and not moved at all. . . . Consider not what is rendered by others, keep thou thy place, preserve thou the simplicity and purity of thine own heart. Answer thou not the angry man according to his anger, nor the unwise man according to his indiscretion; one fault quickly provoketh another. If thou strikest two flints together, doth not fire break forth?" (Ambrose, 'De Officiis'). 2. *Repressive* of resentment, not only in himself, but also in others. "Answer him not" (Isa. xxxvi. 21; xxxvii. 3, 4). 3. *Self-accusing.* Although guiltless of the crimes imputed to him, he feels himself guilty of others not less heinous. "Conscience in that hour had her own tale to tell, of the Almighty Disposer of events, who speaks to us by the reproaches of men as well as by his own blessings. Had he not merited from God, if not from men, whatever disaster could befall the murderer of Uriah? David feels within him that destitution of the Divine presence of which the absence of the ark is but an outward type" (R. Williams).

"Pure from the blood of Saul in vain,
He dares not to the charge reply;
Uriah's doth the charge maintain,
Uriah's doth against him cry.
Let Shimei curse: the rod he bears
For sins which mercy had forgiven;
And in the wrongs of men reveres
The awful righteousness of Heaven."
(C. Wesley.)

4. *Reverential;* looking devoutly (as others did not) beyond Shimei to the All-seeing, All-holy, and Almighty One, by whom he was permitted to be an instrument of retribution, and even employed as such, although not thereby exonerated from guilt (ch. xix. 18—20). "Abishai looked only to the stone (as it were), an instrument; but David looked higher, to the hand that was the supreme caster, and chastiser of him, as all the godly do (Gen. l. 20; Job i. 21); which is the ground of their patience under sufferings" (Guild). His vision of the supreme Judge fills him with holy awe and lowly penitence; his conscious offences against God make him reluctant to punish offences against himself; his dependence upon mercy disposes him to show mercy (Matt. v. 44; vi. 14, 15; Rom. xii. 19—21). 5. *Submissive;* humbly accepting the chastisement of God; and deeming this to be his proper business now, rather than seeking to execute justice on another (Micah vii. 9). "Behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good to him" (ch. xv. 26). "The ways of Providence interlace, not only in capacity, but in retribution; one thing is set over against another. Yet the payment comes, not in the manner nor at the time we might expect, it seems not in the connection we think due; but it comes, like doom. Call Absalom thankless, Shimei brutal, etc. All these things read half a riddle, unless we own that God, in whose counsels these are all as instruments in the hand of a man of war, is just. He gave us wine, let us take also the gall from his hands. If it is not due to us now, nor for this, it was for something else at some other time." 6. *Palliative.* "Behold, my son seeketh my life," etc. (ver. 11). He makes light of present wrongs by comparing them with other and greater. "It is the advantage of great crosses that they swallow up the less." 7. *Hopeful.* "It may be that Jehovah will look upon my guilt [tears]," etc. (ver. 12). "This consciousness of guilt also excited the assurance that the Lord would look upon his sin. When God looks upon the guilt of a humble sinner he will also, as a just and merciful God, avert the evil and change the suffering into a blessing. David founded upon this the hope that the Lord would repay him with good for the curses with which Shimei pursued him" (Keil). "Ziba's gifts did more harm than Shimei's curses; for those betrayed him into an act of injustice, but these proved his patience" (T. Fuller). They also had the effect of making him more humble, pure, prayerful, and filling him with new confidence and joy in God (Ps. cix. 30, 31). "A curse is like a cloud, it passes." "All things work together for good," etc.

"Lord, I adore thy righteous will;
Through every instrument of ill
My Father's goodness see;
Accept the complicated wrong
Of Shimei's hand and Shimei's tongue
As kind rebukes from thee."

(C. Wesley.)

REMARKS. 1. The best of men have been maligned; of the Son of God himself it was said, "He hath a devil." Can we expect to escape insult and provocation? 2. The maledictions of the wicked can do us no harm unless we suffer ourselves to imbibe their spirit. "No man is ever really hurt by any one but himself" (Chrysostom). 3. When reviled of men, instead of considering how little we have deserved their displeasure, we should rather consider how much we have deserved the displeasure of God. 4. We should also consider how little, in comparison with God, do we endure at their hands! 5. "Bless, and curse not" (Prov. xxv. 21, 22; xvi. 32). 6. Imitate "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. x. 1). 7. So what is meant for evil will turn to good.—D.

Vers. 9, 10.—(BAHURIM.) *The zeal of Abishai.* (*References:* 1 Chron. ii. 6; 1 Sam. xvi. 6; ch. ii. 18; x. 14; xxi. 17; xxiii. 18; 1 Chron. xviii. 12.) Of the three sons of Zeruiah (ch. v. 39), the youngest, Asahel, was slain in early life (ch. ii. 23); the oldest, Joab, was now present (ver. 10), "little trusting the revolution which a capricious stripling (like the Stuart Monmouth) was to lead;" the second, Abishai, was one of the earliest, bravest, and most faithful of David's supporters. As on a former occasion, when he sought to destroy Saul with a stroke, so now his thoughtless, headstrong, and undevout impulses needed to be checked. "The characteristic trait of his nature was a blunt, impetuous ferocity." His passionate emotion was—

I. NATURALLY EXCITED by the conduct of Shimei; and was, in some respects, commendable; inasmuch as it showed: 1. An *ardent affection* toward the king, his "lord;" like that of James and John toward Jesus (Luke ix. 54), and of Peter and the other disciples (Luke xxii. 49; Matt. xxvi. 51). The zeal of the Lord's enemies against him calls forth the zeal of his friends on his behalf. 2. A *burning indignation* against wrong-doing. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." 3. A *vehement desire* for the triumph of justice. He doubtless felt that the offender deserved to die; and was eager to "take off his head," in order to the vindication of the royal honour, the maintenance of the Divine Law, and the promotion of the public good. He thus displayed something of the zeal of Phinehas (Numb. xxv. 13; Deut. xxxiii. 9) and of Elijah (1 Kings xviii. 40; 2 Kings i. 10); without, however, being justified therein by the same necessity and authority, or imbued with the same simple, pure, and lofty spirit. It is difficult to indulge in resentment, even when proper to do so, without sin (John ii. 17; Eph. iv. 26).

II. WRONGLY INDULGED. "Let me go over," etc. This request was marked by: 1. *Inconsideration* and want of judgment. It is doubtful whether his attempt, if permitted, would have succeeded, for Shimei was hardly likely to be without defenders (ch. xix. 17); it could scarcely fail to hinder the king's flight and imperil his safety; and its success would have effected no useful purpose at such a crisis. Zeal is often blind and misguided (Rom. x. 2; Phil. iii. 5; Acts xvii. 5) as to the right *end*, the proper *means*, and the suitable *time*. "Zeal without knowledge is as wild-fire in a fool's hand." 2. *Vindictiveness;* such as frequently mingles with deserved indignation toward evil-doers; is bitter (Jas. iii. 14) and violent; and makes him who entertains it partaker of the evil which he condemns. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." 3. *Presumption* and vain-glory; not altogether unlike that of Saul (ch. xxi. 2) and of Jehu (2 Kings x. 16). How often do men feel confident of the rectitude of their course, although acting contrary to the will of God! and how often, whilst apparently full of zeal for public justice and "the glory of God," are they really full of pride and self-will!

"True zeal is merciful and mild,
Can pity and forbear;
The false is headstrong, fierce, and wild,
And breathes revenge and war."

III. RIGHTLY REPROVED. "What have I to do with you," etc.? The spirit of Abishai and Joab (who, perhaps, joined in the request) was different from that of David; which, in its self-control, patience, and forbearance, displayed the highest heroism, and foreshadowed the meekness of Christ. "True Christian zeal is no other than the flame of love. This is the nature, the inmost essence of it" (Wesley). What is contrary to it should be rebuked by: 1. The indication of the will of God (ver. 10). 2. The exemplification of a spirit of submission (John xviii. 11) and charity. 3. The assurance of the blessing with which it will be followed (ver. 12). "So the travellers went on. The roads diverged. The curses died away. The stones fell short of their aim. The evening closed on that long day of weariness and sorrow—the dreariest day that David had ever known; and he and the partners of his exile rested for the night" (Plumptre).—D.

Vers. 15—19.—(JERUSALEM.) *An inconsistent friend.* "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" (ver. 17; ch. xv. 37). On his unresisted and triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, Absalom was met by Hushai with the exclamation, "Long live the king!" (1 Sam. x. 24). Such a display of loyalty to himself on the part of "David's friend" (companion, favourite) appeared to him so inconsistent that he asked, in ironical astonishment, "Is this," etc.? "One might have said to him, 'Is this thy duty to thy father?'" (Patrick). But Hushai's answer was, in effect, that (being bound to prefer the public good before his own private obligations or affections) he could do no other than abide with him whom Jehovah and the people had chosen king, and would as gladly and faithfully serve the son as he had served the father. Although proceeding from a good motive and serving its special purpose, it was marked by flattery and dissimulation; and these, in common with other sins, are certainly inconsistent with the proper character of a "friend of God" and of Christ (1 Sam. xviii. 4). The question may be regarded (in the latter application) as expressive of—

I. RECOGNIZED OBLIGATION. (Prov. xviii. 24; Job vi. 14.) "Absalom had not so little sense as not to consider that no man ought to forsake a friend in his distress." If kindness (love, gratitude, faithfulness, useful service) be due to others, how much more to him who said, "I have called you friends" (John xv. 15)! What does his friendship require? To be with him, to follow him, to share his sufferings; to "walk as he walked" (1 John ii. 6), without guile, in truth, purity, self-denial, etc.; to be separate from "the evil that is in the world," to confess his Name before men, to seek his honour, to aid his friends, and to promote the accomplishment of his purposes.

II. SURPRISING INCONSISTENCY; too often observed (1 Sam. xxix. 1—11) in those who are his real or supposed friends: 1. When they exhibit indifference to his transcendent claims. 2. When they refuse to bear "the cross." 3. When they love "the friendship of the world" (Jas. iv. 4). 4. When they solace themselves with his friendship in secret, but shrink from confessing him openly. 5. When they profess that they know him, but "in works deny him." 6. When they employ deception and other "carnal weapons" (2 Cor. x. 4) in his behalf. 7. When they honour success irrespective of the means by which it is attained. 8. When they neglect and despise those whom he loves. 9. When they are zealous for him in some things, but not in others of greater moment. 10. When they are much concerned for their own safety and advantage, and little concerned for his glory and the welfare of mankind. Alas! how often is he "wounded in the house of his friends"!

III. SEARCHING INQUIRY. Is there not ground for it in the conduct and speech of many? Is the answer which may be given to it satisfactory? Will good intentions and beneficent ends justify unrighteous means (Rom. iii. 8)? Should the answer satisfy others and even ourselves, will it satisfy him "who searcheth the heart"? "Search me, O God," etc. (Ps. cxxxix. 23).

IV. DESERVED REPROACH; which the enemies (and not merely the friends) of Christ are ready to utter, and an enlightened conscience confirms. "As many as I love I rebuke," etc. (Rev. iii. 10). But he rebukes that he may restore. "When thou hast driven him away and lost him, to whom wilt thou then fly? and where wilt thou find a friend? Without a friend, life is unenjoyed; and unless Jesus be thy chosen Friend, infinitely loved and preferred above all others, life will be to thee a scene of desolation and distress. Of all that are dear to thee, then, let Jesus be the peculiar and supreme Object of thy love" (A Kempis, 'Of the Friendship of Jesus').—D.

Vers. 5—13.—*Shimei's curses.* There are peculiar bitterness and moral peril in troubles which spring from, or are mingled with, human malevolence. Such was David's affliction at this time. Absalom's unnatural conduct, Ahithophel's faithlessness, and Shimei's cursing rendered his misfortunes much harder to bear than similar misfortunes coming from the ordinary vicissitudes of human life.

I. SHIMEI'S CURSING. A striking picture here: David, in the midst of his people and servants, including his famous "Ironsides," marching along the ravine; and from a town on the heights, this fierce Benjamite rushing forth, cursing and throwing stones as he comes; and then, moving along the ridge which overlooked the line of march, keeping pace with the king and his company, vomiting forth his rage in bitter taunts and reproaches, and casting down stones and dust; his fury increased by the calmness with which those below marched on, heedless of his impotent rage. It was an outburst of feelings long pent up which dared not express themselves until David seemed to have fallen from his throne beyond recovery. Shimei was a relative of Saul, and chose to regard David as the author of that king's downfall, and of the humiliation of his house, and chargeable with all the bloodshed that had accompanied these changes. And now, in his view, the Divine retribution has at length visited David for his usurpation of the throne, and the "bloody" measures by which he had reached it; and he triumphs over the fallen monarch with bitter resentment and scorn, and unmeasured invective, unsoftened by the spectacle of humiliation and grief which presented itself to his view. In his passion, like most angry people, he is not scrupulous in adherence to the truth. David was not guilty of wantonly shedding blood to reach the throne; he had spared Saul again and again when he might have slain him; and he had punished with death one who professed to have killed him, and others who had treacherously murdered his son. Nor was it nearer the truth to call David a "man of Belial" (a worthless, wicked man). But Shimei cursed the more freely because that was the only way by which he could vent his malice: he was powerless to do anything else. Yet he showed some courage, or at least recklessness, in so freely reviling one who, though fallen, was surrounded by brave warriors, any one of whom could so easily have effectually silenced him (as Abishai desired to do), if permitted by their king. Violent anger is, however, often as regardless of prudence as of truth. Its courage is as that of a maniac.

II. DAVID'S MEEK ENDURANCE OF IT. He doubtless felt it to be annoying and humiliating to be thus bespattered in the presence of his friends, and trampled on so savagely by so contemptible a foe. To be falsely charged with crimes he had carefully avoided was no small addition to his already too heavy affliction. A very natural and justifiable resentment would prompt him to permit the swift punishment that Abishai begged to be allowed to inflict. But he restrained such feelings, and meekly endured the insults heaped upon him. His words reveal the secret of his meekness 1. *He recognized the infliction as from God.* With the freedom which the sacred writers employ when speaking even of human wickedness as it fulfils Divine purposes, he declares that God had bidden Shimei to curse him (ver. 10), and no one must forbid him. Besides his general faith in God as universal and rightful Ruler, just and good, the memory of his own ill desert doubtless aided him, and the conviction that God was chastising him for his sins. Contrition prompted and nourished submission. He no longer saw in Shimei the cruel and vindictive slanderer, but the rod in the hand of his righteous yet merciful God. To his tormentor he would not have submitted, but to his heavenly Guide and Friend he could and would. And evermore the best remedy for impatience and resentment under afflictions and provocations is the recognition of our Father in heaven as ordering and appointing all; and the exercise towards him of confidence and love, humility and self-surrender. Thus Job discerned, behind and above Sabeans and Chaldeans, lightnings and tempest; and would have discerned behind and above Satan, if he could have known him as his accuser and the prompter and mediate cause of his calamities,—the Lord; and therefore could say, "The Lord gave," etc. (Job i. 21). Thus also One who was greater than Job or David could say, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John xviii. 11). 2. *The thought of the greater trouble of his son's conduct helped to reconcile him to the lesser trouble of Shimei's.* (Ver. 11.) What was chiefly burdening and paining his heart is shown in these words. The ravings of "this Benjamite" was a small matter in

comparison. 3. *The hope that God would regard him with pity soothed him.* (Ver. 12.) He felt that he was in a condition fitted to awaken the Divine compassion, and hoped it would be exercised towards him. In like manner, we may yet more confidently be assured that he who chastises pities us, as a father the children he is correcting (Ps. ciii. 13). 4. *He trusted that God would render him good in place of the evil he was suffering.* (Ver. 12.) Not that he thought he deserved it, or that his sufferings gave him a claim on God for it; but, confiding in the mercy which had pardoned him, he could hope for it. Shimei might curse, but if God would bless (Ps. cix. 28), all would be well. So may we be sure that all that God appoints us to endure from men or from circumstances and events, he will cause to issue in a thousandfold more of blessing, if we trust and serve him, and resign ourselves to his will (see further in homily on ch. xv. 25, 26).

In conclusion: 1. *In Shimei we see an example to be carefully avoided.* Let any who permit themselves outbursts of passionate anger and railing, see here what a repulsive spectacle they present to others, and how sad a spectacle to him whom they call their Master. Let all give heed to St. Paul's injunctions in Eph. iv. 31, 32. 2. *In David's meek endurance we see an example to be closely imitated;* yea, by Christians exceeded. For we have a still better Example, corresponding to a higher Law than David knew (see 1 Pet. ii. 23; Matt. v. 44, 45; 1 Pet. iii. 9).—G. W.

Ver. 17.—*Unfaithful friends.* Bad men may and often do see and reprove in others the baseness they are themselves practising, and thus unconsciously condemn themselves. Absalom reproves his father's friend Hushai for supposed unkindness and unfaithfulness to him, while he himself, not merely a friend, but a fondly loved son, was usurping his father's throne, and ready to take away his life (see ch. xvii. 2, 4). Nevertheless, the sentiment which underlies his remonstrance is just, and Hushai would have deserved severe rebuke if he had really been guilty of the conduct he was charged with. It was a time for David's friends to prove themselves to be friends indeed; and to desert him at such a time (as Ahithophel did) would have been perfidious in the extreme. Hushai, however, was serving him by obeying his directions and promoting his interests. Whether the deception he practised on Absalom was justifiable is another question, depending for its solution on the answer to be given to the larger question whether and how far belligerents are bound by the ordinary laws of truth and righteousness. The remonstrance of Absalom is suitable to be addressed to any who are acting in a manner contrary to the duties of friendship. As one and another instance of unfaithfulness or unkindness occurs, the question might well be put to those guilty of them, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" The force of the remonstrance would be proportionate to the degree of friendship which had existed, the benefits received, the professions made, etc.; and also the degree of flagrant violation of the laws of friendship which each act exhibited. And if to the obligations of friendship are to be added those of some other relationship, as here that of subject and servant of a sovereign, the guilt of unfaithfulness is increased, and remonstrance may well be more severe. The words are very suitable to be addressed to professed friends of our Lord Jesus Christ who act a faithless and disloyal part towards him.

I. CHRIST IS OUR ROYAL FRIEND. King, and yet Friend; Friend, and yet King. The claims of each relation to us strengthen those of the other. Although he is so glorious a King, he stoops to be and act the part of a Friend to the meanest and most sinful of his subjects. 1. *He fills this position towards them:* (1) By his self-sacrificing services on their behalf (John xv. 13). (2) By admitting them to the closest and most confidential intimacy of which each is capable (John xv. 15). (3) By the greatness and abundance of the benefits he confers on them. 2. *And they on their part take the position of friends to him:* (1) By their acceptance of his friendship. (2) By their vows of eternal love, loyalty, and service to him. The relation of sovereign and subject is, in the best Christians, more and more lost in, though not destroyed by, that of friend and friend. A love boundless in its promptings and requirements overflows and obliterates the limits of mere law.

II. TO ACT AN UNFRIENDLY PART TOWARDS HIM IS DESERVING OF THE SEVEREST REBUKE. "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" 1. *Conduct to which the words are applicable.* (1) Desertion of Christ in times of difficulty. "Why wentest thou not

with thy friend?" (comp. Heb. xiii. 13); "Let us go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." (2) Moral cowardice in respect to him. The words might well have been addressed to Peter when denying his Lord and Friend—were virtually addressed to him when "the Lord turned and looked" upon him (Luke xxii. 61). It would be well if they could ever be heard by us whenever, from fear of man, we are silent when we ought to speak for Christ, inactive when we should act for him. (3) Parsimony in gifts and services for the promotion of his cause. (4) Failure in duties of love to his friends and representatives—our fellow-Christians, especially the poor and suffering. A timely reproach, reaching the heart, might prevent more terrible words at the day of judgment (Matt. xxv. 41—45). (5) Any act whatever of inconsistency with our position and professions as disciples of Christ. 2. *Their peculiar force.* Arising from the words, "thy Friend." (1) Who has proved himself a Friend indeed. (2) Whom thou hast often addressed and rejoiced in as such. (3) Whom thou hast often been glad to appeal to in that character for help and deliverance. (4) To whom thou hast many times vowed eternal friendship, and fidelity unto death. The reproach, thus viewed, is adapted to break the offender's heart, producing the deepest shame and self-humiliation, and leading to the most earnest penitence and prayers for forgiveness. 3. *From what quarter the remonstrance might come.* (1) From a man's own conscience and heart. It is well when these are sufficiently loyal to Christ to speedily address the offender after this manner. (2) From other friends of Christ. Christians should be sufficiently faithful to their brethren and their Lord to lovingly reprove serious inconsistencies. (3) From the enemies of Christ. As by David's enemy the words were originally spoken. Those who are not themselves Christ's disciples are often quick to detect the faults of those who are, and to taunt them with them. They sometimes thus render good service to Christians. *Fas est et ab hoste doceri.*—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVII.

Ver. 1.—Let me now choose out twelve thousand men. The advice of Ahithophel was such as would have made success almost certain. The rebellion had taken David by surprise, and he was quite unprepared to resist the large forces which Absalom had gathered round him. But the better part of the nation disapproved of the enterprise, especially when they perceived that David's life was in danger; and consequently his followers, in course of time, would increase. Moreover, the day had been one of extreme moral and mental trial to David. Upon the sudden news of Absalom's approach, he had to arrange for the flight of his wives and children; to provide supplies for their wants, and for those of their attendants on the march; to give orders to his officers, and take means to prevent their flight degenerating into a panic. Then, with covered head and feet unshod, he had descended into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and slowly traversed the Mount of Olives; thence, in deep distress, he had advanced to the way of the wilderness towards Jericho, and there had been assailed by Shimei with bitter revilings. His progress after this was unimpeded, and at Ayĕphim he and the other fugitives had needful rest and refreshment. As Bahurim was about four miles from Jerusalem, this caravanserai a little further on was probably about six miles from the city, and about halfway towards the fords of the Jordan. The march was probably continued at sunset, and the fords reached before midnight; and there David halted, waiting for the arrival of Jonathan and Ahimaaz, and making preparations for the passage. Now, if Ahithophel's advice had been followed, he would have reached the fords as quickly as the young men did; for they lost time at Bahurim. Upon this David had not calculated, but supposed that anyhow he should have the interval won by Ahimaaz's fleetness. With twelve thousand picked troops unencumbered with baggage, Ahithophel would thus have found David still on the west of the Jordan, and though Joab and Abishai would have done all that brave men could, yet they would scarcely have been in a position to make a long defence. And the command was to "smite the king only." A panic was inevitable, and confusion among David's followers, who had women and children to defend; and in the midst of it Ahithophel would direct his main attack on the part where David was, and single him out for slaughter. When this was done all would be accomplished; for Absalom would become king by right of succession. Even Joab and the Gibborim would acknowledge him, and the whole nation be at peace.

Ver. 3.—The man whom thou seekest is as if all returned; Hebrew, *as the return of the*

whole is the man whom thou seekest. Both the amendments of the text and the various translations offered are innumerable, but nothing is really more satisfactory than the literal rendering of the words, virtually given us in the Authorized Version. Naturally, Ahithophel did not wish to parade David's death too openly. In his heart Absalom must have known that the safe possession of the kingdom could be assured him only by his father's death, but yet he might have shrunk from publicly avowing this, and having it talked of before his courtiers as a settled purpose. One reason why he adopted the counsel of Hushai may have been his reluctance to commit parricide; for plainly the one main purpose of Ahithophel was David's death. This thorough traitor may have seen even a tremor of alarm in Absalom's countenance when he spake out his purpose so frankly of "smiting the king only," and may have felt that, slumbering in the bosom of the son, was something of that generous spirit which had made the father condemn the Amalekite to death for boasting that he had slain Saul. At all events, he was unwilling to dilate upon so ghastly a theme, and this general reference to David, as the man whom Absalom sought, without dwelling upon the subject, is in far better taste than the coarse open villainy so unreservedly expressed in ver. 2. The reading, however, of the Septuagint has many followers: "And I will bring back all the people to thee as a bride returns to her husband, excepting the life of the one man thou seekest; and for all the people there shall be peace." Ahithophel was bad enough, but scarcely so brutal as to compare to a bridal procession the sad return of David's mourning friends and companions-in-arms weeping round the corpse of their master murdered at the bidding of his own son.

Ver. 4.—**All the elders of Israel.** Their presence seems to show that Absalom professed to act in an orderly and constitutional manner, and with the advice of those in authority. It was possibly this wish to keep up appearances which made him command Hushai to be summoned, as he was one whose advice would certainly have been asked had matters gone on in their ordinary channel. So again in vers. 14, 15, Absalom acts only with the popular consent. Very probably the royal power was gradually superseding that of the tribal authorities, and this may have made David unpopular with many of the great nobles. Absalom would thus gain many adherents by associating "elders" and "men of Israel" with him in his councils.

Ver. 7.—**And Hushai said.** Hushai gives his advice with much Oriental exaggeration, such as ought to have put Absalom on his guard. His main points are that David was too practised a soldier to let himself be surprised. In his adventures with Saul he and his men had been trained to hold large bodies of pursuers at bay, and evade them. The men, too, who were with him were warriors of desperate valour, whose first thought would be the king's personal safety, and to ensure this they would conceal him in some **pit**, some cave or ravine, safe and inaccessible by nature; or **in some place** (omit the inserted word "other"), that is, in some camping-place, made strong with ramparts, so as to resist the first attack. "To smite the king only" is, therefore, an impossibility; and if the attack fail, and David's mighties, in their irritation, slaughter a large number of their assailants, and a panic be the result, men will hesitate before they attack such redoubtable champions a second time. A check is fatal to a rebellion, and Absalom was staking his chance on one hasty encounter. Better leave the decision to all Israel. Their hearts were with Absalom, and, when there has been time for them to gather in their thousands, success is certain. Their numbers will be countless as the sands on the shore, or as the dew upon the grass; while David and his heroes will shrink to so small a body as to be scarcely able to man the walls of one small city. And fighting there will be none; for the myriads of Israel will drag city and fugitives with ropes down into the nearest torrent-bed, where the next floods will wash all away. There was more in this than an appeal to Absalom's vanity. If all Israel did take his side, then David's cause would soon be hopeless, and there would be no need of parricide. David's death would be the act of Israel, and not of Absalom. Evidently Absalom believed that all Israel was on his side, and his success hitherto had been so rapid as almost to justify the assumption. To us this success is almost unaccountable, but it suggests that there were great faults in David's administration. Yet even so we wonder at the existence of such general dissatisfaction. **At this time.** A wrong translation. The Hebrew is, *Ahithophel's counsel this time is not good*, whereas last time, what he advised about the concubines was good.

Ver. 9.—**When some of them be overthrown at the first**; Hebrew, *in the falling on them*; that is, at the first onslaught of David's champions. Even though overpowered finally by force of numbers, they are sure to make a large slaughter at first, which may easily lead to a panic.

Ver. 11.—**And that thou go to battle in thine own person**; literally, *and that thy presence go to the battle.* The versions have preserved a much better reading, "And that thy presence go in the midst of them."

Ver. 12.—**In some place**; Hebrew, *in one*

of the places; one of the fortified camps already described in ver. 9.

Ver. 13.—**The river.** The word does not signify a river, but a ravine or gorge worn away by the action of a torrent. Such ravines are common in Palestine, where the streams rush along with resistless fury after the rains, but in summer are dry (Job vi. 17); and their desolate beds, bordered by precipitous cliffs, are described by Isaiah as favourite places for the cruel rites of Moloch (Isa. lvii. 5). Dragged to the edge of one of these gorges, the city, with its few defenders, would topple over, and in the next rainy season be entirely swept away.

Ver. 14.—**The counsel of Hushai is better.** It seemed safer. Nothing in it was left to chance, and Absalom, already at the head of such numbers as to be able to select from them twelve thousand picked men, saw himself, in fancy, marching forward with all Israel at his feet. As a matter of fact, he did advance with so large an army that David was saved only by the skilful strategy of Joab. Like other king-makers, Ahithophel had put himself too forward. He asked for twelve thousand men to be placed under his command, that he might smite David, and so be, not only Absalom's counsellor, but also his commander-in-chief. Amasa and the other commanders would be displeased at this, and Absalom would feel that he was himself placed in a very secondary position. Ahithophel may have asked for the command solely because no one's presence would so ensure success as his own, but he wounded the vanity both of Absalom and Amasa, and made them ready to listen to any other advice that might be offered. **The Lord had appointed**; literally, *and Jehovah had commanded to bring to nought*, etc. So plain did it seem to the writer that Absalom's success depended upon rapid action, that nothing less than the direct interference of the Divine providence could account for the infatuation of Absalom and his counsellors.

Ver. 16.—**Lodge not this night in the plains** (at the fords) **of the wilderness.** The plan of Ahithophel made David's position so dangerous, that he must hesitate no longer, lest, on second thoughts, Absalom should still adopt it. Hushai had frustrated it for the present; but Ahithophel might urge it again, and get the necessary permission; and then David and all the people that were with him would be **swallowed up**, that is, destroyed utterly, and with ease.

Ver. 17.—**Stayed by En-rogel.** The two youths were posted at En-rogel, that is, the "Fuller's spring," near Jerusalem (Josh xv. 7; 1 Kings i. 9), and probably the place now known as "Job's Well," situated at the point where the valleys of Jehoshaphat and Hinnom meet. They were placed there because, though they would have been admitted into the city, they would scarcely have been allowed to leave it. Instead of **wench**—a term less disrespectful when the Authorized Version was made than it is now—the Hebrew has *the maidservant*. Probably the maid is meant whose usual duty it was to fetch water for domestic purposes, and thus her journey to the well would excite no suspicion.

Ver. 18.—**A lad saw them.** Probably Absalom had sent out spies to watch the route which David had taken, to prevent any friends joining him from the city, who would give him information as to the progress of events there. The word "lad" does not mean a boy; more probably he was one of the young men who formed Absalom's body-guard, like the ten "lads," translated "young men," in ch. xviii. 15, who bare Joab's armour. It would be his duty to seize them, but when he tried to approach them, they fled, and made their way at full speed to Bahurim, where they were saved by the shrewdness and fidelity of a woman. Two such fleet runners would have had no difficulty in outstripping a boy, but one of Absalom's young men would have roused the neighbourhood to join in the pursuit. **The well in his court** really signifies a cistern for storing rain-water; but it was at that time dry, and served as a convenient hiding-place for the two messengers.

Ver. 19.—**A covering**; Hebrew, *the cover*; that is, the usual cover of the cistern, which had been taken off to let the young men descend into it. Over it she spread, not **ground corn**, but brayed or peeled corn (see Prov. xxvii. 22), probably barley-groats. She was probably busy in removing the husks of the barley with a pestle in a mortar when Jonathan and Ahimaaz sought refuge with her; and thus her whole proceeding was so natural as to excite no suspicions.

Ver. 20.—**They be gone over the brook of water.** The word *michal*, translated "brook," does not occur elsewhere, and probably it was a local name for some stream near Bahurim. It was, we may suppose, in the right direction, but when the pursuers had followed for some time, and caught no glimpse of the runners, knowing their swiftness of foot, they concluded that they had outstripped them, and, giving up the chase as hopeless, returned to Jerusalem. It was only when she had seen them far on their way back that she removed the cover and allowed the young priests to resume their journey. The delay would have been fatal to David if vigorous counsel had been followed at Jerusalem; as it was, they reached David's camp without further incident, and acquainted him with Ahithophel's plan; and the king at once recognized his

danger, and without more delay, commenced at once the passage of the Jordan, and carried it out so skilfully and rapidly, that by the morning every one of his company was safe on the other side.

Ver. 23.—**Ahithophel . . . hanged himself.** There is an old fancy, put down by Thenius as one of the curiosities of interpretation, that Ahithophel died of a quinsy; for the word might mean "was strangled or choked." But the act seems mentioned as a proof of Ahithophel's unerring judgment. Indignation at Absalom's folly, and at the slight cast upon himself, is not a sufficient reason for so violent a deed. He must have foreseen the certain ruin of the conspiracy if David was allowed time; and he knew that upon its failure would follow his own punishment. It is proof also that he was a fierce and ill-tempered man, and animated for some reason or other with a malignant hatred of David. The parallel between Ahithophel and the traitor Judas must strike every one.

Ver. 24.—**Then** (Hebrew, *and*) **David came to Mahanaim.** (On Mahanaim, see note on ch. ii. 8.) It was now a fortified city, with walls and gates (ch. xviii. 24), and its strength of position, which had made it a safe capital for Ishbosheth, who had probably added to its defences, made it also a safe retreat for David while gathering his forces. As it was only about fifty miles distant from the fords of the Jordan, David had not retreated far; and, meanwhile, Absalom was wasting time in gathering "all the men of Israel" for the attack. During this interval Absalom was anointed king (ch. xix. 10) by the priests, with all due solemnity.

Ver. 25.—**Ithra an Israelite.** In 1 Chron. ii. 17 he is called "Jether the Ishmeelite." The first name is the same, Ithra being the emphatic form of Jether; and as it is difficult to find a reason for mentioning so ordinary a fact as that his father was an Israelite, we may conclude that "Ishmeelite" is the correct reading. Bishop Wordsworth, however, suggests that "Israelite" was in contrast to "Judahite;" but this distinction did not come into use until after the disruption of the kingdom. The Vatican text of the Septuagint has "Jezreelite," which is probably a conjecture to get rid of the obvious error of calling him an Israelite. Amasa was an illegitimate son, which confirms the reading "Ishmeelite" in 1 Chron. ii. 17, as a marriage between Abigail and a foreigner would be sure to be opposed by all the members of Jesse's family. **Nahash.** Jewish interpreters regard Nahash (equivalent to "serpent") as another name for Jesse, quoting in proof, "Out of the root of Nahash (the serpent) shall come forth the basilisk" (Isa. xiv. 29), which in the Chaldee Paraphrase is explained as meaning, "out of the root of Jesse shall come forth the Messiah." This conceit would scarcely have deserved mention, had it not found a place in the margin of the Authorized Version. Some few commentators regard Nahash as a woman's name, and think that she was a wife of Jesse, and mother of Abigail and Zeruiah, but not of David. But Nahash is so constantly a man's name that it is easier to believe that Nahash was the first husband of David's mother, and Abigail and Zeruiah his half-sisters, not on the father's, but on the mother's side. Joab and his brothers are always described as sons of Zeruiah, both to mark their relationship to David, and also because the rank was on her side. Amasa was probably the Amasai mentioned in 1 Chron. xii. 18 as bringing a powerful reinforcement to David while at Ziklag; but the ambition of supplanting Joab made him now forget David's long friendship.

Ver. 27.—**Shobi.** It is evident that the most powerful chieftains in Gilead were on David's side, and supported him with men as well as with provisions. Adherents, too, would constantly cross the Jordan, and gather round the old king; and thus, when Absalom arrived, he found himself in face of an army estimated at about twenty thousand men. Among these chiefs it is interesting to find Shobi, son of Nahash, the Ammonite king, and David's friend (ch. x. 2). When Hanun, the elder son, on succeeding to the throne, brought ruin upon himself by his misconduct to David's ambassadors, Shobi apparently remained faithful to David, and received the grant of a district in Gilead, where he settled with his followers. Some, with less probability, suppose that he had withdrawn to Gilead in the lifetime of his father, to be out of Hanun's way. **Machir** was the generous man who had given the crippled son of Jonathan a refuge (ch. ix. 4); and David's honourable treatment of Mephibosheth may have won his patron's heart. Of **Barzillai**, and his abode, **Rogelim**, nothing more is known than what is said here, and in the very interesting narrative in ch. xix. 31, etc. David's lasting gratitude to him is shown by his care for his sons (see 1 Kings ii. 7). A clan of priests called themselves "the children of Barzillai," and claimed to be the descendants of his daughter. They could not, however, produce their genealogy, and were therefore degraded from the priestly office (Ezra ii. 61—63). Their claim, nevertheless, is a proof that Barzillai was a little king in Gilead, when thus a priestly race thought their alliance with him so honourable as to make them forget that they were of the lineage of Aaron.

Ver. 28.—**Beds.** These would be for the

women and children, and were scarcely more than rugs and small carpets. **Basons**; pots of metal for cooking, while the earthenware would be vessels for holding their food. **Parched** (corn) . . . **and parched** (pulse); Hebrew, *kali* . . . *and kali*. The word includes all kinds of parched grain. The Septuagint and Syriac rightly omit it in the second place, as it is probably a mere error of some ancient copyist; but for what word it has been substituted we have no means of ascertaining.

Ver. 29.—**Sheep.** This is the only kind of flesh food mentioned. The change in the meaning of the word "meat," which still in America is used simply for "food," as in the Authorized Version, bears witness to the great change in our diet which has taken place in recent times. **Cheese of kine.** The word occurs only here, but the Syriac and the Targum both support the rendering of the Authorized Version. The Bedawees, after removing the butter, make a kind of cheese from the remaining milk. It is as hard as the cheese made from skimmed milk in Dorsetshire, but wholesome. It must, however, be soaked before eating, or softened with butter. Generally in the East, cow's milk is regarded as coarse, and camel's milk is used for drinking, while that of sheep and goats, and cheese made from it, holds the next place in general estimation. It is curious that "butter" literally means "cheese of kine."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—14.—*Conflicting counsels.* The facts are: 1. Ahithophel, in advising Absalom, suggests that he himself should fall upon David by night, when weary, with twelve thousand select men, and urges that by so doing a final blow will be so struck as to secure the fealty of all Israel. 2. The suggestion is pleasing to Absalom, but he, before deciding, wishes to have the counsel of Hushai. 3. On being called to give counsel, Hushai expresses distrust of the counsel of Ahithophel, and assigns as reasons (1) the known valour and caution of David; (2) the possibility of a panic among the troops of Absalom on a slight reverse at the outset; (3) the natural apprehension of the people on approaching for attack one so famed for courage and strategy. 4. As a counter-proposal, he counsels (1) a gathering of the entire forces of Israel; (2) the personal leadership of Absalom; and points out the certainty of success whether by attack in the open country or by an assault on a city. 5. Absalom and his people decide to reject the counsel of Ahithophel and adopt that of Hushai, being overruled in this by the will of God. The bold assumption of regal powers by publicly taking possession of the king's harem was only a formal act, which necessitated other measures if the authority thus usurped was to be maintained. The existence of so valiant and able a man as David, and the attachment to him of a select body-guard, were facts which could not but weigh heavily on the mind of one who knew how his father, in the days of Saul, defended himself amidst rocks and caves against a vindictive and powerful enemy. Hence the natural coherence of the narrative with which this chapter opens, and the account of Absalom's conduct referred to in the previous chapter. In considering the conflicting counsels brought out by the first act of Absalom, we may notice several truths bearing widely on human affairs.

I. POSITIONS IN LIFE ARE ENTERED UPON WHICH RENDER MEN VERY DEPENDENT ON THE SUPERIOR JUDGMENT OF OTHERS. Absalom had aspired to a position of power, and on reaching it found that his difficulties were not materially diminished. The presence in the country of such a man as David, with such a body-guard, was a fact of serious moment, and the well-known hesitancy of the populace as long as there are chances of vicissitude had to be provided against. His early habits of life and his natural gifts by no means qualified him to meet emergencies of this character; and hence he found himself, on usurping the throne, dependent on men of larger experience than himself. It was not preference but necessity which led him to seek the counsel of Ahithophel and Hushai. Occasionally there are men in similar positions of usurped authority who by nature and experience can dispense with the advice of others, but it is more often not so. Young men entering on public life need more wisdom than can be gathered from their own personal experience, and they will do well to consult the wise who have written or may speak. In any position of difficulty, when embarrassed by dangers we cannot escape, whether in professions, commerce, education, morals, or religion, we need not hesitate to act even as did wicked Absalom in this particular—seek out the most

accredited guides and advisers. If it is permitted to learn from an enemy, it is certainly allowable for the good to extract wisdom from the actions of the bad. The "children of light" are advised to learn lessons from the conduct of the "children of this world" (Luke xvi. 8). We may, like Absalom, though not with his evil intent, enter on positions by our free choice, for meeting the difficulties of which we are personally ill prepared; or we may, like Joseph, Moses, and Paul, be forced into positions of delicacy and peril. In either case we shall require more than our own sagacity; and no mere pride should deter us from seeking help of others. Possibly ours may be a case in which no human adviser is available. Be it so; Joseph, Moses, and Paul sought counsel of God, and they found, as we shall, that he directeth the way of those who acknowledge him (Prov. iii. 6). There are many advisers, many professing to know what is best. Let us ponder the path of our feet, that all our ways may be established. The good may adopt the policy of Absalom, while shunning his principles.

II. GREAT POWERS BRING CORRESPONDING DISGRACE WHEN EMPLOYED IN DIRECT ANTAGONISM TO GOD'S GRACIOUS DESIGNS FOR MANKIND. Ahithophel was unquestionably a man of great ability. There is in human nature a profound respect for power of intellect. Men feel instinctively that it is a gift of God, and carries with it the key to unlock many of the mysteries that lie hidden in nature. It rests with the moral disposition as to the application of these powers. The true order is for them to run in the line of God's great purpose of mercy to mankind, as a co-operating force to bring about the redemption of the world from the evils incident to the existence of sin. Thus it is that the highest honours are won. But Ahithophel brought on himself everlasting disgrace in that he laid all his native talents, all his acquired experience, all his personal influence, at the service of one who sought to set aside the Lord's anointed. He must have known all David's antecedents. He had taken "sweet counsel" with him (Ps. lv. 14). His deliberate counsel now, to select choice men who should fall on the weary king in the dead of night, and, in the panic, slay him alone so as to secure ultimately the allegiance of those not slain, was crafty, bold, and cruel in the extreme. Humanly speaking, it meant success to the vices of Absalom, and ruin to the holy cause embodied in the Lord's anointed. The treachery to a former friend counts for much; the inhumanity counts for more; but the crowning crime is war upon God's revealed method for bringing on that glorious time when righteousness shall be established in the earth, and all men shall be blessed (Ps. lxxii.). The same plain issue is involved in the antagonism of men now to the appointed order of providence and grace. God has a kingdom, ruled by the Anointed One, and designed to bring peace and joy and holiness to all mankind. Gigantic intellectual powers are now running along a line in direct antagonism to it. The practical issue of their success would be moral and spiritual ruin to man. The more their strength and enrichment by learning, culture, and experience, command respect, the deeper the disgrace and the more dreadful their doom for daring to seek to destroy the authority of Christ's blessed yoke (Matt. xi. 28—30; cf. Ps. ii.). The daring deeds of the Hebrew secular plane are being repeated in the deeds of the modern spiritual plane.

III. THERE ARE EMERGENCIES IN THE HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH DEMANDING UNUSUAL EFFORTS ON THE PART OF THE FAITHFUL. To ordinary human view the kingdom of God, as represented by the cause of David, was now in great peril. The most sagacious counsel of the age had been given; an eager young prince, proud of the wisdom of the counsellor, was intent on action, and a hesitant people were waiting for the turn of the balance. Hushai had, with remarkable foresight and courage, though doubtless under unconscious direction from above, placed himself in a position to meet the emergency; and now came the call for him to put forth his strength. Absalom little knew what he was doing when he called on Hushai to speak on the question at issue. The venerable man, strong as he was in his own secret and in the help of God, could not but realize the immense responsibility now devolving upon him. A false step, hesitancy, inappropriate suggestions, and feeble arguments, would be disastrous to the dearest of interests. In that critical hour it was as though the fate of Israel and Israel's banished king, and of the blessed world-wide purpose they were working out, rested entirely on his judgment and skill. Angels could not but hearken with intense interest to his words, and watch their gradual effect on the mind of the rebel son. Corresponding occasions, varying in circumstance and magnitude, though virtually one

in principle, have occurred, and will perhaps occur again. The most conspicuous and, in some respects, of course, the unparalleled, instance was that of our Saviour when the "gates of hell" had taken counsel to virtually prevent the salvation of the world by the only method approved of God. Of the people there was none with him. All depended on what he would do. The fate of the world rested with himself. In Caleb and Joshua, in Athanasius *contra mundum*, in the leaders of the Reformation, in the noble men and women who suffered martyrdom in Madagascar, and in many private instances in which family religious interests have been at stake, we may see emergencies demanding of the faithful the exercise of the highest qualities.

IV. UNDISCIPLINED MINDS ARE INFLUENCED BY WHAT WORKS ON THEIR SUSCEPTIBILITIES. Hushai displayed his sagacity and skill by adapting his argument to his man. He wisely did not controvert the particular advice of Ahithophel, but so far complimented him and conciliated Absalom by simply saying that, though good, it was not so just now (ver. 7). And while tacitly recognizing the valour of the twelve thousand, he suggested that there was special danger in attacking men "chafed in their minds." His line of argument was to work upon Absalom's *fears*, *vanity*, and *suspicions*. David and his men were not ordinary men; they were bold, desperate, watchful, and gifted in strategy, and the possibility of a reverse would produce a panic among Absalom's followers. Thus fear is awakened. The whole of the forces of Israel should be gathered, and Absalom himself should set out at the head of an imposing army, and so concentrate enthusiasm around his own person, and gain the renown of being conqueror of the mighty one. Thus vanity is aroused. No one else should take the lead, but the prince himself should, by maintaining a personal influence and winning a victory, keep power in his own hand, and so prevent the uprising of a powerful rival. Thus suspicions are awakened. Hushai was a good rhetorician in assailing the will through a graphic description of details, which in their effect could not but call forth fear, vanity, and suspicion—those prompters of the will. All men, but mostly the undisciplined in mind, are liable to be influenced to action by such appeals. This method explains how masses of men are often swayed by a clever presentation of facts blended with possibilities. There is a legitimate use of this method in seeking to win men over to action in harmony with the gospel. The Word of God is not handled deceitfully (2 Cor. iv. 2) when we set forth facts and possibilities to awaken godly fear and prompt to repentance; for this is only part of the function of the teacher and preacher. Men may be caught by such guile in order to be trained in the knowledge of the truth.

V. THERE IS AN UNTRACEABLE ACTION OF GOD IN THE MINDS OF MEN. The explanation given of the superiority of Hushai's counsel in its influence over Absalom is that it was the determination of God to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel (ver. 14). Unquestionably his counsel was the best for Absalom's purpose. But the wise man is not to glory in his wisdom; all hearts are naked and open to him who brings to nought the wisdom of the wise and the understanding of the prudent (Ps. xxxiii. 10; Isa. viii. 10; 1 Cor. i. 19; ii. 6). All through Hebrew and Christian history there are evidences of God's action on the minds of men, sometimes causing them blindness, sometimes inspiring with unusual courage and wisdom, and sometimes filling them with dread (John xii. 40; Luke xxi. 15; Deut. ii. 25; Ps. ix. 20). This direct action of God on the human mind is involved in any just conception of his freedom as an Infinite Spirit, is in harmony with our action on one another, is essential to moral government, is implied in the work of regeneration, is the ground of faith in prayer, and is a basis of our belief that he will in due time defeat the wiles of the devil and bring all things into subjection to himself. We ought to lay hold of this truth with all firmness, and carry on Christian work in the assurance that greater is he that is for us than all who can be against us, and that he has ways of reaching men of which we have no visible trace.

Vers. 15—29.—The facts are: 1. Hushai, having informed Zadok and Abiathar of his counsel, urges them to send quickly to David, advising him to flee at once beyond the river. 2. Their two sons, staying out of the city in order to be of service as occasion required, are informed by a girl of the duty required, and at once go on their errand. 3. In spite of being recognized by an enemy who told Absalom, they go on

their way, and take refuge in a well at Bahurim, where they are secreted by the woman of the house. 4. The pursuers, being deceived by the woman, return to Jerusalem, while the two young men escape and tell all to David, who at once, before the morning dawns, passes with all his men over Jordan. 5. Ahithophel, seeing that his counsel is not followed, goes home, arranges his affairs, and destroys himself. 6. David passing on to Mahanaim, Absalom also crosses the Jordan with his forces, making Amasa chief captain in place of Joab. 7. On David's arrival with his men at Mahanaim, hungry, thirsty, and weary, he receives gifts of food and clothing from Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai.

Division of labour in doing good. From vers. 15—22 we have a record of the course adopted by the secret friends of David after that Absalom had heard the counsel of Ahithophel and Hushai. Jerusalem was the scene of an evil and a good combination; and as the drift of Scripture is to record the accomplishment of the Divine purposes in the history of the Hebrew people, we have here a more detailed record of the individuals and work of the good combination than of the evil. The work these four faithful ones had in hand was very clearly defined and most persistently pursued. With a wisdom and skill highly creditable to all concerned, the perilous yet immensely important service was carried out on the principle of the division of labour, which obtains in modern times in the best-conducted spheres of activity. Although we may not see here parallels to all the work we have to do for Christ, we may notice features which are also found in well-directed Christian co-operation, and which it behoves us to reproduce in all we do.

I. THERE IS SCOPE FOR VARIETY IN THE NATURE OF THE WORK TO BE DONE. The work to be done, stated in general terms, was to advance the interests of the anointed king. The circumstances in which this general aim was to be carried out necessitated varied conduct and action, both of which must be included in the service rendered, since conduct often produces great effects. There was obviously scope for influences around the person of Absalom—subtle assaults on the very seat of mischief and wrong; for reticent watchfulness in order to take advantage of any movements adverse to David; for fleet runners to convey to him tidings of importance, and for assistance to them when engaged in their perilous undertaking. The work of Hushai in the counsel chamber, of Zadok and Abiathar in the centre of public influence and information, of their sons outside the city, of the wench passing unsuspected for a country walk, and of the hospitable housewife of Bahurim, was in each case different, but all parts of one service. We are engaged in advancing the interests of the Anointed One against the combinations of spiritual wickedness in high places, and, while the service is one, there is great variety in the nature of the work to be done. There is scope for wise, shrewd men, who know how to confront and confound the enemy in high places; for quiet, consistent characters, watching with patient concern over the holiest of functions, and eager to use any new light that may hasten on the triumph of the King of Zion; for vigorous young men, true as steel, accustomed to hardness, prepared to enter on dangerous work in missionary lands, or among the snares and evils of our modern civilization; little ones, acting as links in the great chain of moral influence; and sympathetic helpers, who can feed the hungry, shelter the oppressed and fearful, and frustrate the designs of the cruel. The Christian Church is recognizing more than ever this division of labour, and each one who does a part towards bringing on the triumph of Christ is an important worker in the most blessed of all undertakings.

II. THERE IS SCOPE FOR VARIETY IN THE QUALITIES EMPLOYED. In the service rendered in and near Jerusalem we see room for the exercise of discrimination of human character, prudence in adoption of methods, a shrewd consideration of the assailable points in the enemy's position (see previous homily, division IV.), courage, self-possession in counteracting the influence of the most powerful of antagonists, reticence in council, and fidelity in redeeming pledges made (ch. xv. 35), promptitude in action, and ingenuity in rendering aid in times of danger. The interests of David were promoted by a few persons, but the promotion of them called forth very diverse moral and intellectual qualities. On a small scale we see here a picture of what is true of the promotion of the interests of the Eternal King of Zion. The work is so wide and complicated, and the agencies so numerous, that there is not a native talent, not an acquired gift, not a shade

of good influence, but it may find scope in his Name. It will be found that, as in building a temple, all the powers of body and mind find scope, and all the influences of sun and air are requisite, so, in raising up the vast superstructure of Christ's kingdom, there is room for the constant exercise of all the qualities possessed by humankind not under the domination of sin. The wisdom of the wise, the sanctity of the holy, the enthusiasm of the young, the gentleness of the maid, and the pity and sympathy of the faithful villager, all can be used up as occasion offers.

III. GOD RAISES UP INSTRUMENTS FOR THIS SERVICE AS OCCASION REQUIRES. Was it necessary that the powerful influence of Ahithophel should be counteracted? A Hushai is raised up. Must discreet and influential men be retained on David's side? Zadok and Abiathar are forthcoming. Are links of communication necessary between the friends of the king and himself? The two young men have their hearts inclined aright. Are the spies of the enemy to be eluded? A girl is found to carry a message, and a kindly woman to offer shelter. The solution of these facts is assuredly indicated in the assertion that God had "appointed to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel." He raises up his servants to do his will, little as they know the working of his mighty power within them. So it has always been, and will be in the future. Abraham was raised up to lay the foundation of national life for Israel; Moses to lead the people to the promised land; Elijah and seven thousand to protest against the worship of Baal; the little girl to speak in the house of Naaman the Syrian; Nehemiah and his coadjutors to restore the walls of the city; apostles endowed "with power from on high" to inaugurate the new order of things; and Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, as one "born out of due time." We need never fear but that, in answer to prayer, God will ever do these things for his people. There will be wise men, saintly men, men of vigour and enterprise, maidens to win their way for Christ, and kindly souls to feed the hungry and shelter the distressed.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. In all our Christian organizations we should strive to be influenced by the remembrance that the enterprise is one with that of other organizations; that the interests at stake are most momentous; and that every power and faculty and influence of the community of the faithful should find some scope for exercise. 2. Personally we should cultivate our best talents with a view to lay them at the service of our Eternal King. 3. We should take heed and never despise services which seem inferior to our own, or the full bearing of which we cannot at the time trace. 4. We should be patient, and allow time for influences to operate.

The end of the wicked. The course run by Ahithophel was very wicked. It combined some of the basest crimes of which human nature is capable, the more base because of the intelligence and former professions of the man. His name is the symbol of craftiness, cunning, faithlessness, cruelty, pride of intellect, and ambition. Every reader of the narrative feels that he was most justly cut off from the land of the living, and is not much surprised that he should be cut off by his own hand. The end seems in some dreadful sense natural and befitting. But while that is, perhaps, the spontaneous judgment of men because of what may be termed his exaggerated vileness, yet, looking at the facts in the light of Scripture, we really see here, in very dark colours, what is virtually the end of all who are guilty of treason against Christ, the Anointed One, and seek to frustrate his righteous purposes in the world. Observe that in antagonism to Christ—

1. THERE IS AN ANOINTED KING OPPOSED. Ahithophel's crime lay chiefly in being in antagonism to one whom God had anointed to be king over Israel. The qualities of craft and cunning and cruelty were incidents of the antagonism. The essence of his guilt lay in the fact of setting himself against the Lord and his anointed. And those who persist in a sinful life and will not, because of the love of their own way, bow to the yoke of Christ (Matt. xii. 28—30), are as truly guilty of rebellion. In so far as they thus seek to dispense with his authority, they are guilty of high treason. To say that there is no intention to do so counts for nothing in a matter of resistance to his authority. The facts of life are the tests of loyalty. The position of an impenitent sinner is one of enmity against God. This the Apostle Paul declares, and it is the admission of all who awake to a sense of their state and cry for mercy. The tendency to tone down resistance to Christ's personal authority over the entire life is dangerous.

II. THERE IS INGRATITUDE AND CRUELTY IN THE RESISTANCE TO CHRIST. We can easily see the ingratitude and cruelty of Ahithophel. He had been cared for by the king, and blessed with many favours (Ps. lv. 13). And yet what David had been and done for this man was as nothing compared with what Christ, our anointed King, has been and has done for men who rebel against his authority. He has loved them; suffered and died for them; he has crowned their lives with loving-kindness, and even conferred on them the very powers which they refuse to submit to his governance. If Christ was once wounded in the house of his friends by their rejection of him, he surely feels the pain of beholding the ingratitude of those who say in their hearts, "We will not have him to reign over us." There is positive cruelty in deliberately rejecting One who so tenderly loves and has suffered so much for those who scorn him. The appeal of the prophet to heaven and earth as to whether there could be found any parallel to Israel's crime (Isa. i. 2—4) certainly applies in the instance of those who enjoy clearer light and listen to more earnest exhortations, and yet rebel against him who has brought them up.

III. THERE IS NO PALLIATION OF THE CRIME. No ingenuity can find an excuse for Ahithophel. As to the character and qualities of the two, he knew that Absalom was not to be thought of for a moment in comparison with David. As to the administration of government, no good could possibly come from exchanging a wise, generous king for a vain and selfish young man. Reason and good sense and policy alike condemn the deed of Ahithophel. And those who reject the Son of God are without excuse. No other authority can compare with his in wisdom, goodness, or range of beneficence. No single fault can be found with his holy administration. No policy so sound as the policy of the sermon on the mount, and the submission demanded (Matt. xii. 28). The extreme evil as well as folly of the sin of rebellion should be insisted on with all urgency.

IV. THERE IS AN END OF DISAPPOINTMENT AND DOOM. Ahithophel came to his violent end with pride mortified and prestige gone. The cause in which he had so wickedly embarked was seen to be hopelessly lost by the adoption of the counsel of Hushai. Nor was he free from the terrors of an evil conscience. The suicide was an incident only—the result of the interaction of these causes. The actual inner facts of his end find a counterpart in the experience of all who die in rebellion against Christ. They cease to be the great ones, and are classed among those of whom the obscurity of "I never knew thee" is true (Matt. vii. 23). Whatever social prestige they had in the conventional life of this world, they lose it all where only the obedient and faithful are recognized as blessed of the Father, and are as kings and priests unto God for ever (Rev. i. 5, 6). They become aware of the presence of a conscience which is as a worm that dieth not, and as a fire that is not quenched. There is no hiding these great facts concerning the end of the wicked. They are declared in the Word of God.

Sympathy in the day of adversity. The brief record of the kindness of Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai is refreshing after the previous account of the devices of the wicked against the life and authority of David. The conduct of these men, and the reference to it in the sacred record, bring under our notice the subject of sympathy in the day of adversity. Consider, then—

I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE SYMPATHY. So far as the conduct of these three men reveals the characteristics of true sympathy, they are seen to be these. 1. It is *spontaneous.* As soon as David's trouble was known, their hearts went forth towards him; they took to themselves his sorrows. There was no effort *ab extra* to produce it, and no inward process of reasoning to call forth deeds which would have the semblance of coming from deep compassion and sincere regard. It was natural to the men and the circumstances. That had been the character of David's sympathy for those in trouble when he was in prosperity (1 Sam. xxix. 21—24; ch. i. 11, 12, 19—27). It was pre-eminently so with Christ in all his relations to sorrow and need. It is a test by which we can estimate our own and others' professions. 2. It is *practical.* It did not spend itself in mere feeling cherished or word spoken, but found expression in abundant provision for David's wants (ver. 28). The measure of the feeling can be seen in an estimate of the pains and toil required to bring so great an amount of food and comforts to David's camp. Our Saviour, during his earthly life, left us an example of

this. His sympathy produced food for five thousand. The whole of his life and sufferings were the cost by which he procured for us the blessings of salvation. In this he is infinitely removed from poets who feel and think, and philosophers who discuss the causes and relations of things. 3. It is *timely*. The gifts of these men came just in the hour of extreme need. There is a sympathy which is always too late. Right feeling is not always attended by prompt action. A ready will and quick intelligence are the proper attendants on genuine sympathy. The good Samaritan passed by the scene of sorrow just at the right time, and he acted at once. *Bis dat qui cito dat.* Christian people should cultivate promptitude. It may save many a poor soul from crushing sorrows. 4. It is *discriminating*. These generous men evidently studied the case of David's need, and brought just the things in variety that were most serviceable to a large company of hungry and weary travellers. David's heart must have been deeply affected by observing the care with which their sympathy had expressed itself. Much of the value of acts of kindness lies in this. A blind, blundering sympathy is valuable because it reveals a communion of spirit when the heart is sad; but its value is in the lowest scale. Judgment should guide the expression of feeling if we would make the most of it and secure the highest good of those for whom it is cherished. 5. It is *courageous*. Considering that David was a fugitive, and that to all appearances his friends would be regarded as the foes of the new power rising in Israel, it required some courage in these men to identify themselves in this practical way with the unfortunate king. Herein lies much of the virtue of their conduct. It does require considerable courage to manifest sympathy with the fallen, the shunned, the outcast. Our Saviour's sympathy was of this kind, and it was one of the things that led to his own rejection of men and his cruel death (Matt. ix. 10, 11; xi. 19; Luke xv. 1, 2). There is abundant scope for this virtue.

II. ITS PLACE IN THE WORKING OUT OF GOD'S PURPOSES. The sorrows of David were for purposes of discipline—to chastise and train his spirit so that it might be more fully purged from the evil taint of his terrible sin (ch. xii. 7—12), and be more fitted to perform his part as a servant of God in raising the religious tone of the nation, and, indeed, of the whole world. But God is very pitiful even in his anger. "He knoweth our frame." He will not "always chide." The rough wind is "stayed in the day of his east wind." With the wound he sends the balm. He raises up instrumentalities to cause his people to feel that there is a hand to heal as well as to smite. And the appearance of these men, with their considerate provision for his wants, was a means of revealing the goodness of God, and of assuring David that his compassion was not clean gone for ever. All true sympathy in our adversity is a revelation. It brings hope and courage to the crushed spirit, and strengthens faith in the love which never fails, even in the darkest hour. The storm and sunshine are alike God's servants: they "work together" under his direction to sweeten life and endow it with freshness and beauty of eternal spring.

III. ITS RECOGNITION BY GOD. The sacred historian was doubtless guided by a principle of selection when he inserted the names of these three men in a book that is to abide through all time. It was the will of God that reference should be made to their conduct. Thus has God expressed approval of their regard for his anointed. In the same way our Saviour gave honour to the sympathy of the woman who poured on him the box of ointment, by declaring that what she had done should be told in all the world for a memorial of her (Matt. xxvi. 13). The sympathy of David for the poor is in like manner divinely recognized. The Bible is a book of instances for mankind. Other deeds of sympathy were performed which have left only the trace which belongs to all good deeds, namely, in the higher and gentler tone given to the world's general life: these are referred to in order to encourage all in the same cause of comforting and helping the needy in their season of sorrow.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. In the friendships and kindnesses of one part of our life we are sowing the seeds which may return to us in their own kind when later on we may experience trouble (cf. ch. x. 1; xii. 27), and hence we should be encouraged to do good to all men, "especially to the household of faith." 2. In our acts of sympathy we are to remember that they reach beyond the individual—they are helpful in marking out God's gracious purposes toward mankind. 3. Christ has given encouragement to acts of kindness done to the poor and needy, and conferred great honour upon them in that

he regards them as done to himself (Matt. xxv. 34—40). 4. While we should not cramp and weaken our generous impulses by over-much introspection and supervision, yet we ought to be careful that the forms they assume are such as will most surely benefit those concerned in them.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—14.—(JERUSALEM.) *The council-chamber of Absalom.* "And Jehovah had appointed," etc. (ver. 14). The success of the rebellion seemed well-nigh complete. Absalom occupied the capital; was proclaimed by "all Israel;" supported by the wisest statesman, and, apparently, by "the king's friend" and the high priests; held his council (ch. xvi. 20); and took possession of the harem, "the first decided act of sovereignty" (subsequently he was also solemnly anointed, ch. xix. 10, probably by Zadok and Abiathar). "Absalom's next step was to endeavour his father's destruction, in the conviction that his own throne would never be secure so long as he lived. The son had no relentings. He had knowingly subjected himself to the inevitable necessity of taking his father's life, and he only desired to learn how that object might be most effectually secured. A council was held on this question, and it is *the first cabinet council* to which history admits us. It was doubtless conducted in the same form as other royal councils; and, from the instance before us, it appears that the members who had anything to suggest, or rather such as the king called upon for their opinion, described the course they thought best suited to the circumstances" (Kitto, 'Daily Bible Illust.'). It was the turning-point of the revolt (Ps. xcii. 7—9); and in it we see—

I. A RENOWNED COUNSELLOR urging promptitude with oracular wisdom. "And Ahithophel said," etc. (vers. 1—5; ch. xv. 31); "*this night*" (ch. xvi. 14; vers. 2, 16); *instant action* being, in his view, necessary to the accomplishment of the death of David and the success of the revolution. His counsel was the result of an unerring judgment, expressed with the utmost confidence, and thoroughly adapted (ver. 14, "good counsel") to effect its end. It was worthy of his great reputation. Extraordinary human wisdom is sometimes: 1. Employed *against the servants of God* and against his kingdom, of which they are the most conspicuous representatives. "This wisdom descendeth not from above," etc. (Jas. iii. 15). 2. Stimulated, in its exercise, by *personal hatred* toward them. "I will smite the king only" (perhaps exulting in the prospect of inflicting vengeance with his own hand). 3. Fraught with *deadly peril* to them (ver. 4). David himself, as he came "wearied and weak-handed" to the plain of the Jordan and rested there, knew not yet his imminent danger and "marvellous escape" (1 Sam. xxiii. 24—28). "But a higher power than the wisdom of the renowned Gilonite guided events." The Lord is the Defence of his people; and his promise concerning his Church is that "the gates (counsels) of Hades shall not prevail against it."

II. A RIVAL ORATOR advising delay with plausible arguments. "And Hushai said," etc. (vers. 7—13). "He was not a member of the council; but he had been well received by Absalom, whose greater treachery against his father made him give ready credence to the pretended treachery of his father's friend. It was at Absalom's suggestion that he was called in, and, being informed of the course Ahithophel had advised, he saw at once the danger that this course threatened to David; and, in fulfilment of his mission to defeat this man's counsel, he advanced divers reasons against it, all tending to *delay*" (Kitto). "It would not only ward off David's present danger, but would also, as Tacitus observes, give ill men time to repent, and the good to unite" (Delany). His counsel was the result of a profound acquaintance with human nature, and given with a persuasive eloquence equal to his wisdom. Advice favourable to God's servants: 1. Is often given in *unlikely places*, among their adversaries and by persons unsuspected of sympathy with them (Acts v. 38). 2. Derives its power from the *selfish dispositions* of the ungodly themselves: their fears (vers. 8—10) and their vainglory (vers. 11—14). Hushai's speech was "full of a certain kind of boasting which pleased the younger men" (Clericus). 3. *Succeeds* far beyond what might have been naturally expected, in making wisdom appear foolishness (vers. 4, 14).

"His tongue
Dropp'd manna, and could make the worse appear
The better reason, to perplex and dash
Maturest counsels."

(Milton.)

III. AN INFATUATED USURPER adopting a policy fatal to his own designs. His decision was the result of: 1. His *misjudgment* of the effect of delay upon the nation; for he did not consider that "only the discontented part of the people formed the kernel of the insurrection, that no small portion still remained true to David, and that another part, now for the moment fallen away, would return after the first fit of revolution had passed" (Erdmann). 2. His *over-confidence* in his power and success. 3. His love of *personal display* (his ruling passion). "The new-made king gave the preference to a proposal which promised him, at any rate for a few days, the enjoyment of complete repose and the gratifications of his high position" (Ewald). 4. But herein the sacred historian indicates (what so often appears in the Books of Samuel) the overruling *providence of God* (1 Sam. ii. 1—10; ix. 1—25; xxxi. 7—10; ch. i. 19) which: (1) Pervades all thoughts and actions of men; all places and events. In the council-chamber of Absalom, where there seemed to be nothing but godless ambition, political wisdom, and "the strife of tongues," there was an unseen presence, observing, directing, controlling all. "The king's heart," etc. (Prov. xxi. 1). (2) Employs (without approving) the cunning craftiness of some men to check and punish that of others. (3) "Permits evil to work out its own consequences, and the wicked to entangle themselves in their own snares, that he may reveal his justice and holiness in the self-condemnation and self-destruction of the power of evil" (ver. 23; ch. xviii. 7, 14). "When God is contriving misfortunes for man, he first deprives him of his reason" (Euripides).—D.

Vers. 15—22.—*Slight services: a sermon to young persons.* "And a wench [the maidservant] went and told them, and they went and told King David" (ver. 17). The people of Israel were divided into two parties—the good and the bad; the servants of King David, who had been driven away from Jerusalem, and the servants of Absalom, who had taken possession of the city and were now intent upon his destruction. The world is also divided into two parties, consisting of those who are for Christ and those who are against him. And the slight but useful services rendered to David illustrate similar services to Christ. 1. *It is a good thing to be on the right side*—to be a servant of "the King of kings and Lord of lords." Outside the city, two young men, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, hiding themselves at En-rogel (the Fuller's Fountain), and waiting to carry news to the king; inside the city, their fathers (the high priests Abiathar and Zadok) and Hushai (the king's friend), preparing to send it: these were "faithful among the faithless found." 2. *One who cannot do much can yet do something* for his lord and master. If he cannot lead an army or give counsel in "the assembly of the elders," he can at least carry a message, like the brave Jonathan (1 Kings i. 42) and the swift-footed Ahimaaz (ch. xviii. 23); or, like the trusty maidservant of one of the high priests, who (as though going to the well for water) conveyed intelligence to them without suspicion. She could perform this service even more effectively than others in a higher station (2 Kings v. 2). The servant who has only "one talent" must not "hide it in the earth" (Matt. xxv. 25). Consider what you can do for Christ. 3. *Small services may display great principles* and qualities: love, obedience, diligence, veracity, fearlessness, faithfulness, self-control, self-denial, and self-sacrifice. "He that is faithful in that which is least," etc. (Luke xvi. 10). 4. *Hardly any service can be performed without difficulty* and danger. "And a lad [probably on the watch] saw them," and gave information; so that they were closely pursued by Absalom's servants (soldiers) as far as Bahurim (ch. xvi. 5). It was a race for life. 5. *The servant who does his best will seldom fail to obtain opportune help.* "And the woman took and spread the covering over the well's mouth," etc. (vers. 19, 20). "It was not the first nor yet the last time that an Israelitish woman wrought deliverance for her people" (Edersheim). Her motive was good; not her equivocation and deceit. Many circumstances and casual events, under the ordering of Divine providence, conduce to the safety and success of a faithful servant. 6. *There is as much need of small services as*

great; and such services have frequently important issues; it may be escape from death. The message of Hushai, carried by the maidservant and communicated by the young men, contributed to the security and welfare of the king, "and all the people that were with him" (ver. 22). "In this information sent to him so opportunely, David believed that he had reason to recognize a new sign that the Lord still thought of him in love and cared for his deliverance" (Krummacher).

> "Like the coolness of snow on a harvest day
> Is a faithful messenger to them that send him:
> He refresheth the soul of his master."
>
> (Prov. xxv. 13.)

7. *They are surely noticed,* and will be abundantly recompensed. "And the king said, He is a good man," etc. (ch. xviii. 27). "And whosoever shall give to drink," etc. (Matt. x. 42).—D.

Vers. 21, 22.—*David's escape across the Jordan.* "And they passed over Jordan," etc. (ver. 22). Leaving Bahurim behind them, David and his company pursued their rough and dreary way along the wilderness of Judah until they descended into the plain of the Jordan; and there in some place (Ayephim, equivalent to "weary," Authorized Version; "The Traveller's Rest") at an easy distance from the ford of the river (opposite Jericho, and near Gilgal, ch. xix. 15) they rested at nightfall. "Amongst the thickets of the Jordan the asses of Ziba were unladen, and the weary travellers refreshed themselves, and waited for tidings from Jerusalem" (ch. xv. 28, 36; xvi. 14; ver. 16). David had been uncertain whether to cross the river; but during the night the messengers arrived, saying, "Arise," etc.; the encampment was broken up, and "by the morning light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over Jordan." *That night was another memorable one* (1 Sam. xix. 8—18). "It has been conjectured with much probability that as the first sleep of that evening was commemorated in the fourth psalm, so in the third is expressed the feeling of David's thankfulness at the final close of those twenty-four hours, of which every detail has been handed down, as if with the consciousness of their importance at the time" (Stanley). Ps. iv. 'An Even-song'—

> "In peace will I lay me down and straightway sleep:
> For thou, Jehovah, alone wilt make me to dwell securely."
>
> (Ps. iv. 8.)

Ps. iii. (see inscription), 'A Morning Prayer'—

> "I laid me down and slept;
> I awaked, for Jehovah sustaineth me."
>
> (Ps. iii. 5.)

What a brilliant light do these psalms cast upon the inner life of David! Consider him at this time as—

I. BESET BY FEROCIOUS FOES; numerous, powerful, and crafty (ch. xv. 12, 13; xvi. 15; vers. 1—3); seeking to take away his crown, his honour, and his life; by fraud, treachery, and violence. His trouble represents that of the persecuted and afflicted servant of God in every age. 1. The feeling of trouble is usually intensified with the approach of night, the season of peril and emblem of distress. 2. The good man in trouble seeks relief in God (Ps. cxxi. 4); whilst acknowledging his sins, he is conscious of sincerity, trusts in Divine mercy, and derives from his experience of former mercies an argument for his prayer. 3. He regards his adversaries in no vindictive spirit; and, although he desires their overthrow as the enemies of God, still more he desires their conversion. "The address is directed to the aristocratic party, whose tool Absalom had become" (Delitzsch).

> "When I cry, answer me, O God of my righteousness,
> Who hast made room for me in straitness;
> Be merciful unto me, and hear my prayer!
> Ye sons of men! how long shall my glory become shame?
> How long will ye love vanity, will ye seek after lies?" etc.
>
> (Ps. iv. 1—5.)

II. AIDED BY FAITHFUL FRIENDS, who sympathize with him, strive to defeat his enemies, give him useful counsel, and share his dangers (ch. xv. 15, 21, 23; vers. 7, 15, 17). 1. A time of adversity tests the fidelity of friends; and manifests it, as the night brings out the stars that were unseen by day. 2. It also makes their aid peculiarly precious; and is a sign of the favour of the Eternal Friend. 3. When friends begin to despond in a time of trouble, it is the part of a good man, "strong in faith," to encourage them, by directing their thoughts to the Divine Source of consolation, his own "exceeding joy."

"Many say, Who will show us good?
Lift up the light of thy countenance upon us, O Jehovah!
Thou hast put gladness into my heart
More than when their corn and wine abound," etc.
(Ps. iv. 6—8.)

III. DELIVERED BY DIVINE FAVOUR; shown in his preservation, the salutary warning received during the night, the safe passage of the Jordan, so that "by the morning light," etc. (ver. 22), and the complete defeat of Ahithophel's counsel (vers. 14). 1. In their hostility to the good, wicked men rely on their own wisdom and strength alone, ignoring God; but "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly," etc. (2 Pet. ii. 9). 2. Often when a good man is despised as one abandoned of God, he is taken into closer fellowship with him and more signally protected and delivered. 3. In the morning light of every day he perceives fresh tokens of Divine favour. Whilst God "giveth songs in the night" (Job xxxv. 10), "his mercies are new every morning" (Lam. iii. 23; Ps. v.; xxx. 5; cxliii. 8).

"Jehovah, how many are mine adversaries!
Many rise up against me,
Many say of my soul,
There is no help for him in God.
But thou, Jehovah, art a Shield about me,
My Glory and the Lifter-up of my head.
I cry to Jehovah with my voice,
And he answereth me from his holy mountain," etc.
(Ps. iii. 1—6.)

IV. INCITED TO VICTORIOUS CONFIDENCE; by the contemplation of what God is to him and has done for him (Gen. xv. 1); as, having now escaped his most immediate peril, he travels on "by the morning light" toward Mahanaim (ver. 24). Troubles do not always "pass away with light." Enemies still threaten (Ps. iii. 1), and with each returning day the servant of God has to begin the conflict afresh (ch. v. 22, 23). But: 1. Even when most formidable, they do not terrify him whose hope is in Jehovah. 2. They are regarded as if already overthrown. 3. And to Jehovah alone is the victory ascribed.

"I will not be afraid of ten thousands of the people
Who have set themselves against me round about.
Arise, O Jehovah! Help me, O my God!
For thou smitest all mine enemies on the cheek,
Thou breakest the teeth of the ungodly.
To Jehovah belongeth the victory!
Upon thy people be thy blessing!"
(Ps. iii. 7—9.)

To the period of David's exile beyond Jordan have been also referred many other psalms: Ps. lxi., lxii., lxiii. (see inscription), cxliii. (Septuagint, "when his son pursued him"), xxvi., xxvii., xxviii., etc. "A man who can, like David, amidst the first mutterings of an unexpected storm display such lofty composure and submission, and then amidst its fiercest outbursts sing hymns like the third and fourth psalms, penetrated with the purest trust in God, is already raised in an eminent degree above human weakness and frailty, and, whatever be his outward fate, he can only quit this life as one of God's victors" (Ewald).—D.

Ver. 23.—(GILOH.) *The suicide of Ahithophel.* Displeased with the decision of the

council (ver. 14), Ahithophel left the city and returned to his own house, whence he had been summoned the day before (ch. xv. 12). While Ahimaaz and Jonathan hurried eastward toward the Jordan with their message (the decision of the council being as yet unknown publicly, or its reversal feared), the renowned counsellor rode southward toward Giloh, brooding over what might have been (ver. 2) and what would be; the shadows of night thickening around him (1 Sam. xxviii. 1—10); and the same night (or soon afterwards) "his lamp was put out in darkness" (Prov. xiii. 9). "With the deliberate cynicism of a man who had lost all faith, he committed that rare crime in Israel, suicide" (Edersheim). "He was probably not the first man who hanged himself, but he bears the unenviable distinction of being the first whose hanging himself is recorded; and society would have little reason to complain if all who have since sentenced themselves to this doom were as worthy of it as this father of self-suspenders." (Kitto). "So perished the great Machiavelli of that age, the very wisest of the very wise men of this world!" (Delany). We have here—

I. A DISAPPOINTED POLITICIAN. Like many other eminent politicians, he was destitute of religious principles; set his heart upon the world, and had "his portion in this life" (Ps. xvii. 14); was proud of his own wisdom, ambitious of wealth, fame, honour, and power, and hostile to godliness and godly men; the leading mind of the ungodly party in Israel. "He had no regard either to the ways of God or the laws of God. Providence made no part of his plan. He considered with great sagacity how *he* was to act; but he never considered how God would act; and therefore all his wise designs must have been very defective. The rich man said, 'I shall want room for my stores,' etc. But the Gospel calls him a fool, for not considering that God might call him out of the world that night, and that then all his schemes of happiness and prosperity would die with him. Such is he who is wise without God; and such was this Ahithophel" (Jones of Nayland). We now see him under the influence of: 1. *Wounded pride*, frustrated ambition, and, probably, ungratified malice (ver. 1). The rejection of his counsel was regarded by him as a personal affront, and a fatal blow to his position and prospects; for "he had been impelled by nothing else than a mad ambition, so that life itself became insupportable when the attainment of the position he had hankered after proved insufficient to satisfy his desires" (Ewald). He would be revenged on Absalom himself, by leaving him to pursue his own course. 2. *Unavoidable fear* of the disgrace, infamy, and punishment that awaited him. For, by the adoption of Hushai's counsel, he foresaw that all was lost, and that David would live and reign. Although he had the "Roman" courage (or rather, cowardice and impatience) to face death, he had not courage enough to face disaster.

> "He's not valiant that dares die;
> But he that boldly bears calamity."

3. *Bitter remorse*, desperation, and despair. "Perhaps he now began to see for the first time that, as he had been against God, God was against him, and, according to the prayer of David, was turning his counsel into foolishness. Under this calamity, what had he to support him? Nothing but that policy of a wicked man which never supported anybody long. In the trouble of a righteous man there is hope; but in the trouble of the wicked there is none. And, for a man like him, there is no refuge but in despair" (Ps. vii. 15, 16).

II. A DELIBERATE CRIME. "And put his household in order," etc.; *i.e.* "he settled his affairs, he made his will, as a person of sound mind and memory; as he would have done if death had been coming upon him in a natural way." He did not commit the deed in an outburst of passion, but with deliberation and forethought. Suicide is often due to insanity, and without blame (except in so far as it is induced by previous misconduct); but in his case there is no indication of it; nor was there the same justification or the same extenuation of guilt as in other cases (Judg. xvi. 30; 1 Sam. xxxi. 4, 5). Whatever may have been the measure of his culpability, suicide is a crime: 1. Against a man *himself*; a violation of the law of self-preservation written upon his nature. 2. Against *society*. "Nor can any case be put which is not concluded under sin by the peculiar injury or general mischief" (Paley, 'Sermons'). 3. Against *God*, who has "fixed his canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (Exod. xx. 13);

who has committed life to men as a trust; and whose will in relation to it is intimated in various ways. "In every society where the Christian and old Pythagorean idea of life, as a talent and a trust, is unknown or forgotten, and where its value is measured by enjoyment, suicide will be likely to become common" (Thirlwall, 'Letters to a Friend'). It is "a complication of ingratitude, contempt of the Lord's gift of life, defiance, impatience, pride, rebellion, and infidelity" (Scott; Wardlaw, 'Sys. Theol.'). "What a mixture do we find here of wisdom and madness!" (Hall). "Thus he displayed the miserable infatuation of worldly policy" (Wordsworth). Under the light which the gospel sheds upon the present and the future, the act of the self-destroyer is rendered peculiarly criminal and awful.

III. A DREADFUL RETRIBUTION. (Ch. xii. 10—12.) The course of sin on which he had entered was attended (as it ever is in others) by most baneful effects on himself, and ended in destruction; the culmination at once of his sin and of his punishment. He became: 1. His own *tormentor*; rushing against impassable barriers, and bringing upon himself irreparable misery. 2. His own *tempter*; being urged onward by inward impulses to further transgression. 3. His own *executioner*; inflicting with his own hand the extreme penalty of the law; a retribution more dreadful than when inflicted by the direct stroke of Heaven (ch. vi. 6—8) or the hands of other men (ch. iv. 12; xviii. 7, 14). "The wages of sin is death" (Prov. xiv. 32). "Thus it falleth out that wicked counsel doth chiefly redound to the hurt of the author thereof" (Willet). Like Judas, Ahithophel went to "his own place" (Acts i. 25).

IV. AN ADMONITORY END; the consideration of which should lead to: 1. The conviction of the enormous evil of suicide; which may exert a preserving influence in an hour of temptation. 2. The abhorrence of the principles which induce its commission, and the avoiding of every sinful way. The sinner is a self-destroyer (Hos. xiii. 9). 3. The cherishing, with renewed earnestness, of the opposite principles of humility, faith, patience, godliness, uprightness, charity, etc. "If the affections are violently set upon anything in this world, whether fame, wealth, or pleasure, and are disappointed, then life becomes insupportable. Therefore, the moral is this: 'Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.'"—D.

Vers. 24—29.—(MAHANAIM.) *Hospitality.* Shobi (ch. x. 1—4; xii. 26—31); Machir (ch. ix. 4); Barzillai (ch. xix. 31—40). On hearing of the arrival of David at Mahanaim, these three men came with one accord, bringing presents, and "provided the king of sustenance while he lay" there (ch. xix. 32). "We are inclined to regard them as representative men: Shobi, of the extreme border-inhabitants, or rather foreign tributaries; Machir, of the former adherents of Saul; and Barzillai, of the wealthy landowners generally" (Edersheim). Whilst acting, specially, from feelings of loyalty, gratitude, and affectionate regard, they displayed a *hospitality* such as is often enjoined (Lev. xxv. 35; Isa. lviii. 7; Luke xiv. 13; Rom. xii. 13), but frequently omitted (Heb. xiii. 2). It was: 1. *Much needed* by David and his followers, "who were like a band of beggars or marauders" (Delitzsch), driven from their home, in a comparatively strange land (Ps. lxi. 2), beset by hostile forces (ver. 25), in want of shelter, rest, and provision (ver. 29). "The Son of man had not where to lay his head" (Luke ix. 58); and in his "brethren" he is often persecuted and in want of all things (Matt. xxv. 35; Gal. vi. 10; 1 Tim. v. 10; 3 John 5, 6). 2. *Admirably exemplified.* (1) Spontaneously, without being solicited. (2) Promptly, without delay. (3) Cordially, with sympathy and pity; for they said, "The people have become hungry, and weary, and thirsty in the wilderness." (4) Considerately; those things which were most necessary and agreeable being supplied. (5) Generously; according to ability, and "without grudging" (1 Pet. iv. 9). (6) Disinterestedly, unselfishly, with self-denial and at no little risk. (7) Perseveringly; not (as in another familiar instance) for three days (Acts xxviii. 7), but for nearly as many months. It not unfrequently happens that the poor and the stranger receive the most hospitable treatment from those on whom they have the least claim. 3. *Eminently helpful*, comforting and encouraging; a sign of the Divine care for him (Gen. xxxii. 2)—a proof that he was not forsaken by all the people, and an influence adapted to gather others around him. "The faithfulness of human love, strengthening in need and cheering in misfortune is not only the copy, but also the means and instrument of the faithfulness of the Divine love, granted

to those who bow humbly beneath God's hand and wholly trust him" (Erdmann). 4. *Abundantly requited.* Those who exercise it "are blessed in their doing" (Jas. i. 25); and receive unexpected honour and benefit from their guests (ch. xix. 33, 38, 39; Gen. xviii.; Acts xxviii. 8) and from the Lord himself (Heb. vi. 10; Matt. xxv. 34).—D.

Ver. 23.—*Suicide.* Such was the end of the great counsellor of the age, who was regarded as an "oracle of God" (ch. xvi. 23). Astute as he was, he was evidently unprincipled. His desertion of David for Absalom, and the advice he gave the latter, show this. His wisdom did not avail for his own good. He died "as a fool dieth," and by his own hand. Yet there was a thoughtfulness and deliberateness about the deed such as was in a certain keeping with his intellectual ability. It is not difficult to account for the desperate course he took. He was mortified that Absalom, for whom he had incurred so much guilt, and made so great sacrifices, and who knew and revered his wisdom (ch. xvi. 23), should have rejected his counsel for that of Hushai; and, because of his confidence in the wisdom of his own advice, he felt sure that David would be victorious, and he himself, not only disgraced and ruined, but executed as a traitor. Rather than face this prospect, he hanged himself. Self-murder is not an agreeable subject, yet it may be salutary occasionally to reflect upon it. Many do put an end to their own lives; and doubtless many others are more or less tempted to do so. It may be hoped that consideration of the matter may fortify the minds of some against the first approaches of such temptation.

I. THE CAUSES OF SUICIDE. 1. *Mental derangement is doubtless a common cause.* Not so common as we might infer from the verdicts of coroners' juries, anxious to relieve surviving relatives from the pains and penalties inflicted by antiquated civil and ecclesiastical laws; yet still the most common cause. It is virtually the same thing to say that disease of the brain is the common cause. This is often hereditary, or it may be induced by overwork, or by excessive indulgence of the appetites and passions, or by the pressure of worldly anxieties. Insanity relieves of the guilt of self-murder; nevertheless, where the insanity is the result of habits which are sinful, the guilt of these remains; and, if the probable issue of them was foreseen, the sinner cannot free himself altogether from the guilt which attaches to the act of self-destruction. 2. *The pressure or dread of troubles often leads to this crime.* Not only as they produce insanity, but as they operate on a sane mind. Intense pain, great misfortunes, disgrace, or the dread of it, fear of destitution, etc. Instances: Saul and his armour-bearer (1 Sam. xxxi. 4, 5); Zimri (1 Kings xvi. 18); Ahithophel; and the Philippian jailor (Acts xvi. 27). 3. *Remorse and despair.* Judas (Matt. xxvii. 5).

II. ITS SIN AND FOLLY. 1. *It is contrary to nature.* The love of life is one of the strongest principles implanted in us by our Creator. "Self-preservation is the first law of nature." The natural conscience, which teaches the criminality of taking the life of another, equally teaches that of taking our own. We may for adequate reasons, in serving God or men, expose our lives to peril; but we must not ourselves extinguish them, and thus cut short our opportunities of service. 2. *It is daring impiety towards God.* It is a cowardly abandonment of our trust; an act of rebellion against him who has assigned us our post and work; a contemptuous casting away as worthless, or worse, of God's precious gift. It springs from distrust of God, discontent with his appointments, a proud refusal to serve him unless under such conditions as are agreeable to ourselves. 3. *It is a serious injustice to our friends and society.* Our life is given us for the sake of others as well as ourselves. To abandon it is to rob and injure them. It is vain to say we can no longer be of service to them. Under the worst circumstances a man can set an example of patience and submission such as is much needed in this world of suffering. And if he have become a burden to others, in bearing the burden they may be enriched and blessed. 4. *It is in direct opposition to the revealed will of God.* No distinct prohibition can, indeed, be quoted, unless it is included in the command, "Thou shalt do no murder;" which is doubtful. But it is entirely opposed to all the precepts of Scripture which enjoin patient endurance of trials, and that to the end; and to the examples of such endurance which are set before us, especially that of our Lord Jesus Christ. The instances in Holy Writ of fleeing from suffering by rushing out of the world, are all those of either wicked or deranged persons. 5. *It is a*

desperate plunge into worse miseries than can be experienced in this life. The self-murderer rushes red-handed into the presence of the awful Judge, depriving himself of all possibility of repentance.

III. PRESERVATIVES AGAINST THIS DREADFUL SIN. In this case emphatically "prevention is better than cure"—preservation, that is, from that condition of mind from which suicide springs. And this is to be found in vital godliness in all its branches. In particular: 1. *Constant faith in God.* Confidence that he is, and that he is the Rewarder of those who seek him, however he may try them. Unbounded trust in his goodness and wisdom, as exercised in respect to ourselves. Earnest and cheerful service of him under whatever conditions he may place us. Profound submission to his will. Dread of his displeasure. 2. *Moderation in respect to worldly things.* In our estimates of their worth, and of the evil of being deprived of them; in the pursuit of them; in their enjoyment; in sorrow at their departure. Habitual self-control. Intemperance partakes of the guilt of suicide. 3. *Prayer.* Habitual. Special when cares and temptations press with special weight. "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. v. 7; comp. Ps. lv. 22). "In nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer," etc. (Phil. iv. 6, 7, Revised Version). "The peace of God" thus obtained will best "guard" the heart and the thoughts against all that tends to despondency. 4. *The communion of saints.* Christian society; social worship; visitation of the Christian poor, whose privations and sufferings will often make our own seem small, whose cheerfulness and resignation will shame our discontent and impatience, and assist us to a better mind. 5. *Prompt and resolute* rejection, with loathing, of every thought of this as a possible way out of trouble. Probably many persons of a nervous and desponding temper are visited with such thoughts. Let them be instantly dismissed, lest they grow in frequency and power, and in a weak moment produce the corresponding deed.

In conclusion, all sin is of the nature of suicide. He who impenitently persists in it destroys the life of his own soul. All they that hate the Divine wisdom and forsake its ways "love death" (Prov. viii. 36).—G. W.

Vers. 27—29.—*Supplies for the king's army.* Mahanaim is memorable in the history of Jacob; derived, indeed, its name from the circumstance that there "the angels of God met him" (Gen. xxxii. 1) on his way back to the promised land, and just before his interview with Esau, about whose present disposition towards him he was doubtful. In our text also we read of veritable angels (messengers) of God, though human, coming to the same place to succour and encourage another of his servants when in circumstances of great difficulty. David had with him a large company of friends and subjects, who remained faithful while so many were faithless; but their very number was an embarrassment, and they arrived in the neighbourhood "hungry, and weary, and thirsty." Very welcome, therefore, were the supplies which these chieftains brought for their relief, and which the historian enumerates with so much evident pleasure. They thus cheered the heart of David, contributed very materially to his final victory over his rebellious son and subjects, and obtained for themselves a good name. In the Christian warfare against error and sin there is room and need for this kind of service. The progress of the spiritual cause depends no little on the material aids. As soldiers must eat and drink in order that they may fight, so Christian ministers and missionaries, however spiritual and holy and disinterested, cannot preach and teach unless they are fed and clothed, and their work facilitated by various appliances which are only to be obtained and maintained by money or money's worth. It is only in exceptional cases that competent labourers are able to support themselves by the labour of their hands or from their private fortunes. Hence the absolute necessity that Christians should furnish material supplies, and the certainty that the progress of the Christian cause in the world will be greatly hindered if, through indifference or avarice, such supplies are scantily furnished. In our time the duty of furnishing them more abundantly needs to be pressed on the attention of the disciples of Christ with much urgency. The world is almost everywhere open to the missionary; devoted men and women offer themselves, ready to go anywhere to make Christ known; but in many instances they cannot be sent forth for want of the means of sending and sustaining them. That the ability of Christ's servants in this direction is being

employed to the utmost is incredible in view of the lavish expenditure of many of them on worldly display and luxury. The disposition is wanting; and this in part because a conviction has not yet been awakened in their hearts of the necessity and worth of pecuniary supplies, and the imperative duty and high honour of furnishing them. Such a conviction may be promoted by due attention to the following considerations.

I. THE OBLIGATIONS OF ALL CHRISTIANS IN RESPECT TO THE PROMOTION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE WORLD ARE THE SAME. The character, the toils, the self-denying endurance of hardships and privations, of many missionaries and other ministers of the gospel, awaken admiration and applause. But, amongst those who applaud, the feeling is often wanting that they are themselves as really and truly bound to devoted service of Christ as the men whom they admire. 1. Objects of the same Divine love, redeemed by the same precious blood, called by the same grace, partakers of the same privileges and hopes, they ought to cherish a like ardent love to Christ, and with a like zeal seek to fulfil the purposes for which he lived and died. 2. They are equally "stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. iv. 10; 1 Chron. xxix. 14, 16). 3. They are equally bound to love their fellow-men, and seek their good to the utmost of their power

II. THE NECESSITY OF MATERIAL SUPPLIES AFFORDS TO ALL THE OPPORTUNITY OF BEING PARTNERS WITH THE NOBLEST WORKERS IN SUSTAINING AND EXTENDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD. The good women who ministered to our Lord of their substance (Luke viii. 2, 3) became thus partakers in his work. The Philippians who showed hospitality to St. Paul when amongst them (Acts xvi. 15), or sent gifts to him afterwards (Phil. iv. 14—16), are recognized by him as having "fellowship" (partnership) with him, "in furtherance of the gospel" (Phil. i. 5, 7, Revised Version). St. John describes those who were hospitable to evangelists as their "fellow-helpers to the truth" (3 John 8). In like manner, all who subscribe of their money towards the support of Christian ministries and missions, have the honour of being fellow-workers with those who give the ablest personal service. This was recognized by the lad who hastened to a missionary meeting, and being asked the reason of his eagerness, replied, "I have a share in the concern." Bible, missionary, and other societies have, by awakening such thoughts and feelings, done much to enlarge and elevate the minds of the myriads of their supporters in every part of Christendom.

III. GIVING EXERCISES THE SAME CHRISTIAN VIRTUES AS PERSONAL SERVICE. For right and sufficient contribution of substance, as for right preaching and teaching, are required: 1. Faith and love. 2. Conscientiousness. 3. Self-denial. Indeed, all Christian principles and affections are brought into play in the course of earnest service of either kind. Both are processes of education of the Christian soul, by which the lessons of Christ are more thoroughly learnt.

IV. IT IS EQUALLY ACCEPTABLE TO GOD. St. Paul calls the present he had received from the Philippians "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God" (Phil. iv. 18; see also Heb. xiii. 16). Right motives are, of course, presupposed; but, when these are present, both kinds of service are equally acceptable. "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward" (Matt. x. 41).

V. IT SHALL OBTAIN A SIMILAR RECOMPENSE. In: 1. *The consciousness of Divine approval.* 2. *The pleasure of serving Christ.* 3. *The joy of doing the highest and most enduring good to men.* 4. *The rewards of the last day.* The expressed approval of Christ. Admission to "the joy of the Lord" (Matt. xxv. 21, 23). Participation with Christ and the saints in the joy of final and complete victory over the powers of evil. Every true-hearted sharer in the work and conflict shall share in the gladness of the triumph, when not only the sower and the reaper (John iv. 36), but those who have furnished them with needful support, shall "rejoice together."

Finally, we must not think of workers and givers as two distinct classes of persons, having no part in each other's functions. All Christians can and ought to render personal service as well as contributions. There is need and room for all to labour as well as give. In maintaining Church-life, in teaching the ignorant, in seeking and saving the lost, in comforting the sorrowful, etc., there is scope for the talents of all. No one can by his gifts purchase freedom from such services. We must give account of every talent committed to us.—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Ver. 1.—**And David numbered.** The verb really means that he organized his army, and arranged it in companies and divisions. As Absalom gathered all Israel to him, there would be some delay; and David, like a wise general, made use of it for training the brave but undisciplined men who had joined him, chiefly from Gilead. Besides these, he had with him numerous veterans, whose skill and experience would be invaluable in such service. The result was that when the rebels came to close quarters, they had a vast body of men, but David a disciplined force, which, under skilful generalship, scattered Absalom's raw levies with ease. The arrangement into thousands and hundreds was in accordance with the civil divisions (Exod. xviii. 25), both being, in fact, dictated by nature as multiples of our hands.

Ver. 2.—**A third part.** Armies are usually divided into three divisions: a centre and two wings when drawn up for battle; a van, the main body, and a rearguard when on the march. But the Israelites had no settled rule upon the point, and, when occasion required, Joab divided his army into two parts (ch. x. 9, 10). The reason of the threefold division in this case was that Ittai had brought his clan, or *taf*, with him, and as these would certainly not have fought under an Israelite leader, nor the Israelites under Ittai, David placed all foreigners under his command, while he gave his own nephews the command of the native troops. He thus avoided all jealousies; and Ittai's men, honoured by being made a distinct portion of the army, would feel their reputation at stake, and would rival the Israelites in valour.

Ver. 3.—**It is better that thou succour us out of the city.** David thought it to be his duty to go out with the men who were risking their lives in his cause, but they felt not only how painful it would be for a father to fight against his son; but also that there would certainly be a picked body of men who would try to bring the battle to a rapid end by slaying David. But while they partly urge personal considerations, their chief argument is that David would be of more use if, posted with a body of troops at the city, he held himself in reserve to succour any division that might be in danger. And David, seeing how earnest their wish was, yielded to this representation, feeling that it would give steadiness to his men if they knew that so experienced a general was watching the fight, and was ready to succour them if they needed aid. As the people say that it would not matter "if half of us die," and that David "is worth ten thousand of us," Ewald draws the reasonable conclusion that their whole number was about twenty thousand men. The Hebrew literally is, "For now (*'attah*) as us are ten thousand," which might mean, "There are ten thousand such as we are, but no one like thee." But the Septuagint and Vulgate read, "But thou (*attah*) art as ten thousand of us." The Syriac, however, like the Hebrew, reads "now."

Ver. 5.—**All the people heard.** The king spake so earnestly and strongly to the generals that the words ran from rank to rank as they marched forward. So in ver. 12 the man says to Joab, "In our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai," etc. It does not follow that each one heard the sound of the king's voice, but only that the command was given publicly again and again, and in the presence of the army.

Ver. 6.—**The wood of Ephraim.** There is a diversity of opinion as to the locality thus described. It might mean the large forest tract in the highlands of Ephraim; but if so, the battle must have been fought on the west of the Jordan, whereas the general tenor of the narrative makes it plain that it took place on the eastern side, near Mahanaim. It is true that no wood of Ephraim is ever mentioned elsewhere in the Bible as situated in Gilead, and those who cannot believe in such a wood except within the borders of the tribe, argue that, after the three divisions had marched out to battle, there was long skirmishing, in which Absalom drew David's men across the Jordan, and there gave battle. But Absalom's army was evidently surprised, and as we are told that "he pitched in the land of Gilead" (ch. xvii. 26), for him to have retired would have been a confession of weakness; and Joab, after seeing him cross the Jordan, would not have followed him, but let this retrograde movement have its effect upon his followers. Such a movement is absolutely incredible on the part of an army at least three times as numerous as those whom they attacked, and confident of victory. Moreover, armies in those days were not composed of men receiving pay, and bound to remain with their colours, but of yeomen unwilling to be kept long absent from their farms, and liable, therefore, rapidly to melt away. A quick decision was plainly necessary for Absalom, while David could afford to wait. But besides this, when his forces moved out of Mahanaim, David took his post at the gate with the reserves, and he was still there, sitting "between the two gates," when news was

brought him of the victory (ver. 24). The only real argument in support of the view that the battle was fought on the west of the Jordan is that "Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain" (ver. 23), Hebrew, the *kikkar*—a name specially given to the valley of the Jordan near Jericho. But then Cushi must also have run through the same valley, and it is evident that his route was in this very respect different from that taken by Ahimaaz. Really, *kikkar*, which in Hebrew means "circuit," may be used of the country round any city, and is applied in Neh. xii. 28 to the environs of Jerusalem. Here the meaning probably is that, while the Cushite took the route back over the battle-field through the wood, Ahimaaz went to the left of it, over the more level ground, nearer the Jordan. And though the name is chiefly used of that part near Jericho, it was probably applied popularly to every stretch of level ground near the river. This argument, therefore, is inconclusive; while, on the other side, it is plain that David's army returned that same day to Mahanaim, that they knew at once of his distress, and that they were beginning to steal away home when Joab made David come forth to thank them, and encourage them to remain with him. The most probable explanation of the difficulty is that "the wood of Ephraim" was so called because it was the spot where Jephthah defeated the Ephraimites when they invaded Gilead to punish him for daring to go to war without their consent, they being then the dominant tribe, to whose arbitrament belonged all imperial matters (Judg. xii. 4—6).

Ver. 8.—**The battle was there scattered.** The word in the Hebrew is a noun, which the Massorites have changed into a participle. But the noun is right: "The battle became a scattering," that is, it was a series of disconnected encounters, in which David's three divisions attacked and routed Absalom's men, while still on the march, without giving them an opportunity of collecting and forming in order of battle. **And the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.** The woodland was difficult, full of gorges and bogs and steep defiles leading down to the Jordan, and the fugitives easily lost their way in it, and wandered about till they were hopelessly entangled in thicket and morass.

Ver. 9.—**Absalom met the servants of David.** The verb means that he came upon them by chance. Evidently in the intricacies of the forest, Absalom had lost his way, and, finding himself suddenly in danger of being captured by some of David's men, he urged his mule through a thicket, as the open ground was blocked by his pursuers. But in the attempt his head was jammed between the boughs of a great terebinth, and the mule, struggling onward, left him hanging in mid-air. Nothing is said about his hair having caused the accident, and apparently it was his neck which became fixed. Probably, too, he was half stunned by the blow, and choked by the pressure; and then his hair would make it very difficult for him to extricate himself. And so, after one or two efforts, in which he would be in danger of dislocating his neck, he would remain suspended to await his fate. Now, this adventure makes the whole affair perfectly plain. Absalom was riding his mule, evidently unprepared for battle. The chariot and horses, with fifty men as his body-guard, used by him at Jerusalem (ch. xv. 1), are nowhere near him. Chariots, of course, would have been useless on such rough ground, but Absalom would have had a picked body of young men round him in the battle; and mules were only for use on the march, and were sent into the rear when the fighting began. But the last thing that Absalom expected was that he should be attacked on the march. He was advancing with an army infinitely more numerous than that of David, and assumed that David would wait at Mahanaim, and, if he fought at all, would fight under its walls. His defeat he regarded as certain, and then the vain-glorious prince and all Israel would drag the city into the nearest ravine. In this over-confidence he was riding in advance of his army, which was struggling on over most difficult ground. For "rising as the country does suddenly from the deep valley of the Jordan, it is naturally along its whole western border deeply furrowed by the many streams which drain the district; and our ride," says Canon Tristram, "was up and down concealed glens, which we only perceived when on their brink, and mounting from which on the other side, a short canter soon brought us to the edge of the next" (Tristram, p. 462). Struggling along over such ground, Absalom's men were not merely tired and weary, but had lost all order, and "become a scattering," and probably Absalom had cantered on in order to find some suitable spot for re-forming them. Suddenly he sees at a little distance before him one of the three detachments of David's army, which had marched out a few miles from Mahanaim, and posted themselves on some fit spot to attack the rebels on their march. Apparently they caught no glimpse of him, but he immediately became aware of the tactics of the king's generals, and discerned the extreme danger of his position. Everything depended upon celerity. If he could warn his men, the foremost would halt until the others came up, and a sufficient force be gathered to

resist Joab's onslaught. There was no cowardice on his part, but simply the discharge of his duty as a general. He turns his mule round, and dashes away in order to halt and form his men, keeping to the wood that he may not be seen. In his great haste he is not careful in picking his route, and possibly his mule was stubborn, and swerved; and so, in attempting to force his way through the thicket, he is stunned by a blow from a branch of a terebinth tree, and so entangled in its boughs that he cannot free himself; and as none of David's men had seen him, he might have hung there to be the prey of the vultures, and only his riderless mule have been left to bear witness to his having met with some disaster. Meanwhile his followers struggle on, until they come upon David's men, who put them to the sword. There is no battle, but the three divisions, advancing in order, make merciless slaughter of their opponents. For some time Absalom's forces, extended over many miles of march, do not even learn what is going on in their front, and twenty thousand men had fallen before, becoming aware of their defeat, they fly in wild confusion, to lose more men in their panic than had fallen in fighting. Their loss would even have been greater had not Joab stopped the pursuit upon Absalom's death. But where was Amasa, and what was he doing? He had led his troops miserably, had taken no precautions against surprise, and did nothing to rally them. Had Absalom got back in safety to the van, he might have saved his men from so disastrous a defeat; but Amasa, doubtless a brave soldier, proved himself quite incompetent to the duties of a commander-in-chief, and no match for the sagacious Joab.

Ver. 11.—**A girdle.** This was an important article of dress (Ezek. xxiii. 15), and was often richly embroidered. Absalom's death was well deserved, and there can be little doubt that, if he had gained the victory, he would have massacred David and all his family. The dishonour done to his father at Jerusalem was even intended by Ahithophel to render all reconciliation impossible. But Joab was disobeying the king's express orders, and as Absalom was incapable of making resistance, he ought to have taken him prisoner, and left it to David to decide what his punishment should be.

Ver. 12.—**Though I should receive.** The Hebrew text expresses the horror of the man at Joab's proposal much more vividly than the tame correction of the Massorites admitted into the Authorized Version: "And I, no! weighing in my palm a thousand of silver, I would not put forth my hand against the son of the king."

Ver. 13.—**Against mine own life.** Again the K'tib is better: "Or had I wrought perfidiously against his life—and nothing is hidden from the king—so wouldst thou have set thyself against me." Not only was the man faithful to the king, but he was perfectly aware of Joab's unscrupulous character. If only Absalom were put out of the way, Joab would have readily consented to the execution of the unimportant person who had been the means of gratifying his wish.

Ver. 14.—**Three darts**; Hebrew, *three staves* (see ch. xxiii. 21). The weapons of the ancients were of a very inferior kind, and stakes sharpened at the end and hardened in the fire were used by the infantry, until the increasing cheapness of iron made it possible to supply them with pikes. Joab's act was not one of intentional cruelty, but, picking up the first weapons that came to hand, he hurried away to kill his victim. His thrusts with these pointed sticks were brutal, and inflicted mortal wounds; but as they were not immediately fatal, Joab's armour-bearers, who had followed him, and who had with them Joab's own better weapons, were called upon to put an end to Absalom's sufferings. **His heart** does not mean that organ anatomically, but the middle of his body. So at the end of the verse, **in the midst of the oak**, is, in the Hebrew, *in the heart of the terebinth.*

Ver. 16.—**Joab blew the trumpet.** Stern and unscrupulous as he was, yet Joab is always statesmanlike. He had slain Absalom more for public than for private reasons, though he may have grimly remembered his own blazing barley-field. But the rebellion being now crushed, further slaughter was impolitic, and would only cause sullen displeasure. **The people**, at the end of the verse, are those under Joab's command, and a translation proposed by some, "Joab wished to spare the people," is to be rejected.

Ver. 17.—**A great pit**; Hebrew, *the great pit*; as though there was some great hollow or well-known depression in the wood, into which they cast Absalom's dead body, and raised a cairn over it. Such cairns were used as memorials of any event deemed worthy of lasting remembrance, but the similar cairn piled over the dead body of Achan (Josh. vii. 26) makes it probable that the act was also intended as a sign of condemnation of Absalom's conduct. **All Israel fled every one to his tent.** The Israelites were still a pastoral people, with tents for their abodes, though houses were gradually taking their place. The cry, "To your tents, O Israel!" (1 Kings xii. 16), meant, "Go away to your homes!" and not "Gather for war!" It is remarkable how constantly Absalom's followers are described as "Israel," while the loyal men are "David's

servants." Absalom's was evidently the popular cause, and, besides Uriah's murder, there must have been political reasons for discontent at work to make David's government so distasteful.

Ver. 18.—**Absalom ... had taken and reared up for himself a pillar.** In contrast with the heap of stones cast over his dishonoured body, the narrator calls attention to the costly memorial erected by Absalom in his lifetime. The three unnamed sons mentioned in ch. xiv. 27 seem to have died in their infancy, and probably also their mother; and Absalom, instead of taking other wives to bear him sons, which would have been in unison with the feelings of the time, manifested his grief by raising this monument. We have no reason for supposing that it was the result of vanity and ostentation. Ostentatious he was, and magnificent, but his not marrying again is a sign of genuine sorrow. **The king's dale** is "the Valley of Shaveh," mentioned in Gen. xiv. 17; but whether it was near Jerusalem, as Josephus asserts, or near Sodom, is uncertain. The pillar was probably an obelisk, or possibly a pyramid, and certainly was not the Ionic column of Roman workmanship shown in the Middle Ages and at the present time as "Absalom's grave." This is in the Kidron valley, about two furlongs from Jerusalem. **Absalom's place**; literally, *Absalom's hand*; that is, memorial (see note on 1 Sam. xv. 12).

Ver. 21.—**Cushi.** This is not a proper name, but signifies that he was an Ethiopian, that is, a negro slave in Joab's service. Joab was unwilling to expose Ahimaaz to the king's displeasure, and we gather from ver. 27 that the sending of a person of low rank would be understood to signify evil tidings. The bearer of good news received a present, and therefore the passing over all Joab's personal friends to send a slave was proof that the message was not expected to bring the bearer honour or reward. And Joab was quite right in supposing that David would be more displeased at his son's death than pleased at the victory.

Ver. 22.—**Seeing ... thou hast no tidings ready.** This was not true; there were most important tidings ready. But it is the translation which is in fault. What Joab said is, "Seeing thou hast no tidings that find," that is, no message that will find for thee the king's favour and a reward.

Ver. 23.—**Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain**; Hebrew, *the kikkar*, or *Jordan valley*. The battle, as we saw in ver. 6, was fought on the eastern side of the river, and Absalom's army, in their flight, would endeavour to reach the fords of the Jordan (comp. Judg. xii. 5); and probably Joab had pursued them for some distance before the man found in the thicket the body of the unfortunate Absalom. The large slaughter of twenty thousand men (ver. 7) proves that the defeated rebels were vigorously followed. In carrying the news the negro evidently went back by the route which the troops had followed; while Ahimaaz, using his more developed intellect, took a longer course to the west, but one that avoided the tangles and the deep defiles of the forest. Strictly, the Kikkar, as we have seen, was the name of the Jordan valley near Jericho; but it was probably applicable also to the same sort of formation further north. On approaching Mahanaim, Ahimaaz would strike inland, and the two routes would join one another; and one reason which made Ahimaaz go more to the west was that he did not wish the Cushite to know that he had a rival. He would thus go at a steady pace, picking his way through the forest, while Ahimaaz was using his utmost speed.

Ver. 24.—**David sat between the two gates.** The gateway was in a tower in the city walls, and David was sitting in the space between the inner and outer gates. Over this space was a chamber, mentioned in ver. 33, while the sentinel was posted upon the front wall over the outer gate.

Ver. 25.—**If he be alone.** In case of defeat there would have been a crowd of runaways in eager flight. And when soon afterwards a second courier is seen, as he also is alone, and comes by a different route, his appearance only suggests the idea of completer tidings. And quickly the foremost is recognized by his running as the son of the high priest, and David is then assured that all has gone well, because Joab would not have sent a man of such rank to be the bearer of bad news. The word good may also mean that Ahimaaz was too brave a man to have fled from the battle, and must, therefore, have come on an errand from Joab.

Ver. 28.—**And said unto the king, All is well**; Hebrew, *Peace*. This was the ordinary salutation among the Israelites, but its hurried exclamation on the part of the breathless runner was probably intended to convey the idea given in the Authorized Version. **Hath delivered up the men**, etc; Hebrew, *hath hedged*, or *shut in* (see upon this expression the note on 1 Sam. xvii. 46, and comp. Ps. xxxi. 8). Both there and in ch. xxii. 20 prosperity is compared to the being in a broad place, where there is freedom to act (see also note on ch. xiii. 2).

Ver. 29.—**Is the young man Absalom safe?** literally, *Is there peace to the lad Absalom?* Was this mere love for the handsome but rebellious son, whose image comes back to the father as he was when just reaching manhood? Certainly not. David was thinking of the ominous words, "The sword

shall never depart from thine house" (ch. xii. 10). The sword had devoured one son; was it now to claim another? And then? and then? Where would it stop? And Ahimaaz saw the king's distress, and gave an evasive answer. He understood now Joab's unwillingness to let him carry such painful tidings, and was glad that this part of the news had been entrusted to the Cushite. **When Joab sent the king's servant, and (me) thy servant.** This distinction is strange, and probably one of these phrases has crept in from the margin. But if the Ethiopian was technically "the king's slave," and Ahimaaz "thy slave" (by courtesy), we might imagine that negro attendants already formed part of the state of kings. It was long afterwards that Ebed-melech was a Cushite in the service of Zedekiah (Jer. xxxviii. 7).

Ver. 31.—**Tidings,** etc. The literal meaning is more fit for the mouth of a slave. "Let my lord the king learn the tidings that Jehovah hath judged (and delivered) thee this day from the hand," etc., that is, God, sitting as Judge at the assize of battle; **hath given sentence for thee,** and pronounced thy acquittal. The same phrase occurs in ver. 19.

Ver. 32.—**Is the young man,** etc.? Alarm for Absalom is the dominant feeling in David's mind; and as Cushi had been sent for the very purpose, he at once communicates the news to him in words that leave no doubt of his meaning.

Ver. 33.—**The king was much moved.** The Hebrew word properly refers to agitation of body. A violent trembling seized the king, and, rising, he went up to the guard-chamber over the two gates, that he might give free course to his lamentation. The whole is told so vividly that we can scarcely doubt that we have here the words of one who was present at this pathetic scene, who saw the tremor which shook David's body, and watched him as he crept slowly up the stairs, uttering words of intense sorrow. And it was conscience which smote him; for his own "sin had found him out." In Ps. xxxviii. and xl. he has made the confession that it was his own iniquity which was now surging over his head.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—18.—The facts are: 1. David, refreshed by the aid sent him, sets himself to the work of organizing his followers, and divides them into three corps, under Joab, Abishai, and Ittai respectively. 2. On his proposing to head the force, the people urge him to desist from doing so, pointing out that, in case of a conflict, the enemy would be sure to make an endeavour to kill him rather than to fight a regular battle. 3. The king yields to their persuasions, and, as they suggest, abides by the city to render succour if required. 4. Having seen his men march out, he lays strict injunction on his captains, in the hearing of their forces, to deal gently with Absalom for his sake. 5. A severe battle takes place, in which the followers of Absalom are defeated with great slaughter. 6. Absalom, in riding through a wood, is entangled in the branches by his head, and, while hanging there, is seen by a man who reports the fact to Joab. 7. On being reproached for not slaying Absalom, the man reminds Joab of the solemn injunction of the king, and that he was restrained by that, as also by the fear of being discovered should he attempt the deed in secrecy. 8. Joab in a rage takes three darts, and thrusts them through the heart of Absalom, and his armour-bearers also join in the infliction of wounds on his body. 9. Joab thereupon recalls the people from the pursuit, and causes Absalom to be buried in a pit and covered by a heap of stones, the only monument in his memory being the pillar which he himself had erected during his lifetime. 10. On the death and burial of Absalom becoming known, his forces are dispersed, each man fleeing to his tent.

The discharge of painful obligations. The hasty flight of David from Jerusalem was not the result of cowardice, but of prudence and of spiritual penetration. He thought it possible that a movement which had won over so able a man as Ahithophel, and which had developed so secretly, might issue in a sudden rising which would involve the city in bloodshed. Moreover, with the keen spiritual insight which ever characterized him, he could not but see in this rebellion the chastising hand before which it became him in his lifelong penitence, mingled with sincere trust, to bow. But now that Jerusalem was safe from bloodshed, and the sanctuary of God was undefiled, and his faithful adherents were refreshed and in personal safety, the time had come to consider his position and devise such measures as Providence might render possible; and

he thus at once found himself face to face with the unwelcome necessity of waging war against his own son. We may, then, take this as illustrating the obligations under which good men sometimes find themselves to pursue a course most distressing to their feelings.

I. AS A MATTER OF FACT, OBLIGATIONS INVOLVING MUCH PAIN IN THEIR DISCHARGE DO ARISE SOME TIME OR OTHER IN THE COURSE OF A GOOD MAN'S LIFE. Our entire life is a continuous duty. Obligations attend us every day. Right action means fulfilment of purposes, obeying laws, harmony with moral necessity. The pressure is incessant, and ordinarily is, for the Christian, a not-unwelcome yoke. But now and then duty is in forms requiring all the resources of a strong will, and in a direction against some of the most cherished feelings of the heart. David was bound to care for the kingdom over which he had been appointed by God. The validity of his anointing was still unrevoked by him who ordained it. It was, therefore, due to himself, his kingdom, and his God that he should take means to put down the usurpation of his own son. Paternal feeling might be pained, but the obligation was imperative. The Church furnishes many such instances. The most tender of ties have been severed in order to be true to Christ's commands. The doing of his work in the world often costs much pain because of its apparent antagonism to those best loved. Peter did not exercise discipline in the early Church without anguish of spirit (Acts v. 1—5). The reproofs of the Apostle Paul were with much sorrow of heart. Letters are daily written with tears. Parents daily have to resist the self-will of sons and daughters, and they mourn the sad necessity. Fidelity to right is, in many instances, a secret martyrdom.

II. IN THE MENTAL CONFLICT INCIDENT TO THE DISCHARGE OF DUTY, THE SENSE OF RIGHT RISES ABOVE PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS. The whole history of David proves that when, at Mahanaim, he began to collect his thoughts and consider the path of wisdom, a most painful conflict must have arisen in his mind as to the course to be taken. The clearer the conviction that, as God's anointed, he was bound to put down the force that was driving him from the throne, the sharper the pang awakened by the thought of raising the sword against his own child. The battle had to be fought out within his own nature before it was transferred to the open field. The human spirit is the arena of great struggles and victories, before men see visible triumphs. The dreadful disaster had for a time taken away David's strength; the pains of hell got hold of him: he was poor, weak, and forlorn. But now the recollection of duty to God and man brought back his old courage and resolution; and the calm and sober way in which he began to marshal his forces showed that help had come from God to subordinate the anguish of his heart to the sense of duty. Providence seems to work along these lines in the training of the best men. Character is strengthened by the triumph of conscientious regard for the will of God over the strivings of personal considerations. If to fight against a son, to face the possibility of much slaughter, and to see a prosperous reign darkened by civil war, were evils endured by David in order to carry out the kingly purposes of his anointing, how does it become Christians, in carrying out the purposes of their special anointing, to bring every thought, desire, and preference into subjection? Christ has left us the noblest example of this.

III. A RESOLVE TO SUBORDINATE PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS TO A SENSE OF DUTY BEING TAKEN, A GOOD MAN WILL DEVISE MEANS OF MEETING DIFFICULTIES AND SECURING THE END IN VIEW. The season of mental conflict being passed, and stern duty being accepted, David proves his courage and sagacity by his calm determination, his collection of resources, his estimate of his numerical strength, his dispositions for meeting difficulties and accomplishing the end in view, his preparedness to incur personal risks, his acceptance of good and generous counsel, and his precautions against disaster at the outset (vers. 1—5). The king's soul was evidently sustained by the assurance often expressed in the Psalms that the Lord was his Salvation; and this, instead of encouraging neglect and carelessness, stimulated, as it always does, energy to work along the lines of the Divine purpose. The emotions of the father are kept under by prompt and energetic application of all the powers of body and mind to the performance of kingly duty. Our faith in God and in the realization of his purpose will appear in the zeal with which we work to bring that purpose to pass.

IV. IN SUBORDINATING PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS TO A SENSE OF DUTY, A GOOD MAN WILL NEVERTHELESS CHERISH SENTIMENTS NATURAL TO HIS RELATIONSHIPS. David

suppressed the pain of making war on his son because it was right so to do; but that did not imply the uprooting from his heart of those feelings of tenderness and compassion and yearning sorrow which are proper to a father, even for a prodigal son. He did not waver in his kingly design to subdue rebellion, nor did he show a wicked leniency towards an evil life in the son, when he, in the presence of the whole army, enjoined on Joab to "deal gently with the young man Absalom." The rebel was his own child, and a pious heart could not but wish to have opportunity once more to pour upon that child the full force of its sorrowful love, in hopes of winning him over to a sense of his guilt. No feeling so natural as the wish that a prodigal may not be cut off by unpitying hands in the midst of his sins. The legal question as to what would have to be done with a captured rebel was not yet for decision. Sanctified human nature simply yearned to save the sinner from men as cruel as the grave. Knowing the character of Joab, and being a stranger to mere personal revenge, David urged upon him, as a strong restraint, consideration for himself as king and father. There are many Christian parents to-day who feel for their erring ones just as David did for his, although, like him, they are obliged, out of regard to their families and themselves, to pursue a line of rigid duty. Hope of salvation never dies from a parent's heart. Beautifully does this adumbrate the compassion of God towards his prodigals! "Deal gently with him" seems to be the message sent forth to the forces which work out the king's purposes in the discipline of life. "Do not crush him" is the spirit of God's government. How much we each owe to that!

V. THERE ARE PROVIDENTIAL ENCOURAGEMENTS TO THE SUBORDINATION OF PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS TO A SENSE OF DUTY. David was helped in his mental conflict by reflection on the past and present. He was so far spared by God. Sympathetic friends had brought him aid when in great distress. His own followers were intelligently loyal (ver. 3), and were obviously strong in their confidence in the justice of his cause. This kind of external support is of great service when a man is passing through a struggle as to whether he can perform a painful duty. Generally when God assigns duties involving pain in the performance, provision is made for encouragement. When our Saviour required his apostles to renounce all and to look on to persecution like that which he was suffering from, he cheered them by the promise of the Comforter, and a peace which the world could not give. The Resurrection made them strong to endure the loss of all things, and to subordinate love of home, friends, and country to the obligation of fighting against evil in the world.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. In the time of disaster it behoves us, when occasion arises for reflection on the situation, to avail ourselves with vigour of the resources for recovering our position which God places around us. 2. One of the best preservatives from utter despondency is a remembrance that God has a work for us to accomplish in life, and hence, the more clearly this is kept in view, the more readily shall we be able to face disagreeable duties. 3. It is the duty of citizens to take precautions for the safety of those in high positions, since the welfare of the state is involved in their lives. 4. One of the elements of a perfect moral character to be attained to is the balance between the most rigid justice and the cherishing of feelings free from the taint of personal revenge. 5. As in the state we ought to do things for the "king's sake" which do not involve a breach of morality, so in the Church there are things we should do for Christ's sake, which would not be done did we simply follow out the bare tendencies of our imperfect nature and conform to the usages of society.

A revelation of sin and its issue. The remarkable space given in the sacred history to the life and conduct of Absalom in their relation to David may arouse the question as to the reason. It is not easy to assign all the reasons that may have operated in the mind of the inspired collector of the annals of Israel to give such prominence to these details; but we may be safe in saying that it was the Divine will to set forth, for the instruction of all ages, the discipline of the "man after God's own heart," and also, for the same object, the development and issue of sin in a conspicuous instance. Men learn a lesson written out in large bold characters; and herein lies most of the teaching value of the Old Testament histories. We may, then, trace here, in a concrete instance and striking form, illustrations of what all sin more or less is and involves, though the particular forms it assumes may vary.

I. ALIENATION OF HEART AND LOSS OF THE GENUINE FEELING OF SONSHIP. Absalom had known a time when, in the assertion within his own spirit of self-hood, he virtually ceased to be a true son. This was his fall. The old child-affection became weak; an aversion sprang up; father was no longer regarded as a father should be, and child ceased to be genuine child. This was the secret of all. It was a sort of moral death. The schism was more than political. Virtually he had said, "I will be free and do as I wish." This is also the essence of our sin against God. Adam lost somehow the sonship feeling. Self-will asserted its power. God became one, and he another. Union was gone. This is our Saviour's teaching in the parable of the prodigal son. The young man was weary of his father, and wanted to do as he liked away from him. If we examine our hearts, it will be found to be the same with ourselves. Sin is, negatively, destitution of the sonship feeling; positively, the assertion of self-hood as against God. In this lies its desperate evil, its incurable vice, its secret of doom.

II. A PERVERSION OF GIFTS. As soon as Absalom's heart was gone, he began to use up his beauty, his eloquence, his scheming, every faculty of his nature, to render himself happy in his self-hood, and to be able to dispense with his father's favour. In human nature all gifts flow in the line of one master-feeling. Hence when the dominant feeling is alienation from God, the entire man goes away, and all powers are made subservient to self as against the rightful dominion of God. The prodigal son used his patrimony away from his father. Sinners use up their patrimony for self, and not in harmony with God. Kindness is abused.

III. A RESOLVE TO GET RID OF AUTHORITY. For a time Absalom simply cherished the feeling of alienation and knew the misery of a lost love. But evil is a force, and we cannot remain as we are when it once enters the soul. The wretchedness of a lost love put him on the way to get rid of the authority which existed in spite of his loss of loving delight in it. Thought begets thought, and so in due time positive rebellion arose. The royal father must be formally dethroned. There is a corresponding phase in the life of many a sinner. It is misery to be loveless and to know at the same time that God lives. Hence, thoughts flow in suggesting how, by what scepticism, or disbelief, or defiance, or desperation in vice, he can be dislodged from the conscience. Possibly the war becomes violent. No more welcome thought to some men than that God is not. Lost love means in the end antagonism.

IV. THERE IS FOR A WHILE AN APPEARANCE OF SUCCESS. Unhappy Absalom found abettors and flatterers. His independent spirit accorded with the temper of others. His endeavours to live without his father's love and blessing seemed most successful, for never did men make so much of him as now when he has shaken off the yoke of dependence and has gone in for a free life. His "strength was firm." The aim of his ambition seemed within reach. Wise and astute men encouraged and helped him, and forces were placed at his disposal. So all seems to go well for a while with those who are alienated from God the Father. No visible punishment comes on them. They are free from restraints to which once they submitted. They "become as gods, knowing good and evil." Others, some of them wise and learned and astute, encourage them in their mode of life and join in their aims. The forces of wit, learning, science, worldly sagacity, combine to enable them to put down the authority to which they ought to submit. These are the wicked who prosper in the world.

V. THERE ARE THE BEGINNINGS OF REVERSE. Absalom finds his forces scattered by a force the strength of which he did not expect to meet. The mighty array of power on his side receives a check (vers. 6—8). He has to learn that the authority despised can make itself felt. And in the course of Providence there are times when events remind sinners that God still rules over forces which they cannot resist, that powers are at work before which they have to bow. Sickness, bereavement, adverse conditions of life, ruin of wicked helpers, pangs of conscience, and personal wretchedness, come and beat down the proud array of wit, learning, jovial companionship, and stoutness of will, as the rebel army was beaten down in the wood of Ephraim. Wicked men have intimations of destruction before it falls on them. The conscience sees, as with prophet's eye, the dark shadows of the future in passing events.

VI. VALUABLE GIFTS HASTEN DESTRUCTION. The pride of Absalom's person was the means of hastening his death. The hair which had been so much admired, which

he counted as a treasure, and made him conspicuous in Israel, now combined with the silent forces that ran through the forest trees to bring him into the judgment for which his course of rebellion had been preparing him. When God's time has come, he has many instruments for effecting his purpose. The best gifts of sinful men sometimes get so entangled with the stable order of nature as to prematurely bring their life to an end. There are always "branches" stretching out in the natural order of things, forming objects against which the powers and possessions of men run, to their detriment and speedy death. The young man's natural vigour, of which he is proud, may run against a resisting force which shatters it in proportion to its strength. Brilliant intellects, in their defiance of God, have, in modern times, become so absorbed in literary work bearing on their infidelity, as to be caught early in the arms of death. Of how many may it be said that their beauty has been their destruction!

VII. THEIR MEMORY IS DESTINED TO BE UNHONOURED. Absalom, proud of his name and ambitious of posthumous fame, erected a memorial pillar for himself—a mournful premonition, as it were, of his miserable end. Nothing could have been more mortifying to him, had he known it, than to be cut down from a tree like a common felon and be buried as a dog. The wicked are cut off; their memorial perishes. It may be that men who die in sin have reared to their memory tablets or monuments of marble or brass; but the truth remains that they shall have no everlasting memorial in the assembly of the upright in the new Jerusalem. Earthly monuments are perishable. It is said of those who are so unfortunate and guilty as to die in a state of alienation from God, that their name shall "rot" (Prov. x. 7). The only enduring order of things is that of the kingdom of God: it "cannot be shaken," and a place in that kingdom alone can ensure a perpetual memorial. Those who are true sons, who have recovered the lost feeling of love, shall shine in the kingdom of the Father, and shall be heirs with Christ of his glory and joy. The wicked shall go into "outer darkness."

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. The attention of all, especially of the young, should be called to the fact that the right feeling of sonship is that of loving submission, and that the loss of this towards earthly parents is really the fruit of a loss of the filial feeling towards the heavenly Father. 2. If we would form right notions of the guilt of sin, the need and nature of atonement, and the punishment awarded to sin in Scripture, we must pay due regard to what sin is in its essence—the assertion of self against God. 3. We see here the real nature of the change that is necessary in order to adoption into the redeemed family of God—a radical change of the governing feeling of the heart in relation to God. Regeneration is the inner antecedent of the conversion of the entire man. 4. Young men may take warning against the terrible power of evil when once they break the bonds of love to parents, and in this first and chief sin they have the germ of unspeakable crimes and woes. 5. Let those who in the height of sinful prosperity imagine that all is going well, remember that, though they thus rejoice, yet for all these things God will bring them into judgment (Eccles. xi. 9). 6. Both the righteous and the wicked may accept it as a certainty that, in some way or other, the very inanimate creation will sooner or later be subservient to the ends of justice. 7. The best monument we can rear to ourselves, or that others can raise to our memory, is that blessed memory of the just which rests on a life of love to earthly parents and righteous fulfilment of all the obligations we owe to God and man.

The place of principles in conduct. The controversy between the "certain man" and Joab near the oak where Absalom was hanging was natural, and sprang from diversity of views, which took their shape in each case from the character of the individuals. The man was an ordinary loyal subject of David's, simple in life and thought, governed, as such men generally are, by a few great first principles of conduct. Joab was an astute man of the world, true to David for reasons of a compound nature, entertaining such views of duty and life as generally sway the minds of men of the world, who regard present facts in the light of an unsentimental expediency. Each one was true to himself, and the discussion raised was well sustained on each side by reasons cogent to the men themselves who expressed them, but of no force beyond the individual to convert the other to his view. We see, then—

I. THAT LIFE MAY IN DIFFERENT MEN BE CONDUCTED ON DIFFERENT AND TOTALLY IRRECONCILABLE PRINCIPLES. Here was a simple countryman unwilling to touch the

life of Absalom, solely because of the king's commandment (vers. 5, 12, 13). The question of the prudence or imprudence of the act was not for a moment entertained. Obedience to the royal authority was the prime duty. This belief was the governing rule of conduct. No imaginary advantage to Israel, no example or persuasion of a great general, could turn the man from this fixed principle. On the other hand, Joab swept aside all such forceful pressure of supreme obligation to the royal will, because his conduct was governed, in this case at least, by a worldly wisdom, a consideration of what seemed to himself to be the best thing to do—a policy of expediency. There was a general admission of the existence and value of what the countryman regarded as primary principles of conduct on the part of subjects; but theory was good for theorists, and Joab was a man of deeds when matters were urgent! These men certainly represent two classes—those who accept first principles of obligation, primary conceptions of duty as lying at the very basis of society and of the individual life; and those who, while formally admitting the existence and propriety of such principles, nevertheless set them aside whenever, for prudential reasons, they think it well to do so. There are such primary principles: in government, the law of the ruler is supreme; in the family, *e.g.*, the expressed will of the father is binding; in matters of religion, *e.g.*, God prohibits unholiness of feeling, malice, cruelty, and commands men to repent, believe, and in all things do justly, irrespective of consequences. There are men who do base their action on these principles. But there are men who, like Joab, break the law of their land, and set aside supreme authority for reasons of their own; there are children who violate the fundamental principle of domestic order, because their judgment goes against their parents; there are men of the world who dare to disobey the Eternal King's commandment in relation to repentance, faith, and unswerving righteousness of life, for reasons which seem to them sufficient at the time. Do all Christians follow out the regal commands as to righteousness in all things? Is there not too much expediency in Christian conduct (cf. Matt. vi.)?

II. CONDUCT BASED ON PROMPT RECOGNITION OF FIRST PRINCIPLES IS MORE LIKELY TO CHARACTERIZE UNSOPHISTICATED MEN THAN MEN IMMERSED IN THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS. This plain countryman simply followed the order of the king because the king's will to him was sacred. He was not learned in casuistry, not versed in diplomacy, not skilled in keeping the letter and violating the spirit of the Law. He was amazed that any one should think of deviating from a command so plain. Its justice or injustice, its prudence or imprudence, were no matters for him to settle. Law was binding. The king must be obeyed. This was the instinct of a guileless nature. The force of the principle of obedience to the authority of God's anointed was recognized, because his spirit was politically and morally sound and pure. Joab was a man of the world, a man of many designs and combinations of thought, a man whose purity and guilelessness were gone. In the struggle of high and low principles within his nature, pure principle was deprived of its native force. Our Saviour, in reference to much higher matters, points out this difference of conduct proceeding from difference of character, when he thanks his Father that "these things," which were hidden from the "wise and prudent," were "revealed unto babes" (Matt. xi. 25, 26). We must become as little children—guileless, unsophisticated, quick to act on primary principles apart from the warping influences of worldly prudence, if we would enter his kingdom and be as he was. There may be advantages in being versed in affairs, familiar with the tricks and ways of men, and famed for astuteness and such-like qualities; but on the whole, in matters of pure right and strict adherence to clear duty to God and man, the guileless man is most likely to be the most dependable. Moral intuitions are swift in the pure-hearted, and to debate their applicability is at once to weaken their force.

III. CIRCUMSTANCES MAY ARISE IN WHICH DEVIATION FROM PRIMARY PRINCIPLES MAY AT FIRST APPEAR MOST CONFORMABLE TO REASON. On the face of it most men would have said that Joab was justified in setting aside conscientious scruples about the sacredness of the royal command. The rebel deserved death, the only place of restraint for him was the grave, the king's paternal feelings were a danger to the state, Providence had evidently put Absalom's life in the hands of Joab, and the king would be sure to condone the deed,—all this might be said with force. So may it be argued still. Immediate repentance may be right; but surely a man whose livelihood is at stake may be cautious, and not by a sudden change of life bring himself and family into poverty!

"Love your enemies" is a Divine command; but we are not so good as was he who gave the command, and so he will condone our cherishing some hatred! Be truthful in word and deed is the meaning to us all of Christ's life; but the pressure of business and the difficulties of diplomacy in national affairs are such that we cannot take this grand law of life into all departments of activity! Thus by arguments apparently conclusive the "commandments of God" are "made of none effect."

IV. THE TRUE INTERESTS OF ALL LIE IN ADHERENCE TO PRIMARY PRINCIPLES. Joab, by his deviation from the king's command, while seeming to secure an advantage to the state, was really sowing the seed of rebellion; for it set aside the supreme law, and its natural tendency was to weaken the royal authority throughout Israel. To gain a temporary advantage at the cost of damaging the force of a cardinal truth is no real gain in the end, for the consequences of such an injury are incalculable. Once impair the supremacy of right principles in the national or individual mind, and you have prepared the way for all kinds of degeneracy. God never departs from right, and his ways always come out right. Moral principles are as rigid in their demand for implicit and full recognition as any laws of physics, and they vindicate their neglect with as absolute a certainty. Christ has made it clear that strict and severe adherence to his authority alone will issue well. The sermon on the mount is a statement of unconditioned practical truth. The Church of Christ would have done more for the world had this sermon been more recognized, apart from the limitations of accommodating rules of interpretation.

Vers. 19—33.—The facts are: 1. Ahimaaz being eager to convey tidings of victory to the king, is denied permission by Joab, who, however, sends Cushi. 2. Persisting in his desire to run after Cushi, Joab at last allows him to go. 3. The watchman at the gate of the city reports to the king that a runner is in sight, followed by another, whereupon David takes courage, and hopes for good news. 4. On Ahimaaz being the first to arrive, he briefly announces that all is well, and then prostrates himself before the king, and blesses God for having brought victory to the king's cause. 5. David, in his deep concern for Absalom, inquires after his safety, and receives from Ahimaaz an evasive reply. 6. Just then Cushi comes in and announces tidings of victory, and, in answer to the question as to Absalom's safety, bluntly makes known the fact of his death. 7. The king, overwhelmed with anguish, enters his chamber, and there pours out his soul in a most pathetic lamentation.

The relation of character to work. The work recently accomplished by Joab now gave rise to another, which included elements of good and evil. He was keen enough to see that the communication of the fact of victory would be most welcome to David, but that a statement of the particulars would be most distressing; and, therefore, with his usual practical sagacity, he sought out for the work of conveying tidings to the king a man whose character would fit him for dealing with the evil side of the message very much as he himself would.

I. IN CARRYING ON HUMAN AFFAIRS THERE ARE OCCASIONS REQUIRING THE PERFORMANCE OF DISAGREEABLE WORK. It was a pleasant thing to have to announce to David a great victory over his foes, but far from pleasant to have to tell him what had become of his son, and who had slain him. On a former occasion, when evil tidings, blended with news of the fall of a foe, was brought to him, it went ill with the bearer (ch. i. 13—16). In this case the disagreeable work arose out of the wrong deeds of Joab. One evil created another. Disobedience to absolute authority cannot but bring the transgressor into an awkward position and impose unpleasant obligations. The flow of human life is a flow of work. In consequence of transgression against God, and violation of social order, an immense amount of annoying work has to be done. The sons of Jacob, after the sale of their brother, found difficult work on their hands. The imperfect life in the Church creates the necessity of doing things that pain the tender heart, and which is more adapted to rough and hard men. Evil deeds create duties which always carry with them more or less of pain and sorrow.

II. THERE IS A NATURAL AFFINITY BETWEEN CERTAIN CHARACTERS AND DISAGREEABLE FORMS OF WORK. The reasons for Joab's rejection of Ahimaaz were probably these: fear lest he should so state the facts as to prejudice David against himself, and

belief that his nature was too tender and sympathetic for what he regarded as the proper delivery of the dark side of the message. Joab was a hard and blunt man, and he wanted such a man for a work which, because disagreeable, had better be got rid of as quickly as possible. If David should be angry with the Cushite, and slay him, Joab would not care for that, provided, in the blunt and straight announcement of Absalom's death, no tenderness was displayed and no effort made to compromise himself. Such men as he scorn tenderness as weakness. They abhor what they term "sentiment." Joab's character fitted him to send the painful tidings so bluntly and unfeelingly announced by Cushi (vers. 31, 32). As a rule, character finds work in affinity with itself, and Joab was right in the adaptation he sought for his purpose. As character is often a prophecy of work that will be done when occasion arises, so work done is often a revelation of character. Not any one can be a hangman. Not any one can be a consoler of the sick and dying. Even in the Christian Church there are kinds of work for which a peculiar firmness and almost severity of character is most suited. Only an Ambrose could overawe an emperor. On the other hand, most departments of Church work give scope for men of the Ahimaaz stamp rather than that of Cushi.

III. AN INJURED CONSCIENCE READILY ADAPTS ITSELF TO PAINFUL WORK ISSUING OUT OF FORMER VIOLENCE TO ITSELF. Joab had done violence to his conscience in positive disobedience to the king's commands (vers. 12—14). As every wrong to conscience renders its testimony for right the feebler, it was comparatively easy to frame a blunt, unsympathizing message for the Cushite to deliver to the king. There was as real disregard for David's feelings in the framing of the hard, unfeeling message as in setting aside his command to spare the life of Absalom. Thus it is seen that the human conscience has the wonderful and terrible power of adapting itself to the environment produced by its own abuse, and so of being continuously affected for evil. A "seared conscience" is another expression for the gradual deterioration of sensibility produced by the enforced habit of accommodating itself to deeds which are the natural outcome of former misdeeds.

Sympathetic enthusiasm. The son of Zadok espoused the cause of David (ch. xv. 27, 36) in spite of the attractions for young men of Absalom's manners (ch. xv. 1—6). It was a noble thing for this young man to hold to a right cause in the day of adversity, and to place the fleetness of his feet and the vigilance of his ears and eyes at the command of the exile. The zeal with which he offered his services to Joab to convey the news of success to the king, was in keeping with his past reputation, and, as the sequel shows, was blended with a tender regard for the king's feelings. In contrast with the action of Joab and his servant Cushi in relation to David, that of Ahimaaz is an instructive example of the elements that enter into a commendable, sympathetic enthusiasm.

I. A JUST AND GOOD CAUSE. There may be great enthusiasm, but it may be wicked because manifested in an evil cause. It was to the honour of the son of Zadok that all the force of his nature was devoted to the righteous claims of the Lord's anointed. He had identified himself with the servant of Jehovah in the day of trouble. In the great conflict of his age he was on the right side. This is the primary consideration with us all in the exercise of our powers, whether the questions at issue be political, social, or religious. We can take no credit for enthusiasm, and indeed it will be otherwise our sin, unless we take pains to see that we side with what is essentially just and good. Energy spent in advocacy or encouragement of a party, a movement, a system, a belief, or a practice, is not of moral worth apart from conscientious motive. Especially in the supreme question of every age, the claims of Christ as against the demand on our submission and service of lower and often unholy claims, the question comes—On which side are we? Are we with the rightful King or with his adversaries?

II. ENTIRE SELF-DEVOTION. Ahimaaz had deliberately identified the whole interests of his life with the cause of the exiled king. He was not a mere observer of the conflict. His very life had been at stake when he entered into the compact (ch. xv. 27, 33) and sought out the banished monarch. He had gone out to fight the battle with Joab, and was most eager to render the choicest service on the close of the day of victory. Enthusiasm which consists of approval and delight in the season of prosperity, or in verbal admiration, is of no substantial worth. The men who crossed hill and dale

and lake because of the bread they ate (John vi. 24—27) were not the whole-hearted disciples Christ cared to have. Christ would have the entire life (Luke ix. 59—62).

III. PROMPT ACTION IN EMERGENCIES. The reality of this young man's enthusiasm appeared in his ready offer of the special powers with which he was endowed to the urgency of the hour. He laid his best and most cultivated gifts at the service of his king just when they were most required. It is a characteristic of entire absorption in Christ's work that there is not only the primal and unreserved surrender of life and all its interests to him and his kingdom, but also, as time passes on, a quick perception of entire work is needed, and an instant readiness to use any aptitude possessed for doing the work. "Here am I; send me," is the feeling of true enthusiasm when any emergency arises. There are beautiful instances of the free and prompt devotion of special gifts to the service of Christ when occasions suddenly arise requiring them. Are men smitten with plague or sword? Nurses skilled in care of the sick are at hand. Does calamity come on a house or village? There are eager feet swift to carry gospel consolations.

IV. TRUE SYMPATHY GUIDING ACTION. It was the deep and genuine sympathy of Ahimaaz with what he knew were the most tender and sacred feelings of the king's heart that made him eager to go, and both gladden him with news of God's deliverance, and at the same time gently break the news of his personal loss. This gave extra speed to his fleet steps, and this explains his reference to God's goodness (ver. 28), and also his evident desire to prepare the king for sad tidings (ver. 29). He felt too much for that noble, generous heart to blurt out the intelligence which he knew would crush it. There is great value in a servant who understands and appreciates the most tender and cherished feelings of his master. This sympathy is a discriminating guide to words and actions. It is this intense sympathy with the heart of Christ, this power to enter more than others do into the very passion of the Redeemer for saving men, that accounts for the remarkable zeal and discriminating conduct in doing religious work which have characterized some of the noblest Christians. The nearer we get to the heart of Christ, the more true will our enthusiasm be. The natural gifts and aptitudes of body and mind then turn with zest to all wise devices for advancing the interests most dear to him.

Miscellanies. In connection with the main event referred to in the narrative, there are incidents and statements which suggest a variety of truths bearing more or less on ordinary life or finding their parallels therein. Briefly stated, these are as follows.

I. EAGER MEN AWAITING GREAT ISSUES. David and his followers at the gate of Mahanaim, looking out for news of the issue of the conflict then being carried on, sensible that interests more precious than life were involved, are but types of men still intent on learning the issue of undertakings in which they have embarked or in which they have an inexpressible interest. The disciples once awaited a wonderful issue when Christ was, during his trial and death, in conflict with powers of darkness. For forty days before Pentecost, men and women waited for signs of a great event. Often has the Church, in seasons of peril, waited in agony during the crisis. Men engaged in ordinary business know what it is to look out for the issue of great ventures; and in private religious experience there are times when the soul waits and watches more than those who watch for the morning. What great and momentous issues are being wrought out every day in this world for some of our fellow-creatures!

II. QUALIFIED OPTIMISM. "All is well," said Ahimaaz, to break the painful suspense of the watchers, and bring early consolation to the king's heart. The words are few, but wonderful. Taken in their strict sense, they meant to David more than could ever be expressed. Happy, indeed, is the man of whom and to whom these words can be unconditionally spoken. "All" is the term of widest range in human language; and "well" is the greatest and best affirmation that can ever be made. In David's circumstances the phrase at least meant that his cause was triumphant, that God had come to his help. Ahimaaz was not insincere in saying what he did, knowing all the time that one event of the day would be most distressing to David. His optimism was qualified by a reservation, as is common in human life. There is a sense in which every good is qualified by a shade of ill. Even so great a boon as redemption bears on it the dark shadow of a Suffering One. The greatest victory of things is announced amidst the wail of widows and orphans. The possession of great wealth brings with it carking

cares. Perhaps, in the final issue of all events, when Christ shall have put down all authority and power (1 Cor. xv. 27), and the universe has gained its moral equilibrium after the long struggle between good and evil, it may be true in an absolute sense that "all is well;" but till then our optimism must be qualified.

III. A PIOUS PARENT'S ABSORBING THOUGHT. David did not lose his character of parent in his character as king. As the anointed one he was intent on seeing his authority duly established, but as a father he was anxious for the safety of his rebellious son. By no process could he divest himself of his parental relation—dim shadow is this of the fatherly relation which permeates all God's regal relations to mankind! No one as he could pity the erring youth. He still yearned to have opportunity of bringing some influence to bear on his ungrateful heart. The direst thought to him was the possibility of life being cut short before such opportunity arose. "Is the young man safe?" This question has deep significance to multitudes as they think of their children out on the wide world, exposed to its deadly ills. It comes in the morning with the light of day; it intrudes amidst the busy thoughts of daily business; and it is often the last thought when sleep quiets the heart. It is also a question, in its spiritual application, above all questions of health and secular prosperity. To be "safe" in Christ is the prime concern; for usefulness to others and growth in moral good are then ensured, while at the same time the dreadful guilt of the past is covered.

The great lamentation. On hearing of the death of his son, David retired into secrecy and poured out his soul in perhaps the most touching language to be found in the Bible. The strength and depth of feeling expressed were evidently in proportion to the interest which all along he had cherished in this abandoned child. Some writers have reproached David for yielding to what is termed "weakness" for a son whose just punishment ought to have been accepted with a calm acquiescence. But the criticism on his conduct is not really justified when all the facts are considered. He was a man constitutionally of strong, generous feelings—kindly and tender in his bearing toward others. A father cannot forget that he is a father; and the more holy and generous his nature, the more powerfully will the fatherly feeling assert itself. As seen in our Saviour's case, when he wept over Jerusalem already doomed because of sin against him, equal to, yea, worse even than, that of Absalom, the natural feelings of the heart may flow forth in most touching strains, while there is in the soul a most perfect accord with the righteous judgment of God. Nowhere does Scripture require men to suppress natural sentiments, or, in other words, require us to cease to be true human beings when we are brought face to face with the appalling judgments of God. Moreover, it is given to all parents to cherish hope of the most prodigal of sons while life continues, and David's personal experience of the mercy of God was such as certainly warranted his cherishing hope of the renewal and salvation of even this wicked son; and if such a long-cherished hope was suddenly crushed, and that, too, when care had been taken to prevent its being crushed (ver. 5), surely it was no sin for him, but an acceptable deed in the sight of God, when he vented his grief that now all hope of such a change was gone. There is no complaint against the wisdom and justice of God, no trace of a spirit of discontent with the administration of Divine love; it was pure sorrow for a ruined life. David's humanity was not lost in his kingly office. The love of a father's heart is not eradicated by a son's ingratitude. The parable of the prodigal son is evidence of this and also of its Divine counterpart. And in the case of David, the remembrance of his own sad fall having possibly exercised a detrimental influence over Absalom, just in the most critical period of his life, could not but render both just and natural this great lamentation. Taking, then, this view of David's conduct, we briefly notice the following truths.

I. RELIGION INTENSIFIES AND PURIFIES NATURAL AFFECTION. Had not David been a very devout man, he would not have felt such deep sorrow over the death of Absalom. Religion makes a father a true father; it renders love of offspring a more sacred thing. This follows from the more general truth that religion restores man to his normal state. Such affection has no relation to the sin of the child, except, perhaps, that the sin observed tends to render the affection more yearning and pitiful.

II. WE ARE JUSTIFIED IN CHERISHING HOPE WHILE LIFE LASTS. David did, and had good reasons for it. The gospel encourages it; the revelation of the Father's great love

to the "greatest of sinners" justifies it. Man is not a judge of what may be done either by the most guilty or for them. That many for whom parents pray and strive do, as far as we can see, perish in their sins, is no reason against hope while life continues. Thousands have been brought to God in the eleventh hour.

III. THE DEATH OF OFFSPRING PRESUMABLY RECKLESS AND IMPENITENT IS THE GREATEST OF PARENTAL TROUBLES. To die is the common lot, and natural affection, though strong and pure, does not face death without consolations. But when death means the passage into eternity of a soul laden with guilt, and that soul once the object of delight and occasion of fondest hopes, then the most terrible of woes comes on a pious parent's heart. The "Redeemer's tears over lost souls," on which Howe has so wonderfully dwelt, are best understood by those who, like David, have wept over sons cut off in their sins.

IV. ONE OF THE BITTEREST INGREDIENTS IN SORROW OVER THE LOST IS THAT OF REFLECTION ON PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION TOWARD BRINGING ON THAT CONDITION. David could not but think of the effect on his son's views of life and tendencies of heart produced by his own great sin, and the months of alienation from God which ensued. How far parents are answerable for the character and destiny of their children is a grave question, but unquestionably a bad example in their early years cannot but tell perniciously on their future, and woe cannot but come on the father in darkest form when he connects his own misconduct with the hopeless death of his offspring. What manner of persons ought parents to be? Who knows what a turn a single lapse into sin may give to a youth's destiny?

V. IN THE PUREST HUMAN LOVE WE SEE A SHADOW OF GOD'S GREAT LOVE. David's lamentation, Jeremiah's wail over a ruined people (Jer. ix. 1, 2), the Apostle Paul's anguish on account of his brethren (Rom. ix. 1—3), and especially the Saviour's sorrow over Jerusalem (Matt. xxiii. 34—38), set forth, so far as we can know of such a mystery, the sorrowful feeling of the eternal Father (John xiv. 7—9) towards those who live and die in sin. God's great love for us has been seen in this, that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. vi. 6—10). He actually did what David longed to do for Absalom. Redemption in Christ embodies the best and noblest of all feelings, and transcends the human ideal.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS

Vers. 1—8.—(MAHANAIM.) *David's victory over his rebellious subjects.* Having found refuge in the fortified city of Mahanaim (ch. ii. 8), and recruited their exhausted energies, David and those who were with him prepared for the conflict which now seemed inevitable. Meanwhile (during several weeks) Absalom collected a great army (ch. xvii. 11), appointed Amasa captain, crossed the Jordan, and encamped in the land of Gilead (ch. xvii. 24—27). Here, "in the wood of Ephraim" (ver. 6; Judg. xii. 4), he was met by the forces of David, and the issue was quickly decided. "The traveller who only knows Palestine to the west of the Jordan, can form no idea of the luxuriance of the hillsides of Gilead. Here we crossed sparkling rivulets, where the sunlight glinted through the foliage of handsome oak, terebinth, and carob trees, and traversed glades seldom disturbed by the foot of man, which led into the deep solitudes of the forest. In one of these Absalom met his end; and one could well understand, as one came suddenly upon the brink of some rock or gorge, why possibly, in headlong and disastrous flight, so many of the combatants on that fatal day should have been numbered among the missing, that it was said the wood devoured more than the sword" (Oliphant). Attention is especially directed to David, concerning whom observe—

I. THE RENEWED ENERGY OF HIS CHARACTER. After his deep humiliation, the old king is himself again. His youth is "renewed like the eagle's." Passive submission is succeeded by active exertion, to which he is urged by inward impulses and new circumstances. There is a time to pray, and a time to work. 1. He actively musters his friends around him; and constantly attracts and receives reinforcements from the people who dwell on the east of the Jordan (ch. xvii. 27—29; Ps. xxvii.; xxviii.; cx. 3). 2. He skilfully organizes his forces, appointing captains of thousands and

captains of hundreds, and arranging them in three divisions under Joab, Abishai, and Ittai (ch. xv. 19—22), well knowing the worth of able leaders and of strict order and discipline (ch. viii. 15—18). 3. He courageously purposes to go forth himself into the conflict (ch. xxi. 17), and is prevented from doing so only by their considerate determination (ver. 4). "Those who engage others in arduous and perilous attempts must be willing to take their full share of hardship; but true courage and firmness of mind are very different from rashness and obstinacy, and wise men are always most ready to listen to prudent counsel, even from their inferiors" (Scott). 4. He specially charges them to do his son no harm. "Gently for me with the young man Absalom" (ver. 5); "Beware, whoever it be," etc. (ver. 12). A general and intense feeling of resentment is naturally felt against him; and none are concerned about his welfare, save his father, whom he has chiefly wronged. "See what a thing a godly father's affection is to his child. No undutifulness, no practice on a child's part, no, nor death itself, can divide between him and his child. What though Absalom can forget David, yet David cannot forget him; what though he be a very ungracious imp, yet 'he is my child, my child,' saith David, 'I cannot but love him;' and, indeed, he overloves him; which I do not commend, but only observe, to note the strength of parents' love, if it be natural—a love indeed as strong as death. Is the love of an earthly father so great? What, then, is the affection of our heavenly Father towards us?" (R. Harris: 1610).

II. THE ARDENT ATTACHMENT OF HIS FOLLOWERS; in contrast with the disaffection and hostility of others. 1. They offer themselves willingly to his service, and readily risk their lives for his sake. 2. They set an inestimable value on his life in comparison with their own. "Thou art worth ten thousand of us" (ver. 3). How much often depends on one man! The safety, unity, religion, prosperity, of a whole nation. Both patriotism and piety require the utmost care for his preservation. 3. They see the peculiar peril to which he is exposed, and seek to guard him against it. "They will pay no attention to us," etc. Of Washington, one of his officers wrote, "Our army love their general very much; but they have one complaint against him, which is the very little care he takes of himself." 4. They deem it expedient to provide, in case of need, for receiving his aid. "It is better that thou succour us out of the city." Their proposal is prudent, courteous, and honourable. Whilst he waits in the city with the "reserves," he still commands them, prays for them, and co-operates with them. They go forth under his sanction (ver. 4), are animated on the battle-field by the remembrance of him, and look forward to his approval as their recompense (ch. xix. 3). Such devotion is rare, not merely towards an earthly commander, but even on the part of those who war a spiritual warfare towards the heavenly Leader and "Captain of their salvation."

III. THE SIGNAL OVERTHROW OF HIS ADVERSARIES (vers. 7, 8); which is accomplished by the valour, discipline, and devotion of his "servants," and chiefly: 1. By the interposition of Divine providence (vers. 28, 31). "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong" (Eccles. ix. 11). "Providence is" by no means "always on the side of big battalions." 2. In retribution upon the disobedient and ungodly, over whom mercy lingers long, but not for ever, and who, though used as instruments of chastising others, are themselves ultimately broken in pieces. 3. For the deliverance of the faithful, the restoration of the "Lord's anointed," and the maintenance of the theocracy. 4. As a preparation for, and a foreshadowing of, the nobler victories of the King Messiah. It was another of the decisive battles of the world. "The contest was of short duration. The victors were soon vanquished. The storm was like a whirlwind, and like a whirlwind it passed away, leaving the enemies of God under the foot of the Messiah. To the depth of David's fall, to the height of his exaltation, there is but one parallel. We see it in the Passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The two Davids fell in a manner alike mysterious to their astonished friends. The two Davids rose again in a manner alike terrible to their astonished foes" (M. Hill, 'The Typical Testimony to the Messiah').—D.

Vers. 9—14.—(THE WOOD OF EPHRAIM.) *A faithful soldier.* "Though I should receive [literally, 'weigh'] a thousand pieces of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son" (ver. 12). While pursuing the enemy, a

brave soldier came upon their leader, suspended from "the entangled branches of the great terebinth," in which his head was fastened so that he could not extricate himself. He forthwith reported what he had seen to Joab, who asked him why he had not despatched him, and said that he would have given him ten pieces of silver and a military girdle for doing so. A less scrupulous man might have sought even yet to secure the reward. But he replied that nothing would induce him to disobey the king. "So genuine was the reverence with which the loyalty of even a common soldier then invested the royal dignity" (Ewald). His fidelity may serve to illustrate that of "a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. ii. 3), as it appears in—

I. His respect for the King's commandment; which, unlike that of an earthly ruler, is *always* wise, just, and good. 1. He reverences the authority by which it is given, as rightful, all-powerful, supreme. 2. He regards it as obligatory on each and all to whom it is given (ver. 12). 3. He remembers it constantly in the absence as well as the presence of the King, from whom "there is no matter hid" (ver. 13). 4. He is resolved on performing it with all his might. "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently" (Ps. cxix. 4, 11, 106).

II. His rejection of strong temptation. He will not disobey the order received, though urged to do so by: 1. The impulse of resentment against the common enemy. 2. The plea of expediency, or what may seem to be for the common good. 3. The approval of a fellow-soldier, or the sanction of any "captain" inferior to the King. 4. The promise of reward, certain, immediate, and great. "The Law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver" (Ps. cxix. 72, 31, 36).

III. His rebuke of another's presumption. Joab must have felt himself reproved by this faithful and honest soldier; though he turned away contemptuously, recklessly, and presumptuously to do the deprecated deed. A dutiful soldier may and ought to rebuke the undutifulness of another by: 1. Reminding him of the word which has been spoken by the King. 2. Avowing his own determination to obey it in spite of all inducements to the contrary. 3. Predicting the certainty of the King's displeasure, which outweighs all present gain (Prov. xvi. 14; xix. 12). "What is a man profited," etc.? "In the King's favour is life." 4. Intimating the unreliability of one who favours disobedience and presumes on impunity. "Thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against me;" leaving me alone to bear the blame and suffer the penalty. "He must be a very bad man who is not attracted to what is good by the good example of his subordinates" (S. Schmid). "Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect to all thy commandments" (Ps. cxix. 6, 29, 51, 53).—D.

Vers. 14—18.—(The wood of Ephraim.) *The end of Absalom.* After a long course of flagrant and persistent wickedness, Absalom (at the age of twenty-seven) met his deserved doom. There is not in all history a more signal instance of retribution. In it we see punishment following crime, in the way of natural consequence, and corresponding with it in the manner of its infliction. The sinner reaps as he sows.

> "But Justice hastes t' avenge each impious deed:
> Some in day's clear and open light;
> Some in the dusky evening's twilight shade;
> Or, by delay more furious made,
> Some in the dreary gloom of night."
>
> (Æschylus.)

Absalom was—

I. Arrested by Divine justice, in the perversity of his way. (Vers. 9, 10.) When the battle went against him he sought to escape. Possibly he met with some of David's soldiers, who durst not "touch" him (ver. 12); "but though they let him go, yet God met with him, and put a stop to his flight" (Patrick). His eagerness and impetuosity, his tall form, his long hair, "the king's mule" on which he rode, all contributed to the result. Entangled by the tresses of his hair, and fastened by his neck in a forked bough, he was left hanging "between heaven and earth" (Deut. xxi. 23); "rejected as a traitor by both." None of his companions in crime remained with him, but all left him *alone* to his fate. "A man whom the Divine vengeance is pursuing does not escape" (S. Schmid). Inseneate trees, dumb animals, apparently trivial and

accidental circumstances, the devices and efforts of the transgressor, are so ordered that he shall not go unpunished (Prov. xi. 19, 31; xiii. 21; xxii. 5; xxviii. 17, 18).

II. EXECUTED BY HUMAN VIOLENCE, SIMILAR TO HIS OWN. (Vers. 14, 15.) As he had slain Amnon (ch. xiii. 28, 29), so was he slain by Joab. "He that was a solicitor for the king's favour (ch. xiv. 1, 2, 33) is his executioner against the king's charge" (Hall); influenced partly by zeal for the king's interest and the public good, partly by revenge for private injury (ch. xiv. 30), and jealousy for his own position (ch. iii. 27; xix. 10). He shared the resentment felt by his men against Absalom; was an instrument by which the wrath of Heaven was inflicted; and perhaps deemed himself justified in becoming such, because of the excessive fondness and blamable weakness of David toward his son; but herein he punished disobedience by disobedience, exhibited a pitiless severity and daring presumption, incurred the king's displeasure (ch. xix. 13), involved himself in deeper crime (1 Kings ii. 5), and ultimately in a violent death (1 Kings ii. 32).

III. BURIED IN A SHAMEFUL GRAVE, in contrast with the splendid monument which "in his lifetime he had taken and reared up for himself," etc. (ver. 18). "He had thought that he would be there, some time or other, buried as *king;* but he is now buried as an outlawed *evil-doer*, as an outcast from among men. Till this hour that grave speaks to us with a loud awakening voice. Violations of the commandment, 'Honour thy father and thy mother,' for the most part, indeed, escape the judgment of human authorities; but the Almighty has reserved it to himself to inflict punishment with his own hand, and for the most part even on this side eternity, as he has promised for this world also a gracious reward to those who keep it holy, according to the promise annexed to the commandment, 'that it may go well with thee'" (Krummacher). "The great pit in the wood," with "a very great heap of stones laid upon him"—this was the end of his ambitious career (Deut. xxi. 22, 23; Josh. vii. 26; viii. 29). The site both of his grave and of the "marble pillar in the king's dale, two furlongs distant from Jerusalem" (Josephus), has been for ages unknown; and even the monolith in the valley of the Kidron (probably of the Herodian age, but associated with his name) is "unto this day" regarded with scorn by the passer-by, as he casts another stone, and mutters a curse upon his memory. "Shame shall be the promotion of fools" (Prov. iii. 35; xxx. 17). "Hear this, ye glorious fools, that care not to perpetuate any memory of yourselves to the world, but of ill-deserving greatness. The best of this affectation is vanity; the worst infamy and dishonour; whereas the memory of the just shall be blessed, and, if his humility shall refuse an epitaph and choose to hide himself under the bare earth, God himself shall engrave his name upon the pillar of eternity" (Hall).—D.

Ver. 18.—(THE KING'S DALE.) *Posthumous fame.* "Absalom's place" (literally, "hand," equivalent to "monument," or "memorial," 1 Sam. xv. 12). To live in the memory of men after death is, in a sense, to be immortal on earth (ch. vii. 9). Of this earthly immortality observe that: 1. *It is an object of natural and legitimate desire.* To be wholly forgotten as soon as we are laid in the dust is a prospect from which we instinctively turn away with aversion, as from death itself. The natural love of life, of reputation, of power, of pre-eminence, implies the desire of their continuance, in so far as it is possible, not merely of exerting a continued *influence* (as every one must do), but also of having one's name kept in continued *remembrance;* and this desire exists in those who have little or no knowledge of *personal immortality.* It is well that men's thoughts should extend beyond the narrow span of their own lifetime. But the memory of themselves which they wish to be perpetuated should not be of their shining qualities and extraordinary achievements, but of their genuine faith, their holy character, and their beneficent deeds, as an incentive to the like (Ps. lxxviii. 7; Prov. xiii. 22; Heb. xi. 4); for such a wish alone is of any moral worth. 2. *The desire of it often leads to mistaken and unworthy endeavours in order to its attainment.* Absalom "had taken and reared up for himself the pillar," etc. Imbued with selfish and vainglorious ambition, he imagined that the sight of it would call forth the admiration of posterity. In the same spirit he subsequently made his attempt upon the throne. So others have reared imposing monuments, built huge pyramids and palaces, fought great battles, and rushed into daring enterprises, heedless of the rectitude of their conduct or

the welfare of mankind (Gen. xi. 4; Ezek. xxix. 3; Dan. iv. 30). "Their inward thought is," etc. (Ps. xlix. 11—13). The character of their aim determines the nature of their efforts; and only those efforts which proceed from a right spirit ensure an enduring and honourable "name." 3. *The result of such endeavours is shame and everlasting contempt, instead of immortal honour and glory.* "Absalom's hand," which was intended to indicate to future generations his magnificence, indicated only his ignominy. Even that at length perished (Ps. ix. 6; Prov. x. 7). And his memory remains as a solemn warning against transgression. "In what different lights, in what different aspects of character, the human beings of past time are presented to our thoughts! How many of them are there that an odious and horrid character rests upon! They seem to bear eternal curses on their heads. A vindictive ray of Heaven's lightning seems continually darting down upon them. They appear as the special points of communication and attraction between a wicked world and the Divine vengeance" (J. Foster). But "the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance" (Ps. cxii. 6; Matt. xxvi. 13; Acts x. 4; 2 Pet. i. 15).—D.

Ver. 29.—(MAHANAIM.) "*Is the young man . . . safe?*" Youth is a season of intense activity, favourable opportunities, and glowing promise.

> "The passion, which in youth
> Drives fast downhill, means that the impulse gained
> Should speed us up the hill that's opposite."
>
> (Sir H. Taylor.)

This question is specially suggestive of—

I. DANGER. No soldier on the battle-field, no traveller on "dark mountains," no ship on a tempestuous sea, is exposed to greater peril than a young man. Of what? Not so much of physical suffering and death, as of *sin*—the only real evil, and one which involves the loss of his highest life (Matt. x. 28). From what? Chiefly from *himself*—his "own heart" (Jer. xvii. 9); inexperience; susceptibility to impressions; personal endowments (ch. xiv. 25); "youthful lusts" (2 Tim. ii. 22), the love of pleasure, excitement, "name and fame;" impatience of control, self-confidence, rashness, and presumption. Also from false friends (ch. xiii. 3), rather than open enemies; sceptical and sensuous literature; "the defilements [miasma] of the age" (2 Pet. ii. 20); and the peculiar temptations of the place, the occupation, and the society with which he is connected. "Rejoice, O young man," etc. (Eccles. xi. 9).

II. SAFETY. "To be forewarned is to be forearmed." "Wherewithal, etc.? By taking heed thereto according to thy Word" (Ps. cxix. 9). The most essential thing is a right state of heart; its supreme affection set on God, its ruling purpose directed to the doing of his will (Prov. iv. 23), its varied powers "united to fear his Name" (Ps. lxxxvi. 11; Prov. i. 7). There is also need of watchfulness (1 Cor. xvi. 31), keeping out of the way of temptation, trusting in God to be kept by him, unceasing prayer, association with good men, the cultivation of proper habits, profitable reading, seasonable recreation, useful employment, and advancement toward the true end of life. "If ye do these things, ye shall never stumble," etc. (2 Pet. i. 10, 11).

III. ANXIETY; on the part of parents, instructors, Christian friends; arising from sincere affection, a clear perception of his danger, and an ardent desire for his welfare; expressed in fervent prayer, appropriate endeavour (ver. 5), and frequent inquiries (ver. 32). Alas! that a young man for whom others are so tenderly concerned should recklessly and wilfully "lose himself and become castaway"!—D.

Ver. 33.—(MAHANAIM.) *David's lament over Absalom.* "Would that I had died in thy stead, O Absalom! my son! my son!" In a little court between the inner and the outer *gate* of the fortified city wall, where (in the early morning) he stood and watched his brave soldiers going forth to battle (ver. 4), sits the aged king at eventide (ch. xix. 3, 7), awaiting tidings from the battle-field. The watchman, "from the roof of the gate at the wall," calls out to him that he descries, first one man "running alone" (not with others, as in flight, ver. 25), then another, and, as the foremost approaches nearer, says that he thinks his running is like that of the swift-footed Ahimaaz (ch. xvii. 17). On the arrival of the news of victory ("Peace!"), the first

words of David (like his last, ver. 5) are of Absalom; "Is there peace (*shalom*) to [is it well with] the young man Absalom?" and, perceiving his deep concern, Ahimaaz dares not reveal the whole truth (ver. 20). Again, the king makes the same inquiry of the Cushite, who (with less sympathy, but greater fidelity) utters the wish that *as the young man*, so might all the king's enemies be! "And the king was much moved (greatly agitated with grief), and went up to the upper chamber of the gate, and wept; and thus he said, as he walked (to and fro): My son Absalom! my son! my son Absalom!" etc.

"Is it so far from thee
Thou canst no longer see
In the chamber over the gate
That old man desolate,
Weeping and wailing sore
For his son who is no more?
'O Absalom, my son!'

"Somewhere at every hour
The watchman on the tower
Looks forth, and sees the fleet
Approach of hurrying feet
Of messengers, that bear
The tidings of despair.
'O Absalom, my son!'

"That 'tis a common grief
Bringeth but slight relief;
Ours is the bitterest loss.
Ours is the heaviest cross;
And for ever the cry will be,
'Would God I had died for thee,
O Absalom, my son!'"

(Longfellow.)

"Absalom afflicted his father more by his death than by his life" (Augustine). This expression of intense and absorbing grief (in which all joy of victory is swallowed up, ch. xix. 2) is indicative of—

I. PARENTAL AFFECTION from which it springs. Five times the afflicted father cries, "My son!" (*B'ni*); thrice, "Absalom!" A father's love (especially in such a fervid soul as David's) is: 1. The natural, instinctive, spontaneous effect of the relationship which subsists between him and his child. It is the closest relationship of life, and is mercifully joined by the Creator and Father of all with a great and peculiar *affection*; which, nevertheless (whilst it is intensified and exalted by a proper appreciation of its object, as "the offspring of God") requires to be regulated by intelligence and piety. 2. Deeply rooted, enduring, indestructible. It is not eradicated by a son's estrangement (Luke xv. 12), wilfulness, manifold transgressions, or even open rebellion. It makes large allowances, has much patience and forbearance; "believeth all things," etc. (1 Cor. xiii. 7), "covereth all sins" (Prov. x. 12). It feels persuaded that he has "some good thing in him," and cannot endure the thought of his entire abandonment. "Not only the question itself (ver. 29), but the very terms of it, breathe the tenderness of David's feelings. Absalom is 'the youth,' as if his youth were a full excuse for his conduct" ('Speaker's Commentary'). 3. Pitiful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing (Ps. ciii. 13). "My son, my beloved, my beautiful Absalom! miserably slain, and now lying dead! Would that I had died for thee!" (ch. xxiv. 17; Exod xxxii. 32; Rom. ix. 3).

"Thou seest the braided roots that bind
Yon towering cedar to the rock;
Thou seest the clinging ivy twined
As if to spurn the whirlwind's shock;—
Poor emblems of the strings that tie
His offspring to a parent's heart;
For those will, mouldering, yield and die,
But these can never, never part."

II. DISAPPOINTED EXPECTATION AND HOPE. All through the course pursued by Absalom, David doubtless cherished the hope that: 1. He might see the error of his way, and, constrained by his father's affection, repent of his sins. He may have supposed him penitent at the time of his return (ch. xiv. 23), and that his reconciliation (ch. xiv. 33) would be followed by filial love and obedience. 2. He might fulfil the anticipations formed at his birth, strengthened by the brilliant promise of his early youth, and apparently justified by his more recent diligence and religious zeal (ch. xv. 2, 8). The love of a parent often blinds him to the many defects and malicious designs of his son. Until this moment David hoped (ver. 5) that: 3. His life, at least, might be spared and his destruction averted. All is suddenly extinguished; his "sun is gone down while it was yet day;" and the remembrance of its brightness remains only to deepen the gloom of the succeeding night.

III. PERSONAL COMPUNCTION. Had the righteous judgment of God overtaken Absalom because he had "risen up against him" (ver. 31)? Was David himself, then, blameless? He could not but remember that: 1. He had despised the commandment of the Lord, and rebelled against the Divine King of Israel. 2. He had contributed by his own conduct to the misconduct of his son. "The worst ingredient in this cup of anguish would be, I think, the consciousness in David's heart that, if he had himself been all he ought to have been, his son might not thus have perished" (W. M. Taylor). 3. He was now suffering the chastisement of Heaven, of which his son's death was a part. "Absalom's sin and shame had two sides—there was in it the curse that David's sin brought on David's house (ch. xii. 10), the misdeed of the father's that is visited on the children (Exod. xx. 5); and not less, Absalom's own wickedness and recklessness, which made him the bearer of the family curse. David looks at Absalom's deed not on the latter side, but on the former (for his own guilt seems to him so great, that he looks little at Absalom's); hence his deep, boundless compassion for his misguided son" (Kurtz). "The heart-broken cry, 'Would God I had died for thee!' was not only the utterance of self-sacrificing love, but the confession that he himself deserved the punishment which fell upon another" (Kirkpatrick).

IV. IRREPARABLE LOSS AND SEPARATION. "As that young man is;" his life "as water spilt upon the ground," etc. No cries nor tears can restore him to his father or "the land of the living" (1 Sam. xxv. 29; ch. iv. 11; Ps. xxvi. 9; xlix. 8). Whatever David may have thought of his condition in *Sheôl*, no parent can contemplate the death of a rebellious and impenitent son without heart-rending grief, arising from the fear of his exclusion from the presence of God, sharing the doom of the Lord's enemies, and endless separation from the fellowship of saints. "All hope abandon, ye who enter here!" (Dante, 'Inferno,' iii.).

REMARKS. 1. It is possible, under circumstances most favourable to goodness, to become exceedingly bad. 2. One of the greatest evils in the world is that of disobedience to parents (2 Tim. iii. 3). 3. The love of an earthly parent toward his children is a shadow of the eternal Father's love to men. "He is affected with fatherly love towards the whole human race. Inasmuch as we are men, we must be dear to God, and our salvation must be precious in his sight" (Calvin, on Ezek. xviii. 4). 4. The Divine sorrow over men when they fall into sin and ruin, as revealed in the holy tears of Jesus, indicates their final state in "the world of infinite mourning."—D.

Ver. 3.—*The surpassing worth of Christ.* "Thou art worth ten thousand of us." The doctrine that all men are equal is true in some important respects, but its application and use are very limited. It is equally true that all men are unequal, that no man is of exactly the same weight and worth as any other man. Men differ infinitely in body and mind, in intelligence and goodness, in position and influence, in their value to society; and so in the degrees of their responsibility to God. In domestic and social, civic, national, and Church life, one man is often worth many others. David's "people" felt this now that they were going forth to meet the forces of Absalom in battle; and they give as a reason why he should be content to remain in the city instead of exposing himself to the dangers of the battle-field, that he was worth ten thousand of them; that it was better that ten thousand of them should be slain than he, though he was only one. This sentiment underlies and justifies the natural feeling of loyalty to a sovereign, the willingness to protect him at the cost of

many lives. In personal worth he may not be equal to many a single soldier or subject; but he represents the state; in his life may be involved the welfare of a nation, to protect which it is worth while for many to die. Such thoughts might well console the private soldier dying in obscurity on the field or in hospital. His king, his country, is worth a multitude of such as he. His life is worthily sacrificed for them. The same sentiment is applicable to the commanders of an army in contrast with common soldiers; to great statesmen and other leaders of men in contrast with the multitude. It is no disparagement of these to say that it would require many of them to equal in value to society one of those; and that, if necessary, it would be better that the many should die rather than the one. We may use the words emphatically in reference to our great King and Captain, the Lord Jesus Christ. True, he is no longer in personal peril from his enemies. "He lives beyond their utmost rage" (Watts). But his cause, influence, hold of mankind, place in their esteem and affection, in a word, his kingdom, may be endangered; and his true disciples will be ready to die in thousands rather than he should in these respects perish or even suffer loss. And the justification of their feeling is that he, personally and in his cause, "is worth ten thousand of them."

I. THE SURPASSING WORTH OF CHRIST. 1. *In personal excellence.* It is well when the monarch of a country is distinguished for mental and moral endowments. Even when the personality of the ruler is of less account in the actual government, it adds much to the welfare of the state that he is noble in the qualities of his mind and heart. This has been made manifest in the long reign of our beloved and honoured queen. Where the power of government is very largely trusted to the will of the sovereign, it is of incalculable importance that he should be both wise and good. David's kingdom sprang very mainly from, and was maintained by, his personal qualities. And this is more emphatically true of his great Son Jesus. He is "chiefest among ten thousand," chiefest among and above all creation. The perfections of God and the perfections of man are combined in this one glorious Person. In himself he is worthy of the utmost love and self-devotion. 2. *In position and dignity.* As "King of kings and Lord of lords;" "Lord of all;" King of souls; "Head of the Church;" "Head over all things." These are not empty titles; but represent facts, actual glory and power. To serve such a King may well be esteemed the highest possible honour; to die for him, a great glory. 3. *In relation to the good of men.* Who shall say how much Christ is "worth" in this view? of how much value his work for and amongst men? how essentially their welfare in time and in eternity is bound up with his unchanging existence and power, and the manifestation of himself in the world through his Church? Every believer experiences his preciousness (1 Pet. ii. 7), and desires that all should have a like experience, through a "like precious faith" (2 Pet. i. 1); and to keep him living in the memory of men, and secure the wider exercise of his saving power, would cheerfully sacrifice himself. We are insignificant, and if we die it matters little; but for him to perish from the life of men, or become feeble in his influence among them, would be disastrous indeed. 4. *In power to succour and aid his servants.* David was requested to remain in the city with the reserves, that, if it were required, he might send them to the succour of those fighting in the field. Our Lord can, "out of the city" in which he dwells, aid his servants in more effectual manner. Not only has he numberless reserves eager to do his bidding, but he is able to gather around him, from the very ranks of his foes, fresh hosts to fight his battles. And, beyond all this, he can himself be—yea, he is—with his people everywhere and evermore, to inspirit them by his presence, and render them victorious. Who of them, what "ten thousand" of them, could fill his place? 5. *In power to reward those who die in his service.* Earthly rulers are powerless to recompense the soldiers who are slain in fighting their battles. Not so our great King. He is able to promise eternal life and glory to his faithful followers; and what he promises he performs (see Mark viii. 35; John xii. 25).

II. THE EFFECT WHICH CONTEMPLATION OF THE SURPASSING WORTH OF CHRIST SHOULD HAVE UPON US. 1. *Satisfaction that he lives safe above all the hostility of his enemies.* Lives, not in heaven only, but on earth in spirit and power, working in and with his people and confirming his Word (John xiv. 19; Mark xvi. 20). Human leaders and teachers die, but "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever" (Heb. xiii. 8). That One of so much worth to men, and so needful to them,

should be thus immortal and immutable, is matter for joy and thankfulness. He needs not, like David, the plans and efforts of his servants to preserve him; but we can and should rejoice that he lives and reigns, and "must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. xv. 25). 2. *Devoted loyalty to him even unto death.* The readiness with which David's friends hazarded and gave up their lives for him, nay, the similar devotedness of many a common soldier, may well put most Christians to the blush. 3. *Contentment in view of the enormous sacrifice of human lives which has been made for his sake.* It is not waste; the willing deaths of martyrs, missionaries, Christian workers of all grades, have not been unreasonable. He and his cause are worthy of it all. 4. *Confidence in respect to ultimate victory over all his foes.* With such a King and Captain, final defeat is impossible. 5. *Assurance of ample recompense for whatever we lose, were it life itself, in his service.* 6. *Concern to be on the side of Christ rather than of a multitude in opposition to him.* We are tempted to follow the crowd, and (with or without thinking) to esteem that to be the right course which the greater number pursue. But truth goes not necessarily, or even ordinarily, with the majority. With the one Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, are truth, safety, victory, ultimate gain. His judgment is worth more than that of "ten thousand" others; his favour of infinitely more value than theirs. If adherence to him were to lead to the separation from us of all besides, and we were to find ourselves alone, we might say after his manner, "I am not alone, because the Master is with me" (John xvi. 32). —G. W.

Ver. 13.—*Dealing falsely against our lives.* "I should have wrought falsehood against my own life." Another reading, preferred by the Old Testament Revisers, substitutes "his" for "my own;" but they place in the margin that adopted in the Authorized Version. Taking the passage, then, as it stands in the Authorized Version, the meaning of the speaker is that if he had slain Absalom, he would have brought death upon himself, since the king would have been made acquainted with the deed, and would have sentenced him to death. The form of the expression is worthy of notice. Doing what would have cost him his life is called working *falsehood* against it. A man's life is entrusted to him to guard and nourish. When he does this, he acts truly towards it; when he does what injures or destroys his life, he acts falsely towards it; he violates his trust. Every man virtually professes to be concerned for the safety and well-being of his life; when he does what endangers or terminates it, he may be said to deal falsely with it, to act treacherously towards it. This is the case with those who put themselves to death, or shorten their days by intemperance or licentiousness; or who, by crime, bring themselves to the gallows (see homily on ch. xvii. 23). But we may take the words as suggesting that there are persons who work falsehood against their lives in the higher sense, as beings immortal, and capable of that life which is life indeed,—the life everlasting.

I. How do men commit this sin? 1. *By taking the course which surely leads to death.* In violating the laws of God they bring on themselves the sentence of death, and separate themselves from God, in whose favour is life. 2. *By refusing the new life which is proffered them in the gospel.* Life under the Law having become impossible through sin, God has interposed with another method of imparting life. His Son came to be our Life. He died that we might live. He lives evermore to bestow life on all who believe on him. "He that hath the Son hath life," etc. (1 John v. 12); "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," etc. (John iii. 36). To reject him is to reject life. It is to deal falsely with our own lives, our own souls. 3. *By neglecting the means by which the life of the soul is preserved and nourished.* Reading of the Word, meditation, prayer, watchfulness, ordinances of public worship, union and communion with Christians, etc., whatever is intended and adapted to keep the soul in vital union with him who is "the Life" (John xiv. 6).

II. Its unnaturalness and wickedness. The man implied that to deal falsely with his own life was a thing utterly inadmissible. So it ought to be in respect to the life of the soul. For: 1. *It is the life which is concerned.* It is not a mere question of more or less health, comfort, or other subordinate good. "It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life" (Deut. xxxii. 47). 2. *It is the most precious kind of life.* Unspeakably more important than the life of the body, or even of the mind, or of any

of the principles and affections which relate us to the family or society. Because of (1) its nature, (2) its blessedness, (3) its duration. 3. *It is our own life.* Which should be specially dear to us, and has been specially entrusted to us: which we are therefore especially bound to care for and conserve. 4. *To imperil or sacrifice it is to deal falsely against it and against God.* We are under a covenant to care for it. Nature binds us, and Scripture, and perhaps religious vows, voluntarily made and often repeated. 5. *Such a course will bring upon us the Divine displeasure.* We shall not only lose our souls, but shall find ourselves involved in awful penalties for doing so; not only shall we fail of "eternal life," but shall "go away into eternal punishment" (Matt. xxv. 46). The words may be a safeguard against temptation. "In doing this thing I should deal falsely against my own life."—G. W.

Ver. 13.—*The omniscience of our King.* "There is no matter hid from the king." This is given, by the man who informed Joab that Absalom was hanging in an oak, as a reason why he might have been sure of death himself if he had killed Absalom. It shows how well informed David was understood to be of all that took place amongst his subjects. Such an impression respecting governors and magistrates in general as this man had respecting David, would go far to extinguish crime. The assertion here made as to King David's knowledge may be made absolutely, and without exception, in reference to our great King.

I. THE OMNISCIENCE OF CHRIST. This is claimed for and by him in Holy Scripture (see John ii. 24, 25; Rev. ii. 23; and the repeated declarations in the letters to the seven Churches, Rev. ii. and iii., as to his acquaintance with their works and condition. Also John x. 14, 15). 1. *The sources of his knowledge.* His own essential Divine faculty of knowing. He does not depend, like ordinary rulers, on informants. His "*eyes* are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. xv. 3). 2. *The extent of his knowledge.* He knows, not only the actions of men, but their hearts; all thoughts, emotions, motives, plans, purposes; all movements and events that can affect his kingdom. His enemies take counsel against him under his very eyes. 3. *The impossibility of concealing anything from him.* "There is no matter hid from the King." Nothing can hide aught from him. Not physical darkness; not distance; not efforts at concealment; no hypocrisy; no simulation or dissimulation; no excuses, contradictions, or evasions. The assertions in Ps. cxxxix.; Job xxxiv. 21, 22; 2 Tim. ii. 19; Heb. iv. 13, are as applicable to the Son as to the Father.

II. THE EFFECT WHICH THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE OMNISCIENCE OF CHRIST SHOULD HAVE UPON US. 1. *To confirm our confidence in his fitness to be King.* Rule over such a kingdom as his—extending over numbers so vast, and reaching to the inmost souls of his subjects—requires omniscience as one of the attributes of the Ruler. 2. *To deter us from wrong-doing.* As a similar knowledge deterred this Israelite from slaying the king's son. 3. *To assure us that judgment will fall on the guilty, and only on them; and on each according to the measure of his guiltiness.* For want of better knowledge in human rulers and magistrates, some innocent persons suffer as guilty, and many guilty ones escape punishment. 4. *To encourage us in all that is good.* Christ's perfect knowledge of us is a great comfort for Christians who are unknown or unacknowledged amongst men; for the maligned and misunderstood; for workers in obscurity; for such as do good quietly and secretly. "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" (John xxi. 17). "Thy Father"—thy Redeemer and Lord—"which seeth in secret shall recompense thee" (Matt. vi. 4, Revised Version). "Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall each man have his praise from God" (1 Cor. iv. 5, Revised Version).

> "Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not.
> The Master praises: what are men?"

5. *To comfort us in all troubles.* "Thou hast seen my affliction; thou hast known my soul in adversities" (Ps. xxxi. 7, Revised Version). A special comfort for those whose troubles are too peculiar or too sacred to communicate to others. Though our King be so exalted, he interests himself in each one of his subjects, even the least, knows all that pains them, and sympathizes with them in all.—G. W.

Ver. 18.—*Absalom's monument.* The contrast between ver. 17 and ver. 18 is touching. Absalom, whose three sons (ch. xiv. 27) were dead, desirous that his name should not therefore die, erected a monument to perpetuate it, probably connecting with it a tomb in which he purposed that his body should lie, and in which possibly he may have placed the remains of his deceased children. But he was buried in another sepulchre, and had another monument reared to his memory. A pit in the forest of Ephraim became his grave, and "a very great heap of stones" his memorial. The contrast appears more marked in the original than in our version. The same Hebrew word is translated "laid" in ver. 17, and "reared" in ver. 18. "They *took* Absalom . . . and *raised* a very great heap of stones upon him . . . Absalom in his lifetime had *taken* and *raised* up for himself a pillar," etc. The desire to have our name perpetuated is natural, and in some becomes a passion. It is one of the pleasures parents have, that, when they are gone, their children (especially their sons) will keep their names in the memory of men. Failing this, the hope of a tombstone to fulfil in some measure the same purpose may give satisfaction; it is only a very few who can hope for a "pillar" as a monument. But, after all, these are poor memorials, and they may preserve a very undesirable memory of a deceased person. There are better methods of ensuring that we shall not be soon forgotten amongst men, and, at the same time, that the image thus perpetuated shall be both desirable and useful. These methods, moreover, are open to the multitude who cannot hope for either pillar or tombstone to commemorate them. "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance" (Ps. cxii. 6).

I. HOW TO BUILD MONUMENTS TO OUR MEMORY. 1. *By eminent piety and holiness.* "The memory of the just is blessed; but the name of the wicked shall rot" (Prov. x. 7). 2. *By the faithful discharge of private and public duties.* 3. *By zeal for the spiritual good of others.* Instructing them ourselves. Providing for their instruction. Those who have wealth may erect a house of prayer, which will be a better monument than a pillar. The childless man may thus have spiritual children that shall perpetuate his memory and good influence. Loving work amongst the young is likely to be most successful, both in respect to their good and the long perpetuation of our memory. Our name will be written on their hearts, and repeated by them with gratitude in their conversation and in their thanksgivings to God. 4. *By large general benevolence.* Devotedness in the relief of suffering and the promotion in other ways of the good of others. Some secure a lasting name by building, enlarging, or endowing hospitals, almshouses, or schools. But little acts of kindness, especially if they become the habit of a life, may secure even a warmer place in the memory and affection of those whom we benefit.

II. THE MONUMENTS THUS ERECTED. It follows from what has been said that these will be: 1. *Souls saved or greatly profited.* 2. *Happiness produced or increased.* 3. *Grateful remembrance and mention of us.* By those we have benefited. By all acquainted with our lives who rightly estimate goodness and benevolence. 4. *In the case of some, religious and philanthropic institutions and agencies, which they have founded or greatly strengthened, and with which their names will continue to be associated.*

III. THE SUPERIORITY OF SUCH MONUMENTS. In comparison with pillars, etc., erected to our memory. 1. *In their nature.* Memorials of stone bear no comparison with those written on the hearts, and in the characters and happiness, of men; or indissolubly associated with permanent agencies for their well-being. 2. *In their fruitfulness.* The good done reproduces itself; the memory of the doer, thus perpetuated, more surely excites to imitation of his character and works. 3. *In their duration.* The less durable of such memorials will outlast any material monument; the spiritual ones will survive the last fires, and be everlasting.

To conclude: 1. *It is a solemn thing to reflect that shortly all that will remain of us in this world will be our memorials.* We ourselves must soon be gone, be we princes or peasants, rich or poor, learned or ignorant. The only advantage of the rich over the poor is that of more costly monuments. But the choicest monuments may be secured by the poor as well as the rich. 2. *The securing for ourselves a lasting name amongst men ought not to be the chief motive, nor one of the chief motives, of our conduct.* It should hardly be a *motive* at all. Of *Christian* conduct and works, it cannot be a main motive; for a life so produced is not Christian. To act in order to "have glory

of men" (Matt. vi. 2) after our death differs not in principle from seeking to have such glory now. Had Mary (Matt. xxvi. 6—13) lavished her precious ointment on our Lord in order that she might be memorable to all ages, he would not have commended her. Our chief motives should be love to God and Christ and men, the desire to be approved of God, and to have our names recorded indelibly in the book of life (Phil. iv. 3; Rev. iii. 5). 3. *An enduring name may be obtained by ill-doing as well as by well-doing.* The name of Judas will last as long as that of Mary, and be perpetuated by the same means. And the memory of a good man's failings may be as enduring as that of his virtues. 4. *The grand instance of a Name after death synonymous with all that is great and good in the highest sense and degree,* without any admixture of evil, and productive of the highest and most lasting good in others, is that of our blessed Lord.—G. W.

Ver. 27.—*A good messenger of good news.* "He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings." Underlying this phrase is probably the feeling that there is a congruity between good tidings and a good man. David may have thought that such a messenger as Ahimaaz would not have been sent with bad news; and, indeed, Joab was unwilling that he should run with the news, because he knew how grievous part of it would be to David. It may be permissible to take these words as applicable to the proclaimers of the heavenly good news—the gospel of God. It should be true of every Christian minister and teacher, yea, of every Christian, that "he is a good man, and cometh with good tidings." We are the more readily led to such an accommodation of the words, because the terms used throughout this section of the narrative are in the Septuagint identical with those (εὐαγγέλια, εὐαγγελίζω) with which we are so familiar in the New Testament.

I. THERE ARE GOOD TIDINGS TO BE PROCLAIMED. Christianity is pre-eminently "gospel" (equivalent to "good news"), and is often called by this name. It is good tidings from the region and the Person from whence we might reasonably expect bad; and about the Being and the things which are of most importance to us. It declares to us the love of God to sinful men. It announces the coming and the work of a Divine Saviour; the reign of a Divine King; an all-sufficient propitiation for sin; a full and free redemption; an almighty, most loving and ever-abiding Comforter and Helper. It proclaims pardon for the guilty, cleansing for the impure, life for the dead, comfort for the sad and sorrowful, Divine righteousness for the unrighteous, Divine strength for the weak, peace and joy on earth, perfection alike of holiness and happiness in heaven. It offers all these blessings on the simple condition of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts xx. 21).

II. THESE GOOD TIDINGS ARE COMMITTED TO GOOD MEN TO MAKE KNOWN. Only good men, real Christians, have a Divine commission to engage in this work. God does not need the services of his enemies in the work of turning enemies into friends and ministering to their good. No unconverted man, no one that is carnal, worldly, unholy, can be a true Christian preacher or teacher. 1. *Only good men really know the gospel.* (See 1 Cor. ii. 14; Matt. xi. 25.) We need to be "taught of God" (John vi. 45) in order to our real reception and understanding of Christian truth. 2. *Only good men can rightly make it known.* We cannot teach what we do not know; we cannot teach aright that with which we are out of harmony and sympathy. The work of teaching the gospel requires love to God, to the Lord Jesus Christ, to the truth, to the souls of men; sympathy with the mind and heart and purposes of God as revealed in the gospel; a character consistent with it, and adapted to illustrate and recommend it; and the earnest and believing prayerfulness which secures the Divine aid and blessing. "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?" (Ps. l. 16).

III. GOOD MEN SHOULD MAKE KNOWN THE GOOD TIDINGS ZEALOUSLY. All Christians should do this according to the measure of their abilities and opportunities. They should be incited to do this by: 1. *The nature of the tidings.* With which only intense earnestness in the messenger is in harmony. 2. *Their personal obligations to the redeeming love which they announce.* 3. *The unspeakable blessings they have received through the knowledge of them.* 4. *The commands of their Lord.* 5. *The natural impulses of the Christian heart.* Which are the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

6. *The good they can thus confer on their fellow-men.* Good of the most important and lasting kind, and of which they are most of all in need.

IV. THOSE WHO MAKE KNOWN THE GOOD TIDINGS OUGHT MORE AND MORE TO BECOME GOOD. The work of learning and teaching the gospel ought to greatly benefit the teachers. It is adapted to do so, on account of: 1. *The nature of the gospel.* Its every truth is sanctifying. 2. *The special character of the work.* It exercises and trains every Christian virtue. It brings into close communion with the Infinitely Good, who is also the Inspirer of all good in his creatures. 3. *The regard for consistency which the worker is likely to cherish.* 4. *His desire for success in his work.* This will increase his desire and endeavour after greater personal consecration and holiness. 5. *The concern which he will feel to be accepted of God.* "Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. ix. 27).

In conclusion: 1. *The subject appeals to all who have part in the teaching of Christianity.* Not only preachers, but parents and other teachers of the young, district visitors, etc. 2. *Some need to be reminded that the Christian religion is not all of the nature of good tidings to each one to whom it comes.* If it says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," it says also, "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark xvi. 16). If of the righteous it declares, "It shall be well with him," it also says, "Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him!" (Isa. iii. 10, 11). But its tidings of evil, as well as of good, need good men to bear them properly. It needs faith and faithfulness toward God, tender love and pity toward men, to utter them aright, and with probability of success.—G. W.

Ver. 29.—*Concern for the welfare of young men.* "Is the young man Absalom safe?" or, as in the Revised Version, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" The inquiry reveals what was on David's heart equally with, if not more than, the welfare of the state and the continuance of his own reign. While Absalom had accepted with approval plans for accomplishing his father's death, David was more solicitous for the preservation of Absalom's life than his own; and now that the victory of his forces is announced, he cannot rejoice at the tidings until he knows whether his son still lives; and when he learns that he is dead, his grief quite overwhelms his joy, and bursts all bounds. It is not uncommon for worthless sons, who have lost all affection and dutifulness towards their parents, to have parental love still lavished and wasted upon them. The reprobate is not unfrequently the favourite. The inquiry of David is one that may be, and often is, put respecting young men, with reference to various kinds of well-being. Is it well with him? Is he in health? Is he getting on in business, etc.? It may well be directed towards welfare of a more essential kind—Is it well with him morally, spiritually, and with reference to eternity?

I. WHEN IS IT WELL WITH YOUNG MEN? 1. *When they have become decided Christians.* When of their own free choice they have accepted Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and manfully owned him before men. It cannot be really well with those who are without Christ, living in rebellion towards their heavenly Father, and walking in the way that leads to destruction. 2. *When living lives of watchfulness and prayer.* Sensible of the perils to which they are exposed, guarding against temptation, and ever imploring Divine protection and help. In such a world as this, it cannot be well for the young and inexperienced to be unaware of their dangers, or heedless respecting them. 3. *When carrying Christian principles into consistent practice in every department of their lives.* 4. *When earnestly devoting themselves to works of piety and benevolence.* To do this is well, not only for those whose good they may be seeking, but for themselves. It is a safeguard and an education. Let young men (young women too) thus live, and: (1) It *is* well with them whatever their position in life. Such living *is* well-being. (2) It is likely to be well with them in their relations to others. They will secure esteem, affection, friendships that are worth having, and great influence for good in the Church and the world. (3) It will probably be well with them as to worldly success and comfort. (4) Persevering in such a course, it will be well with them throughout this life and for ever. Such a youth will lead on to an honourable and happy manhood; such a life on earth to a glorious and blissful life in heaven.

II. THE CONCERN WHICH IS FELT IN RESPECT TO THE CHRISTIAN WELFARE OF

YOUNG MEN. 1. *By their Christian parents.* Natural affection and religious faith combine to produce an anxiety which young people can very partially understand. The happiness of parents is bound up with that of their children. Christians "live" (1 Thess. iii. 8) when their sons and daughters live to Christ, and "stand fast" in him. Their anxiety on their account is greatly intensified when they have left home for new scenes and associations, involving new perils to character, without the preservative influence of home and known friends. 2. *Ministers and Churches ought to be more concerned about the spiritual welfare of young men than they always are.* Their mission is to care for souls; and no souls are more interesting, more exposed to danger, more needing and ready to appreciate sympathy and friendly offices, than those of the young. None are of so much value for the advancement of religion at home and abroad. And of the young, none so need guidance and wise influence as young men; young women are drawn to Christ more readily, and are usually exposed to less powerful temptations. Measures for the good of young men should occupy a prominent place in the agencies of every congregation. 3. *Christian citizens may well cherish a like concern.* For on the direction that the youth of a country take depends to a large extent the welfare of the state. If the young could but be generally brought under the power of godliness, with its accompanying intelligence, purity, uprightness, and benevolence, a new era of national glory and happiness would have commenced. Is it well with the young, especially with young men? should, then, be a common inquiry from all good men and women; and should be accompanied with such practical proofs of interest in the inquiry as are possible. There are few Christians who could not do something to bring Christian influences to bear upon the young men they know, and to shield them from the opposite influences, which are so numerous and powerful.

Finally, young men should be concerned for their own best interests. Because it is right; because the practices of godliness and virtue bring solid happiness; because thus they will make the most of their lives; and because of the concern which those who love them feel on their account. Let them, when tempted to neglect or forsake that which is good, or practise wickedness, remember the counsels and prayers of their fathers and mothers, and the pain they will inflict on them if they go wrong.—G. W.

Ver. 33.—*A father's anguish at his son's death.* The stroke which David feared fell upon him at last. In spite of all his desire to save his rebellious son, and his commands to each of the generals to "deal gently" with him for his sake, he had been slain. When the father learnt the unwelcome truth from "the Cushite" (Revised Version), he was overwhelmed with grief; and retiring to "the chamber over the gate" he burst out in the pathetic lamentation, "O my son Absalom!" etc., and continued crying with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" (ch. xix. 4). These loud demonstrations of grief were in a high degree impolitic, as Joab soon convinced him (ch. xix. 5—8), but they were the natural outburst of his tender heart and his unquenchable love for his worthless son. He had grieved sorely in the expectation of the death of his infant child (ch. xii. 16, 21, 22); much more must he grieve over this young man, on whom his heart had been set for so many years, and for whom he had done and borne so much. Moreover, Absalom had died suddenly, and by violence, and in sinful war against his father—unrepentant, unforgiven. David might even, in his passionate grief, reflect on himself as the occasion, however innocently, of his death, since it arose from the measures he had taken in defence of himself and his throne. Still more bitter would be the reflection that, by his foolish fondness, his evil example, his laxity of discipline, his refraining from merited punishment of his son's earlier sins and crimes, and his neglect to crush his treasonable practices at their commencement, he had greatly contributed to the formation of his evil character, and to his untimely and miserable end.

I. THE SORROW OF PARENTS BEREFT OF GROWN-UP CHILDREN. It is composed of various elements. 1. *Sorrow of natural affection.* Which cannot always give account of itself, but is implanted by the Creator for most important purposes, is increased by years of exercise and mutual endearments and services, and often survives when these have ceased, and parental love is requited with ingratitude, neglect, injury, or deadly hostility. 2. *Sorrow of disappointed hope.* Parents picture to themselves a career of prosperity and honourable activity for their children, and try to ensure it by the

education and start in life which they give them. Or they may have looked to their son to be the prop of their own old age. How can they but sorrow bitterly when all their hopes are scattered by death? 3. *Their sorrow may be increased by painful fears.* It may be a sorrow uncheered by hope, because over the death of one who lived and died in sin. 4. *Self-reproach may, as in the case of David, accompany and embitter the grief.* The highest parental duties—those which have respect to the souls of children—may have been neglected. The home may have been, through parental indifference and worldliness, if no worse, a quite unfit place of preparation for holy service on earth or entrance into heaven. The sorrow arising from the consciousness of this cannot be assuaged by remembrance of the education given to prepare for this world's business, or the accomplishments imparted to render life refined and agreeable. 5. *The sorrows of bereaved parents are increased and from time to time renewed by observing the happiness of other parents whose children are continued to them, and are living in habits of piety, rectitude, and benevolence.*

II. CONSOLATIONS FOR SUCH SORROW. These are to be found in: 1. *Profound submission to the will of God.* The death we mourn, however it comes, was his doing who has the right to dispose of us and ours according to his pleasure; and who is infinite in wisdom and goodness—"our Father." "Thou didst it" (Ps. xxxix. 9); "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away" (Job i. 21). 2. *Assurance of his fatherly compassion.* That he sympathizes while he chastises (Ps. ciii. 13). 3. *A good conscience.* Happy the fathers, the mothers, who have the consoling reflection that they did their best to fit their departed children for this world or the next. 4. *In the case of the death of godly children, the assurance of their blessed existence and happy commencement of nobler careers than those cut short by death.* The assurance also of future reunion where "there shall be no more death" (Rev. xxi. 4).

In conclusion: 1. *Let parents think of their children as mortal;* and be concerned so to train and influence them as to fit them for both living and dying. 2. *Let children live in view of a possibly early death.* Seek safety in Christ. Let life be a constant following of him. Dread to have life shortened and death made terrible by sins and vices. Let your parents have the consolation of knowing, should you die young, that you are "not lost, but gone before."—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIX.

Ver. 2.—**The victory** (Hebrew, *the salvation*) **that day was** turned **into mourning.** Naturally, the people did not understand the poignant emotions caused by the activity of David's conscience, and were pained at this seeming ingratitude to them for their brave exertions in his behalf, and at what they must have regarded as indifference to the welfare of the nation. Nor would it be easy for us to understand his conduct during the flight from Jerusalem, and in bearing Shimei's imprecations so tamely, did we not find in the psalms written at this time that David was suffering extreme and even excessive self-reproach and mental anguish at his past sin. It was a relief to bear Shimei's rudeness, for God might remember it for good. Racked thus with self-reproach, he had urged upon his generals to spare the young man (ch. xviii. 5), whose sin was part of a web which he had himself begun to spin, and in terror he waited for the result. Mentally it would have been better for him if he had gone to the battle instead of sitting in gloomy self-reproach between the gates. His eager inquiries, "Is the lad safe?" meant—Has the hand of justice again smitten me? and when he found that a second blow had fallen, his self-control gave way. Joab, more statesmanlike, and with his personal feelings unmoved, notices the fresh wrong that David is committing, and is vexed at seeing his brave warriors slink into Mahanaim ashamed, instead of being welcomed with deserved praise. But their conduct in being so depressed at David's sorrow is a proof of their affection for him, and it was plainly his duty to master his feelings, and to think of making a due return for the great service they had rendered him. The Hebrew word "salvation," that is, deliverance, gives the better side of the idea, while "victory" is a coarser word, taken from the language of a people whose trade was war.

Ver. 5.—**And Joab . . . said.** Joab's speech puts the alternative in a very incisive and even rude way before the king. But what he says is true, namely, that Absalom's success would inevitably have been followed by the massacre, not only of David himself,

but of his sons and daughters, and of the women who had accompanied him in his flight. Nor would it have stopped there, but the officers of his court, the captains of his army, his mighties, and all who had long cared for and loved him would have been put to the sword. It was this horrible certainty, according to Oriental usage, which made Absalom's rebellion so abominable, and which steeled the heart of Joab against him when he saw him hanging in the tree. He regarded him as a fratricide and parricide, who had plotted murder on a large scale; and Joab was not made milder by the thought that this would have included himself and the heroes who had made David's throne so great. With stern good sense he, therefore, bids the king suppress his mere personal feelings, and leave the chamber in which he had concealed himself, to go forth and "speak to the heart of his servants," that is, thank and praise them in a friendly manner. For otherwise they would disperse and leave him; and this would be followed by the uprise of some other claimant of the throne—some relative, perhaps, of Saul, backed by the tribes of Benjamin and Ephraim; and David, abandoned by the nation, would fall an easy victim, with all his family, of this second rebellion. Absalom's rapid success proved that David had many enemies, and without great prudence he might be left at Mahanaim as powerless as Ishbosheth had been. The long delay between the death of this puppet-king and David's appointment to be sovereign of all Israel was probably owing to the same want of enthusiasm for David which had made the nation transfer its allegiance so lightly to the handsome Absalom. But with all his good sense Joab was coarse and rude. He was, moreover, utterly incapable of understanding David's real feelings. He saw only a father giving way to an exaggerated loss for a handsome but worthless son. David really was condemning himself for having brought lust and murder into his own house by abominable sin.

Ver. 8.—**All the people came before the king.** Probably they passed in review before him, and received his thanks. By thus acting in accordance with Joab's wise counsel, David probably saved the nation from years of anarchy, and a fresh civil war. **For Israel had fled every man to his tent**; Hebrew, *and Israel*, that is, Absalom's partisans, *fled each man to his tent*—to his home. The Authorized Version confounds Israel with David's soldiers, but consistently throughout the narrative "the hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom" (ch. xv. 13; and see xvi. 15, 18; xvii. 14, 15, 24, 26; xviii. 6, 7, 16, 17).

Ver. 10.—**Absalom, whom we anointed over us.** It is evident from these words that there had been some solemn anointing and appointment of Absalom, and this accounts for the manner in which his partisans are always described as "Israel," while David's men are simply "his servants." With this anointment there must also have been a formal renunciation of David's rule, and, being thus dethroned, he does not attempt to return until the nation summons him back. As the flight of David narrated in ch. xvi. was extremely hurried, the conspirators must have kept their counsel well, and whatever rumours reached him apparently he disregarded. But meanwhile representatives of the tribes secretly convened at Hebron had claimed to act in the name of Israel, and, chosen a new king. The words certainly imply that, had Absalom lived, the Israelites would have considered themselves bound to obey him.

Ver. 11.—**David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar.** The two high priests had remained behind at Jerusalem, to watch over David's interests, and he now, by a messenger, probably Ahimaaz or Jonathan, urges them to quicken the proceedings of his own tribe. We may feel quite sure that there was discussion in Judah as well as in the other tribes; but the rebellion had begun at Hebron, and probably many of the leading chiefs were deeply implicated in Absalom's proceedings. Probably they now regretted it, but hung back through fear of punishment. It was politic, therefore, to assure them of David's kindly feelings, and that overtures on their side would be readily received, and the past forgiven.

Ver. 12.—**My bones**; Hebrew, *my bone and my flesh*, so nearly related as to be part of my own self (Gen. ii. 23).

Ver. 13.—**Of my bone, and of my flesh**; Hebrew, *art thou not my bone and my flesh?*—a most near and dear relative. It is difficult to understand why in the Authorized Version this common metaphor in the Hebrew has been so meddled with. Ewald thinks that this purposed degradation of Joab and the substitution of Amasa in his stead was a wise and politic act. It was to some extent just, for Joab was a man stained with many murders; but politic it was not. Passing over the fact that Amasa had actually taken the command of the rebel army, he was an ambitious and selfish man, and could lay no claim to that sturdy fidelity which had characterized Joab throughout his long service. For all he had done had been for David's good, and his advice, however roughly given, had averted grave misfortunes. Joab's murder of Absalom was an act of wilful disobedience; but David had used Joab for a far meaner murder, committed, not for reasons of statesmanship, but for purposes

of lust. The guilt of slaying Absalom was as nothing compared with that of slaying Uriah, nor was it so base as the assassination of Abner, which David had tolerated, though made angry by it. The dismissal of Joab could have been effected only by putting him to death, and this certainly he did not deserve at David's hands; and the attempt, unless carried out secretly, would have led to tumult and insurrection. Joab, too, was a far more skilful general than Amasa, who, with larger forces, had just suffered a disastrous defeat; and if Joab was removed secretly, his brother Abishai remained to avenge him. David was, in fact, blinded by love for the son whom for so many years he had treated with coldness. There was a strong reaction now in the father's mind, and under its influence he was prepared to sacrifice the nephew who had been faithful to him and saved him, for the nephew who had joined in Absalom's rebellion. But possibly it had an immediate good effect, as Amasa, assured of forgiveness and promotion, now took David's side.

Ver. 14.—**And he bowed**, etc. It was not Amasa, but David, who made all the members of his tribe unanimous in his recall. And not only were the high priests active in his cause, but David, we may feel sure, sent numerous messages to all the more powerful men, assuring them of forgiveness and favour. In his general policy he was right. After the solemn anointing of Absalom, it was necessary for him to wait until some equally public and national act authorized his resumption of the royal power; and delay was dangerous. Every day now spent at Mahanaim might give the opportunity for fresh troubles.

Ver. 15.—**Gilgal.** As Gilgal lay upon the west bank of the Jordan (Josh. v. 9), near Jericho and the fords, it was a convenient place for the elders of Judah to await there the king. During the crossing, two interesting events happened—the meeting of Shimei and David, and the leave-taking of Barzillai the Gileadite. Shortly afterwards came the apology of Mephibosheth, but it is uncertain whether he was among those who had come to Gilgal to welcome the king.

Ver. 16.—**Shimei the son of Gera.** The fact that he came attended by a thousand men of the tribe of Benjamin is a proof, not only that he was a person of influence, but that he had exerted himself to bring over his tribesmen to David's side. His adherence was, therefore, of importance. Ziba had always professed allegiance to David, and as he virtually represented the house of Saul, his presence was also valuable, even if prompted by the desire to keep Mephibosheth's land. For though Absalom seemed to be the nation's choice, yet there would be many legitimists who would consider that the crown belonged to Saul's heirs, and who would watch the course of events for any opportunity favourable to their views. David's victory ruined their hopes, and the public acts of Shimei and Ziba removed all fear of public disturbance on the part of Saul's friends.

Ver. 17.—**They went over Jordan before the king.** This might mean that, in bringing the king across, Shimei and the Benjamites led the way. But, first, the verb, which is a rare one, means that they dashed through the river impetuously; and secondly, *before the king*, means "in the king's presence." While the tribe of Judah remained on the left bank to receive the king on his landing, Shimei and Ziba sought favour by a show of excessive zeal, and forded the Jordan, so as to be the first to welcome him (see ver. 20).

Ver. 18.—**And there went over a ferry-boat**; more correctly, *and the ferry-boat kept crossing*, went backwards and forwards to bring the king's household over. **Shimei . . . fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan.** If this translation were right, instead of fording the river, Shimei would have waited on the western bank. Some commentators do take this view, but it is contradicted by the latter part of ver. 17. Really the Hebrew words signify no more than "at his crossing the Jordan," that is, at some time or other during the passage. Shimei's course was not only the boldest, but also the wisest. For, in the first place, his prompt surrender would commend itself to David's generosity; and, secondly, had Abishai's counsel been taken, it would have offended the thousand Benjamites who formed his escort, and also all the warriors present there from Israel (see ver. 40). Trouble and discontent would certainly have followed upon any attempt on David's part to punish any of his enemies, and there might even have been armed resistance to his crossing.

Ver. 20.—**The first . . . of all the house of Joseph.** Shimei, who was a Benjamite, could not have thus claimed to be the representative of the northern tribes, had he remained on the western bank, where "half the people of Israel" were assembled. Strictly, "the house of Joseph" signified the tribe of Ephraim (Judg. i. 22, 35; and comp. Ps. lxxviii. 67), and in this sense Shimei did not belong to it. But Ephraim claimed a supremacy over all Israel; and one cause of the opposition to David certainly was the transference of the leadership to the tribe of Judah. Even the long reign of Solomon failed to weld the tribes together, and as soon as the reins of power fell into the weak hands of Rehoboam, an Ephraimite,

Jeroboam, whom Solomon had made "ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph" (1 Kings xi. 28), quickly wrested the ten tribes from him. In Amos v. 6 "the house of Joseph" signifies all the northern tribes, for the reason given in 1 Chron. v. 1, 2; and such is its sense here. And Shimei compressed many powerful arguments in the phrase. For as a Benjamite he offered David the allegiance of the tribe which had given Israel its first king; while, as an Israelite, he professed also to represent the leading house of Ephraim, and all the northern tribes which usually followed its bidding.

Ver. 22.—**Ye sons of Zeruiah . . . adversaries unto me**; literally, *that ye be to me for a Satan;* rendered "adversary" in Numb. xxii. 22, but by Ewald in this place "tempter." It probably means "one who would do me harm." Though David speaks of the sons of Zeruiah in the plural (as in ch. xvi. 10), there is no reason to suppose that Joab shared in Abishai's impetuosity. Indifferent as he was to the shedding of blood, he was too prudent and politic to put the people out of temper by an execution on the day of David's return. **In Israel . . . over Israel.** There is much force in this repetition. A short time before Israel had been for Absalom, but now, by Shimei's submission, and that of the large body of Benjamites with him, David felt that once again he was king over the whole people.

Ver. 23.—**The king sware unto him.** David's magnanimity was not the result merely of policy, but also of joyful feeling at seeing all the tribes so readily welcome him back to the throne. But in spite of his oath, he orders Solomon to execute him, regarding what he had done as a sin past forgiveness. In so doing we can hardly acquit David of breaking his oath, even granting that Shimei's repentance was insincere, and that the motive of his actions was the desire simply to save his life. But we must remember that our Lord described his injunction, "that ye love one another," as "a new commandment" (John xiii. 34); and the utmost that can be said in David's favour is that his character was generous and full of chivalry. A half-excuse may be found for his order in the supposition that Shimei was an inveterate conspirator, and dangerous to Solomon's peace. This view seems confirmed by the command given to Shimei to build a house at Jerusalem (1 Kings ii. 36), where he would always be under surveillance. But had not David himself praised the man who "sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not" (Ps. xv. 4)?

Ver. 24.—**Mephibosheth.** The meeting of David and Mephibosheth possibly took place at Jerusalem (see on ver. 25), and, if so, the order of events is not chronological. Ziba certainly came to the Jordan fords, and the narrative may have been introduced here to complete the account of his doings. In neglecting his person and his dress, Mephibosheth was showing signs of heartfelt sorrow, and as he thus mourned during Absalom's tenure of power, it exposed him to the usurper's displeasure, and was a public avowal that his sympathies were with David. And his treatment was unjust; but David was in a strait. Ziba had been actively useful to him in his flight, and had also aided greatly in his recall. It was, probably, even owing to his influence that Shimei came with a thousand men of Benjamin. He deserved, therefore, a reward, but not at his master's cost. **His beard**; Hebrew, *the upper lip* (see Lev. xiii. 45; Ezek. xxiv. 17, 22).

Ver. 25.—**When he was come to Jerusalem to meet the king.** This certainly looks as if the meeting took place at Jerusalem, and apparently when David had reached the royal palace (see ver. 30). But what, then, is meant in ver. 24 by his "going down" to meet the king? If, too, he had been at Jerusalem all the while, how could he come there? Some, therefore, translate, "Then Jerusalem came to meet the king"—a possible, but not a natural, rendering, nor one that agrees with ver. 30. Others consider that he had withdrawn to his house in the highlands of Benjamin at Gibeah of Saul; but David had given these lands to Ziba, and the crippled Mephibosheth would have met with rough treatment had he endeavoured to contest the ownership. The Arabic Version reads, "when he came from Jerusalem;" but it is not confirmed by any trustworthy authorities. The view of Kimchi is probably right, that Mephibosheth did go down to the Jordan fords to meet David, and certainly his duty required of him no less. He had been slandered and ill used, but the king believed him to be guilty, and regarded him with displeasure. To have remained, therefore, at home when all Judah and half Israel had gone to welcome David back, would have been culpable remissness. And though he was lame, yet the ride was not so long as to be very fatiguing. But he did not rush through the river, as Shimei and his thousand men had done; and when David had crossed, there was too much going on for him to get an audience. He followed, therefore, in David's suite; but in Jerusalem the meeting actually took place. Thus the verses briefly record different facts: ver. 24 that Mephibosheth went with the vast crowd to welcome the king back; ver. 25 that in due time, in Jerusalem, the explanation was given, and Mephibosheth restored to favour.

Ver. 26.—**Thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass.** This would mean, "Thy servant purposed, said within himself, that he would saddle an ass, not by his own hands, but by those of his servants." All the versions, however, except the Chaldee, read, "Thy servant said to him, Saddle me an ass." With this agrees the narrative in ch. xvi. 1. Mephibosheth ordered Ziba to saddle for him an ass, and one for an attendant, and to put hastily together a supply of food for the journey. And Ziba does so; but when everything is ready, he leaves his master in the lurch, and carries all away to David, to whom he falsely represents Mephibosheth as a traitor. In the words that follow, he unreservedly submits himself to David, on the ground that, though innocent in this affair, yet that, as a member of a dethroned dynasty, his life was forfeit (comp. ch. xxi. 7), and that, in permitting him to live, and placing him among his friends, the king had done him an act of grace.

Ver. 29.—**Thou and Ziba divide the land.** Two views are taken of this decision—the one, that it was a complete reversal of the command in ch. xvi. 4, placing matters upon the old footing, by which Ziba was to have half the produce for cultivating the estate; the other, and apparently the most correct view, is that Ziba was now made actual owner of half the land, and Mephibosheth, instead of a half, would henceforth have only a quarter of the crops. The decision was not equitable, and David speaks in a curt and hurried manner, as though vexed with himself for what he was doing. As a matter of fact, Ziba's treachery had been most useful to David. Besides the pleasure at the time of finding one man faithful, when "all men were liars" (Ps. cxvi. 11), Ziba had been most active in bringing over the tribe of Benjamin to David's side; and though his motives were selfish and venal, yet, as the king reaped the benefit of his conduct, he was bound not to leave him without reward.

Ver. 30.—**Yea, let him take all.** These words betray a feeling of resentment. Though outwardly they profess to regard the loss of the property with indifference, as compared with the joy of the king's return, yet this sort of "I don't care" answer usually covers anger. Blunt's arguments ('Undesigned Coincidences,' p. 157, etc.), to show that Mephibosheth really was a traitor, are ingenious, but not convincing.

Ver. 31.—**Barzillai.** Barzillai was so wealthy a man that, with some help from others, he had provided the king "of sustenance," or, in more modern English, "with sustenance," while his army lay encamped at Mahanaim; and now, though he was eighty years of age, he wished to attend the king in person until he reached the other side of Jordan.

Ver. 33.—**And I will feed thee.** This is the same verb as that used in ver. 32, and translated "to provide of sustenance."

Ver. 37.—**That I may die in mine own city, ... by the grave of my father and of my mother.** The inserted words, "and be buried," are very matter-of-fact and commonplace. What Barzillai wished was that, when death overtook him, it should find him in the old abode of his family, where his father and mother had died, and where their tombs were. This regard for the family sepulchre was hereditary among the Israelites, who followed in it the example of their forefather (see Gen. xlix. 29—31). **Chimham.** David remembered Barzillai's kindness to the last, and on his dying bed specially commended Chimham and his brothers to the care of Solomon. In Jer. xli. 17 we read of "the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem," whence it has been supposed that David also endowed the son of Barzillai with land near his own city. Stanley ('Jewish Church,' ii. 201) considers that this was a caravanserai founded by Chimham for the hospitable lodging of travellers on their way to Egypt, and that Mary and Joseph found shelter there. It lay to the south of Bethlehem; but there is nothing more than the name to connect it with the son of Barzillai. In ver. 40 he is called in the Hebrew *Chimhan*.

Ver. 40.—**Half the people of Israel.** The northern tribes had been the first to debate the question of the king's recall (ver. 9), while the men of Judah hung back. But at the instigation of the high priests and of Amasa, who was actually in command, they determined upon David's restoration, and acted so promptly and so independently of the rest of Israel that, when they reached Gilgal, only the delegates of a few tribes were in time to join them. As we read in ver. 41 of "all the men of Israel," it is evident that the rest had rapidly followed. It would have been well if the tribe of Judah had informed the rest of their purpose, as the bringing of David back would then have been the act of all Israel; but tribal jealousies were the cause of Israel's weakness throughout the time of the judges, and broke out into open disunion upon the death of Solomon.

Ver. 41.—**Why have our brethren the men of Judah stolen thee away?** Why, that is, have they acted by stealth and without our concurrence? As they were discussing the matter, their decision should have been awaited, and David should not have crossed until formally invited so to do. The half of Israel consisted, probably, of the trans-Jordanic tribes, upon whom those on the

west of the river looked contemptuously, and of Shimei and his Benjamites, and a few more in the immediate neighbourhood. The trans-Jordanic tribes are probably those described in ver. 39 as "the people who went with David over Jordan;" for certainly a powerful body of the men who had defeated Absalom would escort David back to Jerusalem, to overawe the malcontents and prevent any opposition to his return.

Ver. 42.—**The king is near of kin to us.** The pronouns are singular throughout: "He is near of kin to me. Why art thou angry? Have I eaten . . . I have ten parts . . . Why didst thou despise me?" and so everywhere. This is much more piquant; but such personification is contrary to the genius of our language. **Have I eaten,** etc.? Saul had boasted of enriching the Benjamites (1 Sam. xxii. 7), but probably the speaker intended only to protest the purity of his motives.

Ver. 43.—**I have ten parts in the king.** One tribe disappears, which certainly was not Benjamin; nor was this warlike state thus early awed into obedience to Judah. In 1 Kings xi. 31, 35, again, we have ten tribes given to Jeroboam, and here, also, not only must Benjamin be counted, but be included in the tribes rent from the house of David. The tribe that had disappeared was that of Simeon, partly lost among the desert races south of the Negeb, and partly absorbed by Judah. Its position always made it unimportant, and no trace can be found of its taking any part in the political life of Israel. Some strangers from Simeon are mentioned in 2 Chron. xv. 9 as coming to the great gathering of Judah and Benjamin at Jerusalem after Asa had defeated Zerah the Ethiopian; and Josiah carried out his reformation in Simeon as well as in Manasseh, Ephraim, and Naphtali (2 Chron. xxxiv. 6). But it never seems to have emerged from a state of semi-barbarism, and no town can be found within its territories. We must, therefore, omit Simeon, and of course the Levites, who took no part in politics, and thus we have Judah standing alone, and all the rest determined to resist any attempt on its part to establish a hegemony, and restless even at having to endure the more ancient claims of Ephraim to be the leading tribe. By the ten parts which they claim in the king, they meant that, as king, he belonged equally to all, and not to his own tribe only. In this they were expressing a sound view of the royal position. The next words, literally, are, "And also in David I am more than thou;" to which the Septuagint adds, "And I am the firstborn rather than thou." This is in accordance with 1 Chron. v. 1, and states an important claim always made by Ephraim; whereas the Hebrew, "I in David am more than thou," is unintelligible. Except upon the score of numbers already stated, the right of each tribe in David was equal. **Why then,** etc.? rather, *Why hast thou despised me? Was not my word the first for bringing back the king?* (see ver. 9, and note on ver. 40). **Were fiercer.** While the Israelites debated the matter calmly, the men of Judah met their complaint with harsh and bitter rejoinders. This explains the feud which followed.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—15.—The facts are: 1. In consequence of David's sorrowful isolation, the people mourn and betake themselves to the city ashamed and discouraged. 2. Joab, being informed of the fact, enters the king's house, and sharply rebukes him for his conduct, charging him with disregarding the sacrifices his people had made, and caring more for his rebellious son than for his attached friends. 3. Joab then advises him at once to arise and go forth to encourage the people, pointing out that otherwise the greatest trial of his life will be sure to come in the alienation of his subjects. 4. The king thereupon sits in the gate of the city, and all the people come to him. 5. Meanwhile, during David's sojourn at Mahanaim, the people of Israel are at variance as to the course to be pursued with reference to bringing him back to rule over them, and it is urged that, under all the circumstances of the case, something should be done in that direction. 6. David, hearing of the intentions of Israel, sends to Zadok and Abiathar to suggest to the elders of Judah the impropriety of their being forestalled in the movement by their brethren of Israel. 7. He also instructs them to inform Amasa of his purpose to displace Joab in his favour. 8. The heart of the people of Judah being entirely won, they send unto him a message that he should return, and the king acting upon it, they meet him at Gilgal to conduct him over Jordan.

Solitariness in religious experience. The isolation of David from his people during this absorption in what appeared to be a domestic sorrow caused pain to his staunchest

friends, was very near imperilling his influence as sovereign, and gave some ostensible ground for the ungracious remonstrance of Joab. But the fact is, David was true to himself as a man of deepest piety, and the people were unable to enter into the actual struggle through which he was passing. Like One greater, he "trod the wine-press alone." It was not mere natural affection for a son, it was not pain that a son had been ungrateful, that crushed him and rendered him for the time forgetful of the claims of his people and the duties of his office. The key to the whole is to be sought in the prediction of Nathan (ch. xii. 9—12), the fulfilment of this in its severest form in the tragedy of the life just ended, and the keen perception of this in relation to his own dreadful sin. His distinct recognition of the chastising hand of God (ch. xv. 24—30) when, with bare feet and broken heart, he passed in silence and tears over Mount Olivet, was now repeated with, of course, the fuller and more overwhelming anguish attendant on the ruin of a life, yea, of a soul, as he felt, through his own great sin. Joab and the people never, perhaps, knew of Nathan's declaration. It was always a latent element in David's restored life of piety; but now it was the crushing force before which he could not hold up. He saw, as he believed, how his spiritual degeneracy, during those dark months of horrible sin and guilt, had acted perniciously on the spirit of his son; and he could not but feel that, in the temporal and spiritual destruction of his son, he was now reaping just what he had sown. Yet all this he had to bear alone! No one could share the dreadful secret; and in proportion as he saw what was involved in a ruined soul, so would be the utterness of his anguish. No wonder if in his solitary experience he forgot all earthly things, and gave himself up to the bitterness of his grief.

I. THERE ARE CRISES IN SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE. David was a man of many crises. The history and the Psalms reveal them. His call to kingship by Samuel meant an unrecorded experience of a most extraordinary kind. His anguish in exile when pursued by Saul put his faith to a terrible test. His sad fall was a descent into a pit of horrors. The tremendous conflict involved in his restoration is indicated in the fifty-first psalm, and now, when the judgment of God for his sin falls in heaviest form, he descends into the depths (Ps. cxxx.) further, perhaps, than was ever known by any other man. We see similar crises in the lives of some others. Jacob knew the desolation of Bethel and the pains of the wrestling with the angel. Paul was dumb and blind before God till prayer brought him forth to light and peace; and he later on had experiences of things which it was "not lawful" to utter. Most men whose religion has depths have known times when anguish before God has shut out all thought and care of earthly things. Some have seasons of temptation equal to that of Bunyan's Pilgrim in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. As a rule, religious life is a steady growth, but there are checks and disasters when the question of life itself is at stake. We can understand David's experience in the case before us without having recourse to the hypothesis of a weak mind overborne by natural sorrow for the death of a favourite son.

II. CRISES IN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE ARE OFTEN MOST ABSORBING. David was so absorbed in the spiritual anguish springing from a religious view of the ruin of Absalom in connection with his own great sin, as practically to forget that he was a king, and that a nation needed his guidance. The narrative is true to the spiritual facts that may be traced by a comparison of this event with the king's previous conduct. The intensity of his nature, as revealed in the strong and passionate utterances of the psalms, whether in joy or sorrow, would add to the tendency to yield himself utterly to this greatest of all the calamities consequent on his sin. The passion with which he once pleaded for Bathsheba's child (ch. xii. 16—20) was an instance of the same kind, only less than this, because here the trouble was the more serious in so far as the moral and bodily ruin of a son was a greater consequence of his sin. All who have entered into the solitariness of the great crises in the soul's career know how at such times all earthly things seem to vanish into insignificance; and it is with extreme difficulty that ordinary and necessary duties can be attended to. Men have been known to forget to take food, and to isolate themselves from their friends. And no wonder, when the soul sees its sins in the awful light of God's judgments, or is made to feel the consequences to others of its past deeds. Peter did not associate freely with friends that night on which he "went out and wept bitterly."

III. THERE ARE QUALIFYING CIRCUMSTANCES THAT DETERMINE THE DEGREE OF

ABSORPTION IN THE SORROWS OF A RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE. David never felt anything like this. But the reason is plain. Never before did he see a connection between his own past conduct and so awful an event. The special elements contributing to his self-absorbing misery were a vivid remembrance of his dreadful sin in the case of Bath-sheba and Uriah; a spiritual appreciation of the awful issue of his son's life; a deep conviction that that issue was, in the judgment of God, in some way connected with his own sin; a contrast, inevitable in the association of ideas, of the end of Absalom with the hopes once cherished concerning him; a reflection, which could not but occasionally force itself in (ch. xii. 13), that he only was forgiven and saved; a feeling that no one on earth could enter into his sorrows and afford him consolation. All these circumstances gained force by the fact that constitutionally he always felt strongly, and religiously his superior spiritual discernment rendered sin and its effects the more terrible. So in our own experience there will be, perhaps, specialities which may render our absorption much more absolute than is that of others. The natural mental and moral texture of our nature, the conditions under which our sins were committed, the consequences which we can trace from our former sins, the vividness with which an ideal past is contrasted with present facts, the relative clearness of our spiritual perceptions and tenderness of our susceptibilities, and degree of homage paid to the majesty of God's holy Law,—all these may qualify the self-surrender to the experience of the time. We cannot expect cold and stolid men to bear the same troubles in the same way as do men of quick and highly developed spiritual sensibilities.

IV. THE SORROWS OF SUCH CRISES CANNOT BE SHARED. A community of experience is necessary to the creation of a sympathy coextensive with the depth of the sorrow. There were parents in Israel and Judah who had lost sons, and they would be able to enter into David's grief to that extent, and he could so far speak to them of his trouble. There were sinful men at Mahanaim who knew what trouble of conscience was, and who might afford comfort to their neighbours when mourning over their guilt; but there was no man in all the world who had sinned as David had, and no one in the world, perhaps, who now saw what an unutterably awful thing sin in general was, and especially his sin. To no one except Nathan, who probably kept aloof from him, had the connection of David's sin with this judgment on it been known. Consequently, David felt shut up to his own anguish. "Of the people there was none with him." The transaction was between himself and God. He knew that the people did not understand him, and he could not explain himself to them. So is it with all our deepest experiences before God. We see our sins set in the light of his countenance, and no one can share the experience involved therein. Reversing the picture, it may be said that there are also seasons of blessedness in the course of life when the "joy is unspeakable and full of glory," and which can never be fully told or even understood.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. Let us remember that there are daily some persons passing through fearful crises in their religious life, and that it is possible to help all such by our prayers. 2. We should be very considerate of others who may appear to be unduly cast down, as there may be circumstances which, if known, would strengthen our pity. 3. It is very possible for us to misjudge others in the conduct they adopt, and make our own contracted experience a standard of judgment. 4. We may expect that those who are utterly broken down in spirit will be called out of their self-absorption by the voice of Providence. 5. It is a comfort to us all to know that God understands our real thoughts and feelings, and that we have a High Priest who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, he having entered into deeper depths of sorrow than we can ever know.

The remoter consequences of sin. The narrative sets forth the action of Joab to arouse the king from his self-absorption, and the changed attitude of the people towards him, as also the measures taken by David to bring about a reconciliation between himself and the entire nation. The great judgment on David's sin was now passed. Nathan's words had been fearfully fulfilled, but in what followed we see also some of the remoter consequences of the sin. Thus Joab's rough treatment and unbecoming familiarity in the discharge of an honest duty were connected with the fact that David had put himself in Joab's power by making him privy and accessory to the death of Uriah. The people were now almost alienated because of the absorption of the king in sorrow.

which would not have happened but for the sin which created the sorrow. The question of the precedence of Judah in the matter of his restoration was the distinct formulation of a jealousy and sectional interest which subsequently resulted in a schism of the kingdom, and this question would not have arisen but for the chastisement for sin in the form of a son's rebellion. Likewise the ultimate death of Amasa came through David's having, probably because Joab had been insulting and because a complete amnesty was deemed desirable, displaced Joab in his favour. These bitter streams all flowed into the remoter ramifications of life from the fountain of trouble opened by the fall of David. Hereon we may observe—

I. THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN MAY COEXIST WITH THE ONWARD FLOW OF SOME OF ITS CONSEQUENCES. There is a certainty that David's great guilt was covered (ch. xii. 13). The prayer of the fifty-first psalm had been fully answered, and privately he had been able to rejoice again in the God of his salvation. But we have in this history the spectacle of a pardoned, reconciled man, confident in his personal salvation, and the onward flow of a stream of social and material evils which, so far at least as they were related to him, sprang from his sin. The prediction of Nathan did not establish an arbitrary relation between his conduct to Bathsheba and Uriah, and the whole mental and moral condition implied therein, and the rebellion of Absalom and the perplexities of the situation after its suppression. There was an organic connection between the spiritual fall and the civil troubles. The spiritual element in us is the centre of our composite nature. A change for the worse in it radiates through the entire being, and as the outward relations are affected by the condition and direction taken by our various powers, so the inmost change is the spring of manifold and ever-flowing consequences. The deteriorated influence on others, consequent on a period of spiritual declension, cannot but act dynamically as a wave long after we have by repentance and faith been restored to God. The personal condemnation is gone, but the injury done on society is not gone. The intricate mass of material and social evils now afflicting the world is the outcome of deviation from the perfect will of God, and though some who thus deviated are now blessed in heaven, the quota they contributed by their former sins is still somewhere in the tangled mass.

II. SIN IS A DISTURBER OF MANY RELATIONS. David's sin affected his relation to God and to his own family and people. It touched his personal influence among friends, his administration, and indirectly, through the rebellion, the lives and dearest interests of multitudes. The distress and uncertainty at Mahanaim after the defeat of Absalom and the hesitancy of the tribes to welcome him back, were traceable to what he had formerly done. Who can describe the manifold disturbances in the order of things produced in our world by the sin of Adam? The ramifications of the wave of disturbance created by any one sin are more than can be numbered. It is in the more conspicuous acts of transgression that we get visible traces of a widespread disturbance similar to what is caused by every inconspicuous act. A rebellious son in a home, a dishonest deed in business, a vicious habit,—these reveal a manifest series of troubles in private, social, and public connections. No sinner sins to himself. Moral evil gives colour and form to all things. It infuses an element of defect, if not of positive evil, into every bodily, mental, and moral relation sustained by the sinning man.

III. THE DISTURBANCE CAUSED BY SIN FLOWS ON INTO THE REMOTE FUTURE. The great moral shock involved in David's great sin produced effects which for years flowed on, and which, in fact, are flowing on now. The great storm in mid-ocean sends the under swell into far-distant bays, and long after quietude has been restored at the centre the sullen roll falls on the beach. The whole subsequent course of Hebrew history was modified by the deed of evil done in secret. In so far as the power of David over the world is less, and different in kind, from what it would have undoubtedly been had he kept himself pure, so far his sin is still at work shaping the destinies of men. We can never call back the waves of pernicious influence we send forth in a single sinful act or feeling. It is the law of the universe that they go on. The supposed counteraction of them by subsequent repentance and amendment only means that we modify the influence previously sent forth,—we make the world somewhat better than it would have been had the sinful influence gone out alone. We cannot annihilate it any more than we can annihilate force. The future is the sum of all the influences of the past.

IV. THE MANIFOLD AND EVER-FLOWING CONSEQUENCES OF SIN ARE NOT ADEQUATELY RECOGNIZED BY MANKIND. David recognized the rebellion and death of Absalom and the associated civil inconveniences as being in some way connected with his sin; but even he did not see, when at Mahanaim, that the subsequent death of Amasa and the schism of the two kingdoms were also a consequence of his conduct, and therefore of his sin. His own people probably did not even connect the troubles of the times with his sin, but rather with what they regarded as a foolish over-fondness for a favourite son. In our life, we do not sufficiently connect our bodily and mental imperfections with the sins of others in the past, or, in some cases, especially with our own sins. Political bodies and publicists fail to recognize the spiritual origin of vast and complicated social troubles. The Bible in this respect is the most statesmanlike and philosophical of all books, in that it gives prominence to sin as the determining factor in all our material and social troubles. A spiritual mind discerns the spiritual causes.

Vers. 16—30.—The facts are: 1. Shimei, with a considerable Benjamite following, including Ziba and his household, joins the men of Judah to meet David at the Jordan. 2. Previous to the king being ferried over, Shimei falls down before him, confesses his past sins, and pleads for mercy, and urges as evidence of sincerity that he is the first to come and bid the king welcome. 3. On Abishai expressing his feeling that Shimei should rather be put to death for his evil deeds, David resents the suggestion, and in honour of the day of his restoration declares to Shimei that his life shall be spared. Mephibosheth also comes, with his person uncared for, to welcome the king at Jerusalem, and on being asked why he had not gone out with him into exile, explains that it was owing to the deception of his servant Ziba. 5. Placing himself and all his interests entirely at the king's disposal, admitting that all his rights and privileges were, according to political custom, of pure clemency, he is told that he need not enter further into the question, but that he and Ziba should divide the land between them.

The influence of superior minds. The section now under notice cannot be separated in import from the preceding words (vers. 14, 15), which relate that David bowed the heart of all the men of Judah so that they came to conduct him over Jordan. The particular instances of Shimei and Mephibosheth are special illustrations of the general truth expressed in David's bowing the hearts of men. The mighty power of the king's words and methods gathered around him the most bitter of foes and the most lonely and helpless of his friends. The facts bring out into view the influence which a superior mind exercises over others; and on the nature and conditions of this influence we may, by the help of the narrative in addition to broad facts in human life, make a few observations, noting—

I. THE NATURAL BASIS. The bowing of the hearts of all the people indicates the swaying of an influence of an unusual kind. Whatever the means and whatever aids to this end came from the sudden transition of public feeling produced by Absalom's death, the fact remains that there was in David's nature as a man something which, when aroused, gave him a mental and moral power over others. Intellectually and morally he was a born king of men. If "king" = *könig* = *können*, "to be able," then he, by virtue of his nature, was king—was above others, and there went forth a spell which all recognized. Apart from special endowments, he was the superior man of the age. There were elements in him which, under evil disposition, would render him most capable of leading people captive in evil ways, and which, under a good disposition, did lay hold of them for their good. The history of mankind and the observation of daily life reveal the domination of one mind over others. The influence of mind is the most subtle and mighty thing we know. Millions sometimes submit to its spell. It is the proud prerogative of the select few to bow down the hearts of their fellows. All attempts to explain the fact by psychological analysis are insufficient. No analysis can get at the mysterious nature of the impact of one spirit on another: yet we know that the reality has its root in the peculiar constitution of the individual. This applies to preacher, statesman, philosopher, poet, king. The Apostle Paul's power was in its basis a constitutional power. Grace is grafted on nature, not a force apart from nature.

II. ACQUIRED INCREMENT. The native qualities of David determined the fact and the kind of his superior influence over other minds, though not its moral direction. But his

education and experience in the gradual exercise of his powers in lower spheres of activity contributed to the mature form and range of his influence. The conqueror of lion and giant became, by an educational process, a conqueror of the hearts of men. The development of natural powers, whether of oratory, administration, will-force, moral suasion, or the more nameless thing which goes out from one's personal presence, is another way of saying that we have added to the store of influence which lay in the mental constitution from the first. The difference in the degree to which some men acquire this increment accounts, in large measure, for their ascendancy over the equally gifted. Perhaps this is the meaning of those who regard genius as a name for great powers duly developed by continuous exercise.

III. SPIRITUAL ENDOWMENT. In the case of David we must recognize this element in his superior power over the hearts of good and bad. Grace in him had perfected and beautified a fine nature. The spiritual is always the most subtle and subduing influence over men, when brought fairly into play. In spite of sin, men acknowledge the spell. The anointing by Samuel in the name of God was more than a formal act. David was indeed the Lord's anointed. Hence all the natural and acquired qualities received an elevation and a tone which, when the dire evils of the great fall were not at work on him, gave to his words, his counsels, his movements, and commands a charm and force over men of most diverse temperament and character. In this he was like the apostles when they stood before men. We occasionally see now how greatly the power of certain minds is increased over others when they have the natural and acquired gifts baptized with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. A consecrated heart and intellect gains influence by its consecration. There are men who by oratory have bowed the hearts of thousands; but when such men have became true Christians, the bowing of the hearts under their words is a much more thorough and enduring victory. "Covet earnestly the best gifts" (1 Cor. xii. 31).

IV. CIRCUMSTANTIAL AIDS. The circumstances of the time gave advantage to David in the exercise of his ordinary powers. His friends had mourned his sorrowful isolation; his enemies had felt that, by defeat, they had placed themselves in an awkward position; his being aroused from his self-absorbing grief led him to calmly review the position of advantage in which now the goodness of God had placed him; the reflection that now a supreme effort was needed if he was to prevent the alienation of friends and follow up the fruits of victory so as to save the nation from anarchy, drew forth his entire soul into sympathy with the purpose of God in making him king; and, as a consequence, he so infused into his conversation with the people of Mahanaim, and into his messages to the elders of Judah, the whole power of his nature that he bowed the hearts of all. Events had prepared the minds of the people to receive the influence going forth from his very soul. The narrative evidently implies that there was some unusual persuasiveness in his manner and language, and it reached even to Shimei and Mephibosheth, who certainly were rendered more accessible to his influence by the change in affairs. Seasons of excitement and public interest are favourable to the putting forth of the influence which superior minds can exercise. The Day of Pentecost was a time which brought aid to the efforts of the apostles. A grave responsibility rests on gifted men to use their influence under such favouring circumstances as occasionally occur in human affairs.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. It behoves us not to allow our gifts to be long unused, by reason of absorption in purely personal interests. 2. It is a scripturally enforced duty that we stir up the gifts that may lie in us. 3. Among the various powers that may be exercised in the world, we should especially desire and seek that of bowing down the hearts of men to the interests of God's kingdom. 4. We may rest assured that, if we use our powers to the utmost in a good cause and in dependence on God, we shall overcome many an obstacle and win over even adverse hearts.

Royal clemency. The sudden collapse of the rebellion placed David in a position of advantage, and yet of difficulty. He was not the man to care for sovereignty over a disunited people, and the attitude of those who had been in rebellion was not quite certain. Those who do wrong are suspicious of those against whom the wrong has been done when power comes into their hands. It was, therefore, the policy of David to convince them that they need not be under any apprehension of his using the recovered power to punish them. This was the evident meaning of the deputation of

the high priests to the men of Judah, and the reason of the promotion of Amasa (together with his reasonable desire to express his sense of Joab's dangerous liberty in disobeying a positive public command). The noble-hearted king felt the importance of the restoration of peace and unity so deeply, and was so sensible of the mercy of God in answering his desire when in anguish (ch. xv. 25, 26), that, on this occasion of joy, sobered though it was by thoughts of chastisement just past, he cannot but grant an amnesty to all his foes. In the exercise of this royal clemency we see set forth the following truths.

I. THE INFLUENCE ON MEN OF ALL CONDITIONS OF A TIDE OF SUCCESS. The turn of the tide had come for David, and with it men good and bad, great and small, throughout the land began to consider how they had better comport themselves under the new circumstances. Israel hastened to indicate readiness (ver. 11). Judah was waiting for some encouragement to yield (vers. 12—14), and receiving it, hasted to be first at Jordan (vers. 15, 41). And such representative men as Shimei and Ziba show eagerness to find favour with the victorious monarch. Probably only an active section of the less thoughtful people had really rejected David; the great mass were won over to the winning side because it was the winning side, and, now that David was returning to power, they, and also the real leaders of the rebellion, move on with the tide. Success has a great charm for some minds. The day of prosperity draws out many friends. In national and religious affairs multitudes are influenced, not by a calm and independent consideration of the merits of the question or system, but by the fact that there is a semblance of prosperity. Men are not without reason spoken of as a "flock;" they are disposed to go in with the rest. This is not the highest type of humanity.

II. DOUBTFUL LOYALTY IN THE RELATIONSHIPS OF LIFE. The real friends of Absalom and such men as Shimei fell in with the change in public opinion, and professed, the latter most eagerly and humbly, to welcome the king back. Allegiance is a matter of degrees, and springs from mixed motives. David had to feel for the rest of his days that policy governed the loyalty of some of his people. In national life there are many causes of unsteadiness of loyal attachment to the head of the state—some lying in the seat of authority, and some in ignorance, prejudice, or occasionally the convictions of the people. Every bond of union between moral beings implies a loyalty more or less defined to persons and interests. Master and servant, husband and wife, partners in business and government, teachers and pupils, create, by the relation formed, a demand for loyalty the one to the other and to the common interests professedly sought by the union. The fellowship of the saints in Church life especially creates scope for mutual loyalty and common loyalty to Christ. We may see many things in one, for all truth is related; and therefore, in the doubtful loyalty of men in David's time, with its necessary weakness to the national life, and injury to the highest interests of the kingdom, we see the evil brought on the world by defective loyalty in the various relationships men enter into; and especially do we see the pernicious effect of defective loyalty of professing Christians to the Church and to Christ. The practical bearings of this are very many and very wide.

III. INDICATIONS OF AN UNEASY CONSCIENCE. The moral value of actions is not to be seen by looking at them simply as actions; their form may be perfect, their real value is seen in their connections. It was a beautiful action to hasten over Jordan and be first to bid the king welcome; the most devoted of his friends could not do more; but for Shimei to do it, after his conduct towards David, took away from the deed the flow of its natural beauty. The act was evidence of an uneasy conscience conjoined with a cowardly, time-serving policy. That he was truly penitent is not admissible from the tenor of his words—they sound hollow. It is not the custom of the true penitent to refer to his good deeds in proof of penitence (ver. 20). Nor, perhaps, was Ziba without a restless conscience in thus seeking early to court the favour of the king, who would soon learn the facts concerning his former deception (ch. xvi. 1—4). We here see that conscience is alive, even in very base men; that it is quiescent and seemingly at ease when either possibility of exposure or punishment is far off; that it is nevertheless sensitive to any change in events which tend to hasten exposure or punishment; that its greatest dread is falling into the hands of a supreme power; and that, instead of elevating the man, and prompting to renovation, it rather drags him down to the low and plausible means of avoiding what it knows is deserved. Let the religious teacher

see how this action of conscience is verified in the case of many who have rejected Christ, the Lord's Anointed. Once let them know that he is coming into his kingdom, and uneasiness will appear.

IV. THE INFLUENCE IN LIFE OF DOMINATING IDEAS. The son of Zeruiah (ver. 21) wished to slay Shimei at once, and, had he done so, many would have said that the wicked man reaped the desert of his crimes. The anointed of the Lord desired that the man should not die, and many doubtless thought that the clemency was ill-judged. But the reason of the totally diverse desires and judgments was that the two men were on that day governed by totally diverse ideas. Abishai was the hard, stern soldier, ruled in this instance by the sentiment of rigid discipline, and acting in all things under the idea of power; whereas David was the wise, generous king, ruled by the sentiment of love for his people, and acting in this instance under the idea of kingly grace. The one saw no reason in the event of the day for sparing an unworthy life; the other saw that kingly grace found befitting exercise when prosperity and joy were returning to all. The ideas that ruled the one life left no room for variation; those that ruled the other required variation. It is an important inquiry to what extent men's lives are ruled by a few leading ideas, and what is the relation of these ideas to the impulses and dispositions that seem to lie next to the will. The Christian man has certain clear and definite conceptions concerning God, Christ, himself, the relation of the present to the future, which mark him off from the *non*-Christian man, and these form the intellectual elements that determine all his conduct toward God and man. Men of diverse ages differ much in the general conceptions they entertain on the details of life, and hence we get differences in the degree of conformity of conduct to an absolute standard of morality. In so far as we can procure unity of perception and unity of disposition, so far do we lay the basis for harmony of conduct and the welfare of civil society. Hence the radical and yet progressive work of true Christianity: it will bring "eye to eye" and heart to heart, and so establish peace for evermore. Hence also the importance of instilling in young and old such views as shall, by their range and controlling influence over the mind, practically determine conduct along the Christian line.

V. THE PATIENT WAITING OF THE DECEIVED AND OPPRESSED. The personal appearance of Mephibosheth when he came to welcome David to Jerusalem was indicative of trouble and sorrow arising from neglect and poverty, and possibly real grief, experienced during the time of the rebellion. The conduct of Ziba and the loss of David's table (ch. ix. 9—13; xvi. 1—4) account for his poverty, and it is not likely that such a man as Absalom would make ample provision for one of the house of Saul. There is no trace of Mephibosheth having by treasonous means done wrong to David, though it is possible that, in real Oriental manner, he, like the sons of Zadok, may have assumed an outward prudential appearance of fidelity to the cause of Absalom. He was a helpless man, deceived and oppressed, and placed, by reason of his physical infirmity, in such a position as not to be able to extricate himself from trouble. His only chance was to wait and cherish hope that the generous king, who had so bountifully befriended him for his father's sake, would return to power. A fair illustration is this of the patient waiting of men suffering from craft and wrong. The African race in slavery, deceived and robbed of their patrimony by men more strong and crafty, waited and hoped almost against hope for the day of freedom. Their only hope was in the rise of the beneficent kingly power of the Lord's Anointed, and it did come. Others, such as the Waldenses and Malagasy, wronged and oppressed, waited for the coming of the better day, and it did come. Many a soul, deceived by the cunning craft of the father of lies, and robbed of moral and material wealth, has known the pains of poverty of spirit, and waited for the king's gracious restoration. The Apostle Paul tells us, too, of the "whole creation," afflicted with the ills consequent on the great rebellion against God, travailing in pain, and waiting for a better time (Rom. viii. 18—22). It is the joy of the preacher to be able to announce "the acceptable year of the Lord" to all who mourn. They shall not wait in vain (Isa. lxi. 1—4).

VI. A PRACTICAL VIEW OF THE ANOMALIES OF LIFE. The position in which David found himself when, on hearing the story of Mephibosheth and observing his distressed circumstances, he had to decide with respect to the property at stake, was one of extreme delicacy and difficulty. In all good faith he had handed over the property to Ziba, and

Ziba had befriended his friends in a time of need (ch. xvi. 1, 2), and had been foremost to welcome himself back (ch. xix. 17). The kindness of the man in the hour of need was a set-off to his deceit. On the other hand, the forfeiture of the property of Mephibosheth by royal decree was based on false information; and being a member of a royal house, and not proved to have been openly disloyal, he certainly had a claim to restoration to rights. The brevity of the narrative leaves the actual decision of David in some obscurity (ver. 29). But the sense seems to be that David solved the difficulty by restoring the old relations as a matter of practice (ch. ix. 9—11), without formally revoking the legal right of Ziba. As formerly, so now, the two families were to live on the produce of the soil, and in this there was great consideration, for Mephibosheth was physically incapable of looking after his own affairs. The example of David, as a matter of procedure, is worthy of attention. Life is crowded with difficulties analogous to this. Claims and counter-claims force themselves on our attention. Wrongs have to be righted and merits have to be considered in alleviation of judgment. The principle on which David acted was a sound one, and can be used by us in all things, namely, to deal with anomalies practically, not merely speculatively, and to aim at a restoration of things to their natural basis. To bring men and things back to nature, so far as circumstances admit, is a safe and prudent rule. The old relationship of Ziba to Mephibosheth (ch. ix. 2—4), and the incapacity of the latter, rendered it most unwise to cut the knot of present complications by having recourse to the practical division indicated in ch. ix. 9—12. There is a natural basis, if we will only take pains to find it, in our modern complications.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. We should see in the returning success of the servant of God after a season of severe chastisement a token of our joyous return to the possession of privilege when we have been duly exercised by the chastisement of Providence (Heb. xii. 5—7). 2. Success is not to be regarded as less real because imperfect and weak men crowd in with it, though we ought to separate their attachment from the elements of endurance in the success. 3. In selecting friends we should not place much reliance on those most eager in their expression of interest. Words are to be tested by deeds. 4. It is incumbent on all Christians to purge from their relationships, whether of master, servant, professor of religion, member of Church, or subject of the realm, every trace of doubtful loyalty. 5. The profession of interest in religion is to be carefully weighed, seeing that an uneasy conscience will often prompt to a formal profession when there is not sincere love and faith. 6. It will be a great gain to the Church if we can instil into the minds of the young the most cardinal principles of Christianity, which, by their dominating power, will expel inferior views and lead to right action. 7. We may encourage the poor and oppressed to take heart from seeing how in the course of history God does vindicate the needy. The great vindications will be when the King of kings comes to judgment.

Vers. 31—43.—The facts are: 1. Barzillai, having provided sustenance for David while he was at Mahanaim, and accompanying him over Jordan, is entreated to go and live with him at Jerusalem. 2. Barzillai, having no relish for the kind of life which he thought prevailed at court, pleads age and infirmity and a fear of being an incumbrance to David, as a reason for not complying with his request, but asks that his own son Chimham may be permitted to go. 3. David consents, promises to do for Barzillai all that he may require, kisses and blesses him, and, while the good old man returns home, David passes on to Gilgal, conducted by all the people of Judah and half the people of Israel. 4. The men of Israel protest against what they conceive to be the stealthy way in which the men of Judah forestalled them in bringing back the king. 5. The men of Judah assign, as the explanation of their conduct, that they were not mercenary, but that their near kinship was the clue to their zeal. 6. The controversy waxes strong on the men of Israel asserting in their rejoinder that, being ten tribes, they had more right in the king than had Judah.

A beautiful old age. The scene described by the historian of the parting of Barzillai and David is one of the most touching to be found in Old Testament story; and the two elements which chiefly contribute to its interest are—the return of the banished king to his beloved city and his throne at the close of a most anxious season; and

the beautiful character of the venerable man who had befriended him in his misfortunes, and now, with a consciousness that his own earthly course is nearly run, bids him an affectionate farewell. There are many venerable saints referred to in the Bible—from the time of Enoch to the beloved exile of Patmos—and they all convey to us a certain common instruction concerning life and its destiny, blended with what is peculiar to each; but we shall here confine attention to those features of a beautiful old age which are specially brought out in the description given of Barzillai.

I. OLD AGE ITSELF NATURALLY AWAKENS A TENDER INTEREST. This is the natural basis of all our regard for the aged, and is an element entering into the beauty which in some cases we recognize. In every age and clime, and among all except the most savage, age has won respect and developed tender feelings in the younger. We regard it as a sign of moral debasement when men fail to cherish tender consideration for the aged. The reasons that account for our best feelings are not always definite, and in this case they are certainly very subtle—being hidden away in the thoughts and sentiments that grow with our growth. If we seek the analysis of our sentiment towards age, we shall find these items: a sense of our inferiority in all that makes up the deepest experiences of life; a conviction that the venerable form is the symbol of many a veiled sorrow and buried hope; a perception of traces of unrecorded conflicts; a feeling of sympathy with increasing infirmities; a remembrance of the fleeting character of the best and most vigorous manhood; and a reflection that a responsible being is getting near to the eternal world. In the presence of age we cannot but feel that to live is a grave and solemn business.

II. OLD AGE EXHIBITS A SPECIAL BEAUTY WHERE IT IS PERVADED BY KINDLY FEELINGS AND EARNEST PIETY. Sometimes we meet with old age rendered hard, bitter, venomed, and remorseful, and, while our hearts are touched with tender interest, we feel that we can only pity—there is no admiration, because there is no moral, and probably no physical, beauty. In Barzillai we see all the natural, physical beauties of age crowned by virtues of the most attractive kind. His generous provision for the king when in need, and his making an effort to see him happily on his way home, revealed *kindliness*. His desire to share in such valued society so far as strength permitted, his right estimate of what befits the closing days of life, and his quiet content with the comforts and joys of home, show his *wisdom*. His anxiety not to be a burden to the king amidst the duties and cares of government, and his request for a favour to his son (1 Kings ii. 7), prove his *considerateness*. His wish to live and die and be buried among the kindred whom he had loved so long, was evidence of his *domestic affection*. His having befriended, honoured, and loved the banished king when appearances were against him, and his being privileged to take so tender a leave of the Lord's anointed, was a sign of distinguished *loyalty*. His obvious faith in the right cause when the rebellion was at its height, his bold identification of his interests with those of the Lord's afflicted servant, his doing all for the right cause without any idea of compensation, was proof of deep *piety*. Thus the beauty of old age lies much in years being crowned with kindliness of disposition, wisdom of conduct, consideration of feeling, deep affection for one's own people, faithfulness in the relationships of life, and calm and strong piety. How lovely is old age when so adorned!

III. AN OLD AGE THUS BEAUTIFIED IS VERY HELPFUL TO OTHERS. Barzillai was helpful to David in his trials and triumphs; but it was not the mere food (ch. xvii. 28, 29) which he, with others, brought that gave strength to David's heart and raised his hope in God. The hoary head, crowned with the glory of true goodness, was more to David than all the material supplies. To have the friendship and the kindly attentions of a venerable man of God, was to the king a real spring of new life and vigour. The vain and trifling young man might go off to take sides with rebellion, but age, with its wisdom, its deep experience, its large-heartedness and settled piety, was with him. As cold water to a thirsty soul was the loyalty and affection of so honoured a man. It is a blessing and real help to have the favour and sympathy of men who have had large experience in life, and have won for themselves imperishable honours; and, though the infirmities of age may seem to set a narrow limit to the usefulness of the aged, yet their moral power is very great. Their influence is quiet, but real and pervading. The tone they impart to home affects the world outside, and their known interest in Christ's servants and the work they are doing, is power and cheer to many a heart.

IV. A BEAUTIFUL OLD AGE IS AN ABIDING CHARM IN THE MEMORY. David and Barzillai never met again on earth. Their parting partook of all the sweet tenderness of a final severance. Before David had finished his career, the venerable man had passed away to his blessed reward (1 Kings ii. 7). But it could not but be, as was evident from his charge to Solomon, that throughout his life David cherished the memory of the good old man, and found amid the cares and sorrows of life much comfort therein. The vision of that bent form, laden with precious fruits of a long and godly experience, bending before him and bidding him God-speed in his high vocation, would often rise up and again cheer his spirit. The dead yet speak to us. Our memories retain the cherished form and words and tender embraces of venerable saints, and, as we think of their faith and hope and triumph over the world, we take fresh courage and struggle on. Thank God for aged Christians living or departed!

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. We see how wondrously God does, in his kind providence, sweeten the bitters of life by friendships which would not have been formed but for the trouble. 2. There is great blessedness in being enabled to render encouragement to God's servants when they are engaged in arduous and perplexing service, and this form of usefulness may be sought by all, especially by the aged. 3. We should, in our own lives and in others, look for an advance of moral powers proportionate to the advance of age. 4. We should covet the honour of bringing our ripest and best attainments and placing them at the service of Christ.

The uses and perils of rivalry. It was natural that, at first, there should be some hesitation in at least the leaders of the people, both in Judah and Israel, in making overtures to David and in sending deputations to welcome him back. Israel, however, overcame this feeling first, and David, reasonably anxious that Judah, so near to him, should not be outdone, took means to inform them of what was in contemplation, and urged that they certainly need not hesitate, seeing that his promotion of Amasa was proof of his unchanged feelings of interest in them (ch. xix. 11—13). Influenced by desire not to be outdone in expressions of loyalty, they were first at Jordan, and carried off the honour of accompanying the king to Jerusalem. There is no evidence that David wished Judah to steal a march on Israel, and so embitter the feeling between them. Probably he thought that a conference would take place for joint action. His sole anxiety was that Judah should not be tardy in indicating restored allegiance and taking measures for showing it. For reasons not stated, Judah acted alone, much to the chagrin of Israel, and hence the controversy (vers. 41—43) as to the relative right to manifest special interest in the king. It was a rivalry in good works, not unmixed with questionable feelings. Rivalry has its uses and its dangers.

I. IT TENDS TO STIMULATE ACTION AND DEVELOP LATENT POWERS. The thought that Israel might reach Jordan first, and so get the honour of showing attachment to the king, stirred up zeal in Judah, and drew forth whatever feeling of loyalty was latent in the community; and the fact that Judah outstripped Israel roused the heart of Israel to give verbal evidence of strong attachment to the king. This rivalry in accomplishing a common work enters into all life; it seems to have its roots deep down in our nature. It is associated with the conviction that duties have to be attended to, and that our honour is concerned in attending to them, at least as well as other people. Thus it is a side issue of the action of conscience, though it may easily develop unworthy feelings which will render its connection with conscience very obscure. Leaving out the question of improper feelings for the present, it doubtless does develop our powers, and even draws out latent forces, the existence of which had not been known. By the parallel action of the rivals much mutual instruction is gained as to methods of work, and weakness and strength of character, which instruction being applied, renders effort more successful.

II. IT TENDS TO KEEP THE IDEAL OF DUTY MORE CONSPICUOUSLY BEFORE THE MIND. The suggestion that Israel was about to welcome the king at once set before Judah in striking form the highest ideal of allegiance. Any thoughts concerning it hitherto cherished now were cleared of obscurity, and the duty was manifest. Rivalry among pupils, workmen, statesmen, and literary men necessarily causes all who enter into it to direct their attention from their own achievements as adequate, to the ideal towards which all are striving. This constant presence of a lofty ideal is a great gain to

humanity. It is the absence of ideals which marks off the beast from man. When we are expected to provoke one another to love and good works, we at once think of the standard after which we are, as Christians, bound to strive (Phil. iii. 12—14). The fact that others surpass us is a reminder of the vows we have taken, and so, setting the "mark" before us afresh, we press forward with renewed zeal. The healthful effect on us of the presence of a superior Christian is well known. The sight of holy men and women devoting their energies to the service of Christ in the world rebukes sloth, points to "what manner of persons" we ought to be, and so, by rendering the ideal more real to the mind, enable us to be more faithful to our Lord.

III. THERE IS, HOWEVER, A RISK OF LOSING SIGHT OF BROAD PRINCIPLES, AND BEING ABSORBED IN SIDE ISSUES. Judah and Israel were right in provoking to loyalty and reassertion of allegiance, and so far as they purely followed out the first impulse of rivalry all was well; but the ideal before them became obscured as soon as they began to dispute on a matter of detail as to precedence and personal motive. The question as to whether the motive of Judah was pure arose out of the zeal of Judah on the one side and the zeal of Israel on the other. Probably Judah did design to outwit Israel. The secrecy was not purely for the sake of loyalty to David, but to gratify pride in being first. It was not an open competition. Thus, by the minor feelings of the rivalry being allowed to gain ascendancy, there arose an issue which exposed a wholesome rivalry to the danger of being the occasion of sowing the seeds of permanent mischief. Here lies the great danger of rivalry in deeds and enterprises perfectly good in themselves. Especially is there a great risk in the matter of the competition of denominations and religious parties. Work is done, perhaps, to outstrip others, to gain notoriety, to gratify a love of pre-eminence, and also, in the heat of zeal, motives are impugned, and time and strength spent in mutual recriminations which had better be spent in rendering service to Christ.

IV. RIVALRY BRINGS FORTH ITS WORST FRUIT WHEN IT ISSUES IN PERMANENTLY DEBASED FEELINGS AND MUTUAL ESTRANGEMENT. We see in this controversy the beginning of an unholy feeling of jealousy and ill will, which, we know, issued at last in positive aversion and enmity. They were one people, the people of God, called to do a good and holy work in the world, and held under the government of God's anointed. This consideration ought to have been uppermost in all times of effort and of difficulty. For one to seek to gratify pride at the cost of another was base; for the other to cherish bitterness of spirit was wrong; for both to weaken, by fierce controversy, the brotherly sentiment, and to create separate interests, instead of being one in devotion to their king and country, was a moral debasement from which they never recovered. To do Christian work well in rivalry requires watchfulness over motives, generous consideration of others, and delight in what they accomplish for the Master's sake, and a conscientious maintenance of the honour and glory of Christ above all the petty considerations of personal or denominational interest. The mutual estrangement of Christians is a great calamity. It has its root in the inferior feelings which have been allowed to mingle with genuine zeal for the kingdom of God; and the removal of it is to be sought in deep searching of heart, and a return to the simplicity of entire consecration to Christ's service.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. The holy rivalry of the primitive Christians (John xx. 1—4) to be first at the sepulchre should be preferred as a model, both as to aim and spirit, to that of Judah and Israel. 2. The temptation to indulge in a feeling of personal pride should be met by a reflection on the serious evils that may issue from even one departure from purity. 3. In all our Christian enterprises it should be our endeavour to keep Christ and his honour clearly in view, and get inspiration from the zeal of others, not simply to outstrip them, but to bring more glory to him than any one else can. 4. In our efforts we should remember that we are all equally "kin" to Christ, and are equally dear to his heart. 5. In our estimate of Churches we are to give more weight to spiritual qualities than to numbers. 6. If on our guard against lurking evils, we may frequently ask ourselves how we can more perfectly prove our fidelity to our Lord and advance the honour of his Name.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—(MAHANAIM.) *Immoderate grief.* This interview between David and Joab throws light upon the character of both, and the relations subsisting between them. 1. The *best* of men are by no means perfect. David's grief, although natural, and, in some respects, commendable, was unseasonable, excessive, and injurious; and exposed him to just reproof. 2. The *worst* of men are not altogether bad, but often exhibit admirable qualities. When Joab put Absalom to death against the king's order he was actuated partly by regard for the king's interest and the national welfare, "loyal disobedience;" he was also desirous of preventing unnecessary slaughter (ch. xviii. 16), and showed a thoughtful concern for Ahimaaz (ch. xviii. 19, 20, 22); and now, although his bearing toward the king was harsh and cruel (ch. iii. 24), he was fully justified in expostulating with him (as on another occasion, ch. xxiv. 3). 3. The worst of men are often intimately *associated* with the best of men, and render them invaluable services; but their association is usually uncongenial, and productive of trouble and mischief (ch. iii. 39). By his great abilities Joab made himself necessary to David, and became confirmed in his high position (1 Chron. xi. 6); and by his complicity "in the matter of Uriah," he gained a despotic influence over him; hence his daring disobedience and overbearing attitude, and when the king, resenting his conduct, seeks to replace him as captain of the host, he strikes down his rival, then "calmly takes upon himself to execute the commission with which Amasa had been charged; and this done, 'he returns to Jerusalem, unto the king,' and once more he is 'over all the host of Israel'" (Blunt, 'Coincidences'). David's inordinate grief was—

I. REALLY REPREHENSIBLE. "And the king covered his face," etc. (ver. 4). It was connected (as cause or effect) with: 1. The lack of due *consideration* of the moral causes of the event which he mourned over, and which was their natural and deserved consequence; and of the salutary influence which that event would have upon the nation. In surrendering himself to sorrow for the loss of his son, he was in some measure blind to the justice of his doom. 2. The absence of humble *submission* to the Divine will, such as he had previously displayed in "the day of his calamity" (ch. xii. 20; xv. 26; xvi. 10). 3. The feeling of bitter *resentment* against those who had despised his commandment and disappointed his hopes. He would at first, perhaps, blame all his "servants;" and, when he was informed (ch. xviii. 13) of the circumstances under which Absalom came to his end, would naturally regard the conduct of his executioners in its darkest aspect. "To understand this passionate utterance of anguish, we must bear in mind not only the excessive tenderness, or rather weakness, of David's paternal affection toward his son, but also his anger that Joab and his generals should have paid so little regard to his command to deal gently with Absalom. With the king's excitable temperament, this entirely prevented him from taking a just and correct view of the crime of his rebel son, which merited death, and of the penal justice of God, which had been manifested in his destruction" (Keil). 4. The neglect of urgent *duties:* thanksgiving to God for victory, the commendation of his faithful soldiers, the adoption of proper measures to confirm their attachment and secure peace and unity, the subordination of private grief to the public weal. "The deliverance that day was turned into mourning unto all the people," etc. (ver. 2). "Their hearty participation in the sorrow of their beloved king, for whom they had perilled their lives, soon changed to gloomy dissatisfaction at the fact that the king, absorbed in private grief, did not deign to bestow a look upon them" (Erdmann).

II. RUDELY REPROVED. "And Joab came into the house of the king," etc. (vers. 5—7). His reproof (ch. xii. 1) was: 1. *Unfeeling*, hard-hearted, pitiless. He had no respect whatever for the natural feelings of the father; no sympathy with David's intense and peculiar emotion. 2. *Unscrupulous* and reckless; whilst declaring the truth in part (ver. 5), and as it appeared on the surface, casting unjust reproaches on the king for his heartless selfishness, ingratitude, and hatred (ver. 6). 3. *Unbecoming* the relation of a subject to his sovereign; in language and manner, as well as in substance. 4. United, nevertheless, with wise *counsel* and solemn warning. "And now arise, go forth," etc. (ver. 7). No doubt David felt greatly hurt; and "the immediate effect of his indignation was a solemn vow to supersede Joab by Amasa;

and in this was laid the lasting breach between himself and his nephew, which neither the one nor the other ever forgave" (Stanley). But, convinced that he had given occasion for reproof, he now patiently submitted to it (Ps. cxli. 5). "Hard natures and harsh words have their uses in life after all" (Scott). "The undisciplined word of Joab became a means of discipline to David, and the king turned from the destructive path into which unbridled feeling had led him."

III. READILY RESTRAINED and laid aside. "And the king arose," etc. (ver. 8). "He was stung into action, and immediately roused himself to the discharge of his royal duties." Would we overcome immoderate grief? We must: 1. Listen to the admonitions of truth, however disagreeable; and learn the evil of indulging it. 2. Receive the consoling assurances of Heaven, and pray for needful strength. 3. Repress it with prompt and determined effort. 4. Devote ourselves with diligence to necessary and useful activities.

> "Heaven hath assigned
> Two sovereign remedies for human grief:
> Religion, surest, firmest, first, and best,
> Strength to the weak, and to the wounded, balm;
> And *strenuous action* next."
>
> (Southey.)

Ordinary grief *must* be restrained within due bounds. But there is a sorrow—tender, hopeful, godly sorrow for sin, to which we may freely and fully surrender ourselves; for it always conducts to greater purity, strength, and joy.—D.

Ver. 15.—*David's return to Jerusalem.* "And David returned, and came to the Jordan" (the eastern bank; while Judah came to Gilgal, joined by Shimei and Ziba; and a ferry-boat was passing to and fro to carry over the king's household, ver. 18); crossed over (to the western bank, conducted by Judah and *half* the people of Israel, vers. 39, 40); came to Gilgal (where *all* the men of Israel met him, and a new contention arose, ver. 41; ch. xxi. 1); and finally (conducted by the men of Judah) to Jerusalem (ch. xxi. 3). The return of David, like his flight, is described minutely and graphically. As he had been called to the throne by the voice of the people (ch. v. 1—3), so he desired to return to it, not by force, but by their free consent; and would take no active measures for his restoration until he should receive some intimation thereof. "Our Lord Jesus will rule only in those that invite him to the throne in their hearts, and not till he is invited. He first bows the heart, and makes it willing in the day of his power, then rules in the midst of his enemies (Ps. cx. 2, 3)" (Matthew Henry). David's restoration was distinguished by: 1. *The returning allegiance of the rebellious.* (Vers. 9, 10.) "All the tribes of *Israel*" (except Judah). Popular revolutions are usually followed by speedy reactions. Convinced of their error, ingratitude, and injustice by their defeat, remembering the great services which David had rendered on their behalf, and considering the present condition of affairs, "all the people" manifest a disposition to "bring the king back;" and this gratifying intelligence is reported to him while waiting at Mahanaim. 2. *The decisive action of the dilatory.* (Vers. 11—15.) "The men of Judah," who, since the rebellion arose in their territory, feared the king's displeasure, or proudly held aloof in continued disaffection under Amasa. But when assured of his regard, reminded of their kinship, and urged to activity, they are at once "drawn" unto him "as one man;" send the message, "Return," etc.; and come to conduct him across the Jordan. Judah is again to the front. David's appeal was conciliatory, and seems wise and just (though some think otherwise), however disastrous its ultimate effect. 3. *The humble submission of the guilty.* (Vers. 16—23.) Shimei, with a thousand men of *Benjamin*, and Ziba," etc. "They went eagerly [prosperously, Hebrew, *tzalach*] over the Jordan in the presence of the king" (ver. 17); and "Shimei fell down before the king in his crossing over (*abar*) the Jordan" (while the transit was going on). "With a self-control rare in Western no less than Eastern history, every step in his progress was marked by forgiveness" (Maclear). 4. *The joyful welcome of the suspected.* (Vers. 24—30.) The innocent Mephibosheth, the grandson of *Saul*, now vindicated and restored to "all that he most cared for—the king's favour, his old place at the king's table, and the formal recognition of his ownership" of the

inheritance. 5. *The friendly greeting of the faithful.* (Vers. 31—39). Barzillai, an aged and "very great man," representative of the *trans-Jordanic inhabitants;* testifying his devotion to the king in prosperity, whom he had aided in adversity, and receiving his grateful benediction. How different is it with David now from what it had been at his former crossing (ch. xvii. 22)! "This passage of the Jordan was the most memorable one since the days of Joshua." 6. *The zealous emulation of the tribes.* (Vers. 40—43.) Their strife for pre-eminence; "*Ephraim* envying *Judah*, and Judah vexing Ephraim" (Isa. xi. 13), leading to a fresh revolt, which, however, is speedily overcome. David's troubles, so incessant, so varied, so great, "from his youth" (ver. 7), are not yet ended; but they are all ordered by the hand of God for his good. "Sanctified affliction is spiritual promotion." 7. *The complete establishment of the kingdom.* (Ch. xx. 3, 22—26.) He sees again the habitation of the Lord (ch. xv. 25), and rules over a peaceful and united nation. His return is like the commencement of a new reign (ver. 22). "The remainder of David's life—a period probably of about ten years—flowed on, so far as we can gather, in a bright calm, and an undisturbed course of improvements" (Ewald).—D.

Vers. 16—23.—(THE JORDAN.) *The pardon of Shimei.* The conduct of Shimei towards David in his flight (ch. xvi. 5) was base and iniquitous. "The wheel turns round once more; Absalom is cast down and David returns in peace. Shimei suits his behaviour to the occasion, and is the first man, also, who hastes to greet him; and had the wheel turned round a hundred times, Shimei, I dare say, in every period of its rotation would have been uppermost" (Sterne). But he may have been actuated by something better than selfish and time-serving policy; at least, the history affords no intimation that his repentance was insincere and hypocritical. And he was forgiven by David (of whose clemency he had been persuaded)—

I. ON THE CONFESSION OF WRONG-DOING (vers. 19, 20) with: 1. Deep *abasement.* He "fell down before the king." 2. Free, full, unqualified, and open *self-condemnation.* "Thy servant did perversely," and "doth know that I have sinned." 3. Fervent *petition* for mercy. "Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me," etc. 4. Professed *devotion* and zealous endeavour to repair the wrong which had been done. "And behold I am come the first this day," etc. He had brought with him a thousand men of Benjamin, to do honour to the king whom he had formerly despised; perhaps, also, to show the value of his reconciliation and services (which were really important at such a time, in the light of subsequent events, ch. xx. 1). Confession must precede the assurance of forgiveness; and, when made in a becoming manner, should be graciously treated (Luke xvii. 3, 4). God alone knows the heart.

II. AGAINST THE DEMAND FOR PUNISHMENT (vers. 21, 22); in which Abishai displayed, as before (ch. xvi. 9): 1. An impulse of *natural vengeance* toward the evil-doer; unaltered by change of circumstances, unsoothed by Shimei's repentance. 2. A desire for the *rigorous execution* of the Law, according to which the traitor and blasphemer should suffer death "without mercy." Its stern and relentless requirements, unmodified by its deeper and more merciful principles, are represented in "the sons of Zeruiah." 3. A spirit of *reckless imprudence;* not less injurious to the king's interests on "this day" of his triumphant return than it was on the day of his perilous flight. 4. An assumption of *unjustifiable authority*, and interference with the king's rights and privileges, feelings and purposes; incurring a repetition of the rebuke, "What have I to do with you," etc.? "Ye will be an adversary [*satan*, Numb. xxii. 22; 1 Chron. xxi. 1] to me;" hindering the exercise of mercy and the joy of my return (1 Sam. xi. 12, 13). "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matt. xvi. 23). "Our best friends must be considered as adversaries when they would persuade us to act contrary to our conscience and our duty" (Scott).

III. WITH THE ASSURANCE OF MERCY. "Thou shalt not die" (ver. 23; ch. xii. 13). "And the king sware unto him." From: 1. An impulse of *personal feeling* of the noblest nature; by which (regarding Shimei's offence as a personal one) he was raised above the level of "the Law," and anticipated the forgiving spirit of a higher dispensation. 2. A sense of the *exceeding mercy* of God toward himself; by which he was disposed to show mercy toward others. 3. A perception of the *wisest policy* to be adopted on such an extraordinary "day" as that of his restoration to the throne.

"Shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? For do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?" (It is noticeable how frequently he is designated "the king" in this chapter.) 4. An exercise of the *royal prerogative* of pardon. This prerogative, indeed (though prompted by a generous impulse), he no doubt stretched beyond due bounds. Hence, reflecting on the matter at the close of his life (during which he kept faithfully to his oath), he committed (not from a feeling of personal revenge, but of sacred duty) the vindication of the Law to his successor (1 Kings ii. 8, 9). "It can be explained only from the fact that David distinguished between his own personal interest and motive, which led him to pardon Shimei, without taking the theocratic-legal standpoint and the theocratic interests of the kingdom, of which Solomon was the representative, and so held himself bound on theocratic-political grounds to commit to his successor the execution of the legal prescription which he had passed over" (Erdmann).

REMARKS. 1. In showing mercy to private as well as public offenders, due regard must be paid to the claims of public justice. 2. It is better to err on the side of too much mercy than too much severity. 3. How vast is the mercy of God toward men, in him whom he has "exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour," etc. (Acts v. 31)! 4. Those who have received mercy must live in the sphere of mercy and obedience, otherwise mercy ceases to be of any avail (1 Kings ii. 42—46; Matt. xviii. 32—35).—D.

Vers. 24—30.—(THE JORDAN.) *The vindication of Mephibosheth.* "He hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king" (ver. 27). The lame son of Jonathan comes upon the scene once more before his final disappearance. During the rebellion he seems to have continued at Jerusalem; and a strange spectacle he must have presented there, with his neglected person and mournful countenance. On hearing that the king was returning, he set out *from* Jerusalem (Hebrew, *to;* or "Jerusalem came," Keil) to meet him. But he had been preceded by Ziba, who was present, when, in answer to the inquiry, "Wherefore," etc., he said, "My lord, O king, my servant deceived me," etc. (ch. xvi. 1—4). 1. *The unfortunate and helpless are commonly made the victims of a slanderous tongue.* Others may not escape its venom; but these become its ready prey. Ziba knew that he could not be pursued and punished; and destroyed the reputation of his master with the king for the sake of his own profit. 2. *The voice of slander is put to silence in the presence of honesty and truth.* Already, before Mephibosheth spoke, his appearance must have borne witness to his innocence. His explanation of his conduct, the tone of his defence, and the silence of his accuser, would hardly fail to convince the king that, whatever may have been the designs of others concerning the house of Saul (ch. xvi. 5), the son of his friend Jonathan was not implicated therein. Slander may remain long unchallenged; but it is sure to be ultimately put to shame. 3. *No vindication from slander is able to do away with all its mischievous effects.* The property of which Mephibosheth had been deprived might be restored in whole or in part; but the feelings and actions induced in others could not be obliterated. "Reluctant to think that he had been too hasty; having a royal aversion to admit that he could err and had been duped; and being, in his present humour of overlooking and pardoning everything, indisposed to the task of calling to account a man of such influence as Ziba, who had been forward in his cause when many tried friends forsook him, the king's answer was something less than generous and much less than kind to the son of Jonathan" (Kitto). 4. *Notwithstanding the wrong which he suffers, a man of humble and grateful heart still possesses abundant satisfaction.* Seeking no revenge, acknowledging his dependence even for life, thankful for the kindness formerly shown toward him, and foregoing every claim (vers. 27, 28), he is little concerned about worldly possessions in comparison with the honour and welfare of his lord, and finds his chief delight in "the king's favour." "True to his noble saintly nature, all that he desires is to love and to be loved again" (Plumptre). "Let him also take all," etc. (ver. 30).

> "Fret not thyself because of the evil-doers,
> Be not envious against the workers of iniquity, . . .
> The meek shall inherit the land,
> And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace," etc.
> (Ps. xxxvii. 1—11.)

D.

Vers. 31—40.—(THE JORDAN.) *Old Barzillai.* "How long have I to live?" (ver. 34). Barzillai dwelt at Rogelim (his own city, ver. 37), in Gilead, where, amidst the rich highland pastures, diligently superintending his flocks and herds, he spent his days in peace. He enjoyed "the blessing of the Old Testament"—prosperity; and was "a very great [wealthy] man." Like Machir ben-Ammiel (ch. ix. 4), he was loyal, hospitable, and generous (ch. xvii. 28). One of his sons (1 Kings ii. 7), named Chimham, accompanied him to do honour to the king at his restoration. He was an octogenarian, his memory reaching back to the appointment of the first King of Israel, and Saul's brilliant exploit on behalf of Jabesh-Gilead (1 Sam. xi. 11). Of his genuine piety, his answer to the king's invitation, "Come over with me, and I will provide (ver. 32) for thee in Jerusalem," leaves no room for doubt. "May we not legitimately infer that his conduct was influenced, not merely by loyalty to his earthly sovereign, but by the recognition of the higher spiritual truths, and the hope for Israel and the world, symbolized by the reign of David?" (Edersheim). More especially, he furnishes a picture of *a beautiful old age* (1 Sam. xii. 2). To every one, if he should live long enough, old age will come, with impaired powers of judgment, sensibility, and activity (Eccles. xii. 1); but whether it will be honourable, useful, and happy depends on the course previously pursued and the character possessed. "Clearness and quickness of intellect are gone; all taste for the pleasures and delights of sense is gone; ambition is dead; capacity of change is departed. What is left? The old man lives in the past and in the future. The early child-love for the father and mother who hung over his cradle eighty years ago remains fresh. He cannot 'hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women;' but he can hear, stealing through almost a century, the old tones, thin and ghostlike, of the dear ones whom he first learnt to love. The furthest past is fresh and vivid, and in memory of it is half his life. Also he looks forward familiarly and calmly to the very near end, and thinks much of death. That thought keeps house with him now, and is nearer to him than the world of living men is. Thus one-half of his life is memory, and the other half is hope; and all his hopes are now reduced to one—the hope to die, and then to be laid down and go to sleep again beside his father and mother. And so he returns to his city, and passes out of our sight" (Maclaren). Notice—

I. HIS CLEAR RECOGNITION OF THE NEARNESS OF HIS APPROACHING END. "How many are the days of the years of my life?" etc. (vers. 34, 35; Gen. xlvii. 9). Many an old man considers not that he *is* old, and must shortly leave the world; he rather strives to keep both his age and his departure out of sight. But such a man as Barzillai is accustomed to reflect on his actual condition, deems himself a "stranger and pilgrim on the earth" (Heb. xi. 13; 1 Chron. xxix. 15); and feels certain that a few more steps will bring him to the end of his journey. He also understands what is possible and becoming during his brief continuance, and acts accordingly. "Can anything be more amiable than these simple and sensible words? What a cheerful and peaceful spirit do they breathe! and how does he put to shame very many old men of our day, who, the more the years perform their dismantling work upon them, are so much the more zealously bent on concealing the decay of their strength behind the glittering surroundings of vain dignities, titles, and high alliances!" (Krummacher). "Usually the nearer men approach to the earth, they are more earthly minded; and, which is strange to amazement, at the sunset of life are providing for a long day" (W. Bates).

II. HIS CHEERFUL RESIGNATION UNDER THE INFIRMITIES OF ADVANCED AGE. He utters no complaint (such as is too common with others) at the failure of his mental and bodily powers, the loss of earthly pleasures formerly possessed, his incapacity for new enterprises and excitements, which, at an earlier age, might have been suitable and desirable. His language is singularly free from fretfulness, disappointment, and discontent. He perceives and acquiesces with a "glad contentment" in the will of God, who "hath made everything beautiful in its season" (Eccles. iii. 11), and, although deprived of some enjoyments, he is not destitute of others of a higher order. "It is this, the tasteless meats, the deafness to the singing men and singing women, the apathy to common pleasures, for which old age is pitied and deplored; but this is God's mercy, it is not his vengeance; he deadens the keenness of our bodily senses only to guide us to immortality; we are disgusted with the pleasures of youth, we deride the objects of manly ambition, we are wearied with one worldly trifle or another, that our thoughts

may centre at last in God" (Sydney Smith, 'On the Pleasures of Old Age'). "Old age may be not only venerable, but beautiful, and the object of reverence untinctured by compassion. The intellect, the emotions, the affections (the best of them) all alive, —it is the passions and appetites only that are dead; and who that is wise and has felt the plague of them, does not, with the aged Cephalus, in Plato's 'Republic,' account a serene freedom from their clamorous importunities a compensation for the loss of their tumultuous pleasures?" ('Sel. from the Correspondence of R. E. H. Greyson, Esq.').

III. HIS COURTEOUS REFUSAL OF THE PROFFER OF EARTHLY FAVOURS. What can even a monarch give him now? The society, the pleasures, the honours, of a court; enlarged influence, increased responsibility, more abundant wealth. Is it worth while for their sake to be transplanted to a new soil from the place where he has been so long growing; and when he must so soon be removed from the world altogether? If he had been a sensual, ambitious, or avaricious man, the craving for such things would have remained, and led him (like others) to grasp at their possession, though no longer able to enjoy them or employ them aright. "What so distressing as to see the withered face of old age dull and dead to every consideration of eternity, and kindling with life only at the mention of earthly vanities?" (Blaikie). He declines them, not because they are sinful and worthless in themselves, but because they are unsuitable to him. His heart is set on other pleasures; his immediate duties are determined and sufficient for his strength. He will not take new burdens on himself, nor be a burden to others. He will accompany the king "a little way," to show his loyal devotion, and then return (2 Kings iv. 13). "With all the dignity of self-respect, with the courtesy of a true gentleman, undervaluing not the king's offers, but his own service to him, with the prudent love of a father for the son whom he recommends to his kindness, having outlived nothing really belonging to the true character of the life of man, he returned with the royal kiss and blessing, master of his own will, to his own place" (W. Romanis).

IV. HIS CHERISHED REMEMBRANCE OF PARENTS AND THE FAMILIAR SCENES OF HIS EARLY DAYS. "Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back," etc. (ver. 37). His thoughts turn back to his native place, his childhood, his father and his mother, whom he must have loved and honoured (Exod. xx. 12); and the memory of whom, tender, affectionate, and reverent, is a fountain of pure and undying joy in his breast. How much does the happiness of old age depend upon its memories! Whilst in one case old age is tormented by the recollection of "the pleasures of sin," in another it is gladdened by the recollection of the practice of piety; and such recollections mingle with and, in great measure, determine its anticipations.

"Son of Jesse, let me go;
Why should princely honours stay me?
Where the streams of Gilead flow,
Where the light first met mine eye,
Thither would I turn and die;
Where my parents' ashes lie,
King of Israel! bid them lay me."

(Sigourney.)

V. HIS CONSTANT DESIRE FOR REST in his "long home" (Eccles. xii. 5), "the house of eternity." It is now a pervading and increasing feeling. He longs for repose in the sacred spot where his parents lie, as a pilgrim longs for home. The grave for him has no terrors. "He looks for a city which hath foundations," etc. (Heb. xi. 10, 16); and desires to be "gathered with his fathers," and to be for ever at rest in God (1 Sam. xxv. 1; ch. vii. 12; Ps. xlix. 15; Prov. xiv. 32; Dan. xii. 13). "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace" (Luke ii. 29). "A man should still be bound for home as you see all creatures be. Let a bird be far from the nest, and it grow towards night, she will home even upon the wings of the wind. Every poor beast, and every creature, though the entertainment be but slender at home, yet if you let it slip loose, it will home as fast as it can. Everything tends to its place; there is its safety, there is its rest, there it is preserved, there it is quiet. Now, since it is so with every creature, why should it not be so with us? Why should not we be for our home? This is not our home; here is not our rest. That is our home where our chief friends

be, where our Father God is, where our Husband Christ is, where our chief kindred and acquaintance be, all the prophets and apostles and martyrs of God departed are; that is our home, and thither should we go" (R. Harris). "I am now passing through the latest stage of my pilgrimage on earth. My sun is speedily going down; but ere it wholly disappear, its parting beams stream sweetly forth upon the face of all things, and cover all the horizon with a blaze of glory. My Father's house shines bright before my eyes. Its opening door invites me onward, and fills me with an earnest longing to be safe at home. My richest treasures and my dearest hopes are all packed up and gone before, while my whole soul is on the wing to follow after" (W. Gilpin).

VI. HIS CONSIDERATE REGARD for the welfare of those who survive him. "Let thy servant Chimham go over," etc. (vers. 38, 40). He is not wholly absorbed in thoughts of past time or of his final rest; but is interested in the younger man now present with him, and sympathizes with his enjoyments and aspirations. He remembers his own youth. What he declines for himself, he seeks and obtains for his son (Jer. xli. 17). "When the king could not persuade the father, he gladly accepts the charge of his son. He seems to feel as if the care of this young man would bring comfort to his heart, which was still bleeding for the loss of Absalom. It was not in lightness that he made the request, and when on his death-bed he remembered it and charged Solomon to show kindness to the son for the sake of what his father had done for him when he fled from the face of Absalom. In Barzillai we have (1) a man who knows that he is old, but is not distressed by the thought of it; (2) who is rich, but is satisfied with his natural possessions; (3) of long experience, who has kept up his love of simple pleasures; (4) and is attached to the past, but does not distrust the future" (John Ker). "It is a very reasonable conjecture of Grotius, that David, having a patrimony in the field of Bethlehem, the place of his nativity, bestowed it on Barzillai's son; and from thence this place took the name of Chimham, which remained unto the days of Jeremiah" (Patrick). His descendants continue for ages to partake of the fruit of his piety and beneficence, to perpetuate his name and honour his memory (Ezra ii. 61; Neh. vii. 63; Ps. cii. 28).—D.

Ver. 6.—*Loving enemies and hating friends.* "Thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends." Joab's remonstrance with David was rude, and in the language of exaggeration; yet in substance it was wise, as the issue proved. The king's lamentations did show excessive love for his deceased son, who had been his deadly enemy; and his abandonment of himself to grief when he ought to have been thanking his brave friends as they returned from the battle, and congratulating them on the victory they had won for him, did indicate a present insensibility to their services and claims which might easily be construed as enmity. It is, however, no unusual thing for men to love their enemies and hate their friends; or at least, by their conduct, to give good reason for others to charge them with doing so.

I. THOSE DO SO WHO LOVE ERROR AND HATE THE TRUTH. For truth is one of our best friends, error one of our worst enemies. Moral and religious truth especially is life, health, guidance, happiness, to the soul; it leads to God and goodness and heaven. But error in such matters is death, disease, delusion; producing false peace and leading to destruction. Yet men often love the errors which favour what they are inclined to, and hate the truth which shows them their duties, sins, and dangers. They "love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil" (John iii. 19). "Fools hate knowledge" (Prov. i. 22). Hence they love false teachers and hate the true. "I hate him," said Ahab of Micaiah, "for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (1 Kings xxii. 8).

II. THOSE WHO LOVE THEIR LOWER RATHER THAN THEIR HIGHER SELF. Our lower nature is good in itself, but is very prone to run to excess, and become evil. Then, from a friend, it is transformed into an enemy. Our higher nature is a friend, especially when informed and directed by the Holy Spirit. Man's worth and blessedness depend on his obeying the latter and subduing the former. Too often, however, he takes the opposite course, yielding himself to the government of the flesh, and resisting the promptings of the spirit.

III. THOSE WHO LOVE THE WICKED AND HATE THE GOOD. Associating with the former and finding pleasure in their practices, but avoiding the society of the latter;

loving flatterers, and hating faithful reprovers and advisers. Ungodly and unholy men are necessarily, though it may be unconsciously and unintentionally, the enemies of the souls of those whom they influence, whether by conversation or example; and the more attractive they are, so much the more dangerous. "Evil company doth corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. xv. 33, Revised Version).

IV. THOSE WHO DELIGHT IN BAD BOOKS, AND DISLIKE AND NEGLECT GOOD ONES. Good books are good friends, promoting in us that which is good. The Bible is the best of books. Bad books, books which suggest and foster evil, are enemies; and the more they interest their readers, the more they injure them. Yet many delight in them, and dislike the books which would profit them.

V. THOSE, IN A WORD, WHO LOVE, IF NOT SATAN, HIS WAYS, AND LIVE IN ENMITY WITH GOD AND CHRIST. Satan is our chief enemy, the head and ruler of all other spiritual foes. He seeks our ruin by manifold devices, and, so that we serve him, is quite content that we should do so in the fashion we most approve. We may join which company of his servants—the coarser or the more refined, the open or the secret—we may prefer. But to follow him in any way is, in effect, to love our worst enemy. Christ, on the other hand, and God in him, is our best Friend, who loves us most truly and most wisely, who has made greater sacrifices for us than any other can make, who has done for us what no other can do, who proffers us blessings beyond the power of any other to confer, who exalts those who love him to a position of honour and happiness to which no other can raise their friends, and lives on to bless them when others die and pass away. To reject him, to refuse him the love, allegiance, and obedience which he claims, is, in effect, to hate the Friend who is most of all needed by us, and most worthy to be loved with all the power of loving which our hearts possess.

Let those to whom these representations apply reflect on the sin and folly of which they are guilty; the incalculable good they are losing; the incalculable evils they are choosing. Their eyes will at length be opened; may it be in time!—G. W.

Ver. 9.—*Late reflection and appreciation.* The rebels against King David having been defeated, and their chosen leader slain, they bethink themselves of their position and of the claims of their injured sovereign; and begin to stir up each other to obtain his return and reinstatement. Their words are obviously true; but the facts they now recognize were as truly facts when they rose in rebellion. It was only their feeling with respect to them that had changed. So it is commonly. Under the excitement of sinful feeling, the most obvious truths are forgotten and neglected. Well is it when there is a reawakening to their significance, and a consequent return to the path of duty. Especially desirable is it that all who are living without any due feeling of the claims of their great King should become sensible of them, and begin to render them a practical recognition.

I. THE ACTUAL AND ABIDING CLAIMS OF CHRIST TO BE ACCEPTED AND OBEYED AS KING. 1. *His nature.* Divine and human; including all qualifications for rule. 2. *His Divine appointment.* Signified in manifold ways. 3. *The deliverance he has wrought.* It is here said of David, "The king saved us," etc. Our Lord has saved us in a more marvellous way, from enemies more to be dreaded than the heathen that harassed Israel. He has conquered, in personal conflict and through suffering unto death, Satan, the world, sin, and death. He has thus "saved us out of the hand of our enemies," including those that, like the Philistines in relation to Israel, are nearest to us and most ready and able to harass us—our own special besetting sins. True, the deliverance is not yet completely accomplished in actual experience; but it is assured, and as really ours, if we are Christ's, as if we were already perfectly freed from all evil.

II. THE INSENSIBILITY TO THESE CLAIMS WHICH COMMONLY PREVAILS. Looking at the lives of most men, even where Christ is made known, it is painfully manifest that they have no due sense of his rights and their duty to him; for they do not submit their minds, hearts, and lives to his government. 1. *Causes of such insensibility.* (1) A depraved nature, whose spiritual sensibilities are further suppressed and benumbed by the practice of sin. (2) Absorption in worldly pursuits. Leaving no opportunity for higher matters to attract attention, no time to think of them. (3) Unconcern as to the enemies from whom Christ delivers. No conviction of sin; no

sense of the evil of it; no desire for rescue from its guilt or power. The Deliverer, therefore, excites no real interest. (4) Familiarity with the truth. The habit of hearing, or reading, or even repeating it, without accepting it; or of assenting to it without really believing it; or of accepting (in a sense) the atonement, and relying on Jesus for pardon, without receiving him as King. The process also of indulging feeling and sentiment about Christ, without rendering obedience; and of resisting the feelings which prompt to obedience, thus resisting and grieving the Holy Spirit. In this way the gospel becomes a means of hardening the heart against itself. (5) The attractions of some pretender to the throne. As Absalom "stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (ch. xv. 6) by his youth, beauty, activity, assiduous attentions, insinuating address, and hints as to the defects of his father's government, and the improvements which he would make if he were in power; so the hearts of many are withdrawn from the Lord Jesus by the attractions of some newly revived system of error in philosophy or religion, or anti-religion, of which the novelty (to them) is charming, and the representations of human nature more flattering, and the demands less exacting. The old king comes to be regarded and treated as worn-out, quite unsuited to the needs of an enlightened and scientific age; and the young pretenders are welcomed, one by one class, and another by another, with shouts of joy and pæans of anticipated victory. 2. *Effects of such insensibility.* (1) Negatively, in the prevention of faith and love, loyal obedience and active service. (2) Positively, by leading to disaffection and active rebellion; as in the case of Israel and David.

III. THE HAPPY AWAKENING WHICH IS OFTEN EXPERIENCED. As in the case of the Israelites in respect to David. This may be produced: 1. *By calamity.* As the Israelites were awakened by defeat and disaster. Troubles stir the conscience, lead the soul to look around for support, throw an unusual light on objects, reveal the vanity of cherished dependencies, prepare for due appreciation of those which are solid and satisfying; and so lead to a right appreciation of Christ. 2. *By impressive presentation of forgotten facts.* As by the tribes of Israel to each other, reminding of their obligations to David, and the ill requital he had received from them. It may be a sermon heard with unaccustomed interest, or some part of the Holy Book read with a new perception of the significance and importance of its teaching, or the appeals of a friend, or the statements of a tract, or words of parents or teachers long ago, recurring with new power to the mind; whatever it be that stirs the heart to consideration and renders it sensible of the rights and worth of Christ, blessed are the means, blessed the moment when such effects are produced. 3. *Always by the enlightening and convincing Spirit.* Whose work it is to reveal and glorify the Son of God (John xvi. 14).

IV. THE CHANGE PRODUCED BY THIS AWAKENING. Similar to that in the text. 1. *In conduct.* (1) Return to allegiance, loyalty, and service to the rightful Sovereign. (2) Incitement of others to return. 2. *In position.* The returning rebels are accepted, and restored to the privileges of faithful subjects. Not because the heavenly King is, like David, dependent on his subjects, needing them as much as they him, but of pure grace. However long they may have been insensible and rebellious, on coming to a sense of their duty, and seeking forgiveness, they are pardoned and restored to favour.

Lastly, the awakening may come too late, producing terror and remorse, but not repentance, and importunate prayers which are unavailing (see Luke xiii. 24—28). —G. W.

Vers. 24—30.—*Inability hindering desired service.* Although some are disposed to accept Ziba's account of his master's conduct (ch. xvi. 3) rather than Mephibosheth's own, as given in these verses, there seems to be no just reason to doubt his truth and sincerity. He did not go with David because, owing to his lameness and the treachery and cunning of Ziba, he was unable to do so. The narrative suggests such thoughts as follow.

I. INABILITY DEBARS MANY CHRISTIANS FROM SOME DEMONSTRATIONS OF LOVE AND LOYALTY TO THEIR KING WHICH THEY WOULD FAIN MAKE. Indeed, every one, however strong in some respects, is weak in others. The inability may be in body or mind, in understanding, or heart, or speech, or in purse; but to its extent it disables from forms of service which others can adopt. We can only serve Christ with the

faculties and powers we have. To attempt what we cannot accomplish is to be hindrances rather than helps.

II. INABILITY IN SOME RESPECTS WILL NOT PREVENT THE TRUE-HEARTED FROM MAKING SUCH MANIFESTATIONS OF LOVE AND LOYALTY AS ARE WITHIN THEIR POWER. If Mephibosheth could not follow David in his exile, or take part in the contest, he could mourn for him, and exhibit signs of mourning; and this he did. He thus showed a courage as great as, or greater than, that of those who took part in the war. In like manner, every one, however feeble, poor, or obscure, may do something for Christ; and, if his heart be right, he will. He who cannot preach can speak to a neighbour. He who cannot say much for Christ can bring others where they can hear of him, or give them an instructive book or tract. He who cannot give much money towards the evangelization of the world can give a little, and at least can pray. He who cannot found a hospital can visit the sick poor. All have some power, and, according to the measure of their power, are responsible. All who love their King will employ such ability as they have in serving him. And the service is accepted by him which comes from a true heart and is according to the ability possessed. Work or gift for Christ is valued by him, not for its quantity, or even quality of the material, or merely mental kind, but for the love to him which it expresses; and many a man who wins the plaudits of men for his talents, his outward success in religious work, or his large gifts for its sustentation, is less pleasing to Christ than some poor and humble friend of his who can give and do but little, but thinks much of him, mourns in secret the dishonour done to him, and prays without ceasing for his triumph. Ziba's handsome and timely presents were really of far less worth than helpless Mephibosheth's mourning and self-neglect.

III. INABILITY IS LIABLE TO BE MISUNDERSTOOD AND MISREPRESENTED. Not only by the malicious or designing, as here, but by the inconsiderate. Men judge of others by their own peculiar standards. If truly zealous in a good cause, they show their zeal in the way most natural and available to themselves, and are ready to condemn as lukewarm those who do not adopt their methods, though these may with equal zeal seek the same ends by the means natural and available to them. Even David judged harshly and unjustly of Mephibosheth. It was, in truth, unreasonable to expect his lame friend to accompany him. He could only have been a burden. It was absurdly unjust to accept Ziba's insinuation that his master was hoping to be placed on the vacant throne. But judgments equally unjust are constantly being pronounced upon zealous servants of Christ, whose only fault is that they are not of the same order of mind, or cannot practise the same bustling activity as their accusers, or have not equal incomes, or equal physical strength or energy, or do not care to exhibit their "zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings x. 16) in the same manner or to secure similar results. Happily, the King knows his servants better than they know each other.

IV. INABILITY IS OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH QUALITIES THAT RECONCILE TO THE DISADVANTAGES WHICH BELONG TO IT. Mephibosheth was enabled to bear meekly what he had to endure, because he was humble, thankful, sincerely and disinterestedly devoted to the king, and ready to submit without murmuring to his will. Similar qualities are of great value to those servants of our Lord who are deficient in some endowments or possessions by which others are equipped for Christian service. 1. *Thankfulness for, and contentment with, the powers and opportunities granted to them, and the kind and measure of success accorded to them.* 2. *Humility arising from the consciousness of their defects or unworthiness.* 3. *Absence of envy of those who are more abundantly favoured in respect to talents or success.* 4. *Consciousness of sincere devotion to the King, however men may reflect on them.* 5. *Joy that, by whomsoever and in whatever way, the King's cause is triumphing.* Such qualities are frequently found associated with deficient abilities, and go far to compensate those who possess them for the lack of power, or obvious efficiency, or appreciation of them and their work, which may be their lot. Let the less liberally endowed cultivate them.

V. INABILITY WILL AT LENGTH BE EXPLAINED AND JUSTIFIED. When the King comes back, all his servants will receive commendation and reward, not according to their several abilities, but according to their fidelity. Mistakes will be rectified, unjust judgments reversed. Many a plaudit will be hushed; many an inflated reputation will collapse; many a brave-looking building will be reduced to a mass of rubbish by the searching fires, and the builder put to shame, if not utterly rejected (1 Cor. iii. 12—15),

On the other hand, many an obscure and perhaps disregarded servant of Christ will find himself unexpectedly applauded and exalted. "Lord, when saw we thee," etc.? (Matt. xxv. 37).

Wherefore: 1. "*Judge nothing before the time*" (1 Cor. iv. 5). 2. *Let Christians of limited powers and opportunities be encouraged to do their best.* Their Lord appreciates their spirit and services, though men may mistake and misjudge; and he will pass a juster judgment than David did (ver. 29) in the case of Mephibosheth.—G. W.

Ver. 35.—*The privations of old age.* Barzillai graphically depicts these as experienced by himself. All old men have not exactly the same experience; but all who live to a great age must expect a similar diminution of their powers.

I. THE PRIVATIONS OF THE AGED. 1. *Enfeebled or annihilated powers.* Blunted or extinct senses; dulness or loss of sight, hearing, taste, smelling; feebleness of body and mind. Consequent inability for active employments. Loss of the pleasures which the exercise of vigorous faculties confers. 2. *Increasing dependence on others.* Possibly, unlike Barzillai, for the means of subsistence; certainly for much besides. Hence the old man is apt to become, and feel himself to be, "a burden," putting the kindness and patience of others to a severe test. The discomfort arising from such dependence is often very great. 3. *The sense of loneliness.* Sometimes the aged survive all who have loved and cared for them, and, if not, they commonly feel themselves cut off from the interests and pleasures of the new generation.

II. HOW THESE PRIVATIONS SHOULD BE BORNE. 1. *With cheerful submission and patience.* Remembering that the order of nature which brings such ills to the aged, and the circumstances which occasion their own particular troubles, are the appointment of the infinitely wise and good Creator and Father. Recalling also their many years of vigorous faculty and lively enjoyment, and cherishing a gratitude which will suppress discontent. 2. *With thankfulness for what remains.* The love and care which provide for, or minister to, their needs and alleviate their troubles. Above all, the unchanging love of God and the Redeemer, and the spiritual blessings hence enjoyed. 3. *With watchfulness against the temptations incident to old age.* Such as those to fretfulness, irritability, impatience, envy of the young, and needless interference with their enjoyments. The revival with new power of old sinful propensities, ill tempers, and bad habits. 4. *With joyful hope.* Of speedy deliverance from all burdens and troubles, and the recommencement of life with renewed and perfected energies. Nothing can keep the aged Christian long out of heaven.

III. HOW OTHERS SHOULD REGARD THEM. 1. *With respectful tenderness, sympathy, and readiness to alleviate them.* 2. *With diminished desire for the great prolongation of their own lives.* 3. *With steadfast aim and endeavour so to live that, if old age come, it may not be oppressed with the needless burdens and anxieties which a godless life leads to.* Let the young keep in mind the admonition, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Eccles. xii. 1).—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 1.—**There happened to be there a man of Belial.** The fierce words of the men of Judah led to evil results. It was a time when all wise and thoughtful persons would have laboured for peace, and tried to soothe and appease the angry passions fomented by the late war. Instead of this, the men of Judah irritated the Israelites with insult and contumely, and the day, intended as one of rejoicing and of the restoration of David to his throne by common consent, saw the rebellion break forth afresh. Among those who had taken part in the discussion with Judah was Sheba, a man of Belial, that is, a worthless fellow, but possibly possessed of rank and influence; for, according to many commentators, *ben-Bichri* does not mean **the son of Bichri**, but "a descendant of Becher," the second son of Benjamin (Gen. xlvi. 21), and possibly the representative of the mishpachah descended from him. But it is remarkable that this son of Benjamin disappears from the genealogies, and that no mishpachah of Bichrites is mentioned either in Numb. xxvi. 38 or in 1 Chron. viii. 1. In

both places Ashbel, who is enumerated as the third son in Gen. xlvi. 21, takes the second place. We must be content, therefore, to leave this matter in uncertainty; but evidently Sheba had come with Shimei and Ziba to welcome David back, and, with the rest of the thousand Benjamites, had rushed with loud cries of welcome across the Jordan, and, but for this altercation, would have remained faithful. But tribal jealousies were always ready to break forth, and were a permanent source of weakness; and now, stung by some jibe at Benjamin, Sheba gave orders to a trumpeter to give the signal for the breaking up of the meeting, and, as is commonly the case in large and excited gatherings, the crowd obeyed the unauthorized dictation of one man. His words are contemptuous enough. David is no king, but a private person, and the son, not of a great chief, but of Jesse merely, a yeoman of Bethlehem. **Every man to his tents.** "To his tent" meant "to his home" (see ch. xviii. 17). But this withdrawal home signified the rejection of David's government. Almost the same words are used in 1 Kings xii. 16.

Ver. 2.—**So every man of Israel, etc.**; literally, *so all the men of Israel went up from after David after Sheba.* They had come down to Jordan to bring the king back in triumph, but, on finding that the men of Judah had forestalled them, they had a quarrel, and as no one endeavoured to allay it and mediate between them, it ended in open revolt, and they transferred their allegiance to the worthless Sheba. Nothing could more clearly prove the want of cohesion among the tribes, and how little Saul and David had done to knit them together. We need not, therefore, seek for any deep reasons of state, or for proofs of failure in David's government, to account for the rapid success of Absalom's rebellion. Israel was a confused mass of discordant elements, kept in a state of repulsion by the sturdy independence of the tribes and their jealousy one of another. Even David's victories had failed to infuse into them any feeling of national unity, nor did the long glory of Solomon's reign and the magnificence of the temple succeed better. The kings were not as yet much more than the judges had been—leaders in war, but with little authority in times of peace. What is so extraordinary is that David had lost the allegiance of his own tribe; and it now, on returning to its duty, spoiled by its violence the whole matter. The day must have been a great disappointment to David. He was to have gone back conducted gloriously by all the tribes of Israel; but he had fancied that Judah was holding back, and grieving over Absalom. He had secret dealing therefore with it, in order that the day might not be marred by its absence. It came, but only to do mischief; and David went home with only its escort, and with all the rest in open rebellion.

Ver. 3.—**They were shut up.** We are not to conclude that all widows had to live in seclusion, but only that those women who belonged to the royal harem, but had been taken by another, were not allowed to return to it, but condemned to a sort of imprisonment. **Living in widowhood.** This is explained by the Chaldee as lasting only during David's life, its rendering being, "in widowhood while their husband was alive."

Ver. 4.—**Then said the king to Amasa.** David thus takes the first step towards depriving Joab of the command (see ch. xix. 13). This was a most unwise step, however guilty Joab may have been in slaying Absalom. With all his faults, Joab had always been faithful to David, and it was chiefly his skill in war and statesmanlike qualities which had raised the kingdom to a position of great power. Just now, too, he had crushed with smaller forces a rebellion in which Amasa had taken the lead. To cast him off and put Amasa in his place might please conspirators, and reconcile them to their defeat, but it would certainly offend all those who had been faithful to David in his troubles. Throughout David acts as one whose affections were stronger than his sense of duty, and his conduct goes far to justify Joab's complaint, "This day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well" (ch. xix. 6). If David, in the administration of his kingdom, acted with as little forethought as in the slight he cast upon the ten tribes in negotiating with Judah to be the first to restore him, as it had been the first tribe to rebel, instead of waiting for the rest, and doing his best to make the day of his return one of general concord and good will; or with as little justice as in the matter of Ziba and Mephibosheth; or with as little tact and good sense as in substituting at the end of a revolt the rebel general for the brave soldier who had "saved his life, and the lives of his sons and of his daughters, and the lives of his wives and of his concubines" (ch. xix. 5);—we cannot wonder that he had failed to secure the allegiance of a race so self-willed and stubborn as the Israelites. One cannot help half suspecting that Joab had used the power he had gained over the king by the part he had taken in the murder of Uriah tyrannically, and for cruel purposes, and that David groaned under the burden. But if so, it was his own sin that was finding him out.

Ver. 5.—**He tarried longer than the set**

time. But not longer than was to be expected. For the appointment was so surprising that everybody must have been agape with astonishment. They would naturally have expected that Amasa would be punished. Instead of this, he is commissioned to gather the militia in David's name. And men would hesitate about joining such a leader. Was he really loyal? or would he embark them in a new rebellion? And what would Joab do? He was not a man likely to bear such a slight tamely, and David ought to have foreseen that he was sowing for himself a crop of discord and enmity.

Ver. 6.—**David said to Abishai.** David thus gives the command to the younger brother, and we find in ver. 7 that even "Joab's men," his own special troop, were placed under Abishai's command. There seems always to have been a firm friendship between the brothers, and at first Joab acquiesces. The king was, in fact, in so grim a humour that he probably felt that he had better keep with his men, who would protect him, instead of remaining at Jerusalem, where he would be in David's power. When Amasa joined them, Abishai would have to resign to him the command; and David probably expected that, after a successful campaign, and with the aid of the men of Judah, who were rebels like himself, Amasa would be able to crush Joab. But Joab did not intend to wait for this; and immediately on meeting his rival he murders him, and assumes the command. **Thy lord's servants.** These are the men enumerated in ver. 7, and formed David's usual military attendants. When war broke out, they were reinforced by a levy of the people. **And escape us.** The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. It may signify, "and withdraw himself from our eyes," which gives the sense of the Authorized Version, and is supported by the Vulgate. The Septuagint renders, "and overshadow our eyes," which might have the same meaning, but, as others think, may signify, "and cause us anxiety." Many modern commentators render, "and pluck out our eye;" that is, do us painful damage. Either this or the Authorized Version gives a good sense, and, anyhow, rapid action was necessary, or Sheba's revolt might become dangerous.

Ver. 7.—**There went out after him**—that is, under Abishai's command (comp. ver. 2)—**Joab's men.** The men who formed his regular attendants, and to whose number belonged the ten armour-bearers who slew Absalom (ch. xviii. 15). Joab retained their command, and probably they would not have served under any other person. It is evident from the enumeration in this verse that the "men of Judah," after escorting David to Jerusalem, had all dispersed to their own homes.

Ver. 8.—**The great stone which is in Gibeon.** Gibeon is situated in the mountains of Ephraim, in the tribe of Benjamin, north-west of Jerusalem. The great stone was probably some isolated rock well known in the neighbourhood. **Amasa went before them**; Hebrew, *Amasa came before them*; that is, came in view with the levy of men he had raised in Judah. **And Joab's garment,** etc.; more correctly, *and Joab was girded with his military coat as his garment, and over it was the strap of his sword in its sheath, and it* (masculine, equivalent to "the sheath") *came out, and it* (feminine, equivalent to "the sword") *fell.* This change of gender is very harsh, and has caused the Authorized Version to apply the masculine verb to Joab, and translate, and as he went forth it fell; but a very slight change, supported by the Septuagint, gives us a more satisfactory sense, namely, *and it* (*the sword*) *came out and fell.* It is generally assumed that all this was arranged beforehand on Joab's part, who had so placed his sword that he could shake it out of the sheath. More probably it was an accident, of which he took instant advantage. He had felt that his position was insecure, and that if David had the support of Amasa, and a powerful band of the men of Judah at Jerusalem, he would probably order his execution for slaying Absalom; and Amasa would carry out the command willingly enough, as he thereby would secure the high position offered him. We know David's feelings towards Joab from his dying command to Solomon (1 Kings ii. 5), and probably he had given various indications of his deep-seated resentment. Joab, therefore, determined to stop Amasa's growth in power, and also to give David a rough lesson. And this accident gave him an early opportunity, which he used with ruthless energy.

Ver. 10.—**In the fifth rib**; *in the abdomen* (see note on ch. ii. 23). **He struck him not again.** When his sword fell out of its sheath, Joab picked it up with his left hand, which was not the hand for action, and as he could not put it into its place without taking it into his right hand, his continuing to hold it while he took his cousin's beard in his right hand and kissed him, was too natural to awaken any suspicion. But holding down Amasa's head, he struck him with his left hand so fiercely that no second blow was necessary; and then continued his march forward as if what had occurred was a matter of little importance.

Ver. 11.—**One of Joab's men.** Joab left one of his personal followers to prevent any halt of the people round Amasa's body, and

to suggest that he was a traitor. For he was to say to them as they came up, not only that "whosoever had pleasure in Joab," but also that "all who were for David, were to go after Joab." All loyal men were to regard him as captain of the host, and to disobey him would be rebellion. Naturally they would conclude from this that Amasa had not really been true to David, and that his death was the punishment inflicted on him for his past guilt.

Ver. 12.—**He removed Amasa.** The admonition to move on failed; for the sight was terrible and tragic, and all as they came along stopped to see what had happened, and inquire the cause (comp. ch. ii. 23). The man, therefore, had the corpse carried out of the way, and threw over it a **cloth**, really a coat—the loose upper mantle worn over the tunic (see note on *beged*, 1 Sam. xix. 13). Whereupon the people renewed their march, most of them not knowing what had occurred, and the rest urged to it by the warning voice of Joab's servitor.

Ver. 14.—**And he went through**, etc. It was not Joab, but Sheba, who, by David's prompt action, was compelled to make a rapid retreat, seeking help in vain from tribe after tribe, but rejected of all, and unable to make any defence until he had reached the extreme north of the land of Israel. **Unto Abel, and to Beth-Maachah.** The conjunction probably ought to be omitted, as the proper name of the place is Abel-beth-Maachah, and it is so given in ver. 15 (see below), and in 1 Kings xv. 20; 2 Kings xv. 29. It is the place called Abel-Maim, the "water-meadow," in 2 Chron. xvi. 4—an *abel* being a place where the grass grows rankly from the abundance of springs. It thus forms part of the name of various places, as Abel-Mizraim (Gen. l. 11), Abel-Meholah (1 Kings iv. 12), etc. Abel-beth-Maachah was a fortress in the most northerly part of the tribe of Naphtali, and is identified with the modern village of *Abel*, a few miles above Lake Huleh, the ancient "Waters of Merom." **And all the Berites.** No place or people of this name can be found, but Jerome, when translating the Vulgate, had before him a different reading, which seems clearly right, "And all the chosen men of war were gathered together, and went after him."

Ver. 15.—**It stood in the trench.** This is a literal translation, and yet gives a wrong sense. The Hebrew "stood" means "rose up to," "stood level with;" and the "trench" is what in modern fortifications is called "the glacis," and includes the outer wall of defence. The Revised Version renders, "it stood against the rampart." The usual way of capturing cities in ancient times was to cast up a bank or mound of earth against them (Isa. xxix. 3; xxxvii. 33; Jer. vi. 6); and Joab's work had advanced so far as to be level with the outer line of defence. The name of the city in the Hebrew is not **Abel of Beth-Maachah**, but *Abel-beth-Maachah*. **Battered.** This is a word taken from Roman warfare. The Hebrew says, "And all the people that were with Joab were destroying the wall to make it fall," most probably by undermining it. Ewald even asserts that this is the meaning of the verb, and translates, "were digging pits under the wall." The Revised Version adopts this for the margin, where it gives "undermined." The Septuagint and Chaldee have a different and probable reading, "And all Joab's people were devising (contriving) means to throw down the wall." This would be the next operation after the mound had been carried up to a level with it.

Ver. 18.—**They were wont to speak**, etc. The Hebrew literally is, *they used to say in old time, They shall surely ask at Abel; and so they finished (the matter)*. But of these words two completely distinct interpretations are given. The Jewish Targum records the one: "Remember now that which is written in the book of the Law, to ask a city concerning peace at the first. Hast thou done so, to ask of Abel if they will make peace?" The woman, that is, was referring to the command in Deut. xx. 10, not to besiege a city until peace had been offered to the inhabitants on condition of their paying tribute. When a city was captured the lot of the inhabitants, as the woman declares in ver. 19, was utter destruction; and the Law mercifully gave them the chance of escaping such a fate. Joab had not complied with this enactment, but had assumed that the people would support Sheba, and was proceeding to the last extremity without consulting them. This interpretation gives an excellent sense, but cannot be wrung out of the present Hebrew text without violence. The other interpretation is that of the Authorized Version, that the woman was commending her words to Joab, by reminding him that Abel had been famed in early times for its wisdom, and had probably been the seat of an oracle in the old Canaanite times. When, therefore, people had carried their dispute to Abel, both sides were content to abide by the answer given them, and so the controversy was ended. Literally, these words mean, "they shall surely inquire at Abel," the verb being that specially used of inquiring of God.

Ver. 19.—**I am one of them that are**, etc. The Authorized Version translates in this way, because, while "I" is singular, "peaceable" and "faithful" are plural. Really

this construction shows that the woman speaks in the name of the city, and consequently the Authorized Version, while preserving the grammar, loses the sense. It should be translated, *we are peaceable, faithful people in Israel.* **A city and a mother**; that is, a mother-city, a metropolis, the chief town of that district.

Ver. 21.—**The matter is not so.** It seems from this verse that the citizens did not quite understand why Joab attacked them. Sheba had thrown himself into the city, and Joab, in hot pursuit, finding the gate closed—a measure of ordinary precaution upon the approach of a body of men—at once blockaded the town, and began to cast up the mount. At all events, they were ready to come to terms now, and would probably have given up Sheba at first, if Joab had demanded his surrender. **A man of Mount Ephraim.** Sheba was a Benjamite, but the hills of Ephraim extended into the territory of Benjamin, and retained their name (see 1 Sam. i. 1). **Over the wall**; Hebrew, *through the wall*, being the word rendered "at" a window in Gen. xxvi. 8. It probably means through one of the apertures made for the archers.

Ver. 22.—**In her wisdom**; that is, with her wise counsel. The story in Eccles. ix. 13—15 probably refers to this narrative. **They retired**; Hebrew, *they dispersed themselves each to his tent*; that is, his home. This refers to Amasa's levies, who were glad to depart, and whom Joab did not want at Jerusalem. He took thither with him all those mentioned in ver. 7. Incensed as David must have been at the murder of Amasa following so quickly upon that of Absalom, yet that very act proved Joab's determination, and left the king powerless. He must have felt, too, that Joab was indispensable for the maintenance of peace and order in his dominions, and that he was at the least faithful to himself.

Ver. 23.—**Now Joab**, etc. With this list of his chief officers, the narrator closes the history of David's reign; for the remaining four chapters form a kind of appendix. A similar list closes ch. viii., where, too, there is a break in the history, the previous narrative having been a summary of the rapid rise of David's empire. In this section, ch. ix.—xx., we have a more full and detailed account of David's wars, leading on to his crime and its punishment. The rest of David's life we may trust was calm and uneventful, but it was the life of a sorrow-stricken man; and the sword again woke up against his family when his end was approaching, and filled his dying hours with grief and trouble. This list is much later in date than that previously given, though most of the officers are the same. **Cherethites.** This is a correction of the Massorites to make the passage agree with ch. viii. 18. The K'tib has *cari*, a word which occurs in 2 Kings xi. 4, 19, where in the Authorized Version it is translated "captains," but in the Revised Version *Carites*, which here appears only in the margin. But there is no reason why the place of the Cherethites should not have been taken by Carian mercenaries later on in David's reign, though really we know too little about such matters to be able to form a judgment. Some commentators translate *cari* "digger," and suppose that it means executioner; but why a digger should have such a meaning is inexplicable. It may be interesting to add that the Carians were famous in old times as mercenaries. During the reign of Manasseh, Psammetichus won the throne of all Egypt by the aid of Carians, and from that period they took a leading part in all Egyptian wars. The age of David is much more antique, but as there was constant communication between Phœnicia and Asia Minor and Greece, there is nothing improbable in David taking Carians into his service in place of the Philistine Cherethites. His connection with them would soon cease after he left Ziklag.

Ver. 24.—**Adoram was over the tribute.** This was a new officer, and a new thing. For the Hebrew word *mas* does not mean "tribute," but "forced labour." This was one of the most oppressive exactions of old time, and it continued to be practised in Europe throughout the Middle Ages until it was abolished at the end of the eighteenth century by the French Revolution, except in Russia, where the serfs were freed from it by the late emperor Alexander II. Nevertheless, it was probably made almost necessary at first by the absence of money. As there was no money for the payment of taxes, the dues of the king or lord could only be rendered by personal service. Yet even so it was exceedingly liable to be abused, and the people might be taken from their own homes and fields just when their presence there was most needed. One most painful result was that the women had to endure, upon the farm and among the cattle, a drudgery to which they were unsuited. We gather from this passage that it was David who began this practice in Israel, exacting probably only from the descendants of the Canaanites (who, nevertheless, formed a considerable portion of the inhabitants of Palestine) forced labour employed in preparing for the building of the temple, and in the fortifications of his fenced cities. Under Solomon it seems to have been extended to other classes (1 Kings v. 13, 14; but see 1 Kings ix. 20—22), and reduced to a system, which pressed so heavily upon the people

that it was the principal cause of the revolt of the ten tribes from Rehoboam (1 Kings xii. 4). Unless the Israelites had themselves suffered severely from this exaction, they would not have been driven into rebellion by sympathy with the remains of the native races. Subsequently we find Jeremiah accusing Jehoiakim of employing forced labour (Jer. xxii. 13), but the severity with which he condemned it suggests that it had then ceased to be customary. *Adoram.* His appointment to this office was probably at a late period in David's reign, as he continued to hold the office under Solomon (1 Kings iv. 6; v. 14, where he is called *Adoniram*), and even down to the beginning of Rehoboam's reign (1 Kings xii. 18). We there read that he paid the penalty of his hateful office with his life. In 2 Chron. x. 18 he is called *Hadoram.*

Ver. 25.—**Sheva.** He is called *Seraiah* in ch. viii. 17.

Ver. 26.—**Ira . . . was a chief ruler;** Hebrew, *cohen*, priest, minister (see on this term, ch. viii. 18). We there find David's sons holding this confidential office; but the feuds which resulted from David's sin had destroyed the concord of the family, and the usefulness of David's children. In their degradation from this office we see also a preparation for their being set aside from the succession, and the throne given to Solomon.

ADDITIONAL NOTE.

With this chapter ends the second section of David's history; for, as we have already seen, the last four chapters are not arranged in chronological order, but form an appendix remarkable both for the singularly varied nature of its contents, and also for its omissions. The Second Book of Samuel is so thoroughly a history of David, that we should naturally have expected some account of his latter years, and of his manner of government after his return to power. But such details would have been interesting politically rather than spiritually, and the two narratives which have gone before are complete each in itself; and in each David is regarded from an entirely distinct point of view. In the first eight chapters we have the history of David as the theocratic king. As such he takes the heathen for his inheritance, and founds an empire. Even more remarkable are the alterations he makes in the worship of Jehovah. To the old Levitical sacrifices he added a far more spiritual service of psalms and minstrelsy, without which Judaism would have been unable to develop the evangelical realities which lay embedded in its ritual and legal ordinances. And it is important to notice that his service of sacred song is called "prophecy" (1 Chron. xxv. 1—3), from which we learn two things. The first that David's service was essentially the same as that established by Samuel at Ramah. There, too, we read of the company of the prophets prophesying (1 Sam. xix. 20), their service undoubtedly being one of minstrelsy (1 Sam. x. 5, 10, 11); and without Samuel's authority David would scarcely have ventured upon so great an innovation. Even so, this consecration of music by Samuel, and David's ordinance whereby there was established a daily service, morning and evening, of thanksgiving and praise (1 Chron. xxiii. 30; Neh. xii. 24), is a most remarkable step forward; and by it the service of God ceased to be mere ritual, and became "a reasonable service" (Rom. xii. 1), such as was repeatedly commended by St. Paul to the members of the Christian Church (Col. iii. 16, etc.). But secondly, it drew the minds of the people to the evangelic meaning of the Levitical ordinances. To this day hymns form a most important part of our solemn services, and seem especially adapted to draw out the inner and deeper meaning of rites and doctrines. They did not, indeed, begin with David. There are psalms older than his reign; but this consecration of them to the public daily service of God led to an outburst of Divine psalmody which raised the minds of the people above the material and grosser elements of their worship, and taught them the true nature of God, and made them ascribe to him high and spiritual attributes in wonderful contrast with the grovelling frivolities of heathenism. The Levitical worship was necessarily typical: in the psalms the people learned that God desireth not sacrifice, but the offering of a broken and contrite heart. Even prophecy, in its sense of speaking for God, would scarcely have reached the high eminence of future days but for the psalms. For only in a nation deeply imbued with poetry and song could an Isaiah have arisen, capable of giving in so perfect an outward form the mysteries of Christ's incarnation, his vicarious sacrifice, and universal kingdom.

In the second section, neither the theocratic nor the prophetic element is in the forefront. It is the history of a fearful sin, and of its stern punishment. The sinner is the theocratic king: the punishment is the pollution of his house by incest and murder; the ruin of the glory of his realm, the rending asunder of his empire, begun in his days and consummated in those of his grandson; his own disgrace and flight; and his sorrowful return to his throne, impotent to avenge either the murder of his son or that of the man whom he had chosen in the hope that he would release

him from the stern grip of the ruthless Joab. The moral lessons of this sad story are beyond number. We see the saint changed into a sinner. No privileges save him from hateful crime; no repentance from draining the last dregs of the bitter cup of retribution. But never was the power of repentance in cleansing the heart and giving peace to the conscience more clearly shown; and the psalms written by David as a penitent, and during his flight from Absalom, are the most spiritual and choice and edifying of the whole Psalter. Without them the depths of self-abasement would have been left without inspired expression. The sinner in his greatest need, when crushed with the conviction of sin, when earnestly longing for forgiveness, when thirsting for the restored presence of God within his soul, and when feeling that, vile as he was, yet that he was not shut out from mercy, but that access to God's presence was still permitted him;—at all such times he would have gone to his Bible, and it would have been silent. These psalms are still the sinner's comfort, and give him the words which best express what is present in his heart. Without them the Jewish Church would never have reached that fervid purity of spiritual feeling which so animated the prophets; and even the Christian Church would possibly have stopped short of that full doctrine of repentance which she now holds. It is, indeed, the Christian's privilege to unite the doctrine of repentance with the thought of all that Christ has done and suffered for us, and so to understand why repentance avails to cleanse the heart; but even with this knowledge no Christian writer has ever reached so high a level of spirituality as David, though we may thankfully acknowledge that many of our best hymns do not fall far short of it.

It is easy, then, to see that these two histories are not only of primary importance, but that no narrative after the time of the Exodus equals them in value. They form the very kernel of the Book of the Earlier Prophets, giving us, in the first, the true meaning and spiritual import of the settlement of Israel in Palestine; and setting before us, in the second, the nature of repentance, and so preparing the way for the revelation of the gospel of pardon and peace.

They are followed by an appendix containing several narratives recorded apparently for their intrinsic value. Commentators have endeavoured to trace a connection between them, but their arguments are far-fetched, and their conclusions unsatisfactory. It is better to regard them as separate and complete, each one in itself. They are six in number: (1) the visitation of famine because of Saul's cruelty to the Gibeonites; (2) some incidents in the war with the Philistines, illustrating the heroic character of David's worthies; (3) David's psalm of deliverance; (4) David's last words; (5) a list of the Gibborim, with special records of acts of bravery and devotion; (6) the visitation of pestilence because of David's numbering the people. The third and fourth sections especially are of the highest interest; while the second makes it plain that David's bravery in encountering the giant of Gath lit up an equally bright flame of patriotic heroism in the armies of Israel.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—13.—The facts are: 1. Among the men who discuss the question of priority with Judah is a worthless man named Sheba, and he raises the cry of revolt against David, and the men of Israel follow him, while those of Judah cleave to the king. 2. David enters his house and makes arrangement for the sustenance of his concubines, who henceforth live in virtual widowhood. 3. David, observing that Amasa was tardy in executing his orders to gather the men of Judah, directs Abishai to go out with Joab's men in pursuit of Sheba. 4. While they are obeying the king's orders, Amasa joins them at Gibeon; whereupon Joab, under pretext of saluting Amasa and inquiring concerning his health, smites him, while off his guard, unto death. 5. While the pursuit after Sheba continues, one of Joab's partisans calls upon the people to show their preference for Joab and David by following after Joab, which they do when the bleeding corpse is no longer on the road to arrest their progress.

Man's revolt against Christ. The hot controversy between the men of Israel and Judah issued in more than words. The discussion took its rise in a pretended interest in the restoration of David to the throne, but, becoming mixed up with personal matters, it first developed an alienation of one part of the nation from another; and then the more humiliated section turned their alienation from their brethren into the more dangerous form of revolt against the authority of the king whom those brethren claimed as specially theirs (ch. xix. 42, 43). There is always in human society some

restless, unscrupulous spirit ready to take advantage of divergent sentiments, and form them into expressions of positive opinion and antagonistic action. The man of Belial used up the elements of discord for securing what, at first, was not contemplated —namely, an open repudiation of the right of David to exercise kingly authority over the people. In this revolt against David, the Lord's anointed, we have an illustration of the nature and some of the causes and pleas of man's revolt against Christ.

I. MAN'S REVOLT AGAINST CHRIST CONSISTS ESSENTIALLY OF A REJECTION OF A DIVINE CLAIM. Sheba not only would not have David as his king, but he distinctly indicates as chief reason his rejection of the Divine claim of David to the throne, and which the nation had previously recognized. In speaking contemptuously of him as the "son of Jesse," he clearly ignores the selection and anointing of him by Samuel in the name of God. David is not the Lord's anointed; only Jesse's son—a mere man, to be treated as any other man. The people also who followed Sheba did so on this basis—that whatever may have been once, there was now in David no more right than in any other man; he was not endowed with Divine authority. This is exactly the case with modern infidelity—men will not submit to Christ. They repudiate all claim to Divine authority. To them he is a mere man—possessing no eternal and unchallengeable right to demand the obedience of all men to his yoke. He is the Nazarene, the carpenter's Son, not the beloved Son of God, anointed of God to be Prince and Saviour. It is a simple matter of choice whether they shall accept his testimony and do what he declares is right. This spirit of revolt against the Divine in Christ is the essence of every form of modern infidelity, be it scientific rejection of the supernatural or pure agnosticism. Once recognize him as the anointed Lord of all, all forms of submission to his teaching and will follow; once reject him in this respect, and high treason is the practical issue.

II. A REJECTION OF CHRIST'S DIVINE CLAIM PROCEEDS FROM UNBELIEF IN GOD'S SELF-REVELATION TO MAN. If ever Sheba was a believer in Samuel's mission, he had certainly ceased to be so now, or else had come to believe that revelation had ceased. No one could hold to the Divine appointment of Moses and of Samuel to gradually unfold the purpose of God to Israel, and at the same time logically refuse to submit to David as king, unless he could show that God had set up another. This revolt, therefore, was the expression of a practical unbelief in the fact of a revelation of God to the Jewish people. In like manner, when we look into the reason for the rejection of the Divine claim of Christ, it is to be found in a prior assumption, namely, that a self-revelation of God to mankind by special means distinct from natural law, though not in contravention of it, is a fiction. With a dogmatism evidently based on ignorance, the supernatural is said to be impossible, *i.e.* we know so well the constitution of all things, and the only possible relation of God to all things, that we can affirm that no such a Divine Lord and King as Christ is said to be, could be a reality. He was simply a much-misunderstood man. It is obvious that, as Sheba's unbelief in Samuel's mission was no credit to his memory or historic knowledge (1 Sam. xvi. 13), so the unbelief in God's self-revelation to man is no credit to man's humility or judgment.

III. REVOLT AGAINST CHRIST'S CLAIMS THUS ORIGINATING IS SUSTAINED BY VARIOUS PLEAS. Sheba's unbelief was in the background, his pleas were in front. He could not have gained so many over to his side by any enunciation of abstract views as to the reality or continuance of a revelation of God's purpose. Men are influenced in action by more superficial and concrete forms of thought. The mistakes of David's government, his reputed partiality to the son whom he fought against, his errors of conduct in the case of Bathsheba, his apparent preference for Judah, and the apprehension that Judah would gain an ascendency in public affairs,—these pleas would give an appearance of public reason for the conduct pursued. Nor did he or his followers care to consider that incidents in a fallible life do not annihilate a Divine purpose running through that life. We find the same course adopted in relation to the authority of Christ. Though none can convict him of sin, advantage is taken of the mistakes of the Church, the seemingly tardy progress of Christianity, the peculiar structure of Old Testament history, and what seem to be occasional discrepancies in the gospel record, and, in fact, anything that can be construed into a weakness, in order to justify a total rejection of Christ's supreme authority. An ingenious mind, bent on resisting the holy Saviour, will never lack plausible reasons for open revolt.

IV. REVOLT AGAINST CHRIST IS A COURSE OF CONDUCT DEVOID OF POSITIVE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE. Sheba's principles, so far as he had any, were negative. There was nothing in his words or deeds that indicated any definite principle on which the state was to be governed. Hitherto the theocratic principle, enunciated and enforced by Samuel, regulated the setting up and setting aside of rulers. The spiritual interests of the nation were the prime concern. Now, Divine authority being ignored, there was no principle to determine the destiny of the people. The conflicting whims and passions of men were to contend for supremacy, and the grand purpose for which the nation had been hitherto supposed to exist in relation to Messiah and the world was lost to view. In the same way, the course of human affairs, without Christ, is aimless, chaotic. Infidelity and agnosticism rest on negations. Individual life is as a ship without a helm.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. There is always in human nature a latent tendency to restlessness under authority, and we should both be on our guard against this in our own lives, and also avoid whatever may develop it in others. 2. The quarrels and disputes of Christian men on matters of government and precedence may generate, by degrees, feelings of alienation from religion. 3. In this life we should not be surprised if, like David, we find the pathway of returning prosperity shaded by some transient clouds. 4. The zeal of crowds in a bad cause is more due to the influence of clever and restless leaders than to any profound convictions or intelligent views in the people themselves.

Unsanctified power. We pass over David's provision for his concubines, simply noting how wise and considerate he was in thus cutting himself free from old associations full of reminiscences of sorrow, and at the same time doing no injustice to any one concerned. The chief figure in the narrative before us is Joab, who here stands out as a strong man bent on a definite purpose, and able to carry out his will in spite of moral, social, and loyal considerations. All the other men referred to are as pigmies beside him, and the orders even of the king are so far bent to his will that he becomes practically master of the situation. Regarding him as an illustration of unsanctified power, we notice—

I. GREAT ABILITIES. Joab was a man of great natural abilities. This is obvious throughout his career. There was not one in the army to compare with him. Great natural abilities are the base of power among men. In some men they are purely intellectual, in others they are those of will. For influencing action and obtaining an ascendency over multitudes, will-force must be strong. This partly accounts for success in commerce, in statesmanship, in Church government, in popular movements.

II. STRONG PASSIONS. Passions are not abilities; they are rather the fire that feeds the energy of the will. Joab was a man whose passions were very strong, though not boisterous and impulsive. His jealousy and hatred of Amasa, who had been appointed to supersede him in command, were intense. These, blended with contempt for his inferiority, disgust at David's choice, and a lofty pride which would not deign to remonstrate with the king, formed such a strenuous force on the naturally powerful will, that to kill his rival was a decision which no ordinary obstacles could hinder in accomplishment. When unholy passions, deliberately cherished, concentrate on a powerful will, there results one of the most formidable instances of unsanctified power. Such men are to be dreaded. They cannot but make a great impression on weaker natures, and bend them to their own designs. They are illustrations of what woe comes to mankind when distinguished powers, incorporated in the constitution of man, receive a bent of evil rather than of good. A being who becomes a Miltonic Satan might be a real archangel. It is the spirit that makes the one or the other.

III. A DREAD SECRET. To many the bearing of Joab toward the authority of David in this matter of Amasa may be an enigma, seeing that he raised no revolt, but was rather zealous for the king. But that which made Joab so terrible an example of unsanctified power was his possession of the dreadful secret of Uriah's death (ch. xi. 14—25). He knew too much of David's former guilt; and so all his great natural abilities were concentrated in holding a firm grip on the king's public reputation. It is true, David had found forgiveness with God, and was a new man; but he knew that Joab had him in his power in matters that came nearest to a man's life, and Joab perfectly understood that David dared not do what otherwise he would doubtless have

done. This possession of secret knowledge concerning others always gives increased power. Whoever knows of the financial weakness of a commercial firm, or the private delinquencies of individuals, or of original social inferiority of persons aiming to figure in society, if it be known that he knows, holds a power over these parties which they dread, and which, if he be unholy, he can use in most painful form. Those are to be pitied indeed who have caused their failings and sins to become the secret of unholy men.

IV. FAMILIARITY WITH SUFFERING. Bad as great power is in a man of strong passions and possessed of special knowledge, it is a more terrible thing when the moral sensibilities have been blunted by familiarity with sufferings. Joab had seen many a man dying in agonies. War does not improve the feelings of men. It was with no compunctions of conscience, as far as we can see, that he slew Amasa. What was a bleeding corpse to the man who had smitten many a hero, and who now was governed by jealousy, hatred, contempt, and pride? It is this loss of moral sensibility which has made such men as Napoleon I. so terrible a scourge. There are other men of, perhaps, equally strong will, but their moral susceptibilities restrain them from brutality.

V. CLEARLY DEFINED PURPOSE. Joab knew what he intended to do. The narrative shows that he watched for opportunity. He did not wish to encourage revolt against royal authority, but he did wish and purpose to avenge his displacement from supreme command by the death of his rival, to prove his power to David by actually assuming the leadership and suppressing the revolt, and to vindicate before the people his superiority in the state. Purpose, clearly defined, is a practical addition to power. It avoids waste of energy, and converts subsidiary appliances into instruments of great significance. By such purpose the whole nature of the man and all his strong and unhallowed passions are condensed and concentrated into one channel.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. We see the supreme importance of prayer for the converting power of the Holy Spirit, so that men of great natural powers may have them governed by a principle according to the will of God. 2. The appearance of unhallowed feelings in the heart should be at once an occasion of prayer and self-control, as they will be sure to combine to influence us to deeds of wrong. 3. There is more real honour in being a man of lowly abilities, but under the sway of holy dispositions, than in possessing the highest powers destitute of such a disposition. 4. If we can only secure progress in life or continued possession of privileges by using abilities wickedly, it is infinitely better to lose all than thus sink deeper in moral and spiritual degradation. 5. According to our abilities will be the account we shall have to give unto God.

Vers. 14—26.—*The causes and remedies of religious strife.* The facts are: 1. Joab and his forces, pursuing Sheba till they came upon him in the city of Abel, lay siege to it. 2. A wise woman of the city remonstrates with Joab for attacking the city, and refers to the fact that when Sheba with his armed followers threw themselves into the city, the people felt sure that when the pursuing foes came up they would open negotiations with the authorities, and so bring the conflict to an end. 3. Urging the impolicy and wrong of seeking to destroy a part of the inheritance of the Lord—a city which was as a mother in Israel—she obtains from Joab a disclaimer, and a declaration that it was only the rebel and traitor Sheba that he was fighting against. 4. The wise woman, conferring with the inhabitants, secures that the head of Sheba be thrown over the wall to Joab, who then retires with his men to Jerusalem. 5. A reorganization of the officers of state is made, and Joab regains his former position as head of the army. The patriotism of Joab and a rough kind of fidelity to David manifested itself in his prompt and eager pursuit of the rebel force till it took refuge in a city and began to act on the defensive. There is no evidence that the inhabitants had formally identified themselves with the cause of Sheba, though probably there as elsewhere some disaffected men of Belial were to be found. It is not always within the competence of a city to prevent an armed force entering within its walls and virtually turning its resources against pursuers. The conflict between the opposing forces was becoming desperate, and threatened, if persisted in, to result in the destruction of the city. The horrors and wasting issues of civil war were impending. At this juncture, the more peaceably inclined portion of the inhabitants, encouraged by a woman who had gained reputation for wisdom, were anxious to avoid the calamities of continued strife, and probably

having in mind the old law of Deut. xx. 11, 12, remonstrated with Joab because he had not sought to come to terms before having recourse to arms. And here we see a fact embodying a principle, namely, that a people of one nation, speech, religion, and covenant relation to God, pause while engaged in a ruinous strife, and that it is pre-eminently desirable and right on occasions of strife to seek some basis of reconciliation.

I. THE TRUE CONDITION OF THE PROFESSED SERVANTS OF CHRIST IS THAT OF UNITY AND CONCORD. The strife between Joab's forces and the people of this city was unnatural. They were brethren, the chosen race, called and separated from all nations to work out a blessed purpose in which all men were concerned. Unity and concord became them. How good and beautiful a thing for them to dwell in harmony! The siege of Abel was a sign of an abnormal state of things. This is just what is taught in the New Testament. Christ's disciples are a holy nation, a peculiar people, called to show forth the glory of God and to bless mankind, and in his last most solemn discourses and great prayer he sets forth their unity and concord as the only state befitting them, and congruous with his spirit (John xiv.—xvii.).

II. THE BREAKING OUT OF RELIGIOUS STRIFE IS PRODUCTIVE OF SERIOUS MISCHIEF, AND THREATENS THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD WITH GREAT CALAMITIES. The fact of the strife is itself an evil, and indicates the presence somewhere of a mind alien to the mind of Christ; but also it generates evils of varied form, and intensifies their action in proportion as the spirit of strife is intense. Leaving out of view just now the revolt of Sheba against the lawful authority of David—regarding him in that respect as a type of the men who reject the authority of Christ—we see that there existed a strife between men who had not rejected David's authority. Joab was contending against the whole city of Abel as though it were hostile to him, and many in the city were contending against him as though he were an enemy. The evils of this were obvious: bad feelings were engendered and strengthened the longer the siege continued, desolation and anguish were being brought on many homes, the city as a centre of influence—a mother of children—was having its power for good cut off, and the one kingdom to which all belonged was being checked in its progress. That was the belief of the wise woman and her friends, and it was in accordance with facts. Precisely the same evils attend our more modern strifes. When subjects of the same Lord are engaged in conflict, whatever the passing occasion, there is not only a dire evil in the fact itself, but inevitably bitter unhallowed feelings find scope, many a Christian heart and home are made desolate and sad, Churches and organizations that should embody in themselves all the kindly fostering influences of mothers have their proper spiritual influence weakened, and the progress of the kingdom of love, peace, and righteousness receives a check. "The inheritance of the Lord" is laid waste. "The boar out of the wood doth waste it" (Ps. lxxx. 13).

III. THE CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS STRIFE MAY LIE IN MUTUAL MISUNDERSTANDING AND NEGLECT OF PRIMARY OBLIGATIONS. Joab fought against this city on the supposition that it was in sympathy with Sheba; and the people themselves for a while were constrained by his assaults to assume a defensive attitude. Had he at first, in accordance with Deut. xx. 11, 12, sought an interview with the elders, and had they been willing, in the spirit of that ancient rule, to receive his communications, the strife had earlier come to a close, and brethren would have been one. The beginnings of strife are very subtle, and it is hard to unravel the true causes from among the intricate thoughts and feelings of the human mind; and the incidents which occasion the appearance of strife may be as far beyond the control of communities as was the sudden throwing of an armed force by Sheba into this unguarded city. But most often strife is kept up through mutual misunderstandings. Opinions are supposed to be held which, if fairly looked at in an early stage, would not be ascribed, and motives are imagined which would disappear on closer acquaintance. Perhaps it is inevitable that, differently constituted and educated as men are, judgments must differ as to the form of expressing truth and doing Christian work; but these need not cause actual strife, if formed in a prayerful loving spirit, and all for the glory of Christ, and especially may much contention be avoided if men will but discharge the primary obligation laid down in the ancient law (John xv. 12; Matt. v. 44), of loving and praying for one another, and being frank and generous in intercourse (Matt. xviii. 15, 16).

IV. IT IS THE DUTY OF PERSONS OF REPUTED WISDOM TO BRING ALL THEIR INFLUENCE TO BEAR ON THE PROMOTION OF PEACE AND HARMONY. The "wise woman" and those of her mind in the city were but discharging a duty they owed to their city, their king, and the kingdom, when, amidst the discords of the time, they brought their superior intelligence to bear on a solution of the difficulties of the case. They evidently saw that, if more light were thrown upon the affair, and proper kindly influences were brought to bear on Joab, those would become friends who now were in the unnatural position of enemies. The leaders of opinion in the city showed their good feeling in being willing to come to terms, and their discretion in availing themselves of the superior gifts and qualities of this "wise woman." The proper place of intelligence and wisdom is at the head of movements in the direction of concord. A serious injury is inflicted on the Church in seasons of trial and conflict when men of character and repute keep in the background, and leave the conduct of affairs to inferior minds. Acquired reputation is a precious gift that should be cheerfully laid at the service of the Church, especially in seasons of sorrow. The soothing, healing power of the noblest minds is a great blessing.

V. THE OCCASION OF STRIFE BEING ASCERTAINED, EVERY EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO PUT IT AWAY. The occasion of the strife in this instance was the presence within the city of a rebel and a traitor. Had it not been for Sheba entering the city, Joab and the people would not have so misunderstood each other as to come to actual conflict. Mutual inquiry and explanations revealed the fact that he was the occasion of trouble; and therefore the citizens devised means of getting rid of him in accordance with the rude and swift justice of those times. If in our religious strifes, whether as between communities or within separate organizations, we, in our desire for peace, search out some removable occasion of them, it then becomes an imperative duty that we not only wish to see the occasion removed, but that we make vigorous efforts, though full of pain and sorrow, to put them away. What the disturbing cause may be—evil-minded men, or narrow ideas of our own, or unhallowed feeling, or an exacting temper, or undue pressure of the influence of the world—can only be found out by conscientious rigorous search; and, when found out, it will probably demand a very high and holy resolve to cast it away. Probably one chief reason why there is not more peace and harmony among Christians is that they have not the heart to go deep down into the moral causes of strife, and less heart to cut off those causes when discovered. It takes very much grace to be a thoroughgoing Christian.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. Communities and individuals should watch carefully against the intrusion within themselves of whatever may bring on a disruption of our peaceable relations to the fellowship of the saints. 2. It is possible to imagine others to be hostile in feeling to us, when, on full inquiry, it may turn out that they have been misjudged; and hence we should be careful not to be rash in imputing motives to persons who are casually placed in circumstances of seeming antagonism. 3. The influence of cities in a nation and of Christian communities in the world being maternal in character, their purity, peacefulness, and power should be most jealously guarded. 4. The influence of woman in promoting peace in the Church of God is worthy of the consideration of all, seeing that it is often under-estimated, and that its power is of the most subtle and persuasive kind. 5. We see in the removal of Sheba, the occasion of the trouble in the earthly kingdom, and the subsequent harmony of the chosen nation during the reign of David, a foreshadowing of the final removal of the great spirit of discord from the Church of God, and the consequent peace and unity of the redeemed.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—(GILGAL.) *The insurrection of Sheba.*

"We have no part in David,
And we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse;
Every man to his tents, O Israel!"
(Ver. 1; 1 Kings xii. 16.)

Before the restoration of David was completed, a new rebellion broke out. The people

were still disquieted, like the sea after a storm; the independent action of Judah in conducting the king over the Jordan aroused the jealousy of the other tribes; at Gilgal (1 Sam. xi. 15; xiii. 8—10; xv. 12, 13), where the representatives of the latter assembled and met the king, a fierce altercation ensued (ch. xix. 40—43); and shortly afterwards the trumpet was blown by Sheba the Bichrite (Gen. xlvi. 21). "He who lately (with the rest of Israel) claimed ten parts in David as king, disclaims and disowns him now, as having no part in him at all. David before had raised his hand against a faithful subject, Uriah, and therefore now a faithless subject raises his hand against him; as a man sinneth, so ofttimes he is punished. And as bees, when they are once up in a swarm, are ready to light upon every bough, so the Israelites, being stirred up by the late rebellion of Absalom, are apt here also to follow Sheba; especially finding nothing but clemency, and David's passing by their former revolt" (Guild). Concerning this insurrection, observe that (like others which have since occurred)—

I. IT AROSE OUT OF AN EVIL DISPOSITION INDULGED BY THE PEOPLE. They were: 1. *Discontented* with the government of David; the restlessness, lawlessness, and ungodliness which they displayed in joining Absalom's revolt were only partially corrected by recent chastisement (ch. xix. 9, 10); their complaint to the king concerning the conduct of "the men of Judah" (ver. 41) was due more to regard for their own honour than zeal for his; and was an indirect expression of their dissatisfaction at the disrespect which he had shown toward them, for "very probably it had been learned that he had a hand in the movement." 2. *Contentious* in their treatment of their "brethren;" ready to find occasion of offence "because of envy" and ill will; their anger being increased by the proud and contemptuous bearing of the latter. Whatever may have been the motives of the men of Judah in their recent action, they were now as blamable as the men of Israel; each party sought to exalt itself and depreciate the other; and "the words of the men of Judah were more violent than the words of the men of Israel" (ver. 43). "Grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. xv. 1, 18; xxv. 15; xxix. 22). How differently had Gideon spoken to the men of Ephraim under similar circumstances (Judg. viii. 1—3)! 3. *Self-blinded.* Indifferent to their true interests, without proper self-control, liable to surrender themselves to the guidance of an ambitious leader, and prepared for open rebellion. Having violated the spirit of unity, they were ready to destroy the formal union of the tribes, which it had cost so much to bring about, and on which their strength and prosperity so much depended. "Where jealousy and faction are, there is confusion and every vile deed" (Jas. iii. 16; iv. 1, 11).

II. IT WAS INSTIGATED BY A WORTHLESS LEADER. "A man of Belial, a Benjamite" (like Shimei, ch. xvi. 11); "a man of the mountains of Ephraim" (ver. 21); who probably took an active part in the late rebellion, and had numerous dependents. "He was one of the great rogues of the high nobility, who had a large retinue among the people, and consideration or name, as Cataline at Rome" (Luther). 1. The worst (as well as the best) elements of a people find their chief embodiment in some one man, who is the product of the prevailing spirit of his time, and adapted to be its leader.

> "Avarice, envy, pride,
> Three fatal sparks, have set the hearts of all
> On fire."
>
> (Dante.)

In his selfish ambition, Sheba sought for himself individually what the men of Israel sought for themselves as a whole. 2. Such a man clearly perceives the popular feeling and tendency, with which he sympathizes, and finds therein his opportunity for effecting his own purposes. The design of Sheba was, doubtless, to become head of a new combination of the northern tribes. 3. He seizes a suitable moment for raising his seditious cry; and, instead of quenching the sparks of discord, kindles them into a blaze. "They claim David as their own. Let them have him. We disclaim him altogether. The son of Jesse! Let every man cast off his yoke, return home, and unite with me in securing liberty, equality, and fraternity!" What at another time would have been without effect, is now irresistible with the people. Nothing is more unstable than a multitude; one day crying, "Hosanna!" another, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!"

III. IT ATTAINED A DANGEROUS MAGNITUDE. "And all the men of Israel went up

from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri" (ver. 2); "Now will Sheba do us more harm than Absalom" (ver. 6). The insurrection: 1. Was joined in by great numbers of the people. 2. Spread over the greater portion of the country. "He went through all the tribes of Israel," rousing them to action, and gaining possession of the fortified cities. 3. Threatened to produce a permanent disruption of the kingdom. "It was, in fact, all but an anticipation of the revolt of Jeroboam. It was not, as in the case of Absalom, a mere conflict between two factions in the court of Judah, but a struggle arising out of that conflict, on the part of the tribe of Benjamin to recover its lost ascendency" (Stanley). With what anxieties must it have filled the mind of the restored monarch! And how must it have led him to feel his dependence upon God! The influence for evil which one bad man sometimes exerts is enormous (Eccles. ix. 18). It is, nevertheless, limited; and, though it prevail for a season, it is at length "brought to nought" (Ps. xxxvii. 12, 20, 35—40).

IV. IT ENDED IN UTTER DISCOMFITURE. The first act of David, on arriving at Jerusalem, attended by the men of Judah, who "clave unto the king" (after setting his house in order, ver. 3), was to adopt energetic measures to put down the insurrection; and these succeeded (though in a different manner from what he expected). 1. Many who at first followed Sheba deserted him when they had time for reflection and saw the approach of the king's army; so that he found it necessary to seek safety in the far north. 2. He was beheaded by those among whom he sought refuge; and "rewarded according to his wickedness" (ch. iii. 39). "Evil pursueth sinners" (Prov. xiii. 21; xi. 19). 3. All the people returned to their allegiance. "While to men's eyes the co-operation of many evil powers seems to endanger the kingdom of God to the utmost, and its affairs appear to be confused and disturbed in the unhappiest fashion, the wonderful working of the living God reveals itself most gloriously in the unravelment of the worst entanglements, and in the introduction of new and unexpected triumphs for his government" (Erdmann).—D.

Vers. 4—13.—(GIBEON.) *The murder of Amasa.* "And Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand" (ver. 10). Amasa (son of Abigail, David's sister, and Jether an Ishmaelite, and first cousin of Joab, ch. xvii. 25) joined Absalom in his rebellion; and must have been a man of great ability, courage, and influence, from the fact that he was appointed by him "captain of the host instead of Joab," and afterwards promised by David the same post (ch. xix. 13). This promise "involved no injustice to Joab himself, for he had long been notorious for too great severity in war, and had just acted with such direct disobedience to the royal command in Absalom's case, that it was impossible to overlook his offence without endangering the royal prerogative" (Ewald). Whilst it was adapted to conciliate the men of Judah, it was, nevertheless, certain to give offence to Joab and cause future trouble. It does not appear that he was formally replaced by Amasa; but the commission given to the latter (ver. 4) "was intended as the commencement of the fulfilment of the promise" (Keil). And when he exhibited undue delay in its fulfilment (ver. 5), David, "wishing to have nothing to do with Joab," sent Abishai to pursue after Sheba (ver. 6). "And there went out after him Joab's men" (ver. 7) under Joab (who deemed himself still commander-in-chief). At "the great stone which is in Gibeon" (ch. ii. 13; xxi. 1; 1 Chron. xxi. 29) he met Amasa returning with his military levies, and on saluting him with the kiss of peace, dealt him his death-blow (vers. 8—10); passed on, followed (after a brief hesitation at the spectacle of their murdered captain) by "all the people;" finished the war, and returned to Jerusalem. In this tragedy notice: 1. *The danger of holding a responsible position by one who is ill qualified for it* through want of natural ability, proper antecedents, timely appointment, public confidence, adequate zeal and energy. "The cause of Amasa's delay is not stated. It may have been the unwillingness of the men of Judah to place themselves under the orders of Amasa (contrast vers. 13 and 14), or it may have been caused by a wavering or hesitation in the loyalty of Amasa himself. This last is evidently insinuated in ver. 11, and no doubt this was the pretext, whether grounded in fact or not, by which Joab justified the murder of Amasa before David" ('Speaker's Commentary'). 2. *The tendency of repeated crimes to induce more daring criminality.* This was Joab's third murder (ch. iii. 27; xviii. 14), in addition to his complicity in the death of Uriah; less excusable, more guileful,

malicious, and reckless than any other; his motive being jealousy of a rival. "No life is safe that stands in his way, but from policy he never sacrifices the most insignificant life without a purpose" (ch. ii. 27—30; xviii. 16; xx. 20). "By degrees men grow more and more bold and unfeeling in the commission of crimes of every kind; until they vindicate and glory in their villainies; and when such daring offenders are actuated by ambition or revenge, they will not be restrained by the ties of relationship or friendship; nay, they will employ the guise and language of love to obtain the opportunity of perpetrating the most atrocious murders. The beginning of evil should therefore in everything be decisively resisted" (Scott). 3. *The infliction of deserved punishment by an unauthorized and wicked hand.* "Amasa is innocent of the crime of seeking Joab's place, for which he is murdered by him, yet he is guilty before God for his siding with Absalom. Whereupon we collect that ofttimes men suffer innocently for some crimes that are laid to their charge, and in respect of the persons who are the pursuers; yet in God's judgment they are justly punished for other sins, wherein either they have been spared or else have not been noted to the world; and as many at the hour of their death and execution, publicly have acknowledged" (Guild). 4. *The commission of a great crime by one who possesses great abilities and renders great public services.* Alas! that a man of such military skill, practical sagacity, and tried fidelity as Joab (now far advanced in life), should have been so "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin"! Once more he saved the monarchy; and once more David was compelled to bear with him (ch. iii. 39; xix. 13). "He probably felt obliged to show some indulgence to a man who was indispensable to him as a soldier, and who, notwithstanding his culpable ferocity, never lost sight of his master's interests." His indulgence was doubtless also due, in part, to the consciousness of his own sin (Ps. li. 3), which made him unwilling to inflict the penalty of the law on one who had been his partner in guilt. But at length judgment overtakes the transgressor; the Law is vindicated; and the ways of God to men are justified (1 Kings ii. 5, 6, 28—35). Near the very spot where his crowning act of perfidy was perpetrated, Joab received his death-blow from the hand of Benaiah (1 Chron. xvi. 39).—D.

Vers. 15—22.—(ABEL-BETH-MAACAH.) *A peacemaker.* "Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear! hear!" (ver. 16). 1. Hard pressed by the forces of Joab, Sheba threw himself into the fortified city of Abel-beth-Maachah (in the north-west extremity of Palestine). The feelings of its inhabitants toward him are not stated. But Joab soon appeared; and, without entering into any negotiations with them, made preparations for attack. "Taking advantage of an oblong knoll of natural rock that rises above the surrounding plain, the original inhabitants raised a high mound sufficiently large for the city. With a deep trench and strong wall it must have been almost impregnable. The besiegers cast up a mount against the city, 'and it stood in the trench'" etc. (Thomson, 'The Land and the Book'). A deadly conflict was imminent. 2. At this juncture a wise woman presented herself at the wall; and, having obtained a hearing, sought to make peace; nor was her endeavour fruitless. "There was a little city," etc. (Eccles. ix. 14, 15). "Wisdom is better than strength. Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroyeth much good" (Eccles. ix. 16, 18). As one bad man exposed the city to destruction, so one good woman effected its deliverance. 3. There is often much *need* of a *peacemaker* to heal the strife that arises between individuals, families, cities, Churches, and nations. Regarded as an example to others, this "wise woman" of Abel—

I. POSSESSED AN EXCELLENT SPIRIT; observant, prudent, sagacious, peaceful, faithful, just, and benevolent. Hence she was prompted to go of her own accord, individually and independently, to "seek peace, and pursue it" (1 Pet. iii. 11; Ps. xxxiv. 12—16; Gen. xiii. 8, 9). 1. Being *grieved at the sight of strife between brethren*, and the prospect of the miseries which they were about to inflict on each other. 2. Being *desirous of preventing the evil* which threatened them, and promoting their welfare. Her chief concern was about her own city, which was likely to be the greater sufferer; but she was also (like Joab, ver. 20) concerned about others, and the general good of Israel, in which Abel was "a mother-city," a part of "the inheritance of Jehovah" (ver. 19). 3. Having *faith in the common sense of men*, their regard for their own interest (when they saw it, not blinded by prejudice), their love of justice, their generally good intentions

(when not under the influence of wrath and revenge), and their susceptibility to the power of persuasion. 4. Being *determined to make every possible effort* and sacrifice, and undergo any personal risk and suffering for the sake of peace. She was doubtless willing (as others have been) to lay down her own life if thereby the lives of others might be spared. "Peacemakers are fire-quenchers, who, although they may with plying of engines and much ado, rescue a pile of buildings from the flames, yet their eyes will be sure to smart with the smoke" (R. Harris).

II. ADOPTED AN ADMIRABLE METHOD; thereby justifying the "wisdom" with which she was credited. Perceiving that there was some misunderstanding between the contending parties, her aim was to clear it up; if there were any real cause of contention, to remove it; and thus dispose them to peace. This she endeavoured to effect by: 1. Seizing the *opportune moment* for interposition; promptly availing herself of the pause before the attack. Instead of "battered the wall" (Authorized Version), read, "were devising to throw down the wall." There is generally such a time for the work of a peacemaker, which, if it be neglected, may be afterwards too late. 2. Making use of *courteous, gentle, reasonable, and impressive speech.* "Hear the words of thine handmaid." Like the woman of Tekoah (ch. xiv. 4), she was a mistress in the art of persuasion. "The tongue of the wise is health" (Prov. xii. 18); "a tree of life" (Prov. xv. 4; x. 20; xviii. 21). 3. *Ascertaining the nature of the misunderstanding,* and the occasion of complaint; and, for this purpose, going directly and separately to the persons concerned, and learning it from their own lips. She knew the sentiments of her people, especially that they felt aggrieved that no communications should have been made to them by Joab, and suspected his destructive and merciless designs. And now she sought to discover what were his real thoughts and purposes in relation to them. How much mischief would be prevented if contending parties would only be at pains to understand one another! 4. *Removing all misconception,* and producing the conviction in each party of the just aims and good intentions of the other. To Joab she said, "You evidently deem this city deficient in good sense; whereas it has been always noted for its wisdom and conciliatory disposition and counsel. You think the people contentious and rebellious; I assure you in their name that we are among the most peaceable and faithful in Israel. Yet, without any communication with us, so as to ascertain our feelings, and without any reasonable cause, you are about to give an important city of Israel to the devouring sword. Why will you bring to ruin what belongs to the Lord?" On the other hand, from his reply, it was made apparent that he was not desirous of their destruction (as they supposed), but only sought to inflict a just punishment on a notorious traitor in their midst, and was under the necessity (if, as he had supposed, they harboured him, participated with him in rebellion, and resolved to defend him to the utmost) of making an attack upon them for that purpose. "Far be it, far be it from me . . . The matter is not so," etc. (vers. 20, 21). Misunderstanding was now at an end, but a real occasion of difference remained. 5. Obtaining *needful concessions* on both sides. "Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city . . . Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee through the wall." If (as is doubtful) the people had (from whatever reason) at first shown favour to the cause of Sheba, they were now persuaded by her to do otherwise, "and so they ended the matter." 6. Requiring *no sacrifice of principle;* but only urging a course conformable to "goodness, righteousness, and truth," and consistent with professed obedience to the will of the Lord. "The just punishment of one atrocious criminal is frequently mercy to great numbers" (Scott). "Follow peace with all men, and holiness" (Heb. xii. 14; Rom. xiv. 19; Jas. iii. 17, 18).

III. ACHIEVED AN EMINENT TRIUMPH—the triumph of peace. "And he blew the trumpet" (ver. 22) summoning to peace, as Sheba had blown it summoning to war (ver. 1). It was a victory over error, distrust, wilfulness, wrath, injustice, rebellion; and one by which: 1. An immense evil was prevented. 2. The general good was promoted. 3. The Divine kingdom (as represented in the government of David) was confirmed. 4. The peacemaker's joy was fulfilled. The wise woman accomplished what she had set her heart upon; and in blessing others was herself blessed. "Blessed are the peacemakers," etc. (Matt. v. 9). "Of the following things," said a Jewish rabbi, "men reap the fruits both in the present and the future life—honouring father and mother, bestowing benefits, and making peace between men."

REMARKS. 1. It is hardly possible to estimate too highly the worth of peace among men. 2. Those who would make peace between others must themselves be at peace with God, with their own hearts, and with their neighbours. The peacemaker must not be a peacebreaker. 3. The greatest Peacemaker the world has ever seen is Jesus Christ, who is "our Peace" (Eph. ii. 14). 4. In proportion as we partake of his spirit we shall endeavour to heal all unholy strife and promote "peace on earth."—D.

VERS. 1, 2.—*Departure from and adherence to Christ.* A sudden change in the aspect of affairs. The occasion was a fierce dispute between the Israelites and the men of Judah as to the right of the latter to go so far towards the restoration of the king without consulting the former. The causes, however, are to be found partly in old jealousies between the tribes; partly in the unallayed resentment of the Benjamites on account of the setting aside of the house of Saul from the royalty, and its transfer to the tribe of Judah; partly in the excitement of men's minds by the rebellion under Absalom, and its suppression. A spark only was wanted to produce another desolating flame, and that was supplied by the sudden summons of Sheba to the men of Israel. Hence another insurrection, which seems to have been begun without consideration, and which was brought to an end speedily and ignominiously. The men of Israel followed Sheba; but those of Judah "clave unto their king," and conducted him "from Jordan even to Jerusalem." The division thus for the time produced has its counterpart in the spiritual sphere. It may serve to illustrate especially the more open and manifest departures from the Divine King which at times occur, under, perhaps, some leader, and the steadfast adherence to him of his friends, which, at such times, becomes more pronounced and manifest.

I. THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF DEFECTION FROM CHRIST. 1. *Its nature.* It is the casting off of his rule over mind, heart, life. It may be secret or it may be open, and may be with or without emphatic declaration, with or without open adherence to a leader of rebellion against him. But it ought not to be confounded with separation from a particular Church, or renunciation of a particular humanly constructed creed. We do wrong if we condemn any one as having departed from Christ because he has departed from us. There is room for great variety of conception and expression as to Christian truth, and of modes of sincerely and truly serving Christ; and he recognizes, as loyal subjects of his, many in all Churches, and not a few outside all Churches. At the same time, it must be, and ought to be, distinctly maintained that to reject his supreme authority in matters of belief and practice, to think and express our thoughts without regard to his teaching, to feel and act without recognition of his commands, is to reject him; to openly declare that we no longer recognize his authority is open rebellion against him. 2. *Its causes.* (1) Original unreality in professed adherence to Christ. The religion of many is hereditary and traditional, and therefore only formal. They have experienced no radical change of heart. They are without true faith and love. "They have no root," and so "in time of temptation fall away" (Luke viii. 13). (2) Dislike of the government and laws of Christ. Their holiness, the extent of their requirements, their unbending nature, the restraints they impose. Pride revolts against them, and self-will, and carnality in general; and the propounders of religions that are more indulgent to the lower nature are eagerly listened to and accepted. (3) Superficial feeling as to the need of Christ. He is not felt to be indispensable to the soul; to part from him is not felt to involve very serious loss. (4) Neglect of devotion. It is by habits of prayer and other spiritual exercises that the soul is kept in communion with Christ, and his Spirit received, through whose influences faith, love, and obedience are maintained in vigour. The kingdom of Christ is spiritual, and can be realized only through the power of the Holy Ghost. (5) Dissatisfaction with the results of serving Christ. A superficial religion must be unsatisfactory; and when the vanity of its exercises and fruits is felt, no wonder if it should be given up altogether. To experience the substantial blessedness of serving Christ, we must commit ourselves to him heartily and wholly. Then we shall know too well his preciousness to heed those who would entice us to forsake him. (6) The influence of others. The men of Israel would not have deserted David when they did, if Sheba had not blown his trumpet and summoned them to follow him. In like manner, the latent disloyalty of men to Christ may remain concealed, and they may appear to be, and regard themselves as being, his

good subjects, until some bolder spirit heads a revolt, and "draws away disciples after him" (Acts xx. 30). Or the pernicious influence may come from inconsistent Christians, unworthy ministers of religion, or corrupt Churches. Men do not sufficiently distinguish between Christ and his professed representatives, and find in the evil discerned in them an excuse for deserting him. (7) Disbelief of Christ's power, or will, to execute justice on those who are unfaithful to him. Did men realize the tremendous issues involved in cleaving to or rejecting Christ, they would not so loosely hold their religion or so readily abandon it. Did they seriously regard his picture of the doom of those who will not have him for their King (Luke xix. 27) as representing an awful reality, they would be more concerned to escape it.

II. REASONS WHICH INDUCE THE FAITHFUL TO CLEAVE TO THEIR KING, WHOEVER MAY DESERT HIM. 1. *Faith in his Divine authority.* That he is King by Divine right, and must and will reign, and make all his foes his footstool (Ps. ii.; cx. 1; 1 Cor. xv. 25). 2. *Love to him.* Originating in gratitude for his redeeming love, becoming attachment to him from discernment and approval of his infinite excellences, and to his government and laws, because the renewed heart is in harmony with them. 3. *Experience of the blessings of his reign.* In the heart, the home, the people who truly serve him. Hence, intense satisfaction with his service. 4. *Hope of a yet happier experience when his reign is fully established and perfected.* Hope, as the "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Heb. vi. 19), keeps the soul steadfast when storms of temptation arise. To give up Christ would be, it is felt, to give up hope of glory in his "everlasting kingdom" (2 Pet. i. 11). 5. *Perception of the worthlessness of his rivals.* Observe the contrast presented between Sheba and David—the one "a man of Belial" (worthlessness), the other "their king." Similarly, when "many of Christ's disciples went back, and walked no more with him," and he, turning to the twelve, asked, "Will ye also go away?" Peter exclaimed, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John vi. 66—69). And still we may ask, "To whom shall we go?" Where shall we find one to take the place of Christ? Who has equal claims on our confidence and affection? Who can confer equal benefits? Not the irreligious multitude, whether of the coarser or the more refined sort. Not the leaders of sceptical thought, some of whom simply ignore all that renders Christ precious to the Christian; others maintain that nothing can be known of God, and that all that is believed respecting him and his relation to men belongs to the region of imagination, not of truth; and others proffer a religion without a God. The Christian sees that all who would tempt him to forsake his Lord can offer him as substitutes only "vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver" (1 Sam. xii. 21). 6. *Expectation of the coming of Christ.* The account to be then rendered, the judgments to be pronounced, the rewards and punishments to be distributed. The certainty that "he," and only he, "that shall endure unto the end shall be saved" (Matt. xxiv. 13). For these reasons, and such as these, some of which are felt most by one, and some by another; whilst many may follow this or that pretender, Christians who are really such will "cleave unto their King." —G. W.

Ver. 19.—*Peaceableness and faithfulness.* "I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel." The wise woman probably spoke in these words, not so much for herself, as for the inhabitants of her town, which Joab was besieging. Hence the adjectives are plural. She pleads the peacefulness and fidelity of the people as a reason for sparing them. It was no fault of theirs that a traitor had taken refuge amongst them. Joab acknowledges the force of her plea, and promises to depart if Sheba were delivered up to him—a promise which he fulfilled when the head of the traitor had been flung to him over the wall. The qualities here mentioned are of inestimable value; in an individual in relation to his neighbours, fellow-citizens, and fellow-Christians; in a family as between its members, and in relation to other families; in a town, between its inhabitants, and in respect to other towns; in a country, between the various classes of the people, between the people and their rulers, and in relation to other countries; and in a Church, as between its members, and in its relations with other Churches and with the community at large. They are the subject of many Scripture injunctions and promises They are fruits of the Spirit; essential parts of the character of a Christian;

the natural product of the gospel in those who really believe it. "The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace" (Rom. xiv. 17); "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness" (Gal. v. 22, Revised Version); "Love truth and peace" (Zech. viii. 19, Revised Version).

I. PEACEABLENESS. This Christian virtue is very frequently inculcated in the Scriptures, especially the New Testament. 1. *Its nature.* It consists in a disposition to live in harmony and friendliness with all. It shows itself by courtesy and kindness; by avoidance of contention and quarrels; by carefulness not to give just or needless provocation to others; by meek endurance of provocation and even injustice from others; by readiness to give and receive explanation and apology; by quiet, unobtrusive performance of one's own duties, and abstinence from intermeddling with other people's business; by overlooking small offences, and readiness to forgive greater. 2. *Its sources.* In some it is a natural disposition. As a Christian virtue it springs from: (1) Christian love—love to Christian brethren as such, and love to all. This prompts those in whom it reigns to seek the happiness of others, and to put the most charitable construction on their conduct. It also subdues the irascible dispositions, and the selfishness which so readily leads to alienation and contention. (2) Christian humility. "By pride cometh contention" (Prov. xiii. 10). The proud exaggerate their own claims, expect too much from others, resent slight offences, insist on unreasonable reparation. But the humble avoid, without effort, such occasions of strife. Thus love and humility promote peace; and all the influences and motives which produce and foster the former are equally favourable to the latter. 3. *Its benefits.* (1) To the peaceable themselves. It is itself happiness. It secures the good will of others, the enjoyment of which is happiness. It is a frame of mind favourable to the cultivation and growth of all Christian virtues; and to all those devout exercises by which these are nourished and the favour of God realized. (2) To society. The absence of the annoyance and discomfort which the contentious occasion. The enjoyment of quietness and rest. The peaceable are also peacemakers, and promote a pacific disposition in others. If all men were peaceable, wars, small and great alike, would cease.

II. FAITHFULNESS. "Faithful," on the lips of the wise woman, probably meant "loyal" to the king. It might well include also uprightness in general. "We are a people not only peaceful, but (as the word is) reliable, trustworthy. We are honest, just, steadily occupied with a faithful discharge of our duties, at once to God, to each other, and to the state." Fidelity must be associated with peaceableness to form a noble Christian character; fidelity to Christ and God, to conscience and conviction, to truth and duty, to promises and engagements; fidelity to those to whom we are variously related in family, social, ecclesiastical, and national life. This gives strength to the character, as gentleness and peacefulness give beauty. The two qualities are not incompatible, but mutually helpful. A peaceful spirit prevents fidelity from becoming harsh, censorious, meddlesome, fierce. Fidelity prevents peacefulness from becoming an immoral weakness, which disregards justice and truth, is ever making unworthy compromises, and would rather sacrifice the highest principles than run the risk of arousing the passions of men by asserting and defending them. Only "the wisdom that is from above," which "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy" (Jas. iii. 17, Revised Version); in other words, the teaching of the Holy Spirit,—can enable us to give to each of these virtues, peacefulness and faithfulness, its due place.—G. W.

Ver. 19.—*Seeking to destroy God's inheritance.* "Why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the Lord?" The nation of Israel was called the "inheritance" of God, because specially chosen and set apart for himself, and therefore specially valued and cared for (see Deut. iv. 20; ix. 26, 29). The "wise woman," in remonstrating with Joab against his assault on Abel, applies the term to that part of the people which dwelt there. It was an assertion of their right, as belonging to the chosen people, to be protected, not destroyed. The corresponding word in the New Testament is used of the everlasting possession which Christians will inherit, not of Christians themselves (unless Eph. i. 18 be an exception). But the idea is presented in other words (see 1 Pet. ii. 9, "a people for God's own possession," Revised Version); and the remonstrance might be appropriately addressed to any who seek to destroy the Church of God.

I. CHRISTIANS ARE THE LORD'S INHERITANCE. That part of mankind which is specially his. 1. Which he has peculiarly appropriated. All the world is his; but, while he has left the larger portion of it for a time comparatively waste, he has in a special manner claimed and separated this for himself. 2. For which he specially cares, bestowing upon it peculiar culture, watching over it with special interest. 3. From which he expects and receives special returns. Of thought, love, confidence, praise, "fruits of righteousness" (Phil. i. 11), glory (Matt. v. 16). The words, "inheritance of the Lord," may be applied to the whole Church; or (according to the analogy of the text) to any part of it, any Christian society; or to individual Christians. And it is fitted to awaken in them reflections as to the degree in which they are worthy of the name, and to encourage the sincere to expect the special protection and blessing of God.

II. THERE ARE ATTEMPTS TO DESTROY GOD'S INHERITANCE. Some are wrongly charged with such attempts. Joab declared truly that his aim was not to "swallow up or destroy" (ver. 20). He only wished to punish a traitor, by doing which he would serve instead of injuring "the inheritance of the Lord." In like manner, men who endeavour to purify the Church from error and sinful practices may be wrongly charged with seeking to destroy what their desire is to conserve. Reformers are often regarded as destructives. Such, however, do need to be cautioned lest anything in their spirit or measures should injure what is good more than correct what is evil. Some, again, injure God's inheritance without deliberate intention. Unworthy ministers of religion, hypocrites, and inconsistent Christians are of this class. But others are chargeable with *endeavouring* to destroy God's inheritance. 1. *Such as attempt to destroy faith in the great Christian verities.* Could they succeed, there would be no Christianity, no Church, no "inheritance of the Lord," left in the world. 2. *Persecutors of Christians in general, or of particular sections of them.* Various bodies of Christians have in turn sought not to convince (which is right), but to root out, their fellow-Christians, employing the civil power, if that were at their command, or, if not, using their wealth or social influence to oppress or entice in order to suppress.

III. THE EXPOSTULATION OF THE TEXT MAY BE JUSTLY ADDRESSED TO THOSE WHO MAKE SUCH ATTEMPTS. "Why wilt thou swallow up," etc.? The words may be used to urge consideration of: 1. *The reasons and motives which prompt the attempts.* Such as: (1) Hatred of piety and holiness. This often impels infidels in their assaults on the faith of Christians; but many who are called Christians, if they examined themselves, would find that it was also the motive of their endeavours to suppress Christians more in earnest than themselves. (2) Love of domination. (3) Pride of superiority, real or supposed. (4) Indignation at faithful testimony or reproof. (5) Inability to discern the marks of God's true people. The external being regarded to the exclusion of the internal and spiritual; the essential qualities being overlooked because dissociated from certain over-estimated accidentals. A blindness produced by a narrow education, or exclusive intercourse with one kind of Christians. (6) Unholy zeal, such as actuated St. Paul before his conversion (Acts xxvi. 9; Phil. iii. 6; comp. John xvi. 2). The assailants of the Church or any part or member of it may well be urged to pause and consider their real spirit and motives; and whether these will bear reflection, or are capable of justification. 2. *The impiety and unrighteousness of such attempts.* The wise woman suggests to Joab, by the words she uses, that he would be guilty of these sins if he persisted in his assault on the town. So those who assail the Church of God: (1) Sin against God. Whose inheritance they are invading. So far as they succeed, they lessen God's part in society and its affairs; they injure those who are precious in his sight ("He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye," Zech. ii. 8; comp. Acts ix. 4; Rom. iv. 15, 20; 1 Cor. viii. 12). The friends of God should shrink from any conduct which tends to lessen the testimony for him in the world, and cripple those who are desirous of promoting his kingdom according to their lights. (2) They violate the rights of Christians. Every part of the Christian community is entitled to liberty of profession and "prophesying" (see Bishop Jeremy Taylor's treatise on this subject), and to sympathy and all possible help from the rest. All good citizens are entitled to the protection of the state, and cannot be justly persecuted by it on account of their religion. 3. *Their futility.* "The inheritance of the Lord" cannot be really "swallowed up," although certain portions of it may for a time be injured. "Upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"

(Matt. xvi. 18). 4. *The retribution which will surely follow them.* Christians who, in their blindness, make them in any degree, receive loss and injury thereby in their own souls and in their influence for good; the enemies of God will find that he is too mighty for them. He will "plead his own cause" (Ps. lxxiv. 22), and "avenge his elect" (Luke xviii. 7).—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXI.

Ver. 1.—**There was a famine in the days of David**; Hebrew, *and there was.* There is an entire absence of any mark of time to show in what part of David's reign this famine took place. It does not even follow, from the mention of Mephibosheth's name, that it must have happened at a time subsequent to the sending for that prince from Machir's house; for it may have been the search after the descendants of Saul which made David remember the son of his old friend. The burial, however, of the bones of Saul and Jonathan as an act of respect to the slaughtered king makes it probable that the narrative belongs to the early part of David's reign, as also does the apparent fact that the seven victims were all young and unmarried. Mephibosheth, we read, had a young son when David sent for him. Now, he was five years old when his father was slain (ch. iv. 4), and thus at the end of David's reign of seven years and a half at Hebron, he would be twelve and a half years of age. The famine lasted three years, and if David had been king four or five years when the famine began, Mephibosheth, at the age of twenty, might well have a "young son" in a country where men marry early. We cannot believe that the famine occurred long after David had been king of all Israel, because manifestly it would have been unjust and even monstrous to punish a nation for the sins of a king who had long passed away. The sins of its rulers are visited upon a nation constantly through a long series of years, but it is always in the way of natural development. A statesman may put a nation upon a wrong track, and may involve it in serious difficulties, and even in irretrievable disaster, unless some one be raised up able to make it retrace its steps and regain the rightful direction. But this famine was a direct interference of Providence, and to justify it the sin must be still fresh in the national remembrance. Had it been an old crime long ago forgotten, instead of leading men to repentance, this long and terrible punishment would have hardened men's hearts, and made them regard the Deity as vindictive. It is even probable that the sin was still being committed; for though commenced and approved by Saul, his oppression and purpose of gradually destroying the native races was too much in accord with men's usual way of acting not to be continued, unless stopped by the justice of the ruler. We all know how the Red Indian, the Bushman, the Maori, and the Australian disappear before the advance of the white man. It needs only apathy on the part of the government, and rougher methods for clearing them off are practised than men would care to own. So with Gibeonites and Perizzites and other native races, a similar process would be going on. The lands they held, their little villages, their pastures, and above all their strongholds, would be coveted by the dominant race, and encroachments would lead to quarrels, in which the natives would find any resistance on their part punished as rebellion. Even David seized the hill-fortress of Jebus for his capital, though he still left Araunah the nominal title of king (ch. xxiv. 23). Saul had lent all the weight of the royal authority to the extermination of the natives, and this chapter records the Divine condemnation of wrong done by the dominant race to the aborigines. It remains to this day the charter for their protection, and not only forbids their extinction, but requires that they shall be treated with fair and even justice, and their rights respected and maintained. It has been objected that the execution of Saul's seven sons was a political crime committed to render David's throne secure. If at all to his advantage, it was so only to a very slight extent. The sons of Rizpah could never have become pretenders to the throne; nor were the sons of Merab likely to be much more dangerous. In a few years they would have married, and formed other ties, and been merged in the general population. Mephibosheth was the heir of Saul, and David protected him and Micha his son. It was quite in the spirit of the times to visit upon Saul's house the sins of its chief. The principle was the same as when all Israel stoned Achan, his sons and his daughters, his oxen and his asses, his sheep and his tent, for bringing iniquity upon the people (Josh. vii. 24, 25). We keep chiefly in view the doctrine of personal responsibility; in the Old Testament the other doctrine of the collective responsibility of a family, a city, a nation, was made the more prominent. It was the Prophet Ezekiel who in ch. xviii. stated clearly and with Divine force that

"the soul that sinneth it shall die;" but that the sinner's son, if he walk in God's statutes, shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live. But the collective responsibility enacted in the second commandment is still God's law. In the philosophic jargon of our times the two factors which form human character and decide our fortunes are "heredity and environment." Heredity was the prevailing sentiment in David's days; and it seemed right to the Gibeonites that the sons of the man who had slaughtered them should die for their father's sins; and it seemed just to David also. But he spared the heir to Saul's throne. There is no adequate reason for supposing that David was influenced by political motives, and the more important lesson of the narrative is the emphatic condemnation given in it of wrong and cruelty to aboriginal tribes. **David inquired of the Lord**; Hebrew, *David sought the face of Jehovah*. The phrase is remarkable, and not found elsewhere in Samuel. Probably it means that he went to Gibeon to pray in the sanctuary, and consult God by Urim and Thummim. **His bloody house.** The Hebrew means "the house on which rested the guilt of murder."

Ver. 2.—**Saul sought to slay them in his zeal.** We gather from various incidental circumstances that Saul, in some part of his reign, manifested great zeal in an attempt to carry out literally the enactments of the Levitical Law; but he seems to have done so with the same ferocity as that which he displayed in slaughtering the priests at Nob with their wives and children. Thus he had put to death wizards and all who dealt with familiar spirits (1 Sam. xxviii. 9), in accordance with Exod. xxii. 18 and Lev. xx. 6. In the same way he seems to have tried to exterminate the aboriginal inhabitants of Palestine, in accordance with Deut. vii. 2, and had especially massacred a large number of Gibeonites, in violation of the covenant made with them by Joshua and all Israel (Josh. ix. 3, 15—27). And as he would thus acquire "fields and vineyards" robbed from them to give to his captains, his conduct was probably popular, and the cause of a general system of wrong and oppression practised upon all the natives. It had thus become a national sin, and as such was punished by a national calamity. **Amorites**; that is highlanders, mountaineers. Strictly they were Hivites (Josh. ix. 7).

Ver. 3.—**Wherewith shall I make the atonement**, etc.? Literally the verb means to "cover up," the idea being that of a veil drawn over the offence to conceal it by means of a gift or offering. Thence gradually it attained to its religious idea of an expiation.

Ver. 4.—**No silver nor gold.** It is a common practice in most semi-civilized nations for a fine to be accepted as compensation for the shedding of blood. As no distinction was drawn between murder and homicide, and as the nearest relative was bound in every case to revenge the blood shed, the custom of receiving a money compensation gradually grew up to prevent the tribe or nation being torn to pieces by interminable revenge. The Arabs still retain this usage, but it was forbidden by the Levitical Law (Numb. xxxv. 31), and rightly so, because a distinction was there made between murder and accidental bloodshed, and precautions taken for the rescue of one who had not acted with malice. **Neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel.** The singular is used at the beginning of their answer, in the same way as in ch. xix. 42, 43. Literally their words are, *It is not to me a matter of silver and gold with Saul and his house, nor is it for us to put to death any one in Israel;* that is, "We refuse a money compensation, and it is beyond our power to exact the blood-penalty which would gratify our anger." They make it quite plain that they do want blood, while the Authorized Version makes them say that they do not. The Revised Version more correctly translates, "Neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel."

Ver. 5.—**The man that consumed us**, etc. The strong language of this verse makes it plain that Saul had been guilty, not merely of some one great act of cruelty, but of a long series of barbarities intended to bring about their utter extirpation.

Ver. 6.—**We will hang them.** The punishment indicated here really was impalement, but in Numb. xxv. 4, where the same verb is used, we find that the criminals were put to death first, and that the impalement was for the purpose of exposing their bodies to view, like the practice a century ago of gibbeting. But the Gibeonites were probably very barbarous, and, when David had delivered the seven lads into their hands, would perhaps wreak upon them a cruel vengeance. *Seven* were chosen, because it is the perfect number, with many religious associations; **and unto the Lord** means "publicly." So among the Romans *sub Jove* meant "in the open air" (comp. Numb. xxv. 4). **In Gibeah.** This was Saul's native place and home, and was selected by the Gibeonites as the spot where the bodies should be exposed, to add to the humiliation and shame of the fallen dynasty. **Saul, whom the Lord did choose.** If this reading is correct, the phrase can only be used as a taunt. But in ver. 9 we find *bahar*, "on the hill," instead of *behir*, "chosen," and the right reading probably is, "in Gibeah, on the hill of Jehovah."

Ver. 8.—**Michal.** It was Merab who became the wife of Adriel the Meholathite (1 Sam. xviii. 19). Michal was childless (see ch. vi. 23). **Whom she brought up for.** This is one of the many cases of untrustworthiness in the renderings of the Authorized Version. We have noticed a very flagrant instance before in ch. v. 21. The object of these mistranslations is always the same, namely, to remove some verbal discrepancy in the Hebrew text. The Hebrew says here "five sons of Michal, whom she bare to Adriel;" but Michal never bore a child, therefore something must be substituted which will save the Hebrew from this verbal inaccuracy, and Michal must be represented as having taken Merab's place (perhaps at her death), and been foster-mother to her children. This explanation is, it is true, taken from the Jewish Targum; but the Targum never professes to be an exact translation, and constantly perverts the meaning of the plainest passages for preconceived reasons.

Ver. 9.—**The beginning of barley harvest.** The barley became ripe in April, about the time of the Passover (Deut. xvi. 9). The wheat was not ripe till Pentecost.

Ver. 10.—**Rizpah . . . took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock;** rather, *against the rock*, so as to form a little hut or shelter to protect her from the glaring blaze of the sunshine. The word "upon" has led many commentators to suppose that she used it as a bed; but this is not the meaning of the Hebrew, though given by the Vulgate. The sackcloth was the loose wrapper or cloak which formed the outer dress of mourners. As regards the bodies of those crucified or impaled, the Law required that they should be taken down and buried that same evening (Deut. xxi. 23). Here they remained exposed for six months, as a grim trophy of Gibeonite vengeance. **Until water dropped upon them out of heaven;** Hebrew, *was poured upon them;* until copious and heavy rains came. The outpouring of these rains would put an end to the famine, and be regarded as a proof that the wrath of Heaven was appeased. There is no reason for supposing that these rains came before the usual period, in autumn, which was about the middle of October. Thus, for six months, with no other protection than her mantle of sackcloth hung against the rock, this noble woman watched the decaying bodies of her loved ones, until at last her devoted conduct touched David's heart, and their remains were honourably interred.

Ver. 12.—**The street of Beth-shan;** Hebrew, *the broad place*, or square, just inside the gate, where the citizens met for business. It was upon the wall of this square that the Philistines had hanged the bodies of Saul and of his sons (1 Sam. xxxi. 12). **The men of Jabesh-Gilead;** Hebrew, *the lords* or owners *of Jabesh-Gilead.* The phrase occurs also in 1 Sam. xxiii. 11, 12 of the citizens of Keilah, and is found also in the Books of Joshua and Judges. (For the brave exploit of these men in rescuing the bodies of their king and his sons, see 1 Sam. xxxi. 11—13; and for David's generous approval, ch. ii. 5.)

Ver. 14.—**The bones of Saul and Jonathan.** The Septuagint adds, "and the bones of them that were hanged." As it is expressly said in ver. 13 that these bones were collected, we cannot doubt but that the remains of the seven grandsons were interred with those of Saul and Jonathan, in the tomb of Kish, their common ancestor. But whether the Septuagint has preserved words that have dropped out of the Hebrew text, or has added them to make the fact plain, is more than we can answer. **Zelah.** Nothing more is known of this place than that it was in the tribe of Benjamin.

Ver. 15.—**Moreover.** A new narrative begins here, and the heroic acts related in it are taken probably from some record of the martial deeds of David and his mighties. We have already seen that the Book of Jasher (ch. i. 18) was a national anthology, full of ballads and songs in praise of glorious exploits of Israel's worthies. The source of the narratives recorded here apparently was a history in prose, and commenced, perhaps, with David's own achievement in slaying Goliath —a deed which called forth the heroism of the nation, and was emulated by other brave men. These extracts were probably given for their own sake, and are repeated in 1 Chron. xx. 4—8, where they are placed immediately after the capture of Rabbah; but they here form an appropriate introduction to the psalm of thanksgiving in ch. xxii. It was usual in Hebrew, in making quotations, to leave them without any attempt at adapting them to their new place; and thus the "moreover" and "yet again," which referred to some previous narrative in the history, are left unchanged.

Ver. 16.—**Ishbi-benob.** The Hebrew has *Ishbo-benob*, which Gesenius interprets as meaning "dweller upon the height." But surely the man's name would not be Hebrew; he was a Raphah, and we shall not be able to explain his name until we know the language of the Rephaim. **Of the sons of the giant;** Hebrew, *of the children of the Raphah;* that is, he belonged to the race of the Rephaim, the word not signifying "sons," but the members of a stock. It is translated "children" in Numb. xiii. 22, 28, etc. (For the Rephaim, see note on ch. v. 18.) "The Raphah" may be the mythic pro-

genitor of the Rephaim, but more probably it is simply the singular of "Rephaim," and "children of the Raphah" a more poetic way of describing the race. **Three hundred** shekels. It weighed, therefore, about eight pounds; the spear-head of Goliath was just twice as heavy (1 Sam. xvii. 7). **Girded with a new.** The Vulgate supplies "sword," which the Authorized Version has adopted. The Septuagint reads a "mace" instead of "new;" others think that he had a new suit of armour. If the narrator had thought it of sufficient importance to let us know that the article was new, he would scarcely have left the thing itself unspecified. It is evident, however, that the Septuagint did not read *hadasha*, "new," but the name of some strange warlike instrument, which being unknown to the scribes, they substituted for it a word which they did know, but which makes no sense. We cannot, however, depend upon the translation of the Septuagint, "mace." The want of special knowledge on the part of the translators of the Septuagint, though partly accounted for by the long absence from Palestine of its authors, and their having to depend entirely upon such knowledge of their language as survived at Alexandria, is more than we should have expected or can quite understand. Here, however, there is nothing remarkable in their not knowing the exact meaning of this curious weapon of the Rephaite; but plainly it could not be a mace, but must have been something that could be girt upon him. The Authorized Version, moreover, gives a look of probability to the insertion of "sword," which is wanting in the Hebrew; for it does not connect his purpose of killing David with the hadasha. The Hebrew is, "And Ishbo-benob, who was a Rephaite, and whose spear weighed three hundred shekels, and who was girt with an hadasha; and he thought to smite David."

Ver. 17.—**The men of David sware unto him.** David's men were specifically the mighties, who had so long been his friends and companions. They now bound him by an oath never again to fight in person, lest he should be singled out for combat by some warrior among the enemy and slain. **The light of Israel.** The lamp in the dwelling was the proof that there was life there, and so it became the symbol of prosperity. In Job xviii. 5, 6 the extinction of the lamp signifies the destruction of the family. David was evidently now king, and under him Israel was advancing to freedom and empire. His death would have plunged the nation back into weakness and probable ruin.

Ver. 18.—**Gob.** In the parallel passage (1 Chron. xx. 4) this place is called *Gezer*, and the Septuagint has *Gath*. It was probably some unimportant spot, except as being the site of this battle, and the scribes, knowing nothing about it, made corrections at their fancy. **Sibbechai the Hushathite.** The name is spelt in the same way in 1 Chron. xi. 29 and xx. 4, but in the list of the mighties he is called Mebunnai (ch. xxiii. 27). In 1 Chron. xxvii. 11 we find that he had the command of the eighth division of the army, consisting of twenty-four thousand men. He is called "the Hushathite," as being a descendant of Hushah, of the family of Judah, in 1 Chron. iv. 4. **Saph, which was of the sons of the giant;** Hebrew, *of the Raphah*. He is called *Sippai* in 1 Chron. xx. 4.

Ver. 19.—**Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, a Beth-lehemite, slew Goliath the Gittite.** The words "the brother of" are inserted by the Authorized Version in order to bring this place into verbal agreement with 1 Chron. xx. 5, where we read that "Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite." The Jewish Targum had the same reading as that still found in the text, but regards Elhanan, "God is gracious," as another name for David, and, instead of Jair or Jaare, reads Jesse. Its translation is as follows: "And David the son of Jesse, the weaver of veils for the sanctuary, who was of Bethlehem, slew Goliath the Gittite." Possibly the Authorized Version is right in concluding that the present text is a corruption of that in 1 Chron. xx. 5. For, first, the repetition of *oregim*, "weavers," is suspicious, the Hebrew being, not "weaver's beam," but the plural "weavers' beam," *menor oregim*. Next, *Jaare* is a transposition of the letters of Jair (in the Hebrew) made probably in order that the compound *Jaare-oregim* may obey the rules of Hebrew grammar. More important is it to notice that *Lahmi* is part of the word "Bethlehemite" (Hebrew, *Beth-hallahmi*), and might thus easily suggest to the eye of a scribe the completion of so well-known a word. We must add that among the thirty Gibborim is "Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem." Whoever slew Goliath's brother would certainly attain to high rank among the heroes, but if the name *Jair* is right, the Elhanan there spoken of is not the person who slew Lahmi.

Ver. 21.—**Jonathan.** He was brother to the subtle Jonadab who helped Amnon on his way to ruin. The spelling of the father's name shows how little importance we can place on the Hebrew text in the matter of names. He is called here in the Hebrew Shimei, which the Massorites have changed into Shimeah. In ch. xiii. 3 we have *Shimeah*, in 1 Sam. xvi. 9 *Shammah*, and in 1 Chron. ii. 13 *Shimma*.

Ver. 22.—**These four were born to the giant**; Hebrew, *were born to the Raphah;* that is, belonged to the race of the Rephaim, who seem to have settled in Gath in large numbers, and to have been a fine race of men. (For their antiquity, see Gen. xiv. 5.) **By the hand of David.** Not necessarily in personal conflict, though the Hebrew in ver. 17 would admit of the translation that, with the aid of Abishai, David himself slew Ishbi-benob. But the glory of all that the Gibborim did belonged also to David their king.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—14.—*A story of deferred retribution.* The facts are: 1. A famine continuing for three years, and inquiry being made of the Lord by David, he is informed that it was in consequence of Saul's sin in slaying the Gibeonites. 2. David, asking of the Gibeonites what he shall do for them by way of atonement for the wrong done, is informed that they seek not gold or the life of any man of Israel, but require that seven of Saul's family should be put to death, and hung up in Gibeah of Saul. 3. David at once yields to the demand, but spares Mephibosheth in consequence of the special bond between himself and Jonathan. 4. On the seven men being put to death, Rizpah spreads out sackcloth on a rock, and keeps watch by the corpses against beasts and birds of prey till the rain falls. 5. David is told of the deed of Rizpah, and he soon after obtains the bones of Saul and Jonathan from Jabesh-Gilead, and causes the remains of the seven sons to be collected, and has the bones of Saul and Jonathan interred in the family burying-place in Zelah of Benjamin. We assume that the record in this chapter refers to an earlier period in the life of David than does the narrative in the few preceding chapters, which evidently are designed to set forth the connection of David's great sin with its punishment. The story relates the incidents connected with an otherwise unrecorded sin of Saul's, and the retribution which came in due course upon his house. The varied questions and topics of interest and difficulty suggested by the narrative may be best seen and considered by taking them in their natural order.

I. PROVIDENTIAL CALLS TO THE CONSIDERATION OF FORGOTTEN SINS. Whatever physical account may be possible of the famine referred to, looked at in its relation to God's education and discipline of his ancient people, it is here to be viewed as a providential call to the nation to reflect on sins committed during the reign of Saul. The conduct of Saul was a most scandalous sin (Josh. ix. 8—17). When the sin was committed we know not; probably in the latter part of his reign, when all was in confusion. His family were, it would seem from vers. 1, 4—6, implicated in the deed. It is obvious that the nation had condoned the action of Saul, and for some years subsequent to his death there was no conscience in the people with respect to this great sin. It was for the purpose of arousing the public conscience and giving occasion for bringing this sin to mind that the famine was permitted to arise. Even though the famine was by natural causes, yet it was used by God for this special moral end. There is a tendency in nations especially to be unmindful of their sins, and individuals also are liable to the same danger. The eager rush of affairs and absorption of energy in new lines divert attention from the moral character of acts. The forgotten sins of men are countless. But God does not forget, and now and then events arise—calamities, personal troubles, and disagreeable consequences of former deeds—which are practically God's calls to us to remember our transgressions. The prophet no longer proclaims, but God reaches the conscience in manifold ways, and to many an easy-going soul the words will come some day, "Son, remember."

II. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MORAL AND PHYSICAL EVIL. The mention of famine in the land, and the public sin of the late king as being related the one to the other, establishes in this instance, on the authority of God, the close connection of moral and physical evil. Whether famines do not arise where there is no special moral evil of which they are the chastisements or reminders, is not the question, and makes no difference to the fact in this case. God would have his people know that their past sins were now bearing fruit in physical form. Nor is there anything really wonderful or exceptional in the truth here established. To man, physical evil is, as a whole, the

fruit of sin. Man's moral nature is in contact with the physical order by means of a material vehicle, and as his moral nature is supreme and cannot but affect, by its deterioration and wrong direction, the vehicle by which it acts, so the lesser must be disordered by the disorder of the greater. The miseries of human life would not have come had man kept his first estate. All our painful struggles in commerce and war, our diseases and poverty, are the outcome of a heart not as the heart of God. That Sodom should fall under fire, that Pharaoh should be swept into the sea, that Jerusalem should be trodden down, were but physical facts consequent on sin, bold and striking, yet not different in essence from the general connection of sin and suffering. Hence, Christ's mission to make man's physical environment for ever helpful and not hurtful to him, by rendering his moral nature perfect, and therefore his whole nature in perfect adjustment to all that is.

III. THE DUTY OF SEARCHING OUT THE MORAL ELEMENTS CONNECTED WITH OUR PHYSICAL TROUBLES. The famine was a reality in the experience of every one; but it was the will of God that the people should notice its connection with national sin. They must consider its spiritual bearings; they must associate their difficulties with previous conduct. As a rule, there is an indisposition to do this. Physical law, fate, chance, almost anything, is referred to as being occasion or cause of present difficulties and sufferings, rather than personal sin. Of course, individual sin is not the cause of great public calamities, and not immediately of private sufferings. Yet we ought, as a matter of rigid thought, to trace back the physical troubles of the world, so far as man is sufferer, to the moral cause. In nations troubles are referred to the restlessness of other nations, or ignorance of political economy, or of sanitary laws, or decaying commerce; but we should go deeper, and see what pride and arrogance and defiant tone may have done to inflame other nations, and what sinful neglect in spending money on wars rather than on instruction of the people. In personal life we should search and see to what extent failures in business, in health, and enterprise are connected with persistent violation of some of the primary laws which God has given for our guidance.

IV. MISSING CLUES TO THE SOLUTION OF DIFFICULTIES. There are evident difficulties connected with this narrative which press upon the ordinary reader at once. The demand for seven lives, and the yielding to the demand, both perplex us. The pressure of a famine on a whole people, and the use of that famine for purposes of chastisement for a sin of years past, do not lessen the perplexity. Apart from this narrative, we know nothing of any act done by Saul toward the Gibeonites. Now, if instead of this abrupt declaration of the existence of a national sin, and of the retribution for it in the terrible form of seven deaths, we were told of the precise circumstances under which Saul violated the national compact of Josh. ix. 15—17, we should then certainly see the wisdom and appropriateness of the famine to arouse the national conscience, and the justice of the terrible retribution on Saul's family. The clue here missing because of the incompleteness of history is but an instance of what constantly occurs. In the Bible there are many facts which doubtless would lose all their strangeness and seeming discrepancies and moral difficulties did we but know the details left unrecorded. Historians are guided by this remembrance of missing clues in their estimate of men and characters. In our judgment on conduct we often fail or are in suspense because a clue to some strange feature is lacking. Especially are we at present lacking the clue to many events in the government of God. When we know more perfectly, we shall see that to be just which is now perplexing, and, as a rule, we may say that our ignorance of hidden facts ought to count in our judgments on revealed truth as much as our knowledge.

V. GOD HAS IN RESERVE AGENCIES FOR BRINGING THE FACT OF SIN STRAIGHT HOME TO THE CONSCIENCE. The famine aroused conscience. The men of Gibeon were God's agents in bringing all the facts home to the conscience of the nation. The confusion and change of government in the last days of Saul and early years of David, before he left Hebron to be king over the entire people, will explain why the Gibeonites did not press their suit earlier. Although the sin was so grievous, it must have appeared to any who now and then reflected on it as though it were being passed by, and that no means were at hand to bring the new king face to face with the wrong done. But at the proper season God found means for calling forth the Gibeonites to declare the full facts and to bring the sin home to the national conscience. They proved what the famine only

indicated. According to Scripture, all sin is to be brought home to the sinner. The time may pass, and means for so doing may seem to be lacking; but the universe is God's, and he has in reserve agencies by which the guilty will be found out and the claims of a violated law will be vindicated (Eccles. xi. 9).

VI. THE PRINCIPLE OF RETRIBUTION IN HUMAN AFFAIRS. The charge of the Gibeonites against the house of Saul was that he, contrary to the solemn compact with Israel, had cruelly slain their countrymen, and the demand was that for this wicked violation of a treaty the lives of his sons should be forfeited. Here was an appearance of hardship on the sons; but, had we the missing clue, it would probably appear that they were parties to the deed. The deed, however, was national, being wrought by the representative of the nation; and, acting on the usage of the age in such matters, the Gibeonites demanded that the lives of the representatives of the nation of that date should be sacrificed. The principle was that of *lex talionis*—"an eye for an eye." We are not called upon to pronounce a harsh judgment on their demand. It may, however, be said, in extenuation, that if Saul and his family were the real murderers of the Gibeonites, there was no more wrong in their execution than in the execution of any modern murderer. The principle on which the claim proceeded was that of all criminal law in relation to human life. The Law of Moses was based on it. "An eye for an eye" (Exod. xxi. 24) is but a statement of the principle that runs through all the Mosaic laws (cf. Lev. xxiv. 17—22). Ox for ox, sheep for sheep, life for life,—this was the form of the old jurisprudence. It is also, so far as circumstances permit, the principle of modern law and modern punishment. According to a man's crime so is his punishment. With us the loss of liberty is the form punishment takes, but its degree depends on the degree of the crime. Proportion is kept in view in every sentence. The words of our Saviour (Matt. v. 38, 39) are not intended to set aside the administration of justice by the state, but to indicate that the personal feeling of his followers is not to be vindictive. In the spiritual kingdom all are brethren beloved, and love is to be the dominant feeling. Moses was speaking of what "judges," administrators of the public laws of the state, should do (Deut. xix. 16—21), and in the discharge of official duty they were to be impartial, and not pity or spare. Christ speaks of what his individual followers should do and be in their personal relations to brethren in the new spiritual kingdom; they must not imagine, with the Pharisees, that a principle of action designed for "judges" in a state is to be transferred to their private relationships in his kingdom. Moses distinguishes between the rigid execution of justice on crime and the individual cherishing of tender and pitiful feelings (Deut. xix. 16—21; cf. Exod. xxii. 21—27). The rules for a state are not to be confounded with rules for individual life.

VII. THE DUE MAINTENANCE OF NATIONAL HONOUR. The honour of Israel was at stake in the deed of Saul. Kings compromise the nation. David was quick to see that the wrong done in cruelly violating a national treaty must be atoned. Apart from the form of atonement in this case, the principle recognized is most important. When nations lose faith in nations, trouble must come in terrible form. A nation's word should be sacred, and in relation to the weakest and most barbarous as to the mightiest and most civilized. The methods adopted for upholding national honour will vary with the conceptions of what that honour is. To keep faith, to be courteous and considerate to the weak, to allow of no unjust concessions to the great because they are great, and to promote peace and righteousness in all relationships,—this is that in which honour lies. There is no true glory, no maintenance of honour, in creating wars, in mere military triumphs, or in vaunting of greatness.

VIII. THE SACREDNESS OF PROMISES MADE BY RELIGIOUS MEN. The promises made to the Gibeonites in the days of Joshua differed from all engagements entered into by other people, in that they were the promises of the chosen race, whose conduct towards others was based on higher principles. David felt at once that it would be shocking to allow heathen men to imagine that the servants of the covenant-keeping God could break their vows. The possession of a religious character or the adoption of religious professions lends a special sacredness to our engagements. It is no wonderful thing if one who believes in no eternal morality easily sets aside what others hold to be binding engagements; and a careless man of the world, whose religion is only a name, may not excite surprise if he sometimes violates his word or does a mean action. But

to be a follower of Christ lends an unusual sanctity to everything in life. The Apostle Peter has suggested "what manner of persons" we ought to be by virtue of our holy profession, and our Lord himself expects more of his followers than can be looked for from others (Matt. v. 43—48). We should not forget that we may compromise the honour of our Lord in our words and deeds.

IX. THE CONFLICTING OF PUBLIC OBLIGATIONS WITH PRIVATE ENGAGEMENTS. David, acting according to the light and usage of the age, felt bound to give up the male members of the house of Saul; but he had made a personal promise to Jonathan (1 Sam. xx. 14—17; xxiii. 16—18) to spare the members of his house, and had especially taken Mephibosheth under his care out of love for his father. Here, then, was a conflict of opposing obligations. The solution was obvious. He had kept his promise, and had not, as kings too often were accustomed to do with the families of rivals, cut off the house of Saul on ascending the throne. If he gave them up now it was not a personal act, but an act in the administration of law. But, further, he seems to have regarded the oath to Jonathan as relating to his own immediate descendants, and hence he spared Mephibosheth in order to keep his kingly promise while making acknowledgment for the sin of Saul. Rulers are bound to be true to national obligations, though at the cost of much feeling, and sometimes it will require more than mere casuistry to be true to private sentiments and obligations while discharging public duties. Self is never to be degraded in public affairs. If in nation or Church the rulers cannot conscientiously discharge obligations involved in the office, the proper alternative is to vacate the office.

X. THE HONOUR DUE TO MORTAL REMAINS. The conduct of Rizpah in keeping off birds and beasts of prey from the corpses, and of David in collecting the bones and placing the remains of Saul and Jonathan in their family burying-place, was worthy of their character; it indicated a refined feeling, a reverence for the dead, a deep sense of the sanctity of all that pertains to human life and human destiny. The mortal remains of friend and foe are touchingly suggestive of the greatness and littleness of man, of his checkered lot on earth, and the strange unknown experience on which his higher nature enters while his perishable remains abide with us.

Vers. 15—22.—*The difficulty of establishing the kingdom of God in the world.* The facts are: 1. In one of his wars with the Philistines David waxes faint in personal conflict with a giant, and is succoured by the intervention of Abishai. 2. Observing the failing strength of the king, his people deprecate his going forth with them to battle, lest by personal failure he should be a means of general discouragement. 3. On each of three subsequent occasions of battle, a Philistine giant is slain respectively by Sibbechai, Elhanan, and Jonathan son of Shimeah. It is of no moment as to what precise period in David's life the battles with the Philistines belonged. The first impression on reading the narrative and, at the same time, remembering the promise that Israel was to subdue and hold the land, is the tediousness of the process by which the complete subjugation of the heathen was effected, and the imperfection of the result even at this late period in the national history. Israel all along had represented the principles of true religion as against idolatry, and the special object of David's wars was to render the cause he represented triumphant over all enemies, and so establish the theocracy on an enduring basis. The difficulties of achieving the end in view are suggested by the necessity of these successive conflicts with a most active and stubborn foe. In general outline we have here an analogy with the work which the Christian Church has in hand, and the difficulties attending its speedy and complete accomplishment. The difficulties attending the subjugation of all opposing forces to the kingdom of Christ, and so permanently establishing a reign of righteousness in the earth, may be indicated as follows.

I. THERE IS A WIDESPREAD AND TENACIOUS PREOCCUPATION BY EVIL. The Philistines were a numerous people, spread over a considerable area of country, bold, resolute, powerful, and therefore very tenacious of their possessions and of their local influence. They did not always wait to be subdued, but became active in their assaults on the kingdom ordained of God. As compared with them, the Israelites were not so hardy, so desperate in fighting, and so strongly influenced by the thought of ancient pre-eminence. It is not surprising that the conflict should extend through long and weary years. And is there not some resemblance here to modern facts? The earth is preoccupied by

forces of evil—numerous, strong, tenacious. The power of sin has laid hold of every form of human activity, and has entered into all the public and private ramifications of life. Our preachers at home and missionaries abroad have to face evils hoary with age, and yet strong with the vigour of youth. Nothing is more conspicuous to Christian workers than the terrible grip with which sin holds the human soul to prevent the enthronement there of the King of righteousness.

II. THERE ARE MANY IMPERFECTIONS INHERITED WITH THE WORK WE HAVE TO DO. David's people had not been as true to God as was required of Israel by the great Law laid down for their guidance; and much of this imperfection of character was an inheritance from the generations which had also failed to fulfil the moral conditions of conquest as laid down by the great lawgiver (Deut. xxviii. 1, 7—10, 15, 25). Because Israel of the past had not been fully faithful, Israel of David's age found many conquests unachieved. Failure in moral character ensured to posterity an inheritance of difficulty and sorrow. The work which a thoroughly righteous people could have accomplished remains unfinished, with the additional difficulties created by unfaithfulness. Unfortunately, the Christian Church has too closely followed the example of ancient Israel. There has been, in ages past, sometimes a deviation from the principles laid down by Christ for the casting out of sin and the subjugation of the world to himself, and sometimes a very inefficient application of his instructions. Instead of pure truth, love, faith, holiness of life, prayer, and unity of spirit, there has been a blending of the truth with human errors, and a manifestation of a worldly, time-serving spirit. This age inherits not only the honour of subduing the world to Christ, but the results of the imperfect work done in days gone by. Our own spirit is not so pure and fit as it otherwise would have been; unfinished undertakings are on hand, and the prejudice created by the sins and errors of the Church has to be overcome in addition to the ordinary power of sin.

III. THERE ARE OCCASIONALLY PRESENT GIANT FORMS OF EVIL WHICH, BESIDES BEING ACTIVE CAUSES, TEND ALSO INDIRECTLY TO EMBARRASS THOSE WHO OPPOSE THEM. Philistine giants not only had stout arms wherewith to slay, but their proportions, striking on the senses of men, had the effect of rendering the existing means of resistance and attack less easily available. Giant forms excite fear and awaken self-distrust. The indirect influence on good men of great evils is helpful to the perpetuation of those evils. The monstrous forms of idolatry in vast populations, the magnitude of the influence of Mohammed, the terrible hold of intemperance on multitudes, and the greatness of evil as a whole in the world, when looked at with ordinary eyes, at once bring on a temporary paralysis of energy. Many a brave heart faints in contemplation of the dreadful forms of evil that afflict the world. The Apostle Paul felt this when he reminded his friends to "put on the whole armour of God" (Eph. vi. 11—13), seeing that they had to wrestle with "principalities and powers."

IV. THE VARIABLE CHARACTER OF PROFESSING CHRISTIANS INJURIOUSLY AFFECTS THE PROGRESS OF THEIR ENTERPRISE. There was a day when David, fresh, young, pure, full of faith and courage, without after-thoughts concerning himself, could calmly face and slay a giant (1 Sam. xvii. 39—47). But David, passing the meridian of life, sensible of failing powers, and moreover not free from the remembrance of sad departures from his God, could not perform exploits as of old, and was even in need of succour from another in the field. A true picture is this of many in the Christian warfare. They do not retain all the old vigour. The freshness and power of godliness fail. Were every Christian to grow in spiritual strength from first to last, were the spiritual forces in our religious life to gain momentum the longer we live, and none to become weak, what a mighty army would the Church become! The difficulty of subduing the world to Christ lies very much in the variability of spritual strength in those who form the Church. Many are feeble who ought to be strong.

V. THE NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF LEADERS IS WIDESPREAD. The friends of David were wise in wishing him not to go out to battle. The negative effect of his weakness would be so much positive advantage to the Philistines. If he could no longer positively inspire by his courage and exploits, that very circumstance would tell against the cause he and they had at heart. Leaders have great power by virtue of their position; and when, by any failure of character, or wisdom, or knowledge, any inaptitude for the special circumstances of the time, they dishearten those who expect example and guidance, they really, by such negation of good, add to the difficulties of the situation,

and unwittingly strengthen the position of evil in the world. It would form an instructive study to trace in history the connection of the slow progress of Christianity with the negative influence of its leaders.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—14.—(GIBEON, GIBEAH.) *Famine.* "And there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year" (ver. 1). [*Summary* of the remaining portion (or appendix) of this book: 1. The famine. 2. Victorious acts in wars with the Philistines (vers. 15—22). 3. David's song of thanksgiving (looking backward); ch. xxii. 4. His last prophetic words (looking forward); ch. xxiii. 1—7. "These two lyrical and prophetic productions of David, the ripest spiritual fruit of his life, form a worthy conclusion to his reign" (Keil). 5. List of his heroes (forming, with 2, an historical framework for 3 and 4); ch. xxiii. 8—39. 6. The pestilence (with the famine, "two Divine punishments inflicted upon Israel, with the expiation of the sins that occasioned them"); ch. xxiv.] This famine took place after Mephibosheth was brought to Jerusalem (ver. 7; ch. ix.); and, perhaps, about seventeen years after the death of Saul (ch. iv. 4; ix. 12). It is mentioned here "as a practical illustration, on the one hand, of the manner in which Jehovah visited upon the house of Saul, even after the death of Saul himself, a crime which had been committed by him; and, on the other hand, of the way in which, even in such a case as this, when David had been obliged to sacrifice the descendants of Saul to expiate the guilt of their father, he showed his tenderness towards him by the honourable burial of their bones." After long prosperity and plenty there came adversity and destitution. No rain "out of heaven" (ver. 10) for three successive years! What a scene of general, intense, and increasing distress must have been witnessed (Gen. xii. 10; xxvi. 1; xlvii. 13; Ruth i. 1; 1 Kings xviii. 5; 2 Kings vi. 25; xxv. 5; Jer. xiv. 1—10; Acts xi. 28). Nor has it been unknown in modern times. Consider it (with its attendant circumstances) as—

I. CALLING FOR SPECIAL INQUIRY. "And David sought the face of Jehovah" (ver. 1), equivalent to "inquired of Jehovah" (ch. v. 19), by means of the Urim and Thummim through the high priest (the last recorded instance of this method of ascertaining the Divine will, henceforth more fully revealed through the prophets); urged by the cry of distress, especially among "the poorest sort of the people of the land" (2 Kings xxiv. 14), on whom the famine pressed with peculiar severity. 1. The misery of the poor and afflicted produces in every faithful ruler and in every right-hearted man a feeling of compassionate and *anxious concern.* 2. Physical calamities are often due to *moral causes;* they follow human disobedience to moral laws; being in some cases manifestly connected with such disobedience (as when famine follows desolating wars, agricultural neglect, etc.), in others, however, not directly and apparently so connected. This connection is evident (1) from the common convictions of men who instinctively associate calamity with crime; (2) from the plain teachings of Scripture (Deut. xxviii. 15, 23, 24; Ezek. xiv. 21); and (3) from the moral government of the living, personal God, wherein all things are ordered with a view to moral ends. 3. These causes should be diligently *searched out,* by proper means—observation, consideration, prayer—in order to their removal. "It is not superstition, but rather the highest piety and the highest philosophy, which leads a people, under such a visitation as that of famine, to turn to Jehovah, saying, 'Show us wherefore thou contendest with us'" (W. M. Taylor). "Let us search and try our ways," etc. (Lam. iii. 40; 1 Sam. iv. 3).

II. LEADING TO UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY. "And Jehovah said (through the oracle), Concerning Saul and concerning the blood-guilty house, because he slew the Gibeonites." A crime which had been committed, not recently, but twenty or even thirty years before, was brought to remembrance, and set before the national conscience, quickened in its sensibility by the experience of affliction. "David must hitherto have ruled in a very irreproachable manner to render it necessary to go further back to find a cause for the calamity" (Ewald). 1. *Its iniquity was great.* An attempt was made to exterminate (consume and destroy, ver. 5) a poor, dependent, and helpless people; or the original inhabitants of the land (ver. 2; Josh. ix. 3—27), spared by solemn oath, devoted to the service of the sanctuary (now at Gibeon), for more than four hundred

years dwelling peaceably among "the children of Israel and Judah" (Josh. ix. 17; ch. iv. 3), professing the same faith, and guilty of no offence; many of them being ruthlessly slain, others escaping by flight. 2. *Its effects were still felt* by the "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (*Nethinim*, bondmen), who survived, in bitter grief, popular odium, heavier servitude. Their cries "entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth" (Jas. v. 4). 3. *Its guilt was unacknowledged* and unexpiated; the wrong unredressed, the sin unrepented of, and even ignored and well-nigh forgotten. "It would seem that Saul viewed their possessions with a covetous eye, as affording him the means of rewarding his *adherents* (1 Sam. xxii. 7) and of enriching his *family*; and hence, on some pretence or other, or without any pretence, he slew large numbers of them, and doubtless seized their possessions. It is said that he did this in his zeal for Israel and Judah, and this cannot be explained but on the supposition that the deed was done in order to give the tribes possession of the reserved territories of the Gibeonites. And there is no doubt this would be, as it was designed, a popular and acceptable act (Josh. ix. 18). Saul's own family must have been active in this cruel wrong, and must have had a good share of the spoil; for we find them all, when reduced to a private station, much better off in their worldly circumstances than can else be accounted for" (Kitto). Here lay the secret of the famine, which was interpreted as a sign of Divine wrath.

> "He turneth a fruitful land into a salt-marsh,
> Because of the wickedness of them that dwell therein."
> (Ps. cvii. 34.)

III. INVOLVING IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES; not merely that sin and crime are followed by Divine punishment, and the wrongs of the poor and needy avenged (1 Sam. xxx. 15—17), but also that men are dealt with by God (in the way of chastisement) as communities, as well as separate souls (Ezek. xviii. 2—4). 1. The *guilt* incurred by individuals is participated in by the nation to which they belong when their wrong-doing is connived at, profited by, and not repudiated; and especially when the wrong-doer is its recognized representative. 2. The infliction of *suffering* on a whole nation, on account of the sins of one or more persons therein, is often needful for the vindication of public justice, the reparation of wrong-doing, and the general welfare. 3. Although a nation may be exempted for a season, through the forbearance of God, from the chastisement due to sin, it does not escape altogether, but is *surely called to account* in this world. "Nations as nations will have no existence in another world, and therefore they must look for retribution in this" (Wordsworth). "I can perceive in the story a recognition of the continuance of a nation's life, of its obligations, of its sins from age to age. All national morality, nay, the meaning and possibility of history, depends upon this truth, the sense of which is, I fear, very weak in our day" (Maurice). "Time does not wear out the guilt of sin, nor can we build hopes of impunity on the delay of judgments" (Matthew Henry).

IV. EVOKING RECOGNIZED OBLIGATION. "And the *king* called the Gibeonites, and said . . . What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement [expiation, satisfaction, means of reconciliation], that ye may bless [and no more curse] the inheritance of Jehovah?" (vers. 2, 3); "What ye say, I will do for you" (ver. 5). Whilst acknowledging the national wrong, he also acknowledged the national obligation, and expressed his purpose: 1. To redress their grievance, satisfy *their claim for justice*, and secure their favour and intercession. 2. To respect *the justice of God* (by whom their cause was manifestly maintained), so that prayer might be heard, and the famine removed. Unless right is done, prayer is vain (Ps. lxvi. 18). 3. And to do *whatever might be possible and necessary* for these ends. "The land must expiate the king's wrong. This is rooted in the idea of the solidarity of the people, and the theocratic king as representative of God's people, whence comes solidarity of guilt between king and people" (Erdmann). David herein acted wisely and in a theocratic spirit.

V. REQUIRING ADEQUATE SATISFACTION. (Vers. 7—9.) The expiation was made by the crucifixion of the two sons of Rizpah and the five sons of Merab (Hebrew, Michal), "whom she bare to Adriel," according to the demand and by "the hands of the Gibeonites" (ver. 9), under the authority and sanction of the king (and doubtless with the approval of the nation). The demand: 1. Could be satisfied with *nothing*

short of this. "We will have no silver nor gold," etc. (ver. 4); no private compensation could atone for such a public crime and wilful sin "before the Lord." 2. Accorded with *the requirements of the Law* (Gen. ix. 5, 6; Numb. xxxv. 31); or at least with the custom of blood-vengeance, and the then prevalent ideas of justice. If (as is probable, ver. 1) the hands of the sons of Saul were stained with blood, the Law demanded their death; if (as may have been the case) they were personally guiltless, they *suffered* from their intimate relationship to the murderer, as a "vicarious sacrifice," and for the benefit of the nation. "To understand this procedure, we must bear in mind the ancient Oriental ideas of the solidarity of the family, strict retaliation and blood-revenge—ideas that, with some limitation, remained in force in the legislation of the old covenant" (Kurtz). 3. Was restricted by *merciful consideration* for the assuredly innocent and steadfast fidelity to a solemn engagement. "And the king spared Mephibosheth," etc. (ver. 7). "The obscurities of this narrative probably may never be entirely cleared up. One thing, however, is certain—these seven descendants of Saul were not pretenders to the crown; and David cannot be suspected of having embraced such an opportunity to put them out of the way. Neither is it to be supposed that David delivered up the innocent contrary to the Law (Deut. xxiv. 16). They were, therefore, delivered up to the avengers of blood and punished with death, not on account of the crimes of Saul, but for the murders which they themselves, with the connivance of Saul, had committed on the Gibeonites, and for which they had hitherto remained unpunished" (Jahn, 'Heb. Com.,' xxxii.).

VI. AFFORDING SALUTARY INSTRUCTION (whether the victims be regarded as having actually taken part in the crime or not). "As seen by the people, the execution of Saul's sons (who were not charged with being in any way personally accessory to their father's crime) was a *judicial* act of retribution; but this aspect of the transaction was only an 'accommodation' to the current ideas of the age. Viewed in its essential character as sanctioned by God, it was a *didactic* act, designed to teach the guilt of sin" (Kirkpatrick); to produce repentance, and prevent its recurrence. That melancholy spectacle of a sevenfold crucifixion "on the mountain before Jehovah," in "Gibeah of Saul" (1 Sam. x. 5; xxii. 6), declared: 1. The exceeding *culpability* of unrighteous zeal, of the wanton violation of sacred pledges, of the unjust taking away of human life. "Let us here learn the danger of trifling with oaths and solemn engagements. Four hundred years had elapsed since the treaty made with the Gibeonites; and yet in the sight of God it was as sacred as ever; so that he who presumed to infringe it drew down a severe judgment on the whole nation" (Lindsay). 2. The inevitable, rigorous, and impartial execution of Divine *justice*. Princes are not above its correction, nor bondsmen below its protection. 3. The far-reaching *consequences* of transgression; to the children and children's children of the transgressor. "The evident intention of God in ordering the death of so many of Saul's family" (which, however, is not expressly stated) "was to give public attestation of the abhorrence of Saul's perfidy and cruelty, and to strike into the hearts of his successors on the throne a salutary dread of committing similar offences. The death of these seven persons, therefore, is not to be regarded as a punishment inflicted upon them for personal offences, even though they might have a share in their father's persecution of the Gibeonites, but an act commanded by God in virtue of his sovereign rights over the lives of all men, to teach princes moderation and equity, and to prevent the perpetration of enormous crimes, which are inconsistent with the welfare of the civil government as well as incompatible with the principles of true religion" (Chandler).

VII. FOLLOWED BY MERCIFUL DELIVERANCE. "And after that [the expiation] God was entreated for the land" (ver. 14). "Long-forgotten sin had been brought to mind and acknowledged and expiated; homage had been paid to justice; the evil of unfaithfulness had been exposed; the honour of the nation had been purged from foul stains; it had been shown that neither kings nor princes can do wrong with impunity; maternal fondness had been touchingly displayed; a long-forgotten duty had been attended to; a noble example had borne fruit; *and after that God was entreated for the land.* The generous heavens poured down their showers, the languishing life of field and vineyard revived, and the earth was clothed with beauty and teemed with fruitfulness again. There was one more proof of the everlasting truth, 'Righteousness exalteth a nation'" (C. Vince).—D.

Ver. 2.—(GIBEON.) *Unrighteous zeal.* "And Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah." When his attempt was made is not certainly known; possibly soon after his sparing Amalek (and to make amends for it); or at the time of his massacre of the priests at Nob (where the Gibeonites then assisted the Levites, before the removal of the altar and tabernacle to Gibeon); more probably at the time of his expulsion of the necromancers and soothsayers (1 Sam. xxviii. 3); being "one of those acts of passionate zeal in which he tried to drown the remorse of his later years." His zeal (like that of others in later times) was: 1. Religious and patriotic in intention and profession; to purge the land of the remnant of the heathen (Deut. vii. 2, 24), to honour God, to benefit his people. Good intentions are not enough to constitute good actions. 2. Blind and wilful, "not according to knowledge" (Rom. x. 2; Acts xxvi. 9). 3. Irreverent and ungodly; in violation of a solemn compact in the name of God, and against those who were consecrated to his service. His humblest ministers should be held in respect. 4. Unjust and ungrateful; for they had done no wrong, but had performed useful service. 5. Proud and tyrannical; regarding them with contempt, and taking advantage of their defenceless condition (1 Sam. xxii. 6—19). 6. Cruel and murderous. 7. Selfish and covetous; to appropriate the spoil to his family and adherents. 8. Popular and acceptable. The people never forgave the crafty manner in which they had originally been induced to spare their lives, looked upon them with suspicion and dislike, and readily sympathized with Saul's attack upon them (as they did not in the case of the priests at Nob), and consented to share the plunder. 9. Restrained and unsuccessful. Some survived. It is seldom that persecutors are able to do all they endeavour to do. 10. Infectious and disastrous, in its influence on his family and the nation.—D.

Vers. 8—14.—(GIBEAH.) *Rizpah.* "And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth," etc. (ver. 10; ch. iii. 7). The days of harvest had come; but not the fruits of harvest. The heaven was brass, and the earth iron (Deut. xxviii. 23). The misery of famine was accompanied by a sense of Divine wrath on account of sin. The guilt of blood was on the land, and especially on "the house of Saul," for the destruction of the Gibeonites. Nothing would satisfy the demand of the sorrowing bondservants of Israel, or (as it was believed) restore Divine favour, save the death of seven men of Saul's family (John xi. 50). These, therefore, two of them being sons of *Rizpah*, were taken and crucified (Numb. xxv. 4) at once on the hill before Jehovah, and their remains left unburied, a prey to ravenous birds and beasts. And in her *maternal grief and affection*, spreading sackcloth on the rocky floor (either for her bed or as a rough tent to shelter her), she watched them there, under the scorching sun by day and the drenching dews by night, and protected them from molestation until they received an honourable burial. "They were accounted as accursed and unworthy of the burial of dogs; but she would not cast them out of her heart. The more they were shunned by others, the more she clung to them; and the deeper the disgrace, the deeper her compassion." Observe—

I. HER SPECIAL DESIRE AND AIM; for it was more than an instinct of natural affection that prompted her watching near the dead. Regarding their unburied condition as one of ignominy (Ps. lxxix. 2), and perhaps as, in some way, affecting their happiness in the future life, she was desirous of their being honourably interred. It was deemed necessary (unlike what was required in other instances, Deut. xxi. 22, 23) that they should remain exposed before Jehovah till assurance was given, by the fall of rain, that the satisfaction was accepted. If she could not do what she would, she would do *what she could* (Mark xiv. 8); and, by preventing further injury, render the fulfilment of her desire possible. Her intense maternal love led her to seek the safety and honour of the *dead*; well may a similar love lead others to seek the safety and honour of the *living!*

II. HER EXTRAORDINARY DEVOTION; as it appears in: 1. Her unquenchable attachment. Others might despise them as criminals, but she could only regard them and cling to them as children (Song of Sol. viii. 7). 2. Her humble submission and resignation to what was unavoidable. "Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it" (Jer. x. 19). 3. Her entire self-surrender and self-sacrifice. If she could not remove their reproach, she could share it with them. 4. Her patient endurance of suffering; through long and

lonely nights, and dark and dreary days. 5. Her ceaseless vigilance, zeal, and courage. 6. Her unwearied, faithful, hopeful perseverance. "The emotions in woman act as powerful motives on the will, and, when strongly called forth, produce a degree of vigour and determination which is very surprising to those who have usually seen the individual under a different aspect" (Carpenter). 7. Her importunate prayers for the fulfilment of her desire. "She refrained from all violent and illegal methods of gaining her object. She used no force or stratagem to secure for her beloved ones a safe and decent burial; but waited watchfully, meekly, and humbly, for the time appointed by the Lord. Neither did she give way to despondency, and quit the melancholy scene in wild despair; but did what she could to alleviate the dreadful evil. Though her heart was broken and her grief too bitter for utterance, she still hoped in God, still looked for his merciful interposition, and waited day after day, and night after night until the rain of heaven came down and released the bodies of her beloved ones" (Hughes, 'Female Characters of Holy Writ').

III. HER EFFECTUAL ENDEAVOUR. At length (how long is not stated) "showers of blessing" fell, and her wish was accomplished. Loving, faithful, devoted service: 1. Exerts an undesigned influence on others. "And it was told David," etc. (ver. 11). 2. Fails not, sooner or later, to receive its due reward. 3. Is followed by effects greater than any that were desired or expected. "David was pleased with her tenderness, and was excited by her example to do honour to the bodies of *Saul* and *Jonathan* (1 Sam. xxxi. 12, 13; ch. ii. 5—7), and thus showed that he did not war with the dead, and that his recent act in delivering up Saul's sons was not one of personal revenge, but of public justice" (Wordsworth). She did more than she intended; and what she did is to this day "told for a memorial for her."—D.

Vers. 15—22 (1 Chron. xx. 4—8).—*Giants: a sermon to young people.* "As for these four, they were born to the giant (*Ha-rapha*) in Gath, and fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants" (ver. 22). Of the age before the Flood it is said, "In those days were the giants [*Nephilim*, men of lofty stature and ferocious character] upon the earth" (Gen. vi. 4; Numb. xiii. 32, 33). At a subsequent period there was a like formidable race called Rephaim (Gen. xiv. 5; xv. 20), to which belonged the Emim, the Zuzim (Zamzummim), and the Anakim (Deut. ii. 10, 11, 20, 21; ix. 2). One of this race, of extraordinary stature, was Og, King of Bashan (Deut. iii. 10; Josh. xii. 4). Others, more recently, dwelt among the Philistines (Josh. xi. 12), like Goliath (1 Sam. xvii. 4—11) and the four here mentioned, who were either sons of a celebrated giant (the Rapha) or descendants of the original founder of the tribe. They were all idolaters and formidable opponents of Israel. *And there are giants among us now.* I do not mean such ogres as children read of in story-books; or such harmless persons of exceptional height as are sometimes seen; or even such as appear in any bodily form; but, nevertheless, real, powerful, and terrible giants, aptly represented by "these four" slain by David and his heroes.

I. THEY BELONG TO ONE FAMILY. It is: 1. An *ancient* family; as old as *sin*, and came into the world with it. It survived the Deluge; spread, among the dispersed nations, over all the earth; had one of its principal settlements in Canaan; and, amidst all the conflicts and changes of mankind, has continued to this day. 2. An *ungodly* family. None of its members believe in the living and true God or obey his commandments; yet they have many gods (1 Sam. xvii. 43). 3. A *selfish* family. They all seek their own, and often contend against one another. 4. A numerous, mighty, and *destructive* family. They have their walled cities and strongholds, defy the armies of the living God (ver. 21), and sometimes terrify them (1 Sam. xvii. 1—11) by their imposing appearance and evil doings (Ps. xiv. 1—3; Rom. iii. 10—18). What is this giant family? You have doubtless already discovered that it consists of sins, vices, and wickedness of all kinds.

II. THEY ARE KNOWN BY VARIOUS NAMES. Here are long lists of them (Matt. xv. 19; Gal. v. 19—21; Col. iii. 5—9). But notice especially these four: (1) *Pride*, or undue self-esteem and contempt of other persons (vers. 16, 17). The name *Ishbi-benob* signifies "my dwelling is on the height;" and was possibly given to him because he had his castle on a lofty, inaccessible rock. The brazen head of his lance was eight pounds in weight; and, arrayed in new armour, he resolved to kill David, and nearly succeeded;

but was himself smitten down by the aid of Abishai. Pride is haughty, self-confident, contemptuous, and presumptuous. It has overthrown many mighty men; and is an ungodly, selfish, and most dangerous adversary. "Be not proud" (Jer. xiii. 15; ch. xxii. 28; Obad. i. 3, 4; Jas. iv. 6). (2) *Falsehood,* or deceit (1 Sam. xxi. 1—8). "There was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob [Gezer]: then Sibbechai the Hushathite [1 Chron. xxvii. 11] slew *Saph* [Sippai]." This is a double-faced giant; exceedingly crafty, mean, and mischievous. "Lying lips are abomination to the Lord" (Prov. xii. 22; Rev. xxi. 8). (3) *Hatred,* or ill will; and (in various forms) envy, revenge, anger, and strife. "Elhanan, the son of Jaare-oregim [Jair] the Bethlehemite [ch. xxiii. 24] slew Goliath the Gittite"—possibly a son of the giant whom David slew, and of the same name; or (more probably, as in Chronicles), "*Lahmi* the brother of Goliath, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam." He is a powerful, fierce, and obstinate foe; and only by the strength which God gives [Elhanan] can he be overthrown. (4) *Dishonesty;* "a man of stature [measure or length] that had on each hand six fingers, and on each foot six toes, four and twenty in number," etc.; slain by Jonathan, David's nephew (1 Sam. xvi. 9; xvii. 3; ch. xiii. 3). He has a powerful grasp; covets, seizes, and steals the possessions of others, in defiance of right and justice. There are many other giants, such as (5) Ignorance, (6) Sloth, (7) Intemperance, (8) Impurity, (9) Profanity, (10) Infidelity, (11) Superstition, and (12) Idolatry.

III. THEY MUST BE FOUGHT AGAINST AND OVERCOME; in their onslaught upon ourselves and others. If we do not conquer them, they will conquer us. And we can conquer them only by: 1. Faithfully following "the Captain of our salvation;" obeying his commands, and depending on his might. 2. Incessant vigilance and firm resistance. 3. Ever-renewed and courageous effort. 4. Confident assurance of victory, inspired by many promises, the presence of our Divine Leader, and the success which has been already achieved. "These conflicts of David's servants are typical of the spiritual combats of Christ's soldiers with the family of the evil one" (Wordsworth). "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. vi. 12; 1 Sam. xiii. 1—7; xiv. 1—15).—D.

Ver. 17.—*The lamp of Israel.* In the view of his followers, David was the lamp (Hebrew, *naer*) or glory of the nation, and the continuance of his life and reign was essential to its welfare. This is a striking testimony to their estimate of his personal character and faithful and prosperous rule. Similar language is used of others. "He was the lamp that burneth and shineth," etc. (John v. 35; viii. 12; Matt. v. 14). And every faithful servant of God is "a light-giver in the world" (Phil. ii. 15). Such a lamp is—

I. KINDLED BY THE GRACIOUS HAND OF GOD, the true Glory of Israel, the Father of lights, the Fountain of life and light (Ps. xxxvi. 9). None are so ready to recognize dependence upon God for life and all good as the devout man himself.

> "Thou art my Lamp, O Jehovah,
> And Jehovah enlightens my darkness."
> (Ch. xxii. 29; Ps. xviii. 28; xxvii. 1.)

"David's regal life and actions were the light which the grace of God had kindled for the benefit of Israel." Whatever his gifts, his graces, his position, his success, they are all humbly, gratefully, and constantly ascribed to their Divine Source by the faithful servant; and, whilst we admire him, we should "glorify God in him" (1 Cor. xv. 10; Gal. i. 24).

II. CONDUCIVE TO THE REAL WELFARE OF MEN. "Neither do men light a lamp and put it under the bushel," etc. (Matt. v. 15).

> "Heaven does with us as we with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves," etc.
> ('Measure for Measure,' act i. sc. 1.)

By his counsel, his example, his endeavours, his prayers, he renders invaluable service to others in directing them in perplexity and peril; preserving them from error and evil; stimulating them to effort and conflict; and contributing to their safety, prosperity, and lasting happiness.

III. EXPOSED TO IMMINENT DANGER OF EXTINCTION. The light is liable to be

quenched. Life is always precarious; the life of some peculiarly so; like that of David when he went down into the conflict (vers. 15, 16; ch. v. 17—25), waxed faint, and was set upon by the giant Ishbi-benob, in a new suit of armour. And it is not only natural life, but also moral and spiritual life, that is beset by danger. The part which a good man takes in the conflict between good and evil attracts the attention of his adversaries, makes him a special object of attack (1 Kings xxii. 31); his efforts are exhausting, and his zeal is apt to consume him (Ps. lxix. 9; cxix. 139). "Ernestus, Duke of Luneburg, caused a burning lamp to be stamped on his coin, with these four letters, A. S. M. C., by which was meant, *Aliis serviens meipsum contero*, 'By giving light to others I *consume myself*'" (Spencer).

IV. WORTHY OF BEING HIGHLY ESTEEMED, carefully sustained, and zealously guarded. "And Abishai succoured him, and he [Abishai, or perhaps David, ver. 22] killed him," etc. The preserving care of God (ch. viii. 14) does not render needless human sympathy, assistance, prudence, resolution (ch. xviii. 3). He who freely spends his strength and risks his life for others ought to be esteemed, considered, defended, and helped by them (1 Thess. v. 12, 23; 2 Thess. iii. 2; Heb. xiii. 17); and, herein, they also benefit themselves and the whole community. "If any man serve me, let him follow me," etc. (John xii. 26—28).—D.

Ver. 1.—*Seeking God's face.* "David sought the face of the Lord" (Revised Version). The Authorized Version has here "inquired of the Lord," as in ch. ii. 1, where it is the translation of a different phrase. Doubtless the substantial meaning is the same. But, as with words, so with phrases, two are seldom wholly synonymous; and the differences are often instructive, suggesting each its own train of thought. So it is with these two phrases. That in the Revised Version leads us to think of—

I. THE NATURE OF TRUE WORSHIP. It is seeking the *face* of God, to realize his presence, behold his glory, be made sensible of his majesty, holiness and loving-kindness. Or, in greater strictness, this may be said to be preliminary to the worship of him. We come into his presence that we may present to him our adoration, praises, confessions, and prayers. We must not be content with coming into his house, seeing his servants, joining in ceremonies—leaving, as it were, our names and messages, engaging and depending on the intercession of those who are supposed to approach nearer to him. Our heavenly Father does not keep such state as to exclude or repel any one from coming near to him. He wishes to see his children, to smile upon them, to embrace them, to speak with them. Any methods of worship which keep men at a distance from him are contrary to his will. The mediation of Christ is not a substitute for intimate converse with God, but a means of attaining it, as we may see by considering—

II. THE POSSIBILITY AND WARRANT OF SUCH WORSHIP. There are, doubtless, difficulties in the way of the approach of men to God. These are removed pre-eminently by the mediation of our Lord. 1. *Ignorance separates from God; Christ makes him known.* By his teaching, by his own character, and by the Spirit he imparts to his disciples. "In the face of Jesus Christ" we see that of the Father (2 Cor. iv. 6; John xiv. 8, 9). 2. *Sin separates from God; Christ delivers from sin.* (1) He has atoned for sin by his death. He "suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. iii. 18). He has thus removed the barrier presented by the justice of God and "the curse of the Law" (Gal. iii. 13). And through faith in Christ the conscience is purged from sin by his blood (Heb. ix. 14), and the believer has "boldness to enter into the holiest" (Heb. x. 19—22). Through Christ the face of God shines with a benignant brightness on those who approach him. (2) Christ cleanses the nature and character from sin. He thus produces that purity of heart which is necessary for those who would "see God" (Matt. v. 8). 3. *Not only the putting away of sin, but certain positive dispositions are necessary in seeking the face of God.* Christ has secured and he imparts these. To his disciples is given "the Spirit of adoption (Rom. viii. 15), and thus they come to God with confidence, affection, and self-surrender. Thus Christ is "the Way" by which we "come to the Father" (John xiv. 6). "Through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. ii. 18).

III. THE NECESSITY OF SUCH WORSHIP. We must *seek* God's face if we would behold it with joy. He sometimes surprises men by sudden and unexpected manifes-

tations of himself to them; but this will ordinarily be to those who love him and are in the habit of seeking him (see John xiv. 19—23). Hence the exhortations, "Seek the Lord, . . . seek his face evermore" (Ps. cv. 4); "Seek, and ye shall find" (Matt. vii. 7; comp. 2 Chron. vii. 14).

IV. GODLY MEN ARE DISTINGUISHED BY SUCH WORSHIP. "This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O God of Jacob" (Ps. xxiv. 6). "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek" (Ps. xxvii. 8). 1. *The godly are impelled to this:* (1) By love to God, and consequent longing after him (Ps. xlii. 1, 2; lxiii. 1, 2). (2) By faith in him and in his promises (Heb. xi. 6). (3) By the sense of needs which only God can supply. (4) By memory of former converse with God, and of the enjoyment and profit derived from it. 2. *Hence they seek God's face daily;* and with special earnestness in times of special difficulty or danger. David felt how much he needed Divine guidance in reference to the famine which for three years had harassed the country; hence he "sought the face of the Lord." In trouble the Divine call may be heard, "Seek ye my face;" and many begin to do so when trouble is upon them.

V. SUCH WORSHIP IS FRUITFUL OF BLESSING. It is never in vain (Isa. xlv. 19), although at times it may appear to be so (Job xxiii. 3—9). "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. xxix. 13) is a promise of universal applicability. And to gain the vision of God's face is to be blessed indeed. The sight of him: 1. *Calms and soothes and comforts the heart.* As a mother's face soothes the suffering child.

"Sorrow and fear are gone,
Whene'er thy face appears:
It stills the sighing orphan's moan,
And dries the widow's tears:
It hallows every cross;
It sweetly comforts me,
Makes me forget my every loss,
And find my all in thee."

2. *Encourages to pray.* When his face is seen, we are enabled to tell him all that is in our heart, with the assurance of success in our suit. 3. *Sheds light into the soul.* The "light of his countenance" scatters the darkness. Perplexities are half solved as soon as we have caught sight of the face of God. 4. *Produces likeness to him.* "We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John iii. 2) is a promise partially fulfilled in the present life. 5. *The crowning result is to "see his face" in the fulness of its glory, and for ever.* (Rev. xxii. 4.) But to those who refuse to seek him, turning to him their back, and not their face (Jer. ii. 27), he says, "I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity" (Jer. xviii. 17); and they will at length say "to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. vi. 16).—G. W.

Ver. 10.—*A mother's love and grief.* This verse is part of a narrative full of difficulty and darkness. It stands out a bright light in the midst of the darkness—a grand exhibition of a mother's love.

I. A MOTHER'S LOVE IS MUCH TRIED. Not often as Rizpah's was; but always in some way or other; as: 1. By the conduct of her children. 2. By the conduct of others towards them. 3. By their troubles. 4. By their deaths; especially when untimely or by violence; and most of all when their untimely or violent deaths are the penalty of their misconduct, which was, however, not the case with the sons of Rizpah.

II. IT OCCASIONS HER MUCH SORROW. Love, in this world, always brings grief, through making the sorrows of others our own, as well as rendering us sensitive to their treatment of ourselves. The more deep and tender the love, so much the more poignant the grief. And, as a mother loves most, she is most susceptible of sorrow. She is often pained by her children when they do not think it; and every stroke inflicted on them strikes her to the heart.

III. IT IS UTTERLY UNSELFISH. She loves because it is her nature—freely, spontaneously, making no calculation, asking for no return. Not without hope, indeed, that she may one day be rewarded by her children's welfare and affection; but far from

regulating her love by this: rather she lavishes it most on those from whom she cannot expect recompense—the weakest, the most sickly, those most likely to die; yea, as Rizpah, those who are dead. "Death might bereave her of them, not them of her love" (Bishop Hall).

IV. IT IS MOST SELF-DENYING. Prompting to and sustaining in arduous labours, long and wearisome watchings, self-inflicted privations, for the good of her children. For the sake of their health, she willingly hazards, and even sacrifices, her own. For the sake of their education and advancement, she cheerfully gives up, not only luxuries, but comforts, and even necessaries. And when they have gone beyond her reach into the unseen world, their mortal remains are dear to her, and she will spare nothing that may honour them or prevent dishonour to them. Of such affection Rizpah is a signal instance.

V. IT IS MOST PERSISTENT. Through six months Rizpah continued watching day and night (with the aid, doubtless, of her servants) by the crosses on which the bodies of her sons and other relatives hung, that neither vulture, nor jackal, nor any other "bird of the air" or "beast of the field" might devour, or mangle, or even "rest on" them, until she had gained her point in their honourable burial. A striking example of the persistence of a mother's love. But this was only the crowning proof of her affection. A mother's love is lifelong. "A mother's truth keeps constant youth." It endures through years of toil, hardship, and suffering; when feebly responded to, or quite unappreciated, or requited by neglect, hardness, or cruel wrong. When son or daughter is utterly debased and degraded, the mother clings and hopes; when cast off by all the world, she does not abandon them.

> "Years to a mother bring distress,
> But do not make her love the less."
> (Wordsworth.)

VI. IT IS SOMETIMES BROUGHT INTO NOTICE AND HONOURED. Thus it was with Rizpah. What she had done was reported to the king; it aroused his attention to his neglect to give honourable burial, in the family sepulchre, to the bones of Saul and Jonathan. He now repaired the neglect, and buried, not only them, but (as is implied) the remains of the seven which had so long been hanging exposed, "in the sepulchre of Kish his (Saul's) father." Thus a mother's love, in this case, exercised a powerful beneficial influence. Moreover, it received honourable mention in the holy records, and wherever the Bible comes, "there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matt. xxvi. 13). And although usually the light of a mother's love shines chiefly in the privacy of home, and she neither asks nor expects applause or record, it is impossible that she can act a noble part without exercising an influence for good which may widen and ramify far more than she could have imagined, and may secure her an honour she never desired. And if no others, "her children arise up, and call her blessed" (Prov. xxxi. 28), and tell of her character and works to their children.

In conclusion: 1. *If human love be so deep and strong, what must be the love of God,* from whom it springs, and of which it is one great sign and proof? All the love of all parents, of all human beings, flows from this original Fountain. The Fountain is greater than the streams. 2. *Mothers should seek to have their love perfected,* by being sanctified and elevated by the love of God, and directed supremely to the ends which he seeks—the moral, spiritual, and eternal welfare of their children. With this view, they should watch carefully their living children (as Rizpah her dead ones), and especially whilst they are young, that they may not be defiled or injured by foul bird or beast. 3. *How strong and constant should be the love of children for their mothers!* Prompting them to all that would gratify and honour them and promote their happiness; to self-denial and self-sacrifice for their good, should they live to need the help of their children; and to patience and forbearance towards them, should they, under the infirmities of old age, make demands on these virtues. "Despise not thy mother when she is old" (Prov. xxiii. 22). 4. *How base the conduct of many children (especially of many sons) to their mothers!* Selfishly wasting their resources, imposing on their credulity, abusing their indulgence, disgracing their name, breaking their hearts. "A foolish [wicked] son is the heaviness of his mother" (Prov. x. 1).—G. W.

Vers. 16—22.—*Giant-killers.* These huge monsters were dangerous enemies. To slay them was to do valuable service to king and country. To assail them required much courage. Those who killed any of them gained great renown; and their names and deeds were recorded in the chronicles of the kingdom, and, as to some of them, have found a place in the Book of books.

I. SOME GIANT FOES OF THE DIVINE KING AND KINGDOM THAT NEED TO BE DESTROYED. We may name *superstition*, whether pagan, papal, or protestant; *infidelity*; *selfishness*; *pride*; *tyranny*, ecclesiastical or political; *slavery*; *sensuality*; *intemperance*; *war*; *mammon*. Singly, or in partial union, they assail the subjects of Christ, and oppose them in their endeavours to extend his kingdom. And behind lie the devil and his angels, ever active and formidable (Eph. vi. 11, 12).

II. TO BATTLE AGAINST THESE MONSTERS IS THE DUTY OF ALL CHRIST'S SERVANTS. 1. *It is involved in their Christian calling.* The new nature which is given to them is instinctively hostile to Satan and his works. The endeavour to serve God and benefit men necessarily brings them into conflict with these powers of darkness. The attacks made on themselves compel them to fight in self-defence (1 Pet. v. 8, 9). 2. *They are supplied with arms and armour for the purpose.* (Eph. vi. 11—17.) 3. *The enslaved and degraded condition to which these giant evils have reduced their victims appeals to and stimulates them.* 4. *Their own happy condition under the reign of Christ supplies them with a powerful motive.* 5. *Regard for him impels and strengthens them.* Loyalty, desire for his glory, the hope of his approval, and of the honours and rewards he bestows.

III. HEROES IN THE FIGHT ATTAIN TO DISTINCTION AND REWARD. 1. *Who are the heroes?* Not those who engage these giants (nominally) as a profession and for the sake of earthly rewards. But such as (1) renounce for themselves their service, which all who profess to oppose them do not; (2) show great zeal in contending against them; (3) cheerfully expose themselves to hardship and peril in doing so, displaying conspicuous courage and endurance. Those faithful in times of persecution—confessors, martyrs. Those who bear the gospel to savages, or encounter dangerous climates in seeking its extension. 2. *Their honours and rewards.* (1) In many cases, success; not, alas! in *killing* these giants—they are not dead yet—but in preserving themselves, and rescuing others from their power, and in diminishing their dominions. (2) Enrolment in the Divine records. Many illustrious names are written in human records; more have been overlooked; but all are in the "book of remembrance written before" God (Mal. iii. 16). (3) Final promotion to honour, power, and blessedness (see 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8; and the promises made in Rev. ii. and iii. to "him that overcometh").—G. W.

Ver. 17.—*The unquenchable Light.* "That thou quench not the light of Israel." "The men of David" who thus speak, and doubtless the multitude of his subjects, regarded him as the light (literally, as in Revised Version, "the lamp") of the nation—its guiding mind, its safety, glory, and joy. His death would involve the nation in darkness—in perplexity, confusion, peril, and trouble. Such was likely enough to be the consequence of his death at that period. Nevertheless, David, as a moral and spiritual light, burns on still for all peoples and generations. Death did not quench this light. More emphatically is this true of Jesus Christ our King.

I. HE IS THE LIGHT OF MEN. Intended ultimately to "lighten every man;" actually enlightening those who receive him. He is their: 1. *Teacher and Guide.* Through whose revelations they know God and himself and themselves; sin and righteousness; heaven, and the way to it; perdition, and how to escape it; the real worth of things; the wisdom needful for the guidance of life. Christ sheds light upon all things—the light by which their true character and relations are made apparent. 2. *Safety and Salvation.* In darkness is peril; in light security. 3. *Glory.* Imparting to them of his own lustre. 4. *Joy.* In knowledge and conscious safety are peace and happiness and hope; in ignorance, doubt, and perplexity, is unhappiness.

II. HIS LIGHT CANNOT BE QUENCHED. 1. *Not the light of his personal glory* In the battle with his foes and ours, he fell and died; but he rose again, and to a greater brightness of glory, in consequence of his death. His cross itself is a great light for men. He lives above all the power of his enemies. He goes with his people to battle, but cannot be touched by the foe. 2. *Nor the Light he has become to men through the*

knowledge he has given to the world. Great and formidable and persistent have been the efforts to extinguish the light; but it burns on unquenched and unquenchable. It may be obscured here and there, and for a time, but it can never go out. It will yet shine forth over the whole earth, and scatter all the darkness of error and sin. 3. *Nor the Light he is to each of his believing people.* Through life, and in death, and for ever, he remains their Light. His presence in their hearts is their wisdom and joy under all circumstances.

Then: 1. Be grateful for him. 2. Accept the light he sheds. 3. "Walk as children of light." 4. Be lights yourselves. Shine by speech, and especially in your lives.—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXII.

DAVID'S PSALM OF THANKSGIVING.

This song, which is identical with Ps. xviii., though with many verbal differences, is so universally acknowledged as a genuine composition of King David, that the objections taken by one or two critics serve only to give us greater security by reminding us that the other side has been carefully argued. The differences between its form here and in the Book of Psalms suggest many important considerations with regard to textual criticism. From the absence of manuscripts, we have very scanty means of judging of the correctness of the ordinary Hebrew text. We have, indeed, abundant proof that the Jews took extreme care of their sacred text in the early centuries of our era; but we nevertheless find, most frequently in names, mistakes which have arisen from the carelessness of scribes, and especially from the confusion by them of similar letters. Thus the *Sibbechai* of ch. xxi. 18 becomes *Mebunnai* in ch. xxiii. 27, owing to some scribe having mistaken two letters in the name. And as the similarity between them exists, not in the old Hebrew writing, but in the square character substituted after the exile, the confusion must be subsequent to that date. In comparing the two texts of this psalm, we find similar instances of confusion of letters in vers. 11, 42, 43; we find words transposed in vers. 5, 6; and clauses repeated or omitted in vers. 13, 14. In short, all the phenomena with which we are familiar in the textual criticism of the New Testament are also found here. And may we not add that they end in the same result? The general sense and meaning remain much the same. The variations of reading do not affect the teaching of Holy Scripture on any important point. It may be asked, then—Why should we notice them at all? And why urge them upon the attention of scholars? The answer is that there exist flaws and blemishes in the Massoretic, that is, the ordinary Hebrew, text, and that the removal of them is prevented by the strange idea which accords infallibility to the Massorites, and will not concede to the far more difficult problem of the ancient Hebrew text that which is granted as a matter of course to the comparatively modern Greek text of the New Testament. And thus the Old Testament is neglected, and left outside that careful and minute study so lavishly expended on the New, and so rich in useful results.

Of the date when David wrote this psalm there can be little doubt. It was at the close of his first great series of victories, after Toi, the Hittite King of Hamath, had sent to him an embassy of congratulation (ch. viii. 9, 10), referred to very triumphantly in vers. 45, 46. But there is no trace in it of the sorrow and shame that clouded over his latter days; and no man whose conscience was stained with sins so dark as those of adultery and murder could have written words so strongly asserting his integrity and the cleanness of his hands as are found in vers. 21—25. The psalm belongs to David's happiest time, when he had won for Israel security and empire. It is written from first to last in a tone of jubilant exultation, caused, as we may well believe, by Nathan's acceptance of his purpose to build the temple, and by the solemn appointment of David as the theocratic king. If it were arranged according to time and matter, it would be placed immediately after ch. viii., as it is evidently David's thanksgiving for the benefits and blessings just promised to him and his seed.

But the scribes inserted it here, not so much because of its historical value, as because it is a national thanksgiving for the founding of that empire by which Israel became verily the theocratic people, and the type upon earth of the kingdom of the Messiah. The prophet who compiled the Books of Samuel rejoiced in David's victories, not because they gave Israel worldly dominion, but because they were a fulfilment of past prophecy, and a necessary part of the preparation for the religious position which Israel was to hold. Such as it had been under the judges, Israel would have been no fit home for the prophetic light. It could not have grown and developed, nor the race have become a Church fit to be the teacher of all mankind. And in this hymn the Church expresses her joy at the high office and extended usefulness to which God has seen fit to call her.

The spiritual exposition of the psalm will naturally be sought in commentaries on the Book of Psalms. But such matters as its outward form, and the differences between the two texts, will not be out of place here.

Ver. 1.—**David spake.** The introduction was probably written by the prophet who compiled the Books of Samuel. The scribe who collected the Book of Psalms would be a priest, and he has repeated it with one or two additions, the most important of which is that the psalm was written "by David the servant of Jehovah." This title, meaning the minister or vicegerent of Jehovah, is one so high that it would certainly not have been given to David in his lifetime; nor was it even until Moses was dead that he was honoured with this rank (Deut. xxxiv. 5). But what was David's right to this title, which put him on a level with Moses? It was this: In adding to the sacrificial ritual enacted by Moses a daily service in the temple of sacred minstrelsy and songs, David was acting with higher powers than were ever exercised by any other person. For though, as we have seen, Samuel was the originator of these services in his schools, yet there is a wide difference between private and public services; and David made his anthems part of the national liturgy. But it would only be when the halo of long use had gathered round his holy psalmody that David would be placed on an equality with Moses, and his authority to institute a new ritual for the nation be recognized.

Vers. 2—4.—

"Jehovah is my Cliff and my Stronghold and my Deliverer;
The God of my rock, in whom I take refuge:
My Shield and the Horn of my salvation,
My Fastness and my Place of refuge:
My Saviour: thou savest me from violence.
I call upon Jehovah, the praised One,
And I am saved from my enemies."

The Syriac in ver. 2 inserts, "Fervently do I love thee, Jehovah my Strength;" but it probably only borrows the words from Ps. xviii. 1. For we may well believe that it was at a later period of his life, after deeper and more heart-searching trials, that David thus felt his love to Jehovah only strengthened and made more necessary to him by the loss of his earthly happiness. In ver. 3 **The God of my rock** is changed in Ps. xviii. 2 into "My God my Rock" (Authorized Version, "strength")—probably an intentional alteration, as being far less rugged and startling than this bold metaphor of the Deity being his rock's God. In the original the words present each its distinct idea. Thus in ver. 2 the *rock* is a high cliff or precipice. It is the word *sela*, which gave its name to the crag-city of Idumea. **Fortress** really means a rock, difficult of access, and forming a secure retreat. It is entirely a natural formation, and not a building. In ver. 3 *rock* is a vast mountainous mass (Job xviii. 4), and, as it suggests the ideas of grandeur and immovable might, it is often used for God's glory as being the Strength and Protection of his people (Deut. xxxii. 15, 31; Isa. xxx. 29, margin). Next follow two ordinary metaphors, the *shield* for defence, and the horn for attack; after which David, who had so often sought safety among the cliffs and fastnesses of the mountains, returns to the same circle of thoughts, and calls God his **High Tower**, the word signifying, not a building, but a height, a lofty natural stronghold; and finally *his Refuge*, a place of safe retreat among the mountains. This and the rest of the verse are omitted in Ps. xviii. 2. In ver. 4 the words are as literally translated above, and signify, "Whenever I call, I am saved." In all times of difficulty, prayer brings immediate deliverance.

Vers. 5—7.—

"For the breakers of death surrounded me;
Torrents of wickedness [Hebrew, 'of Belial'] terrified me;
Cords of Sheol surrounded me;
Snares of death came suddenly upon me.
In my distress I cried unto Jehovah,
And to my God I cried.
And he heard my voice out of his palace,
And my cry was in his ears."

Instead of *breakers*—waves dashing violently on rocks—Ps. xviii. 4 has "cords of death," translated "sorrow" in the Authorized Ver-

sion. But "cords of death" mean the fatal snares of the hunter, and are not in keeping with "torrents of wickedness." "Belial," literally, "worthlessness," is by many supposed from the context to mean here "destruction," that is, physical instead of moral wickedness. So in Nah. i. 11 "a counsellor of Belial" means a ruinous, destructive counsellor. **Sheol** is the world of the departed, and is equivalent to "death." **Cried** is the same verb twice used. In Ps. xviii. 6 it is altered, in the former part of the verse unto "I called"—a change probably suggested by the more fastidious taste of a later age. For **temple** we should translate *palace*, or *heavenly temple*. It is not the temple in Jerusalem, which was not yet built, but God's heavenly dwelling, that is meant. Instead of the terse ellipse, "And my cry in his ears," the full but heavy phrase, "My cry before him came into his ears," is substituted in Ps. xviii. 6.

Vers. 8—10.—

"And the earth quaked and trembled;
The foundations of the heavens shook,
And quaked because he was wroth.
A smoke went up in his nostril,
And fire out of his mouth devoured;
Red hot cinders burned from him.
And he bowed the heavens and came down,
And darkness was under his feet."

In describing the manifestation of God for his deliverance, David bore in mind and repeated the description of God's descent to earth given in Exod. xix. 16, 18. But the poetic vigour of David's imagination intensifies the imagery, and makes it more grand and startling. Not merely is there the earthquake and the volcano and the storm-cloud, but the dim form of the Almighty is present, with the smoke of just anger at unrighteousness ascending from his nostrils, and the lightnings flashing forth to execute his wrath. But David certainly intended that these metaphors should remain ideal; and it was quite unnecessary for the Targum carefully to eliminate all such expressions as seem to give the Almighty human shape. In so doing it merely changes poetry into prose. But even more dull and commonplace is the explanation given by some modern commentators, that all that is meant is that David was once saved by a thunderstorm from some danger or other. Really this glorious imagery, taken from all that is grandest on earth, is intended to magnify to us the spiritual conception of God's justice coming forth to visit the earth and do right and equity. In ver. 8 for "the foundations of the heavens," we find in Ps. xviii. 7 "the foundations of the hills." The former is the grander metaphor, and signifies the mighty mountain ranges, like those of Lebanon, on which the skies seem to rest. **The smoke** signifies hailstorms and, perhaps, also the rain driven in wreaths along the ground by the wind. **Red hot cinders burned from him** describes the flashing lightnings that were shot forth like the coals from the refiner's furnace when heated to the full. It is to be regretted that the Revised Version retains the bathos of the old rendering, that God's fiery breath set coals on fire.

Vers. 11—13.—

"And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly;
And he was seen upon the wings of the wind.
And he made darkness booths round about him;
Gathering of waters, thickenings of clouds.
Out of the brightness before him
Coals of fire burned."

In ch. vi. 2 Jehovah is described as sitting upon the cherubim; his presence there, called by the rabbins his Shechinah, that is, *dwelling*, being indicated by a cloud of light. In this psalm the cherub is his chariot, on which he rides forth to judgment. **He was seen.** There can be little doubt that the right reading is preserved in Ps. xviii. 10, where we find a verb signifying the swooping down of a bird of prey upon its quarry (Deut. xxviii. 49; Jer. xlviii. 40). The two words differ only in the substitution of *r* for *d*, and these letters are so similar in Hebrew that they are constantly interchanged. **Booths**; made of branches of trees, and forming a temporary abode. So the dark storm-clouds are gathered round the Almighty to veil his awful form from sight as he goes forth for judgment. **Gathering of waters**; probably the right reading, instead of which in the psalm we find "dark waters." The gathering of waters would describe the massing of the rain-clouds. The difference here also consists only in one letter. **Out of the brightness**, which closely surrounds the Deity in the midst of the black mass of the tempest, the lightning flashes forth. This brightness is the Shechinah (see above), to which St. Paul also refers where he says that God's dwelling is in "the unapproachable light" (1 Tim. vi. 16).

Vers. 14—16.—

"Jehovah thundered from heaven,
And the Most High uttered his voice.
And he sent forth arrows, and scattered them [the evil-doers];
Lightning, and terrified them.
And the sea-beds became visible,
The foundations of the world were laid bare,
At the rebuke of Jehovah,
By the breath of the wind of his nostril."

Terrified. The verb signifies "to strike with sudden terror and alarm" (see Exod. xiv. 24; Josh. x. 10). It describes here the panic caused by the lightning, and by the violent throes of nature, so powerfully described in ver. 16. **Laid bare.** This is the meaning of the word "discovered" in the Authorized Version. When the version was made, it was equivalent to "uncovered," but has now changed its signification.

Vers. 17—20.—

"He stretched forth *his hand* from on high;
he took me,
He drew me out of many waters.
He delivered me from my strong enemy,
From them that hated me; for they were
too mighty for me.
For they attacked me in the day of my
misfortune.
But Jehovah became my Staff,
And he brought me forth into a wide
place;
He delivered me, because he had pleasure
in me."

In the midst of this fearful convulsion of nature, while all around are stricken with panic, David sees a hand stretched out from above, ready to deliver him from the overwhelming flood of hatred and peril. Attacked me. The word does not signify "to prevent," or "anticipate," but "to assail." So in ver. 6, "The snares of death assailed me;" and in Isa. xxxvii. 33, "The King of Assyria shall not attack this city with shield." It is the same verb in all these places. **Staff;** in the Authorized Version, "stay." But it means something to lean upon, and is rightly translated "staff" in Ps. xxiii. 4. **A wide place;** in opposition to the straits of affliction. **He had pleasure in me.** In ch. xv. 26 this confidence is gone, and David doubts whether the favour of Jehovah had not been forfeited by him.

Vers. 21—25.—

"Jehovah hath requited me according to my
righteousness,
According to the cleanness of my hands
hath he recompensed me.
For I have kept the ways of Jehovah,
And sinned not so as to depart from my
God.
For all his judgments have been kept in
sight,
And from his statutes I have not departed.
I was also perfect towards him,
And was on my guard against my sin.
Therefore hath Jehovah recompensed me
according to my righteousness,
According to my cleanness in his eye-
sight."

It is impossible to suppose that these verses could have been written after David's fall. For while he acknowledges in them a tendency to sin, he affirms that he had been on his guard against it, and that he had ever kept God's statutes present before his view. However complete may be the penitent's recovery, yet can he never again be "perfect," the word applied to an animal without blemish, and therefore fit for sacrifice. The crime remains a blemish, even though the intense sorrow for the sin may make it the means of even attaining to a higher stage of spirituality and devotion. In ver. 22 the words literally are, "I have not sinned away from God," sin necessarily removing the sinner away from that nearness to God which is the privilege of the saint.

Vers. 26—28.—

"With the pious man thou wilt show thyself
pious;
With the perfect man thou wilt show
thyself perfect;
With the pure thou wilt show thyself
pure;
And with the crooked thou wilt show thy-
self perverse.
And the afflicted people thou wilt save;
And thine eyes are upon the haughty, to
bring them down."

Having affirmed his integrity, and that God therefore had pleasure in him and rewarded him, David now asserts that this is the unfailing rule of God's dealings with men. The general current of their lives is so ordered as to be in harmony with their characters. It is not by luck or good fortune that prosperity attends the righteous, nor is it by chance that things go awry with the fraudulent, but it is by the law of God's providence. **Pious.** The Hebrew word means "pious" in the original sense of the word, which includes kindness to men as well as love to God. **Perverse.** In the Authorized Version "unsavoury." Really it is the same word as that used in Ps. xviii. 26, and signifies "thou wilt make thyself twisted," only the form is archaic, as is the case with some other words here. Experience confirms the psalmist's verdict. For constantly a strange perversity of fortune and an untowardness of events are the lot of those whose hearts are crooked. **Afflicted.** The word in the original includes the idea of humility, and so leads naturally on to the thought of the abasement of the proud. In the psalm the somewhat harsh expression used here has been softened into the more easy phrase, "The haughty eyes thou wilt bring down."

Vers. 29—31.—

"For thou, Jehovah, art my Lamp;
And Jehovah will make my darkness
light.

For by thee do I run upon a troop;
In my God I leap over a wall.
God—his way is perfect:
The word of Jehovah is purified.
He is a Shield to all that trust in him."

Lamp. The lamp burning in the house is the proof of life and activity present there; and thus the extinguishing of the lamp means ruin and desolation (Job xxi. 17). So David is called "the lamp of Israel" (ch. xxi. 17), because the active life of the nation centred in him. In a still higher sense the life and being of his people centres in God, and without him the soul is waste and void, like the universe before God said, "Let there be light." **I run.** To the warrior in old time speed was as important as strength, and thus Homer constantly calls Achilles "fleet of foot." It was his fleetness which gave Asahel a high place among the mighties (ch. ii. 18), and to this quality David now refers. The troop signifies a light-armed band of marauders, whom with God's aid David could overtake, and stop in their course of rapine. The wall means fortifications like those of Jerusalem (ch. v. 7). Sieges were tedious affairs in old time, but David had captured that city with a rapidity so great that the metaphor in the text is most appropriate. **Purified**; or, *refined*. This does not mean that it is proved by experience and found true, but that it is absolutely good and perfect like refined gold (see Ps. xii. 6).

Vers. 32—34.—

"For who is God, save Jehovah?
And who is a rock, save our God?
God is my strong Fortress,
And he guideth the perfect in his way.
He maketh my feet like the hinds,
And upon my high places he doth set me."

God; Hebrew, *El*; the Mighty One, used several times in this psalm. In the second clause the word is *Elohim*, the ordinary name of God. The psalmist's question is a strong assertion that Jehovah alone is God, and that he alone is a Rock of safety for his people. **He guideth**, etc. In Ps. xviii. 32 "He maketh my way perfect," like his own. The phrase here is probably that which David wrote, as being less usual, and it signifies that God will direct the upright man in his good way. **Hinds.** David's feet are swift as hinds, an animal famous for its speed and sureness of foot. **My high places.** The tops of the mountains are the favourite resort of the antelope (ch. i. 18); and so with David, the possession of such rocky citadels as Bozez and Seneh (1 Sam. xiv. 4) made him master of the whole country.

Vers. 35—37.—

"He teacheth my hands to war;
And mine arms can bend a bow of bronze.
And thou hast given me thy saving shield;
And thy hearing of me hath made me great.
Thou hast enlarged my steps under me;
And my feet have not slipped."

Bow of bronze. In Job xx. 24 we also read of bows made of this metal, or compound of metals, which was a far more ancient material for weapons than steel. The bending of such a bow was proof of great strength, and the last artifice of Penelope, to save herself from the suitors, was to promise her hand to the man who could bend Ulysses' bow. **Thy hearing of me**; in Ps. xviii. 35, and Authorized Version and Revised Version here, "thy gentleness." The words in the Hebrew are very nearly alike, but the Septuagint notices the difference, and translates "hearing" in this place, but "chastisement" in the psalm. The Vulgate has "gentleness" or "mildness" here, and "discipline" in the psalm. The Syriac alone has "discipline" in both places. **My feet**; literally, *ankle-bones*, the weakness of which causes men to totter.

Vers. 38—40.—

"I have pursued my enemies and destroyed them;
Neither did I turn again until I had consumed them.
And I have consumed them, and smitten them through, and they arose not;
Yea, they fell under my feet.
For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle;
Thou hast made them that rose against me to bow under me."

In the Psalms, for **destroyed** we find "overtaken," and the second "I have consumed them" is omitted. This exultation of David at the result of his wars is in accordance with the harsh treatment inflicted by him upon the vanquished. His enemies were God's enemies, whom he must consume. The "new commandment" of Christianity forbids and condemns this delight in conquest.

Vers. 41—43.—

"And mine enemies thou hast made to turn upon me their back,
Even those that hate me; and I have utterly destroyed them.
They looked, but there was none to save,
Even to Jehovah, but he answered them not.
And I beat them small as the dust of the earth;
As the mire of the streets I stamped upon them, I trode them down."

Those that hate me. The sentence is to be completed from the previous clause, "my

haters" and "my enemies" being equivalent. There are several small variations between the text here and in Ps. xviii., such as "they cried" for **they looked**; and "I emptied them out" for **I stamped upon them**, the difference in both cases consisting in a single letter.

Vers. 44—46.—

"And thou hast delivered me from the strivings of my people;
Thou hast protected me that I might be head of the nations.
A people whom I knew not have become my servants;
Children of strangers have submitted themselves to me;
At the hearing of the ear they obeyed me.
The children of the strangers faded away;
They fled trembling out of their fastnesses."

People, in the singular, means the Jewish people as opposed to the nations, that is, the heathen world. **The strivings** here referred to are the long dissensions which followed Ishbosheth's death, and delayed for many years the appointment of David as king of all Israel. He now feels that the watchful care which had protected him during that dangerous period had a higher purpose than the union of the twelve tribes under one head. He was to be the founder also of that empire over the nations which symbolized the gift of the heathen world to Christ. And this empire had been extended to people previously unknown to David. Such might be the case with Hadarezer, King of Zobah, but it more especially referred to Toi, and the Hittite kingdom of Hamath (ch. viii. 9). It was not from force of arms, but from the hearing of the ear, that is, from the wide-extended fame of David's conquests, that Toi sent ambassadors to offer allegiance and presents. **They fled trembling.** This is certainly the sense in Ps. xviii. 45, where, however, there is a transposition of letters. Probably it is the sense here. But if we might go to the cognate languages for an explanation of a rare word, it would mean "came limping out of their fastnesses," as men worn out with fatigue and exhaustion.

Vers. 47—49.—

"Jehovah liveth; and blessed be my Rock,
And exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation,
Even the God that giveth me avengements,
And bringeth down peoples under me.
And bringeth me forth from my enemies.
Yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me;
From the violent man thou deliverest me."

In Ps. xviii. 46 we find simply "the God of my salvation." Perhaps there seemed to the compiler to be some confusion in calling Jehovah, first David's Rock, and then the God of his rock (but see note on ver. 3). **Avengements**, in the plural. In the Law the sanctions were chiefly temporal, and therefore the saints of old watched anxiously for, and were strengthened by observing, the constantly recurring proofs of God's righteous government of men. **Peoples**, in the plural: heathen nations. **The violent man** may especially be Saul, as is supposed in the title prefixed to this song in the Book of Psalms. There probably it is general, and includes all who were bitter in their hostility to David.

Vers. 50, 51.—

"Therefore will I praise thee among the nations,
And to thy Name will I sing.
Great deliverance giveth he to his king,
And showeth grace to his messiah—
To David, and to his seed for ever."

Great deliverance; literally, *he maketh great the salvation of his king*; that is, he rescueth him marvellously again and again. The K'ri substitutes *tower*, but it has no support either from the versions or from Ps. xviii., though admitted into the Authorized Version. The difference between the two words "making great" and "tower" is, in the Hebrew, trifling. **To his messiah.** This mercy was shown to David as the anointed theocratic king, whose rule was the symbol of that of Christ.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Songs of deliverance.* The facts are: 1. David composes a song at the end of all the deliverances which during his life God had wrought for him. 2. He describes God as being to him a Rock, a Fortress, a Shield, a High Tower, a Place of Refuge, and represents him as being actively his Deliverer and Saviour. 3. He, in looking on to the future, resolves to trust in him who had been so much to his life in the past, and expects to be saved from his enemies. 4. He, reviewing the past, feels that God is worthy of the praise expressed in this song. There is a beautiful congruity in the place of this song being at the close of the most detailed and protracted narrative

of personal history to be found in the Old Testament, and even in the entire Bible with the exception of that referring to Christ—seeing that that history was one of most strange vicissitudes, and full of dangers. The story of David's life is so necessarily occupied with events as they appeared to men and as they pertain to visible history, that this song is a true supplement, inasmuch as it brings into view the deep spiritual feelings that influenced him in the midst of those events, and so furnishes a key to the religious life of the great king. This song of deliverances reminds us of the song of Moses when Israel triumphed over Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea (Exod. xv.), of the song of the ransomed as they were to return to Zion with everlasting joy on their heads (Isa. xxxv. 10), and of the still more wonderful new song by the redeemed from all nations and kindreds of the earth (Rev. v. 9—13; xiv. 1—3). In these historic and prophetic instances we have illustrations of songs of deliverance ever rising from grateful hearts, establishing thus with the past and the future a community of religious experience which is at once a fruit and an evidence of the Divine redemption wrought out by our Saviour. Taking the experience of David as our guide, we may observe—

I. THE PERILS OF LIFE ARE SOMETIMES SO EXTREME AS TO INDUCE IMMENSE EFFORTS TO ESCAPE THEM. History tells us some of the perils of David's life, both when Saul pursued him with relentless cunning and cruelty, and when, as king, kindred, friend, and foe, and also the unseen powers of darkness, sought his ruin. The subsequent references in vers. 5, 6 give his impression of the greatness of his distress; and the allusions to "rock," "high tower," and "fortress" remind us of the time when his extremity was such that he climbed the craggy cliff or hid himself in the inaccessible clefts of the rocks. No man was so near to death as was David, and no good man came nearer to moral and spiritual destruction than did he in the case of Bathsheba and Uriah. This is the common lot of men on earth, though some find their perils less than those of their fellows. In business affairs, in statesmanship, in special enterprises, in matters of health, in common intercourse with men, and in spiritual experience, there are seasons when it seems to be a question of a few hours whether we make wreck or escape. Then comes a strain, a demand on our fullest resources, corresponding to that on David when Saul sought his life, or when spiritual destruction was in the train of Bathsheba's unholy love.

II. NO HIGH CHARACTER RAISES US ABOVE LIABILITY TO THESE EXTREME PERILS. The world is infested with evil, and the best characters find that, as mortal, fallible men, they are liable to the exigencies of life, and as good men they are objects of attack by the powers of darkness. David was an honest, sincere, devout man, and specially dear to God when Saul hunted his life; and he was superior to many before the horrible temptation to depart from purity fell upon his soul. Character is a defence against some dangers, else were it of little worth; but danger to our calling, our enterprises, our health, our moral position—subtle and serious—cannot but be our earthly lot. Even our Lord knew the tempter's power in the bitterness of poverty; and he warned the best men around his Person to expect peril to earthly interests, and to watch lest at any time even their devouter hearts should be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life (Luke xxi. 34; cf. 16).

III. TRULY RELIGIOUS MEN WILL USE EVERY EFFORT TO ESCAPE THESE PERILS. In his reference to "rock," "refuge," and "fortress," David at once carries us back to the time when he used his utmost endeavours to escape from Saul by climbing the rocks and taking refuge among the fastnesses of the mountains (1 Sam. xxii. 1, 5; xxiii. 14, 15). David acted as though all depended on himself. The cave, the cliff, the gorge, the lofty peak, were sought to cover him as a "shield," or to raise him as on a "high tower." So far as the two men were concerned, it was a case of skill against skill, endurance against endurance. So, also, in the more spiritual conflicts of his life, he laboured hard to save himself from destruction. Prayer, meditation on the Divine Law, taking heed to his steps, going to the house of the Lord, were so many forms of personal exertion to escape the foes of his highest life. So is it with the followers of Christ. They strive daily to ward off the ills which threaten their temporal interests, and when peril becomes extreme, they stir up all their energies to maintain their head high above all impending evils; and what is true of temporal is true also of spiritual interests—they give all diligence to make their calling sure.

IV. THE VISIBLE MEANS OF SAFETY USED BY RELIGIOUS MEN ARE AN INDEX OF AN INVISIBLE RESOURCE. It is just here that we get at the heart of David's meaning. A spectator, observing how he set his skill against that of Saul, how he baffled the cruel persecutor by feats of daring among the caves and clefts of the rock, might conclude that success was decided by a mere balance of ingenuity and agility—the rock, the cave, were his defence. But no; he used these visible things, but all the time his soul was resting in the protection of God. There was a double exercise of energy—that which expressed itself in agility of movement among the mountain fastnesses, and that which expressed itself in calm trust in the care of God. *God* was his Rock, his Shield, his Fortress. As Elijah saw chariots of fire where others saw nothing but vacant air, so he saw the Eternal Rock, and in him made his refuge. The same double exercise of energy was at work in his strenuous efforts to maintain his piety. It was not prayer, use of the Divine Law, and watchfulness that he trusted in, but the ever-present and faithful God. Herein is the characteristic of a truly godly man. An inner spiritual activity accompanies all the external forms. His soul goes out after the living God. He finds safety in the invisible Rock of Ages. God in Christ is his actual Hiding-place.

V. THE BEST THINGS IN NATURE ARE BUT SYMBOLS AND SHADOWS OF EXCELLENCE IN GOD. The rock and the high tower were the very best things nature afforded to David in his dreadful season of trial. Those wilds then answered indeed a noble purpose. But David saw in their protecting powers only a shadow of the real protecting power of which he was in need. All the saving virtues of the mountain fastnesses were to him the index of the boundless resources that lie in God. He is *the Rock*. Throughout Scripture there seems to be an effort to set forth, if possible, the reality and vastness and sufficiency of the treasures which are in God for us. Thus Christ is represented as being the chief and best of all things in nature—among stars, the Bright and Morning Star; among fruit-bearing trees, the luxurious Vine; of members of the body, the Head. Nature can only indicate what wealth of resources we have in him. His riches are unsearchable (Eph. iii. 8).

VI. A REVIEW OF PAST SIGNAL DELIVERANCES ENCOURAGES CONFIDENCE IN RESPECT TO THE FUTURE. Reviewing the wonderful deliverances wrought for him, David says, "In him will I trust;" "I shall be saved from mine enemies." The conflict of life was not over. New dangers will arise, and other enemies will fill the ranks of the fallen. But experience of God's merciful help keeps the spirit calm, and every triumph in the past by his favour is a guarantee that he will be a very present Help in every time of need. How could David doubt the goodness and power of God after so rich an experience of his aid? If for no other reason than the confidence it inspires, an occasional deliberate review of what great things God has done for us is very desirable. Doubt and fear spring from too much attention to ourselves. Security lies in the covenant of God, and not in our own powers, and a remembrance of actual help received is a reading afresh of the many Divine ratifications of the covenant. The din and hurry of daily life are adverse to reflective habits. It is well to make positive efforts at certain stages of life to resist the hindrances to reflection, and allow to pass before the mind the varied instances in which God has rescued us from impending ruin, both temporal and spiritual.

VII. A RATIONAL BASIS FOR PRAISE IS LAID IN A CONSIDERATION OF GOD'S GREAT DELIVERANCES. It is not without solid reason that David says, "I will call on the Lord, who is worthy to be praised." There are manifold reasons why praise should be rendered to God, but here the basis in view is that found by a consideration of the various acts of mercy he has shown. David's deliverance from Saul, from the treachery of Doeg and Ahithophel, from the sorrows and shame of the banishment from throne and city, and from the more fearful woes of backsliding, were indeed events never to be forgotten. They meant to him life, joy, honour, instead of death and disgrace. All that is valuable in life, in distinction, in personal holiness, and victory over spiritual evil, appealed to his generous nature to acknowledge in thankful form the great things which God had done. It is the wont of some agnostic writers to represent the requirement of praise to God as essentially immoral—as a low representation of God as selfishly egotistic. It might be enough to say that agnostics have no right to speak of essential morality, since on their principles there can be no such thing. But apart from that, it overlooks the real teaching of Scripture and the natural action of human

hearts. Men are not condemned for not praising God, but for being lovers of sin in thought, feeling, and deed. Their condition necessarily involves a condemnation, as surely as an anarchical state involves, by its condition, its own destruction. Their not rendering acknowledgments to God for his mercies is only a symptom of the real evil, and not the actual cause of condemnation. A heart true to generous and pure instincts will always admire power blended with goodness, and be thankful for good placed within reach by that beneficent power. "Praise is comely."

VIII. THE DELIVERANCES WROUGHT FOR US BY GOD ARE ONLY PRELIMINARY BLESSINGS. All through these verses David speaks of deliverance, of being saved from certain evils, and God as a Deliverer, a Saviour. This, of course, is a negative good; it is doing something that he may *not* die, and *not* be lost. But it is only a superficial view to say that this was all that David was thinking of. His present position as honoured king, ruling over a united nation, and blessed with a moral elevation superior to any other man then living, is the counterfoil to this negative aspect. There was no need to say in words what he now was. His life tells that side of the record of God's mercy and power. He refers to the deliverances as blessings preliminary to his positive elevation to honour and distinction. Being delivered from the hand of Saul, he was made king in succession; being saved from the banishment consequent on Absalom's rebellion, of course he was positively restored; being rescued from the sin of backsliding, of course he was reinstated in the Divine favour and holiness of life. This is the correct and New Testament view of the great deliverance, or salvation, wrought for us by Christ. We are delivered from the curse and guilt of sin; but that is the negative good, preliminary, necessary to the implied positive elevation to sonship and eternal holiness. He saves from condemnation, but does not leave us as merely liberated souls. He gives us therewith "power to become the sons of God." He makes us "kings and priests unto God." The positive aspect of salvation means elevation, progress, conformity of nature to the Divine will.

Vers. 5—19.—*God's answer to the cry of distress.* The facts are: 1. David represents death, the grave, and ungodly men, under various figures, as causing him deep distress. 2. He states that, on crying unto God out of the greatness of his distress, his voice entered even into his ears. 3. He thus indicates, in strong figurative language, the tokens of God's attention to his cry. (1) Some manifest signs of his displeasure against his foes (vers. 8, 9). (2) A speedy and yet mysterious condescension to the need of his servant (vers. 10, 11). (3) The blending of concealed purpose with distinct manifestations of the reality of his interposition (vers. 12—14). (4) The pressure of his agencies on David's enemies (ver. 15). (5) The thorough rending of all barriers by his mighty power so as to effect deliverance for his servant (vers. 16—19). David represents his condition as one of isolated anguish—he is cut off from God and man, standing in a position of peril and suffering, from which there is no chance of escape. Doubtless there were several occasions in his checkered life when this was true; but he describes them in the terms more strictly appropriate to the time when, being pursued by Saul and his emissaries, he took refuge in mountains. Like one standing on a slight elevation when the floods are gathering around, he sees only, on every side, death as waves eager to sweep him away. The ungodly men with Saul rush on as a torrent from which there is no escape. The sorrows arising from the thought of all his youthful and patriotic aspirations being soon buried in a premature grave, and a once promising life being cut off as a worthless thing, gather irresistibly around his soul. Whichever way he turns, to the cliffs or the plain, to the ravine or the cave, he sees that death is there spreading out snares to catch him. Neither God nor man is nigh to rescue. Life's great and holy purposes are being crushed and blighted for ever. No one cares for his soul. It was then, when destruction was inevitable, that, as a last desperate resort, he poured out his anguish before God and *cried* for help. The help came, and the fact and form of the interposition are the theme of his song. Here we notice—

I. PROVIDENCE PERMITS MEN TO COME INTO GREAT EXTREMITIES. David's life was especially providential. He was from his youth the child of Providence, and yet, for no other traceable reason than his patriotism and his goodness, he was persecuted by Saul, a jealous, suspicious king, even to the degree that life was despaired of. All the

forces of society and of nature seemed to go against him, and meanwhile the God of his youth and early manhood was silent and apparently far away. Our only interpretation of the facts is that God allows his servants sometimes to be brought very low. He does not give them the immunity from pain and peril which their relative goodness and fidelity would seem to warrant. Yet this is not the result of mere arbitrariness or neglect. It is part of an educational purpose, and inseparable from a government of men free in their deeds of wrong. The latent qualities of the righteous and their powers for future use can often be best developed by means of adverse events which throw them more absolutely on God than under smooth and easy conditions they ever could be. We need not be surprised if we fall into manifold trials (1 Pet. iv. 12).

II. THE EXTREMITIES OF LIFE DEVELOP THE FULL STRENGTH OF PRAYER. David had been accustomed, like all pious men, to pray, but now he *cried* unto God. There was a reserve store of prayer in him which now became developed. He realized as never before his need of God, his helplessness, apart from pure Divine interposition and aid, to accomplish the purpose for which he had been selected by Samuel. There was more faith in him than he had been aware of, and now it was brought into exercise. This was the first gain in the educational process. In the spiritual life, as in the physical and mental, our capacities become atrophied if not well used, and circumstances that draw them forth in unusual degree enrich us with a permanent legacy of increased power. There is a natural tendency to *inertia*, which the stress of our environment urges us to overcome. How great is the power placed in our hands by the privilege of prayer, who can tell? There are indications of its greatness in particular instances recorded in the Bible and known in modern life. It availeth much. It is the human agency by which the exercise of the Almighty Power has conditioned its own exercise. How seldom do we *cry* unto God as though we really wanted him and his aid!

III. THE INTERPOSITION OF GOD ON BEHALF OF HIS PEOPLE IS A REALITY IN LIFE. David contrasts in thought his position and that of his enemies. He was apparently left alone by God and man; they were prosperous, numerous, strong, and eager as rolling waves. Death was before and behind him, so that he could not move; they were free to act, and no one to put them in peril. But a change came; the cry of distress had entered into the very ear of God, and, as though there were a sudden change in the Divine relationship to human forces, rescue came. To David the interposition was as real as the previous peril and agony. It was not mere faint-heartedness in Saul, not accidental diversion of his thoughts, not a simple refusal of his men to go further in pursuit of the victim of his malice; it was God who had somehow so acted on men and things as to bring about deliverance. The strong figures used by David in vers. 8—12 express the conviction that God had come to his help, not simply by the action of normal laws, but by the invisible contact of the eternal energy with those laws, wondrously subordinating them to a special design. The true believer still sees God in his great deliverances. The answer to prayer is a great reality. God can and does get at his suffering children. Men see not the invisible hand, but those who *cry* to God recognize it. The profoundest matters of life are objects of faith, and in faith, as in intention, there is a transcendent knowledge passing all demonstration and all communication.

IV. A REVIEW OF DIVINE INTERPOSITIONS BRINGS OUT TO THE EYE OF FAITH THEIR STRONG CHARACTERISTICS. David here reflects on the deliverances wrought for him in answer to earnest prayer, and their characteristics appear to him to be best represented by the bold and vigorous language in vers. 8—16. Among these we may notice: 1. *A twofold revelation*—to himself, as the God of power actually stooping to his help, and holding in his hand the most terrible and most subtle forces of nature; and to his enemies, as the great God causing his voice so to be heard in the course of things as to reveal his wrath and impress men with a sense of his greatness and majesty. 2. *An assurance blended with uncertainty.* The coming down and the Divine brightness brought assurance unmistakable; but the darkness and mystery of his movements indicated that his methods of working out a saving purpose were beyond human penetration. 3. *Use of appropriate agencies for frustrating wicked purposes.* The Divine "arrows" were so directed by unerring wisdom as to scatter those who hitherto were bent on pursuit. 4. *Thoroughness in clearing away all natural obstacles to the*

perfecting of the deliverance. So thorough was the reserve to be that the swollen torrents and deep places were to be entirely made bare of water in order to render escape complete. We may look at our deliverances as from enemies human or fiendish, and we shall find that God does make himself known as our Friend, and causes our foes to feel his displeasure. We know that he helps, but we know not all his ways. He brings influences to bear on our foes, so that they are weakened, and what he does he does perfectly, clearing away whatever may hinder our safety. The same general truths will hold good if we look at our many deliverances from spiritual peril. He sets himself against evil, and comes to our sorrowing soul. He lets us know enough for our cheer, but does not throw full light on all his methods. He brings the mighty influences of his Word and Spirit to destroy the power of sin, and by the tremendous work of Christ clears away every obstacle to our full salvation.

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. When we come into great troubles let us take comfort that in this matter we are sharing in an experience which, in the case of some of the best of men, has developed a more earnest spirit of prayer. 2. The records of God's dealings with his saints shows that there is no distress too deep for him to reach and remedy. 3. There is no place on earth but that the voice of prayer is free to enter into God's holy temple and even to his ear. 4. Although for a season during the prosperity of those who persecute the pious it may seem as though they were exempt from displeasure, yet God is angry with them, and will in some significant way cause them to know it. 5. However desperate our case, we may rest assured that God is in possession of all the means of gaining access to our need, and of scattering whatever evils threaten us with ruin. 6. There are no powers, however deep-seated and established, but that, if we trust in God, he will clear them out of the way, so that we may find a position of safety, and consequent elevation to honour and blessedness.

Vers. 20—30.—*God's righteousness in saving the righteous.* The facts are: 1. David states that, in delivering him from his enemies, God recognized his uprightness and purity. 2. He affirms that, as a matter of fact, he had in his conduct endeavoured to live according to the will of God. 3. He declares the general truth that, in thus rescuing him the upright, and showing disfavour to the perverse persecutor, there was exemplified the principle of the usual Divine procedure. 4. He ascribes the successes of the past, not to himself, however upright, but to God, his Light in darkness and his Strength for deeds of daring. There is, in David's references to his own righteousness and purity, an appearance of what is now called self-righteousness. He seems to violate the primary canons of Christian propriety and to establish a doctrine of merit. But this interpretation of his words is an utter misconception of his meaning, and proceeds from an ignorance of the historical circumstances he had in mind when penning the words. It is a wrong done to personal experiences of the Old Testament to approach their interpretation with certain prepossessions based on New Testament teaching with reference to our personal unworthiness before God on account of our essential sinfulness. David was not speaking of his state absolutely before God; he was not thinking of the question as to whether he or any one else was a sinner. His sole thought was of the distinct charges brought against him by such men as Doeg the Edomite, and believed by the foolish king Saul; and he was conscious that his being hunted by Saul was a grievous wrong, a treatment he did not deserve. *He* was the righteous man, for he loved Saul, showed him kindness, and paid him honour; *Saul* and *Doeg* and *others* in the conspiracy were the unrighteous men, uttering falsehoods, using cruelty, and cherishing malice. God came as Judge between them, and by interposition showed his delight in what his servant had been and done in this particular matter, and his displeasure with Saul for his wicked conduct. He vindicates the gracious interposition of God on the ground that it is a righteous and glorious thing on the part of God to rescue those who suffer unrighteously, and to declare, by his rescue of them, his delight in them as compared with the men who cause their sufferings (cf. 1 Sam. xxi. 7; xxii. 9—13, 18—23; xxiv. 7—15; xxvi. 10—20). The vindication and illustration of God's righteousness in saving his people may be considered as follows.

I. THERE ARE SPECIAL INSTANCES IN WHICH IT MAY BE SAID THAT GOD SAVES THE RIGHTEOUS. In ordinary speech we say that God saves sinners. That is true in

the sense that all men saved, whether temporally or spiritually, are, in their relation to him, sinful, or transgressors of the Law. But in relation to others and in relation to specific obligations which he may impose on them, they may be relatively righteous, and his saving them may be because they are so. Thus: 1. *Those who are righteous in life, as compared with others, are saved from calamity and suffering.* Noah was a righteous man, and therefore was spared, while the Flood carried away the wicked. Lot was a righteous man in comparison with the Sodomites, and therefore was delivered by Divine pressure put upon him from the destruction which befell the rest. Some of the better Churches in Asia were not doomed to the woe that was to come on others, because God "knew their works" (Rev. ii., iii.). The more holy and devoted to Christ we are, and the more minutely our lives are regulated by the laws of God as written in his Word and works, and in our own mental and physical nature, the more shall we be saved from woes that come upon others who violate laws physical, moral, and spiritual. 2. *Those who suffer as being unrighteous, when all the time they are not so.* This was the case of David, who was persecuted most bitterly by Saul on the ground that he hated his king and sought his life, when all the time he loved his king and guarded his life. It was as a righteous man in this particular that God saved him from distress. The same was true of Joseph in prison; of the Apostles Peter and Paul; yea, of our Saviour himself. And often still does God save his people from the reproach and sorrow brought on them by being represented as being other than they really are (Matt. v. 11, 12; 1 Pet. iv. 14—17). 3. *Those who conform to the gospel law of salvation.* Before God all are sinners, and condemned by their own consciences as also by the broken Law. But Christ has made full atonement for sin, and now therefore God, in his sovereign grace, has laid down a new law for us to keep, based upon his acceptance of Christ's perfect work, namely, that we exercise faith in Christ as our atoning Saviour. We are not to try and keep the Decalogue as a condition of being accepted; we cannot attain to the righteousness of the moral Law. We are not to plead the value of repentance and a future life better than the past; all that is indefinite, uncertain. But we are simply to have faith in Christ as set forth in the gospel, *that* is all that God requires for our acceptance; that is the newly created law, the sum of all obligations in reference to obtaining justification before God. In other words, we are to attain to the "righteousness of faith," the righteousness which consists in fulfilling the obligation created by gospel grace, and then there is no condemnation: we walk then as freed sons in the glorious liberty of the children of God.

II. IN ALL THESE INSTANCES IT IS CONSONANT WITH GOD'S NATURE TO SAVE THE RIGHTEOUS. God's treatment of Noah and Lot, and of all who keep his truth in the midst of prevailing degeneracy, marks his distinction of character on the basis of goodness. It is the Divine nature to love the good and hate the evil tendencies of men. When the persecuted are delivered, there is a vindication of character and a repressing of wrong which cannot but accord with God's natural love of justice. When he graciously accepts us on the condition that we have fulfilled all that he requires under the gospel order, and in our justification recognizes the "righteousness of faith" (Rom. iii. 25—28; iv. 5, 6, 11, 13), he, accepting that kind of righteousness, that fulfilment of all obligation, maintains the honour of the violated Law under which we had lived, and glorifies the sacrificial work of his beloved Son. There is therefore nothing arbitrary in the "law of faith."

III. THESE SPECIAL INSTANCES OF SALVATION ARE IN ACCORD WITH THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE OF GOD'S GOVERNMENT. David was quite warranted in saying that when God, in the matter of the deliverance from the persecutions of Saul, recompensed him according to his righteousness (ver. 25), he was simply acting in harmony with his general kindness to the merciful and upright, and his stern and repressive ways of providence toward the perverse (vers. 26, 27). The actual laws revealed in the Decalogue, in the civil institutions of Moses, in the precepts of the New Testament, in the constitution of the physical and mental worlds, all go for the good and against the wicked, whatever be the form or degree of the goodness or wickedness. It may be that, for reasons not yet made clear, the wicked triumph for a while and the righteous cry out in agony, "O Lord, how long!" but God's government is vast, intricate, and stretching far into the future, and there are forces at work by which at last the

righteous shall be exalted and the wicked abased (Ps. v. 4—6, 11, 12; xxxvii. 6, 7, 23—40).

IV. THOSE WHO ARE SAVED BY GOD ON THE GROUND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS LAY NO CLAIM TO MERIT. The object of David in this passage is not to proclaim his own deeds and claim a right to God's favour, but rather to set forth the righteousness and goodness of God in saving those who conform to his will. He had kept the ways, the statutes, and the judgments of God (vers. 23, 24) in respect to his behaviour toward Saul,—he could honestly say that; and he considers it a matter of praise and glory to God that he manifested his love of what is just in coming to the rescue of such a one. To have allowed Saul to triumph would have been a reflection on Divine justice. In all this, therefore, there is no reference to merit in the sight of God, any more than Noah felt that he merited God's favour. It was in neither case a question of the desert of the entire life, but of the state of the life in relation to other men. So in our personal salvation through faith, there is no claim of merit. It is all of grace. The "law of faith" is the creation of grace, and the heart to conform to it is of grace. The light in which we see spiritual things, and in which we rejoice, is not our own. The Lord is our Lamp, and he lightens our darkness (ver. 29). If we are able to break through troops of spiritual foes, and leap over walls (ver. 30) that hem us in, it is not because of our strength; it is only by our God, who of his free mercy supplies all our need.

Vers. 31—51.—The facts are: 1. David asserts the exclusive perfection of God. 2. He states that his strength and power are from God, and that God teaches him to move and act with advantage in times of war and difficulty. 3. He refers to the help received through the graciousness of God, and the fact that thereby he was able to subdue all his enemies. 4. He alludes to the subjugation of the people to himself as the consequence of Divine help, and looks on to further triumphs over strangers. 5. He recounts the fact of his deliverance, and makes the final reference to them a fresh reason for thanksgiving.

Knowledge of God founded on experience. From vers. 31 to 37 David seems to state some of the results arising out of his experience of God's dealing with him during the earlier portion of his life. He can now say with emphasis what at one time could only be said as a matter of general profession on the part of a pious Hebrew; and there is in ver. 31 an implied contrast with certain apprehensions entertained during those seasons of isolation and distress, when no one cared for his soul, and the course of providence seemed to be all against him. And in this respect others are like him; the more profound their personal experience in life, the more clear and sure are their conceptions of the ineffable perfections of God.

I. A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS MORE A QUESTION OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE THAN OF SPECULATION. Among the Hebrews there were grand traditional beliefs and conceptions which placed their pure monotheism far above the theistic faiths of other nations, and David in early years inherited these, and could give beautiful expression to them. But the traditional and even reasoned views which he had acquired were not his greatest treasure. A long life of communion, service, conflict, and patient trust had caused him to see that experience was the most important element in this matter of knowledge of God. No doubt it is possible to reason up to God. The logical outcome of the principle of causation is God, and the moral nature of man is only intelligible on the hypothesis of a supreme personal Ruler. It is not true that speculative philosophy leads away from God. All its lines, when straightly pursued, converge on him. The question is one of personal relations, and it is not within the competence of a speculative inquirer to settle this great question regardless of the deep, ineradicable, and most sacred experience of which human nature is capable.

II. AS A MATTER OF FACT, EXPERIENCE GIVES A CLEARER, FULLER, AND MORE ASSURED KNOWLEDGE THAN ANY OTHER MEANS. Experience is of first importance in matters pertaining to spiritual things. We know the reality of unseen beings existing beneath the fleshly covering of the body more truly by the mysterious contact of our self with an invisible counterpart, than by any physiological or psychological arguments. There is an inexpressible knowledge in our conscious intuitions of other minds being

in communion with our own, which is the more clear, sure, and satisfying, in that it is inexpressible in words. Likewise the personal experience of holy men brings them so near to the living God, so directly in contact with his Spirit, and gives them such clear and irresistible convictions of his Being and his glorious character, that to such men the light thrown on the question of the Divine existence and character by processes of reasoning seems very cold and dim. They can dispense with it for themselves. Like the Apostle John, they have tasted and handled and felt the Divine reality (1 John i. 1—3).

III. THE CLEARER AND MORE SURE KNOWLEDGE RELATES ESPECIALLY TO HIS EXCLUSIVE PERFECTIONS. After his deep and often trying experience, David could speak most confidently of God as "perfect" in all things. He alone was worthy of the name God. The points referred to are: 1. His methods. 2. His Word. 3. His care. His *methods* of discipline, of guidance, of instruction, and of working out purposes seemed strange and obscure while David was in trial, but in the end he saw that all was *perfect*. So is it ever. The more we experience of his "ways," the more do we learn their wisdom, goodness, and justice. His "*Word*," considered as promise, covenant, revelation, or manifestation in Christ, requires personal experience to enable us to see how *perfect* it is. How hearty an "Amen" can multitudes give to this statement! His *care* is discovered by our experience through scenes of danger and peril to be indeed sufficient, suited to every emergency, and most gentle and considerate. As our "Buckler," "Shield," and "Rock," we know him more truly, as life advances and the heart becomes charged with unutterable experiences, to be *perfect*. How vain are all the negations and disputations of restless speculators to the soul rich in such experience!

IV. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD GAINED BY EXPERIENCE ISSUES IN DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER AND FITNESS FOR HIGHEST FORM OF WORK. The holy man enriched by such knowledge is not a mere knowing creature; he becomes a man of higher character and more extended activity. His way is made perfect; his feet are those of the hind; he rises to the best positions in the spiritual sphere; his hands are fit for warfare; he becomes calm and strong in the guarantee of a perpetual shield; and distinction in the highest society and fitness for the holiest service are the outcome of God's gracious dealings. As David, after all his strange experience of God's power and gentleness, was more strong in faith, more skilful in administration, more apt at spiritual warfare, and more conformed to the Divine will; so all who follow on to know the Lord more perfectly, and enter more deeply into the secret of the Lord, rise in spiritual character, and become more fit instruments for doing the purest form of work in the world.

The gentleness of God. This beautiful saying of David's, in ver. 36, is a wonderful illustration of the tenderness of his own heart, and of the deep and thoroughly evangelical thoughts he entertained of the character of God. There is much in this song to remind us of terrible power (vers. 7—18); but it was to David the power and terribleness of One who pities the poor and needy, and, out of his deep compassion, throws the shield of his almightiness over them. In one respect this display of power is an expression of gentleness; it is tender care and loving-kindness for the needy in their defensive aspect. It was gentleness that took David from the sheepcote to make him King of Israel; that succoured and consoled him when exiled in lonely mountains and heathen lands; that spared his soul and healed his wounds when he fell into his dreadful sin; that upheld his broken spirit when the crushing blow of rebellion came as chastisement for sin; that gradually fashioned his character in spite of adverse influences of the age, and made him a blessing to Israel; and that so toned his life that now in old age, instead of being a proud monarch boasting of his strength, he is constrained to ascribe all the glory of his life to God. It is the gentleness of God that elevates and ennobles all his people.

I. THIS QUALITY IS MOST CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD IN HIS DEALINGS WITH US. To it —called in the New Testament, *love*—we *owe our redemption* through Christ. The revelation of "righteousness," of which the Apostle Paul speaks (Rom. i. 17), is made because of the deep love of God, his tender pity for his erring children. Our Saviour, who is the express Image of his Person, was, during his earthly course, the *embodiment of all that is sweet, tender, pitiful, gentle*. The bruised reed, the smoking flax, knew his gentleness. Weeping widows, fallen women, outcast lepers, despised sinners, little

children, a sorrowing Mary at the cross, were only a few instances in which the infinite tenderness of his nature went forth in words and deeds of blessing. The *spirit of his gospel* is that of *tender compassion* for all men. In our *personal experience* the same spirit is revealed. He found us bruised, defiled, without hope; and he tenderly bound up our wounds, took away our guilt, and gave us power to become his sons. In our *occasional lapses*, how tender, how patient, and pitiful! When *adversity has come*, home laid desolate, or health taken away, how gently his hand has held us up and assuaged our grief! And when by the open grave, and broken down with sorrow, his all-sufficing gentleness has come and turned our sorrow into joy. O blessed gentleness! How dear and precious is our God to our often weary and sinful hearts!

II. THE INFLUENCE OF GOD'S GENTLENESS ON US IS TO ELEVATE OUR LIFE. It made David "great." That was its object, and he, appreciating its blessedness, found that it did secure its object. A knowledge of this as the distinguishing quality in God's dealings with men, tends in itself to raise our conceptions of God, and of the order of his government. The end for which his gentleness found expression in the work of Christ is that we may be raised from our low estate, and be heirs of his own glory. When we open our hearts to his gentle Spirit, we, like the prodigal, rise from our degradation and become reinstated as beloved and honoured children. In seasons of calamity it gives us strength to endure and to wait, and a deep consciousness of its reality often throws over the character a more than earthly beauty; and when his love has done all its blessed work in us, we shall rise to a far more glorious position than that occupied by David when, as king, he reached the highest honour attainable among men (John xvii. 24).

III. THE REMEMBRANCE OF HIS GENTLENESS IN THE PAST IS AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO US FOR THE FUTURE. David was evidently able to look on to the future with perfect composure. The love of the past was pledge for the future. Our review of God's gracious dealings with us will cause us to sing of his loving-kindness, and to fear no evil. Having given us his beloved Son, we are sure he will give us all things.

Life's warfare. From ver. 38 to ver. 44 David takes a general survey of his life's conflicts, and is able to say at the close that his triumph over enemies is complete. The language is strong, and to modern ears fierce and vindictive; but we have to consider the position which he believed himself to hold under God, and which he believed to be imperilled by his adversaries. He was, and knew it well, the anointed of the Lord, set over the people as the representative of God, and for the distinct purpose of preparing the way for the realization of those vast promises of good to the world made to Abraham, and devoutly cherished by every enlightened Hebrew. Consequently, the personal element in his case largely disappeared. The attacks on him were attacks on God's government, an effort to frustrate God's purposes; and, believing those purposes to be the wisest and best, he regarded the attempt to put them aside as most wicked; indeed, as the crime of high treason against the Eternal King. That men who thus oppose the Lord's anointed, and are instrumental in committing so great a sin or doing so serious a mischief in the world, deserved the judgment which God allowed to come is obvious, or he would not have allowed it; and, admitting this, there is no obvious sin in David expressing in figurative terms his acquiescence and even satisfaction in that judgment. There is no sin in a man's spiritual vision being so high and wide that he sees justice, and is glad that justice is done. It is only when we introduce the more personal element, and judge by it alone, that David's words are felt to be improper. His life's warfare suggests ours, and that being led on by the Captain of our salvation.

I. THERE ARE STRONG AND BITTER FOES AROUND US. Cruel men under Saul's leading, Amalekites, Philistines, and rebels within the kingdom, sought the ruin of David, both personally and in his capacity as anointed king. No words can set forth adequately the number, strength, activity, and combinations of the spiritual foes that practically seek our spiritual life, and also oppose the claims and prerogatives of Christ. Every Christian life is a spiritual reproduction of David's temporal life; and in the antagonism of our own Christian experience we have a miniature view of the great conflict going on between the King in Zion and the principalities and powers of darkness and the countless forces that lie concealed in the depths of human depravity.

II. THE CONFLICT IS PROTRACTED AND CHARACTERIZED BY VICISSITUDES. From the day that Saul entertained a wicked jealousy of his powers (1 Sam. xviii. 8) till the revolt of Sheba, David had to be on his guard, and in some form or other defend his person and his right to the kingdom. Now he is in deepest distress, and now rescued by the interposition of God. Sorrow and joy were his portion. The lesson for us is obvious. Our warfare is lifelong. As long as there is lurking evil within the domain of our nature, as long as strong and subtle temptations come upon us, and the great enemy seeketh our life, so long we must stand in the whole armour of God, and watch and strive (Eph. vi. 10—17). And, also, we have our seasons of anguish and desolation, our faintings and fears, our falls and wounds, as well as our songs of triumph and joy. The Apostle Paul wrote at the close of his toils and conflicts as one who had suffered much and accomplished much. What is true of us personally is true in a way of the great Church militant; there are, as history reveals, times of sore defeat and sorrow and apparent abandonment, and times again of magnificent triumphs.

III. THERE IS, THROUGH THE CONFLICT, ABIDING TRUST IN GOD AND USE OF GIFTS. The language in which David describes the issue of his conflicts reveals that all through he cherished unceasing faith in God, and used well the fingers to fight which Providence had trained. In darkest seasons his hope was in God. Not armies, but God, formed his Refuge, Strength, and Defence (vers. 40, 41). Saving the great lapse, when for a time the soul was estranged from its Source of blessing, there was a calm and unshaken confidence that the great purpose for which he was called to the throne would be realized, and this rendered moral support to all material means employed for subduing foes. It is the characteristic of our warfare that it is the "good fight of faith." From first to last, trust in the presence, help, and succour of God enters into the exercise of all watchfulness, prayerfulness, and resolute endeavours to subdue everything to Christ. Success in Christian warfare springs from a subtle blending of the most absolute faith in the almighty grace of God with the most energetic use of knowledge and resolve. By this combination also, the Church, in its corporate action, seeks to banish spiritual foes from the kingdom, and to extend Christ's supremacy over all people and lands.

IV. CERTAIN AND COMPLETE VICTORY IS THE ISSUE. If we compare David when an outcast among the caves of the mountains, or a wanderer among an alien people, dependent on heathen hospitality for his sustenance and protection (1 Sam. xxvii. 1—7), with David at the close of his reign, dwelling in regal splendour, and in peace from all his foes, we can see how complete his triumph, and how true in effect is the bold language of this song. Helpless, unbefriended by the Judge of all the earth, his oppressors are as the beaten dust and trampled mire. Aliens and the rebellious among his own people (vers. 41—44) alike are brought low, and all their pride and strength has vanished. It is only when we come to the end of our Christian career that we can say this of all our foes; but it can even now be said of many in the past. The strongest language of David will be inadequate to express the completeness of the victory we shall at last obtain over all spiritual foes. As Israel saw no living Egyptian as they stood on the shore of the Red Sea, and as the multitude in Rev. xv. 2—4 looked over the calm glassy scene of a former arena of conflict and peril, so we each shall, through Christ, be able to survey the past and see our enemies no more. More than conquerors, we shall sing the song of triumph. Sin and temptation, the horrible dangers, the slippery places, the roaring torrents, the deep waters, will have been overcome, and our sanctified nature will constitute a domain in which the voice of tumult is no more heard. Our personal triumph will be analogous to the triumph of Christ over all the evil forces that once opposed his blessed reign.

The glory of the accomplishment of life's purpose due to God. In the section from ver. 45 to ver. 51 David looks on to what God will yet do for him; he reflects on what is now his happy position, and on the connection of this with the great deliverances of the past; and, thus taking a threefold view of his life, he ascribes all the glory of real and possible achievements unto God (ver. 50). His own people and the heathen would regard him as a great king, and ascribe his wonderful successes to his superior prowess in war, and skill in administration. Not so the man of God. To his God he ascribes all the glory. Taking the particulars of David's life as means of illustration, we also

may see that the accomplishment of our life's highest purpose is no occasion of praise to ourselves, but solely of glory to God.

I. GOD HAS CHOSEN US. David was called to leave the sheepfold, and raised by the distinct will of God to be what he subsequently came to be. Never does he forget this. It was all of free sovereign grace. No conquests over Philistines, no succession to Saul, no subjugation of people under him, no lofty piety for the enrichment of the world by its poetic utterances, would have had place but for the Divine choice. It is so of all men after God's own heart. He hath begotten them. He hath made them kings and priests unto himself. "We love him, because he first loved us." Whatever conquests we achieve in the spiritual life are an outcome of our having that life which, as clearly taught in the New Testament, is not of man, but of God (John iii. 5—8).

II. IN OURSELVES WE ARE UNWORTHY OF ANY BLESSING. David knew and felt that there was no worthiness in him that he should be called to be king. Whatever moral and mental fitness there may have been in him as compared with others, it was all of God, and constituted no more merit than the sweetness of the rose gives merit to the rose. And during his career he fell again and again, so that his spiritual condition was, so far as it depended on his watchfulness and care, not so perfect as it should have been. It was God's wonderful "gentleness" (ver. 36), and not his superior spiritual qualities or natural force of character, that had made him what he was. The experience of good men is the same in all ages. The ancient patriarch (Gen. xviii. 27), the evangelical prophet (Isa. vi. 5), and the Christian apostle (Rom. xv. 10), are one with the "sweet psalmist of Israel" in confessing entire unworthiness of the least of God's mercies. Self-renunciation before God is essential to true godliness. All the honour and glory are due to him.

III. GOD PROVIDES THE MEANS BY WHICH OUR LIFE'S PURPOSE IS WROUGHT OUT. The natural gifts that distinguished David, and the wisdom to use them, and the disposition to use them for the right ends, were provided for him. The mountain fastnesses in which he found a shield from the oppressor, belonged to him who claims the "strength of the hills." The repressive influences brought to bear on the rebellious factions, and the concurrent events which issued in their death or depression, were ordered by a higher wisdom. The gift or non-withdrawal of the Holy Spirit on the occasion of the dreadful fall (Ps. li. 10, 11) was all of pure mercy. And thus it was through God alone that the tempted, tried, sorrowing king was enabled to pursue his course. In his case we have in miniature an illustration of the great provision which God makes for us. We are stewards only of gifts of God. The life and death of his beloved Son is the great Gift by which all else is guaranteed. He directs us to the Rock of Ages. His Spirit worketh within us to will and to do. The faith by which we cling to him in the dark and cloudy day is his own gift (Eph. ii. 8). If we conquer our spiritual foes, it is he who teacheth our hands to war and our fingers to fight. By him alone we are more than conquerors. If we arrive at last "perfect" in Zion, it is because he has led us on by ways we knew not.

IV. HE CONTROLS THE INFLUENCES AT WORK AGAINST US. The "strangers" and his own "people" are brought under him because there is an unseen power so working on them that their force is weakened and their will turned. The life of David is full of this Divine control of adverse influences. Saul and Doeg were baffled and restrained. Philistines at Gath (1 Sam. xxvii. 4—7) were favourably disposed to him in the bitter time of his exile. The nation was made willing to accept him in place of the successors in the line of Saul. The wise counsel of Ahithophel was turned to foolishness, and when for a time the chastisement of rebellion seemed to crush his heart, the hour of deliverance came, and the people were made willing to welcome him once more to his beloved Jerusalem. So is it still. Land and sea, men and evil spirits, life and death, are all alike in the hands of God, and he can say, "Thus far, and no further;" "Touch not mine anointed." Our Lord is Lord also of all. Our highest interests are in his holy hands, and there is nothing, seen or unseen, that can sever us from the love of God that is in Christ our Lord (Rom. viii. 35—39). How natural, then, the words "Therefore, I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord" (ver. 50)! "*He*" showeth mercy for evermore.

Additional topics—

1. The influence of success in promoting success (ver. 45).

2. The accelerated influences of the spiritual world analogous to the laws of motion (ver. 45).
3. The inherent sense in all men of the majesty of righteousness (ver. 45).
4. The power of reputed character and of deeds in extending personal influence over strangers (ver. 46).
5. Foreshadows of the final collapse of the forces of evil before the victorious Christ (ver. 46).
6. The *ever-living* God the Joy and Hope of the Christian amidst the vicissitudes of life (ver. 47).
7. The adoration of God a natural expression of the sanctified heart, and its Christian element based on an experience of his mercy (ver. 47).
8. The qualities of the rock as illustrating the Divine perfection (ver. 47).
9. The reality of providential retribution for the oppression of the righteous and the needy, as seen in individuals and nations, and revealed in history and Scripture (ver. 48).
10. The various methods by which God acts on human souls to bring them into submission to Christ (ver. 48).
11. The Divine process of bringing souls out from embarrassing circumstances, temporal and spiritual (ver. 49).
12. The concurrence of Divine and human action in spiritual conquests (ver. 49).
13. The setting forth of the wonders of redeeming mercy before men who profess no interest in Christ. How to do it (ver. 50).
14. All the resources of the Divine nature in their pledged relation to the accomplishment of the purpose of Christ, the Anointed One (ver. 51).
15. The inheritance of Christ's people in the resources belonging to him (ver. 51).
16. The permanent character of the work of redemption (ver. 51).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—51 (Ps. xviii.).—(JERUSALEM.) *David's song of praise.* "And David spake unto Jehovah the words of this song," etc. (ver. 1). It is a song of: 1. *The anointed (messiah) of the Lord*, his king (ver. 51), his servant (Ps. xviii., inscription). Like Moses and Joshua, David held a peculiar and exalted position in the kingdom of God under the Old Testament. He was "a man [unlike Saul] of God's own choosing" (1 Sam. xiii. 14; xvi. 28), to fill the office of theocratic king, and to fulfil his purposes concerning Israel and the world; he was also specially fitted for his vocation, faithfully devoted to it, and greatly blessed in it. And in the consciousness of this he here speaks. 2. *Praise to the Lord*, on the ground of his perfections, his relations, his benefits; prompted by the desire to render to him the honour which is his due (1 Sam. ii. 1—10). "To praise God means nothing else than to ascribe to him the glorious perfections which he possesses; for we can only give to him what is his own" (Hengstenberg). And, more especially, of: 3. *Thanksgiving for past deliverance*, from imminent perils, to which, as the servant of God, he was exposed through the hatred and opposition of his enemies. Of these Saul was the most formidable; and, after becoming King of Israel, David was attacked by numerous heathen nations, both separately and in combination (ch. v. 17; viii.; x.). It was probably when "the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies" (ch. vii. 1), and after the promise of an everlasting kingdom (ch. vii. 12—16), that the song was uttered; though by some it is regarded as "a great hallelujah, with which he retired from the theatre of life." "Having obtained many and signal victories, he does not, as irreligious men are accustomed to do, sing a song of triumph in honour of himself, but exalts and magnifies God, the Author of these victories, by a train of striking and appropriate epithets, and in a style of surpassing grandeur and sublimity" (Calvin). 4. *Confidence in future triumph* over all the enemies of the kingdom of God; of which the success already attained is an assurance. God is praised, not only for what he is and has been to him, but also for what he will be to "David and *his seed for ever*" (ver. 51). Of this song, consider—

I. ITS SUBSTANCE; or, the reasons for praise. 1. *The personal and intimate relationship of Jehovah* to his servant (vers. 2—4).

"Jehovah is my Rock, and my Fortress, and my, yea, my Deliverer,
My Rock-God, in whom I trust," etc.
(Vers. 2, 3.)

(1) He stands in a *peculiar* relation (beyond that which he bears to all men) to those to whom he reveals his Name, whom he takes into his fellowship, and to whom he promises to be "their God." These things make it possible to say, "my God," and (along with his gracious acts) incite the personal and ardent affection expressed at the commencement of Ps. xviii. (a liturgical variation of the song), "Fervently do I love thee, O Jehovah my Strength," etc. (2) Nature, history, and experience furnish manifold *emblems* of his excellences, and of the blessings which he bestows on those who trust in him (1 Sam. ii. 2; Deut. xxxii. 4; Gen. xv. 1). These images were suggested by the physical aspect of Palestine, and by the perilous condition and special deliverances of David in his early life, as a fugitive and a soldier, beset by many foes. (3) He is all-sufficient for the *needs* of his people, however numerous and great, for their rescue, defence, permanent security, and complete salvation.

"As worthy to be praised, do I call on Jehovah,
And (whenever I call) I am saved from mine enemies."

"Faith knows no past and no future. What God has done and will do is present to it." 2. *His marvellous deliverance.* (Vers. 5—20.) In a single comprehensive picture David describes the many dangers that encompassed him during his persecution by Saul, and the many providential interpositions (1 Sam. xxiii. 24—28) that were made on his behalf. (1) Even those whom God loves (ver. 20) are sometimes "greatly afflicted," and reduced to the *utmost extremity* (1 Sam. xxx. 1—10).

"For breakers of death surrounded me,
Streams of Belial terrified me;
Cords of Sheol girt me about,
Snares of death overtook me."
(Vers. 5, 6.)

(2) Their extreme need impels them to rely upon God all the more entirely, and to *call upon him* all the more fervently; nor do they call in vain. "In my distress I called," etc. (ver. 7), "and he heard my voice (instantly) out of his (heavenly) temple." (3) Very wonderful is *the answer* of God to their cry, in the discomfiture of their adversaries and their complete deliverance. "The means by which this deliverance was achieved were, as far as we know, those which we see in the Books of Samuel—the turns and chances of providence, his own extraordinary activity, the faithfulness of his followers, the unexpected increase of his friends. But the act of deliverance itself is described in the language which belongs to the descent upon Mount Sinai or the passage of the Red Sea" (Stanley). The unseen and eternal King was moved with wrath, at which the whole creation trembled (vers. 8, 9); he approached in the gathering thunder-clouds, and upon the wings of the wind, armed as "a man of war" (Exod. xv. 3), and preceded by his arrows of lightning (vers. 10—13); then, in the full outburst of the tempest, with the thunder of his power, "hailstones and coals of fire," he scattered the enemy, and disclosed the depths from which the cry for help arose (vers. 14—16); finally, with distinguishing, condescending, and tender care (ver. 36)—

"He reached from above, he laid hold of me,
He drew me out of great waters," etc.
(Vers. 17—20.)

"It is true that the deliverance of David was not actually attended by any such extraordinary natural phenomena; but the saving hand of God from heaven was so obviously manifested that the deliverance experienced by him could be poetically described as a miraculous interposition on the part of God" (Keil). 3. *His righteous procedure.* (Vers. 21—28.) "He delivered me *because* he delighted in me" (ver. 20). He acted toward David in accordance with his gracious choice of him to be his servant, and delivered him because he was "well pleased" with his faithful service; the ground of this deliverance being now stated more fully—

"Jehovah rendered me according to my righteousness,
According to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me," etc.

This language (comp. 1 Sam. xxvi. 13—25) neither implies entire freedom from sin nor indicates a boastful spirit, but is expressive of sincerity, integrity, fidelity; in contrast with the calumnies and wickedness of enemies, in fulfilment of a Divine call, in obedience to the Divine will generally, and in the main course of life, as: (1) An expression and justification of the ways of God in a particular instance. (2) An illustration of the law of his dealings with men (vers. 26, 27). "The truth which is here enunciated is not that the conception which man forms of God is the reflected image of his own mind and heart, but that God's conduct to man is the reflection of the relation in which man has placed himself to God (1 Sam. ii. 30; xv. 23)" (Delitzsch). "Jehovah is righteous; he loveth righteousness" (Ps. xi. 7). This is a most worthy reason for praise. (3) An admonition and encouragement; "with the design of inspiring others with zeal for the fulfilment of the Law."

> "And oppressed people thou savest;
> And thine eyes are against the haughty: them thou humblest."

4. *His continued and effectual help.* (Vers. 29—46.) The righteousness and faithfulness of God are further confirmed by the experience of David (after his deliverance from the hand of Saul) in his wars with the external enemies of the kingdom. (1) Having rescued his servant from destruction, he calls him to active conflict with surrounding enemies (vers. 29—32). In the former part of the song, David is represented as a *passive* object of his aid; in the latter, as an *active* instrument for effecting his purposes. (2) He prepares him for the conflict, and strengthens him in it (vers. 33—37). (3) He enables him to overcome his enemies and utterly destroy their power (vers. 38—43). (4) He extends and establishes his royal dominion, making him to be "head of the heathen" (vers. 44—46). Herein *the Messianic element* of the song specially appears. Not, indeed, that "it is a hymn of victory, spoken not in the person of the prophet himself, David, but in the Person of his illustrious Son and Lord" (J. Brown, 'The Sufferings and Glories of the Messiah'); nor that there is here a direct and conscious prediction of the future Christ; but that the assured triumph of "David and his seed" over the nations, the extension of the theocratic kingdom, prefigured the more glorious victories of "the King Messiah." "David's history, from first to last, was a kind of acted parable of the sufferings and glory of Christ" (Binnie). "Prophecy reveals to us the foreknowledge of God; but typical institutions reveal, not only his foreknowledge, but his providential arrangements. The facts of history become the language of prophecy, and teach us that he with whom a thousand years are but as yesterday guides the operations of distant ages with reference to each other; and thus in a typical economy we trace not only the all-beholding eye, but the all-directing hand of the Deity; not only the Divine omniscience, but the Divine omnipotence. The foretold and minute resemblance between characters and transactions, separated from each other by an interval of a thousand years, is too striking an argument of the hand of God to be controverted or explained away" (Thompson, 'Davidica'). The kingdom of Christ, nevertheless, is of a higher nature, and established by other means, than the theocratic kingdom of David. "This was the foundation of that resplendent image of the Messiah which it required the greatest of all religious changes to move from the mind of the Jewish nation, in order to raise up instead of it the still more exalted idea which was to take its place—an anointed Sovereign conquering by other arts than those of war, and in other dominions than those of earthly empire" (Stanley). "Thus all David's hopes and all his joy terminate, as ours always should, in the great Redeemer" (Matthew Henry).

II. ITS SPIRIT; as it appears throughout the song, and particularly in its conclusion—

> "Living is Jehovah, and blessed is my Rock;
> Exalted is the Rock-God of my salvation," etc.
> (Vers. 47—51.)

1. Personal, appropriating *faith.* "Faith it is which gives its peculiar grandeur to David's song of triumph; his masterpiece, and it may be the masterpiece of human poetry, inspired or uninspired. What is the element in that ode, which even now makes it stir the heart like a trumpet? What protects such words (vers. 7—17) from the imputation of mere Eastern exaggeration? The firm conviction that God is the Deliverer, not only of David, but of all who trust in him; that the whole majesty of

God, and all the powers of nature, are arrayed on the side of the good and the oppressed" (C. Kingsley, 'David: Four Sermons'). 2. Heartfelt *delight* in God. 3. Fervent *gratitude*. 4. Unreserved *consecration* to his service, his honour, his glory.

> "Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O Jehovah, among the heathen;
> And sing praises unto thy Name."
>
> (Vers. 50, 51.)

(See on this song, Chandler, Maclaren, W. M. Taylor, and commentaries on Ps. xviii.) "David, King of Judah, a soul inspired by Divine music and much other heroism, was wont to pour himself forth in song; he with a seer's eye and heart discerned the God-like among the human! struck tones that were an echo of the sphere-harmonies, and are still felt to be such. Reader, art thou one of a thousand, able still to *read* the psalms of David, and catch some echo of it through the old dim centuries; feeling far off in thine own heart what it once was to other hearts made as thine?" (Carlyle, 'Miscellaneous Essays').—D.

Ver. 24 (Ps. xviii. 23).—*Self-preservation.* "I kept myself from mine iniquity" (perversion, distortion, departure from the line of truth and rectitude). The life of a good man is a conflict (ch. x. 12). "A man will never persevere in the practice of uprightness and godliness, unless he carefully keep himself from his inquity" (Calvin). His self-preservation—

I. IMPLIES EXPOSURE TO A DANGEROUS ENEMY. 1. There is none greater than sin. Every other evil is slight compared with it. 2. Each man has "his besetting sin." "I kept myself," not merely against iniquity becoming my own, but against the iniquity which lies near to me, and to which I am specially liable from my constitution or condition (1 Sam. xxiv. 5). A traitor within the fortress is a more dangerous foe than any other. 3. It besets him at all times, in all places, and by manifold "devices." 4. To be overcome by it is inexpressibly disastrous.

II. REQUIRES THE ADOPTION OF PROPER METHODS. 1. Due consideration of the danger. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. 2. Constant and resolute vigilance against the first approaches of the enemy (Heb. iii. 13). 3. The habitual practice of self-restraint and self-denial. 4. The daily exercise of the virtues and graces that are most opposite to the sins to which he is disposed (Gal. v. 16). 5. Familiar acquaintance with the Word of God (Eph. vi. 13—17). 6. Continual looking unto God for his effectual aid. "Kept [guarded] by the power of God through faith," etc. (1 Pet. i. 5). 7. Unceasing prayer. "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21); "Keep yourselves from idols" (1 John v. 21).

III. DESERVES TO BE SOUGHT WITH THE UTMOST EARNESTNESS, because of the advantages by which it is attended. 1. An assurance of personal sincerity (1 John v. 18; Heb. iii. 14). "The careful abstaining from our own iniquity is one of the best evidences of our own integrity; and the testimony of our conscience that we have done so will be such a rejoicing as will not only lessen the grief of an afflicted state, but increase the comfort of an advanced state" (Matthew Henry). 2. An experience of Divine help, of which it is an indispensable condition. 3. An increase of moral strength. 4. A preparation for future victories. "To mortify and conquer our own appetites is more praiseworthy than to storm strong cities, to defeat mighty armies, work miracles, or raise the dead" (Scupoli).—D.

Vers. 26—28 (Ps. xviii. 25—27).—*Divine rectitude.* Consider the righteousness of God as it appears in: 1. *The supreme importance which he attaches to moral distinctions amongst men.* Such distinctions are often made light of in comparison with wisdom, might, and riches (Jer. ix. 23); and those who possess the latter despise and trample upon the ignorant, the weak, and the poor (ver. 27). But God has chiefly respect to men in their moral attitude toward himself, their relation to the law of right, their personal character (1 Sam. ii. 30). With him the great distinction is that between the righteous and the wicked (Ps. xxxiv. 15, 16). Whilst his infinite greatness dwarfs earthly power and honour into insignificance, his perfect righteousness exalts moral worth beyond measure. 2. *The different treatment which he adopts toward men of different character.* In himself he is always the same (1 Sam. xv. 29); but the aspect

which his character and dealings assume toward them is determined by their own character and conduct, and is the necessary manifestation of his unchangeable rectitude—on the one hand, toward the "loving," etc., full of love (all that is kind, desirable, and excellent); on the other, toward the "perverse," perverse (contrary, antagonistic, "as an enemy," Lam. ii. 5; Lev. xxvi. 23, 24; Hos. ii. 6), inflicting severe chastisement. "There is a higher law of grace, whereby the sinfulness of man but draws forth the tenderness of a father's pardoning pity; and the brightest revelation of his love is made to froward prodigals. But this is not the psalmist's view here, nor does it interfere with the law of retribution in its own sphere" (Maclaren). 3. *The signal change which he makes in their relative positions;* saving and exalting the oppressed and afflicted, and humbling the proud oppressor; his purpose therein being to vindicate, honour, and promote righteousness, and to restrain, correct, and put an end to iniquity (1 Sam. ii. 8, 10). "What is God doing now?" it was asked of Rabbi Jose, and the reply was, "He makes ladders on which he causes the poor to ascend and the rich to descend" (The Midrash).—D.

Ver. 31 (Ps. xviii. 30).—*God's way, Word, and defence.* "I can overcome all opposition in and with my God" (ver. 30); for: 1. *His way is perfect.* His providential dealings, especially in leading his servant forward in the conflict. Although ofttimes mysterious and different from what might have been expected, it is marked by perfect rectitude, perfect wisdom, perfect love; and is exactly adapted to effect his holy and beneficent purposes (Job xxiii. 8—10; Ps. lxxvii. 19; xcvii. 2). 2. *His Word is tried* (purified as silver and gold, without dross, and very precious). It is the chief means of preparation, instruction and help; "the sword of the Spirit." Its declarations are true, its directions good, its promises faithful (Prov. xxx. 5; Ps. xii. 6, 7). The more it is tested, whether by friends or foes, by examination or experience, the more it proves itself to be indeed the Word of God, and of unspeakable worth. "There is none like that; give it me" (1 Sam. xxi. 9). 3. *His defence is sure;* himself effectuating his Word, and being "a Shield to all that trust in him," affording certain, constant, and complete protection. Faith is the bond of union between men and God, the "taking hold of his strength," a necessary means of defence, and hence often called a shield (Eph. vi. 16; Heb. x. 35); but it is God himself who is such in the highest sense (Jer. li. 20; Deut. xxxiii. 29; Ps. v. 12). He is God alone (ver. 32); the absolute, incomparable, perfect One; worthy to be trusted and praised (ver. 4).—D.

Ver. 33.—*God is my Strength.* "The God who girdeth me with strength" (Ps. xviii. 32). Physical strength is derived from God. Much more is spiritual. It is obtained through faith. And every believer may say, "His strength is mine." Thereby: 1. *I live*—live unto God, "soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus ii. 12; Hab. ii. 4; Gal. ii. 20). 2. *I stand*—stand fast in temptation, attack, danger (Rom. xiv. 4; 2 Cor. i. 24; Phil. iv. 1). 3. *I walk*—walk forward, in the way of the Lord, surely, swiftly (ver. 34), perseveringly (2 Cor. v. 7; Isa. xl. 31). 4. *I labour*—labour with and for God, zealously, patiently, and not in vain (Isa. xxvi. 12; 1 Cor. xv. 58). 5. *I endure*—endure "hardness," afflictions, reproaches, yea, all things, supported and "strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man" (2 Tim. ii. 3; Heb. xi. 27; Ps. cxxxviii. 3). 6. *I fight*—fight "the good fight of faith," against his enemies, courageously and effectually (ver. 35). 7. *I overcome*—overcome in life and death (1 Cor. xv. 57).—D.

Ver. 36.—*True greatness.* "Thy answering hath made me great." Ps. xviii. 35, "Thy gentleness" (humility, meekness, condescending grace). True greatness consists not in external prosperity, nor in splendid achievements, but in moral and spiritual excellence. "The good alone are great." Notice—

I. Its conditions, on the part of man. 1. Conscious weakness, the sense of utter helplessness in himself (1 Sam. xxx. 1—10; John xv. 5; 2 Cor. xii. 10; Heb. xi. 34). 2. Believing prayer (ver. 7). "By showing us our own nothingness, humility forces us to depend upon God; and the expression of that dependence is prayerfulness." 3. Ardent aspiration. "When sea-water rises into the clouds it loses its saltness and becomes fresh; so the soul when lifted up to God" (Tamil proverb).

II. ITS BESTOWMENT; by "that practical hearkening on the part of God when called upon for help, which was manifested in the fact that God made his steps broad" (Keil). 1. In wonderful condescension (Ps. cxxxviii. 6). 2. By manifold methods; preserving, instructing, strengthening, exalting those who trust in him. 3. With considerate adaptation to their nature and capacities. "The great God and Father, intent on making his children great, follows them and plies them with the gracious indirections of a faithful and patient love" (Bushnell, 'Christ and his Salvation'). "Like as a father," etc. (Ps. ciii. 13).

III. ITS MANIFESTATION. As the effect of sunshine and rain, received and appropriated by a plant, appears in its abounding strength, beauty, and fruitfulness, so the effect of Divine grace appears in enlargement and elevation of mind, sincere and fervent love to God, a set purpose to do his will, eminence in "love, joy, peace, gentleness," etc. (Gal. v. 22), maturity of character (Hos. xiv. 5—7), holy and beneficent activity, growing conformity to the perfect Pattern of true greatness (Matt. xx. 25—27). "Have the mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. ii. 5).—D.

Ver. 50 (Ps. xviii. 49).—*The praise of God among the heathen.* "Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O Jehovah, among the heathen" (Rom. xv. 9). The purpose of God to bestow the blessings of salvation upon *all nations* was made known in the earliest ages (Gen. xii. 3; Numb. xiv. 21; Deut. xxxii. 43). "From the beginning there existed a power to rise above the exclusiveness of Old Testament religion, namely, the vital germ of knowledge, that the kingdom of God would one day find its completion in a universal monarchy embracing all people" (Riehm, 'Messianic Prophecy'). In sympathy and co-operation with the Divine purpose David here speaks. That purpose is, in its highest sense, fulfilled in the extension of the kingdom of Christ (1 Sam. ii. 10; v. 3). This language is such as might be adopted by Christ himself (Ps. ii. 8; Heb. ii. 9—13). It should be that of all his followers; to whom he said, "Go ye, therefore" (Matt. xxviii. 18—20), "proclaim the good news to every creature" (Mark xvi. 15); "Ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke xxiv. 48; Acts i. 8). As such it indicates—

I. A JOYFUL PROCLAMATION of the Word of truth, by which God is glorified in his Son (ch. vii. 14, 26); pertaining to: 1. *His marvellous doings*, in conflict with the powers of evil and in victory over them, through humiliation, suffering, and sacrifice (Ps. xxii.). "Make known his deeds among the people" (Ps. cv. 1, 2; John xii. 31, 32). 2. *His glorious exaltation* and reign (ver. 47). "Say among the heathen, The Lord is King" (Ps. xcvi. 10; Phil. ii. 9—11). His reign is righteous, beneficent, and universal. 3. *His saving benefits*—the remission of sins, deliverance from oppression, "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." "Praise him, all ye people: for his merciful kindness is great," etc. (Ps. cxvii. 1, 2). "The means of bringing them to the knowledge of God is not the sword, but the proclamation of God's great deeds for his people. As David in his character of missionary to the heathen world praises his God's grace, so at bottom all missionary work among the heathen is, in the announcement of the Word of the God who is revealed in Christ, a continuous praise of the Name of the living God" (Erdmann).

II. A SACRED RESOLVE. "I will praise thee." This determination, or "vow of thanksgiving," ought to be made by every one who has himself received the knowledge of salvation, from: 1. A feeling of *compassion* for the urgent need of the heathen (Acts xvi. 9). He may not keep the "good tidings" to himself (1 Kings vii. 9). 2. A conviction of *duty*, arising from acquaintance with the merciful purpose and express commands of the Lord. 3. An impulse of *grateful love*, on account of the condescending grace shown toward himself, constraining him to obey the Lord's will, promote his purpose, and glorify his Name. It will also lead him to employ every means in his power that "Christ may be magnified" (Phil. i. 20).

III. A CONFIDENT PERSUASION that the heathen will listen to "the joyful sound," freely submit themselves (vers. 44—46), and join in the praise of God; founded on: 1. His *power* to effect his purposes. 2. His *faithfulness* in fulfilling his promises. 3. His past *achievements* (vers. 48, 49). "They shall come and declare his righteousness" (Ps. xxii. 27—31). "Above eighteen centuries have verified the prediction of the permanency of his kingdom, founded as it was by no human means, endowed with

inextinguishable life, ever conquering and to conquer in the four quarters of the world; a kingdom one and alone since the world has been, embracing all climes and times, and still expanding, unworn by the destroyer of all things, time; strong amid the decay of empires; the freshness and elasticity of youth written on the brow which has outlived eighteen centuries" (Pusey, 'Daniel,' p. 62).—D.

Vers. 2—4.—*God the Refuge and Deliverer.* The psalm was composed as a thanksgiving for the safety and deliverances David had experienced when Saul so persistently sought to destroy him, and afterwards in the wars with the house of Saul, and with the heathen tribes that set themselves against him. It appears to belong to an earlier period than the place it occupies in the book would indicate. It is scarcely possible that David could have asserted his uprightness and innocence in the strong terms of vers. 21—25 after his great sins. These verses form the introduction to the psalm, and express in emphatic language the safety and salvation which David had found in God. The Christian may use the words of the similar perils to which he is exposed, and of others not immediately in the psalmist's view.

I. THE DANGERS TO WHICH WE ARE EXPOSED. Bodily, mental, spiritual. To reputation. From our own constitutional tendencies. From diseases and accidents. From the malice of men, and their favour. From prosperity and adversity. From solitude and society. From labours, rest, and pleasures. From Satan and his angels. From the broken Law and injured justice of God. Always and everywhere, under all circumstances and conditions, we are all exposed to perils.

II. THE SAFETY AND DELIVERANCE TO BE FOUND IN GOD. The psalmist labours to express his sense of the protection, safety, and deliverance which God had vouchsafed to him, yea, which God himself had *been* to him. The imagery he uses is taken chiefly from natural features of Palestine, with which he had become especially familiar as affording refuge and safety during the time that he was hunted by Saul. He calls him "my Rock," in the heights and recesses of which he had been safe from his foes; "my Fortress," his fortified castle, too high to be reached, too strong to be broken into; "my Deliverer," by whose aid he had escaped from many a peril; "the God of my Rock," equivalent to "my mighty God;" "my Shield and the Horn of my salvation," at once protecting him in battle and pushing his enemies to their destruction; "my high Tower," or lofty Retreat; "my Refuge and my Saviour." What the Almighty was to David he is to all his people. We may use similar language. Our dangers may not be so fearful in appearance, or so numerous, or so obvious; but they are as real and serious. And our safety and deliverance must come from "the Lord." The words of the text show that it is not only what he employs for our good, nor what he himself does, but what he *is*, that assures of safety. Not only does he afford protection and secure deliverance; he is our Protector and Deliverer. In his almightiness, love, knowledge, wisdom, universal presence, observation, and operation, we realize salvation. In Jesus Christ, his very righteousness has become our friend, and assures us of victory. The safety thus assured is not absolute immunity from trouble, but protection from the evil it might produce, and change of its character. The righteous are visited with calamities similar to those which befall the wicked, and in some conditions of society with calamities peculiar to themselves. But in their case they lose their unfriendly character, and become visitations of a Father's love, means of deliverance from worse evils, and of obtaining greater good. The evil which they might do God will defend us from, if we trust and obey him. Nor are the righteous sure of absolute preservation from sin, though they would enjoy perfect immunity if they fulfilled the necessary conditions on their part. But they have a right to feel sure of preservation of body and soul in this world, until their appointed work is done; and of final deliverance from all evils (2 Tim. iv. 18). They should not desire more.

III. THE CONDITIONS OF SAFETY AND DELIVERANCE. 1. *Faith.* "In him will I trust" (ver. 3). Confidence in God as our Friend, Protector, and Saviour. Especially as he is revealed to us in the gospel. Faith assures us of the Divine love, lays hold of the Divine strength, enables us to flee to God as our Refuge, to rise to the lofty Rock and Tower where we are above all adverse powers, and safe from their assaults, and gives the calmness needful for employing such means as tend to safety and victory. "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark ix. 23). 2. *Prayer.* "I will call on

the Lord . . . so shall I be saved from mine enemies" (ver. 4). Faith prompts obedience, as in other respects, so in respect to prayer. Divine help and protection are promised to those who pray. "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Ps. l. 15). The sense of peril, the knowledge that there is safety in God, and that his delivering power is exercised on behalf of those who seek him, cannot but lead the Christian to that earnest and believing prayer which prevails. The Apostle Paul, after pointing out other methods of ensuring victory over our enemies, adds, "Praying always," etc. (Eph. vi. 18).

IV. THE RETURN TO BE MADE FOR SAFETY AND DELIVERANCE REALIZED, AND ANTICIPATED. Praise. This psalm is one of the returns of praise which David made to his Deliverer, of whom he speaks in ver. 4 as "the Lord who is worthy to be praised." Many are ready to pray to God in danger, who forget or refuse to praise him when they have experienced deliverance. The Christian will not fail to give thanks, not only for what he has experienced of Divine protection, but for what he feels sure he shall experience, up to and including victory over death itself, "the last enemy," in view of whose approach he sings, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. xv. 26, 57).—G. W.

Ver. 4.—*God worthy to be praised.* The conjunction of ideas here is a little singular. "I will *pray* to the Lord, who is worthy to be *praised*." It may originate in the feeling that it is fitting that, when we seek new blessings from God, we should not be unmindful of those which he has already bestowed. Praise should accompany prayer (see Phil. iv. 6, "prayer . . . with thanksgiving"). Add that the subjects of praise are encouragements to prayer. In the act of praising him we are reminding ourselves of the strong reasons we have for hopefully seeking further mercies from him.

I. GOD IS WORTHY TO BE PRAISED. Not merely to be feared, entreated, strictly obeyed, and submitted to. He is worthy of thankful and rejoicing obedience and submission. It is not fitting that he should be served sullenly or silently; or that prayer to him should be as a cry of a slave to his master, or of one oppressed to his oppressor, or as a request for help addressed to a stranger. We should speak to him with the confidence and love which his relation to us and past goodness are fitted to inspire. One way of ensuring this is to blend praise with prayer.

II. WHAT IT IS THAT RENDERS HIM WORTHY TO BE PRAISED. Some obtain praise who are not worthy of it in any measure; others, much more than they deserve. But God is worthy of and "exalted above all blessing and praise" (Neh. ix. 5). Whether we consider his nature, his regard for his creatures, his works or his gifts, we must feel that it is impossible to render him praise worthy of him. But to the utmost of our power we should praise him for: 1. *His glorious perfections.* Especially his infinite moral excellences—his truth, holiness, righteousness, and love. 2. *His wonderful works.* In creation, providence, and grace. 3. Specially, *his redeeming mercy.* His kindness to us in Christ. The display of his perfections in the gift, the Person, and the work of our Lord and Saviour. The mercy he exercises in the forgiveness of sin, the admission of sinners into his family, and all the operations by which he brings his "many sons [and daughters] unto glory" (Heb. ii. 10). The gift of the Holy Spirit for this purpose. The final bliss and glory. 4. *The goodness of God to ourselves.* Not forgetting that he is "worthy to be praised" for the commonest blessings we enjoy, as well as those distinguishing blessings which we receive as his children through faith in Christ. And not only for the blessings which give us pleasure, but for those which give us pain, but are bestowed that we may become in a greater measure "partakers of his holiness" (Heb. xii. 10).

III. BY WHOM HE OUGHT TO BE PRAISED. 1. *By all his creatures according to their capacity.* All his inanimate and irrational creatures do praise him. Their existence, qualities, order, and (as to the living creatures) their happiness "show forth the excellences" of their Creator. "All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord" (Ps. cxlv. 10; comp. Ps. cxlviii.; xix. 1—4). All intelligent beings ought to praise him; all the right-minded of them do. Those who enjoy least of his bounty have much to thank him for, and often praise him more than those who enjoy most. We do not say that those who are suffering in hell the penalty due to their sins can be expected to praise him whose wrath abides so terribly upon them; although, if a somewhat fashionable doctrine

be true, they have strong reasons for giving him thanks, since he is taking the wisest and best means to make them meet for the glory and joy in heaven which will at length be their portion! 2. *Especially by his redeemed people.* Who are the objects of his special regard and gracious operation, and to whom the work of praise on earth is peculiarly committed (Isa. xliii. 21; 1 Pet. ii. 9). On some accounts the redeemed and regenerate have more reason to give thanks to God than those who have never sinned.

> "They see
> On earth a bounty not indulged on high,
> And downward look for Heaven's superior praise. . . .
> They sang Creation, for in that they shared:
> Creation's great superior, man, is thine;
> Thine is redemption; they just gave the key,
> 'Tis thine to raise and eternize the song."
> (Young.)

Nevertheless, angels do give thanks for redemption, and with good reason. For it is the work of the God whom they love; it enriches their conceptions of him; it enlarges their service of him; and it supremely and eternally blesses vast multitudes in whom they feel the deepest interest. It thus gratifies their desires, and adds to their wealth of knowledge, goodness, and happiness.

IV. THE KIND AND DURATION OF THE PRAISE OF WHICH HE IS WORTHY. 1. *The kind.* Clearly the best possible; which is not necessarily that which is most poetical or most musical, though in these respects man should do his best. But that is best of all which comes from the heart, and from a heart fullest of admiration, adoration, love, and gratitude. Much which professes to be praise of God is heartless mockery. 2. *The duration.* For ever and ever (Eph. iii. 21). While we have any being, in this world and the next (Ps. cxlv. 1, 2; cxlvi. 2). For, as God is everlasting, the reasons for praising him can never end.—G. W.

Ver. 7.—*Prayer in distress heard.* The distress referred to is graphically described in vers. 5, 6, 17, 18. The interposition of God for the psalmist's deliverance is poetically depicted in vers. 8—20. The connecting link is given in this verse. David, in his danger and trouble, called on God, and therefore he was delivered. We have here—

I. DISTRESS. This may arise from various causes; such as: 1. *Enemies.* As in David's case, with the dangers of the battles fought against them. There are many forms less extreme in which the enmity of men may show itself and occasion pain or peril. 2. *Circumstances.* Worldly losses and anxieties. 3. *Personal affliction.* Of body or mind. Special distress from afflictions which implicate the nerves, and so the mind itself. 4. *Death of dear friends.* 5. *Conviction of sin.* (See Ps. xxxii. 3, 4.) It would be well if this form of distress were more common. 6. *Pressure of powerful temptation.* The mighty and threatening uprising of inward corruptions, or the pressing solicitations of evil from without. 7. *Fear of calamities or of death.*

II. PRAYER. Natural for men to call upon God when they are in great trouble or danger. Yet all do not; and of many the prayers are unacceptable, because they lack the moral and spiritual elements of successful prayer (see Hos. vii. 14). Prayer, to be acceptable, must be: 1. *That of a righteous man.* (Vers. 21—25; Jas. v. 16; Ps. lxvi. 18.) Yet the prayers of one who is stirred by his affliction to sincere repentance will be heard; for repentance is the beginning of righteousness. 2. *Offered in faith.* (Matt. xxi. 22.) 3. *Importunate and persevering.* (Luke xi. 8, *seq.*; xviii. 1—8.) 4. *Accompanied, where practicable, with the use of appropriate means.* David fought vigorously as well as prayed earnestly.

III. DELIVERANCE. The Almighty heard the psalmist's voice "out of his temple" (equivalent to "the heavens"), and, interposing in majesty and power, delivered him, discomfiting and scattering his foes. True prayer is always heard and answered; but the deliverance granted is often not according to our conceptions and desires, yet ever according to the perfect wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father. Sometimes the causes of our distress are removed; sometimes they are allowed to continue, but the distress is allayed, and the causes turned into blessings. So it was with St. Paul's "thorn in the flesh," although he prayed earnestly and repeatedly (2 Cor. xii. 8—10).

Spiritual deliverance, however, is always granted to those who truly seek it; and ultimately complete rescue from all that afflicts the Christian.

IV. GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE AND THANKSGIVING. Although David's victories were wrought through the skill and valour of himself and his troops, he gives to God all the glory of them; for he knew that all was due to him. His example will be followed by the Christian, as he reviews life and calls to mind his distresses and deliverances. He will recognize the hand of God in all, and render praise to him who both furnishes the means of deliverance and exercises the power which renders them successful. Finally, let none wait for trouble before they begin to pray. Live in the habit of prayer, and you will be able, when trouble comes, to pray truly and successfully. Otherwise you may find yourself in the miserable condition of those described in ver. 42, who "looked even unto the Lord, but he answered them not."—G. W.

Vers. 17—20.—*Rescue from mighty foes.* In vers. 8—16 the psalmist depicts Jehovah as appearing in his glory for the deliverance of his servant. The picture may have been occasioned by a storm which, in one of his battles, had terrified his enemies and aided in their discomfiture (comp. Josh. x. 11; 1 Sam. vii. 10). In the text he narrates the deliverance itself.

I. THE ENEMIES. Who were: 1. *Malignant.* "Hated me." There was not only opposition and contest, but personal hatred. Many of the Christian's foes have this quality in a high degree (John xvii. 14), notably their great leader and chief, Satan (equivalent to "adversary," 1 Pet. v. 8). 2. *Powerful.* "My strong enemy . . . too strong for me." In physical strength, or military, or in numbers. David may have had in view such instances as those recorded in ch. viii. 3—5 and xxi. 15—17. The Christian's foes also are "powers" (Eph. vi. 12). Wherein consists the power of the enemies of the righteous? (1) Their inherent vigour; (2) their adaptation to our lower nature; (3) their number. 3. *Subtle.* "They prevented me in the day of my calamity." They rushed upon him unexpectedly, when he was enfeebled by calamity, and poorly prepared for them. David may be thinking of the attack of the Syrians of Damascus, while he and his army were engaged with Hadadezer or exhausted by the contest with him (ch. viii. 5); or of the assault of the giant Ishbi-benob, while he was faint from fighting against the Philistines (ch. xxi. 15, 16). Thus, also, the Christian's foes often surprise him when he is preoccupied or distressed by troubles. The day of calamity is a day of spiritual danger. 4. *In a measure successful.* So that he became as a man struggling for life in "great waters" (comp. vers. 5, 6). It seemed as if he must be swallowed up. Thus, also, the enemies of the Christian may do him much mischief, temporal and even spiritual; but there is a limit to their power. "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. xvi. 9).

II. THE DELIVERER. Jehovah, the Almighty, whose glorious interposition on behalf of his servant, in answer to his cry of distress, is described in the previous verses. They set forth: 1. *His awful majesty.* 2. *His power over all the forces of nature.* 3. *The intensity of his interest in his troubled servants.* How he rouses himself, as it were, for the rescue of those in whom he delights (ver. 20). 4. *His anger against their enemies.* (Vers. 8, 9.) With such a Friend, who can neither be surprised, evaded, or resisted, the righteous need not dread the might of any adversary, nor despair of deliverance from the direst troubles.

III. THE DELIVERANCE. God: 1. *Supported him in his perils.* "The Lord was my Stay." 2. *He saved him from them.* "He stretched forth his hand from on high; he laid hold of me; he drew me out of great waters; he delivered me," etc. God's hand can reach his servants in the lowest depths of trouble, and is strong to rescue them from the strongest of their foes. 3. *He brought him into a condition of freedom and safety.* "Into a large place," a broad, open space, where no "cords of Sheol," or "snares of death" (ver. 6, Revised Version), would embarrass or endanger him; where he could move about with perfect freedom, and yet perfect security. Such help from on high is realized by God's people in this world; perfectly when the hand of their God lays hold of them and raises them from earth to heaven.

IV. THE PRAISE. (See homilies on vers. 2—4, 4, and 7.) The perfections and acts of Jehovah are of such a nature that to merely recite them is to praise him. We should

acquaint ourselves as fully as possible with his excellences and works, that we may better praise him by declaring them; but our own experience of his power and goodness will give us the liveliest apprehension of them, and stimulate us to the most ardent praise.—G. W.

Vers. 21—25.—*God rewarding the righteous.* "He delivered me because he delighted in me," the psalmist had just said. The reasons of the Divine delight in him, and his consequent deliverance, are given in these verses. They at first startle us, as inconsistent with the humility which is part of the character of a godly man, and as peculiarly unsuitable in the mouth of one who had been guilty of adultery and murder. The latter part of the difficulty is removed if, as is most probable, the psalm belongs to the earlier period of David's reign, before his commission of those grievous sins. As to the former, we should hardly find the Apostle Paul writing in this strain; but rather referring all his successes to the exceeding grace of God (see 1 Cor. xv. 9, 10). His consciousness of sin in general, and of his special guilt on account of his persecution of Christians, prevented everything that savoured of boasting, at least before God. But even he, in appealing to men, did not shrink from reciting his excellences and devoted labours (see 2 Cor. i. 12; vi. 3—10; xi. 5—31), though ready to call himself a "fool" for recounting them. And, after all, the truth that God does reward the righteous according to their righteousness is as much a doctrine of the New Testament as of the Old; and there are occasions when Christians may fittingly recognize and declare that the favour God is showing them is according to their righteousness; although the deeper consciousness of sin, and of entire dependence on the mercy of God, which is awakened by the revelations of the gospel, makes the Christian more reluctant to mention his virtues as a reason for the kindness of God to him. As the meritorious ground of such kindness, David would have been as far as St. Paul from regarding them. Notice—

I. THE PSALMIST'S CHARACTER. This he describes by various words and phrases, which only in part differ from each other. 1. *Righteousness.* Uprightness, rectitude, moral and spiritual goodness in general. 2. *Cleanness of hands.* Hands free from the stain of innocent blood, of "filthy lucre," etc. 3. *Observance of God's ways.* The ways he prescribes of thought, feeling, speech, and action. These are inquired after and followed by the good man. 4. *Adherence to God.* "Have not wickedly departed from my God"—from his presence, worship, the ways he prescribes, and in which he is to be found. Some degree of turning from God at times, every one who knows himself will be conscious of; but "wickedly" to depart from him, to do so consciously, deliberately, persistently, this is apostasy, the very opposite of godliness and righteousness. The Christian will esteem the slightest deviation from God as wicked; but he justly recalls his perseverance in the habits of piety and holiness, in spite of all temptations, with thankfulness. 5. *Mindfulness of his Word, and persevering obedience to it.* God's Word is "his statutes," what he has determined and appointed, and "his judgments," what he declares and prescribes as just and right. These the psalmist "kept before" him, and from them he "did not depart." And his attention and obedience to them were universal—they extended to "all" of them. One necessary quality of a true obedience. "Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto *all* thy commandments" (Ps. cxix. 6). 6. *Uprightness before God.* With regard both to him and to men. 7. *Avoidance of the besetting sin.* "I have kept myself from mine iniquity." There is a particular sin to which each is specially prone. To keep one's self from that, by watchfulness, prayer, and resolute resistance, is special evidence of genuine piety. 8. *Purity of life in general.* "My cleanness," and that "in his eyesight," a very different thing from being pure in the eyes of men. Includes purity of heart as well as conduct, such as is so true and genuine as to bear the Divine inspection.

II. THE PSALMIST'S RECOMPENSE. In his preservation and deliverance from so many perils and enemies, he recognized the Divine reward of his righteousness, the Divine reply to the calumnies of his enemies, the Divine attestation of his innocence. 1. *There is a real righteousness in the character of godly men.* By this they are essentially distinguished from others. It is not a mere difference of taste. 2. *The Divine recompense of such righteousness is certain.* On account of: (1) The character of God. "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness" (Ps. xi. 7). (2) His relation to the righteous.

As their Father, etc. (3) His promises. (4) His almighty power. He is able to do all that is suitable to his nature, and that he has bound himself to do by his Word. 3. *Those who receive such recompense should recognize and acknowledge it.* The righteous do continually receive recompense for their righteousness; rewards, both spiritual, material, and social. But sometimes the happy results of their piety are very manifest, and then they should be specially noticed. (1) To the glory of God. Praising him and inciting others to praise him. (2) For encouragement of themselves and their brethren. Increasing their faith, and strengthening their determination to continue in their chosen course, and their assurance of ultimate, complete recognition and reward. For the whole reward is not yet. "Great is your reward *in heaven*" (Matt. v. 12); but on earth the "guerdon" may be

"Many a sorrow, many a labour,
Many a tear."

Finally, in the Lord Jesus Christ we have the perfect Example of righteousness and its recompense; how it may be tried, and how sure is its reward. In him, too, we behold the Source of righteousness for us, and the Pledge of its ultimate triumph.—G. W.

Vers. 26, 27.—*Correspondence between the character of men and the conduct of God towards them.* The psalmist, having spoken of God's treatment of himself according to his righteousness, now shows that his case was no exception to the general rule of the Divine proceedings, but an illustration of it; that, universally, God renders to men according to their character and works.

I. THE MERCIFUL EXPERIENCE HIS MERCY. Our Lord declares the same truth, when he says, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. v. 7); and when he declares, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matt. vi. 14); and teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. vi. 12, Revised Version). But how does this consist with the doctrine of justification by faith? It *must* be in harmony with it, since both are Divine. If it do not accord with some human statements of the doctrine, it must be because these are erroneous or defective. Faith is not a mere assent to the truth, or reliance on the atonement of Christ and the mercy of God in him; but it involves acceptance of Christ as Teacher and Lord as well as Redeemer, and therefore a willing obedience to his instructions, of which part is that we should be forgiving, and that only those who are shall be forgiven—only the merciful shall find mercy. Moreover, faith in the love of God in Christ works love in the heart; a faith which does not is of no avail. From another point of view, "repentance toward God" is as essential to salvation as "faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts xx. 21), and will be produced by it. It is vain, therefore, for the unmerciful to trust in the mercy of God, or to cry to him for mercy; his mercy is shown only to the merciful. But to them it is shown; and that not only in the forgiveness of their sins, but in the bestowment of all needful blessings. They also should bear in mind that their enjoyment of the love of God will be in proportion to the love which they cherish and display; and that every degree of selfishness will deprive them of some blessing.

II. THE UPRIGHT EXPERIENCE GOD'S UPRIGHTNESS. He is essentially upright, just, faithful; but the happy experience of his uprightness is for those who "walk uprightly" (Ps. lxxxiv. 11)—those who are sincere and true-hearted towards God and men. To these he will show himself upright by manifesting to them his favour, and fulfilling to them all his promises (comp. Ps. xcii. 12—15); while to others he will show the same quality by the execution of his threatenings.

III. THE PURE EXPERIENCE HIS PURITY. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. v. 8). 1. *Genuine Christians are holy.* Truly so, though not perfectly. They have been cleansed by the Word and Spirit of God, and "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son" (1 John i. 7). They have turned from sin, and it is their abhorrence. They watch and pray against it; and, when they fall into it, mourn with sincere grief. They cherish purity of heart, lip, and life. They desire and strive after perfect holiness. 2. *To such God shows himself holy.* (1) He reveals to them his holiness. They are capable of such a revelation, because of their purity of heart. Sin blinds the soul,

incapacitating it from discerning and appreciating the holy. (2) He acts towards them holily. He requires holiness of them, and works it in them. All his dealings with them are in accordance with holiness, and have for their end to promote their sanctification. Hence he does not indulge his children, but, when necessary, afflicts them, that they may become more and more "partakers of his holiness" (Heb. xii. 10). He will not be satisfied until they perfectly reflect his image, and he can "present them holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight" (Col. i. 22).

IV. THE FROWARD FIND HIM FROWARD. 1. *Sinners are froward.* They are perverse, unreasonable, ungovernable, impracticable. They show this in their feeling and conduct towards God, his Word and ways. They will not submit to his instructions or obey his commands. They "walk contrary unto" him (Lev. xxvi. 21), do the opposite to that which he enjoins. 2. *To them God shows himself froward.* It is a bold expression, and therefore, perhaps, the translators of this book softened it into "unsavoury," or distasteful. But the same word is rightly translated in Ps. xviii. 26, "froward." The meaning is clear. God acts as if perverse towards the perverse. As they will not pay regard to his will, he will not to their desires and prayers. As they oppose him, he opposes them, thwarts their purposes, disappoints their hopes. As they "walk contrary unto" him, he "will also walk contrary unto" them (Lev. xxvi. 24). It is a universal truth, discernible: (1) In nature. If we would have nature work good to us, we must learn and obey its laws. If we will not, they will work us harm. (2) In the affairs of life—in business and association with men. If we will not ascertain and live according to the laws which should regulate our conduct, they will avenge themselves, inflicting pain, loss, perhaps utter ruin. (3) In respect to religion and salvation. These originate in the benevolent will of God; and if we would experience their benefits, we must have humble and obedient regard to that will. We must ask of him, "What must I do to be saved?" and "What wilt thou have me to do?" If we choose to reject the Divine revelations and requirements, and in pride and perversity take a course opposed to them, the Almighty will not alter his plans to please us, but will bring upon us the just consequences of our frowardness. He will appear froward to the froward, in that, when they call upon him, he will not answer; when they seek him early, they shall not find him (see Prov. i. 24—29). It is vain and foolish for man to assert his own proud, capricious will; he will find that there is another and stronger will, that will assert itself to his discomfiture and destruction, unless he repent. —G. W.

Ver. 28.—*God observing and humbling the proud.* "Thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down." The mention of "afflicted people" in the first clause of this verse renders it probable that the psalmist, in the second, referred to proud oppressors who had afflicted them. But the words express a general truth.

I. GOD'S OBSERVATION OF THE PROUD. "His eyes are upon the haughty." 1. *He sees them;* knows who they are, distinguishes them from others, overlooks none of them. 2. *He sees through them, with those piercing eyes of his,* that search the hearts of men. However they may conceal or disguise their pride before men, they cannot before him. 3. *He notices all the exercises and manifestations of their pride.* Their self-complacency and self-laudation; their contempt of others, their insolence, their injustice, their oppression of the meek and humble, their self-assertion as towards him, their resistance and unsubmissiveness, etc.; all is open to his view; and he notes all for remembrance, exposure, and punishment. If the proud did but realize that the eyes of the Infinite One were upon them, how ridiculous would their pride soon appear to themselves! how unbecoming and contemptible as well as impious! How would the things on which they pride themselves—their strength, intellect, knowledge, wealth, honours, mastery of men, virtues, etc., shrivel into insignificance as they looked upon them with the consciousness that God was looking on! 4. *He keeps them ever in sight.* So that nothing can escape his view, and they cannot elude him or do anything to the real injury of his servants.

II. HIS HUMILIATION OF THEM. At the right time and in the most effectual way. "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased" (Luke xviii. 14). 1. *Jehovah sometimes brings down the haughty from the position which fosters or displays their pride.* He may deprive them of that on which they pride themselves—their property,

mental vigour, physical strength, reputation (by permitting them to fall into some disgraceful sin, or otherwise), power over others. He may bring reverses upon them in the full career of their prosperity or enterprises; snatch from them the coveted prize just as they are about to grasp it; rescue the humble victims of their oppressions. While reducing them to a lower level, he may exalt above them some whom they have despised. In the height of their glory he may strike them suddenly down. Pharaoh, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Haman, Herod, are illustrations of the humbling which God may administer to the haughty. In every case of impenitent pride terrible humiliation comes at death and judgment. 2. *He sometimes brings the proud down in their own esteem—humbles their spirit.* This may be by such methods as have just been referred to; and the spirit may be humbled without being really changed. But the happiest humiliation is that which is wrought in the heart by the Word and Spirit of God, aided by such methods or apart frem them. The man thus affected comes to see his true position as a creature and a sinner. He discerns and recognizes his entire dependence on God; that whatever he has he has received (1 Cor. iv. 7). He perceives and acknowledges the sin and folly of his pride, humbles himself before God on account of it, casts himself on his mercy, gladly accepts pardon and salvation as a free gift of God's grace in Christ Jesus; and thus receives a better exaltation than ever he had known or imagined before. Happy those haughty ones whom God thus brings down!

Then, eschew pride; and "be clothed with humility" (1 Pet. v. 5, 6). This grace may best be learned at the cross of Christ. There we see our condition of evil and peril as sinners, our entire dependence for salvation on the mercy of God and the merits of his Son, our equality in respect to sin and salvation with the meanest of those we are tempted to despise. There also we have presented to our contemplation the noblest model of humility and self-humiliation (Phil. ii. 5—8).—G. W.

Ver. 29.—*God the Lamp of his people.* The image of a lamp seems at first too humble to be employed of God. "The Lord God is a Sun" (Ps. lxxxiv. 11) appears more suitable for One so great, who is the Light of the universe. Still, the humbler and homelier image is expressive. A lamp is of service where the sun is of none—in mines, dark cellars and dungeons, etc. Its light is more readily commanded and appropriated. We can say, "*My* lamp," we cannot so well say, "*My* sun." And so this image may convey to us more readily how God is a Light in the darkest places and obscurest recesses; available to each for his own particular needs and for the humblest uses of daily life. But the distinction need not and should not be pressed. The word is an image of light.

I. A FACT STATED. "Thou art my Lamp, O Lord." 1. *He shines as a bright lamp.* (1) He is Light without darkness (1 John i. 5); essential, independent, unchangeable, and eternal Light. Not needing to be or capable of being replenished, as all other lamps, literal or figurative. (2) He shines pre-eminently in his Son Jesus Christ. (3) In and by his Word—its declarations, precepts, promises, threatenings. "The commandment is a lamp, and the Law is light" (Prov. vi. 23). (4) By his Spirit, in the reason, conscience, and heart of man. Thus "the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord" (Prov. xx. 27, Revised Version). (5) In and by his people. He so shines on them as to make them lights. 2. *He thus fulfils the various purposes of a lamp.* (1) Revealing. Himself, and in his light all other persons and things in their true nature and relations to him and each other (comp. Eph. v. 13). Bringing into view what had been hidden in the heart, etc., by the darkness. (2) Guiding. In the way that is right and safe, and leads to salvation (Ps. cxix. 105). He thus gives "the light of life" (John viii. 12). (3) Cheering (Ps. iv. 6, 7; xcvii. 11; comp. Esth. viii. 16). 3. *He is a Lamp to each believer.* "*My* Lamp." Similarly, "The Lord is *my* Light" (Ps. xxvii. 1). The godly man accepts the Divine light, uses it in practical life, enjoys the comfort of it. Others reject it, and wander and stumble on in darkness.

II. AN ASSURANCE CHERISHED. "The Lord will lighten my darkness." From his knowledge of God and his promises, and his past experience, the psalmist felt assured that, whatever darkness might come upon him, God would be his light in and through it, yea, would turn the darkness into light. Such an assurance may be cherished by all the people of God. He will lighten the darkness which may arise from: 1. *Perplexity.* As to Divine truth and as to the path of duty. 2. *Sin.* The memory of sins

long past or recent; the consciousness of proneness to evil. 3. *Spiritual gloom.* When the lights of heaven seem blotted out, and God seems himself to have deserted the soul (Ps. xxii. 1, 2; xlii.). 4. *Troubles.* Afflictions of body; bereavements, making dark the home; unkindness or unfaithfulness of friends; worldly losses. When all other lights go out, and leave in gloom, God remains, the Light of his friends, and will in due time lighten their darkness.

Let all, then, accept this glorious Lamp for their guidance and comfort. How blessed the world of which it is said, "There shall be no night there . . . for the Lord God giveth them light;" and again, "The glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the Light thereof" (Rev. xxii. 5; xxi. 23)!—G. W.

Ver. 31.—*Perfection of God's way and Word.* These words may be regarded as a brief summary of the lessons which David had learned from his varied experiences and meditations. They are the perfection of God's way, the unmixed truth of his Word, and the safety of all who flee to him for protection.

I. THE PERFECTION OF GOD'S WAY. "His way is perfect." This is true of all his proceedings, in every department of his operations. His ways in nature are to a large extent inscrutable; but we are sure they are infinitely wise and good. His method of redeeming and saving sinners is perfect. But here the reference is rather to the course of his providence—the way in which he leads, governs, protects, and delivers his servants. 1. *The meaning of the assertion.* That God's way is perfectly wise and good and holy, perfectly adapted to fulfil the purposes of his love towards his children, and leads to an end that is perfectly good. That, in comparison with the way we might have preferred, it is infinitely superior. 2. *The grounds of the assertion.* It expresses a conviction which springs from: (1) Reason. Because God is perfect, his way must be. Perfect Wisdom and Goodness cannot err; unbounded power carries into effect the determinations of perfect Wisdom and Goodness. (2) Revelation. Holy Writ is in most cases our first source of knowledge as to God and his ways; and it abounds in declarations adapted to assure us, in the midst of all our perplexities respecting the mysteries of Divine providence, that the ways of God are right and good, and will issue in good to those who love and obey him. (3) Experience. Looking back on his own life, with its many difficulties, struggles, and perils, David could see enough of the way of God in it all to awaken in him a profound conviction that it was a perfect way. And no one who serves God can fail to recognize this truth in his own life, however much may remain at present dark and difficult. (4) Observation. By which the experience of others becomes available for ourselves. In this we may include the *recorded* experience of others in biography and history, in the sacred or other books. The history of the Church and of individuals abounds in instances adapted to increase our confidence in the perfection of the Divine way, while leaving vast spaces of unsolved mystery. 3. *The influence which this truth should have upon us.* (1) Thankfulness and praise. (2) Unwavering confidence, however dark some of the Divine proceedings may be, whether towards ourselves or others. (3) Cheerful submission to the guidance and government of God.

II. THE PURITY OF GOD'S WORD. It is "tried;" literally, "smelted," and so purified and refined, as metals by fire (comp. Ps. xii. 6, "The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times"). The meaning is that God's Word is thoroughly genuine, true, sincere, free from every particle of opposite qualities. The statement applies to every word of God—his declarations, revelations, precepts, promises, and threatenings. It is most probably made here as to his promises. These are all thoroughly true and reliable, free from error, free from deceit. For God: (1) Cannot lie (Titus i. 2). (2) Cannot mistake. Knows perfectly all the future, all possible hindrances to the accomplishment of his purposes, and his own power to conquer them. (3) Cannot change. Not in purpose; not in power. Thus whatever tends to throw more or less of uncertainty upon human promises is absent from the Divine (see further on ch. vii. 28). The Word of God is "tried" in another sense of the Hebrew word. It has been "tested," put to the proof, in ten thousands of instances, and has ever been found true. The experience of every believer testifies to its perfect truth; and the experience of the Church, and of the world in its connection with the Church, throughout all ages, gives the same assurance. Then: 1. *Let us trust the Word*

of God with a confidence suited to its entire trustworthiness. 2. *Let us be glad and thankful that, amidst so much that is unreliable, we have here a firm foundation on which to rest our life and hopes.* 3. *Let our word correspond with that of God in its freedom from all insincerity and untruthfulness,* if it cannot be free from the uncertainty which springs from ignorance, inability, or mutability.

III. THE PROTECTION WHICH GOD AFFORDS TO HIS PEOPLE. 1. *The protection itself.* "He is a Buckler [Shield] to all them that trust in him." Not only he secures protection, he is himself the Shield that protects. As a hen protects her chickens under her own wings (Ps. xci. 4), so the Lord covers and defends his people with his own Being and perfections. Their enemies have to conquer him before they can injure them. They are under the guardianship of his knowledge, power, goodness, faithfulness; and these must fail before they can perish. 2. *The persons who enjoy such protection.* "All them that trust in him"—all, as the word is, who flee to him for refuge. (1) It is one of the characteristics of the godly, that in their perils they flee for refuge to God. It is to God they flee; not to some merely imaginary being whom they call God—a God, for instance, who, however despised in the time of prosperity, is always at the call of men in trouble; too merciful to punish his foes severely; too tender-hearted to disregard the cry of distress, although it come from impenitent hearts. Such confidence is vain. God's Word contains not a promise to the ungodly and unholy, however troubled they may be, unless the trouble subdue their hearts to a true repentance. But those who live by faith in God naturally turn to him in danger and distress. (2) To them he is a Shield. Their faith itself, God-produced and God-sustained, is a shield (Eph. vi. 16); it inspires their prayers and struggles after safety; and in response to their confidence and their prayers the Almighty becomes their Defence, and they are safe. (3) Their safety is according to their faith. Faith which is mixed with doubt is an occasion of peril. Intermittent faith brings intermittent safety. If for a time we flee *from* our Refuge, we are exposed defenceless to the assaults of our enemies, and shall be wounded and distressed. Then, "trust in him at *all* times" (Ps. lxii. 8); and let your prayer be, "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke xvii. 5), and, "Pray for us that our faith fail not" (see Luke xxii. 32).—G. W.

Ver. 32.—*Jehovah the only God, the only Rock.* David's experience of what Jehovah his God had been to him impels him triumphantly to contrast him with all other that men called gods.

I. JEHOVAH ALONE IS GOD. David was thinking of the idols worshipped by the nations around, which had proved themselves unable to protect their worshippers from his victorious arms. The question may be asked as to all other idols, and all persons and things that men serve as if they were gods—self, wealth, the world, etc.: 1. *Which of them has perfections like those of Jehovah?* He is the living God, the everlasting, infinite in power, wisdom, and love; perfect in holiness and righteousness. To whom besides can such attributes be ascribed? "There is none else" (Deut. iv. 39). 2. *Which of them has done or can do works like his?* "All the gods of the peoples are idols: but the Lord made the heavens" (Ps. xcvi. 5, Revised Version; comp. Isa. xlv. 18). 3. *Which of them can help their worshippers as he can?* They are "vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain" (1 Sam. xii. 21). 4. *Which of them, then, is worthy to receive homage such as is due to him?* Fear, trust, love, worship, obedience. Yet the unregenerate do honour one or other of these vanities more than God. They, as truly as the heathen, "worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever" (Rom. i. 25, Revised Version).

II. JEHOVAH ALONE IS A ROCK. 1. *God is a Rock.* A term applied to him by Moses (Deut. xxxii. 4), and afterwards very frequently, especially in the Book of Psalms. God is to those who trust in him what a rock, lofty and difficult of ascent and access to strangers, is to a people invaded by powerful foes. In him they find safety and protection. And as a rock is marked by strength, stability, and permanence, so God is mighty to protect, unchangeable, a Rock of ages, "an everlasting Rock" (Isa. xxvi. 4, Revised Version), a Refuge available through each life and for all generations. 2. *He alone is worthy of the name.* There are other persons and things which minister strength and safety to men. "Wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence" (Eccles. vii. 12), friendship also, and civil government and military force, etc. But none besides

God deserves the name of a Rock. (1) They are limited in their worth; he, unbounded One or another of them may be a refuge against some dangers; he, against all. They may not be at hand in the time of most pressing need; he is always near. (2) They are feeble and unstable; he, strong and firm. (3) They are transient; he, everlasting. (4) They are dependent; he, their independent Source. All their fitness and ability to aid us is from him; so that, when they are of service to us, it is he that is showing himself to be our Rock.

Then: 1. *Accept thankfully the good they can do;* but trust in the Lord alone with absolute and unwavering confidence. 2. *Beware of resorting to God's gifts as a refuge from himself.* From the thought of him; from the reproaches of a guilty conscience; from the penalties of his Law 3. *If you reject or neglect God for others, bethink you what help they can give you when he executes his judgments upon you.* (Judg. x. 14; Jer. ii. 28.)—G. W.

Ver. 33.—*Divine protection and guidance.* The experience of David, and the purpose of the psalm, naturally lead to repetition of declarations and images descriptive of the protection and guidance which had been vouchsafed to him. They are not unsuitable to record the convictions and feelings of every good man as he reviews the past and anticipates the future. This verse in the Revised Version reads, "God is my strong Fortress, and he guideth the perfect in his way."

I. GOD IS OUR STRONG FORTRESS. A fortress is a protection against enemies. 1. *We have powerful foes.* The world and the flesh, the devil and his angels, assault us continually, and would destroy, not only our peace, but our souls. They are too strong and numerous for our power and skill; and no creature-power is sufficient for our defence. 2. *God is our Almighty Protector.* The Fortress into which we can flee, and where we are safe; which no enemy can scale or breach. His presence surrounds us; his power defends us. Yea, he is in our hearts to strengthen and protect us. Everywhere, and under all circumstances, we can resort to this Refuge, and defy our foes. We should therefore be ready to go anywhere and do anything at God's command. He may lead us where temptations are numerous and powerful; but obeying and trusting him, we are secure.

II. GOD IS OUR ALL-WISE GUIDE. The reading and translation preferred by the Revisers gives a good sense, harmonizing with many statements of Holy Writ. "He guideth the perfect in his way," or, perhaps, "his [God's] way." The man who is "perfect" in the sense of "upright," sincere, true, righteous, whole-hearted, may be assured of Divine guidance; while the insincere, hypocritical, double-minded, shall be left to go astray. In the margin of the Revised Version, however, another reading and rendering are given, viz. "guideth my way in perfectness," which appears to be substantially in agreement with the Authorized Version, "maketh my way perfect." 1. *God leads his people in their way.* By his providence, Word, Spirit. In respect to the affairs of this life, and those of the soul and eternity. He guides them into the position he has chosen for them, and to and in the work he appoints for them. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" (Ps. xxxvii. 23). 2. *His lead is perfect.* Such was the conclusion of the psalmist in reference to his own way. He could see that all had been ordered aright for the accomplishment of the Divine purposes respecting him. Such will be the conclusion of all God's servants at the last; and their faith in God will enable them to cherish this conviction now, notwithstanding all the perplexities in which they may be involved. The way in which they may be led may not be always pleasant; but it is: (1) The best way. The way of holiness; the way in which they can gain most real good, serve and honour God most, be most useful, attain ultimately the greatest glory and felicity. (2) The safe way. Sometimes a way which avoids enemies and perils; in other cases, a way through the midst of them, which God makes safe by his protection. (3) The way that ends in eternal glory and blessedness. It is "the way of life which goeth upward" (Prov. xv. 24, Revised Version). "The end" is "everlasting life" (Rom. vi. 22). It may be asked how it comes to pass that those who have God for their Guide nevertheless make such grievous mistakes, and fall into so much trouble. (1) The troubles which spring from want of worldly wisdom, as well as those which arise from circumstances, are under Divine guidance. It is the will of God that his people should suffer, and his benevolent purpose is often made manifest in the spiritual profit

and greater usefulness of the sufferers. (2). Even good men do not fully seek and follow the guidance of God. They too frequently choose their own way, and thus fall into mischief. But God, in his goodness, does not therefore forsake them. He leads those who are true at heart out of the evils into which they have brought themselves, turns their very sins and follies to account in training them for further service, and brings them safe home at last.

The lessons are: 1. *Be thankful for such a Guide.* 2. *See to it that you ever honestly seek and submit to his guidance.* By the study of his Word and providence, and by earnest prayer, inquire what is the way in which he would have you go; and, when you see it, walk in it.—G. W.

Ver. 36.—*Greatness from God's condescension.* "Thy gentleness hath made me great." David had been raised from a humble position to one of greatness. He had become great in arms, in royal dignity, in the extent of his dominion. In these words he ascribes all his greatness to the condescending goodness of God. The word translated "gentleness" is elsewhere used only of men, and signifies "humility" (Prov. xv. 33; xviii. 12; xxii. 4). But in speaking of God, we use the word "condescension" rather than "humility." Yet it is said of him (Ps. cxiii. 6) that "he humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth;" *i.e.* he stoops to regard them; it is condescension in him to notice them. The words of the text may be used by all Christians; especially by some of them.

I. THE GREATNESS TO WHICH CHRISTIANS ARE EXALTED. 1. *All of them are made great.* For they are made: (1) Sons and daughters of the great God, brothers and sisters of Jesus the Son of God, having a nature corresponding with the names. They are "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet. i. 4), and therefore God-like, in holiness, righteousness, and love. (2) Wise with heavenly wisdom. A nobler wisdom than that of philosophers. "Taught of God" (John vi. 45), who reveals to them what he hides from the worldly wise (Matt. xi. 25). (3) Powerful with the noblest power, that which is moral and spiritual, by which they "overcome the world" (1 John v. 4), rule their own spirits (Prov. xvi. 32), and subdue others to the obedience of faith. (4) Friends and associates of the best of God's creatures—holy angels and redeemed men; with whom they form one family (Eph. iii. 15). (5) Heirs, and at length possessors, of a grand and enduring estate (1 Pet. i. 4). These things are not mere names or fancies; they are solid and enduring realities, to have the lowest place and the humblest share in which is, in the nature of things, to be greater than the greatest of earthly dignitaries who have no part in them. 2. *Some of them are made specially great.* They realize, in a larger measure than others, the various elements of greatness mentioned above. They have more of God in them; and hence are richer in spiritual wisdom and goodness, exercise a wider and stronger influence, do a greater work, attain to greater honour and renown in this world and the next. Apostles, martyrs; eminent teachers, evangelists, missionaries, and reformers; monarchs, too, and statesmen, poets, etc., who are also devoted Christians. Such special greatness arises sometimes and in part from: (1) Greater natural endowments. More of physical energy, or intellectual power, or emotional force, to begin with. (2) Or greater opportunities, which may be such as rank and fortune give, or the state of things around them, or such as poverty, affliction, and persecution afford. (3) Special earnestness, faithfulness, and diligence in the cultivation and employment of powers and opportunities (Luke xix. 16—26). (4) Special prayerfulness. Hence abundant impartation of the Holy Spirit, the Source and Sustainer of all spiritual excellence. (5) Deeper humility. Without this all seeming greatness is not greatness at all "in the kingdom of heaven," and will shrivel into nothingness (Matt. xviii. 1—4; Luke ix. 48; xiv. 11).

II. TO WHAT SUCH GREATNESS IS TO BE ASCRIBED, AND IS ASCRIBED BY THOSE WHO ATTAIN TO IT. To the condescension of God. David recognized that all his greatness was owing to the goodness and power of God, and in their exercise on his behalf he discerned unspeakable condescension. Similar should and will be the feeling of all who are raised to spiritual greatness. 1. *The work of God in their exaltation is a work of condescension.* This appears as we consider: (1) His greatness and holiness, and their littleness and sinfulness (Ps. viii.; Isa. lvii. 15). God must *stoop* to reach and raise such creatures. (2) His various operations upon and for them. When we

consider what is involved in the Divine processes by which they are exalted, they resolve themselves into attention (so to speak) to, and animating or controlling influence over, a countless multitude of small matters. Yet we shall not be astonished at this when we remember that not a sparrow is forgotten by God, and that his children "are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke xii. 6, 7). Also that great results depend on small things; and that, in fact, to the Infinite Mind there is nothing great, nothing small. (3) And pre-eminently, the incarnation and work of the Son of God. The self-humiliation of the eternal Word in becoming man (John i. 1—3, 14), and of the *God*-Man in lowly service to lowly people, patiently enduring the greatest indignities and most painful and ignominious sufferings, "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Matt. xx. 28; Luke xxii. 27; John xiii. 2—5; Phil. ii. 6—8). (4) The work of the Holy Spirit. Stooping to dwell in the hearts of the mean and sinful, bearing with neglect, waywardness, resistance, and disobedience. 2. *The condescension thus displayed promotes spiritual greatness.* Not only as it is exercised in the ways before mentioned, but: (1) As it is apprehended and realized. The majesty, holiness, and justice of God tend to humiliate and repress the human spirit, and discourage aspiration and effort. At best it produces only a "spirit of bondage" (Rom. viii. 15). But under the influence of condescending love, love is enkindled, confidence is awakened, the heart expands and enlarges, is inspired with the freedom and courage which prepare for noble service of God and man, rises heavenward and yet looks on earth with kindlier eye, and more resolute purpose to labour and suffer for its good. (2) As it incites to imitation. Contemplating the grandeur and beauty of the Divine condescension, we become transformed into its image. We learn to stoop to the lowly and even the degraded. We are content to serve in lowly offices, if thereby we can benefit our fellow-men. It no longer seems strange that we should be required "to wash one another's feet" (John xiii. 14). And this is the way to become great (Mark x. 43, 44). Yet we must not indulge the thought or assume the air of condescension, or we shall fail both to benefit others and to secure honour for ourselves. Rather let us accustom ourselves to think in how many and important respects we are on a level with those whose good we seek. This will produce in us genuine humility, and enable us to feel towards our brethren a brotherly sympathy which will banish the sense of superiority.—G. W.

Vers. 44, 45.—*The head of the nations.* David once more records how God had delivered him in and from the contests in which he had been involved; and declares that he had thus kept him "to be the head of the nations" (Revised Version), not only Israel, but foreign peoples. He, or, if not he, the Spirit which spake by him (ch. xxiii. 2), may have had in view the ultimate purpose of God respecting him and his posterity, viz. the exaltation of his great Son to be, in a wider sense than was applicable to David himself, "the Head of the nations." We may at least take the words as applicable to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. THE OPPOSITION HE ENCOUNTERS. Like David, he has to withstand many "strivings of the people." 1. *In his life on earth he was much opposed.* He endured the "contradiction of sinners against himself" (Heb. xii. 3). "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John i. 11)—his own people, his own family (John vii. 5). All classes, with a few exceptions, rejected him—Pharisees and Sadducees, elders and scribes, ecclesiastics and politicians, rulers and people. The multitude sought once to make him king (John vi. 15), and, when he entered Jerusalem for the last time, welcomed him, in the hope that he was about to ascend the throne; but he would not be such a king as they desired, and they cared not to have such a King as he was to be. Hence they united with their superiors in saying, "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke xix. 14); and, to put an end to his pretensions, put him to death. They did not know that they were thus very effectually promoting his victories and reign. 2. *He has met with various and constant opposition ever since.* His cause has advanced in spite of perpetual "strivings" against it. Jews and Gentiles, kings and subjects, rich and poor, the intellectual and the ignorant, the refined and the coarse, have "set themselves . . . against the Lord, and against his Anointed" (Ps. ii. 2). He, too, can speak still of the "strivings of *my* people." As at first amongst the Jews, so since amongst Christians (so-called), and amongst those in high positions in his Church, have been found his worst foes. Men are willing to bear his Name, to receive some of

his doctrines, and even contend for them, to appropriate the comfort he gives; but to *obey* him, to let him *rule* in their minds and hearts and lives, in their homes, in their business, in their pleasures, in their social life, in their national affairs,—that is quite another matter. And those who strive earnestly to obey him themselves, and to induce others to do so, must be prepared for opposite "strivings," and even persecution. Nor do they wonder, seeing they find, more or less, in their own nature, elements of opposition to the rule of the Christ which explain the hostility of others.

II. THE EXALTED POSITION HE NEVERTHELESS OCCUPIES. "Head of the nations." The answer of the Almighty to all the rebellious counsels and works of men is, "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion" (Ps. ii. 6). The kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of Jehovah; vain, therefore, must be all strivings against it. Its opponents can only dash themselves to pieces, but "he *must* reign" (1 Cor. xv. 25). 1. *The extent of his dominion.* "The nations," in a wider sense than was true of David. "All nations shall serve him" (Ps. lxxii. 11). And not only all nations in existence at any one time, but all that may come into existence while the world endures. 2. *The nature of his dominion.* (1) He is "Head of the nations" by *right*. By the appointment and gift of the Father (Ps. ii. 7, 8; Matt. xxviii. 18). As the result and reward of his own righteousness and self-sacrificing love (Phil. ii. 8, 9). He redeemed men by his blood, to make them "a kingdom" (Rev. i. 5, 6; v. 9, 10, Revised Version). As truth, righteousness, and love are rightful rulers, however far they may be from actually ruling, so is it with our Lord. (2) He actually rules *over* all nations. "He is Lord of all" (Acts x. 36). All authority *on earth*, as well as in heaven, has been given to him (Matt. xxviii. 18). Whether men know him or not, acknowledge him or not, he is their King; he so orders, controls, and directs the affairs of the nations as to make them subserve the advancement and ultimate universal establishment of his spiritual reign. (3) He has already a vast multitude of willing and obedient subjects in many nations. "A people which he knew not," gathered from the Gentiles, serves him; as well as many from the people whom he knew. (4) Many render him feigned obedience (ver. 45, margin). It is an evidence of his great power among the nations that many find it to their interest, or credit, or convenience, to profess his Name, who are still opposed to him in heart. They call him Lord, though they do not the things which he says (Luke vi. 46). (5) All nations will at length own him as their Head, and heartily and lovingly submit to his sway. The prophecy will yet be fulfilled: "There followed great voices in heaven, and they said, The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. xi. 15, Revised Version). In the assurance of this, let his people labour and give and pray with joyful hope for the extension of his reign in the earth.—G. W.

Ver. 47.—*Praise to God as the ever-living Saviour.* The whole psalm is a song of praise to God, but some parts bear more distinctively this character. This verse is one of them.

I. THE TITLES HERE GIVEN TO GOD. 1. *Rock.* (See on ver. 32.) "*My* Rock." The Rock to which I have fled, and where I have found safety and repose. The Rock in which I still trust and will trust with full assurance of its stability and security, whatever be the confidences of others. It is a blessed thing, in speaking of God, to be able to use this word "my," as expressive of personal experience, choice, and confidence. 2. *The God of the Rock of my salvation;* equivalent to "the God who is the Rock of my salvation," "my mighty Saviour." David had experienced salvation from enemies and dangers many times and in many ways; and he ascribes all to God. By whatever means and instruments, it was God who had delivered him. He had been manifested in his history as the God of salvation; and in saving him had shown himself a Rock, *the* Rock in which alone safety was to be found. The higher and better salvation which is presented to us in the gospel is from God. With him it originated; by him in Christ it is wrought. Christians joyfully recognize God as the God of salvation, the Rock of salvation. It is for men one of the most glorious and encouraging names of God. God the Creator, God the Preserver, God the Ruler, are glorious names; but unless to them could be added God the Saviour, they would afford no hope or comfort. It is this which renders all other names of God attractive and inspiring. Specially gladdening is it to be able to say, "The God of *my* salvation," the Rock of ages in which

I find refuge, the God who has saved me and is saving me, and in whom I trust that he will fully save me, from the guilt, power, and consequences of my sins, and all the assaults of the deadly enemies of my soul.

II. THE DECLARATION MADE RESPECTING HIM. "The Lord liveth." Which expresses: 1. *His real existence.* In contrast with idols, which are dead, helpless, and unable to help. 2. *His continued existence.* In contrast with men, who die and pass away. 3. *His manifested existence.* He lives and works in the world, in the Church, in each believer. By his operations for the good of his people, he shows himself the living God. 4. *The satisfaction which his servants feel in him as ever-living.* (1) Joy that such a Being is their God. That they know and worship the true and living God. (2) Confidence that his life renders all their interests secure for this world and the next. And not only their interests as individuals, but those of the whole Church of God. Because he lives, his Church cannot perish. (3) Comfort under the death of Christian friends. He lives; and therefore their death was his act. It did not befall them because he had ceased to be or to be able to deliver. He lives, to support and comfort those who survive. He lives, to supply the place of the departed in the family, the Church, the world. He lives, and therefore they live and will live for ever. For through Christ their life was and is rooted in his. He is their abiding Dwelling-place.

III. THE PRAISE RENDERED TO HIM. "Blessed" (equivalent to "praised"), "exalted." 1. Praise is the utterance of exalted thoughts and feelings respecting him. Without these the language of praise is of no value. 2. To publish his praise by speech or writing is to exalt him in view of others. 3. Praise in such words as are here employed expresses the desire that all should exalt him by accepting, loving, obeying, and extolling him. 4. The publication of his praise is adapted to produce this result. 5. The exaltation of God should ever be sought in our services of praise. Some such services tend rather to the exaltation of musical composers, organists, and choirs.—G. W.

Vers. 50, 51.—*Praising God among the nations.* In bringing to a close this grand psalm of praise, the royal writer looks around and forward. He reveals a purpose and expectation that his song will be heard among the nations at large, and he expresses his assurance that the kindness of God which he had experienced would be extended to his family down to the latest ages, yea, for evermore. The two verses are closely connected. Translate "nations" instead of "heathen;" and instead of "He is the Tower of salvation for his king," read, "Effecting great salvations [deliverances] for his king." Thus the verses will run, "Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the nations, and to thy Name will I sing praises; who effecteth great deliverances for his king, and showeth loving-kindness to his anointed, to David and to his seed for evermore."

I. THE GROUNDS OF THE PSALMIST'S PRAISE. 1. *His position.* God's "king," "his anointed," the messiah (Christ) of God. David was literally anointed by Samuel as the future king of Israel, and had been prepared for and brought to the throne in marvellous ways. He recognized, as Saul had failed to do, that he was God's king and representative, ruling God's people in subjection to him. The position was far more honourable than that of any heathen monarch, however much wider his dominion. 2. *His experience of the goodness and power of God.* Protecting, delivering, giving victory, exalting to the throne, and preserving in it. "Therefore," because of all that I have here recorded of the Divine favour to me, "I will give thanks," etc. Note the value of experience as a help and incentive to praise. It gives reality to our thoughts of God, and personal knowledge of his power and goodness. It stirs the heart to gratitude, and to a desire that all should know and praise him. It furnishes interesting subjects for praise. 3. *The assurance he had of the future kindness of God to himself and his family.* This assurance sprang from the promise of God by Nathan (ch. vii. 12—16), and which finds its ultimate and complete fulfilment in the exaltation of the Christ, the Son of David, to be King of all men, of all beings and things in heaven as well as earth. It was a great honour conferred on David and his family to be made rulers for many generations of the people in and through whom true religion was preserved, to be at length diffused through all the earth; it was a far greater for HIM to spring from them who should be the Saviour of all men, and the eternal King. For consider: (1)

His personal glory. Not only Son of David, but Son of God, filled "with all the fulness of the Godhead" (Col. ii. 9); the incarnate Word. (2) The nature of his rule. Especially his spiritual reign—the reign of Divine truth, holiness, and love in the hearts and lives of men; the reign of peace and joy. (3) Its extent. Far wider than that of David or Solomon. To include at length all nations (Ps. lxxii. 8, 11). (4) Its duration. "For evermore." David discerned, in the Divine promise to him and his, enough to fill his heart with gladness and thankfulness; if he could have seen even as much as we are permitted to behold, his wonder and gratitude would have known no bounds.

II. THE SPHERE OF HIS PRAISE. "Among the nations." 1. *The fulness of his gratitude moved him to make known God's goodness as widely as possible.* 2. *He desired to instruct other nations, and bring them to worship a God so able and willing to bless his worshippers.* He may have felt a special obligation to instruct and benefit the peoples who had been brought into subjection to himself. 3. *The interest which the nations at large had in what God had done and promised to him.* See Rom. xv. 9, where ver. 50 is quoted by St. Paul in proof that it was the purpose of God that the Gentiles should "glorify God for his mercy."—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Ver. 1.—**Now these be the last words of David.** A long interval separates this psalm from the preceding. The one was written when David had just reached the zenith of his power, and, when still unstained by foul crime, he could claim God's favour as due to his innocence. These last words were David's latest inspired utterance, written, probably, towards the end of the calm period which followed upon his restoration to his throne, and when time and the sense of God's renewed favour had healed the wounds of his soul. **David the son of Jesse said.** It was probably this account of the author, and its personal character, which caused the exclusion of this hymn from the Book of Psalms. It seemed to belong rather to David's private history than to a collection made for use in the public services of the temple. **Said.** The word is one usually applied to a message coming directly from God. It is used, however, four times in Numb. xxiv. of the words of Balaam, and in Prov. xxx. of those of Agur. The solemnity of the word indicates the fulness of its inspiration. **The sweet psalmist;** literally, *he who is pleasant in the psalms of Israel.* David might well claim this title, as, under God, we owe the Psalter to him.

Vers. 3, 4.—**He that ruleth,** etc. This rendering of the Hebrew is very beautiful, and fit to be graven on the hearts of rulers. There is often almost an inspiration in the renderings of the Authorized Version. Grammatically, nevertheless, the psalm declares the blessedness of the king who is just, and may be translated as follows:—

"He that ruleth over men righteously,
That ruleth in the fear of God—
And as the morning light shall he be,
when the sun riseth.
A morning without clouds;
Yea, as the tender grass from the earth,
from sunshine, from rain."

A king who rules his people justly is as glorious as the sun rising in its strength to drive away the works of darkness, and give men, by precept and example, the light of clear knowledge of their duty. But the last metaphor is especially beautiful. In the summer, vegetation dries up under the burning heat of the sun; all is bare and brown, and a few withered stalks of the coarser plants alone remain. But when the rains come, followed by bright sunshine, nature at one burst flashes into beauty, and the hillsides and plains are covered with the soft green of the reviving grass, through which myriads of flowers soon push their way, and clothe the landscape with bright colours. So a just and upright government calls into being countless forms of human activity, and fosters all that is morally beautiful, while it checks the blighting influences of unregulated passion and selfish greed.

Ver. 5.—**Although my house,** etc. The rendering of the Authorized Version is that of the ancient versions, and is to be retained. David could not but feel that his house was too stained with sin upon sin for him to be able to lay claim to have been in fact that which the theocratic king was in theory, and which David ought to have been as the representative of Christ, and himself the christ, or anointed of Israel's God. But most modern commentators take the negatives as interrogative, and, therefore, as strong assertions.

"For is not my house so with God?
For he had made with me an eternal
covenant,
Ordered in all things, and secure;

For all my salvation and all my desire,
Shall he not make it to grow?"

But surely David had failed in realizing the better purposes of his heart, and it was of God's good pleasure that the covenant, in spite of personal failure, remained firm and secure.

Vers. 6, 7.—**The sons of Belial**; Hebrew, *belial;* not a proper name, but a word signifying "worthlessness," and especially vicious worthlessness (see note on 1 Sam. i. 16). It is from this worthlessness that opposition arises to the just king, and he recognizes it as that which thwarts his efforts. The words may be rendered—

"But the ungodly are as thorns, to be all of them thrust away;
For they may not be taken hold of with the hand.
And the man that would touch them
Must arm himself with iron and the staff of a spear;
And they shall be utterly burned with fire unto nothingness."

The vicious worthlessness which opposes righteous government must be treated like thorns, too prickly and sharp-pointed for gentle dealing. They must be torn up by an iron hook fixed to the end of a spear-handle, and then burnt. The word translated **in the same place** in the Authorized Version is rendered by Jerome "even to nothing;" and it is just the sort of phrase for which his authority is greatest; for he went to Palestine, and remained there several years, to study the language under Hebrew teachers on the spot. The Septuagint must have had a different reading, as it translates "their shame."

Ver. 8.—**These be the names.** A similar list is given in 1 Chron. xi. 10—47, with several variations, and sixteen more names. It is given there in connection with David's elevation to the throne of all Israel, and the conquest of Jerusalem. Such catalogues might possibly be revised from time to time, and new names inserted as there were vacancies caused by death. And this seems to have been the case with the list in Chronicles, which contains the names of all who were admitted during David's reign into the order of the mighties. The present is the actual list of the order as it existed on the day when David, at Hebron, was anointed king over all the twelve tribes. And we can well conceive that, on so grand an occasion, David founded this, the first order of chivalry, and gave his thirty knights, as they would be now called, their special rank and high privileges. **The Tachmonite.** This verse is extremely corrupt. A man could not be a Tachmonite and an Eznite at the same time. In the Revised Version the corruption is confessed in the mildest terms, but there is something painfully ludicrous in giving Josheb-basshebeth as the man's name. The reading "Jashobeam the son of a Hachmonite," in 1 Chron. xi. 11, is confirmed by 1 Chron. xii. 6, where Jashobeam is mentioned among those who joined David at Ziklag, and by 1 Chron. xxvii. 2, where we find him appointed commander of the first brigade of twenty-four thousand men. The error in the present text arose from the scribe's eye being misled by catching sight of *basshebeth* in the line above, it being the word translated "in the same place" in the Authorized Version. **He Adino the Eznite.** These unmeaning words are a corruption of the right reading preserved in Chronicles, "he lifted up his spear." The number of men whom he slew at one time is there stated as having been three hundred; but, as Abishai accomplished this feat, and yet held only inferior rank, eight hundred is probably right. And possibly it is not meant that he slew them all with his own hand, though that is quite possible. He **was chief of the captains.** The word for "captain," *shalish*, is derived from the numeral "three;" and probably it was the title of the three who formed the first rank of the mighties. But in course of time it seems to have been applied to the commanders of the body-guard (2 Kings x. 25); and we find Bidcar so styled when in personal attendance upon Jehu (2 Kings ix. 25); and Pekah used the opportunities afforded by this office for the murder of Pekahiah (2 Kings xv. 25). It is not used of military officers generally. Those admitted to the list were evidently the outlaws who had been with David in his wanderings and at Ziklag. They now received their reward, and became, moreover, the stay of David's throne. It is their past history which accounts for the strange composition of the list. A large number came from Judah, and especially from Bethlehem. Several are David's own relatives. Seven towns or families furnish sixteen out of the whole list. We find a father and his son, and pairs of brothers. There are, moreover, numerous foreigners—Hittites, Ammonites, Moabites, a Syrian from Zobah, and Gideonites, descended from the aboriginal inhabitants of the land. Such a list would have been sorely resented had it not been formed out of men who had earned it by their past services and their fidelity to David.

Ver. 9.—**Dodo.** The Hebrew has *Dodai*, and "Dodo" is a mere correction of the Massorites to bring the name into verbal agreement with 1 Chron. xi. 12; but in 1 Chron. xxvii. 4 he is called *Dodai*, and we

there find him in command of the second division of the army. For "Dodai," however, we ought to read there "Eleazar the son of Dodai." **Ahohite**; Hebrew, *the son of an Ahohite*, and probably a member of the family descended from Ahoah, a son of Benjamin (1 Chron. viii. 4). He would thus belong to the most warlike tribe of Israel, though not mentioned among the Benjamites who joined David at Ziklag (1 Chron. xii. 1—7). He joined him, apparently, at an earlier date. **That were there gathered together.** The word "there" implies the previous mention of some place, and though the text in the parallel passage in Chronicles is more corrupt than that before us, it has, nevertheless, preserved the name of the spot where the encounter took place. In Chronicles the name of Shammah is omitted, and his achievement is mixed up in a strange fashion with that of Eleazar. Here the two heroes have each his separate record, and it is only on minor matters that the text there is more correct. Restored from the readings in Chronicles, the narrative is as follows: "He was with David at Pas-dammim, and the Philistines were gathered there to battle, and the men of Israel were gone up: and he stood (that is, made a stand) and smote," etc. *Pas-dammim* is called *Ephes-dammim* in 1 Sam. xvii. 1. It was situated in the valley of Elah, and, as being upon the border, was the scene of numerous conflicts, whence its name, "the boundary of blood." It was there that David slew Goliath. **Were gone away**; Hebrew, *went up*; that is, to battle. The idea that the Israelites had fled is taken from the parallel place in Chronicles, where, however, it refers to Shammah's exploit. In vers. 9 and 11 there, the phrase, "the Philistines were gathered together," occurs twice, and the scribe, having accidentally omitted the intervening words, has confused together the exploits of Eleazar and Shammah. In this battle Eleazar withstood the Philistine onset, and smote them till his hand clave to his sword-hilt. Many such instances of cramp are recorded, and Mr. Kirkpatrick, in his commentary, quotes one in which the muscles of a warrior's hand could be relaxed, after hard fighting, only by fomentations of hot water.

Ver. 10.—**Victory**; Hebrew, *salvation*; and so also in ver. 12 and 1 Sam. xi. 13; xix. 5. **Returned after him.** This does not imply that they had fled, but simply that they turned in whichever way he turned, and followed him. Battles in old time depended very much upon the prowess of the leaders.

Ver. 11.—**Into a troop.** Josephus renders it "to Lehi," the scene of Samson's exploit. The word is rare, but occurs again in ver. 13, where, however, we find in Chronicles the ordinary name for a *host* substituted for it. The Revisers have retained in the margin, "or, for foraging:" but its occurrence in Ps. lxviii. 10, where it is rendered "thy congregation," and in the margin of the Revised Version, "troop," makes it probable that "troop" is the right rendering here. **Lentiles.** In 1 Chron. xi. 13, "barley." The difference is probably caused by a transposition of letters. The Philistines seem to have made this incursion in order to carry off or destroy the crops of the Israelites.

Ver. 13.—**And three.** The Hebrew text has "thirty," for which both the Authorized Version and the Revised Version silently substitute "three," as is correctly given in Chronicles. The absence of the article shows that these three were not Jashobeam, Eleazar, and Shammah, but probably Abishai, Benaiah, and another whose name and exploits have been purposely omitted both here and in Chronicles. Apparently this narrative, so interesting as showing the fascination which David exercised over his men, is given as having led to the institution of this second order of three in the brotherhood of the mighties. **In the harvest time.** The Hebrew is "to harvest," but in 1 Chron. xi. 15 "to the rock." As the preposition used here cannot mean "in," this is probably the right reading. In this case, also, it is the similarity of the words that has led to the confusion. Is it possible that these lists were taken from very old and worn catalogues, which it was very difficult to decipher?

Ver. 14.—**An hold**; Hebrew, *the hold*. The definite article here and in ch. v. 17, and the mention of the Philistines as being in the valley of Rephaim, seem to indicate that David had abandoned Jerusalem upon the invasion of the Philistines, and sought refuge at Adullam (see note on ch. v. 17). In its neighbourhood is an isolated hill, on which, probably, was a frontier fortress, in which David prepared to defend himself.

Ver. 15.—**The well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate.** Bethlehem is now supplied with water by an aqueduct, and the wells close to the town have ceased to exist. The cistern of "deep, clear, cool water," described by Ritter, in his 'Geography of Palestine,' and now called David's Well, is three quarters of a mile to the north of Bethlehem, and too distant to be that which David meant.

Vers. 16, 17.—**Brake through the host** (or, *camp*) **of the Philistines.** The Philistine camp was pitched in the valley of Rephaim, and to reach Bethlehem, which was more than twenty or twenty-five miles distant, these three heroes must pass close to the ground occupied by the enemy. The valley of Rephaim, in fact, extended from Jerusalem

to Bethlehem, and, to guard their position, the Philistines held Bethlehem with a strong garrison. Of course the heroes would use every precaution; for to be discovered would be certain death. The story of their perils and presence of mind in danger, and hairbreadth escape, would be full of interest; but we are told only that they succeeded, and returned in safety, bearing their precious burden; but David would not drink, and **poured it out unto Jehovah.** The word is that used of a sacrificial libation; for David regarded it as holy, and consecrated to God, because it had been bought with blood—at the risk, that is, of the lives of these gallant men. Nothing is recorded in the romances of the Middle Ages, when knightly chivalry was at its height, more gallant and noble than the exploit of these men. And the very essence of its devotion lay in the fact that it was done to gratify a mere sick longing, and therefore out of pure love. Sick, no doubt, David was, and burning with fever; and even more depressed by the apparent hopelessness of his position. The exploit changed the course of his thoughts. What could he not do with such heroes! Though racked during their absence with anxiety and self-reproach, yet on their return he would be dispirited no longer, but filled with confidence. The words, "Shall I drink?" inserted in the Revised Version, have apparently dropped out of the text by accident. They are found in the parallel place in Chronicles, and in the Septuagint and Vulgate here. The Syriac has, "At the peril of their life's blood these men went."

Ver. 18.—**Abishai . . . was chief among three.** The sense is obscured in the Authorized Version by the translators having failed to notice the presence of the definite article. Abishai, by reason of this exploit, became "chief of the three;" that is, of the second order of three established in the fraternity of the mighties. At the end of the verse, and in ver. 19, the Authorized Version strangely puts the article where it is absent in the Hebrew, and omits it where it is present. The right rendering and meaning is, "He had a name, that is, rank, reputation, among the three. Was he not the most honourable of the three? For this he was made their captain: yet he attained not to equal dignity with the first three."

Ver. 20.—**Benaiah the son of Jehoiada.** He was a very important person throughout David's reign, being the commander of the body-guard (ch. viii. 18), and general of the third brigade of twenty-four thousand men (1 Chron. xxvii. 5). The meaning of the description given of him there is disputed; but probably it should be translated, "Benaiah the son of Jehoiada the priest, as head," that is, of the brigade. He was thus the son of the Jehoiada who was leader of the house of Aaron, and whose coming to Hebron with three thousand seven hundred martial priests did so much to make David king of all Israel (1 Chron. xii. 27). Subsequently he took the side of Solomon against Adonijah, and was rewarded by being made commander-in-chief, in place of Joab (1 Kings ii. 35). **Kabzeel.** An unidentified place in the south of Judah, on the Edomite border (Josh. xv. 21), called *Jekabzeel* in Neh. xi. 25. **Two lionlike men of Moab.** The Septuagint reads, "the two sons of Ariel of Moab," which the Revised Version adopts. "Ariel" means "lion of God," and is a name given to Jerusalem in Isa. xxix. 1, 2. The Syriac supports the Authorized Version in understanding by the term "heroes," or "champions;" but the use of poetical language in a prosaic catalogue is so strange that the Septuagint is probably right. If so, Ariel is the proper name of the King of Moab, and the achievement took place in the war recorded in ch. viii. 2. **A lion.** This achievement would be as gratefully remembered as the killing of a man-eating tiger by the natives in India. A lion, driven by the cold from the forests, had made its lair in a dry tank near some town, and thence preyed upon the inhabitants as they went in and out of the city. And Benaiah had pity upon them, and came to the rescue, and went down into the pit, and, at the risk of his life, slew the lion.

Ver. 21.—**A goodly man.** The Hebrew text has "who a sight," for which the Massorites read, "a man of sight," that is, handsome, and worth looking at. In 1 Chron. xi. 23 we find what, no doubt, is the right reading, "a man of measure [equivalent to 'a tall man'], five cubits high." The height of Goliath was six cubits and a span (1 Sam. xvii. 4).

Ver. 23.—**David set him over his guard.** We have already seen (upon 1 Sam. xxii. 14) that the words mean that David made him a member of his privy council. Literally the words are, *and David appointed him to his audience.* In 1 Chron. xxvii. 34 mention is made of "Jehoiada the son of Benaiah" as being next in the council to Ahithophel, and many commentators think that the names have been transposed, and that we ought to read, "Benaiah the son of Jehoiada."

Ver. 24.—**The thirty.** This order of knighthood consisted originally of thirty-three men, of whom three were of higher rank, and presided, probably, each over ten, while Joab was chief over them all. This arrangement of men in tens, with an officer over them, was, in fact, the normal rule among the Hebrews. The second triad is

unusual, but is explained by the history. In honour of the exploit of bringing the water from the well of Bethlehem, this second order of three was instituted, lower than the three chiefs, but higher than the rest. The third of these is not mentioned, and the disappearance of the name is not the result of accident, but of purpose. Had it been a scribe's error, there would have been some trace of it in the versions. But if the name was erased, it must have been blotted out for treason, and we thus have two candidates for the vacant niche: one is Amasa, and the other Ahithophel. The name of Joab we cannot for one moment admit. He never was a traitor to David, nor would the latter, though king, have ventured to degrade one so powerful, and who continued to be commander-in-chief until David's death. Now, if Amasa is the same as the Amasai in 1 Chron. xii. 18, who was chief of the captains who came from Judah and Benjamin to David when he was in the hold, it is difficult to account for the absence of his name from the list of the thirty. Plainly, however, David did not regard his treason with strong displeasure, but was prepared, after Absalom's death, to make him commander-in-chief. But we must remember that a place in this second triad was gained by one exploit. The three were those who broke through the Philistine host, and fetched the water from Bethlehem. Such a deed would account for the close attachment between David and Ahithophel. He was the king's companion, and his familiar friend. It would account also for his suicide. His love to David had, for some unknown reason, turned to bitter hatred. He sought, not only David's life, but his dishonour. His feelings must have been highly excited before he could have worked himself up to such a pitch; and the reaction and disappointment would be equally extreme. He never could have faced David again, remembering the warmth of former love, and the shamelessness with which he had sought, not only his life, but to bring upon him public shame and ignominy. And his name would have been totally erased, and gone down into silence. Of Ahithophel's personal accomplishments as a brave warrior, we cannot doubt (see ch. xvii. 1), and his son Eliam was one of the mighties. (On a son and father both belonging to the order, see note on ver. 33.) **Elhanan** (see note on ch. xxi. 19).

Ver. 25.—**Shammah the Harodite.** The town Harod was in the plains of Jezreel, near Mount Gilboa. In 1 Chron. xi. 27 he is called "Shammoth the Harorite," the latter word being an easy corruption of *Harodite*; and in 1 Chron. xxvii. 8 he appears as "Shamhuth the Izrahite," and has the command of the fifth brigade. "Izrahite" is by some regarded as an error for "the Zarhite," that is, a member of the clan descended from Zerah the son of Judah. But if so, how did he get to Harod? **Elika.** Omitted in Chronicles, probably through the repetition of the word "Harodite."

Ver. 26.—**Helez.** He is twice called a *Pelonite* in Chronicles, and was general of the seventh brigade (1 Chron. xxvii. 10), where he is said to have belonged to the tribe of Ephraim. Whether *Paltite* or *Pelonite* is right, no one knows; but Beth-Palet was a town in the tribe of Judah, and not in Ephraim. **Ira.** Ira had the command of the sixth brigade (1 Chron. xxvii. 9). **Tekoah** (see note on ch. xiv. 2). This Ira is a distinct person from his namesake, David's confidential minister (ch. xx. 26).

Ver. 27.—**Abiezer.** He had the command of the ninth brigade (1 Chron. xxvii. 12). Anathoth, now *Mata*, was a priestly city in Benjamin (Josh. xxi. 18), the home of Abiathar (1 Kings ii. 26), and the birthplace of Jeremiah (Jer. i. 1). *Anethothite* and *Antothite*, in the parallel places in Chronicles, are merely different ways of pronouncing the same Hebrew consonants. **Mebunnai.** Written *Sibbechai* in ch. xxi. 18, and, as the name is so written in both the parallel places in Chronicles, *Mebunnai* is probably a mistake. In 1 Chron. xxvii. 11 he is said to have been commander of the eighth brigade, and to have been a Zarhite of the town of Hushah, in the tribe of Judah (see 1 Chron. iv. 4).

Ver. 28.—**Zalmon.** He is called *Ilai* in 1 Chron. xi. 29. **Ahohite** (see note on ver. 9). **Maharai the Netophathite.** Netophah, in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem (Ezra ii. 22), was chiefly inhabited, after the exile, by the singers (Neh. xii. 28). Robinson identifies it with *Beit-Netif*, to the south of Jerusalem; but probably erroneously, as Beit-Netif is too far from Bethlehem. Maharai was commander of the tenth brigade, and was a Zarhite, and therefore belonged to the tribe of Judah.

Ver. 29.—**Heleb.** He is called *Heled* and *Heldai* in the parallel places in Chronicles, where we are told that he was a descendant of Othniel, and commander of the twelfth brigade. **Ittai.** He is called *Ithai*, by a very slight change, in Chronicles. **Gibeah** is the *Geba* so closely connected with the history of Saul (see 1 Sam. xiii. 3, 15, etc.). (For Ittai the Philistine, a distinct person, see ch. xv. 19.)

Ver. 30.—**Benaiah.** He was an Ephraimite, and had the command of the eleventh brigade. Pirathon was a town in Ephraim (Judg. xii. 15). **Hiddai.** Called *Hurai* in 1 Chron. xi. 32, by the common confusion of *d* and *r*. **The brooks of Gaash.** "Nahale-

Gaash," the ravines of Gaash, was probably the name of some village, of which nothing is now known.

Ver. 31.—**Abi-albon.** He is called *Abiel* in 1 Chron. xi. 32. He belonged to the town of Beth-Arabah (Josh. xv. 61; xviii. 22), called also Arabah (Josh. xviii. 18), in the wilderness of Judah. **Azmaveth the Barhumite.** He was of Bahurim, for which see note on ch. iii. 16.

Ver. 32.—**Eliahba.** He was of Shaalabbin, in the tribe of Dan (Josh. xix. 42). St. Jerome calls the place Selebi, the modern *Sebbît*. **Of the sons of Jashen, Jonathan, Shammah the Hararite.** In 1 Chron. xi. 34, "The sons of Hashem the Gizonite, Jonathan the son of Shage the Hararite." The word "of" is not in the Hebrew, and is inserted in the Authorized Version to make sense. Really, *b'ne*, sons, is a careless repetition of the three last letters of the name "Shaalbonite," and should be omitted. The text in Chronicles then goes on regularly, "Hashem the Gizonite, Jonathan the son of Shage the Hararite;" but see note on next verse.

Ver. 33.—**Shammah the Hararite.** He was really one of the first three (see ver. 11). (For the reading in Chronicles, see above.) A very probable correction would be "Jonathan the son of Shammah, the son of Agee the Hararite." Thus both father and son would be in the number of the thirty. **Ahiam.** He is called "the son of Sacar" in 1 Chron. xi. 35.

Ver. 34.—**Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite.** In Chronicles this becomes "Elipha the son of Ur, Hepher the Mecherathite." If the text here is correct, Eliphelet must be a native of Beth-Maachah, a town in Naphtali (ch. xx. 14). **Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite.** Instead of this, we find "Ahijah the Pelonite" in 1 Chron. xi. 36. Eliam is supposed by many to have been Bathsheba's father (see note on ch. xi. 3; and for Ahithophel the Gilonite, note on ch. xv. 12).

Ver. 35.—**Hezrai.** The Hebrew text has *Hezro*, as in 1 Chron. xi. 37. His native place was Carmel, for which see note on 1 Sam. xv. 12. **Paarai the Arbite.** A native of Arab, in Judah. In Chronicles he is called "Naarai the son of Ezbai."

Ver. 36.—**Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah.** In Chronicles, "Joel the brother of Nathan," *Igal* and *Joel* in Hebrew being almost the same. If the text here is correct, he was by birth a Syrian of Zobah, for which see note on ch. x. 6. **Bani the Gadite.** In Chronicles, "Mibhar the son of Haggeri," "Mibhar" taking the place of "from Zobah;" "the son," *ben*, that of "Bani;" and Haggadi, "the Gadite," becoming "Haggeri."

Ver. 37.—**Zelek the Ammonite.** The presence of an Ammonite among the thirty reminds us of the fidelity of Shobi, the son of Nahash the Ammonite king, to David (see ch. xvii. 27). **Armourbearer.** The written text has the plural, "armourbearers," for which the K'ri has substituted the singular. The plural is probably right, and if so, both Joab's chief armourbearers, or squires, were foreigners, Zelek being an Ammonite, and Nahari a Gibeonite (see note on ch. iv. 2). In actual warfare we find Joab attended by ten esquires (ch. xviii. 15).

Ver. 38.—**Ithrite.** Of the family of Jether, of Kirjath-jearim (1 Chron. ii. 53), unless Ira and Gareb were two brothers of Amasa, and sons of Jether the husband of Abigail, David's sister (ch. xvii. 25).

Ver. 39.—**Uriah the Hittite** (see note on ch. xi. 3). **Thirty and seven in all.** "The thirty" became a technical name, and might receive additional members. But if we suppose Asahel's place to have been filled up, the number is exact, there being thirty ordinary members, three chiefs of the first class, and three of the second, of whom, however, one name is omitted. In Chronicles sixteen additional names are given, who were probably men admitted to the order to fill up vacancies.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*The fruitful lessons of David's last words.* The facts are: 1. There is a statement that these are the last words of David, who is spoken of in a fourfold respect. 2. It is affirmed that the utterance which follows is expressly by the Spirit of God. 3. The true ruler is described as one who is just and one fearing God; and the effects of his government are compared to the light of a bright morning, and the tender grass after rain. 4. David affirms that his house is specially characterized as one with which God has made a sure and everlasting covenant, and that, consequently, the whole salvation he cares for and desires will be advanced and realized. 5. He refers to worthless men having no sympathy with the desires of his heart and the purposes of his house—as being like thorns fit only to be ultimately burned. A larger space is given in the Bible to the life of David than to any other except that of his great Antitype; and herein do we see the beautiful harmony of the sacred book as an organic

whole, for just as in the New Testament there is great prominence given to the death of Christ and its relation to sin, corresponding to the prominence in the Old Testament of the sacrifices which foreshadowed it, so the position of the eternal King in Zion in the one book is in the same relative proportion to that of the temporal king who so conspicuously shadowed forth his reign in the other. The great interest thus attaching to the life of David renders his last words of unusual importance. We shall best bring out their teaching by noting in succession the very fruitful topics suggested by this section.

I. THE INFLUENCE OF DYING WORDS OF GOOD MEN. We feel that there is a value in these last words of David, not simply by what an examination of their strict sense may yield, but because they are his last words. All last words are weighty in comparison with others; for they close the record, or end the intercourse, or give, as in dying words, the matured expression of one's long experience. The last words of Jacob, of Moses, of Paul, and above all of Christ, are very rich in instruction by virtue of being last. The last words of children, parents, friends who sleep in Jesus, are most precious; they are treasured for ever. There are special reasons for attaching weight to them. 1. They are *reflective, and touched by the influence of the eternal world.* Men are earnest, sincere, uttering only what a review of the past and a prospect of the future will warrant. 2. The *mind is usually calm.* The passions of life are gone, the strife of tongues is no more heard, the spirit is open to the still, small voice. 3. *Worldly influences are in abeyance.* The pomps and fashions of this world are reduced to their proper position. There is scope for things eternal to get their legitimate hold on the thoughts, and so to form aright the conceptions of duty. 4. The *action of the Holy Spirit* is more direct and strong. The great hindrances to his blessed fellowship are reduced to a minimum, and hence a truer estimate is formed of life, its purpose and perils; of Christ, his love and power. 5. The *affections are most pure and tender.* The heart goes out freely toward the Saviour and toward men. Silver and gold and the perishable things of active life are now as dross, and words flow forth steeped in love and tender concern for others, and delight in God's great salvation. Dying saints preach powerful sermons. Their memory is blessed. Their words are rich in all that is good and helpful.

II. THE HONOUR AND RESPONSIBILITY OF RICH MENTAL ENDOWMENTS. David was the man raised up on high, the anointed of God, the sweet psalmist of Israel. These words necessarily imply the coexistence in time of varied mental endowments—wisdom and discretion for ruling, lofty conceptions of the theocracy and the far-reaching character of God's dealings with Israel, and all the qualities requisite for the sweetest poetry. He was certainly most honoured of men in that age, and hence his responsibility was very great. The references to the ideal ruler (ver. 3) indicate how conscious he was of solemn obligations. The fact is, every gift of God bestowed on man is honour put on him, and in its nature it is a talent for use, that the world may be the better for its existence. The possession of great and varied gifts—of thought, emotion, will-power, and of aptitude to do the right thing at the right time—is a wonderful boon. The men of ten talents may well ponder their responsibilities to God and man. What blessing or woe comes to the world according to the direction in which great gifts are used!

III. THE INFLUENCE OF SACRED SONG ON THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. The incidental reference to the "sweet psalmist" throws a sudden and unexpected light on the immense influence exerted by David on the spiritual thought and feeling of his own and subsequent ages. He had touched the deepest feelings of the people, and by his psalms done, perhaps, more to conserve their faith and hope than by all his acts of formal legislation and words of distinct exhortation. His influence will never cease. The saints of all ages are cheered and comforted by his sweet words of song; and they find relief in using language which so aptly expresses the holiest and purest feelings and thoughts of their life. He blessed Israel with a wise and just rule, and the entire world by the most enduring influence of sacred song. The place of sacred song in the Church is most important. It elevates thought, nourishes the more fine and tender sentiments, strengthens the most secret and radical elements of the religious life by giving form and occasion for their exercise, enriches the memory with strains that spring up in hours of weakness and sorrow, and stores the minds of young and old with a

treasury of precious Christian truth. He who writes a good hymn blesses the generations to come.

IV. THE UNKNOWN WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. When David said, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me," he seemed to speak of what was a familiar truth. He was no stranger to such Divine help, as our Lord's testimony to the Psalms indicates (cf. Ps. li. 11). Yet if we confine our attention to the bare historic record of his life, we find scarcely any distinct reference to his consciousness of the direct aid of the Holy Spirit. For aught we can see in distinct words, there was none. His holy influence has no full record. Thus the most important spiritual element in David's spiritual life was to onlookers unknown. There are two aspects of this fact in our Christian life. 1. We do not know the *great extent* to which we are *indebted to the Holy Spirit* for our perseverance, our highest thoughts, our purest feelings, and general growth in excellence. 2. *The non-Christian world does not know the great work which the Holy Spirit achieves in Christian lives.* "The world knoweth him not" (John xiv. 17). It becomes us to remember what we owe to him, and how incessant his action, though men live as though he were not. Religion is at a low ebb whenever the work of the Holy Spirit is forgotten.

V. THE MODEL RULER. In his closing days David remembered that he had been raised on high to be a ruler over Israel; and doubtless, in reviewing the past, he was humbled in observing the instances in which he had failed to be as a man after God's own heart. But in the assurance of forgiveness he could now reflect on the ideal which had ever stood before him, and for the instruction of others he indicates his hope of the ideal being approximately realized in his immediate successor, and his faith that in the coming Christ it would be perfectly realized. The two *elements* of the ideal ruler are *justice* and *the fear of God.* These qualities being in full exercise, all things will be done for the good of man and the glory of God. Human obligations—morality on the human side—must be combined with religious feeling—supreme regard in everything to the Divine will. The *effect* of such ruling on saints is (1) what the bright light of morning is on the earth, *i.e.* it is conducive to safety, cheerfulness, full development of activities, and extended knowledge and usefulness; (2) what the abundance of rich verdure is in a tropical climate, *i.e.* it is wealth, beauty, restfulness, contrast. The history of civil and ecclesiastical communities illustrates the truth of this. There are conditions of prosperity which can only be fulfilled by the ruled, but here we have to do with the natural tendency of the just and godly ruling. The ruler may be king, president, parent, or pastor, and wherever the standard of ruling is high, so in proportion will these effects follow. Bad as the subjects ruled may be, the model ruler will to some extent secure for them these blessings. The most perfect illustration of the truth is to be found in Christ. He rules justly, and in harmony with the mind of the Eternal. An examination of the principles of his kingdom, its discipline and spirit, will show that it is perfectly equitable and is an expression of the Divine mind. The effects that flow from it in proportion as it is submitted to, are exactly those here set forth. Heaven and earth testify (Ps. lxxii.).

VI. THE ORDERED COVENANT. Through Samuel and Nathan (1 Sam. xv. 28; ch. vii. 12—17), God had declared his promise to David, and David on his part had solemnly recognized the goodness of God, and virtually pledged himself to fulfil his side of the sacred engagement (ch. vii. 24—29). Throughout his singular life, amidst all his frailties, he had found God gracious and merciful. Though manifold dangers had arisen which seemed at one time to frustrate the promise and hand over his kingdom to anarchy and his family to disgrace, Divine wisdom had so ordered all things that now, at the close of life, the throne is firm and succession is sure and promising. His mind evidently ponders a threefold covenant: 1. *Personal.* This God was his God, and he could say, "I am thine" (Ps. cxix. 94; cf. lxi. 5). 2. *Official.* He had been chosen to be king, and God had guaranteed to him all needful help and blessing. 3. *Messianic.* The private and official covenant was to him a type of that wider and more blessed covenant of grace which is exemplified in the working out of the redemptive purpose in Christ (Ps. ii.; cf. Isa. liii. 10—12). In respect to each of these the characteristics "everlasting," "ordered in all things," and "sure," were most precious to David's heart. The covenant made with us in Christ is thus most blessed. It is a covenant of pure mercy, originated by God, designed to elevate us to highest dignity, sustained in its develop-

ment by all the resources of the Eternal; and as to *duration*, from everlasting to everlasting (Matt. xxv. 34; John xvii. 24; Eph. i. 4; 1 Pet. i. 20; Rev. xvii. 8; cf. John iii. 16); as to *execution*, "ordered in all things," everything pertaining to its development and issue being so foreseen and provided for that nothing is left to chance or the exigencies of the hour (Luke xxiv. 26, 27; Acts ii. 23—28; Gal. iv. 4; Eph. i. 10; 2 Pet. iii. 9; cf. Gen. xxii. 14; Rom. xi. 33; Phil. iv. 19); as to *stability*, "sure," resting on the unchangeable faithfulness of the all-wise and all-powerful God (Ps. lxxxix. 1; Isa. xxv. 1; 1 Thess. v. 24; 2 Thess. iii. 3; cf. Acts ii. 30; Heb. vi. 17).

VII. GOD'S FAITHFULNESS MAN'S CONSOLATION. Who can tell the consolation brought to David by the fact that the covenant of God was so "sure"? Reflection on his own frailty and on the dangers of life could not but awaken shame and dread; but this sure, well-ordered, enduring covenant, no words suffice to set forth its preciousness! In this we have a common experience with David. Our hearts are sad and pained by our own shortcomings; we see perils to our salvation on every side; the resolutions we frame for the future partake of our infirmity; the struggle to attain to the likeness of Christ seems to be interminable; and the possibility of so changing our discordant and shattered nature as to present it blameless before his face, seems to us very slight. But the bruised and crushed spirit finds healing and rest in this—that God is true, and has resolved to save us. Blessed knowledge! Instead of inducing indifference or carelessness, it supplements the comfort it brings by a calm and steady flow of energy toward the holy goal, and develops gratitude in form of more entire consecration. In health, in sickness, amidst earthly strifes and fears, and when the chilly hand of death lays hold of us, we rest in him who cannot die, and who has said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Truly we have "abundant consolation."

VIII. JOY IN THE REVEALED PURPOSE OF GOD. To see God's blessed covenant unfold towards realization of the Divine purpose was all David's salvation and desire. His heart was bound up with it. His joys and his sorrows were more deeply interwoven with the spiritual kingdom than with personal ease or regal splendour. Our Saviour sets forth the same more illustriously in his life. It was his meat and drink to do his Father's will. To see the blessings of the covenant spread to all mankind was the absorbing passion of his heart. For this he endured the cross and despised the shame. The prospect of the issue of his death gave him satisfaction in the hour of death (Ps. liii. 10). The secret of his life was oneness with the Father's will. The Apostle Paul exhibits, in his measure, the same delight in God's purpose. It is a mark of high Christian feeling that we pass from our own personal interest in redemption to delight in the merciful purpose being realized in others. This is the spring of enterprise, the purifier of the heart from spiritual selfishness, the sure mark of having the mind that was in Christ.

IX. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A WICKED LIFE. David, in vers. 5, 6, contrasts the men of Belial with those who rejoice in and work along the lines of God's covenant. Their power often terrifies the good, causes much mischief, and seems for a while to tend to their permanent prosperity. But their power is barren of good result, noxious in its influence, and destined to be cut short. Here we have the truth exemplified in the case of all who are alien to the gracious purpose of God as revealed in his covenant of mercy. The life of the wicked is: 1. *Barren* as thorns. Whatever promise of good there may be at one time, it never passes from the bare thorn condition to that of fruitfulness. In highest moral and simplest religious fruitfulness their lives are worth nothing. 2. It is *noxious* as thorns. A wicked life pierces and wounds those who come under its influence; it tends not to healing and comfort, but to pain and distress. 3. It is *fleeting* in power, as thorns destined to be crushed by a mightier force and consumed. The wicked may be in great power, but the day will come when it will be said of him, "He is not" (Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36). These contrasts of the righteous and the wicked should strengthen the hearts of those who endure persecution and trial.

Vers. 8—39.—The facts are: 1. A general statement of the names of David's mighty men, with a comparative reference to some of their deeds. 2. A more special account of the daring of three who procured water for David at the risk of their lives. 3. The refusal of the king to drink that which had been obtained at so great a risk.

Mighty men. The account here of the heroes who figured in the course of David's life is supplementary to the general history, and, while intended to set forth incidents in his career, is also most probably designed to give a place of honour in the national records to those whose strength and valour contributed to establish the kingdom. There are deeds of mighty men recorded in the annals of the Church, and we may note—

I. THAT A PLACE OF HONOUR IS IN RESERVE FOR THOSE WHO RENDER HIGH SERVICE. Because of great service these men were honoured with a place in the record which is to be read by all mankind. In subduing the world to Christ there is scope for great energies and efforts. Those who by prayer, self-denial, holy living, written or spoken words, or other means and weapons, go forth daily in the name of Christ and achieve great things, will be honoured in the esteem of the coming ages and in the esteem of Christ. While all good men shall shine as with the brightness of the firmament, these shall shine forth more distinctly as the "stars" for ever and ever (Dan. xii. 3; 1 Cor. xv. 41).

II. THAT THE GROUND OF THE HONOUR LIES IN THEIR OVERCOMING MUCH EVIL. These men smote gigantic foes. They contributed to the stability and splendour of David's reign by sweeping away the evils which would have checked the progress of his wise and just methods of government. The honour of Christian soldiers lies in ridding the world of gigantic evils, the preliminary step to the perfection of good. Those who smite the greatest evils or a multitude of the most pervasive sins, confer unspeakable benefits on mankind, and clear the way for the positive development of those holy principles which are the glory of the kingdom of Christ. The riddance of sin and the introduction of holiness are concurrent acts in Christian warfare. Some men are marvellous warriors as compared with others.

III. THAT THE SPIRIT WHICH RENDERS SUCH TRIUMPHS POSSIBLE IS THAT OF DEVOTION TO THE KING. These men followed David, were under his guidance, caught his spirit, sought to establish his supremacy, and hence were nerved by a definite inspiring purpose. Consecration to Christ is the key to our victories. Wherever there is true devotion to him, and in proportion to its depth, there will be great deeds done in his name. Hence the apostolic allusions to fighting the good fight under the leadership of the great Captain of our salvation.

Christ's tribute to Christian devotion. The exclamation of David, "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem!" was probably the natural unpremeditated outcome of an intense feeling of thirst when hemmed in by the Philistines. There is no evidence that it was a pretext to draw forth some special proof of devotion to himself. The incidental knowledge acquired of his actual need, nevertheless, developed in the hearts of these brave men a determination to obtain drink for him, even at the risk of their own lives. Where true loyalty exists there is no waiting for formal commands. The refusal of the king to drink what they so nobly obtained, doubtless, at first, filled them with surprise, and possibly caused annoyance. But the generous sentiment expressed—that he valued their generous devotion so highly that he could not at such a risk indulge in any personal satisfaction, deeming the offering too costly for mortal acceptance—this must have removed all disappointment, and strengthened the bond of allegiance. Here we may see a parable setting forth Christ's tribute to the devotion of his followers.

I. THE HIGHEST DEVOTION RISKS ALL FOR CHRIST. As these men went forth, risking life for their king, so the truest devotion leads men to risk all for Christ. There are forms of devotion in which little is given up, and much reserve is made. The stories of the rich young man in the gospel and of the going first to prove the purchased oxen exhibit a profession of attachment too frequent in Christendom. The Apostle Peter came nearer the truth of the case when he declared that he and others had "left all" to follow Christ. The mind to forsake, if need be, father and mother, houses and land, and to give up life, is stated to be the condition of the acceptable service. Wherever there is a real appreciation of who Christ is, what we are, what his vast mercy to us is, and the infinite claims of his love upon heart and life, devotion to him becomes so complete and absorbing that pain, loss, and possibly death among the heathen are faced with composure when they stand between the soul and the advancing of his interests.

II. THIS RISK OF LIFE IS AN OFFERING WORTHY OF CHRIST. The position of David as the anointed of the Lord and distinct ruler of the kingdom of God on earth, rendered it right and reasonable for the personal risk on his account. For the covenant with David and all the great issues involved were at stake. And so, apart from the subjective feeling which prompts to full devotion to Christ, there is in him and the vast enterprise of working out the redemption of man everything to justify this devotion. The surrender of life and all is an offering most worthy. Our mortal interests are as nothing compared to the requirements of his kingdom. He is worthy of all might, all riches, all life, all that men or angels can lay at his feet.

III. CHRIST HAS NO JOY IN THE LOSS OF HIS SERVANTS WHEN SEEKING TO SERVE HIM. David felt no satisfaction that such valued lives were risked for him. It was no pleasure to think that widows might have had cause to weep in consequence of noble devotion in his service. He was always tenderly regardful of the lives and comfort of his people. And although, from the necessities of the case in a world where evil has to be fought at all costs, many a noble life has to be sacrificed and many a pain endured, yet Christ finds no pleasure in the sufferings of his people any more than he had in his own. His and their sufferings were to him a painful condition of conquest over sin. He feels for them in their woes.

IV. BUT CHRIST PAYS HONOUR TO THE SPIRIT WHICH FREELY FACES GREAT RISKS. David's refusal to drink the water, and his pouring it out before the Lord as though it were too sacred for mortal lips to touch, was his way of paying honour to these devoted men. His feeling in regard to their personal devotion is, so far as the human may be a symbol and measure of the Divine, a representation of the feeling cherished by Christ with respect to noble deeds in his service and the spirit from which they spring. He looks with admiration on the self-consuming zeal of his followers; he sees in it the reflection of that spirit of self-sacrifice which enters into his own sufferings and death for men. They are partakers with him of the cup of which some have not the courage to drink (Matt. xx. 20—23). Those who have won great honours in his service are to be welcomed as "good and faithful servants," and to be made "rulers over many things." The loss of parents and houses and lands is to be compensated by others more enduring, with life eternal (Mark x. 30). His care and love assured to them in trial, his grace given according to their need, his distinct promise of distinction among the redeemed, all point to the tribute which he bears to the noble self-sacrificing spirit which animates them (John xiv. 18, 19, 27; xv. 18—21; 2 Cor. xii. 7—10; Rev. ii. 10; iii. 10—12).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7 (Matt. i. 1).—*The son of Jesse, and the Son of David.* The relation of David to Jesus, regarded in the light of prophecy and history, was one of: 1. *Hereditary connection*; inasmuch as he not only belonged to the tribe of Judah (Gen. xlix. 10; Heb. vii. 14; Rev. v. 5) and the house of Jesse the Bethlehemite (Isa. xi. 1), but was ancestor of Jesus (Matt. i. 16; Luke iii. 23); who was thus legal heir to "the throne of his father David," and was born in "the city of David" (Micah v. 2; Matt. ii. 6). 2. *Typical representation*, in his *office* as theocratic king, divinely chosen, "the Lord's anointed" (messiah, christ), the representative of God and of the people; his *devotion* to the purpose of his calling, fulfilling the will of God, contending against his enemies, and ruling his people righteously; his *exaltation*, through suffering (1 Pet. i. 11), by the mighty hand of God, to power, honour, and dominion; his *influence* in securing national deliverance, religious benefits, temporal order, prosperity, and happiness; whereby he foreshadowed an incomparably greater Ruler of a kingdom "not of this world," who saves his people from their sins, reconciles them to God, and gives them eternal life. 3. *Historical resemblance* (closely associated with the former, but without, so far as is revealed, being expressly designed by God), in his lowly birth, youthful consecration (1 Sam. xvi. 12; Luke ii. 49), and humble occupation; his decisive conflict (1 Sam. xvii. 50; Matt. iv. 11), public services, and bitter persecutions; his attracting around him a band of faithful followers (1 Sam. xxii. 1; Matt. x. 1), increasing fame, and popular recognition (ch. ii. 4; John vi. 15; Matt. xxi. 9); his great achievements,

spiritual utterances, and beneficent influence (ch. vi., viii.); his rejection (ch. xv. 13), betrayal, and overwhelming sorrows (ch. xv. 30); his final victory (ch. xviii.; John xii. 31, 32), glorious restoration, and diligent preparation for an enduring reign of peace. 4. *Extraordinary contrast.* Even wherein the first prefigured the second David (Ezek. xxxiv. 23), the imperfection of the former stands opposed to the perfection of the latter. And Jesus is "the Son of God" (Luke i. 35) in the highest sense, David's Lord (Mark xii. 37); was without sin and always well-pleasing to the Father; came to establish, not an earthly kingdom (as the Jews expected), but a spiritual one, and only by moral means (truth, righteousness, and love); died as a sacrifice for sin, rose again, and ascended into the heavens" (Acts ii. 34); "who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom. ix. 5).—D.

Vers. 1—3.—(JERUSALEM.) *David's last words.* [The closing years of David's life (after the insurrection of Sheba was subdued, ch. xx.) were spent in peace. Having secured a site for the altar (ch. xxiv. 25; 1 Chron. xxi. 28), he made preparations for the building of the temple (1 Chron. xxii.). At length his strength began to fail; but, when made acquainted with the conspiracy of Adonijah, he displayed something of his former energy in hastening the accession of Solomon (1 Kings i.). He also "gathered together the princes of Israel," etc. (1 Chron. xxiii. 1, 2), made numerous arrangements, sacred and civil (1 Chron. xxiii. 3—32; xxiv.—xxvii.), addressed a convocation of princes, gave a charge to his successor, and offered thanksgiving to God (1 Chron. xxviii.; xxix. 1—25). He subsequently gave further counsel to Solomon (1 Kings ii. 1—9). About the same time, probably, he uttered these last prophetic words; and then, at the age of seventy, he "fell on sleep" (1 Kings ii. 10; 1 Chron. xxix. 26—28). "The omission of David's death in the conclusion of this work is satisfactorily explained from the theocratic character and aim of the composition, since in this conclusion the fulfilment of the theocratic mission of David is completed" (Erdmann).]

> "And these are the last words of David:
> An oracle of David, son of Jesse,
> And an oracle of the hero highly exalted,
> Anointed of the God of Jacob,
> And pleasant (in) Israel's songs of praise.
> The Spirit of Jehovah speaks within me,
> And his word is on my tongue;
> Says the God of Israel,
> To me speaks the Rock of Israel," etc.

How varied are the last words of men! How significant of their ruling passion! And how instructive to others (Gen. xlviii. 21, 22; xlix. 1; Deut. xxxiii. 1; Josh. xxiii. 14; xxiv. 27; 2 Kings xiii. 19; Luke ii. 29; Acts vii. 59; 2 Tim. iv. 6—8)! Here is David, "the man of God's own choice," about to go "the way of all the earth" (ch. vii. 12; 1 Kings ii. 2). Highly exalted as he was, he must die like other men. "We walk different ways in life, but in death we are all united." Ere he departs his spirit kindles with unwonted lustre, as not unfrequently happens in the case of others; he is under the immediate inspiration of God (Numb. xxiv. 3, 4), and sings his last song of praise, sweet as the fabled notes of the dying swan. "No prince, and certainly no one who had not acquired his kingdom by inheritance, could possibly close his life with a more blessed repose in God and a brighter glance of confidence into the future. This is the real stamp of true greatness" (Ewald). "These are the words of the prophecy of David, which he prophesied concerning the end of the age, concerning the days of consolation which are to come" (Targum). They show that he has in death (what it is also the privilege of other servants of God in some measure to possess)—

I. GRATEFUL MEMORIES of the favour of God; which has been manifested: 1. Toward one of *lowly origin* and condition. "A son of Jesse." "Who am I?" etc. (1 Sam. xviii. 18). "I am the least in my father's house" (Judg. vi. 15). He recognizes his natural relationships, recalls his early life, renounces all special claim to Divine favour, and is filled with humility. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Cor. iv. 7). 2. In raising him up to *exalted honour.* "The man [hero] who was highly exalted." Earthly distinction is the portion of a few, but spiritual distinction is the

possession of every good man; he is a partaker of the Divine nature (2 Pet. i. 4), raised up with Christ, and made to sit with him in heavenly places (Eph. ii. 6), and an heir of all things (1 Cor. iii. 23). "The Christian believes himself to be a king, how mean soever he be, and how great soever he be; yet he thinks himself not too good to be servant to the poorest saint" (Bacon, 'Christian Paradoxes'). 3. In appointing him to *royal dominion* over men. "Anointed," etc. He has "an anointing from the Holy One," and shares in the dominion of Christ. "To him will I give power over the nations," etc. (Rev. ii. 26). 4. In conferring upon him *excellent endowments*, in the exercise of which he quickens the spiritual susceptibilities of men, furnishes them with "acceptable words" in their approach to God, and becomes a helper of their noblest life and joy. "Pleasant [lovely] in [by means of] the praise-songs of [sung by] Israel." "He was not only the founder of the monarchy, but the founder of the Psalter. He is the first great poet of Israel. Although before his time there had been occasional bursts of Hebrew poetry, David is he who first gave it its fixed place in Israelite worship" (Stanley).

"The harp the monarch-minstrel swept,
The king of men, the loved of Heaven,
Which Music hallow'd, while she wept
O'er tones her heart of hearts had given;
Redoubled be her tears, its chords are riven!
It soften'd men of iron mould,
It gave them virtues not their own;
No ear so dull, no soul so cold,
That felt not, fired not to the tone,
Till David's lyre grew mightier than his throne!"
(Byron, 'Hebrew Melodies.')

Although his greatness was peculiar, yet a measure of true greatness belongs to every one of the "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. ii. 6, 9; Rev. i. 6) of the spiritual Israel. He has power with God and with men, represents God to men and men to God, employs his power with God on behalf of men, and his power with men on behalf of God; and if, by the culture and use of the gifts bestowed upon him, he has contributed to the highest good of men—this (together with all the Divine benefits he has received) is a matter of grateful remembrance and fervent thanksgiving (Ps. xxxvii. 25, 37, 39; ciii.). "It is not what we have done, but what God has done for us and through us, that gives true peace when we come to the end."

II. GRACIOUS COMMUNICATIONS by the Spirit of God; inasmuch as he is: 1. Filled with *Divine inspiration*. "The Spirit of Jehovah speaks within me." Such inspiration is of various kinds and degrees, and given for different special purposes. "Men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. i. 21; 2 Tim. iii. 16). But every one who has fellowship with God is inhabited, pervaded, inspired by his Spirit, enlightening, purifying, elevating, gladdening, and strengthening him. Some are "full of the Holy Ghost." In a dying hour, what a marvellous elevation of thought and feeling have they sometimes attained! "Holy men at their death have good inspirations" (see 'Last Words of Remarkable Persons;' 'Life's Last Hours;' Jacox, 'At Nightfall,' etc.; S. Ward, 'The Life of Faith in Death;' J. Hawes, 'Confessions of Dying Men,' etc.). 2. Enabled to utter the *Divine Word*. "And his Word is on my tongue." Even though there be no new, definite, and infallible revelation of the Word of God, there is often a new indication of its meaning and application, and a fresh, fervid, and forcible expression thereof. "As the Spirit gave them utterance." 3. Made a recipient of *Divine promises*. "The God of Israel says." He who entered into a covenant-relation with Israel, and promised to be their God, gave to David the promise of an everlasting kingdom (ch. vii. 12—16), and still gives it, with an inner voice that cannot be mistaken. He also "speaks all the promises," not only in the written Word, but also in the soul of every one to whom that Word comes in "much assurance."

"Oh, might I hear thy heavenly voice
But whisper, 'Thou art mine!'
Those gentle words should raise my song
To notes almost Divine."

4. Constituted a witness of the *Divine faithfulness* in the fulfilment of the promises.

"To me speaks the Rock of Israel" (1 Sam. ii. 2; ch. xxii. 2, 3, 32, 47). "He is faithful that promised" (Heb. x. 23). His faithfulness is the foundation of his promises. "And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Jehovah: and thy *faithfulness* in the assembly of the holy ones" (Ps. lxxxix. 1, 2, 5, 8, 24, 33). On this the believer rests when all things fail, and of this he testifies in death, committing his soul into the hands of God, as "unto a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. iv. 19; Ps. xxxi. 5).

III. GLORIOUS ANTICIPATIONS of the kingdom of God; wherein the glory of the present merges into the greater glory of the future, and earth and heaven are one (vers. 3—5; Ps. lxxxv. 11). He sees: 1. The majesty of *the King of righteousness*; like the splendour of the rising sun. His view of the ideal theocratic ruler of the future has its perfect realization in him who is "King of kings, and Lord of lords." The chief object of the Christian's contemplation in death is the glory of Christ. "Herein would I live; herein would I die; herein would I dwell in my thoughts and affections, to the withdrawing and consumption of all the painted beauties of this world, unto the crucifixion of all things here below, until they become unto me a dead and deformed thing, no way meet for affectionate embraces" (Owen). 2. The brightness of *a heavenly day*; "the drawing near of the kingdom of the heavens," and abounding life and happiness for ever (ch. xxii. 51; ver. 5). "Nevertheless we according to his promise," etc. (2 Pet. iii. 13). 3. The realization of a blessed hope; the hope of *personal salvation* (ver. 5), associated with and assured in the immortal life of the King and his people (Ps. xvi. 9—11; xvii. 15; xlix. 15; lxxiii. 24; John xiv. 19). 4. The *destruction of all iniquity*. (Ver. 6.) The people shall be all righteous. "The dying eyes see on the horizon of the far-off future the form of him who is to be a just and perfect Ruler; before the brightness of whose presence, and the refreshing of whose influence, verdure and beauty shall clothe the world. As the shades gather, that radiant glory to come brightens. He departs in peace, having seen the salvation from afar. It was fitting that this fullest of his prophecies should be the last of his strains, as if the rapture which thrilled the trembling strings had snapped them in twain" (Maclaren).

> "They who watch by him see not; but he sees—
> Sees and exults. Were ever dreams like these?
> Those who watch by him hear not; but he hears,
> And earth recedes, and heaven itself appears."
>
> (Rogers.)

"His funeral obsequies were celebrated with the greatest pomp ever yet known in Israel, and his arms were preserved as sacred relics in the temple; but the lapse of time only increased the reverence in which his memory was held in the national heart, until it finally culminated in a glowing desire to behold him once again upon the earth, and to see the advent of a second David" (Ewald).—D.

Vers. 3—7.—*An oracle concerning the King Messiah.* 1. The hope of salvation, and more especially of the establishment of the kingdom of heaven upon earth, was, in some measure, fulfilled in the reign of *David, the Lord's messiah.* In his character as theocratic ruler he was a type (prefigurement or anticipatory outline) of Christ (1 Sam. ii. 10). "The type is prophecy in deed." 2. Under Divine inspiration, *he formed an ideal of a theocratic ruler,* in connection with his own personality and history. Hence the representations contained in the Messianic psalms (xvi., xxii.), in some things transcend his experience, and in others are mingled with his infirmities. 3. In this oracle or Divine saying (as in Ps. cx., and perhaps others) *he looked forward to the realization of his ideal at a future time.* "No part whatever of the Old Testament is introduced with a greater majesty of language, or more excites the expectation of some splendid and glorious sense, than the last words of David" (Kennicott). The promise of eternal dominion to his house was joined with an intimation of his death (ch. vii. 12); and "these last words show how, in consequence of the consciousness of his own guilt, the image of the Messiah was separated from his subjectivity, and came before him as a majestic form of the future. He, the highly favoured one, who had considered himself immortal (Ps. xvi.), must now die! He therefore grasps the pillars of the promise, ceases to connect the Messianic hopes with himself, and as a prophet beholds the future of his seed" (Delitzsch). "These words are not merely a lyric effusion of

the promise, but a prophetic declaration concerning the true king of the kingdom of God" (Keil). "They form the key-stone of his life; his prophetic legacy; to which the cycle of psalms cxxxviii.—cxlv. must be regarded as supplementary" (Hengstenberg). "If there is any part of Scripture which betrays the movements of the human individual soul, it is this precious fragment of David's life. If there be any part which claims for itself, and which gives evidence of the breathings of the Spirit of God, it is this also. Such a rugged two-edged monument is a fitting memorial of the man who was at once the king and the prophet, the penitent and the saint of the ancient Church" (Stanley). 4. The ideal of a theocratic ruler was *only partially realized in Solomon* and other kings of the house of David (Ps. xlv.; lxxii.; Isa. xxxii.). 5. Although the hope of a more adequate realization thereof was again and again disappointed, it was not extinguished, but *became more and more spiritual and exalted* (Riehm, 'Messianic Prophecy;' C. A. Row, 'The Jesus of the Evangelists;' W. F. Adeney, 'The Hebrew Utopia'). 6. At length the hope of Israel *was perfectly fulfilled in the Person, work, and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Luke i. 32; Matt. xxii. 43; Acts ii. 36; Eph. i. 20—22; Rev. i. 18.) "In using the Old Testament now, especially for purposes of edification, we should feel that we fail to do justice to the Old Testament, if, when expounding any truth taught in it, we do not bring into connection with the passage explained the highest form of the truth as revealed in the New Testament" (A. B. Davidson, 'Messianic Prophecy,' *Expositor*, viii.). What is here said must, on this principle, be referred to Christ; and it may be referred to him, with more or less propriety, in his earthly life, in his heavenly dominion, or at his second appearing. It indicates—

I. HIS EXALTED CHARACTER and principles of government. As if present at the commencement of "the golden age," David beholds

> **"A ruler over men [literally, 'in man'], just!**
> **A ruler fearing God!"**

Many a ruler, like "the unjust judge," neither fears God nor regards man. He acquires his position by craft and bloodshed, and exercises his power in oppression and ungodliness. Not so the ruler here depicted; who is distinguished by: 1. *Rectitude* of heart, of speech, and of conduct; in the laws according to which he rules, and his administration of them, rendering to every man according to his deeds; herein resembling, reflecting, and representing the rectitude of God; and protecting and promoting the best interests of men (Ps. lxxii. 4; Isa. ix. 7; xi. 1—10; Jer. xxiii. 5; xxx. 9; Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24; Hos. iii. 5; Micah v. 1—5; Zech. ix. 9, 10). "The history of the actual David supplies the subject-matter for these idealizations. David is the original prototype on which they are formed, and round whose person they cluster. They may be described as David idealized" (C. A. Row). 2. *Piety;* the fear of offending God, reverence for his Name, delight in his fellowship, obedience to his will, opposition to his adversaries, dependence on his strength, and devotion to his honour and glory. "When he that rules is just, it is as if he did not rule, but the fear of the Lord ruled in the earth" (Barrett, 'A Synopsis of Criticisms'). 3. *Rectitude united with piety;* founded upon it, pervaded by it, and expressive of it; his supreme aim and constant endeavour being the establishment of the kingdom of God. All this is realized, even beyond expectation, in the wonderful Person of Christ, and his just and merciful reign over mankind. "Put together your ideal of true greatness of soul—power combined with gentleness; dignity with no pride; benevolence with no weakness; sympathy and love for humanity as it is, and especially for the poor, the sad, the suffering. Let your ideal be stainless, and even unsuspected of stain; and let him cheerfully and patiently live and die for men who misunderstood and even hated him. This is what you will see in the history of Christ . . . the Messiah of humanity as well as the Jews" (J. M. Wilson). "The *type* set up in the Gospels as the Christian type is the essence of man's moral nature clothed with a personality so vivid and intense as to excite through all ages the most intense affection; yet divested of all those peculiar characteristics and accidents of place and time by which human personalities are marked. What other notion than this can philosophy form of Divinity manifest on earth?" (Goldwin Smith, quoted by Liddon, 'Some Elements,' etc., p. 218).

II. HIS BENEFICENT INFLUENCE.

"And (his appearance is) as the light of morning, (at) the rising of the sun,
A morning without clouds; (and the effect thereof as when)
From brightness (and) from rain verdure (springs) from (out of) the earth."

As the influence of an unjust and ungodly ruler is powerful for evil, so the influence of the King Messiah is powerful for good, and much more abundantly (Ps. lxxii. 6, 7, 16). It is like that of

". . . the great minister
Of nature, that upon the world imprints
The virtue of the heaven, and doles out
Time for us with his beam."

(Dante.)

The sun is the source of light, heat, and force; of life, health, fertility, beauty, and gladness. What a change takes place in the whole aspect of nature at the approach of "the powerful king of day"! A similar change takes place in the moral and spiritual world at the rising of the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. iv. 2; Isa. lx. 2). In him, who is "the Light of the world," Jehovah himself becomes manifest to men, "visits and redeems his people," and "gives light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death," etc. (Luke i. 68—79). "Even as the light of the morning shall he arise, Jehovah the Sun" (Pye Smith, 'Scripture Testimony to the Messiah'). At his appearance, and under his influence: 1. *Darkness is dispersed;* the long dreary night of ignorance, error, injustice, impiety, oppression, discord, and misery, "and the veil that is spread over all nations" (Isa. xxv. 7). 2. *Light is diffused;* the light of truth, pure and bright; revelations of heavenly love and mercy; a spirit of gentleness and tenderness, "of wisdom and might;" guiding, quickening, healing, and saving. 3. *Life abounds* with the peaceful fruits of righteousness; spontaneously, readily, universally; as, when (after a season of drought, or in spring) heavy showers have fallen and bright sunshine breaks forth, the earth clothes itself in fresh and "tender green" (Isa. xxxv. 1, 2). "The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." The one true King of men has come, his influence is powerfully and widely felt, and it is constantly increasing; nevertheless we see not yet all things subdued unto him. Like prophets and kings of old, we still wait for his appearing. "For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. xv. 25).

III. HIS ASSURED MANIFESTATION.

"For (there is sure ground for my expectation, for) is not my house (not myself merely) thus with (related to) God (that out of it such an exalted ruler and his beneficial influence shall proceed)?
For (because) he has established to me an everlasting covenant (to this effect),
Arranged in all (respects) and kept;
For (therefore) all my salvation (involved therein) and all (his) good pleasure (expressed therein)—
For (therefore, I say) will he not cause (them) to sprout (to be fully accomplished)?"

"The pledge of this just ruler was the eternal covenant which God had concluded with him" (Tholuck). The whole oracle is founded upon this *covenant* (solemn promise, sacred engagement, arrangement, constitution, dispensation), securing eternal dominion to his house and the blessings of salvation to the subjects of his kingdom (ch. vii. 13, 10, 24). "The Davidic covenant is the embodiment of the hope of David, and the theme of his last meditations. In this swanlike song David clings to the Messianic promise as his greatest delight" (C. A. Briggs, 'Messianic Prophecy'). 1. *It cannot fail of fulfilment,* in the appearing and reign of the Messiah; because of: (1) The faithfulness of God, "the Rock of Israel" (ver. 3), its Author; (2) its having been actually made, (3) with the express assurance of these things, (4) "to David, and his seed *for ever*" (ch. xxii. 51); (5) carefully arranged, provided with everything adapted to effect the proper end thereof, and to avert failure, even through apostasy (ch. vii. 14, 15); (6) and its being constantly preserved, guarded, watched over, until completely fulfilled. 2. In its fulfilment, *the promised salvation of the people of God, and his gracious purposes concerning them, will be accomplished.* "All my salvation," etc. "The dying Israelite looked forward to the grand destiny of his people, and lost his personality in the larger life of the nation, and thus triumphed over death through the thought of the

immortality and future blessedness of the collective Israel" (W. F. Adeney); or rather he expected to share with them, in some way, their glorious inheritance (Ps. lxi. 5, 6; lxxiii. 23, 26; Isa. liv. 10—14; lv. 3, 4; Dan. xii. 3, 4, 13). 3. On this the servant of God *rests with strong confidence* and blessed hope, in life and death (Gen. xlix. 18). "We are saved by hope." And "when Christ, who is our Life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory" (Col. iii. 4; 1 John iii. 2; 2 Pet. iii. 13).

"My God, the covenant of thy love
Abides for ever sure;
And in its matchless grace I feel
My happiness secure."

IV. HIS FINAL JUDGMENT on the wicked.

"And worthlessness [literally, 'Belial, ungodly men'] as thorns thrust away (are) all of them;
For (because) not with the (unarmed) hand are they seized;
And (but) the man who touches them
Is filled (fills his hand, provides himself) with iron,
And shaft of spear (*i.e.* a long spear),
And with fire are they utterly burned on the spot."

It is the part of a just and godly ruler to punish evil-doers. The undue leniency of David was followed by disastrous consequences (ch. iii. 39; xiii. 21; xiv. 33; xix. 23; xx. 10); and, at the close of his life, he charged his successor to vindicate the Law wherein he had himself failed to do so (1 Kings ii. 1—9). The coming King is not only a Saviour, but also a Judge; and to him all judgment is committed (John v. 22, 27). "There rises up before him (David) a field overrun with thorns, which the Divine ministers pluck up with gauntleted hands, and beat down with their burnished spears, and commit to the consuming flames" (S. Cox, 'Expositor's Note-Book'). His judgment is: 1. Just. 2. Certain. 3. Irresistible. 4. Complete. The day of grace, during which forbearance has been shown in vain, is followed by the day of wrath (Mal. iv. 1; Matt. iii. 12; xiii. 40—43; Heb. vi. 7).—D.

Vers. 8—12 (1 Chron. xi. 10—14).—*The first three heroes. Jashobeam* the son of Hachmoni (*Zabdiel*, 1 Chron. xxvii. 2), who came to David at Ziklag (1 Chron. xii. 6), and became general of the first division of the army; *Eleazar* the son of Dodo the Ahohite, general of the second division (1 Chron. xxvii. 4); and *Shammah* the son of Agee the Hararite. "They served in the most direct manner by their work one who was the representative of the Divine government on earth" (Krummacher). "Such traits of warlike courage (as they displayed) are more significant than anything else; they recall to us completely those few periods of history, otherwise unknown to us, in which a marvellous aspiration for the possession of some higher blessing, such as freedom or immortality, has taken hold of an entire nation, and so has produced, through special instruments of exceptional power, even military exploits which appear incredible to ordinary men" (Ewald). "Christ the Son of David has his worthies too, who, like David's, are influenced by his example, fight his battles against the spiritual enemies of his kingdom, and in his strength are more than conquerors" (Matthew Henry). In these battles, neither physical prowess nor intellectual strength is of so much importance as moral and spiritual qualifications, and especially *eminent faith*; such as that by which many "from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens" (Heb. xi. 34). It ensures success by means of—

I. FEARLESSNESS and daring courage (ver. 8). "He lifted his spear against eight hundred [three hundred], slain at one time;" went undismayed "against a multitude" (2 Chron. xiv. 11), and alone (or possibly aided by others) overcame them (Judg. iii. 31; xv. 15). Instances of a similar kind are recorded in history (see 'Pictorial Bible' in 1 Chron. xi.): "Ajax beating down the Trojan leader with a rock which two ordinary men could scarcely lift; Horatius defending the bridge against an army; Richard, the lion-hearted, spurring along the whole Saracen line without finding an enemy to stand his assault; Robert Bruce crushing with one blow the helmet and the head of Sir Henry Bohun, in sight of the whole army of England and Scotland;—such are the heroes of a dark age. In such an age, bodily vigour is the most indispensable

qualification for a warrior" (Macaulay, 'History of England'). Even in modern times (when the superiority of strength of mind has been so manifest) it has accomplished extraordinary feats. But how much greater and nobler have been the achievements wrought by moral courage and spiritual weapons (2 Cor. x. 4)!

II. INDEPENDENCE and single-handed effort (vers. 9, 10). When "he alone remained" (Josephus), "he arose and smote the Philistines, until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword," etc. In like manner, when "the people fled from the Philistines" (vers. 11, 12), Shammah stood alone against their attack. The valour of some men depends upon the presence, sympathy, and help of others, and fails when they are left to themselves. 1. Under such circumstances, the courage of a true hero is fully brought out (Isa. lxiii. 3). 2. He is independent of men because he depends upon God. 3. By his single-handed effort, one such man is sometimes able to "chase a thousand" (Josh. xxiii. 10). 4. His courage and success infuse fresh vigour into fearful hearts; and "the people return after him," though it be "only to spoil." He alone is fit to be a leader of men.

III. STEADFASTNESS in passive endurance and active endeavour. "He stood in the midst of the ground," which was "full of lentiles," or barley, "defended it, and slew the Philistines" (who had probably come up to carry away the ripe crops); like Eleazar, he "endured to the end," and conquered. It is not enough to exhibit fearlessness and independence at first; we must continue to do so (Luke ix. 51), otherwise nothing will be gained, but everything be lost. "Whatever is each man's post, chosen by himself as the better part, or appointed by his leader, there, as it appears to me, he ought to stay in spite of danger; taking no account of death or anything else in comparison with dishonour" ('The Apology of Socrates'). This is the crowning quality: "Having done all, to stand [hold the field]. Stand therefore," etc. (Eph. vi. 14); "Be ye steadfast," etc. (1 Chron. xv. 58; Gal. vi. 9); "Stand fast in the Lord."

IV. DIVINE HELP. "And Jehovah wrought a great deliverance" (ver. 10, repeated in ver. 12). Here is the chief source of success. Human effort is needful, but in itself ineffectual. It avails only through the help of God (Ps. cxxvi. 1; cxxi. 2). Nor is this withheld from such as seek and rely upon it. He will fight for those who fight for him. How often has he enabled them to prevail against an overwhelming host! "Salvation is of the Lord." To him it should be ascribed. And every great deliverance calls for great thanksgiving.—D.

Vers. 13—17 (1 Chron. xi. 15—19).—*The well of Bethlehem.* When a shepherd-youth, David doubtless often sat beside "the well by the gate," and refreshed himself with its cold, clear, sparkling water. But those days have long since departed; and he is now a king, with many cares. Bethlehem is occupied by a part of the Philistine host, and he is once more in "the hold" (ch. v. 17; 1 Sam. xxi. 1), accompanied by his heroic band of men, to whom his every wish is equivalent to a command. "What a circle of names are associated with his name, some of them names and scarce anything beside—men who would have been unheard of but for the occasions which brought them into temporary connection with so famous a man, and of whose lives, apart from that connection, we know nothing; yet all of whom had a life, had a character, were as precious as individuals in the eye of God as the great soul to whom they owe what little interest they have in the eyes of men!" The names of these three "knights" are not recorded; but their chivalrous achievement is immortalized. "God knows them, as he knows the noble acts of all his saints and martyrs, and will reward them at the great day" (Wordsworth). In the threefold scene here described we have—

I. THE NATURAL WISH expressed by the king. "Oh that one would give me drink!" etc. (ver. 15). It is: 1. *Involuntarily excited.* "In the harvest-time," oppressed with heat, and exhausted by conflict and toil, David is parched with thirst, and overcome with a great longing for a refreshing draught from the well of Bethlehem, whose familiar walls he, perchance, sees from a distance. So men sometimes desire, not merely the satisfaction of bodily appetites, but also the gratification of deeper yearnings, for youth and home, and happier conditions and experiences. "Oh that I had wings like the dove!" etc. (Ps. lv. 6). 2. *In itself innocent.* Many a wish, even for objects at present out of reach and beset by difficulty and peril, is as blameless as the thirst of a traveller "in a dry and weary land where no water is." Although it may be

"according to nature" (in the best sense), it nevertheless requires to be controlled, regulated, and subordinated to a higher law than that of pleasing ourselves; and it is, too frequently: 3. *Inordinately indulged*; so that it becomes a dominant selfish impulse. "The habit of wishing and hankering for those things which Providence denies, though natural to us and often given way to, even by godly men, in an unguarded hour, is a degree of rebellion against the Lord; and it shows the remaining sensuality and selfishness of the heart, and leads to many snares and evils" (Scott). 4. *Inconsiderately uttered.* David may not intend his men to hear what he says (still less to challenge their devotion); he may hardly be aware of their presence. But, knowing their character and his relation to them, he is none the less responsible for the effect of his words upon them; and should have put a bridle on his tongue (Ps. xxxix. 1; cvi. 33; cxli. 3). Unregulated impulses and imprudent speech—what mischief have they wrought in the world! "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

II. THE HEROIC DEED performed by his followers. "And the three mighty men broke through the host," etc. (ver. 16). "It was a foolhardy thing to do," some one says; "they might easily have seen that a draught of water was not worth the conflict and hazard necessary to obtain it." Happily they did not see it; else we had never heard of their heroic enterprise. Without calculating consequences, they act from a sense of duty, an impulse of unselfish devotion, a spirit of chivalry, "which shrinks from no sacrifice in order to do the smallest service for the object of its devotion;" therein exhibiting: 1. *An intense attachment* to their leader, love to his person, sympathy with his need, loyalty to his office, desire to please him and to do his will (as they interpreted it). It could have been inspired in them only by a man of great ability, generosity, and enthusiasm. They learnt it of him (1 Sam. xvii. 50). His self-indulgent and momentary wish was no true index of his prevailing disposition. 2. *A spontaneous, prompt, and cheerful purpose* and endeavour. They say nothing and do not hesitate, but go together "into the jaws of death." 3. *Invincible courage*; a principle which is as needful in moral and spiritual conflict as in physical warfare (ch. x. 12). "Most probably it made such an impression as rendered the host of the Philistines an easy prey to the Israelites" (Blaikie). 4. *Entire self-denial and self-sacrifice*; disregarding alike their own pleasure and peril, and laying down their lives for his sake. "Greater love hath no man," etc. (John xv. 13). "Pure love has its measure in itself, and disregards in its outward expression every critic (Matt. xxvi. 7—13). This exploit of the three heroes was a sacrifice offered, not so much to the *man* David, as rather in him to the 'Anointed of the Lord,' and therefore to the Lord himself" (Krummacher). How does it rebuke our lack of devotion to our Divine King! Were we as ardent, loyal, courageous, and self-sacrificing as they, what victories should we gain over his adversaries and ours!

III. THE SACRED OFFERING presented before the Lord. "And he would not drink thereof," etc. For the first time, probably, he becomes acquainted with their desperate exploit, when they come into his presence, stained with blood, and place the vessel, containing the water for which he longed, in his hands. To him it is as if it were their blood, and he cannot drink it (Lev. xvii. 11, 12). To do so would be to justify his former wish, and gratify himself at the hazard of their lives. Their devotion evokes within him a nobler feeling and impulse than he before displayed; so that he practically confesses his fault, personally shares their suffering and self-denial, and publicly testifies his thankfulness for their preservation and his devotion to their welfare. And this he does in the highest and most effectual manner—by making of their gift a libation (1 Sam. vii. 6), or drink offering, and thereby *giving honour to God.* "It was too sacred for him to drink, but it was on that very account deemed by him as worthy to be consecrated in sacrifice to God as any of the prescribed offerings of the Levitical ritual. Pure chivalry and pure religion there found an absolute union" (Stanley). Alexander denied himself of a draught of water because he could not bear to drink it alone, and the cup was too small to be divided among all his soldiers; Sir Philip Sidney, that he might give it to a wounded soldier, whose necessity appeared to him greater than his own ('Percy Anecdotes'); David, that he might present it unto God. "He never was more magnanimous than at this moment. This deed was a psalm, sublime in its significance, and for ever sweet to all loving hearts in its pure simplicity." In his offering there is: 1. An exalted estimate of the value of human life. 2. A humble renunciation

of the power even of a king to make use of it according to his own pleasure or for a selfish end. 3. A solemn recognition of the sovereignty of God over "life and breath and all things." 4. An unreserved submission, surrender, and sacrifice of every gift to him who alone is worthy. David's offering must have deepened the attachment of his three heroes, and exerted no small moral and spiritual influence on all his followers. How much greator is the "offering" of the Son of David (Eph. v. 2; Heb. ix. 14), and his claim on our affection, gratitude, and self-consecration! Constrained by his love, we should live in the spirit of his life (Rom. xii. 1; 2 Cor. v. 15; Phil. ii. 17, "poured out as a libation;" 2 Tim. iv. 6).

REFLECTIONS. 1. An impulse of a lower kind is most effectually overcome by one of a higher order. 2. A wish in itself blameless may, in certain circumstances, be sinful and injurious. 3. An action which is mistaken and imprudent sometimes affords occasion for the display of the noblest principles. 4. The self-denial of some silently reproves the self-indulgence of others, and incites in them a similar spirit. 5. The highest return that can be made of gifts received from men is to consecrate them to God. 6. A gift made to God is not "wasted," but is a means of conferring manifold benefits on men. 7. The sacrifice of self enriches the soul by enabling it to partake more fully of the life and love of him for whose sake it is made.—D.

Vers. 18—23 (1 Chron. xi. 22—25).—*The heroism of Benaiah.* He was son of Jehoiada, chief priest and leader of the Aaronites who came to David at Hebron (1 Chron. xii. 27); one of (a second) three "mighties" (with Abishai and, perhaps, Asahel), and above the thirty (1 Chron. xxvii. 5, 6); captain of the host for the third month; and commander of the body-guard (ch. viii. 18; xx. 23). He remained faithful to Solomon in the conspiracy of Adonijah, was commissioned to execute Joab, and appointed commander-in-chief in his stead (1 Kings i. 26, 36; ii. 29, 35). He was "a valiant man, of many illustrious deeds." His name (equivalent to "built by Jah") is suggestive of the Divine source of his strength, valour, and successful conflicts with the enemies of the people of God. He slew (1) *two Moabitish champions*, or princes, "lions of God" (ch. viii. 2); (2) *a ferocious lion*, which had been driven by a heavy fall of snow into the neighbourhood of human habitations, to the terror of the inhabitants, and had taken refuge in a pit or (empty) cistern; and (3) *an Egyptian giant* (fighting on the side of the Philistines). "His valour and virtues are recorded, not only for commemoration and remembrance, but likewise for example and imitation of his virtues, and to show how great works the Lord wrought by weak means" (Guild). 1. We ought never to contend, except in *a good cause;* for truth, justice, and liberty, the honour of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the welfare of men. "If it be possible," etc. (Rom. xii. 18). 2. We *cannot avoid conflict* altogether without sin, captivity, dishonour, and destruction. In a world like this there is often no choice but to fight or be slain. "Curse ye Meroz," etc. (Judg. v. 23). "Contend earnestly for the faith," etc. (Jude 3). "Now we must fight if we would reign." 3. We *must not be dismayed* by the power of the enemy; "in nothing affrighted by the adversaries" (Phil. i. 28); their strength, their number (two to one, ver. 20), their formidable appearance, their varied character, natural or spiritual; lionlike men, real lions, or "your adversary the devil," who, "as a roaring lion, walketh about," etc. (1 Pet. v. 8). Be strong and fear not. 4. We should not be unduly concerned about *our own safety;* but seek, above all things, to do our duty faithfully, and use our best endeavours to secure the ends for which we strive. Having traced the footprints of the lion in the snow, "he went down" (voluntarily placing his own life in imminent peril to secure the safety of others) "and slew the lion in the pit" (knowing that he must succeed or perish) "in a time of snow" (which is apt to benumb man's strength and to cool their courage, and when beasts of prey are most fierce and ravenous from hunger). "None of these things move me," etc. (Acts xx. 24; xxi. 13; 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17). 5. We must *make the best of our resources*, however inadequate they may appear; and not shrink from the conflict until we are as fully armed as our opponents. "He went down to him with [only] a staff" (ver. 22); skilfully and adroitly deprived him of his spear ("like a weaver's beam"), rendered him defenceless, and turned his weapon against himself. We must fight with such means as we have. 6. We should never forget the example of *our great*

Leader (1 Sam. xvii. 50); that he sees us, is ready to help us, and will greatly honour "him that overcometh" (vers. 22, 23; Rev. ii. 26).

> "Though the sons of night blaspheme,
> More there are with us than them;
> Hell is nigh, but Christ is nigher,
> Circling us with hosts of fire."

7. We should be encouraged by the remembrance of *past successes*, achieved by ourselves and others. These are a sure earnest of the final victory of the kingdom of light over the kingdom of darkness. "Greater is he that is in you," etc. (1 John iv. 4).—D.

Vers. 1—7.—*The righteous Ruler.* David, in his last days, like Jacob and Moses, received the spirit of prophecy, and was thus enabled to predict the coming of the perfect King, sprung from himself; the blessings of his reign, and his triumph over his enemies. These "last words" of his are, indeed, regarded by some as primarily a description of what a ruler of men should be, and as only secondarily, if at all, relating to the Christ. Our Authorized Version favours this interpretation by introducing in ver. 3 the words, "must be." But the obvious truth that rulers ought to be just would hardly have been prefaced by so solemn an introduction, asserting in such varied words and phrases that the declaration was owing to the special inspiration of God. Nor would the reference to the "everlasting covenant" be so appropriate.

I. THE HUMAN SPEAKER. The terms used indicate: 1. *His origin.* "David the son of Jesse." The royal son was not ashamed of his father. 2. *His exaltation.* "Raised up on high" (comp. ch. vii. 8, 9). 3. *His Divine appointment as king.* "The anointed of the God of Jacob." 4. *His gifts and works as a sacred poet.* "The sweet psalmist of Israel" (Hebrew, "pleasant in the psalms of Israel"). "As David, on the one hand, had firmly established the kingdom of God in an earthly and political respect as the anointed of Jehovah, *i.e.* as king; so had he, on the other, as the composer of Israel's songs of praise, promoted the spiritual edification of that kingdom" (Keil and Delitzsch).

II. THE DIVINE SPEAKER. This is intimated by the word used twice in ver. 1 and translated "said." It is the word commonly used of the utterances of God by his prophets, and, without any addition, indicates that the saying is a Divine oracle. Further, that what is said here is from God is distinctly declared by the assertion, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his Word was in my tongue; the God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me" (vers. 2, 3). Such a preamble prepares us for an utterance of great weight and importance, and is adapted to excite the utmost confidence in it as one of "the true sayings of God" (Rev. xix. 9).

III. THE WORDS SPOKEN. David was himself a divinely appointed king over God's nation. He had ruled on the whole justly, and had, with his people, enjoyed much of the benefit which righteous rule secures. He was, however, conscious of not having realized his ideal, partly through his own weakness and sinfulness, partly through the opposition he had encountered and the impracticableness of the materials which he had had to mould. But before he leaves the world he has a Divine assurance that One should arise out of his own house, who should be, as a Ruler, all, and more than all, that he had himself aimed to be—should diffuse amongst his subjects the greatest blessings, and thoroughly master and destroy all that should oppose his designs. Note: 1. *His descent.* The reference to the "everlasting covenant" in ver. 5, compared with the covenant itself in the promise of God through Nathan (ch. vii. 16), sufficiently indicates that David discerned that the King of whom he was prophesying would spring from himself. He was to be "of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. i. 3). 2. *His character.* "Just, ruling in the fear of God." (1) The fear of God (equivalent to "godliness, piety") would be at the foundation of his character. He would rule with constant regard to the will and the glory of God (comp. Isa. xi. 2, "the spirit of . . . the fear of the Lord"). How much this feature was found in the character of our Lord Jesus the Gospels everywhere testify. (2) He would be eminently "just." This characteristic of the coming King of men appears frequently in the prophecies respecting him (see Ps. xlv. 6, 7; lxxii. 2; Isa. ix. 7; xi. 3—5; Jer. xxiii. 5; Zech. ix. 9). It was a welcome thought in a world filled with injustice, which was unredressed by its rulers, yea, often perpetrated by them—a world in which the

poor and feeble, the widows and the fatherless, instead of being protected by the mighty, were often trampled down by them, that at length a Ruler would arise who would be just, and would cause justice everywhere to triumph. These prophecies receive their fulfilment in the character and reign of the Lord Jesus. (*a*) He is personally just. Hence he is called "that Just One" (Acts xxii. 14); "the Holy One and the Just" (Acts iii. 14). He was like other men in all but this, that he was "without sin" (Heb. iv. 15). He "knew no sin" (2 Cor. v. 21). He "did no sin" (1 Pet. ii. 22). In his addresses to God there is no confession of sin or prayer for pardon. Before men he could boldly say, "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" (John viii. 46, Revised Version). His exaltation is attributed to his love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity (Heb. i. 9). (*b*) Justice distinguishes the salvation he effects. For this King is also Saviour (Zech. ix. 9). David felt that in some way his own salvation depended on him (ver. 5). In the light of the New Testament the truth becomes clear. Jesus the Son of David, the Divine King, works salvation. Now, in doing this, he displays the highest regard for righteousness. He does not deliver in violation of justice; does not take the part of the sinner against God as righteous Ruler. By his death he makes propitiation for sin, that God "might be just" while "the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. iii. 25, 26). Moreover, he saves from sin to righteousness (Rom. viii. 4), so that all who are his become just. (*c*) His laws are just. The very laws of some kingdoms are tainted with injustice. They are oppressive or partial, favouring one class of the people at the cost of others, etc. Not so with the laws of the Christ. They prescribe all that is right, and only what is right, both towards God and towards men. Were they obeyed, all injustice and wrong-doing would cease, and all the evil dispositions from which they proceed. (*d*) His rule is just. Good laws are sometimes ineffective through bad administration of them. Commonly the enforcement of them requires money; and those who have little of it must submit to injustice for want of the means to set the machinery of the law in motion. Sometimes the magistrates are corrupt, and decide in favour of those who bribe them, or too indolent and indifferent to examine sufficiently into the merits of the cases brought before them. Practical injustice also springs from the ignorance or weakness of rulers. But this Ruler will see that full justice is done to all under his sway. He knows exactly the character of each and all; he is powerful to execute judgment. Mighty oppressors find him stronger than they. Secret plotters against the just discover that nothing is hidden from him. With him sophistry has no weight, rank and wealth no influence. "He shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. xvi. 27). (*e*) His whole power and influence are promotive of righteousness, and ensure its ultimate prevalence. 3. *The blessings of his reign.* "[He (or, 'it') shall be] as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, a morning without clouds; [when] the tender grass [springeth] out of the earth, through clear shining after rain" (ver. 4, Revised Version). Under the reign of this Ruler shall be: (1) Unclouded light in place of darkness. Truth, holiness, and happiness shall abound. (2) Fruitfulness. Growth and increase of goodness and the good (Ps. lxxii. 6, 7, 16). (3) Beauty. Like the flush of the tender grass just sprung up and shining in the light of the morning sun. These are the effects which the Lord Christ does produce in heart and home and country, wherever and so far as he is received and obeyed. History confirms prophecy, and gives additional assurance of its fulfilment. 4. *The fate of the wicked under his rule.* (Vers. 6, 7.) The reign of One so just and powerful ensures the destruction of the wicked as well as the salvation of the righteous. He comes, indeed, to subdue the wicked by truth and love, and render them righteous. But many remain obdurate, refuse submission to him, perhaps oppose him actively; these he destroys. Note: (1) Their worthlessness. They are "Belial" (equivalent to "worthlessness"); good for nothing; "thorns, to be thrust away" and "burned." (2) The difficulty of getting rid of them. Like thorns, difficult to handle and "thrust away," requiring whoever would deal with them to be "armed with iron and the staff of a spear." Laws cannot restrain them, example is lost upon them, benevolent efforts are wasted upon them, legal punishments only harden them, the gospel itself renders them more perverse. (3) Their certain destruction. "They shall be utterly burned with fire in their place" (Revised Version); "on the hearth" (Dean Stanley). See Matt. iii. 10, 12; John xv. 6; Heb. vi. 8. Let sinners tremble and repent before it is too late.

IV. THE COMFORT WHICH THE PROPHECY GAVE TO DAVID HIMSELF. (Ver. 5.) The

words are obscure, and variously interpreted. Most modern scholars translate substantially as in the margin of the Revised Version, "For is not my house so with God? for he . . . for all my salvation and all my desire, will he not make it to grow?" So taken, the words are altogether words of assured confidence and hope. But taken as in the Authorized Version, and substantially in the text of the Revised Version, shadows mingle with the brightness. The glorious vision of the future reminds David of the contrast presented by the past and present. His own reign has not corresponded, or only in a small measure, with the picture he has drawn. Yet he finds consolation in the "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." He doubts not that the promise given him through Nathan (ch. vii.) will be fulfilled; and in its fulfilment he recognizes the fulfilment of his own ardent "desire," and the accomplishment of his "salvation."

So let us, amid all the blighted hopes, the fears and troubles of the present, stay ourselves on God, and admit to our hearts the comfort which springs from his covenant in Christ, and the conviction that it cannot but be faithfully and fully performed.—G. W.

Ver. 5.—*Comfort from the everlasting covenant.* David, as he approached the close of life, had this vision (vers. 2—7) of the just king, and the happiness which would attend his reign. It reminded him of what ought to have been the character of his own rule, and what might have been its blessedness. The perfect realization of the picture by himself and his subjects was not, indeed, possible; but the actual condition of things was not inevitable. He knew that he himself had largely contributed to the sins and troubles of his "house" and of the nation. And now life was nearly over; and as the past could not be undone, neither could he hope to repair the mischief it had produced. Under the sadness of his reflections, he finds relief and consolation in the memory of the "everlasting covenant" which God had "made with" him, which ensured that from his house should arise One in and by whom would be realized the perfect ideal of a Divine King and kingdom. His utmost "desire" would then be fulfilled, and his "salvation" effected. For it seems that as David, in the hundred and tenth psalm, calls his great Son his "Lord," so here he recognizes him as his Saviour. These words of David have often been used by godly people for their own comfort; and the hymn of Dr. Doddridge, founded upon them, commencing, "My God, the covenant of thy love," has ministered consolation to thousands. We shall see that there is good reason for such an application of them.

I. THE COVENANT. The word properly signifies a mutual agreement between two or more persons. When used, however, of a transaction or arrangement between God and men, the idea of agreement as between two contracting parties retires into the background, or vanishes altogether; and the word designates, on the one hand, the promises of God, and, on the other, his requirements. In this passage it refers to the Divine promise to David and his house of an everlasting kingdom (ch. vii. 12—16), which was in fact the promise of the Christ, and of all the blessings (poetically set forth in ver. 4) which his coming and reign involved. In the time of Isaiah it was seen that this covenant was in effect made with all repentant and believing souls, and that the "sure mercies of David" (the blessings promised to him) included the spiritual mercies for which they hunger and thirst (see Isa. lv. 1—3). Indeed, in the fourth verse of that chapter, David and his illustrious Descendant are identified, as in other Scriptures the latter is called "David" (Jer. xxx. 9; Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24; xxxvii. 24, 25; Hos. iii. 5). It will thus be seen that our text may be used by Christians in its original purport. But if there were any doubt of this, the direct application of the term "everlasting covenant" to the promises of God in and through the "Lord Jesus," and sealed with his "blood" (Heb. xiii. 20)—promises made to all who have faith in Christ—establishes the propriety of the use of the words by Christians, though it were in a sense only analogous to that which they originally bore. Notice: 1. *The contents of the covenant.* (1) The promises of "all spiritual blessings," yea, of all needful temporal blessings—pardon, renewal, adoption, sanctification, guidance, support, comfort, preservation, etc., terminating in eternal life; in a word, salvation. (2) The requirements of faith in Christ and obedience to his laws. 2. *Its qualities.* (1) "Ordered in all things." Well arranged; the product of perfect wisdom, and worthy of it; so constituted as to be adapted to its purpose, fitted for the wants of men, suited to reveal and glorify God. (2) "Sure." More literally, "guarded," "preserved," and therefore

secure and sure. God takes care of his own Word. Enemies may assail it, but he watches over and preserves it. Foolish friends or professed friends may misinterpret it, may narrow it so as to make it speak the language of their own particular sect, and promise good only to its members, may overlay it by traditional interpretations, or otherwise veil it from the sight of men as if it were too sacred for common eyes, or substitute for it "another gospel, which is not another" (Gal. i. 6, 7), which they regard as more in harmony with the advanced intelligence of the times; but, amid and through all, God's covenant abides sure, the only basis of his gracious dealings with men, the secure basis of men's hopes and life. (3) Everlasting. An assertion that *might* be made in respect to its origin in the eternal thought and purpose of God, but which *is* made of its enduring character. It is a covenant which abides the same evermore, which God will never alter, and will be eternally fulfilling in the experience of his children. "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. i. 25). 3. *With whom it is made.* "With *me*." The covenant was made to David directly and personally, through Nathan. The covenant of God in the gospel is with all those who conform to its requirements—all who repent, believe, and obey. Whoever sincerely accepts Christ as Saviour and Lord, is warranted to regard the promises of God as made to himself, and will be able to do so with increasing confidence as his faith, love, and holiness increase. These are at once the work of the Holy Spirit, and his witness to each Christian that he is a Christian indeed, one of "the children of God," who are "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 16, 17).

II. THE ESTIMATION IN WHICH IT IS HELD. The believer values it as beyond all price, because: 1. *It assures him of salvation.* "This is all my salvation"—salvation in the fullest sense, salvation from all evil to the enjoyment of all blessing, a salvation everlasting as the covenant. 2. *It meets and satisfies his best, his utmost longings.* "All my desire"—delight, pleasure. The aspirations after perfect communion with God, and likeness to him and eternal happiness in him, all are met and satisfied by the promises of God.

III. THE COMFORT IT AFFORDS. "Although my house, . . . yet," etc. Similarly, the Christian may realize unfailing support and consolation from the consciousness of being interested in the everlasting covenant. 1. *In view of his past and present life.* Its unfulfilled ideals, disappointed hopes, broken vows, wasted energies, poor results (material or spiritual); in view of sins committed, work undone or ill done; after sad experience of the unreliableness of the promises of men (whether through changed mind, or changed circumstances, or death); or again, when he thinks with sad heart of the moral condition of his "house" (often a distressing sight to godly parents), or the painful circumstances in which it may be placed through bereavements or worldly misfortunes; or finally, when he looks upon himself, contrasting what he might have become with what he is—it is a thought to bring rest and hope that God has made with him an everlasting covenant, which remains secure and unchanged amid all changes, and assures of forgiveness of all that has been wrong and defective, and eternal profit from all that has been painful, and final and complete deliverance from all sin and sorrow. 2. *In anticipation of the future.* (1) The future of this life. Its uncertainties, its possible or probable troubles, personal, domestic, national, etc. "I know not what is before me, but this I know, that God has made with me a covenant which cannot fail." (2) Its approaching end and the eternal future. The possible suddenness or painfulness of the end; its possible loneliness, through the deaths or removals of those who it had been hoped would be near to impart consolation; in the case of the aged, the certainty that departure from this world cannot be long delayed; the dimness and strangeness of the invisible world, and the awfulness of eternity; the constitutional dread of death which haunts some; the dread, at least the awe, which sometimes visits all as they think of the account to be given of life to the holy Judge. How blessed under all anxieties and forebodings to say, "'I know whom I have believed' (2 Tim. i. 12); I am sure he will not forsake me, but will 'deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom' (2 Tim. iv. 18); for 'he hath made with me an everlasting covenant,' etc."

Let Christians aim so to live that they may ever enjoy such consolation. Let all seek to make it their own; for it is available for all. Hear the Word of the Lord before

referred to: "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (Isa. lv. 3).—G. W.

Ver. 8.—*The king's mighty men.* From this verse to the end of the chapter is given an account of men who had distinguished themselves in the service of David by their might and prowess, and who were rewarded with promotion and a place in this honourable list. Our King, Jesus Christ, has also his mighty ones—men, women, and children—whose exploits are not forgotten.

I. THEIR QUALITIES. 1. *What they are.* They are the ordinary characteristics of a Christian existing in a high degree of strength and fervour. (1) Strong faith. The eye that sees the invisible; the hand that grasps the promises; strong confidence in God and Christ (see Heb. xi.). (2) Ardent love. Warm attachment and devoted loyalty to their King; love to his kingdom and all who belong to it; love to men in general; love disinterested, unselfish. A selfish man cannot be a hero. (3) A strong sense of duty, overpowering the desire for ease, safety, pleasure, or gain. (4) Intense prayerfulness. Earnest prayer is "power with God and with men" (Gen. xxxii. 28). (5) Clear and impressive knowledge. "Knowledge is power." "A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength" (Prov. xxiv. 5). Knowledge adds strength to the character of its possessor, and is a powerful weapon in the service of our King. It is by "the truth" that Christ's battles are fought and victories won. "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. i. 16). Christ's "mighty men" are "mighty in the Scriptures" (Acts xviii. 24). (6) Dauntless courage. (7) Unwavering constancy and perseverance. 2. *Whence they spring.* David was brave himself, and inspired his men with bravery. They became "mighty men" through the influence of a mighty leader. Consciously or unconsciously, they imbibed his spirit and imitated him. In like manner, our "Leader and Commander of the people" (Isa. lv. 4) infuses his own Spirit into his faithful followers. They become mighty through close union and association with him. They are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph. vi. 10); "strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. iii. 16).

II. THEIR WORKS. Their might is exercised: 1. *In resisting and overcoming temptation.* In conquering the enemies of Christ as they assail and would destroy themselves. A man may be a hero in the service of his country and a miserable coward and slave morally and spiritually, yielding without resistance to the impulses of lust and passion, covetousness and ambition, led "captive by the devil at his will" (2 Tim. ii. 26). 2. *In patient endurance of suffering.* Martyrs, confessors, ordinary sufferers. Some of the noblest of Christ's "mighty ones" are found in sick-chambers, enduring pain and perhaps privation for long months or years without a murmur. 3. *In assailing and conquering religious errors or practical evils.* Especially when the many favour them, and not only opposition, but obloquy, has to be encountered. 4. *In promoting the salvation and welfare of men.* David's "mighty men" displayed their strength and courage chiefly in destroying men's lives; Christ's in saving and blessing; though occasionally they too are called to take up material weapons in the service of their King. In this service the noblest heroic qualities are often called into exercise, as in the case of missionaries bearing their message among savages or into perilous climates; ministers of religion at home patiently and lovingly labouring on in obscurity and poverty; visitors of those suffering from infectious diseases; teachers in ragged schools, etc.

III. THEIR VARIETIES. David's "mighty men" were from various tribes of Israel, some even Gentiles, and had each his own peculiarities of character and achievement. But all were alike loyal to their king and brave in serving him. Thus it is also with Christ's mighty ones. They are from every country and nation where he is known, from every section of his Church, from every class of society; and they all bear some marks of their origin. But they all are one in their devoted love to their King, and their readiness to labour and suffer for him even unto death. They differ also in respect of the special elements and manifestations of their power. Some owe their pre-eminence in part to physical peculiarities; others are great in spite of theirs. Some have the might of intellect; others, of heart. Some, the power of inflexible determination; others, of gentleness and tenderness. Some conquer by intense activity; others, by

passive endurance or quiet influence. Some are powerful through their ability to attract and lead numbers; others, acting alone. The special sphere of some is the home; of others, the Church; of others, the exchange, the factory, the workshop, or the public meeting. Some are mighty in argument; others, in appeal; some, in instructing; others, in consoling, etc.

IV. THEIR REWARD. 1. *Promotion.* David promoted those of his men who distinguished themselves by their bravery to posts of honour (ver. 23). Similarly, our Lord teaches us that those who are faithful to him shall be advanced to higher positions of trust and power (Luke xix. 17, 19; Rev. ii. 26—28; iii. 12, 21). The display and exercise of noble qualities increases their vigour, and thus prepares for and ensures higher and wider service. 2. *Honourable record.* As here, "These be the names," etc., Christ's heroes also have their names, characters, and deeds recorded. (1) Some on earth. In the Divine book; in ordinary biographies; in the memories of men. (2) All in heaven (comp. Phil. iv. 3). Not all who are mentioned in the earthly lists are in the heavenly; for some obtain a reputation here to which they are not justly entitled. Not all in the heavenly list are in the earthly; for good men are not omniscient, nor can they always discern superior worth, though it be before their eyes. The chief desire of us all should be to have a place in the heavenly records—to be "accepted of *him*" (2 Cor. v. 9), whoever may reject or overlook us.

In conclusion: 1. *We should not be content just to exist as Christians, but should aim to be "mighty."* This is possible to all, through union with the "strong Son of God," maintained and increased by vigorous exercises of faith, meditation, and prayer; and through faithful use of such power as they possess. 2. *Whatever our might or achievements, we should ascribe all, and be sincerely concerned that others should ascribe all, to God.* (Vers. 10, 12.)—G. W.

Vers. 15—17.—*Love, courage, and self-sacrifice.* This narrative is highly creditable to both David and these three brave men. It shows the power he had of awakening in his soldiers passionate attachment and devotedness to himself, his high appreciation of such qualities, and at the same time his unwillingness that they should be displayed in enterprises which hazarded precious lives for no corresponding advantage. In the pouring of the water out as an offering unto the Lord, because it was too costly and sacred for ordinary use, "pure chivalry and pure religion found an absolute union" (Dean Stanley). On the other hand, the heroism of these men, stirred by their love and loyalty to their chief, although displayed in a rash enterprise, is worthy of great admiration. We are reminded of similar qualities found amongst the servants of the Son of David, our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice—

I. THE DEVOTED LOVE OF CHRIST'S FAITHFUL SERVANTS TO HIMSELF. 1. *They show sincere and practical regard to his every wish.* They do not need explicit commands in detail, still less accompanying threatenings. Enough if they can ascertain what he desires; and their love for him and converse with him enable them to know his wishes without definite verbal revelations or laws. A large portion of the life of many modern Christians, especially in the departments of Christian zeal and benevolence, is founded on no express command, but springs from love and sympathy—from that participation of the Spirit of Christ which produces intuitive discernment of his will, and that devoted attachment which prompts to the gratification of his every wish. 2. *They are ready to encounter danger in his service.* The work of Christ makes at times great demands on love, zeal, and courage. It cannot be done without hazard; but his true-hearted friends are prepared to endure the toil and brave the peril. Not a few in our own day may be described as "men that have hazarded their lives for the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts xv. 26). This spirit of Christian heroism is not confined to the more hardy races, but among the softer tribes of Polynesia and India, the knowledge of Christ has produced a similar courage. Converted natives offer themselves for service in the most dangerous fields of missionary enterprise; and when some fall at the hand of savages, or through attacks of deadly diseases, others eagerly press forward to take the vacant places. The language of St. Paul is still the language of faithful Christians, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself," etc.; "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die . . . for the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts xx. 24; xxi. 13). 3. *They are sometimes moved to extraordinary manifestations*

of their regard. Like the three heroes whose exploit is here recorded. Like Mary in her lavish anointing of her Lord (John xii. 3). Warm love prompts to generous deeds and gifts. There is need of these in the service of Christ; and if ardent love to him were more common, they would be more frequent. Love should, however, submit to the guidance of wisdom, lest it become wasteful or injurious. Our Lord will accept mistaken offerings, but it is well that the offerings should themselves be such as he can approve. One safeguard against mistake is the remembrance that he desires no display of love which is fantastic or useless, no self-denial or daring which answers no proportionate end in the advancement of his kingdom and the promotion of the good either of our own souls or of our fellow-men. There is abundant room for all possible generosity, self-denial, and bravery in the practical service of Christ and man; to expend these in fruitless ways is to expose our works to condemnation, however good and acceptable may be our motives. We are to serve God with our reason as well as our feelings.

II. THE REASONABLENESS AND RIGHTNESS OF SUCH LOVE. Because of: 1. *His self-sacrificing love for them.* "The love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor. v. 14) is their sufficient answer to any who allege that they are "beside themselves" (2 Cor. v. 13). His love requires and justifies the utmost consecration to him of heart and life. 2. *His injunctions.* He claims from all who follow him that they should love him more than their nearest relations, more than their own life (Matt. x. 37; Luke xiv. 26), and that, in serving him, they should be fearless of death (Luke xii. 4). 3. *His example.* Of love to the Father, and complete devotedness to his will and glory (John xiv. 31; iv. 34; Matt. xxvi. 39, 42; John xii. 27, 28). 4. *The effects of such love.* In purifying and ennobling the character of those who cherish it, and promoting through them the well-being of mankind. It is love for all excellence, stimulates to its pursuit and greatly aids its attainment. It is the inspiration and support of the highest and most persistent benevolence; for he who is loved is the Incarnation of Divine holiness and love, and the great Friend and Benefactor of the human race, and the return he asks for his love to us is not a barren, sentimental devotion, but practical obedience (John xiv. 15, 21, 23), and especially a fruitful love to our brethren (John xv. 12—14; 1 John iii. 16—18), whom he teaches us to regard as being himself (Matt. xxv. 35—45). Love to Jesus Christ has been, and still is, the strongest motive-power in the world in favour of all godliness and goodness. 5. *Its rewards.* Love to Christ is not mercenary, and makes no stipulation for recompense. It is its own reward. Yet in the midst of a cold and unbelieving world it needs all supports. These are to be found in the assurance of the approval and affection of Christ himself, and of the Father (John xiv. 21, 23; xvi. 27), and the prospect of sharing the glory and joy of Christ for ever (John xvii. 24; 2 Tim. iv. 8; Matt. xix. 29; Jas. i. 12; ii. 5). On the other hand, to be destitute of love to Christ is to be lost (1 Cor. xvi. 22).—G. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Ver. 1.—And again the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel. It is probable that this chapter once stood in intimate connection with ch. xxi., and that the famine therein described was followed by a pestilence, of which the blame largely rested upon David, though the sin punished by it was fully shared by the people. In saying that David was moved of Jehovah to number Israel and Judah, the writer acknowledges the great truth that all action, both good and evil, is of God. "Shall there be evil in a city, and Jehovah hath not done it?" (Amos iii. 6). While we are taught to pray that we may not be led into temptation, yet trial and temptation are by God's ordinance for man's good. Man falls only when the temptation gives the opportunity for the outbreak of that which already was at work within (Jas. i. 14). If the previous watch over the heart has been careful and earnest, then the temptation is a stepping-stone to a nobler and more pure godliness; and if a man fall, yet even so he learns by outward proof what was secretly ruining his soul, and may by its manifestation be led to repentance. There were festering in David's heart a thirst for war, and pride in his victories; a growing ambition, and, as its necessary result, a disregard of the rights of other nations. The same passions were gaining a daily increasing influence over

the people generally. It is too often the case that a nation uses the bravery which has obtained for it freedom from foreign oppression, to impose the yoke of slavery upon others. But this chastisement brought back David and his subjects to more upright counsels. In 1 Chron. xxi. 1 the temptation is ascribed to Satan, because David fell. God tempts, that is, tries, men that they may stand more firmly and advance in all that is true and good. Satan tempts men that he may find out their weaknesses and effect their ruin. Yet David fell only to rise again. Satan's triumph was but temporary, and the result was good for king and people, who would have suffered far more terribly from the effects of their lust of war than from the pestilence. Temptation, then, has two sides, and is good or evil according to the use we make of it; but in itself it is a necessity for our probation. The trials and sorrows of life serve but to break up the fallow ground (Jer. iv. 3); and without them our hearts would remain hard as the roadway; and the good seed, which may spring up to eternal life, would lie unheeded upon the surface, and find no entrance into their depths. (On the word "Satan," nevertheless, see note on ch. xix. 22. The Revised Version in 1 Chron. xxi. 1 puts in the margin, "or, an adversary." But in such matters our constant adversary is the devil.) As regards the exact time to which this pestilence may be referred, we cannot draw any certain conclusion from its place in 1 Chron. xxi., because it seems to have been inserted there in connection with the arrangements for the building of the temple, which was erected upon the site purchased from Araunah. As Joab, however, could be spared for nine months and twenty days for the making of this census, it is plain that it took place in a time of profound peace. Probably, therefore, its position in 1 Chronicles is right, namely, at some time after the termination of David's great wars. About twelve years elapsed between the capture of Rabbah and the rebellion of Absalom, and if during this period the respect of the people for David was first damaged by the revelation of his adultery with Bathsheba, and the murder of her husband, and then rudely shaken by the repeated manifestation of the displeasure of the Most High, it is not so surprising, perhaps, that his hold upon his subjects was so small as to make them ready to favour the designs of his ambitious son. But wherein lay the sin? Not only was a census lawful, but it was actually commanded (Exod. xxx. 12, *sqq.*); and the idea of the Jewish commentators, that the sin consisted in neglecting to pay the half-shekel there enjoined upon each man numbered, is not merely gratuitous, but is disproved by Joab's remonstrance; for he objects to the census absolutely. From what, too, we know of Joab's character, we cannot suppose that he would be particularly shocked at this being a census of the fighting men. Yet these Israelites were very noble men in their love of freedom and their respect for their national constitution; and if Joab observed in David a growing disposition towards despotism, and foresaw danger to the nation's liberty from the king's lust of foreign conquest, he was too upright a statesman not to oppose a measure which would strengthen the king in his dangerous tendencies. His words in 1 Chron. xxi. 3, "Are they not all my lord's servants?" seem to have this meaning. David was the master of all these fighting men. If their vast number was paraded before his imagination, it might lead him, flushed with past successes, into aggressive war; and victory abroad would lead to the destruction of freedom at home. The sin plainly lay in the violation of the principles of the theocratic government, which fostered personal independence in every member of the nation, and were opposed to every war except one of self-defence; and it was the fact that a nation so governed was weak and almost powerless even to protect itself, that had made the people clamour for a king. And now the opposite dangers were developing themselves, and the Israelites, dazzled by the glamour of victory, were joining with their king in a longing after extended empire. The pestilence stopped them for the present in their ambitious course; the disruption of the kingdom under Rehoboam dispelled their dream for ever. In 1 Chron. xxvii. 23 we also find the thought that the taking of a census, though several times practised by Moses (Exod. xxxviii. 26; Numb. i. 2; xxvi. 2), was in itself presumptuous, because it seemed to contradict the promise in Gen. xv. 5, that the seed of Abraham should be past numbering. **He moved.** It is impossible to translate, "and one moved," understanding thereby Satan, as stated in Chronicles. It was Israel which had incurred the Divine anger by its lust of war, and Jehovah used David, who was himself the victim of the same evil passions, to take a step which led on to the just chastisement. **Number**; Hebrew, *count*. It is a different word from that translated "number" in the rest of the chapter.

Ver. 2.—**For the king said**; Hebrew, *and the king said*. David's command was not the cause of Jehovah's anger, but the result of his having himself given way to ambition; and, as he yielded to the temptation, it so far became an act of Satan, in that it led to

sin; but in its final result it led to good, in that the chastisement cured the people of their thirst for war. And as Satan can act only so far as the Divine will permits, the temptation was most truly the doing of Jehovah (but see note on 1 Sam. xxvi. 19). **Captain of the host, which was with him.** There is a good deal of difficulty about this passage, as the word for "host" is not that elsewhere used, and the last phrase is somewhat meaningless. In 1 Chron. xxi. 2 we find "David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people." Without the concurrence of these rulers, who were the princes of the tribes, the census could not have been taken. But as the ancient versions confirm the reading of the Hebrew here, no change of the text is admissible. **Number ye.** This is distinctly the war-word, for which see note on ch. xviii. 1. It proves that the census was taken for military reasons. Even this in itself was not wrong (Numb. xxvi. 2), but it is indicative of David's purpose. When, moreover, Moses numbered the people, the census was taken by the priests (Numb. i. 3; xxvi. 1, 2), and from the payment of the half-shekel to the sanctuary, it appears that it was to some extent a religious ceremony. All this David neglects, and the employment of Joab goes far to prove that what David wanted was an examination of the military resources of his kingdom.

Ver. 3.—**Why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?** Joab was an unscrupulous and irreligious man; but he was clear-headed, and far more statesmanlike than David (ch. xix. 5—7). He saw whither the king was drifting, and that the increase of the royal power, resulting from successful war, would be fatal to the liberties of Israel. Probably, too, though he had consented to carry out Uriah's murder, yet he despised David for it. When he had murdered Abner to avenge Asahel, David had deprived him of his command, and he had to endure a long period of disgrace; and now David uses him to murder one altogether innocent. Joab, we may feel sure, noted the degradation of David's character, and drew the conclusion that he was not the man to be trusted at the head of a military despotism. Warned thus by what he saw, his mind reverted to the principles of the theocracy, and their truth and value became more clear to his understanding; and honourably he remonstrates with David for violating them.

Ver. 4.—**The captains of the host.** The matter was not undertaken without a council being held, and at it David's chief officers agreed with Joab; but David had made up his mind, and would take no advice.

Ver. 5.—**Aroer.** There is some uncertainty as to the Aroer here meant. There is first a city of that name in the tribe of Gad facing Rabbah (Josh. xiii. 25), and this is apparently the city meant; for it is said that "Joab and his men pitched in Aroer, on the south side of the city situated in the middle of the valley of Gad, and unto Jazer." Now, Jazer is also in Gad, about seven miles west of Rabbah, and as Rabbah is on the extreme east of the Israelite territory towards Ammon, it would be a very convenient spot from which to commence the numbering. But there is another Aroer on the Arnon, to the south of Reuben, and many commentators think that this Aroer must be meant, as otherwise the tribe of Reuben would seem to have been omitted. But this Aroer is regularly called "Aroer on the brink of the valley of Arnon" (Deut. ii. 36; iv. 48; Josh. xii. 2; xiii. 9, 16); or simply Aroer "in the valley of Arnon" (Deut. iii. 12; 2 Kings x. 33); and cannot possibly be "the city in the midst of the valley of Gad," nor can this Aroer be "toward Jazer." Really the difficulty is made by commentators whose idea of the method of the census is superficial. Joab, in commencing it, formed an encampment in the open country on the right-hand side, that is, on the south of Aroer in the tribe of Gad, as being central, with Reuben on the south, and Manasseh on the north. It was "toward Jazer," that is, it was on the Jazer side of Aroer, and not on the side opposite Rabbah. We, with our simpler way of describing the points of the compass, would merely say that Joab's camp was in the open pasture-land south-west of Aroer. Joab probably selected this spot because, though on the eastern border, it was yet not too far from Jerusalem, was central, and because a brook from Jazer flowing eastward for some distance, and thence to the north past Rabbah, would supply his people with water; and from this camp he would direct the proceedings of those who were to take the census. And as probably there would be considerable opposition—for the people would see in an act which for four centuries had been in desuetude threats of heavier taxation, of heavier forced labour, and of longer service with the army—Joab would require the presence of a body of troops sufficiently powerful to overawe malcontents. And these would be of no use at Aroer on the Arnon, in the distant south, but must lie encamped in some central position, whence detachments could rapidly be moved to any place where there was danger of resistance.

Ver. 6.—**Then they came to Gilead.** When the enumerators had finished their labours in Reuben and the region south of Aroer,

Joab moved his camp northwards, and pitched in Gilead, on the river Jabbok; and, having completed the counting in this part of the tribe of Gad, would next enter the wild regions of Manasseh. It is probable that the tribal princes and local officers actually numbered the people, and that Joab, with a powerful force, constrained them to obedience often against their will. It was possibly this danger of resistance which made David entrust the business to Joab, instead of employing the Levites. **The land of Tahtim-hodshi.** Gesenius dismisses this name with the remark that it can scarcely be regarded as genuine. The versions give little help; but Theniuscleverly extracts from the LXX., "unto Bashan, which is Edrei." Others, by a slight change in the Hebrew, read, "the land of the Hittites," and suppose that Hodshi is a corruption of the Hebrew word for "month," so that the whole might have been, "They came to the land of the Hittites in the (third) month." Others, again, suppose that Hodshi is a corruption of the name of the town Kadesh. But the versions would certainly have preserved anything so commonplace as this. When they make mistakes, it is almost invariably in proper names or unusual phrases. The emendation of Theuius is too ingenious to be accepted, but it gives the right sense, namely, that from Gilead and the tribe of Gad the numerators went northward through Bashan and the rest of the half-tribe of Manasseh till they came to Dan, the town on the extreme north-east border, and the limit in that direction of the Israelite realm, as Beersheba was its limit on the south. **Dan-jaan.** Nowhere else is Dan found with this addition, and the Syriac omits it even here. The Vulgate, and Septuagint (Codex Alex.) read *Dan-jaar* the woodland Dan. Possibly the names of two towns have been run into one, and the original reading was "unto Dan and Ijon" (see 1 Kings xv. 20). Ijon was on the direct road from Dan to Sidon. **Zidon.** This was on the extreme north-western boundary. It did not actually belong to David, but both it and Tyre had apparently placed themselves under his protection, and were bound to render some kind of military service.

Ver. 7.—**Tyre** (comp. Josh. xix. 29). Tyre and the whole coast-land between it and Sidon had been too strong for the tribe of Asher, and remained unsubdued. But, like the independent states in India, it acknowledged the supremacy of the paramount power. **The cities of the Hivites, and of the Canaanites.** It is evident from this that even in David's time there were towns and districts were Hivites and Canaanites dwelt as distinct communities, governed probably by their own laws. But as they were bound to serve in the Israelite armies, they were included in the census, and possibly one of its main objects was to learn the number of fighting men of alien races dwelling in Israel. They seem to have been reckoned as belonging to the tribe in whose borders they dwelt. So Baanah and Rechab, the murderers of Ishbosheth, though Beerothites (and therefore Gibeonites, who again were Hivites), were counted to Benjamin (ch. iv. 2). These Gentile communities were chiefly to be found in the north, for which reason it was called "the circuit (*Gelil*) of the nations" (Isa. ix. 1), and in later times from *Gelil* came the name Galilee. The Syriac adds "Jebusites," and we find Jerusalem occupied by a community of Jebusites living in independence in the very neighbourhood of the warlike tribe of Benjamin (ch. v. 6). This numbering of the aborigines by David is referred to in 2 Chron. ii. 17, where it is added that Solomon made a separate census of them, and found that there were in Israel no fewer than a hundred and fifty-three thousand six hundred of these aliens.

Ver. 8.—**Nine months and twenty days.** This long period seems excessive, if nothing more was intended than merely counting the heads of the people, especially as the census was left unfinished. But there might very probably be difficulties with the aliens dwelling in Israel; and it is still more probable that there was a complete examination of all the military resources of the land. The result showed a very different state of things from that described in 1 Sam. xiii. 19—22, and we can well understand the existence of much elation and war-lust among the Israelites on the first flush of pride in their new empire.

Ver. 9.—**There were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men.** In Chronicles the numbers are, "of Israel eleven hundred thousand men, and of Judah four hundred and sixty-five thousand men." These discrepancies are a remarkable confirmation of the truth of what is said in 1 Chron. xxvii. 24 that because of the outbreak of the Divine wrath, "the number was not put in the account of the Chronicles of King David." Neither the writer of the Books of Samuel nor of Chronicles had any official document to refer to; and as the numbers are lump sums, and derived probably from what was said by the enumerators, the more exact four hundred and sixty-five thousand men of the Chronicles might easily in round numbers be called a half-million. The other is a much larger discrepancy, and no satisfactory explanation of it has been given. It

is, however, quite possible that the additional three hundred thousand men were made up of the thirty-eight thousand Levites, as numbered on a later occasion by David, of the Benjamites, and of the aborigines, who belonged to the northern part of the kingdom, and might be included among "all they of Israel" (1 Chron. xxi. 5). The numbers are further attacked on the ground of exaggeration. A million and a half of fighting men means a general population of six or seven millions. Now, Palestine at most does not contain more than eleven thousand square miles, and a population of six millions means five hundred and forty-five persons to every square mile, or one to every acre. The country was undoubtedly very fertile in ancient times, and the ruins of populous cities are found where now there is a waste. But there were vast forests and pasture-lands and downs, where there were the means of subsistence for only a few. But we must remember that the enumerators went as far north as Tyre, and counted the inhabitants, therefore, of the seaboard between it and Sidon. Probably they also acted in the same way in the south, where the limits of Simeon were very uncertain. Besides this, there is a very remarkable undesigned coincidence. We read in 1 Chron. xxvii. that David had a force of two hundred and eighty-eight thousand men, who formed his regular army, and of whom twenty-four thousand were called up for training every month. But there are reasons for believing that David took for this purpose each fifth man of those of the military age (see Sime, 'Kingdom of All Israel,' p. 389); and thus the whole number of such men would be one million four hundred and forty thousand. This, as Mr. Sime has shown (ibid., p. 378), holds a middle place between the one million three hundred thousand of the Book of Samuel, and the one million five hundred and seventy thousand of Chronicles, and shows that these numbers are not to be rejected on the score of exaggeration.

Ver. 10.—**David's heart smote him.** It appears from 1 Chron. xxvii. 24 that the census was not completed, and, though Joab had visited Judah, he had not even begun to enrol the names of the men of the tribe of Benjamin (1 Chron. xxi. 6). It appears also that the displeasure of God was manifesting itself before David repented (1 Chron. xxi. 7; xxvii. 24). Some sign of this, either in public trouble, or in the brooding of the pestilential miasma over the land, brought home to David's mind the conviction of sin; and he at once humbled himself before God, for the vanity of mind which had engendered in him a wicked lust after martial glory and thirst for bloodshed. **I have done very foolishly** (comp. 1 Sam. xiii. 13; 2 Chron. xvi. 9).

Ver. 11.—**For when**, etc.; Hebrew, *and David arose in the morning, and a word of Jehovah came unto Gad, a seer of David, saying.* The visit of the seer was the result of David's repentance, and not its cause. And he was sent in mercy, that, after such punishment as would cure both king and people of their folly, there might be for both forgiveness. The name for *seer* is not *roëh*, the old word used in 1 Sam. ix. 9, and which simply means "one who sees;" but *chozeh*, a gazer, one who looks with fixed eyes, that penetrate into the hidden world.

Ver. 13.—**Seven years of famine.** In 1 Chron. xxi. 12 and here in the Septuagint we find "three years." This is probably right as being in harmony with the rest. Three years of famine, three months of defeat, or three days of pestilence. In Ezek. xiv. 21 famine, pestilence, and the sword are mentioned as three of God's four sore judgments. But a fourth judgment is there enumerated, namely, that of the increase of wild beasts, and Joshua the Stylite says that in Mesopotamia, as a result of the desolating war between the Romans and Persians, about A.D. 505, beasts of prey had become so numerous that they entered the villages and carried off the children from the streets, and were so bold and ferocious that even the men scarcely dared go about their labours in the fields (Jos. Styl., edit. Ur., chap. 85). **Now advise, and see**; Hebrew, *now know, and see.* The phrase is common in the historical books (see 1 Sam. xii. 17; xiv. 38; xxiii. 22; xxiv. 11; xxv. 17, etc.). Our translators render the phrase in a multitude of ways without greatly improving it.

Ver. 14.—**Let us fall now into the hand of Jehovah.** David had sinned against God, and to God he humbly submitted himself. There would thus be nothing to come between the soul and God, and prevent the chastisement from having its due effect upon the heart. A famine would indeed equally come from God, but would necessitate effort and exertion on man's part. In the pestilence he would wait patiently, nor look to anything but prayer for averting God's judgment. In Ps. li. 1 David refers to God's mercies, in much the same way as here, as being a motive to repentance.

Ver. 15.—**Even to the time appointed.** This rendering, though very uncertain, is retained in the Revised Version. It would mean, of course, the end of the third day, as the pestilence was to last for that time. The objections to it are that there is no article in the Hebrew, so that literally it would be "unto a time appointed." Secondly, the pestilence did not continue unto the time appointed, but was mercifully stayed. And thirdly, these words are a literal translation, indeed, of the Vulgate, but a violation of its

meaning. For Jerome, who made the translation, says, "'tempus constitutum' means the hour when the evening sacrifice was offered" ('Tradd. Heb. in Duos Libros Regum'). The versions all agree that the pestilence lasted only a few hours. Thus the Syriac translates, "From morning until the sixth hour," *i.e.* noon. So too the Septuagint, "From morning until the midday meal." The Vulgate adds on three hours, as the evening sacrifice was at the ninth hour; and this is the meaning of the Chaldee Paraphrase: "From the time the daily sacrifice was slain until it was burnt." As the word *moëd* used here means both a time or place appointed for a meeting, and also the meeting itself, the right translation probably is, "From the morning even to the time of assembly," or, as we should say, "the hour of service." *Moëd* was the regular word for the time of the temple service, derived from the old name of the tabernacle, which was called "the tent of *moëd*" (see Numb. xvi. 19, etc.), rendered in the Authorized Version, "the tabernacle of the congregation," and in the Revised Version, "the tent of meeting." The hour would thus be the ninth, or three o'clock in the afternoon. **Seventy thousand men.** This is a vast number to fall victims of the pestilence in so short a time, as even the most dangerous forms of sickness take some days for their development. But similarly the army of Sennacherib was cut off in a night (Isa. xxxvii. 36); as were the firstborn in Egypt, whose visitation more nearly resembles the course of this pestilence; and the rapidity of the death-blow, striking down so vast a multitude suddenly throughout all parts of the land, would be proof to every mind that the mortality was the Divine chastisement for national sin. It is possible, nevertheless, that the black death-cloud, bringing with it the plague, may have been settling down upon the land previously, and have alarmed David, and brought him to repentance; and though no new cases occurred after the offering of his burnt offerings (ver. 25), yet it by no means follows that all cases of infection were miraculously cured. The malady may have run in them its normal course. It was Jerusalem that was saved from the blow, and, after the offering of the burnt offering, the pestilence smote down no more.

Ver. 16.—**The angel.** In the next verse we are told that David saw the angel, and more fully in 1 Chron. xxi. 16 that he beheld him "standing between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand." The pestilence plainly was not a natural visitation; though possibly the means used was a simoom, or poisonous wind, advancing with terrible rapidity throughout Israel. **The Lord repented.** In all the dealings of God's providence, his actions are made to depend upon human conduct. Looked at from above, from God's side, all things are foreknown and immutably fixed; looked at from man's side, all is perpetually changing as man changes. The rescue of Jerusalem as the result of David's penitence and prayers, is thus to human view a change in the counsels and even in the feelings of him who changeth not. **The threshing-place.** "The threshing-floor," as rightly translated in vers. 18, 21, 24. Threshing-floors were constructed, whenever possible, on eminences, that the wind might drive the chaff and dust away. Araunah's was on the east of Jerusalem, outside the walls, upon Mount Moriah, and was the site on which the temple was built (see 2 Chron. iii. 1). **Araunah.** The name is so spelt seven times in vers. 20—24, for which reason the Massorites have substituted it for *Avarnah*, found in this verse in the Hebrew text, and for *Aranyah* in ver. 18. In 1 Chron. xxi. the name is spelt *Ornan;* in the Septuagint in all places, Ὀρνά, *Orna*, and in the Syriac, *Oron*. The name is, of course, a Jebusite word, and the variation arises from the narrators having written down the sound as it caught their ears. In this, as in many other particulars, it is clear that the chronicler derived his account from independent sources.

Ver. 17.—**I have done wickedly;** Hebrew, *I have done perversely*, or crookedly. David acknowledges that his conduct had not been upright and straightforward, but that he had turned aside into the paths of self-will and personal aggrandizement. **These sheep, what have they done?** The sin had been quite as much that of the people as of the king; for the war-lust had entered into the very heart of the nation. But David, with that warmth of feeling which makes his character so noble, can see only his own fault. It is not a true repentance when the sinner looks for excuses, and apportions the blame between himself and others. To David the people seemed innocent, or, if at all to blame, he felt that it was he who had set them the example and led them on. The narrative in this place is much briefer than in Chronicles.

Ver. 18.—**Go up.** David probably, on receiving God's message, had gone to the tent which he had pitched for the ark in Zion (ch. vi. 17), in order that he might pray there; and while on his way he saw the dark plague-cloud coming as the messenger of God's wrath to smite Jerusalem. In an agony of grief, he poured out his prayer that Jerusalem might be spared, and God heard him, and sent Gad a second time to bid him offer sacrifice, that, by making an

atonement, he might stand between the dead and the living, as Aaron had done in the wilderness (Numb. xvi. 46—48). He is therefore to leave the tabernacle, and mount up to the summit on which Araunah's threshing-floor was situated. We read in 1 Chron. xxi. 28—30 that David wished to go to Gibeon, where the Mosaic tabernacle and altar of burnt offering were, to inquire of God, but that he was afraid, as the angel of the pestilence was smiting outside the walls. This is mentioned as an excuse for his offering at an unconsecrated spot. But it also suggests that David's choice was a submission to a chastisement already at work.

Ver. 20.—**Araunah . . . saw the king.** In 1 Chron. xxi. 20, "saw the angel;" but the text there is apparently corrupt, the difference, moreover, in Hebrew between "king" and "angel" being very slight. The addition there of the story of Araunah's four sons hiding themselves is very lifelike and natural. For these remnants of the aborigines, though tolerated, yet held a very insecure position, as we have seen in the dealings of Saul with the Gibeonites; and the coming of the king with his retinue to the out-of-the-way spot where Araunah was at work, no doubt filled them all with terror.

Ver. 22.—**Behold, here be oxen.** Araunah was threshing out his wheat by dragging sledges or frames of wood without wheels over it. All these he at once gives to David, that the sacrifice may be offered without delay, as it would have cost much time and labour to bring wood up from the city. **Instead of and other instruments of the oxen,** the Hebrew has "the harness or furniture of the oxen," all of which was of wood.

Ver. 23.—**All these did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king.** The Hebrew is, "The whole gave Araunah the king to the king;" and so the Vulgate, *dedit Areuna rex regi*. The rendering of the Revised Version (and Keil), "All this, O king, doth Araunah give unto the king," requires a change both of the order and of the tense. It is, of course, possible (though highly improbable) that Araunah was the representative of the kings of Jebus, and a titular monarch, like the Maori king in New Zealand. But the word is omitted in the Septuagint and Syriac, and is probably a mere repetition of the following word. The remark is made in order to point out Araunah's generosity; and to mark even more clearly how hearty and sincere he was in his offering, the narrator adds, in Araunah's own words, his prayer for God's acceptance of David and his offering.

Vers. 24, 25.—**David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.** In 1 Chron. xxi. 25, "So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight." There is a superficial, but no real discrepancy between these two narratives. David gave the fifty shekels for the immediate use of the place, and for the oxen and implements. He had no idea at the time of permanently occupying it, and probably the note in the LXX., interpolated by scribes from the margin into the text, is true, "And Solomon added to the altar afterwards, for it was small at the first." It was a small altar hurriedly put together for the purpose of offering one sacrifice; and fifty shekels would be full compensation. But the sacrifice had hallowed the spot, and, when finally it was selected as the site for the temple, David bought the whole area and all that Araunah possessed there. Fifty shekels of silver would be about £9; six hundred shekels of gold would be about £1500; so that there is no comparison between the two sums. But the precious metals were worth very much more in David's time than in ours, so that the smaller sum was adequate compensation for David's first acquisition, while the larger implies the purchase of an extensive and valuable estate. Substantially the fuller narrative in Chronicles agrees with this. David refuses to sacrifice of that which cost him nothing, and must therefore have at once paid for what he took. But when God accepted his offering, and answered him by fire from heaven, then David said, "This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel." And as the Chronicler has in view throughout the selection of the site for the temple, he naturally mentions its full cost. In the Book of Samuel this purpose is not expressly mentioned, and the narrative closes with the forgiveness of the sin both of David and his people. Jehovah was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed. But this sudden smiting down of so large a host humbled both king and people, and their eagerness for war and their lust of empire ceased.

DEO GLORIA.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—9.—The facts are: 1. On account of some transgressions, God, being angry with Israel, permits some one to incite David to number the people. 2. David, on issuing his commands to Joab, is met with a remonstrance from him and the captains of the host. 3. But the king persisting in his desire, Joab and his officers and men apply

themselves to the work, and at the end of nine months and twenty days return the number of men capable of serving in war at 1,300,000. The difficulties involved in the statements of this section may be, at least, lightened by a few considerations. The parallel passage in 1 Chron. xxi. mentions, in an indefinite way, *an adversary* as the instrument of inciting the mind of David. It is in accordance with the order of the Divine government sometimes to allow agencies to act on the minds of men for purposes of trial and especially for discipline. Adam was assailed. Satan had permission to tempt Job. David recognizes the possibility of Saul being incited against himself by God (the Hiph. as here, וַיָּסֶת); 1 Sam. xxvi. 19. A spirit or agency inclining to evil is said to go forth or be sent from God, when the idea of permitting the free action of evil influences as a means of punishment for previous sins is to be inculcated (Judg. ix. 23; 1 Sam. xvi. 14; ch. xvi. 10; 1 Kings xxii. 21—23). The ascription of actions to God in almost absolute terms, where in reality the Divine action is a withdrawal of restraint, is a strong Hebraism, as seen in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (cf. Isa. vi. 9, 10; lxiii. 17; Matt. xiii. 13—15). It is no uncommon thing for sin to be punished by sin (Ps. xvii. 13, 14; cf. Isa. x. 5, 6). Now, accepting this general teaching as to some of God's methods when trial or chastisement are in view, we find in ch. xxi. that the nation was chastised for a previous national or semi-national sin. It seems, therefore, natural that the expression (ver. 1), "And *again* the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel," really sets forth the event of this chapter as being a second instance of national suffering on account of public sin; the difference being that in ch. xxi. the famine became a fact before the occasion is revealed, while here the fact of sin is first stated, and the human instrumentality of bringing on the punishment is then set forth. David had sinned in the matter of Uriah, and been punished. Absalom had sinned in rebelling, and had also been punished. But he was not the only sinner. Israel had revolted under him against the Lord's anointed, and was there to be no punishment for Israel as a people? The whole history of the dealings of God with them gives the reply. Apart from any recent unrecorded sin, there is, then, historical continuity in the words, "The anger of the Lord" was *again* "kindled against Israel." The peculiarity of the case is this—that the free falling of David into a snare of pride and undue reliance on material strength became the occasion and means by which the transgression of Israel was chastised, while he, being quite free in his sin, was also caused to suffer for it.

Deferred chastisements. Some time evidently had elapsed between the sin of Israel and the expression of Divine anger against it (ver. 1). This and the other Book of Samuel sets forth the chief cases of public visitation on account of sin, *e.g.* Eli, Saul, David, Absalom; and, in keeping with this, the conduct of the people in revolting against the Lord's anointed is now made the occasion of Divine displeasure. With reference to deferred chastisements observe—

I. THAT GOD SOMETIMES WAITS TILL EVENTS SERVE THE PURPOSE OF CHASTISEMENT. The chastisement of Eli did not come till national affairs so far developed as to issue in a disastrous defeat of Israel. David's sin bore its bitter fruit some months and years after committal. The sin of the house of Saul was brought home to the conscience of the nation after his death (ch. xxi. 1). So here the wicked conduct of the nation in rejecting David, God's chosen servant, was allowed to remain relatively unnoticed, as though God were waiting for such a development of events in the natural course of things as would serve the purposes of chastisement. Nations, Churches, and individuals are still allowed to go on for a while till events mature for bringing upon them the reward of their deeds.

II. THAT THE EVENTS WHICH SERVE FOR CHASTISEMENT ARE BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE FREE ACTION OF OTHERS. The free action of the Philistines brought on Eli's trouble. The free action of Absalom and Israel was the means of chastising David for his sin in the case of Uriah. The natural development of famine, united with a revelation of God's overruling purposes, smote Israel for the national crime against the Gibeonites (ch. xxi. 1—4). So here the free action of some evil person or agent on the free mind of David was the natural event which issued in his official sin, and in his punishment in such a form as to bring on Israel the chastisement which all along they were deserving for their revolt. The same is seen in the free action of Babylon bringing on the chastisement of captivity, and of Rome in bringing on the chastisement of the dispersion

due for rejection of Christ. God may wait long before he brings on what is due to sin; but all free events are in his hands, and he will use up some of them when fit conditions arise.

III. THE FREE ACTION OF MEN BY WHICH THEY ARE MEANS OF CHASTISING OTHERS; FOR SIN MAY BE ITSELF SINFUL AND SUBJECT TO PUNISHMENT. David's free act in yielding to the inducement to number the people was a sin. It was displeasing to God. It was a case of sin opening the way for a chastisement for sin. There were circumstances in David's personal and official position which rendered it natural that his deed should be at once disowned, and in that disownment there came the rod which smote also for the past sin of Israel. The acts of Babylon and Rome were wicked, though they were the rod by which God smote his people. It is by a most wonderful adjustment that God thus makes sin the avenger of sin; and so, in course of ages, sin tends to establish that very righteousness of God which in its initiation it sought to set aside. All the resources of God are at his command at any time for expressing his anger against sin; but he does not create new agencies—he uses up what is in existence, and utilizes the successive acts even of the wicked. It is a solemn fact that though judgment be deferred it is not the less sure (2 Pet. ii. 3). Here is a warning to the impenitent, and a restraint on all. The injured may rest assured that God will bring a recompense (Rom. xii. 19).

The subtle power of a sinful motive. The narrative simply states outward facts; but the form of them compels the belief that David's actions were now governed by a subtle motive, sinful in its nature, complete in its mastery over intellect and will, and so able to dominate his entire nature that its own real character should all the time be disguised. It is a difficult matter to disintegrate the complex movements of the mind or to present an accurate psychological analysis of an act of sin; but we may trace in David's case a few features of sin in its subjective workings. An underlying sinful motive may so operate as—

I. TO SECURE BEFORE THE INTELLECT A GOOD ARRAY OF REASONS FOR AN ACT. David must have formulated reasons for his proposal to number the people. Most probably he thought it was a natural thing after all the vicissitudes the nation had passed through. It would afford an occasion of showing how God had blessed and prospered the people. He would be in a better position to make up any defects that might be discovered in the defences of the country. The knowledge of their unity and strength would give encouragement and confidence to men apprehensive of danger from without. The result, becoming known among neighbouring nations, would act as a check on their aggressiveness. His successor to the throne would be in possession of facts that would help his administration of affairs, and there would be some comfort in seeing how far Israel was realizing the hopes held out to their ancestors. Such reasons may seem to be the outcome of mere intellectual activity; but in reality they are set in order by the subtle influence of the ruling motive over the intellectual powers. Men do not know to what extent the form and order of their thinkings are determined by the governing desire. Herein lies much of the deceitfulness of sin. The useful nature of facts can easily be seen when the disposition would have it so. The devil was a clever reasoner in Eden. The inner adversary of our soul, be it evil motive or propensity, practically, by influence over the intellect, performs the part of a cogent reasoner, and makes out a case for the consent of the reason.

II. TO DIVERT CONSCIENCE FROM ITSELF. Conscience was alive in David when first the question of numbering occurred to him, but when once the idea is entertained and the subtle unspoken motive has strengthened its hold on the mind by being temporarily cherished, it so operates as to weaken the gaze of conscience on itself and virtually divert it to more incidental circumstances. An evil motive cannot live face to face with a live conscience; but if by persistence it can get lodgment among the many feelings of the heart, and as it were be hidden from direct single gaze, it can, by its contagious nature, create a condition of things that the conscience shall be occupied with other evils inferior in rank, while it does its deadly work almost without coming into consciousness. So many a man finds his conscience busy with straining out a gnat while the evil disposition most cherished is free to devour a camel. Hence, even great sinners are sometimes precise and punctilious in minor matters.

III. To GIVE OBSTINACY TO THE WILL. It seems strange that David should have ventured to go against the deliberate protest of Joab and the chief military men. His disregard of Joab's wishes can, perhaps, be explained by his previous quarrels with him; but that he should have gone against the judgment of the chief men in the army is explicable only on the moral and psychological principle that the subtle power of an evil motive, when cherished, imparts a peculiar obstinacy to the will. We see this in human life. The persistence of men in carrying out a sinful feeling, active though not perhaps distinct in consciousness, is amazing. The will is so imbued with the feeling as to be proof against all reason and all but physical force. This is the real bondage. This led Augustine to say that man, as a sinner, is not free. There is something akin to the blindness and insensibility and mechanical necessity of physical forces in a will subject to the rule of a sinful motive.

IV. To ENSURE SELF-COMPOSURE. David seems to have set about this business with coolness, and to have been calmly determined to see it through. There was no excitement, and whatever occasional gleams of conscience may have fallen on the dark recesses where the hidden sinful motive lay doing its subtle work, they did not permanently affect the self-possession of his life. The sudden breaking of the spell came after the nine months and twenty days. Restlessness and anxiety during a sinful course can only arise when conscience and desire are face to face, and conscience is not diverted from its gaze. When the governing feeling has, by subtle action, brought intellect, conscience, and will into subjection, or rather when its nature has somehow tainted and weakened them all, there is a peace and composure which, if not of God, is nevertheless serviceable for the execution of a purpose. It is the bane of some wicked men that their strength is firm. It is an evil omen for a religious man when he is undisturbed in doing what others know to be wrong. "Grey hairs are upon him, and he knoweth it not."

GENERAL LESSONS. 1. It becomes men in the most favourable circumstances to remember that they are open to incitements to evil as truly as the most unfavoured. 2. The more elevated our position in the religious life the more subtle are the temptations of the great adversary. 3. It is possible for a really good man to becloud his last days by falling into sin through lack of watchfulness and prayer against the more secret forms of evil.

Vers. 10—17.—*A king's sin and a people's chastisement.* The facts are: 1. David, reflecting on the accomplishment of his purpose, comes to a consciousness of his sin, and makes confession before God. 2. In the morning the Prophet Gad is sent to him from the Lord, offering him, as a choice of a chastisement, either seven years' famine, or three months' defeat before his enemies, or three days' pestilence. 3. David, in his anguish, elects to fall into the hands of God. 4. Thereupon God sends a pestilence which carries off seventy thousand men. 5. There being some relenting in the anger of God when the pestilence reached Jerusalem, David entreats with the angel of the Lord by the threshing-floor of Araunah, that he would have pity on the people and rather smite him and his house. The various truths taught in this section may be briefly set forth thus.

I. THE REACTION OF MAN'S SPIRITUAL NATURE. For more than nine months the unhallowed feeling which prompted the numbering of the people had held sway, and now during the silence of night the spiritual man that had been suppressed again asserts his power. David comes to himself, and sees his conduct in a Divine light. The supremacy of sin means a depression of the better nature. The awakening to a sense of sin is the reaction of that better nature. The same was seen in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah. The prodigal son's coming to himself is an instance; as also the repentance of every sinner. The causes and occasions of the reaction may come from without, but there can be no doubt that the change does lie in a reaction. The spell is broken, and the higher nature of man once more asserts itself.

II. THE CAUSES AND OCCASIONS OF THE SOUL'S BREAKING THE SPELL OF SIN ARE DEFINITE. David came to himself most probably for three reasons. 1. *Difficulties of carrying out his project* may have pressed on him the need of reflection; for not only were Joab and the captains reluctant workers, but long time elapsed, and so strong was the opposition that two tribes were not counted (1 Chron. xxi. 4). 2. The *strain of*

persistence would, by psychological law, enfeeble purpose. He could not go on for ever in a line of sin; exhaustion of moral motive is a reality. 3. The *gracious action of God* would revive the latent and suppressed sense of right; for though the Holy Spirit is grieved, he does not depart for ever from the erring. The same is true still. External difficulties of a sinful course make the way hard, and so give chance for reflection and reaction of the better self. The exhaustion and satiety of persistence in evil tends to open a way for the action of Divine influence. The misery of the prodigal, the weariness of sin, the loss of early novelty, do not turn men, but they render other more spiritual action more timely. The real cause which turns these occasions to account is the gracious action of the Holy Spirit.

III. THE CHANGED ESTIMATE OF CONDUCT UNDER THE LIGHT OF GOD'S SPIRIT. As we have seen (vers. 1—9), plausible reasons could be assigned for numbering the people, but now that in the silence of night the light had come, that which once was reasonable and proper, and persisted in as essential, is folly and sin. It is only in the light which God causes to shine into our hearts that we can see what is the real character of some of the motives lurking there. Saul of Tarsus came to see himself in the light of God, and the old life in which he had prided himself became his shame. No man knows himself apart from Divine illumination. Repentance marks the change undergone in a man's estimate of himself in the sight of God.

IV. THE ANTITHESIS OF SIN AND RIGHT REASON. When David confessed before God that in what he had done he had acted foolishly, he not only expressed a changed estimate of his conduct, but also illustrated a universal truth. Sin and wisdom are incompatible; they are mutually exclusive. The lie from the beginning has been that it is good for man to do his own will. The wisdom of being "as gods" was the first of snares. The votaries of pleasure and the scornful rejecters of the supernatural Christ deem themselves wise in following the bent of their unholy and proud disposition. The wise "disputer of this world" looks with contempt on "the foolishness of preaching" and of the obedience to Christ which is its object. Yes, like David, in his sin, they have their day; but just as he found at last that his wisdom was all the time folly, so others will find that wisdom is utterly removed from their preference of their own to the will of Christ. Sin is the most desperate folly. It debases man's nature, entails numberless ills for body and spirit, interferes with the true development of the mind and the acquisition and enjoyment of the treasures of good hid in nature, inflicts a stigma and leaves a stain that unfit for the highest society in the universe, and, moreover, mars the future possibly beyond recovery. Holiness and wisdom alone coincide. To go against the will of God is a species of madness. The history of individuals and of nations is proof of it.

V. GOD'S WATCHFULNESS OVER REPENTING SINNERS. It was a long solitary night when David came to see the folly and sin of his conduct. The outpouring of his penitent heart was known to no human being. The most sacred experiences of life are secrets between the soul and God. But yet in the morning, just at the right time, the messenger of God came to him. His mission was to offer alternative chastisements, but there was implied in it forgiveness. The eye of God had seen the inner workings of the broken spirit, and the occasion was seized to bring David again into more direct communication with his God. In the case of Bathsheba Nathan had awakened penitence; here Gad came to help forward the good work begun in penitence. The cry of Saul of Tarsus was heard in heaven, and to help him a servant of God was prepared to speak the words suitable to his case. The ear of the Lord is ever open to the cry of the humble, and his eye is on their sorrows. Some message or messenger will be sent to them to confirm the fact of their awakening to a sense of sin, and do what is best for their restoration. Let every penitent remember that God hears the cry in the night, and sees all the desires of the broken heart.

VI. THE ADAPTATION OF CHASTISEMENT TO SIN. In the alternative choice of David as to the form of chastisement there is secured the same adaptation of the infliction to the nature of the sin. Many explanations have been offered of this sin, but we prefer to consider its essence to lie in a sense of elation in the strength of the nation, and a consequent desire to be assured of its sufficiency for all contingencies. David was thinking of strength and glory in numerical form. In this he was going counter to the letter and spirit of the Law laid down for him and his people (Lev. xxvi.). Success and

prosperity were to be dependent on perfect obedience to God's commands (Lev. xxvi. 3, 4). It is expressly added that then a few men will suffice against a host, and, on the other hand, disobedience and "pride of power" (vers. 14, 15—19) will entail defeat and desolation. That this "pride of power" was the real sin in David's case is seen in this—that the three alternatives offered to him are the very three forms of chastisement alluded to in Lev. xxvi. 3—10 (cf. 16—20). But the point is this, that, whichever form of chastisement is taken, the effect is the same—a *diminution of the power* which was an object of pride. The sin of rejoicing in the "arm of flesh" (Jer. xvii. 5; cf. Isa. xxx. 2) was visited by a weakening of that "arm." Famine, war, pestilence, either, would take away from that very *number* which it was David's ambition to know and have as large as possible. This adaptation of chastisement to sin is seen elsewhere. The infliction for wicked craving for flesh in the wilderness (Numb. xi. 33), the confusion and helplessness of those who sought help in Egypt rather than in God (Isa. xxx. 2, 3, 16, 17), the turning of Laodicean outward respectability into a loss of all respectability (Rev. iii. 14—18), the change from boasted glory to corruption in the case of Herod (Acts xii. 21—23),—are instances of a certain adaptation of chastisement to the particular sin committed. All who make self, or personal merits, or created power, a substitute for God, will find that on which they rest vanishing just when they most need comfort.

VII. THE PENITENT'S TRUST IN THE JUSTICE AND MERCY OF GOD. Of the three dreadful alternatives, David took the pestilence, on the ground that his broken heart could rest more calmly in God's judgments, where the human element was not employed as agent. Here was the true instinct of the soul. God is just and good, and in his hands all is sure to be right and kind. Man is weak and evil, and as an agent may blend his own base passions with the execution of a Divine decree. Even in the hour of suffering, when sin is to be punished, the heart has faith in God. Here is homage to God's justice and mercy. Many a man, who by his sins brings terrible wars on himself and family, bows in entire submission, and rests in blended justice and mercy. This is the essence of our faith in Christ as Sacrifice for sin.

VIII. THE RELATIVE CHARACTER OF OPEN MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD'S PRESENCE. There is nothing really surprising in the appearing of the angel of the Lord to David; for it is in keeping with the theophanies of the early dispensation, when men had special need to be reminded of the reality of God's presence. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Manoah, were predecessors of David in this respect. The step from the message of God by the Seer Gad to a visible manifestation is not very great to any one who believes at all in the supernatural; indeed, the final manifestation of God in Christ covers all prior manifestations. Those who profess to see difficulties in these Old Testament accounts do not understand the logic or the historical congruity of their position as believers in the visible incarnation of the Son of God. Manifestations of God's presence are relative. Creation is an expression of the being and presence of God. The voice which comes to prophet or apostle, the glory on which Moses gazed, the pillar of cloud and of fire, the appearance of manna after the promise of it, the vision of the seer, the still small voice to Elijah, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the frustration of the scheme of the wicked and the furtherance of those of the good, and the spiritual revelation to the soul in fulfilment of the precious words (John xiv. 21, 22),—these are all manifestations of God. Christ differs from all in that he is the Fulness of the Godhead bodily. It is a mercy that our poor dull nature has been blessed by these demonstrations of the reality of things unseen and eternal.

IX. MENTAL SUFFERING THE CHIEF PENALTY OF SIN. David sinned in numbering the people; the pestilence smote many of them, but touched him not. Nevertheless, he was the greatest sufferer; for no physical death could equal, in the pain it brings, the anguish of his soul in seeing that his sin had brought such trouble and pain on "these sheep" (ver. 17). To a man of his generous nature, with all the ambition to be a good and wise ruler (ch. xxiii. 3—5), it must have been torment unspeakable to see that he was an occasion of bringing woe to thousands of homes. His punishment was heavy indeed. A similar terrible mental punishment comes to the parent who sees, in his reformed years, his children diseased or ruined by former sins of his own. In this mental anguish lies, perhaps, the hell which men so much dread.

X. THE PARCIMONY OF PROVIDENCE. David was not correct in his supposition that

"these sheep" had not gone astray. We are not certain whether they had indulged in feelings of pride in the strength of Israel, and so were virtually one with their king in the sin of numbering; but we know that they had sinned in the revolt of Absalom and Sheba, and the anger of the Lord against Israel may, as we have seen (vers. 1—9), be referred to those acts. The fact that they had not been chastised for so great a sin is manifest, so far as the history is any guide, though, if Absalom's sin deserved special visitation on him, theirs equally deserved a visitation on themselves. The sense of the whole history, therefore, is that God waited, and made the occasion of the new sin of their king the opportunity of visiting them with stripes while visiting him with stripes for his own. Indeed, the severity of his chastisement lay much in this, that he was the instrumental occasion of their woe. By one pestilence the double chastisement was secured. Philosophy has dwelt much on the "law of parcimony" in nature. It seems also to run through many providential dispensations in relation to man. By the Flood God punished wicked men and set forth his faithfulness to the righteous. The institution of the Hebrew ritual both educated men in spiritual conceptions, and kept them distinct from the nations for the ulterior purpose of Christ's coming. The sacrifice of Christ is at the same time an objective ground of forgiveness, and the most impressive source of moral influence in winning men over to God. There are manifold forms of the same law in daily life.

Vers. 18—25.—The facts are: 1. The Seer Gad having directed David to rear an altar to the Lord in the threshing-floor of Araunah, he proceeds to carry out the instruction. 2. Araunah, observing the approach of David and his servants, makes obeisance, and desires to know the purport of his visit. 3. Ascertaining that David desired to buy the threshing-floor that he might there entreat for the staying of the plague, he generously offers all that was requisite for the sacrifices, and expresses the hope that God might be propitious. 4. But David, not caring to offer to God what cost him nothing, insists on purchasing the place and the oxen required. 5. The offering being presented on the altar, the plague ceases to trouble Israel.

The way to reconciliation with God a matter of Divine revelation. God had graciously condescended to reveal himself in visible form both to assure David that the plague was more than a mere natural course of disease (ver. 17), and to render an approach to himself more accessible. The chief effect, however, on David was to deepen his conviction of sin and his pity for his suffering people. His prayer, like that of Moses, was that he might suffer if so be they be set free. It was not till the seer came the next day that David learnt what course to take in order to secure reconciliation, not only for the people, but for himself also. God reveals to man the way of reconciliation.

I. THIS IS TRUE OF THE GROUND OF OUR SALVATION IN CHRIST. As surely as the prophet from God informed David as to what was to be done in order to find favour with God and escape the plague, so surely has God revealed in his Word the fact that through Christ alone do we find favour and eternal life. The work of redemption by the sacrifice of Christ was not discovered by the exercise of human reason. In the desert, when Israel was perishing, God ordained the lifting up of the serpent, and caused information of the fact to be given. In our desert life God sent his beloved Son, independently of our asking or knowledge, and commissioned his servants to announce the way of salvation. Reason may enable us to ascertain the reality of the historic fact, but reason could not discover the way of reconciliation. The Apostle Paul declares that he received it not of man, but of God. They do not understand the gospel who imagine that man, by his learning or reason, could ever find out, apart from special revelation, the only way to God.

II. IT IS TRUE OF THE MEANS BY WHICH SALVATION BECOMES PERSONAL. Salvation may be spoken of in general terms, and in this sense is too often the subject of discussion. But it is, also, a matter of personal experience. The end for which Christ lived and died becomes realized in individual souls, in the form of actual forgiveness, restoration to favour, newness of life and progressive holiness. By what means this is to be brought about, so far as our action is concerned, is purely a matter of revelation. It is revealed from heaven to be of faith (Rom. i. 17). As Christ was the Gift of God,

so the revelation that we are saved by Christ on condition of our faith is also the gift of God. It was made known to David that sacrifice would be the ground of pardon, and that his personal use or application of that to the need of the hour was the means of his obtaining the benefit of it. The place of our faith in our salvation from the plague of sin is not a question of human speculation: it is fixed by him who gave the sacrifice.

III. IT IS TRUE OF OUR INDIVIDUAL APPRECIATION OF WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY MADE KNOWN. The spiritual bearing of the acts enjoined on David could only be spiritually discerned. That Christ is our great Sacrifice, and that faith is the means by which we are to appropriate it,—these are things plainly revealed in Scripture, and could only be known as Divine ordinations by special revelation; but they are a dead letter to multitudes. We need the revelation of their spiritual bearing to our own souls by the Holy Spirit; and it is only as the Holy Spirit takes of these things pertaining to Christ and reveals them to our individual spirit that we see their force and value their application. Hence a revelation of the matter of revelation is needful to conversion. Hence many read and speak about salvation who never see its real significance or know it as a matter of personal experience. The invisible messenger of God must come to us as truly as the seer came to David, if we are to *see* his salvation (John iii. 5).

Devotion of property to God's service. Araunah was eager to provide a place and oxen for the celebration of the services about to be rendered to God. His interest in David, in Israel, and his homage for God seem to have prompted the generous proposal. On the other hand, David's sense of what was due to God from himself, and his personal interest in the solemn transaction, would not suffer him to be spared cost through the generosity of Araunah. He must honour God with his own and not with another man's possessions.

I. ALL OUR POSSESSIONS ARE GOD'S. This is the basis of our devotion of what we hold to his service. We are really but stewards. Our mental powers, our wealth, our personal influence, our very life, are lent to us for a season, and lent with a view to use in God's Name. This is laid down in the words, "Ye are not your own;" in the parable of the talents; in the very constitution and dependence of our lives; in the specific commands concerning "firstfruits;" and this was practically recognized by both David and Araunah in their emulation in self-sacrifice. It would be a great gain to the Church and world if Christian people would only let this truth sink deeply into their hearts. What elevation, tone, and nobility it would import to life!

II. THERE IS NO NOBLER USE OF POSSESSIONS THAN IN GOD'S SERVICE. David and Araunah were one in this belief. They strove for the honour of devoting substance to God. In a well-ordered Christian life *all* is devoted to God. The entire life, embracing mental powers, occupations, property, time, is a sacrifice (Rom. xii. 1). But by reason of custom we recognize that as specially devoted to God which is directly employed in maintaining his holy worship or diffusing a knowledge of his great mercy to mankind. The wonderful way in which the priesthood was set apart, the distinction put in Scripture on men whose lives were chiefly spent in witnessing for God, the significant words of our Saviour in reference to the widow's mite and the box of ointment, and the glorying of the Apostle Paul in that he was called and counted worthy of a special ministry,—these things point out the honour of using our gifts and possessions in furtherance of God's gracious purposes to mankind.

III. THE USE OF OUR POSSESSIONS IN GOD'S SERVICE IS A MEANS OF VAST BLESSING TO MANKIND. By devoting their substance to God on this occasion, David and Araunah knew that they would be doing that which, being graciously accepted, would issue in the removal of the plague from Israel. No wonder that they were ambitious to lay their gifts at the mercy-seat! It was a question of staying the plague. Equally in our case it is daily a question of staying the plague, lifting the curse of sin and scattering the wholesome blessings of salvation over the land. He who builds a sanctuary, or endows a college, or send forth missionaries, turns his money into streams of spiritual good.

IV. A TRUE HEART WILL FIND PURE SATISFACTION IN DEVISING MEANS OF DEVOTING GIFTS TO GOD. David honoured the noble impulse of Araunah, but he could not be deprived of the satisfaction claimed by every true man of giving of his own. There is

a real blessedness in laying our gifts of mind and body and our material possessions at the altar of God. The meanness which would worship at others' expense, or look on spiritual good done at others' cost, can never dwell in a Christly soul. As the Saviour himself counted it a deep and holy joy to lay down his life for others, so all who enter into his spirit feel it to be a matter of thankfulness when occasion arises for some surrender in his service. The bountiful soul is always rich. The large heart is never in poverty. The joy of their Lord is their portion.

V. IT IS BY THE USE OF SUCH ACTS OF DEVOTION TO HIS SERVICE THAT GOD HAS HITHERTO BLESSED THE WORLD. The self-surrender of Abraham when he left Ur of the Chaldees, the devotion by Moses of his great powers to the leadership of Israel, were simply conspicuous instances in the entire history of redemption of God's acceptance and use of human powers and possessions for carrying out his great purpose of mercy. David was following the usual order in the case before us. Even our blessed Lord came to earth by means of the devotion of a virgin life. The "good news" has been sent abroad by consecration of human speech. Who would not fall in with this glorious succession till the world is saved?

Plague and prayer. The narrative plainly teaches that this plague was ordained of God for moral ends, and that it was stayed by means of the intercession offered in the manner suited to the age of shadowy sacrifice before the offering of the eternal sacrifice by Christ.

I. AFFLICTIVE EVENTS ARE SOMETIMES TO BE REGARDED AS DIVINE CHASTISEMENTS. This was true of the event here referred to. No sensible man can doubt it. The only way to get rid of the fact is to regard this portion of Scripture as a mere superstitious legend—human superstitions being infused into a natural occurrence. The bad logic of this, in the case of one who accepts the supernatural in the incarnation of Christ, is obvious. If God thought fit to deal supernaturally with men at one time, why not at another? In Scripture many afflictive events are set forth in the same light, and we may fairly say that God's government of men has not yet ceased, and that men, especially communities, need discipline as much now as ever. If men are moral beings under government, and if the order of nature is not beyond the reach and control of God, we have a right to regard the events of Scripture as examples of what God does to the sons of men (1 Cor. x. 11).

II. THERE IS MORE IN THESE EVENTS THAN THE NECESSARY ACTION OF PHYSICAL LAWS. The presence of the angel here shows that there was a special Divine element in the event. The same is true of other similar events recorded in Scripture. In modern Divine chastisements of men there may be physical order, but that will not be the interpretation of the moral bearing of the events. There seems to be more than a foreseen coincidence of a chain of physical necessities issuing in an event just at the time when some national or individual sin transpires. Bare prevision of a coincidence that could not be helped is a poor explanation of Divine government. The scriptural idea is the best—that God is *free* and *above* and *behind* all the forces at work, and in some way not revealed and not certainly discoverable by physical science, he does so regulate the succession of physical events as to make them subserve a moral purpose when, in the development of human history, there arises a need of such subservance. We must either admit this, or place God practically outside his own possessions as a helpless spectator, less able to strike in than are we ourselves. The mystery may be great, but it is more mysterious, and certainly more absurd, that there should be such a God deprived of freedom of action.

III. THE REMOVAL OF AFFLICTIVE EVENTS IS CONNECTED WITH THE WORK OF CHRIST. The offering of sacrifice by David was a divinely appointed means of accepting the repentance and homage of the nation. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission." This deep spiritual truth was doubtless recognized by all the truly pious of those times. Thus it sets forth the greater truth that the sacrifice of Christ is the ground on which God exercises his mercy in forgiving our sins and healing our wounds. The far-reaching benefits of his death deserve more consideration than they commonly get. Thousands enjoy the fruit of his sacrifice who know him not. For all men he has lifted up the curse, so that its pressure is not so great as once it was or might have been. When the rod is laid by, and the sinful nation or individual is no longer smitten, it is for "Christ's sake."

IV. PRAYER IS THE HUMAN MEANS BY WHICH CHASTISEMENTS ARE REMOVED. On the basis of the sacrifice typical of Christ's death, David's prayer was accepted and the plague was stayed. In like manner Moses intreated for Israel, and David for his people. The nature of prayer and its place in the Divine government have not changed with years. It is a spiritual power as truly as that gravity is a physical force. Its exercise, according to Scripture, is not exclusive of the use of personal effort to remove physical evils, and certainly not exclusive of moral conduct. As a spiritual power, it is part of our endowment, and to be employed along with our other endowments of good sense, prudence, and correctness of life. It does not follow that answer to prayer is a violation of the order of things. We do not know how far God's personal contact with every force in action is or is not part of the order, and hence we do not know but that his free energy may so modify the course of events as to maintain what seems to us to be natural order, and yet to be the product of his own will. The pointsman on a railway may suddenly save a train from destruction without violating the order of nature. Who shall say that the watchful energy of the Eternal may not, in answer to our urgent cry, so act as to obviate what otherwise would be a great disaster? "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." It is mighty only as it is the concentrated voice of a "newness of life" lifted up to heaven in the all-prevailing Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2 (1 Chron. xxi. 1, 2).—(JERUSALEM.) *A sinful census.* 1. This census appears to have been ordered by David in one of the *later years* of his life. The word "again" (ver. 1) indicates that it was subsequent to the famine (ch. xxi. 1, 14; ver. 25); and a measure that occupied Joab and the captains of the host nine months and twenty days could only have been accomplished during a time of settled peace, such as succeeded the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba. "Three great external calamities are recorded in David's reign, which may be regarded as marking its beginning, its middle, and its close—a three years' famine, a three months' exile, a three days' pestilence" (Stanley). No man, however advanced in life, or whatever the wisdom he may have "learnt by experience," is wholly exempt from the power of temptation. 2. It was a census of those who were capable of bearing arms (ver. 9), and of the nature of a *military organization* (ch. viii. 15—18). "But David took not the number of them from twenty years old and under," etc. (1 Chron. xxvii. 23, 24). The result showed a great increase of the people—800,000 (1,100,000) warriors of Israel, 500,000 (470,000) of Judah, omitting Levi and Benjamin (1 Chron. xxi. 6); representing a population of about five millions. 3. Its direct and *declared object* was that David might "know the number of the people," or become fully acquainted with its military strength, "its defensive power" (Keil). Of any additional object, except what is implied in the words of Joab, "Why does my lord the king *delight* in this thing?" nothing is stated. 4. It, nevertheless, was wrong and *exceedingly sinful.* This is evident, not only from the expostulation of Joab, but also from the confession of David himself (ver. 10), and the Divine chastisement that followed. Wherein consisted his sin? A census was not in itself and always sinful; for it had been expressly directed by God (Exod. xxx. 11—16; xxxviii. 26; Numb. i. 2; xxvi. 1—4, 63—65), and it was (as it still is) attended with important advantages. But this census was determined upon by David, (1) apparently without due inquiry, by means of oracle (1 Chron. xxi. 30) or prophet (ver. 11), concerning the will of the Divine King of Israel; without adequate grounds in relation to the welfare of the people; and without proper consideration of the danger of promoting a spirit of pride, and producing other evil consequences (Exod. xxx. 11, 12). "David forgot the commands of Moses, who told them beforehand that if the multitude were numbered, they should pay half a shekel (the price of a sin offering) to God for every head" (Josephus). In its omission "he invaded the rights of the supreme King of Israel, and set aside a positive command of God. The demanding the tax by his own authority might have created a national disturbance, and therefore should have prevented him from numbering his people" (Chandler). (2) Probably with warlike thoughts and intentions, for the strengthening of the army and the further extension of

Israel's dominion by foreign conquests (ch. xxii. 44, 45). "Warlike thoughts certainly stand in the background; if we fail to see this, we lose the key to the whole transaction, and the Divine judgment is incomprehensible" (Hengstenberg); but it can hardly be supposed that he formed the definite purpose of "transforming the theocratic state into a conquering world-state" (Kurtz). (3) Possibly with a view to "the development of the royal power in Israel" and "general taxation" (Ewald); which made it obnoxious to Joab and the council (for something of the kind seems necessary to account for the opposition of such a man). (4) Certainly with vain-glorious pride, self-elation, distrust of God, who "said he would increase Israel like to the stars of the heavens" (1 Chron. xxvii. 23), and presumptuous confidence in himself (1 Sam. xv. 1—9; Luke iv. 5—12). "David's heart was lifted up to rejoice in the number and strength of the people" (Willet). "The very same action, apparently performed with different intentions, becomes essentially different in a moral point of view. It is the *motive* in which it originates, or the spirit with which it is carried on, that gives it its distinctive character in the sight of God. David was actuated by a vain-glorious spirit, which is always an abomination in the sight of God. He was thus indulging a vain conceit of his own strength, a proud confidence in his own greatness, as if his chief dependence were on an arm of flesh; forgetting his own devout profession that the Lord was his Rock and his Fortress and his Deliverer, in whom he would trust" (Lindsay). "From its first origin Israel was called to *the supremacy of the world* (Deut. xxxiii. 29). David now thought that he could rise step by step to such elevation without the help of God, who had provided for the beginning. The records should bear witness for all time that he had laid a solid foundation for this great work of the future" (Hengstenberg). "It was a momentary apostasy from Jehovah; an oblivion of the spirit of dependence inculcated on the rulers of Israel." This was the root of the offence; and in it the whole nation participated. "This history shows that the acts and fortunes of rulers and people are closely connected together; and that the sins and virtues of the one exercise great influence on the happiness of the other" (Wordsworth). Consider that—

I. GOD IS NEVER ANGRY WITH ANY PERSON OR PEOPLE EXCEPT ON ACCOUNT OF SIN. "David's causing the people to be numbered was the *immediate* cause of the pestilence; for the procedure originated in motives which the Lord condemned. But the *primary* and *real* cause is to be found in the verse which introduces the narrative, and which is almost invariably lost sight of in the common accounts of this transaction. It is that 'the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.' Now, the anger of the Lord could only be awakened by unfaithfulness and evil-doing; and that, whatever its precise nature, was the real cause of the calamity that followed, and relieves the case of the apparent harshness, of which so much has been said, of making the people suffer for the offence of their king" (Kitto, 'Daily Bible Illus.'). 1. *Sin alone excites the anger of God;* which is his holy opposition to sin and sinners, and not inconsistent with his love, but rather the effect of resistance to it (ch. xi. 27). 2. *Whenever sin dwells in the heart,* no less than when it is expressed in outward actions, God observes it, and is displeased with those who are guilty of it. "For he knoweth the secrets of the heart" (Ps. xliv. 21). 3. His displeasure with a whole people implies *prevalent and persistent sin* among them, such as the spirit of unbelief, disobedience, vain-glorious pride, and presumption, which was manifested in the recent rebellions of Israel, and appears to have been subsequently indulged. 4. So far from being palliated or passed over because of *their exalted position and privileges,* their sin is aggravated, and more fully ensures their chastisement on that account. "You only have I known," etc. (Amos iii. 2). "It may be not unreasonably surmised that they were smitten with the same unhallowed elation of heart (as the king); that they were tempted to exult in their own strength; that they rejoiced in the prospect of beholding the proud array of their multitudes of fighting men; and that dreams of grandeur and glory may have been before their eyes, and may have caused them to depart from the Lord" (Le Bas). "The important lesson for all here is this—that even the smallest feeling of *national pride* is a sin against God, and, unless there be a powerful reaction, calls down the judgments of God. With this feeling even the Romans presented offerings of atonement at their census."

II. SIN IN A PEOPLE IS USUALLY ASSOCIATED WITH SIN IN THEIR RULER. 1. The former may be incited by the latter (1 Kings xv. 30). Or: 2. It may be an incitement to it (John xix. 12). "The people had infected the king with their own arrogance,

which had been called forth by their success." Or: 3. Both people and ruler may alike participate in the same prevalent, sinful disposition or tendency of the age. As formerly (ch. xv. 1—5), "soft indulgence" and sensual desire; so now, "the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John ii. 16) seem to have taken possession of his mind. 4. The sin of a people may culminate in, and be manifested and represented by, the sin of their ruler. For this he is eminently responsible, and when his piety, which should have checked the evil tendency of the people, and may hitherto have restrained the righteous judgment of God, begins to fail, it becomes the occasion of the breaking forth of his fiery indignation. "It was the final offence which filled up the cup of wrath, and the punishment smote the nation, and, through the nation, its ruler" (Kirkpatrick, *Hom. Quart.*, vi.). "The Lord was wearied with the sins of Israel and Judah; and he likewise beheld the *secret pride* of David's heart; and for these things he was resolved to visit both the people and the king." "Pride, or vain-glory, or self-sufficiency, which was the sin of David, and which, for the very reason that it effects us less, because it is not so much against man as against God, offends him the more. It is a substitution of ourselves in his place; an impious thought of independence, and transference to ourselves of that confidence and admiration which are due to him alone. It is an invasion of his throne, an assumption of his sceptre, an attempt to rob him of that glory which he will not give to another, a removing of the crown from his head to put it on our own. 'Wherefore it is said, God resisteth the proud'" (J. Leifchild). "He was, for the time, the image and emblem of all who in any age, or in any country, love to have arrayed before them the elements of their worldly strength; who delight to see spread out the full enrolment of their powers and resources, and who forget that there is One before whose breath all these things shall be even as the cloud-capped towers and palaces before the breath of the whirlwind."

III. THE SINFUL MEASURES OF A RULER ARE SOMETIMES THE EFFECT OF THE DIVINE DISPLEASURE WITH HIS PEOPLE, whose sin he shares, and of whose punishment he is made the instrument. "And he [Jehovah] moved [incited, provoked] David to say," etc. "The thought is—there should come a pestilence over Israel, and David become the occasion thereof" (Thenius). "The ruler's sin is a punishment to a wicked people." Sin implies personal responsibility; and "God tempts no man" (Jas. i. 13). But in his universal sovereignty: 1. He appoints the *circumstances*, which are adapted to test and manifest character, and often conduce to sin. 2. He suggests *thoughts* which, although right and good in themselves, are sometimes perverted to wrong and evil by human folly and infatuation (ver. 10). "All good thoughts, counsels, just works, come from the Spirit of God; and, at the same time, we are in the most imminent peril at every moment of turning the Divine suggestions into sin by allowing our selfish and impure conceits and rash generalizations to mix with them" (Maurice). 3. He withdraws his *restraining grace* in consequence of sin, and permits men to be tempted of Satan (1 Chron. xxi. 1), who readily seizes the opportunity to lead them into transgression. *Deus probat, Satan tentat.* 4. He even constrains the *manifestation of the iniquity of the heart* for holy and beneficent ends. "God's influence, making use of Satan as its instrument, leads the corrupt germ to its development, rousing into action that which slumbers in the soul, in order to bring about the retributive judgment in which man, if otherwise well-intentioned, learns fully to recognize his sinful condition, and is moved to repentance. The question is not of simple permission on the part of God, but of a real action, and that of the nature which each one may perceive in his own tendencies. Whoever once yields to his sinful disposition is infallibly involved in the sinful deed which leads to retributive judgment, however much he may strive against it" (Hengstenberg). "Though it was David's sin that opened the sluice, the sins of the people all contributed to the deluge" (Matthew Henry).

IV. AN ADEQUATE REASON IS AFFORDED BY SUCH MEASURES FOR THE CHASTISEMENT OF RULER AND PEOPLE. "It was needful for an external, visible manifestation of the sin to precede the judgment, in order to justify the ways of God to men. The temptation was presented to David; he fell, and in his fall represented truly and faithfully the fall of the nation. The nation was not punished vicariously for its ruler's sin, but for a sin which was its own, and was only embodied and made visible by its ruler's act. And the punishment struck the very point of their pride, by diminishing the numbers which had been the ground of their self-confident elation" (Kirkpatrick, 2 Samuel).

"Because David was about to boast proudly and to glory in the number of his people, God determined to punish him by reducing their number, either by famine, war, or pestilence" (S. Schmid). 1. Sinful *actions* serve to manifest the hidden sin of the heart. 2. They show the connection between such sin and its just retribution. 3. They make chastisement more signal and salutary. 4. They are often overruled to the glory of God and the welfare of men. [*Note:* Some of the difficulties indicated above would be removed by regarding the first sentence as "the heading of the whole chapter, which goes on to describe the sin which kindled this anger, viz. the numbering of the people" ('Speaker's Commentary'); and by reading, "And one moved David," etc.; i.e. "one of his courtiers or attendants, who is therefore called satan, or an adversary, either designedly or consequentially both to David and his people. The people were themselves very culpable; as they knew, or might have known, that, upon being numbered, they were to pay the prescribed ransom, which yet they neglected or refused to do; as partners in the offence, they justly shared in the penalty inflicted" (Chandler). But this explanation is not satisfactory.]—D.

Ver. 2 (1 Chron. xxi. 2).—(THE KING'S PALACE.) *Self-elation.* This chapter contains the spiritual history of a great soul in its "fall and rising again," its sin and recovery—its (1) self-elation, (2) self-will (vers. 3, 4), (3) self-deception (during many months), (4) self-conviction (by self-examination, ver. 10), (5) self-abasement, (6) self-surrender (ver. 14), (7) self-devotion for the people (ver. 17), and self-dedication to God (vers. 24, 25). Of self-elation, pride, presumption, vain-glory (the sin of David), it may be said that it is—

I. A COMMON EFFECT OF EXTRAORDINARY PROSPERITY, temporal or spiritual. Pride; war, famine, or pestilence; suffering and humiliation; peace and industry; prosperity —pride again; such is the melancholy circle of human affairs (Exod. viii. 14). "If we knew how to enjoy our blessings in the fear of God, they would be continued unto us; but it is the sin of man that he extracts, even from the mercies of God, the poison which destroys his comforts; he grows fat upon the bounties of Heaven, spurns its laws, and awakens its vengeance" (R. Watson).

II. AN UNGRATEFUL PERVERSION OF DIVINE BENEFITS. "The grave sin of proud exaltation, which David and the people of Israel here had in common, presupposed the elevation to victory and power that God had bestowed by his gracious mind; and its consequence was the judgment that revealed God's anger against the perversion of his favours into plans of self-aggrandizement" (Erdmann). What should produce thankfulness and humility too often results in unthankfulness and vain-glory (2 Kings xx. 13).

III. A SPECIAL TEMPTATION OF THE EVIL ONE. (1 Tim. iii. 6.) "And Satan [an adversary] stood up," etc. (1 Chron. xxi. 1). "We see that God and Satan both had their hand in the work; God by permission, Satan by suggestion; God as a Judge, Satan as an enemy; God as in a just punishment for sin, Satan as in an act of sin; God in a wise ordination of it to good, Satan in a malicious intent to confusion" (Hall).

IV. A GRIEVOUS EXHIBITION OF SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS; inconsideration of dependence, self-ignorance, self-deception, and foolish infatuation (Jer. xlix. 16). "David, when strongly tempted to this gratification of his vanity, was not at all sensible of the evil of such an act; while Joab was. Joab, though a man of blood, and apparently hardened in iniquity, could see through David's vain and arrogant feelings, while David himself, whose mind was under ordinary circumstances eminently sensitive and pious, could not discover the impiety of his proceeding, but persevered in evil for several months. Such is the infatuation of sin!" (Lindsay).

V. A PECULIAR PROVOCATIVE OF DIVINE WRATH (1 Sam. ii. 3; Prov. xvi. 5); most odious of all things in the sight of God, because most directly opposed to him. "Pride is the beginning of sin" (Ecclus. x. 13). "And what is pride but the craving for undue exaltation? And this is undue exaltation when the soul abandons him to whom it ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself. This happens when it becomes its own satisfaction. And it does so when it falls away from that unchangeable good which ought to satisfy it more than itself" (Augustine, 'The City of God,' xiv. 13).

VI. A PERNICIOUS INFLUENCE IN RELATION TO OTHER PEOPLE; inciting in them a

similar spirit, and bringing untold miseries upon them. What oppression, strife, and other deadly fruits grow out of this "root of bitterness" (Exod. xiv. 5)!

VII. A RUINOUS TENDENCY IN RELATION TO MAN HIMSELF. (Dan. iv. 28; Prov. xvi. 18.) "Pride wishes to dethrone God. Pride takes occasion from virtue itself. Pride was particularly odious in David, who was exalted from so lowly a state. His pride was accompanied by falsehood; for he had protested his humility in the psalms which he made for all the people to sing. David was a just man; but this was a reason why God should punish him more severely. For it is certain that the sins of the children of God are more deserving of condemnation than the sins of reprobates and slaves of the devil. These only offend their master, but those do outrage to their Father; these are only rebel subjects, but those are unnatural children and barbarians; these only abuse the gifts of nature, but those profane miserably the gifts of grace. And how much more abominable is Judas than Pilate! Be not surprised, then, that when David, who was complete in a thousand graces, committed the crime of felony against him, the Eternal could not suffer such an indignity without punishing him severely" (Du Bosc, in Vinet's 'Histoire de la Predication').—D.

Vers. 3, 4 (1 Chron. xxi. 3, 4).—(THE ROYAL COUNCIL-CHAMBER.) *Unheeded remonstrance.* This was not the first time that Joab remonstrated with David (ch. iii. 24; xix. 5); but his manner was now very different from what it had been before; arising, perhaps, from his recollection of the consequences of his former rudeness (ch. xix. 13), and his fear of the displeasure of the king, whose authority was fully restored. His remonstrance appears to have been made in a council of the captains of the army (ch. xxiii. 8), to whom the king declared his purpose, and by whom Joab's objection to it was supported (ver. 4). As often happens in other instances, it was: 1. *Greatly needed,* on account of a sinful and dangerous course about to be pursued. (1) Men of the most exalted position and excellent character sometimes go astray from the right path. (2) The error of their way is often perceived by others, when they are blind to it themselves. (3) One of the principal means of preventing their continuance therein is to reason, expostulate, and remonstrate with them concerning its real nature and probable consequences (Ps. cxli. 5). 2. *Properly offered.* (1) By those to whom the matter is one of just concern. Joab was captain of the host; and, although a man of depraved character, he possessed a sound practical judgment, and had rendered great services to the nation and the king. (2) From sincere conviction. "No man is so wicked but that sometimes he will dislike some evil, and it will be abominable (1 Chron. xxi. 6) to him" (Guild). (3) On reasonable grounds. It can neither increase the number of the people (which is with God) nor the power and honour of the king (already supreme, 1 Chron. xxi. 3), and it will be "a cause of trespass." "Why doth my lord," etc.? "There are many who can give good counsel to others, for the avoiding of some sins, who in grosser trespasses have not grace to take good counsel themselves" (Matt. vii. 3). (4) In a right spirit; devout, loyal, humble, and courteous. There is nothing to indicate that Joab was actuated by sinister motives; and the event justified the wisdom of his counsel. 3. *Impatiently received,* and imperfectly considered; it may be because of: (1) Distrust of the person from whom it comes. "Let none look who gives the counsel, but what it is; and, if good, not to reject it for him who gives the same." (2) A determination to have one's own way; and the wish to show independence of and superiority to other persons. (3) Dislike to the nature of the advice itself, and indisposition to abandon a course on which the heart is set. 4. *Resolutely rejected* and wholly overborne. "The word of the king prevailed," etc. His persistency in his purpose, after the remonstrance, (1) increases his responsibility, (2) aggravates his guilt, (3) consummates his transgression. "And Joab and the captains went out from the presence of the king," reluctantly to fulfil their commission; and it was only when it was well-nigh accomplished (1 Chron. xxvii. 24) that he became aware of his sin and folly. "Men seldom accomplish to good purpose those services in which they reluctantly engage; and God does not generally allow those whom he loves the satisfaction which they sinfully covet" (Scott).—D.

Vers. 5—10 (1 Chron. xxi. 5—8).—(THE ROYAL BED-CHAMBER.) *An awakened conscience.* The taking of the census occupied over nine months; and during this time

David remained insensible to his sin, and waited for the result. At length the work was finished (about wheat-harvest), and the number given to the king; but, whilst he looked at the definite proof of the nation's increase, and at first, perhaps, felt elated at the thought of commanding an army of more than a million soldiers (with something of the spirit of another monarch, Dan. iv. 30), the same night "David's heart smote him; and he said unto Jehovah, I have sinned," etc.; "and David arose in the morning," etc. (ver. 11). What the remonstrance of Joab failed to effect was wrought by the operation of his own conscience. "It was well for him that his own ways reproved him, and that conscience sounded the first trumpet of alarm. This is characteristic of the regenerate. Men who have no light of grace, no tenderness of conscience, must have their sin recalled to them by the circumstances which at once reveal its enormity and visit it with punishment; but the regenerate have an inward monitor that waits not for these consequences to rouse its energy, but lights up the candle of the Lord within them, and will not let them rest after they have done amiss till they have felt compunction and made confession" (J. Leifchild). *Conscience* is of a threefold nature—a law, a judgment, a sentiment (1 Sam. xxii. 20—22). Observe, with respect to it—

I. THE CAUSES OF ITS CONTINUING LONG ASLEEP. These are summed up in "the deceitfulness of sin" (ch. xii. 5, 6). More especially: 1. The persistency of the influence under which sin is at first indulged; viz. the pleasing *illusion* (arising from partial views, strong passions, and self-will) that it is different from what it really is, and the agent better than he really is; which (even when the true standard of right is recognized) perverts the moral judgment and deadens the moral emotion. "A concrete fact is presented in a partial aspect; conscience pronounces its judgment according to the representation made to it; this representation, or rather misrepresentation, is made, directly or indirectly by the influence of the rebellious will, the true seat of all moral evil" (McCosh). Hence evil is often deemed good, and self-glory the glory of God. 2. The *assumption* (arising from self-confidence) that what has been resolved upon is justifiable and right; and indisposition to review the grounds of the determination or to examine one's self so that a too favourable estimate of his character may be corrected. 3. The *absorption* of the mind in the pursuit of the object sought and in other occupations, preventing due consideration of the state of the heart. Alas! how many on this account "regard iniquity in their heart" with an easy conscience!

> "Great crimes alarm the conscience; but she sleeps
> While thoughtful man is plausibly amused."
>
> (Cowper.)

"And Satan is so far from awaking him, that he draws the curtains close about him that no light nor noise in his conscience may break his rest" (Gurnall). "If a man accustoms himself to slight or pass over the first motions to good, or shrinkings of conscience from evil, which originally are as natural to the heart as the appetites of hunger and thirst are to the stomach, conscience will by degrees grow dull and unconcerned, and, from not spying out motes, come at length to overlook beams; from carelessness it shall fall into a slumber; and from a slumber it shall settle into a deep and long sleep; till at last, perhaps, it sleeps itself into a lethargy, and that such a one that nothing but hell and judgment shall be able to awaken it" (South, Serm. xxiii.).

II. THE MEANS BY WHICH IT IS SUDDENLY AROUSED. In some cases the publication of the offence, the reprobation of society, the threatening of punishment; in others, serious consideration, deliberate *reflection*, deeper self-inspection (1 Sam. xxiv. 5; Ps. iv. 4), induced by: 1. The feeling of disappointment and *dissatisfaction* which commonly attends the attainment of an earthly end, or the accomplishment of a selfish purpose. David has the number of the people before him; yet, after all, he cannot "delight in this thing" (ver. 3). "All is vanity." Where shall the heart find rest (Ps. cxvi. 17; lxxiii. 25)? 2. The occurrence of *circumstances* naturally adapted to fix attention on a particular subject and excite inquiry concerning the motives by which one is actuated: a pause in "life's fitful fever;" the necessity of contemplating—what next? and next? a sleepless night (Esth. vi. 1); "sleep that bringeth oft tidings of future hap" (Dante)—"a dream, a vision of the night" (Job xxxiii. 15). "David had made

spiritual progress since the time when it required the parable of Nathan, and the prophetic announcement, 'Thou art the man,' to awaken him from his spiritual slumber. At this period of his life he examined himself and weighed his own actions in private, especially at night-time; and no sooner was the census of the men of war reported to him than, instead of being elated with self-confidence and puffed up with vain-glory, 'his heart smote him,'" etc. (Wordsworth). "*Night and sleep* bring us times of revision or moral reflection, such as greatly promote the best uses of existence. Whatever wrong has been committed stalks into the mind with an appalling tread. All those highest thoughts and most piercing truths that most deeply concern the great problem of life will often come nigh to thoughtful men in the dusk of their evenings, and their hours of retirement to rest. The night is the judgment-bar of the day. About all the reflection there is in the world is due, if not directly to the night, to the habit prepared and fashioned by it. Great thoughts and wonderfully distinct crowd in, stirring great convictions—all the more welcome to a good man; to the bad, how terrible! 'Thou hast visited me in the night,' says David; 'thou hast tried me;' and again, 'My reins instruct me in the night season.' What lessons of wisdom have every man's reins given him in the depths of the night!—things how high, how close to other worlds! reproofs how piercing in authority, how nearly Divine!" (Bushnell, 'Moral Uses of Dark Things'). 3. The operation of Divine *grace* (in connection with a man's own thoughts), which visits the upright in heart, dispels every illusion, and strengthens every holy and God-ward aspiration. Did the Lord in judgment move David to number Israel? His judgment was founded on love, and his goodness led him to repentance.

III. THE EFFECT OF ITS RENEWED ACTIVITY. "And David said unto Jehovah, I have sinned greatly in that I have done," etc. 1. A right knowledge of himself and a correct judgment of his conduct. 2. A painful sense of his guilt and folly. In the truly penitent: 3. A humble confession before the Lord (1 Sam. vii. 6); and: 4. Fervent prayer for forgiveness (ch. xii. 13). Of the way of forgiveness and its own pacification, indeed, conscience is unable to declare anything; the knowledge thereof is afforded by the Word of God alone (ver. 18). Nevertheless, its awakening tests and manifests the character, and results in peace and righteousness, or in increased "hardness of heart," confirmed rebellion, remorse, and despair. The hour of its awakening comes to all; but it may come too late, when there is found "no place for repentance" (ver. 16).—D.

Vers. 9—13, 18, 19 (1 Chron. xxi. 9—13, 18, 19).—*The Prophet Gad.* "And when David was up in the morning," etc. Gad had formerly given valuable direction to David (1 Sam. xxii. 5); and he must have been now far advanced in life. He was "David's seer," or spiritual counsellor; a true prophet of God (1 Sam. ii. 27; iii. 19; ch. vii. 3); assisted in the arrangements for the temple service (1 Chron. ix. 22), and (like Samuel and Nathan) wrote a (theocratic) history of his time (1 Chron. xxix. 29). "The most celebrated representatives of special prophecy in David's period were Nathan the prophet and Gad the seer. As Nathan connected Messianic prophecy for ever with the house of David, so Gad was instrumental in moulding the history of salvation even till the period of the New Testament, since, by directing David to build an altar on the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite, he laid the foundation of the temple upon Mount Moriah, in which Israel, by prayer and sacrifice, honoured his God for more than a thousand years" (Delitzsch). He was fully acquainted with the king's purpose, the remonstrance of Joab, the completion of the census; and may possibly already, from his intimacy with David, have observed misgivings in him concerning the measure, and surmised his present state of mind. "He said nothing to him about his sin, but spoke only of correction for it; which confirms it that David was made sensible of his sin before he came to him" (Gill). Notice: 1. *His Divine mission.* "The word of Jehovah came unto the prophet," etc. (1) It came to him *directly*, by inward intuition, when "in a state most nearly related to communion with God in prayer" (Oehler). (2) With the irresistible *assurance* of its Divine origin. "The prophets themselves had the clearest and most profound consciousness that they did not utter their own thoughts, but those revealed to them by God" (Riehm). (3) With a powerful *impulse* to give it utterance, in "fulfilment of a definite duty laid upon him by God." (4) And it *proved* whence it came, by its manifest adaptation and actual

accomplishment; the Divine wisdom and might with which it was imbued (vers. 15, 25). "The three elements which enter into the true conception of a prophet are *revelation, inspiration, and utterance*; for the prophet is the inspired medium of truth to other minds. Revelation, the inner disclosure of the Divine thought and will to the human soul, is an essential element of genuine prophecy. But this revelation cannot become realized, cannot become a real disclosure of thought and purpose to the individual as a preparation for prophecy, without inspiration. The soul of the prophet must be ethically quickened and elevated in order that the word of Jehovah may reach the people through him. Nor can the message remain concealed in the prophet's own soul; for it is a *message*, a Divine commission, to communicate a revealed truth to those for whom it is divinely intended" (Ladd, 'The Doctrine of Sacred Scripture,' i. 124). 2. *His prophetic message.* More than what is recorded may have been spoken in his two interviews with the king; but his words contain: (1) An assertion of the sole *sovereignty* of Jehovah, which had been for a season practically ignored. "Thus saith Jehovah," etc. (ver. 12). The office of a prophet was that of "watchman to the theocracy" (Jer. vi. 27); he had to observe and denounce every departure from its principles on the part of the king or people, and give warning of coming danger. (2) An announcement of the approach of *judgment.* "I lay before thee three things," etc. Already, perchance, the king had a presentiment thereof; but now it was rendered plain and certain. Yet "mercy is mixed with judgment; the Lord is angry, yet shows great condescension and goodness." "His mercies are great" (ver. 14). (3) An appointment of the means of *deliverance.* "Go up, rear an altar unto Jehovah," etc. (ver. 18). (4) An injunction of those duties or *conditions*, in the fulfilment of which the favour of God would be enjoyed—submission, trust, and unreserved self-devotion. 3. *His faithful obedience.* "And Gad came to David," etc., with: (1) Simplicity; uttering the word of God, just as it was revealed to him, adding nothing, and withholding nothing. (2) Fearlessness. (3) Earnestness. "Now advise," etc. (4) Diligence and perseverance. 4. *His salutary influence* (in accordance with the purpose of his mission), not only in the removal of the pestilence, but also in (1) checking the spirit of presumption and of rebellion against Jehovah, (2) pacifying a troubled conscience, (3) restoring both king and people to their allegiance, (4) promoting the interests of the kingdom of God.—D.

Ver. 13 (1 Chron. xxi. 12).—(JEBUSALEM.) *Preachers and hearers.* "Now advise [know], and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me." The intercourse of the prophet with the king, especially his language at the close of the first interview, is suggestive of—

I. THE VOCATION OF THE PREACHER of the gospel. 1. Every true preacher is sent forth by God. 2. He is put in trust with the Word of God, and is sent to proclaim it to others, as his messenger and ambassador (2 Cor. v. 20); not to teach his own speculations. 3. The purpose of the proclamation is their spiritual welfare—their instruction, edification, salvation. "They watch on behalf of your souls" (Heb. xiii. 17). But, too often,

> "The aim of all
> Is how to shine: e'en they whose office is
> To preach the gospel, let the gospel sleep,
> And pass their own inventions off instead.
> The sheep, meanwhile, poor witless ones, return
> From pasture, fed with wind: and what avails
> For their excuse, they do not see their harm?
> Christ said not to his first conventicle,
> 'Go forth and preach impostures to the world,'
> But gave them truth to build on."
>
> (Dante, 'Par.,' xxix.)

4. The fulfilment of his calling demands the highest qualities—wisdom, sincerity, sympathy, disinterestedness, self-denial, fidelity, courage, zeal, assiduity. 5. The manner of his reception varies (Acts xvii. 34), and tests the character of those to whom he is sent (Matt. x. 11—13; 2 Cor. ii. 16). 6. He must return to him who sent him, and give account, not only of his own conduct, but also of the manner in which they have

treated him and his message (Ezek. xxxiii. 30—33), and the effect produced in their lives. His return takes place in private communion with God on earth, and at "the end of his life" (Heb. xiii. 7). "What answer," etc.?

II. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HEARER of the Word. 1. He receives through the preacher a message from God of unspeakable importance; not, indeed, an announcement of judgment, but a revelation of mercy and of his will concerning him; repentance, faith, and obedience; "all the words of this life" (Acts v. 20). 2. He has the power of considering and understanding it, and of accepting or rejecting it. 3. He is under the strongest obligation to accept and not reject it. 4. He cannot avoid doing the one or the other; indifference, inattention, or procrastination being itself an "answer" little short of positive rejection. 5. Whatever may be his treatment thereof, it is fully known to God. 6. According to the manner in which he treats the message of God, is he justly treated by God, both here and hereafter. "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John xii. 48). "Now therefore advise thyself." "Consider" (1 Sam. xii. 24). "Take heed therefore how ye hear" (Luke viii. 1—18).

III. THE MUTUAL DEPENDENCE OF PREACHER AND HEARER. 1. On the preacher, his character, adaptation, diligence (as well as on himself), depend the hearer's acceptance of the message and his spiritual benefit. 2. On the hearer, his attention, acceptance, obedience (as well as himself), depend the preacher's efficiency, success, and present joy. "That they may do this [watch, etc.] with joy, and not with grief; for this were unprofitable for you" (Heb. xiii. 17). 3. The relation in which they stand to each other will fully appear in the light of the great day; when the salvation of the hearer will be clearly seen to have been connected with the faithful labours of the preacher (Dan. xii. 3), and the reward of the preacher will be *proportioned* to his success (and not merely to his fidelity). "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?" etc. (1 Thess. ii. 19, 20; 1 John ii. 28). 4. For his own benefit, therefore (as well as that of the hearer), the preacher should seek that the hearer may be believing, obedient, and fruitful in good works (1 Thess. iii. 2; v. 12, 13). 5. For his own benefit, also, the hearer should seek that the preacher may be faithful and successful. 6. Each should pray for the blessing of God upon the other, so that the proper end of preaching and hearing may be accomplished.—D.

Ver. 14 (1 Chron. xxi. 13).—(THE KING'S PALACE.) *Submission to Divine chastisement.* "Let us now fall into the hand of Jehovah." Already David had been convinced of his sin. He had also confessed it and sought forgiveness. Nor had he done so in vain. But, as formerly (ch. xii. 10—12), so now, the (temporal) penalties of sin must follow. Throughout he exhibited a spirit the exact reverse of that in which he had numbered the people. Consider—

I. THE CHASTISEMENT OF SIN which was laid before him. 1. It was consequent upon his sin, and *adapted* to its correction. A vain-glorious pride and warlike policy result (in the providence of God, sometimes by means which can be clearly seen) in the destruction of human life; not only directly by war (Matt. xxvi. 52), but also by famine (through lack of proper cultivation of the soil, wasting consumption of its produce, etc.) and by pestilence (to which both contribute); and are rebuked and chastised thereby (Rev. vi. 4—8). 2. It was a necessity, from which there was no escape. He and his people *must* suffer, according to the fixed and just method of the Divine procedure, for the vindication of the honour of God and the promotion of their own welfare. Herein no choice is left. 3. But it was also *optional*, within certain limits (Jer. xxxiv. 17). "Every example, public or private, of a sin brought face to face with its suffering, presents an aspect of choice as well as of compulsion. The mere question of confession or denial, with the consequences of either, is such an alternative in the case of individual wrong-doing. The adoption of this expedient rather than that, in the way of avoidance or mitigation of consequences, is an alternative" (C. J. Vaughan). Why was such a choice submitted to him? To test his character; to deepen his sense of sin, by the consideration of its terrible effects; to induce the open acknowledgment of his guilt; to perfect his submission; "to give him some encouragement under the correction, letting him know that God did not cast him out of communion with himself, but that still his secret was with him; and in afflicting him he

considered his frame, and what he could best bear" (Matthew Henry). 4. And it caused him great *distress;* all the greater because he was required, not merely to submit passively to chastisement, but to choose the form thereof, and thus make it, in some sense, his own. "All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous, but grievous," etc. (Heb. xii. 11).

II. THE SPIRIT OF SUBMISSION which he displayed. "Is it a choice made? or, is it a choice referred back to the offerer? Is it, 'I choose pestilence'? or is it, 'Let God choose'? Whatever the application, the principle stands steadfast—In everything let me be in God's hand; whether for the choice of my punishment, or for the infliction of it, he shall be my Judge; for his mercies are great—greater than man's; the more free his choice, the more direct his dealing, the better is it for the man, the better is it for the nation that must suffer." "And David chose for himself the mortality [death]" (LXX.); "that affliction which is common to kings and to their subjects, and in which the fear was equal on all sides" (Josephus). Of famine and war, with their untold miseries, he had had experience, not of pestilence. By the former he would become dependent on men (for the sustaining or the sparing of life); by the latter, more directly on God; and whilst "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel," his "anger endureth but a moment" (Ps. xxx. 5), and "his mercies are great." The spirit evinced is one of: 1. Self-abasement, before the majesty of the supreme King and Judge. 2. Self-abnegation; with noble disinterestedness, setting aside all care for his personal safety, and enduring, in common with the meanest of his subjects, the just chastisement of Heaven. His position might secure him against suffering and death by famine and "the sword of his enemies;" not by "the sword of the Lord" (1 Chron. xxi. 12)—

> "The pestilence that walketh in darkness,
> And the sickness that wasteth at noonday."
> (Ps. xci. 6.)

3. Self-surrender; the sacrifice of his own will to the will of God (1 Sam. iii. 18; ch. xv. 23—29; Ps. cxxxi.).

> "And in his will is our tranquillity:
> It is the mighty ocean, whither tends
> Whatever it creates and nature makes."
> (Dante, 'Par.,' iii.)

"Though he slay me," etc. (Job xiii. 15). "If Christ stood with a drawn sword in his hand pointed at my breast, yet would I rush into his arms" (Luther). 4. Confidence in the abounding mercy of God. For he is not like man, ignorant, inconsiderate, unjust, wilful, selfish, cruel, and malicious; but knows all things (the secrets of the heart, the force of temptation, the sincerity of penitence, the reality of love), is considerate (of human infirmities, Isa. lvii. 16), righteous, "merciful, and gracious," etc. (Exod. xxxiv. 6), very pitiful (Ps. ciii. 13, 14), mitigates affliction (Isa. xxvii. 8), mingles with it many consolations, and "repents him of the evil" (Jonah iv. 4; 1 Sam. xv. 29; ver. 16). Such trust is the spring of true submission, and it is fully justified by the event. 5. Co-operation with the merciful and holy purposes of God in relation to the moral welfare of those whom he afflicts. The selfishness of men in famine and their cruelty in war tend to evoke rebellion, wrath, and retaliation; the recognition of "the mighty hand of God" (Jas. iv. 10; 1 Pet. v. 6) tends to produce lowly obedience, tenderness, and kindness. 6. Concern for the welfare of the nation, which would suffer less by the last than by the first two of the calamities; and: 7. Zeal for the interests of religion and the glory of God. "Let thy Name be magnified for ever" (ch. vii. 26). "When the apostle said to the Hebrews that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, does it not contradict the decision of David? By no means. The apostle meant to speak of those who fall *without repentance* into the hands of God for punishment; but, in a penitent disposition, nothing is so sweet as to fall into the loving and most gracious hands of the living God" (Du Bosc).—D.

Vers. 15, 16 (1 Chron. xxi. 14, 15).—(JEBUSALEM.) *Pestilence.* Pestilence, even more than famine and war, was regarded by David as directly inflicted by the hand of God. How far, in this instance, it occurred in connection with secondary causes is unknown.

But doubtless, ordinarily, it depends on such causes; the crowding together of great numbers of people, the accumulation of filth, the state of the atmosphere, the susceptibilities of the persons affected by it. "The peculiar source of the thought that a numbering of the people brought mischief lies probably in the experience that epidemic sicknesses often broke out in such numberings, because therein a great mass of people was crowded together, to facilitate the business, in a proportionally small space" (Thenius). Most of the great plagues that have afflicted mankind appear to have originated in the East, where the climate, the soil, and the social habits of the population afford conditions favourable to their production. In all cases, however, the hand of God must be recognized in the consequences of violating his laws, physical and moral; and in the employment of them "for correction." Consider—

I. ITS MOURNFUL PREVALENCE; as at this time in Israel, so in other ages and nations (Exod. xii. 29; Numb. xxv. 9; 2 Kings xix. 35; Jer. xxvii. 13). 1. Its sudden appearance. 2. Its rapid diffusion; "from the morning to the [a] time appointed [the time of assembly]." "It burst upon the people with supernatural strength and violence, that it might be seen at once to be a direct judgment from God" (Keil). 3. Its extensive presence; "from Dan to Beersheba." 4. Its dreadful destructiveness; "seventy thousand men" (fourteen in the thousand of the whole population). "Such a pestilence and loss of life as this [at Athens, 430 B.C.] was nowhere remembered to have happened" (Thucydides, ii. 47). At Rome (A.D. 80) ten thousand perished daily; in England (1348) more than half the population; in London (1603) over thirty thousand; and again (August, 1665) eight thousand persons weekly. These are only a few of the many recorded instances of the awful "visitation of God."

II. ITS MERCIFUL ARREST. "And the angel" (1 Sam. xxix. 9; ch. xiv. 17; xix. 27; Ps. civ. 4; xxxiv. 7; xxxv. 5; xci. 11), who had been "destroying through all the territories of Israel" (1 Chron. xxi. 12), "stretched out his hand" (having a drawn sword therein, 1 Chron. xxi. 6) "upon Jerusalem to destroy it," etc. The pestilence approached the city, threatening its destruction, and filling all hearts with terror (1 Chron. xxi. 16, 20). We can conceive that it might have spread until the whole human race perished. But its destructive force was limited (as it always is): 1. When its purpose was accomplished and the law of retribution satisfied. "It is enough." 2. By the same Divine power as sent it. "Stay now thine hand." God has placed in the human constitution a self-healing power. "Our natures are the physicians of our diseases" (Hippocrates). He provides special remedies for special diseases; alleviates and often cures them in unexpected, extraordinary, and mysterious ways. The Christian religion is a remedial system by which mortality itself is "swallowed up of life." "I am Jehovah thy Physician" (Exod. xv. 26; Matt. viii. 16; John iii. 14, 15; Rev. xxii. 2). 3. With tender pity toward the afflicted, involving a change of his procedure. "And Jehovah repented him of the evil" (1 Sam. xv. 24—31). 4. In connection with the moral condition of men and their altered relation to himself—humiliation (ver. 10), trust (ver. 14), and prayer (ver. 17). "Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces" (1 Chron. xxi. 16), their spirit being doubtless shared in by the people, whose representatives they were. God deals with men according to the state of their hearts (ver. 1), and commences doing so even before it is fully expressed in outward actions. Ps. xci. ("by David," LXX.), 'Under the shadow of the Almighty.'

> "Because he hath set his love upon me,
> Therefore will I deliver him," etc.
>
> (Ps. xci. 14.)

"Some years ago an eminent physician in St. Petersburg recommended this psalm as the best preservative against cholera" (Perowne).

III. ITS MORAL USES, with respect to those who suffer from it or to mankind generally, in: 1. Producing efficient impressions of the majesty of God; his sovereignty, justice, and might. 2. Proving the real condition of the hearts of men; whether they will "keep his commandments or no" (Deut. viii. 3). 3. Inducing, in those who are rightly disposed, proper feelings of penitence, humility, dependence, submission; and correcting vanity, pride, and self-will. 4. Inciting a purer and loftier trust in God, and more complete devotion and self-sacrifice. "Plagues to us are not funerals of terror,

but exercises of holiness. We understand their meaning. They are messages sent to us by God, to explore our hearts, to sound the depth of our love to him, and to fathom our faith in God" (Cyprian, 'De Mortalitate'). 5. Presenting a terrible picture of the evil of sin, by exhibiting, not only the natural consequences thereof, but also its degrading effect on the ignorant and unbelieving, who pass rapidly from the extreme of fear to the opposite extreme of recklessness, licentiousness, and despair (1 Cor. xv. 32). "So they resolved to take their enjoyment quickly, and with a sole view to gratification; regarding their lives and their riches alike as things of a day. And fear of gods or law of men there was none to stop them" (Thucydides). 6. Teaching the solidarity of the race; and, more especially, constraining "the higher and more privileged ranks of mankind to own their oneness of life with the humbler and more degraded or even savage classes" (Bushnell). 7. Promoting, in still other ways, the advancement of mankind in knowledge, virtue, and piety; for it is through the discipline of suffering that the race, like the individual, "learns obedience." "The Lord's dealing herein is not penal, but paternal and medicinal" (Guild).—D.

Vers. 17—19 (1 Chron. xxi. 16—19).—(ZION.) *Self-devotion.* "These sheep, what have they done?" etc. (ver. 17). As through one man many suffer, so through one man many are delivered from suffering and greatly benefited. This is especially the case when, like David, he is their head and representative, the shepherd of the flock of God (ver. 17; ch. v. 2). His numbering the people in a spirit of self-exaltation was the occasion (not the cause, ver. 1) of the pestilence; his *intercession* for them in a spirit of self-devotion is now the means in connection with which the calamity is limited in its duration (from three days to nine hours) and wholly removed (ver. 25). Already, with an "awful rose of dawn," the agent of destruction goes forth on his mission, and a "great cry" of distress reaches the city (Exod. xii. 30). Then the king gathers the elders together (at the tabernacle and before the curtained ark, ch. vii. 2; xii. 20; xv. 25; adjoining the palace in Zion, ch. v. 7); they are clothed with sackcloth, and overwhelmed with fear and grief (1 Chron. xxi. 16; ch. xii. 16; xv. 30); and at length, "about the time of assembly," or evening oblation (Acts iii. 1), there appears (beyond the Tyropœan Valley) on Mount Moriah (2 Chron. iii. 1), "by the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite" (just outside the city), "the angel of the Lord standing between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem;" and they "fell upon their faces" in humiliation before the Lord. "Significantly, it was as the Divine command of mercy sped to arrest the arm of the angel-messenger of the judgment, that he became visible to David and his companions in prayer" (Edersheim). "As in 2 Kings vi. 17 the source of seeing the heavenly powers was in Elisha, and by his mediation the eyes of his servant were opened, so here the flight of David's mind communicated itself to the elders of his retinue, whom he collected about him; and, after he had repaired to the place where he saw the vision, was revealed even to the sons of Araunah" (Hengstenberg). "And David said unto God," etc. "And Gad came *that day* to David," etc. (ver. 18; 1 Chron. xxi. 18). Here is—

I. A FEARFUL VISION OF JUDGMENT impending over the people. This judgment may be regarded as representing that to which nations are exposed in this world, and individuals both here and hereafter; real, terrible and imminent; the result and reflection of human sin and guilt, which

> "Blackens in the cloud,
> Flashes across its mass the jagged fire,
> Whirls in the whirlwind and pollutes the air,
> Turns all the joyous melodies of earth
> To murmurings of doom."
>
> (Talfourd.)

1. Similar judgment has been already executed (ver. 15; Jude 7; Rom. v. 12; Rev. ii. 11; xxi. 8). "The wages of sin is death." 2. Solemn warnings of its certain and speedy approach have been repeatedly given (vers. 13, 17; 2 Pet. ii. 3; 1 Thess. v. 2, 3). 3. Only a few persons have any adequate impression thereof; whilst they behold "the wrath to come," the rest are blind and unconcerned, immersed in the pleasures and

cares of this life (Luke xxi. 34; Matt. vii. 14). 4. They whose eyes are opened are naturally impelled to seek the salvation of themselves and others, and are under the obligation of doing so (Jude 22, 23). "Take a censer," etc.; "and he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed" (Numb. xvi. 46—68; Joel ii. 17).

II. A FERVENT ENTREATY FOR THE PEOPLE, that they may be spared. In his intercession for them (1 Sam. xii. 23; xv. 10, 11, 35) David: 1. Takes the burden of their guilt upon himself; whilst he recognizes his responsibility, openly confesses his transgression in "commanding the people to be numbered" (1 Chron. xxi. 17), and honours the justice of God in inflicting punishment; he "forgets their sin is his own," regarding them, "not indeed as free from every kind of blame, but only from the sin which God was punishing by pestilence" (Keil). "Many of those sheep were wolves to David. What had they done? They had done that which was the occasion of David's sin and the cause of their own punishment; but that gracious penitent knew his own sin; he knew not theirs" (Hall). 2. Feels a tender compassion for them in their misery and danger. His language "shows the high opinion he had of them, the great affection he had for them, and his sympathy with them in this time of distress" (Gill). 3. Offers himself freely, and his "father's house" (his life and all his most cherished hopes) to the stroke, that it may be averted from his people. "Hitherto David offered not himself to the plague, because, as Chrysostom conjectureth, he still expected and made account of himself to be taken away in the plague, but now seeing that it was God's will to spare him, he doth voluntarily offer himself" (Willet). 4. Urges an effectual plea on their behalf; not merely that they are blameless (in comparison with himself), and may be righteously spared, but that they are the chosen flock of the Divine Shepherd, whose mercies are great, whose promises to them are numerous and faithful, and whose glory they are designed to promote in the earth (1 Sam. xii. 22; Ps. lxxiv. 1; xcv. 7). "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (Gen. xviii. 23); "Yet now if thou wilt forgive their sin," etc. (Exod. xxxii. 32; 1 Kings xviii. 36; Dan. ix. 3); "I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ on behalf of my brethren," etc. (Rom. ix. 3); "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke xxiii. 34); "The good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John x. 11); "He ever liveth to make intercession" (Heb. vii. 27). "In his hands intercessory prayer is the refuge of the guilty, the hope of the penitent, a mysterious chain fastened to the throne of God, the stay and support of a sinking world."

III. A FAVOURABLE ANSWER FROM THE LORD. Although David sees not the interposition of God, by which the hand of the angel is stayed, yet his prayer "availeth much in its working" (Jas. v. 16). "And the angel of the Lord [now transformed from a minister of wrath into a minister of mercy] commanded Gad [who previously announced the message of judgment] to say," etc. (1 Chron. xxi. 18); "And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar," etc.; "And David went up as the Lord commanded" (vers. 18, 19). The answer is propitious; a sign of Divine reconciliation. But why the command to rear an altar, instead of the direct assurance of forgiveness (ch. xii. 13)? 1. To show forth to all the people (who confess by their elders and representatives that they have part in the king's transgression) that forgiveness is possible only in connection with sacrifice, wherein justice and mercy are alike exhibited. 2. To call forth their renewed and open obedience and self-devotion. 3. To give there a public sign of the Divine acceptance and removal of the judgment (1 Chron. xxi. 26, 27). 4. To establish a new and permanent centre of Divine worship, in fulfilment of previous promises (ch. vii. 13); so overruling the evil for good, and turning the curse into a blessing (1 Chron. xxii. 1). This was a turning-point in the history of the nation; and henceforth the service of the tabernacle began to be superseded by that of the temple.

CONCLUSION. Let it be remembered that the intercession of Christ (unlike that of David) is the intercession of the Innocent for the guilty; that he is also himself the Altar, "which sanctifieth the gift," and "the Propitiation for our sins;" and that in dependence upon him, as well as after his example and in his spirit, all our prayers and "spiritual sacrifices" must be presented unto God.—D.

Vers. 20—23 (1 Chron. xxi. 18—23).—(MORIAH.) *Araunah the Jebusite.* Araunah (Aravnah, Avarnah, Aranyah, Ornan) was: 1. A *Gentile* by birth; almost the last relic

of the Canaanitish tribe whose fortress was taken nearly thirty years before (ch. v. 6). "He was not slain by David in the siege of Jerusalem, because of the good will he bore to the Hebrews, and a particular benignity and affection which he had to the king himself" (Josephus); with whom, during his exile, he may have become acquainted. 2. A *proselyte* to the faith of Israel (ver. 23). "There was no other people who were specially called the people of God; but they (the Jews) cannot deny that there have been certain men of other nations, who belonged, not by earthly but heavenly fellowship, to the true Israelites, the citizens of the country that is above" (Augustine). 3. A *prosperous owner* of property on the hill Moriah (at that time outside the city), where he had his threshing-floor, and dwelt with his four sons. His prosperity was due, not merely to his own industry, but chiefly to his friendship with David and his people. 4. A *partaker of the sufferings*, as well as the privileges, of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Whilst occupied in threshing wheat (by means of sledges drawn by oxen), it was given him to see the supernatural messenger of wrath (1 Chron. xxi. 20); and "his four sons with him, hid themselves" from fear. 5. A *loyal subject*; respectful, courteous (ver. 20), and grateful for the king's visit to him in his threshing-floor (ver. 21). "It was a piece of condescension to be marvelled at; and the language expresses a desire to know his pleasure concerning him, supposing it must be something very urgent and important" (Gill). 6. A *generous donor* and public-spirited man (ver. 22). "All does Araunah, O king, give to the king" (ver. 23). "His liberality and princely munificence is registered to all after-ages in the Holy Scripture; what is done by a pious heart to the honour and worship of God shall never want its own reward and blessed remembrance; as was the breaking of the box of precious ointment" (Guild). 7. A *devout worshipper* of God. "Jehovah thy God accept thee." 8. A *ready helper* toward the building of the altar and temple of God. 9. A *pattern* to Christians. 10. A *pre-intimation* of the willing homage of the Gentile world to Christ (ch. xxii. 50); an earnest or firstfruits of the harvest (Ps. lxxii. 10, 11). "In every place incense shall be offered," etc. (Mal. i. 11).—D.

Ver. 24 (1 Chron. xxi. 24, 25).—(MORIAH.) *Personal sacrifice.* "And I will not offer unto Jehovah my God of that which doth cost me nothing." The gift of Araunah would have enabled David to perform a religious service in a cheap and inexpensive manner. But, (1) humbly recognizing the obligations that rested upon him, and animated by a spirit of self-devotion, (2) he nobly repudiates an offering which would have been, not really his own, but another's; or rendering to God a selfish and mercenary service; "which rebukes and condemns the avaricious disposition of many in this age, who can part with nothing for the maintenance of God's worship or promoting religion or any good work" (Guild). "It is a heartless piety of those base-minded Christians that care only to serve God good-cheap" (Hall). (3) He also generously resolves (acting toward the Divine King of Israel in the same spirit as Araunah acted toward himself) to purchase all that was required at "the full price," and thus serve God at his own cost, with self-denial and self-sacrifice. "And David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver" (1 Chron. xxi., "the place," the whole hill perhaps, for "six hundred shekels of gold by weight"). The principle applies not only to gifts of money (ch. viii. 11); but also to the employment of thought, effort, time, talents, relationships, influence; the renunciation of ease, pleasure, convenience, name, and fame; the endurance of privation, pain, opposition, dishonour, and shame; its highest application is to the "whole burnt offering" of a man himself (heart, soul, will), which virtually includes all other offerings, and without which they are vain. "What a change it would make in the Christian world if Christians of all sorts would put this question seriously to their souls, 'Shall I serve God with that which costs me nothing?'" (Manton, xxii. 94). Personal sacrifice is: 1. *Enjoined by the express commands of God.* "None shall appear before me empty" (Exod. xxxiv. 20); "Every man as he is able," etc. (Deut. xvi. 16); "It shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein. Neither from a stranger's hand," etc. (Lev. xxii. 21, 25). Men were required to offer what was valuable, not worthless; what was their own, not another's. Even the poorest were not exempt. Self-denial is also "the law of Christ" (Mark viii. 34; x. 21—27). 2. *Incited by the supreme claims of God;* arising from his greatness and goodness, his ownership of all things (1 Chron. xxix. 14), his mani-

fold mercies (ver. 14), above all, the unspeakable Gift of his only Son (Rom. viii. 32; xii. 1). 3. *Expressive of a right feeling toward God.* Reverence, gratitude, love, self-consecration, holy zeal (John xii. 3). "Everything depends on the predominant principle and purpose. If a man's prime feeling be that of self, he will go the easiest and most economic way to work and worship; if a man's prime feeling be that of God, he will rebuke all thoughts of cheapness and facility. In the first case, he will seek the largest possible results from the least possible expenditure; in the second, the expenditure will be itself the result. Now, it is the end and essence of all religion to turn the mind from self to God; to give it absorbing views of the Divine beauty and glory; to fill it with Divine love and zeal; to make it feel honoured in honouring God, blessed in blessing him; to make it feel that nothing is good enough or great enough for him; and when the mind is thus affected and thus possessed, it will understand and share the spirit of David's resolve" (A. J. Morris, 'The Unselfish Offering'). 4. *Essential to the true service of God;* for this depends not so much upon the form or amount of the offering as upon its relation to the offerer; its being the genuine expression of the heart (as it professes to be); without which the service is formal, unreal, and insincere. That which costs nothing is worth nothing (Mal. i. 8; Isa. i. 11; Ps. li. 16, 17). 5. *Necessary to the assured acceptance of God.* It alone is attended with the sign and sense of his approval (1 Chron. xxi. 26). 6. *Conducive to the proper honour of God* amongst men; in whom it begets a spirit like its own. 7. *Embodied in highest perfection in Christ;* "who gave himself up for us, an Offering and a Sacrifice to God," etc. (Eph. v. 2). "A Spanish proverb says, 'Let that which is lost be for God.' The father of a family, making his will and disposing of his goods upon his death-bed, ordained concerning a certain cow which had strayed, and had been now for a long time missing, if it were found it should be for his children, if otherwise for God. Whenever men would give to God only the lame and blind, that which costs them nothing, that from which they hope no good, no profit, no pleasure to themselves, what are they saying in their hearts but that which this man said openly, 'Let that which is lost be for God'?" (Trench, 'Proverbs').—D.

Ver. 25 (1 Chron. xxi. 26—30; xxii. 1).—(MORIAH.) *The new altar.* "And David built there an altar unto Jehovah," etc. 1. An altar was *a place of sacrifice* (Gen. iv. 3, 4; viii. 20; xxii. 14); consisting (according to Divine direction, Exod. xx. 24, 25) of earth or unhewn stone, and constituting (according to Divine assurance) a point of meeting or reconciliation between God and men; the offerings which it sustained and sanctified (and with which it was identical in purpose) being of divers kinds, symbolic of certain truths, and expressive of various feelings on the part of those who brought them. It was a prime necessity of religious worship in ancient time; the appointed way of access to God; the table at which Divinity and humanity held fellowship with one another. 2. The altar erected by David on the threshing-floor of Araunah marks the commencement of a new chapter in the history of the kingdom of God *under the old covenant.* Heretofore sacrifice was offered in different places (1 Sam. i. 3; ii. 33; vi. 15; vii. 9, 17; ix. 12; xi. 15; xiv. 35; xvi. 3; xx. 6; ch. vi. 13, 17; xv. 12); and the requirement of the Law (Deut. xii. 13, 14) was imperfectly fulfilled, in consequence of the unsettled condition of the nation and the disorganized state of religious worship (1 Kings iii. 2). Whilst the ark was at Jerusalem, "the altar of the burnt offering" remained at Gibeon (1 Chron. xxi. 29, 30); and although not finally abandoned till some time after (1 Kings iii. 4), it henceforth began to be superseded by *the new altar,* which was divinely appointed and consecrated by fire from heaven (1 Chron. xxi. 26), and chosen by Jehovah (Deut. xii. 15) as the place of his worship, the central sanctuary for succeeding ages. "Now when King David saw that God had heard his prayer, and had graciously accepted of his sacrifice, he resolved to call that entire place *the altar of all the people*" (Josephus). "And David said, This is the house of the Lord God," etc. (1 Chron. xxii. 1, 2; Gen. xxviii. 17); "And Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David," etc. (2 Chron. iii. 1). Ps. xxx., inscription: 'A song at the dedication of the house' (see Hengstenberg). "I will extol thee, O Lord," etc.

> "And as for me—I had said, in my prosperity,
> I shall not be moved for ever," etc.
>
> (Ps. xxxi. 6—10.)

3. The chief interest for us of this altar (as of every other) arises from the fact that it was not merely symbolic of spiritual truth, but also typical of its embodiment *in Christ*—the Altar (as well as the Offering and the Offerer), the new and only true (Heb. vii. 2), perfect, effectual, central, universal, and enduring Altar and Temple (John ii. 21), where God records his name, and where we draw nigh to God, offer spiritual sacrifices, and find acceptance with him. It was "a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Col. ii. 17). "We have an altar [his cross and sacrifice], whereof they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle" (Heb. xiii. 10). Consider, with this reference—

I. THE ERECTION OF THE ALTAR, as (in connection with the offerings, apart from which it cannot be fully contemplated): 1. *Rendered necessary* by human sin, through the temptation of Satan; estrangement from God through pride and disobedience to his Law; exposure to condemnation and death (Heb. ix. 22). 2. *Ordained* by Divine wisdom and love, "before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. i. 20), in order to the remission of sins and the restoration of sinners to the fellowship of God (Heb. ix. 26). 3. *Adapted* to the fulfilment of that purpose; by the atonement there made (ch. xxi. 3; Lev. i. 4; Isa. liii. 6; John i. 29; 1 John ii. 2; 2 Cor. v. 19; Gal. iii. 13); by the exhibition of the duty, sinfulness, and desert of men, and the sovereignty, righteousness, and mercy of God (Rom. iii. 21—26). "When sinful souls approached the altar of God, where dwelt his holiness, their sinful nature came between them and God, and atonement served the purpose of covering their sins, of cancelling the charges on which they were arraigned" (Küper). 4. *Designed* to do away with every other altar and to afford free access to God for all people in all places and ages (Isa. lvi. 7; John iv. 23; Eph. ii. 18). The language in which the death of Christ is described in the New Testament is derived from the sacrifices of the former dispensation, and can only be properly understood by some acquaintance with them. It is no longer needful or possible to *set up an altar* (according to a common mode of expression), except in the sense of recognizing, approaching, and making known "the altar of God" which is set up in Christ Jesus (Ps. xliii. 4; John xiv. 6). "Let us draw near," etc. (Heb. x. 22).

II. THE OFFERINGS PRESENTED THERE. "And offered burnt offerings and peace offerings" (1 Sam. i. 3; ch. vi. 17—19). In becoming himself an Offering (Isa. liii. 12) and Propitiation for our sins (complete and incapable of being repeated or rendered more efficacious), Christ displayed a spirit (Heb. x. 5—7) in which (coming to him with penitence, ver. 10, and faith) we must participate, and thus "offer up spiritual sacrifices," etc. (1 Pet. ii. 5). 1. The free, entire, and continual surrender (ver. 14) and dedication of ourselves, spirit, soul, and body, to God (Rom. xii. 1). 2. Prayers, supplications and intercessions (ver. 17; Judg. xx. 26; Ps. li. 17; cxli. 2). "And the Lord Jehovah was *entreated* for the land." "Sacrifice is in the main embodied prayer." 3. "The sacrifice of praise" (Heb. xiii. 15). 4. Holy obedience (ver. 19), generous gifts (ver. 24), and benevolent activities. "To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. xiii. 16; Phil. iv. 18). "The altar is not to stand in its beauty and stateliness a solemn, unapproachable thing, on which we may reverently gaze, but which we may not touch without sacrilege. It is for use; its broad summit is to be laden with oblations and crowded with victims; it stands in the midst of us; it accompanies us wherever we wander, that it may invite our offerings, and be always ready to receive what we should always be ready to give" (Ps. iv. 5; xxvi. 6; cxviii. 27).

III. THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE OFFERER. "Jehovah thy God accept thee" (ver. 23); "And the plague was stayed from Israel." Christ's offering was well-pleasing to God; and we are accepted in him (Eph. v. 2; i. 6, 7). 1. There is now no condemnation (Rom. viii. 1; Heb. x. 16—18). The sword is put up again into the sheath thereof. 2. The presence, favour, and sanctifying power of God are manifested to us (Acts ii. 3, 4). 3. Peace with God, and "the communion of the Holy Ghost," are vouchsafed to us. 4. And we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. v. 1, 2; Eph. ii. 19—22; Rev. xxi. 3, 4).

> "Thou didst turn for me my mourning into dancing;
> Thou didst put off my sackcloth, and didst gird me with joy;
> To the end that my glory should sing praise to thee, and not be silent.
> O Jehovah my God, for ever will I give thanks unto thee."
>
> (Ps. xxx. 11, 12.)

CONCLUSION. 1. "Jesus Christ is the Object of the two Testaments: of the Old, its expectancy; of the New, its model; of both, the centre" (Pascal). As in every part of the country there is a way which leads to the metropolis, so in every part of Scripture there is a way which leads to Christ. 2. The method of human salvation has always been the same in the mind of God; but it has been gradually revealed to the mind of man; and wherever faith has been exercised in God, in so far as he has revealed his saving purposes, it has been accounted for righteousness. 3. "To the cross of Christ all eternity looked forward; to the cross of Christ all eternity will look back. With reference to it all other objects were created and are still preserved; and every event that takes place in heaven, earth, and hell is directed and overruled" (Payson). 4. "Wherefore, receiving a kingdom," etc. (Heb. xii. 28). "Now the God of peace," etc. (Heb. xiii. 20, 21).—D.

Ver. 10.—*Sinful numbering.* This is part of a narrative which presents various serious difficulties. The chief is that which arises from the statement that God moved David to commit the sin for which he afterwards punished him. In 1 Chron. xxi. 1 the instigator is said to be Satan, or "an adversary;" and it is possible to translate here ('Speaker's Commentary') "one moved David." Still, the translation in our English versions (both Authorized and Revised) is more natural. The statement reminds us of Numb. xxii. 20, 22, and is probably susceptible of a similar explanation. God gives permission to men who indulge sinful desires to gratify their desires. He says "Go" when they strongly desire to do so, and thus punishes them by allowing them to sin, and then inflicting the penalty due to such sin. Moreover, the sacred writers speak more freely than we are accustomed to do of the agency of God in connection with the sins of men (see ch. xii. 11; xvi. 10; Exod. vii. 3; 1 Sam. xxvi. 19; 1 Kings xxii. 20—23; Ezek. xiv. 9, 10; Mark iv. 12; 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12). Our Lord teaches us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," which implies that God may thus lead men. However, if David knew that in some sense God had bidden him number the people, he none the less felt that the sin of the proceeding was great, and that it was *his own*.

I. DAVID'S SIN. In what did it consist? As the narrative does not explain, and no law or statement of the Scriptures can be adduced in explanation, it is impossible to answer the question satisfactorily. That there was sin in the numbering of the people at this time, the strong remonstrance of the by-no-means-over-scrupulous or pious Joab (ver. 3) makes manifest. It may have been done in a spirit of pride and vain-glory, that the king might delight himself in the contemplation of the greatness of his armed forces. For it should be noted that only those that "drew the sword" (ver. 9) were counted. The kings of Israel were not, like other monarchs, to trust in the multitude of their armed men, but in their God, who could save or give victory by many or by few (1 Sam. xiv. 6; 2 Chron. xiv. 11). Possibly David may have had ulterior designs that were opposed to the will of God. He may have proposed to himself to reduce the people, as into more complete unity, so into more slavish subjection to the throne (comp. 1 Sam. viii. 11—18); or he may have had designs of unjust aggression on other peoples. Similar sins are committed: 1. When men reckon up their achievements or possessions, or the number of their servants and retainers, in a spirit of pride, self-satisfaction, or false confidence (Dan. iv. 30). 2. When they sum up their wealth, not to consider how they may best employ it for the good of men and the glory of God, but to frame schemes of sinful indulgence (Luke xii. 19). 3. When the calculation of numbers or resources is made in order to determine the safety or otherwise of perpetrating or continuing some injustice to others. Rulers increasing and reckoning their hosts, etc., with a view to unjust wars, or the suppression of the liberties, or other violation of the rights, of their subjects. 4. When numbers are counted, instead of arguments weighed, previous to adopting a religious or political creed, or to obtain encouragement in the practice of any wickedness (John vii. 48; Exod. xxiii. 2).

II. DAVID'S REPENTANCE. It was long in coming—so long as to excite our amazement. It included: 1. Conviction. "His heart smote him." His conscience accused him. He saw the greatness of his sin and folly. Sin is always folly, though folly is not always sin (see on ch. xiii. 13). 2. Humble confession made to God. 3. Earnest prayer for pardon.

III. HIS PUNISHMENT. The reply to his prayer was not such as he may have hoped.

The Prophet Gad was sent to him, not to assure him of pardon, but to offer him a choice of punishments (vers. 12, 13). He chose pestilence, as being more immediately from "the hand of the Lord," whose "mercies are great." Accordingly, a terrible plague fell on the people, destroying seventy thousand men in less, apparently, than one day. For although three days had been named as the duration of the pestilence, the time was evidently shortened, and the plague ceased as it threatened to destroy Jerusalem (ver. 16). To that extent the prayers of David (vers. 10, 17), and the sacrifices which he hastened to offer by direction of the prophet, prevailed. The king had sinned; the punishment fell on the people. David felt and pleaded the incongruity (ver. 17). What can we say respecting it? 1. *It is according to a universal law of Divine procedure.* The difficulty meets us everywhere. Subjects suffer on account of the sins, and even the mistakes, of their rulers; children, of their parents; and, more widely, the innocent, because of the sins and follies of others. It is useless to argue against facts. 2. *Events which are judgments to the guilty are simple trials to the innocent, and may be unspeakable blessings.* When the godly are struck down with others in a time of general calamity they exchange earth for heaven.

> "The sword, the pestilence, or fire,
> Shall but fulfil their best desire;
> From sins and sorrows set them free,
> And bring thy children, Lord, to thee."
>
> (Watts.)

3. *In this case the people suffered for sins of their own.* It was because "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel" for their sins (ver. 1), that David's sin was permitted and its punishment inflicted. Many other cases would admit of a similar explanation. 4. *Although the calamity which fell on the nation was great, a greater would have been the death of its sovereign by the plague.* 5. *David suffered severely in the destruction of so many of his subjects.* If his sin was that of pride in the number whom he ruled and could lead to war, the punishment corresponded to the sin. He was made to feel how soon God could deprive him of that in which he boasted. 6. When all has been thought and said that is possible, it is for us (1) to recognize that God's ways are necessarily beyond our comprehension—we are soon out of our depth as we contemplate them; (2) to cherish undoubting confidence in his wisdom, righteousness, and love in all his proceedings, whether they are discernible by us or not. Such confidence is required and justified by what we do distinctly know of him; and it is the only way to settled peace in a world so full of misery and mystery. 7. Let us *carefully avoid sin*, not only because it is evil in itself and will bring pain and sorrow to ourselves, but because others will inevitably be involved in the consequences of our conduct. Many children are sufferers for life through the wickedness of their parents.—G. W.

Ver. 13.—*Pressing for an answer to God's message.* "Advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me." These words of Gad to David might well be addressed by religious teachers, and especially ministers of the gospel, to those whom they instruct. Notice—

I. GOD'S MESSENGERS. "Him that sent me." 1. *True ministers of Christ are God's messengers.* Their office is not a human invention. They are not mere lecturers, who may choose their own themes and aims; not mere philosophers, free to speculate at will and give the people the result of their speculations; still less mere performers, whose business is to amuse. They are sent of God, by the operations of his Spirit, the guidance of his providence, and the appointment of his Church; and have a definite message from him to their hearers, viz. the gospel (in the wider sense) of Jesus Christ—its revelations, precepts, promises, and threatenings. In delivering this message, they have a definite end to seek—the salvation of their hearers. He who is not convinced that he is God-sent—"inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon him this office and ministration" (Prayer-book)—ought not to assume it. 2. *They should cherish a due sense of their position.* Which will keep alive: (1) The feeling of responsibility to God. "As they that must give account" (Heb. xiii. 17). (2) Humility. The consciousness of a Divine mission might tempt them to pride and arrogance, but the consciousness of unworthiness and unfitness for so sacred a work will keep them humble. "Who is sufficient for these

things?" (2 Cor. ii. 16). (3) Care as to what they teach. That it may be the very message of God. "Preach the preaching that I bid thee" (Jonah iii. 2). (4) Care as to the spirit and aim of their teaching. Not to exalt or enrich themselves, or merely please men, but to glorify God and promote the salvation of their hearers (John vii. 18; Gal. i. 10; Col. i. 28). (5) Faith and hope. That he whose messengers they are will guide and support them, give success to their endeavours, and amply reward them. 3. *Hearers should recognize the position of their ministers.* Such recognition will: (1) Regulate their expectations from them. They will not expect them to flatter, or merely entertain, or to suppress unwelcome truths. They will desire them to be faithful to their convictions as to the message God would have them deliver. (2) Induce them to give earnest heed to their instructions and admonitions. Their attitude will be that of Cornelius and his friends (Acts x. 33): "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God;" and, when the words addressed to them are perceived to be Divine truth, they will receive them "not as the word of men, but as the Word of God" (1 Thess. ii. 13), with faith and obedience. (For the opposite spirit and practice, see Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.)

II. THE ALTERNATIVES THEY PRESENT. Happily they have not, like Gad, to offer a choice of fearful calamities, but of: 1. On the one hand, eternal life; commencing now in the enjoyment of pardon and peace, holiness and hope; and perfected in heaven. This to be secured by faith in the Son of God as Saviour and Lord, with corresponding love and obedience. 2. And, on the other, eternal punishment; "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" (Rom. ii. 8, 9); to be assuredly secured by rejection of Christ, and of God in him. These solemn alternatives must not, cannot, be kept out of view by a faithful messenger of God; and the thought of them will give earnestness to his ministrations, and to the treatment of them by his hearers (comp. Deut. xxx. 15—19).

III. THE ANSWER FOR WHICH THEY PRESS. Christian ministers should endeavour as far as possible privately to urge *individuals* to consider what answer they will give to the Divine message, what choice they will make between the alternatives presented to them. This cannot be always done; but in their public addresses they ought to be urgent in pressing their hearers to definite consideration and decision. They should show them: 1. *That an answer has to be given, and that to God,* who searches the heart. That, in fact, they are ever giving a reply; ever choosing the evil, if not the good. 2. *That their answer should be the result of careful consideration.* "Advise, and see;" consider and determine. A great point is gained when men are induced to *consider* the claims of God and their souls. 3. *That such consideration should be prompt.* It is both sinful and perilous to delay. To put off attention to God's message is insulting to him, and may end in his deciding suddenly and unexpectedly for us which of the two alternatives shall be ours. 4. *That they are themselves intensely concerned that the answer given should be that which is alone wise and good* —the hearty acceptance of Christ and salvation. "As though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. v. 20).—G. W.

Ver. 14.—*God's treatment preferred to man's.* David had good reasons for the choice he made. He knew well, from his own treatment of defeated enemies (ch. xii. 31; 1 Chron. xx. 3), how fearfully cruel were conquerors in war in those days, what an awful scourge to his subjects would be the ravages of a victorious invading army. He also doubtless dreaded the disgrace and permanent damage to the kingdom which would be thus wrought, and the dishonour, in the view of the heathen, which would be cast on the Name of Jehovah its God (see Josh. vii. 8, 9). Taking the words in a wider application, they express what will be the natural preference of good men.

I. GROUNDS OF THE PREFERENCE HERE EXPRESSED. 1. *The great mercy of God and the unmercifulness, or limited mercy, of men.* 2. *The righteousness of God and the unrighteousness of men.* We can never be sure that in a particular case righteousness will guide human proceedings; we know that the Divine are always thus guided. Many men are utterly regardless of what is right where their own interests, inclinations, or passions are concerned; and even the best men are liable to fail in respect to pure and constant regard for rectitude. 3. *The knowledge and wisdom of God, and the ignorance and folly of men.* Much of the misconduct and untrustworthiness of

men springs from ignorance and folly. When they mean well, they often do ill through not knowing the actual state of the affairs with which they are called to deal, not taking the trouble, perhaps, to ascertain it; or, when they know it, not understanding how to treat it. But the Divine knowledge and wisdom are perfect. 4. *The power of God and the weakness of men.* Men are often incapable of doing the good they know, and even strongly desire to do; and their weakness often causes them to do mischief while endeavouring to do good. God is Almighty to effect what his wisdom, mercy, and rectitude prompt. 5. *The relation of God to good men.* Their Father, their covenant God. The certainty that he will honour those that honour him, and turn all things, including his own chastisement of them, to their good, and ultimately bring them to eternal glory. The preference will be strong in proportion to the actual contrast between the men with whom we have to do and God. There are some men who are so God-like that we should not be averse to falling into their hands in a considerable variety of circumstances. It would be to a limited extent like falling into the hands of God.

II. CASES IN WHICH THE PREFERENCE WOULD BE EXERCISED. 1. *The endurance of suffering.* As in the text. It is better to suffer from disease than from human violence. The suffering will be easier to bear, more likely to profit, less likely to excite resentment and other evil passions. The infliction will be more tempered with mercy, and promote in a greater degree the ends of mercy. 2. *Judgment of character and actions.* To be judged by God is preferable to being judged by men. Men are often fond of passing judgment, but for the most part very incapable. They commonly judge ignorantly, or from prejudice, and therefore unjustly. They are apt to be wrong alike in their favourable and unfavourable opinions of others. When condemned by them, it is well if we can appeal with confidence to the judgment of God, which is always just. 3. *Forgiveness.* Men forgive reluctantly, in a limited measure, with reserves; and soon grow weary of pardoning the same offender. To pardon "seven times," much more "seventy times seven" (Matt. xviii. 21, 22), seems to them an impossibility. Indeed, repeated offences, as they appear incompatible with real repentance, may justify hesitation to pardon repeatedly, since the state of the offender's heart cannot be known. But God, who knows the heart, discerns where it is true, notwithstanding frequent falls; and, pitying human weakness, forgives many times a day. And his pardons are full and complete. Add that forgiveness from men does not ensure forgiveness from God, and that having the latter we can, if need be, dispense with the former. There is then abundant reason why, in the matter of pardon, we should prefer to have to do with God rather than men. 4. *Spiritual guidance and help.* God has appointed that men should instruct and aid their fellow-men in matters of religion and morals. But those who offer themselves as spiritual guides are fallible, and they differ widely on important points. It is then encouraging and assuring that Divine guidance and help are available. By the devout study of God's holy Word, and earnest prayer for the Holy Spirit, whose aid is promised to those who seek it (Luke xi. 13), all may obtain such heavenly wisdom and strength as shall ensure them against serious error and failure. And after listening to the conflicting statements of human teachers, and their denunciation of those who decline their counsel, a religious inquirer may in many instances wisely turn from them to God, saying, "Let me fall into the hand of the Lord rather than of man."

In conclusion: 1. *It is a great comfort to sincere Christians to know that they are ever in the hand of the Lord.* When they seem to be most left to the will of arbitrary, unjust, and cruel men, God is over all, controlling, overruling, sanctifying, compelling their most malignant foes to promote their real and lasting good. He will rectify and compensate for all the injustice and injury which he permits men to inflict upon them. 2. *Impenitent sinners might well prefer to fall into the hands of men rather than of God.* The limited knowledge and power of men, as well as their feeble hatred of sin, would be in their favour; at the worst, they can only "kill the body." But God abhors sin with a perfect hatred, knows fully the guilt of each sinner, and "hath power to cast into hell" (Luke xii. 4, 5). "Who knoweth the power of *thine* anger?" (Ps. xc. 11).—G. W.

Ver. 23.—*Acceptance with God.* "The Lord thy God accept thee." A good wish, flowing from good will, and all the heartier because of the occasion. For Divine

acceptance of the king and his offerings meant deliverance for the nation, Araunah included, from the ravages of the pestilence. The sincerity of his wish was proved by the substantial offers with which it was accompanied.

I. THE BLESSING DESIRED. Araunah referred to the favourable reception by God of David's offerings. In the widest sense, acceptance with God includes: 1. *Acceptance of ourselves.* Our reception by God into his friendship and favour. Unless the *man* is accepted, his offerings cannot be. God receives nothing from his enemies—a truth which should be very seriously pondered by multitudes of his professed worshippers, who give him outward homage, but withhold from him *themselves*. Who, then, are accepted by God? Those who come to him according to his appointment, with repentance, faith, self-devotement, confessing sin, trusting to the mercy and entering on the service of God. Under the Christian dispensation, men are accepted through faith in Jesus Christ. When we receive him as Saviour and Lord, God receives us (comp. Rom. v. 1, 2). 2. *Acceptance of our worship.* Which includes devout exercises of mind and heart, study of the Word of God, pious meditation, praises and thanksgivings, prayers. What worship is accepted? Such as is offered in the name of Jesus (John xvi. 23, 24; Eph. iii. 12; Phil. ii. 10, Revised Version). Sincere (Isa. xxix. 13; John iv. 24), humble (Luke xviii. 10—14), reverential (Heb. xii. 28), yet trustful and affectionate as children (Rom. viii. 15). Not that of slaves or mercenaries. 3. *Acceptance of our gifts.* We give to God when we give for the support of his worship and the spread of his kingdom, and when we give to the poor for his sake (Matt. xxv. 40). Our gifts are acceptable (1) when presented with pure hearts, not ostentatiously to gain human applause (Matt. vi. 2—4), not with a view to atone for sin and obtain pardon, not to bribe men to unholy compliances; (2) when they are our own property, not the fruit of dishonesty, oppression, or injustice; (3) when they are in due proportion to our ability (2 Cor. viii. 12). 4. *Acceptance of active service.* Labours for the good of others, temporal and spiritual. All honest work springing from and guided by Christian principles.

II. THE DESIRE ITSELF. In this case it was a *patriotic* desire. It is always *pious* and *benevolent*. Pious, as it recognizes the necessity of God's favour and approbation to the well-being of men, and implies his willingness to be favourable to them. Benevolent, as it is a desire that others should enjoy the most essential and all-comprehensive of blessings, without which other blessings are of small and temporary value. Not health or wealth, not acceptance with men, not long life, not intellectual superiority, not refinement of taste, etc., are of primary importance; and these should not be first in our minds when seeking the welfare whether of ourselves or of others; but the favour of Almighty God, and, as the sure means of securing this, the possession of Christian faith and holiness. "Wherefore" let us "labour that, whether present or absent" (living or dying), "we," and all in whom we are interested, yea, all mankind, "may be accepted of him" (2 Cor. v. 9).—G. W.

Ver. 24.—*Cheap religion repudiated.* "Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing." We have in the context "a laudable contention between a good king and a good subject" (Manton). Araunah wished to give the site for an altar, the animals and fuel for sacrifice, taking, on account of the necessity for haste, the threshing oxen and implements for the purpose. David insisted on paying for all. The text expresses his reason. He felt it was unworthy of his position and means as monarch, of the greatness of God, and of his own relation and obligations to him, to offer sacrifices which had cost him nothing. His determination is worthy of adoption by all, and will be adopted by all true-hearted Christians. They will not worship and serve God without cost to themselves. In considering the words, we need not confine attention to gifts of money or other property. In the worship and service of God, expenditure of thought, feeling, time, strength, etc., is required as well as of property; and, in relation to each and all, the true Christian, when the need for such expenditure arises, and he is tempted to avoid it, will be ready to exclaim, "I will not serve the Lord my God without cost." His motives are such as follow.

I. REVERENCE FOR GOD. Sense of his majesty and excellence. The feeling that he who is so great and glorious should be served with the best we can present to him, internal and external; and that to come before him without any worthy gift is to insult him (see Mal. i. 7, 8, 14).

II. GRATITUDE TO GOD. For his great and manifold gifts to us, especially that of his Son, with all the unspeakable blessings which come to us with and through him. If duly sensible of what we have received from God, we shall be eager to make him such return, poor though it is, as is possible to us, and shall feel that we can never do enough for him who has done so much for us.

III. LOVE TO GOD AND MAN. The substance of true religion. Love to God, awakened and kept alive by his love to us and by increasing knowledge of his all-perfect and lovely character, will produce love for his worship, his people, his cause in the world, our fellow-men. In helping these by deed and gift, we offer sacrifices to him (Phil. ii. 17; iv. 18; Heb. xiii. 16), and all who love him will offer such sacrifices. In proportion to the ardour of their love will be the measure of their services; and they will never grow weary of them, since love makes them a delight.

IV. JUSTICE TO OTHERS. The worship of God cannot be maintained, nor his kingdom extended, nor his will as to the poor done, without cost of various kinds, in which it is right that all should do their part according to their capabilities. If some shirk their duty, others may be compelled to do more than fairly belongs to them. The thought of this will move each to take his proper share of gift or labour.

V. THE EXAMPLE OF OTHERS. 1. *The liberal expenditure of some on their idols.* Heathen. Worldly men. Ourselves, perhaps, before we were converted. 2. *The liberality of many Christians.* In every circle a few are known who are generous in deed or gift, or both, in the service of God and the poor. Their zeal incites others by the power of sympathy and the feeling that they are themselves under equal obligation to their Saviour and their God. 3. *The cost at which multitudes of Christians have had to serve God.* In times of persecution their religion has cost many their property, liberty, or lives; and they have borne the cost bravely and gladly (Heb. x. 34; Acts vi. 41; Phil. ii. 17; Col. ii. 24). Shame on us if we grudge the much smaller cost of religion to us. 4. *Above all, the example of our Lord and Saviour.* (2 Cor. viii. 9; Titus ii. 14.) Remembrance of the cost to him of our opportunity of serving God acceptably will strengthen us when tempted to make our religion as cheap as possible.

VI. PERCEPTION OF THE WORTHLESSNESS OF A RELIGION THAT COSTS US NOTHING. 1. *It is unreal.* A mere name and pretence. Real religion begins and is maintained at the cost of much thought, feeling, and prayer. Where it exists it must move the heart to zeal and generosity in the service of God, cannot but manifest itself in works and gifts. 2. *It is unacceptable to God.* Instead of accepting, he abhors it. It is contrary to his will. The spirit of the old injunction, "They shall not appear before the Lord empty," is plainly of universal application; and the New Testament abounds in precepts enjoining zeal and generosity in the service of God. 3. *It is therefore fruitless of good,* now and hereafter. It may be correct in creed, fair in profession, interesting in sentiment, beautiful in phrase; but it is useless. It answers no substantial end of a religion. It does not elevate and improve the worshipper. It can hardly secure even the approval of men. It does not avert, but ensure and increase, the judgments of God. Those who practise it will justly have their "portion with the *hypocrites*" (Matt. xxiv. 51).

VII. ASSURANCE OF RECOMPENSE. God will not let any man be a loser in his service. 1. *He gives valuable rewards now to those who expend their energies or substance for him.* The practical manifestation of Christian principles strengthens them. Talents employed are multiplied. "Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance" (Matt. xxv. 29). Service opens opportunities and develops capacities for service. Influence for good widens, honourable positions in Christ's Church are reached without ambitious striving for them, the esteem and affection of the good are enjoyed. The pleasure of doing good is experienced, and, withal, the pleasures of a good conscience —the consciousness of Christian principles, affections, and aims, and of the approval of God. 2. *Great is their reward in heaven.* Perfected character; enlarged and exalted service; the unclouded light of the Divine countenance; the blessings of those whom they have helped to save; the eternal joy and glory of the Lord.

In conclusion: 1. This resolution deserves the serious consideration and adoption of: (1) Ministers and other teachers of religion, who are often tempted to do their work with as little trouble to themselves as possible. The help afforded by such books as this may be abused by the indolent. (2) All who have opportunity to expend money, time, or talents in the service of Christ. Cordially adopted, it will make the numerous

calls on Christian zeal and liberality in our day matter of thankfulness rather than of annoyance. It will induce even the poor to render aid according to their means. 2. The subject shows the disadvantages attending endowments of religion. They tend to deprive worshippers of the pleasure and profit of worshipping God with cost to themselves. Where they exist, Christians should compensate themselves for the loss thus inflicted on them by exercising all the greater generosity towards other branches of Divine service, such as missions at home and abroad, charity to the poor, etc.—G. W.

Ver. 25.—*Efficacious sacrifices.* These sacrifices of David illustrate the nature and purpose of such offerings under the Law. David acted in obedience to a message from God (ver. 18). He did not offer sacrifices in order to render God merciful; it was the mercy of God which originated them. It was because he would stay the destroying pestilence that he directed David to offer them. Still, the sacrifices were a condition of the exercise of his mercy. It was when they had been offered that "the Lord was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel." Hence the question arises—Why should the Merciful One have required the death of innocent victims in order that his mercy might be displayed in the cessation of the pestilence? If it be said that this method of entreating him was a solemn and expressive acknowledgment that the sins which occasioned the pestilence were deserving of death, the answer may be accepted as a partial explanation. But the question recurs—Why should not the confession of sin, with sincere penitence, be accepted without the infliction of death on the innocent? The only satisfying answer is that which takes into account the justice as well as the mercy of God, and recognizes in the death of the innocent an atonement for the guilt of those to whom mercy is shown. In exercising his mercy, God would also "declare his righteousness . . . that he might be just" while justifying the sinner (Rom. iii. 25, 26), and that men, while seeking and obtaining forgiveness, might discern more clearly, feel more deeply, and acknowledge more heartily, the righteousness of the sentence which condemned them to death. These remarks apply more especially to the "burnt offerings." The "peace offerings" (thank offerings) were added apparently as an expression of joyful gratitude for the deliverance which was confidently expected through the sacrifice of the burnt offerings. The text reminds us of another sacrifice which was offered ten centuries later near the site of David's altar, and which has rendered all other offerings for sin superfluous and unlawful. It may tend to the better understanding of both to view them together, noting their resemblances and contrasts.

I. THEIR RESEMBLANCES. 1. *In their origin.* Both were of Divine origin and appointment. They originated in the love and righteousness and wisdom of God—his perception of what "became him" (Heb. ii. 10). 2. *In their nature.* As making atonement for sin, by which God was "entreated," and the exercise of his forgiving mercy rendered consistent with a due regard for justice. 3. *In their significance for men.* Displaying the evil of sin and the Divine displeasure against it, and at the same time the loving-kindness of God—his readiness to pardon; and thus tending to produce at once abhorrence of sin and penitential grief, and the assured hope of pardon. 4. *In their results.* Reconciliation between God and sinners; forgiveness of sin and deliverance from its penalties; renewed enjoyment of the favour of God; renewed confidence in and obedience to him; added strength to resist temptation.

II. THE INCALCULABLE SUPERIORITY OF THE SACRIFICE OF OUR LORD. 1. *David offered the lives of animals; our blessed Lord offered himself.* They were of little value; but who shall calculate the worth of him who was not only the perfect Man, but the Word Incarnate, the only begotten Son of God? They could not understand the transaction in which they were made to participate, and could take no voluntary part in the sacrifice. But Jesus entered fully into the mind of God, shared to the utmost his love to sinners and hatred of their sins, made the Divine purpose his own, and in devoted obedience to the will of the Father surrendered himself willingly to suffering and death for our salvation. The virtue of his sacrifice arose from his Divine dignity, his perfect oneness with the Father in mind and heart, and his perfect obedience unto death (John x. 17, 18; Phil. ii. 6—8; Heb. ix. 14; x. 5—10). 2. *David provided his own sacrifices; Jesus was the Gift of God.* (1 John iv. 9, 10.) No man, no creature, could provide a sacrifice of sufficient worth to really and effectually atone for the sins

of men. 3. *The moral significance of the sacrifice of Christ is immeasurably greater than of the offering of any number of animal sacrifices.* As a revelation of God and man, of holiness and sin, of the Divine hatred to sin and love to sinners, of the beauty and glory of self-sacrifice, etc., it is altogether unique. 4. *The efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ transcends incalculably that of the sacrifices offered by David.* (1) The value of the latter for atonement depended wholly on the will and appointment of God; the worth of the former was essential and intrinsic. (2) The one atonement was of limited, the other of boundless, efficacy. The former removed limited guilt—of a single nation, and for the time; the other was for the sins of all men, everywhere, and in all ages of the world (John i. 29; 1 John i. 7; ii. 2; Heb. x. 14). (3) The sacrifices of David arrested a pestilence, and thus lengthened the lives of many; that of Christ saves from eternal punishment, and secures eternal life (1 Thess. i. 10; John vi. 51—54). (4) The former had doubtless some influence on some of the Israelites, favourable to repentance, faith, and obedience; the latter has produced and will yet produce a complete revolution in the position and character of vast multitudes belonging to many nations. Those who believe are by the death of Christ brought to God (1 Pet. iii. 18; Heb. x. 19, 20), made partakers of the Holy Spirit (Gal. iii. 13, 14), pardoned and justified (Eph. i. 7; Rom. v. 9), sanctified (Rom. viii. 3, 4; Eph. v. 25—27), led to thorough consecration of life to him who died for them (2 Cor. v. 14, 15), and to assured hope and unspeakable happiness (Rom. v. 5—11; viii. 32—39), issuing in the perfection, glory, and bliss of heaven (Rev. vii. 9, 10, 13—17). 5. *The animals offered by David ceased to exist; the great Redeemer obtained for himself by his self-sacrifice exaltation to universal dominion and immortal glory,* including the honour of leading and saving those for whom he died, and of receiving their loving and devoted homage (Rom. xiv. 8, 9; Eph. i. 19—23; Phil. ii. 8—11; Heb. xiii. 20; Rev. i. 17, 18). 6. *The benefits of David's offerings came to the people through his faith, penitence, and obedience; those of the sacrifice of Christ come to each Christian as the result of his own.* Its moral and spiritual power is thus enhanced. 7. *The burnt offerings of David laid the foundation for his thank offerings; much more does the death of Christ call for, induce, and render acceptable, thank offerings of a nobler kind, and these innumerable, unceasing, and throughout eternity.* Such are the presenting of ourselves to God, and the offerings of praise, prayer, and beneficence (Rom. xii. 1; Phil. iv. 18; Heb. xiii. 15, 16; Rev. viii. 3, 4). Let us not fail to present such thank offerings. Let us take up the song of the banished apostle (Rev. i. 5, 6), "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood . . . to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." Let us now join angels and the Church and all creation, and purpose and hope to join them for ever, in the sublime anthem (Rev. v. 12, 13), "*Worthy is the Lamb* that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing . . . Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. Amen."—G. W.

HOMILETICAL INDEX

TO

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of men. 3. *The moral significance of the sacrifice of Christ is immeasurably greater than of the offering of any number of animal sacrifices.* As a revelation of God and man, of holiness and sin, of the Divine hatred to sin and love to sinners, of the beauty and glory of self-sacrifice, etc., it is altogether unique. 4. *The efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ transcends incalculably that of the sacrifices offered by David.* (1) The value of the latter for atonement depended wholly on the will and appointment of God; the worth of the former was essential and intrinsic. (2) The one atonement was of limited, the other of boundless, efficacy. The former removed limited guilt—of a single nation, and for the time; the other was for the sins of all men, everywhere, and in all ages of the world (John i. 29; 1 John i. 7; ii. 2; Heb. x. 14). (3) The sacrifices of David arrested a pestilence, and thus lengthened the lives of many; that of Christ saves from eternal punishment, and secures eternal life (1 Thess. i. 10; John vi. 51—54). (4) The former had doubtless some influence on some of the Israelites, favourable to repentance, faith, and obedience; the latter has produced and will yet produce a complete revolution in the position and character of vast multitudes belonging to many nations. Those who believe are by the death of Christ brought to God (1 Pet. iii. 18; Heb. x. 19, 20), made partakers of the Holy Spirit (Gal. iii. 13, 14), pardoned and justified (Eph. i. 7; Rom. v. 9), sanctified (Rom. viii. 3, 4; Eph. v. 25—27), led to thorough consecration of life to him who died for them (2 Cor. v. 14, 15), and to assured hope and unspeakable happiness (Rom. v. 5—11; viii. 32—39), issuing in the perfection, glory, and bliss of heaven (Rev. vii. 9, 10, 13—17). 5. *The animals offered by David ceased to exist; the great Redeemer obtained for himself by his self-sacrifice exaltation to universal dominion and immortal glory,* including the honour of leading and saving those for whom he died, and of receiving their loving and devoted homage (Rom. xiv. 8, 9; Eph. i. 19—23; Phil. ii. 8—11; Heb. xiii. 20; Rev. i. 17, 18). 6. *The benefits of David's offerings came to the people through his faith, penitence, and obedience; those of the sacrifice of Christ come to each Christian as the result of his own.* Its moral and spiritual power is thus enhanced. 7. *The burnt offerings of David laid the foundation for his thank offerings; much more does the death of Christ call for, induce, and render acceptable, thank offerings of a nobler kind, and these innumerable, unceasing, and throughout eternity.* Such are the presenting of ourselves to God, and the offerings of praise, prayer, and beneficence (Rom. xii. 1; Phil. iv. 18; Heb. xiii. 15, 16; Rev. viii. 3, 4). Let us not fail to present such thank offerings. Let us take up the song of the banished apostle (Rev. i. 5, 6), "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood . . . to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." Let us now join angels and the Church and all creation, and purpose and hope to join them for ever, in the sublime anthem (Rev. v. 12, 13), "*Worthy is the Lamb* that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing . . . Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. Amen."—G. W.

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