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

VERY REV. F. W. FARRAR, D.D., F.R.S., DEAN OF CANTERBURY.
RIGHT REV. H. COTTERILL, D.D., F.R.S.E.
VERY REV. PRINCIPAL J. TULLOCH, D.D.
REV. CANON G. RAWLINSON, M.A.
REV. A. PLUMMER, M.A., D.D.

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II. KINGS.

Exposition and Homiletics

By REV. G. RAWLINSON, M.A.,

CANON OF CANTERBURY.

Homilies by Various Authors.

REV. C. H. IRWIN, M.A. REV. J. ORR, D.D.
REV. D. THOMAS, D.D.

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THE SECOND
BOOK OF THE KINGS.

INTRODUCTION.

THOUGH the two Books of the Kings "were originally and are really but one work, by one writer or compiler," and though most of the points which need to be touched on in an "Introduction," being common to both books, have been already treated in the Introductory section prefixed to the Commentary on 1 Kings, still there seem to be certain subjects more particularly connected with the Second Book, which require a more general and consecutive treatment than is possible in a running commentary on the text; and the consideration of these will form, it is hoped, a not superfluous or unwelcome "Introduction" to the present volume. These subjects are, especially, (1) "the difficulties in the Chronology," and (2) "the interconnection between sacred and profane history during the period of the Israelite monarchy."

I. DIFFICULTIES IN THE CHRONOLOGY.

The difficulties in the chronology attach almost exclusively to the Second Book. In the First Book we find, indeed, that portions of years are counted for years in the estimates given of the length of kings' reigns, and that thus there is a tendency in the chronology to exaggerate itself—a tendency which is most marked where the reigns are shortest. But the synchronisms which enable us to detect this peculiarity are a sufficient safeguard from serious error; and it is not difficult to arrange in parallel columns the Jewish and the Israelite lists in such a way that all or almost all the statements made in the book are brought into harmony; *e.g.* Rehoboam reigned seventeen *full* years (ch. xiv. 21), when he was succeeded by Abijam, whose first year was parallel with the eighteenth of Jeroboam (ch. xv. 1), and

who reigned three full years (ch. xv. 2), dying and being succeeded by Asa in Jeroboam's twentieth year (ch. xv. 9). Jeroboam, having reigned twenty-two years *incomplete* (ch. xiv. 20), died in Asa's second year, and was succeeded by Nadab (ch. xiv. 25), who reigned parts of two years, being slain by Baasha in Asa's third year (ch. xv. 28). Baasha held the throne for twenty-four *incomplete* years, his accession falling in Asa's third, and his death in Asa's twenty-sixth year (ch. xvi. 8). Elah's "two years" (ch. xvi. 8) were, like Nadab's and Baasha's, *incomplete*, since he ascended the throne in Asa's twenty-sixth, and was killed by Zimri in Asa's twenty-seventh year (ch. xvi. 15). At the end of a week Zimri was slain by Omri, and a struggle followed between Omri and Tibni, which lasted four years —from Asa's twenty-seventh year to his thirty-first (ch. xvi. 23). Omri's reign was reckoned by some to begin at this time, by others to have begun upon the death of Zimri. It is from this earlier event that his "twelve years" are to be dated, and those years are again *incomplete*, since they commenced in Asa's twenty-seventh, and terminated in his thirty-eighth year (ch. xvi. 29). Ahab's "twenty-two years" (ch. xvi. 29) should, apparently, be twenty-*one*, since they ran parallel with the last four years of Asa and with the first seventeen of Jehoshaphat. The entire period from the accession of Rehoboam and Jeroboam to the death of Ahab and accession of Ahaziah in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat was seventy-eight years.

TABULAR VIEW OF THE CHRONOLOGY OF 1 KINGS.

Year before Christ.	Year of the Davidic kingdom.	King of all Israel.	
1012	41	SOLOMON, 40 years (1 Kings xi. 42)	
		Kings of Judah.	Kings of Israel.
972	81	Rehoboam, 17 years (1 Kings xiv. 21)	Jeroboam, 22 years (1 Kings xiv. 20)
955	98	Abijam, 3 years (1 Kings xv. 2)	18th year of Jeroboam (1 Kings xv. 1)
952	101	Asa, 41 years (1 Kings xv. 10)	20th year of Jeroboam (1 Kings xv. 9)
951	102	2nd year of Asa (1 Kings xv. 25)	Nadab, 2 years (1 Kings xv. 25)
950	103	3rd year of Asa (1 Kings xv. 28)	Baasha, 24 years (1 Kings xv. 33)
927	126	26th year of Asa (1 Kings xvi. 8)	Elah, 2 years (1 Kings xvi. 8)
926	127	27th year of Asa (1 Kings xvi. 10, 21)	Zimri (1 Kings xvi. 10) Tibni (1 Kings xvi. 21) Omri (1 Kings xvi. 21), 12 years (1 Kings xvi. 23)
922	131	31st year of Asa (1 Kings xvi. 23)	Omri alone (1 Kings xvi. 23)
915	138	38th year of Asa (1 Kings xvi. 29)	Ahab, 22 (21?) years (1 Kings xvi. 29)
911	142	Jehoshaphat (1 Kings xxii. 41)	4th year of Ahab (1 Kings xxii. 41)
895	158	17th year of Jehoshaphat	Ahaziah (1 Kings xxii. 51)

The chronology of the Second Book of Kings is far more complicated. The following are some of its difficulties. 1. Two dates are given for the accession of Jehoram of Israel, viz. the second year of Jehoram of Judah

(ch. i. 17), and the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat (ch. iii. 1). 2. Jehoram of Judah is said to have begun to reign in the fifth year of his father Jehoshaphat (ch. viii. 16), and also in the fifth year of Jehoram of Israel, which was the twenty-second year of Jehoshaphat. 3. Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, is said (ch. xiii. 1) to have ascended the throne in the twenty-third year of Joash of Judah; but as Joash ascended the throne in the seventh of Jehu (ch. xii. 1), and Jehu reigned no more than twenty-eight years (ch. x. 36), the true year of the accession of Jehoahaz must have been (as Josephus says it was) Joash's twenty-first. 4. Amaziah's first year is made to run parallel with the second year of Joash of Israel (ch. xiv. 1); but if the reign of this Joash began in the thirty-seventh year of his namesake of Judah (ch. xiii. 10), and if this monarch reigned altogether forty years (ch. xii. 1), Amaziah cannot have succeeded him till Joash of Israel's fourth year. 5. Azariah is said to have begun to reign in the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam II. (ch. xv. 1); but if Amaziah lived fifteen years only after the death of Joash of Israel (ch. xiv. 17), Azariah should have succeeded him in Jeroboam's sixteenth year. 6. Zachariah's accession, which seems (ch. xiv. 29) to be placed directly after his father's death, should have fallen in Azariah's twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth year; but it is placed in his thirty-eighth (ch. xv. 8); so that an interregnum of eleven or twelve years, whereof Scripture gives no hint, and which is very unlikely, has to be interpolated (Clinton, 'Fasti Hellenici,' vol. i. p. 325) between the son's reign and the father's. 7. Jotham is given in one place a reign of sixteen years (ch. xv. 33), while in another (ch. xv. 30) his twentieth year is spoken of. 8. Hoshea's accession is placed (ch. xv. 30) in the twentieth year of Jotham—regarded by some as the fourth year of Ahaz, and again (ch. xvii. 1) in the twelfth year of Ahaz. 9. Hezekiah's first year is said to have been the third of Hoshea (ch. xviii. 1), but his fourth year is made Hoshea's seventh instead of his sixth, and his sixth year Hoshea's ninth (ch. xviii. 9, 10) instead of his eighth. 10. Altogether, the years of the Israelite monarchy, from the accession of Ahaziah to the captivity of Hoshea, are made to amount to a hundred and fifty-nine, while those of the Judæan monarchy for the same period amount to a hundred and eighty-three, or an addition of twenty-four.

The difficulties are increased if we compare the sacred chronology for the period with the profane. The Assyrian annals place an interval of a hundred and thirty-two years only between the taking of Samaria and a year in the reign of Ahab, while the scriptural numbers make the interval, at the lowest computation, a hundred and sixty years, and at the highest a hundred and eighty-four. By the Assyrian annals Hezekiah's expedition against Sennacherib took place in the twenty-first year after the fall of Samaria; by the present scriptural numbers (ch. xviii. 10, 13) it took place in the eighth year afterwards.

It is evident that any attempt to restore the true chronology must be to a large extent conjectural, and almost arbitrary. Some of the scriptural

numbers must be altered, or else suppositious must be made for which there is no warranty. Still, a commentator is almost forced to take some definite view, and, so long as he allows that his view is merely put forward tentatively and provisionally, he is not open to censure. No apology would therefore seem to be needed for the following tabular conspectus of the probable chronology of the period between the accession of Ahaziah of Israel and the fall of Samaria:—

Year before Christ.	Year of the Davidic monarchy.	Kings of Judah.	Kings of Israel.	Contemporary kings.		
				Egypt.	Assyria.	Babylon.
895	158	17th year of Jehoshaphat	Ahaziah, 2 years		Asshur-nazir-pal	
894	159	18th year of Jehoshaphat	Jehoram, 12 years (2 Kings iii. 1)	Kings		
890	163	JEHORAM, 8 years	5th year of Jehoram of Israel (2 Kings viii. 16)	of		
883	170	AHAZIAH, 1 year	12th year of Jehoram of Israel (2 Kings viii. 25)	the twenty-		
			JEHU, 28 years	second		
882	171	Athaliah, usurper, 6 years		dynasty		
876	177	JOASH, 40 years	7th year of Jehu (2 Kings xii. 1)			
856	197	21st year of Joash (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' ix. 8. § 5)	JEHOAHAZ, 17 years		Shalmaneser II.	
840	213	37th year of Joash of Judah (2 Kings xiii. 10)	JOASH, 16 years	Kings of		Babylon generally under Assyria
837	216	AMAZIAH, 29 years	4th (not 2nd) year of Joash (2 Kings xiv. 1)	the		
824	229	15th (or rather 14th) year of Amaziah (2 Kings xiv. 23)	JEROBOAM II., 41 years (more probably 53 years)	twenty- third	Shamas-Vul	
809	244	AZARIAH, 52 years	27th (really 16th) year of Jeroboam II. (2 Kings xv. 1)	dynasty	Vul-nirari	
771	282	38th year of Azariah (2 Kings xv. 8)	ZACHARIAH, 2 years			
770	283	39th year of Azariah (2 Kings xv. 17)	MENAHEM, 10 years (perhaps 11)	Later kings of	Pul (?)	
759	294	50th year of Azariah (2 Kings xv. 23)	PEKAHIAH, 2 years	the twenty- third		
758	295	52nd year of Azariah (2 Kings xv. 27)	PEKAH, 20 (rather 27) years (2 Kings xv. 27)	dynasty	Tiglath-pileser II.	
757	296	JOTHAM, 16 years	2nd year of Pekah (2 Kings xv. 32)	Pian-khi (?)		Nabonassar,
742	311	AHAZ, 16 years	17th year of Pekah (2 Kings xvi. 1)	Bocchoris		Nadius, Chinzirus,

Year before Christ.	Year of the Davidic monarchy.	Kings of Judah.	Kings of Israel.	Contemporary kings.		
				Egypt.	Assyria.	Babylon.
730	323	12th year of Ahaz (2 Kings xvii. 1)	HOSHEA, 9 years	So, or Sabaco		Tiglath-pileser (Porus)
727	326	HEZEKIAH, 29 years	3rd (really 4th) year of Hoshea (2 Kings xviii. 1)		Shalmaneser IV.	Shalmaneser IV. (Elulæus)
724	329	4th year of Hezekiah (2 Kings xviii. 9)	7th year of Hoshea: Samaria besieged (2 Kings xviii. 9)	Sibache, or Sevechus		
722	331	6th year of Hezekiah (2 Kings xviii. 10)	9th year of Hoshea: Samaria taken (2 Kings xviii. 10)		Sargon	Sargon (Arkeanus)

After the termination of the Israelite monarchy by the capture of Samaria in B.C. 722, the difficulties of the chronology become much less, chiefly from the absence of those exact synchronisms which have constituted the main difficulty in the period between the accession of Ahaziah and the Israelite captivity. Such exact synchronisms as occur (ch. xxiv. 12; xxv. 2, 8, and 27) show in general a remarkable agreement between sacred history and profane, while the vaguer ones (ch. xx. 12; xxiii. 29; xxiv. 1) are also quite consonant with the accounts given to us by secular historians. The only serious difficulty which meets us is the date in ch. xviii. 14, which assigns the first expedition of Sennacherib against Jerusalem to Hezekiah's *fourteenth* year, or B.C. 714, whereas the Assyrian annals place it in Sennacherib's fourth year, which was B.C. 701, or thirteen years later. This date is best regarded as an interpolation—a marginal gloss which has crept into the text, and which was the mere conjecture of a commentator. The event itself probably occurred in the twenty-seventh year of Hezekiah's reign.

The subjoined table will complete the chronology of the Davidic monarchy, and may be regarded as scarcely presenting any doubtful points or uncertainties—

Year before Christ.	Year of the Davidic monarchy.	Kings of Judah.	Contemporary kings.		
			Egypt.	Assyria.	Babylon.
722	331	6th year of Hezekiah		Sargon (B.C. 722—705)	Merodach-Baladan (B.C. 722—710)
714	339	14th ditto: Hezekiah's illness (2 Kings xx. 6)		Sennacherib (B.C. 705—681)	Bel-ibni (B.C. 704—701)

Year before Christ.	Year of the Davidic monarchy.	Kings of Judah.	Contemporary kings.		
			Egypt.	Assyria.	Babylon.
701	352	27th year of Hezekiah: Hezekiah attacked by Sennacherib (2 Kings xviii. 13—xix. 36).	Tirhakah (B.C. 701—667)		
					Asshur-nadin-sum (B.C. 700—681)
698	355	MANASSEH, 55 years (2 Kings xxi. 1)		Esarhaddon (B.C. 681—668)	Esarhaddon (B.C. 681—668)
				Asshur-bani-pal (B.C. 668—626)	Saul-Mugina (B.C. 668—648)
			Mi-ammon-nut Psamatik I. (about B.C. 650—610)		Chiniladanus, or Asshur-bani-pal (?) (B.C. 648—626)
643	410	AMON, 2 years (2 Kings xxi. 19)			
641	412	JOSIAH, 31 years (2 Kings xxii. 1)			Nabopolassar (B.C. 626—605)
623	430	18th year of Josiah: celebration of Passover (2 Kings xxiii. 23)		Assyrian empire ends about B.C. 617	
610	443	Battle of Megiddo (2 Kings xxiii. 29) JEHOAHAZ, 3 months	Neco (B.C. 610—595)		
609	444	JEHOIAKIM, 11 years (2 Kings xxiii. 36)			Nebuchadnezzar (B.C. 605—562)
598	455	JEHOIACHIN, 3 months (2 Kings xxiv. 8)			
597	456	ZEDEKIAH, 11 years (2 Kings xxiv. 18)	Psamatik II. (B.C. 595—590)		
			Hophra (B.C. 590—565)		
586	467	End of reign.			Evil-Merodach (B.C. 562—560)

II. INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN SACRED AND PROFANE HISTORY DURING THE PERIOD OF THE ISRAELITE MONARCHY.

At the commencement of the monarchy, during the reigns of David and Solomon, the great world-power was Egypt. Assyria, which had exercised

an extensive sway in Western Asia from about B.C. 1300 to B.C. 1070, in the latter part of the eleventh century B.C. passed under a cloud, and did not emerge from it until about B.C. 900. Egypt, on the other hand, about B.C. 1100, began to increase in strength, and soon after B.C. 1000, resumed her *rôle* of Asiatic conqueror under the Sheshonks and Osarkons. It is quite in accordance with these facts that, in the first period of the Israelite monarchy, from the accession of David to the usurpations of Jehu and Athaliah, the historical Scriptures contain no mention at all of Assyria,[1] which lay entirely without the sphere of Hebrew influence, having lost all its authority over any part of the tract west of the Euphrates. Egypt, on the contrary, comes once more to the front. Unmentioned in the history from the date of the Exodus to the accession of Solomon, she then reappears as a power friendly to Israel, and anxious to make alliance with the new kingdom which has been established at no great distance from her borders. Who the Pharaoh was who gave his daughter to Solomon (1 Kings iii. 1), and with her the city of Gezer as a dowry (1 Kings ix. 16), is uncertain; but there can be no doubt that he was one of the kings of Manetho's twenty-first dynasty, and it is probable that he was one of the later kings, either Pinetem II., the last but one, or Hor-Pasebensha, the last. The union of the two royal houses led to much intercourse between the two peoples, and a brisk trade was established between Palestine and the valley of the Nile, which included a large importation of Egyptian horses and chariots into Palestine, and even into Syria (1 Kings x. 28, 29), where the Hittite kings purchased them. Political refugees passed from one country to the other without question (ch. xi. 17—19), and sometimes those from Asia obtained considerable influence at the Egyptian court.

The twenty-first Egyptian dynasty was succeeded by the twenty-second, probably somewhat late in the reign of Solomon. The new dynasty continued the policy of receiving Asiatic refugees, and Sheshonk (or Shishak), the first monarch, gave an asylum to Jeroboam (1 Kings xi. 40) not many years before Solomon's death. There was nothing in this to disturb the relations between the two countries; but when Jeroboam, after the death of Solomon, returned to Palestine, and the two rival kingdoms of Judah and Israel were established side by side in a relation of mutual hostility, Egypt could not well remain friendly to both. Not unnaturally she leant to the state which was the larger, and appeared to be the more powerful of the two, and which had, moreover, been founded by the Israelite refugee to whom she had given an asylum, and who had probably lived in Egypt on terms of personal intimacy with the reigning monarch.[2] Accordingly, the great expedition of Shishak into Asia (2 Chron. xii. 2—4) in Rehoboam's fifth

[1] In the Psalms there is one mention of Assyria (Assur) which may belong to this time (see Ps. lxxxiii. 8). David's Syrian conquests, perhaps, brought him on one occasion into contact with the Assyrians (2 Sam. x. 15—18).

[2] The Septuagint 'Additions to Kings' have not the authority of history, but they show what the Alexandrian Jews believed to have been Jeroboam's position at the court of Shishak (see the additions to 1 Kings xii. after ver. 24)

year, which is recorded on the walls of the temple at Karnak,[1] appears to have been undertaken, in great part, in the interest of Jeroboam, whose hands were thereby greatly strengthened against his adversary. Rehoboam became for a time an Egyptian tributary (2 Chron. xii. 8); and though the *Yuteh malk* of the Karnak inscription may not especially designate him,[2] yet the war was certainly directed mainly against the Judæan kingdom, and resulted in its degradation. Sheshonk had probably entertained designs of wider conquest, and he actually subjected many of the Arab tribes in the trans-Jordanic region, and in the tract between Egypt and Palestine; but his military ardour was not sufficient to urge him to further efforts, and it was left for one of his successors to invade Asia with a greater force (comp. 2 Chron. xiv. 9 with xii. 3) in the hope of sweeping all before him.

Zerach the Ethiopian, who in the eleventh year of Asa (2 Chron. xiv. 1, 9) made an expedition into Palestine at the head of an army of a million men, is probably identical with Osarkon[3] (*Ua-sar-ken*) II., the great-grandson of Sheshonk I., and the fourth king of the twenty-second Manethonian dynasty. Zerach's army consisted of Cushites and Lubim (2 Chron. xvi. 8), as Sheshonk's (Shishak's) did of Cushites, Lubim, and Sukkyim (2 Chron. xii. 3). He invaded Judæa in the south, and marched upon Jerusalem by the way of Mareshah. Here, however, Asa met him, with forces not much exceeding half the number of his adversary's, and defeated him in a pitched battle—one of the most glorious in all Hebrew history—entirely discomfiting his host and pursuing it to Gerar, on the extreme south of Palestine, and returning with an immense spoil to Jerusalem. The Egyptian aspirations after Asiatic conquests were crushed by this terrible blow; and it was not till the advance of Assyria menaced Egypt herself with conquest that the soil of Palestine was again trodden by an Egyptian army.

Assyria's advance to greatness, which commenced about B.C. 900, upon Egypt's decline, is not noticed so early in the scriptural narrative as might have been expected. We find by the Assyrian annals that the contact of Assyria with the northern kingdom began as early as the reign of Jehu, if not even in that of Ahab. An "Ahab," described as "Ahab of Samhala" or "Sirhala," is engaged in battle with Shalmaneser II. about B.C. 854, and suffers defeat.[4] But chronological considerations render it extremely doubtful whether the person thus designated can have been the son of Omri. Jehu, however, seems certainly to have come within the sphere of Shalmaneser's influence, and to have been induced to send him presents, which Shalmaneser regarded as a tribute,[5] not later than the year B.C. 842,

[1] See Mr. Reginald Stuart Poole's article on "Shishak" in Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' vol. iii. pp. 1293, 1294.

[2] Max Müller, in the 'Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archæology' for December 6, 1887, pp. 81—83.

[3] Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 51, Eng. trans.

[4] G. Smith, 'Eponym Canon,' p. 108; Rawlinson, 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. p. 103, 2nd edit.

[5] 'Eponym Canon,' p. 114.

according to the Assyrian chronology. Assyria was at this time pressing especially upon the Syrian states, the Hamathites, Hittites, Syrians of Damascus, and Phœnicians. Shalmaneser contended successively with the Benhadad who preceded Hazael on the Damascene throne, and with Hazael himself; his reign, according to the Assyrian reckoning, extended from B.C. 860 to B.C. 825.[1] His attacks, and those of his successor, Shamas-Vul (B.C. 825—810), may have advantaged the Israelites by weakening the Damascene kingdom, which was at this time their principal adversary (see ch. x. 32, 33; xii. 17, 18; xiii. 17—25).

The advance of Assyria, though not uncheckered by defeats, continued, without serious interruption, until, in the reign of Menahem (B.C. 770—760), an actual invasion of the northern kingdom took place under a monarch called Pul (ch. xv. 19; 1 Chron. v. 26), who put the land to a tribute of a thousand talents of silver. The native monuments make no mention of this Pul, for he can scarcely be Tiglath-pileser, who took the name and reigned as Pulu (Pul or Porus) in Babylon for two years (B.C. 729—728) before his decease in B.C. 727; since Pul is distinguished from Tiglath-pileser both in Kings (ch. xv. 19, 29) and in Chronicles (1 Chron. v. 26), and moreover Tiglath-pileser's first year was B.C. 745. It seems most probable that the Pul who attacked Menahem was a pretender to the throne of Assyria, contemporary with Asshur-dayan III. (B.C. 771—753), in whose time we hear of several revolts, and midway in whose reign three copies of the Eponym Canon draw a line, the usual sign of the commencement of a new reign.[2] Pul may have been acknowledged as King of Assyria by a portion of the nation from B.C. 763, where the line is drawn, to B.C. 758, when peace is said to have been restored to the land; and during this interval may have made the expedition mentioned in ch. xv. 19.

Of the expedition of Tiglath-pileser against Pekah King of Israel, which resulted in the conquest of the trans-Jordanic territory, and the captivity of the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh (1 Chron. v. 26; comp. ch. xv. 19), the Assyrian annals contain a fragmentary account, as well as of the war between the same monarch and Rezin King of Damascus, mentioned in ch. xvi. 9. Tiglath-pileser appears in his inscriptions as a great and warlike monarch, who re-established the military supremacy of Assyria over Western Asia after a period of depression. He seems to have ascended the throne in the year B.C. 745, and to have reigned from that date until B.C. 727—a space of eighteen years. In the earlier part of his reign he seems to have invaded Judæa, probably from the Philistine plain, and to have been engaged for some time in a war with a king of Judah whom he calls Azariah, but who must apparently have been either Jotham or Ahaz. This war, which is not mentioned in Scripture, had no important result; but in a little time it was followed by another which greatly increased the influence of Assyria in the Palestinian region. Ahaz now certainly occupied the Judæan throne, while that of Samaria was held

[1] 'Eponym Canon,' pp. 59, 60 [2] Ibid., pp. 48, 63.

by Pekah, and that of Damascus by Rezin. The northern kings were anxious to form a Syrian confederacy against Assyrian aggression, and invited Ahaz to join them; but, that monarch declining, they resolved to put him down, and give his kingdom to a creature of their own, a certain Ben-Tabeal (Isa. vii. 6), who is thought to have been a Damascene.[1] Under these circumstances, Ahaz invoked the aid of Tiglath-pileser against their common enemies (ch. xvi. 7), and a war followed, which lasted apparently three years (B.C. 734—732). Tiglath-pileser's first efforts were against Rezin. After several battles in the open field, wherein the Assyrian arms were successful, he forced the Syrian king to take refuge within the walls of Damascus, which he then besieged and took.[2] Rezin fell into his hands, and was slain (ch. xvi. 9); several of his generals were impaled on crosses; the country was ravaged; the unarmed inhabitants seized, and the mass of them carried away as captives.[3] The war was then carried from the Damascene territory into that of Samaria, which was entered upon the north and upon the east, and treated much as the Damascene had been. The captivity of Israel commenced. Assyria extended her territory from the Lebanon and the Hamathites' country, to the hills of Galilee and the coast of the Dead Sea. Judæa, under Ahaz, became her tributary,[4] as did Moab, Edom, and Ammon.[5] In Samaria a new king was set up in the person of Hoshea, who murdered Pekah, with the connivance of the Assyrian monarch.[6]

The Assyrian records agree with Scripture in making a Shalmaneser (Shalmaneser IV.) the successor of Tiglath-pileser,[7] though they do not represent Shalmaneser (as Scripture has generally been supposed to do) as the conqueror of Samaria. They give to this king a reign of five years only, from B.C. 727 to B.C. 723, and represent him as a warlike monarch, engaged in a series of military expeditions; but the notices of him which have come down to us are extremely scanty and fragmentary, and throw little light on the biblical narrative. We learn, however, from Phœnician sources,[8] that Shalmaneser's wars were at any rate in the neighbourhood of Palestine, since we are told that he overran all Phœnicia, took Sidon, the continental Tyre, and Akko, and even attacked the island Tyre with a fleet manned chiefly by Phœnician sailors. His enterprises seem to have been cut short by a domestic revolution, headed by the great Sargon, who drove Shalmaneser from the throne, probably put him to death, and mutilated his annals.

[1] Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 158.

[2] G. Smith, 'Eponym Canon,' p. 121.

[3] Ibid.; comp. ch. xvi. 9.

[4] Ch. xvi. 8; comp. ch. xviii. 7 and 'Eponym Canon,' p. 124, where Ahaz seems to be mentioned as a tributary under the name of "Jehoahaz."

[5] 'Eponym Canon,' p. 124, lines 60, 61.

[6] In ch. xv. 30, the murder of Pekah is assigned to Hoshea; but in the annals of Tiglath-pileser ('Eponym Canon,' p. 123, line 17) that monarch appears to have represented it as his own act. He certainly made Hoshea king.

[7] See the 'Eponym Canon,' p. 65.

[8] Menand. Eph. ap. Joseph. 'Ant. Jud.,' ix. 14.

Sargon claims as his first act the conquest of Samaria, from which he says that he carried off 27,290 captives.[1] He is, perhaps, the king intended in ch. xvii. 6 and xviii. 11; and he obtains distinct mention in Isa. xx. 1. Hezekiah seems to have revolted from him (ch. xviii. 7); but he was successful in most other quarters. He put down a rebellion in which Hamath, Arpad, Zimirra, Damascus, and Samaria were combined, about B.C. 720, defeated an Egyptian army, and took Raphia and Gaza in the same year, conquered Ashdod in B.C. 711, and Babylon in B.C. 710; invaded Edom in B.C. 707, and established his authority over Cyprus and over some of the islands of the Persian Gulf about the same time.[2] In his reign the Assyrian empire advanced itself to the borders of Egypt, and from thenceforth until about B.C. 650 the two countries were engaged in almost perpetual hostilities, Judæa and Syria furnishing for the most part the battle-ground between the contending forces. Sargon's first adversary was a certain Sibache,[3] who is probably identical with the Shabak or Shabatok of the hieroglyphics, the Sabaco of Herodotus,[4] and the So or Seveh[5] of Scripture (ch. xvii. 4). He afterwards contended with a monarch whom he calls the King of Meroë,[6] who is perhaps Tirhakah, perhaps Shabatok. After reigning seventeen years, Sargon died, and was succeeded on the Assyrian throne by the world-famous Sennacherib, the most widely known, if not really the greatest, of Assyrian monarchs.

It was in the middle of the reign of Sargon—about B.C. 714 or 713—that the first contact occurred between Judæa and Babylon. A native prince, named Merodach-Baladan, rose in insurrection against the Assyrians on the death of Shalmaneser, and succeeded in re-establishing Babylonian independence for a short space.[7] Threatened by Sargon, and anxious to strengthen himself by alliances, this king sent, about B.C. 714, an embassy into Palestine, under the pretence of congratulating Hezekiah on his recovery from his severe illness (ch. xx. 12). The ambassadors were received with favour, and shown all Hezekiah's treasures (ch. xx. 13); and it is most likely that an alliance was concluded; but a few years later, B.C. 710, Sargon marched an army into Babylonia, defeated Merodach-Baladan, and expelled him from the country, took Babylon, and, following the examples of Tiglath-pileser and Shalmaneser, established himself as king. The Canon of Ptolemy calls him Arkeanos (equivalent to Sarkina), and assigns him the space from B.C. 710 to B.C. 705. It was in this latter year that Sargon died.

The death of Sargon and the accession of the untried Sennacherib gave the

[1] 'Eponym Canon,' p. 125, line 24.

[2] See 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. pp. 141—147.

[3] 'Eponym Canon,' pp. 125, 126; Oppert, 'Inscriptions des Sargonides,' p. 22; Sir H. Rawlinson, *Athenæum*, No. 1869, p. 534.

[4] Herod., ii. 137.

[5] The proper pointing of the word סוא in ch. xvii. 4 is probably סֵוֶא, and not סוא.

[6] 'Eponym Canon,' p. 128, line 61; p. 130, line 36.
Oppert, 'Inscriptions des Sargonides,' p. 28.

signal for a series of revolts. In Babylonia several pretenders arose,[1] and after a time Merodach-Baladan re-established himself as king; but he only wore the crown for six months. In B.C. 702 Sennacherib drove him out, recovered the country to Assyria, and placed a viceroy upon the Babylonian throne.[2] The next year he made his great expedition into Syria, Phœnicia, and Palestine, chastised Sidon and other Phœnician towns which had thrown off the Assyrian yoke, took Ascalon and Ekron, defeating a force of Egyptians and Ethiopians, which had come to help the people of the latter city, and then overran Judæa, and attacked Jerusalem. "Because Hezekiah King of Judah," he says, "would not submit to my yoke, I came up against him, and by force of arms and by the might of my power I took forty-six of his strong-fenced cities, and of the smaller towns which were scattered about I took and plundered a countless number. And from these places I captured and carried off as spoil 200,150 people, old and young, male and female, together with horses and mares, asses and camels, oxen and sheep, a countless multitude. And Hezekiah himself I shut up in Jerusalem, his capital, like a bird in a cage, building towers round about the city to hem him in, and raising banks of earth against the gates, so as to prevent escape. . . . Then upon this Hezekiah there fell the fear of the power of my arms, and he sent out to me the chiefs and the elders of Jerusalem, with thirty talents of gold, and eight hundred talents of silver, and divers treasures, a rich and immense booty. . . . All these things were brought to me at Nineveh, the seat of my government, Hezekiah having sent them by way of tribute, and as a token of submission to my power."[3] The close accord of this entire account with the notice contained in the Second Book of Kings (ch. xviii. 13—16) is very striking. The "fenced cities" are the first object of attack; then Jerusalem is threatened; Hezekiah is shut up in the place (comp. 2 Chron. xxxii. 2—8); then submission is made; a sum of money in gold and silver is paid for a ransom; even the number of the talents of gold is the same in both narratives. The only discrepancy is with respect to the silver, in which Sennacherib may include all that he carried off from the country. Finally, the invading host retires, the siege is broken up, and peace restored between the countries. One serious difficulty alone presents itself—viz. the date of the expedition in the present Hebrew text. This is given as "the *fourteenth* year of Hezekiah," or eight years only after the capture of Samaria. But in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, B.C. 714, Sargon was still upon the throne; the Assyrian arms were engaged in Media and Armenia; and there was no Assyrian expedition into Palestine.[4] Sennacherib's invasion cannot possibly have taken place until B.C. 705, nine years later, for not till then did he ascend the throne;[5] and by his annals[6] it appears not to have actually taken place till his fourth

[1] Polyhistor. ap. Euseb., 'Chron. Can.,' l. 5. § 1.
[2] 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. p. 157.
[3] Sir H. Rawlinson, in 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. pp. 161, 162.
[4] See 'Eponym Canon,' p. 66. [5] Ibid., p. 67.
[6] Ibid., pp. 131—136; comp. 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. p. 158.

year, B.C. 701. The date, therefore, in ch. xviii. 13 must be an error; and the choice would seem to lie between regarding it as a corruption—"fourteenth" for "twenty-seventh"—and viewing it as the marginal note of a commentator which has crept into the text.

After an interval (2 Chron. xxxii. 9), which may not have exceeded a few months, and which certainly cannot have exceeded a year or two, Sennacherib attacked Hezekiah for the second time. It probably vexed him that he had not insisted on occupying Jerusalem with a garrison, and he may also have received fresh provocation from Hezekiah, if that monarch had made an application to Egypt for aid, as he seems to have done (ch. xviii. 24; Isa. xxx. 1—4). At any rate, Sennacherib proceeded once more to threaten Jerusalem, sent a force against it under three of his chief officials (ch. xviii. 17), attempted to stir up disaffection among the soldiers of the garrison (ch. xviii. 17—36), and announced his intention of coming against the city in person and "destroying it utterly" (ch. xix. 10—13). At the same time, he laid siege to various towns in Southern Palestine, and contemplated invading Egypt, where Tirhakah was collecting an army to oppose him (ch. xix. 9). But at this point of his career his ambition received a signal check. In a single night, silently and suddenly—as the Jews believed, by the direct action of the Almighty[1] (ch. xix. 35; 2 Chron. xxxii. 21; Isa. xxxvii. 36)—almost his whole army was destroyed; and nothing remained for him but to relinquish his hopes of further conquest in the south-west, and to make a hurried retreat to his capital (ch. xix. 36).

The later years of Sennacherib were inglorious. In B.C. 694 Babylonia revolted from him, and succeeded in re-establishing its independence. Between this date and his death the only expeditions which can be probably assigned to him are one into Cilicia and another into Edom.[2] He certainly made no attempt to recover the laurels which he had lost in Palestine and on the borders of Egypt, but allowed Manasseh in Judæa, and Tirhakah in the valley of the Nile, to remain unmolested. Domestic troubles probably occupied the later portion of his reign, which was terminated by his murder in 681 B.C. (ch. xix. 37), after he had held the Assyrian throne for the space of twenty-four years.

Sennacherib's murder is not distinctly mentioned in the Assyrian records, but Esarhaddon appears as his son and successor, and there are traces[3] of this prince having had at first to contend for the crown with his half-brothers, Adrammelech and Sharezer (ch. xix. 37). The scene of the conflict was Armenia; and after it was over, Esarhaddon appears to have

[1] The catastrophe has been attributed to the simoom (Milman, 'History of the Jews,' vol. i. p. 307), to a plague (Gesenius, Winer, etc.), to a sudden storm (Vitringa, Stanley), and even to a night attack of the enemy (Michaëlis); but the words of the narrative distinctly point to that silent, sudden extinction which English law calls "the visitation of God."

[2] 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. pp. 175—177.

[3] Ibid., p. 186.

made an expedition into Syria, where Sidon had revolted,[1] and, after crushing the revolt, to have established his authority over the whole of Phœnicia, Palestine, and the adjacent countries. Manasseh, the weak son of Hezekiah, was at this time forced to become a tributary and subject-monarch, as were also the kings of Edom, Moab, and Ammon, of Tyre, Gebal, and Arvad, of Gaza, Ekron, Ascalon, and Ashdod.[2] Assyria's dominion was at once extended and consolidated, and the way was paved for aggressions upon Egypt, which began about B.C. 672, in Esarhaddon's ninth year.[3]

The offence given by Manasseh to his sovereign, on account of which he was arrested and carried captive *to Babylon* (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11), may be probably assigned to the reign of Esarhaddon, who alone of all the Assyrian kings maintained a residence in that city. And we may conjecture that his restoration to his kingdom (2 Chron. xxxiii. 13) had a connection with Esarhaddon's Egyptian projects, since it would have been only prudent to secure the fidelity of Jerusalem before the perils of an Egyptian campaign were affronted. Esarhaddon carried on war with Tirhakah successfully between B.C. 673 and B.C. 670; but in B.C. 669 or 668 the fortune of war turned against him, and Tirhakah once more established his authority over the whole of Egypt.[4]

It is somewhat remarkable that Scripture makes no mention of Esarhaddon's son and successor, Asshur-bani-pal, who mounted the Assyrian throne in B.C. 668, and reigned till B.C. 626. This prince must have been contemporary with Manasseh for twenty-five years, with Amon, and with Josiah. In the early part of his reign he made at least two expeditions against Egypt, and must have repeatedly passed through Palestine at the head of powerful armies.[5] In his later years he warred successfully with Elam, Babylon, Armenia, Phœnicia, and Arabia. It was about the middle of his reign that the decline of Assyria began. A great Scythic invasion swept over Western Asia, and spread everywhere ruin and desolation.[6] Assyria's distant dependencies, Egypt, Palestine, Lydia, detached themselves. Before she had time to recover from her depressed condition, her conquest was taken in hand by the combined Medes and Babylonians.[7] Nineveh fell about B.C. 616, or a little earlier,[8] and Western Asia became a field wherein rival ambitions met and collided. Media, Babylonia, Lydia, and Egypt, all of them sought to profit by the downfall of the great power so long dominant over the Oriental world, while even such petty states as Judæa took the opportunity to aggrandize themselves (ch. xxiii. 15—20; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 6).

So far as Judæa was concerned, the world-powers which took the place

[1] 'Eponym Canon,' p. 137. [2] Ibid., p. 139, lines 13—18. [3] Ibid., p. 69.
[4] Ibid., p. 202. [5] 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. pp. 201—203.
[6] Herod., i. 103—106; comp. 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. pp. 221—228.
[7] Herod., i. 106; Abydenus ap. Euseb., 'Chron. Can.,' i. 9; Polyhistor. ap. eund., i. 5.
[8] The Assyrian Eponym list continues down to B.C. 617 ('Eponym Canon,' p. 71).

of Assyria, and strove to establish their domination in the place of hers, were Babylon and Egypt. Egypt appears to have anticipated her rival. As early as the reign of Psamatik I. she recommenced aggressions upon Asia by persistent attacks upon the strongest of the Philistine cities, the famous Ashdod,[1] and about B.C. 610, under Neco, the son and successor of Psamatik, she invaded Syria in force, defeated Josiah at Megiddo,[2] overran Judæa, Phœnicia, and Syria as far as Taurus and the middle Euphrates, and made herself mistress of the entire region between the borders of Egypt and the great city of Carchemish. Neco held possession for some years of this rich and interesting region, recovering thus the hold upon Asia which had been possessed a thousand years earlier by the great monarchs of the eighteenth dynasty—the Thothmeses and Amenhoteps. Then, however, Babylon bestirred herself. Nabopolassar, the prince who, in conjunction with the Median monarch Cyaxares, had attacked and destroyed Nineveh, became independent King of Babylon from the moment of Assyria's downfall; but it took him some time to establish his authority over the tract lying between Babylon and Carchemish, though probably he claimed a dominion over all the western provinces of the Assyrian empire from the first. Neco's conquest he viewed as a rebellion which must be crushed;[3] but it was not till the year B.C. 605, when he was already becoming enfeebled by old age, that he found himself in a position to carry the Babylonian arms into the far West, and attempt the chastisement of the "rebel." Even then he had to give up the notion of proceeding against his enemy in person, and to depute the task of subjugation to his eldest son, the crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar, in B.C. 605, led the Babylonian forces from the capital to Carchemish (now Jerabus), and there engaged the troops of Neco in the great battle[4] which destroyed Egypt's last hope of maintaining her Asiatic supremacy, and installed Babylon in the position of the dominant power of South-Western Asia. From her defeat at Carchemish Egypt never recovered. She made some feeble efforts under Apries (Pharaoh-Hophra) and Amasis to effect Phœnician and Cyprian conquests;[5] but the results were trivial, and in a short time she collapsed utterly. Babylon, on the other hand, carried all before her. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Elam, Syria, Phœnicia, Judæa, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Egypt. In his long reign of forty-three years (B.C. 605—562) he seems not to have met with a reverse. The Babylonian empire under his sway attained to an extraordinary degree of prosperity. Jehoiakim, having "become his servant" in B.C. 605 (ch. xxiv. 1), revolted from him in B.C. 602, and was deposed (2 Chron. xxxvi. 6) and probably put to death by him (Jer. xxii. 19; xxxvi. 30) in B.C. 598. Jehoiachin, his son, was then set up as king, but within three months (ch. xxiv. 8) displeased his lord paramount, who deprived him of his throne, and carried

[1] Herod., ii. 157.
[2] Berosus, 'Fr.,' 14.
[3] Herod., ii. 161, 182.
[4] Ch. xxiii. 29; comp. Herod., ii. 159.
[5] See Jer. xlvi. 2—17; and Berosus, *l. s. c.*

him captive to Babylon in B.C. 597 (ch. xxiv. 10—15). Still, Judæa was allowed to maintain its semi-independence. Zedekiah, uncle to Jehoiachin, received the crown at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (ch. xxiv. 17), and swore fealty to him (2 Chron. xxxvi. 13); but after a short time he too began to contemplate revolt, made an alliance with Egypt (Ezek. xvii. 15), and in B.C. 588 openly declared himself independent of his suzerain (ch. xxiv. 20). Nebuchadnezzar was not slow to accept the challenge. He at once marched against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it. Apries (Hophra), the Egyptian monarch, made one attempt to come to the assistance of his ally (Jer. xxxvii. 5); but the attempt failed, either through the defeat of his army or through his own want of resolution.[1] In B.C. 586, after a siege of eighteen months, the end came. A breach was made in the northern wall of the town, and a lodgment effected within the defences (Jer. xxxix. 2, 3). Zedekiah fled, but was pursued and made a prisoner, blinded, and carried to Babylon (Jer. xxxix. 4—7). Jerusalem surrendered itself; the temple, palace, and chief houses were burnt (ch. xxv. 9); and the bulk of the population, all except the very poor, were carried off into Babylonia as captives. The history of the entire Israelite monarchy thus ends. From the accession of Saul to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar was a period of five hundred and seven years, which was divisible into three portions: (1) from the accession of Saul to that of Rehoboam—the period of the undivided monarchy—a space of a hundred and twenty years, from B.C. 1092 to B.C. 972; (2) from the accession of Rehoboam in Judah and of Jeroboam in Israel to the fall of Samaria—the period of the two parallel kingdoms—a space of two hundred and fifty years, from B.C. 972 to B.C. 722; and (3) from the destruction of the Israelite kingdom to the final captivity of Judah, a period of a hundred and thirty-seven years, from B.C. 722 to B.C. 586 inclusive. During the first period Israel's fortunes were connected with those of Egypt; during the second, partly with Egypt but mainly with Assyria; during the third, to some extent with both Egypt and Assyria, but mainly with Babylon. Most, if not all, of the points of contact between Israel and these nations during the period treated of have been touched on in these pages, and the result would seem to be a remarkable general harmony and agreement between the sacred records and the profane, together with a certain residuum of difficulties, for the most part connected with the chronology. On these it is not improbable that future discoveries may throw further light; though it is, perhaps, too much to expect that all difficulties will be ultimately swept away. It does not seem to be the general way of God's providence to make everything plain to us. "The trying of faith worketh patience," and without it patience would never "have her perfect work," nor would faith itself be deserving of those encomiums and that "good report" which it obtains throughout the Christian Scriptures.

[1] Josephus says that he was defeated ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 7. § 3). Jeremiah's words (Jer. xxxvii. 7) seem rather to imply a retreat without a battle.

THE SECOND

BOOK OF THE KINGS.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Vers. 1—18.—The Revolt of Moab. The Illness, Impiety, and Death of Ahaziah. The narrative of the Second Book of Kings follows on that of the First Book in the closest possible sequence. The history of Ahaziah's reign begins in 1 Kings xxii. 51, and is carried on, without any real break or pause in the sense, to ch. i. 18. How the two books came to be divided at this point is quite inexplicable. The division is most unhappy. Not only does it, without apparent reason, draw a strong line of demarcation in the middle of a reign; but it separates what it was evidently the intention of the writer most closely to connect —viz. the sins of the monarch and their punishment. Ahaziah began his reign by openly showing himself a devotee of Baal—by "walking in the way of his father *and in the way of his mother*," the wicked Jezebel: therefore calamity immediately smote him—first Moab rebelled, threw off the Israelite yoke, and re-established its independence; and then, within a short space, Ahaziah himself met with an accident which produced a dangerous illness. The writer relates barely the former fact, but enlarges on the latter, which gave occasion for one of the most remarkable of the miracles of Elijah.

Ver. 1.—**Then Moab rebelled**; literally, *and Moab rebelled*, but with an idea, not merely of sequence, but of consequence. The "Moabite Stone," discovered in 1869, throws considerable light on the character and circumstances of this rebellion. **Moab** had, we know, been subjected by David (2 Sam. viii. 2), and had been very severely treated. Either in the reign of Solomon, or more probably at his death, and the disruption of his kingdom, the Moabites had revolted, and resumed an independent position, which they had maintained until the reign of Omri. Omri, who was a warlike monarch, the greatest of the Israelite monarchs after Jeroboam, after settling himself firmly upon the throne of Israel, attacked the Moabite territory, and in a short time reduced it, making the native king, Chemosh-gad, his tributary. At the death of Omri, Ahab succeeded to the suzerainty, and maintained it during his lifetime, exacting a tribute that was felt as a severe "oppression" (Moabite Stone, line 6; comp. ch. iii. 4). The death of Ahab in battle and the defeat of his army encouraged Mesha, who had succeeded his father, Chemosh-gad, to raise the standard of revolt once more, and to emancipate his country after a period of subjection which he estimates roughly at "forty years." The "Stone" is chiefly occupied with an account of the steps by which he recovered his territory. **After the death of Ahab.** Probably, as soon as he heard of it. In Oriental empires the death of a brave and energetic monarch is constantly the signal for a general revolt of the subject peoples. They entertain a hope that his successor will not inherit his vigour and capacity.

Ver. 2.—**Ahaziah fell down through a lattice**; rather, *through the lattice*. It is implied that the **upper chamber** had a single window, which was closed by a single *lattice*, or shutter of interlaced woodwork. The shutter may have been insufficiently secured; or the woodwork may have been too weak to bear his weight. Compare the fall of Eutychus (Acts xx. 9), where, however, there

is no mention of a "lattice." **Was sick**; *i.e.* "was so injured that he had to take to his bed." **Inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron.** As a worshipper of Baal, bent on walking in the evil way of his father and of his mother (1 Kings xxii. 52), Ahaziah would naturally inquire of some form of the Baal divinity. Why he chose "Baal-zebub the god of Ekron," it is impossible to say. Perhaps Baal-zebub had at the time a special reputation for giving oracular responses. Perhaps the Ekron temple was, of all the ancient sites of the Baal-worship, the one with which he could most readily communicate. Philistia lay nearer to Samaria than Phœnicia did, and of the Philistine towns Ekron (now *Akir*) was the most northern, and so the nearest. "Baal-zebub" has been thought by some to be equivalent to "Beel-samen," "the lord of heaven"—a divine title well known to the Phœnicians; but this view is etymologically unsound, since *zebub* cannot possibly mean "heaven." "Baal-zebub" is "the lord of flies"—either the god who sends them as a plague on any nation that offends him (comp. Exod. viii. 21—31), or the god who averts them from his votaries and favourites, an equivalent of the Greek Ζεὺς ἀπόμυιος, or the Roman "Jupiter Myiagrus," flies being in the East not unfrequently a terrible plague. The Septuagint translation, Βάαλ-μυῖαν, though inaccurate, shows an appreciation of the true etymology. **Of this disease**; rather, *of this illness* (ἐκ τῆς ἀῤῥωστίας μου ταύτης, LXX.).

Ver. 3.—**The angel of the Lord.** It would be better to translate, with the LXX., *an angel* (ἄγγελος, not ὁ ἄγγελος). An angel had appeared to Elijah on a previous occasion (1 Kings xix. 5, 7). **Elijah the Tishbite** (comp. 1 Kings xvii. 1; xxi. 17, 28; ch. i. 8; and for the meaning of the expression, *hat-Tishbi*, see the comment on 1 Kings xvii. 1). **Arise, go up.** Elijah was, apparently, in the low tract of the Shefelah, or in Sharon, when the messengers started, and was thus commanded to "go up" and meet them, or intercept them on their journey before they descended into the plain. God would not have the insult to his majesty carried out. **Is it not because there is not a God in Israel?** rather, *Is it that there is no God at all in Israel?* The double negative is intensitive, and implies that the king's consultation of Baal-zebub, god of Ekron, is a complete and absolute denial of the Divinity of Jehovah. To consult a foreign oracle is equivalent to saying that the voice of God is wholly silent in one's own land. This was going further in apostasy than Ahab had gone (see 1 Kings xxii. 6—9).

Ver. 4.—**Now therefore.** The word translated "therefore" (לָכֵן) is emphatic, and means "for this reason," "on this account." *Because* Ahaziah had apostatized from God, God sentenced him to die from the effects of his fall, and not to recover. It is implied that he might have recovered if he had acted otherwise. **And Elijah departed**; *i.e.* quitted the messengers, showing that his errand was accomplished—he had said all that he was commissioned to say.

Ver. 5.—**And when the messengers turned back**; rather, *when the messengers returned*; i.e. when they reached the presence of Ahaziah, he perceived at once that they could not have been to Ekron and come back in the time. He therefore inquired of them, **Why are ye now turned back?** "Why have ye not completed your journey?"

Ver. 6.—**There came a man.** It is not likely that the messengers did not know Elijah by sight. He was too prominent a person in the history of the time, and too remarkable in his appearance, not to have been recognized, at any rate by some of them. But they thought it best to keep back the prophet's name, and to call him simply "a man" (*'ish*)—perhaps actuated by good will towards Elijah, perhaps by a fear for their own safety, such as had been felt by Obadiah (1 Kings xviii. 8—14).

Ver. 7.—**What manner of man** was he? literally, *what was the manner of the man?* What was his appearance? Were there any marks about him by which he might be recognized and known? Ahaziah may have already suspected that the man who had denounced woe on him would be the same who had denounced woe on his father (see 1 Kings xxi. 20—22).

Ver. 8.—**A hairy man**; literally, *a lord of hair* (בַּעַל שֵׂעָר). Some take the meaning to be that he was rough and unkempt, with his hair and beard long; and so the LXX., who give *ἀνὴρ δασύς*. But the more usual explanation is that he wore a shaggy coat of untanned skin, with the hair outward Such a garment seems certainly to have been worn by the later prophets (Zech. xiii. 4; Matt. iii. 4), and to have been regarded as a sign of their profession. But there is no positive evidence that the dress had been adopted by Isaiah's time. **Girt with a girdle of leather.** Generally the Israelites wore girdles of a soft material, as linen or cotton. The "curious girdle" of the high priest's ephod was of "fine twined linen," embroidered with gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet (Exod. xxviii. 8). Girdles of leather, rough and uncomfortable, would only be worn by the very poor and by the ascetic. Elijah may have adopted his rough and coarse costume, either to show contempt for things earthly, as Hengstenberg thinks; or as a penitential garb indicating sorrow for the sins of the people, as Keil supposes; or simply to chastise and subdue the flesh,

as other ascetics. **It is Elijah the Tishbite.** The description given is enough. The king has no longer any doubt. His suspicion is turned into certainty. There is no living person but Elijah who would at once have the boldness to prophesy the death of the king, and would wear such a costume as described. Elijah is, of course, his enemy, as he had been his father's "enemy" (1 Kings xxi. 20), and will wish him ill, and prophesy accordingly, the wish being "father to the thought." It is not improbable that Elijah had withdrawn himself into obscurity on the accession of Ahaziah, or at any rate on his exhibition of strong idolatrous proclivities (Ewald), as he had done on more than one occasion from Ahab (1 Kings xvii. 10; xix. 3—8). Ahaziah may have been long wishing to arrest and imprison him, and now thought he saw his opportunity.

Ver. 9.—**The king sent unto him a captain of fifty.** "Captains of fifties" were first instituted in the wilderness by the advice of Jethro (Exod. xviii. 21—25). Though not expressly mentioned in the military organization of David, they probably formed a part of it, and so passed into the institutions of the kingdom of Israel. **With his fifty.** Some recognition of Elijah's superhuman power would seem to have led Ahaziah to send so large a body. His doing so was a sort of challenge to the prophet to show whether Ahaziah or the God whom he represented was the stronger. The circumstances recall those of the "band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees" (John xviii. 3), which was sent, "with swords and staves," to arrest another righteous Person. **He sat on the top of a hill;** literally, *on the top of the hill* (ἐπὶ τῆς κορυφῆς τοῦ ὄρους, LXX.). The high ground where Elijah had met the messengers (ver. 3) seems to be intended. When they were gone, the prophet took his seat on the highest point, conspicuous on all sides, so avoiding any attempt at concealment, and awaiting the next step that the king would take, calmly and quietly. **He spake unto him, Thou man of God.** The captain is thought by some to have spoken ironically; but there is no evidence of this. The address is respectful, submissive. The miraculous powers of Elijah (1 Kings xvii. 22; xviii. 38) were probably known to the officer, who hoped by the tone of his address to escape the prophet's anger. In the same spirit he avoids issuing any command of his own, and prefers simply to deliver the king's command—**The king hath said, Come down.**

Ver. 10.—**And Elijah answered . . . let fire come down.** The LXX. render, καταβήσεται πῦρ—"fire will come down;" and so some moderns, who are anxious to clear the prophet of the charges of cruelty and bloodthirstiness which have been brought against him. But there is no need of altering the translation. Elijah undoubtedly "commanded fire to come down from heaven" (Luke ix. 54), or, in other words, prayed to God that it might come down, and in answer to his prayer the fire fell. The narrative may be set aside as an embellishment of later times, having no historical foundation, by those who (like Ewald) deny that miracles are possible; but, if it be accepted, it must be accepted as it stands, and Elijah must be regarded, not as having merely prophesied a result, but as having been instrumental in producing it. We must judge Elijah, not by the ideas of our own day, but by those of the age wherein he lived. He was raised up to vindicate God's honour, to check and punish idolatry, to keep alive a faithful remnant in Israel, when all the powers of the earth were leagued together to destroy and smother true religion. He was an embodiment of the Law—of absolute, strict, severe justice. The fair face of mercy was not revealed to him. Already, at Carmel, he had executed the Divine vengeance on idolaters after an exemplary fashion (1 Kings xviii. 40). Now, Ahaziah, the son of the wicked Jezebel, had challenged Jehovah to a trial of strength by first ignoring him, and then sending a troop of soldiers to arrest his prophet. Was Elijah to succumb without an effort, or was he to vindicate the majesty and honour of Jehovah? He had no power of himself to do either good or harm. He could but pray to Jehovah, and Jehovah, in his wisdom and perfect goodness, would either grant or refuse his prayer. If he granted it, the punishment inflicted would not be Elijah's work, but his. To tax Elijah with cruelty is to involve God in the charge. God regarded it as a fitting time for making a signal example, and, so regarding it, he inspired a spirit of indignation in the breast of his prophet, who thereupon made the prayer which he saw fit to answer. The judgment was in accordance with the general tone and tenor of the Law, which assigns "tribulation and anguish to every soul of man that doeth evil" (Rom. ii. 9), and visits with death every act of rebellion against God. **There came down fire.** Josephus says that the "fire" was a flash of lightning (πρηστήρ), and so the commentators generally.

Ver. 11.—**Again also;** rather, *and again* (see the Revised Version). **He answered and said;** rather, *he spoke and said* (ἐλάλησε καὶ εἶπε, LXX.). **Come down quickly.** The king has grown impatient. It is conceivable that the death of the first captain with his band of fifty had been kept from him, and that he was only aware of an unac-

countable delay. He therefore changes his order from "Come down" to "Come down *quickly*."

Ver. 13.—**A captain of the third fifty**; rather, *the captain of a third fifty* (see the Revised Version). This captain **went up**—*i.e.* ascended the hill on which Elijah was still seated, and there fell on his knees, or bowed himself down, before the prophet, as suppliants were wont to do, beseeching his compassion. The fate of the two former captains had become known to him by some means or other, and this induced him to assume an attitude, not of command, but of submission. He acknowledged that the prophet held his life and the lives of his fifty men at his free disposal, and begged that they might be **precious in his sight**, or, in other words, that he would spare them. **What** response Elijah would have made, had he been left to himself, is uncertain. But he was not left to himself. An angel of God again appeared to him, and directed his course of action.

Ver. 15.—**Go down with him: be not afraid of him**; *i.e.* "descend the hill with him—have no fear of him, accompany him to the presence of the king; do my will, and there shall no harm happen unto thee." **And he arose, and went down.** Elijah showed no hesitation, no fear, no undue regard for his own personal safety. He had been contending for God's honour, not for his own advantage. Now that God bade him contend no more, but yield, he complied promptly, and ceased all resistance.

Ver. 16.—**He said unto him**; *i.e. Elijah* said to the *king*. Introduced into the royal presence, as a prisoner, perhaps fettered and chained, the prophet in no way lowered his tone or abated from the severity of his speech. Distinctly, in the plainest possible words, he warned the monarch that his end approached—he would never quit the bed whereon he lay, but, *because* he had insulted Jehovah by sending to consult the god of Ekron, would surely die. Apparently the king, abashed and confounded, released the prophet, and allowed him to go his way. **Thus saith the Lord.** Elijah rehearses the words of the message which he had sent by the first of the three captains (see ver. 6)—Thus saith the Lord, **Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron, is it not because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word? Therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.** God's determinations are unalterable.

Ver. 17*a*.—**So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken.** Not only did he die in consequence of his fall without once quitting his bed, but his death was, as Elijah had said, a judgment on his sin in sending to consult Baal-zebub.

Reign of Jehoram.

Ver. 17*b*. — **And Jehoram** — or, *Joram*, LXX., "whom Jehovah exalts;" another evidence that Ahab did not regard himself as having abandoned altogether the worship of Jehovah (see the comment on 1 Kings xxii. 40)—**reigned in his stead** ("his brother," אחיו, has probably fallen out after "Jehoram," and requires to be inserted in order to give force to the last clause of the verse) **in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat King of Judah.** In ch. iii. 1 it is said that Jehoram, the son of Ahab and brother of Ahaziah, began to reign over Israel in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat himself. The apparent discrepancy is reconciled by supposing that Jehoshaphat associated his son Jehoram in the kingdom in his seventeenth year, when he was about to enter upon the Syrian war, so that the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat was also the second year of Jehoram. It is certain that association was largely practised in Egypt at a date long anterior to Jehoshaphat, and David's proclamation of Solomon as king was an association, so that the explanation is not untenable. On the other hand, the difficulties of the chronology of 2 Kings are so numerous and so great as to defy complete reconciliation, and to lead to a suspicion that the numbers have either suffered extensive corruption, or have been manipulated by an unskilful reviser (see Introduction, p. iii.). **Because he had no son**; *i.e.* because he, Ahaziah, had no son, he was succeeded by his younger brother, Jehoram.

Ver. 18.—**Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did.** These may have included some months of warfare against Mesha, King of Moab, who seems to have rebelled at the very beginning of Ahaziah's reign (ver. 1 and ch. iii. 5). Mesha's war of independence consisted of a succession of sieges, whereby he recovered one by one the various strongholds in his territory, which were occupied by the Israelites—Medeba, Ataroth, Nebo, Jahaz, Horonaim, and others—expelling the foreign garrisons, rebuilding or strengthening the fortifications, and occupying the cities by garrisons of his own. On one occasion, at the siege of Nebo, he declares that he killed seven thousand men. He found in the town a place of worship containing vessels, which he regarded as "vessels of Jehovah" (Moabite Stone, line 18); these he took, and dedicated them to Chemosh, the special god of Moab. How much of the war fell into the reign of Ahaziah, and how much into that of Jehoram his brother, is uncertain. Are they **not**

written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? Mesha's stone is a striking testimony to the *contemporary* record of historical events by the Palestinian monarchs of the time, which has sometimes been doubted.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—18.—*The short reign of Ahaziah: his sins, and their punishment.* For homiletic purposes we must attach to this chapter the last three verses of the First Book of the Kings. We find in that passage a short but very complete account of the general character of Ahaziah's sins; we find in this chapter a tolerably full account of one great act of sin, and a clear declaration of the manner in which that act and his other sins were punished. It will be well to consider separately (1) the sins; (2) their aggravations; and (3) their punishment.

I. THE SINS. These were three in number: (1) walking in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat (1 Kings xxii. 52), or maintaining the calf-worship—the hereditary will-worship of the northern kingdom, introduced by Jeroboam, the first non-Davidic king, and thenceforth continued uninterruptedly by each successive Israelite monarch; (2) walking in the way of his father—neglecting the worship of Jehovah, persecuting his prophets, practically proscribing the old religion, and probably ruling with harshness and cruelty; and (3) walking in the way of his mother—"serving Baal and worshipping him" (1 Kings xxii. 53), maintaining the Phœnician sensualistic cult, which Jezebel had introduced from Zidon (1 Kings xvi. 31), and which was of a most demoralizing and debasing character. It was, primarily, under this third head that the special act of sin fell which forms the main subject of ch. i.

II. THEIR AGGRAVATIONS. Ahaziah might have been expected to have learnt wisdom by experience, to have taken to heart the warning furnished by his father's life and death, and *at least* to have avoided the sins which had brought down upon the king and upon the kingdom so terrible a blow, so signal and severe a punishment. But, on the contrary, he went beyond his father in the great sin for which his father was punished, viz. apostasy from Jehovah to Baal. Ahab had always been half-hearted in his irreligion—he would, and he would not; he strove to combine an acknowledgment of Jehovah with a practical devotion to his rival; he gave both his sons names which placed them under the protection of Israel's true God; he at one time "humbled himself before Jehovah," and "fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly" (1 Kings xxi. 27, 29); he consented to inquire of a prophet of the Lord at the request of Jehoshaphat (1 Kings xxii. 9); he had no dealings, that we know of, with the foreign Baalistic temples or oracles which abounded in Phœnicia and Philistia, and thus did not, at any rate, parade his contempt of Jehovah in the eyes of the adjoining nations. Ahaziah acted differently. He was a consistent, thorough-faced, out-and-out idolater. Jehovah was nothing to him; Baal was everything. We ought, perhaps, to view it as some extenuation of his sin that he would naturally be influenced to some extent by his mother, whatever her character, and that the strong, firm, and fierce character of Jezebel would naturally influence him to a large extent. But men are not mere creatures of circumstances; they have the power to resist influences no less than to yield to them, and are bound to consider the nature of the influences surrounding them, and to resist such as they perceive to be bad. There is no evidence that Ahaziah offered any resistance at all to Jezebel's influences. He was the weak son of a wicked mother, and simply "walked in her way." As Ewald says, he "exhibited a far more decided inclination than Ahab had done to all sorts of heathenish superstitions" ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 77, Eng. trans.). He made a parade of his Baalistic leanings. He was obdurate and persistent, and despised warning after warning. A cruel hardness of heart, quite equal to his mother's, is shown in his exposing to probable death a second and a third body of fifty men, rather than submit to Elijah, and own himself in the wrong. Thus he would appear to have reached, in his comparatively short life, a deeper depth of moral evil than his father in his longer one.

III. THEIR PUNISHMENT. The revolt of the subject kingdom of Moab was the first punishment which befell the apostate king. He had to determine, on ascending the throne, what line he would take in religious matters—whether he would maintain or abolish the Baal-worship, whether he would maintain or abolish the worship of the

calves, whether he would persecute or protect the adherents of the Jehovistic religion. He decided to "walk in the way of his father and of his mother," and at once the first blow fell. Moab revolted, and was successful. The mere attempt at revolt might have happened in any case, for Mesha would naturally have seized such an opportunity as the death of Ahab under such circumstances offered. But the God of battles determines success or failure, and Mesha's unbroken series of victories (Moabite Stone, lines 9—33) were the consequence of Ahaziah's guilt. As usual, "for the king's offence the people bled." Seven thousand Israelite warriors were destroyed in one siege; the women and children were taken prisoners, and "devoted to Ashtar-Chemosh." There was widespread and extreme suffering. This should not surprise us. There is a solidarity between a king and his people, which unites them almost indissolubly in their fortunes and in their sins. The people follow the king's example, and, partaking in his guilt, naturally and justly partake in his punishment (see the homiletics on 1 Kings xxii., pp. 542, 543). The king's second punishment was personal. It was permitted that an accident should befall him. Sitting in an upper chamber, *i.e.* in one not upon the ground floor, which had a latticed window, opening out probably on a garden, he rashly leant against it, when the fastenings or the woodwork gave way, and he was precipitated to the ground. The hurt received was serious, and forced him to take to his bed, where he lay probably in much pain and discomfort. Here was an opportunity for considering his ways, for asking himself what was amiss in them, for mourning over the sins which he had committed (1 Kings xxii. 52, 53), and renouncing them and turning away from them. God's judgments are sent to lead men to repentance. Prolonged lying on a sick-bed is especially favourable to meditation, self-examination, self-condemnation, penitence. But Ahaziah was obdurate. He thought nothing of the goodness of God in sparing his life, for the fall might well have been instantaneously fatal; he thought nothing of God's mercy in giving him a time for reflection and amendment. He was merely impatient of his affliction, and anxious to have done with it. And in his impatience and obduracy he added sin to sin. Ignoring Jehovah and his prophets, through whom it was always possible to "inquire of the Lord" (1 Kings xxii. 5—28), he makes his appeal to Baal. It is an ostentatious appeal. He sends a public embassy to consult the Baal of a foreign town. Then his final punishment is decreed. Hitherto his life had hung in the balance—his fate had been in the hands of him with whom are the issues of life and death. Now his own act had shut the gate of mercy. The sentence went forth from the mouth of God's prophet, "Thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." Cut off in his youth, childless (ver. 17), he pays the fitting penalty of obstinate persistence in sin, and, after weeks or months of suffering, "goes to his own place." He "whom Jehovah upholds" becomes "he whom Jehovah destroys"—destroys after a short reign of little more than a year—a reign disgraceful to himself and disastrous to his country.

Vers. 9—16.—*The "spirit we are of"—the old dispensation and the new.* I. THE SPIRIT OF THE OLD DISPENSATION. The spirit of the Law was strict, stern, inexorable justice. "Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image. . . . Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. . . . Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark," etc. (Deut. xxvii. 15—26); "He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death" (Exod. xxi. 17); "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exod. xxi. 24, 25); "He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall surely be put to death" (Exod. xxi. 12); "He that smiteth his father or his mother, shall surely be put to death" (Exod. xxi. 15); "He that stealeth a man, and selleth him, shall surely be put to death" (Exod. xxi. 16); "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exod. xxii. 18); "Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death" (Exod. xxii. 19); "He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed" (Exod. xxii. 20), etc. Man was so far gone from original righteousness, had so corrupted and depraved himself, that only by the strictest possible system, by the most solemn warnings, the most awful threats, and the sternest possible execution of the threats when the occasion came, could wickedness be repressed, crime prevented from becoming rampant, mankind be reclaimed, society saved. Hence the

severity of the Mosaic code, the frequency of the penalty of death, and the strictness with which the penalty was in almost every case exacted. The first idolatry was punished by the death of three thousand by the sword (Exod. xxxii. 28). Nadab and Abihu, for offering strange fire, were destroyed by fire from heaven (Lev. x. 1, 2). When Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against Moses, the earth gaped and swallowed them up (Numb. xvi. 32). The iniquity of Peor was avenged by the slaughter of all the heads of the people (Numb. xxv. 4, 5). The sin of Gibeah cost the lives of twenty-five thousand Benjamites (Judg. xx. 46). Elijah, in calling down fire from heaven upon the minions of an idolatrous tyrant sent to arrest him for declaring to their master the sentence of Jehovah, was but acting in the general spirit of the Law, which regarded all opposition to Jehovah as deserving of death, and looked upon the inspired prophets of God as the ministers of an avenging righteousness. From time to time some signal display of Jehovah's anger against rebels and his power to punish them was requisite to preserve among the people any respect or reverence at all for true religion; and Elijah deemed that the time for such a display was now come. That the fire fell at his word showed that he had judged aright, and that his will reflected the Divine will and was in unison with it.

II. THE SPIRIT OF THE NEW DISPENSATION. The new dispensation opened with the proclamation of "peace on earth, good will toward men" (Luke ii. 14). The curses of the Law were replaced by the Beatitudes" (Matt. v. 3—10). The gentle and tender Jesus destroyed nothing but a single senseless tree (Matt. xxi. 19). He went about doing good. He was "sent to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that were bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke iv. 18, 19). When men rose up against him, when his life was attempted, before his hour was come, he was content by an exertion of his miraculous power to withdraw himself, to pass through their midst, and go his way. On one occasion he himself pointed the contrast between the two dispensations in the most distinct and remarkable manner. It was when he and his disciples were proceeding on a journey through this very district of Samaria, where Elijah had shown forth the justice of God, that his disciples, James and John, the "Sons of Thunder," as they were called, desired to repeat the Tishbite's act for the punishment of some Samaritans who would not permit him to enter their village. "Lord," they said, "wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" But they little knew the Master they addressed. Jesus "turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village" (Luke ix. 51—56). "It was," remarks Archbishop Trench, "as if he had said, 'Ye are mistaking and confounding the different standing-points of the old and new covenants, taking your stand upon the old—that of an avenging righteousness, when you should rejoice to take it upon the new—that of a forgiving love'" ('Notes on the Miracles,' ch. iv. p. 36, note). The spirit of the Christian dispensation is seen especially in such commands as the following: "Resist not evil but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. v. 39); "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. v. 44); "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom. xii. 10); "Recompense to no man evil for evil" (Rom. xii. 17); "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written; Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. xii. 19—21).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Seeking after strange gods: its cause and consequence.* We are here introduced to a kingly home. All the pomp of royalty is there. But it is not a happy home. To begin with, there is *sickness* in that home. Royalty, or rank, or riches

cannot keep sickness out. Ahaziah had been looking through the window of his chamber, or, as some think, leaning over the frail baluster of wicker-work which ran round the roof on the inner or courtyard side, when the lattice-work gave way, and he was precipitated into the court beneath and seriously injured. But there are homes of sickness that are nevertheless happy homes. The sufferer is happy; the other members of the family are happy. Why? Because they all know that Jesus is there. They hear his voice saying, "It is I: be not afraid." They took Christ into their house when all was going well with them, and they find that he does not leave them when sickness comes. But it was not so with Ahaziah. How a man will bear sickness depends a good deal on what his life and character have been when he was in health. This is true physically. It is true also in a moral and spiritual sense. The bad man is generally afraid of sickness. Yes; for he is afraid of death. What about Ahaziah's previous history? We have it summed up in the closing verses of 1 Kings. "He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin: for he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel, according to all that his father had done." Oh! the tremendous influence of a bad example. Ahaziah was in alarm about this illness. He wanted to know if he was to recover. He had forsaken God when in health; perhaps he does not think that God would hear him now. Or perhaps he has been so hardened in sin that he really believes his heathen god can help him. So he sends messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub at Ekron, whether he would recover of his disease.

I. THE CAUSE OF SEEKING AFTER STRANGE GODS. What is the secret of that idolatry which in all ages has taken such a hold of the human heart? Why is it that such a people as the Hebrews, descended from one who lived so entirely under the power of the invisible God as Abraham did—they who in their Passover had a constant reminder of God's existence and power, and in their ten commandments a constant reminder of his mind and will,—why is it that they so far forgot God as to sink into the degrading worship of the heathen deities? Or, to bring it more home to ourselves and our own surroundings, why is it that men and women who know that Christ died for them, who therefore know the priceless worth of their immortal souls, who bear in the very name of Christian a constant reminder of the Son of God, and who have in the precepts of the gospel the highest code of morality ever taught to man,—why is it that they too forget God, reject his mercy, set at nought his counsels, and will have none of his reproof? Why is it that in our Christian land so many are living in practical heathenism? Why are they so few who read the Bible, and, of those who do read it, so few who obey its teachings? Why so many thousands who never enter the house of God? Why is it that a really religious daily newspaper it is almost impossible to find, while nearly all our daily newspapers largely devote themselves to advance the interests of the theatre, the race-course, and the betting-ring? Truly it may be said that our nation has gone after strange gods. What is the secret of it all? Largely this, *the love of what is seen, more than of what is unseen.* This is at the root of all idolatry. It is this that makes men such an easy prey to sin. They are absorbed in the interests and pleasures of the body only. They forget the interests of the immortal soul. They live for the present, but neglect the future. They live for self, but neglect God. They lay up treasure on earth, but have no treasure in heaven. We see this love of what is seen—this going after strange gods—*in much of the philosophy of the present day.* Men deny God, the God of the Bible, the intelligent, wise, powerful, provident, holy, loving Creator of the universe. And what do they substitute for him? A mere negation. At best matter or force. Here plainly they are absorbed in what is seen. They make a god of matter. They forget that only mind could produce mind, only soul could produce soul, that only an intelligent Being could produce the order and control the workings of the universe. Strange gods, indeed—gods of which they have no certainty—they set up in place of the God of our Christian faith. We see this love of what is seen operating also *in the case of the money-lover.* It is not wrong to acquire wealth, provided it is rightly won and rightly used. But there are many *who make a god of money.* It occupies all their thoughts while they are awake. When they are asleep, they dream of it. Even the sabbath, supposed to be devoted to the worship of God, is often devoted to meditations on money and how to get it. Yet even for

the present life there are things more precious than money. Men who sacrifice everything for money soon find that they have lost things which money cannot buy.

"The world with stones instead of bread
My hungry soul has always fed:
It promised *health*; in one short hour
Perished the fair but fragile flower.
It promised *riches*; in a day
They made them wings and flew away.
It promised *friends*; all sought their own,
And left my widowed heart alone."

And then what shall we say of the folly of those who, while making ample provision for this short life, have made none for the life that is to come? "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Let us beware of making a god of money. We see the same love of what is seen *entering even into the Church of God.* There is too much tendency, even in the Christian Church, to worship earthly rank, to attend to the rich and neglect the poor. How often have our Churches made a god of custom, of the traditions of men, of public opinion, of expediency and worldly policy! Images and pictures are set up to aid in the worship of him of whom it is said that "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

II. THE CONSEQUENCE OF SEEKING AFTER STRANGE GODS. "But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the King of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." The strange deity that Ahaziah sought after had not served him much. Strange gods have never been much help to those who seek after them. They have not helped the heathen nations, but their degrading and demoralizing worship has always been a source of weakness and decay. It is the same with all the strange gods that men serve everywhere—with all the passions and desires to gratify which they spend their energies and time. We read of King Ahaz that he turned away from the true God to serve the gods of Damascus, because Syria enjoyed prosperity. He said, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me." "But," says the Bible narrative, "they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel" (2 Chron. xxviii. 23). How many a man has done like Ahaz—turned his back upon God, and found that the strange gods whom he served proved to be his ruin! Many a man has lived without God when in health, who was very glad to seek him when sickness came and death was drawing nigh. It is told of a sceptic called Saunderson, who was a great admirer of Sir Isaac Newton's talents, but who made light of his religion when in health, that when on his death-bed he was heard to say, in mournful entreaty, "God of Sir Isaac Newton, have mercy on me!" But, as many a one has found, it may be too late then to seek the Lord. Such are the consequences of seeking after strange gods. The same message which was sent to Ahaziah will one day be sent to us—this part at least: "Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." The way to prepare for that message is to accept the messages of life. The way to prepare for sickness is to serve God while in health. —C. H. I.

Vers. 5—16.—*Fire from heaven.* Ahaziah's messengers were intercepted by Elijah. They brought back to Ahaziah the fearless prophet's announcement of his doom. Elijah's message was God's message. He began it by "Thus saith the Lord." The statement that Ahaziah would surely die was in reality the sentence of him who knows the future of every life, and in whose hand is the breath of every human being, be he peasant or be he king. But such a terrible sentence had not brought Ahaziah to his senses. He does not begin to set his house in order. He does not prepare to meet his God as a guilty but penitent sinner. No; but when the messengers tell him of the strange interruption they had met with, recognizing at once from their description that it was Elijah the Tishbite who had stopped them, he is filled with anger and defiance. He has defied God when in health; now he defies him from a bed of sickness. He

sends forth a captain with a company of fifty men to lay hold upon the prophet. It was not the first time Elijah's life had been threatened by royal sinners. When a man is fearless in rebuking sin, he must expect the hatred of impenitent sinners. Smooth words may win a fleeting popularity, but the friendship of this world is enmity against God. Popularity is dearly bought that is obtained at the sacrifice of truth, of conscience, and of duty. But Elijah's life is safe in the hands of the Master whom he serves. Once before God had vindicated his own honour and Elijah's faithfulness by sending fire from heaven to consume his sacrifice. In a similar manner now he defends Elijah and punishes his enemies. The incident is one which presents some difficulties. The study of it suggests many useful lessons.

I. FIRE FROM HEAVEN IS AN ACT OF JUSTICE. It may appear to some that these first two captains and their fifties were hardly dealt with. Some one may say, "It was their duty to obey. They were only executing the king's orders. They were not responsible for the message which they brought from the king to Elijah. It was hard, then, that they should suffer for doing that which it was their duty to do." These are very plausible statements. Let us examine them a little more closely. Let us remember that man is not a mere machine. Every man has an immortal soul, coming from God, going back to God, and accountable to God for its actions. There is such a thing as individual personal responsibility. No external circumstances, no position in life, can ever take away that responsibility. These captains and their men were bound to do their duty to their king. Yes; but not in defiance of the Law and power of God. Where the will of man or the word of man comes into conflict with the will or Word of God, then it is the duty of every human being to say, "We ought to obey God rather than men." These officers and soldiers were really encouraging Ahaziah in his guilt. They knew that he was an idolater. They knew that he was a worshipper of Baal. They knew that the man whom he was sending them to arrest was a servant of the most high God, and his foremost living prophet. They knew of the sentence which had already been pronounced against Ahaziah. Yet here, at his bidding, they go forth as the instruments of his defiance against the living God. They were sharers in his guilt—*participes criminis*. They were personally guilty before God. We can never shift our own responsibility on to the shoulders of others. It did not make Adam's guilt less that he accused Eve, or Eve's guilt less that she accused the serpent. They were intelligent beings, with the power of free choice. Our plain duty is, if we are in any position or business which requires us to violate the Law of God, at once to give it up. God says, "Them that honour me I will honour." Moreover, *they had already been warned of the sin and danger of resisting God.* They knew how the prophets of Baal had been slain. They knew how Elijah's prophecy—in other words, God's sentence—against Ahab had come true, that where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, there they would lick the blood of Ahab, and they knew that a similar doom was foretold against Jezebel. Yet in spite of all these warnings they went forth against the prophet of God. So the sinner has many warnings. How often God's Word and God's messenger have called him to repentance! Perhaps by sickness and suffering he has had reminders of approaching death. By sudden bereavement he has been reminded that "in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Let him beware of turning a deaf ear to the warning voice. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." Further, when we are considering the justice of this fire from heaven, let us remember that *the life of God's most useful servant was at stake.* It is pretty certain that Ahaziah, when he sent for Elijah, wanted to take his life. It is pretty certain also that, had Elijah gone with either of the first two captains, his life would have been in danger. It was only after the third time of sending that God said to Elijah, "Be not afraid of him." It was only then, perhaps, that Ahaziah realized the uselessness of fighting against God. We hold by the principle that life should not be recklessly sacrificed. But if we are disposed to speak of this incident as reckless sacrifice of life, let us remember what hundreds of lives have been imperilled and sacrificed more than once, even for the sake of a single British subject. No right-minded person would condemn the sending forth of soldiers—many of them to certain death—in such a case as that of Abyssinia, where the lives of British subjects were in danger, or that of the attempted rescue of General Gordon. Before we can cherish a suspicion of injustice against the dealings of God, let us be sure that we have right

and reason on our side. A full examination of all the circumstances will generally banish even such a suggestion from our minds. But, then, there are many cases where we cannot possibly understand or know all the circumstances. In such a case, is it not the only course we can take to bow in submission to the all-wise will of God? "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" For all these reasons I conclude that the fire which came down from heaven upon these soldiers was an act of justice.

II. FIRE FROM HEAVEN IS AN ACT OF NECESSITY. More than one reason has already been suggested why this fire from heaven was necessary. It may have been necessary in defence of the prophet's life. It may have been necessary in vindication of the power and honour of God; for it took place at a time of almost universal idolatry and Baal-worship on the part of Israel. This, however, we may be sure of, that, whether we can see the necessity for it or not, *fire from heaven is necessary, or God would not send it.* There are three uses which fire serves in the natural world, for which analogies may be found in the spiritual world. These are *purifying, destroying,* and *testing.* We need the *cleansing fires* to purify us in the spiritual life. Perhaps we are becoming too worldly, too much engrossed with the things of this life, laying up for ourselves treasures upon earth. Perhaps we are making an idol of some earthly object of our affection. Perhaps we are becoming spiritually proud. Perhaps we compare ourselves favourably with others, and think how much better we are than they. Then our heavenly Father may think it wise to purify us from such dross as this. And so he calls us to pass through the furnace of affliction, or adversity, or sickness. Thus he humbles us. Thus he keeps us mindful that we are but dust. Thus he keeps us mindful of our dependence upon him. Then the *destroying fire* is needed in the moral and spiritual world, as well as in the natural world. It was a necessary part of the Divine government that Sodom and Gomorrah should be destroyed. They were a moral plague-spot. The festering limb must be cut off if the body is to be saved. So also Herculaneum and Pompeii were destroyed when they too became a centre of moral degradation and corruption. Would it be any wonder, would it be any injustice, if the fire of God would come down from heaven and burn up some of the moral plague-spots of modern times? Would not the world be vastly the better if the gambling-hells and drinking-hells and hells of immorality were burnt up in one vast conflagration? And if they are spared, and if the moral corrupters of others are spared, will it be any better for them in that day when "the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death"? Then there is *the testing fire.* This also is necessary in the spiritual world. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice," says the Apostle Peter, "though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. i. 6, 7). If there were no trials and difficulties, there would be no test, no proof of our faith. And then the time is coming when the fire—the searching, testing fire of God's judgment—shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If our life is built up on Christ, then out of the *purifying* fire it will come clearer and brighter, from the *destroying* fire it will suffer no harm, and from the *testing* fire it will come forth to honour and glory. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. xiii. 43).

III. FIRE FROM HEAVEN IS NOT INCONSISTENT WITH THE DIVINE MERCY. Here we may consider a difficulty which some have raised. When Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem, passed through a village of the Samaritans, the people there would not receive him, "because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem." The disciples, in anger, asked him if they should command fire to come down from heaven, as Elijah did, and consume them. The answer of our Saviour was, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke ix. 51—56). Now, the question which some have asked is this—Does not Christ here condemn the action of Elijah? A careful study of the narrative before us would at once dispose of such a question as that. It is said here, "*The fire of God* came down from heaven." Even if this were not stated, it is obvious that Elijah of himself had no power to bring down fire from heaven, unless with God's sanction and

assistance. But a great many commentators and preachers, who would not go the length of saying that Christ condemned Elijah, seem to suggest that he condemned *his spirit, as unsuited to gospel times.* Even for this suggestion I do not think there is any warrant. Our Saviour condemned the disciples for a spirit of vindictiveness and revenge, which probably was intensified by the feeling of prejudice and animosity which existed against the Samaritans. He also stated that he was not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. His work, *then,* was one of salvation. But those who rejected his salvation were certainly to perish. More than once Christ in the clearest manner teaches this. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." He foretells the doom of Jerusalem. He foretells the terrible agony of lost souls, who shall go away into everlasting fire; "there shall be the wailing and the gnashing of teeth." The action of retributive justice, therefore, is perfectly consistent with mercy toward the sinner. The consuming fire may be part of a merciful and loving purpose toward the world at large. *In the particular case before us, we see that mercy was exhibited as well as justice.* The third captain, who showed a humble spirit, and apparently some regret at the work he had to do, was mercifully spared the fate which had fallen upon the other two. While we speak of the consuming fire of God's justice, we would speak also of mercy for the penitent, of forgiveness, full and free, for every anxious soul, for every returning wanderer. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—8.—*Worldly royalty and personal godliness.* "Then Moab rebelled against Israel," etc. The two Books of Kings, which form but one in the most correct and ancient edition of the Hebrews, whilst they constitute a very strange and significant history, are fraught with much moral and practical suggestion. These verses bring under our notice two subjects of thought—worldly royalty in a humiliating condition, and personal godliness truly majestic.

I. WORLDLY ROYALTY IN A HUMILIATING CONDITION. 1. Here is a king in *mortal suffering.* "And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick." Nature has no more respect for kings than for beggars; her laws treat them as ordinary mortals. 2. Here is a king in *mental distress.* On his bed of suffering the king's mind was most painfully exercised as to what would be the issue of his bodily suffering. He sends messengers to the idols in order to ask whether "I shall recover of this disease." No doubt the fear of death distressed him, as indeed it distresses most. 3. Here is a king in *superstitious darkness.* He had no knowledge of the true God, no enlightened religious feeling, and he sent his messengers to an idol—the god of flies—to know whether he should recover or not. What a humiliating condition for royalty to be in! And yet it is a condition in which kings and princes are often found. The other subject of thought here is—

II. PERSONAL GODLINESS TRULY MAJESTIC. Elijah is an example of personal godliness, though, in a worldly sense, he was very poor, and his costume seemed to be almost the meanest of the mean. "He was a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins." But see the majesty of this man in two things. 1. In *receiving communication from heaven.* "But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite." A truly godly man is ever in correspondence with Heaven; his "conversation is in heaven." 2. In *reproving the king.* "Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?" The thing called *religion* in many countries is just strong enough to reprove the poor, but too weak to thunder reproof into the ear of the corrupt and pleasure-seeking monarchs. In his reproof he pronounces on him the Divine judgment, "Thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die."

CONCLUSION. Which is the better, do you think—a throne or a godly character? Fools only prefer the former; the man of sense, thoughtfulness, and reflection would say the latter.—D. T.

Vers. 9—18.—*Man in three aspects.* "Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty," etc. In this paragraph we have man in three aspects.

I. MAN RUINED THROUGH THE CONDUCT OF OTHERS. The messengers which the king sent to Elijah—fifty each time on three different occasions—were all, except the last

fifty, destroyed by lightning. This awful judgment came upon them, not merely on their own account—although, like all sinners, they had forfeited their lives to eternal justice—but as messengers of the king. Throughout the human race, in all races and times, there are found millions groaning under the trials and sufferings brought on them by the conduct of others. In this world the innocent suffer for the guilty; the "fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

II. MAN EMPLOYED AS THE EXECUTOR OF DIVINE JUSTICE. These hundred men, messengers from the king, were struck down by Elijah at the command of God. There was no personal vengeance in the act. Elijah was used as the organ of Heaven. God's plan in this world is to *punish* as well as to *save man by man*. How was Pharaoh punished, and the Canaanites, etc.? By man. Sinful nations are punished, often by worthless kings and ruthless despots.

III. MAN STEPPING INTO THE PLACE OF THE DEAD. The King Ahaziah dies; Jehoram steps into his place. "So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram reigned in his stead." "One generation cometh, and another passeth away." Places, positions, and the various offices of life are no sooner vacated by death than they are stepped into by others. Thus the world goes on, and the dead are soon forgotten. The greatest man on earth to-day is but a mere bubble on the great river of human life; he sparkles for a moment, and is lost for ever in the abyss.—D. T.

Ver. 1.—*The revolt of Moab.* (On this cf. ch. iii.) Moab, one of the conquests of David (2 Sam. viii. 2), perhaps regained its independence after the death of Solomon, and, if the Moabite Stone can be trusted, was again subdued by Omri, Ahab's father. Now, on the occasion of the death of Ahab, it renewed the attempt to throw off the Israelitish yoke. 1. The original conquest had been not unstained by cruelty. These things burn into the memory of peoples. 2. The rule of Omri and Ahab had been most oppressive (ch. iii. 4). Nothing else could be expected from these godless monarchs. "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Prov. xii. 10). Half the rebellions and revolutions in the world have their origin in oppression and misgovernment. 3. Ahab and Israel had just sustained a severe defeat, that viz. at the hands of the Syrians (1 Kings xxii.). This weakened the Israelitish power, and gave a favourable opportunity for revolt. Those whom we hold in subjection by force, not love, cannot be blamed if they take the earliest opportunity to get rid of our yoke. 4. Israel and Moab were divided by religion. This is the deepest ground of severance among peoples. Nationalities based on different religious faiths constantly tend to fall asunder. Any unity in which they are held can be only external. The federation of the race can only be accomplished on the basis of the worship of the One Jehovah, and the one Lord Jesus Christ. 5. God used these revolts as a means of chastisement (cf. 1 Kings xi. 23). Under David, the greatest theocratic ruler, the kingdom was built up, consolidated, extended. The revolt from God, both in Judah and Israel, was signalized by the revolt of dependencies. Will our own Britain hold its foremost position among the nations, or will its greatness too decay, and its power be shorn by successive breaking off of its colonies? The answer, we believe, will depend very much on its fidelity to God.—J. O.

Vers. 1—8.—*Ahaziah's sickness.* Son of a doomed house (1 Kings xxi. 29), Ahab's successor on the throne reigned for two inglorious years. His evil character is described in the words, "He walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin" (1 Kings xxii. 52). A weak ruler, he was probably the mere tool of his mother Jezebel, whose worst qualities he inherited. In determined idolatry, open defiance of Jehovah, and vindictive persecution of God's servants, as shown by his attempt on the life of Elijah, he is the true child of the "cursed woman" (ch. ix. 34). Even on his death-bed he shows no such compunction as occasionally visited his father Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 27). Undeterred by examples and warnings, he "hardened his neck" in a way which led to his being "suddenly destroyed" (Prov. xxix. 1).

I. THE FATAL FALL. The *fainéant* king came to his end in a manner: 1. Sufficiently *simple*. Idly lounging at the projecting lattice-window of his palace in Samaria

—perhaps leaning against it, and gazing from his elevated position on the fine prospect that spreads itself around—his support suddenly gave way, and he was precipitated to the ground, or courtyard, below. He is picked up, stunned, but not dead, and carried to his couch. It is, in common speech, an accident—some trivial neglect of a fastening—but it terminated this royal career. On such slight contingencies does human life, the change of rulers, and often the course of events in history, depend. We cannot sufficiently ponder that our existence hangs by the finest thread, and that any trivial cause may at any moment cut it short (Jas. iv. 14). 2. Yet *providential.* God's providence is to be recognized in the time and manner of this king's removal. He had "provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel" (1 Kings xxii. 53), and God in this sudden way cut him off. This is the only rational view of the providence of God, since, as we have seen, it is from the most trivial events that the greatest results often spring. The whole can be controlled only by the power that concerns itself with the details. A remarkable illustration is afforded by the death of Ahaziah's own father. Fearing Micaiah's prophecy, Ahab had disguised himself on the field of battle, and was not known as the King of Israel. But he was not, therefore, to escape. A man in the opposing ranks "drew a bow at a venture," and the arrow, winged with a Divine mission, smote the king between the joints of his armour, and slew him (1 Kings xxii. 34). The same minute providence which guided that arrow now presided over the circumstances of Ahaziah's fall. There is in this doctrine, which is also Christ's (Matt. x. 29, 30), comfort for the good, and warning for the wicked. The good man acknowledges, "My times are in thy hand" (Ps. xxxi. 15), and the wicked man should pause when he reflects that he cannot take *his* out of that hand. 3. *Irremediable.* From the bed to which he had been carried up, the king was never to rise. The injury he had received was fatal. Yet a little space was given him—even him—for repentance. His fall might have produced immediate death. These few remaining days, when the sands were running out, were, however, only to demonstrate further his incorrigibility of nature.

II. THE MESSAGE TO EKRON. A sick-bed, with the possibility of the sickness proving fatal, tests most men. It tested Ahaziah. We note in his behaviour the following instructive facts: 1. *He was moved to apply to some god.* Not, indeed, in hope of a cure, but only to obtain information as to the issue of his illness. He sent to consult an oracle, not to ask a blessing. But even in this there is seen the desire for supernatural help, for direct intercourse with the invisible, which men so often feel in their hour of trouble. It was a dark hour for Ahaziah. Life hung in the balance, and he shrank from death with a great dread. He could not wait for the verdict of events, but would fain wrest the secret from a heathen shrine. Piety can afford to leave the issue in God's hands. Impiety dare not do this, and can find no comfort save in the assurance of recovery. 2. *He did not apply to Jehovah.* Was there not a God in Israel to inquire of? Ahaziah knew very well that there was, and that there were prophets, like Micaiah and Elijah, who would tell him the truth. It need not be questioned that it was an evil conscience, and that only, which kept him from applying to Jehovah. He knew how impiously he had behaved towards Jehovah. He perfectly well understood what kind of reception he would receive from the prophets, and in what language they would address him. He anticipated the nature of the sentence they would pronounce. He dared not, therefore, inquire of the Lord. So when men, in their distress, feel impelled to go to God, they are often held back by the remembrance of past wickedness. They know, if they come, it must be with changed hearts and the renouncing of evil deeds, and for this they are not prepared. 3. *He applied to the god of Ekron.* Baal-zebub—"lord of flies," as the word means. The oracle of this god had probably some local repute, which led him to select it. Here comes in the element of superstition. The craving after the supernatural in human nature is not to be stilled, and, if it cannot be gratified in a lawful, it will seek gratification in some unlawful way. Saul, forsaken of God, turned to the witch of Endor (1 Sam. xxviii. 6, 7). "A notorious infidel like Philippe Egalité, though in other respects a man of ability, could yet try to presage his fate by the sort of cup-augury involved in examining the grounds of coffee." The Roman world, in the time of the apostles, was not more characterized by its educated scepticism than by the influx into it of every kind of superstition (cf. Farrar's 'St. Paul,' ch. xix.; Conybeare and Howson, ch. v.). In our own day, multitudes professing disbelief in God's revelation turn with eager credulity to the delusions

of spiritualism. It was to supersede unlawful modes of consulting the invisible world that God gave "the sure word of prophecy" (Deut. xviii. 9—22).

III. THE UNEXPECTED MEETING. The messengers speed on their way to the shrine of Baal-zebub at Ekron, but their steps are soon to be arrested. Here we notice: 1. *A new task for Elijah.* "The angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the King of Samaria." The medium of communication is, perhaps, the historical angel of the covenant—he of whom God had said, "Provoke him not, for he will not pardon your transgressions, for my Name is in him" (Exod. xxiii. 21). The Divine side of the calamity which had befallen Ahaziah comes to light in this message by the prophet. Ahaziah had forgotten God, but God had not forgotten him. He is the "jealous God" (Exod. xx. 5), who takes the vindication of his honour into his own hands. 2. *A surprise for the messengers.* Elijah's appearances partake everywhere of the nature of a dramatic surprise. He comes no one knows whence; he departs no one knows whither. His personality was impressive—"a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins" (ver. 8). Suddenly he confronts the messengers, and puts to them the ironic question, "Is it not because there is not a God in Israel that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?" It is rare that, in fleeing from the path of duty, we do not meet God in the way in some form. Balaam on his journey to the King of Moab; Jonah fleeing from the presence of the Lord to Tarshish; Elijah himself when he fled to Horeb, hearing the voice of the Lord, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (Numb. xxii. 22; Jonah i.; 1 Kings xix. 9). 3. *Evil tidings for Ahaziah.* The messengers need go no further. The information they sought at Ekron was given them, unasked, from a surer source. An oracle had spoken, but not the one to which they were sent. Ekron's reply was anticipated by Jehovah's: "Now therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." Unhappy monarch! God hath spoken, and no other can reverse it (Numb. xxiii. 20).

IV. THE RETURN TO THE KING. There was that in the appearance, manner, and language of this man who had crossed their path like an apparition which convinced the messengers that God had spoken through him. They accordingly returned at once to the sick king. A few words of explanation sufficed to put him in possession of the circumstances. A guilty conscience is swift to comprehend in such matters. With unerring precision the king's thoughts interpreted the riddle of the mysterious prophet. "What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words?" "It is Elijah the Tishbite." Ahaziah knew what that meant. His feelings would be those of his father Ahab when he exclaimed, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (1 Kings xxi. 20). The appearance of Banquo's ghost at the banquet was not more terrible to Macbeth than this crossing of his path by Elijah was to Ahaziah at that moment. His sins had found him out. However long the lane of wickedness may be, we may be sure the Avenger stands at the end of it.—J. O.

Vers. 9—16.—*The prophet of fire.* The act of Elijah, in calling down fire from heaven on his enemies, is thus remarked upon by Dean Stanley, with reference to Christ's allusion to it in the gospel (Luke ix. 51—56). "When the two apostles appealed to the example of Elijah 'to call down fire from heaven,' he to whom they spoke turned away with indignation from the remembrance of this act, even of the greatest of his prophetic predecessors" ('Jewish Church,' vol. ii. p. 258). We cannot endorse this remark. Jesus, indeed, gently rebuked his disciples, telling them they did not know what manner of spirit they were of, and reminding them that the Son of man was not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. But he did not mean to imply that the spirit which Elijah showed was, in its own time and place, *wrong.* It was a pure and holy zeal for God's honour, and God sanctioned it by sending the fire. Only there was a *better* and *higher* spirit—the spirit of love and grace in Christ; and it was by this the disciples of Christ ought to have been actuated. What was congruous with the old dispensation was not necessarily congruous with the higher spirit of the new. Christ may have intended to suggest also that the disciples were mistaken in thinking that their spirit was exactly that of the Old Testament man of God. He was moved solely by regard for God's honour; in their case personal anger and resentment probably gave an impure tinge to their passion.

I. BEDCHAMBER REVENGE. It is pitiable to see this sick king, within a few hours

of his death, instead of humbling himself in repentance, stretching out his puny arm to do battle with God in the person of his messenger. If he must die, he is resolved that Elijah shall die also. This resolve is: 1. *A sign of character.* It shows the thoroughly hardened and irreligious nature of the man. There are no limits to a sinner's madness in warring against God. 2. *An act of infatuation.* Knowing what he did of the prophet's history, he might have understood that his enterprise was hopeless. He may have reasoned that, as the blood of prophets had been spilt before (1 Kings xviii. 4), so it might be spilt again. But he was now crossing a prophet in the direct discharge of his duty, and was thus, in a sense, giving a direct challenge to God. "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth" (Isa. xlv. 9). A knowledge of the perilousness of the task in which he was embarking is shown in the fact that a band of fifty men is sent to arrest one prophet (cf. John xviii. 3). If a band was necessary, it could only be because Elijah had supernatural aid to rely on; and, if he had that aid, no amount of force could overcome him. 3. *A trace of evil influence.* It is the spirit of Jezebel which breathes in this Heaven-defying resolution. The queen-mother had not forgotten her yet unfulfilled threat, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time" (1 Kings xix. 2). There were old scores to pay off against Elijah, and this wicked woman was no doubt there to strengthen her son in his resolution to pay them.

II. ELIJAH ON THE HILL. The band that was sent to apprehend Elijah found him seated on the top of a hill. Observe: 1. *The solitary grandeur of his situation.* The situation was characteristic. We may say of Elijah what Wordsworth says of Milton, his "soul was like a star, and dwelt apart." He is a strange, solitary figure from first to last—stern, rugged, unconquerable. 2. *His moral fearlessness.* The appearance of Ahaziah's soldiers inspired him with no terror. He had apparently waited in the neighbourhood where he met the messengers, and did not now retreat. Strong in his sense that God was on his side, he did not fear what man could do to him (Ps. cxviii. 6). 3. *His invisible protection.* The result showed how entirely Elijah was justified in his confidence. "The angel of the Lord," who had sent him on his mission, "encamped around him" (Ps. xxxiv. 7), and kept him from all evil. Those who are engaged in Divine work can confidently rely on Divine protection. Not till they had "finished their testimony" was the beast allowed to kill the witnesses (Rev. xi. 7). The mountain on which Elijah sat was no doubt as "full of horses and chariots of fire" as the hill of Samaria was in after-days for the protection of Elisha (ch. vi. 17). What could bands of fifties avail against one thus defended?

III. THE CAPTAINS AND THEIR FIFTIES. 1. *The first captain.* Clothed with a little brief authority, this first captain, accompanied by his fifty men, approaches Elijah, and orders him to surrender. (1) The terms of his summons: "Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down." In the same breath in which he acknowledges him to be a servant of Jehovah, he demands his submission to the wicked King of Israel. *Le roy le veult*—the king wills it. Thus poor, paltry, human authority ventures to assert itself against the authority of the King of kings. No uncommon thing, it must be said, in history. In the extravagance of its conceit, too often has royal authority presumed to set itself above the law of heaven, and to dragoon, imprison, and coerce those who chose to obey God rather than man. Nor have tools ever been wanting to carry out these infamous behests. (2) A lurking fear. Notwithstanding his bravado, the officer was not without his own fear of Elijah. He does not boldly mount the hill to secure his prisoner, but stands at a respectful distance, and summons him to "come down." The wicked often inwardly fear the righteous at the very time when they boast most loudly of having them in their power. (3) The answer of fire. This insolent summons to Elijah, in his character of "man of God," was a direct challenge to Jehovah to vindicate his own honour, and that of his insulted servant. The insult was wanton and public, and must be as publicly met. Elijah met it by invoking God, if he was truly his servant, to send down fire from heaven to consume this blustering captain and his myrmidons. As before, in the contest with Baal's prophets, his prayer was granted, and the answer came by fire (1 Kings xviii. 21—39). "Elijah will let him know that the God of Israel is superior to the King of Israel, and has a greater power to enforce his commands" (Matthew Henry). Thus at length, gospel dispensation

though it is, will fire descend from heaven to consume the hosts of the ungodly (Rev. xx. 9). 2. *The second captain.* One example of this kind should have been enough. But when men are inspired by fury and hate of God, above all, when it is not their own lives they are risking, they are not easily deterred. As if this first defeat but added fuel to the king's anger, the order goes forth for another band to be equipped, and sent to take the prophet. The captain who received the mandate had no choice but to obey, and military pride may have led him to suppress any outward show of misgiving. But it must have been with no small quaking of heart that he set out on this now doubly perilous service. Still Elijah sits on his hill, and, putting as bold a front on matters as he can, the second captain, in the king's name, repeats the summons to come down. "O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly." Elijah from his height returns the former answer; and once again the thunderbolt descends, and scatters the bodies of this second fifty at the hill's foot beside the first. 3. *The third captain.* Not even yet will the king own the folly of resistance. Like Pharaoh in conflict with Moses, each new calamity but seems to harden him the more. A third captain is despatched with the same peremptory orders to seize the recalcitrant prophet. (1) But this captain is wiser than his predecessors. He does what few in his position could help doing—accepts a lesson from experience. He abandons the insolent tone of previous captains, and, falling on his knees before Elijah, sues for peace. "O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight." He sees the folly of flinging away his life, and the lives of his men, to please a foolish king in a contest as wicked as it was vain. (2) This prayer robs his mission of its offensiveness, acknowledges God's supremacy, and shows that Elijah's life is in no danger. The angel of the Lord accordingly says to Elijah, "Go down with him: be not afraid of him." By this timely humbling of himself, the third captain (*a*) saved the lives of himself and his men; (*b*) obtained what the former captains could not obtain by their bullying, viz. that Elijah should go with him. No fire descended from heaven upon him, for God takes no pleasure in the wanton destruction of human life. And not only was his life spared, but he was saved from the king's anger, by Elijah consenting to accompany him. He was a living example of the truth, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (Jas. iv. 6).

IV. THE WORD OF DOOM CONFIRMED. Brought, not as a prisoner, but as a conqueror, to Ahaziah's bedchamber, Elijah repeated in person the terrible message he had formerly sent by the messengers. "Thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." It is the word of doom, and as such Ahaziah cannot but hear it. This is all he has made of his futile attempts to fight against God—to hear that doom confirmed by the very prophet whose head he had vowed to bring to the dust. The counsel of the Lord, it alone stands; the imagination of the sinner perishes. It is from Christ's own lips that those who now fight against him and despise his gospel will hear their final sentence.—J. O.

Vers. 17, 18.—*Unwritten history.* Ahaziah died, and Jehoram his brother succeeded him. "The rest of his acts" were written "in the book of the chronicles of the Kings of Israel;" but Scripture has not preserved them. Why should it? What was there in the records of that brief and evil existence to entitle the memory of it to live? "The memory of the just is blessed; but the name of the wicked shall rot" (Prov. x. 7). Enough is written to hold him up to after-ages as an example of the certainty of retribution. Then Scripture buries him with the epitaph, "So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken."—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1—25.—THE REMOVAL OF ELIJAH FROM EARTH, AND SOME EARLY MIRACLES OF ELISHA. The great prophet of Israel was to have a departure from earth as marvellous as his life had been. Ewald's words, though not intended in an historical, but only in a literary sense, embody very forcibly what the humble believer may accept as the actual *rationale* of the occurrence related in vers. 1—12: "An earthly career which

had no equal in the purity of its devotion to the service of Jehovah, and was at the same time consummated by such powerful efforts to promote the kingdom of God, could only have a corresponding close. It ceases before the very eyes of men, only to be taken up into the realm of pure spirit, that is, to heaven, there to carry on its work with less disturbance, and with greater power; and at that moment heaven itself descends to earth, to take to itself that spirit which is already entirely its own. And so a fiery chariot with fiery horses comes down from heaven and bears Elijah in the tempest up to heaven" ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. pp. 109, 110, Eng. trans.). In Ewald's view, the narrative is pure imagination, the beautiful conception of one who greatly admired the Tishbite, and invented for him an end in ideal harmony with his life. But may not Omnipotence sometimes work out ideal harmonies in the actual matter-of-fact universe? And is it "advanced criticism," or sound criticism at all, to take a professed history, and pick and cull from it certain portions as absolute facts, quite indubitable (see p. 107, note 2, *ad fin.*), while rejecting other portions, which have exactly the same external testimony, as pure fictions absolutely devoid of the slightest historical foundation?

The record of Elisha's early miracles (vers. 13—24) prepares the way for the position which Elisha is to occupy in the next section of the history, under the Israelite monarchs, Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Jehoash. On Elisha falls the mantle of Elijah (ver. 13), and with it a portion of his spirit, sufficient to enable him to carry on the prophetic office with vigour and steadfastness.

Ver. 1.—**And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven.** The subject is introduced as one of general notoriety, the writer professing rather to give the exact details of a well-known fact, than to relate a new fact unknown to his readers. "When the time came," he means to say, "for Elijah's translation, of which you, my readers, all know, the following were the circumstances under which it took place." The fact itself was deeply impressed on the Jewish consciousness. "Elias," says the Son of Sirach, "was taken up in a whirlwind of fire, and in a chariot of fiery horses" (Ecclus. xlviii. 9). He was ranked with Enoch, as not having seen death (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' ix. 2. § 2), and was viewed as "continuing in heaven a mysterious life, which no death had ever interrupted, whence he was ready at any time to return to earth" (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 113). The scribes thought that he was beyond all doubt to make his appearance upon the earth in person, before the coming of the Messiah (Matt. xvi. 10). **By a whirlwind.** *Sa'ârah* is not so much an actual "whirlwind" as a storm or atmospheric disturbance (συσσεισμός, LXX.). It is a word which only occurs here in the historical Scriptures. **That Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.** Elisha had become to Elijah what Joshua was to Moses (Exod. xxiv. 13)—his "minister," or regular attendant, from the time of his call at Abel-meholah (1 Kings xix. 21). Elijah had no fixed residence, but moved from place to place as the Spirit of God suggested. His wanderings had now brought him to Gilgal (probably *Jiljilieh*, near Nablous), one of the most ancient sanctuaries of the land (1 Sam. x. 8; xi. 15, etc.), celebrated in the history of Saul and Samuel.

Ver. 2.—**And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me.** Elijah makes three efforts to rid himself of the presence of his faithful attendant (see vers. 4 and 6), either really desirous to pass in solitude the few remaining hours of his earthly life, for he knows that his end is approaching (vers. 9, 10), or for the purpose of testing his fidelity and affection. Under ordinary circumstances, the servant would naturally have obeyed his lord, and submitted to a temporary separation; but Elisha has a presentiment, or something stronger than a presentiment, of what is impending (vers. 3, 5), and will not be induced to accelerate by a single moment the time of the last parting. He will remain with his master, ready to do him all needful service, until the end. **To Bethel.** Bethel was the spiritual centre of the kingdom of the ten tribes. There may have been many reasons why Elijah should visit it once more before he quitted the earth. He may have had directions to leave, consolation to give, words of warning to speak. We must not suppose that the narrative before us is complete. **And Elisha said** unto him, **As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth.** These were ordinary forms of earnest asseveration with the Israelites, generally used separately (Judg. viii. 19; Ruth iii. 13; 1 Sam. i. 26; xiv. 39; xvii. 55; xix. 6; xx. 21; 2 Sam. iv. 9; xi. 11, etc.); but on occasions of special solemnity united, as here and in 1 Sam. xx. 3; xxv. 26; ch. iv. 30). The prophet is not to be blamed for using them, since the

command, "Swear not at all," had not yet been given. **I will not leave thee.** The resolve indicates strong attachment, deep fidelity, combined, perhaps, with a reasonable curiosity to see how the end would be brought about. **So they went down to Bethel.** The expression, "went *down*," shows that the Gilgal of ver. 1 is not that of the Jordan valley, but the mountain-city between Sichem and Bethel.

Ver. 3.—**The sons of the prophets that were at Bethel.** (On the expression, "sons of the prophets," see the comment upon 1 Kings xx. 35.) The institution of the "schools of the prophets," or theological colleges where young prophets were brought up, is usually assigned to Samuel, one of whose habitual residences for a part of the year was Bethel (1 Sam. vii. 16). Probably he had established a "school" there which continued to this time. **Came forth to Elisha, and said unto him.** The students did not venture to address the master himself, who was a person of too much dignity to be intruded on; but sought out the servant, to give him a warning of what their prophetic instinct assured them was about to happen. **Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head** (*i.e.* from his position as teacher and master) **to-day?** There was, perhaps, something a little officious and self-assertive in this question. They might have felt sure, if they had been properly modest, that Elisha would have at least as much prophetic instinct and foresight as themselves. Hence he answers them with something of rebuke: **And he said, Yea, I know** it—literally, *I too know it*—**hold ye your peace**; or, "Hush—do not chatter about what is so sacred; do not suppose that you are wiser than any one else; be a little modest and a little reticent."

Ver. 4.—**And Elijah said unto him, Tarry here, I pray thee.** The first trial of Elisha's fidelity is followed by a second. The master suggests his tarrying at Bethel, the sacred centre, where he will have the company of the "sons of the prophets," and will not be companionless, as perhaps he would have been at Gilgal. He himself is ordered to take a second journey, longer and rougher than the first. **For the Lord hath sent me to Jericho.** Will it not be better that Elisha shall spare himself the long and rugged descent from the high-land of Ephraim to the deep gulley of Jordan, and remain with the friends who have sought him out, while his master accomplishes the remainder of his journey alone? **And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.** Absolute unchangeableness of resolution is best shown by absolute unchangingness of speech. Elisha, therefore, simply repeats his previous words. And the master once more yields. **So they came to Jericho.**

Ver. 5.—**And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day? And he answered, Yea, I know it: hold ye your peace.** At Jericho, too, as well as at Bethel, there was a school of the prophets, though the two places were not more than about twenty miles apart. This would seem to imply the existence of a large number of such seminaries at this period. No doubt, when the secular power was most strongly opposed to true religion, the prophetical order had to make increased efforts to raise its numbers and multiply its schools. The prophets of Israel, it must be remembered, were, after the withdrawal of the priests and Levites (2 Chron. xi. 13, 14), the sole teachers of the people in true religion.

Ver. 6.—**And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan.** Elijah makes a third effort to detach his follower from him, or a third trial of his fidelity. He is ordered, not to a town, where his follower might find lodging and refreshment and companionship, but into the open country—to the Jordan. And then, who can say whither? Will it not be best for Elisha to leave him now, and not continue a wandering which threatens to be endless? But the follower is staunch; nothing daunts him; and he makes the same reply as before. **And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.**

Ver. 7.—**And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view.** It is a harsh judgment to blame the "sons of the prophets" for an idle and shallow curiosity in merely "standing" at a distance "to view" the wonderful event, which Elisha was determined to witness as closely, and associate himself with as intimately, as possible. For the sons of the prophets to have approached nearer, and hung on the skirts of Elijah, would have been an impertinence. Elisha's persistence is only justified by his strong affection, and the special office which he held, of attendant minister. The fifty students showed a courteous sense of what was due to the prophet's desire of seclusion by not pressing on his footsteps, and at the same time a real interest in him, and a reasonable curiosity, by quitting their college and "standing to view" on some eminence which commanded a prospect of the lower Jordan valley. There were many such eminences within a short distance of Jericho. **And they two stood by Jordan. At** length all other human companionship was

shaken off—"*they two*" stood, side by side, on the banks of the sacred stream, which had played so important a part, and was still to play so far more important a part, in the theocratic history. All the world, except their two selves, was remote—was beyond their ken; the master and the servant, the prophet of the past and the prophet of the coming generation, were together, with none to disturb them, or interfere between them, or separate them. Jordan rolled its waters before their eyes, a seeming barrier to further advance; and Elisha may naturally have looked to see the final scene transacted in that "plain below a plain," the Jordan bed, sunk beneath the general level of the Ghor, green with lush grass and aquatic plants, and with beds of reeds and osiers, but squalid with long stretches of mud and masses of decaying vegetation, brought down from the upper river, and with rotting trunks of trees torn from the banks higher up. But the end was not yet. Jordan was to be crossed, and the ascension to take place from the plain whence Moses, when about to quit earth, had made his ascent to Pisgah.

Ver. 8.—**And Elijah took his mantle** (the LXX. have τὸν μηλωτήν); the sheep-skin cape or capote, which covered his shoulders. **And wrapped it together**; rather, *and rolled it up* (εἴλησε, LXX.); so that it resembled in some degree a rod or staff. **And** [with this he] **smote the waters**; consciously imitating the act of Moses when he "stretched out his hand over the Red Sea" (Exod. xiv. 21), and divided its waters asunder. **And they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.** The parallelism with the miraculous acts of Moses and Joshua (Josh. iii. 13) is obvious, and allowed even by those who view the acts themselves as having no historical foundation (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 111, note, Eng. trans.). It was intended that Israel should regard Elijah and Elisha as a second Moses and Joshua, and should therefore yield them a ready obedience. If miracles are impossible, *cadit quæstio;* exegesis of Scripture, and even reading of Scripture, may as well be put aside. But if they are possible, and have a place in the Divine economy, here was a worthy occasion for them. The powers of the world were arrayed against the cause of true religion and so against God; the cause was about to lose its great champion and assertor, Elijah; a weaker successor was about to take his place;—without some manifest display of supernatural might the cause of religion would evidently have lost ground, perhaps have been ruined altogether. It pleased God, therefore, just at this time, to grant that signs and wonders of an extraordinary character should be done by the hands of his servants Elijah and Elisha, that a halo of mystic glory should encircle them, for the better sustentation of his own cause against his adversaries, for the exaltation and glorification of his faithful ones, and for the confusion and dismay of those who were opposed to them. Now, surely, if ever, was there a *dignus vindice nodus*, justifying a miraculous interposition.

Ver. 9.—**And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.** Elijah knows that the time is growing now very short. He will soon have left the earth. A yearning comes over him, before he goes, to leave his faithful follower, his trusty, persevering adherent, some parting gift, some token of his appreciation, some sign of his love. What does his "minister" desire? Let him ask what he will, and his master will, if it be possible, grant it. **And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.** Elisha's request has been variously explained. The older commentators regarded him as having asked for twice as much spiritual and prophetical power as Elijah had possessed; and this interpretation is certainly favoured by the reply of Elijah, as recorded in the next verse. But it is objected (1) that Elisha's modesty would prevent him from asking so much; and (2) that double the spirit and power of Elijah certainly did not rest upon him. This latter fact is quite undeniable. As Keil says, "It is only a quite external and superficial view of the career of Elisha that can see in it a proof that double the spirit of Elijah rested upon him" ('Commentary on Kings,' *ad loc.*). To one who looks beneath the surface, and regards something besides length of life and number of miracles, Elisha is a very faint and feeble replica of Elijah. Ewald's judgment is here correct: "Elisha is great only so far as he continues and carries out with more force than any other man of his time the work which Elijah had begun with new and wonderful power . . . he did not possess any such intensity of inward power as his master" ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 82, Eng. trans.). Accordingly, Ewald, rejecting the old explanation, suggests one of his own—that Elisha asked for "*two-thirds* of Elijah's spirit" (ibid., p. 81); but this would be a very strange and unusual request, even if the Hebrew could be made to mean it. Who ever asks for two-thirds of a thing? The third explanation, to which most modern commentators incline (Keil, Thenius, Patrick, Clarke, Pool, Böttcher), is that Elisha merely requested that he might receive twice as much of Elijah's spirit as should

be received by any other of the "sons of the prophets." He made a reference to Deut. xxi. 17, and asked for the "double portion" (literally, "double mouthful") which was the right of an eldest son. The only objection to this view is Elijah's answer (see the next verse).

Ver. 10.—**And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing**; literally, *thou hast been hard in asking* (ἐσκλήρυνας τοῦ αἰτήσασθαι, LXX.). Perhaps the "hardness" of the request was in the thing asked, not in the quantity of the thing. Had Elisha asked for anything that Elijah had it directly in his power to give, as for his mantle, or his blessing, or his prayers in the other world, to grant the request would have been easy. But he had asked for something that was not Elijah's to give, but only God's. Elijah could not bequeath his spirit, as a man bequeaths his property; he could only pray God that Elisha's pious request might be granted. Nevertheless, **if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.** Our translators have thought to clear the sense by inserting "nevertheless" and "when I am." But the inserted words would be better away. As Elijah cannot either grant or refuse a request for a spiritual gift, which it is not in his power to bestow, he is divinely instructed to give Elisha a sign, by which he shall know whether God grants his prayer or not. The sign of acceptance is to be his actually seeing his master's translation. Probably the chariot and horses were not visible to the natural human eye, any more than the angelic hosts were who compassed Elisha himself about at Dothan (ch. vi. 17).

Ver. 11.—**And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked** (comp. Luke xxiv. 50, 51). The antitype answers to the type in little details as well as in the general outline. **That behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire.** God's "angels are spirits, and his ministers *a flaming fire*" (Ps. civ. 4). When the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened, and he saw the angelic host that protected his master, it appeared to him that "the mountain was full of horses and chariots *of fire* round about Elisha" (ch. vi. 17). Material fire is, of course, not to be thought of. But the glory and brightness of celestial beings, when made visible to man, has some analogy with fire, or at any rate brings the conception of fire before the mind. The historian doubtless reports the account which Elisha gave of what he saw on this memorable occasion. **And parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven**; literally, *and Elijah went up in a storm into the heavens.* There is no mention of a "whirlwind;" and "the heavens" are primarily the visible firmament or sky which overhangs the earth. Elijah, like our Lord, rose bodily from the earth into the upper region of the air, and was there lost to sight. Three only of the seed of Adam—Enoch, Elijah, Jesus—have passed from earth to heaven without dying.

Ver. 12.—**And Elisha saw** it (comp. ver. 10). The condition was fulfilled which Elijah had laid down, and Elisha knew that his request for a "double portion" of his master's spirit was granted. **And he cried, My father! my father!** It was usual for servants thus to address their masters (ch. v. 13), and younger men would, out of respect, almost always thus address an aged prophet (ch. vi. 21; xiii. 14, etc.). But Elisha probably meant something more than to show respect. He regarded himself as Elijah's specially adopted son, and hence had claimed the "double portion" of the firstborn. That his request was granted showed that the relationship was acknowledged. **The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof**; *i.e.* the best earthly defence of Israel. "In losing thee," he means, "we lose our great protector—him that is more to us than chariots and horsemen—the strength of Israel, against both domestic and foreign foes." The sight of the fiery chariot and horses may have determined the imagery, but they are not spoken of. Note the substitution of "horsemen" for "horses," and comp. ch. xiii. 10, where the same expression is used in reference to Elisha. **And he saw him no more.** Elijah passed beyond Elisha's ken. So far as we can gather from the expressions employed, no cloud received him (Acts i. 9), but he gradually vanished from sight. **And he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces**; an action marking extreme horror or extreme grief—here the latter (comp. Gen. xxxvii. 29; 2 Sam. xiii. 19; Job i. 20; ii. 12, etc.).

Ver. 13.—**He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan**; literally, *the lip of the Jordan*; that is, the brink of the stream, at the point, probably, where he and his master had crossed it.

Ver. 14.—**And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters**—imitated, *i.e.*, the action of Elijah (ver. 8), as Elijah had imitated the action of Moses at the passage of the Red Sea—**and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah?** The present Hebrew text reads, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah, *even he?*" the last two words being emphatic; but the emphasis scarcely appears to be needed. Hence the translators have very generally detached the two words from Elisha's question, and, attaching them to the succeeding clause, have

rendered **it, And when he also had smitten the waters**; but the position of the vau conjunctive, after אַף־הוּא and before יִבָּה, makes this division of the clauses impossible. It has therefore been proposed by some to read אָפוֹא, "now," for אַף־הוּא, "even he" (Houbigant, Thenius, Schultz, Böttcher, Dathe), and to translate, "Where *now* is the Lord God of Elijah?" Is he still here, with me, or has he withdrawn himself from earth with his prophet, and left me alone to my own unaided strength? This gives a good meaning, but is perhaps too bold a change. The LXX. had evidently our present Hebrew text before them, and, as they could make nothing of it, transcribed it into Greek characters, Ποῦ ὁ Θεὸς Ἠλιοὺ ἀφφώ; **they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over.** God showed, *i.e.*, that he was still with Elisha by enabling him to repeat Elijah's last miracle, and thus gave him an assurance that he would be with him thenceforth in his prophetic ministry.

Ver. 15.—**And when the sons of the prophets, which were to view at Jericho** (see ver. 7), **saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.** It is not quite clear upon what grounds the sons of the prophets came to this conclusion. Probably they had seen the passage of the Jordan by the two prophets, the disappearance of Elijah, and the return of Elisha across the stream in a way which they may have suspected to be miraculous. But the Jordan is four or five miles distant from the city of Jericho, and their apprehension of the various circumstances would be incomplete, and more or less vague. Perhaps there was something in Elisha's appearance and expression of countenance which impressed them, and appeared to them to mark his exaltation to a higher dignity and spiritual position. **And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him**; thus acknowledging him for their master, as they had been wont to acknowledge Elijah.

Ver. 16.—**And they said unto him.** Thenius suggests that Elisha first related to them what had befallen his master; but the impression left by the narrative is rather that *they* began the conversation, being aware of Elijah's disappearance, which in that clear atmosphere they may have distinctly perceived, though the ascension may not have been visible to them. Keil thinks that they saw the ascension, but supposed that the body, after being taken up a certain height into the air, would necessarily fall to earth, and that they wished to find it and bury it. But the natural interpretation is that they thought the prophet had been 'caught away" by a Divine influence, as Philip the evangelist was in later times (Acts viii. 39), and would be found somewhere alive, as Philip "was found at Azotus." **Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men**; literally, *sons of strength*; i.e. stout, active persons, capable of climbing the rough and precipitous rocks among which they thought that Elijah might be cast. **Let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley.** On either side of the *ciccar*, or Jordan plain, are rugged districts, consisting of alternate rocky mountain slopes and narrow gulleys, or water-courses, dry during the greater part of the year. The sons of the prophets think that Elijah has been carried by the Spirit of God into one or other of these mountain tracts, and wish to search them. **And he said, Ye shall not send**; or, *do not send*; meaning, "it will be useless—you will find nothing—it is not as you suppose."

Ver. 17.—**And when they urged him, till he was ashamed, he said, Send**; literally, *when they urged him until shame*; which some expound to mean, "until *they* were ashamed to press him any more" (Gesenius, Winer, Keil); but others, with more reason, "until *he* was ashamed to persist in his refusal" (ἐὡς οὗ ἠσχύνετο, LXX.). It is always a hard thing for one man to refuse the repeated and earnest request of a multitude. When Elisha said, "Send," he had not in the least changed his mind; he only meant to say, "Send, then, if you insist upon it, to satisfy *yourselves*, not *me*. There is no harm in your sending." **They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not.** The result bore out the advice and anticipations of the prophet. It was simply *nil*. No trace was found of the aged seer who had been translated from earth to heaven.

Ver. 18.—**And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?** The prophet was not above vindicating the propriety of his past conduct. He waited at Jericho until the fifty men returned from their vain search, and then reminded them that his advice to them had been not to start on a useless errand. The ministers of God *have* to vindicate themselves, because God's honour is concerned in their being without reproach.

Vers. 19—25.—The historian passes to the record of some of Elisha's minor miracles, belonging to the time whereof he is writing, and helping to explain the position of dignity and respect which he is found to occupy in the next chapter (vers. 11—14).

The miracles showed his twofold power, both to confer benefits and to punish.

Ver. 19.—**And the men of the city**—*i.e.* the inhabitants of Jericho; probably the civic authorities, having heard of the recent miracle—**said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth.** According to the unanimous voice of travellers, the situation of Jericho (now *Erîha*) is charming. Lying on a broad plain which is traversed by an abundant river, at the point where one of the main wadys debouched from the Judæan upland upon the low country, shaded by groves of palm trees (Deut. xxxiv. 3) and fig-mulberries (Luke xix. 4), the air scented with aromatic shrubs, opobalsam, myrobalanum, and the like, facing the Orient sun, and commanding a wide prospect both across and also up and down the Ghor, with the mountains of Moab in the distance, Jericho was, no doubt, even before the miracle of Elisha, a "pleasant" place. **But**—there was one drawback—**the water is naught, and the ground barren.** Bitter and brackish springs, of which there are many in the Jordan valley, gushed forth from the foot of the mountains, and formed rivulets, which ran across the plain towards the Jordan, not diffusing health and fertility, but rather disease and barrenness. Untimely births, abortions, and the like prevailed among the cattle which were fed in the neighbourhood, perhaps even among the inhabitants of the locality, and were attributed to the bitter springs, which made the land "miscarrying" (ἀτεκνουμένη, LXX.). It was the prayer of the men of Jericho that Elisha would remove this inconvenience.

Ver. 20.—**And he said, Bring me a new cruse.** Impurity must be cleansed by means that are wholly clean and pure. The prophet called for an absolutely *new* cruse, one that had been put to no use at all, and therefore could not have been defiled. **And put salt therein.** Salt, which physically would be most unapt to heal an unwholesome stream already holding too much salt in solution, is selected doubtless as emblematic of purity, being that by which corruption is ordinarily prevented or stayed. Under the Law every offering was to be purified by salt (Lev. ii. 13). The same symbolism is still employed under the gospel (see Matt. v. 13; Mark ix. 49; Luke xiv. 34). **And they brought it to him.**

Ver. 21.—**And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there.** The "spring" intended is supposed to be that now called *Ain-es-Sultân*, "the spring of the Sultan," which is the only copious source near the site of the ancient Jericho. The modern town lies at a distance of two miles from it. Ain-es-Sultân is described as "a large and beautiful fountain of sweet and pleasant water" (Robinson, 'Researches,' vol. ii. p. 384), and as "scattering, even at the hottest season, the richest and most grateful vegetation over what would otherwise be a bare tract of sandy soil." The other springs of the neighbourhood are mostly brackish. **And said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence**—*i.e.* from the waters—**any more death or barren land;** rather, *or miscarrying.*

Ver. 22.—**So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.** It was not a mere temporary, but a permanent, benefit which Elisha bestowed upon the town.

Ver. 23.—**And he went up from thence unto Bethel.** The ascent is steep and long from the Jordan valley to the highlands of Benjamin, on which Bethel stood, probably one of not less than three thousand feet. The object of Elisha's visit may have been to inform the "sons of the prophets" at Bethel (ver. 3) of the events that had befallen Elijah. **And as he was going up by the way**—*i.e.* by the usual road or pathway, for, in the strict sense of the word, roads did not exist in Palestine—**there came forth little children out of the city.** "Little children" is an unfortunate translation, raising quite a wrong idea of the tender age of the persons spoken of. On the other hand, Bishop Patrick's assertion that the words are to be "understood of adult persons, who had a hatred to the prophet," is quite untenable. *Naârim ketanaîm* would be best translated (as by our Revisers in the margin) "young lads"—boys, that is, from twelve to fifteen. Such mischievous youths are among the chief nuisances of Oriental towns; they waylay the traveller, deride him, jeer him—are keen to remark any personal defect that he may have, and merciless in flouting it; they dog his steps, shout out their rude remarks, and sometimes proceed from abusive words to violent acts, as the throwing of sticks, or stones, or mud. On this occasion they only got as far as rude words. **And mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head! go up, thou bald head!** It has been maintained that the scoff of the lads contained an allusion to the ascension of Elijah (Patrick, Pool, Clarke), of which they had heard, and was a call upon Elisha to follow his master's example in quitting the world, that they might be no longer troubled with him. But it is not at all apparent that the lads even knew who Elisha was—they would probably have jeered at *any* aged person with whom they had fallen in; and by "Go up" they merely meant "Go on thy way;" the force of their

jeer was not in the word *'alêh*, but in the word *kêrêach*, "bald head." Baldness was sometimes produced by leprosy, and then made a man unclean (Lev. xiii. 42—44); but the boys probably flouted the mere natural defect, in which there was no "uncleanness" (Lev. xiii. 40, 41), but which they regarded as a fit subject for ridicule. Their sin was disrespect towards old age, combined, perhaps, with disrespect for the prophetical order, to which they may have known from his dress that Elisha belonged.

Ver. 24.—**And he turned back, and looked on them**; rather, *and he looked behind him, and saw them*, as in the Revised Version. The boys, after the manner of boys, were following him, hanging upon him, not daring to draw too near, hooting him from behind, as ill-bred and ill-intentioned youths are apt to do. **And cursed them in the name of the Lord.** The action cannot be defended from a Christian point of view—Christians have no right to curse any one. But we can well understand that, under the old covenant, a prophet newly installed in office, and commencing his ministry, might deem it right to vindicate the honour of his office by visiting such conduct as that of these misguided youths with a malediction. Under the Law God's ministers were required to curse the disobedient (Deut. xxvii. 14—26). Elisha could not tell what would be the effect of his curse. It could have no effect at all excepting through the will and by the action of God. **And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood**; or, *the forest*; i.e. *the* forest, which, as all knew, lay within a short distance of Bethel, and was the haunt of wild beasts (see 1 Kings iii. 24). **And tare forty and two children of them.** It is not said how far the lads were injured, whether fatally or not. But the punishment, whatever its severity, came from God, not from the prophet, and we may be sure was just. For "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" A severe example may have been needed under the circumstances of the time, when a new generation was growing up in contempt of God and of religion; and the sin of the lads was not a small one, but indicated that determined bent of the will against good, and preference of evil, which is often developed early, and generally goes on from bad to worse.

Ver. 25.—**And he went from thence to Mount Carmel.** Ewald thinks that Carmel was, on the whole, the main residence of Elijah, and "through him became a special prophetic locality" ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 68). If so, we may account for Elisha's visiting it on this occasion by his desire to communicate the facts of Elijah's removal from earth to those who had been his intimates in that quarter. **And from thence he returned to Samaria.** Elisha does not imitate the wild, half-savage life and almost constant seclusion of his master. He "prefers from the first the companionship of men," fixes his home in the capital of his country, Samaria (ch. v. 9; vi. 32); is a friendly counsellor of the king (ch. vi. 9), and highly honoured by him (ch. viii. 4); his whole life, indeed, is, compared with that of Elijah, one of ease and tranquillity. But, though living "in the world," he is not "of the world." As Ewald says, "In spite of all the seductions to which he was abundantly exposed through the great consideration in which he was held, he retained at every period of his life the true prophetic simplicity and purity, and contempt for worldly wealth and advantages" ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 83). He is thus, far more than Elijah, a pattern for Christian ministers, especially for such as are highly placed, who will do well to follow his example.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*Preparation for our departure from earth.* Abnormal as was the mode of Elijah's departure from the earth, his conduct in prospect of departure may be to some extent a lesson to Christians. Note—

I. His resignation. No murmur escapes him; he shows no unwillingness to depart, no clinging to earth, no fear of removal, no shrinking from entrance on the unseen world. When God determines that the objects with which he has been placed upon the earth are accomplished, and that the Divine purposes will now be best carried out by other agents, he is quite ready to go, satisfied to depart, content that God should do with him as seemeth him good. Occupied with listening intently to the Divine voice which speaks within him, and executing its mandates, he moves from place to place, as ordered, indifferent where he is or what toils he undergoes, so that to the last he may faithfully perform the Divine will.

II. His absorption in Divine contemplation and meditation. The things of earth concern him no more. He moves on in a holy calm, wrapt in pious thought, not

even speaking, except in rare snatches, to his attached follower. The unseen world, the coming change, the things of heaven, occupy him. He does not address, perhaps he scarcely sees, the "sons of the prophets," who come forth to take their last look on the great teacher of the day. The time is too solemn a one for greetings, or conversations, or even exhortations. He does not seek to "improve the occasion," as shallower spirits might have done. In silence he goes his way, his mind fixed on God and the things of God—things ineffable, inexpressible—which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man" to conceive, but which are revealed in flashes to the soul about to depart, and give it a foretaste of the final "joy of the Lord."

III. HIS CONSIDERATION, DESPITE HIS ABSORPTION, FOR HIS ATTACHED FOLLOWER. Nothing is more common than for persons, in the near prospect of death, to be wholly occupied with themselves, and to have no consideration at all for others—to lose them out of sight, to forget them. Elijah, though wrapt in holy contemplation, is constantly mindful of his follower. Three times he suggests that his attendance is not necessary, and that he should spare himself the toil and trouble of tedious journeys (vers. 2, 4, 6). Finally, he invites him to ask whatever boon he pleases, with an implied pledge that, if it be within his power, he will grant it. The boon asked is one not directly in his power to grant; but he does not refuse it on that account. He consults God secretly as to the Divine will with respect to it, and obtains an answer which sustains the spirit of his follower, and makes the moment of his bereavement one also of comfort and triumph to him.

Vers. 2—12.—*Faithful friendship.* Though Elisha is said to have "ministered" to Elijah (1 Kings xix. 21), and to have "poured water on his hands" (ch. iii. 11), yet he was far more Elijah's friend than his servant. There was no broad difference of rank between the two to hinder this. Rather Elisha was, in original worldly position, the higher of the two. The glimpse we get of his early home in 1 Kings xix. 19—21 is indicative of comfort and wealth. In education and manners he must have been quite Elijah's equal. A friendship, in the proper sense of the term, was thus possible between them, and seems to have existed, and to have been warm and true. It was a friendship, however, in which a certain disparity was recognized on either side—the φιλία καθ' ὑπεροχήν of Aristotle. Elijah was the elder man of the two; he had, when the two became acquainted, the higher social position, being familiar with the court at the time when Elisha was a mere well-to-do farmer; and, as the recognized head of the prophetical order, he had a *quasi*-ecclesiastical position far higher than that which Elisha occupied during his lifetime. The French proverb says, "Dans les amitiés il y a toujours un qui aime, et l'autre qui est aimé;" and, under the circumstances, it was natural that the attachment should be warmest on Elisha's side. 1. Elisha shows his attachment by that continuous ministry which caused him to be designated as "Elisha, which poured water on the hands of Elijah" (ch. iii. 11)—that constant waiting upon the great prophet, and unceasing service, which lasted from the casting of the mantle at Abel-Meholah to the ascent in the chariot and horses of fire. 2. He shows it by his determination to see the last of his friend, to remain in his company as long as he possibly can. 3. He shows it very remarkably by the sympathy which he displays with Elijah's mood on the journey from Gilgal to the plain east of Jordan, the silence which he keeps, the brief replies which he makes, the care which he takes that his master's meditations shall be kept free from disturbance. 4. Finally, he shows it by his deep grief when the hour of parting comes; the exclamation forced from him, "My father! my father!" and the violent rending of his clothes *into two pieces*, which was something very different from the conventional rending of ordinary mourners. As David and Jonathan furnish the scriptural model for a friendship between equals, so Elijah and Elisha may properly be regarded as the model for a friendship between unequals, both equally constant, but perhaps not both equally loving—one the protector, the director, the benefactor, the teacher, the master, the guide; the other the dependent, the scholar, the servant, the faithful devotedly attached follower, admirer, almost slave; bound together in a lifelong bond always becoming more and more close, and presented to us, not merely to awaken in us a passing interest, but to stir us under suitable circumstances to imitation.

Ver. 14.—**And he said**—he, Elisha, said to Gehazi—**What then is to be done for her?** If the woman will suggest nothing herself, can Gehazi suggest anything? Has he heard her express any wish? Does he know of any boon that would be welcome to her? Evidently the woman's disinterestedness has increased the prophet's desire to do something for her. **And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old.** It does not appear that the woman had made any complaint or exhibited any special anxiety on the subject of offspring. But Gehazi knows that to be barren is regarded by all Hebrew women as a reproach, that it exposes them to scorn and contumely (1 Sam. i. 6, 7), and that offspring is universally, or all but universally, desired. He therefore assumes that the Shunammite must wish for it. And Elisha accepts his suggestion without a moment's hesitation.

Ver. 15.—**And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door**; rather, *the doorway*. The same word in Hebrew stands both for "doorway" and for "door." It would seem that the woman came at once on being called, but, out of modesty and respect, would not advance beyond the entrance of the apartment.

Ver. 16.—**And he**—*i.e.* Elisha—**said, About this season, according to the time of life**—rather, *when the time comes round;* literally, *revives;* i.e. about this time next year—**thou shalt embrace a son**; *i.e.* "a son shall be born to **thee**, whom thou wilt embrace, as mothers **are** wont to do." **And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.** Like Sarah, the woman was incredulous; she could not believe the good tidings, and thought the prophet was only raising hopes to disappoint them. Her words, "Do not lie unto thy servant," are less harsh in the original, being merely equivalent to the "Do not deceive me" of ver. 28.

Ver. 17.—**And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life**; rather, as the Revised Version gives the passage, *the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season, when the time came round, as Elisha had said unto her.* The event was exactly as predicted; the child was born at the same season of the ensuing year.

Ver. 18.—**And when the child was grown**—not grown *up*, for he was still a "child" (vers. 30, 31, 35, etc.), but grown to be a boy, perhaps four or five years old—**it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers.** The corn-fields about Shunem attract the admiration of travellers. The husband of the Shunammite, the owner of several, was in one of them, superintending the cutting of his corn by the reapers; and the boy joined him there, as he had probably often done before. Country children delight in watching the various operations of the farmstead.

Ver. 19.—**And he said unto his father, My head, my head.** Sunstroke was common in Palestine (Ps. cxxi. 6; Isa. xlix. 10; Judith viii. 2, 3), and would be most frequent and most fatal at the time of harvest. The cry of the child is at once most touching and most natural. **And he said to a lad**; literally, *to the lad*—probably *the* lad who had attended the "young master" to the field. **Carry him to his mother**; *i.e.* take him indoors, and let his mother see to him. No wiser directions could have been given.

Ver. 20.—**And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon.** It was in the morning, therefore, that the child received his sunstroke—an unusual, but not an unknown, occurrence. In the East the sun often becomes intensely hot by ten o'clock. **And then died.** There is no ambiguity here, no room for doubt; the child not only became insensible, but *died.* The historian could not possibly have expressed himself more plainly.

Ver. 21.—**And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God.** One cannot be certain what thoughts were working in the poor bereaved mother's heart; but probably she entertained some vague notion that the prophet might be able to resuscitate her child, and thought that, until his presence could be obtained, the next best thing was to place the child where the prophet's presence had lately been. Elijah had placed on his own bed the child whom he restored to life (1 Kings xvii. 19); and the fact may have been known to the Shunammite. She certainly did not expect mere contact with the bed to resuscitate her child. **And shut the door upon him.** Either that the body should not be disturbed, or rather that the death should not be known. It is clear that, from whatever motive, the woman wished to conceal the death of the child until she had seen what Elisha could do for her. She neither told her husband nor the servant who accompanied her. **And went out**; *i.e.* quitted the prophet's apartment, closing the door as she quitted it.

Ver. 22.—**And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses.** She "called to her husband" from the house, without calling him into the house, expressing her desire to visit Elisha, without stating the object of her visit, and asked for the necessary riding-animal and escort. The nearest part of Carmel was at least fourteen or fifteen miles from Shunem, so that she could not walk. **That I may run**—*i.e.* hasten

—**to the man of God.** "Man of God" was evidently the designation by which Elisha was known in the house (vers. 16, 21, 25). **And come again**; *i.e.* return home before nightfall.

Ver. 23.—**And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day? it is neither new moon nor sabbath.** The husband demurred; he saw no occasion for the journey. It was not either "new moon" or "sabbath"—times when evidently the prophets conducted services, which were attended by pious persons from the neighbourhood: what could she want of Elisha? He had evidently no idea that the child was dead. Probably he had not realized to himself that he was in any danger. **And she said, It shall be well.** She uttered the single word *shalôm*, literally, "peace," but used, like the German *gut*, or the English "all right," to content an inquirer without giving him a definite answer. And the husband accepted her assurance, and did not press for an explanation. The ass and the servant were placed at her disposal without more words.

Ver. 24.—**Then she saddled an ass**; rather, *then she saddled* (i.e. "caused to be saddled") *the ass*—*the* particular animal which her husband had placed at her disposal. **And said to her servant, Drive, and go forward**; *i.e.* "set the ass in motion, and then proceed steadily forward." In the East, each donkey has its driver, who sets it in motion, and regulates its pace. The rider leaves all to him. **Slack not thy riding for me**—rather, *slacken me not the riding* (Revised Version), or, *slacken not my riding*; i.e. "do not lessen the pace of my riding"—**except I bid thee.**

Ver. 25.—**So she went and came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel.** Carmel was to Elisha what Gilead had been to Elijah in his early days—a place for solitary retirement and meditation, where, free from disturbance, he might hold communion with nature and with God. It was not usual for his disciples to intrude upon him there, except at stated times, when gatherings were held at his residence for edification and for worship. **And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off**—literally, *over against him*; i.e. coming towards him (ἐρχομένην, LXX.)—**that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite.** The prophet knew her at a distance, probably by her attire and carriage. We may gather, from her husband's words in ver. 23, that she was one of those who had been accustomed to attend the gatherings on new moons and sabbaths.

Ver. 26.—**Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?** Elisha feels that there must be something the matter, to account for the Shunammite's coming to him so unexpectedly. His anxiety is aroused, and, in his impatience to know what has happened, instead of waiting for the woman's arrival, he bids his servant *run*, and ask what is the matter. Some misfortune, he supposes, must have happened either to her, or to her husband, or to the child. **And she answered, It is well.** She gave, as before to her husband (ver. 23), the ambiguous answer, "Peace," intending thereby merely to put off Gehazi, and not explain herself to any one but his master.

Ver. 27.—**And when she came to the man of God to the hill**—rather, *the mountain*; i.e. Carmel, where Elisha's residence was—**she caught him by the feet** (comp. Matt. xviii. 29; Mark v. 22; vii. 25; Luke viii. 41; John xi. 32). It has always been usual in the East to embrace the feet or the knees, in order to add force to supplication. **But Gehazi came near to thrust her away.** He regarded the act as one unduly familiar or unduly importunate, and interfered to protect and release his master. **And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her.** Elisha would not have the woman disturbed. He saw that she was in deep distress, and, if there was anything unseemly in her action according to the etiquette of the time, excused it to her profound grief and distraction. The ordinary mind is a slave to conventionalities; the superior mind knows when to be above them. **And the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.** God had not informed Elisha, by inward miraculous illumination, of the illness of the child, or its death, or the wild hopes stirring in the afflicted mother's mind, which induced her to make her long and troublesome journey. We need not feel surprised at this. There is always a limit to the miraculous; and facts that may be learnt by a little inquiry are but rarely communicated supernaturally.

Ver. 28.—**Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?** The woman does not directly reveal her grief. Great sorrow is reticent, cannot endure to put itself into words. But she sufficiently indicates the nature of her trouble by the form of her reproach. "Did I ask for a son? Did I make complaint of my childlessness? Had I been importunate, and obtained my son of thee by much asking, I would not have complained. But I did not ask. I did not even snatch greedily at the offer. I demurred. I said, 'Do not deceive me.' But now thou hast done worse than deceive me. Thou hast kept the word of promise to the ear, and broken it to the hope. It is greater misery to have a child and lose him, than never to have had one

at all." All this, and more, seems to be involved in the woman's words. And the prophet fully understood their meaning.

Ver. 29.—**Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again.** The object of all these injunctions is haste. Lose not a moment. Go as quickly as thou canst to the house where the child lies. Spend no time in greetings on the way. Slack not. Tarry not. **And lay my staff upon the face of the child.** What effect the prophet expected from this act, we are not told. Gehazi appears to have expected that it would at once cause a resuscitation (ver. 31); but there is no evidence that the prophet participated in the expectation. He may have done so, for prophets are not infallible beyond the sphere of the revelations made to them; but he may only have intended to comfort and cheer the mother, and to raise in her an expectation of the resuscitation which he trusted it would be allowed him to effect.

Ver. 30.—**And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth** (comp. ch. ii. 2, 4, 6), **I will not leave thee.** Apparently, the woman supposed that Elisha intended to do nothing more, but trust the child's recovery to such virtue as might inhere in his staff. But her own resolution was long ago taken—she would be content with nothing less than bringing the prophet face to face with her dead child. She "will not leave" him till he consents to accompany her to her home. **And he arose, and followed her;** as, no doubt, he had intended from the first.

Ver. 31.—**And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff on the face of the child;** but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Gehazi did as he had been told, executed his mission faithfully; but there was no apparent result. The child was not roused by the staff being placed across his face. All remained still and silent as before. Although on some occasions it has pleased God to allow miracles to be wrought by the instrumentality of lifeless objects, as when Elisha's bones resuscitated a dead man (ch. xiii. 21), and when virtue went out from the hem of our Lord's garment (Mark v. 25—34), and still more remarkably, when "handkerchiefs or aprons from the body of Paul were brought unto the sick, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits were cast out of them" (Acts xix. 12); yet the instances are, comparatively speaking, rare, and form exceptions to what may be called the usual Divine economy of miracles. Miracles are, as a general rule, attached in Scripture to intense unwavering faith—faith, sometimes, in those that are the objects of them, almost always in those that are the workers of them. The present case was not to be an exception to the general rule, the circumstances not calling for an exception. The power of faith was to be shown forth once more in Elisha, as not long previously in Elijah (1 Kings xvii. 19—23); and Israel was to be taught, by a second marvellous example, how much the effectual fervent prayer of a faithful and righteous man avails with the Most High. The lesson would have been lost had the staff been allowed to effect the resuscitation. **Wherefore he**—*i.e.* Gehazi—**went again to meet him**—*i.e.* Elisha—**and told him, saying, The child is not waked.** It is clear from this, that Gehazi had expected an awakening; but there is nothing to show what the prophet himself had expected. We are certainly not entitled to conclude, with Peter Martyr, that "Elisha did wrong in attempting to delegate his power of working miracles to another;" or even, with Starke, that "Elisha gave the command to Gehazi from overhaste, without having any Divine incentive to it."

Ver. 32.—**And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed** (comp. ver. 21). The child remained where his mother had laid him.

Ver. 33.—**He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain**—that he might not be interrupted during his efforts to restore the child's life (comp. ver. 4)—**and prayed unto the Lord.** Probably his heart had been lifted up in inarticulate prayer from the time that he realized the calamity which had befallen the Shunammite; but now he went down on his knees, and lifted up his voice in outspoken words of prayer.

Ver. 34.—**And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands;** following the example set him by his master and predecessor, Elijah (1 Kings xvii. 21). The idea may in both cases have been to fit the body for reinhabitation by the soul (see ver. 22), through the restoration of warmth to it. **And he stretched himself upon the child;** *i.e.* brought his flesh as close as he could to the flesh of the child, covering the body and pressing on it, to force his own bodily warmth to pass into it. The word used, וַיִּגְהַר, is different from that in 1 Kings xvii. 21, which is וַיִּתְמֹדֵד, and implies a closer contact. **And the flesh of the child waxed warm.** Elisha's efforts had an effect; the child's body was actually warmed by them.

Ver. 35.—**Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro;** literally, *once to*

and once fro; took, *i.e.*, a single turn up and down the large room adjoining his bed-chamber—scarcely with any remedial object, but as men do when they are in distress and doubt. **And went up, and stretched himself upon him**—*i.e.* repeated his former act, laying himself upon the child, and warming it—**and the child sneezed seven times**—showing the recovery of suspended respiration—**and the child opened his eyes**; *i.e.* came to himself.

Ver. 36.—**And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite**; *i.e.* tell her to come here. No time was to be lost in restoring the child to his mother, now that he was alive again. **And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son**; *i.e.* lift him up, take him in thine arms, feel him to be all thine own once more.

Ver. 37.—**Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground**; in acknowledgment of the boon conferred on her. In the East such prostrations are common, and denote at once gratitude and humility. **And took up her son, and went out.** (On some later circumstances in the life of the woman, see ch. viii. 1—6.)

Vers. 38—41.—3. *The healing of the unwholesome pottage.*

Ver. 38.—**And Elisha came again to Gilgal**; *i.e.* revisited Gilgal, where he had been previously with his master (ch. ii. 1), either casually, or perhaps on one of his regular circuits (Keil) to visit the schools of the prophets. **And there was a dearth in the land**—probably the dearth again mentioned in ch. viii. 1—**and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him.** Some translate "the sons of the prophets *dwelt with him*" (Vulgate, Luther, Bishop Horsley); but our version is probably correct. The LXX. give ἐκάθηντο; and Ezek. viii. 1; xvi. 1; xxxiii. 31; with Zech. iii. 8, show that ישבים לפני may have the meaning of "sitting in the presence of a person." **And he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot**—*i.e. the one* great pot that there would be in the house—**and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets.** Even in a famine there would be some vegetables produced on which life might be sustained.

Ver. 39.—**And one went out into the field to gather herbs.** One of the sons of the prophets, probably, went out into the neighbouring country, and looked about for any wild fruits or vegetables that he could see anywhere. **And found a wild vine.** Not a wild grape vine (*Vitis labrusca*), the fruit of which would have been harmless, but some cucurbitaceous plant, with tendrils, and a growth like that of the vine. **And gathered thereof wild gourds.** The exact kind of gourd is uncertain. Recent critics have mostly come to the conclusion that the vegetable intended is the *Cucumis agrestis* or *Ecbalium elaterium*, the "squirting cucumber" of English naturalists. This is a kind of gourd, the fruit of which is egg-shaped, has a bitter taste, and bursts when ripe at a slight touch, squirting out sap and seeds. The main ground for this conclusion is etymological, פקעת being derived from פקע, "to crack" or "split." Another theory, and one which has the ancient versions in its favour, identifies the "gourd" in question with the fruit of the colocynth, which is a gourd-like plant that creeps along the ground, and has a round yellow fruit of the size of a large orange. This fruit is exceedingly bitter, produces colic, and affects the nerves. **His lap full**; as many as he could carry in the *sinus*, or large fold, of his *beged*, or shawl. **And came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not**; *i.e.* the sons of the prophets, who stood by and saw them shred into the pot, did not recognize them, or did not know that they were unwholesome.

Ver. 40.—**So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out and said, O thou man of God,** there is **death in the pot.** Either the bitter flavour alarmed them, or they began to feel ill effects from what they had swallowed, which, if it was colocynth, might very soon have produced stomach-ache or nausea. Rushing, therefore, at once to the worst possible supposition, they concluded that they were poisoned, and exclaimed, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" "If eaten in any large quantity," says Keil, "colocynths might really produce death." **And they could not eat thereof**; *i.e.* they could not continue to eat the pottage—all stopped eating.

Ver. 41.—**But he said, Then bring meal.** Elisha seems not to have hesitated for a moment. Prompt measures must be taken, if poisoning is even suspected. He has meal brought—not that meal has any virtue in itself against colocynth, or against any other deleterious drug. **But he acts,** now as always, under Divine direction, and is instructed to use meal on this occasion, as he used salt in healing the waters of Jericho. The meal, as Keil observes, "might somewhat modify the bitterness and injurious qualities of the vegetable," whatever it was, but "could not possibly take them entirely away. . . . The meal, the most wholesome food of man, was only the earthly substratum for the working of the Divine effluence which proceeded from Elisha, and made the noxious food perfectly wholesome." **And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out now for the people**—*i.e.* the assembled company of sons of the prophets—**that they**

may eat. And there was no harm in the pot. Such as had faith in Elisha, and continued to eat of the pottage, found no ill result. What they ate did them no harm.

Vers. 42—44.—4. *The feeding of a hundred men on twenty loaves.*

Ver. 42.—**And there came a man from Baal-shalisha.** "Baal-shalisha" is reasonably identified with the "Beth-shalisha" of Eusebius and Jerome, which they place twelve Roman miles north of Diospolis, or Lydda (now Ludd). By "north" we must probably understand "north-east," since the "land of Shalisha" lay between the territories of Ephraim and Benjamin (1 Sam. ix. 4). The position thus indicated would not be very far from the Gilgal (*Jiljilieh*) of ch. ii. and iv. 38. **And brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits.** It is clear that the more pious among the Israelites not only looked to the prophets for religious instruction (ver. 23), but regarded them as having inherited the position of the Levitical priests whom Jeroboam's innovations had driven from the country. The firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil were assigned by the Law (Numb. xviii. 13; Deut. xviii. 4, 5) to the priests. **Twenty loaves of barley.** The "loaves" of the Israelites were cakes or rolls, rather than "loaves" in the modern sense of the word. Each partaker of a meal usually had one for himself. Naturally, twenty "loaves" would be barely sufficient for twenty men. **And full ears of corn;** *i.e.* a few ripe ears of the same corn as that whereof the bread was made. Ears of corn were offered as firstfruits at the Passover (Lev. xxiii. 10), and were regarded as the most natural and becoming tokens of gratitude for God's harvest mercies. **In the husk thereof;** rather, *in his bag*, or *in his sack* (see the Revised Version). **And he said, Give unto the people**—*i.e.* to the sons of the prophets who dwelt at Gilgal—**that they may eat.**

Ver. 43.—**And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men?** The servant felt that the quantity was quite insufficient, and thought it absurd to invite a hundred men to sit down to a meal which would not satisfy a fifth of the number; but Elisha repeated his command. **He said again, Give the people, that they may eat.** This time, however, he added an explanation of the proceeding: **for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof.** God had supernaturally intimated to him that the quantity of food would prove ample for the hundred men; they would show that they had had enough by leaving some of it. And the result was as predicted.

Ver. 44.—**So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord.** We are not expressly told how the miracle was wrought, whether by an augmentation of the quantity of the food supernaturally produced, or by a lessening of the appetites of the men, as Bähr supposes. But the analogy of our Lord's miracles of feeding the multitudes, whereof this is a manifest type, makes it probable that in this case also there was a miraculous increase of the food. The object of the writer in communicating the account is certainly not merely to show how the Lord cared for his servants, but to relate another miracle wrought by Elisha, of a different kind from those previously related. He is occupied with Elisha's miracles through this entire chapter and through the three next.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*The seed of the righteous never forsaken by God.* The whole ground of appeal on which the poor widow relies, and which proves so entirely adequate, is the fidelity to God of her deceased husband. "Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord" (ver. 1). She assumes that Elisha is on this account almost bound to interfere on behalf of the man's two sons, who are in danger of being carried into slavery. And Elisha allows the validity of her claim, and straightway comes to their relief. The example may well recall the emphatic words of the psalmist, which the minister and director cannot too strongly impress on anxious and doubting mothers, "I have been young, and now am old; and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread" (Ps. xxxvii. 25). A blessing rests upon the seed of the righteous—

I. By Divine promise. "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and *showing mercy unto thousands of them that love* me, and keep my commandments" (Exod. xx. 5, 6); "The mercy of the Lord is *from everlasting to everlasting* upon them that fear him, and his righteousness *unto children's children*" (Ps.

ciii. 17); "The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee" (Ps. cii. 28).

II. BY THE SYMPATHY INVOLVED IN GOD'S FATHERHOOD. After God all fatherhood (πᾶσα πατρία) in heaven and earth is named (Eph. iii. 15). As a Father, he sympathizes with all fathers, knows their hearts, understands their longings, is tender towards their tenderness. Them that love him he will love, and will reward them where they would most wish to be rewarded, in their children. The seed of the righteous may often, does often, wander into devious ways, depart from righteousness, provoke God, draw down upon himself God's chastisements; but in the end how seldom does he wholly fall away, completely forget the lessons of his youth, the example of godly parents, the precepts so carefully instilled into his mind in early life, day by day and year by year! how seldom does he become a blasphemer, or an unbeliever, or an utterly hardened reprobate! How often, on the other hand, does he recover from grievous falls, returns to God, repent, amend, and "do the first works"! God's tender care not only saves the children of the righteous from begging their bread, or falling into utter destitution, but watches over their spiritual welfare, and in a thousand ways checks their wanderings, weans them from their evil courses, and at last brings them to himself.

Vers. 8—37.—*Godliness has, to a large extent, the promise of this life, as well as of the life to come.* The "good Shunammite" and her husband are examples of the union, which is more common than men are apt to allow, between piety and prosperity. They have nothing heroic about them, nothing out of the common. They are substantial middle-class people, dwelling in a quiet country-side, farming on a moderate scale, with a comfortable house of their own, dwelling contentedly amid their labourers and their country neighbours. But they are not rendered selfish or worldly minded by their prosperity. They feel and admit the claims of religion upon them. In Elisha they recognize a "man of God;" first, it would seem, officially. As the official representative to them of the Most High, they regard him as entitled to kindness and hospitality. They press upon him their good offices, insist on his taking his meals with them, "constrain him to eat bread" (ver. 8). When by degrees they have become acquainted with his character, they recognize in him something more—they "perceive that he is a *holy* man of God" (ver. 9). Like is perceived by like. It takes some holiness to perceive and recognize holiness. And the perception raises a desire for greater intimacy. Like desires like. It will be a blessed thing if they can persuade the prophet, not merely to take an occasional meal in their house, but to be an occasional inmate—to rest there, to sleep there. So the woman proposes to her husband to build the prophet a sleeping-chamber; and he readily consents, apparently without a murmur (ver. 10). He is neither jealous, nor stingy, nor ill-natured. The woman has her way, and her kindly nature is gratified by the frequent presence of the godly man, whose ministrations she attends on sabbaths and holy days (ver. 23). And now her piety, which has been wholly disinterested, receives an earthly reward. The disgrace of barrenness is, at the prophet's intercession, removed from her, and she obtains the blessing of offspring. Nay, more. Though death removes her offspring, he is restored to her, rendered doubly precious by having seemed to be for ever lost. The well-deserved prosperity of herself and husband culminates in this happy restoration, which puts the finishing touch to the earthly bliss that had lacked only this crowning joy. And so it is in life generally. Not only the proud and ungodly, but the godly also, are "rewarded after their deserving" (Ps. xciv. 2). Many virtues, *e.g.* honesty, sobriety, industry, prudence, have a natural tendency to draw to their possessor a considerable share of this world's goods; as the opposite vices, dishonesty, drunkenness, idleness, imprudence, have a natural tendency to disperse such goods when possessed and prevent their accumulation. Goodness, on the whole, secures the respect and esteem of other men; and the respect and esteem of our fellows tends in various ways to our worldly advantage. Men place more trust in the godly than in the ungodly, and situations of trust are, for the most part, situations of profit. Nor must we omit the consideration of the Divine blessing, which always rests upon the godly, in fact, and is sometimes openly manifested. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (Ps. xxxiv. 15, 16); "No good thing will God withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Ps. lxxxiv. 11).

And the entire result is that, upon the whole, even in this life, right conduct, goodness, piety, have the advantage over their opposites, and that happiness and misery are distributed, even here, very much "according to men's deserving"—not, of course, without exceptions, even numerous exceptions—but still predominantly, so that the law holds good as a general one, that "godliness hath the promise of this life." Our blessed Lord went so far as to say, "There is *no man* that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold *now in this time*, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark x. 29, 30).

Vers. 27—31.—*Limits to inspiration.* Many men seem to suppose that the prophetical inspiration, the Divine *afflatus*, whatever it was, which God vouchsafed in times past to his prophets, apostles, and evangelists, was absolutely unlimited—a sort of omniscience, at any rate omniscience on all those subjects on which they spoke or wrote. But Scripture lends no sanction to this supposition. "Let her alone," says Elisha to Gehazi; "for her soul is vexed within her: *and the Lord hath hid it from me*, and *hath not told me*" (ver. 27). Ignorance of the future would also seem to underlie the instructions given to Gehazi in ver. 29. And there are, in point of fact, limitations to every prophet's knowledge even with respect to the things concerning which he writes or speaks. "Now, behold," says St. Paul, "I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, *not knowing* the things that shall befall me there" (Acts xx. 22). And again, "Now concerning virgins *I have no commandment of the Lord*: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful" (1 Cor. vii. 25). The apostles spoke much of the coming of Christ to judgment, but "of that day and of that hour knoweth no man" (Matt. xxiv. 36). Prophetic knowledge was always partial, limited. To Isaiah the return from Babylon, the establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth, and the final triumph of Christianity, were blended together into a single vision of glory from which the chronological idea was absent. Ezekiel probably did not know whether the temple which he described (xl.—xliv.) was to be spiritual or material. Zechariah knew that a day would come when there would be "a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness;" but the nature of the fountain was, apparently, not revealed to him. The prophets always "saw through a glass darkly," "knew in part" and prophesied in part; had not even a full knowledge of the meaning of their own words. We must therefore not look in the inspired writings for an exactness and accuracy and completeness to which they make no pretence; we must not claim infallibility for the *obiter dicta* of apostles or evangelists; we must not be surprised at occasional slips of memory, as the quotation of "Jeremy" for "Zachary" (Matt. xxvii. 9), or at little discrepancies, as the various readings of the title on the cross, or at other similar imperfections. The Divine element in Scripture does not exclude the presence also of a human element; and the human element cannot but show traces of human weakness, human ignorance, human frailty. The trifling errors that a microscopic criticism points out in the sacred volume no more interfere with its illuminating power, than do the spots seen by astronomers on its surface interfere with the light of the sun, or slight flaws with the magnificence and splendour of a unique diamond. The Bible is God's Word, the most precious treasure that man possesses, even although it be true that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. iv. 7).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7.—*The widow's oil increased.* This simple and touching story is one of those many narratives which make the Bible a book for every one, and a book for everyday life. The individual is never lost in the nation or the race. It is so in actual fact. Our own personal needs and struggles and anxieties are of more importance and interest to us than the struggles of a nation or the general well-being of the human race. It is the same in the Bible. The Bible is partly a history of nations, and particularly of the Jewish nation. But it is much more a history of individuals.

It is this that makes it such a book of universal comfort and instruction. We can all find something in it that suits ourselves. As we read of the men and women whose lives are recorded in it, we learn more from their faith and their failings, from their temptations and their victories, than we could from any abstract discourses about the benefit of virtue and the evil of vice. We learn that they were men and women of like passions with ourselves. We learn that the temptations they conquered we can conquer by the help of the same Spirit; that the trials they endured we can endure; and that the faith and holiness to which they attained are within our reach also. And then how homely and how practical the Bible is! Its heroes and heroines do not live in a Utopia. It shows them to us under very much the same conditions as we live under still. It shows them to us in their homes and at their business, in their loves and in their married life, at the plough and in the fishing-boat, at the marriage-feast and at the funeral. Perhaps we think it hard to be religious in our business, in society, or amid the petty cares and worries of our daily life. The Bible shows us men and women living under the same conditions, and yet living so much in the fear of God and the presence of eternity that they triumphed over their distractions, and, whilst in the world, were not of it. Such a glimpse of everyday life we obtain in the narrative before us. We learned some valuable lessons from the palace of King Ahaziah; we may learn quite as important ones from the humble home of a prophet's widow.

I. INNOCENT SUFFERING. There is a good deal of suffering in the world. Many suffer *innocently*. But not all those who think they suffer innocently are really innocent. Here, however, there appears to be a case of really innocent suffering. It is a poor widow who comes to tell Elisha her tale of want and woe. Her husband had been one of "the sons of the prophets"—a word that was used in a general sense to signify those who were pupils of the prophets, trained by the prophets. He had unfortunately got into debt. How he was led into it we are not told. He was a God-fearing man. It was not, therefore, through dissipation or sin. But it may have been through his own imprudence or improvidence. Or it may have been through some unexpected loss, or through failure on the part of others to meet their liabilities to him. At any rate, he died in debt, and his poor widow is the sufferer. 1. This incident, and there are many like it happening every day, *shows us the folly and danger of getting into debt.* One of the worst features of it is that so often the innocent—the wife or children who perhaps know nothing at all of the debt—have to suffer for the folly or the dishonesty of others. We need to have a more awakened conscience on this subject of using money which really is not our own. As a matter of worldly policy and prudence, it is a great mistake. As a matter of morality, it is very doubtful indeed. How many of the tremendous crashes which have taken place in the commercial world are the result of men living beyond their means! They made too large demands upon the future. They incurred liabilities which they had no means of meeting. And in many cases debt proves to be a temptation to dishonesty. I have yet to learn the difference between the dishonesty of the man who gets a month's imprisonment for a petty theft, and the dishonesty of many who are legally protected in their crime by the strange device of the bankruptcy court. Not that every bankrupt is dishonest. But many who are thus protected are. We want a clearer and a cleaner public conscience on this question of debt. 2. *There is a word here also for creditors.* The creditor in this story was a regular Shylock. He wanted his pound of flesh. He would be satisfied with nothing less. Mark the utter heartlessness and cruelty of the man. He knew the poor widow was unable to pay. There were no goods and chattels that he could seize, or none worth seizing, so he actually came to make her two sons his slaves. Even the slightest touch of humanity might have led him to content himself with *one* of the sons. He might have left the other to be the solace and support of his widowed mother. But no. There is no mercy, no pity, in his hard and selfish heart. He must have the two sons to satisfy his claim. Now, the Scripture, while it countenances lending to those who are in want, and while it commands the payment of debts, recommends the exercise of mercy and humanity in exacting this payment. For instance, in Exodus it is said, "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall

be widows, and your children fatherless" (Exod. xxii. 22—24). And in Deut. xxiv. 17 we have a similar command. We learn here in all the relationships of life to mingle mercy with justice. Too often in the keen competition of life, and in the race for wealth, the finer feelings become blunted. If you are a Christian, it is your duty to imitate the spirit and precepts of Jesus. Whether you are a Christian or not, you are responsible to God for the way you act towards your fellow-men. Always consider the circumstances of the case. Where it is possible, be specially careful of the widow and the fatherless and the orphan. God has a special care for them, and he will aveuge their cause on the persecutor and the oppressor.

II. ACTIVE FAITH. The poor widow had nothing in her house save a pot of oil. She was not as well off as the widow of Zarephath, to whom Elijah came; she had not even a handful of meal in the barrel. The olive oil was used as butter with the flour or meal. Dr. Kitto says it is indeed a remarkable fact that poor people in Israel, who are reduced to the last extremity, have generally a little oil left. Yet in this extremity, with this jar of oil as her sole possession, what does the prophet tell her to do? To go and borrow empty vessels of all her neighbours, and to borrow just as many as she could get. Was it not a strange command? *Empty* vessels! Why not borrow *vessels with something in them?* No; for that would have been to get deeper into debt. *Empty* vessels. The fact of bringing empty vessels into her house implied that she had something to fill them with. *This just shows the greatness of the woman's faith.* She trusted God's prophet. She knew that he would not deceive her or bid her do anything for which there was not a good reason. She trusted God's power. She knew that God was able, in his own way and in his own time, to supply all her need. We need to learn a similar faith. *We need it for our temporal affairs.* We need to trust God that he can and will and does supply the daily wants of his people. What though the purse is empty? God can send the means to fill it.

"It may not be my time;
It may not be thy time;
But yet in his own time the Lord will provide."

We need to learn similar faith—a faith that shows itself not in idleness but in action—*in regard to spiritual things.* We may see but empty vessels before us. God is able to fill them. He does it very often by making us labourers together with him, as he did in this case of the widow and her sons. A respected Sunday-school teacher tells that when he first went to teach in a mission Sunday school in one of our large cities, he said to the superintendent, "Where is my class?" He could see no class for him to teach. The superintendent's answer was, "You'll have to go out and gather a class." He did so, and soon had a large and attentive class of lads gathered in by his own exertions from the streets. Don't you know of any empty vessels that would be better if they were filled with the love of Christ and the grace of God? Are there no empty vessels in your own homes? Are there no empty vessels round about you where you live—hearts that are without God and without hope, lives that are utterly destitute of any aims or usefulness? If you know of such, will you not try to bring them under the influence of the gospel? *This woman showed a strong faith, for she had doubtless to face the ridicule and difficulties and questionings of her neighbours.* They probably laughed at a woman borrowing vessels when she had nothing to fill them with. We must learn not to mind what people will say of us when we are doing God's work. There are some people who object to everything. There are some people who are always raising difficulties. Those who raise the difficulties and make the objections are generally those who do the least and give the least. Never mind them. Make sure that your work is God's work. Consider it prayerfully and carefully before you undertake it. And then, having made sure that it is God's work, so far as you can get light upon your path, turn not aside to the right hand or to the left. Trust in God to carry you and your work safely through, and to crown your labours with success. "The fear of man bringeth a snare; but he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe."

III. ABUNDANT BLESSING. The woman was well rewarded for her unquestioning faith. So long as she continued pouring from her little jar of oil, so long the oil continued to flow until all the vessels were full. She could have filled more vessels if she

had had them. But when there were no more vessels to be filled, the oil ceased to flow. At any rate she had enough to sell for the payment of her debt, and to provide herself and her sons with a temporary support. We learn here that *our blessings may be limited by our capacity to receive.* There is no limit to God's love. There is no limit to his power to bless. He gives in overflowing measure, far beyond our expectations, far beyond our deservings. But then we may stint the blessing for ourselves by not being in a fit state to receive it. We see constantly in Scripture and in the history of the Christian Church that there are certain conditions under which larger spiritual blessings may be expected, and certain conditions which may hinder these blessings. 1. *We may hinder our blessings by want of faith and expectation.* Had Abraham persevered in prayer, he might have won the salvation of Sodom even on account of righteous Lot alone. On a later occasion Elisha was displeased with King Joash for his want of faith in shooting the arrows. The king only smote thrice upon the ground, and Elisha said, "Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice." How often we hinder our blessings because we do not persevere in prayer! 2. *We may hinder our blessings by not making a right use of those we have got.* "To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have." There is no waste in God's kingdom. He will not give further blessings to those who are neglecting or misusing the privileges they have got. Let us see to it that we are in a fit state to receive God's blessing. "If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us." Let us empty ourselves of worldliness and selfishness and sin, if we are to expect God to fill us with his Spirit. A word to Christians. Search your heart, examine your own life, and see if there is anything that hinders the Divine blessing. Give up that besetting sin; give up that godless society; put away that pride, or hatred, or love of the world, or evil temper, out of your heart, and then you may expect God to bless you and make you a blessing. Then you will be *a vessel meet for the Master's use.* A word to the unrepenting. Why go away once more without Christ? Why go away empty from the house of God? All fulness dwells in Christ—fulness of pardon, fulness of grace and strength. Thirsty, unsatisfied soul, draw near to the feet of Jesus. Repent, and ask of him, and he will give you the living water.—C. H. I.

Vers. 8—17.—*Kindness requited.* I. GOOD MEN CARRY THEIR GOODNESS WHEREVER THEY GO. The Shunammite's words are a testimony to the character of Elisha. "I perceive that this is *a holy man of God,* which passeth by us continually." Elisha's conduct and conversation showed him to be a holy man of God. It was evident that God was with him, and that he lived near to God. He did not leave his religion behind him at home. Wherever he was, he took his religion with him. A lesson for modern Christians. There is not much reality in our religion if we do not confess it amongst strangers just as much as where we are known. The inward character is shown by the outward acts. "Cœlum, non animum, mutant, qui trans mare currunt." It is evident that Elisha was a man of studious habits. The furniture which the Shunammite placed in his room shows this. The stool or chair and the table were intended to afford him facilities for study. He who will teach others must store his own mind with knowledge. Paul exhorted Timothy to give attention to reading. The minister and the Sunday-school teacher need constant study to equip themselves for their important work.

II. GOOD MEN CARRY A BLESSING EVERYWHERE. Their goodness benefits others as well as themselves. "The holy seed shall be the substance thereof." Some there are who bring evil wherever they go. One bad man, one wicked woman, may corrupt a whole community. Some are the perpetual occasions of strife, discord, unpleasantness, unhappiness. What an unenviable character! Oh to be like him who "went about every day doing good"!

III. KINDNESS TO GOOD MEN IS NEVER LOST. This Shunammite treated Elisha kindly because he was a servant of God, and the God whom he served rewarded her for her kindness to his servant. "Give, and it shall be given unto you." She lost nothing, but gained much, by her generosity and hospitality, by the trouble she took to provide a resting-place for the prophet. "He that receiveth a prophet in the name

of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward."—C. H. I.

Vers. 18—37.—*Death and restoration.* This is a touching story. It is a story for children. It is a story for parents. It is a story for every one. The circumstances of this little boy's death were peculiarly sad. He had been an unexpected gift of God to his parents. His mother had not sought for him; but God sent her a son as a reward for her kindness to his servant, and in answer to the prophet's prayer. Perhaps when this sudden stroke came upon her, and she watched the little fellow pine away and die in her arms, the poor mother felt a little disposed to murmur at the strange providence. She no doubt wondered why God had tried her thus, to send her a child entirely unexpected and unasked by her, and then—when he had reached that most interesting age, when he was able to run merrily to and fro, when his childish prattle filled the house with gladness, and when his parents' affections had begun to twine themselves about him—*then* to take him from her! She may not, perhaps, have had hard thoughts of *God*, but, with all the faith and patience which she afterwards showed, she certainly was a little disposed to blame Elisha. For we find her saying to him, when she went to tell him of her trouble, "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" But God's hand was in it all, as she soon learned. Perhaps she was beginning to make an idol of this child, and God took this way of reminding her that the child was *his*, that on earth there is none abiding, and that he himself should have the supreme homage of the human heart. Ah yes, she knew something of God's love before, but she never would have known half so much of it but for this trial. The sunshine is beautiful; but sometimes in a time of continued drought we learn that the world would not get on with perpetual sunshine. We are positively glad to see the clouds and the rain. If we could only learn the same lesson for our spiritual life! The sunshine is sweet, but the clouds have their uses too.

"No shattered box of ointment
We ever need regret,
For out of disappointment
Flow sweetest odours yet.

"The discord that involveth
Some startling change of key,
The Master's hand resolveth
In richest harmony."

We have here—

I. A BELIEVING MOTHER. We see her strong faith in God in that answer which she gave to Gehazi. At Elisha's command he asked her, "Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?" And she answered, "*It is well.*" Not a woman of many words, this. But a woman of great thoughts, of practical faith, of heroic patience. 1. *It was well with the child.* She had no doubt of that. She knew less about the hereafter than we do. She did not know what we know about him who is the Resurrection and the Life, who was himself dead and is alive again. She did not know what we know about heaven—about the angels' song and the pearly gates and the golden streets. But this she felt assured of, that there was a hereafter; that, though the body died, the soul still lived; that her child was with God, and that, therefore, it was well with him. 2. *It was well with her husband. It was well with herself.* Yes, although sorrow had entered their home, still she could feel and say that it was well all round. She could have anticipated Paul in his unfaltering assertion, for "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Calmly and confidently, even though perhaps her tears were falling while she spoke, she uttered the single Hebrew word which means "*It is well.*" *Thank God for believing mothers.* A mother's faith in God has rescued many a son from the very grasp of hell itself. How many an eminent servant of God has owed his conversion to the prayers of a believing mother! St. Augustine and John Newton are well-known instances. *A word here to bereaved parents.* You too may have watched a dear child droop and die. Perhaps you murmured rebelliously under your affliction. Learn to look away behind the veil, into that happy land of

which perhaps your darling sang—and as you look there surely you cannot but say, "It is well—it is well with the child." *A word here to all parents.* Can you say, as you think of your children one by one, "It is well with the child"? If they should die in infancy, it certainly is well with them. But your children of maturer years, who are growing up into manhood and womanhood—*how is it with them?* Are there not some in your household that you know are still unsaved? O parents, can you rest until you win them for Christ? It is right to give them a good education. But the most important concern of all is the salvation of their immortal souls.

II. A DEAD CHILD BROUGHT TO LIFE. All dead children will be brought back to life. The body only dies; the soul lives for ever. This little one, however, was brought back to the life of earth. Perhaps God thought that this poor mother had been sufficiently tried. Perhaps he wanted to give even then some proofs of the possibility of a resurrection. It was an exceptional act then. It is not to be expected by bereaved parents now. They can only say with David, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." *Is it not better so?* Could we wish them back again? Look upon them in that bright land where Jesus is, and where the angels are, where their little feet are never weary, where their little faces are always bright and happy, where their little bodies shall nevermore be racked by pain or enfeebled by sickness, where their minds shall never know another thought of sin, and tell me if you would bring them back to this world of wickedness, of temptation, of sickness, and of sorrow? Surely not. Surely they were taken away from the evil that is to come. To depart and be with Christ is far better. 1. *Notice the means of this child's revival.* (1) *First of all, there was prayer.* "And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and *prayed unto the Lord.*" So it must be in all efforts for the revival of dead souls. Parents must have recourse to prayer if they would see their children converted. We want more praying families; we want more praying Churches. Nothing but the Spirit of God can make the dry bones to live. If our work is to last, it must be done in prayer. (2) Then, again, observe that *Elisha used the means to bring about an answer to his prayers.* He asked for a certain blessing, and he showed that he expected an answer. *He stretched himself upon the child,* that his body might communicate heat to that of the child, and his breath upon the child's mouth encouraged the returning vitality. It is God's method of converting the world, of quickening dead souls. It is the Spirit of God that alone can quicken a dead soul. But he uses human instrumentality. *He uses living Christians.* The apostles were men on fire with the Holy Ghost and with zeal for souls, and therefore their labours were blessed. The reason there are so few conversions, the reason the Church has so little influence upon the world compared to what it might have, is that too often the Church itself is worldly, seeking for temporal position and worldly gain, and that Christians show too little of the spirit of their Master. They have a name to live, but are dead. But it is wonderful what one or two living Christians can effect in a congregation, in a community, even throughout the world. 2. *Notice also the signs of this child's revival.* "The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes." It was enough. Elisha did not wait for the child to speak. He did not wait for him to walk. He recognized the unmistakable signs of life, and at once he restored the child to his sorrowing mother. Christians ought to watch for signs of spiritual life as the result of their labours and their prayers. They should not be discouraged if there seems but little fruit. Do not discourage the slightest indication of a desire on the part of any one to turn from sin and come to Christ. Encourage those who may be seekers after God, groping feebly after the truth, struggling, perhaps, with their difficulties and doubts. What souls have you been the means of bringing from death into life?—C. H. I.

Vers. 38—41.—*Death in the pot: a sermon to young men.* These young men were very nearly being poisoned. There was a famine in the land. Elisha came to Gilgal, where there was a school or college of young men in training for the sacred office of teaching others. Perhaps they were not skilled in the art of making the most of the vegetables which grew round about them, and were badly off for food. Elisha ordered his servant to put on the great pot, and make some pottage, or thick broth, for the hungry students. One of the young men went out to gather herbs for the purpose.

There is a species of wild gourd or melon, called *Cucumis prophetarum*, which is common in the hill country, and which, when green, is sliced and boiled as a vegetable. But in the plains near Gilgal there is a plant extremely similar in appearance, but very different in its qualities. It was probably this—the *colocynthus*, or squirting cucumber —that is called the "wild gourd" in this chapter, and that the young men gathered and sliced down into the large pot of broth (see Thomson, 'The Land and the Book'). When the pottage had been poured out, the young men began to eat of it, but, alarmed by its bitter taste, and probably suspecting then that poisonous herbs had been put into it, they cried out to Elisha, "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot!" From this incident we may show that, while there is many an enjoyment, many a course of conduct, as pleasant to the eye and apparently as safe as those poisonous herbs appeared to be, yet there is need for caution. "There is death in the pot." "There is a way that *seemeth* right unto a man, but the end thereof are *the ways of death*."

I. THIS MAY BE SAID OF FRAUDULENT PRACTICES. "*There is death in the pot.*" They nearly always begin in ways that seem perfectly safe and harmless. A man takes a little from his employer's desk, intending to return it again. But in nine cases out of ten he never returns it. He has touched what is not his own. The brand of the thief is on his brow and the curse of the thief is on his life. A young man who had been well brought up went from home to enter a bank in a large city. It was noticed, when he returned home, that he was beginning to dress very extravagantly. Each time he returned, some fresh extravagance was noted. He had already begun to spend money faster than he made it, for his salary was but small. He was a smart young man, and would soon have got on well in his business, for he was a general favourite. But in a foolish hour he began to abstract some of the bank money. Little by little it went on, until his defalcations were very considerable. At last he was discovered, dismissed in disgrace from the bank, and it was only the intervention of an influential friend of his family that prevented his arrest. He broke his mother's heart, and brought down his father's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Fraudulent practices may be very often traced to the habit of *gambling* or *betting*. This was testified once more quite recently in London by Mr. Vaughan, the Bow Street magistrate, on a charge which came before him. There was a cashier in the receipt of a salary of £150 a year, with prospects of advance. For eight or nine years he had filled his post creditably; but having got behind in his home expenses, he took a few shillings, and invested them in betting. As he was lucky, from taking shillings he proceeded to pounds; and having once started, he found that it was impossible for him to stop. He had always the hope of winning some day by a stroke of luck, and of thus being able to pay back again the sums which he had embezzled. But the "luck" never came, and he had at last to confess to his employers that he had defrauded them to the extent of £250. "I wish," said Mr. Vaughan, "that the clerks in mercantile houses would come to this court, and see what I see, and hear what I hear. This is only one of a multitude of cases in which prisoners have confessed that their robberies are entirely due to betting. *I regard it as a curse to the country.*" Beware of dishonesty in any form. "There is death in the pot." It means death to a man's reputation, death to his worldly prospects, death to his peace of mind, for he must live in constant terror of discovery; and if he should escape discovery and judgment upon earth, how can he endure the thought of that day when the secrets of every life shall be disclosed, and when he shall stand condemned at the judgment-seat of God?

II. THIS MAY BE SAID ALSO OF PRACTICES OF IMPURITY. "*There is death in the pot.*" Temptations to it abound on every side. A corrupt press sows broadcast its demoralizing stories, with its suggestive pictures. The theatre, with its brilliant lights and strains of sweetest music—so often dedicated to the service of the devil—lures men into the way of the tempter, and into the den of the destroyer. It appears an innocent, harmless amusement. But "there is death in the pot." For one who comes unscathed and safe out of the theatre, there are scores who come out of it morally and spiritually the worse for its influence. Let men say what they like about the influence of the drama as a teacher of morals—and there is nothing to be said against the drama in itself—is there a single case of a man made better by going to the theatre? *Where is he? Let him be produced.* And even if one or two could be produced, what would they be as

a testimony in favour of the theatre, compared to the testimony against it of the thousands it has ruined? "It might do good, but never did." Beware of impurity in any form. Beware of impure books, impure songs, the impure jest, impure companions. "There is death in the pot." There is no sin that brings a more speedy or more terrible retribution in this life, than impurity of thought or deed. In a diseased body and a diseased mind it leaves its deadly marks. The impure man is a walking sepulchre. He is digging his own grave. Above all, he is destroying all hope of entering that pure and holy heaven where God is, and into which there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth.

III. THIS MAY BE SAID ALSO OF HABITS OF INTEMPERANCE. *"There is death in the pot."* We need not take an extreme position on the subject of alcohol any more than on any other subject. But it is right that, as intelligent beings, with a reason and a conscience, as Christian men and women with God's Word to guide us, we should look facts in the face. Medical opinion is often resorted to by those who make too free in their use of alcohol. Let us hear the latest and best medical opinion on the subject. At the last meeting of the British Medical Association (Dublin, 1887), one of the most interesting papers was the report of a special committee which had been appointed by the association to inquire into the connection of disease with habits of intemperance. Here are some of the conclusions which the committee, after most careful investigation, arrived at: "(1) That habitual indulgence in alcohol beyond the most moderate amounts has a *distinct tendency to shorten life*, the shortening being on the average fairly proportional to the degree of indulgence; (2) that the strictly temperate who have passed the age of twenty-five live on the average at least *ten years longer* than the intemperate." Is not this an important proof of our statement? "Habitual indulgence in alcohol beyond the most moderate amounts has a distinct tendency to shorten life." The man who drinks alcohol to any considerable extent is slowly killing himself. "There is death in the pot." If we turn from the assembly of doctors to the experience of everyday life, we get similar proofs. What terrible madness and infatuation drink causes! What fearful havoc it has made! What hopes it has blighted! What homes it has wrecked! What lives it has ruined! There is death in the cup of intoxicating drink, as many a man has proved when it has been too late. But absence of wrong-doing will never make you right. As Elisha cast the meal into the pot, wholesome and nourishing food in place of the deadly poison, so be it yours to fill your mind with the teaching of God's Word, and your life with holy and useful deeds. The great Teacher is Jesus Christ. Ask him to enter into your life, to purify your heart and your desires. Ask him for time and for eternity to save your soul.—C. H. I.

Vers. 42—44.—*The loaves multiplied.* I. THE PROPHET PROVIDED FOR. It was a time of famine. "But they that fear the Lord shall not want any good thing." Elisha received a thank offering from the people—"bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn." *The objection to a paid ministry has no warrant in the Word of God.* Old Testament and New alike encourage provision for the wants of God's ministers. Jesus said, "The labourer is worthy of his hire." Paul said, "They that preach the gospel should live of the gospel." It is impracticable and inconvenient that men should be preachers of the gospel, with all the preparation which that work requires, and pastors of the flock, with all the attention which this requires, and at the same time be burdened with the toil and anxiety of providing for their own temporal support and that of their families, if they have them.

II. THE PEOPLE FED. We see here: 1. *Elisha's unselfishness.* He had freely received; now he freely gives. In that time of famine he might have thought it prudent to store up for himself the supply of food he had received. But no. He trusts God for the future. His first thought is of others who were hungry round about him. "Give unto the people, that they may eat." There is need for more of this unselfishness, considerateness, thoughtfulness. How many of those who have abundance forget to think of those who are in want! 2. *The Divine power exercised.* God owns his servants, not only by supplying their wants, but by giving power to their word. Oh that every minister of Christ would realize this! What a new power it would give to his work! what a new stimulus to his earnestness! When we think of the

greatness and responsibility of our work, we may well ask, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But when, on the other hand, we think of the Divine power which works along with the faithful minister, we may well say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." He can help us to break among our people the bread of life, and bless it abundantly in the breaking.—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—7.—*A prophet's widow and a prophet's kindness.* "Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha," etc. There are two subjects of thought in these verses.

I. A PROPHET'S WIDOW IN DISTRESS. "Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen." This poor woman had not only lost her husband, and was left with a bleeding heart—left lonely and desolate in a cold world, but was left in great poverty. Her husband was not only a good man, one "who did fear the Lord," but a "prophet," a religious teacher, one engaged in disseminating *Divine* ideas amongst men. It seems that he not only died poor, but died in debt. Even now a large number of ministers are unable to make provision for their wives and children in case of their death. Some of the most enlightened, thoughtful, and really useful ministers are amongst the poorest. Observe: 1. *That poverty is not necessarily a disgrace.* It is sometimes the result of inflexible honesty and moral nobility. 2. *That the best lives here are subject to trials.* It is reasonable to infer that this widow was a good woman—one who, like her departed husband, "did fear the Lord;" and yet see her distress! The afflictions of the good are not penal, but disciplinary. 3. *That avarice feeds cruelty.* "The creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondsmen." The debt she owed, which, we may imagine, could not have been very large, her heartless creditor insisted on being discharged at once, and demanded her two sons to become slaves to him in order to work out the debt. The avaricious world is heartless; even in London hundreds are dying on every side of starvation. 4. *That provision should be made for the widows of ministers.* The incomes of very many ministers in England to-day are not sufficient to enable them to make provision for their wives and children in case of their death. Churches which have committees for sending out missionaries, for distributing Bibles (which are cheap enough now), and for distributing tracts, which are often calumnies on Christianity, ought certainly to see that provision is made for the future of their ministers' families.

II. A PROPHET AT WORK TO RELIEVE A BROTHERS' WIDOW. In her distress instinct tells her where to go, and she goes to Elisha, not only a man who knew her husband, but one of kindred experiences and sympathies. To him she "cried." Her appeal was really an unintentional compliment to Elisha. The greatest compliment a man can offer is an opportunity for contributing to a truly deserving object. When a man's compeers rank him amongst those whose meanness has become patent, Charity ignores him. In her benign mission she marches by him in stately silence, as one whom society has placed in the branded category of sordid souls. See how Elisha helps this widow. 1. *Promptly.* "And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house?" He did not want arguments or testimonials, etc., but with a beaming generosity he virtually said, "Tell me your condition, and I will do my utmost to serve you." He set to work at once. Having told him she had nothing in her house but one "pot of oil," he says to her, "Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few." She obeys his behest, goes amongst her neighbours, and borrows all the vessels, and then, according to his directions, she closes the door upon herself, and upon her sons, and begins to pour out into each vessel a part of the little pot of oil which she had, and as she poured every vessel she had collected became full to the brim. The more she poured the more came, until she lacked vessels to hold it. A symbol this of all benevolent virtues—the more they are used the more they grow. So, indeed, with all the faculties of the soul under the influence of true generosity; right giving is the way to the most precious getting. All this, of course, indicates on Elisha's part supernatural assistance. 2. *Effectively.* "Then she came and told the man of God [Elisha]. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest." Oil was one of the com-

modities Judæa traded in (Ezek. xxvii. 17). She would, therefore, have little difficulty in disposing of this oil, which no doubt was of the best description. The proceeds were to go first to the satisfaction of her heartless creditor, and then to the permanent relief of herself and family.

CONCLUSION. Matthew Henry's remarks are good: "Let those who are poor and in distress be encouraged to trust God for supply in the way of duty. 'Verily thou shalt be fed,' but not feasted. It is true we cannot now expect miracles, yet we may expect mercies if we wait on God and seek him. Let widows particularly, and prophets' widows in a special manner, depend upon him to preserve them and their fatherless children alive; for to them he will be a Husband and a Father. Let those whom God hath blessed with plenty use it for the glory of God, and under the direction of his Word; let them do justly with it, as this widow did, and serve God cheerfully in the use of it; and, as Elisha, be ready to do good to those that need them—be eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame."—D. T.

Vers. 8—17.—*Hospitality.* "And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem," etc. In these verses there are two very interesting subjects of a practical character.

I. HOSPITALITY RIGHTFULLY EMPLOYED. The object of the hospitality was Elisha the prophet, and the author of it is called here "a great woman."[1] The account given is very clear and sententious. "And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread." Observe: 1. *The hospitality was very hearty.* "She constrained him to eat bread." She did not give Elisha a mere formal invitation, nor was she urged to it by pleadings on his behalf, either by himself or others. It was spontaneous and hearty, worthy of "a great woman." It was so hearty that Elisha felt authorized, "as oft as he passed by," to enter and "eat bread." On his prophetic mission he would be constantly journeying, and often passing the house, and as often as he did so he felt there was a hearty welcome for him inside, and entered. 2. *The hospitality was shown to a poor but godly man.* The woman "said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually." Conventional hospitality welcomes to its table the respectable only, and the more respectable in a worldly sense the more welcome. But genuine hospitality, as in the case before us, looks out for the poor and deserving, and constrains them to enter and be fed. "When thou makest a feast, call not thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind." 3. *The hospitality involved considerable trouble and expense.* This "great woman" said to her husband, "Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick." She did not say to her husband, "Entertaining him will put us to no inconvenience or expense, therefore let us invite him." No, she calculated upon some inconvenience and cost; a little chamber would have to be built, quiet and suitable for a man of spiritual thoughtfulness and devotion. And then some furniture, too, would have to be procured—"a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick." The hospitality that involves no outlay is common, but is a counterfeit, nay, a misnomer. The accommodation this woman offered to Elisha, it must be borne in mind, included that of his servant Gehazi—he shared the provisions and the apartments of his master.

II. HOSPITALITY NOBLY REWARDED. Elisha, instead of being insensible to the great generosity of his hostess, glowed with gratitude that prompted a strong desire to make some return, and "said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. . . . And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee?" His offer: 1. *Implies his consciousness of great power with man.* "Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" Though poor himself, he had influence with the rich; and though too independent in soul to ask of them a favour for himself, he could do it for others. Her answer to his generous offer is expressive of the calm self-respect, unmercenariness, and dignity of a "great woman." She answered, "I dwell among mine own people." As if she had said, "We are provided for; we neither aim at nor need preferment." 2. *Implies his*

[1] See *Homilist*, vol. xxxviii. p. 289.

consciousness of his power with God. He finds out, through his servant Gehazi, that the one great thing on earth that they desired most, and would most appreciate, was a family; a child would brighten their hearth and gladden their hearts. This, through his wonderful power with Heaven, Elisha obtains for them. Thus the Almighty himself acknowledged the hospitality which this woman had shown to his faithful prophet. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

CONCLUSION. Dinings out and social banquets are common enough amongst us, but hospitality of the true sort is, it may be feared, somewhat rare—the hospitality described by Washington Irving, which "breaks through the chill of ceremonies, and throws every heart into a glow." There is an emanation from the heart in genuine hospitality that cannot be described.—D. T.

Vers. 18—31.—*Great trials.* "And when the child was grown," etc. This paragraph suggests three general observations.

I. That great trials OFTEN SPRING FROM GREAT MERCIES. With what rapture we may suppose did this woman welcome her only child into the world, and with what care and affection did she minister to his health and enjoyments! It was her greatest earthly prize. She would sooner have parted with all her property, and even, perhaps, with her husband, for he was an old man, than lose this dear boy of hers. Yet she does; death snatches him from her embrace. "And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died." Though the boy was dead, the woman did not seem to lose hope; her maternal love would not allow her to realize the terrible fact at once. She first lays him on the bed in the chamber which she had built for the prophet; then she calls to her husband, and entreats him to send a servant with one of the asses, that she might fly with swiftness to Elisha. When her husband suggested some difficulty about her going just at that time, she replied, "It shall be well." "Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee. So she went and came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel." This was a journey of about five or six hours. Distance is nothing when the traveller's heart overflows with emotion. How frequently it happens that from our greatest blessings our greatest trials spring! 1. *Friendship* is a great blessing. One true friend, whose soul lives in ours and ours in him or her, is of priceless worth. Yet the disruption of that friendship may strike a wound into the heart that no time can heal. 2. A *sanguine temperament* is a great blessing. It drinks in largely of the beauties of nature; it paints the future with the brightest hopes, and stimulates the energies to the greatest enterprises. All the best productions of the human species have sprung from such temperaments. But what trials it brings, in frustrated plans, blighted purposes, and extinguished hopes! But life abounds with illustrations of the fact—the greater the blessings we enjoy, the greater agony felt in their loss.

II. That great trials SHOULD BE PATIENTLY ENDURED. In this great trial this woman seems wonderfully resigned. In reply to a difficulty which her husband suggested in setting out for the journey, she said, "It shall be well." And when Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, on her approach to the prophet, asked her, "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?" she answered, "It is well." "Though I left my dear boy a corpse at home, and my heart bleeds, I feel it is all 'well;' it is the dispensation of a Father all-wise and all-loving. I bow to his will." A state of mind so magnanimous as this under great trial is the duty of all, and the sublime privilege of the holy and the good. Thus Job felt, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord." Thus our great Example felt when overwhelmed with immeasurable distress he said, "Not my will, but thine be done."

"Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
However dark it be;
Lead me by thine own hand,
Choose out the path for me.

"Smooth let it be or rough,
It will be still the best;
Winding or straight it matters not,
It leads me to thy rest."

III. That great trials MAY HAVE A BLESSED END. The end of this woman's great trial was the restoration of her dead child to life. This was brought about: 1. *In connection with her own efforts.* If she had remained at home, and not sped her way to the prophet at Carmel, her boy in all probability would, it would seem, have remained a corpse, and would have had to be buried for ever out of her sight. When she reached him, see how earnestly she pleads: "And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet," etc. 2. *By the power of God through Elisha.* In the following verses we have a representation of the way in which this was brought about. God helps man by man. All our trials might have a blessed end. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Yes; whilst "we look not at the things that are seen," the result, under God, depends upon ourselves.—D. T.

Vers. 32—37.—*The relation of prayer to secondary causes.* "And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead," etc. The death of the Shunammite's son, as we have seen in the preceding verses, was in many senses to her a very severe trial—a trial from which we have inferred that *great trials often spring from great mercies; that great trials should be patiently endured;* and *that great trials might have a blessed end.* By prayer Elisha now raised the woman's dead boy to life. See what Elisha did here.

I. HE PRAYED TO THE LORD. "Let this child's soul come into him again."

II. HE PUT HIMSELF INTO DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE CHILD. Mouth to the child's mouth, eyes to the child's eyes, hands to the child's hands, as if he transfused all the vital magnetism of his own nature into the person of the dead child.

III. HE PERSEVERED WITH THE EFFORT. Until the child's flesh waxed warm, and the child sneezed with the breath of new life.—D. T.

Vers. 38—44.—*Ministries to man, good and bad.* "And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land," etc. Elisha had returned to Gilgal, the seat of a school of the prophets; he had come thither once more on his yearly circuit, and during the famine which prevailed in the land. As the students sat before their master, he discerned in their emaciated forms the terrible effects upon them of the famine. In the narrative we discover the action of several ministries, or events with which men are visited more or less in passing through this sublunary state.

I. Here is the ministry of SEVERE TRIAL. "There was a dearth in the land." To be destitute of those provisions which are essential to the appeasement of hunger and the sustentation of life is undoubtedly one of the greatest trials. Such destitution is of two kinds—the *avoidable* and the *unavoidable.* The former is common. Tens of thousands of people in this country, which so abounds with wealth, are, alas! subject to the trial of this destitution every day. But men bring this destitution on themselves. To the heartless cupidity of one class of men, and the indolence, extravagance, and intemperance of another, the poverty which is rampant in England to-day must be ascribed. The latter kind of destitution, viz. the *inevitable,* is that recorded in these verses; it arose out of the sterile condition into which the land was thrown. This was the destitution which now prevailed in Israel; it afflicted all, the good and the bad. In truth, Nature knows of no moral distinctions; she treats kings and paupers, the righteous and the wicked, alike.

II. Here is the ministry of GROSS IGNORANCE. In order to allay the ravenous hunger of his pupils, Elisha said to his servant, "Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds, his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof." Whatever were the herbs which the servants gathered it matters not;

they were nauseous and pernicious. "The sons of the prophets," says Matthew Henry, "it would seem, were better skilled in divinity than philosophy, and read their Bibles more than their herbals." What they put into the pot tended to produce death rather than to strengthen life. Every day men are afflicted through the gross ignorance of themselves and others. Through ignorance men are everywhere putting "death in the pot," in a *material* sense. The cook, the doctor, the brewer, the distiller, how much death do they bring into the "pot" of human life! Through ignorance, too, men are everywhere putting "death in the pot" in a *spiritual* sense. Calvinistic dogmas, unauthorized priestly assumptions, etc., how much death do they bring into the spiritual "pot" of life! Man's ignorance of God and his claims on the soul, its nature, its laws, and the necessary conditions of true spiritual progress, is the minister of death.

III. Here is the ministry of HUMAN KINDNESS. "And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of bread, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof." Whoever this man was (for no description is given of him save the place of his residence), he was a Heaven-inspired philanthropist. Mercy, the highest attribute of heaven, was in him, and he left his home and came forth to minister to the needs of his suffering race. Thank God for that kindness which has survived the Fall, and still lives in human hearts. The most precious ministry on earth is this: it feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, heals the diseased, wipes away the tears of human sorrow; it is, indeed, Christ in human flesh. For he was then in the world, though the world knew it not.

IV. Here is the ministry of SUPERNATURAL POWER. Supernatural power through Elisha comes to the relief of these sufferers. The supernatural was manifested in two ways. 1. In counteracting the death-tendency of what was in the pot. "But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot." A supernatural power is required to counteract the pernicious in life. If the Almighty allowed evil to take its course freely and fully, death would run riot and reduce the whole race to extinction. The supernatural was manifested also: 2. In increasing the supplies of life. Elisha commanded his servant to distribute amongst his starving pupils the provisions which the man that came from Baal-shalisha had brought. To this the servant replied, "What, should I set this before a hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord." As the pot of oil increased in the pouring, so the provisions increased in the eating. It has been said of old of God, that he will abundantly bless the "provisions of his people, and satisfy the poor with bread." It is true that moral goodness, truth, and justice, skill, prudence, and diligence, have a tendency to increase everywhere the provisions of human life, and they are doing so every day. But in this case there seems to be the exertion of a power transcending the human. However this may be, that which we call the supernatural is nothing more than the natural. As Nature herself is immeasurably beyond our comprehension, transcends our conceptions, for us to speak of the supernatural implies the arrogation of an intelligence which we do not possess.—D. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*The miracles of Elisha: the pot of oil.* The next few chapters relate a number of the miracles of Elisha—all of them works of mercy.

I. THE WIDOW'S TROUBLE. The story told in these verses is one of sore distress. It is a story: 1. *Of bereavement.* A poor woman, widow of one of "the sons of the prophets," cried to Elisha, "Thy servant my husband is dead." We learn from this that the prophetic communities were not monastic. Marriage was permitted, and members of the fraternity had houses and families of their own. But this poor woman's husband had recently died. She had to face the difficulties and fight the battles of life alone. We are in presence of one of the minor tragedies of life—little thought of, because not uncommon. 2. *Of debt.* Her husband had been pious—"Thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord"—but his affairs had been left in confusion at his death, or, having no means of subsistence, the family had sunk into dependence on a creditor since his decease. A man may be good, and yet imprudent. On the other hand, misfortunes may overtake the best-intentioned, and

reduce them from affluence to poverty. It is, however, a sad thing when the head of a household dies, and leaves to his struggling family an inheritance of debt. This is a contingency to be by every legitimate means guarded against. The Rev. C. H Spurgeon, commenting on the text, "Take no thought for the morrow," etc. (Matt. vi. 34), began by announcing, "I insured my own life last week, and have thus been able to carry out the injunction of the text, and not to be over-anxious for the morrow, for much undue care and anxiety that I had is now laid aside, secure in the knowledge that my forethought has provided for my loved ones." 3. *Of bondage.* The creditor to whom the debt was due showed himself merciless, and, as the law permitted, was about to take as slaves the two sons of the woman (Lev. xxv. 39). It mattered little to the hard-hearted creditor that his debtor had "feared the Lord," that the two sons were the only remaining comforts of the widow, and that, with "patience," they might have "paid him all" (Matt. xviii. 29). He must have his own. It was forbidden to a creditor, to whom a fellow-Israelite was sold, to "compel him to serve as a bond-servant," and to "rule over him with rigour" (Lev. xxv. 39, 43). But an unscrupulous man would pay little heed to these injunctions. Altogether, the picture is a sad one. Happily, the poor woman knew where to come with her tale of grief. She remembered the "Father of the fatherless" and the "Judge of the widow" (Ps. lxviii. 5), and, when every earthly avenue of help was closed, poured her sorrows into the ear of God's prophet.

II. THE DIRECTIONS OF ELISHA. As the representative of One who had specially declared himself the Friend of "the fatherless and widow" (Deut. x. 18), Elisha could not turn a deaf ear to the widow's plaint. A sympathetic interest in the bereaved and distressed is at all times a duty of God's ministers. 1. *He inquired as to her possessions.* "Tell me, what hast thou in the house?" God's help takes its starting-point from what we already have. The widow had but "one pot of oil"—oil for anointing; but this was made the basis of what was to be done. So Elijah founded his miracle on the widow of Zarephath's "handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse" (1 Kings xvii. 12), and Christ his on the lad's "five barley loaves, and two small fishes" (John vi. 9). The lesson is that what means of help we have are to be made use of to the utmost before supernatural aid is invoked. 2. *He bade her prepare for a liberal experience of God's goodness.* "Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few." She was to expect large things of the Lord. Her task in collecting the vessels was, like the digging of the trenches in the last chapter, emphatically a work of faith (ch. iii. 16, 17). God does not stint us in answer to our prayers. His word rather is, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. lxxxi. 10). If our faith will but trust him, he will astonish us with his liberality. 3. *He enjoined secrecy.* "When thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out," etc. This was too sacred a work to be made a vulgar wonder. To receive the full benefit of the blessing, the inmates of the house were to be alone, in privacy, their thoughts and spirits undisturbed. Jesus enjoins the cultivation of secrecy in religion (Matt. vi. 1—18). He often forbade the blazoning abroad of his miracles (Matt. viii. 4, etc.). The parading of religious experiences takes the bloom off them.

III. THE MULTIPLYING OF THE OIL. 1. *The oil multiplied.* The widow and her sons did as directed, and, as they poured the oil into the borrowed vessels, it still increased till the vessels were full. The element of miracle here is very notable, but we are not entitled to expect such miracles at the present day. But the pledge of Divine help in distress implied in such a miracle remains to us, and God will honour every draft on his promises made by faith, basing itself on such deeds as this. A singular incident in proof is recorded by Krummacher in his remarks on this miracle ('Elisha,' lect. v.). It might almost be said that there is a multiplying power in the Divine blessing, apart from miracle (Ps. xxxvii. 16). 2. *The oil stayed.* When the vessels were full, the widow said to her son, "Bring me yet a vessel." There was not, however, a vessel more. Then the oil stayed. Had there been more vessels, it would have flowed on. The sole limit of the supply was the limit of their capacity to receive. We are not straitened in God; we are straitened only in ourselves. 3. *The oil sold.* The news being brought to Elisha, he ordered the grateful woman—poor no more—to sell the oil, and pay her debt, and live, she and her children, of the rest. The debt

was not repudiated; it was paid. God would put the stamp of his approval on honesty. The whole incident teaches us the lesson of trusting God in every time of need. When have the righteous been forsaken, or their seed seen begging bread (Ps. xxxvii. 25)? If we can trust in God for temporal supplies, much more may we for our spiritual supplies (Phil. iv. 19).—J. O.

Vers. 8—17.—*The lady of Shunem*: 1. *A son given.* The scene of this exquisite story is the town of Shunem, on the slope of Little Hermon, one of the eminences looking down on the rich and extensive plain of Jezreel.

I. RECEIVING A PROPHET IN THE NAME OF A PROPHET. In this town dwelt a wealthy lady, wife of a man who had large possessions in land—the Boaz of that district. The first part of the story is a beautiful instance of the consecrated use of wealth. 1. *Elisha observed.* Shunem lay in Elisha's route in passing to and fro, probably on his visits to the schools of the prophets. The lady of Shunem did not at first know him, but his appearance, as he passed and repassed, attracted her attention. She saw, from the gravity, benevolence, and distinction of his aspect, that he was "a holy man of God." She felt an interest in him, first as a wayfarer, then as a man of piety. It is well when even our outward deportment is such that others are compelled to take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus (Acts iv. 13). 2. *Elisha welcomed.* The immediate impulse of the pious lady was to show hospitality to the traveller. (1) This illustrates her own piety. It was because she feared God that she was moved to show this kindness to his servant. Piety often lingers in rural districts when wickedness is rampant in the cities. One marked manifestation of piety is reverence for, and hospitable treatment of, God's saints (Matt. x. 40—42; xxv. 34—46). Elisha was received "in the name of a prophet" (Matt. x. 41). (2) It illustrates also her natural benevolence of heart. Had this lady not been naturally of a benevolent disposition, accustomed to act hospitably and generously, she would not so readily have thought of constraining Elisha "to eat bread." St. Paul notes it as the mark of a godly woman, "if she have lodged strangers" (1 Tim. v. 10). 3. *Elisha a customary guest.* When once Elisha had found his way to this good lady's house, it would be alike a pleasure to him and a satisfaction to his hostess "to turn in thither" every time he passed through Shunem. The more the Shunammite saw of the prophet, the more she reverenced and desired to serve him. With the inventiveness of a mind that "deviseth liberal things" (Isa. xxxii. 8), it soon occurred to her to make permanent arrangements for his comfortable reception. Her husband, to whom she proposed her plans, entered heartily into them. Unlike the churlish Nabal (1 Sam. xxv.), he was willing to give of his wealth for a prophet's entertainment. A chamber, accordingly, was fitted up on the wall for Elisha's private use, and there he abode, and could feel at home, whenever he passed that way. How beautiful the large and unstinted generosity, the wise forethought, the warm consideration for another's comfort, displayed in this incident! This wise and unselfish use of wealth is the true secret of obtaining enjoyment out of it.

II. A PROPHET'S REWARD. We are called to notice: 1. *The prophet's gratitude.* It was not with hope of reward that the Shunammite had done her acts of kindness, but Elisha was none the less anxious to show his sense of her generosity by doing her some service in return. He bade Gehazi his servant call her, and say to her, "Thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee?" A grateful spirit well becomes a servant of God (2 Tim. i. 16—18). There is none whose gratitude we should so much desire to have as that of "righteous men." They may not, like Elisha, have interest with kings and courts, but they have interest with Heaven. God rewards for their sake. Their prayers and intercessions are worth more than silver and gold. 2. *The Shunammite's humility.* (1) Elisha's first proposal was, "Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" His influence at court, since the victory over the Moabites, was probably very great. It is not clear what exactly he supposed the king could do for her that the Shunammite was likely to desire; for it could not be thought, least of all by Elisha, that life in Samaria, and a position in Jehoram's court, even though attended by wealth and honour, was an advantageous exchange for her present rural felicity. A case did arise, however, later on, in which it was of benefit to her to "be spoken for to the

king" (ch. viii. 1—6). To many minds such a proposal as Elisha's would have had supreme attractions. To be "presented at court" is, in many circles of fashion, the acme of ambition—to gain titles, honours, royal recognitions, the *summum bonum* of existence. (2) It was different with this Shunammite. Her wise and beautiful and unambitious answer was, "I dwell among mine own people." She had no desire to exchange her simple country life at Shunem, surrounded by those who knew and loved her, for any grander station king or captain could give her. In this she judged rightly. The elements of happiness are probably found in their greatest perfection in such a quiet country existence, with the means of doing good to others, as this lady enjoyed. They are emphatically not to be found in the sphere of court-favour and court-patronage—too often the sphere of sycophancy, intrigue, faction, backstairs influence, miserable jealousies and spites, which reduce life to the emptiest, vainest show. 3. *The prophet's reward.* What, then, was to be done for the Shunammite? (1) Gehazi, with the shrewdness of a man of the world, struck on the right idea. "Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old." Perhaps he had ere this heard the lady lament her want of offspring. It was the one cross of her otherwise contented and happy life. Her husband, like Elkanah, might console her with the words, "Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" but her warm, motherly heart, overflowing as it was with kindness to others, yearned for a child of her own on whom to lavish its riches. Without this boon, however she might feel the duty of resignation, existence remained incomplete. It is rare but that some cross, if it be but one, is mingled with our blessings, if only to teach us that existence here is not the be-all and end-all. (2) Elisha saw at once the propriety of Gehazi's suggestion, and confident in the Divine readiness to give effect to his word, he called the Shunammite, and announced to her the joyful fact that, with the revolving months, she should embrace a son. The intimation astounded her, as well it might. It so entirely transcended her hopes and expectations, that she could hardly believe in its realization. "Nay, . . . thou man of God," she said, "do not lie unto thine handmaid;" as if she was afraid he was trifling with her, trying some experiment upon her feelings, or otherwise deluding her. Her words were not really those of unbelief, but of faith asking for greater assurance. When her mind had time to take in the full extent of Elisha's promise, inexpressible joy would chase the last trace of doubt from her soul. (3) The event happened as predicted, and a son was born. We learn that those who show kindness to God's people shall not go without their reward (Matt. x. 41, 42). The reward may not come in the form they anticipate, but it will come in the way that is best for them, and will generally be above all that they ask or think (Eph. iii. 20). God's power, "which calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. iv. 17), will do marvels for us, if only we have faith to receive his promise.—J. O.

Vers. 18—37.—*The lady of Shunem: 2. The son taken and restored.* A lapse of several years occurs in the story, during which time the child had grown, till he was able to go out to his father to the harvest-field.

I. THE UNEXPECTED STROKE. 1. *A boyhood of promise.* Everything combined to invest this Shunammite's son with interest, and to make him the idol of his parents' heart. He was an only son, the son of his father's old age, a child of promise—almost of miracle. He would be the joy and delight of his home, a constant wonder, an unceasing study. He was his father's, not less than his mother's, favourite, as seen by the way in which the child runs out to him in the field. Great hopes would be built on him, and it might be thought that these could hardly fail to be realized. From the manner in which he had been given, God might seem pledged to preserve him from the ordinary dangers of childhood. He lived—so it might be fancied—a charmed life, and could not fall a victim to disease and trouble as other children did. Alas! the contrary was soon to be shown. 2. *The child smitten.* The manner of the playful child's seizure is simply and naturally told. The boy is sporting among the reapers, when suddenly he exclaims, "My head, my head!" The father is by his side, and orders him to be carried home to his mother. He thinks, apparently, only of some passing illness. The heat has proved too much for him. The mother's instinct more surely divines the fatal character of the stroke. She does not even lay him on his bed, but, taking him on her knees, holds him there in an agony of terror and affection, boding the worst. How

great a mother's love! The father is sought in the hour of play; the mother's knee is the place in sickness. At noon the child dies. 3. *The child dead.* (1) It is not an unexampled thing for children to be taken away as suddenly and pathetically as this Shunammite's son was. Many a parent's bleeding heart can tell of similar wounds. The suffering and death of little children is one of the "dark things" of Providence. Often it is the brightest and most promising that is taken, and the removal is sometimes as sharp, startling, and unlooked-for as in the case here described. Yesterday, nay, at morn, the mother had her child by her, happy, winsome, full of mirth and frolic; at noon he is snatched from her embrace for ever. (2) The special mystery in the case of this Shunammite's son is that he was a child of promise. Had not God given her this son—given him without her seeking—and how could he now, without manifest injustice, snatch him away from her again in this ruthless manner? Was there not, in this way of dealing, a breaking of promise with her, something arbitrary, capricious, unfair? So to her wild, whirling thoughts, it may have seemed. God's ways are, in truth, often very mysterious. Yet in the present instance may not the very fondness of these doting parents for their child help to explain something of the darkness of God's dealing with them? God never binds himself to an unconditional continuance of our blessings. There was danger, just because this child was held so dear, of the parents' centring all in it—forgetting, in their feeling of the security of their possession, that the gift still hung on the will of the Giver. To recall them to a sense of their dependence, or, if this is rejected, then, as in Abraham's case, to perfect the faith of this Shunammite through trial, the gift is for the time withdrawn. (3) The child is dead, and with almost unnatural composure, the stricken mother rises from her seat, bears the child's body aloft to the prophet's chamber, lays it on the bed, and goes out, locking the door behind her. She tells neither servants, husband, nor any one else, of what has happened. Her husband was still in the field, and she must have put off any inquiries he made with evasive answers. A great mystery hung over this unlooked-for bereavement, and as only the prophet can solve that mystery, to the prophet she will go.

II. THE JOURNEY TO CARMEL. 1. *On the way.* (1) The lady sends to her husband for an ass, and a young man to accompany her, that she may "run" to the prophet, and come again. She gives no explanation, for in her heart she no doubt cherished hope that her mission would not be in vain. She clung to the promise of God (cf. Heb. xi. 17—19). In the hour of trouble, nothing lightens the gloom like a promise to hold by. (2) The husband's surprised question, "Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath," shows that it was Elisha's custom to hold religious assemblies on the sabbath days, to which the godly in Israel resorted. This is an interesting side light on the practice of the time. Weekly assemblies were not provided for in the Law, but where love to God is in the heart, it needs no law to bring believers together (Mal. iii. 16). (3) The journey was made in haste. "Slacken not the riding." Such errands brooked no delay. When one is earnest in pressing for a blessing, no obstacles will be allowed to stand in the way. Neither in service of God, in seeking blessing from God, nor in pursuit of holiness, should we be tempted to "slacken" our endeavours (Phil. iii. 13, 14). 2. *Meeting Gehazi.* From afar, from his dwelling on Carmel, Elisha saw the hard riding of the lady whom he recognized as the Shunammite. With an instant presentiment that something was wrong—though nothing had been revealed to him (ver. 27)—he bade Gehazi hasten, and inquire concerning herself, her husband, and her child, if it were "peace." To him, however, she was in no wise minded to open up her heart. She but curtly replied, as she had before done to her husband (ver. 23), "It is peace." With all her deep affliction, she had not surrendered faith. She felt that God was trying her, but though "faith and form" were sundered in the night of fear, she had courage to believe that it would yet be "well." Her comfort was not in the well-being of her child with God, but in the hope that he would be restored to her. With the new light the gospel has given, Christians can say of their dear lost children, "It is well," though they have no hope of beholding them again on earth (see sermons and pieces in Logan's 'Words of Comfort;' especially sermon by C. H. Spurgeon on this text, 'Infant Salvation,' p. 117, 9th edit.). 3. *At Elisha's feet.* (1) Arrived in the prophet's presence, the bereaved mother cast herself in mute grief and supplication at his feet. With singular inappreciation of the delicacy of the situation, Gehazi approached to thrust her away. But Elisha

perceived how deeply her soul was "vexed" within her, though as yet he could not divine the cause. There is a silence which is often more eloquent than speech. God does not need our words to tell him what we want; he can read even the "groanings that cannot be uttered" (Rom. viii. 26). This mourner took her trouble to the right place. (2) By-and-by she found words, which in form were words of expostulation, "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" In reality she was recalling to the prophet that it was his own word which had promised her this child. She was telling him in effect that the child was dead, and supplicating his help to prevent his original promise being completely cancelled. God is pleased that we should plead his promises with him. He bids us "put him in remembrance" (Isa. xliii. 26); like Job, "fill our mouth with arguments" (Job xxiii. 4). He will honour his own word, for "his gifts and calling are without repentance" (Rom. xi. 29).

III. THE CHILD RESTORED. 1. *Gehazi's failure.* Anxious to lose no time in doing what he was confident it was the will of God should be done, Elisha directed his servant, who could go much more quickly than himself, to speed forward, and lay his staff upon the face of the child. He was neither to allow time to be wasted, nor his thoughts to be distracted, by saluting any one on the way. ("The King's business required haste;" 1 Sam. xxi. 8; cf. Luke x. 4.) Gehazi did as he was commanded, but "there was neither voice nor hearing." The staff did not work the wonder—was never intended to do so; it was only a symbol of the prophetic authority under sanction of which the deed was to be wrought. There have been many speculations as to the cause of Gehazi's failure, some supposing that Elisha had stepped beyond his province in presuming to delegate this power to another; others, that the failure was a designed rebuke to Gehazi; others, that this was a new trial of the Shunammite's faith. But surely the simplest explanation is also the most probable. Gehazi was sent in good faith, but the deed was not one to be wrought by magic, but by the concurrence of faith and prayer. Elisha's prayers accompanied his messenger, but the defects in Gehazi's own spiritual nature proved too serious for the work he had to do. God would not act through such an instrument. Even when Elisha came upon the scene, it was not without difficulty that he accomplished the miracle. His foresight in this was limited, even as in the matter of the child's death the fact was "hid" from him. 2. *Elisha's success.* The Shunammite had refused to leave Elisha, and now, as they journeyed onward, Gehazi met them, announcing, "The child is not awaked." Elisha himself now took in hand the task in which Gehazi had failed. (1) He went into the room where the child was, shut the door "upon them twain," and prayed. The prophet and the dead are alone together, but God is there too. Elisha attacked the problem from its spiritual side. His first object was to get his own soul into a spiritual frame, and to secure God's approval of his efforts. He believed, like his master Elijah, in the virtue of "effectual fervent prayer" (Jas. v. 16). Such preparations are necessary if we would accomplish the greater miracle of raising the spiritually dead. Prayer attains its highest power when "secret" (Matt. vi. 6). (2) Divinely directed in answer to his prayer, Elisha now stretched himself upon the body of the child, placing his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, his hands on his hands, etc. (cf. 1 Kings xviii. 21), and a first stage in restoration was accomplished—"the flesh of the child waxed warm." We can give no explanation whatever of the *rationale* of this procedure, which yet in some way unknown may have made Elisha a co-agent in the work of restoration. If life was not absolutely extinct—a supposition countenanced by the fact that decomposition does not seem, even at the distance of many hours, to have set in (Bähr)—some reason might be seen for it. (3) Elisha now arose, walked for a time to and fro, perhaps to increase animal heat, more probably in an energetic bracing of mind and spirit to overcome remaining obstacles to the power of faith, then renewed his former position of contact with the child. Life gradually reasserted its power; the child sneezed once, again, seven times; then opened his eyes, and was restored to his parent. The lessons from this concluding part of the story are: (1) Prayer conjoined with appropriate action does not fail of its reward. (2) The duty of perseverance. (3) Some spiritual tasks are more difficult than others (Mark ix. 29). (4) In the case of the Shunammite, the victory of faith. (5) The ease with which Christ wrought his miracles as compared with these laborious exertions of Elisha—a proof of the superior greatness of his power.—J. O.

Vers. 38—41.—*The deadly pottage.* Two other remarkable, though more briefly related, works of Elisha are narrated in the closing verses of this chapter. Both have to do with "the sons of the prophets" at Gilgal; both relate to a time of famine; and one is an Old Testament anticipation of a signal miracle of Christ. The first is the healing of the deadly pottage.

I. THE PROPHETIC COLLEGE. We are transported to Gilgal, and gain a glimpse into the interior of the prophetic school. 1. *Religious instruction.* Elisha is there, and "the sons of the prophets" are "sitting before him," receiving his instructions. There is dearth of temporal provision, but none of spiritual. The usual exercises of instruction and devotion go on, as if plenty reigned. 2. *Religious fellowship.* The famine has not sufficed to break up the little community, but has drawn the members of it—as trial should always do—closer together. They have a common table. They "dwell together in unity" (Ps. cxxxiii. 1). Elisha, like a good captain, shares the hardships of his army. God's people are sometimes brought into difficulty enough, but the effect should only be to strengthen the bonds of brotherly love. 3. *Religious order.* There are orderly arrangements. Elisha is not only preceptor, but director of the temporal affairs of the community. All obey him, as all appeal to him when trouble arises. The invisible Head of the community is Jehovah. On him they rely with confidence, when every other source of help fails.

II. DEATH IN THE POT. The great pot is set on to seethe pottage in, and one goes out to gather herbs to eke out the scanty supply. 1. *The poisonous gourd.* Attracted by some wild creepers, the messenger gathers therefrom a lapful of gourds, which he mistakes for gourds of a similar appearance that are edible. The plants he had gathered were in reality poisonous. He brought them home, and they were shred into the pottage. We may learn two lessons. (1) The danger of being deceived by appearances. Things often are not what they seem. The most plausible errors are those which bear a superficial resemblance to great truths. We need to have our "senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. v. 14). To the true vine there correspond many wild vines; to the gourds that nourish and satisfy, many fair but poisonous imitations. (2) The best intentions may lead to sad mistakes. The important point to be noticed here is that our intentions, however good, cannot prevent things from acting according to their real nature. The person who gathered the gourds thought them innocuous, but they produced their poisonous effects all the same. "Sincerity" does not exonerate us from the consequences of our actions; at least it cannot prevent these consequences following. Poisonous principles are as harmful in their influence when promulgated in ignorance, as when diffused with the fullest knowledge of their deadly character. "They knew it not" does not suffice to alter the nature of facts. 2. *The timely discovery.* The pottage was no sooner tasted than the peculiar flavour and felt effects discovered to those eating it that there was something amiss. The cry was raised, "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot!" (1) One poisonous ingredient had destroyed the value of much wholesome food. It did not require that all the elements in the pottage should be unwholesome; it was enough that this one was. Through it the whole mixture was rendered deadly. It is not uncommon to defend a system by pointing to the numerous truths which it contains. But one vital error blended with these truths may give the whole a fatal quality. The gospel itself may be adulterated with specious lies which destroy its power for good. (2) It is well when there is timely discovery of evil. It is better when, as here, those who have made the discovery resolve to partake no more of the poisoned dish. "They could not eat thereof." But many, in moral things, who know, who at least have been warned, that there is "death in the pot," go on eating of it. There is death in the *intoxicating* pot, yet many will not refrain.

III. THE POTTAGE HEALED. Elisha had within himself a monition what to do. He said, "Bring meal." The meal was brought, and cast into the pottage, and the evil was at once cured. There seems no reason for using the meal except that it was customary to accompany these prophetic miracles with an outward symbolical act; and the meal, as a symbol of what was wholesome and nutritious in food, was as appropriate a medium as any to be used. We get this idea—that the unwholesome is to be displaced by the wholesome. If the bane is to be destroyed, we must use as antidote that which is of opposite character. As a work of God's power, the miracle was a pledge to the

prophets of God's ability and readiness to help them in every time of need. The simplest means can be made effectual if God blesses it.—J. O.

VERS. 42—44.—*The twenty barley loaves.* This miracle foreshadows Christ s acts of multiplying the loaves (Matt. xiv. 15—21; xv. 32—39, etc.).

I. THE GIFT OF LOAVES. In a time of great need in the little society, there came a man from Baal-shalisha, bringing with him twenty barley loaves and a quantity of fresh corn. This welcome gift was: 1. *Prompted by a religious motive.* It was "bread of the firstfruits." The religious dues were ordinarily paid to priests and Levites, but in the state of religion in Israel, this good man thought that he kept the spirit of the Law best by bringing his loaves and corn to Elisha and his pupils. The act is proof (1) of his genuine piety; (2) of his religious good sense; (3) of his habitual conscientiousness in discharge of duty. He did not conceive that "dearth in the land" freed him from the obligation of the firstfruits. Would that every *Christian* had as high and conscientious a standard in religious giving! We may suppose that the man was further moved in part by a benevolent desire to be of service to Elisha and the prophets. In that case he would be no loser by his kindness. 2. *Providentially timed to meet a pressing necessity.* From the point of view of Elisha and his friends, the visit of the man of Baal-shalisha was a signal interposition of Providence for their relief. Their supplies were exhausted, and they had been praying and hoping for a door of help to be opened to them. Just then this anonymous donor from Baal-shalisha comes in with his bread. It was as direct a case of Divine provision as when the ravens brought bread and flesh to Elijah at the brook Cherith (1 Kings xvii. 6). God's ways of providing for his people are endless in their variety. Many instances are on record of help sent in just as wonderful a way to those in need as this passage exhibits.

II. THE MIRACULOUS INCREASE. Precious as these twenty barley loaves were, they formed, after all, but scant provision for a hundred hungry men. The prophet had, however, warrant from God to convert them into the sufficiency required. 1. "*Thus saith the Lord.*" "Give unto the people," said Elisha, "that they may eat." When Gehazi objected that there was not enough for all the company, the prophet repeated his command, adding, "For thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof." A "thus saith the Lord" suffices to overcome all objections. What can it not accomplish? It made the worlds at first; it gave the Israelites manna in the wilderness; it brought water from the rock; it had but a little before multiplied the widow's oil. If we have this warrant for anything we are told to do, we need not hesitate to attempt it. 2. *The people fed.* Accordingly, when the bread was served out, it was found to be sufficient for all. It is curiously supposed by some that the miracle was not in the multiplication of the bread, but in causing the portions received to satisfy hunger. The analogy of the other miracles by multiplication, not in the Gospels alone, but in these very histories (1 Kings xvii. 12—16; ch. iv. 1—7), is against this. We see in the provision made (1) a blending of providence and miracle. An appreciable quantity of the bread provided was furnished by the man of Baal-shalisha; God made this sufficient by a direct act of power. Another illustration of the variety of the Divine methods. The one thing certain is that those who trust him *will* be provided for (Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10). We do well to see in it also (2) an image of the true, God-given, spiritual bread, which God brings to us in our spiritual need, and by which he satisfies our spiritual hunger (John vi. 26—58).—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

VERS. 1—27.—THE CURE OF NAAMAN'S LEPROSY. HIS GRATITUDE; AND THE SIN OF GEHAZI. The historian continues his narrative of Elisha's miracles, commenced in ch. ii., and gives in the present chapter a very graphic and complete account of two which were especially remarkable, and which stood in a peculiar relation the one towards the other. One was the removal of leprosy; the other, its infliction. One was wrought on a foreigner and a man of eminence; the other, on a Hebrew and a servant. The second was altogether consequential upon the first, without which the

occasion for it would not have arisen. The two together must have greatly raised the reputation of the prophet, and have given him an influence beyond the borders of the land of Israel; at the same time extending the reputation of Jehovah as a great God through many of the surrounding nations.

Ver. 1.—**Now Naaman, captain of the host of the King of Syria.** The name "Naaman" is here found for the first time. It is thought to be derived from that of an Aramæan god (Ewald), and appears in the later Arabic under the form of *Noman*, in which shape it is familiar to the students of Arabian history. Benhadad, who had been wont in his youth and middle age to lead his armies into the field in person (1 Kings xx. 1—20; xxii. 31; 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. p. 103), seems now in his old age to have found it necessary to entrust the command to a general, and to have made Naaman captain of his host. Compare the similar practice (ibid., p. 101) of the Assyrian monarchs. **Was a great man with his master, and honourable**—rather, *honoured*, or *held in esteem* (τεθαυμασμένος, LXX.)—**because by him the Lord had given deliverance**—literally, *salvation*, or *safety* (σωτηρίαν, LXX.)—**unto Syria.** Probably he had commanded the Syrian army in some of its encounters with the Assyrians, who at this time, under Shalmaneser II., were threatening the independence of Syria, but did not succeed in subjecting it. **He was also a mighty man in valour**—*gibbór hail*, commonly translated in our version by "mighty man of valour," does not mean much more than "a good soldier"—but he was a leper. Leprosy had many degrees. Some of the lighter kinds did not incapacitate a man for military service, or unfit him for the discharge of court duties (ver. 18). But there was always a danger that the lighter forms might develop into the severer ones.

Ver. 2.—**And the Syrians had gone out by companies**; or, *in marauding bands*. No peace had been made after Ahab's expedition against Ramoth-Gilead. Hostilities, therefore, still continued upon the borders, where raids were frequent, as upon our own northern border in mediæval times. **And had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid.** The marauding expeditions of ancient times had for one of their main objects the capture of slaves. In Africa wars are still carried on chiefly for this purpose. **And she waited on Naaman's wife.** Either Naaman had led the expedition, and this particular captive had been assigned to him in the division of the booty, or she had merely passed into his possession by purchase, and thus become one of his wife's attendants.

Ver. 3.—**And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!** literally, *Oh that my lord were before the prophet who is in Samaria!* Elisha had a house in Samaria (ch. vi. 32), where he resided occasionally. **For he would recover him of his leprosy.** The "little maid" concludes from her small experience that, if her master and the great miracle-working prophet of her own land could be brought together, the result would be his cure. She has, in her servile condition, contracted an affection both for her master and her mistress, and her sympathies are strongly with them. Perhaps she had no serious purpose in speaking as she did. The words burst from her as a mere expression of good will. She did not contemplate any action resulting from them. "Oh that things could be otherwise than as they are! Had I my dear master in my own country, it would be easy to accomplish his cure. The prophet is so powerful and so kind. He both could and would recover him." Any notion of her vague wish being carried out, being made the ground of a serious embassy, was probably far from the girl's thought. But the "bread cast upon the waters returns after many days." There is no kind wish or kind utterance that may not have a result far beyond anything that the wisher or utterer contemplated. Good wishes are seeds that ofttimes take root, and grow, and blossom, and bear fruit beyond the uttermost conception of those who sow them.

Ver. 4.—**And one went in, and told his lord, saying.** "One went in" is a possible translation; but it is simpler and more natural to translate "he went in," *i.e.* Naaman went in, and told his lord, Benhadad, the King of Syria. **Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel.** Being "of the land of Israel," her words had a certain weight—she had means of knowing—she ought to know whether such a thing as the cure of leprosy by the intervention of a prophet was a possible occurrence in her country.

Ver. 5.—**And the King of Syria said, Go to, go**; rather, *Go, depart*; i.e. lose no time; go at once, if there is any such possibility as the maiden has indicated. "We see," Bähr says, "from the king's readiness, how anxious he was for the restoration of Naaman." **And I will send a letter unto the King of Israel.** Letters had been interchanged between Solomon and Hiram, King of Tyre (2 Chron. ii. 3—11), a century earlier; and the communications of king with king in the East, though some-

times carried on orally by ambassadors, probably took place to a large extent by means of letters from a very early date. Written communications seem to have led to the outbreak of the war by which the foreign dynasty of the Hyksos was driven out of Egypt, and the native supremacy re-established ('History of Ancient Egypt,' vol. ii. pp. 199, 200). Written engagements were certainly entered into between the Egyptian kings and the Hittites at a date earlier than the Exodus (ibid., pp. 291, 310). Benhadad evidently regards the sending of a letter to a neighbouring monarch as a natural and ordinary occurrence. **And he**—*i.e.* Naaman—**departed, and took with him ten talents of silver**—reckoned by Keil as equal to 25,000 thalers, or £3750; by Thenius as equal to 20,000 thalers, or £3000—**and six thousand pieces of gold.** "Pieces of gold" did not yet exist, since coin had not been invented. Six thousand shekels' weight of gold is probably intended. This would equal, according to Keil, 50,000 thalers (£7500); according to Thenius, 60,000 thalers (£9000). Such sums are quite within the probable means of a rich Syrian nobleman of the time, a favourite at court, and the generalissimo of the Syrian army. Naaman evidently supposed that he would have, directly or indirectly, to purchase his cure. **And ten changes of raiment** (comp. Gen. xlv. 22; Hom., 'Od.,' xiii. 67; Xen., 'Cyrop.,' viii. 2. § 8; 'Anab.,' i. 2. § 29; etc.). The practice of giving dresses of honour as presents continues in the East to this day.

Ver. 6.—**And he brought the letter to the King of Israel, saying.** The hostile relations between Syria and Israel would not interfere with the coming and going of a messenger from either king to the other, who would be invested with an ambassadorial character. **Now when this letter is come unto thee.** We must not suppose that we have here the whole letter, which, no doubt, began with the customary Eastern formalities and elaborate compliments. The historian omits these, and hastens to communicate to us the main point of the epistle, or rather, perhaps, its main drift, which he states somewhat baldly and bluntly. **Behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him**—literally, *and thou shalt recover him*—**of his leprosy.** The letter made no mention of Elisha. Benhadad assumed that, if the King of Israel had in his dominions a person able to cure leprosy, he would be fully cognizant of the fact, and would at once send for him, and call upon him for an exertion of his gift or art. He is not likely to have comprehended the relations in which Kings of Israel stood towards the Jehovistic prophets, but may probably have thought of Elisha "as a sort of chief magus, or as the Israelitish high priest" (Menken), whom the king would have at his beck and call, and whose services would be completely at his disposal.

Ver. 7.—**And it came to pass, when the King of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes.** In horror and alarm (comp. 2 Sam. xiii. 19; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27; Ezra ix. 3; Jer. xxxvi. 24). He concluded that once more (see 1 Kings xx. 7) the Syrian monarch was determined to find a ground of quarrel, and had therefore sent to him an impossible request. **And said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive?** To "kill" and to "make alive" were familiar expressions in the mouth of the Israelites to designate omnipotence (see Deut. xxxii. 39; 1 Sam. ii. 6). Recovering from leprosy was equivalent to making alive, for a leprous person was "as one dead" (Numb. xii. 12) according to Hebrew notions. **That this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy.** The king evidently does not bethink himself of Elisha, of whose great miracle of raising the dead to life (ch. iv. 34—36) he may not up to this time have heard. Elisha's early miracles were mostly wrought with a certain amount of secrecy. **Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.** The king misjudged Benhadad, but not without some grounds of reason, if he was ignorant of Elisha's miraculous gifts. Benhadad, when seeking a ground of quarrel with Ahab, had made extravagant requests (see 1 Kings xx. 3—6).

Ver. 8.—**And it was so**—or, *it came to pass*—**when Elisha the man of God** (see ch. iv. 7, 16, etc.) **had heard that the King of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes?** The king's act was public; his complaint was public; he wished his subjects to know the outrageous conduct, as he viewed it, of the Syrian king (comp. 1 Kings xx. 7, where Ahab similarly calls attention to the strait in which he is placed). Thus the rumour went through the town, and reached the ears of the prophet, who therefore sent a message to the king. **Let him come now to me**; *i.e.* let Naaman, instead of applying to thee, the earthly head of the state, the source of all human power, which is utterly unavailing in such a case, apply to me, the source of spiritual power, the commissioned minister of Jehovah, who alone can help him under the circumstances. **And [then] he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel**; *i.e.* he shall have swift and sure demonstration, that God "has not left himself without witness," that, "in spite of the apostasy of king and people, the God who can kill and make alive yet makes himself known in

Israel in his saving might through his servants the prophets" (Bähr), of whom I am one.

Ver. 9.—**So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot.** The Syrians had had chariots, and used horses to draw them, from a remote date. The Hyksos, who introduced horses and chariots into Egypt, though not exactly a Syrian people, entered Egypt from Syria; and in all the Syrian wars of the Egyptians, which began about B.C. 1600, we find their adversaries employing a chariot force. In one representation of a fight between the Egyptians and a people invading Egypt from Syria, the war-chariots of the latter are drawn by four oxen; but generally the horse was used on both sides. Syria imported her horses and chariots from Egypt (1 Kings x. 29), and, as appears from this passage, employed them for peaceful as well as for warlike purposes. There was a similar employment of them from a very early time in Egypt (see Gen. xli. 43; l. 9). **And stood at the door of the house of Elisha** Elisha was at this time residing in Samaria, whether in his own house or not we cannot say. His abode was probably a humble one; and when the great general, accompanied by his cavalcade of followers, drew up before it, he had, we may be sure, no intention of dismounting and entering. What he expected he tells us himself in ver. 11. The prophet regarded his pride and self-conceit as deserving of a rebuke.

Ver. 10.—**And Elisha sent a messenger unto him.** Elisha asserted the dignity of his office. Naaman was "a great man" (ver. 1), with a high sense of his own importance, and regarded the prophet as very much inferior to himself. He expected to be waited on, courted, to receive every possible attention. Elisha no doubt intended very pointedly to rebuke him by remaining in his house, and communicating with the great man by a messenger. But there is no ground for taxing him with "priestly pride," or even with "impoliteness" on this account. He had to impress upon the Syrian noble the nothingness of wealth and earthly grandeur, and the dignity of the prophetic office. He did not do more than was requisite for these purposes. **Saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times.** Elisha speaks, no doubt, "by the word of the Lord." He is directed to require of Naaman a compliance with a somewhat burdensome order. The nearest point on the course of Jordan was above twenty miles distant from Samaria. Naaman is to go thither, to strip himself, and to plunge into the stream seven times. The directions seem given to test his faith. They may be compared with that of our Lord to the blind man, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam," and, in another point of view, with that given to Joshua (Josh. vi. 3—5), and that of Elijah to his servant (1 Kings xviii. 43). To repeat a formal act six times without perceiving any result, and yet to persevere and repeat it a seventh time, requires a degree of faith and trust that men do not often possess. **And thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.** The scaly leprous scurf shall fall off and reveal clean flesh underneath. Thy body shall be manifestly freed from all defilement.

Ver. 11.—**But Naaman was wroth, . . . and said.** Not unnaturally. As a "great man," the lord on whose arm the king leant, and the captain of the host of Syria, Naaman was accustomed to extreme deference, and all the outward tokens of respect and reverence. He had, moreover, come with a goodly train, carrying gold and silver and rich stuffs, manifestly prepared to pay largely for whatever benefit he might receive. To be curtly told, "Go, wash in Jordan," by the prophet's servant, without the prophet himself condescending to make himself visible, would have been trying to any Oriental's temper, and to one of Naaman's rank and position might well seem an insult. The Syrian general had pictured to himself a very different scene. **Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the Name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper;** rather, *take away the leprosy* (*ἀποσυνάξει τὸ λεπρόν*, LXX.). Naaman had imagined a striking scene, whereof he was to be the central figure, the prophet descending, with perhaps a wand of office, the attendants drawn up on either side, the passers-by standing to gaze—a solemn invocation of the Deity, a waving to and fro of the wand in the prophet's hand, and a sudden manifest cure, wrought in the open street of the city, before the eyes of men, and at once noised abroad through the capital, so as to make him "the observed of all observers," "the cynosure of all neighbouring eyes." Instead of this, he is bidden to go as he came, to ride twenty miles to the stream of the Jordan, generally muddy, or at least discoloured, and there to wash himself, with none to look on but his own attendants, with no *éclat*, no pomp or circumstance, no glory of surroundings. It is not surprising that he was disappointed and vexed.

Ver. 12.—**Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?** The "rivers of Damascus" are streams of great freshness and beauty. The principal one is the Barada, probably the Abana of the present passage, which, rising in the Antilibanus range, and

flowing through a series of romantic glens, bursts finally from the mountains through a deep gorge and scatters itself over the plain. One branch passes right through the city of Damascus, cutting it in half. Others flow past the city both on the north and on the south, irrigating the gardens and orchards, and spreading fertility far and wide over the Merj. A small stream, the Fidjeh, flows into the Barada from the north. Another quite independent river, the Awaaj, waters the southern portion of the Damascene plain, but does not approach within several miles of the city. Most geographers regard this as the "Pharpar;" but the identification is uncertain, since the name may very possibly have attached to one of the branches of the Barada. The Barada is limpid, cool, gushing, the perfection of a river! It was known to the Greeks and Romans as the Chrysorrhoas, or "river of gold." We can well understand that Naaman would esteem the streams of his own city as infinitely superior to the turbid, often sluggish, sometimes "clay-coloured" (Robinson, 'Researches,' vol. ii. p. 256) Jordan. If leprosy was to be *washed* away, it might naturally have appeared to him that the pure Barada would have more cleansing power than the muddy river recommended to him by the prophet. **So he turned and went away in a rage.**

Ver. 13.—**And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father.** Naaman's attendants did not share his indignation, or, if they did, since servants in the East are apt to be jealous of their masters' honour, had their feelings more under control; and they therefore interfered with mild words, anxious to pacify him, and persuade him to follow the prophet's advice. "My father" is a deferential and, at the same time, an affectionate address, not unnatural in the mouth of a confidential servant (comp. ch. ii. 12). There is thus no need of any alteration of the text, such as Ewald (לוֹ for אָבִי) or Thenius (אֵם for אָבִי) proposes. It must be admitted, however, that the LXX. seem to have had לוֹ in their copies. **If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing**—"had set thee," *i.e.*, "some difficult task"—**wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, [shouldest thou perform his behest] when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?** The reasoning was unanswerable, and took effect. Naaman was persuaded.

Ver. 14.—**Then went he down**; *i.e.* descended into the deep Jordan valley from the highland of Samaria—a descent of above a thousand feet. The nearest route would involve a journey of about twenty-five miles. **And dipped himself seven times in Jordan**—*i.e.* followed exactly the prophet's directions in ver. 10—**according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child**—literally, *of a little lad*—**and he was clean.** Not only was the leprosy removed, but the flesh was more soft and tender than that of a grown man commonly is. It was like the flesh of a boy.

Ver. 15.—**And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company.** It is not always seen what this involved. It involved going out of his way at least fifty miles. At the Jordan, Naaman was on his way home, had accomplished a fourth part of his return journey; in three more days he would be in Damascus, in his own palace. But he feels that it would be an unworthy act to accept his cure and make no acknowledgment of it, having turned away from the prophet "in a rage" (ver. 12), now, without apology, or retractation, or expression of regret or gratitude, to return into his own country under the obligation of an inestimable benefit. His cure has wrought in him, not merely a revulsion of feeling from rage and fury to thankfulness, but a change of belief. It has convinced him that the God of Elisha is the God of the whole earth. It has turned him from a worshipper of Rimmon into a worshipper of Jehovah. He must proclaim this. He must let the prophet know what is in his heart. He must, if possible, induce him to accept a recompense. Therefore he thinks nothing of an outlay of time and trouble, but retraces his steps to the Israelite capital, taking with him all his company, his horses and his chariots, his gold and silver and bales of clothing, and numerous train of attendants. **And came, and stood before him**; *i.e.* descended from his chariot, and asked admittance into the prophet's house, and was received and allowed an audience—a striking contrast with his previous appearance before the house, in expectation that the prophet would come down and wait upon him. **And he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.** This is an acknowledgment of the sole supremacy of Jehovah on the part of a heathen, such as we scarcely find elsewhere. The general belief of the time, and indeed of antiquity, was that every land had its own god, who was supreme in it—Baal in Phœnicia, Chemosh in Moab, Moloch in Ammon, Rimmon in Syria, Bel or Bel-Merodach in Babylon, Amun-Ra in Egypt, etc.; and when there is an acknowledgment of Jehovah on the part of heathens in Scripture, it is almost always the recognition of him as *a* god—the God of the Jews or of the Israelites, one among many (see Exod. x. 16, 17; ch. xvii. 26; xviii. 33–35; 2 Chron. ii. 11; Dan. ii. 47;

iii. 29: vi. 20, etc.). **But here we have a** plain and distinct recognition of him as the one and only God that is in all the earth. Naaman thus shows a greater docility, a readier receptivity, than almost any of the other pious heathens who are brought before us in Scripture. Balaam and Cyrus alone equal him. **Now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing**—*i.e.* "a present"—**of thy servant.** Heathens were accustomed to carry presents to the oracles which they consulted, and to reward those from which they received favourable responses with gifts of enormous value (see Herod., i. 14, 50, etc.). The Jewish prophets did not generally object to such free-will offerings. Naaman therefore quite naturally and reasonably made the offer. He would have contravened usage had he not done so.

Ver. 16.—**But he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none.** Elisha regards it as best, under the circumstances, to refuse the offered recompense. It was not compulsory on him so to act; for the precept, "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. x. 8), had not been yet uttered. Pious Israelites commonly brought gifts to the prophets whom they consulted (1 Sam. ix. 7, 8; 1 Kings xiv. 3). But, in the case of a foreigner, ignorant hitherto of true religion, whom it was important to impress favourably, and, if possible, win over to the faith, Elisha deemed it advisable to take no reward. Naaman was thus taught that Jehovah was his true Healer, the prophet the mere instrument, and that it was to Jehovah that his gratitude, his thanks, and his offerings were due. **And he urged him to take it; but he refused.** Contests of politeness are common in the East, where the one party offers to give and even insists on giving, while the other makes a pretence of declining; but here both parties were in earnest, and the gift was absolutely declined.

Ver. 17.—**And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth?** Naaman does not state what he intends to do with the earth; and the critics have consequently suggested two uses. Some suppose that he intended to make the earth into an altar upon which he might offer his sacrifices; comp. Exod. xx. 24, where an altar of earth is spoken of (Bähr and others). But the more general opinion (Thenius, Von Gerlach, etc.) is that he wished to spread the earth over a piece of Syrian ground, and thereby to hallow the ground for purposes of worship. The Jews themselves are known to have acted similarly, transferring earth from Jerusalem to Babylonia, to build a temple on it; and the idea is not an unnatural one. It does not necessarily imply the "polytheistic superstition" that every god has his own land, where alone he can be properly worshipped. It rests simply on the notion of there being such a thing as "holy ground" (Exod. iii. 5)—ground more suited for the worship of God than ordinary common soil, which therefore it is worth while to transfer from place to place for a religious purpose. **For thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice [as meat offerings or firstfruits] unto other gods, but unto the Lord.** It is implied that Naaman had been hitherto a polytheist. Not much is known of the Syrian religion, but, so far as can be gathered, it would seem to have been a somewhat narrow polytheism. The sun was the supreme god, and was worshipped ordinarily under the name of Hadad (Macrob., 'Sat.,' i. 23). There was also, certainly, a great goddess, the "Dea Syra" of the Romans, whom they identified with Cybele and with their own "Bona Dea," a divinity parallel with the Ashtoreth of the Phœnicians, and the Ishtar of the Assyrians and Babylonians. Whether there were any other distinct deities may be doubted, since Rimmon is possibly only another name of Hadad (see the comment on ver. 18). Adonis is simply "Adonai," *i.e.* "my Lord," an epithet of the Supreme Being.

Ver. 18.—**In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant.** Naaman is not prepared to be a martyr for his religion. On returning to Damascus, it will be among his civil duties to accompany his master to the national temples, and to prostrate himself before the images of the national deities. If he declines, if (like an early Christian) he will not enter "the house of devils," much less bow down before the graven image of a false god, it may cost him his life; it will certainly cost him his court favour. For such a sacrifice he is not prepared. Yet his conscience tells him that he will be acting wrongly. He therefore expresses a hope, or a prayer, that his fault, for a fault he feels that it will be, may be forgiven him—that Jehovah will not be "extreme to mark what is done amiss," but will excuse his outward conformity to his inward faith and zeal. **That when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon.** Rimmon is probably derived from *rum* (רוּם), "to be high," and means "the exalted god," according to the gloss of Hesychius—Ῥάμας, ὕψιστος θεός. It is wrongly connected with רִמּוֹן, "a pomegranate," and should rather be compared with the Arabic *Er Rhaman*, "the Most High." The royal name, "Tab-Rimmon" (1 Kings xv. 18), contains the root, as does also the local name (Zech. xii. 11), "Hadad-Rimmon." This last word gives rise to the suspicion that Hadad and Rimmon are merely two names

of the same deity, who was called "Hadad" or "Hadar" as bright and glorious, "Rimmon" as lofty and exalted. **To worship there, and he leaneth on my hand.** Either Naaman's leprosy must have been recent, and he refers to the king's practice in former times, or there must have been far less horror of leprosy among the Syrians than there was among the Hebrews. **And I bow myself in the house of Rimmon**—before the image, or at any rate before the supposed presence of the god—**when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.** The repetition of the clause indicates Naaman's anxiety on the subject.

Ver. 19.—**And he said unto him, Go in peace.** Elisha declared neither that God would nor that he would not forgive Naaman his departure from the path of strict right. He was not called upon to give an answer, since Naaman had not put a question, but had only expressed a wish. His "Go in peace" is to be taken simply as "wishing the departing Syrian the peace of God upon the road." So Keil, rightly. **So he departed from him a little way.** Naaman left the presence of Elisha, quitted Samaria, and had gone a short way on his homeward journey when Gehazi overtook him. Ver. 19 is closely connected with ver. 20.

Ver. 20.—**But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said** (see ch. iv. 12—36 for the position held towards Elisha by Gehazi), **Behold, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian.** Gehazi either honestly thinks, or at least persuades himself, that a *Syrian* ought to be, not spared, but spoiled, as being a foreigner and an enemy. **In not receiving at his hands that which he brought** (see ver. 5). Gehazi may not have known how much it was, but he had seen the laden animals, and rightly concluded that the value was great. **But, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.** "As the Lord liveth" seems a strange phrase in the mouth of one who is bent on lying and on stealing. But experience teaches us that religious formulæ do drop from the lips of persons engaged in equally indefensible proceedings. This is partly because formulæ by frequent use become mere forms, to which the utterer attaches no meaning; partly because men blind themselves to the wrongfulness of their actions, and find some excuse or other for any course of conduct by which they hope to profit.

Ver. 21.—**So Gehazi followed after Naaman.** A company of travellers in the East, even though it consist of the retinue of a single great man, will always contain footmen, as well as those who ride on horses or in chariots, and will not travel at a faster pace than about three miles an hour. Thus Gehazi, if he went at his best speed, could expect to overtake, and did actually overtake, the cavalcade of Naaman. He probably overtook them at a very short distance from Samaria. **And when Naaman saw** him **running after him.** Gehazi was pressed for time. He could not start at once, lest he should make it too plain that he was going in pursuit of Naaman; and he could not absent himself from the house too long, lest his master should call for him. He had, therefore, at whatever loss of dignity, to hurry himself, and actually "run after" the Syrian. Naaman, either accidentally looking back, or warned by some of his train, sees him, recognizes him, and is only too glad to respond to his wishes. **He lighted down from the chariot to meet him.** An act of great condescension. As Bähr notes, "Descent from a vehicle is, in the East, a sign of respect from the inferior to the superior;" and Naaman, in lighting down from his chariot, must have intended to "honour the prophet in his servant" ('Commentary on Kings,' vol. ii. p. 55). But such honour is not commonly paid, and thus the act of Naaman was abnormal. **And said, Is all well?** The words admit of no better translation. Seeing Gehazi's haste and anxious looks, Naaman suspects that all is *not* well, that something has happened since he left the prophet's house, and accordingly puts his question, הֲשָׁלוֹם—*Rectene sunt omnia?* (Vulgate).

Ver. 22.—**And he said, All is well.** Gehazi's reply was, "All is well." There has been no accident, no calamity—only a casual circumstance has caused a change in my master's wishes, which I am sent thus hurriedly to communicate to thee. **My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now** (*i.e.* just at this time) **there be come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets.** The details are added to give a greater air of truthfulness to the story. **Give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments;** *i.e.* a change apiece, and a talent between them—rather a large sum in respect of the pretended occasion, but a trifle compared with the amount which Naaman had expected to expend (ver. 5), and probably very much less than he had recently pressed upon the prophet (ver. 16). Gehazi had to balance between his own greed on the one hand, and the fear of raising suspicion on the other. His story was altogether most plausible, and his demand prudently moderate.

Ver. 23.—**And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents**; rather, *consent, take two talents.* Do not oppose thyself to my wishes

—consent to receive double what thou hast asked. Naaman is anxious to show his gratitude by giving as much as he can induce the other side to accept. He suggests two talents, probably because the strangers who are said to have arrived are two. **And he urged him.** Gehazi must have made some show of declining the offer. **And bound two talents of silver in two bags**—*i.e.* put up two talents separately in two bags, closing the mouth of the bag in each case by "binding" it round with a string—**with two changes of garments**—as asked for (ver. 22)—**and laid them upon two of his servants.** If the Hebrew silver talent was worth £375 as Keil supposes, or even £300 as Thenius reckons, it would be pretty well as much as an ordinary slave could carry, being somewhat over a hundredweight. **And they bare them before him**; *i.e.* they—the servants—bare the two sacks of money before him—Gehazi.

Ver. 24.—**And when he came to the tower**; rather, *to the hill* (Revised Version). Some well-known eminence at a little distance from the Damascus gate of Samaria must be intended. Here Gehazi stopped the slaves, and took the money from them. It was important for his purpose that they should not be seen re-entering the city, as that would have occasioned remark, and might naturally have led to inquiry. **He took** them—*i.e.* the bags—**from their hand**—*i.e.* from the hands of Naaman's servants—**and bestowed them in the house**; *i.e.* by himself or deputy brought them to Elisha's house, and there hid them away. **And he let the men**—Naaman's servants—**go, and they departed.** They hastened, no doubt, to rejoin their master.

Ver. 25.—**But he went in, and stood before his master.** Gehazi, lest his absence should be noticed, as soon as he had put away the money, sought his master's presence, entering the room casually, as if he had been busied about the house. He was met at once, however, by the plain and stern question which follows. **And Elisha said unto him, Whence** comest thou, **Gehazi?** literally, *Whence, Gehazi?* A short, stern, abrupt question. **And he said, Thy servant went no whither.** There was no help for it. One lie necessitates another. Once enter on the devious path, and you cannot say whither it will conduct you. To deceive and plunder a foreigner of a hostile nation probably seemed to Gehazi a trifle, either no sin at all, or a very venial sin. But now he finds himself led on to telling a direct lie to his master, which even he could not have justified to himself.

Ver. 26.—**And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee?** There is no "with thee" in the original; and the words have been taken in quite a different sense. Ewald regards לִבִּי, "my heart," as designating Gehazi, and meaning "my loved one, my favourite disciple." "Thou hast denied that thou wentest any whither; but did not my favourite disciple in truth go forth, when the man turned again from his chariot, as Naaman did?" (ver. 21). But no parallel instance can be adduced of any such use of לִבִּי, which is altogether too strong a term to be applied to a mere favourite servant. The irony, moreover, of the term under the circumstances would be too great. Maurer's interpretation of לִבִּי by "my prophetic power" (my prophetic power had not departed from me) is no better, since it requires חָלַךְ to be taken in two different senses in the two most closely connected clauses of vers. 25 and 26. Altogether, our version would seem to be the best rendering that has been suggested. It accords with the Septuagint, with Theodoret, and with the Vulgate; and it gives a satisfactory sense: "Did not my spirit go forth with thee when thou wentest forth, etc.? Was I not present in spirit during the whole transaction?" **When the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?** (see ver. 21). **Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?** The prophet follows Gehazi's thoughts, which had been to purchase, with the money obtained from Naaman, olive yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, etc.; and asks—Was this a time for such proceedings? Keil well explains, "Was this the time, when so many hypocrites pretend to be prophets from selfishness and avarice, and bring the prophetic office into contempt with unbelievers, for a servant of the true God to take money and goods from a non-Israelite . . . that he might acquire property and luxury for himself?" It was evidently a most unfit time. As Thenius says, "In any other case better than in this mightest thou have yielded to thy desire for gold and goods."

Ver. 27.—**The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee**; *i.e.* "As thou hast taken his goods, thou shalt also take his leprosy, which goes with them." A just Nemesis. **And unto thy seed for ever.** The iniquity of the fathers is visited upon the children. Gehazi, however, could avoid this part of the curse by not marrying. **And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.** There were many forms and degrees of leprosy (Lev. xiii. 2—46). Gehazi's was of the most pronounced kind. And it fell on him suddenly, as her leprosy fell upon Miriam (Numb. xii. 10), complete

at once, so that there could be no further aggravation of it. The lesson should be taken to heart, and should be a warning to us, both against lying and against covetousness.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—19.—*The lessons taught by the story of Naaman.* "The story of Naaman," says Menken, "is a worthy part of the history of those revelations and manifestations of the living God which, in their connection and continuation through many centuries, and in their tendency towards one goal and object, were designed to plant upon earth the knowledge and the worship of the true God! But it offers besides to our consideration *a rich store of reflections*, in which neither heart nor understanding can refuse a willing participation." Among the lessons, or "reflections," would seem to be the following.

I. No EARTHLY HAPPINESS WITHOUT ALLOY. Naaman, as far as external prosperity went, had all that he could desire. 1. He was "captain of the host of the King of Syria," commander-in-chief, *i.e.*, of all the national forces. He held a great position, involving high rank, vast patronage, considerable emolument, and a place in the thoughts of men next to that of the king. 2. He was "a great man with his master"—high in the royal favour—able to obtain any boon that he desired, and advance all whom he cared to patronize. 3. He was also "a mighty man of valour," or rather "a good tried soldier," approved by deeds of arms to the nation, and enjoying his own confidence and self-respect. But on all this there was one drawback. Naaman "was a leper." And so it is generally. "Everywhere, where there is or seems to be something great and fortunate, there is also some discordant 'but,' which, like a false note in a melody, mars the perfectness of the good fortune. A worm gnaws at the root of everything pertaining to this world; and everything here below contains the germs of death in itself" (Menken). Life is full of compensations. There is no misery without alleviation; no low estate without some gleam of joy or hope to brighten and glorify it; and also no happiness without some concomitant annoyance or discomfort. Now it is domestic trouble, now an unhappy turn of mind, now a recollection of some sin in the past, now an anticipation of some calamity in the future. But, perhaps most frequently, it is ill health, some form of bodily suffering. Naaman's affliction was of the most grievous kind—leprosy! a disease at once painful, unsightly, disgusting, and regarded as a disgrace.

II. SOLACE AND HELP COME TO US FROM THE MOST UNEXPECTED QUARTERS. A "little maid," a foreigner, a captive, a slave, accidentally introduced into his household, and occupying a very humble place in it, perhaps almost unknown by sight to the great lord of the mansion, who has something better to do than to take notice of his wife's attendants,—this little maid, humble as she is, and apparently of the least possible consequence, initiates the entire series of events which form the substance of the narrative. She sees her master's sufferings; she is touched by them; she longs to have them assuaged; and she bethinks herself of a possible cure of them. "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!" Perhaps it was a mere vague wish, a thought that rose in the mind, and was uttered without the slightest idea that action would be based on it. But our lightest words may have effects of which we never thought. The "little maid's" gentle aspiration fell on some ear which took note of it; inquiry was made; hope was aroused; and finally action followed. The small accident of an Israelite maid, who knew of Elisha's power to work miracles, being a member of his wife's household, and giving utterance to her feelings of compassion, led on to the great general's cure, and to the glorification of the Name of Jehovah throughout the Syrian nation. The mouse in the fable gave aid which was of the most vital importance to the lion. We can never tell from what humble friend or dependant we may not receive help in trouble, by precious hints or suggestions, or by effectual fervent prayers, which may be of inestimable service to us.

III. THE GREAT OF THE EARTH A POOR STAY AND SUPPORT. Neither Benhadad King of Syria, nor Joram King of Israel, were really of any help to Naaman in his trouble. Benhadad meant well; but his letter to the King of Israel confused the plain

issue, and was not of the slightest practical service. Joram had to acknowledge himself utterly powerless (ver. 7), and, but for the prophet's interference, would probably have represented to the King of Syria that there was no more help to be obtained for Naaman in Israel than in his own country. Great civil personages are rarely fit to take the lead in matters which even touch upon religion. They place far too much trust in the cunning devices of mere human policy, and far too little in the force of religious principle and the overruling providence of God. The Magi did not help Christ by bringing him their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. They did but draw Herod's attention to him, and bring his infant life into peril. Herod Antipas did not help John the Baptist. He "heard him gladly" (Mark vi. 20), but imprisoned him, and ultimately put him to death. The advice of the psalmist is excellent, "Put not your trust in princes; . . . for there is no help in them" (Ps. cxlvi. 3).

IV. OUR BEST HELP FROM RELIGION AND ITS MINISTERS. Naaman might have returned to Damascus in the same condition in which he left it, unhelped, unaided, uncured, but for the existence, and for the action taken by, a minister of God. Men often jeer at ministers, deride them, deny the use of them, call them idlers and supernumeraries, and declare their belief that the world would get on quite as well, or much better, without them; but in times of difficulty and danger, and especially in the time of sickness, they are apt to have recourse to them. A Belshazzar in difficulty seeks to Daniel (Dan. v. 13), a Naaman to Elisha, a Theodosius to Ambrose, a guilty sinner to his parish priest or to the nearest godly minister of his acquaintance. Ministers, it is true, do not now heal diseases; and it is fitting that in sickness the physician should be called in, to begin with. But when the physician can do no more, when he declares the resources of his art exhausted, when death draws near us, then there are but few who despise the aid of the previously contemned servant of God, but few who are not glad to have a minister of God at their bedside, and to receive from his hands the last consolations of religion. How many have been brought by ministerial aid to die in peace and joy, who without it would have lain for days tortured with doubts and fears and misgivings! How many have even been snatched at the last moment like brands from the burning, brought through ministerial influence, even on their death-beds, to a repentance not to be repented of! It is well not to trust beforehand to a death-bed repentance, but to set our house in order while we are still in health. But the example of the thief on the cross shows that, even under the very shadow of death, the mercy of God is not exhausted. A death-bed repentance is always possible; and in bringing it about the assistance to be derived from an experienced minister can scarcely be over-estimated.

V. THE NATURAL MAN A POOR JUDGE OF GOD'S METHODS OF SALVATION. "I thought," said Naaman, "he will surely come out to me," etc. Naaman had made up his mind what the prophet's method would be. He had his own notions concerning the fitness of things, and the mode in which Divine help, if it came at all, would come to him. When his expectations were disappointed, as human expectations on such a subject are likely to be, he was offended, and "turned and went away in a rage" (ver. 12). Do not many turn from religion altogether on similar utterly insufficient grounds? They "thought," if God gave a revelation at all, he would give it in this or that way—by a voice from heaven speaking with equal force to all, with the accompaniment of a continuous display of miracles, by the mouth of an immaculate priesthood, or in some way quite different from that in which it has pleased God to give it; and, being disappointed in their expectation, they reject the whole matter, refuse to have anything to do with it, "turn and go away in a rage." "I thought" is all-powerful with them. Well does Menken observe, "This 'I thought' is the most mighty of all mighty things upon earth, and even if it is not the most ruinous of all ruinous things, it is yet certainly the most unfortunate of all unfortunate ones. This 'I thought' brought sin and misery and death into the world; and it prevents redemption from sin and death in the case of thousands! These thousands, if they perish in their opinion, will begin the next life with 'I thought.'"

VI. SECOND THOUGHTS OFTEN THE BEST. It is never too late to amend. To pride one's self on absolute consistency and unchangingness is the height of folly in a being who is not, and knows he is not, omniscient. Our first thoughts must often be mistaken ones, and in such cases it is at least possible that our second thoughts may be better. Moreover, second thoughts may be suggested from without, and may come

from those who are far wiser than ourselves. Naaman showed his good sense in giving up his original intention and adopting the advice of his servants. To have persisted for consistency's sake would have been foolish obstinacy, and would have resulted in his remaining a leper and an idolater to the day of his death.

VII. A TIME FOR ALL THINGS—A TIME TO GET, AND A TIME TO LOSE. "The labourer is worthy of his hire." Ministers cannot live on air any more than other people. There is a time when, and there are circumstances under which, it is lawful for them to receive such an amount of this world's goods as they need, or even such an amount as is offered to them. For any surplus which they receive beyond their needs they are trustees, bound to expend such surplus as they deem best for the honour of God and the benefit of man. Prophets were entitled to accept gifts of those who consulted them (1 Sam. ix. 7, 8), and Elisha himself took without hesitation the twenty loaves from the man of Baal-shalisha. But when Naaman made his offer, Elisha felt that it was "a time to lose." He had to show that "the gift of God could not be purchased with money;" he had to impress it on an ignorant but intelligent heathen, that Jehovah was a God not like other gods, and that his prophets were men not like other men. He had to teach the doctrine of free grace. His example should be a lesson to ministers, that not every gift, even though it be offered by a willing heart, ought to be accepted. There are times when a minister should decline a testimonial, an augmentation of stipend, the donation of a new pulpit, or a new organ, and when he should be glad to "lose" them for the furtherance of higher objects.

VIII. GRATITUDE FOR TEMPORAL BLESSINGS BEST SHOWN BY OUR TURNING TO GOD. When Naaman found that the prophet would receive no gift at his hand, he acquiesced, and resolved to show his gratitude for the great blessing which he had received in another way. He would thenceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto any other god, but only unto the Lord (ver. 17). It was a noble resolve. It might offend his sovereign, it might hamper his promotion, it might deprive him of court favour. Still, he did not hesitate; he made the resolution, and he proclaimed it. Whether he kept it faithfully or no, we are not told; we know nothing of his after-life; the curtain drops on him as he departs to his own country. But, so far as the history is carried, it shows him faithful and true. He bears off his two mules' burden of earth. He means no more to worship Rimmon. He will acknowledge and worship one God only, Jehovah. There may be weakness in the compromise with conscience which he proposes in ver. 18; but it is a pardonable weakness in one bred up a heathen. At any rate, he does right, and sets us a good example, in his resolute turning to Jehovah, as the true Source of the blessing which he has received, and as therefore deserving henceforth of all his worship and all his gratitude.

Vers. 20—27.—*The lessons taught by the sin and punishment of Gehazi.* Gehazi's is a sad case, but a not unusual one; the case of a person brought into close contact with a high form of moral excellence and spirituality, who, instead of profiting by the example, wilfully casts it aside, and adopts a low standard of life and conduct—a standard which always tends to become lower. The first lesson to be learnt from his case is this—

I. IF CONTACT WITH EXCELLENCE FAIL TO RAISE US, IT WILL SINK US, IN THE MORAL SCALE. The two disciples closest to our Lord seem to have been St. John and Judas Iscariot. The one leant upon Jesus' breast; the other dipped with him habitually (τὸν βάπτοντα μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ τρυβλίῳ) in the dish (Mark xiv. 20). The one was exalted to a spirituality rarely attained by man; the other sank to such a condition that his Lord said of him, he "is a devil" (John vi. 70). Both elevation and degradation are equally natural. The one comes from the imitation of the high example before us; the other from resisting the impulse to such imitation. If we resist impulses to good, we do ourselves irreparable harm; we blunt our consciences, harden our hearts, render ourselves less sensitive to good influences for ever after. And the longer the contact with goodness continues, the higher the exaltation, or the lower the deterioration, of our nature. Gehazi had been for years Elisha's servant. He had been on the closest terms of intimacy with him. He had witnessed his patience, his self-denial, his gentleness, his kindness, his zeal for Jehovah. But the only effect had been to harden him in evil. He had grown proud and contemptuous, as shown by his calling Naaman "this

Syrian" (ver. 20), a swearer (ver. 20), covetous, untruthful, careless of his master's honour, secretive (ver. 24), shameless. He had no sense of God's watchful eye and continual presence, no respect or love for his master, no care for what Naaman and the other Syrians would think of him. He thus did as much as in him lay to ruin his master's projects, and to lower him in the esteem of those whose good opinion he knew his master valued. Another lesson to be drawn from the narrative is the following:—

II. ONE SIN LEADS ON TO ANOTHER BY A SEQUENCE WHICH IS ALMOST INEVITABLE. Gehazi begins with covetousness. He cannot see the great wealth of Naaman, the wedges of silver and gold, and the large bales of rich stuffs, without a keen desire to obtain possession of a portion. He hopes that his master will spoil the Syrian, and not spare him; in that case he may contrive to get a share in the advantage. His master's refusal, no doubt, seems to him mere folly, quixotism—almost madness. He sets his clever wits to work, and soon frames a scheme by which his master's intentions shall be frustrated. The scheme, as any scheme must under such circumstances, involves him in lying; nay, in a whole heap of lies. He tells a circumstantial tale in which there is not a single word of truth. The tale runs glibly off his tongue, and easily deceives the foreigner, who is not of a suspicious temper. Gehazi is completely successful, obtains even more than he had ventured to ask; hides it away without any difficulty, and thinks that all is over. But all is not over. "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" sounds in his ears; and he must either confess all or, directly and unmistakably, lie to his master. *Of course*, the lie is resolved upon; his previous conduct has so demoralized him, that we cannot even imagine him to have hesitated. The direct falsehood to his master, which he would fain have avoided, has to be uttered: "Thy servant went no whither." *Facilis descensus Averni.* The only security against a moral decline as grievous as Gehazi's is not to enter upon it, not to take the first step. *Principiis obsta.* Check evil tendencies at once, and the fatal sequence need never be entered upon. Gehazi's punishment has also its lesson. He had gained his coveted wealth; the prophet could not take it from him. He was a rich man, and might carry out all his far-reaching schemes of proprietorship, and lordship over others. But what will it all profit him, if he is to be, to the end of his days, a leper? The apples of Sodom, so "fair to view," are felt and known to be worthless, when they "turn to ashes on the lips." So was it with him; and so is it, commonly, with those who pursue a course similar to his. The prosperity acquired by fraud has within it a taint of rottenness. There is "a little rift within the lute"—a drawback of some kind or other, which deprives the prosperity of all its value, and makes the wealthy prosperous man a miserable wretch. If he escape external calamity, he will, at any rate, not escape the worm of remorse, which will eat into his heart, and poison his cup of pleasure.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The captive Israelitish maid.* There are four personages that stand out with special prominence in this chapter, from each of which important lessons may be learned. These are—the little Hebrew maid; Naaman, the commander-in-chief of the Syrian army; the Prophet Elisha; and Gehazi, the prophet's servant. We shall speak first of the little maid.

I. THIS LITTLE MAID DID NOT FORGET HER RELIGION WHEN SHE WENT FROM HOME. We see that, though in a foreign land, she still thought of her fathers' God and of his prophet. That is an important lesson in these days, when travelling has become so common. The motto with a great many professing Christians seems to be that when they are at Rome, they must do as Rome does. When they travel on the continent, they keep the continental Sunday, just as if the same God was not looking down upon them there as at home, just as if the Lord's day was not the Lord's day everywhere, and as if there were not good Christian people on the continent who valued the day as a day of rest and worship. Mr. Ruskin wrote some pointed words lately in reference to the way Christian people seem to forget their religion when they go abroad. He asked them to count up their expenditure on railway fares and sight-seeing, on guides and guide-books, on luxuries and photographs; and then to ask themselves how much

they had spent in donations to the poor Churches of France and Belgium, or of the Waldenses in Italy. Happily, all travellers are not like this. Many Christian tourists like to find a Sunday blessing, and to hear a word of refreshing, in some little country church among the hills of Scotland or of Switzerland, or in the quiet chapel amid the pleasure-seeking crowds of Paris. But how many there are who lock up their religion when they turn the key in their house-door, and, however careful they may be of taking guide-books and other provisions for the journey, never dream of putting a Bible in the trunk! No matter where we go, let us take our religion with us, as Joseph took his into Egypt, as Daniel took his into Babylon, as this little Hebrew maid took hers into Syria. *This little maid had strong inducements to give up her religion.* No doubt it would have pleased her master and mistress if she had worshipped their gods. They might have said that her worship of any other God was an impertinence, a sort of suggestion that they were doing wrong. But she listens to the voice of conscience and of duty rather than to the voice of worldly policy and expediency. *It is a message to all who are in the employment of others.* Never sacrifice principle for place. Never sacrifice the favour of God for the favour of man. Your employer pays for your labour; he does not buy your conscience. If ever attempts are made to tamper with your conscience, be it yours to answer, "We ought to obey God rather than man." Trust God for the consequences. Trust him to provide for you. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

II. THIS LITTLE MAID DID NOT RENDER EVIL FOR EVIL. She had been torn from her home and from her native land by the rude hands of Syrian soldiers. Perhaps her father had fallen beneath the enemy's sword. Yet we do not find her cherishing a spirit of vindictiveness or revenge. Instead of rejoicing to see her captor suffer, she pities him. She longs that he may be healed of that terrible and loathsome disease. Have we never exulted in the sufferings of others? Have we never felt a secret thrill of gratification when some misfortune has befallen one with whom we were at variance? Such a spirit, the spirit of revenge, however natural it may be, is not the spirit of Christ. He bids us do unto others as we would wish them to do unto us. The Christ-like spirit is to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us.

III. THIS LITTLE MAID WAS BUT YOUNG; YET, BY DOING WHAT SHE COULD, SHE BECAME A BLESSING TO OTHERS. She did not say to herself, "I am but young; there is nothing *I* can do." She did not wait for some great thing to do. But she just did the work that lay nearest her. She saw a way in which she might be useful, and she took the opportunity at once. She said to her mistress, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." That was all. She just told of where the blessing of health was likely to be found. 1. *This is a lesson for young people, for the children.* None of you is too young to do something for Jesus. Jesus has some work for every one of you to do. It may be his work for you that you should conquer some sinful passion, some evil habit. It may be his work for you that you should stand up for him and his Word among bad companions; or that by your own quiet and gentle life, and loving disposition and kind deeds, you should show how good it is to be a Christian. Do the work that lies nearest. If you are at school or college, and find your studies irksome, and long to get free to work at your own will and pleasure; if you are learning your business, and find it a drudgery;—remember that just here Christ has a work for you to do. These difficulties have to be mastered. Master *them*, and then you will show your fitness for mastering far greater difficulties. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." 2. *It is a lesson for young and old.* What are you doing to be a blessing to others? Is there not some sick person to whom you might read, some poor family that you might visit occasionally with some of the comforts of life, some tempted one to whom you might speak a word of help and encouragement, some backslider to whom you might speak a word of kindly warning, some careless, godless one whom you might urge to flee from the wrath to come? And if you can do but little for the sinner and the godless yourself, perhaps you can do as the little maid did—*tell them where blessing is to be found,* and invite them to come to the house of God. There is no need for rivalry between different Christian communities. There are godless people enough to fill all the places of worship, if only Christian people would stir themselves and

go out into the streets and lanes, into the highways and hedges, and, by the power of irresistible persuasion, compel them to come in. Don't trouble yourself by thinking of your own fitness or unfitness. Are you willing to be of use in Christ's work? Are you anxious to be a blessing to others? That is the great question. If so, Jesus will do the rest. He will make you a vessel unto honour, sanctified, meet for the Master's use.

IV. THE SECRET OF THIS LITTLE MAID'S FAITHFULNESS AND USEFULNESS WAS HER STRONG AND SIMPLE FAITH. She could be faithful *to* God, because she believed *in* God. She believed that God would take care of her when she was faithfully serving him. She could be useful to others because, though she was a captive and had no means to help them, she knew of One who had. *She had faith in God.* She knew that God was with Elisha, and therefore she had no doubt about Elisha's success. Yes; it is *faith* we want, if we are to be useful. We *say* we believe a great many things. But *how* do we believe them? Where is our faith in God's promises shown in our patience under difficulties and trials and discouragements? Where is our faith in God's promises shown by our liberality to his cause? Where is our faith in God's promises shown by our work done for Christ? If our faith in God is real, it will show itself in every detail of our daily life; it will overflow in acts of usefulness and love.—C. H. I.

Vers. 4—19.—*Naaman the Syrian.* This case of Naaman is an illustration of the imperfection that there is in all things human. Naaman was commander-in-chief of the Syrian army. Not only so, but he had seen service. He had won his spurs in active warfare. He had led his troops to victory. "By him the Lord had given deliverance to Syria." Hence, as we read, "he was a great man with his master, and honourable." No doubt he had been greeted on his return from battle, as victorious generals were greeted then and are greeted still, with the triumphant shouts of a joyful and exultant multitude. His cup of happiness was almost full. But there was one element of trouble that mingled with his joy. "But he was a leper." That little word "*but*," how significant it is! We should all be happy, but for something. Our plans would all be successful, but for something. We should all be very good, but for some inconsistency, some failing, some besetting sin. Here is a very good man, but he has such a bad temper. There is a very kind woman, but she has such a bitter tongue. Here is a very good man, but he is so stingy and so selfish. Here is a man who would be very useful in the Church of Christ, but he is so worldly minded. Here is a good preacher, but he doesn't just practise what he preaches. These little "buts" have their uses. They keep us, or they *ought* to keep us, humble. We ought not to be very proud of ourselves, we ought not to be very hard on others, when we think of that ugly sin of our own. But most of all, these "buts" ought to be the means of driving us, as Naaman's leprosy was the means of driving him, nearer to God. That almighty hand can alone weed the evil forces out of our nature, and bring us into conformity to his own heavenly likeness.

I. NAAMAN'S PRIDE. Kings sometimes, like other people, do stupid things. The Hebrew maid had spoken of the *prophet* that was in Israel, as being able to cure her master of his leprosy. But the King of Syria sends a letter to the *King* of Israel, saying, "I have sent Naaman my servant unto *thee*, that *thou* mayest recover him of his leprosy." The King of Syria may have meant nothing more than this, that the King of Israel might bring about Naaman's recovery by sending him to the prophet; but the King of Israel took the words as an attempt to pick a quarrel with him, and rent his clothes in anger and passion. Very often great and destructive wars have arisen from much more trifling causes—from the folly or incapacity, the rashness or stubbornness, the pride or the passion, of rulers. How thankful we should be for a wise and prudent sovereign, when we think how much harm a foolish sovereign can do! After Elisha heard of the King of Israel's absurd and childish display of anger and dismay, he sent to him, saying, "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with all the pomp and grandeur of a great Oriental general, and stood at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha is not overawed by this display of magnificence. He does not hasten forth and make a humble obeisance to the man of rank. He knew what respect was due to authority and station; but just then he had to do with *Naaman the man, with Naaman the leper*, and not with Naaman the general. As the servant of God, it is his

duty to benefit Naaman's soul as well as his body, *and the first thing he must do is to humble him.* Naaman's leprosy was an enemy to his happiness. But he had a far worse enemy in his own heart. That was pride. How hard it was to expel it we shall see. Elisha did not go himself to speak to Naaman, but sent a messenger. That was bad enough for Naaman's pride. And this was the message that he sent: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." That was worse. How keenly Naaman felt it we see in his action and his words. He turned away from the place in a rage, perhaps swearing at his servants to get out of his way, and said, "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the Name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." His leprosy had not humbled his pride. Here he was—come all the way from Syria just for the one purpose of getting cured; and yet he turns away from the only person who could cure him, because he does not pay him sufficient court, and does not flatter his vanity. How unreasonable was Naaman's pride! How unreasonable is pride in any one! And yet it is a common failing. There are very few of us without a little of it. Bishop Hooker says, "Pride is a vice which cleaveth so fast unto the hearts of men, that if we were to strip ourselves of all faults, one by one, we should undoubtedly find it the very last and hardest to put off." *What have any of us to be proud of?* Has the *sinner* any reason to be proud? He is walking on the broad way that leadeth to destruction. Not a journey, not a prospect, to be proud of, certainly! Has the *saint* any reason to be proud? Surely not. It is by the grace of God he is what he is. "Not of works, lest any man should boast." No true child of God has ever had a proud heart. Look at the humility of the Apostle Paul. Early in his Epistles he speaks of himself as "the least of the apostles;" later on he calls himself "less than the least of all saints;" while the latest description he gives of himself is "the chief of sinners." Such was Paul's estimate of his own character, the more he looked at it in the light of God's holy Law, and in the light of the cross of Jesus. The longer he lived, the more humble he became. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." Away, then, with pride! Away with pride of riches! away with pride of rank! away with pride of learning! away with pride of beauty in the face that is made of clay! away with pride from every Christian heart! away with pride from the house of God! away with pride from all departments of Christian work! away with pride towards our fellow-men! Let us follow in the footsteps of him who was meek and lowly in heart.

II. NAAMAN'S CURE. Observe *the simplicity of the cure.* "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." It was the very simplicity of the cure that was the stumbling-block to Naaman. So it is with the sinner still. The simplicity of the gospel offer prevents many a one from accepting it. The servants of Naaman expressed this weakness of the human heart when they said, "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?" The simple thing, strange though it may seem, is often the hardest to do. The great thing, the thing which costs most labour, in which there is most room for our own effort, is the thing which many find it easiest to do. This is one of the reasons why the heathen religions, and the Roman Catholic religion, have so strong a hold upon the human heart. Their religion is justification by works. They afford large scope for human exertions, for penances, for pilgrimages. There is scope for good works in Protestantism too, in true Christianity. "Be careful to maintain good works," says the apostle. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." But good works are the result, and not the cause, of our justification. We can never by any pilgrimages, by any penances, by any fastings, work out a salvation, a righteousness, for ourselves. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." Was it not a foolish thing for Naaman, a poor, miserable leper, with his life a burden to him, to be questioning the method of his cure? Is it not a foolish thing for any sinner, with death at every moment staring him in the face, and a dark and hopeless eternity yawning before him, to question God's plan of salvation? A man who is seized with a dangerous illness does not spend a whole day in discussing what

remedies the physician has ordered, but, if he has common sense, he uses the remedies at once. *Sinner, the cure for your disease is a simple one.* "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." *It is the only one.* "There is none other Name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved," except the Name of Jesus. Naaman, at last, persuaded by his servants' entreaty, believed the prophet's promise, and acted in obedience to his instructions. He went and washed in Jordan, and, as the prophet said, he was made whole. God promises to every sinner that if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you shall receive everlasting life. Did you ever know God's promise to fail? Why, then, should you hesitate, as a lost soul, to take the way of salvation provided for you through the mercy of God and the infinite love of Christ?

"There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

"The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away."

III. NAAMAN'S GRATITUDE. Naaman's marvellous cure made him a believer in the God of Israel. He returned to Elisha with gratitude in his heart. How different the spirit in which he now approaches the prophet! No longer proud and haughty, waiting at the door for Elisha to come out to him, he enters the prophet's house, and humbly stands before him. He shows a spirit of gratitude to God and to his prophet. He asks Elisha to give him a quantity of earth, that he may raise an altar unto the God of Israel, saying that he will henceforth sacrifice to no other god. You whom God has raised up again from beds of sickness—have you shown in any practical way your gratitude to him? *Do you ever count up your mercies* when you calculate how much you will subscribe to some religious object? If you did, there would not be much difficulty in clearing off church debts. We are, all of us, every day we live, dependent on God's mercy and bounty. In his hand our breath is. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." Many of us are saved sinners, redeemed through the precious blood of Christ. What have we done to show our thankfulness to God, who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light? Naaman, though a changed man and no longer an idolater, was still *wanting in decision.* He asked to be pardoned for bowing in the temple of the god Rimmon, when his master, the king, went in to worship there. Some have thought that Elisha's answer, "*Go in peace,*" gave permission to Naaman to go through this outward form of idolatry. But the prophet did not mean this at all. His words were but the Eastern form of saying "good-bye." He neither condemned nor approved Naaman's action. He left it as a matter for his own conscience. And so it must be in many things. We cannot lay down hard-and-fast lines for others. Beginners in the Christian life, especially, should be tenderly dealt with. But while we make every allowance for Naaman, who had spent all his life in heathenism, let us not imitate him in his want of decision. He owed allegiance to a higher King than to the King of Syria. In matters of conscience, let no man be our master but Christ. Let us never sacrifice principle for expediency, or obey the call of popularity rather than the call of duty. A far higher example is that of John Knox, who, when rebuked for his outspoken words before Queen Mary and her council, said, "I am in the place where I am demanded of conscience to speak the truth; and therefore the truth I speak, impugn it whoso list."—C. H. I.

Vers. 20—27.—*Elisha and Gehazi.* We shall, perhaps, derive most profit from the study of these two characters if we look at them together, as they are here set before us, in sharp and striking contrast.

I. CONTRAST THE COVETOUSNESS OF THE ONE WITH THE UNSELFISHNESS OF THE OTHER. 1. Look, first of all, at *Elisha's unselfishness.* It is a sublime picture. We hardly know which to admire most—*Elijah* as he stands forth alone in rugged grandeur to confront the prophets of Baal; or *Elisha,* as in quiet simplicity and sincere forgetfulness of self he stands there before Naaman, and gently puts away from him the

general's tempting gift. Of the two, I think Elisha's was the harder and therefore more heroic deed. Look at the temptations which he must have felt. The fame of him had spread into Syria, so much so that this haughty general, the foremost man in all Syria except its king, comes to him to be healed of his leprosy. The King of Syria himself sends a letter with his general. And now, when, at Elisha's bidding, Naaman has washed in Jordan, and become cured, was it not a strong temptation to the prophet to take glory and honour and reward for himself? Naaman wanted to give him rich remuneration. He presses it upon him. "Now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant." Listen to the answer: "As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none." Again Naaman urges him to take the gift, and once more and finally the prophet refuses. And why? Did he think there was any harm in taking a gift? Not at all. At other times he was quite content to be dependent on the bounty of others. St. Paul tells us that "even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." Elisha had no objection to the gift as such, and even if he did not want it for himself, he could have made good use of it. *Why, then, did he refuse it?* (1) In the first place, *he thought of the honour of his God.* Elisha knew well that it was not by *his* word or by *his* power that Naaman had been healed, but by the power of the living God. He wanted Naaman to think, not of the prophet, but of the prophet's God. So St. Peter acted when he and St. John had healed the lame man at the Beautiful gate of the temple. He said to the people, "Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" and then proceeded to point out to the people the benefit of faith in Christ. So it will be with every true servant of Christ. He will seek to point men to his Master, and not to himself. (2) Again, *he thought of the honour of his religion.* He doubtless felt that if he had taken Naaman's gift, Naaman might afterwards have said, "Well, these prophets of Israel, who call themselves followers of the true God, are no better than our own heathen priests. They follow their calling just for the money that it brings." Elisha knew that that was not true. He knew that he might lawfully take the gift, and yet be influenced by far higher motives, in the service of God. But he felt that, though all things are lawful, all things are not expedient. Oh that all God's people were equally solicitous about the honour of Christ's cause and kingdom! How careful we should be lest by our worldliness, our inconsistencies, our thoughtlessness, we bring reproach upon the religion we profess! (3) Further, *Elisha thought of the honour of his country.* Israel had, at that time, been defeated by Syria. Elisha felt that it would be an humiliating thing for him—a Hebrew—to take a gift from one of the conquering nation, and especially from him who had perhaps been the leading general in the war against the Jewish people. Evidently that was what he meant when he said to Gehazi afterwards, "Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?" The time of his country's disgrace and defeat was not a time for him to indulge in luxury and display. There is room for more Christian patriotism in the present day—a patriotism that shall rest the honour of its country on the industry, morality, and uprightness of its people, and that shall see in every departure from these virtues a cause of humiliation and shame. (4) Finally, *Elisha thought also of the good of Naaman.* He wanted not only to benefit his body, but his soul also. Therefore he avoided everything that might put a stumbling-block in his way. And we see how well he succeeded. Naaman, from what he had seen of Elisha, the prophet of the true God, and from what he had seen of God's power, resolved that he would never sacrifice to any other god but to the God of Israel. If we would benefit others, our own hearts must be right with God. There must be no doubt about our sincerity, no uncertainty about our motives. We see in all this how little Elisha thought of self. He had a great opportunity, and he used it well. He had a strong temptation presented to him, and he resisted it. It is a splendid instance of unselfishness, a splendid illustration of the power of Divine grace. 2. How different from all this *the covetousness, the selfishness, of Gehazi!* The honour of his God, the honour of his religion, the honour of his country, the good of Naaman—none of these things ever cost him a thought. In *his* mind self is the one all-absorbing, overmastering consideration. Even his master's honour is of little value in his eyes. Elisha had refused to take Naaman's gift, yet Gehazi runs after him, and says that his master has sent him to ask for

money and clothes, just as if he was so fickle as not to know his own mind, and so mean as now to send and beg that which but a little time before he had sturdily declined. Gehazi's greed for money had blunted all the finer feelings of his nature. No wonder that our Saviour said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness." No wonder that Paul said, "The love of money is a root of all evil." All kinds of sins result from the love of money. We have an illustration of it in Gehazi's case. We have illustrations of it every day. How often men grow rich, but do not grow better! Sometimes increasing wealth has the strange effect of *decreasing liberality*. Sometimes increasing wealth brings with it increase of pride. Sometimes increasing wealth has made men more worldly. Instead of seeking to serve Christ *more* with their increased opportunities and increased influence, *they serve him less*. Thank God if with increasing wealth he has given you increasing grace. Thank God if he has enabled you to *give* the more, the more you got. Thank God if with increasing wealth you have kept a cool head, a warm heart, a steady hand, a clear conscience, and the friends of your youth. To those who are beginning life we would earnestly say, *Beware of covetousness*. Don't imagine that to be rich is the be-all and end-all of life. There are some things which money cannot buy. There are some things which money cannot do. Money can't keep death away from the door. Money cannot purchase the pardon of sin, or obtain for a single soul admission into heaven. "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." But we are not therefore to despise money. Get all the money you can, provided you get it honestly, provided yon do not sacrifice your soul's interests because of it, and provided that, when you have it, you spend it well. Make a good use of your money in your lifetime. "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon which the unrighteous worship, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

II. CONTRAST THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE ONE WITH THE STRAIGHTFORWARD HONESTY OF THE OTHER. There was nothing two-faced about Elisha. He did not say one thing with his lips, and think the very opposite in his heart. When Jehoram, King of Israel, after his idolatry and his sins, got into difficulties at the time that he and the other two kings went forth against the King of Moab, he then sent for Elisha. But Elisha does not meet him in any fawning, flattering spirit. He at once rebukes him for his sins. He says, "What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother." In the same way he treats Naaman as one whose pride needs to be humbled. Though he might have offended Naaman by refusing to take his gift, he plainly tells him, "As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none." What a contrast to this blunt, straightforward honesty is the two-faced deceitfulness of Gehazi! Observe how one sin brings another with it. He first of all *coveted the money and the raiment*, when he heard Elisha refuse Naaman's present. Then *covetousness leads to deception and lying*. He ran after Naaman's chariot, and invented a false story that some young men had come to Elisha, and that he wanted money and clothing for them. His guilt was doubly great, because he was Elisha's trusted servant or steward, and because he probably had other servants under him. And then he lies, not only to Naaman, but to his master, when he says, "Thy servant went no whither." Oh, the baseness, the wickedness, of deceit! And yet how much of it is practised in the world! *How much of it in the social relationships of life!* What sham friendships! What hollow civilities! Whited sepulchres and social shams! How much of it *in the commercial* world! What barefaced adulteration! What cheating of customers! What false statements—known to be false—about the value of goods! Sometimes there are revelations—great failures, gross frauds. But what an immense amount of deceit goes on that is never heard of! Many deceive or act dishonestly just up to the limit of detection, just as if God's eye was not on them all the time. To say, "Every one does it," as an excuse for deceit or dishonesty in a business, is no reason why a Christian man should do it, why any man should do it. God's eye sees. His command is clear, "Thou shalt not steal." Thou shalt not put forth thine hand to take what is not thine own. The man who robs his customers, the man who plunders or purloins from his employers, even though he may be respectable in the eyes of the world, is as much a thief in the sight of God, and perhaps far more guilty, than the poor boy who steals a loaf in his hunger and want. Deceit and dishonesty never can bring a blessing. "Be sure your sin will find you out." We have many

instances in history of the fearful consequences of even a single act of deceit. The one great stain upon the memory of Lord Clive, the hero of Plassey, and one of the greatest men who ever administered British rule in India, is his single act of deception practised on an Indian prince. The words which Lord Macaulay has written on this subject are so important and so true, that they are well worth repeating: "Clive's breach of faith," he says, "was not merely a crime, but a blunder. We don't know whether it be possible to mention a state which has on the whole been a gainer by a breach of public faith. The entire history of British India is an illustration of this great truth, that it is not prudent to oppose perfidy to perfidy—*that the most efficient weapon with which men can encounter falsehood is truth.* During a long series of years, the English rulers of India, surrounded by allies and enemies whom no engagement could bind, have generally acted with sincerity and uprightness, and the event has proved that sincerity and uprightness are wisdom. *English valour and English intelligence have done less to extend and preserve our Oriental empire than English veracity.* All that we could have gained by imitating the doublings, the evasions, the fictions, the perjuries, which have been employed against us, is as nothing compared with what we have gained by being *the one power in India on whose word reliance can be placed.*" Covetousness and deceit are injurious to personal happiness, to the order and peace of society, and to the welfare and prosperity of the nation. It is the gospel of Christ that alone has proved itself capable of grappling with these evils, and banishing these vices from the human heart. It teaches us not to think of self merely, but of others also. It teaches us to "put away lying, and to speak every man truth with his neighbour." To spread the gospel of Christ is the best way to promote social and commercial morality, to promote confidence between man and man, and to hasten the coming of that time when there shall be peace on earth and good will to men. Let the love of Jesus fill your heart, and flow out into your life, and then you will not intentionally do a wrong to any one, in thought, in word, or in deed.—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—27.—*History of Naaman's disease and cure, illustrative of certain forces in the life of man.* "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the King of Syria, was a great man with his master," etc. Naaman, in a worldly point of view, was a great man—one of the magnates of his age. But he was the victim of a terrible disease. "He was a leper." Leprosy was a terrible disease—*hereditary, painful, contagious, loathsome,* and *fatal.* In all these respects it resembled sin. Naaman's disease and his cure, as here sketched, manifest certain *forces* which have ever been and still are at work in society, and which play no feeble part in the formation of character and the regulation of destiny. Notice—

I. The force of WORLDLY POSITION. Why all the interest displayed in his own country, and in Israel, concerning Naaman's disease? The first verse of this chapter explains it. "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the King of Syria, was a great man." Perhaps there were many men in his own district who were suffering from leprosy, yet little interest was felt in them. They would groan under their sufferings, and die unsympathized with and unhelped. But because this man's worldly position was high, kings worked, prophets were engaged, nations were excited, for his cure. It has ever been a sad fact in human history that men magnify both the trials and the virtues of grandees, and think but little of the griefs and graces of the lowly. If a man in high position is under trial, it is always "a great trial," of which people talk, and which the press will record. If he does a good work, it is always "a great work," and is trumpeted half the world over. This fact indicates: 1. The *lack of intelligence* in popular sympathy. Reason teaches that the calamities of the wealthy have many mitigating circumstances, and therefore the greater sympathy should be toward the poor. 2. The *lack of manliness* in popular sympathy. There is a fawning servility, most dishonourable to human nature, in showing more sympathy with the rich than with the poor in suffering.

II. The force of INDIVIDUAL INFLUENCE. "And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the

land of Israel." This little girl, who had been torn from her native country, and carried into the land of strangers by the ruthless hand of war, told her mistress of a prophet in Israel who had the power to heal lepers. This led the King of Syria to persuade Naaman to visit Judæa, and to give the leprous captain an introduction to the king, who, in his turn, introduced him to the prophet, who effected his healing. The influence of this little slave-girl should teach us three things. 1. The *magnanimity of young natures.* Though she was an exile in the land of her oppressors, instead of having that revenge which would have led her to rejoice in the sufferings of her captors, her young heart yearned with sympathy for one of the ruthless conquerors. A poor child, a humble servant, a despised slave, may have a royal soul. 2. *The power of the humblest individual.* This poor girl, with her simple intelligence, moved her mistress; her mistress, the mighty warrior; then Syria's king was moved; by him the King of Israel is interested; and then the prophet of the Lord. Thus the little maid may have been said to have stirred kingdoms. No one, not even a child, "liveth to himself." Each is a fountain of influence. 3. The *dependence of the great upon the small.* The recovery of this warrior resulted from the word of this captive maid. Some persons admit the hand of God only in what they call great events! But what are the great events? "Great" and "small" are but relative terms. And even what we call "small" often sways and shapes the "great." One spark of fire may burn down all London.

III. The force of SELF-PRESERVATION. "And the King of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the King of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. And he brought the letter to the King of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." It would seem that Naaman at once consulted Benhadad, King of Syria, on the subject suggested by the captive maid, and, having obtained an introduction to the King of Israel, hurried off, taking with him "ten talents of silver," etc.—great wealth—which he was prepared to sacrifice in the recovery of his health. The instinct of self-preservation is one of the strongest in human nature. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Men will spend fortunes and traverse continents in order to rid themselves of disease, and prolong life. This strenuous effort for recovery from disease reminds us of: 1. The *value of physical health.* This man had lost it, and what was the world to him without it? Bishop Hall truly says of him, "The basest slave in Syria would not change skins with him." Health—this precious blessing—is so lavishly given, that men seldom appreciate it till it is lost. 2. The *neglect of spiritual health.* This man was evidently morally diseased—that is, he neither knew of the true God nor had sympathy with him. He was a moral invalid. A worse disease than leprosy infected his manhood and threatened the ruin of his being. Yet there is no struggling here after spiritual recovery. This is a general evil.

IV. The force of CASTE FEELING. "And the King of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the King of Israel." Why did the King of Syria send Naaman with the letter to the monarch of Israel? Was it because he was given to understand that the king would work the cure? No; for mention was made by the captive girl of no one who could effect the cure but "the prophet that is in Samaria." Or was it because he thought that Israel's monarch would discover the prophet, and influence him on behalf of the afflicted officer? No; for in his royal letter he says, "Behold, I have . . . sent Naaman my servant to thee, that *thou* mayest recover him of his leprosy." Why, then? Simply because of caste feeling. He, forsooth, was too great to know a prophet—too great to correspond with any one but a king. What was a prophet, though full of Divine intelligence, and nerved with Divine energy, compared even to a soulless man if a crown encircled his brow? 1. Caste feeling *sinks the real in the adventitious.* The man who is ruled by it so exaggerates external things as to lose sight of those elements of moral character which constitute the dignity and determine the destiny of man. He lives in bubbles. 2. Caste feeling *curtails the region of human sympathies.* He who is controlled by this feeling has the circle of his sympathies limited not only to what is outward in man, but to what is outward in those only in his own sphere. All outlying his grade and class are nothing to him. 3. Caste feeling is *antagonistic to the gospel.* Christ came to destroy that middle wall of partition that divides men into

classes. The gospel overtops all adventitious distinctions, and directs its doctrines and offers its provisions to man as man.

V. The force of GUILTY SUSPICION. "And it came to pass, when the King of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me." The construction that the monarch put upon the message of his royal brother was, instead of being true and liberal, false and ungenerous. He ascribed evil motives where there were none, and saw malignant intentions where there was nothing but a good-natured purpose. All this springs from that *suspicion* which is a prevalent and disastrous evil in the social life of this world. Where this suspicion exists, one of the two, if not the two, following things are always found. 1. *A knowledge of the depravity of society.* The suspicious man has frequently learnt, either from observation, testimony, or experience, or from all these together, that there is such an amount of falsehood and dishonesty in society as will lead one man to take an undue advantage of another. However, whether he has learnt this or not, it is a lamentable fact, patent to all observant eyes. 2. *The existence of evil in himself.* The suspicious man knows that he is selfish, false, dishonest, unchaste, and he believes that all men are the same. If he were not evil, he would not be suspicious of others, even though he knew that all about him were bad. An innocent being, I trow, would move amongst a corrupt age without any suspicion whatever. Being destitute of all bad motives himself, he would not be able to understand the corrupt motives of others. On the other hand, were society ever so holy, a bad man would still be suspecting all. An unchaste, selfish, fraudulent man would suspect the purity, the benevolence, and the integrity of angels, if he lived amongst them. The greatest rogues are always the most suspicious; the most lustful husbands are always the most jealous of their wives, and the reverse. Well has our great dramatist said, "Suspicion haunts the guilty soul." A miserable thing truly is this suspicion. Heaven deliver us from suspicious people! Suspicion is the poison of all true friendship; it is that which makes kings tyrants, merchants exactors, masters rigorous, and the base-natured of both sexes diseased with a jealousy that shatters connubial confidence, and quenches all the lights of connubial life.

VI. The force of REMEDIAL GOODNESS. Though the king could not cure, there was a *remedial* power in Israel equal to this emergency. That power Infinite Goodness delegated to Elisha. God makes man the organ of his restorative powers. It was so now with Elisha. It was pre-eminently so with Christ. It was so with the apostles. The redemptive treasure is in "earthly vessels." The passage suggests several points concerning this remedial power. 1. It *transcends natural power.* "When Elisha the man of God," etc. The monarch felt his utter insufficiency to effect the cure. Natural science knew nothing of means to heal the leper. Supernatural revelation reveals the remedy through Elisha. Herein is an illustration of Christianity. No natural science can cure the leprosy of sin; it tried for ages, but failed. 2. It *offends human pride.* "So Naaman came with his horses," etc. Naaman came in all the pomp of wealth and station to the prophet's door, expecting, no doubt, that Elisha would hurry out to do him honour. But a true man is never moved by glitter. He did not even go out to meet the illustrious visitor, but sent a messenger to bid him go to the Jordan, and there wash. But both the unbending independency of the prophet, and the simple method he prescribed, so galled the proud heart of the Syrian warrior, that he "was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me," etc. Herein is an illustration of Christianity. It strikes at the root of pride, and requires us to become as "little children." 3. It *clashes with popular prejudices.* "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?" It is common for men to regard that which belongs to themselves and to their country as the "better"—*our* children, *our* family, *our* sect, *our* class, *our* nation, are "better." This man's prejudice said, "Abana and Pharpar;" the prophet said, "Jordan;" and this offended him. "And he went away in a rage." Herein, again, is an illustration of Christianity. Human prejudices prescribe this river and that river for cleansing, but the gospel says, "Jordan." 4. It *works by simple means.* "And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then

when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" The means to Naaman seemed to be too simple to answer the end he sought. Had there been some severe regimen, or some painful operation, or some costly expenditure, he would have accepted it more readily; but "to wash," seemed too simple. The means of spiritual recovery are very simple. But men desire them otherwise. Hence vain ceremonies, pilgrimages, penances, prolonged fastings, and the like. "Believe, . . . and thou shalt be saved," says God; man wants to do something more. 5. It *demands individual effort.* "Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan according to the saying of the man of God." Naaman had to go down *himself* to the river, and to dip *himself* seven times in its waters. His restoration depended upon his individual effort. And so it is in spiritual matters. Each man must believe, repent, and pray, for himself. There is no substitution. 6. It is *completely efficacious.* "His flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child." The means employed for this leper's cure fully answered the end. Every vestige of the disease was gone, and he was restored to more than the vigour of his former manhood. Herein once more, "Believe, . . . and thou shalt be saved."

VII. The force OF A NEW CONVICTION. "And he returned to the man of God," etc. Observe: 1. The *subject of* this new conviction. What was the subject? That the God of Israel was the *only* God. This new conviction reversed his old prejudices and the religious creed of his country. It was not reasoning, it was not teaching; *experience* had wrought this conviction into his soul. He *felt* that it was God's hand that healed him. 2. The *developments* of this new conviction. A conviction like this must prove influential in some way or other. Abstract ideas may lie dormant in the mind, but convictions are ever operative. What did it do in Naaman? (1) It evoked gratitude. Standing with all his company before the prophet, he avowed his gratitude. "Now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant." Just before his cure he had anything but kindly feelings towards the prophet. He was full of "rage." New convictions about God will generate new feelings toward man. (2) It annihilated an old prejudice. Just before his cure he despised Israel. Jordan was contemptible as compared with the rivers of Damascus. But now the very ground seems holy. He asks of the prophet liberty to take away a portion of the earth. "Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth?" A new conviction about God widens the soul's sympathies, raises it above all those nationalities of heart that characterize little souls. (3) It inspired worship. "Thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice . . . but unto the Lord." His whole nature was so flooded with gratitude to God who had healed him, that his soul went forth in holy worship. Through the force of this new conviction, he felt as St. Paul did when he said, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss."

VIII. The force of ASSOCIATES. Naaman had been in the habit of worshipping "in the house of Rimmon," with his master the king. This, probably, he had done for years with other officers of the state. The influence of this he now felt counteracting the new conviction of duty. He felt that, whilst it would be wrong for him to go there any more, yet he could not but go. "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant," etc. Loyalty and gratitude towards the king contributed much to prevent him renouncing all connection with the house of Rimmon. How often do our associations prevent us from the full carrying out of our convictions! It ought not to be so. "He that loveth father or mother," etc. It is somewhat remarkable that the Prophet Elisha, instead of exhorting Naaman to avoid every appearance of idolatry, said to him, "Go in peace." The prophet, perhaps, had faith in the power of Naaman's conviction to guard him from any moral mischief.

IX. The force of SORDID AVARICE. Gehazi is the illustration of this. In his case we have: 1. *Avarice eager in its pursuits.* "But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha," etc. He saw, as he thought, a fine opportunity for his greed, and he eagerly seized it. "I will *run* after him." Avarice is one of the most hungry passions of the soul. It is never satisfied. Had the avaricious man, like the fabled Briareus, a hundred hands, he would employ them all in ministering to himself—Dryden calls it

"A cursed hunger of pernicious gold."

It is that passion that makes all men like Gehazi "*run.*" Men are everywhere out of

breath in their race for wealth. 2. *This avarice is in one associated with the most generous of men.* He was the servant of Elisha, who, when Naaman offered some acknowledgment of his gratitude to him, exclaimed, in the most solemn way, "As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none." One would have thought that association with a generous soul like this would have banished every base sentiment from Gehazi's heart. But when it once roots itself in the soul, it is the most inveterate of lusts. The history of modern enterprises shows us numerous examples of men who, from early life, have been in association with ministers, churches, religious institutions, and in some cases have themselves been deacons, chairmen of religious societies, and the like, whose avarice has so grown, in spite of all those influences, as to make them swindlers on a gigantic scale. 3. *This avarice sought its end by means of falsehood.* "My master hath sent me," etc. This was a flagrant falsehood. Avarice is always false. Its trades are full of tricks; its shops of sophistries. All its enterprises employ the tongue of falsehood and the hand of deceit.

X. The force of DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE. There is justice on this earth as well as remedial goodness, and Heaven often makes men the organ as well as the subject of both. Elisha, who had the remedial power, had also the retributive. Here we see retributive justice: 1. *Detecting* the wrong-doer. "And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" etc. Justice has the eyes of Argus; has more than the eyes of Argus—it sees in the dark. It penetrates through all fallacies. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro, beholding the evil and the good." 2. *Reproving* the wrong-doer. "Is it a time to receive money," etc.? An old expositor has quaintly put it, "Couldest thou find no better way of getting money than by belying thy master, and laying a stumbling-block before a young convert?" His avarice was a thing bad in itself, and bad also in seizing an opportunity which should have been employed for other and higher ends. 3. *Punishing* the wrong-doer. "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee," etc. He had money of the leper, but he had his disease too. In getting what he considered a blessing, he got a curse as well. Wealth avariciously gotten never fails to bring a curse in some form or other. If it does not bring leprosy to the body, it brings what is infinitely worse, the most deadly leprosy into the soul, and often entails injuries on posterity.—D. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*The story of Naaman:* 1. *The disinterested maiden.* The story of the great Syrian captain, who was healed of his leprosy and brought to the knowledge of the true God through the instrumentality of a captive Hebrew maid directing him to Elisha, is one of the most beautiful, as it is one of the richest in gospel suggestion, of the narratives of the Old Testament. Our Lord refers to it in his discourse at Nazareth, as showing that it is not always the direct possessors of privileges who know best how to take advantage of them. "Many lepers were in Israel," etc. (Luke iv. 27).

I. THE GREAT MAN'S LEPROSY. The story opens by introducing us to Naaman, the captain of the host of the King of Syria. 1. *So much, and yet a cross.* On this distinguished man Fortune seemed to have lavished her utmost favours. He was (1) high in rank, "captain of the host;" (2) great in honour, "a great man with his master;" (3) successful in war, "honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria;" (4) distinguished for personal bravery, "a mighty man of valour." The expression quoted above, "The *Lord* had given deliverance," etc., shows how far the Hebrews were from regarding Jehovah as a merely national Deity. His providence extended to other nations as well. It was he, not Rimmon, who had given Syria her victories. Naaman had thus wealth, honour, the favour of his sovereign, the admiration of the people—everything that men commonly covet. Yet (5) "he was a leper." This spoiled all. It was the cross in his lot; the drop of gall in his cup; the worm at the root of his prosperity. It made him such that, as has been said, the humblest soldier in his ranks would not have exchanged places with him. Few lives, even those which seem most enviable, are without their cross. The lady of Shunem has wealth, comforts, a loving husband; but she is childless. It does not take much sometimes to dash our earthly happiness, to take the golden light out of life. Because it is so, we should seek our happiness in things that are enduring. "He builds too low who builds beneath the skies." 2. *The cross a mercy in disguise.* As it proved, this grief of Naaman's became his salvation. It brought him under the notice of the little

Hebrew maid, led to his visit to Elisha, ended in his cure and his conversion to the faith of the God of Israel. He was one who could say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Ps. cxix. 71). How often are seeming crosses and trials thus overruled for good! "Men see not the bright light which is in the clouds: but the wind passeth, and cleanseth them" (Job xxxvii. 21). The evangelical application of the story is aided by the fact that leprosy is so impressive a type of sin—insidious, progressive, corrupting, fatal.

II. THE SLAVE-GIRL'S ADVICE. It was God's design to show mercy to Naaman, for his own glory, as well as for a testimony that the Gentiles were not outside the scope of his grace. The instrument in accomplishing that design was a little Hebrew maid. 1. *Her presence in Naaman's house.* She had been taken in a marauding expedition, and brought to Syria as a captive. Sold, perhaps, like Joseph, in the slave-market, she had been purchased as an attendant for Naaman's wife. Her presence in the great captain's household was thus: (1) providential, even as was Joseph's residence in the house of Potiphar; (2) sad, for she was torn from her own land and friends, and the thought of their sorrow at her loss would add to hers; yet (3) designed for blessing. It not only gave her the opportunity of doing good to her master, but no doubt ultimately turned to her own great advantage. Another example of how the things which seem all "against us" (Gen. xlii. 36) are often for our good (comp. Gen. l. 20). 2. *Her helpful suggestion.* Slave though she was, the little maid was in possession of a secret which the great Naaman did not know, and which was worth "thousands of gold and silver" (Ps. cxix. 72) to him. She dropped a hint to her mistress, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!" etc. Her suggestion was indicative of: (1) Pity. Though a slave, her heart was tender, even towards her master. She was grieved for his affliction. She yearned to see him recovered. Her "would God!" is almost a prayer for his recovery. (2) Fidelity. It is told of Joseph that he was faithful as a servant in the house of his master the Egyptian (Gen. xxxix. 2—6). This little maid, though a "servant under the yoke" (1 Tim. vi. 1), yet "counted her master worthy of all honour" (1 Tim. vi. 1). She served, "not with eye-service, as men-pleasers," but "in singleness of heart," "with good will doing service" (Eph. vi. 5—7), though her lord was an alien, and might seem to have little claim upon her gratitude. As a good servant should, she desired his prosperity in mind, body, and estate. In this was shown (3) her disinterestedness. In her position it need not have been wondered at if she had secretly rejoiced at her master's affliction. But her heart cherished no resentment. Anticipating the gospel, she sought to return good for evil (Matt. v. 44). We learn from this part of the story (1) that even the humblest may be of essential service to those above them. Most of all is this the case when they possess the knowledge of the true God. A hint dropped may guide the spiritual leper to the fountain of healing. (2) The young, too, should take encouragement. In their several stations they may be greatly used for good. (3) We should do to others the utmost good we can, even though they are our enemies.

III. THE ARROGANT KING'S EPISTLE. The news of what the little maid had said soon spread abroad, and came first to the ears of Naaman, then to the ears of the King of Syria (Benhadad?). 1. *The King of Syria's epistle.* The monarch valued his general, and was ready to take any steps to further his cure. Accordingly, he indited a letter, and sent Naaman with it, with much pomp and state, to the King of Israel (Jehoram?). He sends: (1) With the arrogance of a victor. The tone of his communication to the monarch at Samaria was unmistakably of the nature of command. It haughtily announces that he has sent Naaman to him, and requires that he shall recover him from his disease. There lurks in the letter a reminder of the defeat at Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kings xxii.). (2) With the ignorance of a heathen. He writes to the rival ruler as if it lay in *his* power to kill and to make alive. He probably thought that the king had only to command, to compel Elisha to serve him in any way he pleased. Hence, without mentioning Elisha, he lays the whole responsibility of seeing that his captain is cured on the shoulders of Jehoram. He has the notion—common enough to monarchs—that kings should be supreme in religion as in everything else. He thinks that God's prophets must take their commands from whoever chances to occupy the throne. (3) With the munificence of a sovereign. If there was haughtiness in the tone of his letter, he did not at least send his officer without abundant rewards. He

bore with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of raiment. These enormous sums were, no doubt, thought certain to purchase the cure. Another heathenish idea, akin to the modern notion that anything can be bought with money. Elisha taught him differently when the cure was accomplished (ver. 16). Simon Magus would have bought even the power to communicate the Holy Ghost with gold (Acts viii. 18, 19). There are blessings which are beyond the reach of money, and yet can be had "without money and without price" (Isa. lv. 1). 2. *The King of Israel's distress.* When the King of Israel read the communication, he was both indignant and distressed. As he viewed the letter, it was: (1) A request for the impossible. "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" This was, at any rate, a frank acknowledgment of his own helplessness. It sets in a stronger light the Divine character of the cure by Elisha. (2) An attempt to force upon him a quarrel. His interpretation of the letter was not unnatural. Yet it was mistaken. We do well to be careful in forming judgments and imputing motives. (3) An attack upon his weakness. It was this that distressed him so much. He did not feel able to make war against the King of Syria, and therefore he resented the more keenly this attempt (as he conceived it) to drive him into a corner.—J. O.

Vers. 8—19.—*The story of Naaman: 2. The suggestive cure.* The cure which Naaman came to seek was, nevertheless, obtained by him. We have here—

I. THE INTERPOSITION OF ELISHA. Naaman was on the point of being sent away, when Elisha interposed. God's prophet vindicates God's honour. 1. *Elisha sends to the king.* "He sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes?" etc. His words were: (1) A rebuke of faithlessness. The king was not God, to kill and to make alive; but was there not a God in Israel who could? Had he already received no proofs of this God's power? Wherefore, then, had he rent his clothes? How much of our despondency, fear, despair, arises from want of faith in a living God! (2) An invitation to seek help in the right quarter. "Let him come now to me." The proof that there was a prophet, and behind the prophet a living, wonder-working God, in Israel, would be seen in deeds. Why does the sinner rend his clothes, and despair of help? Is Christ not able to save? Does he not invite him to come? 2. *Naaman comes to Elisha.* (1) He seeks cleansing. (2) Yet with unhumbled heart. His horses and chariot drive up to Elisha's door. The great man has no thought of descending to ask the prophet's blessing. He waits till he comes out to him. He is the man of rank and wealth, whom Elisha should feel honoured in serving. But Elisha does not come out. Not in this spirit are cures obtained at the hand of God. Naaman must be taught that gold, silver, horses, chariots, rank, avail nothing here. To be saved the highest must become as the humblest. Pride must be expelled (Phil. iii. 7, 8).

II. THE MODE OF CURE. 1. *Elisha's direction.* Instead of himself appearing, Elisha sent a messenger to Naaman, directing him to wash seven times in Jordan, and he would be clean. The means of cure was: (1) Simplicity itself. Nothing could be simpler or more easy than to bathe seven times in Jordan. Any leper might be glad to purchase cleansing by plunging in a river. God's way of salvation by Christ is characteristically simple. It involves no toilsome pilgrimages, no laborious works, no protracted ceremonies. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts xvi. 31). (2) Symbolical. Jordan was the sacred stream of Israel; bathing was the Levitical mode of the purification of a leper (Lev. xiv. 8, 9); seven was the sacred number. Leprosy, as the type of sin, was fitly cleansed by these purificatory rites. That which answers to the bathing in the spiritual sphere is "the washing of regeneration, and of renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus iii. 5). (3) In its very simplicity, fitted to humble the proud heart. As we are immediately to see, it humbled Naaman. It did not strike him as a sufficiently great thing to do. Thus many are offended by the very simplicity of the gospel. It seems treating them too much like children to ask them simply to believe in the crucified and risen Saviour. Their intellectual eminence, their social greatness, their pride of character, are insulted by the proposal to efface themselves at the foot of the cross. 2. *Naaman's anger.* "Naaman was wroth, and went away." The causes of his anger were: (1) His expectations were disappointed. He thought the prophet would have shown him more respect; would have employed impressive words and gestures; would have given the cure more *éclat*. Instead of this,

there was the simple command to wash in Jordan. What a down-come from the imposing ceremonial he expected! Men have their preconceived ideas about religion, about salvation, about the methods of spiritual cure, which they oppose to God's ways. They say with Naaman, "Behold, I thought, He will surely" do this or that. The Jews rejected their Messiah because he was "as a root out of a dry ground" (Isa. liii. 2); they rejected Christianity because its spiritual, unceremonial worship did not accord with their sensuous ideas. Others reject the gospel because it does not accord with the spirit of the age, is not sufficiently intellectual, philosophical, or æsthetical. God reminds us, "My thoughts are not your thoughts," etc. (Isa. lv. 8). (2) He was required to submit to what seemed to him a humiliation. He was told to bathe in the waters of Jordan, a stream of Israel, when there were rivers as good, nay, better, in his own country, to which, if bathing was essential, he might have been sent. "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus," etc.? It seemed like a studied slight put upon his native rivers, an intentional humiliation put upon himself, to require him to go and bathe in this local stream. How often does wounded pride rebel at the simple provisions of the gospel, because they involve nothing that is our own, that reflects glory on self, or allows glory to self! This is the very purpose of the gospel. "Where is boasting, then? It is excluded" (Rom. iii. 27). Things are as they are, "that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. i. 29). When Christ's atonement is extolled, the cry is, "Have we not rivers, Abanas and Pharpars, of our own?" "Naaman came with his mind all made up as to *how* he was to be healed, and he turned away in anger and disgust from the course which the prophet prescribed. He was a type of the rationalist, whose philosophy provides him with *à priori* dogmas, by which he measures everything which is proposed to his faith. He turns away in contempt where faith would heal him" (Sumner). 3. *Naaman's obedience.* Thus a second time the blessing was nearly missed—this time through his own folly and obstinacy. But, fortunately, a remonstrance was addressed to him, and he proved amenable to reason. (1) The remonstrance of his servants. They, looking at things through a calmer medium, and with less of personal pique, saw the situation with clearer eyes. They addressed him soothingly and affectionately. They touched the core of the matter when they said, "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?" It was Naaman's *pride* that had been offended. But they pointed out to him, in very plain terms, the folly of his conduct. Was it not a cure he wanted? And if it was, then, surely, the simpler the means prescribed the better. Why quarrel with the conditions of cure because they were so simple? The same reasoning may be applied to the gospel. It is the simplicity of its arrangements which is the beauty of it. If men really wish to be saved, why quarrel with this simplicity? Surely the simpler the better. Would men not be willing to do "some great thing" to obtain peace with God, pardon of sin, renewal and purity of heart? How much more, then, when it is said, "Wash, and be clean"? (2) The washing in Jordan. Naaman's ire had cooled. He felt the force of what his servants urged. He might prefer Abana and Pharpar, if he liked; but it was Jordan the prophet had named. If he did not choose to submit to bathe in this river, he must go without the cure altogether. "Neither was there salvation" (Acts iv. 12) in any other river than this one. This decided him. He went down without further parley, bathed seven times in Jordan as directed, and, marvel of marvels, "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." So speedy, sure, and complete was the reward of his obedience. As effectual to procure salvation and spiritual healing is the look of faith to Jesus, the appropriation of the merit of his blood, the spiritual baptism of the Holy Ghost.

III. NAAMAN'S GRATITUDE AND PIETY. What joy now filled the heart of the newly cleansed Naaman! How clearly he saw his former folly! How glad he was that he had not allowed his anger to prevail against the advice of his servants and his own better reason! At once he returned to Elisha; and it was very evident that his heart was overflowing with gratitude, and that he was a changed man. Like the leper in the Gospel, he returned "to give glory to God" (Luke xvii. 17, 18). Gratitude is most becoming in those who have received great mercies from God. Salvation awakens joy; gratitude prompts to consecration—not in order to salvation, but as the result of it, man becomes "a new creature" (2 Cor. v. 17). We observe: 1. *His acknowledgment*

of God. "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." This is not a comparative statement, but an absolute one. Naaman is convinced that the gods of the heathen are nullities, and that the God of Israel is the only true God. He was brought to this acknowledgment through the great miracle God had wrought upon him. It is God's mighty acts in and for men which give the best evidence of his existence. 2. *His offer of reward.* It was no longer the heathenish notion of purchase, but a pure motive of gratitude, which led Naaman to press the wealth he had brought upon Elisha. The prophet, however, had no desire for his goods. With an emphatic asseveration, he declared that he would accept nothing. (1) He must keep his act free from the possibility of misconception. (2) A miracle of God must not be vulgarized by being made the occasion of money presents. (3) Naaman's instruction must be completed by teaching him that money gifts do not pay for spiritual blessings. Yet Naaman's motive was a right one. It is right also that, from the motive of gratitude, we should consecrate our wealth to the Lord's service. 3. *His determination to worship.* If he cannot persuade Elisha to accept gifts, he himself will become a suppliant, and ask a favour from the prophet. He entreats that he may be permitted to take with him two mules' burden of earth of the Holy Land, that he may form an altar for the worship of Jehovah; for he is resolved henceforth to worship him only. This was granted. His altar would connect his sacrifices with the land which God had chosen as the place of his special habitation. Real religion will express itself in acts of worship. It will not content itself with cold recognition of God. It will build its altars to Jehovah, in the home, in the closet, in the church, and in the chief places of concourse. 4. *His religious scruple.* One point alone troubled him. In attending his royal master, it would be his duty to wait on him in his state visits to the temple of Rimmon, and, as his master leaned on his hand in bending before that idol, he would be under the necessity of seeming to bend before it, and yield it obeisance also. He asked that the Lord might pardon him in this thing. Elisha bade him go in peace. (1) His act was not really worship, nor did he mean it to pass for such either before the king or the other worshippers. (2) "An idol is nothing," and, if he understood that clearly, his conscience would not be "defiled" (1 Cor. viii. 4—7). There is need for great care, even in outward acts, lest they expose the doer to misconception, or hurt the consciences of others. Life, however, is woven of intricate threads, and it is impossible but that in public, social, and official positions the Christian will sometimes find himself in situations of all the concomitants of which he can by no means approve. It will not do to say of these that it is his duty at all hazards to come out of them; for it is frequently through his duty that he is brought into them, and to escape them entirely he would require to "go out of the world" (1 Cor. v. 10). If active participation in anything sinful is sought to be forced on him—as if Naaman were required actually to bow the knee in worship to Rimmon—then he must refuse (Dan. iii.).—J. O.

Vers. 20—27.—*The story of Naaman: 3. Gehazi's falsehood.* In Elisha's company we might have expected only honour, integrity, truthfulness. But the society of the good will not of itself make another good. Hypocrisy can cover a foul interior. A fair outward seeming can cloke a heart ruled by very evil principles. In the first apostolic band there was a Judas. In Elisha's service there was a Gehazi. The sin of both was covetousness. The offspring of covetousness in Gehazi's case was hypocrisy and falsehood.

I. COVETOUSNESS PROMPTING FALSEHOOD. 1. *His reproach of his master.* When Naaman was gone, Gehazi indulged in reflections on his master's conduct. It did not at all commend itself to him. "Behold, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought," etc. Such generosity seemed absurd. It was a chance missed which might never come again. Fantastic scruples were all very well, but when they led to the loss of a fortune, they were greatly to be reprobated. What scruple need there have been in any case about spoiling a foreigner? Covetousness generally sees only the money consideration. When great gain is at stake, the man is held to be a fool who allows religious or sentimental considerations, or even ordinary moral scruples, to stand in the way. 2. *His covetous determination.* If his master has acted foolishly, he will not imitate his example. It is not yet too late, with a little art, to repair the damage. He will hurry after the Syrian, and obtain

something from him. "As the Lord liveth"—mark the profane mixing up of religion and impiety—"I will run after him, and take somewhat of him." Morality goes down before the greed of gain. 3. *His unblushing falsehood.* (1) Naaman beheld Gehazi running after him, and was delighted to think that he might, after all, have the opportunity of serving Elisha. He alights from his chariot—a different man now than when his stately equipage "stood" at Elisha's door—and asks eagerly, "Is all well?" (2) Gehazi, in reply, tells him an unblushingly invented falsehood. There had come two young men of the sons of the prophets from Mount Ephraim, and Elisha had sent to entreat for them a talent of silver and two changes of raiment. The finish of this style of falsehood, and Gehazi's subsequent hypocrisy, speak to considerable practice in the art of deceit. Such ready audacity, so great perfection in the arts of lying and concealment, are not attained at the first attempt. No man becomes a rogue quite suddenly. Elisha was probably no more deceived in the character of Gehazi than Jesus was in the character of Judas, who was secretly "a thief," and "had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John xii. 6).

II. GRATITUDE DICTATING LIBERALITY. The willing response made by Naaman to what he took to be Elisha's request is the bright side of this otherwise discreditable incident. 1. He doubled what was asked. "Be content, take two talents." He was glad to get an opening for forcing some acknowledgment of his gratitude on Elisha. 2. He sent two of his servants back with the sacks of silver and the raiment. What he did, he did handsomely. He gave every token he could of his desire to oblige Elisha. 3. Gehazi relieved the servants when they came near the house, and had the treasure smuggled into the house, and safely hid. This was the part of the business in which there lay some risk of detection; but it was securely managed, and Gehazi no doubt breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the valuables carefully stowed away. His treasure was as safely concealed as Achan's wedge of gold, and two hundred shekels of silver, and goodly Babylonish garment (Josh. vii. 21). But it was to prove as great a curse. Meanwhile, light in conscience, glad in heart, and pleased at having been permitted to bestow even this small gift (comparatively) on Elisha, Naaman sped on his way home. He probably never knew how he had been deceived.

III. JUSTICE DECREEING PENALTY. Gehazi's act, however, skilfully concealed as it was from human view, was not to remain unpunished. God knew it. Gehazi had forgotten this. God is the one factor which the wicked leave out of their calculations, and he is the most important of all. David was careful to conceal his crime with Bathsheba; but it is written, "The thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (2 Sam. xi. 27). 1. *Gehazi's hypocrisy.* He went calmly in, and stood before his master, as if nothing had happened. There is, as above stated, a perfection in this villainy which shows that it was not a first offence. But there comes a point when men's sins find them out. They gain courage by repeated attempts, and by-and-by take a step too far. What they think is their master-stroke proves their ruin. 2. *Elisha's challenge.* What had happened had not been "hid" from Elisha. The Lord had showed it to him. His heart had gone with Gehazi, and he had seen Naaman turning from his chariot to meet him. He now challenged him with his conduct. He: (1) Exposed his falsehood. Gehazi answered boldly to the question, "Whence comest thou?" "Thy servant went no whither." Then Elisha told him what he knew. We can imagine the servant's conscience-stricken look and speechless confusion at this discovery. Let sinners consider how they will face the disclosures of the judgment-day, and what they will answer (Eccles. xii. 14; Rom. ii. 16; Col. iii. 25). We have a parallel instance of exposure, with an even severer punishment, in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts v. 1—11). (2) Unveiled his inmost motives. "Is it a time"—in connection with a work of God so great—"to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards," etc. These were the things Gehazi intended to purchase with his money. His mind was running out in grand plans of what he would do with his treasures. A miracle such as had been wrought should have filled him with very different thoughts. Elisha lays bare the covetous root of his disposition. God reads to the bottom of our hearts (Heb. iv. 12; Rev. ii. 23). Gold is valued by covetous men for what it will bring. It is a further development of avarice when it comes to be loved for its own sake. 3. *The judgment of leprosy.* By a just retribution, the leprosy of Naaman, which had been taken from him from miracle, is now by miracle put on Gehazi and his seed for ever (cf

Exod. xx. 5). There is a symmetry—a relation of fitness—often observable in God's retributions (Gen. ix. 6; Judg. i. 7; Esth. vii. 9, 10; Matt. vii. 2; xxvi. 52, etc.). Little would Gehazi's wealth delight him with this loathsome and accursed disease upon him. Men make a wretched bargain who for wealth's sake barter away peace with God, purity of conscience, inward integrity, and their soul's honour. They may obtain gain, but they are smitten with a leprosy of spirit which is their ruin. Covetousness in the heart is already a leprosy. The outward leprosy, in Gehazi's case, was but the external sign of what internally already existed.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1—ch. vii. 20.—FURTHER MIRACLES WROUGHT BY ELISHA. The historian relates first a (comparatively) private miracle wrought by Elisha in the vicinity of Jericho, for the benefit of one of the "sons of the prophets" (vers. 1—8). He then tells us briefly of a series of public miracles which brought Elisha into much note and prominence. War, it appears, had again broken out in a pronounced form between Israel and Syria, Syria being the aggressor. The Syrian monarch prepared traps for his adversary, encamping in places where he hoped to take him at a disadvantage. But Elisha frustrated these plans, by addressing warnings to the King of Israel, and pointing out to him the various positions occupied (vers. 8—12), which he consequently avoided. When this came to the ears of the King of Syria, he made an attempt to obtain possession of Elisha's person—an attempt which failed signally (vers. 13—23), owing to the miraculous powers of the prophet. Benhadad, some time after this, made a great expedition into the land of Israel, penetrating to the capital, and laying siege to it. The circumstances of the siege, and the escape of the city when at the last gasp, are related partly in the present chapter (vers. 24—33), partly in the next.

Ver. 1.—**And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee**—literally, *before thee*—**is too strait for us.** The scene of this miracle is probably the vicinity of Jericho, since both Gilgal and Bethel were remote from the Jordan. The "school of the prophets" at Jericho, whereof we heard in ch. ii. 5, 19, had increased so much, that the buildings which hitherto had accommodated it were no longer sufficient. A larger dwelling, or set of dwellings, was thought to be necessary; but the scholars would make no change without the sanction of their master. When he comes on one of his circuits, they make appeal to him.

Ver. 2.—**Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan.** Jericho was situated at some little distance from the Jordan, on the banks of a small stream, which ran into it. Along the course of the Jordan trees and shrubs were abundant, chiefly willows, poplars, and tamarisks (see Josephus, 'Bell. Jud.,' iv. 8. § 3; Strabo, xvi. 2. § 41). It would seem that the Jordan thickets were unappropriated, and that any one might cut timber in them. **And take thence every man a beam.** The meaning is, "Let us *all* join in the work, each cutting beams and carrying them; and the work will soon be accomplished." **And let us make us a place there.** They propose to build the new dwelling on the banks of Jordan, to save the trouble of conveying the materials any long distance. **Where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye.** Elisha, *i.e.*, approved the proposal, gave it his sanction and encouragement.

Ver. 3.—**And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants.** One of the number was not satisfied with the prophet's mere approval of the enterprise, but wished for his actual presence, probably as securing a blessing upon the work. **And he answered, I will go.** Elisha approved the man's idea, as springing from piety and faith in God. He, therefore, raised no difficulty, but at once, in the simplest manner, acceded to the request. There is a remarkable directness, simplicity, and absence of fuss in all that Elisha says and does.

Ver. 4.—**So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan**—*i.e.* to the river-bank—**they cut down wood.** They set to work, each felling his tree, and fashioning it into a rough beam.

Ver. 5.—**But as one was felling a beam**—*i.e.* a tree, to make it into a beam—**the axe-head**; literally, *the iron.* We see from Deut. xix. 5 that the Hebrews made their axe-heads of iron as early as the time of Moses. They probably learnt to smelt and work iron in Egypt. **Fell into the water.**

The tree must have been one that grew close to the river's edge. As the man hewed away at the stem a little above the root, the axe-head flew from the haft, into which it was insecurely fitted, and fell into the water. The slipping of an axe-head was a very common occurrence (Deut. xix. 5), and ordinarily was of little consequence, since it was easily restored to its place. But now the head had disappeared. **And he cried, and said, Alas, master!**—rather, *Alas, my master!* or, *Alas, my lord!*—**for it was borrowed**; rather, *and it was a borrowed one.* The words are part of the man's address to Elisha. He means to say, "It is no common misfortune; it is not as if it had been my own axe. I had borrowed it, and now what shall I say to the owner?" There is no direct request for help, but the tone of the complaint constitutes a sort of silent appeal.

Ver. 6.—**And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim.** Two natural explanations of this miracle have been attempted: (1) that Elisha passed a piece of wood underneath the axe-head, which he could see lying at the bottom of the river, and then lifted it up to the surface (Von Gerlach); (2) that he thrust a stick or bar of wood through the hole in the axe-head, made to receive the haft, and so pulled it out (Thenius). But both explanations do violence to the text; and we may be sure that, had either been true, the occurrence would not have been recorded. The sacred writers are not concerned to put on record mere acts of manual dexterity.

Ver. 7.—**Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.** Elisha does not take the axe-head out of the water himself, but requires the scholar to do it, in order to test his faith. He must show that he believes the miracle, and regards the iron as really floating on the top of the water, not as merely appearing to do so.

Ver. 8—ch. vii. 20.—PUBLIC MIRACLES OF ELISHA (*resumed*).

Ver. 8.—**Then the King of Syria warred against Israel.** It may seem strange that, so soon after sending an embassy to the court of Samaria, and asking a favour (ch. v. 5, 6), Benhadad should resume hostilities, especially as the favour had been obtained (ch. v. 14); but the normal relations between the two countries were those of enmity (ch. v. 2), and a few years would suffice to dim the memory of what had happened. The gratitude of kings is proverbially short-lived. **And took counsel with his servants**—*i.e.* his chief officers—**saying, In such and such a place** (comp. 1 Sam. xxi. 2) **shall be my camp**; or, *my encampment.* מַחֲנֹת appears to be "a noun in the form of the infinitive." It does not occur elsewhere.

Ver. 9.—**And the man of God**—*i.e.* Elisha, who at the time was "*the* man of God" (κατ' ἐξοχήν)—**sent unto the King of Israel**—Jehoram, undoubtedly (see ver. 32)—**saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down.** Some translate, "Beware that thou *neglect* not such a place, for thither the Syrians *are coming* down;" but our version is probably correct, and is approved by Bähr and Thenius. Elisha did not suffer his hostile feeling towards Jehoram personally (ch. iii. 13; v. 8; vi. 32) to interfere with his patriotism. When disaster threatened his country, he felt it incumbent on him to warn even an ungodly king.

Ver. 10.—**And the King of Israel sent to the place.** Recent commentators (Keil, Thenius, Bähr) mostly suppose this to mean that Jehoram sent troops to the place pointed out by the prophet, and anticipated the Syrians by occupying it. But it agrees better with the prophet's injunction, "Beware that thou *pass not* such a place," to suppose that he merely sent out scouts to see if the place were occupied or no, and finding, in each case, Elisha's warning true, he avoided the locality. **Which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice**; *i.e.* repeatedly; at least three several times, perhaps more.

Ver. 11.—**Therefore the heart of the King of Syria was sore troubled for this thing.** Keil says, "The King of the Syrians was *enraged* at this;" but קָעַר exactly expresses "trouble," "disturbance," not "rage," being used of the tossing of the sea, in Jonah i. 11. **And he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not show me which of us is for the King of Israel?** Benhadad not unnaturally suspected treachery among his own subjects. How otherwise could the King of Israel become, over and over again, aware of his intentions? Some one or other of his officers must, he thought, betray his plans to the enemy. Cannot the others point out the traitor?

Ver. 12.—**And one of his servants said**—*i.e.* one of those interrogated, answered—**None, my lord, O king**; literally, *Nay, my lord, the king*—meaning, "Think not so; it is not as thou supposest; there is no traitor in thy camp or in thy court; we are all true men. The explanation of the circumstances that surprise thee is quite different." **But Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel**—compare "*the* man of God" (ver. 9); so much above the others, that he is spoken of as if there were no other—**telleth**

the King of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber; literally, *in the secret place of thy bedchamber*. How the Syrian lord knew this, or whether he merely made a shrewd guess, we cannot say. Elisha's miraculous gifts had, no doubt, become widely known to the Syrians through the cure of Naaman's leprosy; and the lord, who may possibly have been Naaman himself, concluded that a man who could cure a leper could also read a king's secret thoughts without difficulty.

Ver. 13.—**And he**—*i.e.* Benhadad—**said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him**; *i.e.* "Send out spies to learn where Elisha is at present residing, that I may despatch a force to the place, and get him into my power." The object was scarcely "to find out, through Elisha, what the King of Israel and other princes were plotting against him in their secret counsels" (Cassel), but simply to put a stop to Elisha's betrayal of his own plans to Jehoram. **And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan.** The spies were sent, and brought back word that, at the time, Elisha was residing in Dothan. Dothan, the place where Joseph was sold by his brethren to the Ishmaelites (Gen. xxxvii. 17), lay evidently not very far from Shechem (Gen. xxxvii. 14), and is placed by Eusebius about twelve miles north of Samaria. In the Book of Judith (iv. 6; vii. 3) it is mentioned among the cities bordering the southern edge of the Plain of Esdraelon. Modern travellers (Van de Velde, Robinson) have reasonably identified it with the present *Dothân*, a tel, or hill, of a marked character, covered with ruins, and from the foot of which arises a copious spring, to the south-west of Jenin, between that place and Jeba, a little to the left of the great road leading from Beisan (Scythopolis) to Egypt.

Ver. 14.—**Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host**; rather, *and a strong force*. The expression, חַיִל כָּבֵד, is used by the historical writers with a good deal of vagueness—sometimes of a really great army, sometimes merely of a large retinue (1 Kings x. 2) or of a moderate force (ch. xviii. 17). We must assign it its meaning according to the context. **And they came by night, and compassed the city about.** A night march was made, to take the prophet by surprise, and the city was encompassed, that it might be impossible for him to escape.

Ver. 15.—**And when the servant of the man of God was risen early**—he had, perhaps, heard the arrival of the Syrian forces during the night, and "rose early" to reconnoitre—**and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots**; rather, *an host compassed the city, and horses, and chariots*. A force of footmen, a force of horsemen, and a chariot force, are intended (comp. ver. 14). **And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?** Though the servant could not know that it was Elisha's person which was especially sought, yet he was naturally alarmed at seeing the city invested by a hostile force, and anticipated either death or capture, which last would involve the being sold as a slave. Hence his "Alas!" and his piteous cry, "How shall we do?" Can we, *i.e.* in any way, save ourselves?

Ver. 16.—**And he**—*i.e.* Elisha—**answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.** Elisha did not need to *see* the forces arrayed on his side. He *knew* that God and God's strength was "with him," and cared not who, or how many, might be against him (comp. Ps. iii. 6, "I will not be afraid for ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about;" and Ps. xxvii. 3, "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident"). His confidence reminds us of that shown by Hezekiah (2 Chron. xxxii. 7) on the invasion of Sennacherib.

Ver. 17.—**And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see.** If the prophet's servant was to be reassured, he must be made to *see* that help was at hand; he would not have found rest or peace in the mere assurance that God was nigh, and would keep his prophet from harm. His mental state required something like a material manifestation; and hence Elisha prays that he may be permitted to behold the angelic host, which everywhere throughout creation is employed at all times in doing the will of God, and accomplishing his ends (comp. Gen. xxviii. 12; xxxii. 2; Ps. xxxiv. 7; lxviii. 17; Dan. vii. 10, etc.). The prayer is granted. **And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.** As the earthly force, which had alarmed Elisha's servant, was a force mainly of horses and chariots, so the heavenly force revealed to his eyes was made to bear the same appearance. But the heavenly chariots and horses were "of fire"—glowed, *i.e.* with a strange unearthly brightness (see the comment on ch. ii. 11).

Ver. 18.—**And when they came down to him.** Keil and others suppose this to mean that the Syrians "came down" to Elisha; but, if they were in the plain that surrounds the hill whereon Dothan was built, as appears from ver. 15, they would have had to

ascend in order to reach Elisha, not to *descend*. We must, therefore, with F. Meyer, Thenius, and Bähr, translate, "When they [Elisha and his servant] came down to *them* [the Syrians]"—either changing אֵלָיו into אֲלֵיהֶם, as Thenius does, or understanding אֵלָיו to refer to the "host" (חַיִל) of the Syrians. **Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness.** Not literal blindness, or they could not have followed Elisha's lead, and marched a distance of twelve miles to Samaria; but a state of confusion and bewilderment, in which "seeing they saw, but did not perceive" (compare the "blindness" of the men of Sodom, in Gen. xix. 11). **And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.**

Ver. 19.—**And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city.** This was clearly "an untruthful statement" (Keil), if not in the letter, yet in the intent. Elisha meant the Syrians to understand him to say, "This is not the way which ye ought to have taken if ye wanted to capture the Prophet Elisha, and this is not the city (Dothan) where you were told that he was to be found." And so the Syrians understood him. In the morality of the time, and, indeed, in the morality of all times up to the present, it has been held to be justifiable to deceive a public enemy. **Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria.** It could only be through the miraculous delusion for which Elisha had prayed, and which had been sent, that the Syrians believed the first comer in an enemy's country, followed him to the capital without hesitation, and allowed him to bring them inside the walls. But for the delusion, they would have suspected, made inquiries of others, and retreated hastily, as soon as the walls and towers of Samaria broke on their sight.

Ver. 20.—**And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.** Their delusion was dispelled—they returned to their proper senses, and, seeing the size and strength of the town, recognized the fact that they were in Samaria, their enemy's capital, and so were helpless.

Ver. 21.—**And the King of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father.** In his joy at the deliverance of so large a force of the enemy into his hands, Jehoram forgets the coldness and estrangement which have hitherto characterized the relations between himself and the prophet (ch. iii. 11—14; v. 8), and salutes him by the honourable title of "father," which implied respect, deference, submission. Compare the use of the same expression by Joash (ch. xiii. 14), and the employment of the correlative term "son" (ch. viii. 9) by Benhadad. **Shall I smite them? shall I smite them?** The repetition marks extreme eagerness, while the interrogative form shows a certain amount of hesitation. It is certain that the Israelites were in the habit of putting to death their prisoners of war, not only when they were captured with arms in their hands, but even when they surrendered themselves. When a city or country was conquered, the whole male population of full age was commonly put to death (Numb. xxxi. 7; 1 Sam. xv. 8; 1 Kings xi. 15; 1 Chron. xx. 3, etc.). When a third part was spared, it was from some consideration of relationship (2 Sam. viii. 2). The Law distinctly allowed, if it did not even enjoin, the practice (Deut. xx. 13). Jehoram, therefore, no doubt, put his prisoners of war to death under ordinary circumstances. But he hesitates now. He feels that the case is an extraordinary one, and that the prophet, who has made the capture, is entitled to be consulted on the subject. Hence his question.

Ver. 22.—**And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them.** The prophet has no doubt. His prohibition is absolute. *These* prisoners, at any rate, are not to be slain. "The object of the miracle," as Keil says, "would have been frustrated, if the Syrians had been slain. For the intention was to show the Syrians that they had to do with a prophet of the true God, against whom no human power could be of any avail, *that they might learn to fear the Almighty God*" ('Commentary on 2 Kings,' p. 327, Eng. trans.). There was also, perhaps, a further political object. By sparing the prisoners and treating them with kindness, it might be possible to touch the heart of the King of Syria, and dispose him towards peace. **Wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow?** rather, *Wouldest thou be smiting those*, etc.? *i.e.* "Wouldest thou, in smiting these persons, be smiting those whom thou hadst made prisoners in war, so as to be able to justify thy conduct by Deut. xx. 13? No; thou wouldest *not*. Therefore thou shalt not smite them." **Set bread and water before them.** "Bread" and "water" stand for meat and drink generally. Elisha bids Jehoram entertain the captive Syrians hospitably, and then send them back to Benhadad. **That they may eat and drink, and go to their master.**

Ver. 23.—**And he prepared great provision for them.** Jehoram followed the directions of the prophet, carrying them out, not in the

letter merely, but in the spirit. He entertained the captives at a grand banquet (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' ix. 4. § 3), and then gave them leave to depart. **And when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.** The Syrian raids, which had hitherto been frequent, perhaps almost continuous (ch. v. 2), now ceased for a time, and the kingdom of Israel had a respite. Bähr supposes that the raids were discontinued simply "because the Syrians had found out that they could not accomplish anything by these expeditions, but rather brought themselves into circumstances of great peril" ('Commentary on Kings,' vol. ii. p. 69). But the *nexus* of the clause, "So the bands," etc., rather implies that the cessation was the consequence of Jehoram's sparing and entertaining the captives.

Ver. 24—ch. vii. 20.—*The siege of Samaria by Benhadad.*

Ver. 24.—**And it came to pass after this**—probably some considerable time after, when the memory of Jehoram's kind act had passed away—**that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host.** A contrast is intended between the inroads of small bodies of plunderers and the invasion of the territory by the monarch himself at the head of his entire force. **And went up.** However Samaria was approached from Syria, there must always have been a final ascent, either from the Jordan valley or from the Plain of Esdraelon. **And besieged Samaria.** Josephus says that Jehoram was afraid to meet Benhadad in the open field, since his forces were no match for those of the Syrian king, and therefore at once shut himself up within his capital, without risking a battle. The walls of Samaria were very strong.

Ver. 25.—**And there was a great famine in Samaria.** It was Benhadad's design to capture the place, not by battering down its walls with military engines, but by blockading it, and cutting off all its supplies, as Josephus tells us (*l. s. c.*). **And, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.** The ass, being an unclean animal (Lev. xi. 4), would not be eaten at all except in the last extremity, and the head was the worst and so the cheapest part; yet it sold for "eighty pieces" (rather, shekels) of silver, or about £5 of our money; as in the Cadusian famine mentioned by Plutarch ('Vit. Artaxerx.,' § 24), where an ass's head was sold for sixty drachmas (about forty shillings). "Dove's dung" is thought by some to be the name of a plant; but it is better to understand the term literally. Both animal and human excrement have been eaten in sieges (Josephus, 'Bell. Jud.,' v. 13. § 7; Cels., 'Hierobot.,' ii. p. 233), when a city was in the last extremity.

Ver. 26.—**And as the King of Israel was passing by upon the wall.** The wall of Babylon is said to have been so broad at the top that a four-horse chariot could turn round on it (Herod., i. 179). All ancient cities had walls upon which a great part of the garrison stood, and from which they shot their arrows and worked their engines against the assailants. From time to time the commandant of the place—the king himself, in this instance—would mount upon the wall to visit the posts, and inspect the state of the garrison, or observe the movements of the enemy. **There cried a woman unto him.** Houses sometimes abutted on the wall of a town (see Josh. ii. 15; 1 Sam. xix. 12, etc.), and women sometimes took part in their defence (Judg. ix. 53), so that in visiting the posts a commandant might be brought into contact with women. **Saying, Help, my lord, O king;** rather, *save*, i.e. "preserve me from perishing of hunger."

Ver. 27.—**And he said, If the Lord do not help thee.** This is probably the true meaning. The king is not so brutal as to "curse" the woman (ἐπηράσατο αὐτὴ τὸν Θεόν, Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' ix. 4. § 4); neither does he take upon himself to tell her that God will not save her (Maurer). He merely refers her to God, as alone competent to do what she asks. **Whence shall I help thee?** Whence, *i.e.*, dost thou suppose that I can save thee? **Out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?** Dost thou suppose that I have stores of food at my disposal? An overflowing barnfloor, where abundant corn is garnered, or a winepress full of the juice of the grape? I have nothing of the kind; my stores are as much exhausted as those of the meanest of my subjects. I cannot save thee.

Ver. 28.—**And the king said unto her, What aileth thee?** Probably, as Bähr suggests, the woman explained to the king that she did not appear before him to beg food, but to claim his interposition as judge, in a case in which she considered herself to be wronged. Such an appeal the king was bound to hear; and he therefore asks, "What aileth thee?" *i.e.* "What is thy ground of complaint?" Then she tells her story. **And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to-day, and we will eat my son to-morrow.** Compare the prophecy in Deuteronomy, "The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil towards

the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, and toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates" (xxviii. 56, 57). There is historical testimony that the prophecy was three times fulfilled; viz. (1) in Samaria on the present occasion; (2) in Jerusalem during the last siege by Nebuchadnezzar (Lam. iv. 10); and (3) in Jerusalem during the last siege by Titus (Josephus, 'Bell. Jud.,' vi. 3. § 4). In modern sieges surrender is made before the population is driven to such straits.

Ver. 29.—**So we boiled my son** (comp. Lam. iv. 10, "The hands of the pitiful woman have *sodden* their own children"), **and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son.** Some have supposed that the woman concealed her child in order to consume it alone; but it is more probable that, when the time came for carrying out her agreement, she found that she could not give it up, and hid it in order to save it.

Ver. 30.—**And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes.** In horror and consternation at the terrible state of things revealed by the woman's story (comp. ch. v. 7). **And he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked.** It is better to translate, with our Revisers, (*Now he was passing by upon the wall;*) *and the people looked;* or, *and, as he was passing by upon the wall, the people looked.* **And, behold,** he had **sackcloth within upon his flesh.** Jehoram had secretly assumed the penitential garment, not a mere sign of woe, but a constant chastisement of the flesh. He wore sackcloth next his skin, no one suspecting it, until, in the exasperation of his feelings at the woman's tale, he rent his robe, and exposed to view the sackcloth which underlay it. We are scarcely entitled to deny him any true penitential feeling, though no doubt he was far from possessing a chastened or humble spirit. Poor weak humanity has at one and the same time good and evil impulses, praiseworthy and culpable feelings, thoughts which come from the Holy Spirit of God, and thoughts which are inspired by the evil one.

Ver. 31.—**Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him**—*i.e.* "continue on him"—**this day.** The form of oath was a common one (comp. Ruth i. 17; 1 Sam. iii. 17; xxv. 22; 2 Sam. xix. 13; 1 Kings ii. 23; xix. 2, etc.). It was an imprecation of evil on one's self, if one did, or if one failed to do, a certain thing. Why Jehoram should have considered Elisha as responsible for all the horrors of the siege is not apparent; but perhaps he supposed that it was in Elisha's power to work a miracle of any kind at any moment that he liked. If so, he misunderstood the nature of the miraculous gift. In threatening to *behead* Elisha, he is not making himself an executor of the Law, which nowhere sanctioned that mode of punishment, but assuming the arbitrary power of the other Oriental monarchs of his time, who regarded themselves as absolute masters of the lives and liberties of their subjects. Beheading was common in Egypt, in Babylonia, and in Assyria.

Ver. 32.—**But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him; and the king sent a man from before him.** It is best to translate, *Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him, when the king sent a man from before him.* Elisha had a house in Samaria, where he ordinarily resided, and from which he made his circuits. He happened to be sitting there, and the elders of the city to be sitting with him, when Jehoram sent "a man from before him," *i.e.* one of the court officials, to put him to death. The "elders" had probably assembled at Elisha's house to consult with him on the critical situation of affairs, and (if possible) obtain from him some miraculous assistance. **But ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head?** Elisha was supernaturally warned of what was about to take place—that an executioner was coming almost immediately to take away his life, and that the king himself would arrive shortly after. He calls the king "this son of a murderer," or rather "this son of *the* murderer," with reference to Ahab, the great murderer of the time, who had sanctioned all Jezebel's cruelties—the general massacre of the prophets of Jehovah (1 Kings xviii. 13), the judicial murder of Naboth (1 Kings xxi. 9—13), the attempt to kill Elijah (1 Kings xix. 2)—and had, by a fierce and long-continued persecution, reduced the worshippers of Jehovah in Israel to the scanty number of seven thousand (1 Kings xix. 18). Jehoram had now shown that he inherited the bloodthirsty disposition of his father, and had justly earned the epithet which Elisha bestowed on him. **Look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door.** Keil renders the last clause, "force him back at the door;" the LXX. "press upon him in the doorway"—παραθλίψατε αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ θύρᾳ—they were not to allow him to enter the apartment. **Is**

not the sound of his master's feet behind him? Elisha adds this as a reason why the elders should stop the messenger. He could not in a general way have expected them to resist the king's will as declared by his representative; but he might reasonably ask a short respite, if the king was just about to arrive at the house, to confirm the order that he had given, or to revoke it.

Ver. 33.—**And while he yet talked with them**—*i.e.* while Elisha yet talked with the elders, endeavouring probably to persuade them to stop the messenger—**behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said.** The narrative is very compressed and elliptical. Some suppose words to have fallen out (as וחמלך אחריו after אליו); but this is unnecessary. The reader is expected to supply missing links, and to understand that all happened as Elisha had predicted and enjoined—that the messenger came, that the elders stopped him, and that the king shortly arrived. The king was, of course, admitted, and, being admitted, took the word, and said, **Behold, this evil is of the Lord; what**—rather, *why*—**should I wait for the Lord any longer?** Jehoram had, apparently, to some extent repented of his hasty message, and had hurried after his messenger, to give Elisha one further chance of life. We must understand that they had been in communication previously on the subject of the siege, and that Elisha had encouraged the king to "wait for" an interposition of Jehovah. The king now urges that the time for waiting is over; matters are at the last gasp; "this evil"—this terrible suffering which can no longer be endured—"is of the Lord," has come from him, is continued by him, and is not relieved. What use is there in his "waiting" any longer? Why should he not break with Jehovah, behead the lying prophet, and surrender the town? What has Elisha to say in reply?

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*Mutual love and help the best bond of religious communities.* "Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is, brethren, to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down unto the beard, even unto Aaron's beard, and went down to the skirts of his clothing; like as the dew of Hermon, which fell upon the hill of Zion" (Ps. cxxxiii. 1—3). In religious communities it has been too often the practice to govern by fear. An autocratic authority has been committed to, or assumed by, the head, who has exacted from all the other members an entire, absolute, and unreasoning obedience. Vows of obedience, of the most rigid character, have been taken; and it has been inculcated on all that the sum total of virtue lay in obeying, without a murmur or a question, every order issued by the superior. An iron rule has characterized such institutions, and a cold, unloving temper has prevailed in them. How different is the picture drawn in the beautiful passage before us! How sweet and pleasing is the community-life of Elisha and his prophet-disciples! Though bound by no vow of obedience, they undertake nothing without their master (vers. 2 and 3). They require an enlargement of their dwelling-place, but they will not commence it without his sanction. Even his sanction is not enough; they ask his presence, his superintending eye, his guiding mind. And he complies willingly, cheerfully. No trouble is too much for him. "Go *ye*," he says; but when they object and plead, "Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants," he at once consents, and says, "I will go." He goes, he looks on with sympathy, he guides, he aids. At the first touch of misfortune, his sympathy blossoms into help. How charming is the childlike confidence and communicativeness of the disciple, who, on losing his axe-head, immediately reveals his loss to the master, and tells him why it was so especially grievous to him—"And it a borrowed one!" And how admirable the kindness and fellow-feeling, which uttered no reproach, made no suggestion of carelessness or of stupidity in selecting a tree so near the stream, but thought only of finding a remedy. Natural means being unavailing, the prophet deems the occasion no unsuitable one for the exercise of his miraculous powers, which he is as willing to exert on behalf of a humble prophet-student as on that of a great Syrian general. The terms on which Elisha and his disciples live are evidently those of mutual confidence and affection, of protection and fatherly care on the one hand; of appeal, regard, and childlike love on the other; and the result is a community which it is delightful to contemplate, and which increases and flourishes, in spite of the contempt and persecution of the world-lover, so that its place is "too strait for it."

Vers. 8—23.—*Wicked men vainly attempt to outwit God.* Benhadad, after the miracle wrought upon his favourite Naaman, had abundant reason to know that Israel was the people of God, and enjoyed special Divine protection and superintendence. Had he been truly wise, he would have laid aside his hostile designs against the nation, and have made it his endeavour to cultivate friendly relations with them, and, if possible, secure their alliance. But true wisdom is a plant of rare growth, while its counterfeit, cunning, is a weed that grows rankly at all times and everywhere. Benhadad resolved to have recourse to craft against the Israelites, and thought perhaps that, while the protection of their God would not fail them in a pitched battle, he might be able in petty engagements, by means of ambushes and surprises, to snatch an occasional victory. But his plan failed egregiously. God enabled his prophet to foresee where each ambush would be placed; and each time he warned Jehoram of the snare, which was thereupon easily avoided. Craft and cunning were of no avail against the wisdom which is from on high—the Divine foreknowledge, of which the prophet was made in some measure partaker. Benhadad then bethought him of a new device. He would capture the prophet, and thenceforward his plans would be undetected, and the success which he had expected from them would follow. How simple and easy it must have seemed! The prophet moved about from city to city, teaching the faithful, and was now in one place, now in another. What could be easier than to make inquiry, and learn where he was residing at any particular time, and then to make a sudden inroad, surround the place, occupy it, and obtain possession of his person? Such seizures of individuals have been planned many hundreds of times, and have generally been successful. Had Benhadad had only human enemies to deal with, there can be little doubt that his plans would have prospered. He would have outwitted the prophet, and would have got him into his power; but it was necessary that he should also outwit God. Here was a difficulty which had not presented itself to his mind, and which yet surely ought to have done so. What had frustrated his efforts previously? Not human strength; not human wisdom or sagacity; but Divine omniscience. God had enabled Elisha to show the King of Israel the words which he spake in the secrecy of his bedchamber. Why should he not grant him a foreknowledge of the new design? Or why should he not enable the prophet in some other way to frustrate it? There are ten thousand ways in which God can bring the counsels of men to no effect, whenever he pleases. Benhadad ought to have known that it was God, not merely the prophet, against whom he was contending, and that it would be impossible to outwit the Source of wisdom, the Giver of all knowledge and understanding. But men in all ages have thought (and vainly thought) to hoodwink and outwit God. 1. The first dwellers upon the earth after the Flood were divinely commanded to spread themselves over its face and "replenish" it (Gen. ix. 1). They disliked the idea, and thought to frustrate God's design by building themselves a city and a tower as a focus of union (Gen. ix. 4). But God "came down," and confounded their language; and so "scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth" (Gen. ix. 8). 2. Isaac sought to outwit God, and frustrate his preference of Jacob over Esau (Gen. xxv. 23), by giving his special blessing to his firstborn; but God blinded him, and caused him to be himself outwitted by Rebekah and Jacob, so that he gave the blessing where he had not intended to give it (Gen. xxvii. 27—29). 3. Pharaoh King of Egypt at the time of the Exodus, thought to frustrate God's designs respecting his people by a long series of delays and impediments, and finally by shutting them up into a corner of the land, whence apparently they had no escape unless by an absolute surrender; but God gave them a way of escape across the Red Sea, which removed them wholly from his control. 4. Jonah thought to outwit God, when commanded to warn the Ninevites, by flying from Asia to the remotest corner of Europe, and there hiding himself; but God counteracted his schemes and made them of no avail. 5. Herod the Great thought to outwit God, to preserve his kingdom, and to make the advent of Christ upon earth unavailing, by a general massacre of all the young children to be found in Bethlehem (Matt. ii. 16); but the warning given by God to Joseph and Mary confounded his counsels, and made the massacre futile. 6. Men have, in all periods of the world's history, endeavoured to hoodwink God by professing to serve him, while they offered him a formal, outward, and ceremonial observance, instead of giving him the true worship of the heart. But

God has not been deceived; he "is not mocked;" he readily discerns the counterfeit from the genuine, and rejects with abhorrence all feigned and hypocritical religiousness. Every attempt of man to cheat his Maker recoils on his own head. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. i. 25). We cannot deceive him. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. iv. 13).

Vers. 16, 17.—*The spirit-world, and the power to discern it.* The little episode of the alarm felt by Elisha's servant, and the manner in which Elisha removed it, teaches us principally three things.

I. THE REALITY, AND PERPETUAL PRESENCE, AROUND US AND ABOUT US, OF THE SPIRIT-WORLD. The existence of an order of spirits intermediate between God and man, who are closely connected with man, and play an important part in the Divine government of the world wherein we live, is an essential part of the scheme of things set before us in the Scriptures. "The doctrine of angels," as it has been called, is this: "That there lives in the presence of God a vast assembly, myriads upon myriads of spiritual beings (Ps. lxviii. 17; Dan. vii. 10), higher than we, but infinitely removed from God, mighty in strength, doers of his word, who ceaselessly bless and praise God, wise also, to whom he gives charge to guard his own in all their ways, ascending and descending to and from heaven and earth (Gen. xxviii. 12, 13; John i. 51), and who variously minister to men, most often invisibly. All these beings are interested in us and in our well-being. When our earth was created, 'all the sons of God burst forth into jubilee' (Job xxxviii. 7) in prospect of our birth, who were to be their care here, their fellow-citizens hereafter in bliss. At the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, they were present in myriads. When God vouchsafed his presence on Mount Zion, and the holy place became a new Sinai, 'twice ten thousand angels, yea, thousands many times repeated' (Ps. lxviii. 17) were there. They are present with God, witnessing the trials of our race (Job i. 6; ii. 1; 1 Kings xxii. 19). Their love for man is indicated by the charge given to them when they are set to destroy the guilty in Jerusalem, 'Let not your eye spare, neither have pity' (Ezek. x. 5), as though they would have pity, only that they must needs be of the same mind with God. There is a distinction, or gradation of ranks, among the members of the heavenly host—Cherubim, seraphim, archangels, principalities, powers" (abridged from Pusey's 'Daniel the Prophet,' pp. 517—524). It is irrational to explain away as embellishment or poetic imagery a representation of the actual condition of things in God's universe, which is so frequent, so all-pervading, so harmonious, and, it may be added, so consistent with what we should have naturally expected apart from revelation.

II. THE PERPETUAL REALIZATION OF THIS PRESENCE BY THOSE POSSESSED OF FAITH. There is no reason to believe that Elisha saw the angels that compassed him round, with his bodily eyes. But he knew that they were there. He was sure that God would not desert him in his peril, and had such a confident faith in "the doctrine of angels," that it was as if he could see them. And so it was with David. "The angel of the Lord," he says, "encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps. xxxiv. 7). So with Hezekiah, who, when Sennacherib invaded his land, "spake comfortably to the people, saying, Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for *there be more with us than with him*" (2 Chron. xxxii. 7). Judas Maccabæus had probably the same faith when he uttered the words, "It is no hard matter for many to be shut up in the hands of a few; and with the God of heaven it is all one, to deliver with a great multitude, or a small company: for the victory of battle standeth not in the multitude of an host; but *strength cometh from heaven*" (1 Macc. iii. 18, 19). St. Paul realized the continual angelic presence when he declared, "We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (1 Cor. iv. 9). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews realized it when he told the Jewish converts, "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to *an innumerable* company of angels" (Heb. xii. 22). St. John the divine realized it, when he gave the angels a large share in all the later judgments that should befall the earth, and made them dispensers of the blessings and of the wrath of God (Rev. vii. 1—xx. 3). If the doctrine has been at any time obscured, it has been when

faith wavered, and there was a tendency to confine the supernatural within the narrowest possible limits. It was easy to suggest that the expression, "the angels of God," was a periphrasis for God himself, and that he had no need to act, and therefore probably did not act, by intermediaries. But the faith of the Church has always been different. The festival of St. Michael and All Angels has been generally celebrated from a very ancient date; and the Collect for that festival has borne witness to the perpetual ministration of angels, not only in heaven, but also upon earth, and to the part borne by them in the succour and defence of God's people.

III. THE POSSIBILITY OF A MANIFESTATION OF THE PRESENCE IN QUESTION TO THE BODILY SENSES OF THOSE WHOSE FAITH IS TOO WEAK TO APPREHEND IT. Elisha's servant did not see a vision. It was not his mind only that was impressed. His bodily eyes beheld an appearance as of chariots and horses of fire (ver. 17), which was based on the objective reality of the actual presence of an angelic host upon the hill whereon Dothan was situated. The prophet prayed that his eyes should be opened, and his prayer was granted. "The Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw." Physicists are probably right in saying that what is absolutely immaterial cannot be seen by the optic nerve. But we are nowhere told that angels are absolutely immaterial. It is the belief of many philosophers that all finite spirits are attached to bodies of some kind or other—bodies more or less volatile and ethereal. We can readily conceive that the optic nerve may, by an increase of its sensitiveness, be made to see these; and in this way we may account, not only for the wonderful sight beheld on this occasion by Elisha's servant, but for the many other appearances of angels to men and women recorded in Scripture (Gen. iii. 1; xix. 1—15; xxxii. 24—30; Judg. vi. 11—22; 2 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17; 1 Kings xix. 5—7; Isa. vi. 6; Dan. vi. 22; ix. 21; x. 16—21; Zech. i. 11—19; iv. 1, etc.; Luke i. 11—19, 26—38; ii. 9—13; John xx. 12; Acts v. 19; viii. 26; xii. 7—10; Revelation, *passim*). Miraculously, power is given to the optic nerve which it does not ordinarily possess, and it is enabled to see beings actually present, who under ordinary circumstances are invisible to it.

Vers. 24—33.—*Half-heartedness.* Jehoram was altogether half-hearted in his religion. He "halted between two opinions." While he paid a certain amount of respect to Elisha, as the prophet of Jehovah, he nevertheless allowed the worship of Baal to continue in the capital (ch. x. 18—28), if not elsewhere, and maintained the calf-worship also at Dan and Bethel (ch. iii. 3). He had suffered himself to be guided by Elisha in respect of the Syrian prisoners captured by the prophet (ver. 23), and had evidently been in communication with him on the subject of the present siege, had probably been exhorted by him to repentance, and promised that, if he would wait upon Jehovah, in due time there should be deliverance. The prophet's words had made some impression on him; he had to a certain extent turned to God, had put sackcloth upon his loins, not ostentatiously, but secretly (ver. 30), had borne the privations of the siege without murmuring, had refused to surrender the town, and looked to Jehovah to deliver it. But there was no depth in his penitence, no surrender of the heart and the will to God, no firm and rooted faith in God's truthfulness, and in the certain accomplishment of his promises. His repentance was but a half-repentance. A single incident of the siege, a horrible one certainly, but yet not without a parallel in other sieges and in shipwrecks, shattered the whole fabric of his repentance and his resolution, turned him against the prophet and against Jehovah, caused him to threaten the prophet's life, and to make up his mind that he would follow his own course, and not wait for the Lord any longer (ver. 33). He thus revealed the true state of his heart and soul, showed his spiritual unsoundness, revealed himself as one whose character was rotten at the core, who had never turned to Jehovah in sincerity and truth. What wonder, then, that God had not granted the deliverance promised to true faith and true penitence, that a half-repentance had not availed with him? So it had been with Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 27; xxii. 34); so it would always be with all those who, after Jehoram's example, should be half-hearted in religion, should at once "fear the Lord, and serve their own gods" (ch. xvii. 33)—own for masters both God and mammon. A half-repentance is useless. Nothing avails but to turn to God with all the heart and all the soul and all the strength. God hates waverers. To such he says, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would

thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will *spue thee out of my mouth*" (Rev. iii. 15, 16).

Ver. 32.—*Princes may be resisted when they are bent upon wrong-doing.* There was a time when princes were flattered by being told that they "could do no wrong;" that "a divinity hedged them in;" that their subjects were bound to render them, under all circumstances, an absolute and unqualified obedience. But this is certainly not scriptural teaching. The higher powers are to be obeyed in their lawful commands, but not in their unlawful ones. When Pharaoh, King of Egypt, commanded the midwives to put to death all the male children borne by the Hebrew women, "the midwives feared God, and *did not as the King of Egypt commanded them*, but saved the men children alive" (Exod. i. 17); and God rewarded them for so acting: "Therefore God dealt well with the midwives; . . . and because they feared God, he made them houses" (Exod. i. 20, 21). So now Elisha, the prophet of God, bids the elders resist the king's messenger—"hold him fast," and not let him execute the king's commands. Again, the higher powers, the great council of the Sanhedrin, commanded Peter and John, shortly after the Day of Pentecost, "not to speak at all nor preach in the Name of Jesus" (Acts iv. 18); to whom the apostles replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we *cannot but speak* the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts iv. 19, 20). Resistance to lawful authority, when it commands unlawful acts, is an important part of a Christian man's duty, and ought to be inculcated just as much as obedience to lawful authority when it commands lawful acts.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7.—*An early theological college; its life and lessons.* Our theological colleges, where young men are trained for the office of the Christian ministry, do not receive from the Christian public that attention and sympathy which they deserve. More interest ought to be taken in education generally. The Church should show more interest in Sunday-school work. If office-bearers and parents in every Christian land would visit the Sunday school occasionally, and hear the children repeat their lessons and sing their hymns, it would do themselves good, and it would be a great encouragement to those who are engaged in the important work of Sunday-school teaching. The work of our theological colleges is to a great extent different from that of other places of education. The very nature of the studies is such that the general public could not be expected to take much interest in them. But there are other ways of showing an interest in our colleges besides actually entering a college class-room, or listening to a professor's lecture. Occasionally, a rich member of the Church leaves a considerable sum to found a scholarship or a bursary; but how little is done by the members of the Church generally! Yet all the members of the Church are interested in having not only a godly, but also a well-educated ministry.

I. THERE WAS INDUSTRY IN THAT COLLEGE. These students in Elisha's college knew how to work, and *they were not above doing their own work.* They had not reached that high state of civilization when manual labour is considered a disgrace. Their house, which was college and students' residence all in one, had become too small for them. So they said to Elisha one day, "Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell." It was an enactment of the Jewish religion that every boy, no matter what his position, should be taught some handicraft. The Jewish Talmud says, "What is commanded of a father toward his son? To circumcise him, to teach him the Law, and to teach him a trade." Thus we find that the Apostle Paul, who had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, and was a distinguished scholar, was also a tentmaker. Even when a preacher of the gospel, he laboured with his own hands for his support. It is not generally the custom now for ministers of the gospel to follow any other calling. It is found more convenient that they should devote themselves entirely to the work of the ministry, for all men have not the genius of the Apostle Paul. It is true that the missionaries of certain Missionary Societies all learn a trade, and most of them

support themselves by their own exertions at farming or other work. But this also has been found very undesirable, and it has been under serious consideration to abandon the custom altogether. But whether they engage in manual labour or not, all ministers and all students for the ministry should be, as these students in Elisha's time were, industrious in their work. In whatever calling we are engaged, let us cultivate habits of industry. Let us remember the apostle's injunction to be "diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

II. THERE WAS DISCIPLINE IN THAT COLLEGE. These young students, excellent and well-conducted as they no doubt were, did not think they might do as they liked or go where they liked. They came to Elisha, and asked his consent to their proposal. And so it should be in all the relationships of life. "Order is Heaven's first law." There should be discipline in the family, discipline in the Church, discipline in the Sunday school, discipline in the nation, and regard for constituted authority. Dr. Arnold of Rugby once said to his assembled scholars, when there had been some disorder in the school, and he had expelled several boys, "It is *not* necessary that this should be a school of three hundred, or of one hundred, or of fifty boys; but it *is* necessary that it should be a school of Christian gentlemen." No wonder there is disregard for authority in the nation when it is not properly taught or insisted on in the home. The Christian Church should be a model of order. Order should characterize its services, its management, its work. "Let all things be done decently and in order."

III. THERE WAS KINDNESS IN THAT COLLEGE. What pleasant and brotherly relations between the prophet and his pupils! He could be stern with the haughty Naaman; he could severely rebuke the covetous, lying Gehazi; but he knew how to unbend among his innocent-hearted students. He had evidently already won their affections. *It was a good sign of both him and them that they asked him to accompany them.* And now he shows his kindly nature once more by going with them at their request. So it ought to be with all Christians. We hardly think enough of Christ's command that we should love one another. What friendly relations there should be between professors and students, between ministers and their people, between parents and children, between teachers and scholars, between employers and employed, between masters and servants! *Authority is never weakened by kindness.* Some employers, some teachers, seem to think it adds to their dignity and to their influence to be stern to those beneath them. They make a great mistake. The most respected professors are those who treat their students as brothers, and not as inferiors. The most respected employers are those who are kind and courteous and considerate to those in their employment. Kindness does not weaken influence; it increases it. Oh! to be filled with the spirit of Christ, who made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant. Kindness and humility are twin sisters.

IV. THERE WAS GROWTH IN THAT COLLEGE. Under the influence of such a teacher as Elisha, the number of students increased so much that the place became too small for them, and it was necessary for them to build a new school of the prophets. Let me see growth in a Church and I shall believe in its life. A stone does not grow, because it has no life. A tree grows, because there is life in it. If you see that a tree has ceased to grow, to put forth new leaves in the spring-time, you know that it is dead. A Church that is not growing must be a lifeless Church. If you are a living Christian, let the signs of it be manifest in the growth of your Christian graces.

V. THE PRESENCE OF GOD WAS THERE. This was shown in the miracle which Elisha wrought of causing the iron to swim. It was not by his own power. He was only the instrument in the hand of God, and God owned his efforts, for he was engaged in God's work. This last feature of that theological college was the best of all. God's presence was in the midst of it. Without that, of what use would have been their industry or their discipline? Without that, would there have been such bonds of kindness? Without that, would there have been such evidences of growth? "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." Without that, what a mockery it would have been for them to have looked forward to be the teachers of others in the truths of religion! What a mockery for any man to enter a pulpit and speak about the love of Jesus, who is himself a stranger to that love! What a mockery for any man to speak about the grace of God, who has never experienced it

in his own heart and life! The late Rev. Dr. Cooke of Belfast once said that "*an educated ministry is desirable, but a converted ministry is essential.*"—C. H. I.

Vers. 8—16.—*God's presence with his people.* There has been a sudden change in the horizon of Elisha's life. From the quiet work of cutting down trees and building a college, he is suddenly called upon to stand a siege from a Syrian army. These changes do come in the lives of most of us. Health suddenly changes into sickness. Friendship suddenly changes into hostility. Wealth suddenly changes into poverty. Such changes will come in the life of the believer and in the history of the Church of God. At one time all seems bright; the next moment the prospect seems dark and discouraging. It is well to be prepared for such changes when they come. The true servant of God will heed them very little. He lives not under, but above, the things of earth.

> "As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
> Swells from the vale, and midway cleaves the storm,
> Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
> Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

So it was with Elisha. Wherever you find him, he always seems the same. On the present occasion the circumstances were such as to strike terror to the stoutest heart. Elisha's servant trembled at the sight that met him when he rose that morning and looked forth from the city walls. A mighty host, with horses and chariots, encompassed the city round about. It was an unexpected attack. No forces were within the city to defend it against such a mighty host. Elisha was the only one whom the besieging army wanted. In the desire for self-preservation, it was not unlikely that the inhabitants of Dothan might give him up to the enemy, and thus turn away the invader from their gates. From a human point of view it was no wonder that Elisha's servant said, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" There was no terror in Elisha's face, no panic in his heart, at this startling news. What calmness, what courage, what sublime confidence there is in that answer of his, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them!" *And what was the secret of his confidence?* The one reason of Elisha's confidence and calm was that God's presence was with him. What a beautiful fulfilment of that promise, "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man; thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues"! We learn from this story—

I. GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE IS NOT GENERALLY REALIZED BY THEIR ENEMIES. It was so on the occasion before us. The King of Syria commenced another war against Israel. He held, as we should say, a council of war, and consulted with his generals concerning the arrangements for the campaign. He thought, by skilful strategy, to take the King of Israel unawares. But all his plans and manœuvres were thwarted in some mysterious way. The King of Israel seemed to know all his movements with more certainty than a clever player at a game of skill might anticipate the moves of his opponent. Several times in this way the King of Israel saved himself. At last the King of Syria began to be suspicious. There must be a traitor in the camp. Some of those enjoying the king's confidence must be revealing his plans to the enemy. And so he asks, "Will ye not show me which of us is for the King of Israel?" The King of Syria was an able general; but like another great general of modern times, Napoleon the Great, there were some forces that he did not take sufficient account of. The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. There are other things than military skill and big battalions to be thought of in going forth to battle. When Edward, the English king, came forth to view the Scottish troops before the battle of Bannockburn, he was astonished at the small force waiting on foot to receive the attack of his mighty army. But they were putting their trust in the God of battles, and presently he saw the unusual sight of the whole Scottish army, as their custom was, kneeling down and offering a short prayer to God. "Believe me," said the general who rode by his side, "yon men will win or die." Of that unseen Power, in whose hands are the issues of battle, the Syrian king took no account. *He did not realize that God's presence was with his people.* Is not this the mistake which the enemies of God's people have made in all ages? It was the mistake of the persecutors and oppressors of Israel. It was

the mistake of those who persecuted the Reformers of England, Scotland, France, and Switzerland. It was the mistake which Pharaoh made when he refused to let the children of Israel go. It was the mistake which Herod made when he thought to crush the new kingdom that was yet to arise, by slaughtering the helpless babes in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood. It was the mistake which Nero made in his persecutions of the Christians at Rome. It was the mistake which Louis XIV. of France made when he revoked the famous Edict of Nantes. It is the mistake which the Roman Curia has made in all ages, in thinking to crush out civil and religious liberty by the tortures of the Inquisition, by the martyrdoms of the scaffold and the stake, by the massacres in the Waldensian valley, by the *autos-da-fé* of Spain. *The same thing may be said of the unbeliever and the sceptic.* They have not realized that the presence of the living God is with his Church and in the midst of her, and that he, in his own way and in his own time, can vindicate his own truth. How often, during these eighteen hundred years, has the unbeliever exulted in what he has called the overthrow of Christianity! and yet how vain and foolish the boast has proved to be! Voltaire boasted that with one hand he would overthrow the Christianity which it had required twelve apostles to build up. "At this day, the press which he employed at Ferney to print his blasphemies is actually employed at Geneva in printing the Holy Scriptures." May we not still say, as we think of the enemies of the truth, the enemies of virtue, the enemies of religion, and as we listen to their audacious boasts, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision"?

II. GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE IS NOT REALIZED BY MANY AMONGST THEMSELVES. Elisha's servant, no doubt, believed in God. If any one had denied God's presence with his people, he would doubtless have firmly asserted it as his belief. Yet when the time came to put his belief to a practical test, we see how slight a hold it had taken of him. When he went forth in the morning and saw the horses and chariots and the mighty host encompassing the city round about, he said to Elisha, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" Do *you* never feel a sensation like Elisha's servant? You believe you are a child of God, you believe that God takes care of his people, yet perhaps there are times when you are unduly anxious about your business, and allow yourself to be weighed down by foolish and causeless fears. How many are alarmed by the thought of sickness in themselves or in their families, and nervously ask, "What shall we do?" Oh that we would learn to realize God's presence with us! "My times are in thy hand." In the same way, how many professing Christians are there who do not sufficiently realize *God's presence in his Church!* How much more active we should be, how much more earnest in Christian work, if we realized that God is working with us! With what power a minister ought to preach if he could only remember to say with John the Baptist, "There cometh One mightier than I after me"! Then how many are *easily discouraged by difficulties.* Some are always saying when they see a difficulty in the way, "What *shall* we do?" "Who will roll us away the stone?" Some are always imagining difficulties and foreseeing them at the very beginning of a work. This spirit of timidity, of fear, is a great hindrance in Christian work. Half-belief is almost as bad as no belief, in this respect. Half-heartedness in religious work is one of the greatest hindrances to its success. In this, as in everything else, the maxim holds good, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." The *half-hearted ten* out of the twelve spies sent to view the promised land frightened the Israelites from going up, and nearly caused God, in his righteous anger at their unbelief, to disinherit them altogether. *The half-hearted inhabitants of Galilee* prevented the blessing of the Saviour of men resting upon them, for we read that "he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." *The half-hearted followers of Christopher Columbus* nearly prevented him from discovering America. There is no room for half-heartedness in religion. There is a loud call for decision and firmness both in belief and in conduct.

III. GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE IS ALWAYS REALIZED BY HIS TRUE SERVANTS. The King of Syria did not realize that God's presence was with his people, and he was at his wits' end to know how to circumvent them. Elisha's servant did not realize that God's presence was with himself and his master; and how panic-stricken he was at the danger that seemed to threaten them! But there was one man for whom the armies of the King of Syria had no terror, to whom difficulties brought no dismay, and that was

the man who lived near to God, and realized that God was near to him. Hence it is that we find Elisha saying, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." So it has been with God's true servants in all ages. They have realized that God's presence was with them, and in the strength of that one idea they have surmounted the greatest difficulties, braved the most terrible dangers, met fearlessly the most overwhelming opposition, and accomplished tasks that to the worldly eye seemed almost incredible. Look at *Abraham*. He went forth from his native land, "not knowing whither he went." And why? Because he knew that God was with him. Look at *Nehemiah*. An exile from his native land, he undertook the wonderful enterprise of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He had plenty of opposition. But he went on with his work in spite of the ridicule and attacks of Sanballat and his companions. And what was the secret of his determination and perseverance? You have it in his answer to Sanballat, "The God of heaven, *he will prosper us*; therefore we his servants will arise and build." This year (1888) is the anniversary of two great events in British history—two great deliverances which illustrate in a marvellous way God's presence with his people. It is the three hundredth anniversary of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, which took place in 1588. Yet it was not English ships or English power that really turned away that invasion from our shores; but the winds and waves of him who holdeth the sea in the hollow of his hand. It is also the two hundredth anniversary of the revolution of 1688. And while we should never use such anniversaries as the occasion of displaying a vindictive or unchristian spirit towards those who differ from us, yet in the interests of truth, in the interests of true Anglicanism, in the interests of civil and religious liberty, it is most desirable that these two great events should be rightly and piously commemorated. One thing they illustrate very clearly, and that is, that however dark the prospects of God's people seem to be, and however overwhelming seem the forces arrayed against them, he is able to banish every cloud and to give them the victory over all their enemies.

"God is our Refuge and our Strength,
In straits a present Aid;
Therefore, although the earth remove,
We will not be afraid."

One or two practical applications. 1. *It is well to be on God's side.* In a time of danger or of trouble, a great many people expect God to be on their side, who have never taken any pains to show themselves on his side. If you want to have the unspeakable advantage of God's presence with you in your time of difficulty or danger, the most important question you could now ask yourself is, "Am I on God's side?" 2. A word to those who are God's people. *Undertake great things for God.* Remember that you have unlimited resources at your command. We should be ashamed of how little we are attempting to do for God, when we have the inexhaustible treasury of Divine grace to help us. 3. *Never suffer yourself to be daunted or depressed by difficulties.* The greater the difficulties, the greater should be the determination of the Christian. "Let courage rise with danger." Luther sang his most stirring songs of praise and hope and courage in the darkest moments of his life. Those who have God with them can afford to sing amid the darkness.—C. H. I.

Vers. 17—23.—*Eyes closed, and eyes opened.* I. EYES CLOSED. 1. *The young man's eyes were closed.* He did not see the horses and chariots of fire that were round about Elisha. He did not realize that deliverance was at hand. How many like him are blind to the power of God, to the providences of God! How many are quick to see anything that concerns their temporal advantage, but slow to see that which concerns their immortal souls! How many see no beauty in Christ! 2. *The Syrians' eyes were closed.* This was a judicial act of God in response to Elisha's prayer. So there is a spiritual judicial blindness. "Seeing they shall see, but not perceive; hearing they shall hear, but shall not understand." It is a spiritual law which has its analogies in the natural world. If we neglect to use any of our bodily powers, the power itself is soon lost. Similarly, mental or spiritual powers, if neglected, will soon become useless. Let us be careful that we use the privileges and opportunities and talents which God has given us, lest they be taken from us altogether. "To him that hath shall be given,"

that is, to him that hath made a good use of his talents; "and from him that hath not" —from him that has so neglected his talents that they are practically not *his*—"shall be taken away even that which he hath."

II. EYES OPENED. 1. *The Syrians' eyes were opened to see their true condition.* Instead of being a victorious army, with Elisha a captive in their hands, they find that he has them in his power, and has led them into the midst of Samaria and into the presence of the King of Israel. They then saw how defenceless and how helpless they were. That is the first step in the path of salvation. The first step for a sinner is to see his need. So with Bunyan's pilgrim. The first thought that led him to set out on his journey was the feeling of his utter helplessness. "Sir, I perceive by the book in my hand that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment (Heb. ix. 27); and I find that I am not willing to do the first (Job xvi. 21), nor able to do the second (Ezek. xxii. 14)." "Lord, show me myself." 2. *The young man's eyes were opened to see that deliverance was at hand.* "The Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." This is the second step in the sinner's salvation. Having seen his need, he next needs to see the Saviour. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" Have *you* seen your true condition, your spiritual need? Have *you* seen your need of Jesus as your Saviour?

"When free grace awoke me, by light from on high,
Then legal fears shook me, I trembled to die;
No refuge, no safety in self could I see—
Jehovah Tsidkenu my Saviour must be.

"My terrors all vanished before the sweet Name;
My guilty fears banished, with boldness I came
To drink at the fountain, life-giving and free—
Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me."

III. THE POWER OF PRAYER. Elisha's prayers prevailed three times in this short narrative. There may be some one known to us whose eyes are closed, who is spiritually blind. Have we brought the case to God in prayer? Is it a wandering son? "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see." Is it a wayward daughter? a godless friend? We may not reach them by our words; *but we can reach them by our prayers.*

IV. THE POWER OF DIVINE GRACE. Elisha did not exult in his triumph over his enemies. He did not take advantage of their helplessness. They had come to take him captive, perhaps to take away his life; but he heaps coals of fire on their head. The King of Israel wanted to smite them. But Elisha reminds him (according to one view) that it was not customary to smite even captives taken in war: how much less should he smite those who had been put within his power, not by any exertions of his own, but by the miraculous interposition of God! On the contrary, Elisha recommends that they should be well treated and well fed. This was done. And what was the consequence? "So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." *This little act of kindness had turned away their wrath.* What an example for us to imitate toward those who treat us ill! "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."—C. H. I.

Vers. 24—33.—*Samaria besieged.* I. A CITY IN DISTRESS. Once more the people of Samaria were in great straits. A besieging army was at their gates, and, most terrible of all, the horrors of famine were within their walls. They were reduced to the greatest extremities. The women were actually beginning to cook and eat their own children. Whichever way they looked, the prospect was dark. To open the gates to the Syrians meant death or captivity. And the longer they remained within their walls, the more certainly death and starvation stared them in the face. *See here the evil result of forsaking God.* To such extremities they had brought themselves by their own sins. They had forsaken the living God, and now their false gods were not able to help them in the day of their calamity. It is an evil day in a man's history when he turns his back upon God's Word, upon God's commandments, upon God's Son. As it often happens, *their calamities had hardened their hearts and blinded their eyes.* There was

one man in their midst who had often before proved a wise counsellor and friend. They had Elisha, the man of God, in their city—the man who, by counselling them to make the valley full of ditches, had delivered the Moabites into their hands; the man, too, who had revealed Benhadad's secrets, and smitten the Syrian army with blindness. But they had forgotten all that. Instead of looking to Elisha for guidance or help, they blame him for all their troubles. How often does it happen that, when people get into difficulties, they throw the blame upon others! When troubles and difficulties come upon us, our first business should be to search our own hearts and lives, and see whether the trouble may not be of our own causing.

II. A PROPHET IN DANGER. The king was a partaker in the wickedness of the people. He encouraged the prevailing idolatry. Now he shares their suffering. But he never thinks of looking to God for deliverance. He never thinks of humbling himself before God, and confessing his sins. On the contrary, he shows a disposition to cast the blame both on God and on his prophet. When the poor woman in her hunger and distress called to him for help, he answered, "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?" Though he wore sackcloth, the outward sign of mourning or penitence, there was no sign of inward penitence or humility in his heart. How blind and infatuated he is in his anger and defiance! He threatens to take away the prophet's life. Jezebel had once said to Elijah, "So let the gods do to me and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them [the prophets whom she had slain] by to-morrow about this time." So here Jehoram says, "God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day." Even Jezebel's threat had apparently more reason for it than Jehoram's. Elijah had undoubtedly slain the prophets of Baal. But in this case Elisha was innocent of any charge. Jehoram quite gratuitously holds him responsible for the famine in Samaria, and threatens to take away his life. But man proposes and God disposes. Although Elisha is in danger, he is never in dismay. When the king's messenger came to take off his head, Elisha bade the elders to hold the messenger fast at the door till the king himself, who was close behind, should arrive. Elisha had bad dealings with Jehoram before. He would hear his sentence from the king himself, if at all. Well for those who, like Elisha, live near to God. "Serve the Lord in fear," said John Knox on his death-bed, "and the flesh will not fear death." Dangers do not distress them; death brings no dismay. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—7.—*A Church-extension enterprise.* "And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us," etc. If there were a Church in Israel at all, the schools of the prophets undoubtedly constituted a part of that Church. They were a communion of godly men. The brief narrative, therefore, may fairly be regarded as a record of a Church-extension enterprise, and as such four things are observable—things that all who contemplate such enterprises should ponder and imitate.

I. This Church-extension enterprise was STIMULATED BY THE PRINCIPLE OF GROWTH. The old sphere had become too narrow for them, they had outgrown it. "And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us." The numbers who came to listen to Elisha and the increase of students required greater accommodation than the whole place could afford. This is a principle on which all Church-extension, should proceed; but in these modern times it is sometimes not only ignored, but outraged. Although statistics show that the churches and chapels in England fall miserably short of the accommodation necessary for the whole population, it is three times greater than is required for the number of attendants. On all sides empty churches and chapels abound, millions of money contributed for religious purposes lie as the "one talent," wrapped in a napkin, unused. And yet still, almost every religious denomination seems to feel that the building of new churches is its grand mission. The fact is that church-building has, in many cases, become a business speculation. One church should grow out of another; the grain of mustard seed will create its own organism, multiply its own branches, and propagate its vitality.

II. This Church-extension enterprise was CONDUCTED IN A MANLY MANNER. 1. *The*

best counsel was sought before a step was taken. These sons of the prophets went to Elisha and said, "Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan." Though they were young, perhaps with all the stirring impulses of youth, they were conscious of their need of counsel, and they sought it. In these modern times in England—we speak from extensive experience—churches and chapels are often built from ignorant zeal and a spirit of rivalry. How unmanly is this! 2. *Each man set to honest work in the matter.* "Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell." Matthew Henry quaintly says, "When they wanted room they did not speak of sending for cedars, and marble stones, and curious artificers, but only of getting every man a beam, to run up a plain hut or cottage with." Each man, it would seem, felled his beam, carried and adjusted it. How right, manly, and honest all this! They never thought of putting up a grand place at other people's expense. Ah me! how far we are fallen in spirit from them! To erect modern churches and chapels, what means do we use? Fawning entreaties, addressed to moneyed ignorance and stupidity, bazaars with their questionable procedures, their displays, their raffles, and their flirtations.

III. This Church-extension enterprise ENCOUNTERED DIFFICULTIES UNEXPECTED. "And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed." Why this distress of the woodman? Was it because the axe was borrowed and he had not the wherewith to pay, or because he was checked in his operation? Perhaps both were reasons for his distress. The former I trow the greater. In all worthy enterprises on this earth difficulties crop up unawares. Perhaps the best enterprises encounter the greatest difficulties. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." But difficulties are in truth blessings in disguise. They challenge the courage and rouse the forces of the worker. They bring out his manhood. They are to the true worker what tempests are to young trees—they deepen the roots and strengthen the fibres. Besides, there is no consciousness of virtue in doing that which involves no struggle.

IV. This Church-extension enterprise OBTAINED SUPERNATURAL HELP WHEN NEEDED. When the man who had lost his axe was crying out in distress, Elisha, the "man of God said, Where fell it? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it." Elisha here, by raising the axe and making the iron swim, overcame a law of nature—the law of gravitation. Up to this point in this enterprise there does not seem to have been any supernatural interposition. They prosecuted their journeying, they cut down the timber, they carried their beams, all by their own natural skill and force. They did not require supernatural aid. But now one of them did, and it came. We must not expect any special power from heaven to do that which we have the natural force to accomplish ourselves. "As thy day, so thy strength shall be."—D. T.

Vers. 8—23.—*The King of Syria and Elisha.* "Then the King of Syria warred against Israel," etc. In these sixteen verses we have four subjects worth looking into —wickedness thwarted, timidity dispelled, supernatural power manifested, and revenge overcome.

I. WICKEDNESS THWARTED. The King of Syria had determined on an enterprise of bloodshed and wickedness. He had made all arrangements, fixed on the place for his camp. "In such and such a place shall be my camp." But Elisha thwarted the bloody purpose of the Syrian king by informing the Israelitish monarch, Jehoram, of the very place where the Syrians had determined to encamp. His words are, "Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down." The king attended to the prophet's directions, "and saved himself there, not once nor twice." Terrible was the disappointment of the Syrian monarch. "The heart of the King of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not show me which of us is for the King of Israel? And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the King of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber." Observe: 1. That wicked men are most secretive in their purposes. It would seem that the plans of the King

of Syria's bloody enterprise were known only to his most confidential officers, and that they were revealed to them in his bedchamber. There, and perhaps there only, did he detain them, and perhaps with closed doors and soft whisperings. Wicked men, in order to get on in the world, are bound to be secretive. And the more wicked they are, the more necessary for them is this secretiveness. Were dishonest doctors, lawyers, tradesmen, merchants, statesmen, to be open and candid, revealing all that is nefarious in their aims, they would fall into poverty and universal contempt. The good alone can afford to be open and candid; the wicked are bound to be hypocrites if they would live. 2. That none of their purposes are so secret as to escape the notice of Almighty God. How came Elisha to know them? He was far away from the monarch's bedchamber—away in Israel. It was Elisha's God who made the communication to him. Solemn thought. There is One who knoweth what is in man—in every man. He reads all secrets; he "understandeth our thoughts afar off." 3. The revelations of a wicked man's secrets will frustrate his designs. It did so in the case of this king.

II. TIMIDITY DISPELLED. When the Syrian monarch learnt that Elisha was in Israel, he despatched a spy to find him out; and when he discovered that he was in Dothan, "he sent thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about." All this struck a panic into the heart of Elisha's servant, and he cried out, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" How did Elisha relieve his servant of this terrible fear? By assuring him that there were more on their side than on the side of their enemies. "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." This assurance he gave not merely with words, but by ocular demonstration. "And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." It is generally supposed that the reference is here to angels "that excel in strength;" they are in truth the body-guard of the good. They are more in their number than our foes, superior in their power, in their invincible determination, in their authority too. But to see them we must have our spiritual eyes open as the prophet's eyes were now. Faith in the wonderful resources which Heaven has provided for the good will dispel all fear.

III. SUPERNATURAL POWER MANIFESTED. Supernatural power is here manifested: 1. In opening the eyes of the prophet's servant. 2. In bringing under his notice the mountain which was full of horses and chariots of fire. 3. In smiting with blindness the army of Syria. "And when they came down to him [that is, the Syrian army], Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha." These armed legions, whose eyes were glaring with vengeance before, were now in midnight darkness. In this state Elisha becomes their guide and conducts them to Samaria, and when they had come there another supernatural act was performed in the restoration of their sight, and then they beheld their terrible position. "Behold, they were in the midst of Samaria," in the hands of the King of Israel.

IV. REVENGE OVERCOME. The King of Syria, hearing that Elisha had revealed his murderous plan to the monarch of Israel, and had thus thwarted the purpose and the plan of his campaign, was fired with indignation, and sent to Dothan "horses, and chariots and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about." How furiously we may suppose revenge flamed in every member of the army, as well as in the soul of their royal master, as they "compassed the city about"! And this feeling would no doubt be intensified when they found that Elisha had betrayed them into the hands of their enemies. They were in the midst of Samaria, within the very grasp of the King of Israel, and at his mercy. How would Elisha advise the King of Israel to treat these revengeful legions now? "And the King of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?" What was the prophet's advice? Did he say, "Destroy them"? No. He answered, "Thou shalt not smite them." Did he say, "Spare their lives, but make them slaves, take them into captivity and make them beasts of burden"? Did he say, "Deprive them of all food, and starve them to death"? No; he said, "Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them

away, and they went to their master." What was the result of this generous treatment? Did they go away with the old passion of vengeance burning in them? Away to reorganize themselves in greater numbers and with greater force to make another attack? No. Here is the result: "So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." The magnanimous kindness extinguished the flames and paralyzed the arms of revenge, so that they came no more into the land of Israel. This is the Divine way, nay, the *only* way, of conquering our enemies. Evil can only be overcome by good. The most glorious victory over an enemy is to turn him into a friend.—D. T.

Vers. 15—17.—*Invincible helpers of the good.* "And when the servant of the man of God was risen," etc. The context illustrates two circumstances too frequently overlooked, but ever demanding the recognition and study of mankind. 1. *The value of a good man to his country.* The Syrian monarch makes war with Israel; his counsels are formed, his arrangements are complete, and sanguine are his hopes of victory. But there is a good man in Israel—Elisha—who reads the hidden purpose of the Syrian despot, sounds the alarm, puts his country on its guard, invokes Heaven, and thus confounds the wily stratagems and thwarts the murderous purposes of the foe. "So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." True piety is the source of true patriotism; its prayers and prophecies are the sure "defences" of nations. This idea is dawning on the world now; and in coming periods will blaze in broad daylight on mankind. We shall one day see that the victories of truth and prayer were the only victories that ever served the interest of any nation, and that many a pious man, who lived in obscurity and died under oppression, conferred greater blessings on the commonwealth than those statesmen and warriors whose patriotism has been emblazoned in history and sung in verse. The context illustrates: 2. *The source of a wicked man's weakness.* Why did not this Syrian tyrant succeed in his plans? The words which one of his servants addressed to him explain the cause: "Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the King of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber." His projects would not bear the light. As a principle, wicked men would seldom, if ever, realize their ends were there a prophet to unveil their hearts, and publish all the selfish, sensual, dishonest, and blasphemous thoughts that transpire in the hidden chamber of their souls. Wicked tradesmen, lawyers, statesmen, and others succeed only as they conceal their hearts from public view. Let some prophet, like Ezekiel of old, break open the barred door of their "chamber of imagery," and expose the hideous forms "portrayed upon the wall," the impious works that are wrought "in the dark," and forthwith they will lose all public sympathy, patronage, and support. O my soul, cherish thou thoughts that shall bear a prophet's fiery glance—principles that will glow, bloom, and look attractive in the daylight; and purposes that will commend thee to the Divine consciousness of brother spirits, and to the favour of the Everlasting. I proceed to state, with the utmost brevity, a few general truths suggested by the incident before us.

I. THAT THE GOOD ARE OFTEN PLACED IN CIRCUMSTANCES TO REQUIRE SUPERHUMAN HELP. Elisha and his servant were, at this time, at Dothan. The Syrian king, enraged with the prophet for frustrating his military designs on Israel, sends "horses, and chariots, and a great host" in pursuit of him. The mighty army "came by night, and compassed the city about." Early in the morning the prophet's servant beheld the armed and ruthless multitude drawn up around the city. Here were enemies which the prophet himself could not subdue, perils from which his unaided power could not extricate himself. Faint symbol this of the spiritual enemies that surround our dwellings! True, in these days, the antagonists of the good are not so outwardly visible as they were in times that are past. The *great enemy* does not send forth his host now garbed in the attire of the persecutors. They appear not amongst us in the grim and savage forms of the Julians and the Neros, the Maximins and the Diocletians; they assume an habiliment more consonant with the tastes of this civilized era. Their forms fascinate rather than terrify. They seek to draw rather than to drive. But still, are they any less deadly in their aim, or formidable in their power, because they change their garb, drop the sword, and stretch out the hand of false friendship? It is not the plundering of our property nor the wounding of our bodies that injures us most, but the corrupting of our souls. The awakening within our spiritual natures of an impure

suggestion may work a far more fearful ruin than incarcerating us in dungeons, or sending us to the martyr's stake and flames. I call those *forces* mine enemies that are unfavourable to my spiritual interests. Whatever dims my inner vision, and tends to veil from me the sublimities of the "unseen;" whatever deadens my sensibility to duty, and interferes with the free and vigorous play of my faculties; whatever draws me from the eternal future, and links me to the transient present; whatever cools, materializes, and contracts my sympathies, and keeps me more in connection with the contingent than the absolute; whatever depresses me in my struggles to reach that ideal of perfection dimly portrayed in my soul, but drawn out in abiding loveliness in the life of Jesus; whatever forces act thus, I call, with emphasis, my foes. And do not such foes surround us? Tell me of a period when "sinful lusts," which "war against the soul," were more potent and active than now? Our civilization is little more than a perfection in those arts that minister to the senses, pander to the appetites, and gratify the desires of the flesh. When did worldliness ever wield a more wide and mighty sway? When were the votaries of mammon so numerous and enthusiastic in their devotions? The deepest cry of the age seems to be, "My soul thirsteth for gold." When did corrupt literature scatter over the social soil the seeds of error, impiety, and licentiousness to such an extent as now? We are as truly hemmed in by antagonistic forces as was Elisha by the horses and chariots and hosts than encompassed him at Dothan. As we glance at them, the impression of the prophet's servant comes to us, "Alas, master! what shall we do?" We require the help that Elisha had—help from without—from Heaven.

II. THAT HEAVEN HAS PROVIDED HELPERS FOR MEN SUPERIOR TO ALL ANTAGONISTS. "And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." It is generally supposed that the reference is here to the angels "that excel in strength," and that *they* were the horses and chariots of fire that came to the prophet's help. Angels are the hosts of God, and "the body-guard of the good"—"ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation." This doctrine is so antecedently probable, so clearly revealed in Scripture, and so generally believed, as to require no evidence. It is to their *superiority* that our attention is now called. 1. *They are "more" in number than the foe.* If we confine our attention to merely what we see in this world, we shall conclude that the agents of evil are the more numerous. A wider survey of the general realm of spiritual being, as suggested by philosophy, and as revealed in the Bible, presents an opposite view. As malformations in nature are few compared with symmetrically organized existences, so evil spirits are few compared with the good. The great cities, principalities, and hierarchies of the universe are loyal subjects of the great King, and zealous agents in promoting his will; it is but a little province that has here and there thrown off its allegiance. Hell is but a withered leaf in the waving forest of life—a flickering meteor in the starry vault of being. It is our happiness to know that evil is the exception in the universe; good is the rule. Thus evil exists as a contingency—it might or might not be; but good exists by an absolute necessity—it is and must be, because God is and must be. 2. *They are "more" in the instrumentalities they wield.* The agents of evil are not only fewer in number, but inferior also in their armour. Falsehood, selfishness, wrong,—these are their miserable weapons; and are they not weakness compared with truth, love, right, the weapons of the good? Ay; they can no more stand before them than "dry stubble" before the raging fire—the gloom of the night-heavens before the rising sun. The history of the world gives many instances of one man, with truth and right on his side, subduing countries under the reign of falsehood and wrong. 3. *They are "more" in their invincible determination.* The *power* of a moral intelligence in any operation will not be entirely or chiefly determined by the instruments he employs, but by the strength of the purpose under which he acts. A man with a weak purpose, however great his advantages, will not do much. Now, the agents of evil can have no invincible purpose, for the obvious reason that their consciences—whose sanctions can alone give invincibility—are not on their side. Just as far as any being is under the influence of evil, he must be fickle and fearful. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion." 4. *They are "more" in the authority under which they act.* The Bible teaches that the angels of evil are under the control of one master-spirit of darkness—"the prince of the power of the air;" but those of the good are

under the authority of the Infinite. His Spirit inspires them, his will they obey, his energy is their strength. Satan, the master of the evil spirits, is himself the creature and slave of God. The moral usurper cannot move or breathe but by the permission of *him* who "maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." Truly, then, my pious friend, however great the spiritual foes, thy helpers are greater. To the eye of sense, indeed, thou seemest to wrestle against fearful odds. Wealth, fashion, customs, influence, worldly maxims, habits, and even numbers, seem against thee; but "fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Open the eye of faith, and look beyond the boundary-line of sense, and thou shalt see that the great "mountain" of universal being is "full of horses and chariots of fire round about" thee.

III. THAT THE SUPERIOR HELPERS OF THE GOOD ARE ONLY SEEN BY SOME. Elisha saw the celestial helpers, but his servant saw them not—saw nothing but the enemy. The one, consequently, stood calm amidst the gleaming and rattling weapons of the Syrian army, the other was all perturbation and alarm. Thus men under similar circumstances receive different impressions. The event which overwhelms one with alarm inspires another with hope and heroism. The reason of this is that some have eyes to see only the evil in things, others to see the good as well. Why is this? Why is it that all men cannot see the spiritual helpers that surround them? Several reasons might be assigned. 1. There is the *tendency to judge after the senses.* The majority of men, like the servant of the prophet, see only with the physical eye. Although true philosophy shows that all things that come within the cognizance of the senses are shadows, not substances—semblance, not essence, they reversely consider the visible and tangible only as real. Spirits, therefore, which lie beyond the line of sense, and which are the living creatures in all the "wheels" of human events, and in all the forms of matter, are never practically realized, and often theoretically ignored. 2. There is *the habit of referring everything to secondary causes.* This habit allows no room for God, nor for spiritual interpositions, but in a miracle. What is regular it calls natural; what is miraculous alone is Divine. It sees God in holding the sun over Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, but sees nothing of him in rolling these stupendous bodies, age after age, in their spheres, with an undeviating regularity, and a swiftness incalculable. I say nothing of the irrationality of this habit, nor of its prevalence, of which there can be no question. All I say is that, since God helps us by natural laws, this habit manifestly prevents men from seeing the helpers he sends. 3. There is also a *gloominess of disposition.* This is sometimes a cause. There are men who will not see good. They hear no music in the harp of love; they see no brightness in the unclouded sky of noon. On this earth, even when robed in its summer beauty or laden with autumnal wealth, they sing, or rather groan—

> "Lord, what a wretched land is this,
> That yields us no supply!"

The horses and chariots of mercy may move around them as celestial guards, yet they cry, "All these things are against me." 4. There is *want of sympathy with God.* Strong and earnest sympathy with a being always induces the mind to bring that Being near—near to the inner eye and heart. By this law we bring the distant near—cross oceans and continents. Yes; from worlds beyond the grave the imagination wafts the loved one home to our inmost breasts; and we see the form and hear the voice again. Had we this sympathy with God and holy spirits, we should set them always before us. Jesus had it, and he said, "Ye leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

IV. THAT TO SEE THESE SUPERHUMAN HELPERS ONLY REQUIRES THE OPENING OF THE EYES. "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes." The outward world is to us according to our five senses. Had we fewer, it would be less than it is; or, if more, it would be greater. There are, probably, properties in the material system which we have at present no sense to discover; or, peradventure, there may be senses closed up within, that will one day be developed, and make this old world a new thing to us. But, likely as this may be, the existence of a sense in the soul for seeing spiritual existences is more probable. I am not disposed to pronounce all who have stated that they have seen such beings to be either fanatics or impostors. The *à priori* wonder is, not that

they should be seen, but that they are not more generally perceived. We are related to the material world, and we have senses to discern material existences. We are, confessedly, more intimately and solemnly related to the spiritual; and is it not natural to expect that we should have a sense to see spiritual beings? Were such a sense to be opened within us, as the eye of the prophet's servant was now opened, what visions would burst upon us! The microscope gives to us a new world of wonders; but were God to open the spiritual eye, what a multitude of worlds would be revealed! Ah, my sceptic brother! deniest thou a spiritual world? Where is thy reason? Wilt thou plead the fact that thou hast never seen a spiritual existence? This, assuredly, will not serve thee. Wilt thou permit a deaf man to deny that a thunderstorm ever rent our cloudy atmosphere, because he has never heard the terrific roar; or a blind man to deny that a rainbow has ever spanned these skies, because he, forsooth, has never seen the beauteous arch? Why, then, shouldest thou deny a spiritual world? Before the eyes of the prophet's servant were opened, he might have denied the existence of these helpers. When his master spoke to him of them, he might have said within himself, "Has my master lost his reason, or is he dreaming? I see nothing on the mountain but the Syrian host." All at once, however, his eyes were opened, and what a scene burst upon him! "The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Even so it will be with thee, my friend: ere many days shall pass, God will open thine eyes; and that spiritual world in which thou art now living, and whose existence thou deniest, will burst in awful sublimity upon thine astonished soul!—D. T.

Vers. 24—33.—*Subjects worth considering.* "And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria," etc. These verses, brimful of the wicked and the horrible, press the following subjects on our attention.

I. THE INHUMANITY OF WAR. "And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver." The inhumanity of the Syrian king and his host in invading Samaria is seen in the shameful disregard of the kindness which the Samaritans had previously shown them. In the preceding verses we read that the Samaritans had not only allowed them to escape entire destruction when they were at their mercy, but, at the interposition of Elisha, supplied them with abundant provisions to appease their hunger and to invigorate their frames. Notwithstanding this, they now came to work ruin on their very saviours. War has no gratitude, no sense of right, no sentiment of kindness; often it dehumanizes human nature, transforms the man into a fiend.

"How all minor cruelties of man
Are summed in war, conclusive of all crimes!"
('Festus.')

II. THE TERRIBLENESS OF HUNGER. To such absolute destitution did these ruthless warriors reduce the inhabitants of Samaria, that not only did the ravenous hunger drive them to obtain food from the "ass's head" and from "dove's dung," but from human flesh—mothers from the children of their womb. "And as the King of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. And he said, If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress? And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to-day, and we will eat my son to-morrow. So we killed my son, and did eat him," etc. Here is a tragic tale, a tale that makes the heart quail, and the nerves quiver with horror. Hunger in itself is a blessing, it implies health and stimulates to action; it is in truth the mainspring that keeps the human machinery of the world in action. But when it becomes intense and unappeasable, it sets all moral commandments at defiance, it will break through stone walls, shatter thrones, and break up empires. It is among the primary duties of rulers to keep the hunger of the people appeased. Alas! everywhere in England we hear its groans; may not these groanings be the mutterings of nature before the volcanic eruption?

III. THE MISDIRECTION OF PASSION. The tale of the famishing woman, and the revolting scenes he beheld, pierced the heart of the King of Israel. His feelings at first seem to have been those of great humiliation and deep sympathy. "And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes." But they soon became those of raging wrath against Elisha. "Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day." If Elisha had, from a malign spirit, really brought all this distress upon the Samaritan people, this wrath might have been justified. Anger against wrong is right. But it was not Elisha that brought the calamities; it was themselves—their idolatries, their sins. Elisha was their greatest friend. The misdirection of human indignation is no uncommon evil. How often men are angry with one another without a cause! Passion misdirected put to death the Son of God himself.

IV. THE CALMNESS OF GOODNESS. Whilst all these revolting scenes were taking place, and the king burning with rage against Elisha, was resolving on his destruction, where was Elisha? "But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him." With his disciples, fellow-citizens, and "elders" Elisha sat, without anxiety or alarm. Mark: 1. It was not the calmness of *servile submission*. Though he knew the threat of the king, he had no idea of making an apology or seeking to appease unreasonable indignation, or yield with stoicism to his fate. No. Whilst he sat calmly, the pulse of manhood throbbed stronger in every vein, and when he heard the king's messenger approach the door of his house, he said to the elders, "See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head?" It is grand to hear men give others their proper title, even though they be kings. Were all men thus honest, many of those who are now called "right honourables" would be "right abominables." 2. It was not the calmness of *irresolution*. It was not a state of unnerved indifference; on the contrary, there was in it a resolute power. "Look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door." For the man's own sake hold him, do not let him contract crime by committing murder. Probably at this moment Elisha saw the king himself hurrying towards him, to revoke his murderous decree. Conscious goodness is always calm. He is "kept in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on the Lord." 3. It was the calmness that *conquers*. The king himself, it would seem, was soon at the door. He had relented, and hurried to prevent the execution of his murderous command. "And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said, Behold, this evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" This utterance is that of the king, and it would seem it was a response to the prophet's exhortation to "wait for the Lord." And he means to say, "This evil is not from thee, Elisha, but from the Lord, and it is hopeless; 'what should I wait for the Lord any longer?'" It is not likely that such a humiliating utterance as this would have fallen from the lips of the king, had he met Elisha in a state of furious excitement. No doubt it was the moral majesty of calmness that struck the heart of the monarch.—D. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*The borrowed axe.* This is another of Elisha's miracles of aid. The story belongs to the same class of acts as those related in ch. ii. 19—22; iv. 1—7, 38—44.

I. THE AXE-HEAD NEEDED. The first verses present us with a picture of expansion and extension. The place where "the sons of the prophets" dwelt or "sat" before Elisha, at Jericho, had become too strait for them. Elisha's influence was evidently telling on the nation. The religious movement represented by the prophetic schools was growing in force and volume. It is encouraging to hear of growth and progress in the Church. We note: 1. *The prophets faced their situation.* "Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us." They did not stand still, and endeavour to accommodate their increased numbers to the old conditions. They showed a spirit of enterprise, of advance, in correspondence with their altered needs. This was true wisdom. The Church must adapt herself to new needs, to altered circumstances, to the conditions of progress, if she is to hold her ground. "Enlarge the place of thy tent," etc. (Isa. liv. 2). 2. *They were willing to put forth needful effort.* "Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam," etc. They were prepared to do what was necessary to bring about the changes

required. They had the two conditions of successful work—unity of spirit, and individual willingness. They were to work together for a common end, and each man was to do his separate part. The individual wood-cutter could accomplish little. Unitedly, they could easily make a place for their common accommodation. 3. *They desired Elisha to go with them.* "Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants." Elisha was the bond of their community. They desired neither to act without his sanction nor to go where he could not accompany them. The Church, in her changes, must abide by fundamental truth, and do nothing which would exclude the Master.

II. THE AXE-HEAD LOST. Elisha's sanction given, the band of prophets was soon busy at Jordan, cutting down trees, and preparing for the new building. Then occurred the mishap and loss which gives its name to the story. As one was felling a beam, the axe-head flew off, and fell into the deep part of the river. It was a borrowed axe, and the man's lamentations were instant and sincere. Mishaps will occur in the best undertakings. 1. *He had lost what a neighbour had lent him.* The property was not his own. It had been lent him, probably at his own request, and in the spirit of neighbourly good will. Such neighbourly acts are pleasing to think of. But the more willingly the axe had been lent him, the more did the loser now regret the mishap which had befallen it. It is well that neighbours should be ready to lend; but the incident also shows the danger of borrowing. We should seek to be as independent of others as we can; then, if misfortune does befall us, what we lose is at least only our own. 2. *He could not replace the loss.* Had he been able to do so, he would not have required to borrow. The "sons of the prophets" were good men, but poor men. An axe-head was a small thing, but it meant much to the user, and perhaps not less to the original owner. It is a spirit of conscientiousness which speaks in the man's lament. He held the axe as a trust, and desired earnestly to return it. It is good to see men "faithful in that which is least" (Luke xvi. 10). 3. *He could no longer do his part of the work.* The axe-head was indispensable for the cutting down of his beam. He had the handle, but it was of no use without the iron. This also grieved him. Anything that incapacitates a man for bearing his part in the building work of God's kingdom will be a sorrow to him.

III. THE AXE-HEAD RECOVERED. The indirect appeal made to Elisha in the words, "Alas, master! for it was borrowed," was not in vain. It was a case in which Elisha might be expected to help, and he did so. In the miracle we see: 1. *Human agency.* There is a remarkable blending of the Divine and the human in the whole transaction. Elisha asked, "Where fell it?" It might have been thought that if he had the power to bring the iron to the surface, he would also be able to tell where it fell. But the man had to show him the place. Then, when the iron swam, Elisha said, "Take it to thee." And the man put out his hand and took it. 2. *Expressive symbol.* The miracle, as usual, was accompanied by a symbolical action. A stick was cut down, and thrown into the water. The act was only an expressive way of saying, "Let the iron swim as this stick does." Its sole function was to direct attention to the supernatural result. 3. *Almighty power.* "The iron did swim." There was here, not the alteration of the properties of iron (else it would be iron no longer), but the introduction of a new cause, which counteracted the natural effect of gravity, and raised the iron to the surface. Nature is but an instrument in the hand of God, and can be bent by him to his own purposes. The lesson of the incident is to trust God for help even in what we might be tempted to call the small things of life. The loss of an axe-head may seem a trivial circumstance to call for an interference with the laws of the universe. But with God there is no great and little. We can make known *all* our wants to him, with assurance of being helped.—J. O.

Vers. 8—23.—*A bootless invasion.* The chronic hostility which subsisted between the Israelitish and the Syrian kingdoms soon broke out again in war. In this, as in other instances, Syria was the aggressor. The invaded kingdom was delivered, not through "the sword and the bow" (ver. 22) of its king, but once more through the interposition of Elisha.

I. FRUSTRATED PLANS. 1. *Royal strategy.* The war which the King of Syria commenced was intended to be carried on, not by battle in the open field, but by a series of surprises, caused by the planting of ambuscades at convenient spots. It was

cunning more than strength that the king relied on. He "took counsel with his servants" as to the best method of carrying out his plans. Men are apt to overvalue cunning. It plays a large part in the conduct of worldly, especially of political and military, affairs. 2. *The failure of plans.* If the plotters were "profound to make slaughter" (Hos. v. 2), God was deeper than the plotters, "a rebutter of them all" (Hos. v. 2). This was the element Benhadad left out of his calculations. Everything that passed in the king's council-chamber was revealed by God to Elisha, who told it to the King of Israel. What was spoken "in the ear" in Damascus was proclaimed "upon the housetops" in Samaria (Luke xii. 3). Thus the King of Israel saved himself "not once or twice." The wicked greatly err when they say, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" (Ps. lxxiii. 11). Not one of their plans but is "naked and opened" (Heb. iv. 13) to him. With a knowledge and skill infinitely beyond theirs, he can easily bring the cunningest of their schemes to nought. This is the comfort and safety of those who trust God, and are under his special care. 3. *The secret discovered.* The King of Syria's chagrin at the continual frustration of his schemes was great. He could account for it in no other way than that some of his own servants habitually betrayed his counsels. They who have God to fight with must lay their account for many disappointments and troubles. At last the real state of the case was made known to him by one who had learned the facts about Elisha. It was a startling discovery to make, that the things which he spoke in his bedchamber were accurately told by Elisha to his enemy, the King of Israel. None of us would like to be thus supervised in our secret doings by our fellow-men. How little we reflect that, in sober fact, we are being thus morally supervised by the living God! Elisha's name would be well known in Syria since the healing of the famous captain.

II. INVISIBLE DEFENCE. If Elisha was the medium of discovering his plans, the only practicable course for the King of Syria to pursue was to secure the person of the prophet, and so stop further communications with the King of Israel. Benhadad might have reflected that, if all his plans were known to Elisha, this plan would be known too, and Elisha could easily escape. But wicked men do not, as a rule, reflect on the folly of their opposition to God. The king, having ascertained that Elisha was at Dothan, sent an expedition to arrest him. 1. *The encompassing host.* The force despatched against Elisha was "a great host," far exceeding the captains of fifties with their fifties who were sent to arrest Elijah (ch. i.). Benhadad put trust in chariots and horses (Ps. xx. 7). Yet why so great a company to take one prisoner, if no supernatural arm was there to fight for him? And if God was Protector, what would even this great host avail? Another proof of the inward uncertainty with which this enterprise was entered upon is seen in the fact that the host surrounded the city "by night." Combined with the worldly man's belief that physical force is irresistible, there is the lurking fear that it may not prove irresistible after all. 2. *The trembling servant.* Awaking early the next morning, and going forth, the servant of Elisha saw, to his dismay, the city compassed about with both chariot and horse. His cry, as he rushed back to report the fact to his master, was, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" Thus apt are men to judge of a situation purely by the standard of sense. The material factors are nearly the only ones looked at. Things are esteemed to go well or ill with us according as the *natural* situation looks favourable or the reverse. It is the constant aim of Bible-teaching to lift us above this point of view—to give us a higher one. 3. *The invisible protectors.* Elisha prayed that the young man's eyes might be opened, and then he saw the mistake he was committing. "The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." No wonder that, in this moment of apparent danger, Elisha was full of calm trust. Knowing Benhadad's designs, he might have escaped had he desired, but with the forces of the invisible King interposed between him and his enemies, he did not feel even this to be necessary. Not less confidently, in seasons of danger from ungodly men, may the believer commit his way unto the Lord. It may not be given him to see the symbols of invisible protection, but not the less surely can he depend that "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps. xxxiv. 7). He can say with David, "I will not be afraid of ten thousand of people that have set themselves against me round about" (Ps. iii. 6). They can do him no further harm than God sees meet to allow. They that are for him are more than they that be against him.

III. GOOD FOR EVIL. 1. *The supernatural blindness.* Descending from the neighbouring heights, on which they had encamped during the night, the Syrians now approached to take Elisha. He, on his part, prayed the Lord, "Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness." The prayer was granted, though the word means rather confusion and dazedness of mind, than absolute deprivation of sight (Gen. xix. 11). Their movements became aimless, and Elisha, going up to them, said, "This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek." There is the appearance of falsehood in this speech only if we forget that the men were in a mental maze, and probably were actually going aside both from the way and the city in their attempted search for it. Elisha, in promising to bring them to the man whom they wanted, undertook no more than he performed. Only when the Lord opened their eyes, they found they were, not in Dothan, but in Samaria. This is one way in which God frequently discomfits wicked men, pouring confusion into their counsels. They "grope for the wall, like the blind, and grope as if (they) had no eyes: (they) stumble at noonday as in the night; (they) are in desolate places as dead men" (Isa. lix. 10). They are granted the desires of their hearts, but after a fashion of God's own; and in such a way as to lead to their final discomfiture (2 Sam. xv. 31). 2. *The King of Israel's proposal.* It seemed at first as if this great multitude of the Syrians had been led like sheep into the slaughter-house. They were now in the King of Israel's power, and for what end could Elisha have brought them there but that the king might smite them? The king himself was nothing loth. In eager tones, he urged Elisha to be permitted to destroy them. The policy of slaughter is always an easy one. It might seem sanctioned by Old Testament precedents. Probably, however, even in the Old Testament, there is no example of the divinely sanctioned extermination of a multitude who were not captives in lawful war. This is the point Elisha urges in reply. If the king smote this multitude, would he be smiting those whom he had taken with his sword and bow? He would not. God had delivered these captives into his hands, and with other ends than that he should destroy them. 3. *Elisha's magnanimous counsel.* Elisha showed the King of Israel "a more excellent way" (1 Cor. xii. 31). Let him set bread and water before them, that they might eat and drink, and go to their master. Here, surely, in the Old Testament, breathes the spirit of the New. It is Christ's precept of doing good to enemies, of returning good for evil, of seeking to overcome evil with good. The King of Israel behaved more nobly in this way than if he had shed the blood of these captives. God has no pleasure in the unnecessary effusions of blood. An instance of similar clemency to captives took place in the reign of Pekah, at the instigation of the Prophet Oded (2 Chron. xxviii. 9—15). The King of Israel did as Elisha desired, and the captives were first entertained, then sent back. So generous a deed should have evoked a friendly spirit in Benhadad, but at most it only did so for a time. We are not, however, to be discouraged from acting rightly, because those to whom we show kindness do not appreciate our action.—J. O.

Vers. 24—33.—*The siege of Samaria.* Unwarned by the failure of previous attempts, Benhadad was soon engaged in a new war on Israel. The fresh invasion was made the occasion of a fresh deliverance, more wonderful than any of the preceding, but not before Samaria had been reduced to the most desperate straits.

I. THE HORRORS OF A SIEGE. 1. *The city invested.* The King of Syria advanced with his army, and struck a direct blow at the capital of the country. Samaria was the key of the situation. In it was the king, the court, the Prophet Elisha, the whole state of royalty. If it could be forced to capitulate, the entire land would be at the mercy of the invader. Benhadad, accordingly, surrounded the city, and, having cut off all supplies, waited till famine compelled it to surrender. The method of siege is common in warfare. Nothing could more awfully illustrate the helplessness of human beings when deprived of the use of the ordinary productions of nature. We depend on God for daily existence, and do not realize it. 2. *The fearful famine.* With no supplies coming in, the stock of food in Samaria was soon utterly exhausted. We are reminded of the terrible distress in such famous sieges as those of Londonderry in 1689, and Paris in 1870. What in ordinary circumstances would have been deemed unfit for human food, nay, loathed, was eagerly seized upon, and famine prices were gladly paid for it.

"An ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver," etc. Hunger is one of the most commanding of appetites. "In every land and in every age the first and most interesting question the majority of men have to practically solve is, 'How are we to get bread?' Man's social, moral, and spiritual welfare turns to an incalculable extent on that question. Throughout all history, sacred and profane, this great want has been swaying and moulding as a first power the nations of men. Hence the significance of the petition in the centre of the Lord's prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' It may seem at first sight a comparatively small petition, overshadowed and dwarfed by the great, spiritual petitions both before and after it; but he who knew what was in man, knew what a powerful influence the question of daily bread had upon his whole life and welfare; and when we ourselves consider what a power it is in the world, we see something of the reason for placing such a petition in the centre of a model of prayer" (F. Ferguson). 3. *Natural affection destroyed.* The shocking episode narrated in vers. 26—29 illustrates the previous remarks (cf. Deut. xxviii. 53—57). The king was stopped when passing by on the wall by a woman appealing to him for help. With not unnatural bitterness he replied, "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?" Was it out of the empty barnfloor, or the dry winepress? He then inquired into her complaint, and heard from her her revolting tale. A woman had proposed to her that she should give her son for food to them both that day, and she would give *her* son next day. The complainant had fulfilled her part of the bargain, and now the second woman had hidden her son. One asks—Could human nature, in its direst extremity, ever descend to such revolting deeds? Alas! the instances in history are not few. We have reason to thank God for his goodness in preserving us from such extremity and such temptation.

II. GUILT LAID AT THE WRONG DOOR. 1. *The token of humiliation.* The woman's dreadful story, revealing such depths of horror in the city, stung the king to the heart. His first act was to rend his clothes, and, as the people looked, they saw that secretly he had been wearing sackcloth upon his flesh. The commentators, perhaps, hardly do justice to Jehoram in this act. The next verse shows that his religion did not go very deep; but various circumstances suggest that there was a measure of sincerity in his penitence. He had evidently thus far listened to the counsels of Elisha, and tried to "wait on the Lord" for deliverance. He does not show badly in his sympathy with the people. The very secrecy of his wearing of sackcloth distinguishes it from the act of an ostentatious formalist. He probably, like his father Ahab, really "humbled" himself for a time, "and went softly" (1 Kings xxi. 27, 29). If, in his outburst of passion, he uttered a threat of death against Elisha, it appears to have been no sooner spoken than it was repented of, and he hastened after his messenger to counteract it. It is good when God's chastisements lead to humiliation of the soul. We can at least make Jehoram an example in the unostentatiousness of his exercises of penitence (Matt. vi. 16—18). 2. *The threat and its reception.* Carried away by his anger and his feeling of the intolerableness of the situation, the king swore an oath that that very day the head of Elisha should be taken from him. It was a wicked and inexcusable utterance. The reasons of it may be thus assigned: (1) Elisha had apparently urged him to patience and repentance, assuring him that help would come. That hope had been disappointed. (2) He fixed the responsibility of the delay of help on Elisha, as one who had power with God, and had not exercised it. (3) He was angry with God himself, and was moved to wreak his vengeance on God's ministers. Had he properly considered the matter, he would have reflected that Elisha, like himself, could but present his desires to God, and wait God's time; that the prophet had unweariedly been doing this, and was the one hope and saviour of the people; and that, if guilt lay at any one's door, it was his own wickedness, and that of his associates, that was bringing these calamities upon the nation. Wicked men, however, are seldom willing, except in a very limited degree, to take home guilt to themselves. They will blame God, their fellows, their spiritual counsellors, any one but themselves, for their miseries. It is a very different picture we have of Elisha. He sits composedly in his house, with the elders of Samaria around him, no doubt exhorting them and strengthening them to wait on God. By that prophetic *clairvoyance* of which we have so many instances, he knew of the king's threat as soon as it was uttered, and bade the elders shut the door against this messenger of "the son of a murderer," and detain him till the

king himself came. 3. *Why wait longer on the Lord?* Jehoram soon arrived, and his first words to Elisha were, "Behold, this evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" That he had departed from his threat may be presumed from Elisha answering him as he did. But his words show his radical misconception of religion. To wait on the Lord was not a duty to be done from regard to its own rightness and propriety. It was, he thought, a means to an end. If benefits were to be gained from it, it was to be done; if not, it was to be set aside. Service of God which springs from this principle is not true service. It is disguised self-interest. It has no real spring of love, devotion, or worship. The spirit is kindred with that of the fetish-worshipper, who prays to his gods for rain, and beats them if he does not get it. But why blame Jehoram, as if he were specially impious? Does not the same spirit show itself in multitudes among ourselves? While the sun shines on them they are willing enough to be religious. If adversity comes, there is unbelief, murmuring, impatience, rebellion at the Divine ordering. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job ii. 10). It is not enough to acknowledge that evil is from the Lord, we must humble ourselves under his hand, submit to him, own the justice of his dealings, and seek to profit by his chastisements. We must not faint, or grow unbelieving, but be assured that, in protracting the hour of deliverance, God is but waiting to make the deliverance more signal and glorious (Heb. xii. 5—11).—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VII.

Vers. 1—20.—THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA (*continued*): THE DELIVERANCE.

Vers. 1, 2.—The separation of these verses from the preceding narrative is most unfortunate. They are an integral part of it, and form its climax. In answer to the king's attempt upon his life, and hasty speech in which he has threatened to renounce Jehovah, Elisha is commissioned to proclaim that the siege is on the point of terminating, the famine about to be within twenty-four hours succeeded by a time of plenty. There is thus no reason for the king's despair or anger.

Ver. 1.—**Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord.** This was a very solemn exordium, well calculated to arrest attention. It must be remembered that the prophet's life was trembling in the balance. The executioner was present; the king had not revoked his order; the elders would probably have suffered the king to work his will. All depended on Elisha, by half a dozen words, changing the king's mind. He therefore announces a Divine oracle (comp. 2 Chron. xiii. 4; xv. 2; xx. 20; and for the exact expression, see Isa. i. 10; xxviii. 14; xxix. 5, etc.; Jer. ii. 4; vii. 2, etc.). **Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time shall a measure**—literally, *a seah*—**of fine flour be sold for a shekel.** The "seah" was probably about equal to a peck and a half English, the shekel of the time to about half a crown. Thus no extraordinary cheapness is promised, but only an enormous fall in prices from the rate current at the moment (ch. vii. 25). Such a fall implied, almost necessarily, the discontinuance of the siege. Jehoram appears to have accepted the prophet's solemn asseveration, and on the strength of it to have spared his life, at any rate till the result should be seen. **And two measures**—literally, *seahs*—**of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.** The gates, or rather gateways, of Oriental towns were spacious places, where business of various kinds was transacted. One at Nineveh had an area of above two thousand five hundred square feet. Kings often held their courts of justice in the city gates. On this occasion one of the gates of Samaria seems to have been used as a corn-market (comp. vers. 17—20).

Ver. 2.—**Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned**; rather, *the lord*, or *the captain*, as the word שָׁלִישׁ is commonly translated (Exod. xiv. 7; xv. 4; 2 Sam. xxiii. 8; 1 Kings ix. 22; ch. ix. 25; x. 25; xv. 25; 1 Chron. xi. 11; xii. 18; 2 Chron. viii. 9). (For the habit of kings to lean on the hand of an attendant, see above, ch. v. 18.) **Answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?** The king makes no reply; he waits for the result. But the officer on whose arm he leans is not so reticent. Utterly incredulous, he expresses his incredulity in a scoffing way: "Could this possibly be, even if God were to 'make windows in heaven,' as he did at the time of the Flood (Gen. vii. 11), and pour through them, instead of rain, as then, a continual shower of fine meal and corn?"

Disbelief is expressed, not only in the prophetic veracity of Elisha, but in the power of God. Hence Elisha's stern reply. **And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.** At once a threat and a warning. If the thing was to be, and the lord to see it and yet not profit by it, the only reasonable conclusion was that his death was imminent. He was thus warned, and given time to "set his house in order," and to repent and make his peace with the Almighty. Whether he took advantage of the warning, or even understood it, we are not told.

Vers. 3—16.—The mode in which Elisha's prophecy of relief and deliverance was fulfilled is now set forth. Four lepers, excluded from the city, and on the point of perishing of hunger, felt that they could be no worse off, and might better their condition, if they deserted to the Syrians. They therefore drew off from the city at nightfall, and made for the Syrian camp. On arriving, they found it deserted. The entire host, seized with a sudden panic, had fled, about the time that they began their journey. The lepers' first thought was to enrich themselves by plunder, but after a while it occurred to them that, unless they hastened to carry the good news to Samaria, inquiry would be made, their proceedings would be found out, and they would be severely punished. So they returned to the capital, and reported what they had discovered. Jehoram, on receiving the news, feared that the Syrians had prepared a trap for him, and declined to move. He consented, however, to send out scouts to reconnoitre. The scouts found evident proof that the entire army had actually fled and was gone, whereupon there was a general raid upon the camp and its stores, which were so abundant that Elisha's prophecy was fulfilled ere the day ended.

Ver. 3.—**And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate**; or, *at the entrance to the gate-house.* Lepers were forbidden by the Law to reside within cities (Lev. xiii. 46; Numb. v. 3). They were thrust out when the disease developed itself, and forced to dwell without the walls. No doubt their friends within the city ordinarily supplied them with food; and hence they congregated about the city gates. **And they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?** In the extreme scarcity, it is probable that no food was brought to them, the inmates of the city having barely enough wherewith to sustain themselves (ch. vi. 25). Thus they were on the point of perishing.

Ver. 4.—**If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there.** The lepers were certainly not at liberty to enter the city when they pleased; but perhaps they might have managed, in one way or another, to return within the walls. They ask themselves, however, "Cui bono?" What will be the use of it? The famine is inside the town no less than outside. If they entered the city, by hook or by crook, it would only be to "die there." **And if we sit still here, we die also**; rather, *if we remain here*, or, *if we dwell here.* Lepers, excluded from a city, are in the habit of building themselves huts near the gateways. "The lepers of Jerusalem, at the present day, have their tents by the side of the Zion gate" (Keil, *ad loc.*). If the leprous men remained where they were, death stared them in the face equally. **Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians.** Let us, *i.e.*, fall away from our own side, desert them, and go over to the enemy (comp. ch. xxv. 11; Jer. xxxvii. 13, 14; xxxix. 9; lii. 15). **If they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die**; *i.e.* we cannot be worse off than we are, even if they kill us; while it may be that they will be more merciful, and let us live.

Ver. 5.—**And they rose up in the twilight.** Most certainly in the *evening* twilight, as soon as the sun was down (see ver. 9). Had they set off in the daytime, the garrison would have shot at them from the walls. **To go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part**—*i.e.* the most advanced part, that which was nearest to Samaria—**of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there.** The camp was empty, deserted. Not a soul was anywhere to be seen.

Ver. 6.—**For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host.** קוֹל, voice, is used for noises of any kind (see Exod. xx. 18; Ps. xlii. 7; xciii. 4; Jer. xlvii. 3; Ezek. i. 24; iii. 13; Joel ii. 5; Nah. iii. 2), though generally for those in which the human voice preponderated. A noise like that of chariots and of horses and of a great host (חֵיל גָּדוֹל) was borne in upon the ears of the Syrians about nightfall of the day on which Jehoram had determined to put Elisha to death; and, as they expected no reinforcements, they naturally concluded that succour had arrived to help their enemy. How the noise was produced it is impossible to say. Natural causes are insufficient; and the writer

evidently regards the event as miraculous: "The *Lord had made* the host of the Syrians to hear a noise," etc. Nothing can be more weak and irrelevant than to remark, with Bähr, "There are instances, even nowadays, that people in certain mountainous regions regard a rushing and roaring sound, such as is sometimes heard there, as a sign of coming war." The Syrians thought they heard the actual arrival of a vast army. **And they said one to another, Lo, the King of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites.** This supposition has been thought "strange," almost inexplicable. "No such nation as the Hittites any longer existed," says Mr. Sumner ('The Books of the Kings,' vol. ii. p. 72, Eng. trans.). But the Assyrian records of the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. make it evident, not only that the Hittites still existed at that date, but that they were among the most powerful enemies of the Ninevite kings, being located in Northern Syria, about Carchemish (Jerabus) and the adjacent country. It is also apparent that they did not form a centralized monarchy, but were governed by a number of chiefs, or "kings," twelve of whom are mentioned in one place (G. Smith, 'Eponym Canon,' p. 112). It was no very improbable supposition on the part of the Syrians that Jehoram had called in the aid of the Hittite confederacy, and that they had marched an army to his assistance. **And the kings of the Egyptians.** "The plural, *kings* of the Egyptians," says Keil, "is not to be pressed. It is probably occasioned only by the parallel expression, 'kings of the Hittites.'" But Egyptian history shows us that about this date Egypt was becoming disintegrated, and that two or three distinct dynasties were sometimes ruling at the same time, in different parts of the country—one at Bubastis, another at Thebes, a third at Tanis, occasionally a fourth at Memphis (see "Ancient Egypt," in 'The Story of the Nations,' p. 311). The writer thus shows a knowledge of the internal condition of Egypt which we should not have expected. **To come upon us**; *i.e.* to fall upon us from the north and from the south at the same time. In their panic, the Syrians did not stop to weigh probabilities, or to think how unlikely it was that such a simultaneous attack could have been arranged between powers so remote one from the other.

Ver. 7.—**Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight.** At the very time when the lepers were drawing off from the gate of Samaria to fall away to them (see ver. 5). **And left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was.** Partly, perhaps, in mere panic; partly to induce a belief on the part of the enemy that they had not quitted their camp. So Darius Hystaspis, when he began his retreat from Scythia (Herod., iv. 135), left his camp standing, and the camp fires lighted, and the asses tethered (see ver. 10), that the Scythians, seeing the tents and hearing the noise of the animals, might be fully persuaded that his troops were still in the same place. Asses were the chief baggage-animals in many ancient armies. **And fled for their life.** Thinking that, if they waited till dawn, the Israelite allies, Hittites and Egyptians, would exterminate them.

Ver. 8.—**And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp.** The narrative, begun in ver. 3, is here taken up from the point where it was broken off in ver. 5, and the phrase there used is repeated, to mark the connection. **They went into one tent, and did eat and drink.** The first necessity was to satisfy the cravings of their appetite, as they were well-nigh starving. Then their covetousness was excited by the riches exposed to view in the tent. **And carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment.** Oriental armies carried with them vast quantities of the precious metals, in the shape of gold and silver vases, goblets, dishes, as well as in collars, chains, furniture, and trappings. Herodotus says (ix. 80) that, when the camp of Mardonius at Platæa fell into the hands of the Greeks, there were found in it "many tents richly adorned with furniture of gold and silver, many couches covered with plates of the same, and many golden bowls, goblets, and other drinking-vessels. On the carriages were bags containing gold and silver kettles; and the bodies of the slain furnished bracelets and chains, and scimitars with golden ornaments—not to mention embroidered apparel, of which no one made any account." The camp of the Syrians would scarcely have been so richly provided; but still it contained, no doubt, a large amount of very valuable plunder. **And went and hid it.** The lepers had no right to the pick of the spoil. It belonged to the nation, and it was probably the king's right to apportion it. The lepers had to conceal what they appropriated, lest it should be taken from them. **And came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it.** Plundering thus probably, not two tents only, but several. At last, either covetousness was satiated or conscience awoke.

Ver. 9.—**Then they said one to another, We do not well.** It was a tardy recognition of what their duty required of them. As Grotius says, "Officium civium est ea indicare, quæ ad salutem publicam pertinent." Their fellow-countrymen in the city of Samaria were perishing of hunger, mothers eating their children, and the like, while they employed hour after hour in collecting

and hiding away their booty. They ought, as soon as they had satisfied their hunger, to have hurried back to the city and spread the good news. **This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace**; *i.e.* we keep silence, and do not proclaim them, as we ought. **If we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us**; rather, *punishment will fall on us;* we shall suffer for what we have done—a very reasonable supposition. **Now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household.** The "king's household" means the court, the medium through which the king was ordinarily approached.

Ver. 10.—**So they came and called unto the porter of the city**; *i.e.* to the guard of the gate nearest them. The word שֹׁעֵר, "porter," or "gate-man," is used *collectively*. **And they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were.** The horses and asses within a camp were always "tied," or tethered, as we see from the monumental representations of Egyptian camps (Rawlinson, 'History of Ancient Egypt,' vol. i. p. 476), and also learn from historians (Herod., iv. 135). It is somewhat surprising that the horses were left behind, as they would have expedited the flight had they been saddled and mounted. But this was, perhaps, overlooked in the panic.

Ver. 11.—**And he called the porters; and they told it to the king's house within**; rather, *and the porters* (or, *gate-keepers*) *called out and told it*, etc. וַיִּקְרָא may be a plural *before* its subject; or the true reading may be וַיִּקְרְאוּ, which is found in some manuscripts.

Ver. 12.—**And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now show you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field.** Jehoram, knowing of no reason for the flight of the Syrians, suspected a not uncommon stratagem. He supposed that the enemy had merely gone a little way from their camp, and placed themselves in ambush, ready to take advantage of any rash movement which the Israelites might make. So Cyrus is said to have entrapped and slaughtered Spargapises, the son of Tomyris, together with a large detachment, in his last war against the Massagetæ (Herod., i. 211). His supposition was not unreasonable. **Saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.** A double advantage might be expected to follow—those who quitted the town to plunder the camp would be surrounded and made prisoners, while the town itself, left without defenders, would be captured. Compare the capture of Ai by Joshua (Josh. viii. 3—19), when the chief part of the garrison had been enticed out of it.

Ver. 13.—**And one of his servants answered and said, Let some take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain.** One of Jehoram's "servants," *i.e.* of the officers attached to his person, suggested that a small body of horse (four or five) should be sent out to reconnoitre. The besieged had still some horses left, though apparently not many. Note the phrase, "five of the horses *that remain*." The majority had died of want, or been killed to furnish food to the garrison. **(Behold, they are as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it**—*i.e.* in Samaria—**behold, I say, they are even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed)**; *i.e.* they will run no more risk than the other troops who remain in the city, for these, too, "are consumed," *i.e.* are on the point of perishing. Supposing that they fall into the enemy's hands, it will go no harder with them than with the "multitude" which is on the point of starvation. **And let us send and see.** We can do nothing until we know whether the siege is really raised, or whether the pretended withdrawal is a mere *ruse*. We must send and have this matter made clear.

Ver. 14.—**They took therefore two chariot horses**; literally, *two chariots of horses;* i.e. two chariots, with the accustomed number of horses, which (with the Israelites) was two, though with the Assyrians and Egyptians it was frequently three. The employment of chariots instead of horsemen is remarkable, and seems to indicate that with the Israelites, as with the Egyptians, the chariot force was regarded as superior to the cavalry for practical purposes. **And the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see.** The advice of the king's "servant" was taken; a couple of chariots were sent out to reconnoitre.

Ver. 15.—**And they went after them unto Jordan.** The charioteers, finding the camp really empty, discovering no ambush, and coming upon abundant signs of a hasty and perturbed flight, followed upon the track of the fugitives until they reached the Jordan, probably in the vicinity of Beth-shan, which lay on the ordinary route between Samaria and Damascus. Convinced by what they saw that the Syrians had really withdrawn into their own country, they pursued no further, but returned to Samaria. **And, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste.** Cloaks, shawls, shields, and even swords and spears, would be cast away as *impedimenta*—hindrances to a rapid flight.

These strewed the line of the retreating army's march. **And the messengers returned, and told the king.** Gave a full and complete account of what they had seen.

Ver. 16.—**And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians.** The whole population of Samaria, with one accord, quitted the town, and flung themselves upon the spoil—the rich garments, the gold and silver vessels, the horses and asses, of which mention had been made previously (vers. 8—10). At the same time, no doubt, they feasted on the abundant dainties which they found in the tents. Having satisfied their immediate wants, they proceeded to lay in a store of corn for future use, and crowded tumultuously into the gate, where the corn found in the camp was being sold. **So a measure of fine flour;** rather, *and a measure*, etc.—**was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord** (see ver. 1).

Ver. 17.—**And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate.** Anticipating disorder, unless special care were taken, through the probable eagerness of the people to purchase the corn which was offered to them at so moderate a rate, Jehoram appointed the officer on whose arm he had leant when he visited the house of Elisha (see ver. 2), to have the charge of the gate, and preside over the sale. Probably there was no thought of the post being one of danger. **And the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died.** It has been questioned whether the death was accidental (Bähr), and suggested that the eager and famished people resisted his authority, and violently bore down his attempts to control them. But there is nothing in the text that is incompatible with an accidental death. Such deaths are not uncommon in dense crowds of anxious and excited people. **As the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him.** The varieties of reading here do not affect the general sense. The writer's intention is to lay special stress on the fulfilment of Elisha's prophecy; and to emphasize the punishment that follows on a lack of faith. The concluding passage of the chapter is, as Bähr says, "a finger of warning to unbelievers."

Ver. 18.—**And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be to-morrow about this time in the gate of Samaria.** The otiose repetition of almost the whole of ver. 1 can only be explained as a mode of emphasizing, and so impressing upon the reader two main points: (1) Elisha's prophetic powers; and (2) the dreadful consequences that follow on scornful rejection of a message from God (see the comment on ver. 2).

Ver. 19.—**And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, if the Lord should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof** (see the comment on the preceding verse).

Ver. 20.—**And so it fell out unto him;** *i.e.* the prophecy was exactly fulfilled. The lord, being appointed to keep order in the gate where the corn was sold, "saw with his eyes" (ver. 2) the wonderful fall of prices within the short space of twenty-four hours, which Elisha had prophesied; but "did not eat thereof"—did not, in his own person, obtain any benefit from the sudden plenty, since he perished before he could profit by it. **For the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died** (see the comment on ver. 17).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2, and 17—20.—*The sin of the scoffer, and its punishment.* Unbelief may be involuntary, and so neither incur guilt nor deserve punishment. St. Paul "obtained mercy" notwithstanding his bitter persecution of the early Christians, "because he did it ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim. i. 13). Modern sceptics are, no doubt, in many cases unable to believe, their eyes being blinded through their education, through ingrained prejudice or invincible ignorance. But to scoff at religion must be at all times a voluntary act; and it is an act which Holy Scripture views as in the highest degree blamable. In the instance here recorded, where Elisha, rising up in all the majesty of God's prophet, and addressing himself to king, nobles, and elders, solemnly required them to "hear the word of Jehovah," and then proclaimed with a voice of authority the raising of the siege and the speedy conversion of the existing scarcity into abundance, it indicated extreme effrontery and contempt for holy things, to take the word, when the king himself was silent, and utter a scoff, questioning the power as well as the truthfulness of God. The "lord" was clearly puffed up with a high opinion of his own wisdom, enlightenment, and knowledge of the world and its ways, and perceiving no probability of the change prophesied, of which there was indeed at the time no sign,

thought himself entitled, not only to disbelieve the announcement, but to pour contempt upon it. "It is too often the case that high-born and apparently well-bred men, at court, take pleasure in mockeries of the Word of God and of its declarations, without reflecting that they thereby bear testimony to their own inner rudeness, vulgarity, and want of breeding" (Bähr). They think it a proof of their own cleverness and superiority to superstitious terrors, to mock and ridicule what they know to be reverenced by others. For the most part God allows them to escape punishment in this world, but now and then he signally vindicates his honour in the sight of all, by a manifest judgment upon the scoffers. An Elymas the sorcerer is struck blind (Acts xiii. 11) suddenly, an Arius perishes in the dead of night, or an Israelite "lord" suffers the penalty due to his rash words by being "trampled underfoot." God can at any time "arise to judgment," and "reward the proud after their deserving." Let men see to it that they provoke him not by "speaking unadvisedly with their lips." If they cannot receive his Word and hold fast his truth, let them at least "keep still silence," refrain themselves, and not draw down his vengeance upon them by profane scoffs and idle jesting.

Vers. 3—15.—*The plenitude of God's power to deliver from the extremest dangers.* It is impossible to conceive a peril greater than that of Samaria at this time. The Syrians were masters of all the open country. They had for months surrounded the town and strictly blockaded it. The store of provisions within the walls was almost wholly exhausted, and there was no possibility of obtaining a supply from without. Jehoram had no ally who could be expected to come to his aid. Human wisdom, as personified in the "lord on whose hand the king leaned," might well view the end as certain, not seeing from what quarter deliverance could possibly come. But man's extremity is God's opportunity. With God nothing is impossible. Nothing is even hard. He has a thousand resources. He can send forth his angel into a camp at nightfall, and in the morning they shall be "all dead men" (ch. xix. 35). He can make brothers-in-arms to fall out, and turn their swords one against another (2 Chron. xx. 23). He can send a groundless panic upon the largest and best-appointed host, and cause them to flee away and disappear, "like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor." He can make two men, like Jonathan and his armour-bearer (1 Sam. xiv. 6—16), victorious over a multitude. "A thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one," if God so wills it. Panic he can cause in a hundred ways. "It is only necessary that in the darkness a wind should blow, or that water should splash in free course, or that an echo should resound from the mountains, or that the wind should rustle the dry leaves, to terrify the godless, so that they flee as if pursued by a sword, and fall though no one pursues them" (Lev. xxvi. 36). In the present case, the Syrians heard a sound, how caused we know not, and instantly imagined that a danger threatened them, which could only be escaped by immediate flight. Israel had hired against them, they thought, two armies, one of Egyptians and the other of Hittites; the armies had arrived, and would fall upon them at dawn of day. So they hastily fled in the darkness, casting away arms and vessels and garments as they went (ver. 15), and leaving behind them their camp standing, with all its stores intact, its flour and barley, its gold and silver, its rich raiment, its war-horses and beasts of burden. The Samaritans were called upon to do nothing—they had but to "stand still, and see the salvation of God" (Exod. xv. 13). In one day, without any exertion of their own, their deliverance was complete. And so it is with God always.

I. GOD HAS POWER TO DELIVER FROM ALL EARTHLY PERILS. In an hour, in a moment, if he pleases, God has power to deliver: 1. From disease. He can cleanse the leper; give sight to the blind; heal malignant ulcers; infuse strength and vigour into the palsied; make plague, or fever, or any other mortal sickness to pass away. 2. From poverty. He can cause the poorest man to find a treasure, or put it into the heart of a rich man to leave him one, or so bless his little store that it becomes abundance (ch. iv. 1—7), or give him favour in the sight of a monarch (Esth. vii. 6—11), or put the wealth of thousands at his disposal (Acts iv. 34—37). 3. From oppression. He can destroy or cast down the oppressor, cut him off suddenly, release his victims, break the chains from off their neck, "lift them up out of the mire, and set them with the princes of his people." 4. From shame. He can raise from the dungeon to the palace (Gen. xli. 14; Dan. vi. 23—28); can make men ready to worship one whom a moment before they

denounced as a murderer (Acts xxviii. 3—6); can "set on thrones" those who have been treated as "the offscouring of all things" (1 Cor. iv. 14).

II. GOD HAS ALSO POWER TO DELIVER FROM SPIRITUAL PERILS. 1. He can preserve from the power of Satan, "deliver from the evil one," quench all his fiery darts, abate his pride, rescue men from his dominion when they seem on the point of submitting to it. 2. He can deliver from the guilt of sin; can accept atonement; can put away men's sins from them, so that, "though they were as scarlet, they shall become white as snow; though they were red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. i. 18). 3. And he can deliver from the power of sin. He can "strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees" (Isa. xxxv. 3), can take away the evil out of men's hearts, and put his Holy Spirit within them; can enable them to resist the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; can make of them "new creatures." God, and God alone, can do this; and to him we must look for this deliverance; to him we must pray for this deliverance; to him, when we have obtained it, we must be eternally grateful for this deliverance. "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable Gift!"

Vers. 4—11.—*Afflictions may alienate men from God instead of bringing them near to him.* This truth is remarkably exemplified in the conduct and reasonings of the lepers. Here are four poor men, severely afflicted by a malady which was reckoned to come, more directly than most others, from God's hand, whom we should have expected to find humbled and softened by it, more God-fearing, more tender and compassionate towards their fellow-men, than the generality. But the reverse is the case with them. Instead of submitting themselves to God in their wretchedness, and hanging upon him, and looking to him for succour, they are sunk in a dull discontent, well nigh reckless and desperate. It is scarcely possible that they had not heard how Elisha preached a miraculous deliverance, and urged the king not to surrender the city, but "wait for Jehovah" (ch. vi. 33). Yet of deliverance they have not the slightest expectation; they are as unbelieving as the proud "lord" of the court; if they remain with their countrymen, they hold that they must certainly die. So they resolve not to remain, but to go over to the enemy. No feeling of shame restrains them—it does not seem even to occur to them that there is any disgrace in desertion. They are impelled by motives which are purely egoistic—what is *their* best chance? Whether their countrymen will be damaged by its becoming known that they have now no food for their lepers, they either do not inquire or they do not care. What weighs with them is that, if they go over, they may possibly save their wretched lives; if they do not, they have, they think, no chance at all. It may be said that "self-preservation is the first law of nature;" but not self-preservation at all costs. Death is preferable to dishonour. The lepers take their departure, and reach the Syrian camp. Here an extraordinary surprise befalls them; the camp, which they had expected to be full of Syrian soldiery, is empty—there is not a man left in it (ver. 5). All its wealth, all its stores, are open to the first comer. How do the lepers act under these strange circumstances? Again in a purely selfish spirit. That they should fall upon the food, and "eat and drink" (ver. 8), was natural, and no one will blame them so far, though it would have been nobler to have at once hurried back, and proclaimed the glad tidings to the famished city. But, having satiated their appetites, they are not content. Covetousness is stirred up by what meets their gaze, and they must proceed to enrich themselves by carrying off and securing a quantity of objects in silver and gold (ver. 8). When doubt begins to stir in their minds as to the propriety of this proceeding, it is not conscience that awakens, or regard for their fellow-citizens that moves them, but mere consideration for their own interests—"If we tarry till the morning light, we shall find punishment" (marginal rendering). Thus, from first to last, the lepers are an example of mean and grovelling selfishness—such selfishness as poverty too often engenders, as misfortune intensifies, and to which the sense of belonging to a despised class lends a peculiar bitterness. Their calamities have in no way brought the lepers near to God, or induced them to cast their care upon him, but have hardened and brutalized them. We may learn from this—

I. THAT, THOUGH AFFLICTIONS ARE SENT FOR OUR GOOD, WE SHALL GET NO GOOD FROM THEM UNLESS WE RECEIVE THEM IN A RIGHT SPIRIT; *i.e.* submissively, resignedly, even gratefully, as intended to benefit us.

II. THAT, IF WE EXTRACT NOT FROM THEM THE SWEET USES FOR WHICH THEY WERE MEANT, WE SHALL BE APT TO GET FROM THEM IRREPARABLE HARM—the irreparable harm of a lowering of our moral tone, and an alienation of our souls from their Creator.

Vers. 12—15.—*Unseasonable distrust.* Humanly speaking, Jehoram's distrust of the report of the lepers was not *unreasonable.* Such a stratagem as that which he suspected was often practised in the wars of the ancient world, with great advantage to one side and great loss to the other. But his distrust, though not unreasonable, was *unseasonable* from the point of view of faith and belief in God. Elisha having just announced such an inversion of the actual state of things as could only be brought about in an extraordinary way, the occurrence of something extraordinary was to be expected. Jehoram ought to have been on the look out for some strange intelligence; and that which the lepers brought him was in such complete accordance with the tenor of Elisha's prophecy, that a very moderate degree of faith would have sufficed to make him receive it gladly, joyfully, and without any mistrust. He would then have shortened the sufferings of his people by a day, which must have been lost by the despatch of the two chariots to reconnoitre; and he might, perhaps, have saved the life of his "lord," whose dreadful death may have been caused by the impatience of a famished multitude too long restrained from sallying forth. Men are apt to be mistrustful; and it is generally just at the wrong time. They are sanguine and over-confident when it would have been well to suspect, suspicious and over-circumspect when there is no need of doubt or circumspection. God calls them to the kingdom that he has prepared for men, and bids them "come, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. lv. 1); and they hang back, hesitate, delay, as if they were about to be entrapped. A bold impostor invites them to adopt his shibboleth, and trust in it for salvation—they listen eagerly, hang on his words, are persuaded, and join the Mormons or the Peculiar People. Rash youth boasts as it girds on its armour, and looks for an easy victory over sin and Satan, over the world, the flesh, and the devil. Timid old age faints and is weary, and despairs of winning through and "persevering to the end," though God has brought it so far upon its way. It is well to mistrust one's self; it is faithless to mistrust God. He who has borne us up hitherto on eagles' wings will still bear us up. He "fainteth not, neither is weary." He "will not leave us, nor forsake us."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2, with 12—20.—*The unbelieving lord.* Elisha interrupts the king's evil design by a prediction of plenty in Samaria. His mention of a fixed time doubtless induced the king to wait until he should see if the prophecy was fulfilled. "Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." It was a bold statement to make, for *there was no human likelihood of its fulfilment.* If the next day had proved Elisha to be a deceiver, no doubt he would have been torn limb from limb by the infuriated and hungry populace. But Elisha makes not the statement on his own authority, but uses the words, "Thus saith the Lord." One of the king's principal courtiers, on whose arm he leaned, could not conceal his scorn and incredulity. "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" Observe, his statement is not "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, this thing *might be.*" He doesn't even admit that. It is a question expressing entire impossibility. "Even if the Lord would open windows in heaven, *is it at all likely* that such a thing as this would happen?" But what seemed impossible to him was possible with God. The prophet warned him that he would suffer for his unbelief. "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." As it was predicted, so it came to pass. During the night, the Lord caused the Syrian army to hear a great noise, like the noise of horses and chariots and a mighty host, and they fled in terror, leaving their camp with all their possessions and provisions behind them. Four lepers, going out of the city in the evening twilight, discovered the deserted camp. They brought back the news to the beleaguered city. At first, a stratagem

was feared; but by-and-by in wild eagerness for food and plunder, the famished citizens rushed forth. The unhappy lord, who had doubted the prophet's message and the promise of God himself, was trodden upon at the gate and died. From this striking and tragic story we may learn—

I. UNBELIEF MAY HAVE REASON, APPARENTLY, ON ITS SIDE. This courtier might have given many plausible reasons for doubting the prophet's message. 1. *He might have disputed the prophet's right to speak in the name of God at all.* He might have said, "How do I know that this man is speaking the truth?" though even there Elisha had already given pretty tangible proof of his credibility and trustworthiness. The faithful minister of Christ need not mind the sneers of men, provided God has owned his work, and set his heavenly seal upon his ministry. 2. Or he might have said, "*The thing is utterly incredible.* It is utterly impossible. Where is flour to come from in such plenty as to supply this whole city of Samaria? There has been a besieging army around our walls for many days. They have desolated and plundered the country round about. Where is the food to come from, even if there was any one to bring it to us? And we know of no friendly army that is coming to raise the siege or cut its way through the serried ranks of the Syrians." All these would have been very natural thoughts to pass through that courtier's mind. No doubt they were the very reasons, or some of them, which led him to disbelieve Elisha's message. Probably, if he had stated his reasons to the people, he would have got a hundred to agree with him for every one who believed Elisha. No doubt they all looked upon Elisha as a fanatic and an enthusiast. *They,* to all appearance, had common sense, had reason on their side. And yet it turned out to be one of those many cases in which "God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the mighty." Unbelief can be very plausible. Unbelief nearly always appears to have reason on its side. There is not a doctrine of the Bible against which the most plausible arguments might not, and have not, been advanced. Even Scripture itself can be quoted in support of unbelief and sin. "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose." *Good arguments are not necessarily a proof of the truth or justice of a case.* This needs to be remembered in an age when many arguments are urged against the truth of Christianity. What plausible reasons have been urged against the main truths of the Christian religion! Take *the Deity of Christ,* for example. How plausible are the arguments which human reason can bring forward against the doctrine of the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ! And yet of what value are such arguments when placed side by side with our Lord's statement, "I and my Father are one;" with the statement of the Apostle John, "The Word was with God, and the Word was God;" or with the statement of the Apostle Paul, that "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"? In the same way the most plausible arguments can be, and are being, brought against the *atoning nature of Christ's death,* although we have the clear statements of God's Word that "he bore our sins in his own body on the tree," and Christ's own statement that he laid down his life for the sheep. Over and over again it has been asserted that *the Gospel miracles* are incredible. Over and over again the most plausible arguments have been brought against future punishment, although we have the clear and emphatic statements of our Lord Jesus Christ himself on the subject. Unbelief may have reason, apparently, on its side.

II. OUR REASON IS NO TEST OF POSSIBILITY. Our ideas are no test as to what is possible or impossible. Our minds are limited in their range. How often in the march of scientific discovery and invention it has happened that things which seemed impossible in one century were proved to be possible in the next! It is not yet three hundred years since Galileo was condemned to imprisonment by the Inquisition for asserting that the earth moved round the sun. Even our own Sir Isaac Newton, little more than two hundred years ago—the man who discovered the force of gravitation, and invented the first reflecting telescope—was assailed with such abuse on propounding his discoveries, that he actually determined on suppressing the third book of the 'Principia,' which contains the theory of comets. And what shall we say of the invention of the steam-engine by James Watt, scarcely a hundred years ago—an invention which has revolutionized our manufactures, and made possible a speed of locomotion by land and sea that would have been ridiculed as impossible only a few years ago? Every discovery of science, every invention in the useful arts, has at first been scorned as an

impossible dream, then laughed at as impracticable, and finally accepted when it became impossible to deny the truth of the one or the usefulness of the other. *The impossibilities of to-day turn out to be the possibilities of to-morrow.* It is well to remember this, that, because we are unable to conceive of something taking place, it does not therefore follow that it is impossible. The fact is, that when we say anything is "impossible," we just mean that *we cannot conceive it.* But, as has already been shown, this is no reason why a doctrine or statement may not be true, or why a certain occurrence may not take place. We may have never known anything of the kind to occur before; but that is no proof that a thing is impossible, though in the minds of many people it is the only argument. What has never occurred before, may occur yet. There are discoveries in science still undreamed of in our advanced philosophy. There are inventions yet to be conceived which, if to-day we could hear of them, we might pronounce the wild ravings of a fanatic. *There are infinite resources in the hand of him who rules the world.* Who are we, that we should limit God? Who are we, that we should set bounds to his power? Who are we, that we should set bounds to his justice on the one hand, or to his mercy on the other? Must we not bow in deep humility before all the problems that affect his dealings with men, and say, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Must we not reverently accept whatever he has been pleased to reveal in his own Word of his Divine purposes and plans, no matter what our reason may say?

III. THE DANGEROUS CHARACTER OF UNBELIEF. We have seen how unreasonable this courtier's unbelief was. Not only so, but it was *injurious.* So unbelief in a professing Christian is injurious to himself and to others. It hinders his own usefulness. It hinders the progress of the gospel. It hinders the success of Christian work. It is the Achan in the camp, the canker of Christian life and power, the chilling blight of the Christian Church. What an age of deadness in the Church of Christ in England, Scotland, and Ireland, was the eighteenth century, the age of moderatism, the age of indifference and rationalism! What an absence of missionary enterprise! What an absence of evangelistic effort! As Churches and as individuals, we should pray to be delivered from unbelief, and to be filled with living, working, all-conquering faith. Mr. Spurgeon says, in his remarks on this passage, that if we are hindering God's work by our unbelief, it may happen to us as it happened to this nobleman, that God may see fit to take us out of the way. He says that he has remarked, "that when any truly good man has stood in God's way, God has made short work with him. He has taken him home, or he has laid him aside by sickness. If you will not help and will hinder, you will be put aside, and perhaps your own usefulness will be cut short." If you have not faith enough in the power of the gospel, if you have not faith enough in the promises of God, if you have not faith enough in the power of prayer, then be in earnest in asking for more faith—such faith as will stand firm in the day of temptation, of trial, of conflict, of opposition. Never say to yourself about any Christian work, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might such a thing be?" An affectionate word to the unbeliever, to the sinner. *Unbelief is dangerous.* Christ speaks of unbelief as *a sin.* He says of the Holy Spirit that "he will convince the world of sin, because they believed not on me." Men may call it a hard doctrine, but there it is. "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God." Is there anything hard in that? The offer of salvation is made to every one. It is so plain that there can be no mistake about it. If there had been any other way, any other Saviour, men might plead uncertainty. But they are plainly told, "neither is there salvation in any other." Those who believed not the warnings in the days of Noah, perished. Their day of grace was long, but they neglected it. So with the Israelites whose bones lay whitening in the wilderness. "They entered not in because of unbelief." Oh, how terrible that unbelieving courtier's doom: "Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof"!—C. H. I.

Vers. 1, 2.—*A Divine teacher and a haughty sceptic.* "Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow," etc. Here are two objects not only to be looked at, but to be studied.

I. A DIVINE TEACHER. "Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a

shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." Elisha was inspired and commanded by the Almighty God to make a proclamation to a starving population. The famine was still prevailing. The shadow of death darkened the sky, and his freezing breath was in the air, and men were shivering on the confines of the grave. Thus, when things seemed to be at their worst, Elisha appears as a messenger of mercy from Heaven, declaring that on the next morning there would be an abundance of provision obtainable in the gate of Samaria. Two circumstances connected with this promise will apply to the gospel. 1. It was *a communication exactly suited to the condition of those to whom it was addressed.* People were starving, and the one great necessity was food, and here it is promised. Mankind are morally lost; what they want is spiritual restoration, and the gospel proclaims it. 2. It was *a communication made on the authority of the Eternal.* "Thus saith the Lord." That the gospel is a Divine message is a truth too firmly established even to justify debate. By the gospel, of course, I do not mean all the tracts of which the book we call the Bible is composed, but the Divine biography of Christ as recorded by his four biographers.

II. A HAUGHTY SCEPTIC. "Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" Here is one of the most contemptible of all classes of men—a courtier, a sycophant in relation to his king, a haughty despot in regard to all beneath him. When he heard the prophet's deliverance, he, forsooth, was too great a man, and thought himself, no doubt, too great a philosopher, to believe it. It was the man's *self-importance* that begat his incredulity, and this, perhaps, is the parent of all scepticism and unbelief.—D. T.

Vers. 3—8.—*The force of will.* "And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate," etc. Here we have—

I. MEN INVOLVED IN THE MOST WRETCHED CONDITION. "There were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate." Of all the diseases which afflict mankind none is more painful, loathsome, and disastrous than leprosy. It was the scourge of the Hebrew race. Moses minutely describes the appearance of this malady, and gives clear and forcible rules to govern the medical treatment of it. Fat and blood and other particles of diet which excite or aggravate constitutional tendencies to diseases of the skin, were strictly forbidden to the Jews. There are many points of analogy between leprosy and sin.

II. Men in the most wretched condition FORMING A RESOLUTION. "They said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die." Emaciated and wretched as might have been their bodily condition, their moral nature had sufficient stamina left to make a resolution. Mind is often more active in physical disease than in physical health. Pain whips all the faculties into action, marshals all the forces of the soul. Truly wonderful is the power of the human will. Let no man justify mental indolence and moral inertia by pleading his bodily troubles. But how often this is done! How often do you hear men say, "We can do nothing because of the circumstances in which we are placed"! The "cannot" of such is their "will not," and the "will not" is their own choice.

III. Men ACTING OUT THE RESOLUTION formed in the most wretched condition. These four poor starving leprous men not only formed a resolution, but they worked it out. "And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians." In giving practical effect to their resolution, two results followed. 1. *Difficulties vanished.* Their great dread was of the Syrians, but as they approached the Syrian camp, "Behold, there was no man there." Wherefore had they fled? Here is the answer: "For the Lord hath made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host. And they said one to another, Lo, the King of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they rose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life." By what force were these Syrians scared away? Not the force of the

rough elements of nature, or the force of armies, but the force of terrible ideas—ideas that made them hear the noise of the rattling chariots and the tramping steeds of war, that had no existence. But these ideas, albeit, were ideas from God. "The Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise." God often frightens wicked men by ideas. "God can," says Matthew Henry, "when he pleases, dispirit the boldest and most brave, and make the stoutest heart to tremble. Those that will not fear God, he can make to fear at the shaking of a leaf." Before a strong resolution, apprehended difficulties frequently vanish into air. Where there's a will there's a way, even though it be over rugged mountains and surging floods. A man's "I will" has a power in it mighty as the forces of nature, ay, mightier, for it can subordinate them. "If thou hast faith as a grain of mustard seed, thou shalt say to this mountain, Be thou removed," etc. 2. *The object was realized.* What these poor starving leprous men deeply needed and sought was provisions to appease the cravings of hunger and to reinvigorate their waning life. And they got them. "And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it," etc. Thus they gained even more than they sought; they not only gained food, but wealth.

CONCLUSION. Learn here the wonderful moral force of the human mind. It possesses a power to make resolutions under the most trying external conditions, and the power to work them out successfully. The fiat "I'll try" has wrought wonders in human history, is working wonders now, and so it ever can. Well does Dr. Tulloch say, "Everything yields before the strong and earnest will. It grows by exercise. It excites confidence in others, while it takes to itself the lead. Difficulties before which mere cleverness fails, and which leave the irresolute prostrate and helpless, vanish before it. They not only do not impede its progress, but it often makes of them stepping-stones to a higher and more enduring triumph."—D. T.

Vers. 9—11.—*The right and the prudent.* "Then they said one to another, We do not well," etc. These verses record the conference which these four lepers had with one another after they had succeeded in working out their resolution to go unto the "host of the Syrians;" and in this conference we discover—

I. THE RIGHT. "They said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace." The silver and the gold which they had discovered they had hidden away; and now, perhaps, conscience told them it was not right. It is not right for us to conceal the good we have discovered, or to appropriate it entirely to our own use; let us communicate it. The distribution of good is right. Every man should be "ready to communicate." The monopoly of *material* good is a huge wrong, and the crying sin of the age. Legislation will have to deal with this social abomination sooner or later; it is crushing the millions to the dust. Monopolies must be broken up; the wants of society and the claims of eternal justice demand it. What is truly "glad tidings" to us we should proclaim to others. The rays of joy that fall over our own lives we should not retain, but reflect.

II. THE PRUDENT. Whether these poor men felt it was right to communicate to others the tidings of the good they had received or not, they certainly felt it was prudent. "If we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household." Accordingly they acted. "So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were. And he called to the porters; and they told it to the king's house within." Not to do the right thing must cause some "mischief"—mischief not only to the body, but to the soul as well, to the entire man. There is no prudence apart from rectitude. What is wrong in moral principle is mischievous in conduct. He who is in the right, however outvoted by his age, is always in the majority, for he has *that* vote which carries all material universes and spiritual hierarchies with it. Right is infallible utilitarianism.—D. T.

Vers. 12—16.—*The help that comes to distressed men from without.* "And the king arose in the night," etc. These verses suggest a few thoughts concerning the help that sometimes comes to distressed men from *without*. The best help that a man can get

in any case is from *within*—from a right working of his own faculties, independence on his Maker. Still, help from without is often most valuable. There are three kinds of human helpers without. 1. Those that help men *by their will.* These are men, the chosen of the race, who lay themselves out for philanthropic service. 2. Those that help men *against their will.* It often turns out, as in the case of Joseph's brethren, that our enemies really serve us. 3. Those that help men *irrespective of their will.* We are helped in many ways by those who know and care nothing about us. We come into possession of their knowledge, inventions, property. The property of the men of the last age is ours to-day. Such is the kind of help which the Syrians now rendered the Israelites, and we offer three remarks concerning this help.

I. IT WAS NEEDED. The men of Samaria were in the utmost distress, and the king arose in the night and sent forth two of his servants (ver. 12) in pursuit of the Syrians to see what had happened. As they approached the spot they found that the Syrians had departed, but had left their property behind. "And the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste." Thus in the height of their distress they found relief. It is often so in passing through life; often so in individual as well as in social life. In the greatest extremity help appears. When the cloud is darkest a beam of light breaks on it.

II. IT WAS UNDESERVED. Did these Samaritans deserve help? By no means. They were nearly all idolatrous and worthless people. They merited condign punishment, everlasting ruin. This is true of all men as sinners. Whatever help we receive is utterly undeserved. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed."

III. IT WAS UNEXPECTED. They went forth longing for food, but quite uncertain whether they would find any. They found that the enemy had fled, and in their haste had left provisions behind. "So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel." Are not all men, in the providence of God, constantly receiving *unexpected* favours? The choicest blessings come when least expected.—D. T.

Vers. 17—20.—*God's promise realized and his truth vindicated.* "And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate," etc. We have here an instance of two things.

I. GOD'S PROMISE REALIZED. In the first verse of this chapter Elisha had said, "Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel." The morrow had come, and here is the fine flour and the barley being sold in the gate of Samaria. Here is the Divine promise fulfilled to the letter. God is ever faithful who hath promised. If a being makes a promise, and it is not fulfilled, it must be for one of three reasons—either because he was insincere when he made the promise, or subsequently changed his mind, or met with unforeseen difficulties which he had not the power to surmount. None of these can be applied to the all-truthful, unchangeable, all-seeing, and almighty God.

II. GOD'S TRUTH VINDICATED. The haughty courtier said to the prophet yesterday, when he was told that a measure of fine flour would be sold for a shekel, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" As if he had said, "Do not presume to impose on me, a man of my intelligence and importance. The intellectual rabble may believe in you, but I cannot." Whereupon the prophet replied, "Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." And so it came to pass. Here are the flour and the barley, and there lies dead the haughty sceptic. "And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died." Truth has ever vindicated itself, and will ever do so. Men's unbelief in facts does not either destroy or weaken facts; the facts remain. Though all the world deny the existence of a God, moral obligation, and future retribution, the facts remain.—D. T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The unbelieving lord.* The spirit of despair had taken possession of Jehoram. It was at this point that Elisha interposed with his promise of deliverance.

I. PREDICTED DELIVERANCE. Elisha made what must have seemed an incredible announcement. 1. The city was at that moment suffering the extremest horrors of famine. By the same hour on the morrow food would exist in plenty. 2. Such food as was then obtainable was of the coarsest, most loathsome, and most revolting nature. By to-morrow they would be dieting on fine flour and barley in abundance. 3. Their

disgusting food was only to be had at famine prices. To-morrow a measure of fine flour would be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel. 4. To-day they were fast beleaguered. To-morrow flour and barley would be sold in the open gates of Samaria. After this, "is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. xviii. 14). If men will not seek him, God leaves them to feel the extremity of their own helplessness before he interposes. Then he shows himself "plenteous" in mercy (Ps. ciii. 8). Who can doubt that, if king and city had sought God earlier with sincere hearts, the deliverance would have come sooner? Thus by his own frowardness does the sinner stand in the way of his own good.

II. RATIONALISTIC DOUBT. The spirit of incredulity, which must have been in many minds when Elisha made this surprising announcement, found expression in the utterance of the captain on whose hand the king leaned, "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" 1. *The author of this sceptical scoff was a person in high rank.* The atmosphere of a court, and the position of a courtier, are not favourable to the development of piety. They are more apt to develop, as here, a worldly, sceptical, cynical spirit, with small faith in God, virtue, and truth. Piety is to be looked for rather in the cottages than in the palaces of a people, though there are notable exceptions. "Not many mighty," etc. (1 Cor. i. 26). 2. *The language is that of scornful incredulity.* It is the speech of a rationalist. Judged by the standards of sense and of natural reason, the sudden access of plenty which Elisha predicted was impossible. If the Lord opened windows in heaven, it might be looked for, but not otherwise. And who expected help from that quarter? Thus the worldly wise lord reasoned, sneering at Elisha's word as the imagination of a heated brain. He is the type of all rationalists. Interpositions from heaven are the last things they are disposed to believe in; and in any case they will not believe God's Word unless they can see how it is to be fulfilled, and on what natural principles the unusual event is to be explained. As in the present case there was no possibility of help from within the city, and no prospect of the Syrians leaving when the city was just about to fall within their power, and no evidence that food in such abundance could be obtained at a day's notice even if they did leave, Elisha's promise could only be assigned to the category of delusion. The spirit of faith is the opposite of this. It takes God at his word, and leaves *him* to find out the means of accomplishing his own predictions.

III. THE PUNISHMENT OF UNBELIEF. Elisha entered into no argument. He left his word to be proved or disproved by the arbitrament of time. But he told the great lord who—so much wiser than Elisha—had scoffed at its fulfilment, what the penalty of his unbelief would be. He would see the promised plenty indeed, but he would not eat of it. Is not this the fate of every unbeliever? God's word stands sure: it comes to pass in due time; but the intellectualist, the scoffer, the doubter, the man who was too wise to believe, finds himself shut out from participation in the blessing.—J. O.

Vers. 3—11.—*The four lepers.*

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform."

Speculation might have exhausted itself in vain in conjecturing how Elisha's prediction was to be accomplished. Nevertheless, the wonder was performed by a series of events as simple as it was unlooked for.

I. A POLICY OF DESPAIR. 1. *The lepers at the gate.* We are first introduced to four lepers at the entering in of the gate. They were outside, and had hitherto subsisted by food handed out or thrown to them from within. But now the famine in the city made such assistance impossible, and the four men were dying of hunger. Poor, pitiable objects, the last persons to whom any one would have thought of looking for a glimpse of hope on the situation within the walls. Yet these despised lepers were to be, in a sense, the saviours of the city. We cannot but reflect on the humble and seemingly unlikely instruments God often chooses to accomplish his ends. He puts the "treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. iv. 7). As if to abase human pride, he purposely selects instrumentalities which the wisdom of man would scorn. 2. *Dire alternatives.* Brought face to face with death, the poor lepers are forced to the earnest consideration

of their position. What could they do? If they stay where they are they must die, and if they enter the city they must die. There remains the alternative, only to be contemplated as a last resource, of going over to the camp of the enemy. This has been put off as long as possible; but it appears now to be the only course which affords them any chance of life. Suppose the Syrians kill them, they are no worse off than before; if the Syrians take pity on them and save them alive, they shall live. The chance of life may be faint, but it is the only one left, and better than none. When men are in earnest, a very slight probability suffices them to act upon. They discover the truth of Butler's axiom that "probability is the guide of life." Did these men not act rationally in allowing even a slight probability to turn the balance of their action? How should it be otherwise when we deal with spiritual things? A man is in doubt as to the existence of God, as to the reality of a future life, etc. It may seem to him that the evidence for these truths amounts to no more than probability. He perhaps makes this an excuse for dismissing the consideration of them from his mind. But ought he not to give weight to this probability in action? In another way the doubter may take a leaf from the lepers' book. If he remains where he is, he perishes, for atheism can hold out to him no other hope. But if, on the ground even of a slight balance of probability, he acts on the lines of Christ's religion, he can be no worse than he is, while, if that religion is true (we speak only from his standpoint), he obtains eternal advantage. Or is the doubter one who does not question the truth of the gospel, but only questions his own right to appropriate its provisions? Let such a one imitate Esther, who, with the words on her lips, "If I perish, I perish" (Esth. iv. 16), went in to Ahasuerus. Let him cast himself on Christ, and leave himself there. He will find, like Esther, that he does not perish. 3. *The Divine will and the human will.* In these consultations among themselves, the lepers were moved only by the consideration of their own misery. They neither knew of Elisha's prediction, nor had any thought of aiding to fulfil it. Yet all the while they were working out God's secret counsel. They were, while seeking their own ends, the unconscious instruments of a higher will than their own. Thus are we all. Man's passions, ambitions, wants, follies, sins even, are subordinated in providence to the fulfilling of all-wise, comprehensive purposes, of which the immediate actors have no glimpse. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever; the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. xxxiii. 11).

II. THE DESERTED CAMP. 1. *An astonishing discovery.* At nightfall, in pursuance of their purpose, the lepers betook themselves to the camp of the Syrians. It was the evening of the day on which Elisha had made his promise. Of the hope then held out they were ignorant, but they were to be the first to make the discovery that deliverance had been wrought. It would be with fear and trembling that they approached the well-appointed tents, and the very silence that everywhere prevailed would strike them at first with new awe. But now an astonishing state of things revealed itself. The camp was there—that camp so lately astir with military life—but not a soul was to be seen in it. Absolute stillness reigned throughout the tents; or, if sounds were heard, they were only those of the horses and asses which were left without masters. Thus near may our salvation be to us, and we know it not. 2. *The flight of the Syrians.* The explanation of the state of things which the lepers discovered is given in vers. 6, 7. The Syrians themselves may in later years have told the story, or it may have been got from Elisha, whose prophetic gift gave him the knowledge of what had taken place. The Syrians, it appears, had heard strange noises—sounds as of chariots and horses and of a great host; and, smitten with sudden panic, believing that the Hittites or Egyptians had brought help to the Israelites, they at once abandoned everything and fled. The panic was of supernatural intensity, as the sounds were of supernatural origin. The mind of man, no less than external natural conditions, is in the hand of God. He can smite with "madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart" (Deut. xxviii. 28); can make men the sport of their own imaginations and delusions. Such penalties are threatened against the wicked. 3. *Dividing the spoil.* The first impulse of the lepers, when they discovered that the camp was literally empty, was to supply their own wants. We can fancy them rubbing their eyes, and wondering if what they beheld was not all a dream. There around them, as if in some region of enchantment, were food and drink in abundance, with gold, silver, raiment, and valuables of every kind.

They were stunned with their good fortune, and wandered about from tent to tent, eating and drinking, and carrying out the good things they saw, to hide them. We can compare with the surprise of these lepers the joy of the soul on its first discovery of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. iii. 8). How infinite, grand, and varied the provision found in him, the riches of salvation, the supply for spiritual wants, the treasures for the enrichment and beautification of the soul! and how wondrously and unexpectedly these burst upon the view when God "reveals his Son" in us (Gal. i. 16). At first the absorbing concern is for one's self—the engrossing thought is to appropriate what is necessary for our own life. But this stage, as in the case of the lepers, soon passes by, and gives place to another less selfish.

III. THE BRINGERS OF GOOD TIDINGS. 1. *Self-rebuke.* Four leprous men alone in that great camp, and a city near at hand perishing of hunger: it was a strange situation. The lepers themselves began to feel they were not acting rightly in delaying to carry the news of this astonishing plenty to their famine-stricken brethren. "We do not well," they said: "this is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace." Does not every mind feel that their words were just? Would it not have been selfishness unspeakable had they continued to think only of themselves, and delayed to carry the good tidings to their friends in the city? Acting thus selfishly, might they not justly fear that some "mischief" would come upon them? And did they not at length do right in saying, "Now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household"? The application is obvious to our own duty as those who possess the saving knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ his Son. "We do not well," if we withhold it from those who are perishing for lack of this knowledge (Hos. iv. 6). How many are in this condition! The whole heathen world, and ignorant multitudes are around us. "It is a day of good tidings:" shall we not make these good tidings known? "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. x. 8). "Shall we whose souls are lighted," etc.? 2. *Bearing good news.* The lepers delayed no more, but hastened to the gate of the city, and told their wonderful story to the porter, who told it to others, who carried it to the king's house. Thus, from one to another, the news spread. It was not reckoned any drawback to it that they were lepers who brought it.—J. O.

Vers. 12—20.—*The good news verified.* The tidings brought by the lepers were so astounding that it was natural there should at first be some hesitation in acting on them.

I. THE KING'S SUSPICIONS. Jehoram was roused in the night-time, but his mood was distrustful and desponding. He was convinced that the Syrians were but playing him a trick. Their apparent retreat was a piece of strategy to get the Israelites out into the plain. Then they would fall on them and destroy them. "I will now show you what the Syrians have done to us," etc. 1. *Distrust of man.* The suspicious disposition of the king accords with his general character. It has been noticed that Jehoram presents himself throughout the history as a man of moody, changeful, unreliable nature. "When the prophet leads the enemy into his hands without a blow, he becomes violent, and is eager to slaughter them all; then, however, he allows himself to be soothed, gives them entertainment, and permits them to depart in safety. At the siege of Samaria, the great distress of the city touches his heart. He puts on garments which are significant of grief and repentance, but then allows himself to be so overpowered by anger, that, instead of seeking the cause of the prevailing misery in his own apostasy and that of the nation, he swears to put to death, without delay, the man whom he had once addressed as 'father.' Yet this anger also is of short duration. He does not hear the promise of deliverance with scorn, as his officer does, but with hope and confidence. Then, again, when the promised deliverance is announced as actually present, he once more becomes doubtful and mistrustful, and his servants have to encourage him and push him on to a decision" (Bähr). It is shown by the present instance how a suspicious, distrustful disposition often outwits itself. One could not have blamed Jehoram for being cautious; but his habit of mind led him to go beyond caution, and to conclude for certain that the news brought was false, and that the Syrians were attempting a deception. Had he been left to himself, he would have rested in that conclusion, and inquired no further. Yet he was wrong, and the Syrians had actually fled. An excess of scepticism thus frequently leads those who indulge it astray. Jehoram was so accustomed to diplomacy, to intrigue, to strategy,

that he thought of no other explanation of the facts related to him. By his moody unbelief he nearly missed the blessing. 2. *Distrust of God.* There was more than distrust of man in Jehoram's suspicions; there was likewise distrust of God. Had his attitude to God's promise, as conveyed through Elisha, been one of faith, he would at once have recognized that this which was told him was its fulfilment. He would have remembered Elisha's word; he would have perceived how precisely this report fitted into it; he would at least, before dismissing the lepers' story, have felt it his duty to consult Elisha, and ask him for his guidance. It was his unbelief which gave the dark tinge to his reflections. Are we not often guilty of similar distrust? We offer prayers, and, when the answer comes, we are astonished, and can hardly believe (Acts xii. 15, 16). Our unbelief darkens God's providence to us, and prevents us from seeing his gracious hand.

II. VERIFICATION OF THE FLIGHT. 1. *The servants' counsel.* The servants on this, as on other occasions, showed themselves wiser than their lord (Exod. x. 7; ch. v. 13). One of them gave him sound advice. The report they had received was, surely, at least worth inquiring into. Let him send some of the chariot-horses that remained (they were very few, and, like the remnant of the people of Israel, wasted with starvation, so that, at the worst, no greater evil could befall them than already existed), and let the charioteers bring word of the true state of the case. How many rash criticisms, hasty condemnations, unwise delays, would be avoided, if men would but act upon the principle "go and see"! The practical instincts are often sounder in the common people than in their lordly superiors. 2. *The king's messengers.* The king did as his servant suggested, and the chariots, two in number, were sent forth. The camp was found deserted, as the lepers had said, but, to make sure, the messengers continued their tour of inspection along the road leading to Jordan. The evidences of hasty flight were indubitable. "All the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste." There was now no further doubt, so "the messengers returned, and told the king." They had seen, and believed: how much better had the king trusted the word of the Lord, and believed, though he had not seen (John xx. 29)! When men are fleeing for their lives, they willingly leave all behind them. It should moderate our sense of the value of earthly treasures when we see how, in an emergency, they are so little recked of. A day will come when the proudest and haughtiest would gladly part with all they have for a single smile from the face of him who sits upon the great white throne (Rev. vi. 15, 16; xx. 11). 3. *God's word fulfilled.* Thus it came about that, in a manner wholly unprecedented and unlooked for, the prediction of Elisha was fulfilled. The starving people found themselves set free from their besiegers, and, crowding out to the deserted tents, regaled themselves on the abundance of provision the Syrians had left. The store of the Syrian host was at their disposal, and a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel. "Wisdom is justified of her children" (Matt. xi. 19). Those are always found right at last who repose implicit trust in God's Word. Worldly men may laugh at them; rationalists will mock them; the astute in this world's affairs will count them hare-brained and foolish; but the event justifies them. The principle of verification holds as true in religion as in science. What we now accept in faith will ultimately be verified by sight. The difference between religion and science is that the latter refuses to act till it has received the verification (though even this is subject to qualification); the former trusts God, acts, and *awaits* the verification.

III. FATE OF THE MOCKER. There remained to be fulfilled the word which Elisha had spoken, that, though the king's officer who had scoffed at the promise should see the predicted plenty, he would not eat thereof. This word also was verified in a remarkable, but seemingly accidental, way. This officer was appointed to superintend the sale of provisions in the gateway, but the pressure of the frantic crowd was so great that he was trodden underfoot and died. How simply, yet how accurately, was the prophet's forecast fulfilled! 1. The incident is another evidence that even seeming "accidents" do not lie outside the providence of God. 2. It teaches men the folly and danger of mocking at God's Word. 3. It shows the certainty of God's threatenings being fulfilled. 4. It illustrates the end of the ungodly—*seeing* the fulfilment of God's promises of mercy, but not permitted to *enjoy*.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VIII.

VERS. 1—29.—THE SEQUEL OF THE STORY OF THE SHUNAMMITE. THE KILLING OF BENHADAD BY HAZAEL; AND THE WICKED REIGNS OF JEHORAM AND AHAZIAH IN JUDAH.

Vers. 1—15.—Elisha is still the *protagonistes* of the historical drama. The writer brings together in the present section two more occasions of a public character in which he was concerned, and in which kings also bore a part. One of the occasions is domestic, and shows the interest which Jehoram took in the miracles of the prophet, and in those who were the objects of them (vers. 1—6). The other belongs to Syrian, rather than to Israelite, history, and proves that the influence of Elisha was not confined to Palestine (vers. 7—15).

Vers. 1—6.—*The sequel of the story of the Shunammite.*

Ver. 1.—**Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life.** There is no "then" in the original, of which the simplest rendering would be, "And Elisha spake unto the woman," etc. The true sense is, perhaps, best brought out by the Revised Version, which gives the following: *Now Elisha had spoken unto the woman*, etc. The reference is to a time long anterior to the siege of Samaria. **Saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the Lord hath called for a famine.** A famine is mentioned in ch. iv. 38, which must belong to the reign of Jehoram, and which is probably identified with that here spoken of. Elisha, on its approach, recommended the Shunammite, though she was a woman of substance (ch. iv. 8), to quit her home and remove to some other residence, where she might escape the pressure of the calamity. He left it to her to choose the place of her temporary abode. The phrase, "God hath *called for* a famine," means no more and no less than "God has determined that there shall be a famine." With God to speak the word is to bring about the event. **And it shall also come upon the land seven years.** Seven years was the actual duration of the great famine which Joseph foretold in Egypt (Gen. xli. 27), and was the ideally perfect period for a severe famine (2 Chron. xxiv. 13). Many of the best meteorologists are inclined to regard the term of "seven years" as a cyclic period in connection with weather changes.

Ver. 2.—**And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God.** It is a satisfaction to find that there was yet faith in Israel. There were still those to whom the prophet was the mouthpiece of God, who waited on his words, and accepted them as Divine commands whereto they were ready to render immediate and entire obedience. It is conjectured by some that the woman had become a widow, and fallen into comparative poverty; but the narrative gives no indication of this. Even opulent persons have to migrate in times of severe dearth. **And she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines.** Philistia was a great grain country (Judg. xv. 5), and, though not altogether exempt from famine, was less exposed to it than either Judæa or Samaria. The soil was exceedingly fertile, and the vapours from the Mediterranean descended upon it in dews and showers, when their beneficial influence was not felt further inland. The Shunammite may have had other reasons for fixing her residence in the Philistine country; but probably she was chiefly determined in her choice by its proximity and its productiveness. **Seven years.** As long, *i.e.*, as the famine lasted (see the last clause of ver. 1).

Ver. 3.—**And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines.** She stayed no longer than she could help. Her own land, where she could have the ministrations of a "man of God" (ch. iv. 23), was dear to her; and no sooner had the famine abated than she returned to it. **And she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land.** During her prolonged absence, some grasping neighbour had seized on the unoccupied house and the uncultivated estate adjoining it, and now refused to restore them to the rightful owner. Widows were especially liable to such treatment on the part of greedy oppressors, since they were, comparatively speaking, weak and defenceless (see Isa. x. 2; Matt. xxiii. 14). Under such circumstances the injured party would naturally, in an Oriental country, make appeal to the king (comp. 2 Sam. xiv. 4; 1 Kings iii. 16; ch. vi. 26, etc.).

Ver. 4.—**And the king talked with Gehazi;** rather, *now the king was talking with Gehazi*, as in the Revised Version. The king, *i.e.*, happened to be talking with Gehazi at the moment when the woman came into his presence and "cried" to him. It has been reasonably concluded from this, that chronological order is not observed in the portion of the narrative which treats of

Elisha and his doings, since a king of Israel would scarcely be in familiar conversation with a leper (Keil). It may be added that Gehazi can scarcely have continued to be the servant of Elisha, as he evidently now was, after his leprosy. He must have dwelt "without the gate." **The servant of the man of God.** That a king should converse with a servant is, no doubt, somewhat unusual; but, as Bähr notes, there is nothing in the circumstance that need astonish us. It is natural enough that, having been himself a witness of so many of the prophet's marvellous acts done in public, Jehoram should become curious concerning those other marvellous acts which he had performed in private, among his personal friends and associates, with respect to which many rumours must have got abroad; and should wish to obtain an account of them from a source on which he could rely. If he had this desire, he could scarcely apply to the prophet himself, with whom he was at no time on familiar terms, and who would shrink from enlarging on his own miraculous powers. "To whom, then, could he apply with more propriety for this information than to the prophet's familiar servant"—an eye-witness of most of them, and one who would have no reason for reticence? Oriental ideas would not be shocked by the king's sending for any subject from whom he desired information, and questioning him. **Saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done.** Miracles are often called "great things" (גְּדֹלוֹת) in the Old Testament, but generally in connection with God as the doer of them (see Job v. 9; ix. 10; xxxvii. 5; Ps. lxxi. 19; cvi. 21, etc.).

Ver. 5.—**And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he**—*i.e.* Elisha—**had restored a dead body to life.** This was undoubtedly the greatest of all Elisha's miracles, and Gehazi naturally enlarged upon it. As an eye-witness (ch. iv. 29—36), he could give all the details. **That, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land.** The coincidence can scarcely have been accidental. Divine providence so ordered matters that, just when the king's interest in the woman was most warm, she should appear before him to urge her claim. At another time, Jehoram would, it is probable, have been but slightly moved by her complaint. Under the peculiar circumstances, he was deeply moved, and at once granted the woman the redress for which she asked. **And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life.** The Shunammite was accompanied by her son, now a boy of at least ten or eleven years old—the actual object of Elisha's miracle. The king's interest in the woman would be still more roused by this circumstance.

Ver. 6.—**And when the king asked the woman, she told him**; rather, *and the king made inquiry of the woman, and she answered him.* The extent of the inquiries is not indicated. They may have included questions concerning the miracle, as well as questions concerning the woman's claim to the land and house, and the evidence which she could produce of proprietorship. **So the king appointed unto her a certain officer**—literally, *a certain eunuch*, or *chamberlain*—an officer of the court, who was in his confidence, and would give effect to his directions—**saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now.** The order was, that not only was the Shunammite to receive back her house and estate, but that she was also to have "the mesne profits"—*i.e.* the full value of all that the land had produced beyond the expense of cultivation during the seven years of her absence. English law lays down the same rule in cases of unlawful possession for which there is no valid excuse.

Vers. 7—15.—*Elisha's visit to Damascus, and its consequences.* It has been usual to connect this visit of Elisha's to Damascus with the commission given to Elijah many years previously, to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria (1 Kings xix. 16). But it is certainly worthy of remark that neither is Elijah authorized to devolve his commission on another, nor is he said to have done so, nor is there any statement in the present narrative or elsewhere that Elisha anointed Hazael. It is therefore quite possible that Elisha's journey was wholly unconnected with the command given to Elijah. It may, as Ewald imagines, have been the consequence of disorders and dangers in Samaria, growing out of the divergence of views between Jehoram and the queen-mother Jezebel, who still retained considerable influence over the government; and Elisha may have taken his journey, not so much for the sake of a visit, as of a prolonged sojourn. That he attracted the attention both of Benhadad and of his successor Hazael is not surprising.

Ver. 7.—**And Elisha came to Damascus.** It was a bold step, whatever the circumstances that led to it. Not very long previously the Syrian king had made extraordinary efforts to capture Elisha, intending

either to kill him or to keep him confined as a prisoner (ch. vi. 13—19). Elisha had subsequently helped to baffle his plans of conquest, and might be thought to have caused the disgraceful retreat of the Syrian army from the walls of Samaria, which he had certainly prophesied (ch. vii. 1). But Elisha was not afraid. He was probably *commissioned* to take his journey, whether its purpose was the anointing of Hazael or no. **And Benhadad the King of Syria was sick.** Ewald supposes that this "sickness" was the result of the disgrace and discredit into which he had fallen since his ignominious retreat, without assignable reason, from before the walls of Samaria; but Benhadad must have been of an age when the infirmities of nature press in upon a man, and when illness has to be expected. He was a contemporary of Ahab (1 Kings xx. 1), who had now been dead ten or twelve years. **And it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither.** Elisha seems to have attempted no concealment of his presence. No sooner was he arrived than his coming was reported to Benhadad. The Syrians had by this time learnt to give him the name by which he was commonly known (ch. iv. 7, 21, 40; v. 20; vi. 6, 10; vii. 2, 18) in Israel.

Ver. 8.—**And the king said unto Hazael.** It is implied that Hazael was in attendance on Benhadad in his sick-room, either permanently as a chamberlain, or occasionally as a minister. According to Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 4. § 6), he was "the most faithful of the king's domestics" (*ὁ πιστότατος τῶν οἰκετῶν*). We cannot presume from ver. 12 that he had as yet distinguished himself as a warrior. **Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God.** It was usual, both among the heathen and among the Israelites, for those who consulted a prophet to bring him a present (see 1 Sam. ix. 7; 1 Kings xiv. 3). Hence, mainly, the great wealth of the Delphic and other oracles. Naaman (ch. v. 5) had brought with him a rich present when he went to consult Elisha in Samaria. **And inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?** The miracles of Elisha had had at any rate this effect—they had convinced the Syrians that Jehovah was a great and powerful God, and made them regard Elisha himself as a true prophet. Their faith in their own superstitions must have been at least partially shaken by these convictions. It was by these and similar weakenings of established errors that the world was gradually educated, and the way prepared for the introduction of Christianity. There was very early among the Syrians a flourishing Christian Church.

Ver. 9.—**So Hazael went to meet him**—*i.e.* Elisha—**and took a present with him**; literally, *in his hand*; but we must not press this expression. "In his hand" means "under his control." The present was far too large to be carried by an individual. It consisted **even of every good thing of Damascus**; *i.e.* of gold and silver and costly raiment, of the luscious wine of Helbon, which was the drink of the Persian kings (Strab., xv. 3. § 22), of the soft white wool of the Antilibanus (Ezek. xxvii. 18), of *damask* coverings of couches (Amos iii. 12), perhaps of Damascus blades, and of various manufactured articles, the products of Tyre, Egypt, Nineveh, and Babylon, which her extensive land trade was always bringing to the Syrian capital. **Forty camels' burden.** Not as much as forty camels could carry, but a gift of such a size that it was actually placed on the backs of forty camels, which paraded the town, and conveyed in a long procession to the prophet's house the king's magnificent offering. Orientals are guilty of extreme ostentation with respect to the presents that they make. As Chardin says, "Fifty persons often carry what a single one could have very well borne" ('Voyage en Perse,' vol. iii. p. 217). The practice is illustrated by the bas-reliefs of Nineveh and Persepolis, which furnish proofs of its antiquity. One present-bearer carries a few pomegranates; another, a bunch of grapes; a third, a string of locusts; a fourth, two small ointment-pots; a fifth, a branch of an olive tree, and the like (Layard, 'Monuments of Nineveh,' second series, pls. 8, 9, etc.). It is not unlikely that a single camel could have carried the whole. **And came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Benhadad King of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying**—Benhadad seeks to propitiate Elisha by calling himself his son, thus indicating the respect he feels for him (comp. ch. vi. 21; xiii. 14)—**Shall I recover of this disease?** Nothing was more common in the ancient world than the consultation of an oracle or a prophet in cases of disease or other bodily affliction. Two questions were commonly asked, "Shall I recover?" and "How may I recover?" So Pheron of Egypt is said to have consulted an oracle with respect to his blindness (Herod., ii. 111), and Battus of Cyrene to have done the same with respect to his stammering (ibid., iv. 155). It was seldom that a clear and direct answer was given.

Ver. 10.—**And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover.** The existing Masoretic text (אֱמָר־לֹא חָיֹה תִחְיֶה) is untranslatable, since *ĕmár-lo* cannot mean, "say not," on account of the order of the words; and *lo* cannot be joined with *khayih thikhyah*, first on account of the makkeph which attaches it to *ĕmár*,

and secondly because the emphatic infinitive is in itself affirmative, and does not admit of a negative prefix. The emendation in the Hebrew margin (לֹא for לוֹ), accepted by all the versions, and by almost all commentators, is thus certain. Our translators are therefore, so far, in the right; but they were not entitled to tone down the strong affirmative, *khayih thikhyah*, "living thou shalt live," or "thou shalt surely live," into the weak potential, "thou mayest certainly recover." What Elisha says to Hazael is, "Go, say unto him, Thou shalt surely live;" *i.e.* "Go, say unto him, what thou hast already made up thy mind to say, what a courtier is sure to say, Thou shalt recover." **Howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die.** If Hazael had reported the whole answer to Benhadad, he would have told no lie, and thus Elisha is not responsible for his lie.

Ver. 11.—**And he settled his countenance steadfastly**—literally, *and he settled his countenance and set it;* i.e. Elisha fixed on Hazael a long and meaning look—until he—*i.e.* Hazael—**was ashamed**; *i.e.* until Hazael felt embarrassed, and his eyes fell. It may be gathered that the ambitious courtier had already formed a murderous design against his master, and understood by the peculiar gaze which the prophet fixed upon him that his design was penetrated. **And the man of God wept.** There flashed on the prophet's mind all the long series of calamities which Israel would suffer at the hands of Syria during Hazael's reign, and he could not but weep at the thought of them (see the next verse).

Ver. 12.—**And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord?** While inwardly contemplating an act of audacious wickedness in defiance of the prophet's implied rebuke, Hazael preserves towards him outwardly an attitude of extreme deference and respect. "My lord" was the phrase with which slaves addressed their masters, and subjects their monarchs (see ch. v. 3; vi. 12, etc.). **And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child.** The prophet does not intend to tax Hazael with any special cruelty. He only means to say, "Thou wilt wage long and bloody wars with Israel, in which will occur all those customary horrors that make war so terrible—the burning of cities, the slaughter of the flower of the youth, the violent death of children, and even the massacre of women in a state of pregnancy. These horrors belonged, more or less, to all Oriental wars, and are touched on in Ps. cxxxvii. 9; ch. xv. 16; Isa. xiii. 16, 18; Hos. x. 14; Nah. iii. 10; Amos i. 13, etc. The wars of Hazael with the Israelites are mentioned in ch. x. 32, 33; xiii. 3—7; and Amos i. 3, 4.

Ver. 13.—**And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?** This rendering is generally allowed to be incorrect. The true sense, which is well represented in the Septuagint (Τίς ἐστιν ὁ δοῦλός σου, ὁ κύων ὁ τεθνηκὼς, ὅτι ποιήσει τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο;), is—"But what is thy servant, this dog, that he should do so great a thing?" Hazael does not accuse Elisha of making him out a dog in the future, but calls himself a dog in the present. "Dog" is a word of extreme contempt—"the most contemptuous epithet of abuse" (Winer), as appears, among other places, from 1 Sam. xxiv. 14 and 2 Sam. xvi. 9. Hazael means to say—How is it possible that he, occupying, as he does, so poor and humble a position as that of a mere courtier or domestic (οἰκετής, Josephus), should ever wage war with Israel, and do the "great things" which Elisha has predicted of him? **And Elisha answered, The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.** Elisha explains how it would be possible. Hazael would not continue in his poor and humble condition. Jehovah has revealed it to him that the mere courtier will shortly mount the Syrian throne.

Ver. 14.—**So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldest surely recover.** This, as already observed, was giving half Elisha's answer, and suppressing the other half. The *suppressio veri* is a *suggestio falsi;* and the suppression was Hazael's act, not Elisha's. Had Hazael repeated the whole of Elisha's answer—"Say unto him, Thou shalt surely recover; howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die"—Benhadad might have been puzzled, but he would not have been deceived.

Ver. 15.—**And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth.** *Macbêr* is a cloth of a coarse texture—a mat, or piece of carpeting. It has here the article prefixed to it (*ham-macbêr*), which implies that there was but one in the sick-room. We may conjecture that it was a mat used as a sort of pillow, and interposed between the head-rest (so common in Egypt and Assyria) and the head (compare the *c'bir* of 1 Sam. xix. 13). **And dipped it in water.** The water would fill up the interstices through which air might otherwise have been drawn, and hasten the suffocation. A death of the same kind is recorded in the Persian history entitled 'Kholasat el Akh-

bar,' which contains (p. 162) the following passage: "The malik ordered that they should place a carpet on Abdallah's mouth, so that his life was cut off." **And spread it on his face, so that he died.** It has been supposed by some commentators, as Luther, Schultz, Geddes, Boothroyd, that Benhadad put the wet *machêr* on his own face for refreshment, and accidentally suffocated himself; but this is very unlikely, and it is certainly not the natural sense of the words. As "Hazael" is the subject of "departed" and "came" and "answered" in ver. 14, so it is the natural subject of "took" and "dipped" and "spread" in ver. 15. Ver. 11 also would be unintelligible if Hazael entertained no murderous intentions. Why Ewald ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 93, Eng. trans.) introduces a "bath-servant," unmentioned in the text, to murder Benhadad for no assignable reason, it is difficult to conjecture. **And Hazael reigned in his stead.** The direct succession of Hazael to Benhadad is confirmed by the inscription on the Black Obelisk, where he appears as King of Damascus (line 97) a few years only after Benhadad (*Bin-idri*) had been mentioned as king.

Vers. 16—24.—THE WICKED REIGN OF JEHORAM IN JUDAH. At this point the writer, who has been concerned with the history of the kingdom of Israel hitherto in the present book, takes up the story of the kingdom of Judah from 1 Kings xxii. 50, and proceeds to give a very brief account of the reign of Jehoshaphat's eldest son, Jehoram, or (by contraction) Joram. His narrative has to be supplemented from 2 Chron. xxi., which contains many facts not mentioned by the writer of Kings.

Ver. 16.—**And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab King of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then King of Judah;** literally, *and of Jehoshaphat King of Judah.* The words are wanting in three Hebrew manuscripts, in some editions of the Septuagint, in the Peshito Syriac, in the Parisian Heptaplar Syriac, in the Arabic Version, and in many copies of the Vulgate. They cannot possibly have the sense assigned to them in our version, and are most probably a gloss which has crept into the text from the margin. **Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat King of Judah began to reign.** Jehoram's reign was sometimes counted from the seventeenth year of his father, when he was given the royal title, sometimes from his father's twenty-third year, when he was associated, and sometimes from his father's death in his twenty-fifth year, when he became sole king (see the comment on ch. i. 17 and ch. iii. 1).

Ver. 17.—**Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.** The eight years seem to be counted from his association in the kingdom by his father in his twenty-third year. He reigned as sole king only six years.

Ver. 18.—**And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab;** *i.e.* he introduced into Judah the Baal and Astarte worship, which Ahab had introduced into Israel from Phœnicia. (On the nature of this worship, see the 'Commentary on the First Book of Kings,' p. 374.) The "house of Ahab" maintained and spread the Baal-worship, wherever it had influence. Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, championed it in Israel (1 Kings xxii. 53); Jehoram, his brother, allowed its continuance (ch. x. 18—28); Jehoram of Judah was induced by his wife, Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, to countenance it in Judæa; Athaliah, when she usurped the throne upon the death of her son Ahaziah, made it the state religion in that country. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." The alliance of the two separated kingdoms, concluded between Jehoshaphat and Ahab (1 Kings xxii. 2—4), had no tangible result beyond the introduction into Judah of the licentious and debasing superstition which had previously overspread the sister country. **For the daughter of Ahab was his wife.** In ver. 26 Athaliah, the wife of Jehoram, is called "the daughter of Omri;" but by "daughter" in that place must be meant "descendant" or "granddaughter." Athaliah has been well called "a second Jezebel." **And he did evil in the sight of the Lord.** The wicked actions of Jehoram are recorded at some length in Chronicles (2 Chron. xxi. 2—4, 11—13). Shortly after his accession he put to death his six brothers—Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Ahaziah (?), Michael, and Shephatiah—in order to "strengthen himself." At the same time, he caused many of the "princes of Israel" to be executed. Soon afterwards he "made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication" (*i.e.* to become idolaters), "and compelled Judah thereto." That the idolatry which he introduced was the Baal-worship is clear, both from the present passage and from 2 Chron. xxi. 13.

Ver. 19.—**Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah for David his servant's sake.** The natural punishment of apostasy was rejection by God, and on rejection would, as a matter of course, follow destruction and ruin. God had declared by Moses, "If

thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and statutes, which I command thee this day; all these curses shall come upon thee. . . . The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, *until thou be destroyed*, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me. The Lord shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, *until he have consumed thee from off the land*, whither thou goest to possess it. The Lord shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee *till thou perish*. And thy heaven which is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is underneath thee shall be iron. . . . The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten of thine enemies; thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and thou shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. . . . Thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee" (Deut. xxviii. 15—37). The apostasy of Jehoram, and of the nation under him, was calculated to bring about the immediate fulfilment of all these threats, and would have done so but for a restraining cause. God had made promises to David, and to his seed after him (2 Sam. vii. 13—16; Ps. lxxxix. 29—37, etc.), which would be unfulfilled if Judah's candlestick were at once removed. He had declared, "If thy children forsake my Law, and walk not in my statutes, . . . I will visit their offences with the rod, and their sin with scourges. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take away, nor suffer my truth to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips; I have sworn once by my holiness that I will not fail David." If he had now swept away the Jewish kingdom, he would have dealt more hardly with those who clave to David than with those that broke off from him. He would not have shown the "faithfulness" or the "mercy" which he had promised. He would have forgotten "the loving-kindnesses which he sware unto David in his truth" (Ps. lxxxix. 49). Therefore he would not—he *could* not—as yet "destroy Judah," with which, in point of fact, he bore for above three centuries longer, until at last the cup of their iniquities was full, and "there was no remedy." **As he promised him to give him alway a light**, and to his children. There is no "and" in the original. Translate—*As he promised him to give him always a light in respect of his children*, and compare, for the promise of "a light" (1 Kings xi. 36; xv. 4; and Ps. cxxxii. 17).

Ver. 20.—**In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah.** Edom had been conquered by Joab in the time of David, and had been treated with great severity, all the males, or at any rate all those of full age, having been put to death (1 Kings xi. 15, 16). On the death of David, Edom seems to have revolted under a prince named Hadad, and to have re-established its independence. It had been again subjected by the time of Jehoshaphat, who appointed a governor over it (1 Kings xxii. 47), and treated it as a portion of his own territories (ch. iii. 8). Now the yoke was finally thrown off, as had been prophesied (Gen. xxvii. 40). Edom became once more a separate kingdom, and was especially hostile to Judah. In the reign of Ahaz the Edomites "smote Judah" and carried away many captives (2 Chron. xxviii. 17). When the Chaldæans attacked and besieged Jerusalem, they cried, "Down with it, down with it, even to the ground!" (Ps. cxxxvii. 7). They looked on with joy at the capture of the holy city (Obad. 12), and "stood in the crossway, to cut off such as escaped" (Obad. 14). After the return from the Captivity, they were still Judah's enemies, and are especially denounced as such by the Prophet Malachi (i. 3—5). In the Maccabee wars, we find them always on the Syrian side (1 Macc. iv. 29, 61; v. 3; vi. 31; 2 Macc. x. 15, etc.), doing their best to rivet the hateful yoke of the heathen on their suffering brethren. As Idumæans, the Herodian family must have been specially hateful to the Jews. **And made a king over themselves.** The king mentioned in ch. iii. 9, 26 was probably a mere vassal king under Jehoshaphat.

Ver. 21.—**So Joram went over to Zair.** Naturally, Joram did not allow Edom to become independent without an attempt to reduce it. He invaded the country in full force, taking up a position at a place called Zair, which is not otherwise known. Zair (צָעִיר) can scarcely be Zoar (צוֹעַר), which, wherever it was, was certainly not in Edom; and it is hardly likely to be a corruption of "Seir" (שֵׂעִיר), since the utterly unknown צעיר would scarcely be put by a copyist in the place of the well-known שעיר. Moreover, if Mount Seir were intended, it would probably have had the prefix הַר, as in 1 Chron. iv. 42; 2 Chron. xx. 10, 22, 23; Ezek. xxxv. 2, 3, 7, 15. "Seir" alone is poetical rather than historical, especially in the language of the later books of the Old Testament. **And all the chariots with him;**

or, *all his chariots* (Revised Version). The article has the force of the possessive pronoun. **And he rose by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him about.** Josephus understands the writer to mean that Joram made his invasion by night, and smote the Edomites on all sides ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 5. § 1); but it seems better to suppose, with most modern commentators, that the meaning is the following: Soon after Joram invaded the country, he found himself surrounded and blocked in by the Edomite troops, and could only save himself by a night attack, which was so far successful that he broke through the enemy's lines and escaped; his army, however, was so alarmed at the danger it had run, that it at once dispersed and returned home. **And the captains of the chariots**; *i.e.* the captains of the Edomite chariots. They too were "smitten," having probably taken the chief part in trying to prevent the escape. **And the people fled into their tents**; *i.e.* dispersed to their homes. Compare the cry of Jeroboam (1 Kings xii. 16), "To your tents, O Israel!"

Ver. 22.—**Yet Edom revolted**; rather, *and Edom revolted*; or, *so Edom revolted.* Joram's attempt having failed, the independence of the country was established. **From under the hand of Judah unto this day.** The successes of Amaziah and Azariah against Edom (ch. xiv. 7, 22) did not amount to reconquests. Edom continued a separate country, not subject to Judæa, and frequently at war with it, until the time of John Hyrcanus, by whom it was subjugated. "Unto this day" means, at the most, until the time when the Books of Kings took their present shape, which was before the return from the Captivity. **Then Libnah revolted at the same time.** Libnah was situated on the borders of Philistia, in the Shefelah, or low country, but towards its eastern edge. Its exact position is uncertain; but it is now generally thought to be identical with the modern *Tel-es-Safi*, between Gath and Ekron, about long. 34° 50′ E., lat. 31° 38′ N. It had been an independent city, with a king of its own, in the early Canaanite time (Josh. x. 30; xii. 15), but had been assigned to Judah (Josh. xv. 42), and had hitherto remained, so far as appears, contented with its position. Its people can scarcely have had any sympathy with the Edomites, and its revolt at this time can have had no close connection with the Edomite rebellion. Libnah's sympathies would be with Philistia, and the occasion of the revolt may have been the invasion of Judæa by the Philistines in the reign of Jehoram, of which the author of Chronicles speaks (2 Chron. xxi. 16), and in which Jehoram's sons were carried off.

Ver. 23.—**And the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?** Some of these acts are recorded in our present Second Book of Chronicles; *e.g.* his execution of his brothers and of many nobles (2 Chron. xxi. 4); his erection of high places (2 Chron. xxi. 11); his persecution of the followers of Jehovah (2 Chron. xxi. 11); his reception of a writing from Elisha, which, however, had no effect upon his conduct (2 Chron. xxi. 12—15); his war with the Philistines (2 Chron. xxi. 16) and with the Arabs (2 Chron. xxi. 16); his loss of all his sons but one during his lifetime; his long illness, and his painful death (2 Chron. xxi. 18, 19). But the 'Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah' was a work on a larger scale than the extant Book of Chronicles, and probably went into much greater detail.

Ver. 24.—**And Joram slept with his fathers.** Joram died after an illness, that lasted two years, of an incurable disease of his bowels. No "burning" was made for him, and there was no regret at his death. **And was buried with his fathers in the city of David**; *i.e.* in the portion of Jerusalem which David built; but, according to Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 5. § 3) and the author of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxi. 20), not in the sepulchres of the kings. **And Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.** Ahaziah is called "Jehoahaz" in 2 Chron. xxi. 17, by an inversion of the two elements of his name, and "Azariah" in 2 Chron. xxii. 6, apparently by a slip of the pen.

Vers. 25—29.—THE WICKED REIGN OF AHAZIAH IN JUDAH. The writer continues the history of Judah through another reign —a very short one—almost to its close. He describes the wickedness of Ahaziah, for the most part, in general terms, attributes it to his connection with the "house of Ahab," and notes his alliance with Joram of Israel against the Syrians, and his visit to his brother monarch at Samaria, which led on to his death.

Ver. 25.—**In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab King of Israel.** In ch. ix. 29 the year of Ahaziah's accession is said to have been Joram's *eleventh* year. It is conjectured that he began to reign as viceroy to his father during his severe illness in Joram's eleventh year, and became sole king at his father's death in the year following. **Did Ahaziah the son of Jehoram King of Judah begin to reign**; *i.e.* begin to be full king.

Ver. 26.—**Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign.** The

writer of Chronicles says, "two and forty" (2 Chron. xxii. 2), which is absolutely impossible, since his father was but forty when he died (see ver. 17, and comp. 2 Chron. xxi. 5, 20). Even "two and twenty" is a more advanced age than we should have expected, since Ahaziah was the youngest of Jehoram's sons (2 Chron. xxi. 17); he must therefore have been born in his father's nineteenth year. Yet he had several elder brothers (2 Chron. xxi. 17; xxii. 1)! To explain this, we have to remember (1) the early age at which marriage is contracted in the East (twelve years); and (2) the fact that each prince had, besides his wife, several concubines. That Joram had several appears from 2 Chron. xxi. 17. **And he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name** was **Athaliah, the daughter of Omri King of Israel.** There is something very remarkable in the dignity and precedence attached to Omri. He was, no doubt, regarded of a sort of second founder of the kingdom of Israel, having been the first monarch to establish anything like a stable dynasty. His "statutes" were looked upon as the fundamental laws of the kingdom, and were "kept" down to the time of its destruction (Micah vi. 16). Foreigners knew Samaria as *Beth-Khumri*, or "the house of Omri." He is the only Israelite king mentioned by name on the Moabite Stone (line 5), and the earliest mentioned in the inscriptions of Assyria. Even Jehu, who put an end to his dynasty, was regarded by the Assyrians as his descendant, and known under the designation of "Yahua, the son of Khumri" (Black Obelisk, epig. ii.). Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, is called "the daughter of Omri," not only in the present passage, but also in 2 Chron. xxii. 2.

Ver. 27.—**And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab.** Compare what is said of Ahaziah of Israel in 1 Kings xxii. 52, 53, and of Jehoram of Judah in the present chapter (ver. 18). What is specially intended is that Ahaziah kept up the Baal-worship introduced by his father into Judah. **And did evil in the sight of the Lord, as did the house of Ahab: for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab**; literally, *for he was related by marriage to the house of Ahab.* חתן is any relation by marriage, not "son-in-law" in particular (see Exod. iii. 1, and the comment on the place).

Ver. 28.—**And he went with Joram the son of Ahab to the war against Hazael King of Syria in Ramoth-Gilead.** Some translate, *and Joram himself went;* but this is a very rare use of אֵת, and one which would be unnatural in this place—for why "Joram himself," when "Joram" alone would have been quite sufficient?—and still more unnatural in 2 Chron. xxii. 5, where the same phrase occurs. It is best, therefore, to follow our translators, who are in accord both with the Septuagint and with the Vulgate. Ahaziah followed the example of his grandfather Jehoshaphat, who had accompanied Ahab to Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kings xxii. 29), to fight against the Syrians in the time of Benhadad. That the city was still disputed shows the importance which it possessed in the eyes of both parties. **And the Syrians wounded Joram.** It appears that Hazael, soon after his accession, with the ardour of a young prince anxious to distinguish himself, made an expedition against Ramoth-Gilead, which had been recovered by the Israelites between the death of Ahab and the time of which the historian is now treating. Joram went to the relief of the town with a large force, and, being received within the walls, maintained a gallant defence (ch. ix. 14), in the course of which he was wounded severely, though not fatally. Thereupon he and his brother king quitted the town and returned to their respective capitals, leaving a strong garrison in Ramoth-Gilead under Jehu and some other captains. Joram needed rest and careful nursing on account of his wounds, and Ahaziah would naturally withdraw with him, since he could not serve under a mere general.

Ver. 29.—**And King Joram went back to be healed in Jezreel.** Jezreel was more accessible from Ramoth-Gilead than Samaria. It lay in the plain, and could be reached without travelling over any rough or mountainous country. It was also the usual place to which the court retired for rest and refreshment—the Versailles or Windsor of Samaria, as it has been called. **Of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael King of Syria.** "Ramah" is another name for "Ramoth-Gilead" or "Ramoth in Gilead," which is the full name of the place. The word means "high," "elevated," and is cognate to *Aram.* **And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram King of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel.** Ahaziah would probably take the route by way of Jericho, the Jordan valley, and the Wata el Jalud, and would consequently begin his journey by the rapid *descent* from Jerusalem to Jericho. **Because he was sick**; *i.e.* unwell, wounded.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—"*All things work together for good to them that love God.*" The piety of the Shunammite had been sufficiently shown in the previous record left us of her (ch. iv. 8—37). The sequel of her story indicates how, in a wonderful way, events and circumstances seemingly fortuitous and unconnected work together for the advantage and happiness of one who lives virtuously, and seeks in all things to serve God and advance the cause of religion. "The series of incidents," it has been well said, "forms a marvellous web of Divine dispensations" (Bähr).

I. THE FAMINE. This lies at the root of the whole. If God had not ordained a famine upon the land—"called for it," and brought it about—none of the other incidents would have been possible. The woman would not have lost her property, would have had no occasion to "cry" to the king, and would have come into no personal contact either with him or with Gehazi.

II. THE PROPHET'S WARNING. The prophet, when so terrible a calamity as a seven years' famine impended over the land, might well have given all his thoughts to the general sufferings of the people, and have forgotten individuals. But God's providence determines otherwise. Elisha bethinks himself of the Shunammite, albeit she is but a unit in the vast mass of suffering humanity, and warns her of the coming evil, bidding her quit the land and sojourn elsewhere. This advice, which she follows, is the second link in the chain.

III. THE COINCIDENCE OF THE KING'S DESIRE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ELISHA WITH THE RETURN OF THE WOMAN TO HER OWN LAND. It was, humanly speaking, a pure accident that the curiosity of the king with respect to Elisha happened to be aroused just as the famine was over, and the woman, having returned from Philistia into the land of Israel, found her estate occupied by another. It was another accident that she bethought herself of appealing to the king, instead of having recourse to any other remedy.

IV. THE COINCIDENCE OF GEHAZI BEING SPEAKING OF HER CASE EXACTLY AS SHE MADE HER APPEARANCE. Gehazi had scores of miracles to relate, and might have been discoursing of any one of them; but events were so ordered that it was of her child's resurrection that he was telling the king, and not of any other miracle, when she came into the royal presence. This coincidence it was which so interested the king in her, that he at once gave the order for restoring her estate to her.

We may learn from the entire narrative, (1) that our lives are divinely ordered; (2) that nothing happens to us by mere chance; (3) that events which seem to us, at the time when they happen, of the least possible importance, may be necessary links in the chain which Divine providence is forging for the ordering of our lives, and for the working out through them of the Divine purposes.

Vers. 7—9.—*The power of calamity to bend the spirit of the proud.* Benhadad had hitherto been an enemy of Jehovah and his prophets. He had sought Elisha's life (ch. vi. 13—20), and, when baffled in his design to seize his person, had made a bold attempt to crush and destroy the whole Israelite nation. But now God had laid his hand upon him; he was prostrated on a sick-bed; and lo! all was altered. The mighty monarch, so lately glorying in his strength, and, in his own opinion, infinitely above any *soi-disant* prophet, is brought down so low that, on hearing of Elisha's having come voluntarily to his capital, instead of seizing him, he sends him a humble embassy. Hazael, a high officer of the court, is bidden to "take a present in his hand, and go meet *the man of God*, and inquire of Jehovah by him—Will the king recover from his disease?" The present is a rich one, made by Oriental ostentation to appear even grander than it is in reality. Forty camels bear their burden to the prophet's door, and bring him "every good thing of Damascus," without let or stint. The great king calls himself Elisha's son—"Thy son Benhadad has sent me to thee" (ver. 9). Never was there a more complete reversal of human conditions. The hunted enemy is now felt to be the best friend; is courted, flattered, propitiated both by act and word. The proud king grovels in the dust, is content to be the prophet's son and servant, does him obeisance morally, and hangs upon his words as those of

one with whom are the issues of life and death! And so it is with the proud and mighty generally. (1) A Pharaoh despises Jehovah, and asks, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go" (Exod. v. 2); but in a little time the same Pharaoh has to rise up in the dead of the night, and to call for Jehovah's servants, Moses and Aaron, and to entreat them to go forth from among his people, both they and the children of Israel, and go, serve Jehovah, as they had said; also to take their flocks and their herds, as they had said, and to be gone; and to "*bless him also*" (Exod. xii. 31, 32). (2) An Ahab lets loose the dogs of persecution against the people of God, destroys the prophets of Jehovah, and sells himself to work evil in the sight of the Lord; but, when boldly rebuked and threatened with calamity, all his pride forsakes him, and he rends his clothes, and puts sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasts, and lies in sackcloth, and goes softly (1 Kings xxi. 27). (3) A Manasseh turns from God to worship Baal, and does after all the abominations of the heathen, and builds again the high places, and rears up altars for Baal, and uses witchcraft, and sets up a carved image in the house of God, and sheds innocent blood very much till he fills Jerusalem from one end to another (ch. xxi. 16), and does worse than the heathen whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel, even causing Isaiah (according to the tradition) to be sawn asunder; but calamity smites him, the captains of the host of the King of Assyria take him, and put hooks in his mouth, and chains upon his limbs, and carry him captive to Babylon to the King of Assyria—then all his pride falls away from him like a cast-off garment, and in his affliction he beseeches the Lord his God, and humbles himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prays to him, and makes supplication, and is forgiven, and thenceforth serves Jehovah (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—16). The pastor who has under his charge proud, tyrannical, oppressive persons, who scorn rebuke, and think to ride roughshod over their fellow-men, may wait with a good hope for the hour of sickness or calamity, which sooner or later, unless in the case of sudden death, comes to all. He will find the Benhadad of the sick-room a very different person from the Benhadad of the camp, or of the court, or of the mart, and one much more open to admonition. Hardness, stubbornness, self-reliance, can scarcely survive, when the weakness of decay and the helplessness of acute sickness have supervened. He need not despair, however cruel, oppressive, and injurious to others the man's earlier life may have been. If a Benhadad could humble himself, if an Ahab could repent and "go softly," if a Manasseh could turn to God and obtain pardon, there must be a possibility of repentance even for the most hardened sinners.

Vers. 10—15.—*Hazael and Elisha.* The contrast is striking between the two characters here brought for the first and last time into contact. In Hazael we have—

I. THE CRAFTY SCHEMER, cunning and treacherous, who sees in his master's calamity his own opportunity; who feels no gratitude for past favours, no pity for present weakness and suffering, no compunction at playing a double part; who has no horror of crime, no dread of the enduring infamy which attaches to the assassin and the traitor. Hazael is wise in a certain sense—he is clever, audacious, skilful in devising means to ends, secret, determined, unscrupulous. He contrives a mode of death which will leave no trace of violence, and may appear accidental, if suspicion arises that it has not happened in the ordinary course of nature.

II. THE MAN OF BLOOD. Hazael is altogether cruel and unsparing. He reaches the throne through blood. As king, he deluges Israel in blood, "cutting the nation short, and smiting them in all their coasts" (ch. x. 32); "destroying them, and making them like the dust by threshing" (ch. xiii. 7). We must view him as a born soldier, never so happy as when engaged in a campaign, now resisting the attacks of Assyria on his northern border ('Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. p. 364), now attacking the Philistines (ch. xii. 17), almost constantly warring with his immediate neighbours the kings of Israel, once even threatening Judah, and "setting his face to go up to Jerusalem" (ch. xii. 17) in the hope of taking it.

III. THE SUCCESSFUL WARRIOR. Hazael succeeded in repulsing the Assyrians, and maintaining his independence, notwithstanding all their efforts to conquer him. He reduced Israel to a species of semi-subjection (ch. xiii. 7). He compelled even Judæa to purchase peace at his hands (ch. xii. 18). He was, on the whole, the most warlike

of all the early kings of Syria; and, though he suffered one great defeat at the hands of the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser II., yet he issued from the struggle unsubdued, and left his dominions intact to his son and successor, Benhadad III.

In Elisha, on the other hand, we have—

I. THE WISE, CLEAR-SIGHTED, SINGLE-MINDED, HONEST ADVISER. Elisha has no cunning, no art, no special cleverness. But he can read character; he can see through Hazael's designs. Whether king, or noble, or common person applies to him for advice, he uses the same simplicity, counsels each as seems to him for the best, and seeks to gain nothing for himself by the advice which he gives them. His plainness offends Naaman (ch. v. 12); his firmness enrages Jehoram (ch. vi. 31); his penetration disconcerts Hazael (ch. viii. 11); but he cares nothing how men may receive his words. It is a Divine message that he delivers, and deliver the message he must and will, in simple plain language, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear.

II. THE MAN OF PEACE. Elisha's character is eminently peaceful and conciliatory. He weeps at the thought of those horrors which war causes almost of necessity (ch. viii. 11). Once only do his counsels lead on to an engagement (ch. iii. 16—24); mostly he contrives that perils shall be averted without the shedding of blood (ch. vi. 18—22; vii. 6—15). He will not allow the prisoners that he has made to be put to death, or in any way ill treated (ch. vi. 22, 23). He seeks to check Hazael's murderous propensities by a look which he cannot misunderstand (ch. viii. 11).

III. THE PROPHET AND TEACHER. The office of the prophet was to rebuke sin, as Elisha did (ch. iii. 13, 14), to sustain faith, to train up fresh prophets, to teach the faithful (ch. iv. 23), to announce God's will to king and people, and to execute commissions with which God specially entrusted him. Elisha never failed in the performance of any of these duties. Cast upon a dark time, when a debasing superstition, imported from a foreign country, had full possession of the court and had laid a strong hold upon the country, he faithfully upheld Jehovah and Jehovah's laws before backsliding kings and "a disobedient and gainsaying people." To Elisha principally it was owing that true religion still maintained itself in the land against the persecutions of Jezebel and her sons, and that, when the dynasty of Omri came to an end, there was still a faithful remnant left, which had not bowed the knee to Baal, but had clung to Jehovah under all manner of difficulties. If Elisha left no *great* prophet to succeed him, it was probably because great men are not made to order, and God's providence did not see fit to continue the succession of first-rate prophetical teachers, which had been raised up to meet the extreme danger of the introduction and maintenance of a false state religion by apostate kings.

When two such characters are brought into contact, the natural result is mutual repulsion. Hazael is ashamed that Elisha should read him so well; and Elisha weeps when he thinks of the woes that Hazael will inflict upon Israel. Outward respect is maintained; but the two must have felt, when they parted, that they were adversaries for life, bent on opposite courses, with opposed principles, aims, motives; not only the servants of different gods, but antagonistic in their whole conception of life and its objects, sure to clash if ever they should meet again, and, even if they should not meet, sure to be ever working for different ends, and engaged in thwarting one the other.

Vers. 16—27.—*The power of bad women for evil.* All the evil wrought, all the irreligion, all the licentiousness and depravity, and almost all the misery suffered during the reigns of Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram in Israel, and of Jehoram and Ahaziah in Judah, were caused by the machinations and influence of two wicked women—Jezebel and her daughter Athaliah. Jezebel, a proud imperious woman, born in the purple, a "king's daughter," and extraordinarily strong-minded and unscrupulous, obtained a complete ascendancy over the weak and unstable Ahab, and must be viewed as the instigator of all his wicked actions. With Ahab's connivance, she "slew the prophets of the Lord," persecuted the faithful, set up the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth in Samaria, introduced into Israel the unchaste rites of the Dea Syra and of Adonis, threatened the life of Elijah and drove him into banishment, contrived the judicial murder of Naboth, and imparted to Ahab's reign that character of licentiousness and bloody cruelty which gives it its sad pre-eminence above all others in the black list of Israel's monarchs. Nor did Jezebel's evil influence stop here. She

outlived her husband by some thirteen years, and during that period was the evil genius of her two sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram. Ahaziah she completely perverted (ch. xxii. 52, 53). Over Jehoram she had less influence; but to her we must ascribe it that during his reign the Baal-worship continued in the capital (ch. x. 25—27) and in the country districts (ch. x. 21), though he himself took no part in it (ch. iii. 2). Athaliah, though without the strength of mind and will which characterized her mother, resembled her, as a faint *replica* resembles a strongly painted portrait. Married to Jehoram of Israel, a weak prince, she had little difficulty in establishing her ascendancy over him, and becoming his chief adviser and counsellor (ver. 18). It was under her direction that Jehoram "made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah thereto" (2 Chron. xxi. 11), or, in other words, established the Baal-worship in Judah and Jerusalem, and forced the inhabitants to embrace it. Over Ahaziah, her son, who was but two and twenty at his accession, her influence was naturally greater. He seems to have been a mere puppet in her hands (2 Chron. xxii. 3—5). With a boldness worthy of her mother, Athaliah, on the death of her son Ahaziah, murdered all his half-brothers, and seized the sovereign power, which she held for six years—a unique feature in the history of the Jews. The Baal-worship was now made to supersede the worship of Jehovah in the temple on Mount Zion, and Mattan, the chief of Baal, was installed in the place previously occupied by the Aaronic high priest (2 Chron. xxiii. 17). Jehovah-worship was forbidden, persecuted, and probably ceased, except in secret; and the kingdom of Judah was, so far as appearances went, apostate. Such were the evils wrought by these two ambitious and wicked women. The history of the world, though it can furnish no exact parallels, has many cases more or less similar. Semiramis may be a myth, but Queen Hatasu in Egypt, Queens Atossa and Parysatis in Persia, Olympias in Greece, Messalina and Poppæa Sabina in Rome, Catharine de Medici, and Catherine Empress of Russia, in modern Europe, were women equally imperious, equally determined, and the prolific causes of equal mischief. It would seem that, in the female nature, where the natural impulses are so largely towards good, if these are perverted and Satan allowed the mastery, there is no longer any let or restraint; the passions become ungovernable, the will as iron, the heart hard and unrelenting; evil has unresisted sway, and the result is something even more fearful and terrible than the wickedness of the worst man. *Corruptio optimi pessima.* Woman's function in the world is to be soft and tender, to smooth down man's roughnesses, to pacify and soothe and mitigate; if she abnegates these functions, and assumes the man's duties of ruling and repressing and bending to her will the stubborn necks of others, she runs counter to her proper nature, and becomes a monstrosity. There is no saying to what lengths of profligacy, cruelty, and other wickedness she may not go. She is worse than a wild beast, and may do infinitely more evil. She may utterly corrupt a society, or she may deluge with blood a continent. She may ruin the country to which she belongs and bring its fairest provinces to desolation. She may stir up hatreds, set class against class, and cause a civil war that shall cost the lives of hundreds of thousands. The only security against all this mischief is for woman not to desert her sphere, but to remain within it, working for God, and doing the good which she was designed to do.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—6.—*The Shunammite's land restored.* The Bible has a good deal to say about the land question. There is one memorable passage in Isaiah (v. 8): "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!" There is another memorable passage in the Epistle of St. James: "Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth." If such denunciations of oppression and wrong had been remembered, we should have had less of socialistic combinations and less of agrarian crime. In this passage we have—

I. A COMMAND OBEYED. Elisha's command seemed a hard one. This woman of

Shunem was to arise with her household, and leave her home and farm for seven years. He told her, indeed, that there was to be a famine in the land. But she might have wanted more proof. She might have said, "Well, I shall wait till I see some signs of the famine. It is a great hardship to have to get up in this way and leave my home, without any immediate reason. What if Elisha's fears should turn out to be untrue? May not the famine be as bad anywhere else?" So men often reason when God gives them some command or points out to them the way of salvation. Lot lingered, when urged to depart out of Sodom, though the very angels of God had come to warn him of his doom. So men linger still, when urged to flee from the wrath to come. They linger, though every day is bringing them nearer to eternity. They linger, though they know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man may come. Whether it be the path of salvation or the path of Christian service which God calls us to tread, let us not linger, let us not hesitate to obey, but, like this woman of Shunem, let us do at once what God commands.

II. Loss INCURRED. This woman actually did suffer by her prompt obedience. She escaped the famine, indeed, but she lost her land. On this subject Dr. Thomson says, in 'The Land and the Book,' "It is still common for even petty sheikhs to confiscate the property of any person who is exiled for a time, or who moves away temporarily from his district. Especially is this true of widows and orphans, and the Shunammite was now a widow. And small is the chance to such of having their property restored, unless they can secure the mediation of some one more influential than themselves. The conversation between the king and Gehazi about his master is also in perfect keeping with the habits of Eastern princes; and the appearance of the widow and her son so opportunely would have precisely the same effect now that it had then. Not only the *land*, but all the *fruits of it* would be restored. There is an air of genuine verisimilitude in such simple narratives which it is quite impossible for persons not intimately familiar with Oriental manners to appreciate, but which stamps the incidents with undoubted certainty." *We may incur loss from a worldly point of view by obeying a command of God.* But which do we prefer—worldly gain or a conscience at peace with God? Which loss is greater—the loss of a few pounds, or the loss of our heavenly Father's smile? Even if we do lose by it—it is best to do the will of God, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

III. QUESTIONS ASKED. We are not told what led to this remarkable conversation which Jehoram had with Gehazi. Perhaps the time of famine had humbled him. Perhaps he was becoming penitent for his threat of taking Elisha's life. Perhaps it was mere idle curiosity. But at any rate, here is the King of Israel inquiring of Gehazi, "Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done." Gehazi, at this time, loved to think and speak of Elisha. He had been a good master to him. His deeds were worth recording. And so Gehazi proceeds to tell the story of Elisha's mighty deeds. 1. *We ought to be ready to answer questions about our Master.* They may proceed from curiosity, from wrong motives. Never mind. Our answer, given in a Christian spirit, may be the means of disarming ridicule. It may be an opportunity for us to tell the old, old story of the cross. 2. *We ought not to be ashamed of our Master.* He is "the chiefest among ten thousand . . . and altogether lovely." His Name is above every name. The Name, the life, the works, the words, of Jesus ought to be a favourite theme with us.

IV. RESTITUTION MADE. When God's time comes, how very easily he can fulfil his purposes! Gehazi had just reached that part of his story where Elisha restored the Shunammite's son to life, when, to his astonishment and delight, the Shunammite herself appeared on the scene. She came with her petition to the king that he would cause her house and land to be restored. Gehazi, not, perhaps, very regardful of courtesy or etiquette, calls out in the fulness of his joy, "My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life." The king, whose feelings had already been touched by the pathetic narrative of the little lad carried home from the harvest-field to die, touched also by the entreaty of the woman for the restoration of her lost property, and perhaps recognizing the hand of Providence in the remarkable events of that day, gives orders that not only her land, but the fruits of it from the day she left, should be restored to her. That was wholesale restoration and restitution. Who shall say it was unjust? What a disgorging there would be, if all who have taken money

or land from others by unlawful means, all who have extorted unjust rents, were compelled to restore their ill-gotten gains! The Shunammite had not suffered, after all, by her obedience. "No one hath forsaken houses, or lands, or father, or mother, or friends, . . . but he shall receive an hundredfold more in this life, and in the world to come life everlasting."—C. H. I.

Vers. 7—15.—*Elisha, Hazael, and Benhadad.* The present interview between Elisha and Hazael arose out of Benhadad's illness. Benhadad heard that Elisha had come to Damascus, and he sent Hazael to inquire of the Lord by him if he would recover of his disease. It is wonderful how ready men are to forsake God when they are well, and to seek his help when they are in sickness or trouble. When he was well, the King of Syria "bowed himself in the house of Rimmon," but now, in his time of weakness and anxiety about his life, he sends to inquire of the God of Israel. Elisha's answer to Benhadad's question was evidently an enigma. "Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die." Elisha looked steadfastly into Hazael's face. Did Hazael understand the enigma or not? Why, then, are such signs of confusion in his face? Why does his eye fail to meet the prophet's gaze? Why does his cheek grow pale? Why that uneasy twitching of the mouth? Yes. Elisha's suspicions—and perhaps also the hints which God had given him—are confirmed. It was true that Benhadad *might* recover. His illness was not mortal. And yet his death was certain, and Hazael's conscience told him that he was already a murderer in his heart. As Elisha thinks of all the trouble and suffering that shall come upon Israel through Hazael's instrumentality, he can no longer restrain his feelings. He bursts into tears. When Hazael asks him why he weeps, it is then that the prophet tells him all the cruelties which he will perpetrate upon God's people. This tale of horrors called forth the question from Hazael, "What is thy servant, this dog, that he should do this great thing?" It was only then that Elisha showed him that he knew that murder was already in his mind. He quietly says, "Behold, the Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria." Hazael then went back to Benhadad, and gave him an answer very different from that which Elisha had really given to him. Instead of giving him the whole message, he gives him merely a part, tells him that he shall recover, omits that it has been revealed to the prophet that he shall surely die. *The morrow came; and on the morrow Hazael was a murderer.* Despite all his protestations of weakness and inability to do "great things," he—the king's trusted servant—betrays his master's confidence and takes away his life. Taking a thick cloth and dipping it in water, he spread it upon the king's face, either when he was asleep, or under pretext of cooling and refreshing him, so that the breathing was stopped and the king died. Terrible succession of falsehood, treachery, and murder. We learn from this incident—

I. THE POSSIBILITIES OF EVIL IN THE HUMAN HEART. Many persons deny the depravity of human nature. They deny the story of the Fall. They object to such ideas, and regard them as theological dogmas, and the mere creations of narrow, hard, illiberal minds. But these truths of the fall of man and the depravity of human nature are something more than theological dogmas. They are facts of experience—painful, indeed, and humiliating to human pride, but facts nevertheless. And here it may be stated that to believe in the fall of man and the depravity of human nature is quite consistent with the deepest human sympathy and love. To believe in the possibilities of evil that there are in the human heart is quite consistent with believing in its great possibilities of good. The Bible, which teaches man's fall, teaches also that man was made in the image of God, and that it is possible yet for that lost and faded image to be restored. The Bible, which tells man that he is a sinner, helpless, condemned, perishing, tells him also that, in the infinite mercy of that God against whom he has sinned, a way of salvation has been provided; that the Saviour is the Son of God himself; that we may have "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins;" and that "whosoever believeth on him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." It is *for our own good* that we should know what possibilities of evil there are in the unregenerate heart. What use is it to say, "Peace! peace!" when there is no peace? What avails it for the watchman to cry, "All's well!" if the enemy are not only at the gates, but actually within the city? He who would help men to do the right and over-

come the wrong must faithfully point out to them the possibilities of evil that are within their own heart. Who that knows human nature, that knows the facts of history, can doubt that such possibilities exist? Look at Hazael, hitherto the faithful, trusted servant, stooping over the bedside of his master, and calmly and deliberately taking away his life. He had the ambition to be King of Syria, and he wades to the throne through his master's blood. Who that knows what crimes men will commit when under the influence of covetousness, intemperance, hatred, or some other passion—men who otherwise would have shrunk from the very mention of such acts—can doubt the possibilities of evil within the human heart? *There are possibilities of evil even in good men.* The old nature is not taken away. "When I would do good," said St. Paul, "evil is present with me, so that how to perform that which is good I find not." "For I see a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin." What, then, is the difference between a Christian and an unregenerate man? There are possibilities of evil in them both, but the Christian strives against the evil, whereas the unregenerate man yields to sin and loves it. The Christian may fall, but if so, he is filled with penitence. The Christian will have his faults, but, if so, he acknowledges them and seeks help to forsake them. "Faults!" says Thomas Carlyle, in his lectures on 'Hero-Worship,' "the greatest of faults is to be conscious of none." Yes; there are possibilities of evil, there are actualities of evil, in the best of men. Christ might still say to an assembly of even his own disciples, "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone at a fallen sister or an erring brother."

II. THE DANGER OF IGNORING THESE POSSIBILITIES. Hazael did not become a murderer all at once. The old Latin saying is, *Nemo repente fit turpissimus*—"No one becomes suddenly very wicked." It is true. Perhaps a few years before this if any one had told Hazael that he would be a murderer, he would have been highly indignant. Even now he asks, "What is thy servant, this dog, that he should do this great thing?" It is uncertain whether this exclamation of Hazael refers only to Elisha's prophecy about the cruelties he would perpetrate on Israel, or whether it refers also to the suggestion of Elisha that he was to be the murderer of Benhadad. If it refers to the murder of the king, then the exclamation would express surprise at the idea of his venturing to lift his hand against his master. If it only refers to the subsequent cruelties which he was to commit, it shows in any case that Hazael did not know of what he was capable. Shakespeare's representation of Brutus when meditating the murder of Julius Cæsar, to which he had been incited by other conspirators, throws light upon Hazael's feelings.

> "Since Cassius first did whet me against Cæsar
> I have not slept.
> Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:
> The genius and the mortal instruments
> Are then in council; and the state of a man,
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
> The nature of an insurrection."

It is, indeed, a dangerous thing to tamper with temptation. There is that affinity between the evil which is in our own heart and the temptations which are without, that there is between the gunpowder and the spark. It is wisdom to keep the sparks away. It is wisdom to keep away from the temptation.

> "Vice is a monster of so hideous mien,
> As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
> Yet, seen too oft, familiar with her face,
> We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

It is "fools" who make a mock at sin. It is a foolish thing to make light of the guilt of sin in God's sight. It is a foolish thing to make light of the power of sin in our own hearts. "Lead us not into temptation."

III. THERE IS ONLY ONE SAFEGUARD AGAINST THESE EVIL TENDENCIES IN OUR OWN HEARTS: THAT SAFEGUARD IS THE GRACE OF GOD. Of the power of that grace Hazael knew nothing. Temptation upon temptation came crowding into his mind. *The first*

was the great ambition to be king. He has yielded to that long since. It has taken complete possession of his mind. Then there came *the temptation to carry a false message* to his master, who had reposed such confidence in him. He yielded to that. Then there came *the temptation to take away his master's life.* It was a strong one, no doubt. There was but that weak, helpless king, upon a bed of sickness, between him and the throne. One little act, which no one would suspect, and the object of his ambition would be attained. But if he had resisted the other temptations, this one might never have assailed him at all, or, if it had, he would easily have resisted it. *The reason of his fall was the want of a sufficient force within.* We need something more than human to conquer the Satanic power of sin.

"What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?"

Hazael had *no restraining power* to check his own evil tendencies, *no resisting power* to stop the temptation at the door, ere it entered and took possession of his heart. He seems to have had a feeling of shame, as when he became confused before Elisha's steady glance. But shame, by itself, with no other superior influence to sustain it, is easily vanquished. Lust, covetousness, ambition, intemperance,—every one of these is able to put shame to flight. The *immoral* man—he has long since trampled on shame. The miser, the *covetous* man—he will stop at nothing that will increase his possessions. The *ambitious* man—he will not allow shame to hinder him in the desire for power and place. The *drunkard*—shame has long since ceased in his besotted mind; no blush is seen upon his bloated face. No; if we are to resist evil, if we are to conquer sin, it must be in some power stronger than poor human nature can supply. Hazael did not know that power. He trusted in his own sense of shame, in his own sense of what was right, and that failed him. He who had said, "What is thy servant, this dog, that he should do this great thing?" on the morrow took his master's life. Contrast Hazael's exclamation with Joseph's when he was tempted: "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin *against God?*" Ah! there was something there to which Hazael was a stranger. There was the personal presence of a personal God; there was the fear of offending that holy God; there was the fear of grieving that loving heavenly Father who had watched over Joseph when his brethren had forsaken him, and who had provided for all his wants. Hazael's feeling is more like that of Peter, "Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I"—the expression of wounded pride, of boastful self-security. Yet Peter fell into the very sin of which he had expressed such horror only a few hours before. It is not such self-confidence, but a humble feeling of our own weakness and an attitude of entire dependence upon God, that will really keep the door barred against temptation.

One or two practical applications. 1. *Be on your guard against the beginnings of evil.* If you yield to one temptation, no matter how small and insignificant it may be, others are sure to follow in its wake. 2. *Be charitable toward the faults and failings of others.* When we know what possibilities of evil there are in our own hearts, how can we have the presumption to sit in judgment upon others? If others have fallen and we are secure, perhaps it was because we were not exposed to the same temptations. We are to consider ourselves, lest we also be tempted. 3. If you have not yet experienced the forgiveness that is in Christ Jesus and the power of Divine grace, *seek them now!* Let it be your earnest prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." If you would be safe from the possibilities of evil that are in your own heart, and from the temptations of a godless world, then your prayer should be now and always, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—6.—*Topics for reflection.* "Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life," etc. In these verses we have an illustration of the reward of kindness, the ignorance of royalty, and the influence of godliness.

I. THE REWARD OF KINDNESS. "Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years. And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years." Through Elisha this Shunammite woman obtained three

great favours: (1) the restoration of her son (ch. iv.); (2) direction for herself and family to leave their old home during the seven years' famine; and then, when she returned from the land of the Philistines, where she had sojourned seven years; (3) the restoration of her old home, which had either fallen into the hands of covetous persons, or been confiscated to the crown (ver. 6). These are confessedly signal favours; but why were they rendered? Undoubtedly on account of the kindness which this woman had manifested to Elisha, as recorded in the fourth chapter (vers. 8—10). She had shown him great hospitality, built a chamber for him in her own house, furnished it, and boarded and lodged him for a considerable time. Here, then, is the *reward of kindness*. Observe: 1. *Kindness should always awaken gratitude.* The very constitution of the human soul and the moral laws of God as revealed in Christ show this. Yet, alas! so far away has the human soul gone from its pristine state that real gratitude for favours is somewhat rare. So much so, indeed, that it often turns out that the person on whom you bestow the greatest favours turns out to be your opponent and foe. Seneca has truly said that "were ingratitude actionable, there would not be in the whole world courts enough to try the causes in." So common is it that it is almost a maxim that, if you would alienate a man from you, you should bestow on him favours. Shakespeare has compared it to the cuckoo—

> "The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long
> That it had its head bit off by its young."

2. *Gratitude will always requite favours.* The man who receives favours without some practical acknowledgment is an ingrate. "A man," says L'Estrange, "may as well refuse to deliver up a sum of money that is left him in trust, without a suit, as not to return a good office without asking."

> "He that has nature in him must be grateful;
> 'Tis the Creator's primary great law,
> That links the chain of beings to each other,
> Joining the greater to the lesser nature,
> Trying the weak and strong, the poor and powerful,
> Subduing men to brutes, and even brutes to men."
>
> (Madan.)

II. THE IGNORANCE OF ROYALTY. When the Shunammite woman had returned from the land of the Philistines, she made application to the king for the restoration "of her house and for her land," whereupon "the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done." Now, mark the ignorance of this King of Israel. He was so ignorant of Elisha—the man who had been working such wonders in his country, delivering such sublime truths, and rendering such high service to the state, that he here inquires of the prophet's servant concerning him. "It was to his shame," says Matthew Henry, "that he needed now to be informed of Elisha's works, when he might have acquainted himself with them as they were being done by Elisha himself." Shame! that kings should be ignorant of the morally best and greatest men in their kingdom! Yet they have always been so, especially if the men, as in Elisha's case, lived in poverty. They know all about the moral pigmies that live in splendid palaces, bear high-sounding titles, are lords of castles, and owners of broad acres. Such, they not only know, but will honour with their visits, consort with them, shoot with them, etc. But to go into the obscure home of a truly great man who blesses the country with his soul-quickening thoughts, and holds fellowship with Heaven, they would no more think of doing, than of travelling to the moon. Will it be always thus? Heaven forbid!

III. THE INFLUENCE OF GODLINESS. When the king heard from Gehazi what Elisha had done, "his majesty" (as we say) granted the woman her request. "And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now." It was the involuntary influence of Elisha that disposed the monarch to do all this. Who shall tell the good that even the *involuntary* influence of a godly man communicates to his age? The voluntary influence of a man's life—that is, the influence he exerts by intention and conscious efforts—is truly insignificant compared with that stream of unconscious influence

that goes forth from him, not only at all times through his life, but even after he has quitted this mundane sphere. "Though dead, he yet speaketh." "As a little silvery ripple," says Elihu Burritt, "set in motion by the falling pebble, expands from its inch of radius to the whole compass of the pool, so there is not a child—not an infant Moses—placed however softly in his bulrush ark upon the sea of time, whose existence does not stir a ripple gyrating outwards and on, until it shall have moved across and spanned the whole ocean of God's eternity, stirring even the river of life and the fountain at which his angels drink."—D. T.

Vers. 7—16.—*Striking characters.* "And Elisha came to Damascus," etc. We have here—

I. A DYING KING. "Benhadad the King of Syria was sick." Benhadad, for his age and country, was a great king, rich and mighty, but now he is on his dying-bed. Kings die as well as others. Observe: 1. This dying king *was very anxious.* What was he anxious about? Not about any great spiritual interest concerning himself or others, but concerning his own physical condition. "Shall I recover of this disease?" This was the question he wanted Elisha to answer. Not, you may be sure, in the negative. Knowing some of the wonders that Elisha had performed, he in all likelihood imagined he would exert his miraculous power on his behalf, and restore him to life. All men more or less fear death, kings perhaps more than others. If ungodly, they have more to lose and nothing to gain. 2. His anxiety *prompted him to do strange things.* (1) It was strange for him to ask a favour from the man whom he had so long regarded as his enemy. We read (ch. vi. 14, 15) that this Benhadad had sent to Dothan "horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about," in order to capture this lonely prophet. What a change is this! Dying hours reverse our judgments, revolutionize our feelings, bring the lofty down. (2) It was strange for him to ask a favour of a man whose religion he hated. Benhadad was an idolater; Elisha was a monotheist, a worshipper of the one true God. Now, in dying, all the king's idolatrous thoughts have taken wing, and the one God appears as the great reality, and to the servant of that one God he sends, urging a favour. (3) It was strange for him to make costly presents to a poor lonely man. "The king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease? So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him," etc. What is the wealth, the grandeur, the crown, the sceptre, of the mightiest monarch to him when he feels himself dying? He will barter all away for a few short hours of life.

II. A PATRIOTIC PROPHET. "The man of God wept." Elisha, forecasting the king's death, and knowing the wickedness of this Hazael who was to succeed to the throne, smitten with patriotic tenderness, looked so "steadfastly" into the eye of Hazael that he blushed with shame, and the prophet broke into tears: "The man of God wept." But why did he weep? "Why weepeth my lord?" said Hazael. "And he answered Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire," etc. This was the overwhelming misery that the prophet foresaw would befall Israel, when this wretched courtier, his interrogator, would take the throne. As Christ foresaw the coming doom of Jerusalem, and wept over it, so Elisha saw the horrors approaching Israel, and broke into tears. The loving sympathies of a godly man are not confined to men or places, but spread over the ages, and flow down to bless posterity.—D. T.

Vers. 17—24.—*Lessons from the life of Jehoram.* "Thirty and two years old was he [Jehoram] when he began to reign," etc. This is a short fragment of a king's history—the history of Jehoram. Brief as it is, it contains many practical truths.

I. THAT PIETY IS NOT NECESSARILY HEREDITARY. Parents, as a rule, transmit their physical and intellectual qualities to their children, but not their moral characters. Jehoram was a bad man and a wicked king, but he was the son of Jehoshaphat, who was a man of distinguished piety, and reigned wisely and beneficently over Israel for twenty-five years. Of him it was said that "the more his riches and honour increased the more his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord" (2 Chron. xvii.

5, 6). He caused the altars and places of idolatry to be destroyed, and the knowledge of the Lord to be diffused throughout the kingdom, and the places of ecclesiastical and judicial authority to be well filled (2 Chron. xvii. 9). But how different was his son! One of the first acts of his government was to put to death his six brothers, and several of the leading men of the empire. It is here said that "he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab." He regulated his conduct by the infamous "house of Ahab," and not by the religious house of his father. He was in truth a murderer, an idolater, and a persecutor. But whilst piety is not *necessarily* hereditary—not necessarily, because children are moral agents—what then? Are parents to do nothing to impart all that is good in their character to their children? Undoubtedly, no! They are commanded to "train up a child in the way it should go" when it is young. And where their power is rightly employed, there is, if not invariable, yet general, success. Where the children of godly parents turn out to be profligate and corrupt, as a rule some defect may be found in the parental conduct. How often eminent ministers of the gospel, and in the main good men, are guilty of neglecting, to a greater or less extent, the parental oversight and religious training of their children! Even in the life of Jehoshaphat we detect at least two parental defects. 1. *In permitting his son to form unholy alliances.* This good man, Jehoshaphat, formed a league with Ahab against Syria, contrary to the counsel of Micaiah (2 Chron. xviii.). For this the Prophet Jehu censured him severely. In consequence of this alliance his son married the daughter of this infamous Ahab, and the matrimonial connection with such a woman, idolatrous, corrupt, and the daughter of Jezebel, had, no doubt, a powerful influence in deteriorating his moral character. 2. *In granting his son too great an indulgence.* He raised him to the throne during his own lifetime. He took him into royal partnership too soon, and thus supplied him with abundant means to foster his vanity and ambition. Ah, me! how many parents ruin their children for ever by over-indulgence!

II. THAT IMMORAL KINGS ARE NATIONAL CURSES. What evils this man brought upon his country! It is said that "in his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves. So Joram went over to Zair, and all the chariots with him: and he rose by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him about, and the captains of the chariots: and the people fled into their tents," etc. Through him the kingdom of Judah lost Edom, which "revolted" and became the determined enemy of Judah ever afterwards (Ps. cxxxvii. 7). Libnah, too, "revolted at the same time." This was a city in the south-western part of Judah assigned to the priests, and a city of refuge. But these revolts are but specimens of the tremendous evils that this immoral man brought upon the kingdom. It has always been so. Wicked kings, in all ages, have been the greatest curses that have afflicted the human race.[1] God said to Israel of old, "I gave thee a king in mine anger" (Hos. xiii. 11). And the gift, on the whole, it must be confessed, has been a curse to mankind; and that because few men who have attained the position have been divinely royal in intellect, in heart, in thoughts, in aims, in sympathies. What does Heaven say of wicked kings? "As a roaring lion, and a raging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people." When will the world have true kings?—such a king as is described in the Book of Proverbs, as one "that sitteth in the throne of judgment," and who "scattereth away all evil with his eyes"? He is one who sees justice done. He does not rule for the interest of a class, but for the good of all. His laws are equitable. Partialities and predilections which govern plebeian souls have no sway over him.

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

III. THAT DEATH IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS. 1. *Death does not respect a man's position, however high.* "And Jehoram slept with his fathers, and was buried." Jehoram was a king, yet death struck him down, and he "was buried with his fathers." Palaces are as accessible to death as paupers' huts. Attempted resistance in the former,

[1] See 'New Book of Kings,' by Davidson, M.A. (Reeves and Co., Fleet Street).

however skilfully organized, would be as futile as in the latter. Death cares nothing for kings; crowns, diadems, sceptres, courtiers, and pompous pageantries are only as dust in his icy glance. 2. *Death does not respect a man's character, however vile.* Jehoram was a bad man, and utterly unfit to die; but death waits not for moral preparation. When we remember what evils wicked men, especially wicked kings, work in the world, death must be regarded as a beneficent messenger. The psalmist saw mercy in the destruction of despots. He "overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea: for his mercy endureth for ever." "To him which smote great kings, and slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever" (Ps. cxxxvi.). There is mercy for the race in their destruction. When such demons in human flesh are cut down, the world breathes more freely, a load is rolled from its heart, obstacles are swept from its path of progress. When the Pharaohs are overwhelmed, the human Israel can march on to promised lands.

CONCLUSION. Parents, cultivate personal religion, and endeavour with all earnestness to transmit it to your children. Kings, seek to understand and to embody the ideal of true kingship, be royal in moral character. All, stand in readiness for the approach of death.—D. T.

Vers. 1—6.—*The Shunammite and her lands.* This narrative is the sequel to the history of the Shunammite in ch. iv. It furnishes another instance of how God cares for and rewards his people.

I. ELISHA'S WARNING. In chronological order this narrative seems to precede the cure of Naaman, while Gehazi was still the servant of the prophet. A famine of long duration was about to descend on the land, and Elisha gave timely warning to the Shunammite to take refuge somewhere else. 1. *The good are often sharers in the calamities of the wicked.* This famine was no doubt sent on Israel as a punishment for sin. God's prophet foretold it, as Elijah had foretold the drought in the days of Ahab (1 Kings xvii. 1). Famines and similar calamities do not come uncalled for. They are instruments used by God in his moral government (Ezek. xiv. 21; Amos iv.). And in the distresses brought upon the world by sin God's people are often sharers. The innocent are involved in the sufferings of the guilty (Ezek. xxi. 3, 4). This lady of Shunem, now probably a widow, is compelled, by the approach of famine, to abandon home and lands and rural comfort for a sojourn among idolaters. 2. *The good, notwithstanding, are marvellously protected amidst the calamities of the wicked.* It was God's mercy to this Shunammite, who in former days had befriended his prophet, which now led to her being warned beforehand. God's rewards for kindness shown to his servants are not soon exhausted. It was sad to be involved in the famine, but it would have been sadder had she not received this warning to withdraw in good time. Thus God, by a special providence, cares for and watches over the interests of his people. He guides their steps, and is a Shield to them from trouble. 3. *The good are provided for amidst the calamities of the wicked.* The Shunammite was directed to sojourn with her household wherever she could find a refuge. She believed the word of the man of God, obeyed it, and went to sojourn in the land of the Philistines. There she abode for the seven years that the famine lasted, and during that period was sufficiently provided for. It was an act of faith on the part of the Shunammite to take this step, for she had nothing to go upon in regard to this famine but the prophet's bare word. That, however, was held sufficient, and she left all to do as he had bidden her. God's people are always safe in acting on his commands. When Elijah was sent to hide by the brook Cherith, the ravens were "commanded" to feed him; and when he was told to go from there to Zarephath, a widow woman was similarly "commanded" to sustain him (1 Kings xvii. 4, 8). As God provided for Jacob and his household in Egypt in a time of famine, so he prepares a provision for all his people who humbly trust him. "They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing" (Ps. xxxiv. 10).

II. THE SHUNAMMITE'S RETURN. At length, through the ceasing of the famine, the way was open for the Shunammite to come back. Her return was: 1. *After long exile.* Seven years had she been absent from the land of Jehovah. During that period she had lived amidst Philistine surroundings. Her spirit must often have been grieved at the idolatrous and heathenish sights she witnessed; for what moral communion could she have with the worshippers of Dagon? Nor could she now, as of

old, saddle her ass, and repair to the prophet on sabbaths and new moons for consolation and instruction. Exile of this sort would be painful to her spirit, as it was to that of the psalmist (Ps. xlii. 4, 6). God in his providence often thus deprives his people for a time of the privilege of ordinances, perhaps through sickness, perhaps through removal to new scenes, perhaps through the interposition of direct obstacles. There was in the Shunammite's case a famine of the Word as well as of bread. These things try faith, and operate to the quickening of spiritual desire. 2. *To meet a new trial.* The Shunammite came back to her home, to find that, in her long absence, her house and lands had been alienated from her. Probably, as deserted by their owner, they had become the property of the crown (ver. 6). Or some neighbouring proprietor may have possessed himself of the abandoned fields. In any case, it was a sore discovery for the Shunammite to make, on her return, that she could no longer obtain her own. The trial of coming back seemed almost greater than that of going away. Might not the same providence that had cared for her in Philistia have watched over her possessions at home? It was God who had called her thence: might he not have secured that, when she returned, she would get her own? The issue of this trial should encourage believers not too readily to distrust the Almighty. It came to be seen that God *had* been caring for her in her absence—had, so to speak, been putting out her lands at interest for her, so that, when they were restored, she "received her own with usury" (Matt. xxv. 27).

III. THE SHUNAMMITE'S APPEAL. The most striking part of the story is yet to come. Having no other remedy, the Shunammite appealed to the king, as first magistrate, to restore to her her lands. "She went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land." We note concerning her appeal: 1. *Its justice.* The Shunammite had a good and just cause. Kings and magistrates are set to administer justice. Yet it is possible that, but for the circumstances next narrated, the impoverished lady might have cried long enough before her possessions were restored to her. It is difficult to get the holders of unlawfully acquired property—especially in land—to yield up again their title to it. The cry of the poor does not always penetrate, as it should do, to the ear of justice. 2. *Its providential opportuneness.* It is God's prerogative to maintain the cause of the oppressed (Ps. ix. 4, 9, 10), and he was preparing the way for this cause being heard. The circumstances are remarkable, showing how entirely all events are in the hand of God, how what we call accidental conjunctures are really providences, and how, without overriding human freedom, all things, even the most ordinary, are working together for good to those who love him. (1) It happened that, just as the Shunammite approached, her son being with her, to present her prayer, the king and Gehazi, Elisha's servant, were talking together of the wonderful works of the prophet. "Tell me, I pray thee," said the king, "all the great things that Elisha hath done." Jehoram, though a wicked man (ch. ix. 22), had yet, as we have formerly seen, a certain susceptibility to good in him. His was a divided nature. He had a reverence and respect for Elisha; he knew the right; he took pleasure in hearing of Elisha's wonderful deeds. Yet he never took God's Law truly into his heart. How many are like him (Ezek. xxxiii. 30—33)! (2) In particular, Gehazi was relating to the king how Elisha had restored the dead son of the Shunammite to life. How singular, we say, that this should have been the subject of conversation at that very moment! But it was God who ordered that this should come about. We find a very similar instance in the case of King Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther. He could not sleep, and ordered the chronicles of his kingdom to be read before him. It was the night when Haman's plot was ripe for the destruction of Mordecai, but the passage read was that which told how Mordecai had made known a conspiracy against the king's life. This saved him, and led to Haman's own destruction (Esth. vi.). The wheels within wheels in God's providence are truly marvellous. He lifts up one and casts down another by the simplest possible means. (3) As Gehazi was speaking, the Shunammite and her son stood before them, and cried to the king. No doubt in great surprise, Gehazi said, "My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life." The ear of the king was now effectually gained. 3. *Its success.* The woman, being asked to state her plea, did so, and her request was at once granted. Not only were her house and land restored to her, but recompense was made for all the fruits of the field since the day she had left it. Thus she received back in abundance

all she possessed. She not only got justice, but generosity. How good it is to be a friend of God! "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. viii. 31). With him for our Advocate, what need we fear? Having given this woman the greater gift, in reward for her kindness to his prophet, he does not withhold from her any lesser gift. So may the believer reason, if God "spared not his own Son," etc. (Rom. viii. 32).—J. O.

Vers. 7—15.—*Elisha and Hazael.* Elisha had come to Damascus, probably sent thither by God to carry out in spirit the commission given long before to Elijah (1 Kings xix. 15).

I. BENHADAD'S MESSAGE. 1. *Its occasion.* "Benhadad the King of Syria was sick." Royal rank affords no protection against the invasions of disease. Nor is the thought of death less alarming to the monarch than to the peasant. Benhadad's heart trembled as he reflected on the possible issues of his trouble, and he gladly availed himself of the opportunity of Elisha's presence in Damascus to send a messenger to him. His conduct is in striking contrast with Ahaziah's (ch. i.). That Israelitish king, forsaking the God of Israel, sent to inquire at an idol shrine at Ekron. Benhadad, though a Syrian and a worshipper of Rimmon, turns in his sickness from Rimmon to Jehovah. 2. *The messenger.* The person sent was Hazael, one of Benhadad's great courtiers. Hazael was a very different kind of a man from Naaman. He was a bold, bad, ambitious intriguer, who was already cherishing deep thoughts of crime against his master. Yet Benhadad seems to have trusted him. How unreliable are the friendships of the wicked! Men flatter with their tongue, but in their hearts are malice, falsehood, and selfish, ambitious designs (Ps. v. 9). 3. *The message.* Hazael came to Elisha with great pomp. He brought a present borne on forty camels. If lavish wealth could buy a favourable answer from Jehovah, surely now it would be obtained. But God is no respecter of persons; still less does he bestow favour for bribes. We may be sure that, as in a former case (ch. v. 16), Elisha touched nothing of all this wealth that was brought to him. Accompanying the present was a message from the king: "Thy *son* Benhadad hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover from this disease?" For those to whom this world is all, such a question is of very terrible moment. Well may they cling to life who have nothing beyond to hope for.

II. THE INTERVIEW WITH HAZAEL. 1. *Elisha's exposure of Hazael's motives.* As Hazael stood before Elisha, the prophet's clear vision read to the depths of his soul. Hazael was evidently speculating on the possibilities of his master's death, and had private designs upon the throne. When once the idea of making himself king had occurred to him, he was not the man to let the ambitious project readily drop again. The thought of removing the king by violence had no doubt flashed upon him, but he waited to learn whether the sickness would prove fatal before he framed a settled purpose. Elisha showed by his answer that he read the whole character of the man. "Go, say unto him, Thou shalt certainly recover"—that was the truth as regards the sickness; then he added, "Howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die." Hazael's guilty thoughts would furnish the explanation. We do well to remember that there is nothing we can conceal from the Searcher of hearts. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. iv. 13). Our thoughts, even in their most inchoate condition, are known to him. He understandeth our thoughts "afar off" (Ps. cxxxix. 2). 2. *Elisha's prophecy of Hazael's barbarities.* Did Elisha approve of Hazael's designs, and mean to give them Divine sanction? We are able to answer this by noting his subsequent conduct. (1) He settled his face steadfastly, and looked with a fixed gaze at Hazael till the latter was ashamed. Then Elisha wept. Elisha stood before Hazael as a kind of outward conscience. He revealed Hazael to himself, but at the same time condemned the thoughts which he saw in his mind. It was a holy, earnest gaze which Elisha turned on Hazael—a look of reproval, of sorrow, of holy pain; and Hazael felt that it was so when he blushed under it. (2) When Hazael asked concerning his weeping, Elisha became more explicit, and told him of the awful barbarities he would inflict on Israel. The picture was so dreadful that even Hazael, with apparent sincerity, asked, "Who is thy servant, this dog, that he should do this great thing?" Hazael, like many others, was not aware of the possibilities of his own heart. A certain measure of crime he knew himself to be capable of, but

he thought that other iniquities were beyond him. Once on the downward grade, however, there is no point at which a sinner can be sure of stopping. One crime leads with a fatal facility to a worse. The heart grows hardened, and things are done which, at an earlier stage, might have been thought impossible. It is told of Robespierre that, in the beginning of his career, he was almost driven distracted by the thought of having sentenced a man to death. The greatest criminals were once innocent children, and at one period of their lives would have shuddered at the deeds they afterwards calmly perpetrated. The only safe course is to resist the beginnings of evil. 3. *Elisha's announcement of Hazael's greatness.* Elisha's final announcement to Hazael was, "The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria." The prophet announces the fact, which indeed fulfilled a Divine purpose regarding Hazael (1 Kings xix. 15), but announces it without approval of the particular means by which that purpose would be realized. Jacob would have received the blessing in God's time and way, though his mother Rebekah had not counselled deceit as a means of obtaining it; and the kingdom would have come to Hazael, also in God's good time and way, though he had kept his hands free from crime.

III. A PALACE MURDER. If Elisha's words did not arrest the guilty purpose which was shaping itself in Hazael's mind, they could only have the contrary effect of inflaming his ambition. Like Macbeth with the witches' salutation ringing in his ears, he felt himself a child of destiny, and took speedy means to fulfil his destiny. 1. *He deceived the king.* He repeated, in the letter of them, Elisha's words, "Thou shalt surely recover;" but said nothing of the context, which gave the words so terrible a significance. The king was assured that his disease was not mortal, which was true; but he was left in the dark as to the declaration that he should nevertheless surely die. 2. *He slew the king.* Next day, probably while Benhadad slept, Hazael took a thick quilt, and, dipping it in water, spread it over the king's face, and suffocated him. He thus fulfilled the prediction that he should be King of Syria. He "had his reward." But was it worth the crime? What could compensate for a soul stained with the sin of treachery and murder? Of Banquo it was prophesied that he would be lesser than Macbeth, yet greater; not so happy, yet happier. Would the same not have been true of Hazael had he been content to remain Benhadad's faithful officer, instead of climbing to the throne in this hateful fashion? What, after all, is there so much to envy in the state of kings, that a soul's peace should be bartered to acquire it? Surrounded by false friends; served by courtiers ready at any moment to turn against him if it serves their interests better; envied even by those who flatter him; exposed to the peril of assassination,—the monarch is almost more to be pitied than the humblest of his subjects. Hazael had but exchanged his own pillow for a more thorny one. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."—J. O.

Vers. 16—29.—*Two kings of Judah.* (On the chronology, see Exposition.) The reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah are black spots in the history of Judah.

I. JEHORAM, SON OF JEHOSHAPHAT. We may notice concerning this ruler: 1. *He had a pious father.* We may quote Thomas Fuller's quaint comments on this part of the Saviour's genealogy: "Lord, I find the genealogy of my Saviour strangely checkered with four remarkable changes in four immediate generations. (1) 'Rehoboam begat Abiam;' that is, a bad father begat a bad son. (2) 'Abiam begat Asa;' that is, a bad father a good son. (3) 'Asa begat Jehoshaphat;' that is, a good father a good son. (4) 'Jehoshaphat begat Joram;' that is, a good father a bad son. I see, Lord, from hence, that my father's piety cannot be entailed; that is bad news for me. But I see also that actual impiety is not always hereditary; that is good news for my son." 2. *He made an evil marriage.* "The daughter of Ahab"—Athaliah—"was his wife." In sanctioning this union of his son with the house of Ahab Jehoshaphat grievously erred. Jehoshaphat's whole policy of keeping up friendly relations with Ahab was a mistake, destined to bear bitter fruit in his family and his kingdom. No considerations of political expediency should have tempted him to allow a marriage of the heir of his throne with a daughter of the infamous Jezebel. Rulers have even yet to learn that the sacrifice of religious and moral considerations to state policy is in the end the greatest impolicy. Marriage is a relation which cannot be too carefully entered into. Yet it is often the relation which is entered into most thoughtlessly.

Pecuniary, social, or family considerations are allowed to determine a step which ought never to be taken except on grounds of real affection and moral and spiritual affinity. Athaliah's entrance into the royal household of Judah had a disastrous effect on its future. She was a true child of the Israelitish Jezebel, and reproduced her character in all its essential features. Bold, bad, energetic, unscrupulous, ambitious, her influence over her husband was wholly for evil. And he seems to have yielded himself entirely up to it. 3. *He walked in evil ways.* "He walked in the way of the kings of Israel," etc. The connection of this with his marriage is indicated in the words, "For the daughter of Ahab was his wife." To that malign influence is probably to be attributed the great crime with which his reign began—the slaughter of his six brethren, with many of the princes (2 Chron. xxi. 2—4). The other evils of his reign are indicated by the Chronicles—tempting and compelling the people to idolatry, etc. (2 Chron. xxi. 11, 13). 4. *He was mercifully dealt with for the sake of David.* Grieved though God was with his conduct, he would not destroy Judah, having pledged himself to David to perpetuate his line. The descendants of holy men and women do not know how much of God's mercy and forbearance they often owe to their ancestral connection. God spares them for their fathers' sakes (Rom. xi. 28). 5. *Yet his sins brought heavy disasters on the kingdom.* God did not destroy Judah, but he punished it. As the wickedness of the Israelitish kings was punished by the revolt of Moab (ch. i. 1), so the sins of Jehoram were visited by a series of calamities which fell upon the nation. The revolt of Edom, of Libnah, invasions of the Philistines, Arabians, etc., broke in upon and desolated the land (2 Chron. xxi. 16, 17). Only when rulers and people were fearing the Lord could it be said, "Also in Judah things went well" (2 Chron. xii. 12). Things cannot go well when men's hearts are bent on wickedness. God is against us, and troubles rise thick on every side. The revolt of Edom is the only calamity referred to in detail in the text. Jehoram seems to have attempted to suppress the rebellion, but, being encompassed by the enemy, had great difficulty in cutting his way through, and escaping. The loss of Edom was a permanent one. 6. *He came to a miserable end.* He went down to his death visibly under a cloud of Divine wrath, and amidst the contempt, if not the execrations, of his people. God smote him, the Chronicler tells us, with a painful and incurable disease, and he died, despised and unlamented (2 Chron. xxi. 18, 19). He was buried in Jerusalem, but not in the tomb of the kings. Presumptuous transgressors are rightly visited with judgments of exceptional severity (cf. Acts xii. 23). It is the memory of the just that is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot (Prov. x. 7).

II. AHAZIAH, SON OF JEHORAM. 1. *A short but evil reign.* Ahaziah, who reigned but one year, was the youngest son of Jehoram, the elder having been slain in the wars with the Arabians (2 Chron. xxii. 1). His reign was evil, like his father's. In this case it is said expressly that Athaliah and others of her kindred were his counsellers to do evil (2 Chron. xxii. 3, 4). A mother's influence is even more potent than a father's. But when both parents go partners in open wickedness, it is no wonder if a son follows their example. 2. *A fateful visit.* Ahaziah and Jehoram of Israel were speedily to meet their end together. The Chronicler says "the destruction of Ahaziah was of God by coming to see Joram" (2 Chron. xxii. 7). Jehoram had been wounded in a campaign against Hazael at Ramoth-Gilead, and was now at Jezreel to be healed of his wounds. Thither Ahaziah repaired to visit him, and there both kings were slain by Jehu. The visible providence of God is again seen in this visit. His hook is in the nose of the sinner; he leads him wherever he will (2 Kings xix. 28).—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IX.

Vers. 1—37.—THE ANOINTING OF JEHU. HIS MURDER OF JEHORAM AND AHAZIAH. THE DEATH OF JEZEBEL.

Vers. 1--10.—Elisha is still the primary figure in the historical drama; but at this point his personality merges in the general account of the kingdom of Israel, which it is one of the objects of the writer to trace from beginning to end. Elisha here performs his last public act, being commis-

sioned, and carrying out his commission, to transfer the kingdom of Israel from the unworthy dynasty of Omri, which on account of its persistent idolatry has fallen under Divine condemnation, to a new dynasty, that of Jehu, which will, at any rate, check the worst excesses of the prevalent idolatrous system, and maintain the Jehovah-worship as the religion of the state. The position recalls that of Saul and David at the original institution of the monarchy, but has many special points which differentiate it from that conjuncture. The circumstances called on Jehu for prompt action; there was no such immediate call upon David. Jehu's public proclamation as king laid him open to a charge of high treason; David's secret anointing placed him in no such danger. History never repeats itself *exactly*, and its events have severally to be judged by a consideration of all their circumstances, without much reference to any former *quasi*-parallel historical passage.

Vers. 1—10.—*The anointing of Jehu.*

Ver. 1.—**And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets**; *i.e.* one of the students in one of the prophetical schools which he superintended. There is no indication that the individual chosen for the mission stood to Elisha in any peculiar relation. A rabbinical fancy, scarcely to be called a tradition, makes him "Jonah, the son of Amittai." **And said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil**; rather, *this flask of oil.* Oil and ointments were commonly kept in open-monthed jars, vases, or bottles, made of stone, glass, or alabaster, as appears from the remains found in Egypt and Assyria. Many of the bottles are earlier than the time of Elisha. **In thine hand, and go to Ramoth-Gilead.** Ramoth-Gilead lay across the Jordan, in the proper territory of Gad. It had been seized and occupied by the Syrians in the reign of Ahab; and the possession had been maintained till recently. Joram, however, had recovered it (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' ix. 6. § 1, Ἤδη γὰρ αὐτὴν ῥῴηκει κατὰ κράτος), and had left a strong garrison in the place when he retired to Jezreel.

Ver. 2.—**And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi.** Jehu had been in a high position under Ahab (ver. 25), and had been pointed out to Elijah, by Divine revelation, as the future King of Israel (1 Kings xix. 16). Elijah had been bidden to anoint him king, but apparently had neglected to do so, or rather had devolved the task upon his successor. Meantime Jehu served as a soldier under Ahaziah and Jehoram, Ahab's sons, and attained such distinction that he became one of the captains of the host (*infra*, ver. 5), according to Josephus (*l. s. c.*) the chief captain. Jehu was commonly known as "the son of Nimshi" (1 Kings xix. 16; ch. ix. 20), either because, his father having died young, he was brought up by his grandfather, or perhaps simply "because Nimshi was a person of more importance than Jehoshaphat." **And go in**—*i.e.* seek his presence, go into his quarters, wherever they may be, have direct speech with him—**and make him arise up from among his brethren** (comp. vers. 5 and 6). Jehu's "brethren" are his *brother*-officers, among whom Elisha knows that he will be found sitting. **And carry him to an inner chamber.** Persuade him, *i.e.*, to quit the place where thou wilt find him sitting with the other generals, and to go with thee into a private apartment for secret conference. Secrecy was of extreme importance, lest Joram should get knowledge of what was happening, and prepare himself for resistance. Had he not been taken by surprise, the result might have been a long and bloody civil war.

Ver. 3.—**Then take**—rather, *and take*—**the box of oil**—rather, *the flask of oil*—**and pour it on his head.** Compare the consecration of Aaron to the high-priestly (Lev. viii. 12), and of Saul (1 Sam. x. 1) and David (1 Sam. xvi. 12) to the kingly office. The oil used was the holy anointing oil of the sanctuary (Exod. xxx. 25)—τὸ ἅγιον ἔλαιον, as Josephus says. **And say, Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel.** This is an abbreviated form of the actual message, which is given in its entirety in vers. 7—10. The writer of Kings avoids all needless repetitions. **Then open the door**—the conference was to be with closed doors, that no one might either hear or see what took place—**and flee, and tarry not.** The Divine message delivered, all would have been done that needed to be done. There would be nothing to wait for. So the young man was to depart with the same haste with which he had come.

Ver. 4.—**So the young man, even the young man the prophet**—the repetition of *han-na'ar* is doubtful, since it is not found either in the Syriac or in the Septuagint—**went to Ramoth-Gilead.**

Ver. 5.—**And when he came, behold, the captains of the host were sitting**—either "sitting in council," or, at any rate, collected together in one place, not engaged in any active work, but seated—**and he said, I have an errand**—literally, *a word*—**to thee, O captain.** Probably he knew Jehu by sight,

and looked at him as he spoke; but, as he addressed no one by name, there might be a doubt who was intended. Jehu, therefore, causes the doubt to be resolved by his question. **And Jehu said, Unto which of all us? And he said**—*i.e.* the young man the prophet answered—**To thee, O captain.** Jehu was thus singled out as the object of the message—the person to whom alone it was addressed, and whose special attention was, consequently, required to it.

Ver. 6.—**And he** (Jehu) **arose, and went into the house.** Jehu left his seat, rose up, and led the way, from the court, where he had probably been sitting with the other generals, into the house which adjoined the court. The messenger followed; and the two were together, alone. **And he**—*i.e.* the messenger—**poured the oil on his head**—as directed (ver. 3)—**and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel;** literally, *Thus saith Jehovah, God of Israel.* Jehovah's name is emphatically put forward, in contrast with the name of Baal, as that of the true God of Israel; and appeal is made to Jehu, as to one whose God is Jehovah, and who will accept as authoritative a message emanating from him. **I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord,** even over **Israel;** literally, *over the people of Jehovah, over Israel.* Practically, the people is, in the main, "the people of Baal" (ch. x. 19—21), but theoretically and by covenant it is "the people of Jehovah"—his "peculiar people" (Deut. xiv. 2), chosen by him out of all the nations of the earth to be his own.

Ver. 7.—**And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master.** This is plainly a command, not a prophecy. Jehu is expressly ordered by God to "smite," *i.e.* destroy utterly, the whole house of Ahab. This command he carried out (vers. 24, 33; ch. x. 1—11); and his obedience to it obtained for him the temporal reward that his children to the fourth generation should sit on the throne of Israel (ch. x. 30). Yet still his conduct in destroying the house of Ahab is spoken of by the Prophet Hosea as a sin, and God declares, by Hosea's mouth, that he will "avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu" (Hos. i. 4). It is naturally asked—"How could Jehu's shedding this blood, at God's command and in fulfilment of his will, be a sin?" And it is rightly answered, "Because, if we do what is the will of God for any end of our own, for anything except God, we do in fact our own will, not God's. It was not lawful for Jehu to depose and slay the king his master, except at the express command of God, who, as the supreme King, sets up and puts down earthly rulers as he wills. For any other end, and done otherwise than at God's express command, such an act is sin. Jehu was rewarded for the measure in which he fulfilled God's commands, as Ahab, 'who had sold himself to work wickedness,' had yet a temporal reward for humbling himself publicly, when rebuked by God for his sin, and so honouring God, amid an apostate people. But Jehu, by cleaving, against the will of God, to Jeroboam's sin (ch. xi. 29, 31), which served his own political ends, showed that, in the slaughter of his master, he acted, not as he pretended, out of zeal for the will of God (ch. x. 16), but served his own will and his own ambition only. By his disobedience to the one command of God, he showed that he would have equally disobeyed the other, had it been contrary to his own will or interest. He *had no principle of obedience.* And so the blood which was shed according to the righteous judgment of God, became sin to him that shed it in order to fulfil, not the will of God, but his own" (see Dr. Pusey's 'Minor Prophets, with a Commentary,' p. 9, col. 1). **That I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets.** Comp. 1 Kings xviii. 4 and xix. 14. Elijah believed *all* the prophets of Jehovah, except himself, to have been either slain or banished under Ahab, as we see from 1 Kings xviii. 22 and xix. 10, 14. **And the blood of all the servants of the Lord.** There had evidently been a general persecution of the followers of Jehovah, and not merely a persecution of the prophets. It was only after a number of martyrdoms that the followers of Jehovah in Israel were reduced (1 Kings xix. 18) to the scanty number of "seven thousand." **At the hand of Jezebel.** Jezebel was at the bottom of all the persecutions. Sometimes she took matters into her own hands, gave her own orders, and saw them carried out (1 Kings xviii. 13; xxi. 8—14). At other times she was content to "stir her husband up" (1 Kings xxi. 25) and incite him to evil courses.

Ver. 8.—**For the whole house of Ahab shall perish: and I will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel** (see the comment on 1 Kings xiv. 10). While the exact force of the phrases used is doubtful, the general intention to embrace in the sentence all Ahab's posterity cannot be doubted.

Ver. 9.—**And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.** Jeroboam's house had been "cut off," smitten, destroyed, till not one of his posterity was left, about seventy years previously (1 Kings xv. 29), by Baasha, "because of his sins which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin, by his provocation wherewith he provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger" (1 Kings xv. 30). The far greater sin of Ahab could not be visited with less severity. **And like the house of Baasha the**

son of Ahijah. As the whole house of Jeroboam had been cut off for its idolatries, so the house of Baasha, which succeeded to the throne, was removed even more speedily, Baasha himself and all his posterity being swept from the earth by Zimri, who "smote him and killed him," and succeeded him (1 Kings xvi. 11). The house of Ahab had had a double warning of the fate in reserve for those who deserted the religion of Jehovah, but had disregarded both warnings alike, and had provoked God yet more than their predecessors, by introducing a novel and degraded form of idolatrous worship.

Ver. 10.—**And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel.** This had been previously prophesied by Elijah (1 Kings xxi. 23; ch. ix. 26, 27). To an Israelite, and even to a Phœnician, it was an awful threat; for both nations alike buried their dead carefully in deep-dug graves or rocky receptacles, and both regarded the desecration of a corpse as a grievous calamity ('Records of the Past,' vol. ix. pp. 112, 114). The dog was to the Hebrews, and to the Orientals generally, an unclean animal, and to be devoured by dogs would have been viewed as a fate which, for a queen, was almost inconceivable. **And there shall be none to bury her.** Jezebel had no one sufficiently interested in her fate to watch over her remains. Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, had kept watch over the bodies of the seven sons of Saul, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night (2 Sam. xxi. 10); and in Greece, if we may believe the poets, life had been risked, and actually forfeited, to save a near relative from similar ignominy (Soph., 'Ant.,' lines 245—743). But "Jezebel had none to bury her." When she was ejected from the palace window (ver. 33) and fell to the ground, and was trodden under foot by Jehu's chariot-horses, no one came forth from the palace to give the bruised and wounded corpse such tendance as was possible. There was entire neglect of the body for (probably) some hours; and, during these, the catastrophe occurred which Divine foresight had prophesied, but which human malice had not intended (see vers. 34—37). **And he opened the door, and fled.** The young man the prophet obeyed to the letter the injunctions which Elisha had given him (ver. 3). The moment that he had executed his errand, he fled.

Vers. 11—22.—*Conspiracy of Jehu against Jehoram.*

Ver. 11.—**Then Jehu came forth to the servants of his lord.** After the young man the prophet had made his precipitate retreat, Jehu, too, quitted the inner chamber, and "came forth"—returned to the place where he had been sitting with "the servants of his lord"—the other captains of the host (ver. 5)—and rejoined their company. **And one said unto him, Is all well?** One of the other captains of the host took the word, and asked, in the ordinary phraseology of the time, "Is it peace?" (comp. vers. 17, 18, 19, 22)—or, in other words, "Is all right?" "Is all well?" The sudden appearance and disappearance of the messenger had evidently created an impression that all was *not* well. **Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?** He did not suppose the man to be actually mad. He calls him "this wild fellow"—"this scatterbrain," on account of the haste and strangeness of his conduct; but he quite expects to hear that there was "method in the madness," and that the communication had some serious import. **And he**—*i.e.* Jehu—**said unto them, Ye know the man, and his communication.** Jehu suspected that the whole scene had been arranged beforehand; that Elisha and the young prophet and the captains of the host were in league, and had concerted a way of offering him the throne. He may have had reason to regard the captains as disaffected towards Jehoram, though this does not appear at all distinctly in the very brief narrative.

Ver. 12.—**And they said, It is false.** There was no rudeness in the reply. It merely denied that Jehu's supposition was correct. There had been no collusion between the spiritual and temporal authorities. The captains had no knowledge of the young prophet's errand. **Tell us now.** "Tell us," *i.e.*, "what the young prophet said, since we are completely in the dark upon the subject." **And he said, Thus and thus spake he to me, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel.** Jehu declared to them without any reserve all that the young prophet had said to him. He accepted their declaration that they were not in league with him, and then gave them an exact account of all that had occurred. He left it for them to determine what, under the circumstances, they would do.

Ver. 13.—**Then they hasted, and took every man his garment, and put it under him on the top of the stairs.** Kings were honoured by the spreading of garments in their way, that their feet might not touch the dusty ground (Matt. xx. 8). The captains of the host, without hesitation, acclaimed Jehu king on the strength of the prophetical announcement, made his cause their own, and joined in his rebellion. It is reasonably conjectured (Bähr) that "a deep dissatisfaction with Joram must have prevailed in the army," though whether the dissatisfaction arose from the idolatry of the house of Ahab, or from Joram's withdrawal from the war, may be doubted. Jehu, on the other hand,

was evidently highly esteemed. The captains threw themselves with ardour into his cause, and extemporized a sort of enthronement. As often in an Oriental house, an external staircase led from the court to the upper story or to the roof. This they carpeted with their *begedh*, or outer cloaks, and, seating him on the top stair, saluted him as actual king. The expression, *el-gerem ham-ma'alôth*, is not literally, "on the *top* of the stairs," but rather "on the stairs *themselves*." Naturally, however, the captains would emplace him upon the topmost stair. And blew with trumpets. This was a recognized part of the ceremonial of a coronation (see 2 Sam. xv. 10; 1 Kings i. 39; ch. xi. 14). **Saying, Jehu is king.**

Ver. 14.—**So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi** (see the comment on ver. 2) **conspired against Joram.** It is not meant that there was a secret conspiracy previous to the prophet's coming, but that, by the open acts which followed on his coming, Jehu and the captains were guilty of a "conspiracy." **Now Joram had kept Ramoth-Gilead**; rather, *now Joram was keeping Ramoth-Gilead.* Joram, in his capacity of chief ruler, was keeping, *i.e.* defending, Ramoth-Gilead against the Syrians with the bulk of his forces. **He and all Israel, because of Hazael King of Syria**; since Hazael wished to win the city back, and would have done so, had it not been stoutly defended. The writer speaks of Joram as the defender, though he was absent, because the defence was made under his orders. Then, to prevent misunderstanding, he repeats what he had already said in ch. viii. 29 with respect to Joram's wounds, and his retirement to Jezreel to be healed of them.

Ver. 15.—**But King Joram was returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him, when he fought with Hazael King of Syria** (see the comment on ch. viii. 29). **And Jehu said, If it be your minds.** As soon as he is proclaimed king, Jehu addresses himself to the captains, and proposes a policy. He does not venture to assume a tone of authority, or of imperative command, since he is still but a pretender, and not "established in the kingdom." "If it be your minds," he says; *i.e.* "If you agree with me, and have nothing to urge against my proposal. Then **let none go forth** nor **escape from the city**—literally, *let no escaper go forth from the city*—equivalent to *let no one quit the city*—**to go to tell it in Jezreel.** This is the important point. Secrecy was absolutely essential. If the revolt had got wind—and a single messenger might have carried the news—the whole attempt might have failed, or only have succeeded after a long and bloody civil war. All Jehu's efforts were bent on keeping his revolt secret until he himself announced it to the astonished king (see ver. 22).

Ver. 16.—**So Jehu rode in a chariot, and went to Jezreel; for Joram lay there.** We must understand that the captains came into Jehu's views, acknowledged the necessity of secrecy, and took precautions against the departure of any one, openly or secretly, from the city. Jehu, with a moderate troop or company (שְׁמֹנִים), sets out, perhaps on the very day of his enthronement, and hastens with all speed to Jezreel, bent on arriving there before any suspicion has arisen of revolt or rebellion. His great object was to surprise Joram, and to kill or capture him before he could take any steps to organize a defence. Probably the force which accompanied him was wholly a chariot force. **And Ahaziah King of Judah was come down to see Joram** (see ch. viii. 29, and the comment *ad. loc.*). Ahaziah, it must be remembered, was Joram's nephew, as well as his ally in the war against Syria. It was natural that he should visit his uncle when he was wounded, even if the wounds were not very serious.

Ver. 17.—**And there stood a watchman on the tower in Jezreel**; literally, *and the watchman stood on the tower in Jezreel.* The watch-tower on the south-east, towards Ramoth-Gilead, is intended. There were probably others in other directions; but the writer is not concerned with them. Each watch-tower had its *one* watchman, who gave warning if anything unusual caught his attention. **And he spied the company of Jehu as he came.** *Shiph'ah* is generally "abundance," "multitude" (Deut. xxxiii. 19; Job xxii. 11; Isa. lx. 6), but seems here to designate a "band" or "company" of moderate size. It is a somewhat rare word. **And said, I see a company.** The watchman gave notice to those whose business it was to inform the king, that a band or company of men was approaching the city. **And Joram said, Take an horseman, and send to meet them, and let him say, Is it peace?** Joram apprehended no danger. If the "company" had been a band of Syrians, or other enemies, coming in hostile fashion, the watchman would have worded his warning differently. The king probably concluded that he was about to receive tidings from the seat of war, and meant to ask, "Is the news good or bad—peaceful or the contrary?" No blame attaches to him for not taking alarm at once.

Ver. 18.—**So there went one on horseback to meet him, and said, Thus saith the king, Is it peace? And Jehu said, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me.** Jehu chooses to accept the messenger's words as if they were his own, and not those of the king. "What does it matter to such

a one as thee, a mere common man, whether my tidings are peaceful or the contrary? I shall not tell thee my errand. Turn and follow in my train." The messenger had no choice but to obey. An attempt at flight would have led to his being seized or slain. **And the watchman told, saying, The messenger came to them, but he cometh not again.** The watchman evidently thought his not returning suspicious, and reported it at once. Joram should now have taken alarm, but he did not. He appears to have had no notion that any danger could be approaching.

Ver. 19.—**Then he sent out a second on horseback.** Persistency in a course shown by experience to be futile was characteristic of the sons of Ahab and Jezebel (compare the conduct of Ahaziah, as described in ch. i. 9, 11, 13). **Which came to them, and said, Thus saith the king, Is it peace?** Exactly the same inquiry as before, and no doubt in the same sense (see the comment on ver. 17). Jehu, addressed with the same words, thinks it sufficient to give the same answer. His object is to lose no time, but to reach the king as quickly as possible. **And Jehu answered, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me.**

Ver. 20.—**And the watchman told, saying, He came even unto them, and cometh not again.** A still stranger circumstance, and one still more suspicious. The second messenger could only have been sent out because the king disapproved the detention of the first. Whoever, therefore, had detained the second messenger must be consciously acting in opposition to the wishes of the king. **And the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi.** It is not meant that Jehu was driving his own chariot (which great men never did, ch. xxii. 34), and drove in a furious manner, but that the "company" was being urged forward at an unusual pace, in a reckless and hot-headed way. The watchman conjectured, therefore, that Jehu must be leading them, since he had a character for impetuosity. **For he driveth furiously;** or, *madly*—"like a madman" (Keil)—"præcipitanter" (Vatabl.). The LXX. translate ἐν παραλλαγῇ—which has, perhaps, the same meaning (comp. Eur., 'Hipp.,' 935; Lysias, Fr., 38).

Ver. 21.—**And Joram said, Make ready**—rather, *harness;* literally, *attach*—i.e. "attach the horses to the chariot—**and his chariot was made ready**—literally, *and one attached,* or *harnessed, his chariot*—**and Joram King of Israel and Ahaziah King of Judah went out, each in his chariot.** The uncle and the nephew went out together, still, as it would seem, unapprehensive of any danger, though the circumstances were certainly such as might well have aroused suspicion. Joram was probably anxious to know the reasons which had induced the captain of his host to quit his post at Ramoth-Gilead. Ahaziah probably accompanied him out of politeness, though he too may have been curious to learn the news. If any disaster had overtaken the army of Israel, the safety of Judah might also be endangered. "Tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet." **And they went out against Jehu**—rather, *to meet Jehu*—εἰς ἀπαντὴν Ἰοὺ (LXX.); see the Revised Version—**and met him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite.** Humanly speaking, this was accidental. The "portion of Naboth," or his plot of ground, lay outside the south-eastern gate of the city, at no great distance from the walls; and it happened that Joram and Jehu met within its limits. Had the king started a little sooner, or had Jehu made less haste, the meeting would have taken place further from the town, and outside the "portion of Naboth." But Divine providence so ordered matters that vengeance for the sin of Ahab was exacted upon the very scene of his guilt, and a prophecy made, probably by Elisha, years previously, and treasured up in the memory of Jehu (ver. 26), was fulfilled to the letter.

Ver. 22.—**And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu?** Still the same question is asked; but we cannot be sure that it is asked in exactly the same sense. Something in the aspect of Jehu, and in his furious haste, may by this time have alarmed the king. Or possibly he may be merely repeating the question put through his messengers, and still unanswered, "Is all well with the army or no? Has there been any disaster?" Jehu, at any rate, chooses to understand his vague phrase in the former sense, as if he had asked, "Is it peace between thee and me?" and answers in the negative. **And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?** literally, *so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and those many witchcrafts of hers continue.* By "whoredoms" are meant idolatries, as so frequently in Scripture (Lev. xix. 29; xx. 5; Jer. iii. 2, 9; xiii. 17; Ezek. xvi. 17; xx. 30; xxiii. 11, etc.; Hos. ii. 2; iv. 12; v. 4; Nah. iii. 4, etc.); by "witchcrafts" all those magical practices which were so common at the time in Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia, and no doubt also in Phœnicia, and which were so strictly forbidden by the Mosaic Law (Exod. xxii. 18; Deut. xviii. 10). Besides the Baal-worship, Jezebel had introduced these unhallowed practices into the kingdom of Israel. Jehu reproaches Joram with allowing them, and declares that there can be no peace between him and his master under such circumstances.

Having gained his object and got within bowshot of the unsuspecting monarch, he throws off the mask and declares uncompromising hostility. "No man could use such terms of the queen-mother who was willing any longer to be a subject."

Ver. 23—26.—*Murder of Jehoram by Jehu.*

Ver. 23.—**And Joram turned his hands, and fled.** Joram made his charioteer turn the chariot suddenly round, and fled by the way by which he had come. "Turning the hands" is turning the chariot round by means of the hands; and Joram is said to have done that which he caused to be done. **And said to Ahaziah, There is treachery, O Ahaziah.** *Mirmah* is "deceit" or "fraud" of any kind, and here is not ill rendered by "treachery." Jehu's conduct was not justified by the mission given him (vers. 6—10), which certainly did not authorize him to commit a treacherous murder.

Ver. 24.—**And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength.** This meaning is scarcely contained in the Hebrew, which merely says that Jehu "filled his hand with his bow," that is to say, took his bow into his hands for the purpose of using it. **And smote Jehoram between his arms;** *i.e.* directed an arrow against Jehoram with so true an aim, that it struck him in the middle of the back between his shoulders. **And the arrow went out at his heart.** This was quite possible, for the heart lies towards the centre of the chest, not wholly on the left side. It is not necessary to suppose an oblique wound. **And he sank down in his chariot.** Jehoram fell into the "well," or body, of the chariot, and there lay, the chariot being brought to a stand.

Ver. 25.—**Then said Jehu to Bidkar his captain;** literally, *his thirdsman;* Keil renders "his aide-de-camp," probably one of those who was in his chariot with him— **Take up, and cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite.** "Take up the body," *i.e.* "and cast it into the plot of ground which once belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite, and was forfeited to the crown at his death (1 Kings xxi. 15), and taken possession of by Ahab" (1 Kings xxi. 16). The reason for the order follows. **For remember how that, when I and thou rode together after Ahab his father, the Lord laid this burden upon him.** The LXX. have *μνημονεύω*, "I remember;" but the Hebrew text is זכר, not אזכר "Remember" (imperative mood) is the correct translation. Jehu recalls his captain's recollection to an occurrence which was deeply impressed upon his own. "When thou and I rode together after Ahab" probably means "when we two stood behind Ahab in his chariot." The Assyrian sculptures usually represent the monarch as attended by two body-guards, who ride in the same chariot with him, standing up behind him, and often interposing their shields to protect his person. In this near proximity Jehu and Bidkar would hear any speech which was addressed to Ahab. By a "burden" is meant a sentence of punishment (comp. Isa. xiii. 1; xv. 1; xvii. 1; etc.; Nah. i. 1, etc.).

Ver. 26.—**Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth** (comp. 1 Kings xxi. 19, where the same idea of retribution is expressed, though in different words). Jehu, after the lapse of fourteen or fifteen years, naturally had forgotten the exact words used. **And the blood of his sons.** The execution of Naboth's sons had not been mentioned previously; but, under the rude jurisprudence of the age (ch. xiv. 6), sons were usually slain with their fathers. And, unless they had been removed, Ahab could not have inherited the vineyard. **Saith the Lord; and I will requite thee in this plat, saith the Lord.** This was the gist of the prophecy, which ran as follows: "*In the place* where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." **Now therefore take and cast him into the plat of ground, according to the word of the Lord.** The evil prophesied against Ahab had been formally and expressly deferred to his son's days on Ahab's repentance (cf. 1 Kings xxi. 29).

Vers. 27—29.—*Murder of Ahaziah.*

Ver. 27.—**But when Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled by the way of the garden house.** As soon as Ahaziah saw Jehu shoot his arrow, he too took to flight; not, however, in the same direction as Joram, but southwards, towards his own land. If "garden house" is the right translation of בֵּית הַגָּן, we can say no more than that it was probably one of the lodges of the royal demesne, which lay south-east and south of Jezreel, whereof nothing more is known. But it is quite possible that we ought to translate, with the LXX., "by the way of Beth-Gan"—*ἔφυγεν ὁδὸν Βαιθ-γάν.* In this case "Beth-Gan" would be a village or town, probably identical with En-gannim, which lay at the foot of the hills bounding the Plain of Esdraelon, nearly due south of Jezreel (Zerin), and which is now known as Jenin (see the Map of Western Palestine, by Mr. Trelawney Saunders, compiled from the surveys of the Palestine Exploration Fund, where Ahaziah's flight is well traced. **And Jehu followed after him, and said, Smite him also in the chariot;** rather, *in his chariot*, not in that of Jehoram, since the two kings rode respectively in their own chariots (ver. 21). It was a bold step in a pretender not yet settled upon the throne to provoke the hostility of a neighbouring country by murdering its monarch; but Jehu probably

thought he had more to fear from Ahaziah himself, who had been on such close terms of friendship with Jehoram, than from any probable successors. He, therefore, finding him in his power, pursued after him and slew him. From a religious point of view he could justify the act; since the commission given to him (ver. 7) was to smite all the house of Ahab, and Ahaziah was Ahab's grandson. **And they did so at the going up to Gur, which is by Ibleam.** The "ascent of Gur," מַעֲלֵה־גוּר, was probably the rising ground between the southern edge of the Plain of Esdraelon and the place known as "Ibleam," or "Bileam" (1 Chron. vi. 70), which is reasonably identified with the modern *Bir-el-Belameh*, two miles south of Jenin. Here the steep ascent necessarily delayed the chariot, and Ahaziah's pursuers gained upon him, approached him, and wounded him. **And he fled to Megiddo.** Wounded at the ascent of Gur, and despairing of making his way through the rough mountainous country which lay between him and Jerusalem, Ahaziah suddenly changed his route, perhaps thereby baffling his pursuers, and, skirting the hills, had himself conveyed to Megiddo (*Ledjun*), where he died, either of his wounds, or through some fresh violence on the part of Jehu (see 2 Chron. xxii. 8, 9). The reconciliation of 2 Chron. xxii. 8, 9 with the present passage is difficult, but not wholly impossible. Perhaps the Chronicler means by "Samaria" the kingdom, not the town.

Ver. 28.—**And his servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem.** No king of the house of David had as yet been buried elsewhere than in the rock-hewn sepulchre which David had constructed for himself and family at Jerusalem. As soon, therefore, as Ahaziah was dead, his attendants conveyed his dead body in a chariot to the Judæan capital. Jehu did not oppose, having no quarrel with the dead. **And buried him in his sepulchre**; *i.e.* in the particular excavation, or *loculus*, which he had prepared for himself. Jewish, like Egyptian, kings seem to have made it their business to see to the construction of their tomb as soon as they mounted the throne. Thus Ahaziah, though he had reigned but a year (ch. viii. 26), had already prepared himself a sepulchre. His "servants" buried him in it. **With his fathers in the city of David** (comp. 1 Kings xi. 43; xiv. 37; xv. 8, 24; xxii. 50; ch. viii. 24).

Ver. 29.—**And in the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab began Ahaziah to reign over Israel.** In ch. viii. 25 the accession of Ahaziah is placed in Joram's twelfth, instead of his eleventh, year. The slight discrepancy is sufficiently explained by the double reckoning of a king's "first year," familiar to chronologists, either (1) from the date of the accession to the end of the current civil year; or (2) from the date of the accession to the same day in the ensuing year.

Vers. 30—37.—*Death of Jezebel.*

Ver. 30.—**And when Jehu was come to Jezreel.** Some commentators suppose that Jehu did not engage personally in the pursuit of Ahaziah, but, leaving that to a portion of his retinue, pushed on with all haste to Jezreel, where Jezebel was, "the originator of all the mischief." But it is certainly more natural to understand (with Keil and Josephus) that Jehu himself pursued. The pursuit to Ibleam, where Ahaziah was mortally wounded, and the return to Jezreel, need not have occupied more than about three hours. **Jezebel heard** of it. She would naturally be the first to hear. On the death of her son, which must have been plainly seen from the walls of Jezreel, she became practically the chief authority in the place, and indeed in the kingdom. Jehoram's sons were probably minors. **And she painted her face**; literally, *and she put her eyes in antimony*; i.e. she adorned her eyes with the dark dye which has always been fashionable in the East, and which is still used at the present day. The dye is spread both on the upper and the lower eyelids. It at once increases the apparent size of the eye, and gives it unnatural brilliancy. The Oriental nations, Babylonians, Assyrians, Medes, Persians, were acquainted with the practice from very early times; and it is not surprising that it was known to Jezebel. What was her exact object in applying it is more doubtful. The older commentators, who are followed by Ewald, suppose that she intended to "summon up all her seductive fascinations in order to tempt and conquer Jehu;" but more recent writers (Bähr, Keil, and others) argue that her probable age renders this incredible, since she had already a grandson who was twenty-three years of age (ch. viii. 26), and must therefore have been herself at least fifty. But, if we remember that Cleopatra was forty when she held Antony as her slave and hoped to captivate Augustus, it would seem to be not altogether beyond the bounds of possibility that a Phœnician princess of fifty may have thought that, by the use of art, she might render herself a captivating personage. There is, at any rate, no evidence that "putting the eyes in antimony" was an ordinary or a fitting preparation for meeting death in a way worthy of a queen. Ewald's view has, therefore much to commend it to our acceptance. Jezebel, trusting in the charms and the fascination which had been so potent over Ahab, may have imagined that she had still enough beauty left to capture

Jehu, provided she increased her natural attractions by a careful use of all the resources of art. And tired her head. Phœnician statues of goddesses have their hair arranged in long pendent curls, and bear on their heads a small conical cap with a ribbon wreathed round the base. The artists probably had queens and princesses as their models. There is no evidence that false hair was worn in Phœnicia, either by men or women. **And looked out at a window.** Windows, sometimes open, sometimes latticed, were common in Oriental houses from the earliest times. They mostly looked into the court round which a house was commonly built; but some few were in the external wall of the building: and through these new arrivals might be reconnoitred. Jezebel "looked out," partly to see, but perhaps still more to be seen.

Ver. 31.—**And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?** This is a possible meaning of Jezebel's words, and it has among its advocates—Luther, De Wette, Maurer, and Dathe, besides our own translators. But so defiant an utterance is quite incompatible with an intention to captivate and conciliate. Probably, therefore, we should understand the queen either as saying affirmatively, "Peace to thee, Zimri!" (or, "Hail, Zimri!") "slayer of thy lord," or else as asking, "Is it peace" (*i.e.* "Is it peace now between thee and me?"), "Zimri, slayer of thy lord?" In either case, Zimri is an honorific appellation, recalling the fact of another Israelite general, who had revolted, slain his master, and reigned as king.

Ver. 32.—**And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who?** Whatever Jezebel's intention, Jehu yielded not a jot; he was deaf to her flatteries, blind to her seductions. He had made up his mind for "war to the knife" before he embarked upon his enterprise, and the feeble attempts of a queen whose part was played out, whose age he knew, and whom he no doubt regarded as an old woman, had no power on him. Instead of responding to her blandishments, he took a stern and hard line. He would not see her privately. He summoned to his aid the menials of the palace—the eunuchs—those on whom beauty has least influence. "Who is on my side? who?" he exclaimed (literally, "Who is with me? who?"); thus calling on the court servants to desert their masters, the guards to turn their swords against their employers, the menials to consummate an intra-palatial revolution. We cannot deny to Jehu the credit of vigour, promptness, audacity, the talent to seize on the opportunity of the moment, and to make the most of it; but he must ever present himself to us as the rough soldier, with no courtesy, with no chivalry, bent on accomplishing his own ends, and shrinking from no deed of blood, no precedent *pessimi exempli*, if thereby his ends might be brought about. **And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs.** Eunuchs had become an integral part both of the Jewish and of the Israelite courts from the time of David (1 Chron. xxviii. 1). They are an institution which almost necessarily accompanies polygamy; and they had long held high office in Egypt, in Babylon, and in Assyria. A position outside nature, at variance with all men's natural feelings and aspirations, of necessity depraves the character, weakens the moral principle, and ends by debasing the class. In Oriental history, the lowest, vilest part is always played by the eunuchs of the palace, who are ever ready to take part in any intrigues, in any conspiracies, and who seem to be almost wholly devoid of the ordinary feelings of humanity. The eunuchs who "looked out" to Jehu were probably the *chief* eunuchs of the palace, who had authority over the others, and indeed over the court officials generally.

Ver. 33.—**And he said, Throw her down.** A splendid example of the wicked man's prompt and bold and unscrupulous decision. A queen, a queen-mother, always more tenderly regarded than an ordinary queen-regnant, a princess in her own right (see ver. 34), daughter of a neighbouring and powerful potentate, settled in her kingdom for over thirty years, the most powerful person in the state during that entire period, backed up by the numerous and dominant party of her co-religionists, she is to Jehu nothing but a wicked woman who is in his way; she inspires him with no awe, she does not even touch him with any feeling of respect. "Throw her down." History presents no parallel to such an indignity. Kings and queens had been, time after time, removed by violence; their lives had been taken; they had been transplanted to another sphere of being. But the open casting forth from a window of a crowned head by the menials of the court, at the command of a usurper, was a new thing, unprecedented, unparalleled. It must have been a shock to all established notions of propriety. In commanding it Jehu showed his superiority to existing prejudice, his utter fearlessness, and his willingness to create a new precedent, which might seriously shake the monarchical principle. **So they threw her down.** There appears to have been no hesitation. The boldness of Jehu communicated itself to those whom he addressed; and the eunuchs violently seized the person of the queen, and precipitated her from the window to the ground below. She fell on

the road by which the palace was approached, and lay there bleeding and helpless. **And some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall.** As she fell, some portion of her body struck against the wall of the palace, and left splashes of blood upon it. There were probably some projections from the wall between the window and the ground. **And on the horses.** As her body struck the projections, a bloody shower spurted from it, which fell in part upon the horses that drew Jehu's chariot. **And he trode her underfoot.** Like Tullia (Liv., i. 48), Jehu had his chariot driven over the prostrate corpse, so that the hoofs of his horses, and perhaps his own person, were sprinkled with the royal blood. Compare the passage of Livy, "Ameus, agitantibus furiis, Tullia per patris corpus carpentum egisse fertur, partemque sanguinis ac cædis paternæ cruento vehiculo, contaminata ipsa respersaque, tutisse ad penates suos viriqne sui." It is not often that royal corpses, unless in the heat of battle, have received such treatment.

Ver. 34.—**And when he was come in**—i.e. when Jehu had established himself in the royal palace—**he did eat and drink, and said.** His first care was to refresh himself—to order a banquet to be served, and to satisfy his appetite with food and drink. Not till afterwards did he bethink himself of the bloody corpse of his late queen and mistress, lying on the cold ground uncared for and untended, exposed to scorn and ignominy. When the thought occurred to him, it brought about a certain amount of relenting. **Go, see now this cursed woman.** He calls Jezebel "a cursed woman," not inappropriately. She had brought a curse on her husband, on her sons, and on her grandsons; she had been the evil genius of two countries, Israel and Judah; she had been the prime mover in a bloody persecution of the worshippers of Jehovah; and was the true original source of the present revolution, which was to result in the deaths of so many others. **And bury her: for she is a king's daughter.** As queen-mother, Jehu, it seems, would not have regarded Jezebel as entitled to burial; but as daughter of Eth-Baal, King of the Zidonians (1 Kings xvi. 31), and so a princess born, he allowed her claim. Perhaps he feared lest further insult to the corpse might provoke the resentment of the Phœnician monarch, and draw down upon him that prince's hostility.

Ver. 35.—**And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands.** "The harder parts of the human frame" (Stanley); perhaps also the less palatable, since cannibals say that the palm of the human hand is excessively bitter. Dogs in Oriental countries are ever prowling about, especially in the vicinity of towns, on the look-out for food, and will eat flesh or offal of any kind. They have been called "the scavengers of the East," and the phrase well describes them. Dean Stanley saw "the wild dogs of Jezreel prowling about the mounds where the offal is cast outside the gates of the town by the inhabitants."

Ver. 36.—**Wherefore they came again, and told him.** The men whom he had sent to bury Jezebel returned, and told the king what they had found. The narrative woke another chord of memory which had hitherto slept. **And he said, This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite.** The prophecy referred to is doubtless that recorded in 1 Kings xxi. 23. It is, however, here expanded, either because Jehu's recollection was not exact, or because the record in 1 Kings is abbreviated. The great point of the prophecy is common to both records, viz. that the dogs should eat Jezebel at Jezreel, on the scene of her iniquities. **Saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel.** It is not quite clear what is meant by the "portion" (חֵלֶק) of Jezreel. Probably there is no allusion to the "portion" (חֶלְקָה) of Naboth (vers. 25, 26). Rather the same is meant as by חֵל in 1 Kings xxi. 23, viz. the cultivated space or "portion" of land outside the wall of the town (see the comment on that passage).

Ver. 37.—**And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field** (comp. Ps. lxxxiii. 10; Zeph. i. 17; Jer. ix. 22; xvi. 4, etc.). The expression was proverbial. **In the portion of Jezreel** (see the comment on the preceding verse); **so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel.** The fragments of the body were so scattered that there could be no collective tomb, no place whereat admirers could congregate and say, "Here lies the great queen—here lies Jezebel." To rest in no tomb was viewed as a shame and a disgrace.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*The prophet and the prophet-disciple—the duties of direction and of obedience.* The time had come for a great change—a "great revolution," to use the words of Ewald. The first dynasty of Israel which had shown any indications of stability was to be swept away, and another still more stable dynasty was to be estab-

lished. That the will of God might be seen and recognized in the matter, its initiation was entrusted to the regular expounders of the Divine will—the prophets. Elisha, we may be sure, received express directions how to act; and the directions included a delegation of certain most important duties to another. Thus two persons are concerned in the great initiative scene; and the conduct of each is worthy of attention, and, under given circumstances, of imitation. Consider—

I. ELISHA AS DIRECTOR. 1. Elisha has made up his mind; there is no hesitation about him, no instability of purpose; he knows what he has to do, and is wholly bent on doing it. 2. His directions are clear, definite, unmistakable. There is no ambiguity in any of them. He prescribes a fixed and clearly defined line of conduct, which his subordinate is to carry out. He wastes no time on the consideration of accidents or contingencies. A certain work is to be done; and his subordinate is to do it in the simplest and most direct way.

II. THE PROPHET-DISCIPLE AS SUBORDINATE AGENT. 1. The prophet-disciple accepts the subordinate position readily, cheerfully, without reluctance. He is content to obliterate himself, and to play the part of a tool or instrument. 2. His obedience is exact, perfect. Whatever he has been ordered to do, he does; and he does no more. He is not officious, as so many zealous servants are; he does not seek to better his instructions. 3. His errand done, he disappears, sinks back into obscurity. We hear of his making no claim either on Elisha or on Jehu. The greatest political transaction of the day had proceeded from his initiative; but he asks no reward, he makes no boast. His work done, he vanishes, and we hear no more of him.

God's work has still to be carried on in the world by two sets of persons—directors and executants. It will be well or badly done, according as the lines here marked out are kept to or departed from. That wonderful efficiency which none can fail of admiring in the working of so many institutions within the Roman communion is traceable in a great measure to the fact that both directors and executants act in the spirit that animated Elisha and the prophet-disciple.

Vers. 11—24.—*Political revolutions justifiable under certain circumstances.* In a general way, revolution, resistance to constituted authority, rebellions, risings against the civil power, seem to be condemned, or at any rate discountenanced, by the teaching of Scripture, whether in the Old Testament or the New. They arise, for the most part, from human ambitions, from lust of power, from greed, from unrestrained passions, from selfishness; they involve in their course untold sufferings to large numbers; they issue commonly in a condition of social and political life, not better, but worse, than that from which they sprang. "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers;" "Fear God: honour the king;" "Ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but for conscience' sake," are precepts of wide application and of great force, deriving additional weight from the fact that, when they were uttered, a Nero occupied the throne. Still, their force may be overstrained. Scripture does not require, under all circumstances, an absolute and entire submission to the civil rulers, but justifies resistance, and allows of the resistance being pushed, in extreme cases, to rebellion. Examples are: 1. The resistance offered by David, first to Saul, and then to Ishbosheth. According to human law, Ishbosheth was the legitimate ruler, against whom David rebelled (2 Sam. ii. 1—10). 2. The rebellion of Jeroboam (1 Kings xii. 12—20). 3. The present instance—the rebellion of Jehu. 4. The rebellion of the Maccabee princes, related in the first and second Books of the Maccabees, which enlist our sympathy strongly in their behalf, and are set before her members by the Church "for example of life, and instruction in morals." If we ask, "When is rebellion justifiable?" the answer would seem to be—

I. IN THE LAST RESORT, WHEN THE NATION MUST OTHERWISE BE IRRETRIEVABLY INJURED. In Jehu's case "a family was on the throne which had introduced a licentious worship, had fostered it, and had persecuted the older and purer religion, which, if it had not succeeded in taking so firm a hold upon the people as to bind them to purity and virtue, at any rate had not been itself a deeply corrupting influence. The mischief had spread so far that it was time to try the last and severest measures, or to give up the contest entirely. The indictment was made out against the ruling house of corrupting the national honour, and undermining the national existence, of depriving

the nation of a religion whose spirit was pure and elevating, and giving it one whose spirit was corrupting and licentious" (Bähr). In the case of the Maccabees, a foreign power, dominant over the country by right of conquest, had formed the design of completely sweeping away the Jewish religion and substituting for it the Greek, or rather the Syrian, polytheism and idolatry. The crisis was even more terrible than that in Jehu's time, the danger more pressing and greater. In both these cases the nation seems to have waited with the utmost patience, until there was no other remedy. Either a convulsion had to be faced, or the national religion, the national morality, and the national self-respect, would have been swept away. The nation in each case preferred revolution to submission; and the sympathies of the sacred writers evidently go with them in their choice.

II. WHEN THERE IS A FAIR PROSPECT OF SUCCESS IF A STAND IS MADE. *Nemo tenetur ad impossibilia.* If the force on the side of authority is overwhelming, if the national spirit opposed to it is weak and faint, if there is no reasonable hope that resistance may be effectual and save the nation from the evils suffered and apprehended, then, whatever their reluctance, though it be "pain and grief to them," patriots are bound to restrain themselves and to remain quiescent. As Plato says, they must shelter themselves under a wall while the storm rages; they must be content to keep themselves pure, as the seven thousand, who had not bowed the knee to Baal, did in Ahab's reign; they must wait for better days. If, however, there be a fair chance of success, if it be reasonable to hope that the yoke which is doing deadly hurt to the nation may be thrown off, then no considerations of their own convenience or ease, no fear of blame, no shrinking from disturbance, or even bloodshed, should deter patriotic souls from initiating the struggle by which alone their country can be saved. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies. If Elisha and Jehu had waited with folded hands for Joram and Jezebel to work out their wicked will, the Baal-worship would have been riveted upon the northern, perhaps even upon the southern, kingdom. If the Maccabee family had submitted to the agents of Antiochus Ephiphanes, and failed to raise the standard of revolt, Judaism would have been merged in heathenism, and have perished from the earth. It may be added that if, in our own country, no resistance had been offered to James II., but his commands had been submitted to and carried out, then Great Britain would have been recovered to the Roman obedience, and the witness to a purer Christianity than that of Rome, which has been held up to the world by the English Church during the last two centuries, would have been extinguished and crushed, with what loss to the nation, to Europe, and to the world generally, it is impossible to estimate.

Vers. 25—37.—*Retribution may be long in coming, but it comes at last.* Even a heathen could say, "Raro antecedentem scelestum deseruit pede pœna claudo" (Horace, 'Od.,' iii. 2, lines 31, 32). Yet throughout all history evil-disposed men have persisted in wicked and cruel conduct, just as if it was not only possible, but probable, that retribution would be escaped. The lesson thus needs continually to be impressed on men, that, sooner or later, retribution *must* come—that there is no escape from it. Retribution must come—

I. BECAUSE GOD RULES THE UNIVERSE, AND GOD IS JUST. Disbelief in retribution is essentially atheistic. It implies either that there is no God, or that God is without one or more of those attributes which make him God. A just God must have the will to punish; an omnipotent God must have the power to punish. If a so-called God did not punish sin, he must be either not just, or not omnipotent, or not either; but then he would not be God. As Bähr says, "A God without vengeance, *i.e.* who cannot and will not punish, is no God, but a divinity fashioned from one's thoughts."

II. BECAUSE GOD HAS DECLARED THAT IT SHALL COME, AND GOD IS TRUE. God has said to each man, through his conscience, that he will punish sin. Remorse and regret, the dissatisfaction of a guilty conscience, are such punishment begun. In his Word God has expressly declared that he "will reward every man according to his works" (Ps. lxii. 12; Prov. xxiv. 12; Matt. xvi. 7; Rom. ii. 6; 2 Tim. iv. 14); that he "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exod. xxxiv. 7); that "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, shall be on every soul of man that doeth evil" (Rom. ii. 8, 9). Nothing is more plainly taught in the whole of Scripture, from the beginning to

the end, than requital, retribution, condign punishment. Ahab's case is singular, not in the general principle, but only in the exact correspondence between the sin and its punishment. Such correspondence is rare and abnormal; but it does occur from time to time, and, when it occurs, there is something about it that is most impressive and striking. When the author of proscription, Marius, is himself proscribed; when the dethroner of kings, Napoleon I., is himself dethroned; when the inventor of conspiracies, Titus Oates, falls a victim to an invented conspiracy; when Robespierre and Danton, who have ruled by the guillotine, perish by the guillotine;—"poetic justice," as it has been called, is satisfied, and the world at large is forced to recognize and acknowledge that requital has taken place in a signal way.

III. BECAUSE ANY NEGATIVE INSTANCE THAT CAN BE PRODUCED WILL ONLY SHOW A DELAY, NOT AN ABROGATION OF THE SENTENCE. Infinite time is at the disposal of the Almighty. Men are impatient, and, if retribution does not overtake the sinner speedily, are apt to conclude that it will never overtake him. But with the Almighty "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." The important thing to be borne in mind is the end; and the end will not be reached till "the judgment is set, and the books are opened" (Dan. vii. 10), and men are "judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. xx. 12). Punishment may be long in coming—the ungodly may continue during their whole lifetime in prosperity. But there remains a future. Where the heathen felt and said, "Raro," the Christian will say, "*Nunquam* antecedentem scelestum deseruit pede pœna claudo."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—37.—*The deaths of Jehoram and Jezebel; or, the Divine law of retribution.* King Jehoram was lying sick at Jezreel of the wounds he had received in battle from the Syrians. Ahaziah King of Judah had come down to visit him, and, as they conversed together, the watchman upon the city wall brought tidings of an armed company approaching. Jehu, at the head of them, was by-and-by recognized by his furious driving. He had already been proclaimed king in Ramoth-Gilead, but Jehoram knew nothing of this. He suspected some ill news, however, and he and Ahaziah drove out with their two chariots to meet Jehu. *And where was it that they met?* Jehu had good reason to know the place. So had Jehoram. About twenty years before, another memorable meeting had taken place there. Jehoram's father, Ahab, had coveted Naboth's vineyard. Jehoram's mother, Jezebel, had brought about Naboth's death by a process of false swearing against him. Naboth was dead, and Ahab, accompanied by his two captains, Jehu and Bidkar, rode out to take possession of that vineyard whose owner the queen had murdered. But his sin had found him out. Elijah, the messenger of God, met him there. And there, in that vineyard which he had procured through covetousness, envy, treachery, and bloodshed, Ahab was compelled to listen to his doom. Terrible words they were indeed for a king to hear. "Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." And Jezebel, the instigator of the crime, was not forgotten. "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." And now, in that very place, stained with the blood of Naboth, Jehu meets Jehoram, the son of Ahab the murderer and the king. The blood of Naboth cries to Heaven for vengeance. Jehoram was little better than his father. He too "cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." He forsook the true God and served other gods. No doubt his conscience smote him and his spirit failed him, as he asked of Jehu, "Is it peace?" But there was not much time left him to prepare to die. Jehu's words were few, and his actions quick as thought. With his full strength he drew his bow and sent his arrow straight to Jehoram's heart. It was then that the words of Elijah, spoken twenty years before in that very place, flashed back upon his mind, and he caused the lifeless body of Jehoram to be cast into the field of Naboth the Jezreelite. But Jehu's work of vengeance is not yet done. Jezebel's long career of wickedness had hardened her heart and blinded her to her danger. As Jehu rode into the city, she sat at her window in her best attire, as if to defy him, and greeted him with the sneering question,

"Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" But Jehu is not a man to be trifled with. He finds willing helpers in her own servants. At his command they threw her down into the street, and she—the adulteress and the murderess, the woman whose name has become proverbial as a symbol of everything that is bad—is trampled under the horses' feet, and once more the doom of Heaven is fulfilled: "In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel." We learn from this narrative some important lessons.

I. SIN, NOT REPENTED OF, MUST BE PUNISHED. This is a law of nature. It is a fact of history. It is the very essence of morality. It is the very essence of justice. It is at the basis of social order in a nation. It is at the basis of the moral government of the universe. Those who transgress *the law of nations*, those who transgress the laws of honesty or of morality, those who take away the life, or the property, or the character of others, must be made to suffer for it. This is necessary, that justice may be vindicated. It is necessary, in order that property and person and character may be safe. It is necessary, in order that other evil-doers may be deterred from crime. Even under our own national law, we feel that there is something wrong when an evil-doer escapes. We feel that it has a bad effect upon the community when crime goes unpunished. Now, what is *sin* in the Bible sense? *Sin is the transgression of the Law.* It is a transgression of a far higher law than the law of nations, of that law on which the well-being of all nations depends—the eternal Law of God. The Law of God is at the foundation of all true well-being and happiness in every nation and in every age. "This do, and thou shalt live." "The commandment is holy, and just, and good." It is, therefore, in the interests of every nation, it is in the interests, not of one generation of men merely, but of those who shall come after them, that those who transgress the Divine Law should suffer for it. *Every violation of a Divine law must be followed by its corresponding punishment.* "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Look at your own lives in the light of this great truth. Are there any sins in your lives unrepented of? Then be assured that the punishment, if it has not yet come, awaits you. Sins against God, against God's Law, against God's sabbath; sins against our fellow-man—sins of unfair dealing, sins of evil-speaking, or other and grosser sins; every one of these, if not repented of, is sure to bring its corresponding punishment. "Be sure your sin will find you out."

II. PUNISHMENT MAY BE DELAYED, BUT IT IS NONE THE LESS SURE. There is an old Irish proverb, "The vengeance of God is slow, but sure." We have many illustrations of that in history. It was long after Jezebel's great crime before her punishment overtook her. When the Israelites were journeying through the wilderness, the Amalekites treated them with great treachery and cruelty, falling upon them in the rear, and when they were faint and weary. It was not until four hundred years afterwards that the sentence against Amalek was executed; but it was executed at last. We may kill our enemies, we may seek to destroy all traces of our crime, but *we can never destroy the memory and the guilt of it by any acts of ours.* Charles IX. of France was led, by the importunity of another Jezebel, Mary de Medicis, to kill Admiral Coligny, who was the great leader of the French Protestants. For a long time he refused, but at last he consented in the memorable words, "Assassinate Admiral Coligny, but leave not a Huguenot alive in France to reproach me." That was the origin of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. Having killed Coligny, he did not want any of his friends to remain to bear witness against him. How anxious men are to destroy all traces of their crime! And yet how vain all such efforts are! There is One whose eye sees every act of human life. We may escape the judgment of men, but we cannot escape the judgment of God. *If not here, then certainly hereafter*, every sin, not repented of, will receive its due reward. "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

III. THERE IS OFTEN A RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN THE PLACE AND MANNER OF THE SIN AND THE PLACE AND MANNER OF THE PUNISHMENT. 1. It was *at Naboth's vineyard* that the great sin of Ahab's house had been committed. There, too, at Naboth's vineyard, Jehoram, Ahab's son, was slain. It was *outside the walls of Jezreel* that the dogs licked the blood of Naboth. There, too, the dogs licked the blood and ate the flesh of Jezebel his murderess. It would seem as if this was part of the Divine Law of

retribution. One reason for it would appear to be that *it fixes unmistakably the connection between the sin and its punishment.* Robespierre, the famous French revolutionist, literally choked the river Seine with the heads of those whom he sent to the guillotine. But the day came when the death-tumbrel containing himself was trundled along the streets of Paris to the selfsame fatal axe, amid the shouts and execrations of the multitude. Cardinal Beaton condemned to death George Wishart, one of the first of the Scottish Reformers, and watched him burning at the stake, while he himself reclined on rich cushions on the walls of his castle at St. Andrew's. Three months afterwards the cardinal himself was put to death, and his dead body was hung by a sheet from the very battlements whence he had looked at the execution of Wishart. *There is something more than accident in such things.* There is the vivid impression intended to be made on people's minds, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." 2. *The same is true of the resemblance between the manner of the sin and the manner of the punishment.* Jezebel's murder of Naboth was treacherous and ignominious. She herself was put to death in a treacherous and ignominious way. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Jacob cruelly deceived his aged father Isaac when he was blind and feeble. What a pointed retribution it was when he was afterwards cruelly deceived by his own sons in their statements about Joseph! Haman was hanged on the gallows which he had made for Mordecai. One of the most terrible instances of this truth, that as we have treated others we shall be treated ourselves, is the case of Charles IX. of France, referred to above. He consented to the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. He caused the streets of Paris to run with the blood of the Huguenots. He died at the age of twenty-four: and what a death! French historians of the highest order say that he was in such agony of remorse that he literally sweated blood. The blood that oozed from his own body caused him to think of those whose blood he had so freely shed, and he cried out in his last hours about the massacre of the Huguenots. Horrible! Yes; but there is a deep and solemn truth underlying all this. It is a truth that should have practical result upon every life. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." If your sin is public, most likely your punishment will be public. Men who commit commercial frauds—that is, sins against public confidence and trust—they ought to suffer, and they do suffer, public exposure. If your sin is secret, your punishment will also most likely be secret. They who sin against the laws of health suffer in an impaired constitution. They who sin by speaking evil about others most likely will have many to speak evil about themselves. Standing there by Naboth's vineyard, and thinking of the envy, covetousness, and murder, of which it reminds us, and their terrible consequences, let us hear the blood of Naboth and the blood of Naboth's house crying to us from the ground, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Such, then, is the Divine law of retribution. But God, who is just, is also merciful. He willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness, and live. We have looked at the way of his justice. Let us look also at the way of his mercy. It is the way of the cross. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." *If you reject God's mercy, there is only the other alternative—God's retributive justice.*—C. H. I.

Ver. 1—ch. x. 36.—*The history of Jehu.* "Then Jehu came forth to the servants of his lord," etc. Jehu was the son of Jehoshaphat and the grandson of Nimshi. He was one of the monsters of history. The leading facts of his revolting life will be found in this and the following chapter. His history furnishes—

I. A REVOLTING EXHIBITION OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY. He was ruthlessly and craftily cruel. He shot Jehoram dead in his chariot. "And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms." He commanded Jezebel, who was looking out of a window as he drove up, to be thrown down, and in her fall she was fatally injured, and her body was trodden down by the feet of horses, and afterwards consumed by dogs (ver. 36). He then proceeded to exterminate the family of Ahab. He addressed letters to those who had the care of his sons (no less than seventy in number), and proposed to them to select the fittest of them, and place him on the throne of his father. This they declined to do (through fear of

Jehu), but promised to do anything else that might be required. Accordingly Jehu directed them to bring the heads of Ahab's sons the next day to Jezreel, and they were sent in two baskets. He directed them to be emptied out in two heaps at the gate of the city, and to remain there over night. The next morning he ordered a general slaughter of all Ahab's family and adherents in the town of Jezreel. He then set out for Samaria, and, meeting on his way a party of forty-two persons, all of the family of Ahaziah, he seized and slew them (ch. x. 1—13). Pursuing his malignant cruelty, on his arrival at Samaria, he cuts off every branch of the house of Ahab that he can find (ch. x. 17). To effect this, with an infernal craftiness, he ordered all the worshippers of Baal throughout the land to assemble, as if he desired to join them in united worship. All having assembled, without the absence of a single man, he caused every one to be put to death (ch. x. 20—28). Here is a fiend in human form; and, alas! he is but a specimen of those monsters in human history who, in almost every age and land, have revelled in the blood and slaughter of their fellow-men. Such characters as these declare in thunder that men have fallen from their normal state. For who can believe that Infinite Purity and Benevolence would create characters of this class? All sin is an *apostasy*.

II. A DISTRESSING MYSTERY IN THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD. That a just God should allow such men to become kings, and should even place them on a throne over the destinies of millions, is a mystery at which we stand aghast. That the merciful Father should permit men to be murderers one of another confounds us with amazement. Yet this has been going on everywhere through the millenniums of human history. Verily "clouds and darkness are round about him." "His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters," etc.

III. A MIGHTY ARGUMENT FOR FUTURE RETRIBUTION. Were we to believe that this state of things is to continue for ever, that there is no retributive period before us, when there will be a balancing of human accounts and a settling of human affairs, religion, which is supreme love to God, would be out of the question. He who could prove to me that there is no future state of retribution would destroy within me all the possibilities of religion. But the concurrent belief of mankind, the universal cries of conscience, and the declarations of the gospel assure us that there is a reckoning day to come. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." "I saw, and behold a great white throne," etc.

IV. A PROOF OF THE SUPREME NEED OF A MORAL REGENERATOR. What can alter the character of such men as this Jehu, and put an end to all the cruelties, tyrannies, frauds, and violence, that turn the world into a Pandemonium? Philosophy, literature, civilization, legislative enactments, ceremonial religions? No; nothing short of a power which can *change the moral heart*. "Marvel not that I say unto you, Ye must be born again." The gospel is this regenerating power. Thank God, One has come into this world who will "create a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."—D. T.

Vers. 1—14.—*Jehu made king.* The word of the Lord to Elijah, that Jehu should be anointed king (1 Kings xix. 16), was now to be fulfilled. The delay in the fulfilment is perhaps to be attributed to Ahab's repentance (1 Kings xxi. 29). God bore long with this wicked house, and did not cut it off till the cup of its iniquity was full. The execution of God's threatenings may be long postponed, but, like his promises, his threatenings never fail in the end to be fulfilled (2 Pet. iii. 9).

I. THE MESSENGER DESPATCHED. 1. *He was sent by Elisha.* On Elisha had fallen the mantle of Elijah, and to him belonged the task of executing Elijah's unfulfilled commissions. We must distinguish throughout this history between the motives which actuated Jehu in his conspiracy against Ahab, and the providential purpose which, as God's instrument, he was raised up to fulfil. That is to be read from the standpoint of the prophet. Israel was a people called into existence for the purpose of being a witness for the true God amidst surrounding heathenism. It owed its existence and possession of the land of Canaan to Jehovah. From him it had received its polity; to him it was bound in solemn covenant; the fundamental laws of its constitution required undivided allegiance to him. The penalties which would follow from disobedience were but a counterpart of the blessings which would flow from obedience.

The first great sin of the nation was in the setting up of the calves under Jeroboam. For adherence to this unlawful form of worship two dynasties had already perished (ver. 9). But with the accession of the house of Omri a new development in evil took place (1 Kings xvi. 31, 32). The worship of the Phœnician Baal was introduced; God's prophets were relentlessly persecuted, and, under the influence of Jezebel, the moving spirit of three reigns, corruption had spread far and near throughout the realm, and had penetrated even to Judah. Jehoram at first showed a better spirit (ch. iii. 2), but he must afterwards have yielded to the superior influence of his mother, for Baal-worship was restored, and had the prestige of court example (ver. 22; ch. x. 21). Under these circumstances, it was folly to hesitate, if Israel was to be saved. "Here the question of the justifiableness of rebellion against a legitimate dynasty, or of revolution in the ordinary sense of the word, cannot arise. The course of the house of Ahab was a rebellion against all law, human and Divine, in Israel" (Bähr). Even in ordinary earthly states, the right of revolution when religion, liberty, morality, and national honour can be saved by no other means, is universally conceded. But revolution here was not left to dubious human wisdom. The initiative was taken by Jehovah himself, acting through his prophet, and express Divine sanction was given to the overthrow of Ahab's house. 2. *His responsible commission.* The person chosen by Elisha to convey God's call to Jehu, and anoint him king, was one of the sons of the prophets. The anointing was to be in secret; hence the choice of a deputy. No value attaches to the tradition that the messenger was the future Prophet Jonah. Of his personality we know nothing more than is here told. He was an obscure individual, yet he set in motion a train of events of the most tragic significance. A child's hand may suffice to explode a mine. This messenger Elisha ordered to take a flask of the holy oil, and go to Ramoth-Gilead, where Jehu was. When he found the son of Nimshi, he was to retire with him into the innermost apartment, and anoint him King of Israel in the name of Jehovah, then he was to "open the door, and flee, and tarry not." 3. *The spirit in which he was to execute it.* It was a clear, unmistakable, but terribly serious and important message this prophetic disciple was entrusted with; and it is instructive to notice the manner in which he was directed to perform his task. "Gird up thy loins," etc., said Elisha. He was to prepare at once for action; he was to make no delay on his errand; he was faithfully to execute the commands given to him; when his work was done, he was directly to leave the spot. In God's service there is to be no lingering, or looking back, or turning from side to side, or dallying on the field of duty. The powers of body and soul are to be braced up for the doing of the "one thing" given us to do. "Girding up the loins of your mind," says an apostle (1 Pet. i. 13). Promptitude, speed, fidelity, stopping where the command of God stops,—these are invaluable qualities for doing God's work.

II. JEHU ANOINTED. 1. *The messenger's arrival.* Jehoram had returned to Jezreel to be healed of wounds received from the Syrians, and Jehu was at this time in command of the army at Ramoth-Gilead. The city itself had previously fallen into the hands of the Israelites. When the messenger arrived, he found the captains of the host sitting together in some house or court, and he at once addressed Jehu with the words, "I have an errand to thee, O captain." Jehu put the question, "Unto which of all US?" and the answer was, "To thee, O captain." The call of God may come to us at unexpected times and in surprising ways. It may come through others, or its voice may be heard in providence. There are general calls which God gives "to us all," and there are special calls to the individual. In whatever way the call of God is made known to us, we do well to give attentive heed to it. 2. *The act of anointing.* Jehu's anointing was to take place secretly. The messenger was to take him into an "inner chamber," and there make known his errand. We are reminded that it is generally in silence and secrecy that God gives men their summons to their peculiar life-work. No time was wasted. The young man, trembling, excited, no doubt, at the thought of the perilous deed he was performing, and at the awful nature of the message he had to deliver, had no sooner got Jehu in private than he poured the oil from his flask upon his head, and said, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord, even over Israel." There is involved in this brief announcement the truths: (1) That royal authority is from God. He sets up kings and puts down kings (Dan. ii. 21). Those only who rule by his sanction and with

his favour are legitimate rulers. (2) Israel was a people of the Lord. Only God, therefore, had the right to appoint its rulers, and to determine the limits within which royal power should be exercised. It was by their setting at nought of all the limits of a theocratic constitution that Ahab and his house had forfeited the throne. (3) Jehu was made king by the direct act of God. God had taken the kingdom from Ahab's house and given it to him. It followed however, that if he, in turn, departed from God's commandments, he would incur the same fate. 3. *The terrible charge.* The prophet next declared to Jehu the terrible duty imposed upon him as the executor of God's judgments. It was certainly work from which any man might shrink, though to Jehu it does not seem to have been repugnant, as paving his own way to the throne. We notice: (1) The ground of the judgment: "That I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets," etc. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps. cxvi. 15). Whoso touches them, touches him (Acts ix. 4). He will not allow the least injury done to them to pass unavenged (Matt. xviii. 6). (2) The range of the judgment: "The whole house of Ahab"—king, queen-mother, the royal household, every one, great and small, having in him the accursed blood. It was a root-and-branch extermination that was decreed. (3) The terribleness of the judgment. Dreadful as this execution was, it was in accordance with the ideas of the time. In some sense it was a necessary concomitant of such a revolution as Jehu was about to bring about. From the Divine side it was justified as an act of vengeance against a wicked house. Ahab's house did not fall without warning, for it had already the doom of Jeroboam's and Baasha's dynasties to warn it from evil courses. Special signs of the Divine wrath were to attend the end of Jezebel, the prime instigator of Ahab's wickedness. It was foretold that the dogs would eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and there would be none to bury her. How fearful a thing it is, as shown by these examples, to fall into the hands of a living God (Heb. x. 31)! Great persecutors have often met a terrible end.

III. JEHU PROCLAIMED. 1. *Jehu and his captains.* The whole circumstances of the prophet's visit had been so strange, his appearance had been so wild, and his calling out of Jehu for a private interview so remarkable, that the captains who had witnessed the scene were naturally much astonished. Their first question, accordingly, when Jehu reappeared among them, himself somewhat agitated, and his hair streaming with the oil which had been poured upon it, was "Is it peace? Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?" Men under any spiritual excitement seem "mad fellows" to profane minds (Hos. ix. 7; Acts xxvi. 24; 2 Cor. v. 13); but there may have been something in this messenger's dishevelled appearance—the result of his haste—his eager, hasty manner, and the strange fire that burned in his eye, which gave them the impression of one not altogether accountable for his actions. His hasty flight at the end of the interview would add to their surprise. Jehu, in reply, sought to evade explanation. His words, "Ye know the man, and his communication," mean either, "You have taken a right estimate of him as a madman, and therefore need not concern yourself with what he said;" or, "You are yourselves at the bottom of this trick, and know very well wherefore he came." The latter is, perhaps, the better sense, and may indicate that Jehu wished to sound his companions before going further. Their eager, "It is false; tell us now," shows how greatly their curiosity was aroused. Jehu thereupon told them frankly what had happened. 2. *Jehu proclaimed king.* The response on the part of the captains was immediate. Jehu must already have been a general favourite, or the proposal to make him king would not have met with such easy acceptance. As with one accord, the captains threw off their upper garments, spread them on the stairs, made Jehu mount above them, and, blowing the trumpets, forthwith proclaimed him king. Would that when God comes declaring to men the anointing and exaltation of "another King, even Jesus," his words found as ready a response!—J. O.

Vers. 14—37.—*Jehu as avenger.* No sooner is Jehu proclaimed king than, with characteristic decision, he gives orders that no one be permitted to leave the city to carry news to Jehoram; then, mounting his chariot, he drives off furiously to Jezreel. Whatever Jehu did, he did "with all his might" (Eccles. ix. 10). It is this vigorous decision of character which made him so suitable an instrument in executing God's vengeance on the house of Ahab.

I. JEHU'S APPROACH TO JEZREEL. 1. *The watchman's announcement.* In the far distance the watchman on the tower of Jezreel beholds a company of horsemen rapidly approaching. What can it portend? The report is brought to the king, who unsuspiciously sends out a messenger on horseback to inquire. Towers and watchmen are for the protection of a city and its inhabitants. But "except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Ps. cxxvii. 1). And if the Lord decrees the destruction of a city, or of those in it, towers and watchmen will do little to protect them. 2. *Successive messengers.* These verses are chiefly interesting as illustrating the character of Jehu. The messenger sent by Jehoram soon reaches the company, and asks, "Is it peace?" The idea probably is, "What tidings from the field of battle?" Jehu does not even answer him civilly, but, with a rude "What hast thou to do with peace?" he orders him to turn behind him. A man this who will brook no delay, submit to no curb, endure no check, in his imperious course. He sweeps obstacles from his path, and bends them to his will. This messenger returns not, and a second, sent out from the king, meets a like reception, and is also compelled to ride behind. 3. *Jehu recognized.* At length the horsemen are near enough for the watchman to get a closer view, and he has no difficulty in recognizing the furious driving of the leading figure as the driving of Jehu. It is familiar to all that character imprints itself on manner. Physiognomy, walk, gesture, handwriting even, are windows through which, to an observant eye, the soul looks out. Hypocrisy may create a mask behind which the real character seeks to hide itself. But hypocrisy, too, has characteristic ways of betraying its presence, and the mask cannot always be kept on. If we wish habitually to appear true, we must be true.

II. JEHORAM AND AHAZIAH SLAIN. 1. *The fateful meeting.* On learning that Jehu was approaching, King Jehoram, now convalescent, prepared his chariot, and, accompanied by Ahaziah of Judah, went out to meet his captain. (1) The two encountered at the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite. Strange coincidence, only, as we shall see below, more than coincidence. As the chariots meet, the king puts the anxious question, "Is it peace, Jehu?" Alas! the day of peace is over; it is now the day of vengeance. (2) Jehu throws no disguise over his intentions. With his usual vehement abruptness he at once bursts forth, "What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" Jehu was right: there can be no peace in a state when the foundations of religion and morality are everywhere subverted. When fountains of immorality are opened at head-quarters, their poisonous influence speedily infects the whole nation (Hos. iv. 5). They who are responsible for the subversion of righteousness in a state, must bear the penalty. (3) Jehoram needed to hear no more. He saw at a glance the situation, and with a shout, "Treachery, O Ahaziah!" he turned and fled. But there was no grain of pity in Jehu. With fierce promptitude he seizes his bow, fits one arrow to the string, and, taking sure aim, smites the flying king right through the heart. Jehoram falls—is dead. 2. *Blood for blood.* The tragedy thus transacted was in the immediate neighbourhood of Naboth's vineyard. On that very spot, or near it, Naboth's own blood had been shed (1 Kings xxi. 13), and, as this verse shows (ver. 26), not his alone, but the blood of his sons. Thither, after the murder, Ahab went down to take possession of the vineyard, and there, when he arrived, he found Elijah standing, waiting to denounce upon him the doom of blood. This was not all, for among those who rode with Ahab that day were two of his captains, one of them Bidkar, the other this Jehu, who heard the prophetic announcements against Ahab and his family (1 Kings xxi. 19—24). Ahab himself was subsequently spared, but the doom predicted against him had now fallen on his son: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine" (1 Kings xxi. 19). That prophecy, probably, had never altogether left the mind of Jehu, but now it came home to him with fresh force as he saw it actually fulfilled by his own hand. Bidkar, too, as it chanced, was there, and Jehu recalled to him the prophetic oracle. Then, to give it literal accomplishment, he bade Bidkar give orders that the corpse of Jehoram should be thrown into the plat of ground which formerly belonged to Naboth. Startling correspondences often thus occur between sin and its mode of punishment. When they occur in fiction, we speak of them as instances of "poetic justice." But poetry, in this as in other cases, is "unconscious philosophy," and is not opposed to truth. Its

truth in such representations lies rather in seizing and bringing to light actual laws in the moral government of the world. There is a singular tendency in events in history to fold back on each other—even dates and places presenting a series of marvellous coincidences. 3. *A partner in doom.* The King of Judah had, the moment the alarm was given, sought his own safety. He fled "by the way of the garden house"—was it the "garden of herbs," into which Naboth's vineyard had been converted (1 Kings xxi. 2)? But in vain. The peremptory Jehu allows nothing to escape his vigilance, and immediately he is on Ahaziah's track. His command was, "Smite him also in the chariot," and this was done, "at the going up to Gur, which is by Ibleam." Ahaziah continued his flight to Megiddo, where he died. A slightly different account of the manner of his death is given in 2 Chron. xxii. 9. Whatever the precise circumstances of the death, we cannot but see in it (1) a righteous retribution for his own sins; and (2) an example of the end of evil association. Through his mother Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel, he was brought into close and friendly relations with the court of Samaria, and, sharing in the crimes of Ahab's house, shared also in their fate. It was his visit to King Jehoram which immediately brought down this doom upon him.

III. THE FATE OF JEZEBEL. 1. *Her daring defiance.* When Jehoram had been slain, the end of Jezebel, the prime mover and presiding spirit in all the wickedness that had been wrought in Israel, could not be far distant. Jezebel perfectly apprehended this herself, for, on hearing that Jehu had come to Jezreel, she prepared to give him a defiant reception. While one loathes the character of the woman, it is impossible not to admire the boldness and spirit with which she faces the inevitable. Her proud, imperious nature comes out in her last actions. She paints her eyelids with antimony, tires her head, and adorns her person, as if she was preparing for some festal celebration. Then she plants herself at the window, and, when Jehu appears, assails him with bitter taunting words. "Is it peace, thou Zimri, thy master's murderer?" she mockingly asked. What a power for evil this woman had been in Israel! What a power, with her strong intellect and will, she might have been for good! 2. *Her ghastly end.* If Jezebel thought, by this show of imperious defiance, to produce any effect on Jehu, perhaps to disarm him by sheer admiration of her boldness, she had mistaken the man. Jehu's impetuous nature was not to be thus shaken from its purpose. He quickly brought the scene to a conclusion. "Who is on my side? who?" he cried, lifting up his eyes to the windows. Two or three eunuchs, no friends of Jezebel, and anxious only to please the new ruler, gave the needful sign. "Throw her down," was the pitiless order; and in another instant the painted Jezebel was hurled from the palace window, and, dashed on the ground, was being trodden by the hoofs of the horses. Pitiless herself, she now met with no compassion. One who had shed much blood, and rejoiced in it, her own blood was now bespattered on the wall and on the horses. Jehu had no compunctions, but, fresh from the dreadful spectacle, entered the palace, and sat down to eat and drink. But the climax was yet to come. As if even he felt that, vengeance being now sated, some respect was due to one who had so long held sway in Israel, he bade his servants "Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for," he said, "she is a king's daughter." The servants went, but soon returned with a shocking tale. Attracted by the scent of blood, the prowling city dogs had found their way into the enclosure, and, short as the time had been, all that remained of haughty Jezebel was the skull, and feet, and palms of the hands, strewn about the court. 3. *A prophecy fulfilled.* Such was the dreadful end of this haughty, domineering, evil woman. Possibly even Jehu could not restrain a shudder when he heard of it. He had not thought of it before, but now he recalled the close of that awful prophecy of Elijah to Ahab, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel" (1 Kings xxi. 23), the terms of which had been repeated to him by Elisha's messenger, (ver. 10). That word of God had been fulfilled with ghastly literalness. Would that men would lay to heart the lesson, and believe that all God's threatenings will be as certainly fulfilled!—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER X.

Vers. 1—36.—THE REIGN OF JEHU OVER ISRAEL.

Vers. 1—28.—The revolution initiated by the destruction of Joram and Jezebel is here traced through its second and its third stages. The immediate question, after Joram's death, was—Would any member of his family rise up as a claimant of the throne, and dispute the succession with Jehu? Ahab had seventy male descendants, all of them resident in Samaria: would there be any one among their number bold enough to come forward and assert his hereditary right? Jehu regarded this as the most pressing and imminent danger, wherefore his first step was to challenge such action, and either precipitate it or crush it. In vers. 1—11 is related the action taken by him, so far as the descendants of Ahab were concerned, and his success in ridding himself of all rivals possessed of so strong a claim. Vers. 12—14 relate his dealings with another body of Ahab's relations, belonging to the neighbouring kingdom of Judah. In vers. 15—28 an account is given of the still more bloody and more sweeping measures by which he cowed the party opposed to him, and firmly established his dynasty in the Israelite kingdom.

Vers. 1—11.—*The destruction of the seventy sons of Ahab.*

Ver. 1.—**And Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria.** By "sons" we must understand "male descendants." Most of the "seventy" were probably his grandsons (see ver. 3); some may have been great-grandsons. They lived in Samaria; since Samaria was the principal residence of the court, Jezreel being simply a country palace—the "Versailles," as it has been called, or "Windsor" of the Israelite kings. **And Jehu wrote letters, and sent to Samaria, unto the rulers of Jezreel.** "Jezreel" is almost certainly a corrupt reading. The "rulers of Jezreel" would be at Jezreel; and, if Jehu wished to communicate with them, he would not need to "write." Had any chance taken them to Samaria—a very improbable circumstance—they would have had no authority there, and to address them would have been useless. Jehu's letters were, no doubt, addressed to *the rulers of Samaria;* and so the LXX. expressly state (ἀπέστειλεν ἐν Σαμαρείᾳ πρὸς τοὺς ἄρχοντας Σαμαρείας); but the reading "Jezreel" can scarcely have arisen out of "Samaria" (יזרעאל out of שמרון), since the difference of the two words is so great. Most probably the original word was "Israel" (ישׂראל), which is easily corrupted into "Jezreel" (יזרעאל). The rulers of Samaria, the capital, might well be called "the rulers of Israel." **To the elders;** rather, *even the elders.* Not distinct persons from the "rulers," but the same under another name (see 1 Kings xxi. 8, 13; and compare the Revised Version). **And to them that brought up Ahab's** children—*i.e.* the tutors, or governors, under whose charge they were placed—**saying**—

Ver. 2.—**Now as soon as this letter cometh to you.** In the East at this time, and in most parts of it to the present day, letters can only be sent by special messengers. There is no public post. Kings and private individuals must equally find persons who will undertake to carry and deliver their despatches. Even the post organized by Darius Hystaspis was not one that went daily, but only one kept ready for the king to use when he had occasion for it. **Seeing your master's sons are with you.** "Your master's sons" must mean Joram's sons; by which we learn that, unlike his brother Ahaziah (ch. i. 17), Joram had male offspring who survived him, and were now with the rest of Ahab's descendants, at Samaria. **And there are with you chariots and horses, a fenced city also, and armour;** literally, *the chariots, and the horses, a fenced city also, and the armour.* The main chariot force of the country, and the chief arsenal, containing both armour and arms, were naturally at Samaria, the capital, and might thus be regarded as at the disposition of the Samaritan municipality. Jehu scornfully challenges them to make use of their resources against him. He is quite ready for a contest. Let them do their worst. The LXX. have "fenced cities" (πόλεις ὀχυραί) instead of "a fenced city;" but the existing Hebrew text is probably right. Samaria was the only fortified town in their possession.

Ver. 3.—**Look even out the best and meetest of your master's sons, and set him on his father's throne.** "Choose," *i.e.*, "among the sons of Joram the strongest, the boldest, and the ablest, and make him king in his father's room; take him for your leader against me; do not hesitate and beat about the bush; but at once make up your minds, and let me know what I have to

expect." **And fight for your master's house.** There had been a civil war before the dynasty of Omri succeeded in settling itself on the throne (1 Kings xvi. 21, 22). Jehu believes, or affects to believe, that there will now be another. He does not deprecate it, but invites it. Probably he felt tolerably confident that the garrison of Samaria, even if called upon by the municipality, would not venture to take up arms against the army of Ramoth-Gilead, which had declared itself in his favour. Still, supposing that it did, he was not fearful of the result.

Ver. 4.—**But they were exceedingly afraid.** They were men of peace, not men of war—accustomed to discharge the duties of judges and magistrates, not of commandants and generals. They could not count on the obedience even of the troops in Samaria, much less on that of any others who might be in garrison elsewhere. They would naturally have been afraid of taking up arms under almost any circumstances. What, however, caused them now such excessive fear was probably the tone which Jehu had adopted—his "scornful challenge," as it has been called. He evidently entertained no fear himself. He dared them to do that which he pretended to recommend them to do. They must have felt that he was laughing at them in his sleeve. **And said, Behold, two kings stood not before him: how then shall we stand?** The kings intended are Joram and Ahaziah, who had confronted Jehu, and had met their deaths. What were *they* that they should succeed where "two kings" had failed? The argument was fallacious, and a mere cloak for cowardice. The two kings had been taken by surprise, and treacherously murdered. Their fate could prove nothing concerning the probable issue of a civil war, had the "princes" ventured to commence it. It must be admitted, however, that the chance of success was but slight.

Ver. 5.—**And he that was over the house**—*i.e.* the officer in charge of the royal palace (comp. 1 Kings iv. 6)—**and he that was over the city.** There would be a single "governor of the city"—not the commandant of the garrison, but the chief civil ruler, nearly corresponding to a modern "mayor" (see 1 Kings xxii. 26). **The elders also** (comp. ver. 1). The "governor" of a town was assisted by a council of "elders." **And the bringers up** of the children (see the comment on ver. 1). **Sent to Jehu, saying, We are thy servants, and will do all that thou shalt bid us; we will not make any king.** Jehu's letter had the effect which he intended, of making the authorities of Samaria declare themselves. They might, perhaps, have temporized, have sent an ambiguous answer, or have sent no answer at all, and have let their action be guided by the course of events. But, taken aback by Jehu's directness and plainness of speech, it did not occur to them to be diplomatic; they felt driven into a corner, and compelled to make their choice at once. Either they must resist Jehu in arms or they must submit to him. If they submitted, they had best (they thought) do it with a good grace. Accordingly, his letter produced a reply, more favourable than he can possibly have expected—"They were his servants," or "his slaves," ready to do all his pleasure; they would not set up a king, or in any way dispute his succession; they submitted themselves wholly to his will. **Do thou** [they said] **that which is good in thine eyes;** *i.e.* "take what steps thou pleasest to confirm thyself in the kingdom."

Ver. 6.—**Then he wrote a letter the second time to them, saying;** rather, *a second time.* The reply of the Samaritan authorities gave Jehu an opportunity, of which he was not slow to take advantage. They might have been contented with their negative response, "We will not make any man king;" but they had gone beyond it—they had departed from the line of neutrality, and had placed themselves unreservedly on Jehu's side. "We are thy servants," they had said, "and will do all that thou shalt bid us." It is always rash to promise absolute obedience to a human being. To volunteer such a promise, when it is not even asked, is the height of folly. **If ye be mine**—as they had said they were, when they called themselves his "slaves"—**and if ye will hearken unto my voice**—*i.e.* obey me, do as I require—**take ye the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel.** The Samaritan authorities were ordered to bring the heads with them, that they might be seen and counted. In the East generally, the heads of rebels and pretenders, by whatever death they may have died, are cut off, brought to the sovereign, and then exposed in some public place, in order that the public at large may be certified that the men are really dead (comp. 1 Sam. xxxi. 9). **By to-morrow this time.** As Jezreel was not more than about twenty miles from Samaria, the order could be executed by that time. It necessitated, however, very prompt measures, and gave the authorities but little time for consideration. **Now the king's sons, being seventy persons, were with the great men of the city, which brought them up** (comp. ver. 1).

Ver. 7.—**And it came to pass, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons, and slew seventy persons.** Having committed themselves by their answer to Jehu's first letter, the Samaritan great men seemed to themselves to have no choice, on

receiving his second, but to allow themselves to become the tools and agents of his policy. They accordingly put the seventy princes to death without any hesitation, though they can scarcely have done so without reluctance. **And put their heads in baskets.** Thus concealing their bloody deed as long as they could. In the Assyrian sculptures, those who slay the king's enemies carry the heads openly in their hands, as though glorying in what they have done. **And sent him** them **to Jezreel.** Jehu had bidden them to *bring* the heads to him; but this was a degradation to which they did not feel bound to submit. They therefore *sent* the heads by trusty messengers.

Ver. 8.—**And there came a messenger, and told him, saying, They have brought the heads of the king's sons. And he said, Lay ye them in two heaps at the entering in of the gate until the morning.** Thus all who entered into the town or quitted it would see them, and, being struck by the ghastly spectacle, would make inquiry and learn the truth. "The gate" was also a general place of assembly for the gossips of the town and others, who would soon spread the news, and bring together a crowd of persons, curious to see so unusual a sight.

Ver. 9.—**And it came to pass in the morning, that he went out, and stood, and said to all the people, Ye be righteous.** Not an ironical reproach to those who had brought the heads—"Ye consider yourselves righteous, yet this bloodshed rests upon you;" much less a serious declaration (Gerlach) that now at last the sins of idolatrous Israel were atoned for; but an argument *ad captandum*, addressed to the crowd of spectators whom the unwonted spectacle had brought together, "Ye are just persons, and capable of pronouncing a just judgment; judge, then, if I am the wicked person which men generally consider me." **Behold, I conspired against my master, and slew him: but who slew all these?** I confess to one murder; but here are seventy murders. And who is guilty of them? Not I, or my party, but the trusted adherents of the Ahabite dynasty, the rulers placed by them over the capital, and the governors to whom they had entrusted the royal children. Does not this show that all parties are weary of the Ahabites and of their system? Does it not clear me of any private or selfish motive, and indicate the desire of the whole nation for a change, civil and religious—a change which shall entirely subvert the new religion introduced by Jezebel, and fall back upon the lines of that maintained by Elijah and Elisha?

Ver. 10.—**Know now that there shall fall unto the earth**—*i.e.* "perish," "come to nought"—**nothing of the word of the Lord, which the Lord spake concerning the house of Ahab.** As the accomplishment had gone so far, it was safe to predict, or at any rate Jehu felt emboldened to predict, that the entire prophecy of Elijah would be fulfilled to the letter. The whole house of Ahab would perish—it would be made like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah (1 Kings xxi. 23), and its adherents would share its fate. **For the Lord hath done that which he spake by his servant Elijah**; *i.e.* "has requited Ahab in the portion of Jezreel; has caused dogs to eat the flesh of Jezebel; and has begun the destruction of his house. The inchoate fulfilment of prophecy was always felt to be the strongest possible argument for its ultimate complete fulfilment.

Ver. 11.—**So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks**; rather, *and Jehu slew.* Encouraged by his past success, having killed Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Jezebel, having secured the adhesion of the chief men in Samaria, and effected the destruction of all those who might naturally have claimed the succession and involved him in civil war, Jehu proceeded to greater lengths. He "slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel"—the princesses probably, as well as the princes—and further put to death all the leading partisans of the dethroned dynasty, the "great men," perhaps even those who had worked his bloody will at Samaria, and the intimate friends and supporters of the house—the מְיֻדָּעִים, as they are here called—not relatives, but "intimate acquaintances." **And his priests.** This expression causes a difficulty, since the destruction of the Baal-priests is related subsequently (vers. 19—25). It has been suggested to understand by כֹּהֲנִים, not "priests," but "high state officers" (**Bähr**)—a meaning which the word is thought to have in 2 Sam. viii. 18 and 1 Kings iv. 5. But this signification of כֹּהֵן is scarcely an ascertained one. Perhaps the same persons are intended as in ver. 19, the present notice of their death being a mere summary, and the narrative of vers. 19—25 a full statement of the circumstances. **Until he left him none remaining**; *i.e.* until the entire Ahabite faction was blotted out.

Vers. 12—14.—*The massacre of the brethren of Ahaziah.*

Ver. 12.—**And he arose and departed, and came to Samaria**; rather, *went on his way to Samaria* (ἐπορεύθη εἰς Σαμάρειαν, LXX.). Having arranged matters at Jezreel as his interests required, and secured the adhesion of the Samaritan "great men," Jehu now set out for the capital. The narrative from

this point to ver. 17 is of events that happened to him while he was upon his road. **And as he was at the shearing-house in the way.** Between Jezreel and Samaria was a station where the shepherds of the district were accustomed to shear their flocks. The custom gave name to the place, which became known as Beth-Eked (Βαιθακάδ, LXX.; *Beth-Akad*, Jerome), "the house of binding," from the practice of tying the sheep's four feet together before shearing them. The situation has not been identified.

Ver. 13.—**Jehu met with the brethren of Ahaziah King of Judah.** The actual "brethren" of Ahaziah had been carried off and slain by the Arabians in one of their raids into Palestine, as we learn from 2 Chron. xxi. 17; xxii. 1; the youths here mentioned were their sons (2 Chron. xxii. 8), and therefore Ahaziah's nephews. **And said, Who are ye?** Travellers in a foreign country were always liable to be questioned, and were expected to give an account of themselves (see Gen. xlii. 7—13; Story of Saneha, line 38; Herod., ii. 159, etc.). The princes were thus not surprised at the inquiry, and readily answered it. **And they answered, We are the brethren of Ahaziah; and we go down to salute the children of the king.** There is something abnormal and needing explanation in this visit. *Forty-two* princes, with their retinues, do not, under ordinary circumstances, start off on a sudden from one capital, on a complimentary visit to their cousins at another. Perhaps Ewald is right in surmising that, "at the first report of disturbances in the kingdom of the ten tribes, they had been sent off by Athaliah to render any assistance that they could to the house of Ahab in its troubles" ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 100, Eng. trans.). In this case their answer must be regarded as insincere. Falling in with an armed force stronger than their own, they *pretended* ignorance of the revolution that had taken place, and sought to pass off their hostile purpose under the pretence of a visit of compliment. But the pretence did not deceive Jehu. **And the children of the queen.** The queen-mother, Jezebel, is probably intended. Her rank entitled her to special mention.

Ver. 14.—**And he said, Take them alive. And they took them alive, and slew them.** The brevity of the narrative leaves many points of it obscure. It is impossible to say why the order was given, "Take them alive," when, immediately afterwards, they were massacred. Perhaps Jehu at first intended to spare their lives, but afterwards thought that it would be safer to have them put out of his way. It must be borne in mind that they were descendants of Ahab. **At the pit of the shearing-house;** rather, *at the well of Beth-Eked.* Probably the bodies were thrown into the well (comp. Jer. xli. 7). Even **two and forty men.** It is this number which makes the idea of a visit of compliment incredible. **Neither left he any of them.** The Greeks said, Νήπιος, ὃς πατέρα κτείνας παῖδας καταλείπει; and the general Hebrew practice was to give effect to the teaching conveyed by the maxim (see Josh. vii. 24, 25; ch. ix. 26; xiv. 6).

Vers. 15—17.—*Jehonadab the son of Rechab associated by Jehu in his acts.*

Ver. 15.—**And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab.** Between Beth-Eked and Samaria Jehu fell in with the great Kenite chief, Jehonadab, the founder of the remarkable tribe and sect of the Rechabites (Jer. xxxv. 6—19). Jehonadab is mentioned only here and in the passage of Jeremiah just quoted; but it is evident that he was an important personage. His tribe, the Kenites, was probably of Arab origin, and certainly of Arab habits. It attached itself to the Israelites during their wanderings in the Sinaitic desert, and was given a settlement in "the wilderness of Judah," on the conquest of Palestine (Judg. i. 16). Jehonadab seems to have been of an ascetic turn, and to have laid down for his tribe a rule of life stricter and more severe than any known previously. He required them not merely to dwell in tents, and, unless under the compulsion of war, never to enter cities, but also to abstain wholly from the use of wine, and to have neither house, nor field, nor vineyard (Jer. xxxv. 8—10). Gautama, between three and four centuries later, enjoined a somewhat similar rule upon his disciples. It is indicative of much strength of character in either case, that so strict a rule was accepted, adopted, and acted upon for centuries. On the present occasion, Jehu, it would seem, desired the sanction of Jehonadab to the proceedings upon which he was about to enter, as calculated to legitimate them in the eyes of some who might otherwise have regarded them with disapproval. Jehonadab had, no doubt, the influence which is always wielded by an ascetic in Oriental countries. **Coming to meet him.** This expression tells us nothing of Jehonadab's intent. The meeting may have been merely a chance one. **And he saluted him, and said to him, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?** literally, *he blessed him;* but the word used (*barak*) has frequently the sense of "to salute" (see 1 Sam. xiii. 10; xxv. 14; ch. iv. 29, etc.). Jehu's inquiry was made to assure himself of Jehonadab's sympathy, on which no doubt he counted, but whereof he was glad to receive a positive promise. Jehonadab must have been known as a zealous servant of Jehovah,

and might therefore be assumed to be hostile to the house of Ahab. **And Jehonadab answered, It is.** Unhesitatingly, without a moment's pause, without the shadow of a doubt, the Kenite chief cast in his lot with the revolutionist. Heart and soul he would join him in an anti-Ahab policy. **If it be, Give me thine hand.** The Hebrews did not clench agreements, like the Greeks and Romans, by grasping each other's hands. Jehu merely means to say, "If this is so, if thou art heart and soul with me in the matter, put out thy hand, and I will take thee into my chariot." Jehu intended at once to do honour to the Kenite chief, and to strengthen his own position by being seen to be so familiar with him. **And he**—*i.e.* Jehonadab—**gave him**—*i.e.* Jehu—**his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot.** There was always room in a chariot for at least three or four persons—the charioteer and the owner of the chariot in front, and one or two guards behind.

Ver. 16.—**And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.** Jehonadab must have understood that some further measures were about to be taken against the family and adherents of Ahab. He evidently approved of all that Jehu had already done, and was willing to give his countenance to further severities. He probably did not know exactly what Jehu designed; but he must have been able to make a tolerably shrewd guess at what was impending. **So they made him ride in his chariot.** Perhaps וַיַּרְכִּבוּ should be changed into וַיַּרְכִּיב, which seems to have been the reading of the LXX., who translate, by ἐπικάθισεν αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ἅρματι αὐτοῦ, "*he* made him ride in his chariot."

Ver. 17.—**And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him.** Seventy male descendants of Ahab had been already destroyed in Samaria (vers. 1—7). It seems unlikely that the city can have contained any other members of his house excepting females. Did Jehu now destroy the daughters of Ahab resident in Samaria, with their families? The masculine form used—הַנִּשְׁאָרִים—does not disprove this. **According to the saying of the Lord, which he spake to Elijah** (comp. ver. 10, and see also the comment on ch. ix. 7).

Vers. 18—28.—*Jehu destroys the worshippers of Baal, and puts an end to the Baal-worship.*

Ver. 18.—**And Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much.** Hitherto the revolution had borne the appearance of a mere dynastic change, like those introduced by Baasha (1 Kings xv. 27—29), Zimri (1 Kings xvi. 9—12), and Omri (1 Kings xvi. 17—19), and had had none of the characteristics of a religious reformation. Probably, as yet, no suspicion had touched the public mind that Jehu would be a less zealous worshipper of Baal than his predecessor. The outburst against Jezebel's "whoredoms" and "witchcrafts" (ch. ix. 22) would be known to few, and might not have been understood as a condemnation of the entire Baalistic system. The "zeal for Jehovah" whispered in the ear of Jehonadab (ver. 16) had been hitherto kept secret. Thus there was nothing to prevent the multitude from giving implicit credence to the proclamation now made, and looking to see the new reign inaugurated by a magnificent and prolonged festival in honour of the two great Phœnician deities, Baal the sun-god, and Ashtoreth or Astarte the famous "Dea Syra." Such festivals were frequently held in Phœnicia and the rest of Syria, often lasting over many days, and constituting a time of excitement, feasting, and profligate enjoyment, which possessed immense attraction for the great mass of Asiatics.

Ver. 19.—**Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests.** In Phœnicia, it would seem, as in Egypt and among the Jews, "prophets" and "priests" were distinct classes of persons. The Egyptians called the priest *ab*, the prophet *neter hon*, literally, "servant of God." They held the priest in the greater honour. In Phœnicia, on the contrary, judging from the scanty notices that we possess, prophets appear to have taken precedence of priests, and to have had the more important functions assigned to them (see 1 Kings xviii. 19—40; xxii. 6). **Let none be wanting**—literally, *let not a man fail*—**for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal.** Like the other gods of the heathen, Baal and Ashtoreth were worshipped chiefly by sacrifice. The sacrifice was sometimes human, but more commonly a sacrificial animal, such as a bull, a ram, or a he-goat. In the greater festivals several hundreds of victims were offered; and their flesh was served up at the banquets by which the festivals were accompanied. **Whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live.** His absence would be regarded as an act of contumacy verging on rebellion, and so as deserving of capital punishment. **But Jehu did it in subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal.** "Subtilty" was characteristic of Jehu, who always preferred to gain his ends by cunning rather than in a straightforward way. Idolaters were by the Law liable to death, and Jehu would have had a perfect right to crush the Baal-worship throughout the land, by sending his emissaries everywhere, with orders

to slay all whom they found engaged in it. But to draw some thousands of his subjects by false pretences into a trap, and then to kill them in it for doing what he had himself invited them to do, was an act that was wholly unjustifiable, and that savoured, not of the wisdom which is from above, but of that bastard wisdom which is "earthly, sensual, devilish" (Jas. iii. 15). Jehu's religious reformation did not succeed, and it was conducted in such a way that it did not deserve to succeed. A little more honest boldness, and a little less frequent resort to subterfuge and craft, might have had a different result, and have been better both for himself and for his people.

Ver. 20.—**And Jehu said, Proclaim a solemn assembly for Baal.** The word translated "solemn assembly" is the same which is applied to the great feasts of Jehovah among the Israelites in Lev. xxiii. 36; Numb. xxix. 35; Deut. xvi. 8; 2 Chron. vii. 9; Neh. viii. 18; Isa. i. 13; Joel i. 14; ii. 15; and Amos v. 21. Originally, it signified a time of repression, or abstention from worldly business; but it had probably grown to mean a day when worldly business was suspended for the sake of a religious gathering. Such gatherings had no doubt been held from time to time in honour of Baal; and Jehu's proclamation consequently excited no distrust. **And they proclaimed** it. No opposition was made to the king's wish. No Jehovist party showed itself. The "solemn assembly" was proclaimed for some day in the near future, when all the people had been apprised of it.

Ver. 21.—**And Jehu sent through all Israel**; *i.e.* through the whole of his own kingdom, from Dan on the north to Bethel on the south. **And all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that came not.** Duty and inclination for once coincided. The king's command made it incumbent on them, they would argue, to attend; and attendance would, they supposed, result in a time of excitement and enjoyment, which they were not disposed to miss. The death-penalty threatened for non-attendance (ver. 19) was scarcely needed to induce them all to come. **And they came into the house of Baal.** Ahab had erected a temple to Baal in Samaria shortly after his marriage with Jezebel (1 Kings xvi. 22). Like the other temples of the time, in Judæa, in Egypt, and in Phœnicia, it was not a mere "house," but contained vast courts and corridors fitted for the reception of immense numbers. **And the house of Baal was full from one end to another**; literally, *from brim to brim*; i.e. brimful—"metaphora sumpta a vasibus humore aliquo plenis."

Ver. 22.—**And he said unto him that was over the vestry.** The word translated "vestry" (מַלְתָּחָה) occurs only in this place; but its meaning is sufficiently ascertained, first, from the context, and secondly, from the cognate Ethiopic *altah*, which means "a linen garment." *Linen* garments were regarded as especially pure, and were generally affected by the priests of ancient religions, and preferred by the worshippers. Heathen temples had almost always "vestries" or "wardrobes" attached to them, where garments considered suitable were laid up in store. **Bring forth vestments for all the worshippers of Baal.** It may be doubted whether "*all* the worshippers of Baal" could have been supplied with robes out of the temple vestry, which would ordinarily contain only vestments for the priests. But Jehu may have had the supply kept up from the robe-room of the palace, which would be practically inexhaustible. The gift of garments to all comers, which was certainly not usual, must have been intended to render the festival as attractive as possible. **And he brought them forth vestments.** The keeper of the wardrobe obeyed the order given him, and supplied vestments to all the worshippers.

Ver. 23.—**And Jehu went, and Jehonadab the son of Rechab, into the house of Baal.** Keeping up the pretence that he was a devotee of Baal, anxious to "serve him much" (ver. 18), Jehu himself entered the sacred edifice, together with Jehonadab the son of Rechab, whom he wished to have as a witness to his "zeal for the Lord" (ver. 16). Having entered, he addressed the multitude, or the chief authorities among them, requiring that they should exercise extreme vigilance, and make it quite certain that none but true followers of Baal were present. **And said unto the worshippers of Baal, Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the Lord, but the worshippers of Baal only.** Jehu's real object was undoubtedly to save the lives of any "servants of Jehovah" who might incautiously have mixed themselves up with the Baal-worshippers, out of curiosity, or to have their share in the general holiday. That he should have thought such a thing possible or even probable indicates the general laxity of the time, and the want of any sharp line of demarcation between the adherents of the two religions. He cleverly masked his desire for the safety of his own religionists under a show of keen anxiety that the coming ceremonies should not be profaned by the presence of scoffers or indifferent persons. His requirement was in the spirit of that warning which the heathen commonly gave before entering upon the more sacred rites of their religion—"Procul este, profani."

Ver. 24.—**And when they went in**—rather,

when they had gone in; i.e. when the whole multitude of Baal-worshippers, priests and people, had entered within the precincts of the temple—**to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings.** The priests officiate, but the offerings are regarded as conjointly made by priest and people. **Jehu appointed four score men without.** Josephus says ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 6. § 6) that they were the most trusty men of his body-guard, which is likely enough. They were no doubt also known to Jehu as attached to the worship of Jehovah. **And said, If any of the men whom I have brought into your hands escape,** he that letteth him go, **his life shall be for the life of him** (comp. 1 Kings xx. 39). Gaolers were commonly put to death if a prisoner committed to their charge escaped them (see Acts xii. 19; xvi. 27).

Ver. 25.—**And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering.** It has been concluded from this that Jehu "offered the sacrifices *with his own hand*, as though he were the most zealous of Baal's adorers" (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 100); but the conclusion does not follow necessarily from the expression used. The suffix ו in כְּכַלֹּתוֹ may be used indefinitely, "when *one* finished," or "when *they* finished;" or Jehu may be said to have made the offerings, because he furnished the victims, not because he immolated them with his own hand. Throughout heathendom, wherever there were priests, it was the duty of the priests to slay the victims offered. **That Jehu said to the guard**—literally, *to the runners* (see the comment on 1 Kings i. 38)—**and to the captains**—*i.e.* the officers in command of the guard—**Go in, and slay them; let none come forth.** We must suppose that some guarded the doors, while others advanced into the crowd and struck right and left. The unarmed multitude seems to have made no resistance. **And they smote them with the edge of the sword**—*i.e.* cut them down unsparingly, smote and slew till none were left alive—**and the guard and the captains cast them out.** This is generally understood to mean that all the bodies were thrown by the guards out of the temple. Dean Stanley says, "The temple was strewn with corpses, which, as fast as they fell, the guard and the officers threw out with their own hands" ('Jewish Church,' vol. ii. p. 188). But it is not apparent why they should have taken this trouble. Perhaps Bähr is right in suggesting that no more is meant than that the guard and the officers thrust the bodies out of their way, as they pressed forward to enter the sanctuary which contained the sacred images. **And went to the city of the house of Baal.** "They made their way," as Ewald says, "into the inner sanctuary, the enclosure of which rose like a lofty fortress—עִיר originally meant "fortress"—where Baal was enthroned, surrounded by the images of his fellow-gods" ('History of Israel,' *l. s. c.*). It is to be remembered that the assembled multitude occupied the court or courts of the temple, within which, in a commanding position, was the "house" or "sanctuary"—perhaps reserved for the priests only.

Ver. 26.—**And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal;** rather, *the pillars* (see the comment on 1 Kings xiv. 23). It was a special feature of the Phœnician worship to represent the gods by στῆλαι or κίονες, which appear to have been conical stones, or obelisks, destitute of any shaping into the semblance of humanity (see Tacitus, 'Hist.,' ii. 3; Damasc. ap. Phot., 'Bibliothec.,' p. 1063; Max. Tyr., 'Diss.,' xxxviii. p. 384). The Phœnicians acknowledged several deities besides Baal, as Ashtoreth, Melkarth, Dagon, Adonis or Tammuz, El, Sadyk, Esmun, and the Kabiri. The "pillars" brought forth may have represented some of these deities, who might all of them be "contemplar" deities with Baal; or they may have been "Baalim," *i.e.* forms and aspects of Baal, each the object of some special cult (see Movers, 'Phönizier,' § 674). **And burned them.** The "pillars" in this instance were probably, not of stone, but of wood.

Ver. 27.—**And they brake down the image of Baal;** rather, *they brake in pieces the pillar of Baal.* The representation of Baal, the main *stele* of the temple, being of stone or metal, could not be destroyed by fire, and was therefore broken to pieces (comp. ch. xxiii. 14). **And brake down the house of Baal**—*i.e.* partially ruined it, but still left portions of it standing, as a memorial of the sin and of its punishment—a solemn warning, one would have thought, to the people of the capital—**and made it a draught-house unto this day;** made it, *i.e.*, "a depository for all the filth of the town" (Stanley); comp. Ezra vi. 11; Dan. ii. 5; iii. 29; and for the word "draught" in this sense, see Matt. xv. 17. Such a use was the greatest possible desecration.

Ver. 28.—**Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel.** The measures taken were effectual; the worship of Baal was put down, and is not said to have been revived in the kingdom of the ten tribes. Moloch-worship seems to have taken its place (see ch. xvii. 17).

Vers. 29—31.—*Jehu's shortcomings.*

Ver. 29.—**Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them.** It was a crucial test of Jehu's faithfulness to Jehovah; would he maintain the calf-worship of Jeroboam or not? With whatever intent the worship had been set up by its author,

the curse of God had been pronounced against it by the chief prophet of the time (1 Kings xiii. 2), and his word had been attested as from heaven by two miracles (1 Kings xiii. 4, 5). Jehu ought to have known that the calf-worship, if not as hateful to God as the Baal-worship, at any rate was hateful, was a standing act of rebellion against Jehovah, and laid the nation under his displeasure. But, while his own interests were entirely detached from the one, they were, or at least would seem to him to be, bound up with the other. The calf-worship was thought to be essential to the maintenance of the divided kingdom. Abolish it, and all Israel would "return to the house of David" (1 Kings xii. 26—30). Jehu was not prepared to risk this result. His "zeal for Jehovah" did not reach so far. Thus his "reformation of religion" was but a half-reformation, a partial turning to Jehovah, which brought no permanent blessing upon the nation. To wit, **the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan.** The erection of the calves (1 Kings xii. 29) was the initial sin, their worship the persistent one. (On the nature of the calf-worship, see the comment on 1 Kings xii. 28, and compare the 'Speaker's Commentary' on the same passage.)

Ver. 30.—**And the Lord said unto Jehu**—scarcely by direct revelation, rather by the mouth of a prophet, most probably of Elisha, as Thenius supposes—**Because thou hast done well in executing** that which is **right in mine eyes.** In making himself the executor of God's will with respect to the house of Ahab, and utterly destroying it, as he had been commanded (ch. ix. 7), Jehu had "done well;" he had also done well in putting down the worship of Baal, and slaying the idolaters, for the destruction of idolaters was distinctly commanded in the Law (Exod. xxii. 20; xxxii. 27; Numb. xxv. 5). These acts of his are praised; but nothing is said of his motives in doing them. They were probably to a great extent selfish. And **hast done unto the house of Ahab all that was in mine heart** (see ch. ix. 24—37; x. 1—7, 11, 14), **thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.** External obedience was suitably rewarded by an external, earthly honour—the honour of having his dynasty settled upon the throne during five generations, and for a period of above a hundred years. No other Israelite dynasty held the throne longer than three generations, or for so much as fifty years. The "children" or descendants of Jehu who sat upon the throne after him were Jehoahaz, his son, Jehoash or Joash, his grandson, Jeroboam II., his great-grandson, and Zachariah, son of Jeroboam II., his great-great-grandson.

Ver. 31.—**But Jehu took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart.** Jehu's character is thus summed up by Dean Stanley: "The character of Jehu is not difficult to understand, if we take it as a whole, and consider the general impression left upon us by the biblical account. He is exactly one of those men whom we are compelled to recognize, not for what is good or great in themselves, but as instruments for destroying evil, and preparing the way for good; such as Augustus Cæsar at Rome, Sultan Mahmoud II. in Turkey, or one closer at hand in the revolutions of our own time and neighbourhood. A destiny, long kept in view by himself or others—inscrutable secrecy and reserve in carrying out his plans—a union of cold, remorseless tenacity with occasional bursts of furious, wayward, almost fanatical zeal;—this is Jehu, as he is set before us in the historical narrative, the worst type of a son of Jacob—the 'supplanter' . . . without the noble and princely qualities of Israel; the most unlovely and the most coldly commended of all the heroes of his country" ('Lectures on the Jewish Church,' vol. ii. p. 289). The estimate is lower than that formed by most other writers; but it is not far from the truth. **For he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin** (comp. ver. 29).

Vers. 32—36.—*Jehu's wars, length of reign, and successor.*

Ver. 32.—**In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short.** It is certainly not stated in direct terms that the ill success of Jehu's foreign wars was a punishment on him for his continued maintenance of the calf-idolatry; but the juxtaposition of vers. 31 and 32 naturally raises the idea, and constitutes a strong presumption that it was in the writer's mind. The "theocracy" under the kings was carried on mainly, as the writer of Chronicles clearly saw, by the bestowal of worldly prosperity and military success on good kings, and the accumulation of misfortunes and military disasters on bad ones (see 2 Chron. xii. 5—12; xiii. 4—18; xiv. 2—15; xv. 2—15; xvii. 3—5. etc.). By "cutting Israel short"—literally, "cutting off in Israel"—is probably meant the conquest of certain portions of the territory. Hazael resumed the war which Benhadad had so long waged, and gained numerous successes. **And Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel;** or, *along their whole frontier* (Bähr). The frontier intended is, of course, that on the north and east, where the Israelite territory was conterminous with that of Syria.

Ver. 33.—**From Jordan eastward.** The territory west of the Jordan was not attacked at this time. Hazael's expeditions were directed against the trans-Jordanic region,

the seats of the three tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. This tract was far easier of access than the other, and was more tempting, being the richest part of Palestine. The region comprised **all the land of Gilead**—*i.e.* the more southern region, reaching from the borders of Moab on the south to the Hieromax or Sheriat-el-Mandhûr upon the north, the proper land of the Gadites, **and the Reubenites, and** [a portion of] **the Manassites**—together with Bashan, the more northern region, which belonged wholly to Manasseh—**from Aroer** (now *Arair*), **which is by the river Arnon**—the *Wady-el-Mojeb*, which was the boundary between Israel and Moab (Numb. xxi. 13, 24), both in the earlier and (Isa. xvi. 2) in the later times—**even Gilead and Bashan.** There is other evidence, besides this, that Hazael was one of the most warlike of the Syrian kings. We find him, on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser II., mentioned as a stubborn adversary of the Assyrian arms. In the seventeenth campaign of Shalmaneser, a great battle was fought between the two monarchs. Hazael brought into the field more than twelve hundred chariots, but was defeated, and obliged to retreat, his camp falling into the hands of the enemy ('Records of the Past,' vol. v. p. 34). Four years later Shalmaneser invaded Hazael's territory, and took, according to his own account (ibid., p. 35), four cities or fortresses belonging to him. He does not claim, however, to have made him a tributary; and by his later annals it is evident that he avoided further contest, preferring to turn his arms in other directions. (On Hazael's campaign in Philistia, and designs against Jerusalem, see the comment upon ch. xii. 17, 18.)

Ver. 34.—**Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, and all that he did, and all his might.** This last phrase is remarkable, considering that Jehu's wars, after he became king, seem to have been entirely unsuccessful ones, that he lost a large portion of his dominions to Syria, and (as appears by the Black Obelisk) paid tribute to the Assyrians ('Records of the Past,' vol. v. p. 41). "Might" has been ascribed by the writer of Kings only to Baasha and Omri among previous Israelite monarchs, and only to Asa and Jehoshaphat among previous Jewish ones. "*All* his might" has only been used of Asa. We must probably understand, that, although defeated, Jehu gained much distinction, by his personal prowess and other military qualities, in the Syrian wars, and was reckoned "a mighty man of valour" in spite of the ill success of his wars. **Are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?** (see the comment on ch. i. 18).

Vers. 35, 36.—**And Jehu slept with his fathers: and they buried him in Samaria. And Jehoahaz his son reigned in his stead. And the time that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty and eight years.** Twenty-eight years was a long reign for an Israelite king, only exceeded by one other king in the entire list, viz. Jeroboam II., who is said in ch. xiv. 23 to have reigned forty-one years. **The kings of Judah were longer lived.**

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*The fear of man a stronger motive with the wicked and worldly than the fear of God.* Revolutions subject to severe trial most of those who occupy high stations at the time of their occurrence. Such persons have to determine, at very short notice for the most part, the line which they will pursue, the side which they will embrace, and the lengths to which they will go in their support of it. In making their choice they are apt to think less of what they ought to do than of what their worldly interests require them to do. They "are in a strait betwixt two"—on the one hand is the fear of man, on the other the fear of God. The one ought to prevail; the other commonly does prevail. Let us consider a little why this is so.

I. REASONS WHY THE FEAR OF GOD IS WEAK. 1. The wicked and worldly, who form, alas! the vast mass of mankind, do not generally even so much as realize the existence of God. They may not be absolute atheists, but practically they do not have God in their thoughts. 2. Those who believe in God and have *some* fear of him view him as distant, and his vengeance as a thing that may come or may not. He is merciful, and may be propitiated; he is compassionate, and may not be "extreme to mark what is done amiss." Men hope that he will forget their misdeeds, or forgive them for his Son's sake, or accept a tardy repentance as compensating for them and blotting them out. 3. Some view God as altogether benevolent and beneficent, and therefore as incapable of punishing men, forgetting that, if he is kind, he is also just, and, if he is forgiving, he is also jealous. They take their idea of God, not from what is revealed concerning him in Scripture, but from their own imaginations respecting him—imaginations which are echoes of their wishes.

II. REASONS WHY THE FEAR OF MAN IS STRONG. 1. Man is visibly present, and has a power to injure and punish which cannot be doubted. 2. Man's vengeance falls heavily and speedily. It is rarely delayed; and it is often of great severity. 3. It consists of pains and penalties which are more easily realized than those which God threatens. We know very well what is meant by the death of the body, but what the death of the soul may mean is obscure to us. 4. If we offend men, it is very unlikely that they will forgive us. Most men regard clemency as a weakness, and exact "the uttermost farthing" from those who, they think, have injured them.

Under these circumstances, the fear of man prevails. The rulers of Samaria, challenged by Jehu either to raise the standard of revolt against him, or definitely to embrace his cause, and mark their adhesion to it by embruing their hands in blood, must have balanced in their minds for a time the two alternatives—should they consent to slay, without offence alleged, seventy persons obnoxious to the powers that were, undeterred by fear of Divine vengeance, to escape the anger of Jehu? or should they brave his anger, and refuse to engage in the massacre required of them, out of regard for the Law of God (Exod. xx. 13), and through fear of the vengeance denounced by God upon such as contravened it (Gen. ix. 6)? They yielded to the lower, but more immediate, fear, and submitted themselves to be mere tools in Jehu's hands, because they feared man rather than God. Having made up their minds that their forces were insufficient to contend with those of Jehu, they put themselves at his disposal, and consented to do all that he required of them. So, constantly, in civil struggles, parties have put before them the alternative of following conscience and embroiling themselves with the civil authorities, or of defying those authorities, keeping their conscience clear, and observing the strict Law of God in the matters whereon they have to exercise a choice. Sometimes, as in the case of the Girondists, the better part is taken—duty, truth, virtue, are preferred to expediency, and martyrdom, a glorious martyrdom, is for the most part the consequence; but generally the result is different—expediency carries the day, and the sad spectacle is seen of men sacrificing their principles to their immediate interest, and consenting to wade through crime if they may preserve their worthless lives by so doing.

Vers. 8—11.—*The wicked have small regard for their helpers and confederates.* Jehu had made the authorities of Samaria his tools. He had required of them the performance of a wicked and bloody act, such as despotism has rarely exacted from its instruments. Seventy persons to be slain in the course of a few hours—for no offence, for no state necessity except to smooth the path of a usurper! And the seventy persons for the most part boys and youths, some probably infants, and these defenceless ones entrusted to the care and protection of those who were now called upon to take their lives! It was a tremendous burden to cast on men not previously his partisans, not bound to him by any interchange of good offices and benefits—rather, under the circumstances, his natural opponents and adversaries. Yet they took the burden on themselves; they accepted the miserable task assigned to them—they accepted it, and carried it out. No doubt they thought that by so doing they had bound the king to them, made him their debtor, and laid him under an obligation which he would not be slow to acknowledge. But the deed once done, the deaths once accomplished, and immediately the instigator of the crime turns against his accomplices. "Ye are righteous," he says to the crowd which has gathered together to gaze at the heads of the victims—"ye can discern aright; now judge between me and these murderers. I slew my master—I killed one man, a political necessity compelling me: *but who slew all these?*" He holds up his friends and allies, without the least compunction, to the popular odium. He entirely conceals the fact that he himself has been at the root of the whole matter, has conceived the massacre, and commanded it (ver. 6). He contrasts the terrible deed of blood, which has horrified all who have heard of it, with his own comparatively small crime, and claims to have his light offence condoned, overshadowed as it is by the heinous deed of the Samaritans. We do not know whether by his speech he provoked any popular outbreak. At the least, he turned the tide of popular disfavour from himself to his confederates, and left them to answer, as best they might, the serious question, "Who slew all these?" It is worth the preacher's while to impress on men the frequency of such conduct on the part of

the persons who conceive evil designs, but must have tools to execute them. There is no solidarity among those who are confederates in wickedness. We hear of "honour among thieves;" but it is often "conspicuous by its absence." Monarchs engaged in plots denounce and disgrace their agents, when the plots fail, even sometimes permitting their execution; ministers are conveniently oblivious of the services rendered by those who win elections by intimidation and bribery; even "head-centres" are apt to look coldly on the work done by "ratteners" or "moonlighters," and, instead of commending and rewarding them, are rather anxious to disclaim all complicity in their actions. If the poor tools knew beforehand how little benefit they would derive from their wicked violence, what small thanks they would get from those who set them on, and how ready these last would be, on any difficulty arising, to leave them in the lurch, they would scarcely lend themselves to the purposes of their instigators. It is one of the weaknesses of the kingdom of evil that its agents do not keep faith one with another. It would weaken the kingdom still more if the conviction were general that this is so, and that the subordinate agents who work out an end have little to look for in the way of reward or encouragement from their employers.

Vers. 15—23.—*Jehu and Jehonadab—the man of the world and the recluse ascetic.* Worldly policy often finds it advisable to call to its aid the sanctions of religion, and the support of those who stand high in popular estimation as religionists of more than ordinary strictness and sanctity. It is comparatively seldom in the East that a political revolution is effected without the assistance of a dervish or a mollah of high reputation for strictness of life, who throws over a questionable movement the halo of his reputed holiness. In the present instance we have, on the one hand—

I. JEHU, THE MAN OF THE WORLD, versed in the ways of courts, experienced in affairs both civil and military, a good general, popular with his brother-officers, prompt in action, decided, not overburdened with scruples, and at the same time subtle, inclined to gain his ends by cunning and artifice rather than by force. Circumstances have brought him to the front, and put the direction of a politico-religious movement into his hands; but the situation is not without its risks and dangers. Jehu, if he does not absolutely require, cannot but welcome, and feel his position strengthened by, any spiritual support. From the time that he took action, he had not received, and he did not dare to invite, the co-operation of Elisha. He could not expect that Elisha would approve the proceedings on which he was bent, involving, as they did, a large amount of falsehood and dissimulation. All the more, therefore, must he have rejoiced when help appeared from another quarter—help on which it is scarcely possible that he can have reckoned. Over against Jehu stands—

II. JEHONADAB THE SON OF RECHAB, a chief whose position is abnormal and peculiar. The tribe of the Rechabites, whose sheikh he was, was a branch of the Kenites, Midianitish Arabs apparently, settled at the time of the Exodus in the Sinaitic peninsula. The Kenites, or some of them, had accompanied the Israelites during a large part of their wanderings in the wilderness, and had been of great assistance to them (Numb. x. 29—32; 1 Sam. xv. 6); in return for which they were allowed to settle in Southern Judæa (Judg. i. 16) and other parts of the Holy Land (Judg. iv. 11). They retained, however, their nomadic habits, and were a wandering people, like our gipsies, in the midst of the settled inhabitants of Palestine. When the Rechabite tribe fell under the chieftainship of Jehonadab, he appears to have bound them down by stricter rules than they had previously observed, and to have required of them an austerity of life whereof there have been few examples in the history of nations (Jer. xxxv. 6, 7). They were to dwell in tents, avoid cities, drink no wine, and cultivate no land. Jehonadab must himself have been a recluse and an ascetic, or he would never have instituted such a "rule." He had probably the same sort of reputation as now attaches to a Mohammedan *santon* or *fakir*, and represented to the mind of his tribe, and even to numbers among the Israelites, the strict devout religionist, whose accession to a party or a cause stamped it at once with a high moral and religious character. Jehu needed Jehonadab; but there was not much to attract Jehonadab to Jehu. He would seem to have lent Jehu his countenance simply from a regard for the honour of Jehovah, and a detestation of the Baal-worship. But he would, perhaps, have done Jehovah more honour had he held himself

aloof from the crafty schemer who disgraced the cause of true religion by lies and treachery.

Vers. 29—33.—*Half-heartedness punished by God as severely as actual apostasy from true religion.* The temper of the Laodiceans is no uncommon one. Men may even think that they have a "zeal for the Lord" (ver. 16), and yet show by their acts that it is a very half-hearted zeal—a zeal that goes a certain length, and then stops suddenly. There is no reason to doubt that Jehu honestly disliked, nay, perhaps detested, the religion of Baal. It was an effeminate, sensual, weakening, debasing system, which a rough soldier might well view with abhorrence. Jehu was honest and earnest in his opposition to it, as he showed by the measures which he took to put it down. They were no half-measures—they stamped out the religion, for the time at any rate (ver. 28). But with this destructive process his zeal terminated. He did not go on to consider what he could do to reintroduce and stimulate the true worship of Jehovah. Had his thoughts moved in this direction, he would have been brought face to face with the calf-worship, and would have had to consider seriously the question of its maintenance or abolition. But this question probably never presented itself to his mind. He was not possessed by any real love of God, or desire to worship him in spirit and in truth. Had he been, he would have called in the advice and help of Elisha, and taken counsel with him as to what was best to be done. But this is exactly what he does not do. He comes into no contact with Elisha. After delivering his one great attack upon Baalism, he rests upon his oars, and is "neither cold nor hot" (Rev. iii. 15). Consequently, punishment falls upon him. Hazael "smites him in all his coasts." While the apostate Ahab and his dynasty had maintained the kingdom, on the whole, without serious loss or diminution of power, Jehu loses province after province to Syria, is deprived of all his trans-Jordanic territories, and induced to submit to the indignity of paying tribute to Assyria. God punishes his lukewarmness as severely—may we not say more severely than Ahab's open rebellion?

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—11.—*Ahab's sons put to death.* Jehu's commission is to cut off utterly the whole house of Ahab. Like a moral plague was the iniquity of Ahab's house. Every member of it, by heredity, by example, by association, shared the guilt of Ahab and Jezebel. There is a good moral reason for the extermination of such a nest of evil-doers. But Jehu was not troubled with many scruples or difficulties. He had got a certain work to do, and he did it. We have here—

I. FAITHLESS SERVANTS. The general corruption and demoralization were manifest in the way in which Ahab's sons were treated by the elders of Samaria, and those that brought up Ahab's children. It was no zeal for what was right, no particular hatred of what was wrong, that caused them to yield so complaisantly to Jehu's real wish. Jehu, indeed, satirized them to their face. He made it appear as if he really wanted them to defend their master's children and fight for their master's house. It would not have been unnatural to expect this from them. But they were sore afraid. Not only were they willing, in their craven cowardice, to surrender Ahab's children to Jehu, to let him work his own will on them, but they actually slew them with their own hands, and sent their heads to Jehu. *Where there is unfaithfulness toward God, there will be unfaithfulness in the relations between man and man.* Fickleness is a characteristic of the world's friendships. Deception is a characteristic of the world's business. But the Christian will be faithful to duty, to conscience, to God. "He sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not" (Ps. xv. 4).

II. THE UNFAILING WORD. "There shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of the Lord, which the Lord spake concerning the house of Ahab: for the Lord hath done that which he spake by his servant Elijah." Every judgment of God which was threatened upon Ahab's house was fulfilled. God's judgments upon Israel—how literally and fully have they been fulfilled! Every judgment pronounced against sin is sure of certain and complete fulfilment. *So also God's promises will be fulfilled.* Not a single promise of God was ever broken. Why, then, should any of us doubt his

word, his willingness to receive, his power to save, his desire to pardon? "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."—C. H. I.

Vers. 12—14.—*Ahaziah's brethren put to death.* Fresh from the scene of retribution and bloodshed at Jezreel, Jehu is now on his way to Samaria. At the shearing-house on the way he meets the brethren of Ahaziah King of Judah. Ahaziah himself had already perished at Jehu's hands for his companionship with Jehoram. And now his brethren, not warned by Ahaziah's fate, go down "to salute the children of the king and the children of the queen." Jehu's vengeance on Ahab's house was searching and complete. He had already slain at Jezreel not only Ahab's kinsfolk, but his great men and his priests—all who in any way showed favour or encouragement to Ahab. In the same spirit he now puts to death these brethren of Ahaziah because of their relationship and sympathy with Ahab's house. Note here—

I. THE RESULTS OF EVIL COMPANIONSHIP. "The companion of fools," says the wise man, "shall be destroyed." These brethren of Ahaziah might have pleaded that they were doing no harm. But the house of Ahab was notorious for its wickedness. It had been singled out for the terrible retribution of God. To keep up friendship with men and women so wicked was to become a partaker of their crimes. The old Latin proverb was *Noscitur a sociis*—"A man is known by the company he keeps." If we would avoid the fate of the wicked, let us avoid their fellowship. "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

II. THE RESULT OF UNHEEDED WARNINGS. The brethren of Ahaziah had already got a warning in the fate which had befallen their brother. But notwithstanding this, they went on to their own destruction. So men act every day. 1. *God's Word warns them, but in vain.* They laugh to scorn the message of the gospel that urges them to accept salvation, and to flee from the wrath to come. They act as the people in the days of Noah, who disregarded the warnings of that faithful, patient preacher, and knew not till the flood came and swept them all away. 2. *God's providences warn them, but in vain.* Sudden deaths remind them of life's uncertainty. Perhaps for a day or two they are impressed; and then they become engrossed with the world again. If one were to speak to them about their soul, they would say, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." 3. *God's judgments warn them, but in vain.* The intemperate man, the immoral man, the dishonest man, infatuated with evil desires, go on in their sinful courses, notwithstanding the ruin and misery, the premature deaths, the unhappy lives, the degradation and disgrace, which so many have suffered in consequence of these sins. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh."—C. H. I.

Vers. 15—31.—*The zeal of Jehu, and its lessons.* Jehu is now going up to Samaria with the resolve to destroy the prophets of Baal firmly rooted in his heart. On his way he meets Jehonadab the son of Rechab. This Jehonadab was the founder of the Rechabites. It was he who commanded his children to drink no wine, to build no houses, and plant no vineyards, but to live in tents all their days—a command which was so scrupulously obeyed by their descendants that the Lord instructed the Prophet Jeremiah to hold them up as an example of obedience to the Jews in after-years; and with this obedience God was so much pleased that he made the promise that Jonadab the son of Rechab should not want a man to stand before him for ever. It was this simple-minded, temperate, self-denying man whom Jehu met in his career of vengeance and ambition, and whom doubtless he wanted to associate with himself in order to give a measure of respectability to his further proceedings. He invited him into his chariot, and said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord."

I. THERE WAS MUCH THAT WAS GOOD ABOUT JEHU'S ZEAL. From the day that Jehu got his work to do, he lost no time in the doing of it. He was eminently a man of action. That he had good qualities no one can doubt. There are many things that are attractive about Jehu. He was a brave and fearless soldier. *Decision, earnestness, promptness, thoroughness,*—these were the chief features of his character. His decided

character impressed itself on every detail of his life. When he was still far off from Jezreel, the watchman upon the city wall was able to distinguish him in the dim distance by the way he drove his horses. "The driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously." He did not waste many words. When the messengers of King Jehoram rode out to meet him with the question, "Is it peace?" his answer to one after the other of them, without reining in his horses for a moment, was, "What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me." Neither did he waste words when he came to deal with Jezebel and Jehoram. He knew that in such work as he was engaged there is danger in delay. We may learn much from what was good in Jehu's character. Zeal itself is a grand thing. It is men of zeal who have revolutionized the world. Moses was a man of zeal. So was Elijah. So was Daniel. So was St. Paul. So was Martin Luther. So was John Knox. All these men were mocked at as fools and fanatics and enthusiasts in their time. But every one of those men has left his mark for good upon the history of the world. We may say the same of such enthusiasts as William Wilberforce and John Howard, and, to come to more modern times, as Plimsoll, the sailors' friend. It is the world's enthusiasts that have been its greatest benefactors. Yes; we want more zeal; we want more enthusiasm. It is the fashion amongst many to sneer at enthusiasm, and to mock at zeal. But let those who mock at enthusiasm show what they can do compared with what the enthusiasts have done. Give me the man who has an enthusiasm about something. Give me the man who thinks that life is worth living, and that there is something worth living for. Let it be study, let it be business, let it be one of the learned professions,—the man who has enthusiasm in his work is the man that is most likely to succeed. If there is any one who should show enthusiasm, it is *the Christian*. Who should be so full of zeal? Who has so much cause to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory? Who can point to such a leader as the great Captain of our salvation? What example so inspiring as the example of Christ? What name is such a watchword as the precious Name of Jesus—the Name above every name? Who can look forward to such a prospect as that which awaits the faithful Christian? "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." Who has such resources at his disposal as the Christian for work and conflict? Zeal! surely the Christian ought to overflow with zeal. Zeal! when he thinks of his Saviour and his cross. Zeal! when he thinks that heaven with all its glory awaits him. Zeal! when he thinks of the welcome from the King. Zeal! when he thinks how short his time is here. Zeal! when he thinks of the perishing and needy all around him. Yes; it is well to have within your heart the glow and fire of Christian zeal. What if the careless and the callous, the godless and the worldly, mock? You have a heart, you have a hope, you have a strength, that is above their shallow sneers. And, having Christian zeal, let it not spend itself in mere sentiment, profession, or words. But let it show itself in action prompt and decisive, in earnestness and thoroughness of life. "Whatever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men."

II. THERE WAS MUCH THAT WAS WRONG, AND THERE WAS SOMETHING WANTING, IN JEHU'S ZEAL. 1. *There was much that was wrong mingled with Jehu's zeal.* (1) In the first place, there was *boastfulness*. "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord." The man who thus parades his good deeds is lacking in one of the first elements of true goodness and usefulness, and that is humility. Yet there has been a good deal of that kind of zeal for God in all ages. The Pharisees considered themselves very zealous for the Law of God, but they sounded a trumpet before them when they gave their alms, and loved to pray standing at the corner of the streets. We have not the sounding of the trumpet nowadays in the same form, but we have other ways of making known our generous and philanthropic acts. There is nothing wrong in these acts being made known. On the contrary, a public acknowledgment of charitable and religious contributions is necessary to guard against fraudulence and deceit. It is of use also to remind others of their duty and stimulate them, perhaps, to greater liberality. But when we give our alms in order that we may be known to have given them—"to be seen of men"—we give from a wrong motive—we do that which Christ condemned. It is the same with all branches of Christian work. And it seems to be one of the dangers of modern Christian life that there is too much temptation to boast of mere numbers in our Churches, or of so much money accumulated, or of so many converts made,

Too many Christian workers act like Jehu when he said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord." True Christian work is far quieter than this. (2) There was something worse than boastfulness in Jehu's zeal. *There was cruel treachery and deceit.* When he came to Samaria, he gathered all the people together and said, "Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much." Then, under the pretence of offering a great sacrifice to Baal, he assembled all the worshippers of Baal in the temple of that false deity, and, having thus unfairly and deceitfully entrapped them, caused them to be put to death. It was an act of deceit for which there was no excuse. Matthew Henry truly observes, "God's service requires not man's lie." What a contrast to Elijah's honest, outspoken conduct when he, single-handed, confronted the prophets of Baal, and put their god and his God to the test! No cause will ever prosper, no matter how much zeal may be manifested in it, if it is built up by the treachery and deceit of those who are at the head of it. Let us never so far accommodate ourselves to the false morality of our time as to do evil that good may come. God can, and does, bring good out of evil. But those who do the evil must suffer for it, according to that Divine law of retribution which was so plainly and terribly fulfilled in the case of Ahab and Jezebel. 2. In addition to all this, *there was something wanting in all Jehu's zeal.* He had not the love of God in his heart. He had indeed obeyed God's command and fulfilled his commission *in one particular direction,* but the ruling motive in his actions would seem to have been personal ambition. It was no hatred of idolatry as such that caused him to destroy the worship of Baal. Perhaps it was because it was a foreign worship. It certainly was not his zeal for the pure worship of God, because we read, "Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan" (ver. 29). And again, "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart" (ver. 31). We may learn here that a man may have the outward form of godliness without the power of it. He may appear to be a foremost worker in the cause of religion, and yet have no religion in his own heart. He may even appear to be a great religious reformer, and yet he may be utterly destitute of any personal reformation of character. *Jehu was able to pull down, but he built nothing up.* Why? Because his own character and life were not founded on the rock. He had not begun at the beginning—the fear of God and the Law of God. "He took no heed to walk in the Law of God with all his heart." See to it that your zeal springs from a right motive, and that it works in ways of which God will approve.

III. NOTE HERE SOME LESSONS ABOUT GOD'S DEALINGS. 1. *God often makes use of even godless men.* Perhaps you start at this. Yes; but it is true. *He uses them for certain purposes.* There are some things which do not require a high kind of character. So God sometimes uses even wicked men to be the executioners of his judgments. The kings and nations whom he used to execute his judgments upon Israel were by no means righteous themselves. Many of them were grossly corrupt. But they were the rod in his hand to chasten and punish his offending people. We might give many illustrations from history. To take one only. King Henry VIII. of England was far from being a model man, yet God in his all-wise providence used his quarrel with the pope to be the means of furthering and establishing the Reformation in England. It was in the time of Henry VIII. that for the first time the papal supremacy in England was overthrown. 2. *God gives such agents of his justice and providence their own reward.* We find this in the case of Jehu. For the good he had done, God rewarded him. He had set his heart on the throne, and God gave it to him. The measure of our desires is very often the measure of our blessings. If we set our ambition on earthly rank, or riches, or honour as our chief good, we shall very likely get them. But in getting them we shall perhaps lose something that is far better worth having. "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" 3. *For God's work of salvation, he uses consecrated men.* Jehu was of use as a destroyer, as an image-breaker, but he was no national or moral reformer in the true sense. He was of no spiritual benefit to others. For such work God uses only those who themselves have received spiritual blessing. *There is a limit to the extent and to the ways in which he will use godless men.* Even David—God's own servant, who had repented of his sins—was not permitted to build a house to his Name,

because his hands were stained with blood; he had been a man of war all his days. David was permitted to provide and store up the material, but to Solomon, David's son, was given the great honour of building a temple to the God of Israel. If we want to be of use in God's service, we must be thoroughly consecrated to God. We must be vessels meet for the Master's use. "Their hands must be clean, who bear the vessels of the Lord." It is personal character that gives power for God's service. It is personal character that gives fitness for God's fellowship here and hereafter. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—14.—*Destruction of Ahab's house.* Jehu was not a man to do things by halves. Whatever matter he had in hand, he pushed with unhesitating feet to his goal. His motto was, "If it were then done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly." This vigorous determination is a feature in his character worthy of commendation. It is not so clear that the craft and guile he employed in securing his ends were, even from an Old Testament standpoint, justifiable.

I. THE CRAFTY MESSAGE. No small amount of craft, as this chapter shows, mingled with Jehu's headlong zeal. 1. *The seed royal in Samaria.* The direct posterity of Ahab—here called Ahab's sons—amounted to seventy persons. Some may have been his own children, others the children of Jehoram, or of his other sons. They resided at Samaria, and were under the care of nobles responsible for their education and up-bringing. On them, too, the judgment of God was to fall. In itself it was a common Oriental practice for the founder of a new dynasty to put to death the descendants and blood-relations of his predecessor (cf. 1 Kings xv. 29; xvi. 11; ch. xi. 1; xxv. 7). This was to protect the new ruler from blood-vengeance. In the present case the destruction was by direct command of Heaven. The principle of corporate responsibility for sins committed is recognized and acted on throughout the Old Testament (see Mozley's 'Ruling Ideas of the Old Testament'). It embodies a truth of permanent validity (Matt. xxiii. 34, 35). Nevertheless, a pathos attends a fate like that of Ahab's sons. "Whirled down," as Carlyle says of other unfortunates, "so suddenly to the abyss; as men are, suddenly, by the wide thunder of the mountain avalanche, awakened not by *them*, awakened far off by others!" 2. *The crafty letter.* Having struck his first blow, Jehu lost no time in delivering his second. But instead of openly advancing to Samaria, and demanding the surrender of the seventy sons, he proceeds by guile. His policy was, not to put the nobles and elders in Samaria in opposition to him, but to gain them to his side. His further object was to implicate those persons in his deeds, by making them the direct agents in the slaughter of Ahab's sons. The manner in which he accomplished these ends shows no little skill. He first sends a letter to the great men in the capital, offering them a challenge to open war. He recounts to them their advantages—the presence of their master's sons, a fortified city, horses, chariots, armour, etc.; then bids them select the one of Ahab's descendants whom they think most suitable, and make him king, and fight for their master's house. This put the nobles in the dilemma, either of getting up an improvised resistance to Jehu, or of making unconditional submission. No time was given them to consider. They must decide at once, and that, in circumstances like theirs, meant only submission. 3. *The submissive reply.* The course taken by the nobles and elders was what Jehu anticipated. A terrible panic took possession of them. They saw how vain it was to attempt war with the most popular and energetic general in the army, backed as he was by the support of other captains. They had no head, and, notwithstanding Jehu's sarcastic list of their advantages, no proper means of defence. The fact that two kings—not to speak of Jezebel—had already fallen before this "scourge of God" added to their dismay. With the unanimity of despair, "he that was over the house, and he that was over the city, the elders also, and the bringers up of the children," indited a humble epistle, sent it to Jehu, and put themselves entirely in his hands, offering to do whatever he bade them. Necessity is a terrible tyrant. How many things men yield to force and fear which they would not yield to reason or persuasion!

II. THE TREACHEROUS MASSACRE. 1. *The new demand.* Jehu took the leaders at their word, and sent them the conditions of his acceptance of their submission. If

they were his, and would hearken to his voice, the proof of allegiance he would require of them would be that they bring to him by the same hour to-morrow the heads of their master's sons. The requisition was peremptory, the time given brief, and they had already committed themselves by promising obedience to whatever Jehu wished. Their case was a hard one; nevertheless, the act they were called upon to perform was, from their side, a revolting and treacherous one. 2. *Ahab's sons slain.* Hateful as the requirement was, the nobles and elders of Samaria, now that they had come to terms with Jehu, do not seem to have shown any hesitation in carrying it out. The sons of Ahab had been entrusted to their care; they had no quarrel with them; they did not profess to be moved by any regard for a command of God; yet now that policy and their own safety dictated that their charges should be given up to death, they acquiesced without a murmur. This shows the weakness of moral feeling in the ruling classes of Samaria. It shows how utterly rotten were all the bonds that bound man to man. The willingness with which the men of Jezreel swore away Naboth's life at Jezebel's command (1 Kings xix.) was one instance, and here is another. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man" (Ps. cxlvi. 3). Political morality is of the weakest fibre. For some paltry interest men will turn their backs to-morrow on the most sacred professions of to-day. They will forswear the closest friendships, stoop even to the lowest treachery. 3. *Jehu's public appeal.* That very evening apparently, the heads of Ahab's sons were brought to Jehu in baskets. He bade them be piled in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until the morning. Then, standing in the gateway, he called the people to witness that the leaders in Samaria were as deeply incriminated as he. They, the people whom he addressed, were "righteous," *i.e.* clear from blood-guiltiness, and might be disposed to judge him severely for his acts of the previous day. He acknowledged that he had conspired against his master, and had slain him; but—pointing to the pyramids of heads—who had slain all these? In truth, he went on to aver, not any of them were guilty, for this was but the fulfilment of the word of the Lord which he had spoken by Elijah. (1) Jehu was right in his averment, "Know now that there shall fall to the earth nothing of the word of the Lord." Many demonstrations of that fact have been given. We do well to impress the truth upon our minds. (2) It is a common thing for men to shield themselves from the consequences of their acts by pleading that others are as guilty as they are. This, however, will not justify them.

III. AHAZIAH'S BRETHREN. A further act in the tragedy of the destruction of Ahab's house took place at a certain shearing-house on the road to Samaria. Thither forty-two brethren (kinsmen) of Ahaziah had come down on their way to pay a pleasure visit to their relations, the princes at the capital. They were apparently as yet unaware of the revolution that had taken place. It was, however, to prove a costly visit to them. Jehu, fresh from his work of blood, encountered them at the shearing-house, and, on ascertaining who they were, had them all put to death on the spot. Their bodies were cast into the pit of the place. In pursuit of their pleasures, how many, like Ahaziah's brethren, have found themselves overtaken by death! The way of pleasure is, for many, the way of death—the way to the pit of destruction.—J. O.

Vers. 15—28.—*Destruction of the worshippers of Baal.* The plans of Jehu were already assuming larger shape. He had now a scheme in view for rooting Baal entirely out of the land.

I. THE MEETING WITH JEHONADAB. 1. *A helpful ally.* While relying mainly on his own promptitude and energy, Jehu had a shrewd eye to whatever would help to strengthen his position before the people. Hasting to Samaria in his chariot, he met a man of much reputation for sanctity—Jehonadab the son of Rechab. As a protest against the corruption and luxury of his time, Jehonadab had withdrawn from life in cities, and had laid upon his sons a vow that they would drink no wine, neither build houses, nor plant vineyards, but would dwell in tents all their days (Jer. xxxv. 6, 7). To get this man of ascetic virtue on his side would, Jehu felt, greatly fortify his claims. It would give colour and repute to his proceedings. Jehu at once sounded Jehonadab as to his feelings in regard to him, and finding that Jehonadab's heart was as his heart, he extended his hand to the anchorite, and took him up with him into his chariot. It is noticeable how anxious men who make no pretensions to godliness often

are to get the countenance and approval of good men for their deeds. Hypocrisy has been called the homage which vice pays to virtue, and this desire for the approval of a holy man is, in another form, the tribute of worldly policy to the superior power of character. 2. *Zeal for the Lord.* "Come with me," said Jehu, "and see my zeal for the Lord." (1) Of Jehu's "zeal," in itself considered, there could be no question. Zeal was his most prominent characteristic. His zeal is seen in his eager haste to attain his ends, in his scouting of difficulties, in the thoroughness with which each piece of work is accomplished, in the quickness and skill of his devices. Such zeal is in large measure a natural endowment—a thing of temperament. Still, it is an essential to success in practical undertakings, spiritual as well as worldly. The man who gets on is the man who does not let the grass grow beneath his feet, who is an enthusiast in what he takes in hand. "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing" (Gal. iv. 18). (2) More doubtful is the quality of Jehu's zeal "for the Lord." Ostensibly it was God's will Jehu was carrying out; outwardly it was God's work he was doing. He may even have persuaded himself into the belief that he was honestly and disinterestedly serving God's ends. But the result showed that, in serving God, it was really his own ends Jehu was serving. His zeal was impure. It was largely inspired by selfish ambition, by considerations of policy, by the thought of the reward to himself. It was impure also in its admixture of craft and worldly expediency. Had the same service been proposed to Jehu without any apparent material advantages to himself, his zeal would not have been so easily evoked. (3) Similarly, how much that passes for "zeal for the Lord" in this world is of the same impure nature! How much of it is inspired by sectarian rivalry, by party spirit, by the desire to make "a fair show in the flesh" (Gal. vi. 12), by self-interest and worldly policy! How largely is it alloyed with human passion and intrigue! Truly we do well to examine ourselves. Zeal is to be tested, not by its passing and spasmodic exhibitions, but by its power of endurance amidst good report and evil report. 3. *The end of Ahab's house.* When Jehu reached Samaria with Jehonadab, he made an end of all that remained of the family of Ahab—the word of the Lord by Elijah being thus completely fulfilled.

II. THE FEAST TO BAAL. 1. *Jehu's proclamation.* Hitherto Jehu had acted without giving to any one much explanation of his motives and designs. He had denounced to Jehoram Jezebel's idolatries and witchcrafts; he had whispered to Jehonadab of his "zeal for the Lord;" but to the eye of the crowd his proceedings bore only the complexion of an ordinary political conspiracy. Having established himself upon the throne, the stage was clear for the revelation of his own intentions. And great dismay must have spread through the ranks of all those who looked for a revival of true religion from the downfall of Ahab's house, when the first public manifesto of the new king proclaimed him an enthusiastic worshipper of Baal. "Ahab," were his words, "served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much." If Ahab's service of Baal was reckoned little, what was to be expected from one who would serve him so much more? It was certain that, whatever Jehu did, he would do it with abounding zeal. If he took up Baal's cause, there was no saying to what lengths he would carry it, or what severities he would employ to crush rival worships. Terrible disappointment would seize the hearts of the worshippers of Jehovah; and the servants of Baal, who had thought their cause destroyed, would be correspondingly elated. It is good neither to be unduly uplifted nor too heavily cast down at unexpected turns in public affairs. Those who rely for the success of their cause on the favours of great men are apt to be sorely disappointed. 2. *The deluded assembly.* It seemed at the first as if Jehu were to be every whit as good as his word. His proclamation not only included a declaration of his fixed intention to worship Baal, but gave effect to that intention by summoning a great assembly of the prophets, priests, and servants of Baal, to be held in the house of Baal at Samaria. A day was set apart, and the assembly was proclaimed throughout all Israel. The king was to offer a great sacrifice, publicly ratifying his avowal of allegiance to the heathen god. From all parts of the land the worshippers of Baal come trooping up, and the spacious courts of the great "house of Baal" were filled to overflowing. As if to give the highest possible *éclat* to the occasion, Jehu first ordered vestments to be produced from the temple or palace robe-chamber, and given to the worshippers; then he caused search to be made that none but servants of Baal were present. The worshippers of Baal were charmed; yet in truth they were

there as sheep gathered together for the slaughter. All this, we are told, "Jehu did in subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal." It is impossible to condone this flagrant hypocrisy, which even went the length of offering up a sacrifice to the false god. How unlike the open challenge of Elijah, who gave orders, indeed, for the destruction of Baal's prophets, but only after they had been publicly convicted of imposture (1 Kings xviii.)! We must not do evil, even that good may come. We see, however, how sometimes the wicked are on the very brink of their destruction when their hearts are most lifted up (Esth. v. 11, 12; Ps. lxxiii. 18—20). Things are not always what they seem. It is no uncommon thing to see the haters of truth given up to believe a delusion, that they may be destroyed.

III. BAAL ROOTED OUT. 1. *The guards posted.* While the festal throng is rejoicing within, eighty strong guards are posted without by the wily Jehu, to secure that none shall escape. To the captains and guard are committed the task of actual slaughter. 2. *Jehu's sacrifice.* Proceeding to the interior, Jehu takes part in the various solemnities. At length the worship reaches its climax in the offering of the great burnt offering of the king. This, as remarked above, was an act not to be justified. It showed how little Jehu understood the spiritual nature of God, or was sincerely desirous of serving him, when he could bring himself to promote God's cause by going through this idolatrous farce. Is it, however, worse than many other things that are professedly done in the Name, and ostensibly for the honour, of God? 3. *A promiscuous slaughter.* When the festivity was thus at its height, Jehu gave the word, and, the soldiers entering, an indiscriminate and merciless slaughter took place. Not one of Baal's worshippers was allowed to escape. It was a fearful massacre, but seems effectually to have rooted Baal-worship out of the land. The slaughter of the deluded votaries was followed by the breaking down of the house of Baal, with its pillars, images, etc. The retribution in itself was righteous, and shadows forth the terrible, sudden, and overwhelming ruin that shall yet overtake all God's enemies. But the deed of vengeance is sadly stained with human passion, deceit, and wrong.—J. O.

Vers. 29—36.—*The reign of Jehu.* Under this head we note—

I. JEHU'S REWARD. 1. *Four generations on the throne.* Jehu had outwardly fulfilled the commission given him by God, and had wrought a great deliverance for Israel. This public service God acknowledged by the promise that his sons should sit upon the throne to the fourth generation. The service was outward, and the reward was outward. Approval of Jehu's deeds did not extend to approval of every detail in his conduct. The limit—"fourth generation"—already implies that Jehu was not all he should have been, and anticipates that his sons would not be morally better, else the line would have been continued. 2. *The stain of blood.* Jehu had shed much blood. Guilt could not be imputed to him in this, so far as he was acting under an express Divine command. He "delivered his soul" (Ezek. xxxiii. 9), however, only if this Divine command furnished the actual motive of his conduct. If the Divine mandate but covered designs of selfish ambition, the stain of blood came back on him. Hence the different judgment passed on these deeds in Hos. i. 4, "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu." In 2 Kings Jehu's acts are regarded on their outward side, while in Hosea they are considered on their inner and spiritual side. His real character was made apparent by his subsequent deeds. He obeyed God only so far as he could at the same time serve himself. He would willingly have shed the same amount of blood to secure the throne for himself, had there been no Divine command at all. It hence became impossible to exonerate him from a measure of blood-guiltiness. By making himself one with Ahab in his sins, Jehu fell back to the position of an ordinary manslayer.

II. JEHU'S FAILURE. 1. *His sin.* Generally it is affirmed that, after his elevation to the throne, "he took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart," and particularly it is charged against him that he did not remove the golden calves of Jeroboam. He continued that idolatrous and schismatic worship at Bethel and at Dan. This means that his "zeal for the Lord" stopped short at the point needed for the consolidation of his own power. Once seated on the throne, with no more blood of Ahab's house to shed, he became indifferent to religious reform. The self-will that underlay his pretended zeal for God thus became apparent. It seemed to

him politically prudent to keep up the division of the kingdoms by perpetuating the calf-worship of Jeroboam; so, though he knew it was wrong, he refrained from interfering with it. We see in this the distinction between true and false zeal. True zeal for God is careful above all things to walk in God's ways. It honours his commandment above considerations of expediency. It is not spasmodic, but persists in well-doing. False zeal, on the contrary, is fitful and wilful. It is moved when self-interest, or private passion, or inclination, or the praise of men, coincides with the Divine command; it throws off the mask when religion and interest point in opposite directions. It is time alone can test the quality of zeal. 2. *His punishment.* We find that after his declension Jehu suffered severe losses of territory. Hazael and the Syrians pressed in, and took from him most of the land on the east side of Jordan. It is not difficult to connect the two things as cause and effect. Had Jehu remained faithful to God, it is not to be thought that he would have suffered these losses. Because he did not remain faithful, he was scourged more severely than perhaps another man would have been. He was raised up to punish others, and, foreseeing his declension, an instrument had been prepared to punish him (ch. viii. 12). When God was against him, his generalship and valour were of no avail. We are thus taught that true self-interest and irreligion do not coincide. Jehu sought his own ends, and, as a politic ruler, thought it wiser to disobey God than to run the risk of putting down a popular idolatry. The result showed how short-sighted his calculations were. The wisest course, even for our own interests, is to do what God requires.

Nothing more is told of the twenty-eight years' reign of Jehu. He was buried in Samaria, and his son Jehoahaz succeeded him.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XI.

Vers. 1—21.—REVOLUTION IN JUDAH, FOLLOWING THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS IN ISRAEL. REIGN OF ATHALIAH OVER JUDAH. CONSPIRACY OF JEHOIADA, AND DEATH OF ATHALIAH.

Vers. 1—3.—On learning the death of Ahaziah (ch. ix. 27), Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, the queen-mother, murders all her grandchildren (except the youngest, Joash, who is secreted by his aunt, Jehosheba) and seizes the kingdom. No resistance is made to her, and she retains the sole authority for six years. The worship of Baal, introduced by Jehoram into Judah, and supported by Ahaziah (ch. viii. 27), is maintained by her (ch. xi. 18).

Ver. 1.—**And when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead.** (On Athaliah, see the comment upon ch. viii. 18.) She was married to Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, probably in the lifetime of his father, to cement the alliance concluded between Ahab and Jehoshaphat against the Syrians (1 Kings xxii. 2—4). She inherited much of her mother Jezebel's character, obtained an unlimited ascendancy over her husband, Jehoram, and kept her son Ahaziah in leading-strings. It was unquestionably through her influence that Jehoram was prevailed upon to introduce the Baal-worship into Judah (ch. viii. 18; 2 Chron. xxi. 5, 11), and Ahaziah prevailed upon to maintain it (ch. viii. 27; 2 Chron. xxii. 3, "He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: *for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly*"). On the death of Ahaziah, she found her position seriously imperilled. The crown would have passed naturally to one of her grandchildren, the eldest of the sons of Ahaziah. She would have lost her position of *gebirah*, or queen-mother, which would have passed to the widow of Ahaziah, the mother of the new sovereign. If she did not at once lose all influence, at any rate a counter-influence to hers would have been established; and this might well have been that of the high priest, who was closely connected by marriage with the royal family. Under these circumstances, she took the bold resolution described in the next clause. **She arose and destroyed all the seed royal.** She issued her orders, and had all the members of the house of David on whom she could lay her hands put to death. The royal house had already been greatly depleted by Jehoram's murder of his brothers (2 Chron. xxi. 4), by Arab marauders (2 Chron. xxi. 17), and by Jehu's murder of the "brethren of Ahaziah" (ch. x. 14); but it is clear that Ahaziah had left several sons behind him, and some of his "brethren" had also, in all probability, left issue. There may also have been many other descendants of David in Judah, belonging to other branches of the

house than that of Rehoboam. Athaliah, no doubt, endeavoured to make a clean sweep, and get rid of them all.

Ver. 2.—**But Jehosheba** ("Jehoshabeath," Chronicles; "Josabethé," Josephus). **The daughter of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah**—half-sister, according to Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 7. § 1), the daughter of Joram by a secondary wife, not by Athaliah—**took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons** which were slain. As aunt of the royal children, Jehosheba would have free entrance into the palace, and liberty to visit all the apartments. She did not dare openly to oppose Athaliah's will, but contrived secretly to save one of the intended victims, the smallest of them, an infant of a year old (*παιδίον ἐνιαύσιον*, Josephus). His tender age, probably, moved her compassion, and induced her to select him from the rest. **And they hid him,** even **him and his nurse.** The order in the Hebrew is, "even him and his nurse, and they hid him," which clears the sense. Jehosheba stole away Joash and his nurse, and they, *i.e.* Jehosheba and the nurse together, hid him between them. **In the bedchamber;** rather, *in the chamber of mattresses*—a room in the palace where mattresses, and perhaps coverlets, were stored. Chardin notes ('Works,' vol. iii. p. 357) that there is usually such a room in an Oriental palace, which is only used as a store-chamber, and not as a dwelling-room. **From Athaliah, so that he was not slain.** Athaliah's servants may not have been very anxious to carry out her cruel orders to the uttermost, and may have made no very careful search.

Ver. 3.—**And he was with her**—he, *i.e.* Joash, was with her, *i.e.* Jehosheba, his aunt—**hid in the house of the Lord**; *i.e.* the temple. We learn from Chronicles (2 Chron. xxii. 11) that Jehosheba was married to Jehoiada, the high priest, and would thus have ready access to the temple. We must suppose that, after a few days' concealment in the "chamber of mattresses," Jehosheba found an opportunity of transferring him, with his nurse, to a chamber in the temple, where he was thenceforward nourished and brought up. There were various chambers in the temple used for secular purposes, as we learn from 1 Kings vi. 5—8 and Neh. xiii. 5—9. **Six years** (comp. ver. 21 and 2 Chron. xxiv. 1). **And Athaliah did reign over the land.** It is difficult to realize all that this implies. It cannot mean less than that for six years Baalism was triumphant in Judah—the temple was allowed to fall into decay (ch. xii. 5)—a temple to Baal was erected in Jerusalem itself, to supersede the temple of Jehovah (ch. xi. 18), and a high priest appointed to be a rival to the successor of Aaron. Whether persecution was indulged in, as under Jehoram (2 Chron. xxi. 11), is uncertain; but the servants of Jehovah were at any rate under a cloud, slighted, contemned, held as of small account. Perhaps we may conclude, from the position occupied by Jehoiada, and from the powers which he was able to exercise when he determined on revolt (ver. 4; 2 Chron. xxiii. 1, 2), that Athaliah, during her six years' reign, was to some extent held in check by a Jehovistic party, which she knew to exist, and which she did not dare openly to defy. Thus she left Jehoiada (apparently) in possession of the temple, of its treasures and its armoury (ver. 10); she allowed the temple service to continue (2 Chron. xxiii. 4—7); she permitted the priests and the Levites to serve in their regular "courses" (2 Chron. xxiii. 8); she let the fortress of the eastern city—for the temple was always a fortress—remain in her enemies' hands. Still, the time was evidently one "of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy:" the oppressed worshippers of Jehovah were greatly discontented; and the nation generally was ripe for a counter-revolution, so soon as the signal was given by an authority whom they could trust.

Vers. 4—16.—*Conspiracy of Jehoiada.* After waiting, impatiently we may be sure, for six long years, and seeing the young prince grow from an infant to a boy of seven years of age, Jehoiada deemed that the time was come to venture on an effort. It was necessary for him to make his arrangements beforehand with great care. His first step was to sound the captains of the royal guard. To these men, five in number (2 Chron. xxiii. 1), he sent secretly, and invited them to confer with him in the temple on important business. Finding them well disposed to adopt his views, he revealed to them the fact that Joash had escaped the massacre of Ahaziah's sons, and was still living, even allowing them to see him. The result of the interview was that they put themselves at Jehoiada's disposal, and agreed to take their orders from him (ver. 4). Jehoiada then proceeded to his second step. Either distrusting the body-guard which the captains commanded, or regarding it as insufficient in numbers, he gave them orders to visit the various cities of Judæa, and collect from them a strong force of Levites and other trusty persons, and bring them to Jerusalem (2 Chron. xxiii. 2), where he would give them their orders. This was

done successfully, and, as it would seem, without in any way rousing the suspicions of Athaliah. A day was fixed for proclaiming Joash king; the guard and the Levites were skilfully disposed about the temple and the palace; the king was brought up, crowned, anointed, and saluted as monarch, with noisy acclamations (ver. 12). The noise was heard in the palace, and Athaliah went forth, with a few attendants, to inquire the reason of it. Following the sound, she came to the temple, and entered it, when she saw what was going on, and cried out, "Treason! treason!" By Jehoiada's order the guards seized her, conducted her out of the temple, and slew her (vers. 13—16).

Ver. 4.—**And the seventh year**—literally, *and in the seventh year;* i.e. in the course of it—**Jehoiada sent and fetched the rulers over hundreds, with the captains and the guard**; rather, *the captains over hundreds* (or, centurions) *of the Carites and the guard* (see the Revised Version). The "Carites," here first named, are generally regarded as identical with the Cherethites of earlier times (2 Sam. viii. 18; 1 Kings i. 38; 1 Chron. xviii. 17). They were undoubtedly a particular portion of the royal guard, and may, perhaps, as many suppose, have been "Carian" mercenaries, though we have no other evidence that the Carians had adopted the mercenary life so early as the time of Athaliah. Still, as their devotion to it had passed into a proverb when Archilochus wrote (B.C. 700—660), it is quite possible that they had begun the practice a century or two earlier. When Jehoiada is said to have "sent and fetched" the centurions, we must understand that he secretly invited them, and that they consented to come. He could not possibly have any authority over them, so as to require their attendance. The names of the five centurions, together with their fathers' names, were put on record by the writer of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxiii. 1), whose account of the revolution is in many respects fuller than that in Kings. **And brought them to him into the house of the Lord**—as the safest place for an interview which had to be kept secret from the queen—and **made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of the Lord**. We can easily understand that the soldiers, who had been willing to serve Athaliah under the notion that the house of David was extinct, might waver in their allegiance so soon as they heard that a scion of the old royal stock survived, and could be produced at a moment's notice. Their traditions would attach them to David and his seed, not to the house of Ahab. **And showed them the king's son.** Having bound the centurions by a solemn covenant to the cause of the young king, Jehoiada introduced them into his presence. He had, no doubt, previously sworn them to secrecy.

Ver. 5.—**And he commanded them, saying, This is the thing that ye shall do.** It is evident, from 2 Chronicles and from Josephus, that a considerable interval of time separates the events of ver. 5 from those of ver. 4. The *immediate* arrangement made between Jehoiada and the centurions was that they should "go throughout the whole land" (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' ix. 7. § 2), visit "all the cities of Judah" (2 Chron. xxiii. 2), and gather out of them a strong force of Levites and priests (Josephus), together with a certain number of other representative Israelites, which force they should bring with them to Jerusalem, and place at his disposal. To accomplish this must have taken some weeks. When the force had arrived, Jehoiada summoned it to meet him in the courts of the temple, and swore it to a similar covenant to that which he had made with the centurions. He then bided his time, completed his arrangements, utilized the store of arms laid up in the temple armoury (ver. 10), and finally gave two charges—one to the centurions, which is given here (vers. 5—8), and the other to the force collected from the cities of Judah, which is given in Chronicles (2 Chron. xxiii. 4—7). The orders given to the two forces were very similar, but not identical. **A third part of you that enter in on the sabbath.** The royal body-guard consisted of five divisions, each probably of a hundred men, and each commanded by its own captain (2 Chron. xxiii. 1). It was usual on the sabbath for three divisions out of the five to mount guard at the royal palace, while two were engaged outside, keeping order in the city, and especially at the temple. We do not know the ordinary disposition of the guard, either inside or outside the palace. On this occasion Jehoiada commanded that the palace-guard should be disposed as follows: one division at the palace proper, in the courts and halls and antechambers; a second at one of the issues from the palace, known as "the gate of Sur;" and a third at an issue called "the gate of the guard," which was certainly towards the east, where the palace fronted the temple. The object was to secure the palace, but not to prevent the queen from leaving it. **Shall even be keepers of the watch of the king's house**; *i.e.* of the royal palace.

Ver. 6.—**And a third part shall be at the gate of Sur.** The "gate of Sur" is not elsewhere mentioned. It seems to be called

in Chronicles (2 Chron. xxiii. 5) "the gate of the foundation" (שַׁעַר יְסוֹד) instead of "the gate of Sur" (שַׁעַר סוּר), as here—the one reading having evidently arisen out of the other by a corruption. We must understand one of the *palace* gates, but which of them is uncertain. **And a third part at the gate behind the guard**; called in ver. 19 "the gate of the guard," and shown there to have been on the *east* side of the palace, where it faced the temple, and abutted on the Tyropœon. **So shall ye keep the watch of the house**—*i.e.* of the "*king's* house," or palace, which is contrasted with the "house of the Lord" of the next verse—**that it be not broken down.** This rendering is scarcely accepted at the present time by any writers. Ewald renders, "according to custom;" Keil, "for defence;" Fürst, "alternately;" our Revisers, "and be a barrier." The Hebrew word used occurs nowhere else, and it seems impossible to determine its sense. The LXX. simply omit it.

Ver. 7.—**And two parts of all you that go forth on the sabbath.** Three-fifths of the guard having been disposed of about the palace, there remained only two-fifths, or two "companies" (margin of Authorized Version). These Jehoiada commanded to enter the temple and protect the young king. **Even they shall keep the watch of the house of the Lord about the king.** According to Chronicles (2 Chron. xxiii. 7), the great body of the Levites gathered from the cities of Judah was also to be in the temple, and to assist in the protection of the monarch.

Ver. 8.—**And ye shall compass the king round about; every man with his weapons in his hand.** The guard was to take up a position, partly in front of the king, and partly behind him; interposing themselves between his person and any danger, and at the same time extending themselves across the entire court of the temple (ver. 11) from one wall to the other. They were, of course, to have their weapons in their hands, ready for use. **And he that cometh within the ranges, let him be slain**; rather, *within the ranks.* The order was that if any one entered the temple, and attempted to break through the ranks of the guard, either in front of the king or behind him, he should instantly be put to death. No attempt of the kind was made; and so the order remained a dead letter. **And be ye with the king as he goeth out and as he cometh in**; accompany him, *i.e.* in all his movements—let him never for a moment stray outside your ranks—continue to surround him whithersoever he goes. Boys are restless, and curiosity would lead the young prince to move from place to place in order to see what was going on.

Ver. 9.—**And the captains over the hundreds**—*i.e.* the five centurions of the guard, Azariah the son of Jeroham, Azariah the son of Obed, Ishmael, Maaseiah, and Elishaphat—**did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest commanded.** The secular arm placed itself entirely at the disposal of the spiritualty, and was content for once to be subordinate. **And they took every man his men that were to come in on the sabbath, with them that should go out on the sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest.** The position of Jehoiada as high priest ("*the* priest" always means "*high* priest") had not been previously mentioned, probably because it was presumed to be known. The Chronicler, writing much later, gives Jehoiada the title on the first occasion that he mentions him (2 Chron. xxii. 11). When it is said that "*all* the captains took their men and came to Jehoiada," the intention is to mark their exact obedience to the orders given them. Strictly speaking, only two out of the five actually appeared before Jehoiada on the day of the execution of his project, two divisions only having been summoned to come to the temple (ver. 7). The other three took up the positions assigned them in and about the royal palace.

Ver. 10.—**And to the captains over hundreds did the priest give King David's spears and shields, that were in the temple of the Lord.** We hear of David carrying with him to Jerusalem the "shields of gold," *i.e.* shields ornamented with gold, which he took from the servants of Hadadezer (2 Sam. viii. 7); but otherwise we are not told of his establishing an armoury. Solomon made six hundred shields of solid gold, and laid them up in the house of the forest of Lebanon (1 Kings x. 17); but these were carried off by Sheshonk, when he invaded Judæa in the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kings xiv. 26). Rehoboam, in their place, made three hundred brazen shields (1 Kings xiv. 27), which, however, were deposited in the guard-chamber of the royal palace. Of spears collected by David, and laid up in the temple, we know nothing beyond the present passage. There can be little doubt that the weapons were brought forth from their receptacle with the view (as Ewald says) of "consecrating the work of the restoration of the Davidic house with the sacred arms of the great founder himself" (see 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 136)—not, however, with arms that he had worn, but with some which he had collected and laid up.

Ver. 11.—**And the guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, round about the king, from the right corner of the temple to the left corner of the temple.** "Corner" is a wrong word used in this connection. The Hebrew כָּתֵף is literally, "shoulder,"

and must mean here, not "corner," but "side" (so our Revisers). The guard was drawn up right across the temple court from wall to wall, probably in several ranks, both before and behind the king (see ver. 8). **Along by the altar.** The "altar" intended is, of course, the altar of burnt offering, which stood in the great court, a little way from the porch, right in front of it; not the altar of incense, which was inside the sanctuary. No one, it must be remembered, was ever allowed to enter inside the sanctuary but the priests and officiating Levites (see 2 Chron. xxiii. 6). **And the temple.** "The temple" is here the sanctuary, as in the passage of Chronicles just quoted. The guard occupied a position at the upper end of the court, immediately in front of the altar and the temple porch.

Ver. 12.—**And he**—*i.e.* Jehoiada—**brought forth the king's son**—produced him, *i.e.*, from the chamber or chambers where he had been concealed hitherto. (On the temple chambers, see Neh. xiii. 4—9.) **And put the crown upon him.** That the Israelite kings actually wore crowns appears from 2 Sam. i. 10 and 1 Chron. xx. 2. The crown was probably a band of gold, either plain or set with jewels (Zech. ix. 16), fastened behind with a riband. It receives here the same name that is given to the high priest's diadem in Exod. xxix. 6 and xxxix. 30. **And gave him the testimony.** The words "gave him" are not in the original, and are superfluous. What is meant plainly is that the high priest laid on the young king's head a copy of the Law, or of some essential portion of it, perhaps the Decalogue, which is often called "the testimony" (Exod. xvi. 34; xxv. 16, 21, etc.). The object apparently was to show that the king was to rule by law, not arbitrarily—that he was to be, as Dean Stanley says, "not above, but beneath, the law of his country" ('Jewish Church,' vol. ii. p. 397). The ceremony seems to have been a new one, and is indicative of the gradual curtailment of the regal power under the later monarchy. **And they made him king, and anointed him.** A change is made from the singular to the plural, because, as we learn from 2 Chron. xxiii. 11, "Jehoiada *and his sons* anointed him." We have had no mention of the anointing of a new monarch in Judah since the time of Solomon (1 Kings i. 39). It may, however, have been the usual practice. **And they**—*i.e.* the people—all who were present—**clapped their hands**—an ordinary sign of joy (see Ps. xlvii. 1; xcviii. 8; Isa. lv. 12; Nah. iii. 19, etc.)—**and said, God save the king!** literally, *long live the king!* (comp. 1 Sam. x. 24; 2 Sam. xvi. 16; 1 Kings i. 25, 39).

Ver. 13.—**And when Athaliah heard the noise of the guard** (comp. 1 Kings i. 41—45, where the noise accompanying the coronation of Solomon was heard to an equal distance) **and of the people.** The "and," which is omitted in the present Hebrew text, may be supplied by a very slight alteration. We have only to read הָרָצִי וְהָעָם for הָרָצִין הָעָם—an emendation rendered almost certain by the fact that the plural in ין־ does not belong to the date of the writer of Kings. **She came to the people into the temple of the Lord.** It was not her habit to enter the temple on the sabbath, or on any other day; but, hearing the noise, she hurried across from the palace to learn its cause. It would seem that she was still unsuspicious of danger, and brought no guards with her, nor any large body of attendants.

Ver. 14.—**And when she looked, behold, the king stood by a pillar**; rather, *on the pillar*, or *on the raised platform*. The king's proper place in the temple seems to have been a raised standing-place (הָעַמּוּד, from עָמַד, to stand) in front of the entrance to the sanctuary, which made him very conspicuous (comp. ch. xxiii. 3; 2 Chron. xxiii. 13, and xxxiv. 31). **As the manner was**—*i.e.* as was the usual practice when kings visited the temple—**and the princes**—*i.e.* the centurions or captains of the guard—**and the trumpeters by the king**—the officials whose business it was to blow the trumpet at a coronation (see 2 Sam. xv. 10; 1 Kings i. 39; ix. 13)—**and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets**; *i.e.* the people who had been admitted into the great court to witness the coronation. Some rumour of what was about to occur had got abroad, and many of the people had provided themselves with trumpets. As Dean Stanley puts it, "The temple court was crowded with spectators, and they too took part in the celebration, and themselves prolonged the trumpet-blast, blended with the musical instruments of the temple service." **And Athaliah rent her clothes.** Athaliah took in all with a single glance. She "saw that the fatal hour was come" (Stanley). With a strong hand she rent her royal robes, partly in horror, partly in despair; for the single glance which she had cast around was sufficient to show her that all was lost. **And cried, Treason! Treason!** or, *conspiracy! conspiracy!* The cry was scarcely an appeal for help, as Josephus makes it ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 7. § 3), but rather an instinctive utterance, without distinct aim or object, wrung from her under the circumstances. It fell dead on the assembly.

Ver. 15.—**But Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains**—literally, *princes*—**of the hundreds, the officers of the host**—the commanders, *i.e.*, of the small "army" assembled

in the temple court—**and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges**; rather, *have her forth*, or *conduct her out between your ranks*. The object was probably to preserve her from suffering violence at the hands of any of the people within the temple precincts, which Jehoiada desired to preserve free from pollution. **And him that followeth her kill with the sword**; *i.e.* if any come after her out of the temple, to attempt a rescue, slay them with the sword. The order, given aloud, was sufficient to deter persons from making the attempt. **For the priest had said, Let her not be slain in the house of the Lord.** Jehoiada had previously given an order that her execution should take place outside the temple.

Ver. 16.—**And they laid hands on her.** So the LXX. (ἐπέθηκαν αὐτῇ χεῖρας), the Vulgate, Luther, and others; but most moderns understand that they formed in two lines, one on either side of her, and so let her pass out of the temple and proceed towards the palace *untouched*—the divinity that hedged a queen preventing them from molesting her until the time came for her execution (see the Revised Version). **And she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house.** Josephus makes Athaliah pass out of the temple by the east gate, and descend into the Kedron valley. He says she was put to death "at the gate of the king's mules," but does not mark the locality. The gate intended can scarcely be the "horse gate" of Neh. iii. 28, which was in the eastern wall, and north of the temple. It was probably a gate on the western side of the Tyropœon valley, giving entrance to the stables of the palace (comp. 2 Chron. xxiii. 15, and see below, ver. 20). **And there was she slain**; "with the sword" (ver. 20). A single blow from one of the guardsmen probably sufficed.

Vers. 17—21.—*Further doings of Jehoiada.* The king being at present a mere puppet in his hands, Jehoiada had to determine the next steps which were necessary to be taken. These, in his judgment, were three. 1. A solemn covenant must be made between the king and the people; and another between the king, the people, and God—the latter pledging the king and people to maintain the worship of Jehovah, and never again to apostatize; the former pledging the king to govern according to law, and the people to remain faithful to him. 2. The temple of Baal, erected in Jerusalem at the instance of Athaliah, must be destroyed. 3. The king must be removed from the temple and installed in the palace of his ancestors. A brief account of these proceedings concludes the present chapter.

Ver. 17.—**And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people.** In the original it is "made *the* covenant;" and the meaning is that the high priest renewed the old covenant understood to exist between king and people on the one hand and God on the other, that they would be faithful to God and God to them—that they would maintain his worship, and that he would continue his protection (see Exod. xix. 5—8; xxiv. 3—8; xxxiv. 10—28). The apostasy of Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah was regarded as having put an end to the old covenant, and therefore it was solemnly remade or renewed. **That they should be the Lord's people** (comp. Exod. xix. 5; Deut. iv. 20; ix. 29; xxxii. 9, etc.); **between the king also and the people.** The terms of this covenant are nowhere distinctly stated, but we can only suppose them to have expressed in words the intention of that novel act, the imposition of "the testimony" upon the head of the king at the time of his coronation (see the comment upon ver. 12).

Ver. 18.—**And all the people of the land**—*i.e.* all those who had come up to Jerusalem from the various cities of Judah to help Jehoiada (see 2 Chron. xxiii. 2)—**went into the house of Baal.** According to Josephus, "the house of Baal" here mentioned was built by Jehoram and Athaliah in the reign of the former ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 7. § 4). But, if this was the case, it is rather strange that the writer of Chronicles, who enumerates so many of the evil acts of Jehoram (2 Chron. xxi. 4, 6, 11), does not mention it. The present narrative shows that the temple was in, or very near, Jerusalem; but there is nothing to fix the site of it. **And brake it down**—Josephus says they "razed it to the ground" (κατέσκαψαν)—**his altars and his images brake they in pieces thoroughly.** It was common among the heathen to have several altars in one temple, and not uncommon to have several images even of the same god, especially if he was a god worshipped under different forms, as Baal was (whence the word "Baalim"). The Baalim of this temple are mentioned by the writer of Chronicles (see 2 Chron. xxiv. 7). **And slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars.** The name "Mattan" recalls that of the last King of Judah, which was originally Mattan-iah, equivalent to "gift of Jehovah" (ch. xxiv. 17). Mattan would be simply "gift." We may presume that, though only called "priest," he was the high priest. **And the priest**—*i.e.* Jehoiada—**appointed officers over the house of the Lord.** The parallel passage of Chronicles

(2 Chron. xxiii. 18, 19) explains this statement. We are there told that "Jehoiada appointed the offices of the house of the Lord by the hand of the priests the Levites, . . . to offer the burnt offerings of the Lord, as it is written in the Law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, as it was ordained by David. And he set the porters at the gates of the house of the Lord, that none which was unclean in anything should enter in." During Athaliah's reign the temple service had ceased; breaches had been broken in the outer walls; and neither the priests nor the porters had served in their regular order; there had been no morning or evening sacrifice, and no antiphonal psalm-singing. Jehoiada re-established the regular courses and the worship.

Ver. 19.—**And he took the rulers**—literally, *princes*—**over hundreds**—*i.e.* the five centurions of 2 Chron. xxiii. 2—**and the captains**—rather, *and the Carites* (see the comment on ver. 4)—**and the guard**—*i.e.* the "runners," the other division of the guard—**and all the people of the land**—those who had flocked to his standard either originally (2 Chron. xxiii. 2) or since—**and they brought down the king from the house of the Lord.** They escorted Joash from the temple to the palace, first bringing him *down* into the valley of the Tyropœon, and then conducting him up the opposite, or western hill, on which the palace stood. **And came by the way of the gate of the guard to the king's house.** The "gate of the guard" is probably that called in ver. 6 "the gate behind the guard." We may presume that it was the main entrance to the palace on the eastern side. **And he sat on the throne of the kings.** Not till he had placed Joash on the royal throne of his ancestors, in the great throne-room of the palace, was Jehoiada content with the work of the day.

Ver. 20.—**And all the people of the land rejoiced.** "All the people of the land" has here, perhaps, a wider signification than in vers. 18 and 19. The *whole land* was content with the revolution that had taken place. No opposition showed itself. Ewald has no ground for his statement that the heathenizing party was strong in Jerusalem, and that the worshippers of Jehovah "had for a long time to keep watch in the temple, to prevent surprise by the heathenizing party" ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 136, note 3). He has mistaken the intention of the last clause of ver. 18. If anything is clear from the entire narrative of the early reign of Joash (ch. xi. 3—21; xii. 1—16; 2 Chron. xxiii. 1—21; xxiv. 1—14), it is that there was no heathenizing party in Jerusalem, or none that dared to show itself, until after the death of the high priest Jehoiada, which was later than the twenty-third year of Joash. **And the city**—*i.e.* Jerusalem—**was in quiet: and they slew**—it might be translated, *when they had slain*—**Athaliah with the sword** beside **the king's house.** The intention of the writer is to connect the period of tranquillity with the removal of Athaliah, and therefore to point her out as the cause of disturbance previously.

Ver. 21.—**Seven years old was Jehoash**—or, *Joash*—**when he began to reign** (comp. vers. 3 and 4 and 2 Chron. xxiv. 1). The clause would be better placed at the beginning of the next chapter

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3 and 14—16.—*Athaliah and Jezebel, the wicked daughter and the wicked mother.* It has often been noted that, while women are, as a general rule, better than men, in the cases where they enter upon evil courses their wickedness exceeds that of their male associates. The character of Lady Macbeth is true to nature. Wicked women are more thorough-going than wicked men, more bloody, more daring, more unscrupulous. In Athaliah we have a sort of repetition of Jezebel—a second picture on the same lines—the picture of a fierce, ambitious, utterly unscrupulous woman, occupying much the same station as her mother, equally powerful, equally unsparing, and equally remorseless. Both women are represented as—

I. DEVOTEES OF THE SAME SENSUOUS AND IMMORAL CULT. Jezebel introduces the Baal and Ashtoreth worship into Israel; Athaliah into Judah. Each defiles the capital of her adopted country with a temple to Baal—a temple where images of Baal are set up, altars erected to him, and sacrifices offered to him. Each brings with her into her new home the Baal priesthood, and instals it in power.

II. OPEN ANTAGONISTS OF JEHOVAH. Jezebel persecutes the Jehovistic prophets, slaying as many as she can, and threatening the life even of Elijah (1 Kings xviii. 4; xix. 2). Athaliah stops the temple-worship at Jerusalem, has breaches made in the temple walls, and gives to Baal the offerings which properly belong to Jehovah (2 Chron. xxiv. 7).

III. MURDERESSES. Jezebel, of Naboth (1 Kings xxi. 8—14) and of the Jehovistic prophets (1 Kings xviii. 4); Athaliah, of "all the seed royal of the house of Judah" (2 Chron. xxii. 10).

IV. EAGER TO GRASP AND WIELD SOVEREIGN POWER. Jezebel governs Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 25), uses his signet (1 Kings xxi. 8), orders executions (1 Kings xviii. 4; xxi. 10), and the like. Athaliah governs Jehoram (ch. viii. 18) and Ahaziah (2 Chron. xxii. 3), and then seizes the royal power, and actually rules Judæa (ch. xi. 3).

Athaliah is, on the whole, the bolder of the two, and the more unscrupulous; since to destroy the entire seed royal, including several of her own grandchildren, was a more atrocious and unnatural deed than any committed by Jezebel; and the actual assumption of the royal name and power, in spite of her sex, was a more audacious proceeding than any on which her mother ventured. But her audacity verged on rashness, which cannot be said of Jezebel. She brought her fate upon herself; Jezebel succumbed to an inevitable stroke of adverse fortune. There was weakness in Athaliah's half-measures after she became queen, in her suffering Jehoiada to retain so much liberty and so much power, and still greater weakness in her unsuspiciousness. We cannot imagine Jezebel, if she had ever been actual queen, allowing herself to be put down in the way that Athaliah was. She would at least have made a fight for her life, instead of walking straight into a trap, which was what Athaliah did. *Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat* is an old saying. Athaliah's folly at the last can only be accounted for by an infatuation, which may have been a Divine judgment on her.

Vers. 4—19.—*Jehoiada an example of a faithful and wise high priest under trying circumstances.* The history of the Jewish kingdom from the time of Saul to the Captivity furnishes but few examples of remarkable high priests. Zadok and Abiathar were personages of some importance in the time of David, and left behind them a name for zeal and fidelity; but otherwise no man of eminence had arisen among the high priests until Jehoiada. This may be partly accounted for by the fact that the high priesthood was hereditary, not elective; but still more by the nature of the office, which was not such as to bring its holder into historical prominence in quiet times. Jehoiada's opportunity for distinction arose from the difficult circumstances in which he was placed. Holding the office of high priest when the throne was usurped and religion outraged by Athaliah, it devolved on him to rescue Church and state alike from peril, and to counter-work the wicked schemes of an enemy alike bold and unscrupulous. He could not prevent the destruction of the royal stock by Athaliah, which was a crime so unnatural that none could have anticipated it; but he did what he could. At the peril of his life he saved one prince, concealed him from prying eyes, protected him, bred him up secretly, and did not allow his existence to be even suspected. In faith and patience he waited till the infant had become a boy of an age to interest people, and till Athaliah had lost the affections of all classes of her subjects. He then organized a counter-revolution to the one effected by Athaliah, with the greatest prudence, caution, and sagacity. It would have been easy to gather partisans and raise a revolt; but Jehoiada shrank from the horrors of a civil war, and from the risk of losing his precious charge by a stray shot or a chance sword-thrust. He therefore set to work to detach Athaliah's supporters from her cause by the peaceful method of persuasion. First he gained over the captains of her guard, then through them the rank-and-file, finally the "chief fathers" of Israel in the various cities (2 Chron. xxiii. 2). Doubting the sufficiency of this force, he further summoned to his aid a large body of Levites. And all this he did so secretly as to create no alarm, to arouse no suspicion. When the time for action came, he made his arrangements with the most consummate skill. He could not, indeed, have foreseen that Athaliah would so play into his hand, as she did, by coming within the temple walls with few or no attendants; but he had taken his measures in such a way as to make failure impossible, and to reduce to a minimum the probability of tumult or armed resistance. It was an indication of extraordinary prudence and political wisdom to be able to effect a complete revolution, both in Church and state, at the cost of two lives, both of them clearly forfeit by the Law of Moses. Up to this time, Jehoiada's wisdom had been chiefly conspicuous. Henceforth it is his fidelity that draws our admiration. Aiming at nothing for himself, his first thought is for the honour of God, and therefore he renews

the Mosaic covenant; his next for the welfare of his country, and therefore he makes king and people mutually swear to each other; his third for the honour of true religion, and therefore he destroys the temple of Baal, and inaugurates afresh the Jehovistic service. As Bähr says, "If ever a man stood pure and blameless in the midst of such a bold, difficult, and far-reaching enterprise, then Jehoiada, *the ideal Israelitish priest*, did so here." The after-life of Jehoiada is less remarkable (ch. xii. 2—16; 2 Chron. xxiv. 2—14), but not unworthy of his earlier reputation.

Vers. 15—17.—*God's judgments not unfrequently fall in this life, though sometimes they are deferred to the life beyond the grave.* The Athaliahs and Mattans of history seldom come to a good end. Though the wicked man be often seen in prosperity, though he "flourishes as a green bay tree," yet it is not often that he continues flourishing to the close of his days, or dies in comfort, peace, and happiness. The psalmist was satisfied when he saw "the end" of the man whose long-continued prosperity had vexed and grieved him (Ps. lxxiii. 2—22). Heathen wisdom bade men "never to pronounce any one happy before his death," since in human life changes were of continual occurrence, and the higher a man's exaltation above his fellows at a given time, the lower was likely to be his depression and degradation at another. The *rationale* of the matter seems to be—

I. GOD HAS ATTACHED PENALTIES TO VICE IN THE WAY OF NATURAL CONSEQUENCE, WHICH TAKE EFFECT IF TIME BE ALLOWED. Tyrants lay up for themselves a constantly increasing amount of hatred and resentment, which naturally bursts forth and sweeps them away after a while; *e.g.* Hipparchus, Tarquin, Dionysius, Caligula, Nero. Drunkards, gluttons, and profligate persons destroy their health. Reckless spendthrifts reduce themselves to poverty and want. Unfaithfulness strips men of their friends, and leaves them weak and defenceless against their adversaries. The prosperity of the wicked is naturally but for a time—give them the full term of human life, and, before they die, their sin will, to a certainty, find them out, and they will cease to prosper.

II. GOD DOES, ON OCCASION, VISIT HIGH-PLACED, PROSPEROUS SINNERS WITH SUDDEN, SIGNAL PUNISHMENTS DEALT BY HIS OWN HAND. Scripture gives us a certain number of examples, as those of the Pharaoh of the Exodus, Saul, Jezebel, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod Agrippa, and the like, whose afflictions are distinctly declared to have been sent upon them by God himself in the way of punishment. While, no doubt, great caution is necessary in applying the principle thus indicated to other persons in history, and especially to living persons, we need not shrink from *some* application of it. God speaks to us in history, not only in his Word. When selfish usurpers, who have deluged whole continents in blood, and sacrificed tens or hundreds of thousands of lives to gratify their ambition, are cast down from their thrones, and die in exile or banishment, it is almost impossible not to see his hand in the occurrences, executing judgment. When an Arius, bent on the disruption of the Church, and seemingly at the point of triumph, expires silently in the night, or a Galerius, the most cruel of persecutors, perishes in most horrible agonies, there is no want of charity or of reverence in once more recognizing his finger interposed to save his Church or to avenge his martyred ones. "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment" (1 Tim. v. 24); and, when the judgment falls, it would be wilful blindness on our part not to recognize it. We must be cautious, and remember that those on whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, were not sinners above the other dwellers in Jerusalem (Luke xiii. 4); but, if it was God's vengeance that destroyed the cities of the plain, and that visited Nadab and Abihu, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Sihon and Og, Balaam, Adonizedek and his brother kings, Eglon, Sisera, Zebah, Zalmunna, Abimelech, Agag, Doeg, Shimei, Jezebel, Haman, Ananias, Sapphira, Herod Agrippa, Elymas, so we may be sure that it has fallen on hundreds of others whose names do not occur in Scripture, coming suddenly upon them, and cutting them off in their iniquities, generally when neither they nor others were in the least expecting it. God is still, as he has ever been, "the great, the mighty God, the Lord of hosts, great in counsel and mighty in work; his eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. xxxii. 18, 19). Either in this life or in the life to come he will execute vengeance

upon evil-doers. Well for them if it is in this life, and if they so escape the dreadful lot of those "to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever" (Jude 13).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—16.—*The preservation and coronation of Joash.* This is a touching story of human wickedness and of God's overruling and preserving power. Three principal personages come before us here, from each of whom something may be learned.

I. ATHALIAH AND HER WORK. *Athaliah's life-work was a work of destruction.* She did much harm. She did no good. A daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (sometimes called a daughter of Omri, whose granddaughter she was), she had inherited all the evil propensities of her parents. *She destroyed her own husband,* Jehoram King of Judah. We read of him that "he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: *for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife:* and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Chron. xxi. 6). *She destroyed also her son Ahaziah.* We read of him that "he also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: *for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.* Wherefore he did evil in the sight of the Lord like the house of Ahab; for they were his counsellors after the death of his father *to his destruction*" (2 Chron. xxi. 3, 4). And now she completes her destructive career by *putting to death her grandchildren,* the seed royal of the kingdom. There are many women like Athaliah, whose life-work is a work of destruction. What harm one wicked woman can do! Some corrupt the morals of others. Some, by their evil-speaking and slander, do what they can to destroy the reputation and good name of their neighbours. The Jezebels and Athaliahs of Scripture story have their parallels in the Queen Marys, the Pompadours, the Medicis, and the Maintenons of more modern times.

II. JEHOSHEBA AND HER WORK. *Jehosheba's work was a work of preservation.* She too was a king's daughter. But she had not been corrupted by the wickedness of the court. She was the wife of Jehoiada the priest—a good wife of a good man. She rescued Joash from Athaliah's massacre, and kept him hid in the priests' apartments in the temple. There he was hid for six years, until the time that, as a boy-king, he was called to the throne. If there are Athaliahs in the world still, there are also Jehoshebas. If there are women of cruelty, there are also women of sympathetic and compassionate spirit. If there are women who are corrupters of others, how many there are who by their own pure life and conduct have been the preservers of public purity and morality! If one wicked woman can do much harm, one pure-minded Christian woman can do a vast amount of good. What an amount of quiet beneficence is being carried on by Christian women throughout the world at the present day! What a vast number of ladies who visit and minister to the poor! What a vast number of ladies who, in hospitals and in private houses, devote themselves to the noble work of nursing the sick! How many are engaged in instructing the young in our Sunday schools! How many have gone forth as missionaries to heathen lands! Woman's work in the Christian Church, and in the cause of charity and philanthropy, seems to be increasing every year.

III. JEHOIADA AND HIS WORK. Jehoiada's work was of a twofold nature. *His work was both destroying and preserving.* He destroyed idolatry. He put an end to Athaliah's reign and life. He did not believe in the policy of non-resistance. He believed in doing his utmost to overthrow even the power of the reigning queen, when that power was wickedly obtained, and exercised in an evil way, dishonouring to God and injurious to the interests of the nation. Like many another reformer, he incurred the charge of disloyalty and treason. But there are many things that need to be destroyed. And who can overestimate the harm done by a wicked ruler? But Jehoiada was no mere revolutionist. He did not rebel against Athaliah for revolution's sake. He did not put an end to her reign because of his antipathy to governments. He would have agreed with St. Paul that "the powers that be are ordained of God." He set up another king in her place, and, in place of the idolatry which she had sanctioned, he set up the worship of the true God. We see in the whole narrative *the overruling providence of God.* Athaliah thought she would make her power secure by her holocaust of young princes. But man proposes, and God disposes. We see also

the use of human instrumentality. God works by means. He used Jehosheba to preserve the young life which in the end was the means, in Jehoiada's hand, of overthrowing the wicked power of Athaliah.—C. H. I.

Vers. 17—21.—*The covenant and its results.* Jehoiada was faithful to God. All that he had hitherto done was but the work of a pioneer, preparing the way for the restoration of God's worship and God's Law in the land. We have here—

I. THE COVENANT MADE. Very early in the history of God's people we find them entering into covenants with him. When Jacob had that comforting vision at Bethel, he entered into a covenant. "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, . . . so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God; and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." The pillar he set up was the witness of the covenant. When God gave the ten commandments to the children of Israel, they entered into a covenant that they would keep them and do them. That covenant they publicly renewed and ratified many times in their subsequent history. They renewed it shortly before the death of Moses. They renewed it shortly before the death of Joshua, and on that occasion Joshua set up a great stone to be a witness of what they had done. On the occasion before us they renew it under the influence of Jehoiada. "And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people; between the king also and the people." They renewed it also in the reign of Josiah, and under Ezra and Nehemiah after the return from the Captivity. In all these cases we find three important features, common to them all. In each case the duty of making the covenant was enjoined upon the people by eminent men of God—prophets, priests, and kings. In each case it was a public covenant, entered into by all the people. And in each case, when the covenant was renewed, it was accompanied by moral and spiritual revival and reformation. Have we not in the New Testament the same duty pointed out and practised, though not indeed under the same name? It was a public covenant with the Lord when on the Day of Pentecost the three thousand souls were baptized. When Paul praises the Churches of Macedonia for that "they first gave their own selves to the Lord;" when he calls his readers to present themselves a living sacrifice unto God; to remember that they are not their own, but are bought with a price; to come out from among the godless and be separate;—all these are just different ways of reminding them that as Christians they have entered into a covenant with God. Passing over the dark ages which came upon the Christian Church, we find that when the Bible truths began to shed their light once more in the surrounding darkness, the early Reformers found it necessary to band themselves together in a solemn covenant with God and with one another. By this means they kept before them their great purpose. By this means they stimulated and strengthened and encouraged one another. By this means they lifted up a testimony against surrounding error. Such a covenant was publicly agreed to by the Protestant princes and states of Germany, and also by the Huguenots of France. But the best-known and most memorable covenants are those of Scotland. John Knox laid the foundation of the Reformation in Scotland, but the covenants built it up and strengthened it. The first of these was called the National Covenant, first drawn up in the year 1580. It was signed by the king, nobles, and persons of all ranks—the king being James VI. of Scotland, afterwards James I. of England. By this memorable document the whole people of Scotland pledged themselves to renounce and resist all the errors of popery, and to maintain the truth as it is in Jesus. It was this covenant which was afterwards renewed in the Greyfriar's Churchyard at Edinburgh, when, among the immense multitude who signed it, many opened their veins and wrote their names with their own blood. The other was the Solemn League and Covenant, entered into between the two parliaments of England and Scotland, also for resistance to popery, and the maintenance of pure religion throughout the land. These things suggest to us that, in times of prevailing wickedness or of prevailing error, it is the duty of God's people to make public avowal of their faith in Christ and allegiance to him. It is a duty pointed out both in the Old Testament and in the New, and confirmed by the experience of God's Church both in Scripture times and in more recent days. If ever there was a time when it was the duty of Christ's people

publicly and unitedly to confess him, that time is the present. Wickedness abounds. The love of many waxes cold. Many of Christ's professing people seem utterly indifferent to the claims of their Master and his cause. False doctrines are taught; and under the show of religion there is a growing conformity to the world. A faithful, strong, united testimony for Christ is urgently needed. *How, then, are we to carry out this duty of making a public covenant with God?* There is one way which is available to us all, and that is the Lord's Supper. It is an act of commemoration, communion, and *consecration*. In partaking of the Lord's Supper we enter into a covenant with God. It is a public covenant. The eyes of the world are upon us. They see us make a profession to be Christ's. Do they see that our practice corresponds with our profession? Each communion ought to be a personal covenant with God on the part of each individual believer. It ought to be a public covenant with God on the part of families. It ought to be a public covenant with God on the part of congregations.

II. THE COVENANT KEPT. Jehoiada and the people had entered into a covenant or engagement that they would be the Lord's. And they kept their promise. The first way in which they showed it was by breaking in pieces the idols and their altars, which were so abundant in the land. So, if we take Christ's vows upon us at his table, let us show that we mean what we profess. Let us show that we are on the Lord's side. "Better not to vow, than to vow and not pay." Let us begin with our own hearts. Are there no idols there that need to be thrown down, no besetting sins that need to be put away, no evil passions that need to be crucified? "If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only" (1 Sam. vii. 3).

III. THE BLESSINGS OF THE COVENANT. "And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was in quiet." God kept them in perfect peace, because their minds were stayed on him. They kept their part of the covenant. God kept his. We find in Scripture that God promises special blessings to those who enter into a covenant with him. Before he gave the Law on Mount Sinai, he said to the children of Israel, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine." Then again God says, "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord God Almighty." We also find that more than once these promises were fulfilled. In the days of Asa, when the people of Judah made a covenant with God, we read that "it was a time of great rejoicing, for they had sought the Lord with all their heart, and he was found of them; and the Lord gave them rest round about." So in the days of Josiah, when they made the covenant and put away the strange gods, we read, "Surely there was not holden such a Passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah." It was the same in more recent times. The covenanters, whose motto was "For Christ's crown and covenant," and who shed their blood in defence of Christ's authority, were a great means of preserving pure and undefiled religion in Scotland. Let us all, then, faithfully witness for him by our lives. "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten" (Jer. l. 5).—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—21.—*The history of Athaliah.* "And when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead," etc. Among the blackest names in the long roll of the world's infamy are those of kings and queens, and amongst them Athaliah is not the least abhorrent and revolting. She was the daughter of Ahab King of Israel, and of Jezebel, his notorious wife. She married Joram (or Jehoram) King of Judah. She was the mother of Ahaziah, and advised him in his wickedness. After Jehu had slain him, she resolved to put an end to all the children of her husband by his former wives, and then mount the throne of Judah herself. But the half-sister of Ahaziah, Jehosheba, secured Joash, one of the children and heir to the throne, and secreted him with his nurse for six long years. In the seventh year the young prince was brought forth and placed on the throne. Crowds of people assembled to witness the ceremony, and Athaliah, hearing the shouts of the crowd, hastened to the temple, utterly unsuspicious even of the existence of the young king. When, however, she caught a sight of the

young king and heard the hurrahs of the crowd, she felt that her atrocious plans had been frustrated, and in her savage humiliation rent her clothes and cried, "Treason! Treason!" But her hour was over; she was too late to rally a party in favour of her own interest, and by the command of the priest she was instantly removed and violently destroyed. In this woman's life, as here sketched, we have *hereditary depravity, outwitted wickedness*, and *just retribution*.

I. HEREDITARY DEPRAVITY. We find in this woman, Athaliah, the infernal tendencies of her father and her mother, Ahab and Jezebel. Though they had been swept as monsters from the earth, and were now lying in the grave, their hellish spirit lived and worked in this their daughter. It is, alas! often so. We have an immortality in *others*, as well as in ourselves. The men of long-forgotten generations still live in the present. Even the moral pulse of Adam throbs in all. By this fact we are reminded: 1. *That the moral qualities of parents may become physical tendencies in their children.* The man who voluntarily (and all moral qualities are voluntary productions) contracts habits of falsehood, dishonesty, profanity, incontinence, drunkenness, and general intemperance, transmits these to his children as physical tendencies. This is marvellous, but patent to every observer of society and student of history. Who cannot refer to both men and women who have received an unappeasable craving for strong drinks by the drunken habits contracted by their parents? 2. That the evil moral qualities of parents, reappearing in their children in the form of physical tendencies, is *no complete justification for the children's wickedness*. This is clear: (1) From the fact that God has endowed all with *sufficient force to control* all physical tendencies. Most men have sufficient mental faculties to quench the strongest physical passion. (2) From the *personal consciousness of every sinner*. When the conscience is quickened, the greatest liar, debauchee, drunkard, thief, becomes filled with compunctions for the crimes committed. Every sigh of remorse on account of sin is a testimony to the power of the human mind to control the passions. (3) From the *Divine Word as found in the Scriptures*. "Whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." "He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." 3. *That the way to raise the human race is to improve their moral qualities.* Indoctrinate men's souls with truth, benevolence, piety, chastity, purity, etc., and you help on the race to its milleunium. And in no other way. The gospel is the instrument for this.

II. OUTWITTED WICKEDNESS. No doubt this woman, who thought she had destroyed all the "seed royal," considered she had made her way to the throne clear and secure. For six long years she had no conception that one had escaped her bloody purpose. Now it was revealed to her, and her disappointment maddens her with vengeance, and excites the desperate cry, "Treason! Treason!" It is ever so. "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty." History abounds with the examples of the bafflement of wrong. The conduct of Joseph's brethren, Ahithophel, Sanballat, Haman, and the Jewish Sanhedrin in relation to Christ, are instances. Satan, the arch-enemy of the universe, will exemplify this through all the crises of his accursed future. A piece of conduct, wrought by the highest human skill and earnest industry, if not in accord with the immutable principles of right and truth, can no more succeed in its purpose than a house can stand, which is built regardless of the resistless laws of gravitation. The architecture may look well, the materials be most precious, and the production be most costly, yet down it must come, and confound the builder. Craftiness uses lies as concealment and defence, but the eternal law of Providence makes them snares. One lie leads to another, and so on, until they become so numerous that the author involves himself in contradictions, and he falls and flounders like a wild beast in a snare.

III. JUST RETRIBUTION. "Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges: and him that followeth her kill with the sword. . . . And they laid hands on her; and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house: and there was she slain. . . . And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was in quiet: and they slew Athaliah with the sword beside the king's house." Thus *Sæpe intereunt aliis meditantes necem*. Those who plot the destruction of others often fall themselves. Here is: 1. A *terrible* retribution. 2. A *prompt* retribution. It came on her here before she passed into the other world. Retribution is going on now and

here. 3. A retribution *administered by human hands.* Truly "the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment. Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; yet he shall perish for ever. . . . Yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night." An Oriental poet thus vividly describes the retribution that must follow wickedness—

"All vice to which man yields in greed to do it,
Or soon or late, be sure, he'll sorely rue it;
Experience deep, howe'er false seeming blind him,
Surcharged with retribution, out will find him.
It locks upon his soul a fatal fetter,
Explodes throughout his face in horrid tetter,
Over his shameless eyeballs brings a blurring,
Keeps in his heart a deadly fear-load stirring;
At all pure joys with fiendish talon snatches,
The noblest traits from out his being catches;
Each beam and hope and vision darkens,
His conscience stuns whene'er towards heaven he hearkens;
On goading thorns his sleepless longing tosses,
With soul remorse-foam pleasure's waves embosses.
Sometimes from phantom-fears impels him flying,
Sometimes in frantic horrors shrouds his dying;
Now turns his dearest friends to cease to love him,
Now spreads avenging Siva's form above him;
Makes this world black with prison walls and gibbets,
And in the next escape from hell prohibits.
The whole creation's strange and endless dealing,
In spite of shields and veils and arts concealing,
Proclaims that whosoe'er is long a sinner
Can only be by it of woe a winner."

D. T.

Vers. 1—3.—*Athaliah's usurpation.* Athaliah was the evil genius of Judah, as Jezebel was of Israel. The mother was slain, but, unwarned by her fall, the daughter snatched at the reins of power, and held the throne for six years. The track of both was marked by violence, bloodshed, and political convulsion.

I. THE WICKEDNESS OF ATHALIAH. Ahaziah's death gave Athaliah her opportunity. Nothing could more clearly reveal the wicked disposition of the woman than the means by which she raised herself to the throne. When she "saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal." 1. She was a *woman*, yet, to pave her way to power, she did not hesitate to crush every feminine instinct in her breast, and to imbrue her hands in innocent blood. 2. She was a *mother*, yet she remorselessly put to death her own grandchildren. The youngest was a babe, but her savage temper made no distinctions. Her son's offspring were only rivals, to be got out of the way by murder. In this tigress-like nature of the queen-mother all womanhood is effaced. Truly "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Prov. xii. 10).

II. THE PRESERVATION OF JOASH. After all, Athaliah's end was not gained. Unknown to this savage woman, one of Ahaziah's sons, the youngest, was saved from the general massacre by his aunt Jehosheba, and, after a temporary concealment in the store-chamber of the palace, was conveyed to the temple, and there secretly brought up. We have in this deliverance of the young Joash: 1. *An example of faith and courage.* It was "by faith" that the pious Jehosheba did this daring act, even as it was by faith that the parents of Moses hid their goodly child (Heb. xi. 23). And faith, in this instance as in the other, had its reward. 2. *A proof of God's faithfulness to his promise.* It had been promised to David that he should never want a man to sit on his throne (1 Kings viii. 25). That promise seemed now frustrated, when to outward appearance every descendant of David was destroyed. But "the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever" (Ps. xxxiii. 11). No device of man can prevail against that. 3. *An illustration of how God can defeat the designs of the wicked.* Skilfully as the wicked lay their plots, there is generally something overlooked, forgotten, which brings them to nought. Some witness of their crimes is left undetected. They seem to have closed

up every chink and cranny through which defeat could enter, yet it is found that some loophole has been left. A good and true cause may be safely left in the hands of God. He will not suffer it to fall.—J. O.

Vers. 4—21.—*The coronation of Joash.* For six years Athaliah was dominant in Israel. Jehoiada meanwhile kept his secret well. Least of all did the usurping queen suspect that a legitimate heir to the throne was in hiding in the temple almost at her own palace door. Her reign must have grown well-nigh unendurable to the people, when they were so willing as the event proved to throw it off. At the six years' end Jehoiada prepared for his *coup d'état.*

I. JEHOIADA'S PREPARATIONS. 1. *Joash produced.* The good priest found it necessary to proceed with caution. His measures were taken with skill and secrecy. He first took into his confidence the five centurions of the life-guards, made them swear an oath of fidelity, then produced the king, and showed him to them. The soldiers entered into his plan at once. The risks were enormous, but God's shield was around this one remaining "lamp" of David's house, and did not allow its tremulous light to be extinguished. The boy-king was the feeble ark that bore the fortunes of David's house and of Messianic promise. Had he perished, God's Word would have fallen to the ground. The Chronicler tells how the captains of hundreds went forth and secretly spread among the Levites and chief of the fathers of Israel the tidings that there was still a living heir of David's line, and how these came to Jerusalem, and saw the young king too (2 Chron. xxiii. 2, 3). It is remarkable that a fact known to so many persons did not in some way leak out. But the people were of one heart and one soul, and Athaliah was left in her false security without a single friend to warn her of her danger. 2. *The eventful sabbath.* The day chosen for the public production of the king was probably a feast-day. Otherwise the large concourse of people from all parts of the land could hardly have failed to attract attention. It was a sabbath and an high day—"the better the day, the better the deed." What was contemplated was indeed a revolution, and might involve bloodshed; but it was also a reviving of the fallen theocracy, a replanting of the rod of Jesse, and therefore fit work for the sabbath. Nothing that favourably affects the fortunes of the kingdom of God is out of place on the sabbath day. Jehoiada made careful strategic preparations, combining apparently the Levites who went on and off duty in the temple with the life-guards under the captains, and assigning to different companies their respective posts. 3. *The palace and temple guarded.* Guards were told off both for the "king's house" and for the temple. (1) Those who entered on duty on the sabbath were divided into three parts, and posted round the palace. One third was posted at the principal entrance; a second third at "the gate Sur"—perhaps a side gate—and the remaining third was placed at a gate which communicated with the temple (ver. 19), where the guards or "runners" were usually stationed. (2) Those, again, who went off duty on the sabbath were placed within the court of the temple, stretching across from side to side, to guard the person of the king. To these weapons were given from David's spears and shields, which were in the temple of the Lord. While trusting in God, Jehoiada thus took every human precaution. Faith and works co-operate in God's service. Our dependence should be as entirely in God as if human means were unavailing, yet our use of means should be as diligent as if everything depended on their employment.

II. THE KING CROWNED. 1. *The safety of the king's person.* When the young king Joash was brought forth, and placed on a raised stand in the temple court, his guard stood firmly around him, each man clutching his weapon. The instructions were that any person attempting to break through the ranks should at once be slain. The person of David's son was too precious to be left without an effectual guard. Yet more effectual is the guard which God places round *his* sons (Ps. xxxiv. 6, 7). 2. *The ceremony of coronation.* The act of coronation of the child-king was then proceeded with. Jehoiada presided at the ceremony. (1) The crown—visible symbol of royal office—was placed upon his head. God's priest could well preside at the coronation of God's king. As son of David, Joash was the legitimate heir of the throne. Royal authority is from God, and investiture at the hands of God's ministers is our acknowledgment of this. Only those who rule by Divine favour can look for a blessing on their crown. (2) He had put upon his head "the testimony," *i.e.* the Law of Moses, by which kings of

Judah and Israel were to be guided (Deut. xvii. 18—20). "Finely are both the crown and the book presented to the king, that he might be not only mighty, but also wise, or, as we may say, know God's Word and right. Thus, even now, we make kings with a sword and book" (Luther). The highest in the land are not above the authority of God's Word. He by whom "kings reign" is mightier than the mightiest, and requires from the monarch the same allegiance as from the humblest of his subjects. A nation is happy, prosperous, and blessed only when God's Law is made the rule of its policy and the foundation of its government (Deut. iv. 6—8). (3) He was anointed with oil. For where God gives office he gives also qualification for that office. Oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Word without the Spirit to interpret it, and to give strength for obedience to it, is useless. Kings need the grace of God for the discharge of their duties as much as, even more than, ordinary people. Jesus is God's King, "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows" (Heb. i. 9). (4) He was acknowledged as king by popular acclamation. "They clapped their hands and said, God save the king!" The Divine choice was ratified by the free election of the people. While kingly, like all other authority, is derived from God, a throne is only strong when it rests on the loyal affection of the body of the people.

III. THE DEATH OF ATHALIAH. 1. *The shout of a king.* Athaliah, though queen of Judah, was not a worshipper of the God of Judah. While the scenes above described were being transacted, she was either in her own "house of Baal," or in the palace. But now the ringing shouts of the people apprised her that something was wrong. The sight of the guards posted round her palace would add to her alarms. She hastened to the temple, and there beheld a spectacle which told her that her hour was come. The young Joash was standing on his platform, the crown on his head, the captains and trumpeters around him, while the air rang with the joyful huzzas of the people, with the notes of the silver trumpets, and with cries of "Let the king live!" Only in part could Athaliah read the meaning of the scene, for she did not know who this crowned boy was. But she saw enough to tell her that the loyalty of the people had found a new centre, and that her power was gone. The rejoicings of the people would be gall and wormwood to her heart, for they told her, not only that it was all over with her authority, but that the people were glad it was so. How swiftly, as by a bolt from a clear sky, does retribution often fall upon the wicked! An hour before Athaliah had no suspicion of any calamity. She had but to speak, and guards and servants were ready to yield her all obedience; now her authority has departed like a pricked bubble, and she stands helpless among a multitude—none so poor as to do her reverence. The passage is an illustration of the proverb, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn" (Prov. xxix. 2). 2. *Treason to a traitress.* When Athaliah saw what was being done, heard the shouts, and witnessed the rejoicings, she rent her garments, and cried, "Treason! treason!" Treason is an act or series of acts designed to compass the overthrow of a constituted government, and is generally held to be punishable by death. It is wicked and illegitimate governments which make most of the crime of treason, and most severely enforce the penalties against it. Yet it is plain that these penalties are justified only on the supposition that the government against which the treason is directed is a legitimate one. A government which is itself born and bred of treason has no moral justification for punishing treason in others. Athaliah was queen, not by God's will, but in defiance of all right and morality. She had usurped the throne, and killed (or thought she had killed) the rightful heirs to it. Treason against such a government, itself the offspring of the blackest treachery, was not a crime, but might be the highest duty. Still, as if some horrid iniquity was being practised, the traitress rends her clothes, and cries, "Treason!" Her own treason is unthought of; she sees only the treason of her enemies. Is not this state of mind too common? Men are loud in denouncing transgressions which they themselves are flagrantly guilty of. They point to the mote in another's eye, without reflecting on the beam in their own. Callous as to their own falsehood, selfishness, and dishonesty, they detect in an instant, and loudly denounce, the same vices in their neighbours, especially when practised towards themselves. It is this which renders them inexcusable. For the power to detect sin in others implies a knowledge of the law which condemns the person judging if he does the same things (Rom. ii. 1). 3. *Just retribution.* The order of Jehoiada was that

if any one ventured to follow Athaliah, he was to be killed with the sword. But no one seems to have shown any pity for the fallen queen. The downfall of her power was thus complete. A new government having been constituted, her own attempt to excite rebellion now fell under the category of treason, and was punishable. Jehoiada gives orders for her being taken beyond the temple bounds, and there slain. We see hands laid upon her, and she is led away, or goes, "by the way by the which the horses come into the king's house," and in that place of stables meets her death. An inglorious end! But what glory can we look for to crown a career of sin? In Athaliah, the last member of Ahab's cursed house met a deserved doom. Judgment against the sinner may not always be executed speedily, but the stroke will surely fall at last (Eccles. viii. 11).

IV. A COVENANT WITH JEHOVAH. 1. *The covenant with God renewed.* The people had received, as if from heaven, a new king of the line of David, and the moment was auspicious for a new covenant being entered into, and formally ratified, with God. It is good when special mercies are made an occasion of renewal of vows. The covenant promoted by Jehoiada was twofold. (1) It was a covenant between the king and people and Jehovah. In this transaction they solemnly pledged themselves to be the Lord's people. National covenanting is only appropriate when it springs from the spontaneous impulse of the masses of the people. Among the Hebrews, who, by the very form of their national existence, were a people in covenant with Jehovah, such renewal of religious vows was specially suitable. The idea of a "people of the Lord" is now embodied, not in a national form, but in the Church of Christ. Great is the honour of forming part of this "chosen generation," this "royal priesthood," this "holy nation," this "peculiar people" (1 Pet. ii. 9), and we should often recall the fact to ourselves, and make it the basis of new consecration. (2) It was a covenant between the king and the people. He, on his part, would pledge himself to maintain the government according to the Law of God; and they, on theirs, would promise him loyalty and obedience. Happy is it, when rulers and people stand in this bond of mutual confidence! 2. *Zeal in religious reform.* The earnest spirit awakened by this solemn act of covenant immediately showed itself in zealous efforts for the removal of abuses. We read that, not one or two, but "all the people of the land," set themselves to reforming work. (1) They went into the house of Baal, and brake it down. A house of Baal in Jerusalem, and possibly on the temple hill, was a deliberate insult to Jehovah. No respect for the beauty or costliness of the building was allowed to save it from destruction. When higher interests are involved, artistic and sentimental considerations must go to the wall. (2) They brake in pieces "thoroughly" Baal's altars and images. Idolatry was to be thoroughly rooted out in accordance with the word of the testimony (Deut. xii. 1—3). (3) They slew Mattan, the high priest of Baal. By the Law of Israel his life was forfeited through the practice of idolatry. (4) They restored the worship of the temple. This is implied in the statement, "The priest appointed officers over the house of the Lord." It is evident from the next chapter that the temple service had been allowed to become greatly disorganized. The zeal of these reformers had, therefore, its positive side. They sought to build up as well as cast down. The false worship of God was replaced by the true. Court fashion goes a long way in determining preferences in religion. When Athaliah worshipped Baal, it was fashionable to neglect Jehovah; now that Joash restored the worship of Jehovah, people flocked back to the temple. Those in high stations have great responsibilities, and not least for the examples they set in religion. 3. *The joy of the people.* Joash was now escorted in grand procession to the palace of his fathers. Athaliah was dead, and he sat on the throne of the kings. Joy filled the people's hearts, and quiet reigned in the city. When godliness is victorious, it diffuses peace and gladness through all minds.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XII.

VERS. 1—21.—THE REIGN OF JOASH. THE REPAIR OF THE TEMPLE. WAR OF JOASH WITH HAZAEL, AND HIS DEATH BY A CONSPIRACY.

Vers. 1—3.—The writer of Kings is extremely brief and incomplete in his ac-

count of the reign of Joash. He seems to have had a great tenderness for him, and to have determined that he would put on record nothing to his discredit. We have to go to Chronicles (2 Chron. xxiv.) for a complete account, and for an estimate of the real character of the king and of his reign. Both writers appear to have drawn from the same original document, but the writer of Kings made large omissions from it. In a few points only is his narrative fuller than Chronicles.

Ver. 1.—**In the seventh year of Jehu.** Athaliah began to reign very soon after the accession of Jehu (ch. xi. 1), and reigned six full years (ver. 3). The first year of Joash was thus parallel with Jehu's seventh. **Jehoash**—or *Joash*, as he is called sometimes in Kings (ch. xi. 2; xiii. 1, 10), and always in Chronicles—**began to reign; and forty years reigned he in Jerusalem**—the writer of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxiv. 1) and Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 8. § 4) agree—**and his mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba.** Josephus calls her "Sabia."

Ver. 2.—**And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him.** So the Septuagint, the Vulgate, Luther, De Wette, Keil, Bähr, and our Revisers. Only Ewald and Thenius attempt to make the passage contradict Chronicles by translating, "Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days, because Jehoiada the priest had instructed him." But this translation is very forced and unnatural. The writer evidently intended to add a qualifying clause to his statement that Joash reigned well "all his days," but did not wish to draw too much attention to it.

Ver. 3.—**But the high places were not taken away.** So it had been with the best of the previous kings of Judah, as Asa (1 Kings xv. 14) and Jehoshaphat (1 Kings xxii. 43); and so it was with the other "good" kings (ch. xiv. 4; xv. 4, 35) until the reign of Hezekiah, by whom the high places were removed (see below, ch. xviii. 4). We must remember that it was Jehovah who was worshipped in the "high places," not Baal, or Moloch, or Ashtoreth (see the comment on 1 Kings xv. 14). **The people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places.** The *people*, not the king, in the earlier portion of his reign; but in the later portion, probably the king also (see 2 Chron. xxiv. 17, 18).

Vers. 4—16.—*The repair of the temple.* It is rather surprising that the temple had not been thoroughly repaired by Jehoiada during the long minority of Joash, when he must practically have had the sole management of affairs. Probably he did repair the worst of the damage done by Athaliah's orders (2 Chron. xxiv. 7), which may have been very considerable, but neglected the restoration of such portions of the edifice as appeared to him of secondary importance, as the walls of the courts and the outbuildings. Joash, however, when his minority came to an end, and he succeeded to the administration of the state, took a different view. To him the completion of the repairs seemed a pressing business. Probably he thought the honour of God required the entire obliteration of Athaliah's wicked proceedings, and the renewal of the temple's old glories. His six years' residence within the temple precincts may have also inspired him with a love of the building as a building.

Ver. 4.—**And Jehoash said to the priests.** The initiative of Joash is strongly marked, alike in Kings and Chronicles (2 Chron. xxiv. 4). The general weakness of his character, and want of vigour and decision, make it the more surprising that he should in this particular matter have shown himself capable of taking his own line and adhering to it (ver. 7). He has scarcely received from historians the credit that is due to him for his persistent and successful efforts to accomplish an object which was for the honour of religion, and which was yet not pressed forward by the priesthood. Certainly he was no mere puppet of the priestly order. **All the money of the dedicated things that is brought into the house of the Lord**; rather, *all the money of the holy gifts that is brought into the house of the Lord*; i.e. all that ye receive from the people in the way of money. This money accrued from three sources, which the king proceeded to enumerate. First, even **the money of every one that passeth** the account; *i.e.* the census money—the aggregate of the half-shekels received from the males of above twenty years old, whenever a census was taken (Exod. xxx. 12—16). The rendering, "current money," preferred by Thenius, Bähr, and our Revisers, is shown by Keil to be untenable. Secondly, **the money that every man is set at**; *i.e.* the redemption money, derived in part from the payments made for redeeming the first-born (Numb. xviii. 15, 16); in part from the sums which the priests exacted from such as had vowed themselves (Lev. xxvii. 2—8), or those belonging to them, to God.

And [thirdly] **all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the Lord**; *i.e.* all the free-will offerings that should be made in money by any of the Israelites.

Ver. 5.—**Let the priests take it to them, every man of his acquaintance.** The money was to be gathered of "all Israel," out of all "the cities of Judah" (2 Chron. xxiv. 5). The priests of each locality were to be the collectors, and would therefore gather "of their acquaintance." As we cannot suppose that very much would accrue from either the first or second source, since a census was rarely taken, and personal vows were not very common, we must regard the command of Joash as, in the main, the authorization of a general collection throughout the kingdom of voluntary contributions towards the temple repairs, and so as analogous to the "letters" which our own sovereigns, or archbishops, issue from time to time for collections in churches for special objects. **And let them repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found.** The "breaches," or dilapidations, may have been caused, partly by the neglect of necessary repairs during the reigns of Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah; but they were mainly the result of the wilful violence of Athaliah (2 Chron. xxiv. 7). Apparently, the damage done must have been very great.

Ver. 6.—**But it was so, that in the three and twentieth year of King Jehoash the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house.** No charge is made against the priests of malversation or embezzlement. They had simply been negligent. Probably very little money had come in; and they had not been very active in their endeavours to obtain larger contributions. It must be remembered that what went to the fabric fund would, for the most part, be a deduction from the ordinary revenue of the temple, which was not, perhaps, much in excess of the ordinary demands upon it. We can, therefore, quite understand that the king's policy would not be popular with the priests (see 2 Chron. xxiv. 5). Still, it is to be observed that they are not said to have executed no repairs, but only not to have "made haste" and completed their task by the time that the king looked for its completion.

Ver. 7.—**Then King Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest.** So, too, the writer of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxiv. 6). The king did not take the matter into his own hands, but consulted with the head of the priestly order on the best steps to take in order to expedite the repairs. He made no "charge," delivered no "rebuke." He did not "remove the administration of the funds from the hands of the delinquent order" (Stanley). On the contrary, he left it in their hands (vers. 9—11). Two changes only were made: 1. A public chest was set up conspicuously in the temple court, near the great altar, and the people were invited to bring their contributions to the temple, and hand them to the priests, who should straightway deposit them in the chest in the sight of the congregation. 2. The chest was opened from time to time, and the money counted, in the presence of the high priest *and of a royal secretary*. It was then delivered over to "the overseers of the house"—persons, probably, of the priestly order—appointed by Jehoiada (ch. xi. 18), who disbursed it to the carpenters and masons (ch. xii. 11, 12). The chest was a sort of tangible evidence to the people of the purpose to which their contributions would be applied, and naturally stimulated their giving. The presence of the king's officer at the counting of the money, was equivalent, not really to an "audit" (Stanley), but to a publication of the accounts, and would prevent any suspension of the work, so long as it was clear that the money found in the chest had not been expended. Thus a new impetus was given to the movement. The measures taken completely answered. Contributions flowed in rapidly, and in a few years the whole work was accomplished (see 2 Chron. xxiv. 13, 14). **And the other priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house?** This shows that no repairs were going on in the twenty-third year of Joash, but not that none had been done previously. **Now therefore receive no more money of your acquaintance.** This was a revocation of the order given in ver. 5, and necessarily put an end to the local collections, which that order required. **But deliver it for the breaches of the house.** If the priests were not to "receive" the money, they could not "deliver" it. Obscurity is introduced by the desire for extreme brevity. In point of fact, they were to "receive" (ver. 9), but in a new way.

Ver. 8.—**And the priests consented to receive no more money of the people**—*i.e.* to put an end to the local collections ordered in ver. 5—**neither to repair the breaches of the house**; *i.e.* neither to be responsible severally for laying out the money which they collected in repairs.

Ver. 9.—**But Jehoiada the priest took a chest.** The writer of Chronicles says, "At the king's commandment, they made a chest" (2 Chron. xxiv. 8). The suggestion was probably the king's, but the ecclesiastical and civil authorities worked harmoniously in the business. **And bored a hole in the lid of it**—as hundreds of thousands have done since his time—**and set it beside**

the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the Lord. The altar intended is, of course, the altar of burnt offering, which was in the court of the temple, directly opposite the porch. The chest was placed outside the sanctuary (2 Chron. xxiv. 8), and, indeed, outside the porch, on the right hand as one entered into the court by the north door. It was thus very conspicuous. **And the priests that kept the door**—*i.e.* the door of the court—**put therein all the money that was brought into the house of the Lord.** The priests received the money from those who offered, at the gate of the court, and, proceeding to the chest, dropped it in through the aperture. A man could not see that all which he had given was put in, but he reckoned on the good faith of the priest, and was satisfied.

Ver. 10.—**And it was so, when they saw that there was much money in the chest.** "When they saw" means "when they perceived." They would not *see* that the chest was becoming full, but would know by the weight, and perhaps by the sound which the money made when it was dropped in. **That the king's scribe.** "Royal secretaries" were common in ancient Persia, and often acted as the king's commissioners (Herod., iii. 128; Xen., 'Cyrop.,' viii. 6. § 16; 'Œconom.,' iv. 8). Such persons are seen on the Assyrian sculptured slabs, with a roll of paper or parchment in one hand, and a pen in the other, taking account for the king of the spoil brought in from foreign countries (see 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. p. 86). **And the high priest.** Since the time of Joshua, the high priest had been called simply "the priest." The restoration of the full title (*hac-cohen hag-gâdol*) marks the increasing power of the priests and the diminishing power of the kings under the later monarchy. **Came up, and they put up in bags, and told, the money that was found in the house of the Lord.** Money was ordinarily put up in bags, containing a certain definite amount, the mouth of the bag being then tied round with a string (see ch. v. 23; and comp. Prov. vii. 20; Isa. xlvi. 6; Hag. i. 6). Hence putting money up in bags was sometimes called, as in this place, "binding it." No doubt they "told," or counted, the money first, and put it in the bags afterwards; but ὕστερον πρότερον is a very common figure of speech.

Ver. 11.—**And they gave the money, being told**—rather, *after weighing it*—**into the hands of them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of the Lord.** It must be remembered that no coins existed as yet; and the lumps of silver which passed as shekels and half-shekels, were of very uncertain weight. To know the value of the money in each bag, it was necessary, not only to count the pieces, but to weigh each bag separately. The bags, when weighed, were handed over by the high priest and the royal secretary to the officers whom Jehoiada had appointed (ch. xi. 18) to have the general superintendence of the "house." **And they laid it out to the carpenters and builders, that wrought upon the house of the Lord.** The "*paid* it out" of our Revisers is better than "laid it out." The overseers of the temple paid over to the carpenters and the builders, from time to time, such money as was needed for the work done or doing.

Ver. 12.—**And to masons**; rather, *to the masons.* The "masons" (*goderim*) are the actual artisans who worked under instructions from the "builders." **And hewers of stone**—or, *stone-cutters*—rather, those who sawed up the stones on the spot, than those who hewed them in the quarries—**and to buy timber and hewed stone to repair the breaches of the house of the Lord.** The writer of Chronicles mentions "workers in iron and brass" (bronze) also (2 Chron. xxiv. 12). Probably, when once the work was taken thoroughly in hand, it was found that repairs of all sorts and kinds were needed. The temple had stood for a hundred and thirty-six years, and up to this time it had, so far as we know, undergone no repairs at all. Certainly none are mentioned. **And for all that was laid out for the house to repair it.** This general clause shows how wide were the powers of the overseers. The suspicions and jealousies which modern writers have imagined contrast remarkably with the general confidence and trust which seem to have prevailed among all those concerned in the repairs.

Ver. 13.—**Howbeit there was not made for the house of the Lord bowls of silver, snuffers, basins, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money that was brought into the house of the Lord**; *i.e.* while the repairs were incomplete, while the work was still going on, no portion of the money taken from the chest was expended in the purchase of new sacred vessels, whether of gold or silver, whether bowls, or snuffers, or basins, or trumpets—the whole was rigidly applied to the renovation of the temple building. There is no contradiction between this statement and that of the writer of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxiv. 14), who tells us that, *after the entire repairs were completed*, the surplus money was expended in this way, on the purchase of "vessels to minister and to offer, spoons, and vessels of gold and silver." We can well understand that, after the spoiling of the temple by successive kings to buy off enemies—by Rehoboam to content Shishak (1 Kings xiv. 26), by Asa to gratify Benha-

dad (1 Kings xv. 18), and by Joash himself (ver. 18) to procure the retreat of Hazael from the siege of Jerusalem, the vessels of the temple must have required renovating almost as much as the fabric itself; and when it was found that there remained a surplus over and above all that was needed for building purposes, we cannot wonder that it was applied to the renewal of the vessels, absolutely essential as they were for the service of the sanctuary.

Ver. 14.—**But they gave that**—*i.e.* the whole money contributed—**to the workmen**—equivalent to "the carpenters, builders, masons, hewers of stone, etc., mentioned in vers. 11, 12—**and repaired therewith the house of the Lord**; *i.e.* expended the money on the repairs.

Ver. 15.—**Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen.** Society rests upon faith and trust. In all business transactions confidence must be reposed in some one, whose character is the guarantee of his honesty. In the case before us, the overseers of the temple were the persons trusted to expend the money aright (see ver. 11). The overseers (ch. xi. 18) had been appointed by the high priest. **For they dealt faithfully**; *i.e.* honestly.

Ver. 16.—**The trespass money.** When a man had injured another, he was bound by the Law to make compensation to the injured party at the valuation of the priest, with the addition of one-fifth more than the value (Lev. vi. 2—6; Numb. v. 6—8). The compensation was, primarily, to be made to the man himself; secondarily, if he were dead, to his nearest kinsman; finally, if he had left no kinsman, to the priest. **And sin money.** According to the Law, the priest was entitled to no money with a sin offering; but it seems to have become customary to make the priest who offered it a voluntary gift, to compensate him for his trouble. Such free gifts the priest was by the Law (Numb. v. 10) entitled to receive. **Was not brought into the house of the Lord**—*i.e.* it was not deposited in the chest, or applied to the repairs, but—**it was the priests'.**

Vers. 17, 18.—*The war of Joash with Hazael.* A considerable gap occurs between vers. 16 and 17. We learn from Chronicles some particulars of the interval. Not long after the completion of the repairs, Jehoiada, who had lived to a good old age in complete harmony with the monarch, expired. His piety, and his good services, as preserver of the house of David, as restorer of the temple-worship, and joint-repairer with Joash of the temple itself, were regarded as entitling him to extraordinary funeral honours; and by general consent he was interred within the city of Jerusalem, in the sepulchres of the kings (2 Chron. xxiv. 16). His removal led to a fresh religious revolution. "The Jewish aristocracy, who perhaps had never been free from the licentious and idolatrous taint introduced by Rehoboam and confirmed by Athaliah, and who may well have been galled by the new rise of the priestly order, presented themselves before Joash, and offered him the same obsequious homage that had been paid by the young nobles to Rehoboam. He, . . . feeling himself released from personal obligations by the death of his adopted father, threw himself into their hands. Athaliah was avenged almost upon the spot where she had been first seized by her enemies" (Stanley, 'Jewish Church,' vol. ii. p. 345). Joash began by allowing the reintroduction of idolatry and grove-worship (2 Chron. xxiv. 18), and then, when remonstrated with by Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, who had succeeded his father in the office of high priest, had the remonstrant set upon by the people and slain. The writer of Chronicles closely connects this murderous deed with the Syrian war, which followed it within a year (2 Chron. xxiv. 23), and was generally regarded as a Divine judgment.

Ver. 17.—**Then Hazael King of Syria went up, and fought against Gath.** Hitherto Judah had been safe from any attack on the part of Syria, since Israel had been interposed between the two powers. Now, however, that Hazael had conquered from Jehu the entire trans-Jordanic territory (ch. x. 33), the case was wholly altered—Judah and Syria had become conterminous along the line of the lower Jordan, and Syria could invade Judæa at any moment. It is surprising that Gath should have been the special object of attack, since Gath (*Abu-Gheith*) lay remote from the Syrian frontier, in the south-western part of Judæa, and could only be reached from Syria by an enemy who was not afraid of leaving Jerusalem behind him. Gath, when last mentioned, was a Judæan city, and was fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi. 8); but it was originally Philistine (1 Sam. v. 17), and the Philistines had recovered it before the time of Uzziah (2 Chron. xxvi. 6). To which power it belonged when Hazael made war upon it is uncertain. **And took it**—probably took it by storm, and plundered it, but did not attempt an occu-

pation—**and Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem.** If Gath be *Abu-Gheith*, as appears probable, it would be distant from Jerusalem not less than forty miles in a direct line. If Hazael, however, was returning to the trans-Jordanic country taken from Israel, it would lie in his way, and might naturally tempt him to make a dash at it, more especially as he was flushed with victory.

Ver. 18.—**And Jehoash King of Judah took all the hallowed things.** The writer of Chronicles tells us that, first of all, there was a battle. "The army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the Lord delivered a very great host into their hand" (2 Chron. xxiv. 24). The loss was especially heavy among the nobles, who officered the Jewish army. Much plunder was taken by the visitors (2 Chron. xxiv. 23). Then, probably, the siege of the city was commenced, and Joash, like Rehoboam and Asa before him (1 Kings xiv. 26; xv. 18), and Hezekiah subsequently (ch. xviii. 15, 16), had recourse to the temple treasures, and with them bought off the invader. It is noticeable that Athaliah had not deprived the temple of them previously. **That Jehoshaphat, and Jehoram, and Ahaziah, his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated.** Though Jehoram and Ahaziah apostatized so far as to maintain the Baal-worship in Jerusalem, and even to force attendance on it (2 Chron. xxi. 11), yet they did not relinquish altogether the worship of Jehovah. That Jehoram called his son, Ahaziah, "possession of Jehovah," and Ahaziah one of his sons, Joash, "whom Jehovah supports," is indicative of this syncretism, which was common in ancient times, but against which pure Judaism made the strongest possible protest. **And his own hallowed things**—*i.e.* the gifts which he had himself made to the temple—**and all the gold that was found in the treasures of the house of the Lord.** This was probably not much; but some "vessels of gold" had been made (2 Chron. xxiv. 14) out of the residue of the money subscribed for the repairs. **And in the king's house.** The royal palace had been plundered by the Arabs and Philistines combined in the reign of Jehoram (2 Chron. xxi. 16, 17); but in the thirty years that had since elapsed there had been time for fresh accumulations. **And sent it to Hazael King of Syria: and he went away from Jerusalem.** The personal presence of Hazael at the siege seems to be here implied, while 2 Chron. xxiv. 23 rather implies his absence. Perhaps he was absent at first, but joined the besiegers after a while.

Vers. 19—21.—*The close of the reign of Joash—his murder by his servants.* Again the narrative of Kings is to be supplemented by that of Chronicles. From Chronicles we learn that, before the withdrawal of the Syrians, Joash had fallen into a severe illness, which confined him to his apartment (2 Chron. xxiv. 25). This gave opportunity for conspiracy. Among the courtiers were two, perhaps more, whom the fate of Zechariah had grieved, and who were probably opposed to the entire series of later changes in religion which had been sanctioned by Joash (2 Chron. xxiv. 17, 18). These persons "made a conspiracy," which was successful, and "slew Joash on his bed" (2 Chron. xxiv. 25). They then buried him in Jerusalem, but "not in the sepulchres of the kings."

Ver. 19.—**And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, are they not written in the chronicles of the kings of Judah?** This formal phrase, with which he concludes his account of almost every Jewish king (1 Kings xiv. 29; xv. 7, 23; xxii. 45; ch. viii. 23; xiv. 18; xv. 6, etc.), cannot be regarded as an acknowledgment by the author of any special or designed reticence with respect to the reign of Joash. We must suppose him unconscious of any such design. He had to omit much in every case; in the present he happened to omit all the darker shades; and the result was an over-favourable portraiture of the monarch. But, in the providence of God, complete historical justice was secured by the labours and researches of a second inspired writer.

Ver. 20.—**And his servants arose, and made a conspiracy.** By "his servants" officers of his household are probably intended, attendants whose position would give them ready access to his person. **And slew Joash in the house of Millo.** Joash had probably transferred his residence to "the house of Millo"—the great fortress built by David (2 Sam. v. 9) and Solomon (1 Kings ix. 15, 24) in Jerusalem—for greater security during the siege; and, being there prostrated by sickness, could not remove from it when the siege was over. **Which goeth down to Silla.** No commentator has succeeded in explaining this passage. There is no other mention of Silla; and it is difficult to understand how a fortress could be said to "go down" to any place. Our Revisers' conjecture—"*on the way that goeth down* to Silla"—may be accepted as a possible explanation; but it implies that a word (בְּרֶדֶת) has dropped out of the text.

Ver. 21.—**For Jozachar the son of Shimeath;** called in Chronicles "Zabad," probably through a corruption of the text. **His**

mother, Shimeath, was, according to Chronicles (2 Chron. xxiv. 26), an Ammonitess. **And Jehozabad the son of Shomer.** For "Shomer" we have in Chronicles "Shimrith," which is the feminine form of "Shomer," and we are told that she was a Moabitess. The Jews were at all times fond of taking wives from Moab and Ammon (Ruth i. 4; I Kings xi. 1; Ezra ix. 1, 2; Neh. xiii. 23), despite the prohibition of mixed marriages in the Law (see Deut. vii. 3). **His servants, smote him, and he died** (for their motives, see the introductory paragraph), **and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David.** Some critics (as Thenius and Dean Stanley) see a contradiction between this statement and that of 2 Chron. xxiv. 25, that he was "not buried in the sepulchres of the kings;" but, as Bertheau, Keil, and Bähr observe, "the two statements are not irreconcilable," since he may have been regarded as "buried with his fathers," if his grave was anywhere in Jerusalem, even though he was excluded from the royal burying-place. **And Amaziah his son reigned in his stead.** (For the reign of Amaziah, see ch. xiv. 1—20.)

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*Weakness in a monarch almost as bad as wickedness.* The most prominent trait in the character of Joash was his lack of independence and moral weakness. He had no strength of will, no stamina; in the expressive, if inelegant, language of our times, "no backbone." He must always lean upon some one. Let us look at Joash—

I. IN HIS YOUTH. At this time he was so fortunate as to have a natural prop and support in Jehoiada, his uncle by marriage, and his guardian during the years of his minority. Jehoiada's was a strong character, and the life of Joash, while Jehoiada guided his steps, if not marked by any strikingly great actions, was correct, exemplary, worthy of praise. There was piety and right feeling in the pains which he took to promote the restoration of the temple, and prudence in the measures whereby he succeeded in effecting his purpose. The measures may have been—probably were—suggested by Jehoiada; but the king deserves some credit for adopting them.

> Οὗτος μὲν πανάριστος, ὃς αὐτὸς πάντα νοεῖται,
> Φρασσόμενος τά τ' ἔπειτα καὶ ἐς τέλος ἔστιν ἀμείνων.
> Ἐσθλὸς δ' αὖ κἀκεῖνος, ὃς εὖ εἰπόντι πίθηται.

As the writer of Kings says, "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord *all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him*" (ver. 2). But Jehoiada could not live for ever. He reached a very advanced age; but at last he "waxed old and died" (2 Chron. xxiv. 15), and Joash was left to manage as he might without him. Let us look at him now—

II. IN HIS MIDDLE AGE, AFTER THE DEATH OF JEHOIADA. Apparently his weakness is known, and it is at once assumed that he must put himself under directors. The "princes of Judah" go to him, pay him court, flatter him probably, at any rate offer him unusual honours. And at once he succumbs, and places himself under their influence. We cannot suppose him not to have been aware of what he was doing. He must have known the leanings of the "princes," and have understood that, in adopting them as his advisers, he was giving up all the traditions of his earlier life, and taking a new departure. Such lightness would not have been surprising in a mere youth; but Joash was now at least thirty years of age, probably more, and might have been expected to have formed and settled his principles and his character. Still, experience shows that even thirty years of a pious life, if it has been passed "under tutors and governors," does not fix a man's future in the same line—nay, often leads him to an almost irrepressible desire for revolt, and for departing widely from his antecedents. The desire is a temptation of the devil, and, if yielded to, has devilish results; but it is very often yielded to. Nero's outbreak after he had got rid of Seneca is the most palpable historical example; but the experience of most persons must have shown them scores of instances of men, trained and brought up in good courses till middle life, and then suddenly set free to take their own line, who have plunged into dissipation, impiety, and wickedness of all kinds. The case of Joash is extraordinary, not in its general features, but in the lengths to which he went. Under the influence of the "princes," he allowed the Baal-worship to be reintroduced, and gave it free tolerance,

When prophets remonstrated, and Zechariah denounced God's vengeance on those who had forsaken him (2 Chron. xxiv. 19, 20), then Joash, unaccustomed to opposition, was so exasperated that he went the length of murder—murder of a high priest, within the precincts of the temple, by the cruel death of stoning, and murder of one for whom he ought to have had a special kindness, in remembrance of the vast benefits which he had received from his father (2 Chron. xxix. 22). It is quite possible—nay, probable—that Joash (like Henry II. in the case of Becket) did not deliberately determine on the murder—that hasty words, uttered in extreme exasperation, were seized upon (Stanley) by his too-officious servants, and carried out in act before he could retract them. But this only emphasizes his weakness. A well-intentioned prince, yielding to evil influences, sanctions the most atrocious crime that the temple ever witnessed (Matt. xxiii. 35) and through his weakness involves the nation in guilt greater than any that had been incurred by the doings of the most wicked of preceding monarchs.

Vers. 4—8.—*Inconvenience of setting priests and ministers to "serve tables."* However convinced we may be of the honesty of the priests and Levites concerned in collecting money at this time for the repairs of the temple, it is undeniable that their proceedings in the matter created distrust and dissatisfaction. We know too little of the monetary arrangements previously in use among the Jews to see with any real clearness what exactly the complaint of the laity was, or how far the priests and Levites had a satisfactory answer to it. Probably the rules given were not sufficiently definite; and it may also well have been that the priests and Levites were not sufficiently versed in business transactions to understand completely what the rules laid down expressed. We must remember that, in the early Church, when the apostles had to occupy themselves with money matters, it was not long before complaints arose (Acts vi. 1), and the apostles refused any longer to "serve tables." The very foundation of society is a division of labour. In an organization like that of the Church, whether Jewish or Christian, it is of extreme importance to disconnect the performance of high spiritual functions from the duty of receiving, apportioning, and disbursing large sums of money. This is so—

I. BECAUSE, AS A GENERAL RULE, THE MOST SPIRITUALLY MINDED OF MEN ARE THE MOST INAPT FOR THE DETAILS OF BUSINESS. Different qualities of mind, qualities offering a strong contrast, and very rarely united in the same person, are requisite for success in business and for winning souls to God; also intimate acquaintance with an entirely different set of facts is in each case necessary. Spiritually minded men are in many instances woefully deficient in worldly knowledge, know nothing of book-keeping by double entry, and even find a difficulty in remembering the multiplication table. Their faculties are suited for something higher than "serving tables," and to employ them in such service is to waste valuable material in work for which it is wholly unsuited.

II. BECAUSE, IF BUSINESS TRANSACTIONS ARE ILL MANAGED, SUSPICIONS ARISE, AND GOD'S MINISTERS SHOULD BE ABOVE SUSPICION. A minister's usefulness is gone if once he is suspected in money matters. It is seriously impaired, even if nothing is proved against him beyond incapacity and blundering. Many a clergyman has got into most serious trouble by undertaking work of a worldly kind, which he never ought to have undertaken, and failing in the proper management of it, though his honesty was quite unimpeachable.

III. BECAUSE THE TIME GIVEN BY MINISTERS TO BUSINESS MATTERS MIGHT BE BETTER SPENT IN THE PROPER WORK OF THE MINISTRY. This was what the apostles felt (Acts vi. 2—4); they wished to give themselves wholly to "the ministry of the Word and to prayer." Modern clergymen have, in addition, parochial visiting and reading to employ them, both making large demands upon their time, and impossible to be shifted upon others. A congregation will, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, derive far more benefit from their minister having an additional hour a day, or two hours a day, for reading, than from his spending the time in slaving at accounts, collecting the children's pence, looking after clubs, and bargaining for coals or blankets. The study of the Bible, with all the new light which is thrown upon it by recent scholarship and research, is imperative; and it is also essential that a clergyman should have such a knowledge of the current and tendencies of modern thought as is only to be maintained by very diligent reading of the popular literature, periodical and other, of the day.

IV. BECAUSE IT PROMOTES HARMONY AND UNION IF THE LAITY ARE EMPLOYED IN THE BUSINESS MATTERS OF THE DISTRICT, OR CHURCH, OR PARISH. In almost every parish or congregation there will be among the laity persons quite fit to undertake the functions whereof we have been speaking. And such persons will in most cases be gratified by being asked to undertake them. They will be glad to be associated with the clergyman in parochial matters, and to relieve him of a portion of his burdens. It will be a satisfaction to them to be doing some work for Christ and his Church, to feel that they are a part of the organization, and that by their gratuitous service they are furthering the cause of their Lord and Master. And the greater intercourse which will thus take place between them and their spiritual guides will foster good feeling and mutual regard and respect.

Vers. 4—15.—*Church restoration a good work, acceptable to God.* David's desire to build God a house is often mentioned to his honour (2 Sam. vii. 2; 1 Chron. xvii. 1, 2; 2 Chron. vi. 7; Acts vii. 46). Solomon's reputation for piety and zeal rests mainly upon the pains which he took to erect for God's worship a noble and suitable edifice (Wisd. ix. 8; Ecclus. xlvii. 13; Acts vii. 47). The "repairing of the house of God" (2 Chron. xxiv. 27) by Joash obtained him his place among the good kings (ch. xii. 2). Josiah's restoration (ch. xxii. 3—7) helped to put him in the higher category of those who were in no way defective (Ecclus. xlix. 4). Zerubbabel and Jeshua were long held in honour, because they "builded the house, and set up an holy temple to the Lord" (Ecclus. xlix. 12). It was the great glory of Judas Maccabæus that he cleansed and "renewed the sanctuary" (1 Macc. v. 1). If God is to have any outward worship at all, if nations are to honour him openly, if men are to join in *common* prayer for mutual encouragement and edification, there must be buildings for the purpose; and natural reverence requires that they shall be kept solely for the purpose. He who provides such buildings does a good work; he who repairs them when they need it, or restores them when they have gone to decay, shows the same spirit as the original builder, and deserves scarcely less praise. Of course, we assume that both builders and repairers and restorers do their work in a proper frame of mind, and from proper motives; otherwise church-building, like almsgiving or any other good work, may cease to be pleasing to God, or may even become an "offence" to him. Church-builders and church-restorers should see—

I. THAT THEY DO NOT THEIR WORK OUT OF OSTENTATION OR FOR THEIR OWN GLORY. This their conscience will readily tell them if they honestly consult it.

II. THAT THEY DO IT NOT IN A SPIRIT OF MERE ÆSTHETICISM, OUT OF A LOVE OF ART. Considering the personal character of those who built St. Peter's at Rome, and the dominant spirit of the age, it is difficult to suppose that the main motive at work among the promoters was not the æsthetic one. And there may be a danger of the same kind at the present day, when art is in such high estimation.

III. THAT THEY DO IT NOT OUT OF STRIFE, OR JEALOUSY, OR EMULATION, BUT, IF POSSIBLE, WITH A SINGLE EYE TO GOD'S HONOUR, OR, AT ANY RATE, WITH GOD'S HONOUR AS THEIR MAIN OBJECT. As some preached the gospel out of strife (Phil. i. 15) in the apostles' time, so it may be that occasionally nowadays the desire of surpassing a neighbour, or outshining a rival, may be at the root of men's munificence in church-building and chapel-building. As "dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to stink" (Eccles. x. 1), so a wrong motive takes away all its sweet savour from a good action.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The influence of a wise counsellor.* "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him."

I. MUCH DEPENDS UPON THE CHARACTER OF THE SOVEREIGN. Compare England under the Stuarts with England under Cromwell or Queen Victoria. An impure and licentious court demoralizes a whole nation. A pure court is a standing rebuke to iniquity in high places. We have much need to pray "for kings, and for all that are in authority." We have much need to be thankful for the character and life of our present sovereign.

II. THE NATIONAL LIFE LARGELY DEPENDS UPON THE CHARACTER OF THE NATION'S COUNSELLORS. In our limited monarchy the "ministers of the Crown" are virtually the rulers of the nation. How important that a Christian nation should have Christian rulers, Christian legislators! The time has surely come when the voice of the Christian people of the British empire should be much more heard in Parliament. It is not so much the politics of party we need, as the politics of Christianity. We want rulers who will remember that "righteousness exalteth a nation." We want our laws to be based upon the eternal law of God. We want legislators who have the fear of God before their eyes. Christian people need to be aroused to their duty in this matter. They should see to it that, so far as they can secure it, Christian men are chosen to represent them in the legislature of the nation.—C. H. I.

Vers. 4—16.—*The repairing of the temple under Joash: a missionary sermon.* I. THIS WORK HAD ITS ORIGIN IN THE KING'S COMMAND. Kings get a great many hard knocks nowadays. But kings have not been all bad. Considering the fierce light which beats upon a throne, and the special temptations to which they are exposed, perhaps the character of kings will bear investigation as well as the character of many of their critics. If in Jewish history we find a Jeroboam and an Ahab, we also find a Solomon and a Hezekiah. If in Roman history we find a Nero staining with cruelty and bloodshed the imperial purple, we find others like Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, the patrons of literature, philosophy, and the arts. If in our British nation some of our sovereigns were not all they should have been, we can point to the influence for good which many of our rulers have exercised. So, although Joash ended badly, he began well. The first work of Joash and Jehoiada was to pull down the temple of Baal, and destroy his images. *Their next work was to repair the temple of the Lord.* Not merely had the house of the Lord been neglected for the worship of Baal, but, as we read in 2 Chronicles, "the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord did they bestow upon Baalim." Joash was grieved that the house of God should be in this shameful condition. He gave command that the temple should be repaired. He instructed the priests and Levites that they were to make collections for this purpose, not only in the temple, but throughout the land, every man from his acquaintance. 1. *We have got the command of a King in reference to his Church.* The Lord Jesus Christ expects that all who are his people will take an interest in building up that Church. We are first of all to build up the Church of Christ in our own land and in our own district. The professing Christian who enjoys the privileges of a Church, but contributes nothing to its support, is not obeying the teaching of God's Word. Then, also, we are to pray and give and labour for the extension of Christ's kingdom throughout the world. "Let him that heareth say, Come." "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." Here are three commands of Christ. How are we seeking to fulfil them? 2. *The cause of Christian missions rests upon the command of our King.* Some may think little of Christian missions. They may make light of their necessity, or undervalue the work they have done—though testimonies to the value of missionary work are becoming more frequent every year from explorers, from scientific men, from statesmen, even from heathen who have not become Christians. But it is enough for the true Christian that Christ has commanded the evangelization of the world. "That command," said the Duke of Wellington, "is the marching orders of the Christian Church."

II. THIS WORK WAS DELAYED BY NEGLECTFUL PRIESTS. Notwithstanding the command of King Joash, which would seem to have been given early in his reign, for a long time nothing was done. The time passed by till the twenty-third year of his reign, and still the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house of the Lord. Joash called the priests and the Levites together, and asked them why they had not carried out the work entrusted to them. Then he took it out of their hands in a certain measure. They who should have been the foremost in their zeal for the house of God had been tardy in this important work. How often it has unhappily been so in the history of the Christian Church! It was through the priesthood of the Western

Church in the Middle Ages that the greatest corruptions crept in. Forgetting their spiritual profession, they mixed themselves up with the political strife of their day. The popes aspired to be lords over God's heritage—a claim which Christ forbade his apostles to exercise. They thirsted for temporal power, and put the power of the Church into competition with the governments of the nations, just as the present pope is seeking to do in our own time. They thirsted for wealth and splendour, and thus began the traffic in indulgences against which Luther raised his mighty voice. All this time they were unfaithful to the high commission they professed to hold. They were forgetful of the plain statement of Christ, "My kingdom is not of this world." But this unfaithfulness of the teachers of religion is not confined to the Church of Rome. All Churches have suffered from it at one time or another. How much of the delay in the great work of Christian missions has been due to the neglect and unfaithfulness of religious teachers! For centuries scarcely anything was done to carry the gospel into heathen lands. Protestant missions can scarcely be said to have existed before the nineteenth century. The blight of moderatism, which was over all Christian communities in the last century, was fatal to all missionary effort for the time. *But God's work does not depend upon men, or on any class of men.* If those who are stewards of God are unfaithful to their trust, God will commit it to other hands. If men enter the sacred office of the ministry for the sake of earning a livelihood, God can deprive them even of that. How important for ministers of Christ to remember that they are watchmen upon the walls of Zion, and that if they neglect to warn the sinner, the blood of lost souls will be required at their hands! They are to be teachers and examples of the flock, leaders in every good work. Well it is for the Christian minister when he can say with the Apostle Paul, "I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

III. THIS WORK WAS SUPPORTED BY GENEROUS PEOPLE. We may learn much from this chapter about *the place of money in the Church of God.* First of all, we see that *the people were regularly rated or assessed for the support of religious ordinances.* It is to this that Joash refers (ver. 4) when he speaks of the money of every one that passeth the account—the money that every man is set at. And in the account which is given in 2 Chronicles it is said that they made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to bring in to the Lord the collection that Moses the servant of the Lord laid upon Israel in the wilderness. When we look into the thirtieth chapter of Exodus, the last chapter of Leviticus, and other passages, we find the clear instructions of God himself on this matter. When the numbering or census of the people was made, each one was assessed at so much for an atonement offering. This money was devoted to maintain the services of the sanctuary. Then again, if any one entered into a special vow to be the Lord's, he incurred *special* pecuniary obligations, and was rated accordingly. All these offerings Joash ordered to be set apart on this occasion for the repairs of the temple, with the exception of the sin and trespass offerings, which were secured to the priests, and which could not be touched for any other purpose. From these and other details we learn that God expected the Israelites to contribute regularly a fixed sum, in proportion to their income, for the support of religious ordinances. He expected of those who took special vows upon them that they should consecrate more of their money to his service. So God expects of his people still, and particularly of those who make the full profession of Christianity involved in attendance at the Lord's table. Some preacher stated lately that it is no "charity" when we give to the support of the Church with which we are connected. It is merely the payment of a debt—the fulfilment of obligations which every one incurs when he becomes a member of a Christian Church, and obligations which can no more be rightly shirked than any other just and lawful debt. Over and above that, he said, there is, of course, a large margin for the exercise of Christian charity and benevolence. This was the case when Joash appealed to the people to contribute, not only the fixed sum at which they were rated, but also "all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the Lord." He was not ashamed to appeal to them for money, for it was for a good cause. It was for God's cause, for God's house. He put the chest in a prominent place, where it could be seen (ver. 9). And his faithful, earnest appeal was not without effect. We read in 2 Chronicles (xxiv. 10) that "all the princes and

all the people *rejoiced*, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end." No doubt they experienced the blessing which is implied in the words, "*God loveth a cheerful giver.*" We need to study God's Word more on this subject of Christian giving. We have seen what the Old Testament rules were. Here is one from the New Testament: "On the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." If we were to give *systematically*, as these words exhort, if we were to measure our weekly offerings by our prosperity, how much larger our offertories would be! what an overflowing offering of silver and gold would be given to carry the gospel to the heathen!

IV. THIS WORK WAS CARRIED OUT BY FAITHFUL WORKERS. Those are very remarkable words, "Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: *for they dealt faithfully*" (ver. 15). There were faithful workmen, and faithful overseers of the work. And what was the explanation of this unusual confidence on the part of the contributors, and unusual faithfulness on the part of the workers? Ah! there had been a reformation of religion! Wherever true religion flourishes, *there* there will be honest and upright dealing between man and man. When the great revival of religion took place in Ulster in 1859, the change was soon manifest in the conduct of the whole community. Scenes of strife and turbulence became scenes of kindness and peace. The officers of justice had easy work in maintaining law and order, and at many of the sessions there was absolutely no criminal business. When men are influenced by the fear of God it will not be hard to procure obedience for the law of man. When the love of Christ is in men's hearts there will be love for our fellow-creatures also. May we not say the same of the great work of missions to the heathen, that it *is being carried on by faithful workers?* Where shall we find such a record of faithfulness, of patience, of devotedness, of perseverance, of heroic courage, as in the life and work of many a humble missionary to heathen lands? When we remember how many of those who have gone forth as missionaries, in connection with the Church and with the great missionary societies, have sacrificed high literary, or commercial, or professional prospects at home, it is but reasonable that the Christian Church should express its sympathy with such self-denial and devotedness by contributing liberally to the work of foreign missions (*vide infra*, on ch. xiii. 14—19).—C. H. I.

Vers. 17—21.—*The last days of Joash. He began well, but ended badly.* The close of the reign of Joash is a melancholy contrast to its beginning. In a most remarkable way preserved, by the providence of God and the kindness of a God-fearing woman, from the massacre of his brothers; then kept safe in the house of the Lord for six years of his helpless childhood;—one would think he would never have forgotten how much he owed to the watchful care and goodness of God. He had been surrounded with good influences. Jehoiada had watched over him like a father. When he came to the throne, Jehoiada had caused him to enter into a covenant with God. He began his reign with a great religious reformation. He ended it with a shameful forsaking of God. There were three causes of his fall. 1. *He retained the high places.* His reformation was not complete. The germs of future evil were there. How careful we should be of the beginnings of evil! It seemed a small matter to retain the high places. But that small act of negligence or want of courage prepared the way for national idolatry, and for the ultimate downfall of Joash. It accustomed the people to heathen modes of worship (cf. *infra*, on ch. xiv. 1—4). 2. *He listened to evil counsellors.* It was an evil day for Joash when Jehoiada passed away. "Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. *Then the king hearkened unto them.* And they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass" (2 Chron. xxiv. 17, 18). Ah! how true it is that "evil communications corrupt good manners"! 3. *He disregarded the warnings of God.* The Lord "sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the Lord; . . . but they would not give ear" (2 Chron. xxiv. 19). Zechariah the son of Jehoiada came with a special warning. But here again we see the hardening effect of sin. Not only did Joash pay no attention to his warnings, but with the basest ingratitude, forgetful of all he owed to Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, he put Zechariah to death. The messenger of God may

suffer for his faithfulness in rebuking sin, as John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod, but no royal power can stay the judgments of God. Joash, who had slain God's prophet, was himself slain by his own servants. The nation had forsaken God, and God forsook them in their time of need. Such a career as that of Joash shows the necessity for constant watchfulness against sin. Many, like him, begin well, but end badly. They make a fair profession at first, but by-and-by, when troubles or persecutions arise, they are offended. They go back and walk no more with Christ. Or they become worldly minded, and, being engrossed in the present, forget the concerns of eternity. Many might utter the melancholy cry, "Our lamps are gone out." To every one of us the message may well be sent, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—21.—*The history of Joash.* "In the seventh year," etc. The whole story of Joash is soon told. He was a son of Ahaziah, and the only one of his children who escaped the murderous policy of Athaliah. "It would seem that this child, whom the pity and affection of a pious aunt (Jehosheba) had preserved, was the only surviving male representative of the line of Solomon. Jehoram, his grandfather, who married Athaliah, in order to strengthen his position on the throne, slew all his brethren, and all his own sons were slain in an incursion by the Arabians, except Ahaziah, the youngest, who succeeded him; while on the death of Ahaziah, his wicked mother, Athaliah, 'arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah,' except the little child Joash, who was rescued from her grasp. So that the unholy alliances formed by the descendants of Solomon, and the manifold disorders then accruing, had reduced everything to the verge of ruin. Measures were concerted by Jehoiada, the high priest, for getting rid of Athaliah, and placing Joash on the throne, after he had attained to the age of seven; and having in his youth the wise and the faithful round his throne, the earlier part of the reign of Joash was in accordance with the great principles of the theocracy. The Lord's house was repaired and set in order, while the temple and idols of Baal were thrown down. But after Jehoiada's death, persons of a different stamp got about him, and, notwithstanding the great and laudable zeal which he had shown for the proper restoration of God's house and worship, a return was made to idolatry to such an extent as to draw forth severe denunciations from Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada. Even this was not the worst, for the faithfulness of Zechariah was repaid with violence; he was even stoned to death, and this, it is said, at the express command of the king. The martyred priest exclaimed as he expired, 'The Lord look upon it, and require;' and it was required as in a whirlwind of wrath. For a Syrian host, under Hazael, made an incursion into Judæa, and both carried off much treasure and executed summary judgment on many in Jerusalem, not excepting Joash himself, whom they left in an enfeebled state, and who was shortly afterwards fallen upon and slain by his servants. Such was the unhappy termination of a career which began in much promise of good, and the cloud under which he died even followed him to the tomb, for while he was buried in the city of David, it was not in the sepulchres of the kings of Judah. He reigned forty years—from B.C. 878 to 838." The narrative, whether we regard it as inspired or not, reminds us of five things worth considering—the dilapidating influence of time upon the best material productions of mankind; the incongruity of worldly rulers busying themselves in religious institutions; the value of the co-operative principle in the enterprises of mankind; the potency of the religious element in the nature of even depraved people; and the power of money to subdue enemies.

I. THE DILAPIDATING INFLUENCE OF TIME UPON THE BEST MATERIAL PRODUCTIONS OF MANKIND. Joash here called upon the priests and the people "to repair the breaches of the house," *i.e.* the temple. The temple, therefore, though it had not been built more than about a hundred and sixty years, had got into a state of dilapidation, there were breaches in it; where the breaches were we are not told, whether in the roof, the floor, the walls, or in the ceiling. The crumbling hand of time had touched it. No human superstructure, perhaps, ever appeared on the earth built of better materials, or in a better way, than the temple of Solomon. It was the wonder of ages. Notwithstanding this, it was subject to the invincible law of decay. The law of dilapidation seems universal throughout organic nature; the trees of the forest, the

flowers of the field, and the countless tribes of sentient life that crowd the ocean, earth, and air, all fall into decay; and so also with the material productions of feeble man. Throughout the civilized world we see mansions, churches, cathedrals, palaces, villages, towns, and cities, in ruins. All compound bodies tend to dissolution; there is nothing enduring but primitive elements or substances. This being so, how astoundingly preposterous is man's effort to perpetuate his memory in material monuments! The only productions of men that defy the touch of time, and that are enduring, are true thoughts, pure sympathies, and noble deeds. He who builds up the temple of a true moral character produces a superstructure that will last through the sweep of ages, the wreck of thrones, and the crash of doom.

II. THE INCONGRUITY OF WORLDLY RULERS BUSYING THEMSELVES IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS. Joash was no saint, the root of the matter was not in him; he had no vital and ruling sympathy with the Supreme Being, yet he seemed zealous in the work of repairing the temple. "Then King Joash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the other priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? now therefore receive no more money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house." Though the conduct of corrupt men in busying themselves with things pertaining to religion is incongruous, alas! it is not uncommon. Such conduct generally springs from one of two things, or from both—*policy* or *superstition*. The religion that is popular, whether it be true or false, rulers recognize and sanction. They use the religious element in the community as a means by which to strengthen their thrones and augment their fame. Not only, indeed, are kings actuated thus, but even the corrupt tradesman, lawyer, doctor, etc., must show some interest in the popular religion in order to succeed in his secular pursuits. But *superstition* as well as policy often prompts corrupt men to busy themselves in matters of religion. Do not many build and beautify churches and subscribe to religious institutions, hoping thereby to escape perdition and to ensure the favour of Heaven? Alas! some of the corruptest men are often most busy in religious affairs. The man that betrayed the Son of God at the last Passover was most busy on that awful night; "his hand was on the table."

III. THE VALUE OF THE CO-OPERATIVE PRINCIPLE IN THE ENTERPRISES OF MANKIND. It would seem that the work of repairing the temple was so great that no one man could have accomplished it. Hence the king called earnestly for the co-operation of all. "And Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the dedicated things that is brought into the house of the Lord, even the money of every one that passeth the account, the money that every man is set at, and all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the Lord, let the priests take it to them, every man of his acquaintance: and let them repair the breaches of the house." They obeyed his voice. The people gave the money, and all set to work; the "priest that kept the door," the "high priest," the "carpenters," the "masons," the "builders," the "hewers of stone," etc. By this unity of action "they repaired the house of the Lord." Two remarks may be made concerning the principle of co-operation. 1. It is a principle that *should govern* all men in the undertakings of life. It was never the purpose of the Almighty that man should act alone for himself, should pursue alone his own individual interests. Men may, and often do, make large fortunes by it, but they destroy their own peace of mind, degrade their natures, and outrage the Divine laws of society. Men are all members of one great body; and was ever a member made to work alone? No; but for the good of the whole, the common weal. 2. It is a principle that has *done and is doing wonders* in the undertakings of life. Our colleges, hospitals, railways, etc., are all the products of co-operation. The more men get intellectually enlightened and morally improved, the more this principle will be put into operation. This principle, however, has its limits. In spiritual matters it must not infringe the realm of individual responsibility. There is no partnership in moral responsibility. Each man must think, repent, and believe for himself. "Every man must bear his own burden."

IV. THE POTENCY OF THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENT EVEN IN DEPRAVITY. At this time Israel was morally almost as corrupt as the heathen nations. From the beginning Israel was the Church of God in little more than *a metaphorical* sense. Never in the history of the world has there been a member of the true Church whose sympathies with Jehovah were not supreme. But how many of the Jews had this supreme sympathy?

Notwithstanding this, the religious sentiment was in them, as in all men, a constituent part of their natures; and this sentiment is here appealed to, and roused into excitement; and, being excited, men poured forth their treasures and employed their energies for the repairing of the temple. This element in man often sleeps under the influence of depravity, but mountains of depravity cannot crush it; it lies in human nature as the mightiest latent force. Peter the Hermit, Savanorola the priest, Wesley the Methodist, and others in every age, have roused it into mighty action, even amongst the most ignorant and depraved of the race. Cunning priests and crafty kings have appealed to it as the strongest force that can bear them on to the realization of their miserable ends. The truly good and godly must appeal to it if they would accomplish any great work for mankind. By its right action only can men rise; by its dormancy or wrong development men must inevitably fall.

V. THE POWER OF MONEY TO SUBDUE ENEMIES. "Hazael King of Syria . . . set his face to go up to Jerusalem. And Joash King of Judah took all the hallowed things that . . . his fathers . . . had dedicated, . . . and all the gold that was found in the treasures of the house of the Lord, . . . and sent it to Hazael King of Syria: and he went away from Jerusalem." Here is a man, a proud, daring monarch, who was determined to invade Judæa, and to take possession of Jerusalem, relinquishing his designs. What was the force that broke his purpose? *Money.* It is said that Joash sent gold to Hazael, "and he went away from Jerusalem." Truly money answereth for all things. Money can arrest the march of armies and terminate the fiercest campaigns. After contending armies have destroyed their thousands, it is money alone that brings the battle to a close. Money is the soul of all pacifying treaties. What fools the rulers of the people are not to employ money to prevent war and turn it away from their country! Enemies can be conquered by gifts. Evil can only be overcome by good. "If thine enemy hunger, offer him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head."—D T.

Vers. 1—3.—*A mixed character.* The reign of Joash began with bright hopes, showed for a while excellent promise, yet ended ingloriously. To explain this we may consider—

I. JOASH'S ADVANTAGES. 1. *He had a pious education.* As a child he was brought up by his aunt Jehosheba, who, with her husband the high priest, would instil into his mind the principles of true godliness. In his strict seclusion he was kept free from sights of vice. Like Timothy, he would be taught from a child to know the things that make wise unto salvation (2 Tim. iii. 15). To have an early training of this kind is an inestimable advantage. 2. *He had a good counsellor.* The early education of our own Queen Victoria was carefully conducted with a view to the royal office she was afterwards to fill. It would not be otherwise with young Joash. Jehoiada would carefully impress upon his mind the principles of good government, and, after his coronation, this holy man continued to be his guide and counsellor. So it is said, "Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him." It is a happy thing when a king is willing to receive counsel from older and wiser heads than his own (cf. 1 Kings xii. 6—11). 3. *He had an excellent opportunity.* Joash started with every advantage for reigning well. The people were animated with hatred of idolatry from the experience they had had of it in Athaliah's reign; they were enthusiastic in their return to the worship of Jehovah; they had inaugurated the restoration of the line of David by a new covenant with God, and by zealous acts of reform. The tide was with Joash, if he had shown strength of character sufficient to avail himself of it.

II. JOASH'S WEAKNESS. Circumstances test men, and it was to be proved that, with all his advantages, Joash was a weak king. 1. *He lacked independence of judgment.* Whether the early seclusion of his life had anything to do with this, we cannot tell; but it seems plain that he was not a king accustomed to think and act for himself, but one who was easily influenced and led by others. His nature was passive clay, on which the judgment of others stamped itself. While Jehoiada lived, he allowed himself to be led by him; and when this good priest and counsellor died, he allowed himself as readily to be turned into evil courses by the wicked nobility (2 Chron. xxiv. 17, 18). 2. *He lacked firmness of will.* This defect flowed from the feebleness of judgment now

indicated. Joash knew the right, but he had not the courage or persistence to do it when pressure was brought to bear on him in an opposite direction. His life thus proved at last a wretched failure. Notwithstanding Jehoiada's kindness to him, he was betrayed at length into shedding the blood of Zechariah, his benefactor's son (2 Chron. xxiv. 20—22). 3. *He lacked true surrender of heart to God.* This was the prime defect in his character. His goodness, such as it was—and for a time it seemed perfectly genuine—was the result of natural amiableness, of early training, of external influences; it did not spring from a root of true conviction. Therefore, when the sun was up, it was scorched, and withered away (Matt. xiii. 6). It was goodness like the morning cloud, and the early dew—unenduring (Hos. vi. 3). The lesson we learn is the need of a radical change of heart as the foundation of true and enduring piety.

III. JOASH'S IMPERFECT REFORMS. The one point noticed about him at this stage is that, while reforming the worship of the temple, the high places were not taken away as commanded by the Law. This was a reform, it is to be allowed, not easily achieved, but had Joash been a man of more character he might have accomplished it, as Hezekiah did after him (ch. xviii. 4). The fact that he did not attempt it, though popular feeling was so strongly on his side, is an evidence of that weak line in his character which came more clearly to light when Jehoiada was removed.—J. O.

Vers. 4—6.—*The temple repairs—a good purpose frustrated.* At an early period of his reign, Joash, instigated no doubt by the good Jehoiada, took steps to have the temple put in a proper state of repair.

I. THE REPAIR OF THE TEMPLE PROJECTED. 1. *The need of repair.* What is stated in Chronicles of the condition of the temple shows how terrible had been the blight which had fallen on true religion in Judah during the reign of Athaliah. "That wicked woman," we are told, "had broken up the house of God"—probably carried away its stones to build or adorn her own house of Baal; or, perhaps, had broken down part of the courts to make room for her temple on the same hill. Moreover, she had taken away all the dedicated things to bestow upon the house of Baal (2 Chron. xxiv. 7). There was thus much work to be done in repairing the temple, as the numbers of workmen afterwards employed show. Many are the inroads of the world upon the Church—God's spiritual temple; and any breaches found in *its* walls should give rise to earnest desires and efforts to see them mended. 2. *The resolve to repair.* Joash gave orders that the repairing of the temple should be proceeded with. He had, perhaps, by this time attained his majority. But it is a singular thing that, with such a wave of reforming zeal as passed over the nation at the time of his accession, the people themselves should have been content to let the temple lie out of repair so long. Care for God's house is one of the ways of showing honour to God himself. Yet how slow men are to move, or make sacrifices, that God's worship may be suitably provided for! They are content to dwell in ceiled houses, while God's house lies waste (Hag. i. 4).

II. THE REPAIR OF THE TEMPLE PROVIDED FOR. 1. *By sacred dues.* In ordaining that the temple should be repaired, Joash showed also how the funds for the work were to be obtained. The Chronicler gives prominence to the half-shekel tax, which in the days of Moses was levied for the benefit of the sanctuary (2 Chron. xxiv. 6, 9), and there were the other moneys to be paid on occasion of the fulfilment of vows (Lev. xxvii. 2—8). It is well when religion is not left to be supported by haphazard contributions, but when there is some definite principle of giving—some portion of income which is regularly set apart for the Lord's use. This creates a fund which can be readily drawn upon when any good work requires aid. 2. *By free-will offerings.* The stated dues were not to be the only source of revenue. There is named also "all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the Lord." It is expected that religion will touch the heart of a man, and make him willing to part with a portion of his substance for the service of God. If it does not, it is not of much value. On the other hand, it is the heart which is the source of true religious giving. The gifts which come from the hand, not from the heart, do not count for much in Heaven's reckoning. "God loveth a *cheerful* giver" (2 Cor. ix. 7).

III. THE REPAIR OF THE TEMPLE STILL UNEXECUTED. Years passed on. Joash had now been twenty-three years upon the throne, yet the repairs of the temple had not so much as begun. It seems unaccountable that in so holy a work such apathy should

have prevailed. The fact may be attributed: 1. *To the inertia of the priesthood.* Everything seems at first to have been left to the priests and Levites. They were to go through the land, make proclamation of the king's purpose, and collect the money for the work. In this duty they appear to have been slack. "The Levites," the Chronicler says, "hastened it not" (2 Chron. xxiv. 5). Large bodies of men are slow to move. Some of the priests and Levites were probably men of no great religious enthusiasm. One can sympathize with them in their shrinking from the task of collecting money. There are few tasks more thankless. 2. *To the distrust of the people.* The people appear not to have had the requisite confidence in the priests to entrust them with large sums of money. At least the money seems to have come in more freely after Jehoiada made his chest with the hole in the lid of it, than it did before. The distrust of the people was natural, for the priests were in no hurry to lay out the revenues they collected. 3. *To the self-interest of a privileged class.* The priestly dues would suffer serious diminution during the reign of such a queen as Athaliah. Irregularities would creep in, and the priests and Levites, deprived of their proper income, would feel justified in appropriating primarily to their own support whatever moneys came to hand. Joash's decree had the effect of cutting off these perquisites, and of restoring them to their original use in keeping up the sanctuary. It could not be expected that the classes who were to suffer would be very eager in carrying out this decree. It is never safe to trust a privileged class to carry out measures which tell against its own interests. Average human nature is not so disinterested as to act enthusiastically for the promotion of reforms which injure itself.—J. O.

Vers. 7—16.—*The temple repairs—a good purpose accomplished.* When so many years had elapsed without anything being done, Joash called the priests to account, and ordered them to take no more of the money of the people for themselves, but to repair the breaches of the house. A new start was made, and this time success was attained. We may ascribe the success to—

I. PRUDENT ARRANGEMENTS. Wise, business-like arrangements have much to do with the success of any undertaking. Those now entered into were under the superintendence of Jehoiada, and afforded: 1. *Security against misappropriation.* Jehoiada obtained a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it. It was placed beside the altar, on the right side, and all the money that was brought was put therein. There could thus be no suspicion of any mal-appropriation of the funds. Every worshipper had the certainty that what he gave would go for the purpose for which it was given. 2. *A removal of temptation.* The arrangement of the chest was an advantage to the priests as well as to the people. It no longer afforded any temptation to needy individuals among them to retain funds that were passing through their hands. It put the order, as a whole, above suspicion and reproach. It is well not to put needless temptations in any one's way. 3. *A convenience for giving.* The chest, as it stood there beside the altar, was a permanent depository to which the contributions of the faithful could be brought. The people had not to seek out persons to receive their gifts. They knew, without asking, where to take them. Sound arrangements of this sort, inspiring confidence, minimizing temptations to negligence or dishonesty, and consulting the convenience of the offerers, were admirably adapted to promote the ends aimed at. The example may be attended to with profit in the financial management of churches, charities, missionary societies, etc.

II. WILLING GIVERS. The fact that the work was taken partially out of the hands of the priests, and that the people had now security for their gifts being properly applied, had an immediate effect on the flow of contributions. We find: 1. *Liberal gifts brought.* It was not long, as we are told, before there was "much money" in the chest. People are seldom as willing to give for religion as they should be, but if a good cause is put before them, if they have the case properly presented, and if they feel secure as to the disposal of their gifts, it is wonderful often how freely liberality flows forth. We must not blame people for illiberality when their backwardness in giving arises from removable, and perhaps justifiable, causes. 2. *A strict account kept.* This is another feature in the business-like management of the funds which was now introduced, showing what great pains were taken to impress the minds of the people with confidence in the disposal of their money. When the chest was full, the king's scribe and the

high priest came up, opened the box, put the money in bags, and made a strict account of the sums. Strictness in pecuniary details may seem a minor matter, but it is really not so. The man who is honest in his pecuniary affairs is likely to be honest all through. Nothing shakes confidence so much as the suspicion of small unfaithfulnesses in money transactions. Instinctively we apply the principle, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (Luke xvi. 10, 11).

III. DILIGENT WORKERS. The money contributed by the people was applied to hire the services of workers to execute the needed repairs. 1. *The workers were many.* There were carpenters and builders, stonemasons and hewers, and part of the money was expended also on the purchase of materials. As in this temple-building so in the Christian Church, there is need not only for givers but for workers, and every variety of gift proves to be of service. Some can give who cannot work; others can work who cannot give; others can both give and work. There are needed those with mission talent—the quarrymen and excavators; there are needed those who can educate, or hew and polish the stones when obtained; there are needed the organizers and builders—those whose function it is to put the stones in their places, and build up the holy temple to the Lord. 2. *The workers were diligent.* They were set on as soon as funds were forthcoming to employ them, and they wrought with good heart till the work was finished. Labour in the kingdom of God should be diligent. The many workers did not work separately, but together, all of them helping one another; and similar combination and co-operation are necessary to overtake the work of Christ.

IV. FAITHFUL OVERSEERS. Another step in the right direction, following up the previous precautions to inspire confidence, was the appointment of men to superintend the work who could be implicitly trusted. It is a noble testimony borne concerning these men who did the part of overseers in the work of the temple, that they did not need to be reckoned with, "for they dealt faithfully." 1. *They were faithful in their oversight.* They were men of probity and honour, who conscientiously looked after the men set under them, seeing that the work committed to their care was properly done. It is difficult to estimate the value, even in an economical respect, of the higher moral qualities of character. How much loss, suffering, disease, death, not to speak of minor annoyance, is inflicted on mankind through badly inspected, ill-done work? There is a sphere for faithfulness in the discharge of every kind of duty. Carlyle says of Louis XV., "His wide France, look at it from the fixed stars (themselves not yet infinitude), is no wider than thy narrow brickfield, where thou, too, didst faithfully, or didst unfaithfully. . . . It is not thy works, which are all mortal, infinitely little, and the greatest no greater than the least, but only the spirit thou workest in that can have worth or continuance." 2. *They were faithful in their money dealings.* So perfectly faithful that it was not felt necessary to keep a strict reckoning with them as to their expenditure upon the workmen. No better tribute could be paid to their incorruptible integrity than the trust thus reposed in them. It was only a very high degree of integrity which would warrant it. As a rule, it is wise to keep account even with those whose integrity we do not dispute.

V. RESPECT FOR RIGHTS. It is added that the revenues which properly belonged to the priests, the trespass money and sin money, were not touched for the purpose of the repairs. Neither was the money given for the restoration of the building applied, until the repairs were completed, to purchase new vessels for the sanctuary—bowls of silver, snuffers, trumpets, etc. Probably in connection with the above arrangements for collecting the people's money other steps were taken to put the priests' legitimate income, the tithe dues, etc., on a more satisfactory footing. A regard for justice is thus observable throughout the whole of these dealings. Right is the proper basis to take one's stand on in works of reformation.—J. O.

Vers. 17—21.—*Dark days for Judah.* The reign of Joash began with bright promise, but ended in gloom and tribulation. It furnishes another instance of the evil consequences of forsaking God.

I. JOASH'S APOSTASY. Of this a fuller account is given in the Book of Chronicles than here, though the statement in ver. 2, "Joash did right all his days wherein

Jehoiada the priest instructed him," already hints at a falling away after Jehoiada's death. From Chronicles we learn the nature of his apostasy. 1. *He yielded to bad counsel.* His good adviser having died at the extreme age of a hundred and thirty, he listened to the flatteries and seductions of the princes of Judah, whose bent was all towards evil (2 Chron. xxiv. 17). 2. *He revived idolatry.* If he did not actually participate in the renewed setting up of idols, he permitted it. Baal-worship, from which in infancy he had suffered so much, again lifted up its head in Jerusalem. For this trespass it is said, "wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem" (2 Chron. xxiv. 18). 3. *He shed innocent blood.* This declension of Joash was not allowed to go unrebuked. God sent prophets to him to testify to him and warn him, especially Zechariah, the son, or perhaps grandson, of the priest Jehoiada. But so far had the infatuation of Joash gone that he actually permitted this son of his former friend and benefactor to be stoned with stones between the temple and the altar in the court of the Lord's house (2 Chron. xxiv. 20—22; cf. Matt. xxiii. 35). This ineffaceable crime completed his ruin. As Zechariah died he had said, "The Lord look upon it, and require it" (2 Chron. xxiv. 22); and God did require it. The Jews had a tradition that, at the capture of Jerusalem, this blood of Zechariah bubbled up from the floor of the temple court, and could not be pacified. Nebuzaradan brought rabbis, and slew them on it, still it was not quiet; he brought children, and slew them on it, still it was not quiet; he slew ninety-four thousand on it, yet it was not quiet. The fable illustrates at least the heinousness of the deed.

II. HAZAEL'S INVASION. The instrument employed to chastise Joash and the people for their sins was the redoubtable Hazael. He invaded the land by the way of Philistia, and reduced it to great distress. We note regarding the invasion: 1. *Its resistless character.* It was but a very small company of men that came with Hazael, but they seem to have swept the "very great host" of Judah before them with ease, destroying the princes of the people, who had been ringleaders in wickedness, and sending the spoil on to Damascus (cf. 2 Chron. xxiv. 24). It is a fatal thing to break faith with God, to apostatize from solemn covenants with him, to provoke him to anger by open wickedness and deeds of blood. The strength of a nation stands not in its mighty men, but in the favour of God, and where that is withdrawn, a handful of armed men will chase a thousand (cf. Deut. iv. 25—27; xxviii. 27—48). 2. *The ignominious tribute.* What, in so deplorable a case, could Joash do? His princes, so bold in counselling him in courses of sin, were cowards in the field; and Hazael seemed bent on utterly overthrowing him. He had no alternative but to make the best terms he could, and buy the invader off. To furnish the requisite tribute he had to strip both the temple and his own house of all their goodly treasures. He took the hallowed things of his forefathers out of the temple, and the gold that was found in its treasuries; he took also his own gold, and sent everything to Hazael. He, the restorer of the temple, is forced to become the spoiler of the temple. To such depths of ignominy and misery are men led by forsaking the ways of God. Yet nothing seems to avail sinners for warning! They go on as madly in ways of wickedness as if no one had ever tried these paths before them, and found them the ways of death.

III. THE FATAL CONSPIRACY. We have, finally the account of how Joash met his end by a conspiracy of two of his servants. 1. *The origin of the conspiracy.* We cannot err in supposing that it had its origin in the seething discontent of the people. They saw the kingdom going to pieces in the hands of an unfaithful king; they saw righteous blood shed; they had suffered severely from the barbarities of invasion. The conspirators do not seem to have plotted any dynastic change. Their act only expressed the bitter hatred with which the person of the king had come to be regarded. How different from the day when the multitude shouted, "God save the king!" And that change had come about solely through Joash's departure from the right ways of God. 2. *Its fatal result.* The servants, whose names are given in the text, smote him in "the house of Millo" so that he died. Thus Joash fell by the stroke of an assassin, unpitied, unlamented by his people. When the bonds of godliness are loosed, the bonds of fidelity between man and man are loosed too (Hos. iv. 1, 2). 3. *The dishonour to his body.* The crowning ignominy put upon Joash was the refusal of the people to allow him to be buried in the sepulchre of the kings, as Jehoiada had been (2 Chron. xxiv. 25). This confirms what is said above of the odium in which he was held by his people.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIII.

Vers. 1—25.—Reigns of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, and Joash, son of Jehoahaz, over Israel. Notices of Elisha. War of Israel with Syria.

Vers. 1—9.—The Reign of Jehoahaz. The writer returns in this chapter to the history of the Israelite kingdom, taking it up from the death of Jehu, which was recorded in the closing verses of ch. x. He sketches briefly the reign of Jehu's son and successor, Jehoahaz, in the present section, after which he passes to that of Jehu's grandson, Jehoash or Joash. The Syrian oppression was the great event of Jehoahaz's reign.

Ver. 1.—In the three and twentieth year of Joash; rather, as in Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 8. § 5), *in the one and twentieth year.* This is a correction required by ver. 10 and also by ch. xii. 1. The proof is given at somewhat tedious length by Keil ('Biblical Commentary,' pp. 373, 374) and Bähr ('Books of the Kings,' pp. 139, 140). It seems unnecessary to enter into a lengthy discussion of the point, since *all* the synchronisms of the later kings of Israel and Judah are in confusion, and appear to be the work of a later hand. **The son of Ahaziah** (comp. ch. xi. 2; 2 Chron. xxii. 11) **King of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel**; literally, *reigned over Israel.* The "later hand," which inserted the synchronism, neglected to bring the two portions of the verse into agreement. Our translators have sought to cover up his omission by translating *mâlak* "began to reign," and then supplying "and reigned" in the next clause. **And reigned seventeen years** (so also Josephus, *l. s. c.*).

Ver. 2.—And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. There is no reason to believe that Jehoahaz re-introduced the Baal-worship, or sinned in any other flagrant way than by maintaining the calf-worship at Dan and Bethel. Jehu had done the same (ch. x. 29), as had all previous kings of Israel from the time of Jeroboam. The honour of God, however, required that idolatry of whatever kind should be punished, and the Samaritan kingdom could not otherwise be saved from destruction than by "casting away *all* the works of darkness" and returning to the *pure* worship of Jehovah. Hence Jehu himself, notwithstanding the good service that he had done in crushing the Baal-worship, was chastised by God (ch. x. 32, 33) on account of his continuance in the "sin of Jeroboam;" and now Jehoahaz was even more signally punished. As Keil remarks, "The longer and the more obstinately the sin was continued, the more severe did the punishment become." **And followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat** (comp. ch. x. 29, where the exegetical clause is added, "To wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan") **which made Israel to sin** (comp. 1 Kings xv. 26; xvi. 19, 26; xxii. 52, etc.); **he departed not therefrom.** This is emphatic. Jehoahaz kept up the worship to the full, and in no way suffered it to decline.

Ver. 3.—And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. We know so much less of the nature of the calf-worship and of the rites which accompanied it, that we cannot to the same extent justify the Divine severity in connection with it as in connection with the Baal and Astarte cult. Still, we must remember the coarse, lewd dancing which accompanied the first calf-worship (Exod. xxxii. 19), for which death was not thought too heavy a penalty (Exod. xxxii. 27), and the almost universal combination of unchastity with idolatrous ceremonies, which raises a suspicion that those who frequented the shrines at Dan and Bethel were not wholly innocent of impurity. **And he delivered them into the hand of Hazael King of Syria.** The national sins of Israel were mostly punished in this way, by the sword of some foreign foe. Hazael had been already made an instrument for the chastisement of Jehu (ch. x. 32, 33). Now he was to chastise Jehoahaz still more severely. **And into the hand of Benhadad the son of Hazael, all their days**; literally, *all the days.* Not certainly all the days of the two kings Hazael and Benhadad, for Benhadad was entirely worsted in his war with Joash (vers. 24, 25), but either all the days of Jehoahaz, or all the days that God had appointed for the duration of the calamity. It is perhaps against the former interpretation that Hazael appears to have outlived Jehoahaz (vers. 22—24); but Benhadad may have warred against him as his father's general (ver. 25) during his father's lifetime.

Ver. 4.—And Jehoahaz besought the Lord; literally, *besought the face of the Lord* (comp. 1 Kings xiii. 6, and the comment *ad loc.*). Jehoahaz, as Josephus says, "betook himself to prayer and supplication of God, entreating that he would deliver him out

of the hands of Hazael, and not suffer him to continue subject" ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 8. § 5). He did not turn from his sin of idolatry, perhaps did not suspect that it was this sin which had provoked God's anger; but in a general way he repented, humbled himself, and besought God's mercy and assistance. **And the Lord hearkened unto him.** God accepted his repentance, all imperfect as it was, so far as to save the people from the entire destruction with which it was threatened by the severe measures of Hazael (ver. 7), to continue the national existence (ver. 23), and ultimately to restore the national prosperity (ver. 25 and ch. xiv. 25—27). But he did not remove the oppression, as Josephus imagines, in Jehoahaz's time. Ver. 22 makes this fact absolutely certain. **For he saw the oppression of Israel, because the King of Syria oppressed them.** Oppression is always hateful to God, even when he is using it as his instrument for chastising or punishing a guilty people. He "sees" it, notes it, lays it up in his remembrance for future retribution (comp. Exod. iii. 7; Isa. x. 5—12, etc.). (On the nature and extent of the oppression of this period, see ver. 7, and the comment *ad loc.*)

Ver. 5.—**And the Lord gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians.** A "saviour" means a deliverer from the hand of the Syrians (comp. Judg. iii. 9, 15; Neh. ix. 27, where in the Hebrew the word used is the same). The special "deliverer" was probably in the mind of the writer, Jeroboam II., by whom he says, in ch. xiv. 27, that God "saved" Israel; but Joash, who began the deliverance (ver. 25), may also be glanced at. **And the children of Israel dwelt in their tents.** Here, as so often elsewhere (1 Kings viii. 66; xii. 16; ch. xiv. 12; Zech. xii. 7), the word "tents" is a mere archaism for "abodes, houses." Israel had dwelt in tents until the going down into Egypt, and again from the time of quitting Egypt to the entrance into Canaan; and thus the word *ohel* had acquired a secondary meaning of "abode," "dwelling-place." In the time which followed on the deliverance from the Syrian yoke, the Israelites of the ten tribes were no longer engaged in marches and countermarches, in battles, skirmishes, or sieges, but quietly abode in their several houses. **As beforetime;** *i.e.* as in the peaceful time before the attacks of Hazael began.

Ver. 6.—**Nevertheless they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin.** "The *house* of Jeroboam" is an unusual expression in this connection, and is scarcely appropriate, since every "house" had acted in the same way. Some manuscripts omit the word, and it is wanting in the Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic versions. Thenius would cancel it. But **walked therein**; literally, *he walked.* But here again a corruption may be suspected. Instead of חָלַךְ we should read חָלְכוּ, which lost its final letter in consequence of the *vau* that immediately followed it. **And there remained the grove also in Samaria.** "The grove in Samaria" was that idolatrous emblem which Ahab had set up at Jezebel's suggestion (1 Kings xvi. 33), the nature of which has been much disputed. Some think that it was "an image of Astarte" (see 'Homiletic Commentary' on 1 Kings, p. 374); but more probably it was a mere emblem, analogous to the Assyrian "sacred tree." Its material may sometimes have been wood, but was perhaps more usually metal. The mistranslation "grove" originated with the Septuagint translators, who uniformly rendered אֲשֵׁרָה by ἄλσος. It is surprising that Jehu did not destroy the *asherah* together with the other idolatrous erections of Ahab in Samaria (ch. x. 26—28); but, for some reason or other, it seems to have been spared, and to have been still standing. So long as it stood, even if it did not attract the religious regards of any, it would be a standing dishonour to God, and would so increase the sin of the nation. Hence its mention in this passage.

Ver. 7.—**Neither did he leave of the people to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen.** This verse seems to be an exegetical note on ver. 4, which perhaps it once followed immediately, the parenthetic section (vers. 5 and 6) having been added later, as an afterthought, either by the original writer, or perhaps by a later hand. The meaning seems to be that Hazael limited the standing army of Jehoahaz to fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen, not that he slew the entire military population except this small remnant. The policy of limiting the forces to be maintained by a subject-king was one known to the Romans, and has often been adopted in the East. It is still a part of our own policy in the government of India. The limitation left the country at the mercy of all its neighbours (see ver. 20). **For the King of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing.** Possibly this means no more than an utter destruction—a trampling in the dust, as we phrase it (see Jer. li. 33; Micah iv. 12, 13; and perhaps Isa. xxi. 10). But it may be an allusion to that destruction of prisoners by means of a threshing instrument, which was certainly sometimes practised (2 Sam. xii. 31; Prov. xx. 26), and which is made a special charge against

Damascus (Amos i. 3. See Pusey's 'Minor Prophets,' p. 158).

Ver. 8.—**Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might**; rather, *his prowess*, or *his valour*. Though defeated and reduced to subjection by the Syrians, yet Jehoahaz had distinguished himself, and shown his own personal courage, in the course of the war. **Are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?** (comp. ch. i. 18). The regular use of the phrase is one of the indications that the two Books of the Kings are by one author, and form one book.

Ver. 9.—**And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria** (comp. 1 Kings xvi. 28; ch. x. 35; xiii. 13, etc.). The kings of Israel from the time of Omri were buried in the capital, Samaria, as those of Judah were in Jerusalem. It is uncertain whether they had one common mausoleum, like the kings of Judah (2 Chron. xxviii. 27), but it is most probable that they had. To rest with their fathers in the same royal sepulchre was to be duly honoured at their death; to be excluded from it was a disgrace. **And Joash his son reigned in his stead.**

Vers. 10—25.—THE REIGN OF JOASH. The writer passes from the reign of Jehoahaz, Jehu's son, to that of Joash, Jehu's grandson, which he seems to have intended at first to despatch in the short space of four verses (vers. 10—13). He afterwards, however, saw reason to add to his narrative, first, an account of an interview between Joash and Elisha, shortly before the death of the latter (vers. 14—19); secondly, an account of a miracle wrought soon afterwards by means of Elisha's corpse (vers. 20, 21); and thirdly, a brief notice of Joash's Syrian war (vers. 22—25).

Ver. 10.—**In the thirty and seventh year of Joash King of Judah.** Three years before his death, since he reigned forty years (ch. xii. 1). The two Joashes were thus contemporary monarchs for the space of three years. **Began Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years.** The construction is the same as that of ver. 1, and is equally ungrammatical. Our translators again amend the faulty phrase by introducing the words "and reigned." The "sixteen years" of the reign of Joash are confirmed by Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 8. § 6), but still present some difficulty (see the comment on ch. xiv. 23).

Ver. 11.—**And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin**; but **he walked therein.** Josephus says that Joash was a good king, and quite unlike his father in disposition ('Ant. Jud.,' *l. s. c.*); but he is not likely to have had any independent data for judging of his character. Our author seems to include both son and father in the same category (comp. ver. 2). The narrative contained in ver. 14 is probably the foundation of the historian's favourable judgment.

Ver. 12.—**And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might wherewith he fought against Amaziah King of Judah** (see ch. xiv. 11—14), **are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?** Either this and the next verses have been displaced from their rightful position by some accident, or the author at one time intended to terminate his account of Joash at this point. The formula used is one which regularly closes the reign of each king. The proper place for it would have been after ver. 25.

Ver. 13.—**And Joash slept with his fathers; and Jeroboam sat upon his throne.** That Joash should call his eldest son Jeroboam, after the founder of the kingdom, indicated a thorough approval of that founder's policy and conduct, and perhaps a hope that he would be to the apparently decaying kingdom a sort of second founder. The name means, "he whose people is many," and was thus anticipative of that great enlargement of the Israelite kingdom, which took place under him (see ch. xiv. 25—28). **And Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel** (see the comment on ver. 9).

Ver. 14.—**Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died.** Elisha, who was grown to manhood before the death of Ahab (1 Kings xix. 19), must have been at least eighty years old at the accession of Joash. His illness was therefore probably the result of mere natural decay. **And Joash the King of Israel came down unto him.** The visit of a king to a prophet, in the way of sympathy and compliment, would be a very unusual occurrence at any period of the world's history. In the East, and at the period of which the historian is treating, it was probably unprecedented. Prophets waited upon kings, not kings upon prophets. If a king came to a prophet's house, it was likely to be on an errand of vengeance (ch. vi. 32), not on one of kindness and sympathy. The act of Joash certainly implies a degree of tenderness and consideration on his part very uncommon at the time, and is a fact to which much weight should be attached in any estimate that we form of his character. He

was, at any rate, a prince of an amiable disposition. **And wept over his face**—*i.e.* leant over the sick man as he lay on his bed, and shed tears, some of which fell *on* him—**and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.** As Elisha had addressed Elijah, when he was quitting the earth (ch. ii. 12), so Joash now addressed the dying Elisha, using exactly the same words, not (certainly) by a mere coincidence. Joash must have known the circumstances of Elijah's departure, which had probably been entered before this in the 'Book of the Kings,' and intended pointedly to allude to them. "O my father, my father," he meant to say, "when Elijah was taken from the earth, thou didst exclaim that the defence of Israel was gone" (see the comment on ch. ii. 12): "how much more must it be true that it is gone now, when thou art on the point of departure! He left thee as his successor; thou leavest no one!"

Ver. 15.—**And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows.** The prophet was moved, no doubt, by a sudden inspiration. He was bidden to assure the weeping king of victory—speedy victory—over Syria. The defence of Israel would not fail because he—a mere weak instrument by whom God had been pleased to work—was taken from the earth. God would bless the king's own efforts. "Take bow and arrows," he exclaims under the prophetic afflatus. "Take them at once into thine hands, and do my bidding." Words would not have been enough; greater assurance and conviction was produced when prophecy took the shape of a symbolical action (comp. 1 Sam. xv. 27; 1 Kings xi. 30; Isa. xx. 3; Jer. xiii. 1—11; xviii. 3, 4, etc.). So the Spirit of the Lord moved the prophet to the performance of a symbolical act, or set of acts, which the historian now proceeds to describe. **And he took unto him bow and arrows.** Joash would take these from the hands of his attendants, who might be carrying his own special weapons after him, as was the practice in Persia ('Ancient Monarchies,' vol. iv. p. 161), or who would at any rate have arms of their own, since they would wait upon him not merely as attendants, but as guards.

Ver. 16.—**And he said to the King of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow**—literally, *let thine hand ride upon the bow;* i.e. "Take it into active use—place thine hands as thou dost commonly for shooting"—**and he put his hand upon it**—he did as Elisha commanded—**and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands.** Elisha, it would seem, rose from his bed, and took the attitude of an archer, covering the king's two hands with his own hands, and making as if he too was pulling the bow, so that the shooting should be, or at least appear to be, the joint act of himself and the king. The intention was, no doubt, as Keil says, "to show that the power which was to be given to the bow-shot" was not the king's own power, but "came from the Lord through the mediation of his prophet."

Ver. 17.—**And he said, Open the window.** Though glass was unknown, or at any rate not applied to windows, yet the windows of sitting-rooms, and still more of bedrooms, had latticed shutters, which partially excluded the light and the air, and could be opened and closed at pleasure (see the comment on ch. i. 2). The prophet ordered the shutter to be opened, that the king might shoot from the window. He addressed, not the king, whose hands were both engaged, but his own servant, or one of the royal attendants. **Eastward.** Not so much in the direction of Syria, which was north-east of the Israelite territory, as in the direction of Gilead and Bashan, which had been the scene of Hazael's victories (ch. x. 33), and was now to be the scene of his reverses. Aphek lay almost due east of Shunem, where it is probable that Elisha was. **And he opened it;** or, *and one opened it,* or *they opened it.* The Hebrew idiom allows of this *indefinite* use of the third person singular. **Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he**—*i.e.* Elisha—**said, The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria;** rather, *an arrow.* "This is," the prophet meant to say, "an arrow symbolical of deliverance about to come from Jehovah, of deliverance from the cruel oppression of the Syrians"—and not merely of deliverance, but of victory. **For thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek.** The Aphek intended is probably that which lay east of the Sea of Galilee, at the distance of about three miles, in lat. 32° 49′ nearly. This place was on the direct route between Samaria and Damascus, and had already been the scene of one great victory gained by Israel over Syria (1 Kings xx. 26—30). The site is marked by the modern village of *Fik.* **Till thou have consumed them;** literally, *till consuming*—i.e. till the army which thou shalt defeat at that place is destroyed utterly. We have no account of the fulfilment of this prophecy, but may regard the defeat as one of those touched on in ver. 25.

Ver. 18.—**And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them.** Elisha bade the king take into his hand the remainder of the arrows which the quiver contained. This the king did, and held them in a bunch, as archers do when they have no quiver. **And he said unto the King of Israel, Smite upon the ground.** It is disputed what this means The LXX. translate Πάταξον εἰς τὴν γῆν

"Strike upon the ground;" and so Ewald, De Wette, and Thenius, who regard the order as one to strike with the arrows against the ground (*i.e.* the floor) or in the direction of the ground. Keil and Bähr, on the contrary, think that the order was to shoot the arrows down from the window and hit the earth with them. But some contrast seems to be intended between the "shoot" (יָרָה) of ver. 19 and the "strike" (חָךְ) of the present passage. Ewald's explanation is thus to be preferred. **And he smote thrice, and stayed.** Joash struck with the arrows against the floor three times, and then paused, thinking he had done enough. He did not enter into the spirit of the symbolical act, which represented the smiting and slaying of enemies. Perhaps he had not much faith in the virtue of the symbolism, which he may even, with the arrogance of a proud and worldly minded man, have thought childish.

Ver. 19.—**And the man of God** (comp. ch. iv. 7, 25; vi. 6, 9; viii. 4, etc.) **was wroth with him.** Elisha was angered at the lukewarmness of Joash, and his lack of faith and zeal. He himself, from his higher standpoint, saw the greatness of the opportunity, the abundance of favour which God was ready to grant, and the way in which God's favour was stinted and narrowed by Joash's want of receptiveness. Had the king been equal to the occasion, a full end might at once have been made of Syria, and Israel might have been enabled to brace herself for the still more perilous struggle with Assyria, in which she ultimately succumbed. **And said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it.** It has been suggested that Joash associated the number three with the notion of completeness, and "thought that what was done thrice was done perfectly" (Bähr); but in this case the prophet would scarcely have been angered. It is far more consonant with the entire narrative to suppose that he stopped from mere weariness, and want of strong faith and zeal. If he had been earnestly desirous of victory, and had had faith in the symbolical action as divinely directed, he would have kept on smiting till the prophet told him it was enough, or at any rate would have smitten the ground five or six times instead of three. The idea that he abstained from modesty or from prudence, "lest too extravagant demands might deprive him of all" (Von Gerlach), finds no support in the text of the narrative. He abstained (as Keil says) because "he was wanting in the proper zeal for obtaining the full promises of God." Had it been otherwise, the complete success obtained by Jeroboam II. (ch. iv. 25—28) might have been anticipated by the space of fifteen or twenty years. **Whereas now thou shalt smite Syria** but **thrice** (comp. ver. 25, which declares that this prophecy was exactly accomplished).

Ver. 20.—**And Elisha died, and they buried him.** There had been no burial of Elijah, who "went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (ch. ii. 11). All the more anxious, therefore, would the Israelites be to bury their second great prophet with due honour. They prepared him, no doubt, one of those excavated sepulchres which were usual at the time and in the country—a squared or vaulted chamber cut in the native rock. St. Jerome says that the place of his sepulture was near Samaria ('Epitaph. Paulæ'), and this is sufficiently probable; but in the Middle Ages his grave was shown at Ruma, in Galilee (Ewald, 'Hist. of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 122, note 3). According to Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 8. § 6), his funeral was magnificent. **And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year.** It seems to be implied that this was a usual occurrence. Just as the Syrians in the days of Naaman made marauding raids into the land from time to time (ch. v. 2), so now the Moabites each spring made an incursion. The weakness of Israel is strongly marked by this fact, and still more by the penetration of the Moabites so deep into their country. Amos (ii. 1) perhaps glances at these incursions of Moab.

Ver. 21.—**And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that.** "They" is used indefinitely of some unnamed Israelites, like the French *on*. Certain persons, it does not matter who, were burying a man, *i.e.* about to bury him, and were carrying the corpse to the grave, when an interruption occurred. **Behold, they spied a band** of men—rather, *the band*, i.e. *the* band of that year—**and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha.** There was no time for ceremony. Hastily, and somewhat roughly, it may be, the bearers of the body thrust it into Elisha's tomb, which happened to be at hand, and from the mouth of which they were able to remove the closing stone. They did not "throw" the body in, but pushed it in. **And when the man was let down.** The man was not "let down." Our translators seem to have been unacquainted with the Jewish mode of burial. They imagine that Elisha's tomb is a pit dug in the ground from the surface downwards, like a modern grave, and the man has therefore to be "let *down*," or to "go *down*" (marginal translation) into it. The Revised Version avoids the mistranslation, but weakens the force of the original. Translate, *and when the man came*, etc. **And touched the bones of Elisha, he revived.** The violent push given to the corpse im-

parted to it a movement which brought it in contact with the bones, *i.e.* the body (1 Kings xiii. 31) of Elisha, as it lay, wound in its grave-clothes, but uncoffined, on the floor of the sepulchral chamber. At the moment of contact the dead man came to life —"revived." **And stood up on his feet.** In many Jewish tombs the sepulchral chamber would allow of this.

Ver. 22.—**But Hazael King of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz**; rather, *now Hazael King of Syria had oppressed Israel*, etc. The author, having parenthetically related the extraordinary miracle wrought by the instrumentality of Elisha's corpse, returns to the subject of the Syrian oppression. He had, in vers. 14—19, dwelt upon the promises of victory given by the prophet to Joash. He is now bent on relating their fulfilment. But before doing so he recapitulates. Ver. 22 refers back to ver. 3, and ver. 23 to vers. 4 and 5.

Ver. 23.—**And the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them.** Even in his wrath God "thinketh upon mercy." While he was still punishing Israel by the sword of Hazael, he was yet careful not to make a full end, not to allow the affliction to proceed too far. He still preserved the nation, and kept it in being. **And had respect unto them**—*i.e.* "considered them—kept them in his mind—did not permit them to slip out of his recollection"—**because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.** God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was a covenant of mercy. By it he had pledged himself to multiply their seed, to be their God, and the God of their seed after them, and to give to their seed the whole land of Canaan for an *everlasting* possession (Gen. xvii. 4—8, etc.). This covenant bound him to extend his protection over the people of Israel so long as they had not utterly and entirely cast off their allegiance (comp. ch. xvii. 7—18). **And would not destroy them.** They were "persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. iv. 9). The national life might seem to hang by a thread, but the thread had not snapped. **Neither cast he them from his presence as yet.** The writer has it in his mind that ultimately they *were* cast away, rejected, removed out of God's sight (ch. xvii. 18, 20, 23); but it was not "as yet"—there was still an interval of a century, or a little more, before the blow fell, and the nation of the ten tribes ceased to exist.

Ver. 24.—**So Hazael King of Syria died**; rather, *and Hazael . . . died.* His death is a new fact, not involved in anything that has been previously stated. It appears by ver. 22 that he outlived Jehoahaz. **And Benhadad his son reigned in his stead.** Hazael, the usurper, gave his eldest son the name of the monarch whom he had murdered. It was an old royal name in Syria (1 Kings xv. 18), having been borne by at least two of Hazael's predecessors. The meaning which has been assigned to it ("Son of the sun") is doubtful.

Ver. 25.—**And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Benhadad the son of Hazael the cities, which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war.** The capture of these cities by Benhadad had not been previously mentioned. It appears by the present passage, compared with ver. 22, that, during the lifetime of his father, Benhadad had led expeditions into the land of Israel, acting as his father's representative and general, and had made himself master of several Israelite towns. These were now recovered by Jehoash. They lay probably in the Cis-Jordanic territory. **Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel** (comp. ver. 19). Thrice defeated, Hazael was forced to abandon his conquests in Western Samaria. He retained, however, the trans-Jordanic territory, which was not recovered by the Israelites till the reign of Jeroboam II. (see ch. xiv. 25).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*God's severity and God's goodness alike shown in the history of Israel under Jehoahaz.* I. GOD'S SEVERITY. Two sins only are noted as existing among the people at this time—the calf-worship, and the maintenance of the "grove," or asherah (ver. 6). One of these, the worship of the calves, was ancestral. It had been an established usage for a hundred and twenty years, and had been upheld by every king from the date of its institution. Even the prophets, with one exception (1 Kings xiii. 2, 3), had not denounced it. The people at this time accepted it without question, and were probably quite unconscious that it was a sin at all. The other sin, the maintenance of the asherah, was negative rather than positive—the emblem still stood erect; it had not been removed—but it is not said that it was worshipped. Yet God, in his severity, visited the people for these two sins heavily, terribly (vers. 4 and 7). He did not accept thoughtlessness, unconsciousness, absence of any evil intention, as an excuse.

His honour was impugned by both practices, and he is very jealous of his honour. To leave the asherah standing, not to break it down, was to show a want of zeal for the purity of religion, for the honour of God, for the true faith, for virtue, for decency. To be indifferent to the calf-worship, to tolerate it, to continue it, was to live in constant violation of the second commandment. God could not, would not, tolerate this. If the conscience of the nation had gone to sleep, he must rouse it. By sharp pains, by severe afflictions, by actual agonies, if necessary, he must stir them from their self-satisfaction, awake them to self-examination and keen searchings of heart, and so bring them to a sense of their sinfulness, if not to a distinct recognition of their special sins.

II. GOD'S GOODNESS. As soon as any relenting is shown, as soon as the king acknowledges God's hand in his punishment, and turns to him and entreats his aid, even although he does not put a stop to the practices by which God's anger has been provoked (ver. 6), yet the Divine compassion is stirred. "The Lord hearkened unto him" (ver. 4). A saviour is given, in the Divine counsels, if not at once in fact. The nation's fall is arrested, its life prolonged. "O faithful Christian, if God heard Jehoahaz, how much more will he hear thee, if thou callest upon him! The Lord gave Israel a deliverer, but Jehoahaz did not live to see him. God hears the cry of those who earnestly call upon him, and helps them; but the time, and place, and manner of his aid are retained in his own discretion. Do not despair if thy prayer does not seem to be heard, and the Lord delays his assistance. He knows that fitting season as well as he knows what is useful to us" (Starke).

Ver. 6.—*The persistency of evil.* "There remained the grove." One would have thought that, in such a reformation as that of Jehu (ch. x. 15—28), there would have been a clean sweep, or, at any rate, that Ahab's pet idolatries (1 Kings xvi. 33) would have gone. But no! evil is terribly persistent. "The evil that men do lives after them," and not in men's recollections only, but in fact. No reformation ever sweeps away at once all that it was intended to sweep away. "The grove remains." How many heathen superstitions survived the supersession of heathenism by Christianity! How many iniquitous laws continue in all countries after every attempt that is made to reform the laws! How many abuses remain after each removal of abuses! The result is partly through the fault of the reformers, who are careless about doing their work thoroughly, and cease their efforts while much still remains to be done; but it is also caused in part by the tenacity of life which the things that need to be swept away possess in themselves. And, as evil is thus persistent in communities, so is it also in the character of individuals. *Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret.* A man makes a great effort at self-reformation, changes his rules of conduct, his habits, the whole method of his life, as he thinks; but in some corner there still lurks a remnant of the old leaven, which shortly reasserts itself, and too often leavens the whole mass with its corrupting influence. The lesson to be learnt is watchfulness and perseverance. By care, by consideration, and by constant effort, the persistency of evil may be met and counteracted. God's Holy Spirit is always ready to assist our endeavours; and, whether in a community or in an individual, continued effort, divinely aided, will prevail at last.

Vers. 14—19.—*The closing scene of Elisha's life.* The time had come to Elisha which comes to all the sons of men, however great, however holy, at the last. He had exceeded man's ordinary term of three score years and ten—nay, he had exceeded the extended term of those who are exceptionally "strong" men, four score years (Ps. xc. 10)—but now at length he was overtaken by sickness, he was manifestly drawing near to death. What lessons does his departure teach us? It may teach us—

I. A LESSON OF CONSOLATION. It is a good thing so to have lived that our departure is felt as a loss, not merely to our family or to our own narrow circle of friends, but to our king and country. Not many persons can do the sort of service which Elisha did for Israel; but all may do some service. All may seek their country's good, labour for it, strive for it, pray for it. All may use the powers and talents committed to them by God in such a way that not themselves alone, but their country also, may derive advantage from them. Honest endeavours of this kind will at any rate bring to us "the answer of a good conscience" at the last—they may bring to us something more,

viz. praise and acknowledgment on the part of those who represent the nation and have a right to speak on its behalf. Due acknowledgment is seldom grudged, when the end has come or approaches; and, though man's judgment is a "small thing" compared with God's, it is not altogether to be despised—we may feel in such acknowledgment a legitimate satisfaction.

II. A LESSON OF FORTITUDE. Elisha makes no moan, expresses no complaint. It is extraordinary how many men, even men who profess to believe in a future life of infinitely greater happiness than the present one, are discontented, and murmur, or even passionately cry out, when a mortal disease attacks them. And this although they have lived the full term of average human life in this world. Very few quit the scene gracefully, placidly, bravely. Almost all seem to regard the summons to set their house in order as untimely, and themselves as hardly used by the call being made upon them. There is always something for which they think they might as well have been allowed to wait—

"Half the cows to calve, and Barnaby Holmes to plough."

III. A LESSON OF PERSEVERANCE AND EFFORT TO THE VERY END. Elisha, though stricken with a mortal disease, does not give himself up to inaction, or cease to take an interest in the affairs of this life. On the contrary, he has his country's welfare most deeply at heart, and initiates and carries through a scene, in which his physical powers must have been severely tasked, for encouraging king and people in their death-struggle with Syria, and assuring them of final victory. The confidence inspired may have been a serious factor in the result. Elisha, at his age, might have been excused, had he remained wholly passive, and received the king's visit as the compliment which it was intended to be; but he could not be content without utilizing the visit to the utmost. He rouses the king from his despair (ver. 14); inspires in him hope, courage, energy; promises him success, actively participates in the symbolic drama, which at once indicates and helps forward the result aimed at. We may learn from this that, while we live, we have active duties to perform; we are not *exauctorati* till the last summons comes; on our sick-bed, on our death-bed, we may still be agents for good—we may advise, exhort, incite, rebuke evil (ver. 19), and be active ministers of good, impressing men more than we ever did before, when we speak from the verge of the grave, and having our "strength made perfect in weakness."

Vers. 20, 21.—*Life in death.* The miracle wrought by the instrumentality of Elisha's bones would seem to have been designed for three main ends or purposes.

I. FOR THE HONOUR OF THE PROPHET; that so he might have in his death (as Elijah had had in the method of his departure) a testimony from God that he was approved by him, and that he would have him respected and honoured by his countrymen. Worship of relics was not a Jewish superstition; and thus there was no danger of those ill results which followed on the alleged miracles wrought by the bodies of Christian martyrs. Those who witnessed or heard of the miracle in Elisha's tomb were led to venerate the memory of the prophet, to whom so great a testimony had been given; and might thence be moved to pay greater attention and stricter obedience to what they knew of his teaching.

II. FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE NATION. The death of Elisha was no doubt felt as a national calamity. Many, besides the king, must have seen in it the loss to the nation of one who was more to it than "chariots and horsemen" (ver. 14). Despondency, we may be sure, weighed down the spirits of numbers who might think that God, in withdrawing his prophet, had forsaken his people. It was a great thing to such persons that they should have a clear manifestation that, though the prophet was gone, God still continued present with his people, was still among them, ready to help, potent to save. The more spiritually minded might view the miracle as symbolical, and interpret it to mean that, as the dead man had sprung to life again on contact with Elisha's bones, so the dead nation should, as it were, rise out of his tomb and recover itself, once more standing on its feet, in full possession of all its energies.

III. FOR THE HONOUR OF GOD, AND THE SHOWING FORTH OF HIS TRANSCENDENT POWER. To give life is among the highest of the Divine attributes. It is God's special privilege, one that he cannot communicate to a creature. Even modern scientists bow

their heads before the mysterious, inconceivable act, and confess that they find it impossible to present it distinctly to their consciousness. But to give life to that which is held by death, in which decay is begun, which is under the law of dissolution and corruption, is a still more incomprehensible thing, stranger, more astonishing. And to crown all by bringing the new life out of death, making a dead corpse the source out of which vitality shall leap forth to fresh energy, is to surpass all that the most lively fancy could imagine of wonderful, and almost to reconcile contradictions. God willed at this time to show that he could effect even this marvellous thing—make death give life to that which was recently dead—educe from one dead in him the vital power that should resuscitate and reanimate another also dead, and make a tomb—the place of death—the scene of the transformation! "O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy Name; for thou hast done wonderful things" (Isa. xxv. 1); truly "wonderful art thou in thy doing towards the children of men" (Ps. lxvi. 4).

The miracle of Elisha's bones is no argument for relic-worship. Relic-worship implies a belief that a virtue exists in the remnants of a deceased saint's body, which enables them of themselves to exercise a miraculous power. Elisha's bones were never thought to possess any such property. They were not exhumed, placed in cases, or exhibited to the faithful to be touched with the hand or kissed by the lips. It was understood that God had been pleased to work one miracle by them; it was never supposed that they might be expected to work any more. They were therefore suffered to remain in the tomb wherein they had been from the first deposited. It was not till the time of Julian that any importance was attached to them; though then we must conclude that they had become objects of reverential regard, since the Apostate took the trouble to burn them.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—13, with 22—25.—*The reigns of Jehoahaz and Joash, kings of Israel.* Observe here—

I. THE PERPETUITY OF EVIL. How sad it is to read of one king after another, "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord"! And then the statement is usually made, "He departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." A bad man does harm to others besides himself. "None of us liveth to himself." Not merely while we live, but after we are gone, our lives and words and deeds will influence others. We may think ourselves very obscure and insignificant, so insignificant that we may argue it does not matter to others how we live. But who can measure the circle of his influence? In ways that we know not, influence may reach other hearts and other lives. Oh! how dangerous is one evil influence in a community! It takes a long time to do away with its effects.

> "The evil that men do lives after them;
> The good is oft interrèd with their bones."

Let us be careful how we are influencing others. For good or for evil we are exercising some influence, however unconsciously, on those around us. If we would influence men for good, we ourselves must live near to God.

II. THE MERCY OF GOD. God punished Jehoahaz and his people for their sins. "He delivered them into the hand of Hazael King of Syria, and into the hand of Benhadad the son of Hazael, all their days." When suffering or troubles come, let us see whether the cause of them is not within our own hearts and lives. *But he mingled mercy with judgment.* God is ever on the watch for signs of the prodigal's return. His ear is ever open for the cry of penitence, for the faintest prayer for forgiveness and help. "Jehoahaz besought the Lord, and the Lord hearkened unto him; for he saw the oppression of Israel, because the King of Syria oppressed them" (ver. 4; see also ver. 23).

> "Come, let us to the Lord our God
> With contrite hearts return;
> Our God is gracious, nor will leave
> The desolate to mourn.

"His voice commands the tempest forth,
And stills the stormy wave;
And, though his arm be strong to smite,
'Tis also strong to save."

III. HUMAN INGRATITUDE. Though God delivered them from their difficulty and distress, and gave them peace from their enemies, yet, when the difficulty was over, they forgot all about God's mercy. They went back to their old sins. "Nevertheless they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, . . . but walked therein" (ver. 6). How prone the human heart is to forsake God! The Books of Judges and Kings are full of illustrations of this painful fact. By forsaking God the Israelites brought themselves into misery and bondage. Time after time God raised up judges and kings and prophets to be the means of their deliverance. But when these were dead, or when the immediate danger had passed away, once again the people forsook God. It is the same in the history of the individual. How ungrateful we are for God's unceasing and unfailing goodness! How forgetful of his commandments and his promises! "The way of man is not in himself; and it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." We need all the influence of Divine grace to keep us in the way that is right.

IV. A HUMBLED NATION. To what a low level sin reduces a nation! How shamefully Israel was humiliated before Syria! The King of Syria only left to Jehoahaz fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen; "for the King of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing." The fate of Israel, the fate of other mighty nations of the past, are a great national lesson to be remembered so long as the world shall last. Ought we not earnestly to pray that this great British empire, which has been built up by God-fearing men, and which God has blessed and honoured so highly, may not forsake God for secularism or gross corruption, and thus fall into the fate of the fallen nations of the past? Knowing how great are the forces of evil, it becomes every true Christian to be more valiant for the truth, to be more active in everything that will extend the kingdom of Christ in this and other lands.—C. H. I.

Vers. 14—19.—*A royal visit to a dying prophet.* What a peaceful death-bed Elisha's was! He had long since made his choice. He had lived not for time, but for eternity; not under the fear of man, but under the fear of God; not for the favour of kings or their rewards, but so as to win the approval of his conscience and his Creator. And now, when death came, it brought him no terrors. Not only so, but he was able to give encouragement to others. When King Joash sees the prophet on his death-bed, he feels how great is the loss which Israel is about to sustain. Good men are a nation's strength. And so Joash, bending in tears over the dying prophet's couch, exclaims, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" But Elisha wants to keep up his heart. He wants to teach him that, though the prophet dies, the prophet's God remains. The workmen pass away, but the work of God goes on. So the true Christian will ever look beyond his own death to the glory that awaits him, beyond the present hour of darkness or difficulty or delay to the ultimate triumph of the Church of Christ. It was in this spirit that the martyrs died. What a vision of the future lit up their suffering faces! What a prophetic instinct in such words as those which Bishop Latimer spoke to his fellow-reformer Ridley, as they stood side by side, waiting for the faggots to be kindled: "Be of good cheer, brother Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle in England, as by God's grace shall never be put out." And here Elisha on his death-bed gives utterance to prophetic words. He told Joash that the arrow which, in obedience to his directions, he had shot forth from the open window, signified the arrow of the Lord's deliverance. But Joash was slow to learn the double lesson of God's unlimited power and the necessity for human effort which this simple illustration taught. Elisha had already told him that he should smite the Syrians till they were consumed, and then, *to teach him furthermore the necessity for perseverance and patience,* he commands him to smite upon the ground. Joash, seeing that the prophet had already revealed to him so much and encouraged him so greatly, might have continued until he was requested to cease. But

instead of that, he only smote three times, and then gave up. Thus he illustrated his own want of faith in God's almighty power, his own want of patience and perseverance, and therefore how little he deserved God's interference on his behalf. The old proverb truly says, "God helps those that help themselves." The chief lesson of this incident is—*Want of faith a hindrance to success in Christian work.*

I. CHRISTIANS SHOW WANT OF FAITH, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE DIVINE PROMISES. It was so here in the case of Joash. He had stood beside the bedside of Elisha in a state of utter dismay. It had seemed to him as if he already saw the downfall of his kingdom, as if all other resources were useless if the man of God, who had so often guided kings and people to victory, was taken away. But look at the encouragement which Elisha had given him. He had taken his thoughts away from human wisdom and human strength, and turned them upward to the almighty, unlimited power of God. "*The arrow of the Lord's deliverance.*" What suggestions of power, of help, of victory, were in those simple words! *The Lord's deliverance!* That almighty power which delivered Israel out of the hand of Pharaoh; that almighty power which turned back the waves of the Red Sea, and brought the people over safely on dry land; that almighty power which, only a few years since, filled the dry valley with water and thus gave victory to Israel, and which, by smiting the Syrians with blindness, delivered Israel out of the hands of their enemies;—that almighty power, O Joash, will be with *you, will deliver you.* Oh, what a thrill of determination, of resolute, energetic purpose, should have been awakened in his mind! Might he not reasonably have felt, "Yes, the Lord is on my side. Victory is sure. I shall redouble my efforts against the enemies of Israel, against the workers of evil. Out of gratitude to God I shall serve the Lord only"? But Joash failed when put to the test. When Elisha gave him an opportunity of showing his faith by his own efforts, he only showed how little faith he had in the promises of God. If we believe that God's Word is true, that his promises are true, it is but reasonable that he should expect us to act on them. To every unsaved soul God says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The promise is salvation. But there is a duty, a condition, a necessity, coupled with it. That duty is faith in Christ—taking him as our Saviour, serving him as our King. How many act like Joash! They would like to get to heaven, but they are not willing to tread the narrow path. They would like to obtain salvation, but they are not willing to take God's way of obtaining it. They say, "If I'm to be saved, I shall be saved." To any one who has been thinking about eternity and the judgment to come, whose heart has been softened by sickness or bereavement, who has been impressed by any message from God's Word, but has not yet accepted Christ, we would say, "Stay not thine hand. Let not the good impressions pass away." "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Arise to-day, and in the strength of God smite your unbelief, smite the tempter to the ground. Strive to enter in at the narrow door. Then shall that good impression, then shall that warning voice, prove to be to you *the arrow of the Lord's deliverance.* Take the step, fulfil the condition, if you would obtain the blessing. The same applies to *Christian work.* How many call themselves God's servants, how many expect the reward of the faithful servant, who are doing absolutely nothing for the Lord! Jesus has given one very precious promise to his people: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world;" but it is to those who in some way are seeking to fulfil that command, "Go ye therefore, and preach the gospel to every creature." The truth is, the promise depends upon the work, and the work depends upon the promise. We cannot expect God's blessings if we are not doing his work. And we cannot do his work if we do not meditate much on his promises.

II. CHRISTIANS SHOW WANT OF FAITH, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE PROOFS OF DIVINE POWER. In the history of his nation, even in the history of Elisha's life alone, Joash had many proofs of Divine power, yet still he showed a want of faith in God. In the whole history of God's kingdom in the world, in the whole history of the Christian Church, *we* have proofs of God's power, yet where is our faith at all proportionate to the strength of evidence on which it rests? There is no stronger testimony to the power of the gospel than *the history of modern missions.* It is just seventy years since the first missionaries landed in Madagascar; it is not thirty years since the terrible persecutions ceased there, by which the missionaries were driven out of the island, and

the little companies of Christians who survived the massacre met for worship in secret, in dens and caves of the mountains, and were in constant danger of their lives. Yet in that large island to-day there is a Christian population of nearly three hundred thousand, the idols have been publicly burned, and the Christian religion is publicly recognized by the state. What hath God wrought! Think of the work which Dr. Moffat accomplished among the degraded tribes of South Africa, not so many years ago. The conversion of Africaner, the Hottentot chief, under his ministry, is well known. Every one warned Moffat against him as a man who was a terror to the whole neighbourhood. But Moffat thought he was just the man to go to with the gospel. He went, and was the means of leading the savage chief to Christ, and "Africaner's changed life convinced many, who had never believed in them before, of the efficacy of Christian missions." Think of the progress of Christianity in Japan, in India, in China. The following testimony was recently borne to mission work in China in his report to the Foreign Office by the late British Consul at Newchwang. He says, "The labours of the missionaries indirectly benefit our merchants, manufacturers, and artisans. I further believe that, partly owing to the Christian principles disseminated by the missionaries, the tone of morality among the Chinese people has during the last twenty years perceptibly attained a higher platform." The Rev. William Swanson, a veteran missionary, and lately moderator of the English Presbyterian Church, states that when he went to China twenty-six years ago there were only five small churches at the treaty ports. Now, in going from Canton to Shanghai, and travelling twenty or twenty-five miles a day, he could sleep every night, with one or two exceptions, in a village having a Christian church. The first time Charles Darwin visited the island of Tierra del Fuego, he said that the people there were irreclaimable. He saw four Christian Fuegians at a meeting in England, and was so impressed by what he heard of the work of the missionaries that he became an annual subscriber to the funds of the Missionary Society, and said he should feel proud if the committee would think fit to elect him one of its honorary members. When we think of these things, of the wonderful work done in the South Sea Islands, and of the many nations where heathenism has yielded to the preaching of the cross, surely we may well say, "What hath God wrought!" To-day, just as in St. Paul's day, the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." If we doubt the power of the gospel, our doubts are in the face of overwhelming and irresistible facts.

III. THE EVIL RESULTS OF THIS WANT OF FAITH. This want of faith has ill results on life and practice and Christian work. Many who went part of the way with Christ turned back and walked no more with him because of their want of faith. It is so still. *Want of faith leads to low expectations and feeble efforts.* True faith in God's presence and power, instead of making us inactive and careless, is the greatest stimulus to activity. It rouses us to put forth all our energies. It makes us patient under difficulties. It causes us to persevere even when we see no immediate result. How many a good work has been begun, but given up, because of want of faith! *This was nearly being the case at one time with what has since proved one of the most successful missions to the heathen.* After twelve years' labour in the island of Tahiti, in the Pacific, the mission seemed to be an utter failure. All but one of the missionaries left the South Sea Islands. At home the directors of the London Missionary Society seriously discussed the abandoning of the mission. But two members of the committee, men of strong faith in God and the gospel, strenuously opposed this, and proposed a season of special prayer for a blessing on its work. This was agreed to; letters of encouragement were written to the missionaries; and while the ship that bore these letters was on her way to Tahiti, *another ship was bearing to England the rejected idols of the people.* How had this happened? Some of the missionaries who had left the island were led in some way to return. One morning one of them went out into the fields for meditation, when he heard, with a thrill of joy, the voice of a native raised in prayer to God—the first token that their teaching had been blessed in Tahiti. Soon they heard of others. A Christian Church was formed. The priests publicly burned their idols; and thus, after a night of toil of sixteen years, the dawn at last broke (see 'Outlines of Protestant Missions,' by Rev. John Robson, D.D.). What a rebuke to the weak faith of the directors who had proposed to abandon the mission! What a lesson to every minister and missionary, to every Sunday-school teacher, to every Christian worker, *not to stay*

their hand, even when they see no results of their labour! "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Work done for God never dies. *Stay not your hand in the matter of your own spiritual life.* Persevere in the conflict with your besetting sins. Persevere in the cultivation of Christian graces. Use the arrow of the Lord's deliverance. Put on the whole armour of God. *Persevere also in prayer for others.* Never give up as hopeless a single soul. Stay not thine hand. *You* can't do much for them, perhaps, but God can. Lay the case of erring child or godless friend before God in prayer. Ask him to open their eyes. Ask the Lord Jesus to lay his hand upon them—to speak the word only, and they shall be made whole. *Persevere also in Christian work.* "Be not weary in well-doing." Leave no work unfinished for which God gives you the strength and the means. Perhaps we have been shooting too few arrows, making too little effort in God's cause. Seek the guidance of God's hand and the power which God's presence gives, and then go forth to win victories for him.—C. H. I.

Vers. 20, 21.—*A resurrection and its lessons.* This miracle was wrought, in a time of prevailing unbelief, to teach a lesson to a faithless age. Strange sight indeed—for those who were engrossed with the sensual pleasures of the present world, thus unexpectedly to be brought face to face with the power of the Unseen!

I. GOD'S POWER TO RAISE THE DEAD. Here was something which their heathen gods could never do. Heathenism, agnosticism,—these systems bring no comfort to the bereaved and sorrowing spirit. Christ alone has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. None but he has ever dared to say, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

II. THE UNDYING INFLUENCE OF GOOD MEN. "Non omnis moriar" was the saying of the old heathen poet. But the humblest Christian who is faithful to God may have confidence that his influence for good will continue long after he has passed away from earth. 1. *Elisha's words were to continue.* The prophet was dead, but his words still lived. His words were the words of God. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." We see in the twenty-fifth verse how Elisha's prediction to Joash was literally fulfilled. Three times Joash defeated the Syrians and recovered the cities of Israel. Elisha's words still remain, to be our consolation and comfort. 2. *Elisha's work remained.* The memory of his faithfulness to God, of the wonders he was able to do by God's presence with him, remained to be a help and stimulus to many faithful servants of God when Israel was growing worse and worse. A good man's influence—who can tell how long it may last, or what unexpected places and persons it may reach?—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—21.—*The death of Elisha.* "In the three and twentieth," etc. The Book of Kings is, to a large extent, a record of crime, and of crime of the most heinous and aggravated character. The terrible monstrosities recorded are, for the most part, ascribable, directly or indirectly, to kings. In this very chapter we have a sketch of two of those monarchs who have been among the greatest curses of their race. Jehoahaz, son and successor of Jehu King of Israel, whose reign was disastrous to the kingdom to such a degree that his army was all but utterly destroyed, and had become like the dust on the "threshing-floor;" and Jehoash, who for three years was associated with his father in the government, and who, when his father was swept away, was a curse to the world for sixteen years. The only portion of this chapter which requires notice is from ver. 14 to ver. 21. These verses present to us four subjects of thought—a great man dying; a good man leaving the world interested in posterity; a wicked man regretting the event; and a dead man exerting a wonderful influence.

I. A GREAT MAN DYING. "Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died." The whole history of Elisha is not only the history of the marvellous, but the history of loyalty to Heaven and of devotion to the interests of the Israelite race. But here we find this great and good man dying. Elijah, his master, had escaped death and had been borne to heaven in a chariot of fire, but Elisha had to die in the ordinary way of mankind, through sickness. It is true he was an old man; threescore years had passed since he commenced his prophetic ministry. For a great many years we are told nothing about him, but no doubt he had been actively and usefully engaged.

Even the most useful public men, and the most popular too, cease to attract great public attention as they pass into years. Often they become as "dead men out of sight," albeit they are useful. Though all men have to die, death is not the same to all men. It has a widely different significance to different men. To the good man it is life breaking through exuviæ and taking wing to revel in a sunny universe. It is the "mortal putting on immortality."

II. A WICKED MAN REGRETTING THE EVENT. "And Joash the King of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father!" Why did he weep? Not because he had any sympathy with the character of the departing man. His moral sympathies were in antagonism to those of the prophet. Not because he felt that the prophet himself would suffer loss. He was not thinking of the prophet's gaining or losing by death. Not because he knew that the event would be a loss to the living in general. He cared nothing for his race, not he; but because he knew that the prophet was the "chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." His chariots and horsemen were gone, and Elisha was his only hope.

III. A GOOD MAN LEAVING THE WORLD INTERESTED IN POSTERITY. Elisha, though dying, still took an interest in the future of his country. "Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows," etc. (vers. 15—19). Elisha seems to have been touched by the king's tears; and he held out the hope that he would yet become victorious over the Syrians. The symbolic action which the prophet recommended, putting his hand upon the bow, opening the window, shooting the arrow, smiting the ground, does not, I think, necessarily mean that the prophet approved of the future wars of the king, but merely indicated the fact. He foretold his success; for, in three campaigns against the Syrians, he recovered the cities which they had taken from his father. He was also successful in the war with Amaziah King of Judah. But the point worth notice is the interest felt in the future by the prophet in his dying hours. Had he not done with life? Would he not soon be in his grave? What would the world be to him in the future? An interest in posterity seems to be an instinct in humanity. There is a nerve in humanity that runs through all races and all generations, linking men together. "No man liveth to himself;" all men are in one. The more moral goodness a man has in him the more sensitive this nerve becomes. Hence the best men in all ages have been the men who made provision for posterity.

IV. A DEAD MAN EXERTING A WONDERFUL INFLUENCE. "It came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet." The incident which takes place in his grave is as strange as it is significant and suggestive. The bearers of a dead man, struck with terror at the approach of enemies, instead of carrying the remains to their appointed resting-place, pushed them into the sepulchre where slept the bones of the illustrious Elisha. No sooner did the corpse touch the sacred relics of the great seer than it quivered with life, and the dead man, to the astonishment of all, revived, and stood on his feet. This miraculous incident was designed and calculated to make a wholesome moral impression on the mind of the age. It had a tendency to demonstrate to all the Divinity of the prophet's mission, to show the honour with which the Eternal treats the holy dead, to prove the existence of a Power superior to death, and to foreshadow a future state. Whilst I would at all times studiously endeavour to avoid the mistake of what is called spiritualizing God's Word, I feel that it is lawful to use an incident like this as an illustration of spiritual realities. The incident which occurred in the grave of Elisha on this occasion, viz. the deriving of life by contact with the holy dead, is, in the material department of things to which it belongs, sublimely singular. Such an event as this, perhaps, will never occur again; but a thing analogous to this in the spiritual domain is, thank God, of frequent occurrence. The dead minds of earth are constantly deriving life from contact with the spiritual remains of the dead.—D. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*Israel's humiliation under Jehoahaz.* The story of the reign of Jehoahaz, Jehu's son, is a story of unmitigated misfortune. We note—

I. JEHOAHAZ'S EVIL REIGN. 1. *The downward movement in Israel.* With the

extinction of Ahab's house, the rooting out of Baal, and the establishment of Jehu's dynasty, Israel obtained a new chance of doing well. But Jehu's reforming zeal soon died out, and he fell back into godless ways. His son followed the worse, and not the better, traditions of his father's reign. Thus the downward movement again began. Of Jehoahaz also the old monotonous refrain has to be spoken, "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." This is the burden of the song regarding every king of Israel. In the whole line, from first to last, there is not one of whom a different report can be given. 2. *The cardinal sin.* The foremost sin of all these monarchs—that which fatally entangled them in other sins—was the perpetuation of the worship of the calves. Religion affects the springs of morality, and this idolatrous *cultus* sent poisonous streams through the whole life of the nation. It was the grand transgression which, amidst all temporary reforms, was never abandoned.

II. THE SYRIAN OPPRESSION. 1. *Divine anger.* "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel." God had done so much for the people, had granted them so favourable an opportunity for repentance, had counselled and warned them so long by great prophets like Elijah and Elisha, that he was justly wroth with them for their continued transgressions. God is jealous of his honour, and presumptuous transgressors must expect to find his hand laid heavily upon them. When God's anger is kindled against a people, things cannot go well. Troubles break out on every side, and calamities fall thick and fast. 2. *Weighty chastisements.* God delivered the people of Israel into the hands of the kings of Syria—Hazael and Benhadad. This time it was no passing invasion. The completeness of the conquest, and the severity of the oppression, recall the days of the judges, or the Philistine oppression of the reign of Saul (Judg. v. 6, 7; 1 Sam. xiii. 19—22). Out of the hosts of Israel there was left to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen. Elisha's foresight of the evils which Hazael would inflict on the nation was thus terribly verified. Again is the reflection forced on us—How bitter is the fruit of sin! The Bible is little else than a repeated enforcement of the truth, "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him. . . . Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (Isa. iii. 10, 11).

III. JEHOAHAZ'S PRAYER, AND ITS ANSWER. 1. *The king's prayer.* The very existence of the kingdom seemed threatened. Happily, the desperate straits to which he was reduced led Jehoahaz to humble himself before God. He felt himself in the hands of a living God, and, rightly tracing the calamities which had befallen him to Jehovah's anger, he turned to Jehovah for his help. The chastisements with which God visits men for their sins are designed to break their pride and stubbornness, and lead them to repentance. They often have the effect of producing a temporary submission, though they cannot of themselves change the heart. We have examples in Pharaoh (Exod. viii. 28) and in Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 27). 2. *God's answer to the prayer.* A prayer wrung from the king, not by the sense of his sin, but by the intolerable pressure of affliction, might have been thought undeserving of an answer. But the Lord is very pitiful, and welcomes the faintest approach of the sinner unto him. He does not thrust the suppliant away, but seeks, by giving him tokens of his grace, to ripen his imperfect desires into real repentance. Accordingly, the approaches of Jehoahaz to the throne of grace met with a gracious response. God promised a saviour to the land, and ultimately raised one up in the person of Joash, who, but for his want of perseverance, would have completely delivered the nation from the Syrians. The work which he left undone was finished by his son, Jeroboam II. Thus God shows himself ready to hear the cries even of the worst of men. None need despair in calling on Heaven when Jehoahaz was listened to in such dire straits. Happy they who are led to call, though it be from the depths, to God (Ps. cxxx. 1). He will not turn any away. His promise is, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee" (Ps. l. 15). 3. *Imperfect repentance.* The imperfection of Jehoahaz's repentance is seen in the fact that the worship of the calves was still maintained; also there remained the symbol of Astarte in Samaria. God's promise having been given, was not revoked, and there were other reasons why he was willing to help the people (ver. 23). But these sins in high places wrought ruin afterwards.—J. O.

Vers. 8—19.—*Joash and Elisha.* Jehoahaz reigned for seventeen years, and was

succeeded by his son Jehoash, or Joash. In this reign, after a long interval, Elisha again appears.

I. ACCESSION OF JOASH. The change of rulers was in some respects a gain for Israel. Joash was a man of better disposition than his father, and under his reign the kingdom, which had been so sorely broken down, was again partially built up. But he still adhered to the cardinal sin of the nation—the calf-worship—so that of him also the formula has to be employed, "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." That is, notwithstanding military successes, and some signs of respect for and attention to Elisha's monitions, things still remained on a fundamentally false basis in the kingdom. So Herod feared John the Baptist, and observed him, and, when he heard him, did many things, and heard him gladly, yet remained a bad man (Mark vi. 20). God's judgment on men is not according to superficial characteristics, but according to the fundamental bent of their minds.

II. ELISHA ON HIS DEATH-BED. 1. *Elisha's sickness.* Elisha by this time was a very old man. He was Elijah's attendant in the reign of Ahab; he was a prominent figure in the reigns of Ahaziah and Jehoram; he gave the commission to Jehu to overthrow the incurably corrupt dynasty of Ahab, and lived through the twenty-eight years of that king's reign; he witnessed the troubles of the reign of Jehoahaz, and was perhaps the means of that monarch being led to humble himself before God; now, in Joash's reign, he is still alive. From the time of Jehu's accession he seems to have taken little part in the political life of the nation; at least, no accounts of his activity remain to us. When the curtain again lifts he is lying on his death-bed. It was not to be with him as with Elijah. He must pay the common debt to nature, experience the infirmities of age, be smitten with sickness, and succumb to death. The longest and most useful life thus comes to its close. It is well when, on a death-bed, one can look back on a life which has been spent in the service of God. 2. *The visit of Joash.* To the bedside of the dying Elisha came the King of Israel, apparently drawn thereto by sincere reverence and respect for the aged prophet. He came to him, it is said, and wept, saying, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" This language speaks to former relations of intimacy and friendship between the king and prophet. Probably Elisha had been the counsellor of his youth, and had guided and encouraged him in his duties as king. It is to be remembered also that the promised deliverance from the Syrians was not yet begun. The kingdom was still in humiliation and distress, and Joash may have felt as if, with the death of Elisha, the last spark of hope for the nation would be extinguished. We see how, in the hour of extremity, good men are felt, even by the ungodly, to be a tower of strength to the state. Their presence and prayers are its truest bulwark. The full extent of the loss sustained by their removal is only realized when they are taken away. We see also how possible it is to have great respect for God's servants, to appreciate their worth to the community, and to weep over and deeply regret their loss, and yet not do the things that they say. Joash shows fairly well in this narrative, but his conduct as a whole is stamped as "evil in the sight of the Lord."

III. THE ARROW OF DELIVERANCE. Once and again had mighty deliverances for Israel been announced through Elisha. The last was to be the greatest of all. 1. *The pledge of deliverance.* Raising himself up on his bed, prophetic fire gleaming in his eye, Elisha bade the young and stalwart king take his bow and arrows. Joash did as the prophet required, not yet understanding his meaning, but no doubt forecasting some encouraging message. Elisha then bade him put his hand upon his bow, and placing his own hands on the king's, told him further to open the window eastward, and shoot. This was done. Then the symbolic action was explained. That arrow he had shot into the air was the arrow of the Lord's deliverance, an arrow pledging deliverance from the yoke of Syria. It was shot eastwards, because the Syrian ravages were commonly from that quarter (ch. x. 32, 33). The action declares: (1) That deliverance in trouble is from God only. As he alone can give it, so he is the true Source from which to seek it. (2) God employs human agency in his deliverances. The bow and arrows were the symbols of the human instrumentality. Joash had to put his hands upon the bow. It was he who shot the arrow. It was he who was to smite the Syrians. Man has his part given him in all God's works of deliverance on earth. (3) The human agent could only succeed as God strengthened him. Elisha put his hands upon Joash's,

signifying that the power to gain the predicted victories came from God. His hands were to be "made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob" (Gen. xlix. 24). It is on God's power we must always rely for victory. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us," etc. (Ps. cxv. 1). 2. *The victories in detail.* The symbol was not yet complete. Joash's quiver was yet full, minus that one arrow, and the prophet bade him shoot other arrows, this time to the ground, as if smiting something down to it. Joash took his arrows and began to smite. He shot once, and twice, and thrice, then stayed. The prophet was wroth at this, and told him he should have gone on smiting, then would the Syrians have been wholly consumed, whereas now he would only gain three victories over them. These successive smitings, therefore, represented the victories in detail which Joash would gain over the Syrians. One is at a loss at first to see why the prophet should have dealt so severely with the king for what may have been a perfectly natural mistake. But the stopping with the third arrow no doubt brought to light a certain weak line in Joash's character—a want of perseverance, a tendency to be satisfied with partial results, to stop short of the ultimate goal of effort. And one can see how *that* may have hindered his complete success over the Syrians. We learn: (1) Very trivial actions often reveal a great deal of character. (2) We often have not from God because we ask not. These shootings of the arrows were at once prayers for victories from God, and pledges of victories. Joash, as it were, asked for only three victories, and he only got three. Had he asked for more, he would have got more. Had Abraham not ceased pleading for Sodom when he did, he might have got a yet further extension of grace for that doomed city (Gen. xviii. 32, 33). It is never in God we are straitened in our prayers; it is only in ourselves. (3) It displeases God that we do not ask more from him. His controversy with us is not that we ask too much, but that we do not ask enough. Joash missed the full blessing by stopping in his asking.—J. O.

Vers. 20, 21.—*Power in dead bones.* These verses contain a circumstantial notice of a singular miracle that was wrought at Elisha's sepulchre by contact with his bones. Bands of Moabites were ravaging the country, and one of these bands came upon the scene during a funeral. The mourners were terrified, and hastily thrust the corpse into Elisha's sepulchre, which was hard by; whereupon the dead man, having touched the bones of Elisha, revived and stood upon his feet. We notice—

I. THE GOOD MAN LAID IN HIS GRAVE. Elisha's sickness had proved to be indeed unto death, and his mortal remains had been reverently conveyed to a sepulchre. He who had been the means of restoring life to others, whose very bones were made the instrument of reviving the dead, was not able to protect himself from the universal law. He left the world by the same gate as ordinary mortals. It is pathetic to reflect that, however long and useful a life may be, this is always the end of it. The certainty of removal by death from the scene of their labours should animate those who are still in the vigour of their powers to work while it is to-day (John ix. 4), and should lead those who enjoy the presence and services of good men to prize and honour these servants of God while they are here. From the side of the saint himself death is not a calamity, but a gain. "He rests from his labours, and his works follow him" (Rev. xiv. 13).

II. POWER ISSUING FROM THE GOOD MAN'S GRAVE. Though Elisha was not taken to heaven as Elijah was without tasting of death, he had yet great honour put upon him in his death. God set the seal on his prophetic work by making life-giving power to issue even from his grave. The miracle suggests to us the fact that from every good man's grave there issues in an important sense a life-giving power. The influence of men does not die with them. On the contrary, it is often greater after their deaths than during their lives. 1. *Sometimes in a literal sense the grave is a source of new life to men.* In the act of committing dust to dust, and ashes to ashes, holy impressions steal over men, new resolves take possession of their hearts. Many a man, *e.g.*, has been brought to his senses at the graveside of a father or mother, whose counsels, perhaps, he disregarded in life. 2. *Sometimes in a figurative sense souls are quickened by the bones of the dead.* A man's actions, for instance, are things of the past when he is dead. But they may be written in a book, and become a source of life to countless generations who read them afterwards. It is but a few facts of any man's life which

can be thus rescued from oblivion—the mere bones of his history; but what a power is in them! So of a man's words. The fragments of a man's speech that can be preserved in any collection of his sayings are comparatively few. They are the mere bones of his speech. But they quicken souls through the ages. The words of David, of St. Paul, of the prophets, touch and work on souls to the present hour. The world is the living thing it is because of the influence of these dead men in it. They are

"The dead but sceptred sov'rans,
Who rule our spirits from their urns."

3. *The highest life has come out of death.* Jesus said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone," etc. (John xii. 24). Elisha communicated resurrection-power without himself rising from the dead; Christ has himself risen, and is now the Principle of resurrection-life to others.—J. O.

Vers. 22—25.—*Joash's victories.* We have in the closing verses a record of the fulfilment of the promise given through Elisha. Notice—

I. THE GROUND OF THESE VICTORIES. While God had respect to the prayer of Jehoahaz, there was a deeper ground for his interposition to save Israel. He was gracious to them, and had compassion on them, and had respect to them, we are told, because of his covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. More specifically, we have as grounds: 1. *Love to the fathers.* God remembered Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and would not hastily cast off their posterity (cf. Deut. iv. 37; Rom. xi. 28). Many of the blessings which sinners enjoy, the forbearance God shows them, etc., are due to the prayers of godly ancestors. 2. *Regard for his own promise.* God had made a covenant with the patriarchs, and had promised to be a God to them, and to their seed after them. That covenant was the main fact in the history of Israel. It underlies and governs all God's dealings with them, past, present, and prospective. It was the remembrance of this covenant which led to the deliverance from Egypt (Exod. ii. 24, 25); to the settlement in Canaan (Deut. ix. 3); and to God's patient dealings with the nation amidst their various rebellions, and under their constant provocations. God saved them, not for their righteousness' sake, but for his own Name's sake. He is the God of unchanging faithfulness. 3. *Unwillingness to destroy the people.* God casts off none hastily, for he has "no pleasure in the death of him that dieth" (Ezek. xviii. 32). He bears long with men, if haply they will repent. Wherefore it is said, "He would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet." There is a limit, however, to Divine forbearance. The time came when, still remaining impenitent, they were cast away, though even then not for ever.

II. THE EXTENT OF THESE VICTORIES. They amounted, as Elisha had predicted, only to three. Three times Joash beat the King of Syria, and recovered the cities of Israel from his hand. This was a great gain, but it might so easily have been greater, had Joash only fulfilled aright the conditions of success. How much blessing we often deprive ourselves of by our own unfaithfulness and shortcoming! It is reason for rejoicing that God does so much for us; but the joy must eternally be shaded by regret when we reflect that it is by our own doings that far more is not done.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIV.

Vers. 1—29.—REIGNS OF AMAZIAH, SON OF JOASH KING OF JUDAH, OVER JUDAH, AND OF JEROBOAM, SON OF JOASH KING OF ISRAEL, OVER ISRAEL.

Vers. 1—20.—THE REIGN OF AMAZIAH OVER JUDAH. This chapter takes up the history of the kingdom of Judah from the end of ch. xii., with which it is closely connected. The writer, after a few such general remarks as those with which he commonly opens the history of each reign (vers. 1—4), proceeds to relate (1) the punishment by Amaziah of the murderers of his father (vers. 5, 6); (2) the war of Amaziah with Edom (ver. 7); (3) the challenge which he sent to Joash King of Israel, that king's reply, and the war which followed (vers. 8—16); and (4) the circumstances of Amaziah's

death (vers. 17—20). Between vers. 14 and 16 there is interposed a summary of the reign of King Joash of Judah, which is little more than a repetition of ch. xiii. 12, 13, and is thought by many to be an interpolation.

Ver. 1.—**In the second year of Joash son of Jehoahaz King of Israel reigned Amaziah the son of Joash King of Judah.** Again the chronology is defective. If Joash of Israel ascended the throne in the thirty-seventh year of Joash of Judah (ch. xiii. 10), and the latter reigned forty years (ch. xii. 1), Amaziah cannot have become king till the fourth or fifth year of the Israelitish Joash, instead of the second. The ordinary explanation of commentators is a double accession; but this is unsatisfactory. It is best to allow that the chronology of the later half of the Israelite kingdom is in confusion.

Ver. 2.—**He was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem.** Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 9. § 3) and the author of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxv. 1) confirm these numbers. **And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem.** Josephus (*l. s. c.*) calls her Jodade, but the LXX. have, more correctly, Joadim.

Ver. 3.—**And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David his father.** Only one King of Judah hitherto, viz. Asa, had obtained the praise that he "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, *as did David his father*" (1 Kings xv. 11). All the others had fallen short more or less; and Amaziah fell short in many respects. He was wanting in "a perfect heart" (2 Chron. xxv. 2), *i.e.* a fixed intention to do God's will; he was proud and boastful (ver. 10); he gave way to idolatry in his later years (2 Chron. xxv. 14), and he despised the reproof of the prophet who was sent to rebuke his sin (2 Chron. xxv. 16). Though placed among the "good kings" by the authors of both Kings and Chronicles, it is, as it were, under protest, with a distinct intimation that, although better than most of his predecessors, he did not reach a high standard. **He did according to all things as Joash his father did.** There is something of Oriental hyperbole in this statement, which must be understood in the spirit, not in the letter. The two kings were differently circumstanced, and history did not "repeat itself" in their reigns. The position of Joash with respect to Jehoiada finds no parallel in the circumstances of the life of Amaziah. Still, the lives are parallel *to some extent*. Both kings began better than they ended. Both were zealous for Jehovah **at first, but turned to idolatry at last.** Both opposed themselves to prophets, and treated their rebukes with scorn. Both roused conspiracy against them by their misconduct, and were murdered by the malcontents. Further, both were unsuccessful in war, had to withstand a siege of their capital, and bought off their enemy by the surrender of the greater part of its wealth, including the treasures of the temple (comp. ch. xii. 18 with ch. xiv. 14).

Ver. 4.—**Howbeit the high places were not taken away.** No king ventured to touch the "high places" until the time of Hezekiah, by whom they were put down (ch. xviii. 4). Even Asa did not remove them (1 Kings xv. 14). They were remnants of an old ancestral worship which went back to the time of the judges, and which had been connived at by judges and kings and prophets. Local feeling was everywhere in their favour, since they provided for local needs, and enabled men to dispense with the long and tedious journey to the distant Jerusalem. **As yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places**; literally, *were sacrificing and burning incense*; *i.e.* continued the practice, which had come down to them from their ancestors. (On the morality and legality of the practice, see the comment on 1 Kings iii. 2.)

Ver. 5.—**And it came to pass, as soon as the kingdom was confirmed in his hand.** Joash had been murdered in Jerusalem by conspirators (ch. xii. 20). A time of trouble had, no doubt, supervened. The conspirators would not wish to see Amaziah placed upon the throne, and may have opposed and delayed his appointment. But their efforts proved fruitless. After a time, the young king was confirmed (literally, "strengthened"), *i.e.* settled and established in his kingdom, all opposition being overcome or dying away. This seems to be what the writer means. He cannot intend a confirmation by a foreign suzerain, which the phrase used might import (ch. xv. 19), when he has given no hint of any subjection of the kingdom to any foreign power, or indeed of any serious attack on its independence. **That he slew his servants.** Jozachar and Jehozabad were "servants" of Joash, apparently domestic servants employed in his palace, and are therefore reckoned "servants" also of his successor. **Which had slain the king his father.** In the "house of Millo," where he lay sick. They "slew him on his bed" (see 2 Chron. xxiv. 25).

Ver. 6.—**But the children of the murderers he slew not.** It was the ordinary usage in the East for the sons of traitors to share the fate of their fathers. A Greek poet went so far as to say that a man was a fool who put to death the father, and allowed the son to live. The practice had a double ground.

Sons, it might be assumed, would be cognizant of their father's intention, and would so be accessories before the fact. And the law of *daim*, or "blood-feud," would make it dangerous to spare them, since they would be bound to avenge their father's death on his destroyer. That the practice prevailed among the Israelites appears from Josh. vii. 24, where we find the children of Achan involved in his fate, and again from 2 Kings ix. 26, where we are told that Naboth's sons suffered with their father. But it was contrary to an express command of the Law, as the writer goes on to show. **According unto that which is written in the book of the Law of Moses.** "The book of the Law of Moses" (סֵפֶר תּוֹרַת־מֹשֶׁה) may be either the Pentateuch regarded as one book, or Deuteronomy, the particular "book" of the Pentateuch in which the passage occurs. In either case the passage is fatal to the theory of the late composition of Deuteronomy, which is here found to have ruled the conduct of a Jewish king a hundred and fifty years before Manasseh, two hundred before Josiah, and two hundred and eighty before the return from the Captivity—the dates assigned to Deuteronomy by recent "advanced" critics. **Wherein the Lord commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin.** As usual, when one sacred writer quotes another, the quotation is not exact. "But" (כִּי אִם) is inserted at the beginning of the final clause, and the form of the verb in the same clause is modified. It seems to be intended that we should be made to feel that it is the sentiment or meaning conveyed, and not the phraseology in which it is wrapped up, that is of importance.

Ver. 7.—**He slew of Edom in the valley of salt ten thousand.** Edom had revolted from Judah and recovered complete independence in the reign of Jehoram, about fifty years previously (ch. viii. 20). Since that time the two countries had remained at peace. Now, however, Amaziah resolved upon a great effort to resubjugate them. According to Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 9. § 1) and Chronicles (2 Chron. xxv. 5), he levied an army of 400,000 men—300,000 Jews, and 100,000 hired Israelites—with which he marched against the three nations of the Amalekites, the Idumæans, and the Gabalites. Rebuked by a prophet for want of faith in calling to his aid the wicked Israelites, he consented to dismiss them, and made the invasion at the head of his own troops only. These were carefully organized (2 Chron. xxv. 5), and met with a great success. Ten thousand of his enemies fell in battle, and an equal number were made prisoners. These last were barbarously put to death by being precipitated from the top of a rock (2 Chron. xxv. 12). "The valley of salt," the scene of the battle, is probably identified with the sunken plain, now called *Es Sabkah*, at the southern extremity of the Dead Sea. This is "a large flat of at least six miles by ten, occasionally flooded" (Tristram), but dry in the summer-time. It is full of salt springs, and is bounded on the west and north-west by a long ridge of pure salt, known as the *Khasm Usdum*, so that the name "valley of salt" would be very appropriate. **And took Selah by war.** Selah with the article (*has-Selah*) can only be the Idumæan capital, which the Greeks called Petra (Πέτρα or ἡ Πέτρα), and which is one of the most remarkable sites in the world. In the rocky mountains which form the eastern boundary of the Arabah or sandy slope reaching from the edge of the Sabkah to the Red Sea, amid cliffs of gorgeous colours, pink and crimson and purple, and ravines as deep and narrow as that of Pfeffers, partly excavated in the rock, partly emplaced upon it, stood the Edomite town, difficult to approach, still more difficult to capture, more like the home of a colony of sea-gulls than that of a number of men. Petra is graphically described by Dean Stanley ('Sinai and Palestine,' pp. 88—92), and has also received notice from Robinson ('Researches,' vol. ii. pp. 518—538), Highton ('Dictionary of the Bible,' vol. iii. p. 1191), and others. **And called the name of it Joktheel**; *i.e.* "subdued by God." The name took no permanent hold. Selah is still "Sela" in Isaiah (xvi. 1), Obadiah (ver. 3), and Jeremiah (xlix. 16). It is known only as "Petra" to the Greeks and Romans. **Unto this day**; *i.e.* to the time of the writer who composed the account of Amaziah's reign for the 'Book of the Kings,' and whose words the author of Kings transcribes here as so often elsewhere.

Ver. 8.—**Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, King of Israel, saying.** Amaziah had a cause of complaint against Jehoash, or at any rate against his subjects, which does not appear in the narrative of Kings. The author of Chronicles tells us that, when Amaziah dismissed his Israelite mercenaries, they were offended, and vented their anger by an inroad into his territories (2 Chron. xxv. 13), where they killed three thousand men and "took much spoil." This was a clear *casus belli*, if Amaziah chose to consider it such. **Come, let us look one another in the face.** A rude message, if it was actually couched in these terms. But perhaps the writer substitutes the gist of the message for the language in which it was wrapped up. Josephus says that Amaziah

wrote a letter to Joash, and required him to submit himself and people to the authority of the Jewish state, and thus restore the state of things which had existed under David and Solomon. Otherwise the sword must decide between them ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 9. § 2). Whatever its terms, pride and self-confidence, the result of his success against Edom, were at the root of the challenge.

Ver. 9.—**And Jehoash the King of Israel sent to Amaziah King of Judah, saying.** According to Josephus, the reply to the challenge was given in a formal letter, of which he presents us with a copy—

"King Joash to King Amaziah [sends greeting]:

"Once upon a time there was in Mount Lebanon a very tall cypress, and also there was a thistle. And the thistle sent to the cypress, saying, 'Contract thy daughter in marriage to my son.' And while this was transacting, a wild beast passed by and trod down the thistle. Let this be a warning to thee not to cherish immoderate desires, and not, because thou hast had success against Amalek, to pride thyself thereupon, and so draw down dangers both upon thee and upon thy kingdom."

The force of the original message is much weakened in this paraphrase. **The thistle that was in Lebanon.** "Thistle" is a better translation than "thorn-bush" (Keil), first, as a meaner growth, and secondly, as more likely to be trodden down by a wild beast. The monarch intends to say that the meanest thing in the vegetable world sent to the grandest, claiming equality. **Sent to the cedar**—certainly "the cedar," and not "the cypress," as translated by Josephus—**that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife.** *Nube pari* was a Roman maxim; and the rule was one generally established throughout the ancient world. To ask a man's daughter in marriage for one's self or for one's son was to claim to be his equal. **And there passed by a wild beast**—literally, *a beast of the field*—**that was in Lebanon** (on Lebanon as the haunt of wild beasts, see Cant. iv. 8), **and trode down the thistle.** So levelling with the dust the pride of the impertinent one. We must not seek an exact application of all the details either of a fable or of a parable. It is not required that metaphors should "run on all fours."

Ver. 10.—**Thou hast indeed smitten Edom** (see ver. 7, and the comment), **and thine heart hath lifted thee up**—*i.e.* made thee proud, exalted thee above measure—**glory of this, and tarry at home**—*i.e.* rest content with the glory which thou hast gained in thy Edomite war; make thy boast thereof, but do not affront fresh dangers—**for why shouldest thou meddle to thy hurt**—literally, *why wilt thou meddle with misfortune?*—**that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee?** Joash was as confident of success, if it came to war, as Amaziah. His three victories over Syria (ch. xiii. 25) were, he thought, at least as good evidence of military strength as Amaziah's one victory over Edom.

Ver. 11.—**But Amaziah would not hear.** The message of Joash was not conciliatory, but provocative. On hearing it, Amaziah (as Josephus says, 'Ant. Jud.,' ix. 9. § 3) was the more spurred on to make his expedition. **Therefore Jehoash King of Israel went up.** "Joash," as Bähr says, "did not wait for the attack of Amaziah, but anticipated his movements, and carried the war into the enemy's country." Defensive warfare often requires such an offensive movement. **And he and Amaziah King of Judah looked one another in the face**—*i.e.* came to an engagement (comp. ver. 8)—**at Beth-shemesh, which** belongeth to **Judah.** Beth-shemesh was assigned to Judah by Joshua (xix. 38), and lay on its western frontier line. Its position is marked by the modern *Ain-Shems*, which lies nearly due west of Jerusalem, on the road from Hebron to Jaffa. Ain-Shems itself is an Arab village, but "just to the west of it are the manifest traces of an ancient site" (Robinson, 'Researches,' vol. iii. p. 17). The position commands the approach from the Philistine plain; and we may suspect that Joash, avoiding the direct line of approach, led his troops to the attack through Philistia, as was so often done by the Syrians in their attacks on the Maccabees (see 1 Macc. iii. 40; xiii. 12, 13; xv. 40; xvi. 4—8, etc.).

Ver. 12.—**And Judah was put to the worse before Israel; and they fled every man to their tents**; *i.e.* "to their *homes*" (see the comment on ch. xiii. 5). This was the first trial of strength between the two nations of which we have any distinct account. It resulted in the complete discomfiture of Israel. There was another great struggle in the time of Pekah and Ahaz, wherein Judah suffered even more severely (see 2 Chron. xxviii. 6—8).

Ver. 13.—**And Jehoash King of Israel took Amaziah King of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh** — Josephus says (*l. s. c.*) that Amaziah was deserted by his troops, who were seized with a sudden panic and fled from the field—**and came to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem.** According to Josephus, Joash threatened his prisoner with death unless the gates of Jerusalem were opened to him, and his army admitted into the town; and it was upon Amaziah's representations that the surrender was made as

soon as the Israelite army appeared before the place. The breach in the wall was therefore not the result of siege operations, but the act of a conqueror, who desired to leave his enemy as defenceless as possible. **From the gate of Ephraim**; *i.e.* the main gate in the northern wall of the city—that by which travellers ordinarily proceeded into the territory of the tribe of Ephraim. In later times it seems to have been called indifferently "the gate of Ephraim" (Neh. viii. 16; xii. 39) and "the gate of Benjamin" (Jer. xxxvii. 13; Zech. xiv. 10). The great north road, which passed through it, led across the Benjamite into the Ephraimite territory. **Unto the corner gate.** The "corner gate" is generally thought to have been that at the north-*western* angle of the city wall, where it turned southward, but this is perhaps doubtful. The exact line of the city wall in the time of Amaziah is exceedingly uncertain. **Four hundred cubits**; six hundred feet, or two hundred yards. This seems to have been the entire distance between the two gates. As there were at least thirteen gates in the circuit of the walls (Neh. iii. 1—31; xii. 31—39; Zech. xiv. 10), which were probably not more extensive than those of the present town (3960 yards), the distance of two hundred yards between one gate and another would not be improbable, the *average* distance being about three hundred yards.

Ver. 14.—**And he took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the Lord.** As Joash of Judah had, fifteen or twenty years previously, stript the temple of its treasures to buy off the hostility of Hazael (ch. xii. 18), there could not have been at this time very much for Joash of Israel to lay his hands on. Still, whatever there was passed into the possession of the Israelite king. **And in the treasures of the king's house.** Neither can this have amounted to much, unless the booty taken from Hazael after his defeats (ch. xiv. 25) was very considerable. **And hostages.** This is a new feature in the warfare of the time; but hostages were given and taken from an early date by the Persians (Xen., 'Cyrop.,' iv. 2. § 7; Herod., vi. 99), the Greeks, and the Romans.

Vers. 15, 16.—**Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah King of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his stead.** These verses are repeated with very slight alterations from ch. xiii. 11, 12. Curiously, on both occasions they are out of place. It is scarcely worth while to consider how they came into the text at this point, since no explanation could be more than a conjecture. In point of fact, they are redundant.

Ver. 17.—**And Amaziah the son of Joash King of Judah lived after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz King of Israel fifteen years.** This note of time is based on ver. 2, which makes Amaziah begin to reign in the *second* year of Joash of Israel, and hold the throne for twenty-nine years. If he really began to reign in the *fourth* year of Joash, he would have survived him only thirteen years (see the comment on ver. 2).

Ver. 18.—**And the rest of the acts of Amaziah**—especially the circumstances of his war with Edom, as related in 2 Chron. xxv. 5—13, his idolatry (2 Chron. xxv. 14), and the rebuke which he received from one of God's prophets (2 Chron. xxv. 15, 16) in consequence—**are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?**

Ver. 19.—**Now they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem.** The author of Chronicles connects this conspiracy with the idolatry of which Amaziah was guilty (2 Chron. xxv. 27); but, though his subjects may have been offended by his religious changes, and have become alienated from him in consequence, the actual conspiracy can scarcely have been prompted by an act which was fifteen, or at any rate thirteen, years old. It is more likely to have sprung out of dissatisfaction with Amaziah's military inaction from and after his defeat by Joash. While Jeroboam II. was carrying all before him in the north, recovering his border, pushing it as far as Hamath, and even exercising a suzerainty over Damascus (vers. 25, 28), Amaziah remained passive, cowed by his one defeat, and took no advantage of the state of weakness to which he had reduced Edom, but sat with folded hands, doing nothing. The conspirators who removed Amaziah, and placed his son Azariah, or Uzziah, upon the throne, may be credited with the wish and intention to bring the period of inaction to an end, and to effect in the south what Jeroboam was effecting in the north. It is true that Azariah was but sixteen years of age (ver. 21; comp. 2 Chron. xxvi. 1), but he may have given indications of his ambition and capacity. Sixteen, moreover, is the time of manhood in the East, and the conspirators had probably waited until Azariah was sixteen in order that his competency to reign should not be disputed. As soon as he was on the throne he initiated the warlike policy which they desired (see ver. 22). **And he fled to Lachish.** Lachish, one of the south-western Judæan towns (Josh. xv. 39), was at all times a fortress of importance. It resisted Joshua (x. 3, 31), and was taken by storm. It was

fortified by Jeroboam against the Egyptians (2 Chron. xi. 9). It was besieged and taken by Sennacherib (ch. xviii. 14; Layard, 'Nineveh and Babylon,' pp. 149—152). The position is marked by the modern *Um-Lakis*, on "a low round swell or knoll," between Gaza and Beit-Jibrin, about thirteen miles from Gaza and nearly thirty-five from Jerusalem. **But they sent after him to Lachish, and slew him there.** So the author of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxv. 27) and Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 9. § 3); but details are wanting.

Ver. 20.—**And they brought him on horses**; literally, *on the horses*, which must mean "on *his* horses." Probably Amaziah had fled to Lachish in the royal chariot, and his body was now brought back in it to Jerusalem. The conspirators were evidently minded to treat the royal corpse with all respect. **And he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David**; *i.e.* the city on the eastern hill, which David took from the Jebusites (see the comment on 1 Kings ii. 10).

Vers. 21, 22.—SUCCESSION OF AZARIAH AND RESUMPTION OF THE WAR WITH EDOM. Though reserving his account of the reign of Azariah to the next chapter (vers. 1—7), the writer is led by the circumstances of Amaziah's death to mention *at once* the fact of his son Azariah's succession, and the first important act of his reign, the resumption of war with Edom. He then breaks off suddenly, in order to interpose an account of the reign of Jeroboam II., who was contemporary with Amaziah during fourteen years of his reign.

Ver. 21.—**And all the people of Judah took Azariah.** This is a new expression, and implies a new, perhaps a tumultuary, proceeding. The *people*, uncertain probably of the intentions of the conspirators, and fearful that they might set up a king not of the house of David, took the initiative, went to the royal palace, and finding there a son of Amaziah—whether his eldest son or not, we cannot say—proclaimed him king and placed him upon the throne. The author of Chronicles (2 Chron. xvi. 1) agrees. Josephus is silent. **Which was sixteen years old.** Young certainly, considering that his father was fifty-four (see ver. 2), but not necessarily "a younger son," since Amaziah's earlier children may have been daughters, or he may have married late in life. It is not doubted that Manasseh was Hezekiah's eldest son, yet he was only twelve when Hezekiah died at the same age as Amaziah, viz. fifty-four. **And made him king instead of his father Amaziah.** There are two forms of the king's name, Azariah and Uzziah. The difference between them is not so great in the Hebrew, where they both begin with the same letter; but still it is considerable. One name is not a mere contraction of the other. Some suppose that the king changed one name for the other upon his accession; others, that he was called indifferently by either, since they were very similar in meaning. "Azariah" is "he whose help is Jehovah;" "Uzziah," "he whose strength is Jehovah." "Uzziah" is the predominant form, occurring four times in 2 Kings, twelve times in 2 Chronicles, three times in Isaiah, once in Hosea, once in Amos, and once in Zechariah; while "Azariah" occurs only in 2 Kings (eight times) and in 1 Chron. iii. 12 (once). Josephus uses the form "Ozias" (equivalent to "Uzziah)," and so does St. Matthew (i. 8, 9).

Ver. 22.—**He built Elath, and restored it to Judah.** On the position of Elath, or Eloth, and its importance, see the comment on 1 Kings ix. 26. It had been the headquarters of Solomon's fleet (1 Kings ix. 26), and again of Jehoshaphat's (1 Kings xxii. 48; 2 Chron. xx. 36); but had been, of course, recovered by the Edomites when they revolted (ch. viii. 22). Azariah's reoccupation seems to imply an intention on his part of renewing the old Red Sea trade. By "built" in this passage we must understand "rebuilt," or (as in 2 Chron. xi. 6) "fortified." **After that the king slept with his fathers.** Keil is probably right in understanding this to mean "*immediately* after he had ascended the throne," or "as soon as ever his father was dead" (see the comment on ver. 19). His further military successes will be considered in the comment on his reign, as sketched in the next chapter.

Vers. 23—29.—REIGN OF JEROBOAM THE SON OF JOASH OVER ISRAEL. This reign, the most important of those belonging to the kingdom of Israel since that of Ahab, is treated with great brevity by the writer, whose interest is far more in Judah than in Israel. Seven verses only are devoted to him. The result of his wars is given without any account of the wars themselves. And the great fact of his ruling over Damascus only comes in by a sort of afterthought (ver. 28). The usual formulas are followed in introducing his reign and dismissing it.

Ver. 23.—**In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash King of Judah**—this note of

time agrees with those in ch. xiii. 10 and ch. xiv. 1, 17, but not with that in ch. xv. 1 (see the comment on that passage)—**Jeroboam the son of Joash King of Israel began to reign in Samaria**, and reigned **forty and one years**. Josephus says "forty years." Many moderns (Thenius, Bähr, and others) extend the term to fifty-one years. Some suppose that Jeroboam was joint-king with his father in Amaziah's third year, sole king from his fifteenth. But it is better to acknowledge the general confusion of the chronology, and to regard it as uncertain, unless where a synchronism is distinctly made out. Such assured synchronisms are the following: (1) The synchronism of Ahab with Jehoshaphat; (2) the synchronism of Jehoram, Ahab's son, with the same; (3) the synchronism of Jehu's first year with the first year of Athaliah; (4) the synchronism of Amaziah with Joash of Israel; (5) the synchronism of Pekah with Ahaz; (6) the synchronism of Hoshea's last year with Hezekiah's sixth; (7) the synchronism of Amaziah's fourteenth year with Jeroboam II.'s first, being twice asserted in two distinct forms (vers. 17 and 23), is, at any rate, highly probable. Numbers which occur once only in ancient writers can seldom be implicitly trusted, since the liability of numbers to corruption is excessive.

Ver. 24.—**And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin** (comp. ch. x. 29 and xiii. 2, 11, where the same is said of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather). The judgments which had fallen upon Jehu and Jehoahaz on account of these sins did not teach any lesson to Joash or Jeroboam II. The fatal taint, which was congenital with the Israelite monarchy, could never be purged out, but clung to it to the end.

Ver. 25.—**He restored the coast of Israel from the entering in of Hamath.** By "the entering in of Hamath" is to be understood the opening into the Cœle-Syrian valley a little north of Baalbec, where the ground begins to slope northwards, and the streams to flow in the same direction to form the Orontes. Hamath itself was between eighty and ninety miles further to the north, on the middle Orontes, about N. lat. 35° 22'. The "entering in of Hamath" was always reckoned the northern boundary of the Holy Land (see Numb. xxxiv. 8; Josh. xiii. 5; Judg. iii. 3; 1 Kings viii. 65). It corresponded with the watershed between the Orontes and the Litany. **Unto the sea of the plain.** The "sea of the plain" is undoubtedly the Dead Sea, "the plain" (*ha-Arabah*) being used as a sort of proper name for the lower Jordan valley, like *El-Ghor* at the present day (see Deut. iii. 17; Josh. iii. 16; xii. 3, etc.). The territory recovered no doubt included all the trans-Jordanic region as far south as the river Arnon; but the recovery of dominion over Moab, and even over Ammon, which some have seen in this passage (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 124), is scarcely contained in it. **According to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai** (comp. Jonah i. 1). Jonah's date is determined by this passage. He was contemporary with Hosea and Amos, and earlier than Micah. His prophecy concerning Jeroboam is probably assigned to the early part of that king's reign. **The prophet, which was of Gath-hepher.** Gath-hepher is mentioned in Joshua, under the name of Gittah-hepher, as a city of Zebulon (ch. xix. 13), not far from Mount Tabor. It is conjecturally identified with *El-Meshhed* north of Nazareth, where the tomb of Jonah is shown.

Ver. 26.—**For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter** (comp. ch. xiii. 4, 23). The repetition is perhaps to be accounted for by the desire of the writer to explain how it came to pass that so great a deliverance was granted to Israel under a king who maintained the worship of the calves. He views it as the consequence of God's infinite compassion, and of the extreme bitterness of Israel's sufferings under the Syrians (comp. ch. xiii. 7 and Amos i. 3). **For there was not any shut up, nor any left** (see the comment on 1 Kings xiv. 10), **nor any helper for Israel.** Apart from Jehovah, Israel had no one to come to her aid. Judah would not help her, for Judah had just suffered at her hands (vers. 11—14); still less would Philistia, or Moab, or Ammon, who were her constant enemies. Her isolation rendered her all the more an object for the Divine compassion.

Ver. 27.—**And the Lord said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven.** God's decision under the circumstances was not, as it well might have been, considering Israel's ill desert, to blot out forthwith the very name of Israel from the earth. On the contrary, he gave the nation a breathing-space, a gleam of light, a second summer before the winter set in—a further opportunity of repenting and turning to him with all their hearts if they would only have taken advantage of it, a chance of redeeming the past and re-establishing themselves in his favour. He might well have destroyed them at this time if he had looked only to considerations of justice, if in his wrath he had not thought upon mercy. **But he saved them;** *i.e.* **he**

gave them the deliverance promised first by Elisha (ch. xiii. 17), and then by Jonah the son of Amittai (ver. 25)—deliverance from Syria, recovery of their borders, and triumph over their enemies. He gave them all this **by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.** Joash began the salvation, but it was reserved for Jeroboam to complete it. He was the true "saviour" (ch. xiii. 5), the true accomplisher of the work, for which his father only paved the way. Thus one Jeroboam founded the kingdom; another refounded it, restored its ancient glories, and gave it its old dimensions.

Ver. 28.—**Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered Damascus and Hamath.** It has been suggested that these words mean no more than that Jeroboam took territory from Damascus and Hamath—from Damascus the trans-Jordanic territory which Hazael had conquered from Jehu (ch. x. 33); from Hamath some small portion of the Cœle-Syrian valley, about the head-streams of the Orontes and Litany (so Keil and Bähr). But there does not seem to be any sufficient reason for giving the words used this narrow signification. Damascus was conquered and annexed by David (2 Sam. viii. 6), and held for a time even by Solomon (1 Kings xi. 24), of whose kingdom Hamath also seems to have formed a part (1 Kings iv. 21—24; 2 Chron. viii. 4; ix. 26). The word "recovered" is, therefore, a suitable one. The prophecy of Amos, no doubt, represents Damascus as independent (Amos i. 3, 4); but this may have been written before Jeroboam conquered it. Hamath's subjection seems to be implied in Amos vi. 2, 14. We may, therefore, well understand, with Ewald ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 124) and Dr. Pusey ('Minor Prophets,' pp. 157, 209), that Jeroboam "subdued Damascus and even Hamath," and added them to his kingdom. How long the subjection continued is a different question. Probably, in the troubles that followed the death of Zachariah (ch. xv. 10—14), the yoke was thrown off. In the Assyrian Inscriptions, Damascus appears under its own king about B.C. 786 (G. Smith, 'Eponym Canon,' p. 115), and it was certainly independent in B.C. 743. At the latter date Hamath also appears as the capital of an independent kingdom (ibid., pp. 118, 120) under its own monarch. Which belonged **to Judah.** Keil and Bähr render, "Hamath *of* Judah," regarding לִיהוּדָה as a genitive. Ewald proposes to read חֲמָת לְצוֹבָה, "Hamath of Zobah" (comp. 2 Chron. viii. 3), or else to cut out לִיהוּדָה altogether. The passage is one of great difficulty. **For Israel.** It is questionable whether this meaning can be obtained from the present text, which is בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. Bähr thinks that it can; but Ewald regards the change into לְיִשְׂרָאֵל as one "of necessity." Might we not avoid all these alterations by translating simply—"how he recovered Damascus and Hamath *to* Judah *through* Israel"? Attaching them to Israel was a sort of recovering of them to Judah, to which (*i.e.* the Judah of David and Solomon) they had once belonged. **Are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?**

Ver. 29.—**And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, even with the kings of Israel**—his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had been actually among the kings of Israel; but *all* the kings, his predecessors, were probably reckoned among his ancestors—**and Zachariah his son reigned in his stead** (see the comment on ch. xv. 8). By Zachariah's accession the promise given to Jehu (ch. x. 30), that his "children to the fourth generation should sit on the throne of Israel," was literally fulfilled. No other royal house occupied the Israelitish throne for more than three generations.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 3, 4.—*A father's evil example no justification for a son's misconduct.* Amaziah "did according to all things as Joash his father did." Like his father, he was half-hearted. In his earlier years he kept to the worship of Jehovah, and "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," yet not with any zeal or energy. Afterwards he fell away, introduced idolatry (2 Chron. xxv. 14), and when a prophet rebuked him for his evil courses, answered him with scoffs and threatenings (2 Chron. xxv. 15, 16). His father Joash had done even worse after the death of Jehoiada. He had not only sanctioned idolatries (2 Chron. xxiv. 17, 18), but had had the servant of God who rebuked them put to death (2 Chron. xxiv. 21). This, however, is not held by the sacred writer to be any justification or excuse for Amaziah. The reasons are manifest.

I. NO MAN IS TO BE CALLED MASTER, NOT EVEN A FATHER. God gives men in his Law and in their conscience a standard of right, which they are to follow. He nowhere bids them take any man but the "God-Man" for pattern. He warns them

that men are, all of them, more or less imperfect. He requires that parents shall be "honoured," not imitated.

II. THE EVIL EXAMPLE OF A FATHER IS A WARNING TO SONS, WHICH SHOULD LEAD TO AVOIDANCE, NOT IMITATION. The sight of a drunken father should disgust sons with drunkenness. Blasphemous and violent words should so shock them as to suggest an exactly opposite behaviour. Looseness of morals should breed in them a determination never to offend in a way so absolutely revolting. Given that simplicity which is natural to youth, and every fault of a father should so keenly wound and vex their souls as to bend them in the exactly contrary direction. Sin is so ugly, so offensive, so coarse, that in another it naturally disgusts us; and the more plainly it is revealed, the closer it is brought to us, the more are we naturally provoked and angered by it.

III. THE PUNISHMENT WHICH SIN DRAWS AFTER IT SHOULD COME ESPECIALLY HOME TO THOSE WHOSE HOMES ARE CURSED WITH IT, AND ACT AS A DETERRENT. Disease, decay, the loss of others' respect, the severing of friendships, general dislike and aversion, in some cases contempt, dog the footsteps of sin, and mark it as a thing to be avoided. Sons are naturally sensitive with regard to their fathers' honour, and keen to mark whether they are held in respect or no. There can be no natural deterrent from evil courses stronger than the perception that one with whom we are bound up is deteriorating from day to day, not merely in character, but in reputation, falling in men's esteem, becoming a mark for their scorn. The father's fall should thus not produce the son's, but rather stimulate the son to rise to greater and greater heights of virtue.

Vers. 5, 6.—*A father's sins not to be visited by the civil magistrate on his children.* Human legislators have differed greatly in their judgments upon this point. In the East, and in early times, the idea was generally accepted that the guilt of the father attached to all his descendants, and was justly visited on them. "Lege cantum erat," says Q. Curtius ('Vit. Alex.,' vi. 11), "ut propinqui eorum, qui regi insidiati essent, cum ipsis necarentur." The family was regarded as the unit of society, and the crime of one member tainted the whole of it. What the Egyptian practice was is uncertain; but we find the Israelites, shortly after the Exodus, putting to death the whole family of Achan on account of their father's sin (Josh. vii. 24, 25), and the usage seems to have continued long afterwards (ch. ix. 26). The Greeks and Romans adopted a different line of action. Recognizing the separateness of the individual, they never executed a family *en masse*, but only the guilty member or members of it. Yet, in secondary punishments, the contrary idea to some extent prevailed. At Athens, when the sentence on a man was degradation from his rights of citizenship (ἀτιμία), the penalty was shared by his children. A similar disability attached to the children of those who were executed. So, even by our own law, attainder and forfeiture, which mainly affect the children, are attached to the crime of treason, and the property of felons escheats to the Crown. It is very remarkable that the Law of Moses should have anticipated the ultimate judgment of the human conscience upon the point, and have laid down so clearly and strongly the humane principle that the criminal *alone* should be punished for his own crime. To us at the present day the principle may appear axiomatic; but at the time when Moses enunciated it, the contrary idea was prevalent; and it is doubtful whether the broad assertion, "Every man shall be put to death for his own sins," had ever been heard previously. Even now, though in the letter the principle is universally accepted, infractions of its spirit are common enough—

I. BY NATIONS. Nations infringe it when they cashier a royal family for the fault, or even the crime, of the reigning sovereign. In an hereditary monarchy the son has a right to succeed, though his father may by unconstitutional acts have justly forfeited the crown. Still more unjust is the perpetual exile of all those whose ancestors have ever reigned over a country. Such persons are punished, not so much for the sins as for the merits—the wisdom, prowess, high renown—of their forefathers, since it is for their merits, ordinarily, that persons are first placed upon thrones. Confiscation of the property of exiled princes is still more indefensible, since it is at once unjust and mean. It may be added that forfeiture and attainder, as they exist in our own law, seem to be contrary to the spirit of the rule, which is that no one should be punished for anything but his own acts.

II. BY INDIVIDUALS. Individuals infringe this rule when they maintain a family

feud, transferring to the children of those by whom they consider themselves to have been injured the animosity which they have long entertained towards their parents. Or when they treat a man with coldness or incivility because his father has done something disgraceful. Or, generally, when they attach blame or discredit to any one, not for anything that he has done, but for something that somebody connected with him has done. Strict justice requires that each man should "bear his own burden," and stand or fall by his own acts. If we allow anything but his own acts to affect our estimate of a man—still more, if we allow it to affect our demeanour towards him—we act unjustly, we infringe the principle of the law, "Every man shall be put to death [*i.e.* shall suffer] for *his own* sin."

Vers. 8—14.—"*Pride goes before a fall.*" Amaziah's challenge and its result furnish a remarkable illustration of this maxim. The following points should be dwelt upon.

I. THE WEAK GROUND OF THE PRIDE. This was military success, which is just as often the result of good fortune, or one's enemies' mistakes, as of any merits of one's own. Amaziah's after-life showed that he did not possess any great military capacity, and so had nothing on which he ought to have prided himself. Men constantly over-estimate their own merits.

II. THE WRONGFUL WAY IN WHICH THE PRIDE VENTED ITSELF. In quarrel, causeless quarrel with a neighbour. Amaziah had no grievance which he felt it necessary to redress, no need to quarrel with Joash. Having gained one success, he was simply greedy for more. And to gratify his self-esteem he was careless how many lives he sacrificed or what injuries he inflicted (1) on his adversaries; (2) on his own subjects. He forgot that the Israelites were of kindred blood (1 Kings xii. 24), of the same religion, a portion of God's people. He plunged into an unnecessary war—in itself always a sin—with a nation towards which he ought to have felt friendly, without obtaining or seeking any Divine sanction, in sole reliance on himself. What wonder that God punished such combined folly and wickedness!

III. THE OBSTINACY WITH WHICH THE WRONGFUL COURSE WAS PERSISTED IN. Proud men dislike above all things admitting that they are in the wrong. Amaziah had ample time to retract his challenge and give up his enterprise. Joash was not at all eager for the encounter; on the contrary, he was quite willing to have remained at peace if Amaziah would have let him. But to retract, still more to apologize, would have been unpleasant. The pride which had given birth to the challenge absolutely forbade its withdrawal.

IV. THE COMPLETENESS AND EXTREME IGNOMINY OF THE FALL. Amaziah had, no doubt, counted on an easy victory; he went to war "with a light heart." He would do with Israel as he had done with Edom—smite and slay, and make prisoners, and perhaps punish his prisoners with death (ver. 7). The result is, not a victory, not even a drawn battle, not a long war with alternations of success and defeat, but one crushing blow, from which there is no recovery even for an instant. His army is defeated, dispersed; he himself is a prisoner in the hands of his enemy, his capital is taken, its walls broken down, its treasures carried off. He is disgraced in the eyes of all his subjects, as well as of the neighbouring nations, and thenceforth remains absolutely quiescent, attempts nothing, but, humbled and confounded, "sits in the dust."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4 with 7—20.—*Compromise and its consequences.* We read here of Amaziah that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David his father: he did according to all things as Joash his father did. *Howbeit the high places were not taken away;* as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places." And we read of him in 2 Chronicles that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart." To understand the meaning of the statement which we meet with so often, that "the high places were not taken away," we must go back to the period before the children of Israel entered the promised land. At that time the inhabitants of Canaan were heathen—pagans and idolaters. One of the peculiarities of their heathen worship was to have groves of trees, generally

of oaks, planted on the summit of the hills. In these groves there was usually placed a shrine with an image of their deity, just as we see, when travelling on the continent, shrines of the blessed Virgin, or shrines with a crucifix, by the roadside and on the hill-tops. The custom of having groves of oaks for religious purposes was shared by the early inhabitants of Britain, and the Druids derived their name from this very practice. In these groves the heathen priests sacrificed and burnt incense to their gods. It was to such groves that the name of "high places" was given. When the Israelites were about to enter Canaan, God foresaw the temptation to which they would be exposed from the idolatry of the heathen inhabitants and of the neighbouring nations. He therefore charged them not only to drive out the heathen nations from Canaan, but also *to utterly destroy their high places*, to overthrow their altars, and break their graven images, and burn their groves with fire (Deut. xii. 2, 3). This command was repeated over and over again. But, notwithstanding this, the high places were never utterly abolished. Time after time during the period of the judges, the people set up a worship in the high places, which, though nominally that of Jehovah, was tinged with idolatrous practices. It was much the same under the kings. Now and then some courageous, God-fearing, whole-hearted king made a clean sweep of the high places. But the old habit was continually revived, and so in one reign after another we read *the policy of compromise*, "The high places were not taken away." *And whenever that was the case, we find it had evil results.* It was so in the time of Solomon himself. It was so in the time of the two kings who succeeded him over the divided kingdom—Rehoboam and Jeroboam. It was so in the case of Amaziah now before us.

I. AMAZIAH'S COMPROMISE PREPARED THE WAY FOR POSITIVE SIN. The high places in themselves were not necessarily places of idolatry. There is no doubt that sincere worship to the true God was often offered up in them. Thus we find Solomon sacrificing to the Lord in Gibeon, which was the great high place. But the associations of these places were entirely idolatrous. From time immemorial they had been associated with the worship of the heathen gods. It was for this reason that God forbade the use of them. It was necessary to make the wall of separation between his people and the heathen as wide as possible—to teach them that they could not serve God and Baal, that there could be no compromise between right and wrong without danger to the right. The results showed the wisdom and necessity of God's strict command. The natural tendency of the human heart is to worship what is seen, to look at the outward symbol rather than at the thing signified. This was just what happened in Amaziah's case. He did not see that there was any harm in preserving the high places. Might not God be worshipped there as well as in Jerusalem? And so he made the compromise: "The high places were not taken away." *But look at the result.* "Now it came to pass, after that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, *and set them up to be his gods*, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them" (2 Chron. xxv. 14). What a falling off was there! This is that Amaziah who began his career by doing right in the sight of the Lord, now stupidly bowing down before the lifeless idols of the heathen! He conquered the heathen in one sense, but the heathen conquered him in another and more dangerous sense. Has it not been the same in the history of the Christian Church? The early Christian Church was simple in its worship and its government; its members were simple in their habits and pure in their lives. But when it became powerful at Rome, and in a sense captured pagan Rome, its very power was its danger. There was a sense in which the paganism of Rome captured the simplicity of the gospel. As Mourant Brock has so fully shown in that interesting book of his on 'Rome: Pagan and Papal,' and as Gibbon and other historians have pointed out, Christianity, in Rome at least, made a compromise with paganism. And the compromise was anything but an advantage to the Christian religion. The ill effects of it remain to this day in the images and pilgrimages, and the many other superstitions which deface the Roman branch of the Christian Church. Such facts of history carry with them a memorable lesson. The Christian Church ought ever to keep in mind the spiritual objects for which it exists. It ought, therefore, to guard most scrupulously the spirituality and scripturality of its worship. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." It ought to guard also the spirituality and scripturality of its doctrine,

and teach men to trust, not to penances or indulgences for their acceptance with God, but to the work and merits of Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. The countries of the Reformation are marked out among the nations of Europe for their prosperity and industry. The more thorough the work of religious reformation, the stronger has been the national character, the more vigorous the national life. And on the other hand, as we look at the general decay of the Roman Catholic nations, and the corruption that has marked their history, may we not trace the secret of their downfall in the words of the fourth verse, "The high places were not taken away"?

II. AMAZIAH'S COMPROMISE LED TO TEMPORAL DISASTER. Amaziah had elements of strength mingled with the elements of weakness in his character. He was capable of acting upon certain occasions with decision and firmness. What a pity he had not carried that spirit of decision into the most important duty for every human being—obedience to the Law of God! Once, indeed, he had done so. And the success which followed his obedience to God's command on that occasion should have encouraged him in a similar decision always. He was going forth to battle against the Edomites. He had raised out of his own kingdom of Judah alone an army of three hundred thousand men. In addition to these, he hired out of the kingdom of Israel a hundred thousand men for a hundred talents of silver, that is to say at a cost of about £50,000. But there came to him a man of God, saying, "O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee; for the Lord is not with Israel" (2 Chron. xxv. 7). Amaziah had not yet hardened his heart against God's message. He was not yet blinded to the evil results of forsaking God. So he considered seriously this difficulty, and saw that it would be folly to go forth in defiance of God's warning. But the question arose about the payment of these hired soldiers, and he said, "What shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?" And the man of God answered, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." Amaziah hesitated no longer. He sent away these hired troops, though he incurred their anger and vengeance in consequence; but when he went forth against the Edomites, his army gained a most decisive and overwhelming victory. Would that Amaziah had acted in a similar spirit of decision all through his life! Would that he had showed in other matters a similar spirit of dependence on God and obedience to him! Would that he had always remembered the prophet's words, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this"! Oh that we would all remember this when tempted to make compromise with the world—when, for the sake of worldly gain, or popular applause, or the favour of men, or earthly rank, we are tempted to disregard the voice of conscience and of God! God's commands are clear. His promises are equally clear. *We never gain anything by making compromise with sin.* From the moment that Amaziah forsook God, success began to forsake his banners. He and his army were defeated by the army of Israel, and eventually he himself was slain by a conspiracy of his own servants. Let us learn that we should never, for the sake of any temporal advantage, make a compromise with sin, or disobey the command of God. *We may be the losers for the time, but the Lord is able to give us much more than this.* In an interesting book lately published, which gives an account of the mission to the fishermen in the North Sea, we are told that some of the owners of the fishing-vessels refused to allow their vessels to be used for a prayer-meeting or other religious service; but expected the men to work on the Lord's day as on others. There was a small fleet, all the skippers of which were anxious to have no fishing on Sunday, and accordingly sent home a "round robin" to the owners, praying for this concession. They waited anxiously for the return of the cutter with the owners' reply, and when at length it reached them, their hopes were utterly dashed, for the employers, while saying they would not forbid the skippers to keep their fishing-gear on board, gave them clearly to understand that any skipper doing so would run the risk of losing his berth at the end of the voyage. The matter was quietly and prayerfully discussed, and eventually all but one agreed, "We ought to obey God rather than man;" and so sabbath after sabbath this solitary dissentient laboured with his gear, while all the other vessels were lying-to. As each skipper's voyage expired, he ran home for the bi-monthly refit, yet not a word was said about discharging him, and as this happened to every skipper in turn, they made up their minds that the threat was an empty one. However, at Christmas the secret came out; for the owner, according to custom, read aloud to his assembled crews the list of the

different vessels' earnings during the year. At last he stopped, and put down the paper. "Oh, but, sir," exclaimed several skippers, "you haven't read what So-and-so made," referring to the skipper who had fished seven days a week. "Why, what is that to *you?* I've read what *you've* made: doesn't that satisfy you?" "Why, no, sir, because, don't you see, he's fished every Sunday, while we've kept our trawls on board." "Well, well," muttered the owner, "I suppose it's sure to come out, so I may as well tell you. *He's at the bottom of the list.*" The man who related this story added reverently, "Them that honour me I will honour, but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." Those men showed true faithfulness. They would have no compromise. Cost what it might, they would obey the command of God, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." And he who gave the command honoured and rewarded them for their observance of it. He prospered their industry on the six days of the week more than the industry of the man who laboured on every day of the seven. Even in temporal blessings the policy of compromise is a policy of disaster. Much more when we look at the eternal consequences, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" We find that Amaziah's spirit of compromise infected his whole character. *Unfaithful himself, he did not like faithfulness in others.* When he began to worship the heathen idols, God sent a prophet to remonstrate with him. The prophet said to Amaziah, "Why hast thou sought after the gods of the people, which could not deliver their own people out of thine hand?" (2 Chron. xxv. 15). A very reasonable question, one would say. But the king was beyond rebuke. He commanded the prophet to cease, and threatened to punish him if he continued. It is a sign that something is wrong when men and women begin to dislike faithful preaching. Those whose own conscience is clear need feel no hurt when sin is rebuked. Beware of the policy of compromise. Let there be no compromise with the world, with godlessness, with sin; no compromise with godlessness in your family; no compromise with wrong in your business; no compromise with evil customs or companionships in your social life; no calling of evil good, and of good evil. Nail your colours to the mast. Let there be no compromise with your own besetting sins. Many a man has begun well, like Amaziah, but has ended badly, because he made a compromise with sin. He retained some old habit. He did not put away the high places of his pride, or his ambition, or his covetousness, or his passion—and in the long run his sin became too strong for him.—C. H. I.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Personal responsibility.* Amaziah visits with just execution the servants who had conspired against his father Joash. But he did not put to death the children of the murderers. He acted on the principle laid down by God through Moses (Deut. xxiv. 16), that "the fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin."

I. EVERY ONE OF US IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS OWN LIFE. "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

II. EVERY ONE OF US IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RIGHT DISCHARGE OF HIS OWN DUTIES. We cannot excuse ourselves by the unfaithfulness of others. Responsibility is something which we can never transfer to any one else. Men may deny their responsibility. They may refuse to fulfil it. They may neglect it. But there it is. They cannot get rid of it. Our responsibility to God for the life and opportunities which he has given is a truth we should do well to keep constantly before us.—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—29.—*Significant facts in God's government.* "In the second year of Joash," etc. In this chapter we have a sketch of a succession of kings both of Judah and Israel. Here are two kings of Judah—Amaziah and Azariah; and Joash, Jeroboam, and his son Zachariah, kings of Israel. The whole chapter suggests certain significant facts in God's government of mankind.

I. THE ENORMOUS FREEDOM OF ACTION WHICH HE ALLOWS WICKED MEN. Here we learn: 1. That God allows wicked men to *form wrong conceptions of himself.* All these kings, although descendants of Abraham, who was a monotheist, became idolaters. "The high places were not taken away: as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places." Golden calves, symbols of Egyptian worship, still stood

in Dan and Bethel, at the extremities of the dominions. Terribly strange it seems to us that the Almighty Author of the human mind should permit it to think of him as some material object in nature, or as some production of the human hand. What human father, had he the power, would permit his children to form not only wrong but wicked impressions of himself? For what reason this is permitted I know not. Albeit it shows God's practical respect for that freedom of action with which he has endowed us. 2. That God allows wicked men to *obtain despotic dominion over others.* All these kings were wicked—Amaziah, Azariah, Joash, Jeroboam, and Zachariah, and yet they enjoyed an almost autocratic dominion over the rights, possessions, and lives of millions. Here we read of Amaziah slaying ten thousand men, capturing ten thousand prisoners, and taking Selah, the capital of the Edomites, and of Joash King of Israel using harshly the rights of the conqueror. "He came to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim unto the corner gate." It is said of Jeroboam, who reigned forty-one years, that he "did evil in the sight of the Lord, and departed not from the sins of his father." Antecedently one might have concluded that, if a wicked man was allowed to live amongst his fellows, he would be doomed to obscurity and to social and political impotence; but it is not so. Why? Who shall answer?

II. GOD PUNISHES WICKED MEN BY THEIR OWN WICKEDNESS. 1. A wicked man is punished by *his own wickedness.* Amaziah's conduct is an example. Elated with his triumph over the Edomites, he sought occasion of war with the King of Israel. "He sent messengers to Joash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, King of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face," etc. About fifteen years after his defeat he fled from Jerusalem to Lachish to escape assassination, but the assassin pursued him, and struck him dead. It is ever so. Wickedness is its own punishment. The wicked passions of a corrupt man are his tormenting devils. Sin is suicidal. 2. A wicked man is punished by the *wickedness of others.* The thousands whom these despotic kings reduced to anguish, destitution, and death, were idolaters and rebels against Heaven, and by the hand of wicked men they were punished. Thus it ever is. Devils are their own tormentors. Sin converts a community of men into tormenting fiends; man becomes the avenging fate of man.

CONCLUSION. Learn: 1. *Humanity in this world is obviously in a morally abnormal condition.* It can never be that he whose power is immeasurable, whose wisdom and goodness are infinite and radiant everywhere above us and below us, could create such a state of things as we have here. He originates the good alone, permits the evil, and will ultimately overrule it for good. 2. *Faith in a future that shall rectify the evils of the present seems essential to true religion.* Genuine religion is a supreme love for the Supreme Existence. But who could love a Supreme Existence which could permit for ever such a state of existence as we have here? There must come a day of rectification: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him," etc. (Matt. xxv. 31—46).—D. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*Amaziah doing right.* The murder of Joash King of Judah, and the accession of his son Amaziah, took place a little after the accession of Joash the son of Jehoahaz in Israel, therefore just before the turn of the tide in the fortunes of the latter kingdom.

I. EARLY RIGHT-DOING. 1. *A promising beginning.* Amaziah was not, any more than his father, a man of strong character. He proved to be vain, boastful, and foolish. But he began well, giving heed to the counsels of God's prophets (cf. 2 Chron. xxv. 7—10), and therefore it is said of him, "He did right in the sight of the Lord." It is not, however, the beginning, but the end, which tests character (Col. i. 23; Heb. iii. 14). 2. *Significant shortcoming.* To the record of his right-doing it is added, "Yet not like David his father," or, as elsewhere, "not with a perfect heart." His conduct is likened to that of Joash his father, whose history very much resembled his own. Amaziah, like Joash, began well, afterwards lapsed into idolatry and cruelty, and died by conspiracy of his servants under a cloud of ignominy and contempt. Those who are like in sin need not wonder that they are like in doom. 3. *The high places unremoved.* This was one of the points in which Amaziah showed a want of thoroughness in right-doing. The sin was one of shortcoming rather than of positive transgression, like the keeping up of the worship of the calves in Israel. It is not, therefore, reckoned so hideous as the Baal-

worship; but the after-effects show that no portion of God's Law can be neglected with impunity. The worship on high places was a temptation and snare to Judah. The neglect to remove them reacted seriously on the life of the nation.

II. JUST JUDGMENT. The treatment by Amaziah of his father's murderers gives further evidence of his early disposition to do well. We observe: 1. *The execution of justice.* The murderers were put to death. This was right. The existence of even real *grievances* does not justify resort to crime. David's treatment of Saul shows the right course to be pursued in such cases (1 Sam. xxiv. 4—12). And a nation is only secure when real crime is punished within its borders. 2. *Discrimination of innocent and guilty.* It is specially noted about Amaziah that, in taking this vengeance on the men who slew his father, he did not, as was a frequent custom in those times, slay the children of the murderers. He acted, therefore, on principle in his judgment, not in blind fury. His object was to vindicate justice, not to take revenge. He drew the line where it ought to be drawn—between the actually guilty and the innocent. There is a strong tendency, where anger is strongly kindled against a person or persons, to allow rage to overflow on those not directly implicated in their offence. The odium that attaches to them is extended also to their families, and pleasure is taken in inflicting insult and pain on their children and relatives. This ought not to be. 3. *Regard for God's Law.* The reason for Amaziah acting as he did was that it was so commanded in the Law of Moses (Deut. xxiv. 16). On the seeming contradiction between this passage and those which speak of the iniquity of the fathers being visited on the children, or which illustrate the actual punishment of children for their parents' sins—as in the case of Achan (Josh. vii. 24—26)—it may suffice to remark that the rule here laid down is one for *human* jurisprudence. There is a wider treatment of human beings, constantly finding illustration in providence, in which the principles of organic union and corporate responsibility have full play; but God does not entrust the enforcement of these to any human magistracy. What specially concerns us here is the fact that, finding such a rule laid down in the Word of God, Amaziah faithfully adhered to it. His conduct shows an advance in the moral conceptions of the time—a better appreciation of the fact of individuality.

III. EARLY VICTORY. In connection with this earlier and more promising part of Amaziah's reign, we are told of a great victory which he gained over the Edomites. The Edomites had revolted in Jehoram's reign (ch. viii. 20); but Amaziah now felt himself strong enough to attempt their resubjugation. In setting out on this war—the origin of which we do not precisely know—he had the countenance of God's prophets, and acted by their directions (2 Chron. xxv. 6—10). He had, as men always have when God is with them and they are content to be guided by his will, great success. He slew of Edom ten thousand, took Selah, or Petra, and changed its name. But the flush of his victory proved also the beginning of his ruin. 1. His conquest was not unmarked by great cruelty (cf. 2 Chron. xxv. 12). 2. He fell into idolatry, actually setting up the gods of the Edomites which he had brought home, and burning incense to them—those gods which, as a prophet reminded him, could not deliver their own people out of his hand (2 Chron. xxv. 15). From this point dates his declension. He acted precisely as his father had done in forcibly silencing the prophets; and God, in return, gave him up to a reprobate mind for his destruction. Prosperity tests a man's nature. There are few who can carry the full cup without becoming haughty and God-forgetful.—J. O.

Vers. 8—14.—*The boastful challenge, and its results.* It is in the light of the facts narrated in the Book of Chronicles, but not alluded to here, that we are to read the story of Amaziah's folly in his boastful challenge to Joash of Israel (cf. 2 Chron. xxv. 20).

I. THE BOASTFUL CHALLENGE. 1. *Its motives.* It is not difficult to conceive the kind of influences which led Amaziah to give this challenge to Joash. (1) Naturally vain-glorious, he was greatly elated by his successes over Edom, and was ambitious to pose as a great military conqueror. How many wars have had their origin in no higher source! To gratify the vanity and ambition of individuals, or the lust of glory in nations, torrents of blood have been shed. (2) Israel was at this time in a very humbled state, but showed signs of reviving. Amaziah probably thought it was

a good time to bring back the revolted tribes to the sceptre of Judah. (3) The Israelites had given some provocation in attacks upon the cities of Judah (2 Chron. xxv. 13). This at least would furnish a pretext. 2. *Its nature.* The challenge took the form of a message to Joash, "Come, let us look one another in the face." In giving such a challenge, Amaziah did not count the cost (cf. Luke xiv. 31). He was puffed up with conceit, and did not reflect on the superior military abilities of Joash, already beginning to be displayed in his wars with the Syrians, or on his larger forces. Rather, Joash's rising reputation roused in him the ambition to measure himself against Joash. When men are left to themselves there are no limits to the extent to which their folly will lead them. 3. *Its lack of sanction from God.* This time God was not with Amaziah in his undertaking. No prophet's voice commanded, sanctioned, or promised blessings on the war. Amaziah was acting on his own motion, and in reliance solely on his own strength. God had left him, as he left Saul. In such condition a man but plunges on to his ruin.

II. THE HAUGHTY REPLY. Joash perfectly took the measure of his challenger, and answered him according to his folly. 1. *His insulting parable.* First, he replied by a parable. He told how the briar (or thistle) of Lebanon sent to the cedar of Lebanon, demanding that the daughter of the cedar should be given in wife to his son. But a wild beast of the forest passed by, and trode down the briar. The idea of the parable is, of course, to ridicule the presumption of Amaziah in venturing to put himself on an equality with Joash. It was meant to sting and insult the Jewish king by intimating to him that in Joash's eyes he was no more than a contemptible briar in comparison with the majestic cedars. On it we remark (1) that Joash also cannot be acquitted of overweening arrogance. It is a scornful, haughty spirit which breathes in his parable. From the Israelitish point of view the ten tribes were *the* kingdom of Israel; Judah was the isolated tribe. But the state of Israel at this time, and in the recent past, did not warrant these boastful metaphors. The cedar, as well as the briar, had been pretty well trodden down by the wild beast of the forest. This arrogant spirit, moreover, is apt to lead its possessor into the error of despising things simply because they are outwardly weak. In this case the King of Israel very justly took the boastful Amaziah's measure. But it does not always follow that the cedar has the right to lord it over the briar. It is no uncommon thing for the weak things of the world to overcome the mighty (1 Cor. i. 27, 28). David was a feeble stripling in Goliath's sight, but Goliath fell before him (1 Sam. xvi. 43—51). The numbers may be few, but if they have a good cause, are inspired by faith, and go forward at God's call, one will chase a thousand (Deut. xxxii. 30; Josh. xxiii. 10). (2) Nevertheless, the parable was just in so far as Amaziah was matching himself against one who, as the event showed, was greatly his superior. Joash was by far the abler soldier, and had larger forces. Amaziah wished to show himself his equal, but lacked the power of taking a just estimate of his own capabilities. This is one of the first conditions of a man's strength—to know himself. "How many men may you meet in middle life whose career has been marked by bitter disappointments, and whose hearts have been soured by these! They began with vaulting hopes which have never been realized; and so they blame what they call their adverse fate. But you see the effect of one great blunder which has pursued them all their lives—you see that they have never sought to know themselves. They began in a fool's paradise, and they have never made their escape from it. A more exact and modest estimate of their own powers, a clear and honest apprehension of their own capacity, a readiness to do the work within their limits, the work they were meant to do, and they had been spared many bitter hours." 2. *His contemptuous advice.* Following up his parable, Joash gave the King of Judah a piece of advice, scornfully and contemptuously expressed, but such advice as, on the whole, Amaziah would have done well to take. (1) He touched truly enough the motive of his foolish challenge. "Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thine heart is lifted up." A measure of success turns the heads of some people, inflates their ideas of themselves, and incapacitates them for sober calculation of the future. (2) He bids him content himself with what he has achieved, and tarry at home. The tone is most insulting, implying the most perfect contempt for Amaziah's threatened attack; but the advice was wise. Amaziah was a fool to provoke a needless war, and run himself and his kingdom into danger from a mere motive of vain-glory. (3) He predicts to him what will happen if he persists in his foolish

course. "Why shouldest thou meddle to thy hurt, that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee?" It perhaps was not to be expected that Amaziah should take advice so unpalatable, so tauntingly conveyed, so wounding to his pride and royal honour. But the result showed that Joash had not overstated his case. Amaziah meddled truly to his hurt, and he fell, even he, and Judah with him. It is the fatality of a foolish mind that it is impregnable to considerations which would show it its folly.

III. THE CRUSHING DEFEAT. Amaziah, as was to be expected, would not hear. No obstinate man does. He went on his foolish, headstrong way, and brought down upon himself an avalanche of trouble. 1. *The army was defeated.* He and Joash met in battle, and his army was utterly routed. It is characteristic that the fight took place at Beth-shemesh, in the territory of Judah. This shows that Joash was the first to move when he saw that war was inevitable. While Amaziah was dallying and mustering his men, Joash was already on the march, and took the offensive. For victory of any kind, much depends on promptitude, alertness, and activity on the part of the assailant. 2. *The king was taken prisoner.* Joash "took Amaziah." How long the king remained a captive is not said. He was probably delivered up after "hostages" had been given. But the humiliation was great and bitter. The people of Judah never forgot or forgave it. 3. *Jerusalem was captured and plundered.* The royal city shared the fate of its king. It had no alternative but to open its gates to the conqueror. Joash did not spare it. To mark the completeness of his conquest he, (1) brake down four hundred cubits of the city wall on the side towards Ephraim; (2) plundered the house of the Lord and the palace of the king of their treasures. The treasuries had been emptied in the preceding reign for Hazael (ch. xii. 18); now a second time their contents are taken away. Miserable people, and miserable king! No wonder burning indignation existed against Amaziah, who had led the kingdom into this trouble. We may see some parallel to it in the feelings of the French towards their emperor after the Franco-Prussian War. The lesson had been taught in the preceding reign, but Amaziah had not profited by his father's misfortunes; and, having followed his footsteps in sin, was now reaping the consequences in even severer chastisement.—J. O.

Vers. 15—22.—*Changes in two thrones.* The next events recorded are the accession of Jeroboam II. after the death of Joash, in Israel; and the conspiracy against Amaziah fifteen years later and the accession of Azariah, in Judah.

I. THE ACCESSION OF JEROBOAM. More is not told us, than we have already heard, of the "might" of Joash. Jeroboam, who succeeded him, proved the able son of an able father. But the stock of Jehu was godless as ever. The new king also, as we are to see, "did evil in the sight of the Lord," and kept up the "sin" of his namesake, Jeroboam I., in the worship of the calves. Great natural ability is often associated with godlessness of heart.

II. THE ACCESSION OF AZARIAH. 1. *Azariah made king.* The notice of the conspiracy against Amaziah precedes in the narrative the notice of Azariah's accession; but there is some reason from the chronology to think that the son was made king along with his father shortly after Amaziah's disastrous defeat. (1) It is stated in ch. xv. 8 that the son of Jeroboam II., Zachariah, began to *reign* in the thirty-eighth year of Azariah, and as there is no sign in the narrative of the interregnum of eleven years which chronologers usually introduce, it would follow that Azariah really began to reign about eleven years before his father's death. (2) This is in itself not unlikely when we remember the odium which must have fallen on Amaziah after his defeat and captivity, and the capture of Jerusalem. The proof he had given of incapacity for government would make it desirable, to secure the popularity of the throne, that his son should be associated with him in the kingdom. (3) There are indications in the narrative which point in this direction, *e.g.* the age of Amaziah, only sixteen years; the statement that Amaziah "lived" fifteen years after the death of Joash, where we might have expected the word "reigned;" lastly, the statement that Amaziah "built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers." 2. *Amaziah's ignominious end.* In any case, it seems certain that Amaziah's popularity never revived after the unhappy encounter with Joash. Fifteen years rolled on, and at length, from causes to us unknown, a plot was formed against him in Jerusalem.

He fled to Lachish, but was pursued and killed. The slain king was brought back on horses, and buried in Jerusalem in the royal sepulchre. Thus the sun of another descendant of David, who had forsaken the God of his fathers, went down in blood and shame.—J. O.

Vers. 23—29.—*The reign of Jeroboam II.* After the usual statement that Jeroboam "did evil in the sight of the Lord, and departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin," we have some brief notices of his reign. Note—

I. THE REVIVED FORTUNES OF ISRAEL. 1. *Jeroboam's successes in war.* This able monarch continued the work of Joash. In fulfilment of the promise that God would give Israel a saviour, Jeroboam was enabled to complete the recovery of the cities and territories of Israel from the Syrians. "He restored the coast of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the plain," that is, he extended the boundaries of the kingdom as widely as they had ever reached in the days of its greatest prosperity. 2. *The cause of this—God's pity for Israel.* This remarkable turn in the fortunes of Israel was strange when it is remembered that Jeroboam was not a man who had the fear of God before him. The explanation is that already given (ch. xiii. 23), the pity which God had for Israel, his desire to give it one more chance before blotting out its name, his respect for the covenant with the fathers, and, subordinately, his regard to the prayer of Jehoahaz (ch. xiii. 4, 5). If, as the result of this revival of the nation's fortunes, piety did not also revive, destruction would come all the more speedily. In raising up this powerful king to save Israel, we see God's faithfulness to his promise.

II. PROPHETIC ACTIVITY. We have allusion in the text to the prophetic activity of Jonah, the son of Amittai, the same who was sent to Nineveh, and we know that in this reign other prophets, notably Hosea and Amos, exercised their ministry. The writings of the latter prophets show us how, amidst the sunshine of revived prosperity, the condition of the people did not improve, but grew more and more corrupt. But God's faithfulness and care and love for his people are shown in sending such prophets to warn them (cf. ch. xvii. 13). What could exceed the tender pathos of a ministry like Hosea's, or the fidelity and earnestness of a testimony like that of Amos, who bearded the highest in the land to bear witness against them (Amos vii. 10)? Yet the people would not hear, but attributed their prosperity to their idols, and worshipped them more than ever, while immorality, violence, and the loosening of all bonds between man and man abounded more and more (Hos. iv. 1).

III. THE EVE OF COLLAPSE. Jeroboam died, and was succeeded by his son Zachariah. This was the fourth generation of the house of Jehu, and it will be seen that he reigned only six months. From this time Israel went rapidly to its ruin. The height of prosperity reached in the reign of Jeroboam was but the last flicker of the light before final extinction. A little over thirty years after Jeroboam's death—forty at most—the words of the prophets were fulfilled, and the kingdom of Israel was destroyed, and its people carried away by the Assyrian.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XV.

Vers. 1—38.—REIGNS OF AZARIAH AND JOTHAM OVER JUDAH; AND OF ZACHARIAH, SHALLUM, MENAHEM, PEKAHIAH, AND PEKAH OVER ISRAEL.

Vers. 1—7.—THE REIGN OF AZARIAH OVER JUDAH. The writer now more and more compresses his narrative. Into a single chapter he crowds the events of seven reigns, covering the space of nearly seventy years. He is consequently compelled to omit several most important historical events, which are however, fortunately supplied by the writer of Chronicles. Azariah's reign, which here occupies only seven verses, in Chronicles fills an entire chapter (twenty-three verses). (See 2 Chron. xxvi. 1—23.)

Ver. 1.—**In the twenty and seventh year of Jeroboam King of Israel began Azariah son of Amaziah King of Judah to reign.** In ch. xiv. 23 it is distinctly stated that Jeroboam's reign of forty-one years commenced in the fifteenth of Amaziah, who from that time lived only fifteen years (ch. xiv. 17). Either, therefore, Azariah must

have begun to reign in the fifteenth year of Jeroboam, or there must have been an interregnum of twelve years between the death of Amaziah and the accession of Azariah. As this last hypothesis is precluded by the narrative of 2 Chron. xxvi. 1 and ch. xiv. 20, 21, we must correct the "twenty-seventh year" of this verse into the "fifteenth." If we do this, corresponding changes will have to be made in vers. 8, 13, 23, and 27.

Ver. 2.—**Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned two and fifty years in Jerusalem.** These numbers are confirmed by Chronicles (2 Chron. xxvi. 1—3) and by Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 10. § 4), who says that he reigned fifty-two years, and died at the age of sixty-eight. **And his mother's name was Jecholiah of Jerusalem.** Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 10. § 3) calls her "Achiala."

Ver. 3.—**And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done** (comp. ch. xiv. 3 and 2 Chron. xxvi. 4). Josephus uses still stronger expressions. "Azariah was," he says (*l. s. c.*), "a good king, naturally just and high-minded, and indefatigable in his administration of affairs." According to the author of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxvi. 5), he "sought God in the days of Zechariah."

Ver. 4.—**Save that the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places** (comp. ch. xiv. 4, and the comment *ad loc.*).

Ver. 5.—**And the Lord smote the king.** This comes in somewhat strangely, following close upon a statement that the king "did that which was *right* in the sight of the Lord." We have to go to Chronicles for an explanation. By Chronicles it appears that, in the earlier portion of his reign, Azariah was a good and pious prince, and that God blessed him in all his undertakings. Not only did he recover Eloth (2 Chron. xxvi. 2), but he carried on a successful war with the Philistines—took Gath, Jabneh (Jamnia), and Ashdod, and dismantled them (2 Chron. xxvi. 6), defeated the Arabians of Gur-Baal, and the Mehunim or Maonites (2 Chron. xxvi. 7), forced the Ammonites to pay him a tribute, and caused his power to be known and feared far and wide (2 Chron. xxvi. 8). The standing army which he maintained numbered 307,500 men, under 2600 officers, well armed and equipped with shields, spears, helmets, breast-plates, bows, and slings (2 Chron. xxvi. 12—14). "His name spread far abroad, for he was wonderfully helped" (2 Chron. xxvi. 15). This marvellous prosperity developed in him a pride equal to that of his father, but one which vented itself differently. Azariah, deeming himself superior to all other men, and exempt from ordinary rules, boldly invaded the priestly office, took a censer, and entered into the temple, and proceeded to burn incense upon the golden altar that was before the veil (2 Chron. xxvi. 16—18). It was then that "the Lord smote the king." As, in defiance of the high priest and his attendant train, who sought to prevent the lawless act, Azariah persisted in his endeavours, God struck him with leprosy, his forehead grew white with the unmistakable scaly scab, and in a moment his indomitable pride was quelled. The priests closed in upon him and began to thrust him out, but no violence was necessary. Aware of what had happened, "he himself also hasted to go out, because the Lord had smitten him" (2 Chron. xxvi. 20). It is not very clear why the writer of Kings passes over these facts; but certainly they are not discredited by his silence. At any rate, those who accept the entire series of conquests, whereof the writer of Kings says nothing, on the sole authority of Chronicles, are logically precluded from rejecting the circumstances accompanying the leprosy, which is acknowledged by the writer of Kings, and viewed as a judgment from God. **So that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house** (comp. 2 Chron. xxvi. 21). Lepers had to be separated from the congregation—to "dwell alone"—"without the camp" (Lev. xiii. 46). Ahaziah's "several house" is regarded by some as an "infirmary," or "hospital for lepers" (Ewald, Gesenius, Winer); but there is no reason to believe that hospitals of any kind existed among the Israelites. The lepers mentioned in ch. vii. 3 are houseless. בֵּית הַחָפְשִׁית is best translated "house of separation," and understood of a house standing by itself in the open country, separate from others. "Probably the house in which the leprous king lived was," as Bähr says, "especially built for him." **And Jotham the king's son was over the house**—not over the "several house," but over the royal palace—**judging the people of the land**; *i.e.* executing the royal functions, whereof "judging" was one of the highest. Azariah's infirmity made a regency necessary, and naturally his eldest son held the office.

Ver. 6.—**And the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?** For Azariah's principal acts, see the commentary on the first clause of ver. 5.

Ver. 7.—**So Azariah slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David.** Here again the writer of Chronicles is more exact. Azariah, he tells us (2 Chron. xxvi. 23), was not buried in the rock-sepulchre which contained the

bodies of the other kings, but in another part of the field wherein the sepulchre was situated. This was quite consonant with Jewish feeling with respect to the uncleanness of the leper. **And Jotham his son reigned in his stead.** Jotham, already for some years prince regent, became king as a matter of course on his father's demise.

Vers. 8—12.—REIGN OF ZACHARIAH OVER ISRAEL. FULFILMENT OF THE PROMISE MADE TO JEHU. The writer has nothing to record of Zachariah but his murder by Shallum after a reign of six months. Vers. 8, 9, and 11 contain the usual formula. Ver. 10 gives the only event that needed record. Ver. 12 recalls to the reader's attention a previous passage, in which a prophecy had been mentioned, whereof Zachariah's reign was the fulfilment.

Ver. 8.—**In the thirty and eighth year of Azariah King of Judah did Zachariah the son of Jeroboam reign over Israel in Samaria.** If Azariah began to reign in the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam (ver. 1), and Jeroboam died in his forty-first or forty-second year (ch. xiv. 23), Zachariah must have ascended the throne in the fifteenth or sixteenth year of Azariah. Even if Azariah became king in the fifteenth of Jeroboam, as has been shown to be probable (see the comment on ver. 1), Zachariah's accession cannot have been earlier than Azariah's twenty-sixth year. An interregnum between the death of Jeroboam and the accession of Zachariah is not to be thought of. **Six months.** So also Josephus (see 'Ant. Jud.,' ix. 11. § 1).

Ver. 9.—**And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his fathers had done: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.** The customary formula, with nothing to emphasize it. In the short space of barely six months, Zachariah could not do either much good or much evil.

Ver. 10.—**And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him.** Josephus calls Shallum Zachariah's "friend," but otherwise adds nothing to the present narrative. **And smote him before the people.** The phrase employed is very unusual, and has justly excited suspicion. It was not understood by the LXX., who translate ἐπάταξαν αὐτὸν Κεβλααδμ, which gives no sense. Ewald sought to solve the difficulty by inventing a king, "Zobolam," but other critics have found this expedient too bold. The rendering of our translators is generally accepted, though *qobal*, "before," only occurs here and in Daniel. If we accept this rendering, we must suppose that the act of violence was done openly, like Jehu's murder of Jehoram. **And slew him, and reigned in his stead** (comp. ver. 13).

Ver. 11.—**And the rest of the acts of Zachariah, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.**

Ver. 12.—**This was the word of the Lord which he spake unto Jehu** (comp. ch. x. 30), **saying, Thy sons shall sit on the throne of Israel unto the fourth generation.** The direct promise was, "Thy house shall hold the throne so long;" the implied prophecy, "They shall not hold it longer." There had not been wanting other indications of the coming troubles. Hosea had declared that God would avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu (Hos. i. 4). Amos had gone further, and had openly proclaimed that God would "rise against the house of Jeroboam *with the sword*" (Amos vii. 9). The threat had been understood as a threat against Jeroboam himself (Amos vii. 11), but this was a misinterpretation. The words plainly pointed to a revolution in the time of his son. **And so it came to pass.** The house of Jehu ceased to reign in the fourth generation of the descendants of its founder. No considerations of prudence or of gratitude could keep the nation faithful to any dynasty for a longer time than this. In breaking off from the divinely chosen house of David, and choosing to themselves a king, the Israelites had sown the seeds of instability in their state, and put themselves at the mercy of any ambitious pretender. Five dynasties had already borne rule in the two hundred years that the kingdom had lasted; four more were about to hold the throne in the remaining fifty years of its existence. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel," though said of Reuben only (Gen. xlix. 4), fairly expressed the character of the entire kingdom, with which Reuben cast in its lot at the time of the separation.

Vers. 13—15.—SHORT AND UNIMPORTANT REIGN OF SHALLUM. Three verses suffice for the reign of Shallum, the son of Jabesh, who held the throne for only thirty days. Hearing of his conspiracy, Menahem, the son of Gadi—"the general," as Josephus calls him ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 11. § 1)—marched from Tirzah to Samaria, got Shallum into his power, and put him to death (ver. 14). The writer concludes with the usual formula (ver. 15).

Ver. 13.—**Shallum the son of Jabesh began to reign in the nine and thirtieth year of Uzziah King of Judah.** This date

follows from that of ver. 8, and must stand or fall with it. The true accession-year of Shallum was probably the twenty-seventh of Uzziah. **And he reigned a full month in Samaria**; literally, *a month of days*—"thirty days" according to Josephus.

Ver. 14.—**For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah.** Ewald supposes Tirzah to have been the "native city" of Menahem; but this is not stated. According to Josephus (*l. s. c.*), he was commander-in-chief, and happened to be in Tirzeh at the time. (On the probable site of Tirzeh, see the comment on 1 Kings xiv. 17.) It was the royal city of the kingdom of the ten tribes from the later part of Jeroboam's reign to the building of Samaria by Omri (see 1 Kings xiv. 17; xvi. 6, 8, 15, 23). **And came to Samaria, and smote Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria**—Josephus says that there was a battle, in which Shallum was slain—**and slew him, and reigned in his stead.**

Ver. 15.—**And the rest of the acts of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he made** (see ver. 10), **behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.**

Vers. 16—22.—REIGN OF MENAHEM, AND EXPEDITION OF PUL AGAINST SAMARIA. Two events only of Menahem's reign receive notice from the writer. (1) His capture of Tiphsah, and severe treatment of the inhabitants (ver. 16). (2) The invasion of his land by an Assyrian monarch, called "Pul" or "Phul," and his submission to that monarch's authority. Pul's retirement was bought by a large sum of money, which Menahem collected from his subjects (vers. 19, 20).

Ver. 16.—**Then Menahem smote Tiphsah.** The only town of this name known to history or geography is the famous city on the Euphrates (1 Kings iv. 24), called by the Greeks Thapsacus. It has been thought that Menahem could not have pushed his conquests so far, and a second Tiphsah has been invented in the Israelite highland, between Tirzah and Samaria, of which there is no other notice anywhere. But "Tiphsah," which means "passage" or "fordway," is an unsuitable name for a city in such a situation. The view of Keil is clearly tenable—that Zachariah had intended to carry on his father's warlike policy, and had collected an army for a great Eastern expedition, which had its head-quarters at the royal city of Tirzah, and was under the command of Menahem. As the expedition was about to start, the news came that Shallum had murdered Zachariah and usurped the throne. Menahem upon this proceeded from Tirzah to Samaria, crushed Shallum, and, returning to his army, carried out without further delay the expedition already resolved upon. The Assyrian records show that, at the probable date of the expedition, Assyria was exceptionally weak, and in no condition to resist an attack, though a little later, under Tiglath-pileser, she recovered herself. **And all that were therein, and the coasts thereof, from Tirzah.** "From Tirzah" means "starting from Tirzah," as in ver. 14. It is to be connected with "smote," not with "coasts." **Because they opened not to him, therefore he smote it.** Determined resistance on the part of a city summoned to surrender has always been regarded as justifying an extreme severity of treatment. It is not clear that Menahem transgressed the ordinary usages of war in what he did, however much he transgressed the laws of humanity. **And all the women therein that were with child he ripped up** (comp. ch. viii. 12, with the comment; and see also Isa. xiii. 18; Hos. x. 14; xiii. 16; Amos i. 13).

Ver. 17.—**In the nine and thirtieth year of Azariah King of Judah began Menahem the son of Gadi to reign over Israel** (comp. ver. 13, and the comment), **and reigned ten years in Samaria.** So Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 11. § 1).

Ver. 18.—**And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord: he departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.** The writer does not seem to regard Menahem as either better or worse than his predecessors. The usual formula suffices to describe the moral and religious aspect of his reign.

Ver. 19.—**And Pul the King of Assyria came against the land.** There is no connective in the Hebrew text, and it has been proposed to supply one; but there can be little doubt that the best emendation is that suggested by Thenius, who changes the בְּלֵיָמָיו of ver. 18 into בְּיָמָיו, and attaches that word to ver. 19. Ver. 19 will then read thus: "In his days Pul the King of Assyria came against the land"—and no connective will be wanted. The greatest doubt has been entertained with regard to the identity of Pul, whose name does not appear in the Assyrian Eponym Canon, or in any other purely Assyrian document. But recently discovered Babylonian documents seem to prove that Pul (Pulu) was the Babylonian name for Tiglath-pileser, who reigned under that name in Babylon during his last two years, and appears in the Canon of Ptolemy as "Porus." Tiglath-pileser, the great founder of the later Assyrian empire, made himself king in

B.C. 745, and proceeded to consolidate the Assyrian power on every side, after a period of great weakness and disorganization. He made several expeditions against Babylonia, and several into Syria and Palestine. The expedition in which he came into contact with Menahem is thought to have been that of his eighth year, B.C. 738 (see G. Smith, 'Eponym Canon,' pp. 117—120; and, for the identity of Tiglath-pileser with Pul, see the 'Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archæology' for 1884, p. 198). **And Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver.** A vast sum certainly, equal to above a quarter of a million of our money, perhaps to some extent a punishment for the siege and sack of Tiphsah. But not a sum that it would have been impossible to pay. A King of Damascus, about fifty years previously, had bought off an Assyrian attack by the payment of two thousand three hundred talents of silver and twenty talents of gold (see 'Eponym Canon,' p. 115). **That his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand**; *i.e.* that Pul might take him under his protection, accept him as one of his subject-princes, and (by implication) support him against possible rivals.

Ver. 20.—**And Menahem exacted the money of Israel.** Either he was not possessed of any accumulated treasure, such as the kings of Judah could commonly draw upon (1 Kings xv. 18; ch. xii. 18; xvi. 8; xviii. 15, 16), or he thought it more prudent to keep his stores untouched, and obtain the money from his subjects. **Even of all the mighty men of wealth.** The context shows this to be the meaning; and the rendering is justified by Ruth ii. 1; 1 Sam. ix. 1. "Mighty men of *valour*" cannot possibly be intended. **Of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the King of Assyria.** Fifty shekels was a heavy tax, not less than £5 or £6 of our money. To produce a thousand talents, this tax had to be levied on some sixty thousand persons. Tiglath-pileser mentions his receipt of tribute from "Minikhimmi of Tsammirin" (Menahem of Someron or Samaria), but does not tell us the amount (see 'Eponym Canon,' p. 120, line 29). **So the King of Assyria turned back, and stayed not there in the land.** Kings of Assyria usually returned home at the end of each campaign, and wintered in their own territory.

Ver. 21.—**And the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?** Nothing more is known of Menahem the son of Gadi, since he certainly cannot be identical with the prince of the same name who is mentioned as "Menahem of Samaria" in the inscriptions of Sennacherib ('Eponym Canon,' p. 132, line 17). This second Menahem is probably a descendant of the first, who was allowed a sort of titular sovereignty over the conquered town.

Ver. 22.—**And Menahem slept with his fathers**—*i.e.* died—**and Pekahiah his son reigned in his stead.** So Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 11. § 1), who calls him "Phakeias."

Vers. 23—26.—SHORT REIGN OF PEKAHIAH. The short reign of Pekahiah was wholly undistinguished. He held the throne for two years only, or perhaps for parts of two years, and performed no action that any historian has thought worthy of record. Our author has nothing to relate of him but the circumstances of his death (ver. 25), wherewith he combines the usual formulæ (vers. 23, 24, 26).

Ver. 23.—**In the fiftieth year of Azariah King of Judah**; really in the thirty-seventh year (see the comment on vers. 1, 8, and 27). Azariah is mentioned by Tiglath-pileser as contending with him in the year in which he took tribute from Menahem ('Eponym Canon,' pp. 117—120), which is thought to have been B.C. 738. Apparently, he too was forced to pay tribute (ibid., pp. 117, 118, lines 2, 3) to the Assyrian monarch. **Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years.** So Josephus (*l. s. c.*).

Ver. 24.—**And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.** Josephus adds that he reigned with the same cruelty as his father (τῇ τοῦ πατρὸς κατακολουθήσας ὠμότητι), but we cannot be sure that this is more than a conjecture, founded on the shortness of his reign.

Ver. 25.—**But Pekah the son of Remaliah.** Remaliah was probably a man of some importance, since Pekah seems to have been almost better known by his patronymic, Ben-Remaliah, "son of Remaliah," than by his own proper name (see Isa. vii. 4, 5, 9; viii. 6). **A captain of his**—"captain of a thousand," according to Josephus (*l. s. c.*)—**conspired against him, and smote him in Samaria, in the palace of the king's house**; literally, *in the tower* (or *keep*) *of the king's house*, the loftiest part (אַרְמוֹן is from רוּם, to be high)—certainly not the harem (Ewald), if Pekahiah was feasting there with his friends (δολοφονηθεὶς ἐν συμποσίῳ μετὰ φίλων ἀπέθανε), as Josephus says. **With Argob and Arieh.** These seem to be the "friends" of Josephus, who

were *with the king* and shared his fate, not fellow-conspirators with Pekah. The names are uncommon ones. **And with him**—*i.e.* Pekah—**fifty men of the Gileadites**; fifty men of "the Four Hundred," according to the LXX. "The Four Hundred" were probably the royal body-guard, which at this time may have consisted of Gileadites. **And he killed him, and reigned in his room.** It does not appear that Pekah had any grievance. His crime seems to have been simply prompted by ambition.

Ver. 26.—**And the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.**

Vers. 27—31.—REIGN OF PEKAH. The writer is again exceedingly brief. Pekah's reign was a remarkable one, and might have furnished much material to the historian. In conjunction with Rezin of Damascus, he made war upon Judæa, defeated Ahaz with great loss (2 Chron. xxviii. 6), and laid siege to Jerusalem (Isa. vii. 1). Ahaz called in the aid of Assyria, and Tiglath-pileser made two expeditions into Palestine—the one mentioned in ver. 29, and another some years afterwards. In the latter he seems to have had the assistance of Hoshea, who, with his sanction, slew Pekah, and became king. The scanty notices of our author must be supplemented from 2 Chron. xxviii.; Isa. vii. 1—9; viii. 1—8; and the Assyrian inscriptions.

Ver. 27.—**In the two and fiftieth year of Azariah King of Judah**; rather, *in the thirty-ninth* or *thirty-eighth year* (see the comment on ver. 23). Pekahiah's "two years" may not have been complete. **Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned twenty years.** The Assyrian records make this number impossible. Tiglath-pileser's entire reign lasted only *eighteen* years, yet it more than covered the entire reign of Pekah. When he first invaded the kingdom of Samaria, Menahem was upon the throne ('Eponym Canon,' p. 120, line 29); when he last attacked it, probably in B.C. 730—two years before his death in B.C. 728—he set up Hoshea, or, at any rate, sanctioned his usurpation (ibid., pp. 123, 124, lines 15—18). Pekah's entire reign must have come in the interval, which is certainly not more than one of fifteen, probably not more than one of ten years.

Ver. 28.—**And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.** Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 11. § 1) says that Pekah was an irreligious king, and a transgressor of the Law (ἀσεβὴς τε καὶ παράνομος). Isaiah shows how he intrigued with foreigners against his brethren of the sister kingdom (Isa. vii. 2—6). The writer of Chronicles tells of his fierce anger against the Jews (2 Chron. xxviii. 9), and of the dreadful carnage which he sanctioned after the great battle.

Ver. 29.—**In the days of Pekah King of Israel came Tiglath-pileser King of Assyria.** Tiglath-pileser's records are not in the shape of annals, and are, moreover, in a very mutilated condition. He does not date events, like most Assyrian kings, by his regnal years. His first expedition into Syria is thought, however, to have been in his third year, B.C. 743, but there is no evidence that, on this occasion, he proceeded further south than Damascus, where he took tribute from Rezin. Some years after this—B.C. 738, according to Mr. G. Smith—he penetrated to Palestine, where his chief enemy was Azariah King of Judah, who had united under his sway most of the tribes as far as Hamath. After chastising Azariah, he extended his dominion over most of the neighbouring states and kingdoms; and it was at this time that (as related in ver. 19) he took tribute from Menahem. Subsequently (about B.C. 734) he made an expedition for the purpose of conquest, which receives very scant notice, in one inscription only. This is probably the expedition of the present passage. **And took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah.** These were places in the extreme north of the Israelite territory, in the vicinity of the Lake Merom, such as would naturally be among the first to fall before an Assyrian invader (on their exact position, see the comment on 1 Kings xv. 20). **And Janoah.** Janoah is now generally regarded as identical with the modern *Hunîn*, a village close by "an ancient fortress of great strength" (Robinson, 'Later Researches,' p. 371), in the hill country north-west of Merom. It is in a direct line between Abel-beth-maachah (*Abil*) and Kedesh (*Cades*), as we should expect from the present passage. **And Kedesh, and Hazor.** Kedesh is beyond all doubt the "Kedes," or "Cades," of to-day—an important site in the same mountain district, rather more than six miles south of Hunîn, and four from the "waters of Merom" (see Robinson, 'Later Researches,' pp. 366, 367). Hazor was in the near neighbourhood of Kedesh, towards the south probably. The exact position is disputed. Robinson's arguments in favour of El-Khureibeh are weighty; but the engineers employed by the Palestine Exploration Fund regard Khurbat-Harrah, between Kedesh

and the Lake Merom, as a still more probable situation. **And Gilead.** "Gilead," in this connection, can scarcely be "the whole of the land to the east of the Jordan" (Keil, Bähr)—the territory of Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh, not of Naphtali. It is more likely to be a *small* district near Merom, perhaps the eastern coast of the lake (Gesenius), which was afterwards a part of Gaulonitis. The LXX., instead of Γαλαάδ, have Γαλαδν. **And Galilee**; Hebrew הַגָּלִיל (see the comment on 1 Kings ix. 11, p. 190). The inscription of Tiglath-pileser, which appears to allude to this expedition, mentions "Galhi," and "Abel" (probably Abel-beth-maachah) as conquered at this time, and "added to Assyria." The places were, it says, on the border of the land of Beth-Omri (Samaria) (see the 'Eponym Canon,' p. 123, lines 6, 7). **And carried them captive to Assyria.** Deportation of captives was largely practised by Tiglath-pileser, as appears from the 'Eponym Canon,' pp. 118—120, and 122.

Ver. 30.—**And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and smote him, and slew him, and reigned in his stead.** By a mutilated notice in the records of Tiglath-pileser, it appears that the revolution here related was the result of another invasion of the Israelite territory by that monarch. "The land of Beth-Omri," he says, ". . . the tribe . . . the goods of its people and their furniture I sent to Assyria. Pekah their king [I caused to be put to death?] and Hoshea I appointed to the kingdom over them; their tribute I received, and [their treasures?] to Assyria I sent" ('Eponym Canon,' pp. 123, 124, lines 15—19). It is probably this invasion of which the writer of Chronicles speaks (1 Chron. v. 26) as resulting in the deportation of the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. **In the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.** This date stands in contradiction with ver. 33, where Jotham's entire reign is reckoned at sixteen years, and apparently must be a corrupt reading.

Ver. 31.—**And the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did** (see the comment on vers. 27—31), **behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.**

Vers. 32—38.—REIGN OF JOTHAM. Once more the writer turns from Israel to Judah, and proceeds to give an account of the reign of Jotham the son of Azariah, or Uzziah, who was appointed regent in his father's place, when Uzziah was struck with leprosy (ver. 5). The account given of the reign is somewhat scanty, and requires to be supplemented from Chronicles (2 Chron. xxvii.).

Ver. 32.—**In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah King of Israel began Jotham the son of Uzziah King of Judah to reign.** In the second year of Pekah, Azariah died, and Jotham became actual king; but his joint reign with his father commenced very much earlier. His sole reign was probably a short one.

Ver. 33.—**Five and twenty years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem**—*i.e.* sixteen years from his appointment to be regent, as appears plainly from 2 Chron. xxvi. 23 and xxvii. 1 (comp. Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' ix. 10. § 4; 12. § 1)—**and his mother's name was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok.** So the author of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxvii. 1); Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 11. § 2) calls his mother "Jerasa."

Ver. 34.—**And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord: he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done.** The author of Chronicles says the same, but adds, very pertinently, "Howbeit he entered not into the temple of the Lord"—*i.e.* he did not repeat his father's act of impiety. Josephus is still warmer in his praises. "This king," he says (*l. s. c.*), "was deficient in no manner of virtue; but was at once pious in things pertaining to God, and just in those pertaining to men. He was careful and watchful over the city; whatever needed reparation or adornment, he laboured to supply strenuously, as the porticoes in the temple and the gates thereof; and where any part of the wall had gone to ruin, he raised it up again, and built towers of vast size and difficult to capture. And in all other matters pertaining to the kingdom, where there had been neglect, he applied great care and attention."

Ver. 35.—**Howbeit the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places. He built the higher gate of the house of the Lord.** The "higher gate" is thought to be that towards the north, and its fortification implied a fear of attack from that quarter. It must have become amply evident to the kings of Judah, at any rate from the time of the attack on Menahem (ver. 19), that the independence of both kingdoms was menaced by Assyria, and that it was of great importance that their principal fortresses should be placed in a state of efficient defence. Azariah had paid great attention to the fortifying and arming of Jerusalem (2 Chron. xxvi. 9, 15), and his son now followed in his footsteps. From 2 Chron. xxvii. 3 we learn that he not only built the high gate of the temple, but also "on the wall of Ophel built much."

Nor was he content with fortifying the capital. He also "built cities in the mountains of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers." Tiglath-pileser had made war on his father ('Eponym Canon,' pp. 117, 118). He felt that any day his own turn might come.

Ver. 36.—**Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did.** The principal event of Jotham's reign was his war with Ammon. The writer of Chronicles says, "He fought also with the king of the Ammonites, and prevailed against them. And the children of Ammon gave him the same year an hundred talents of silver, and ten thousand measures of wheat, and ten thousand of barley. So much did the children of Ammon pay unto him, both the second year, and the third" (2 Chron. xxvii. 5). Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 11. § 2) gives nearly the same account, but regards the payment as an annual tribute, intended to be permanent. **Are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?**

Ver. 37.—**In those days the Lord began to send against Judah Rezin the King of Syria.** Rezin's name occurs in the Assyrian inscriptions early in the reign of Tiglath-pileser, probably in the year B.C. 743. At that time he pays to the Assyrians a heavy tribute, consisting of eighteen talents of gold, three hundred talents of silver, two hundred talents of copper, and twenty talents of spices. Subsequently, about the year B.C. 734, he is found in revolt. His alliance with Pekah, here implied, is directly stated by Isaiah (vii. 2). Begun in Jotham's reign, it continued, and came to a head, in the reign of Ahaz (see ch. xvi. 5 and Isa. vii. 1—9; viii. 6). **And Pekah the son of Remaliah.** Pekah and Rezin intended to establish on the Jewish throne a certain Ben-Tabeal (Isa. vii. 6), a creature of their own, with whose aid they thought to offer an effectual resistance to Assyria.

Ver. 38.—**And Jotham slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.** It may be suspected that the full name of this king was Jeho-ahaz. Ahaz, "possession," is a name never assigned to any other Israelite, and it is one not likely to have been given by a religious father like Jotham. In the Assyrian inscriptions the Jewish king contemporary with Rezin and Pekah is called "Yahu-khazi."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*The leper-king a pattern and a warning.* I. IN HIS EARLIER YEARS AZARIAH WAS A PATTERN KING. He "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (ver. 3); he "sought God" (2 Chron. xxvi. 5); he consorted with "Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God;" and the result was that "God made him to prosper." "God helped him against the Philistines and the Arabians and the Mehunim" (2 Chron. xxvi. 7), and he "was marvellously helped" (2 Chron. xxvi. 15). So far, he is a pattern to us, the model of a good king, of one who is at once religiously minded and full of practical zeal and energy, who serves God without ceasing to serve man, "not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom. xii. 11). But there is a reverse to the picture.

II. IN HIS LATER YEARS AZARIAH WAS A WARNING TO KINGS AND GREAT MEN GENERALLY. Azariah, like his father (ch. xiv. 10), became "lifted up" (2 Chron. xxvi. 16). He was not content with his kingly power and greatness, his secular dignity and majesty; he would be first everywhere, and invaded the priestly office (2 Chron. xxvi. 16—19). It had pleased God, in the theocratic polity which he had set up, to draw the sharpest possible line between the sacerdotal order and the rest of the community. None were allowed to sacrifice, or to burn incense, or even to enter into the sanctuary, but "the priests the sons of Aaron"—the lineal descendants of the first and greatest of the high priests. Kings had their functions—great and high and (in a certain sense) sacred functions—to rule, to judge, to determine on peace or war; to lead armies, if it so pleased them; to direct the whole policy of the nation. But one thing they might not do, and that was to assume the duties which had been assigned to the priests and Levites, who had been appointed God's special ministers, to minister to him in the congregation. The exclusive right of the priests to their functions had been vindicated in a most terrible and awful way, when, soon after the institution of the Levitical priesthood, its honours were coveted by great men who did not belong to the privileged body. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their company, were swallowed up, and "went down quick into hell," because they claimed to be as "holy" as the priests (Numb. xvi. 3), and to offer incense before the door of the tabernacle of the con-

gregation, each from his own censer. The lesson taught by the miracle had been taken deeply to heart; and even such mighty monarchs as David and Solomon had carefully abstained from setting aside the privileges of the priests, or infringing upon them in any way. But Azariah despised the teaching of the past, and the example set him by his predecessors. See him as Josephus depicts him! On a great festival day, when the people had all come together in crowds to keep the feast, he robed himself in priestly garments, and entering into the sacred enclosure declared his intention of going within the temple building, and himself offering incense on the golden altar that was before the veil. In vain did the eighty priests in attendance, headed by the high priest, resist him, and exhort him to lay aside his design and retire; Azariah, hot with passion, refused, and threatened them with death if they made more ado. Then, Josephus declares, the ground suddenly rocked with an earthquake (comp. Amos i. 1; Zech. xiv. 5), and the roof of the temple gaped, and a sunbeam entering smote upon the head of the king, and at once leprosy spread over his face, and, overwhelmed with grief and shame, he departed ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 10. § 4). Here Azariah is a warning to kings (1) that they attempt not to minister the Word and sacraments; and (2) that they in no way trench upon the rights of the priests or other ministers; and further, he is a warning to great men, or such as think themselves great, in less exalted positions, that they rest content with the performance of their own proper duties and do not invade the office of others; either (1) by dictating to ministers what doctrine they shall preach; or (2) by undue interference with schools, teachers, etc.; or (3) by any other form of arrogant and overbearing conduct. Punishment will assuredly fall upon those who so act. They will lose men's respect and God's approval. Failure will overtake them at the moment when they look to have their efforts crowned with complete success. Well for them if it be simply failure, and not an utter downfall. It often happens that he who covets more than he has any right or claim to have, loses that which was lawfully in his possession.

Vers. 8—31.—*Worldly prosperity not unfrequently the ruin of kingdoms.* I. EXAMPLE OF SAMARIA. Scarcely ever was there a more prosperous reign than that of Jeroboam II.—a reign of forty-one years of continual success, uncheckered by a misfortune—Syria defeated, the old border everywhere recovered, Hamath occupied, Damascus brought into a subject condition. As usual, where there is military success, wealth flowed in, and with wealth, luxury. "Great houses" were built (Amos iii. 15), "ivory houses," *i.e.* houses inlaid or panelled with ivory; distinct mansions were inhabited during the summer and during the winter time (Amos iii. 15). The children of Israel passed their lives in Samaria, lying "in the corner of a bed," and in Damascus lounging "upon a couch" (Amos iii. 12). "Flagons of wine" were "loved" (Hos. iii. 1); "whoredom and wine and new wine took away their heart" (Hos. iv. 11). And with this softness was blended, on the one hand, the seductive influence of a licentious religionism, on the other, the coarser and ruder vices to which luxury and self-indulgence inevitably lead. Patriotism disappeared, and self-seeking took its place. "Politically all was anarchy or misrule; kings made their way to the throne through the murder of their predecessors, and made way for their successors through their own. Shallum slew Zechariah (ch. xv. 10); Menahem slew Shallum (ver. 14); Pekah slew the son of Menahem (ver. 25); Hoshea slew Pekah (ver. 30). The whole kingdom of Israel was a military despotism, and, as in the Roman empire, those in command came to the throne" (Pusey's 'Minor Prophets,' p. 2). Society was corrupt to the core. The idolatries of the calves, of Baal, and of Moloch worked out their natural results, and bore their bitter fruit. "Creature-worship, as St. Paul points out (Rom. i. 23—32), was the parent of every sort of abomination; and religion having become creature-worship, what God gave as the check to sin became its incentive. Every commandment of God was broken, and that habitually. All was falsehood (Hos. iv. 1), adultery (Hos. iv. 11; Amos ii. 7), bloodshedding (Hos. v. 2; vi. 8); deceit of God (Hos. iv. 2) producing faithlessness to man; excess and luxury were supplied by secret or open robbery (Hos. vii. 1), oppression (Hos. xii. 7), false dealing (Amos viii. 5; Hos. xii. 7), perversion of justice (Hos. x. 4; Amos ii. 6), grinding of the poor (Hos. xii. 7). Blood was shed like water, until one stream met another (Hos. iv. 2), and overspread the land with one defiling deluge. Adultery was consecrated as an act of religion (Hos. iv.

14). Those who were first in rank were first in excess. People and king vied in debauchery (Hos. vii. 5); and the sottish king joined and encouraged the free-thinkers and blasphemers of his court (Hos. vii. 3). The idolatrous priests loved and shared in the sins of the people (Hos. iv. 8, 9); nay, they seem to have set themselves to intercept those on either side of Jordan, who would go to worship at Jerusalem, laying wait to murder them (Hos. v. 1; vi. 9). Corruption had spread through the whole land, even the places once sacred through God's revelations or other mercies to their forefathers—Bethel, Gilgal, Gilead, Mizpah, Shechem—were especial scenes of corruption or of sin (Hos. iv. 15; v. 1; vi. 8, 9, etc.). Every holy memory was effaced by present corruption. Could things be worse? There was one aggravation more. Remonstrance was useless (Hos. iv. 4); the knowledge of God was wilfully rejected (Hos. iv. 6); the people hated rebuke (Amos v. 10); the more they were called, the more they refused (Hos. xi. 2, 7); they forbade their prophets to prophesy (Amos ii. 12); and their false prophets hated God greatly (Hos. ix. 7, 9). All attempts to heal all this disease only showed its incurableness" (ibid., p. 3).

II. EXAMPLE OF TYRE. The prosperity of Tyre in the seventh and eighth centuries before our era was extraordinary. She was mistress of her sister cities, Sidon and Gebal and Arvad; she ruled over a hundred colonies; on her island-rock she was safe from Assyria; the trade of the world was in her hands. "Situate at the entry of the sea, a merchant of the people for many isles" (Ezek. xxvii. 3); full of wordly wisdom, the wisdom that gets increase of riches (Ezek. xxviii. 3—5); rich beyond all conception in precious metals, and in gems (Ezek. xxviii. 13), and in spices, and in broidered work (Ezek. xxvii. 22, 24), and in ivory and ebony (Ezek. xxvii. 15), and in all manner of merchandise; approved, respected, called "the renowned city, strong in the sea" (Ezek. xxvi. 17);—she had reached the acme of her glory, of her wealth, of her greatness. But with what results to her moral tone and temper? Her heart was "lifted up" (Ezek. xxviii. 5); her pride became excessive; she said in her heart, "I am of perfect beauty" (Ezek. xxvii. 3)—"I am a god; I sit in the seat of God" (Ezek. xxviii. 2). "Iniquity" of every kind was found in her (Ezek. xxviii. 15)—ενvρ (Ezek. xxvi. 2), and "violence" (ver. 16), and corrupt wisdom (ver. 17), and profanation of sanctuaries (ver. 18), and even dishonesty in her traffic (ver. 18). And with iniquity, as usual, came ruin. Because of her pride, and her envy, and her violence, and her other iniquities, God brought a fire into her midst, which devoured her and reduced her to ashes (Ezek. xxvi. 18). The Babylonians were made God's instrument to chastise her, and carry off her wealth, and break down her walls, and destroy her pleasant houses, and slay her people with the sword (Ezek. xxvi. 11, 12), and make her a byword among the nations (Ezek. xxvii. 32)—a desolation, a hissing, and a terror (ver. 36).

III. EXAMPLE OF ROME. The ruin of Rome was undoubtedly wrought by that long career of unexampled military success which began with the closing years of the Second Punic War, and continued till she was the world's mistress. The wealth of Carthage, Macedonia, and Asia flowing into her coffers, destroyed the antique simplicity and severity of manners, stimulated ambition, provoked inordinate desire, and led to those terrific civil wars, in which the blood of the noblest and the bravest was shed like water, and "Rome fell ruined by her own strength" (Horace). It was not the influx of the barbarians that destroyed Rome; she fell from internal decay. The decline of Roman civilization dates from before the fall of the republic. It was then that population began to diminish, and the pure Roman blood to be mingled with the refuse of every nation. Slaves, freedmen, clients, glided into the tribes and gentes, and were followed by absolute foreigners, Greeks and Egyptians and Syrians, effete races in a state both of physical and moral degradation. "The Orontes flowed into the Tiber." The very names of those in the highest position became grotesque and strange, such as Cicero and Cato would have pronounced manifestly barbarous. A decay of moral principles followed this admixture. Slavery prevailed, and slavery in ancient as in modern times was "a hotbed of vice and selfish indulgence, enervating the spirit and vital forces of mankind, discouraging legitimate marriage, and enticing to promiscuous and barren concubinage. The fruit of such hateful unions, if fruit there were, engaged little regard from their selfish fathers, and both law and usage continued to sanction the exposure of infants, from which the female sex undoubtedly suffered most. The

losses of Italy from this horrid practice were probably the greatest; but the provinces also lost proportionably; the imitation of Roman habits was rife on the remotest frontiers; the conquests of the empire were consolidated by the attractions of Roman indulgence and sensuality; slavery threw discredit on all manual labour, and engendered a false sentiment of honour, which constrained the poorer classes of freemen to dependence and celibacy; vice and idleness went hand-in-hand, and combined to stunt the moral and physical growth of the Roman citizen, leaving his weak and morbid frame exposed in an unequal contest to the fatal influences of his climate" (Merivale, 'Roman Empire,' vol. viii. pp. 353, 354). It was a race which had thus lost its stamina, and become effete and worn out, that succumbed to barbarian inroads which, a few centuries earlier, it would have repulsed without any difficulty.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7.—*Prosperity and its dangers.* The contrast between the opening and the close of Uzziah's reign—here so sharply set before us—has few parallels in history. There is, indeed, no lack of monarchs who have risen to proud positions of authority and power, and then suddenly have fallen ignominiously from their pinnacle of pride. Memory at once recalls such names as Nebuchadnezzar, one day surveying with pride great Babylon that he had made, and the next dwelling among the beasts of the field, his body wet with the dew of heaven; or Napoleon, one day with all Europe at his feet, and but a few days after, like a caged lion, a baffled, helpless prisoner on the lonely island of St. Helena. But Uzziah's early career was different from that of most monarchs who have fallen. To all appearance he promised well. He did right in the sight of the Lord. He did indeed continue *that dangerous compromise* of which Amaziah, his father, had been guilty, of permitting the high places to remain. But still he worshipped the true God. He sought God's help and guidance. He honoured God's prophet. Moreover, he used his power well, not as a tyrant, but for the good of his people and for the prosperity and strengthening of the nation. And God prospered him in his efforts, as he will prosper all those who seek his help and blessing (2 Chron. xxvi. 5—15). But in an evil hour Uzziah (he is also called Azariah in this chapter) forgot that, though he was a king, he owed allegiance to a greater King. His prosperity turned his head. He forgot how much he owed to God. There was an old command of God, given after the rebellion of Korah and his sons, that none but the sons of Aaron—the priestly family—were to offer incense before the Lord. The obvious lesson was that special fitness, special holiness, was required of those who would stand as representatives of the people before God. But Uzziah disregards both the letter and the spirit of the command. He—poor weak mortal!—dares to defy the living God, and enters into the sanctuary to burn incense. It is another case of *compromise and its consequences.* He had been so accustomed to the violation of God's command in the matter of the high places, that now he thinks very little of this flagrant act of high-handed defiance. The priests remonstrated, but in vain. The proud king seizes the censer, and thrusts the priests aside with gestures of impatience and anger. But stay! What means that growing whiteness in his forehead? Ah! the symptoms are too well known. The hand of God is upon him. He is a leper. The censer falls from his hand. He can resist no longer. The priests thrust him forth from the holy place, and beyond the very precincts of the temple. Henceforth he is a king and yet an outcast, separated and secluded from the haunts and enjoyments of men (see 2 Chron. xxvi. 16—21).

I. PROSPERITY AND ITS UPWARD PATH. For a long time the career of Uzziah was an upward path. His motto would seem to have been, as the motto of every young person, of every one of us, ought to be, "Excelsior!" There were three elements in his progress, three sources of his prosperity, three steps in his upward path. Along these three steps every one of us may fairly and with advantage follow Uzziah. 1. First of all, *there was the fear of God.* As a young man, unquestionably he had the fear of God before his eyes. We read of him in 2 Chronicles that "*he sought the Lord.*" This implies that he honoured God's worship. He honoured God's house. He honoured God's Word, and sought guidance from the Divine Law. And what was the

consequence? Just what the consequence of a God-fearing life will always be. "As long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper." It is so still. God keeps his word. He has never yet broken that promise, "Them that honour me I will honour." This was the starting-point in Uzziah's prosperity, and, so long as he prospered, the secret of it was that he sought the Lord. Godliness is the best foundation of all true and lasting prosperity. Men like the late Samuel Morley, or the late Sir William McArthur, were not less successful because they were God-fearing men, and their business did not suffer because of the large amount of time and attention and money they devoted to religious work. To seek God's guidance in everything, God's blessing on every undertaking and every event of life,—that is the secret of true prosperity and success. 2. The second step in Uzziah's prosperity was *a good man's influence.* We read in 2 Chronicles that "he sought the Lord in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God." While the Word of God and our own conscience are to be our chief guides, there are many details and plans of daily life in which we shall be greatly the better for the experience and advice of others. To what kind of men do you go for your advice or guidance? Go by all means to those who have best experience of the business or subject in question. But if you are to choose between the advice of a practical Christian man and that of a practical worldly man, surely for a Christian the Christian man's advice will carry most weight. Some one has well said, "You can never rise above the level of your companionship." *Cultivate the society, seek the advice, look for the sympathy, of good men and good women.* 3. The third step in Uzziah's prosperity was *his diligence in business.* Uzziah was no idler. He realized the responsibility of life. He realized the responsibilities of his high position. So we find him improving the defences of Jerusalem and building towers; improving also the condition of the country and digging wells, so useful to the traveller and the husbandman in the East; and, as it was a time of warfare, providing suitable equipments for his soldiers, and encouraging new inventions of military engines and weapons. No success is won without hard work. Whatsoever our hand findeth to do, we should do it with our might. By these three methods, then, Uzziah attained to great prosperity. "He was marvellously helped, till he was strong," are the words of the writer in 2 Chronicles. His name and fame became well known. If you want to attain to prosperity and success in your business—and it is a desirable thing to see wealth, honourably earned and wisely spent, in the hands of Christian men—then, with the strong arm of a vigorous resolution, cut these three steps in your upward path, and plant your feet firmly in them—*the fear of God, the influence of good men,* and *diligence in business.* This is prosperity and its upward path. But we have reached the summit of Uzziah's career. Hitherto all has been progress upward. Hitherto all has been bright as the path of the just. But the scene changes. The shadows gather. The footsteps that pointed upwards now are turned downwards. We must look now at the other side of the picture, at—

II. PROSPERITY AND ITS DOWNWARD PATH. We may gain prosperity by rightful means, but sometimes the difficulty is to keep our prosperity and our religion at the same time. Riches bring with them their own temptations and dangers. We see in Uzziah's case *the way* to prosperity, which we should follow; we also see the *dangers* of prosperity, which we should avoid. 1. *Prosperity leads to pride.* We read of Uzziah in 2 Chronicles: "But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction." He became filled up with ideas of his own importance, and, instead of giving God the glory, reflected with complacency on all the great deeds that he had done, and all the benefits he had conferred upon the nation. When he was younger, and in the beginning of his career, he was humbler. He was very glad then to seek God's guidance, to have the help and influence of Zechariah. But now he has got yond all that. His whole character is completely changed.

"For lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
Whereto the climber upward turns his face;
But, when he once have gained the topmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend."

Pride of riches, pride of rank, how vain, how foolish they are! Riches may bring with them bodily comforts and enjoyments. But if health goes or troubles come, what comfort can they bring us? Can they give us any satisfaction or peace of mind? Can they banish care or sickness? Can they arrest the skinny hand of Death? Yet this is a common danger to those who are prosperous in worldly things—to be puffed up with this empty and unreasonable pride. How much we all need, in any time of prosperity, to pray for humility! If our business prospers, let us ask God to keep us humble. If our Church prospers, let our sincere utterance ever be "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name be all the praise." 2. *Prosperity leads to presumption.* It is a step further than pride. Uzziah's pride was bad enough, but when it led him to trample on the Law of God and to violate the sacredness of God's holy place, his presumption was a bad example to others. Yet how many there are whose prosperity or whose wealth leads them to violate the laws of God! They think anything becomes them. They have become inflated with success, and the Law of God is a very small matter indeed in their eyes. Look at Claverhouse, inflated with his triumphs over the Scottish Covenanters, as with his dragoons he surrounded the cottage of John Brown of Priesthill. Touched by the prayers of John Brown, and the sight of his wife and helpless children gathered round him, the dragoons, with moistened eyes, refused to do their deadly work. Snatching a pistol from his belt, Claverhouse himself shot the good man through the head. Turning to the wife whom he had widowed, he said, "What do you think of your husband now?" "I always thought much of him, sir," replied the brave woman; "but never so much as I do this day. *But how are you to answer for this morning's work?*" "To men," he replied, "I can be answerable, and as for God, I will take him in my own hands." Four years afterwards, in the Pass of Killiecrankie, Claverhouse died by an unknown hand. How many think as Claverhouse did! Because they have rank, or wealth, or power, therefore they imagine they can trample on God's laws, or trample on morality. Napoleon the Great thought that when he divorced his innocent and faithful wife; and he afterwards testified that that false and guilty step was the beginning of his downfall and disgrace. Because, by their wealth or their position, men think they can defy public opinion, therefore they imagine they can also disregard the commands of God. But it is a great mistake. No prosperity, no riches, no position in life, can ever lift us above the Law of God.

> "In the corrupted currents of this world,
> Offences' gilded hand may shove by justice,
> And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
> Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above.
> *There* is no shuffling; there the action lies
> In his true nature; and we ourselves compelled,
> Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
> To give in evidence."

Ah! yes; that is the one message for rich and poor alike. "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Such, then, are the dangers which prosperity brings with it. There is a strong temptation to presumption and to pride. If we have much prosperity, then we need to be much in prayer. If riches increase, the responsibility to use them well increases also. If we look at worldly prosperity in relation to eternity, on the one hand it will seem *very poor and insignificant.* What are all the riches of this world compared with the "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fadeth not away"? What are all the honours and privileges that worldly rank and prosperity bring with them, compared to the privilege of *being one of God's children?* What is all the society of earth in comparison with the fellowship of Jesus? If you are making worldly prosperity the be-all and end-all of your existence, sacrificing for it, as many do, health and conscience and your spiritual life, *pause and think! Is it worth it?* Put the two worlds in the balance. *To an unsaved soul, with a dark and hopeless eternity, earthly prosperity is only a mockery.* But, on the other hand, worldly prosperity, won by Christian efforts, guided by a Christian heart, and used by a Christian hand, *what a blessing it may become!* Let

Jesus be in your heart first. Let him abide there—his love your motive power, his Word your guide—and then there will be no danger in prosperity.—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—38.—*Some lessons from the history of kings.* "In the twenty and seventh year of Jeroboam," etc. The mighty Governor of the universe is represented as saying to the Jewish nation, "I gave thee a king in mine anger" (Hos. xiii. 2). And truly, with a certain number of exceptions here and there through the ages, kings have proved malific scourges of the race. In this chapter there are mentioned no less than seven of those men who are called kings, but who, instead of having one grain of moral royalty in their souls, were contemptible serfs to the last degree, slaves to their passions of sensuality and greed. How many conventional kings in all ages are moral paupers and vassals of Satan! Glance for a moment at each of the kings before us. Here is *Azariah*, elsewhere called Uzziah, who was the son and successor of Amaziah. Here is *Zachariah*, the son and successor of Jeroboam II. King of Israel, who reigned only six months, and then fell by the hand of Shallum. Here is *Shallum*, the fifteenth King of Israel, and the murderer of Zachariah, and who in his turn was murdered. Here is *Menahem*, the son of Gadi, who, having slain Shallum, reigned in his stead ten years—a reign characterized by ruthless cruelty and tyrannic oppression. Here is *Pekahiah*, the son and successor of Menahem, who reigned two years over Israel, and then was assassinated by Pekah. Here is *Pekah*, who was a general of the Israelitish army, and assassinated King Pekahiah in his palace, and usurped the government, reigning, according to the existing text, twenty years. Here is *Jotham*, the son and successor of Uzziah, the eleventh King of Judah, who reigned for sixteen years. He, perhaps, was the least wicked of all these princes. The whole chapter reminds us of several things worth note.

I. THE EXISTENCE OF RETRIBUTION IN THIS LIFE. Here we discover retribution in the leprosy of Azariah, and in the fate of the other kings. Of Azariah it is said, "The Lord smote the king, so that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house." Of all physical afflictions, perhaps that of leprosy is the most painful and revolting. It eats out the life of a man and dooms him to solitude. Disease strikes princes as well as paupers. Then see how the other wicked doers fared. The murderer is murdered, the slayer is slain; Shallum strikes down Zachariah; Menahem strikes down Shallum; and Pul, the King of Assyria, strikes Menahem with a terrible blow of humiliation and oppression; Pekah smites Pekahiah, and reigns twenty years when he is himself struck down by the blow of an assassin. Truly, even in this life, "with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." Though retribution here may not be complete and adequate, still it is at work everywhere in human society. It comes as a pledge and a prophecy of that realm beyond the grave, where every man shall be dealt with according to his works.

II. THE MIGHTINESS OF RELIGIOUS ERROR. In this chapter there is the record of long periods and of great changes. Battles are fought, revolutions are effected, monarch succeeds monarch, and the years come and go; but one thing remains, that is, idolatry—"The high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places" (vers. 4 and 34). Among the many evil tendencies of man there is none so mighty and influential as the *pseudo-religious*. Two facts will account for this. 1. *The strength of the religious element in man.* Burke and others of the wisest of the race have designated man as a religious animal. Religion with man is not a faculty, but the substratum in which all the faculties inhere; it is the core and the root of his nature. Hence, wherever man is found, if he has no home, he has a shrine; if he has no friend, he has a god. 2. *The might of selfishness in man.* What man needs most presents the greatest motives to human avarice and ambition. Hence the creation of bodies of priests to bolster up false religions, and derive position and wealth from them. *Corruptio optimi pessima.* It is most sad when men seek to "make a gain of godliness."

III. THE CRAVEN-HEARTEDNESS OF ENSLAVED PEOPLES. Had the peoples of Judah and Israel been really men worthy of their humanity, would they have tolerated for a day such monsters as we have in this chapter? The existence of tyrants is the fault of the people.—D. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*Another king beginning well, ending ill.* It is remarkable that three

kings of Judah in succession exhibited this characteristic. They begin well, serve God for a time and prosper, yet stumble and fail at last. We have seen the fates of Joash and Amaziah; and Azariah furnishes a third example.

I. AZARIAH'S REIGN. 1. *His righteous rule.* Azariah began to reign when only sixteen years of age; he reigned long—fifty-two years, and during the greater part of his reign he signalized himself as a king that did right. Save that the high places were unremoved, the praise given to him is unqualified. He was an able, energetic ruler, much more so than either his father or grandfather. The virtue of his reign is traced in Chronicles to the influence of a good man, Zechariah, "who had understanding in the visions of God" (2 Chron. xxvi. 5)—another example of the power for good exercised by prophets in the political history of Judah (cf. 2 Chron. xxiv. 2, 17; xxv. 7). 2. *His prosperity.* On this the Book of Chronicles dilates. So long as Azariah (or Uzziah) sought the Lord, God made him to prosper. Everything he touched went well with him. It was long since Judah had so enlightened, so enterprising, and so able a king. He subjugated the Philistines, the Arabians of Gur-baal, and the Ammonites; he greatly strengthened the defences of Jerusalem; he developed the resources of the country, and fostered agriculture; he brought the organization and equipment of the army to a high pitch of perfection. As it is stated, "His name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong" (2 Chron. xxvi. 15). It was as if God wished, by the abundance of his blessings, to teach Azariah and his people that assuredly their true advantage lay in his service. The previous reigns had given examples of this; but here was a new proof, still more undeniable than the preceding. Yet it was ineffectual to restrain from sin.

II. AZARIAH'S LEPROSY. 1. *The worm at the root.* Azariah had scarcely reached the acme of his power, when, as in the case of his predecessors, declension began. Unwarned by the past, he allowed his heart to grow proud and haughty. He was head of the state; why should he not also be head of the Church? His prophetic adviser was by this time removed, and he was left to the bent of his own will. In his arrogance, he insisted on going into the holy place of the temple to burn incense to the Lord. It was there his doom fell upon him. We are again reminded of the subtle temptations that lie in prosperity. When men wax fat, they kick; and their hearts are apt to be lifted up to their destruction (Deut. viii. 11—14; xxxii. 15). Once let pride enter the heart, and deterioration is rapid. Its beginnings may be unseen, but it by-and-by reveals itself in overt acts. 2. *The stroke from heaven.* It was Heaven's laws that Azariah was defying, and it was from heaven the blow came which struck his pride low. While yet he stood at God's altar, offering unhallowed incense, the leprous spot began to burn in his forehead, and in presence of the priests, whose protestations he despised, he felt himself a leper. The priests, in horror, thrust him out from the holy place. But it needed not their violence: "Yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him" (2 Chron. xxvi. 20). How quickly God can bring the haughtiness of men low! He is a jealous God, and what touches the honour of his sanctuary and worship is of special concern to him. We are warned against will-worship in God's service (Col. ii. 23; cf. Numb. x. 1, 2). The leprosy was but the outward token of the invisible sin of pride; yet how little shame the reality of sin occasions, as compared with that caused by an outward symbol of it like this! We may believe that in the end inward character will somehow stamp itself upon the outward appearance, and then men will see sin in its real loathsomeness. 3. *Jotham as vicegerent.* We are told that from this time Azariah took no more part in public business. He dwelt apart "in a several house"—a living evidence of the weakness of man in contending with God, of the dishonour which is the Nemesis of presumptuous sin, of the isolation which they bring upon themselves who refuse the bounds which God's Law prescribes. During this period, Jotham, the king's son, acted as his deputy. It would appear, from comparison with the Israelitish reigns, and with Assyrian chronology, that Jotham's sixteen regnal years include this period when "he was over the house, judging the people of the land." Sin is a living death. Azariah was king in name, but morally, physically, legally, he was dead; for leprosy in the body is simply a process of decay and death. When, in fact, he did die, he was buried in Jerusalem, but in a "several" tomb, as during life he had dwelt in a "several" house (2 Chron. xxvi. 23).—J. O.

Vers. 8—22.—*Anarchy in Israel.* With rapid descent the kingdom of Israel, which had risen to great external prosperity under Jeroboam II., hastened to its fall. The prophets give us vivid pictures of the corruption of the times. The bonds of social life were loosened, oppression was rampant, the fear of God seemed to have died out of the land; there was no confidence, peace, or good will among any classes in the nation. As a consequence, the throne was a prey to any adventurer who had power to seize it.

I. THE FALL OF JEHU'S HOUSE. 1. *The shadow of doom.* With the accession of Zachariah, Jeroboam's son, the fourth generation of Jehu's dynasty ascended the throne The shadow of doom may thus be said to have rested on this ill-fated king. A prophet had spoken it to the founder of the house, "Thy sons shall sit on the throne of Israel unto the fourth generation." That word had its bright side of reward, but it had also its dark side of penalty, and it is this which becomes prominent as the predicted term nears its close. Yet, as we can now also see, there is no fate in the matter. The reason why Jehu's sons were *only* to sit on the throne till the fourth generation lay in their own character and actions. God's decrees do not work against, but in harmony with, the existing nature of things, and the established connection of causes and effects. Jehu's house was about to fall (1) because Jehu's sons had been ungodly. None of them had sought God's glory or taken any pains to promote godliness in the nation. On the contrary, they had continued sowing the wind of disobedience to God's will, and the nation was now to reap the whirlwind. (2) Under the rule of these kings, irreligion and immorality had spread fast, and struck their roots deep and wide in the kingdom. This will undermine any dynasty, will overthrow any empire. Rulers make a great mistake when they fix attention solely on external prosperity. If the foundations are rotten, the structure will sooner or later inevitably come down. (3) Zachariah himself was a feeble king. This is implied even in the brief notice we have of him. It may be he who is referred to by Hosea, "In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine," etc. (Hos. vii. 5). In any case, we know that he was not only weak, but wicked—"He did evil in the sight of the Lord." 2. *The prophetic word fulfilled.* A brief six months of the throne was all that was allowed to Zachariah. He seems to have been held in contempt by the people. His feeble character would appear the more feeble in contrast with that of his energetic and victorious father. We have a similar contrast in English history between Richard Cromwell and his father, Oliver. But Zachariah was more than feeble, he was worthless. Therefore, when the conspirator Shallum smote the king in the light of public day, "before the people," no hand seems to have been raised in his defence. He perished, and the house of Jehu was extinguished with him. Sinners do not live out half their days (Ps. lv. 23). In due time the words of God are all fulfilled.

II. THE REIGN OF MENAHEM. We may pass by the brief reign of Shallum, which lasted only a month, and of which no events are recorded. He was slain by Menahem, the son of Gadi, illustrating the truth of which this chapter affords other exemplifications, that they who take the sword shall perish by the sword (Matt. xxvi. 52). In respect of Menahem, we notice: 1. *His violent usurpation.* He too possessed himself of the throne by violent means. He smote Shallum in Samaria, as Shallum had, a few weeks before, smitten Zachariah. The effect of these revolutions on the morals of the people and the administration of law may be imagined. What respect could be felt for royalty established by such methods? Shallum, indeed, was a murderer, but Menahem was no better. Neither by sanction of God nor by election of the people, but solely by brute force, did he set himself upon the throne. His rule was thus, in its inception and essence, a tyranny. To this had Israel come by rejecting their true Ruler—God. "They have set up kings," said God, "but not by me" (Hos. viii. 4). He who rejects God as his Sovereign must bear a heavier yoke. 2. *His sickening cruelties.* The fact that Menahem kept the throne for ten years shows him to have been a man of no small natural ability. But his disposition was savagely cruel. Not only did he smite Shallum—a deed which might be pardoned—but in his war with Tiphsah he was guilty of brutal atrocities on those who refused to submit to him (cf. ver. 16). In this he showed himself a man of a fierce and unscrupulous character. The people had become fierce, godless, and violent; and God gave them a king after their own image. 3. *His league with Assyria.* This is not the first contact of Israel with Assyria, but it is the first mention of that contact in the sacred history.

The King of Assyria, here named Pul, came against the land, evidently with hostile intent; but Menahem, by the payment of a huge tribute, bought him off, and secured his sanction to his occupancy of the throne. (On the identification of Pul, see the Exposition.) Israel now came under a foreign yoke, and "sorrowed," as Hosea says, "for the burden of the King of princes" (Hos. viii. 10). Sin, which is an effort after emancipation from the Law and authority of God, ends in the sinner being reduced to miserable bondage (Luke xv. 15, 16; John viii. 34). 4. *His oppression of the people.* To raise the money for Pul, Menahem was under the necessity of exacting large sums from the men of wealth in the land. From each, we are told, he took fifty shekels of silver. Much of this money had been wrung from the poor, and now it was taken from the rich. In the end, it was probably upon the poor that the burden would come back. Thus the land groaned under tyranny, foreign oppression, robbery, and grinding of class by class. The end was not quite yet, but it was fast approaching. We need not doubt that Menahem's oppressive reign was hateful to the people. He escaped, however, the penalty of his misdeeds in his own person, and "slept with his fathers." It was his son Pekahiah who reaped the harvest he had sown.

III. THE REIGN OF PEKAH. Pekahiah's reign of two years, like that of Shallum, may be passed over. A stronger hand was needed to hold together the warring elements in this distracted kingdom, and such a hand was that of Pekah, the son of Remaliah. 1. *Overthrow of the house of Menahem.* Menahem had succeeded in handing down the throne to his son, but the latter could not keep it. The bold and ambitious Pekah, one of Pekahiah's captains, having secured the co-operation of fifty Gileadites, smote the king in his palace, and his attendants with him. Thus another violent revolution took place in Israel. It is stated that Pekah kept the throne for twenty years, but there is great difficulty at this point in adjusting the chronology. It seems impossible, on the side of Judah, to shorten the reign of Ahaz, having regard to his own age, and that of his son Hezekiah, at their respective accessions. To bring the Jewish and Assyrian chronologies into accord, we must apparently either (1) shorten the reign of Pekah by about ten years, and bring down the reign of Ahaz to a date considerably below that usually given, which involves also the abandonment of the biblical date for the commencement of the reign of Hezekiah (ch. xviii. 1), and of the synchronisms of this period generally; or (2) suppose some break or hiatus of twenty years or so in the Assyrian lists at the epoch of the accession of Tiglath-pileser, *i.e.* the commencement of the new Assyrian empire. This view has its difficulties, but is not impossible. Pekah's reign was as evil as that of his predecessors. 2. *Invasions of Tiglath-pileser.* During this reign began those invasions of the Assyrians, and deportations of the population, which culminated in the fall of Samaria and carrying captive of the whole people, some years later. This expedition, of which mention is made in the Assyrian inscriptions, took place towards the end of Pekah's period of rule, and was a sequel to the events related in ch. xvi. 5—9. Pekah, in alliance with Rezin of Damascus, had made a plot to depose Ahaz of Judah, and to set a creature of his own upon the throne (Isa. vii. 1—6). To this proposed attack we owe Isaiah's magnificent prophecy of the Child Immanuel. 3. *Pekah's death.* This intriguing monarch also, as he had climbed to the throne by assassination, fell a victim to assassination. He was slain by Hoshea, the son of Elah, who succeeded him as the last King of Israel.—J. O.

Vers. 32—38.—*A good reign.* In welcome contrast with the character of the reigns we have been considering, stands this of Jotham, who walked in the footsteps of his father in all that was right.

I. JUDAH WELL GOVERNED. 1. *Rule in the fear of God.* Jotham proved an excellent ruler. He took warning from his father's example, and "prepared his ways before the Lord his God" (2 Chron. xxvii. 6). His reign, indeed, was a brief one compared with his father's, and, had time been given, he might have backslidden as had his predecessors. But, so far as it went, his conduct was blameless, except that the high places were still unremoved. If we assume that Jotham's years of rule are reckoned from the time when he took his father's place in the public administration, he cannot have reigned alone for more than five or six years. 2. *Religion honoured.* It is told of him, negatively, that he did not, like his father, enter into the temple of the Lord (2 Chron. xxvii. 2), and positively, that "he built the higher gate of the

house of the Lord." Whereas a wicked ruler like Athaliah broke down the temple, this good king set himself to adorn and strengthen it. In this he showed a laudable zeal for God's honour. 3. *The kingdom strengthened.* Jotham strengthened the kingdom of Judah in many other ways—by just administration, by extensive works of building, by subjugation of enemies, etc. (2 Chron. xxvii. 3—6). If the annals of this reign, "written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah," could be recovered, they would show Jotham to be one of the best kings Judah ever had—a worthy son of a very able father. Such rulers are a blessing to a country. Their loss is to be deplored, for there is no guarantee that their successors will be like them. From Jotham to Ahaz the descent is great.

II. JUDAH THREATENED. 1. *A discordant note.* It is said in Chronicles that, notwithstanding Jotham's enlightened and righteous government, "the people did yet corruptly" (2 Chron. xxvii. 2). It is not easy to purge out evil leaven when once it has got into a community; and the worship of the high places gave opportunity for evil practices to develop themselves away from the centre, which was more under the king's eye. The pictures Isaiah now begins to draw for us show that the corruption was not slight. 2. *Threatened invasion.* To this inward corruption of the people may be attributed the chastisements which God now saw fit to send on Judah. In Jotham's reign they but begin, but in the reign of Ahaz they develop to considerable proportions. In the text we are simply told, "In those days the Lord began to send against Judah Rezin the King of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah." These two kings, as we shall subsequently see, had designs upon the throne of Judah. Chastisement is the more deserved when great privileges are given and fail to be improved.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVI.

Vers. 1—20.—REIGN OF AHAZ OVER JUDAH. WAR OF AHAZ WITH PEKAH AND REZIN. EXPEDITION OF TIGLATH-PILESER AGAINST THEM. RELIGIOUS CHANGES MADE BY AHAZ. HIS DEATH.

Vers. 1—4.—*General character of the reign of Ahaz.* Ahaz was the most wicked king that had as yet reigned in Judah. The author, therefore, prefaces his account of the reign by a brief summary of some of the king's chief iniquities. (1) He departed from the way of David (ver. 2); (2) he made his son pass through the fire to Moloch (ver. 3); and (3) he took an active part in the worship at the high places and in the groves, at which most previous kings had winked, but which they had not countenanced.

Ver. 1.—**In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah Ahaz the son of Jotham King of Judah began to reign.** (For the chronological difficulties connected with this statement, see the comment on ch. xv. 27.)

Ver. 2.—**Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign.** As sixteen years afterwards his son Hezekiah was twenty-five (ch. xviii. 2), it is scarcely possible that Ahaz can have been no more than twenty at his accession, since in that case he must have married at ten years of age, and have had a son at eleven! The reading of "twenty-five" instead of "twenty," found in some Hebrew codices, in the Vatican manuscript of the Septuagint, and elsewhere, is therefore to be preferred. **And reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem.** So the author of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxviii. 1) and Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' ix. 12. § 3). The reign of Ahaz probably lasted from B.C. 742 to B.C. 727. **And did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God, like David his father.** Compare what is said of Abijah (1 Kings xv. 3), but the form of speech here used is stronger. Manasseh (ch. xxi. 2) and Amon (ch. xxi. 20—22) alone, of all the kings of Judah, receive greater condemnation.

Ver. 3.—**But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel.** Not, of course, by establishing a worship of calves, but by following the worst practices of the worst Israelite kings, *e.g.* Ahab and Ahaziah, and reintroducing into Judah the Phœnician idolatry, which Joash and the high priest Jehoiada had cast out (ch. xi. 17, 18). As the writer of Chronicles says (2 Chron. xxviii. 2), "He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, *and made also molten images for Baalim.*" *Baalim* is either a plural of dignity, or a word denoting the different forms under which Baal was worshipped,

as Melkarth, Adonis, Rimmon, etc. **Yea, and made his son to pass through the fire.** In Chronicles (2 Chron. xxviii. 3) we are told that "he burnt incense in the valley of Hinnom, and burnt his *children* in the fire," as if he had sacrificed more than one son. The practice of offering children in sacrifice was not a feature of the Assyro-Babylonian religion, as some suppose, but an intrinsic part of the worship of the Phœnicians, common to them with the Moabites, Ammonites, and others. It was based upon the principle of a man's offering to God that which was dearest and most precious to himself, whence the crowning sacrifice of the kind was a man's offering of his firstborn son (see ch. iii. 27; Micah vi. 7). Some have supposed that the rite was a mere dedication or lustration, the children passing between two fires, and being thenceforward employed only in God's service. But the expressions used by the sacred writer and others, and still more the descriptions that have come down to us from heathen and patristic authors, make it absolutely certain that the "passing through the fire" was no such innocent ceremony as this, but involved the death of the children. The author of Chronicles says, "Ahaz *burnt* his children in the fire;" Jeremiah (xix. 5), "They have built also the high places of Baal, *to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings* unto Baal;" Ezekiel (xvi. 21), "Thou hast *slain* my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire." Josephus declares of Ahaz that he "made his own son a whole burnt offering (ἴδιον ὡλοκαύτωσε παῖδα)." Diodorus Siculus describes the ceremony as it took place at Carthage, the Phœnician colony. There was in the great temple there, he says, an image of Saturn (Moloch), which was a human figure with a bull's head and outstretched arms. This image of metal was made glowing hot by a fire kindled within it; and the children, laid in its arms, rolled from thence into the fiery lap below. If the children cried, the parents stopped their noise by fondling and kissing them; for the victim ought not to weep, and the sound of complaint was drowned in the din of flutes and kettle-drums (Diod. Sic., xx. 14). "Mothers," says Plutarch ('De Superstitione,' § 13), "stood by without tears or sobs; if they wept or sobbed, they lost the honour of the act, and the children were sacrificed notwithstanding." The only doubtful point is whether the children were placed alive in the glowing arms of the image, or whether they were first killed and afterwards burnt in sacrifice; but the description of Diodorus seems to imply the more cruel of the two proceedings. **According to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel.** (On the practice of this terrible rite by the Canaanitish nations at the time of the Israelite invasion, see Lev. xviii. 21; Deut. xii. 31; xviii. 9, 10; Ps. cvi. 37, 38.)

Ver. 4.—**And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places.** The special sin of Ahaz here noted is that he not only allowed the high-place and grove worship, as so many other kings of Judah had done, *e.g.* Solomon (1 Kings iii. 2), Rehoboam (1 Kings xiv. 23), Asa (1 Kings xv. 14), Jehoshaphat (1 Kings xxii. 43), Joash (ch. xii. 3), Amaziah (ch. xiv. 4), Azariah (ch. xv. 4), and Jotham (ch. xv. 35), but himself countenanced and took part in it, which no other king appears to have done. It was probably the stimulus that his example gave to the cult which induced Hezekiah to abolish it (see ch. xviii. 4). **And on the hills, and under every green tree** (comp. 1 Kings xiv. 23, with the comment).

Vers. 5, 6.—*War of Ahaz with Pekah and Rezin.*

Ver. 5.—**Then Rezin King of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah King of Israel came up to Jerusalem to war.** The alliance between Rezin and Pekah has been already glanced at (ch. xvi. 37). It began, apparently, in the reign of Jotham. The policy which brought it about was one that was entirely new. Since Syria developed an aggressive tendency under the first Benhadad (1 Kings xx. 1), there had till now been no alliance made with her by either of the two Israelite kingdoms. She had been reckoned as their common enemy; and while they had on two occasions been allied together against her (1 Kings xxii. 4—36; ch. viii. 28), never as yet had either asked her help against the other. Now, however, Ephraim became confederate with Syria against Judah. The new policy must be ascribed to the new condition of things consequent upon the attitude assumed by Assyria under Tiglath-pileser. Assyria had been under a cloud for forty years. The nations of the western coast of Asia had ceased to fear her, and had felt at liberty to pursue their own quarrels. Her recovery of vigour altered the whole situation. It was at once evident to the statesmen who directed the policy of the small western states that, unless they combined, they were lost. Hence the alliance between Pekah and Rezin. Probably they would have been glad to have drawn Ahaz into the confederacy; but it would seem that he did not share their fears, and would not join them. Hereupon the design was formed to dethrone him, and set up in his place a new ruler, a certain Ben-Tabeal (Isa. vii. 6), on whose assistance they could

rely. The two confederate princes then began the campaign. Pekah invaded Judæa, and gained a great victory over Ahaz, which is perhaps exaggerated in 2 Chron. xxviii. 6—15; Rezin carried his arms further south, took Elath, and re-established the Edomites in power (see the comment on ver. 6). Then the allies joined forces and proceeded to besiege Jerusalem. **And they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him.** The siege is mentioned by Isaiah (vii. 1), who was commissioned by God to comfort Ahaz, and assure him that the city would not fall (Isa. vii. 7). The fortifications of Uzziah (2 Chron. xxvi. 9) and Jotham (2 Chron. xxvii. 3) had, no doubt, greatly strengthened the city since the time when (as related in ch. xiv. 13) it was captured so easily by Joash.

Ver. 6.—**At that time Rezin King of Syria recovered Elath to Syria.** The Syrians had certainly never previously been masters of Elath, which had always hitherto been either Jewish or Edomite (see 1 Kings ix. 26; xxii. 48; ch. xiv. 22). Hence it seems to be necessary that we should either translate the Hebrew verb הֵשִׁיב by "gained," "conquered," instead of "recovered;" or else change אֲרָם, "Syria," into אֱדֹם, "Edom." The Syrians could "recover" Elath for Edom; they could only "gain" it for themselves. **And drave the Jews from Elath**—*i.e.* expelled the Jewish garrison which had been maintained in Elath from the time of its conquest by Uzziah (ch. xiv. 22)—**and the Syrians came to Elath**; rather, *the Edomites*—אֲדֹמִים for אֲרָמִים. Rezin could not have thought of holding a place so remote from Damascus as Elath; and, had he done so, the danger of his kingdom in the next year would have necessitated the relinquishment of so distant a possession. **And dwelt there unto this day.** It is quite certain that Elath belonged to Edom, and not to Syria, at the time when the Books of Kings were written.

Vers. 7—9.—*Expedition of Tiglath-pileser against Pekah and Rezin.* In the extremity of his danger, when the confederacy had declared itself, or perhaps later, when he had suffered terrible defeats, and was about to be besieged in his capital (2 Chron. xxviii. 5, 6), Ahaz invoked the aid of Tiglath-pileser, sent him all the treasure on which he could lay his hands (ver. 8), offered to place himself and his kingdom under the Assyrian monarch's suzerainty, and entreated him to come and "save him out of the hands" of his enemies (ver. 7). Humanly speaking, he might be justified. He had not called in one foreign power until Pekah had called in another. There was no other prospect (again humanly speaking) of escape. But, had he accepted the offers of Isaiah (vii. 4—16), and relied wholly on Jehovah, his position would have been far better. However, he was unable to see this; he made his application; and Tiglath-pileser "came up," and utterly crushed the Syro-Israelite confederacy (ver. 9).

Ver. 7.—**So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser King of Assyria, saying.** This appeal to man rather than to God, this trust in "an arm of flesh," was exactly what Isaiah had been endeavouring to prevent, what he viewed as unfaithfulness, and as inevitably drawing down God's wrath both upon king and kingdom. Ahaz was young, was weak, and had no doubt a large body of advisers, who considered the prophet to be a fanatic, who had no belief in supernatural aid, and who thought that in any emergency recourse was to be had to the measures which human prudence and human policy dictated. The aid of Tiglath-pileser seemed to them, under the circumstances, the only thing that could save them; and they persuaded the weak prince to adopt their views. **I am thy servant and thy son.** The offer of submission was unmistakable. "Servant," in the language of the time, meant "slave." Complete subjection, enrolment among Assyria's feudatories, the entire loss of independence, was well understood to be the price that had to be paid for Assyria's protection. Ahaz and his worldly advisers were prepared to pay it. They surrendered themselves, body and soul, into the hands of the great world-power of the period. **Come up, and save me out of the hand of the King of Syria, and out of the hand of the King of Israel, which rise up against me.** Syria is put forward as at once the more formidable of the two foes, and the one most open to Assyrian attack. Already Damascus had been more than once menaced by Assyrian armies ('Eponym Canon,' pp. 113, 115, 116), while the kingdom of Samaria had only suffered at her extremities (ch. xv. 29). Samaria could not well be approached excepting through Syria, and after Syria's downfall.

Ver. 8.—**And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house.** Hitherto the temple treasures had been diverted from their proper use, and secularized for the sole purpose (except in one instance) of buying off the hostility of a foreign foe, who threatened the city and the

temple itself with destruction (see 1 Kings xiv. 26; ch. xii. 18; xiv. 14). Now, as on *one* former occasion (1 Kings xv. 18), they were utilized to purchase an alliance. **And sent it for a present to the King of Assyria.** So Gyges King of Syria sent presents to Asshur-bani-pal to purchase his aid against the Cimmerians ('Records of the Past,' vol. i. p. 68), and Susub of Babylon sent his temple treasures to Umman-Minan of Elam (ibid., pp. 46, 47), to purchase his assistance against Sennacherib.

Ver. 9.—**And the King of Assyria hearkened unto him.** Overtures of the kind were almost certain to be accepted. The great conquering monarchs of the East were always glad to receive small states into their alliance for a time, and even to allow them a shadow of independence, while they made use of their services against their near neighbours. Tiglath-pileser was already bent on conquering Samaria and Damascus, and could not fail to perceive that their subjugation would be greatly facilitated by his having the support of Judæa. **For the King of Assyria**—rather, *and the King of Assyria*—**went up against Damascus.** Damascus was naturally attacked first, as nearer to Assyria than Samaria, and also as more wealthy and more important. Tiglath-pileser's records contain an account of the campaign, but it is unfortunately much mutilated. We may gather from it, however, that Rezin began by meeting his assailant in the field, and engaging him in a battle which was stoutly contested. Eventually the Assyrians were victorious, and Rezin, having fled hastily to Damascus, shut himself up within its walls. Tiglath-pileser pursued him, laid siege to the city, and eventually took it, though not perhaps till it had resisted for above a year ('Eponym Canon,' p. 65). The Assyrian monarch thus describes the siege (ibid., p. 121): "Damascus, his city, I besieged, and like a caged bird I enclosed him. His forests, the trees of which were without number, I cut down; I did not leave a tree standing. [I burnt] Hadara, the house of the father of Rezin, King of Syria." **And took it.** The ancient Damascene kingdom, which had lasted from the time of Solomon (1 Kings xi. 24), was thus brought to an end. Damascus gave the Assyrians no further trouble; and within little more than thirty years it had been so absolutely absorbed into the empire that its governor was one of the Assyrian eponyms ('Eponym Canon,' p. 68). The capture of the city, foretold by Amos (i. 4, 5), was followed by the destruction of its walls and palaces. **And carried the people of it captive.** The system of transplanting large masses of the population from one part of the empire to another seems to have begun with Tiglath-pileser. In his very imperfect and fragmentary annals we find the removal of above thirty thousand captives recorded, of whom more than half are women. His example was followed by his successors on a still larger scale. **To Kir.** The situation of "Kir" (קִר) is wholly uncertain. It has been identified with Kis (Elam or Kissia), with the country watered by the Kur; with Kourêna or Koura, on the river Mardus; with Kariné, the modern Kirrind; with Kirkhi near Diartekr; and with Kiransi in the Urumiyeh country. But the similarity of sound is the sole basis for each and all of these identifications. It is best to confess our ignorance. **And slew Rezin.** This is perhaps implied, but it is not distinctly stated, in the extant annals of Tiglath-pileser.

Vers. 10—18.—*Religious changes introduced into Judæa by Ahaz.* The new position into which Ahaz had brought himself with respect to Assyria was followed by certain religious changes, which were probably, in part at any rate, its consequence, though some of them may have been the result of his own religious (or irreligious) convictions. He had a new altar made and introduced into the temple, which at first he used for his own private sacrifices (vers. 10—13); then, that his new altar might occupy the post of honour, he removed from its place the old brazen altar of Solomon, and put it in an inferior position (ver. 14). After this, he required all sacrifices to be offered on the new altar (ver. 15). Finally, he proceeded to interfere with several other of Solomon's arrangements, with what particular object is not very apparent (vers. 17, 18). In carrying out all these changes, he had the high priest of the time for his obsequious servant.

Ver. 10.—**And King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser King of Assyria.** It was a practice of the Assyrian monarchs to hold *durbars*, or courts, at central places in the provinces, in the course of their military expeditions, whereat to receive the subject princes of the neighbourhood, who were expected to do homage, and bring with them presents, or their fixed tribute. Tiglath-pileser held one such court in the earlier part of his reign at Arpad, a Syrian town, at which were present the kings of Commagene, Syria, Tyre, Carchemish, Gaugama, and others. He seems to have held another at some unknown place, about B.C. 732 (it may have been at Damascus), which was

attended by the kings of Commagene, Carchemish, Gebal, Hamath, Gaugama, Tubal, Arvad, Ammon, Moab, Askelon, Gaza, Edom, and Judah, the last-mentioned being Yahukhazi (Jehoahaz), by which is probably meant Ahaz. It is with reason conjectured that this was the occasion mentioned in the text, when "King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser." **And saw an altar that was at Damascus.** It is almost certain that this was an Assyrian altar. Ahaz may at one time have turned for help to the gods of Syria (2 Chron. xxviii. 23), and asked their aid against his enemies; but the glory of Syria was now gone, her gods were discredited, and the place of power was occupied by Assyria, which had asserted its supremacy. When Ahaz visited Tiglath-pileser at Damascus, and "saw an altar," it was, in all probability, Tiglath-pileser's altar. The Assyrian kings were accustomed to carry altars about with them, and to have them set up in their fortified camps, or in other convenient places. They also, not unfrequently, set up altars to the great gods in the countries which they conquered, and required the inhabitants to pay them reverence. Ahaz may either have been required by Tiglath-pileser to set up an Assyrian altar in the temple, or he may have volunteered the act as one which was likely to please his suzerain. **And King Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest**—*i.e.* the high priest—**the fashion of the altar and the pattern of it.** Assyrian altars were quite different from Jewish ones. Generally they were of small size, either square with a battlemented edge, or round at the top and supported on a triangular base ('Dict. of the Bible,' *ad voc.* "Altar," vol. i. p. 55, woodcuts Nos. 3 and 5). It is scarcely likely that Ahaz was particularly pleased with the pattern (Keil), and therefore wished to have one like it. He probably merely wished to satisfy his suzerain that he had conformed to some of his religious usages. **According to all the workmanship thereof.** Though not very elaborate, the Assyrian altars have an ornamentation which is peculiar and unmistakable. Careful instructions would be needed for workmen who had never seen the sort of object which they were required to produce.

Ver. 11.—**And Urijah the priest.** No doubt the Uriah of Isaiah (viii. 2), who might be a "faithful witness" to the record of a fact, though a bad man, over-complaisant in carrying out the will of the king. **Built an altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus**:—rather, *built the altar*, i.e. the altar commanded by the monarch—**so Urijah the priest made it against King Ahaz came from Damascus.** A bold high priest like Azariah (2 Chron. xxvi. 17) would have refused to work the king's will in such a matter, which was certainly a desecration of the temple, and to some extent a compromise with idolatry. But Urijah was a man of a weaker fibre, and does not seem to have thought even of remonstrance, much less of resistance.

Ver. 12.—**And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon.** It is not necessarily implied in these words that Ahaz, like Uzziah, usurped the priestly functions, though conceivably he may have done so, and Urijah may have stood tamely by. What the writer has it in his mind to record is that the king, on his return from Damascus, at once made use of the new altar for his private sacrifices. If he had meant to tax Ahaz with so great a sin as that which brought the curse of leprosy upon Uzziah, he would almost certainly have made his meaning clearer.

Ver. 13.—**And he burnt his burnt offering and his meat offering, and poured his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings, upon the altar.** (On the different kinds of offerings, see Lev. i.—vii.)

Ver. 14.—**And he brought also the brazen altar, which was before the Lord.** One sin leads on to another. Having introduced his self-invented *quasi*-idolatrous altar into the temple, and so inserted "the thin end of the wedge," Ahaz was not satisfied, but proceeded to another innovation. Urijah, having had no express order from the king with respect to the position of the new altar, had placed it in front of the old one, between it and the eastern gate of the court. Thus the old altar, which was directly in front of the temple porch, seemed to cut the new altar off from the temple. Ahaz would not have this continue, and resolved on removing the altar of Solomon from its place, and putting it elsewhere. **From the forefront of the house** (comp. 1 Kings viii. 54), **from between the altar**—*i.e.* the new altar—**and the house of the Lord**—*i.e.* the temple building—**and put it on the north side of the altar.** The removal of Solomon's altar from its place of honour to a side position left the space clear between the temple and the new altar, which thus, without exactly occupying the same site, took practically the place of Solomon's altar. Solomon's altar, shifted to one side, was put, as it were, in the background; the eye rested on the new altar, right in front of the porch and temple, which so became "the main altar" (הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הַגָּדוֹל), as it is called in the next verse.

Ver. 15.—**And King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying.** Here the king, no doubt, stepped out of the sphere of his duties, not to usurp exactly the priestly

office, but to give directions in matters which belonged, not to the *regale*, but to the *pontificale*. Urijah ought to have refused obedience. **Upon the great altar.** Certainly not so called because of its size (Keil), for it was probably much smaller than the old altar, but because of its position (see the comment on ver. 14). **Burn the morning burnt offering, and the evening meat offering**—*i.e.* offer the daily sacrifice both morning and evening—**and the king's burnt sacrifice, and his meat offering**—*i.e.* the customary royal sacrifices (see 1 Kings viii. 62)—**with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings**—*i.e.* all the private offerings of the people for themselves—**and sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice** (comp. Exod. xxix. 16, 20; Lev. i. 5, 11; iii. 2, 8, 13; vii. 2; xvii. 6; Numb. xviii. 17, etc.) **and the brazen altar shall be for me to inquire by**; rather, *and as for the brazen altar, it will be for me to inquire concerning it*; i.e. I shall hereafter determine what use, if any, it shall be put to. As, by the king's directions, all the regular and all the occasional sacrifices were to be offered upon his new altar, the other would practically be superfluous. It would have been only logical to remove it, or break it up; but this the king was probably afraid of doing. He therefore said that he would take time to consider what he should do.

Ver. 16.—**Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that King Ahaz commanded.** An emphatic condemnation of the high priest, whose subserviency evidently provokes the writer's indignation.

Ver. 17.—**And King Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases.** By "the bases" are probably meant the stands of the ten brazen lavers, which Hiram the Tyrian artificer made for Solomon, and which Solomon placed outside the temple, five on either side of the entrance (1 Kings vii. 39). The "borders of the bases" seem to have consisted of ornamental panels, on which were carved, in relief, figures of lions, oxen, and cherubim (1 Kings vii. 29). The object of Ahaz in these mutilations may have been merely destructive, as we find Egyptian kings, after a change of religion, mutilating the tablets, and erasing the inscriptions put up in honour of those gods who had ceased to be in favour with them. Or, possibly, he may, as Keil supposes, have wished to transfer the ornamental carvings to some other edifice, *e.g.* an idolatrous temple or a palace. **And removed the laver from off them**—removed, *i.e.*, from each base "the laver" which stood upon it—**and took down the sea from off the brazen oxen that were under it.** (On Solomon's 'molten sea," or great laver, and the twelve oxen which supported it, comp. 1 Kings vii. 23—26, and Jer. lii. 20.) The "sea" was probably removed from off the backs of the oxen, in order that they might be made use of, as ornaments, elsewhere. **And put it upon a pavement of stones**; rather, *upon a pedestal of stone* (ἐπὶ βάσιν λιθίνην, LXX.).

Ver. 18.—**And the covert for the sabbath that they had built in the house.** The "covert for the sabbath" was probably (as Keil notes) "a covered place or stand in the court of the temple, to be used by the king whenever he visited the temple with his retinue on the sabbath, or on feast-days." It may have been elaborately ornamented. **And the king's entry without.** This may have been "the ascent into the house of the Lord," which Solomon constructed for his own use (1 Kings x. 5), and which was among those marvels of art that made the spirit of the Queen of Sheba faint within her. **Turned he from the house of the Lord for the King of Assyria.** It is not clear what meaning our translators intended to express, and it is still less clear what was the sense intended by the original writer. Ahaz did something to the royal stand inside the temple, and to the "ascent" which led to it, and what he did was done, not "*for* the King of Assyria," but "*for fear* of the King of Assyria;" but what exactly his action was, we cannot say. No satisfactory meaning has been assigned to מִפְּנֵי בֵּית יְהוָה by any commentator.

Vers. 19, 20.—*The death of Ahaz.* The writer terminates his account of the reign of Ahaz with his usual formulæ, which in this instance are wholly colourless. Ahaz's acts were written in the book of the chronicles of the kings; he died, and was buried with his fathers; Hezekiah, his son, reigned in his stead. This is all that he thinks it needful to say.

Ver. 19.—**Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?** The writer of Chronicles adds some important facts not found in the narrative of Kings. Among them are the following: (1) The complete defeat of Ahaz by Pekah, who "smote him with a great slaughter" (2 Chron. xxviii. 5), killing a hundred and twenty thousand of his soldiers, and carrying off two hundred thousand captives, men, women, and children (2 Chron. xxviii. 8); these captives were, however, afterwards restored (ver. 15). (2) His defeat by the Syrians (ver. 5). This is, perhaps, implied in ch. xvi. 6; but it is not expressly stated. (3) His defeat by the Edomites,

who invaded his land, and made a large number of prisoners (2 Chron. xxviii. 17). (4) The conquest in his reign of a considerable portion of Southern Judæa by the Philistines (ver. 18). (5) The fact that Ahaz at one time in his life adopted the Syrian worship, and "sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which smote him" (ver. 23). (6) The fact that in his latter years he shut up the temple (ver. 24), closing the doors of the porch (2 Chron. xxix. 7), extinguishing the lamps (2 Chron. xxix. 7), and putting an end to the burning of incense and the offering of sacrifice. (7) The fact that, not content with the previously existing high places, he set up a number of new ones, so that there should be a "high place" in every several city (2 Chron. xxviii. 25). The religious condition of Judæa can scarcely have been worse in the worst time of Manasseh or Amon.

Ver. 20.—**And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David.** This must be taken in the same sense, and with the same limitations, as the same phrase in ch. xii. 21. The writer of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxviii. 27) says, "And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem: *but they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings.*" Like Uzziah, he was not thought worthy of sepulture in the royal catacomb (see the comment on ch. xii. 21).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*The godliness of parents does not secure the perseverance of their children in well-doing, but increases the children's guilt if they take to evil courses.* Ahaz, the worst of all the kings of Judah, is the son of one of whom it is said that "he did right in the sight of the Lord" (ch. xv. 34). Manasseh, perhaps the next worst, is the child of the one king for whom the sacred writers have no word of blame. Wicked Abimelech is the son of the pious Gideon (Judg. ix. 1). We naturally expect the contrary of this to happen. We suppose that education does everything, and we look to see the children of godly parents grow up godly, and are apt, without any inquiry into the circumstances, to suppose that every ill-conducted young man must have been badly brought up. The dictum of the wise man, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. xxii. 6), may be quoted in justification of such views, and is often so quoted, as if it were a rule without any exception. But no proverb is of this character. All are *general* rules, which admit of exceptions; and the exceptional character of this particular proverb is continually allowed in the Scriptures (Prov. xvii. 21, 25; xix. 13; Ezek. xviii. 10, etc.). The points to be urged practically are—

I. THAT PARENTS SHOULD MAKE EVERY POSSIBLE EFFORT, JUST AS IF THEIR CHILDREN'S CHARACTERS DEPENDED ENTIRELY UPON THEM. "Instruction," education, training, though sometimes of no avail, have, in the majority of cases, very great weight. Even when they seem to have failed, it often happens that their results remain deep buried in the soul, and in the end show themselves, and are of sufficient force to snatch many a brand from the burning. The parent must not despair because he does not see much fruit of his labours at once. He has to do his best, to "liberate his own soul," to see that, if his child be lost, it is not owing to his neglect. He has to "hope against hope," to persevere with his efforts, to be unwearied in his prayers, to do the utmost that lies in his power to lead his children into the right path. A parent ought never to despair. While there is life there is hope. The way of repentance is open to all; and, historically, there have been repentances from such a depth of depravity that no case should seem quite hopeless. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. v. 20). The mercy of God is unsearchable, unfathomable. There is no saying what sinner may not turn from his sin, put away the iniquity of his doings, and become a true servant of the Most High.

II. THAT PARENTS SHOULD NOT BE OVER-SORROWFUL, OR DEPRESSED BEYOND MEASURE, BECAUSE THEIR EFFORTS TO KEEP THEIR CHILDREN IN THE RIGHT PATH HAVE IN SOME CASES FAILED. If, indeed, they have had many children, and their efforts have failed with *all*, they may reasonably suspect some defect in themselves or in their system. But if the results are varied, if a portion of their children have been all that they could wish, while others—despite all that they could do—have preferred to "walk in the way of sinners," and even to "sit in the seat of the scornful," then they have no need to

sorrow overmuch, or to regard themselves as culpable. The influences which go to form each man's character are countless, and with hundreds of them a parent has nothing to do. Again, there is "the personal equation." There do seem to be some who, "*as soon as they are born*, go astray and speak lies." It is among the mysteries of man's existence here on earth that natural dispositions should so greatly vary. No parent of many children but knows, by certain experience, that this is so. One child gives no trouble, and scarcely requires any guidance. Another is wilful, perverse, headstrong, almost devoid of good impulses, and full of inclination to evil. Parents are answerable for neglect, for unwisdom, above all for bad example; but they need not fear, if they earnestly endeavour to do their duty by their children, that in God's just judgment the iniquity of their children will be imputed to them. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, *neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son*" (Ezek. xviii. 20); "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. xviii. 4).

III. THAT CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN RELIGIOUSLY BROUGHT UP, IF THEY TURN TO EVIL COURSES, INCUR A FEARFUL RESPONSIBILITY. "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (2 Pet. ii. 21). If children, notwithstanding a godly training, take to an evil life, what must we suppose that they would have done had they been born, as so many are, amidst adverse influences, and from infancy exposed to contact with indecency, drunkenness, blasphemy? Alas! every blessing abused becomes a curse; and to have a pattern of goodness before our eyes, to have virtue instilled into us, and then to reject it—to choose the evil and refuse the good—is to provoke God's heavy displeasure, and bring down his severe judgments upon us. What excuse can such persons offer for their misconduct? They know that by sin they displease God, grieve their parents, injure themselves, ruin their worldly prospects, imperil their salvation; yet for a little present pleasure they shut their eyes to all future consequences, and rush to their destruction. Their conduct is folly, madness, idiocy; but not the sort of madness which shuts out responsibility. They are answerable for it, and will have to answer at God's judgment-seat. Oh! that they would pause ere it is too late, recognize the folly of their evil courses, and "put away their iniquity"! God is still willing to pardon all whom he suffers to live. Let them "arise, and go to their Father," and say unto him, "We have sinned;" and he will go out to meet them, and receive them, and "there will be joy in the presence of the angels of God over each such sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke xv. 7, 10).

Vers. 5—7.—*God's punishments of a nation's sins are often long delayed, but, when they come, it is not by degrees, but suddenly, violently, and at once.* This subject may best be treated, as the last, under three heads, viz. (1) *the sins of Judah, which had provoked God*; (2) *the long delay in their punishment*; and (3) *the suddenness and overwhelming force with which the punishment came at last.*

I. THE SINS OF JUDAH. Though, on the whole, less guilty than her sister, Ephraim, still Judah had, from the division of the kingdom of Solomon, been more or less unfaithful to Jehovah in several respects. 1. An unauthorized and illegitimate high-place worship, tinged with superstition and perhaps even idolatry, had maintained its place by the side of the authorized Jehovah-cult, throughout the whole period of the divided monarchy, from the accession of Rehoboam to the death of Ahaz (1 Kings xiv. 23; xv. 14; xxii. 43; ch. xii. 3; xiv. 4; xv. 4, 35; xvi. 4). 2. The worship of Baal had been introduced from the sister kingdom by the influence of Athaliah, and had prevailed during the reigns of her husband, Jehoram, her son, Ahaziah, and her own (ch. viii. 18, 27; xi. 18). 3. Luxury and effeminacy had crept in, especially during the prosperous reigns of Uzziah and Jotham, and had led on to debauchery and licentiousness (Isa. i. 4; ii. 6—8; iii. 16—24; v. 11, 12; Joel i. 5; Amos vi. 1—6, etc.). 4. Injustice and oppression had become rife. The rich men sought to "join house to house, and field to field" (Isa. v. 8); they stripped the poor of their small properties by legal chicanery (Isa. iii. 14), oppressed them, and "ground their faces" (Isa. iii. 15). The judges in the courts accepted bribes (Isa. i. 23) and gave wrong judgments (Isa. v. 23). Widows and orphans were the special objects of attack, on account of their weakness and defencelessness (Isa. i. 17, 23; x. 2). 5. The forms of

religion were kept up, but the spirit had evaporated. Men thronged God's courts, brought abundant offerings, made many prayers, kept the new moons and the sabbaths and the appointed feasts, but without any real care for the honour of God or any thought of seeking to serve and obey him. Hence their worship was "an offence;" their ceremonies were mockeries, their oblations "vain," their solemn meetings "iniquity." God was "weary to bear them" (Isa. i. 11—15).

II. THE LONG DELAY IN THEIR PUNISHMENT. More than two centuries had elapsed since Judah began to "do evil in the sight of the Lord, and to provoke him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done" (1 Kings xiv. 22). Above a century had passed since the apostasy of Jehoram and Ahaziah. During all this time Judah had maintained her independence, had received no severe blow, fallen under no crushing affliction. Latterly, she had even prospered. Under Uzziah she had recovered Elath (ch. xiv. 22), conquered a part of Philistia (2 Chron. xxvi. 6), defeated the Arabians and Mehunim (2 Chron. xxvi. 7), and made the Ammonites her tributaries (2 Chron. xxvi. 8); under Jotham she had maintained these conquests, and when Ammon revolted had reduced her to subjection (2 Chron. xxvii. 5) without any difficulty. God, in his long-suffering mercy, bore with his people. He would win them by kindness, draw them to him by cords of love, at any rate give them ample time for repentance. But it was in vain. The longer he left them unpunished, the further they wandered from the right way, and the more they hardened their hearts. The time came when the prophet could only say of them, "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. . . . The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores" (Isa. i. 4—6).

III. THE SUDDENNESS AND OVERWHELMING FORCE WITH WHICH THE PUNISHMENT DESCENDED WHEN IT CAME. Bishop Butler remarks how, in the punishment which God brings upon vicious individuals in this world, there is often a long respite. "After the chief bad consequences, temporal consequences, of their follies have been delayed for a great while; at length they break in irresistibly, like an armed force; repentance is too late to relieve, and can only serve to aggravate their distress; the case is become desperate, and poverty and sickness, remorse and anguish, infamy and death, the effects of their own doings, overwhelm them, beyond possibility of remedy or escape" ('Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed,' pt. i. ch. ii. p. 52). And so it is often with nations; so it was now with the nation of the Jews. As soon as the punishment began, blow was dealt upon blow. First, Rezin "smote them, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus" (2 Chron. xxviii. 5). Then they were delivered into the hand of Pekah, who "smote them with a great slaughter, slaying a hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men" (2 Chron. xxviii. 5, 6). Next, Edom had her fling at the sick lion, and "came and smote Judah, and carried away captives" (2 Chron. xxviii. 17). Then Philistia attacked the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and took a number of them, "and dwelt there" (2 Chron. xxviii. 18). Presently, Pekah and Rezin, joining their forces, advanced together to the siege of Jerusalem. All was lost, except only honour; and then honour was thrown into the gulf; Judah went down on her knees to Assyria, and implored aid, gave tribute, accepted a suzerain, made the inglorious confession, "I am thy servant and thy son" (ch. xvi. 7). Having incurred defeat, disgrace, the loss of military honour, the loss of the flower of her troops, she crowns all by giving up her national independence, inviting a master, and herself placing a foreign yoke upon her own shoulders. But for the wonderful efforts made by Hezekiah when he ascended the throne (ch. xviii. 3—8), Judæa's ruin would have been completed under Ahaz; and the punishment so long delayed, when it came, would have been final, "without escape or remedy."

Vers. 10—17.—*A wicked king allowed to have his way by a weak priest.* The double *régime*, civil and ecclesiastical, which it pleased God to establish in his first Church, the Jewish, and to continue, with certain modifications, in his second Church, the Christian, seems to have been designed for the mutual advantage of both parties.

Authority, in whatever hands it is placed, is always liable to be abused, to over-assert itself, to grow arbitrary, autocratic, tyrannical. Hence the necessity of checks, of a balance of forces, of counterpoise, of an arrangement by which the undue preponderance of any single authority shall be prevented. It is sometimes needful that the civil authority shall interpose to keep the spiritual within due bounds, and disallow the establishment of sacerdotal tyranny. It is quite as often requisite for the spiritualty to assert itself, and check the endeavours of kings and nobles to establish an unlimited autocracy. From time to time the two independent authorities, the civil and ecclesiastical, the *regale* and the *pontificale*, are sure to come into collision. Our own history presents instances in the struggles of Anselm against Rufus, of Becket against Henry II., and of the seven bishops against the last of the Stuart kings. Under such circumstances weakness on either side constitutes a serious peril to the community. A weak king, priest-ridden, makes dangerous concessions to the ecclesiastical order, and imperils the peace and prosperity of his kingdom by so doing. A weak priest, timid and time-serving, allows the rights of his order to be trampled on, and lays up no less an amount of trouble in the future for the nation to which he belongs. If Ahaz had been succeeded by another worldly minded and ambitious king, instead of the pious Hezekiah, there is no saying how low the ecclesiastical authority might not have sunk, or how soon the kingly office might not have freed itself from all checks, and have become absolute, and in a short time tyrannical. Urijah did his best to destroy the constitution of his country, and to turn the Judæan limited monarchy into a pure despotism. He was weak rather than wicked; but his weakness might have had the worst results. It was only the accident of Ahaz being succeeded by a truly religious prince that prevented the precedent, which he had set, from entailing ruinous consequences.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—20.—*Steps in a downward path: the reign of Ahaz.* In the opening chapters of Isaiah we have an account of the condition of the kingdom of Judah at the time that Ahaz succeeded to the throne. The prosperity which the country had enjoyed under Uzziah had been continued and increased under the righteous reign of his son Jotham. And now the grandson, Ahaz, a young man of twenty, finds the country abounding in wealth, full of silver and gold. Isaiah says there was no end of their treasure; their land also was full of horses, neither was there any end of their chariots. Their commerce, too, was in a thriving condition. "The ships of Tarshish, sailing from Elath, could boast their gilded prows and stems, and purple sails, and brought home rich cargoes from the distant East" (Geikie, 'Hours with the Bible: Rehoboam to Hezekiah,' p. 292). But before Ahaz died, all this was changed. Enemy after enemy invaded his country. The land became desolate. The king was reduced to great extremities to obtain money. Instead of the sunshine of prosperity, there was on every side the dark shadow of desolation and decay. We have the explanation of it all in the third and fourth verses. Ahaz began badly, and every fresh movement in his life was a step from bad to worse. His history is a further illustration of how one sin leads to another. It was a continuously downward path.

I. THE FIRST STEP IN THE DOWNWARD CAREER OF AHAZ WAS HIS IDOLATRY. (Vers. 3, 4.) He forsook the worship of the true and living God, and worshipped the gods of the heathen. Even that step he would seem to have taken gradually. At first he began with the high places, which had never been taken away. Then graven images and other heathen customs were used in the worship of God; and finally the idols of the false gods themselves were set up. The policy of compromise had now reached its fitting conclusion. When the right makes compromise with the wrong, the wrong is sure to gain the victory. So it was in this case. The people had got accustomed to the high places. They saw no harm in *them*. And now they see no harm in the idols. Isaiah describes the universal corruption when he says, "Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made." And what a worship it was to substitute for the worship of the only true and living and almighty God! A *useless* worship, as Isaiah indicates, to worship the work of their own hands. It brought them no help in their hour of distress. But it

was worse than useless. It was a *foul and degrading* worship. It is best described in the words of the third verse, "the abominations of the heathen." We can have but a faint conception of the loathsome practices associated with the worship of the pagan deities. The passage before us speaks of one act of worship—by no means the worst, though sufficiently cruel and revolting. This was the worship of Moloch. In the valley of Hinnom, afterwards called Gehenna or Tophet, an image of Moloch was erected. Dr. Thomson, in 'The Land and the Book,' refers to the passage in Jeremiah (xix.) where the valley of Hinnom is spoken of, and thinks, because it is said there that the image of Baal was there, that Moloch and Baal were one and the same. At any rate, part of the worship of Moloch consisted in making children pass through the fire before his image, or in actually burning them in it. The cries of the children were drowned by the sound of musical instruments and the shouts of the frenzied worshippers. It is to this that Milton refers when he says—

> "First, Moloch, horrid king, besmear'd with blood
> Of human sacrifice, and parents' tears;
> Though for the noise of drums and timbrels loud
> Their children's cries unheard, that passed through fire
> To his grim idol."

Such was the worship which Ahaz, in his infatuation and desire to be like the nations round about him, substituted for the spiritual, elevating worship of the great Father of us all. After all, was he much worse than many in modern times who profess to be so enlightened that they regard the Christian religion as a superstition? And what do they give us in place of it? A worship of dead matter, of blind force; of a mere supposition of their own minds. If Christianity be a superstition, what are some of the fancies of our philosophers? Before we give up our Christian religion, *let us know what we are to have in place of it.* Let us compare the results of Christianity with the results of any rival system, and how immeasurably superior to them all it stands, in the purity of its teaching, in the power it exercises to elevate and ennoble human life, and in the blessings it has brought to the nations! How it alone lights up the darkness of the grave, and breathes into the bereaved heart the inspiration and comfort of the heavenly hope! This was the first downward step in the career of Ahaz—*forsaking the worship of God.* So many a man has begun the downward path. The empty seat in the house of God indicates often the beginning of a useless and wasted life. Or if he comes to the house of God, he worships God in form only. His thoughts are far away. Self and the world, money and pleasure,—how often are these the idols men worship with the thoughts of their hearts and with all the efforts of their lives!

II. THE NEXT STEP IN THE DOWNWARD PATH OF AHAZ WAS THE ALLIANCE HE ENTERED INTO. (Vers. 5—7.) The Syrians made war on him along with the King of Israel. Ahaz, in his difficulty, sought the help of the King of Assyria. How humiliating is his entreaty! "I am thy servant and thy son," was the message he sent: "come up and save me out of the hand of the King of Syria, and out of the hand of the King of Israel, which rise up against me." There was nothing wrong in itself in seeking the help of friendly kings. On this occasion, however, God absolutely warned Ahaz against seeking their help. But, to begin with, *there was something wanting.* Ahaz did not seek God's guidance in the matter. He did not seek God's help. He who had rejected the service of the living God, makes himself the cringing slave of the King of Assyria, and humbles himself to a heathen for help. What a mistake when a nation trusts to its resources or its strong alliances, and forgets to look to that Divine power from whom all blessings flow! There may be nothing wrong in all our efforts to improve our worldly position, but there may be *something wanting.* There may be nothing wrong in your life, but there may be *something wanting.* You may be anxious to be useful in the world; but are you setting about it in the right way? One thing is needful, one thing is essential to all true happiness, to all true usefulness. That is the presence and help of God. Is the Lord Jesus dwelling in your heart? Whatever else may disappoint you, he will never fail.

> "When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
> Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me!"

III. THE NEXT DOWNWARD STEP WHICH AHAZ TOOK WAS HIS PLUNDERING THE HOUSE OF GOD. (Vers. 8, 9, 17, 18.) Ahaz paid dear for his alliance with the King of Assyria. He had already disobeyed and dishonoured God by his idolatry. He had already dishonoured God by refusing to heed the warnings which Isaiah gave him. But now he commits a still more flagrant act of defiance and desecration. In order to reward the Assyrian king for his help, and to retain his friendship, he actually takes the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and sends it for a present to the King of Assyria. *The world's friendships are often dearly bought.* We pay for them, in peace of mind, in peace of conscience, in loss of money, in loss of time, a greater price than they are worth. Sooner or later the crisis must come in every man's life when he must choose between the friendship of God and the friendship of the world. What choice are *you* making? What choice would you make if you were put to the test now? Perhaps you are being put to the test in your daily life. Perhaps you are being tempted, for the sake of worldly friendship, for the sake of your business, for the sake of popularity, to sacrifice some principle, to trample on some command of God, to neglect some plain duty which conscience and the Word of God alike point out. Business! The great business of your life, of every man's life, is to fear God and keep his commandments. "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him for ever." *Oh what a fearful thing it is to take from God that which rightfully belongs to him!* It is a crime against law, against morality, to take from our fellow-creatures, without their permission, that which belongs to them. But how much more guilty is he who would take from God that which is his! We condemn Ahaz for his impiety and sacrilege in taking from the temple those things which had been consecrated to God. *But let us look into our own hearts and lives.* Are we giving God that which is his due? Are we keeping back nothing from him? Has he no greater claim on our daily thoughts than a hurried prayer at morning or evening, or none at all? Has he no greater claim on our money than the few shillings, or, it may be, few pounds we give to him every year? Let us measure our service of God much less by what others do and give, and much more by our own responsibilities, by our own overflowing cup of mercies, by the relation of our own soul to God.

IV. THE NEXT DOWNWARD STEP OF AHAZ WAS TO SET UP A HEATHEN ALTAR IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD. (Vers. 10—17.) Ahaz had gone to Damascus to meet the King of Assyria. While there he saw an altar used in the worship of the heathen gods. Its workmanship may perhaps have pleased him. He sent to Urijah the priest a description, perhaps a drawing of it, and Urijah, influenced more by the fear of the king than by the fear of God, caused a similar altar to be erected in the temple at Jerusalem. When Ahaz returned, he substituted this altar for the altar of the Lord, although God himself had given the pattern of that altar to Moses and to David. *But all the idols and sacrifices of Ahaz did not benefit him much.* He thought the gods of the heathen would help him; but, says the writer in 2 Chronicles, "They were the ruin of him and of Israel." So in everyday experience many a man finds, when he forsakes the gospel of Christ, and turns his back upon the Law of God, to follow worldly gain or pleasure, or society, or dissipation, that these things are the ruin of him. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—20.—*A people's king and priest; or, kinghood and priesthood.* "In the seventeenth year of Pekah," etc. Throughout all lands, almost throughout all times, *two functionaries* have been at the head of the peoples, too often treading them down by oppression, and fattening on them by their greed. One of these functionaries was not, among the Jews, of Divine ordination; for the Almighty is represented as saying, "They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not." Let us notice each functionary as presented in this chapter—the king and the priest—the one named *Ahaz*, the other *Urijah*.

I. THE KINGHOOD. It is said, "In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah Ahaz the son of Jotham King of Judah began to reign. Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God, like David his father." Here we learn that Ahaz, who was the son of Jotham, began to reign over Judah in his twentieth year, and that his reign continued for sixteen years. Elsewhere we are told that

Hezekiah, his son, succeeded him at the age of twenty-five (see ch. xviii. 17). According to this he became a father when he was only eleven years of age. This is not, necessarily, a mistake of the historian, since among the Jews in Tiberias there are mothers of eleven years of age and fathers of thirteen. And in Abyssinia boys of ten years and twelve years enter into the marriage relationship (see Keil). The account given of Ahaz in this chapter furnishes us with an illustration of several enormous evils. 1. *The dehumanizing force of false religion.* Ahaz was an idolater. "He walked in the way of the kings of Israel," we are told. Instead of worshipping the one true and living God, he bowed down before the idols of the heathen. This false religion of his made him so *inhuman* that he "made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel; and he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree." Moloch was this idol-god of fire, and the rabbins tell us "that it was made of brass, and placed on a brazen throne, and that the head was that of a calf, with a crown upon it. The throne and image were made hollow, and a furious fire was kindled within it. The flames penetrated into the body and limbs of the idol, and, when the arms were red hot, the victim was thrown into them, and was almost immediately burnt to death." The revolting cruelty of Moloch-worship is thus described by Milton—

> "In Argob and in Basan, to the stream
> Of utmost Arnon. Nor content with such
> Audacious neighbourhood, the wisest heart
> Of Solomon he led by fraud to build
> His temple right against the temple of God
> On that opprobrious hill; and made his grove
> The pleasant valley of Hinnom, Tophet thence
> And black Gehenna call'd, the type of hell."

Thus the idolatrous religion of this Ahaz dehumanized him, by destroying within him all parental affection and transforming him into a fiend. This is true, more or less, of all false religions. Idolatry is not the only religion that makes men cruel. A corrupt Judaism and a corrupt Christianity generate in their votaries the same dehumanizing results. False religion kindled in Paul the savage ferocity of a wild beast. "He breathed out slaughter." Ecclesiastical history abounds with illustrations. 2. *The national curse of a corrupt kinghood.* Then "Rezin King of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah King of Israel came up to Jerusalem to war: and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him. At that time Rezin King of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drave the Jews from Elath: and the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there unto this day." These two kings, Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel, had their eyes upon this Ahaz, saw, perhaps, how his wickedness had injured his people, had taken away their heart and exhausted their resources, until they felt that this was the time for striking at Jerusalem, taking possession of the metropolis, and subjugating the country. And they made the attempt. Although they could not "overcome" Ahaz, and failed to strike him down personally, yet they "recovered Elath to Syria [or, 'Edom'], and drave the Jews from Elath." So it has ever been; corrupt kings expose their country to danger, they invite the invader and make way for him.

> "Proudly up the regal heights they sit in pampered power,
> While fires smoulder underground that strengthen every hour."

3. *The mischievous issues of a temporary expediency.* Ahaz, in order to extricate himself from the difficulties and trials which Rezin and Pekah had brought on his country, applies to the King of Assyria. "So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser King of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the King of Syria, and out of the hand of the King of Israel, which rise up against me. And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the King of Assyria. And the King of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the King of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin." What else could he do? To whom could he have looked for help in his emergency? The *right* thing to have done would have been the utter renuncia-

tion of his idolatry, submission to the Divine will, and invocation of the Almighty's help; but he followed what appeared to him the expedient, not the right, and hence two evils ensued. (1) *He degraded himself.* He sold himself as a slave to the king whose help he invoked. "I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the King of Syria." What more dishonourable thing can a man do than to renounce his independence and become the slave of another? He loses his self-respect, which is the very essence of true manhood. (2) *He impoverished his people.* "And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the King of Assyria." This silver and gold belonged to the nation. It was public property. What right had he to dispose of a fraction? No right whatever. Alas! it is not uncommon for kings to rob their people, consume what they have never produced, live on the property of others, and thus impoverish their subjects! What happened with Ahaz must happen with all, in the long-run, who pursue the expedient rather than the right. The right alone is truly expedient.

II. THE PRIESTHOOD. Urijah is the priest. There seems to have been more priests than one of this name, and little is known of this Urijah more than what is recorded in the present chapter. He was the priest, who at this time presided in the temple of Jerusalem. He seems to have been influential in the state, and, although a professed monotheist, was in far too close connection with Ahaz the idolatrous king. Two things are worthy of note concerning him, which too frequently characterize wicked priests in all times. 1. *An obsequious obedience to the royal will.* The Assyrian king, having taken Damascus, is visited by Ahaz in the city, the object of his visit being, no doubt, to congratulate him on his triumphs. While at Damascus, Ahaz is struck with the beauty of an altar. He seems to have been so charmed with it that he commands Urijah, the priest, to make one exactly like it. "And King Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof." Knowing the king's wishes, with shameful obsequiousness he sets to the work. "And Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus: so Urijah the priest made it against King Ahaz came from Damascus. And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon." This obsequious priest not only did this, but, without one word of protest or reproof, he witnessed the sacrifices of the king at the altar, and allowed the position of the brazen altar in the temple to be altered; further, he actually engaged, according to the king's command, in the services. "And King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, Upon the great altar burn the morning burnt offering, and the evening meat offering, and the king's burnt sacrifice, and his meat offering, with the burnt offerings of all the people of the land, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice; and the brazen altar shall be for me to inquire by. Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that King Ahaz commanded." Thus wicked priests have too often acted. 2. *An obsequious silence to the royal profanation.* See what the king did, no doubt in the presence of the priest. "And King Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brazen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones. And the covert for the sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the Lord for the King of Assyria." This fawning, sacerdotal traitor not only "did according to all King Ahaz commanded," but he stood by silently and witnessed without a word of protest this spoliation of the holy temple. Had he acted according to his profession as a minister of the most high God, he would have risen up in all the sternness of honesty and manhood against the first intimation of Ahaz concerning the construction of an unauthorized altar. He would have said, "We have a divinely sanctioned altar already; we do not need another." And when the command came to him to make such an altar, he would have felt it an insult to his conscience, an outrage on his loyalty to Heaven, and have broken into thunders of reproof. When he saw the king's hand employed in disturbing and altering the furniture of the temple, he would have resisted him, as Azariah resisted Uzziah when he wished to offer incense. But instead of this, he, like some of his class in almost every age, seems to have been

transported with the honour of seeing the royal presence, hearing the royal voice, and doing the royal bidding. A true priest should, by inflexible loyalty to Heaven, mould kings to be lords paramount in all mundane affairs, and in none other; and should lead them to be very kings of men, governing, not by craft and force, fraud and violence, but by royal thoughts, actions, and aims.—D. T.

Vers. 1—4.—*The wickedness of Ahaz.* The history has passed rapidly over the later kings of Israel. That kingdom was lost beyond recovery. "The victim having once got his stroke-of-grace, the catastrophe can be considered as almost come. There is small interest now in watching his long low moans; notable only are his sharper agonies, what convulsive struggles he may make to cast the torture off from him; and then, finally, the last departure of life itself" (Carlyle). In Judah the crisis too is approaching, but it is not yet reached. Prophets and good kings are yet to do their utmost for the nation. But a reign like that of Ahaz is a sensible step in the advance to the catastrophe.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE KING. Though the son of the vigorous Jotham, and already twenty or twenty-five years old when he ascended the throne, Ahaz proved one of the weakest and most incapable of rulers. One sees in him the reflection of the luxurious and effeminate age described by Isaiah (iii. 12—26). Feeble, petulant, arbitrary, in his ways of acting; without strength of mind or strength of will; busying interests of his kingdom were at stake; craven in war; above all, full of religiosity and himself in *dilettante* fashion with novelties, with altars and sun-dials, while the greatest superstition without the faintest spark of true religion—"this is that King Ahaz" (2 Chron. xxviii. 22). Possibly his father Jotham was too much occupied with state and public affairs to give the necessary attention to his son's education—a fatal mistake not unfrequently committed by parents.

II. HIS ABOUNDING IDOLATRIES. Ahaz displays great zeal of his own kind in religion, but it is zeal of the most perverse and suicidal description. We observe: 1. *His imitation of the kings of Israel.* He took for his pattern, not his ancestor David, the type of the true theocratic king, but the wicked kings of the northern kingdom, whose idolatries were bringing their own realm to ruin. He made, like them, molten images to Baal, and sacrificed to them (2 Chron. xxviii. 2). Wicked men seem absolutely impervious to warning. The northern kingdom was an object-lesson, to those who had eyes to see, of the folly and fatal effects of this very course on which Ahaz was now entering. Yet he would not be deterred. 2. *His reversion to Canaanitish practices.* Not content with importing the licentious Baal-worship patronized in Israel, Ahaz revived the worst abominations of the old Canaanitish religions. He even went so far as to sacrifice his own son to Moloch in the valley of Hinnom—a deed indicating a degree of fanaticism, a blunting of the moral sense, and a depth of superstition which could hardly have been believed possible in a King of Judah. It was, moreover, a daring defiance of the direct letter of God's Law (Deut. xii. 31). Well might such a deed bring down wrath on Judah! 3. *His extravagance in worship.* It is further narrated that Ahaz sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. Worship in this reign seemed to have run riot; yet there was no true religion in it. All this depraved religiosity was but a manifestation of self-will, of subjective caprice; it had its origin in superstition and an impure craving for excitement, not in the fear of God. Yet Ahaz, in his *dilettante* way of looking at things, may have thought that he was introducing improvements into Jewish religion. He may have flattered himself that he was robbing it of its narrowness, and giving it the philosophic breadth suitable to persons of taste and culture. He might argue that there was something good in all religions; that all were but diverse expressions, equally acceptable to God, of the fundamental instinct of worship; and that none, therefore, ought to be despised. We hear such arguments nowadays, and they may very well have been used then. Ahaz was but going in for a species of Jewish Broad-Churchism. But the Bible brands this so-called breadth of view as treason against the God who has definitely revealed his will to men, and taught them how they are, and how they are not, to worship him. The true lessons to be learned from this conduct of Ahaz is that religiosity—delight in sensuous and impure religious services—is far different from religion; that altars may be multiplied,

yet multiplied only to sin (Hos. viii. 11); that the religious instinct, itself the noblest part of man, is capable of the most perverted developments; that only worship according to his own commandment is acceptable to God.

III. NOT ALONE IN SINNING. The lengths to which Ahaz could go, apparently without awakening any public opposition, show that the heart of the nation also had widely departed from God. This is borne out by the descriptions in Isaiah (cf. ii. 6—8; iii. 16—26; v. 8—25). The king's innovations were acceptable to a people wearied of the severer worship of Jehovah. They were glad to have the services adapted to their corrupt and dissolute tastes. "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. viii. 7).—J. O.

Vers. 5—9.—*The Syro-Israelitish war.* Again was the truth to be verified that national sins bring in their train national calamities. God is not mocked. He vindicates the reality of his moral government by visiting the transgressor with manifest strokes of his displeasure. In addition to the invasion of Pekah and Rezin spoken of below, we read of assaults of the Edomites and of the Philistines, by which Judah was brought very low (2 Chron. xxviii. 17—19). The kingdom also was brought into a state of servitude to Assyria.

I. THE ATTACK OF PEKAH AND REZIN. 1. *The Syro-Israelite conspiracy.* Israel and Syria had been hereditary enemies. Now they make common cause, on the one side against Assyria, and on the other against Judah. Their object in invading Judah was probably not the simple one of plunder, but the political one of still further strengthening themselves against the King of Assyria. Pekah was a mere military adventurer, and would be restrained from attacking Judah by no scruples of brotherhood. He and Rezin had begun their attacks while Jotham was still alive, but now that Ahaz was on the throne, their plans took bolder shape. They conceived the project of removing Ahaz, and putting a certain "son of Tabeal" in his place (Isa. vii. 6). The news of their expedition terrified Ahaz and his people. Instead of putting their trust in God, their hearts were moved "as the trees of the wood are moved by the wind" (Isa. vii. 2). They had cause to fear, for they showed no desire to forsake their sins, and when a people forsake God, they have no reason to hope that God will protect them. 2. *The assault on Jerusalem, and its discomfiture.* The earlier part of the joint expedition was crowned with great success. We read in Chronicles of terrible battles that were fought, and severe defeats that were sustained by the army of Judah. Large numbers of captives, with their spoil, were taken to Samaria, and were only restored by the intercession of the Prophet Oded (2 Chron. xxviii. 6—13). God permitted Judah to be thus far humbled. But when, elated with victory, the conquerors pressed on, and invested Jerusalem, he interposed to prevent their further progress. Not for the sake of Ahaz, but for his own Name's sake, he saved Jerusalem, and hindered the invaders from accomplishing their purpose of overthrowing the house of David. Isaiah had predicted this deliverance (vii. 7), and, but for the unbelief of Ahaz, and his sinful recourse to the King of Assyria, it is unlikely that the adversaries would have been permitted to go so far even as they did. Wicked men often receive mercies of which they are wholly undeserving. God spares them, not because they have any claim upon his favour, but for the sake of some oath or promise of his own, or from regard to the righteous who remain, or in order to give the sinners yet another opportunity of repentance. Because God had sworn to David that his seed should sit upon the throne (2 Sam. vii.), he did not allow even the wicked Ahaz to be removed. In the case of Pekah and Rezin, we see how entirely human movements are under the Divine control. It appeared as if these bold men would sweep all before them, but God had said, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further" (Job xxxviii. 11), and there their proud waves were stayed. 3. *The loss of Elath.* The war was not wholly without gain to the Syrians. They possessed themselves of the port of Elath, at the head of the Red Sea, and thus stripped Judah of another important dependency.

II. THE APPEAL TO ASSYRIA. In the distress to which the repeated attacks on his territory reduced him, Ahaz, instead of casting himself on Divine protection, foolishly betook himself to the King of Assyria. 1. *Short-sighted policy.* Israel had set the example of resort to the Assyrian, but the prophets had always denounced such insensate conduct (Hos. v. 13; viii. 9, 10; x. 6). Even from the point of view of

worldly policy, the action was foolish. As well might the lamb invoke the help of the lion against the wolf, as any lesser power invoke the help of the King of Assyria against an enemy. The conqueror, pleased with any pretext for interfering in another nation's affairs, would not refuse his help, but only that the weaker power which had solicited the help might in the end be despoiled and devoured. Thus Ahaz found it. The King of Assyria was glad enough of the occasion to march against Israel and Damascus, but when once the conquest was effected, Ahaz found that he had derived no benefit, but only exchanged one oppressor for another. 2. *Expensive help.* To purchase the aid of Tiglath-pileser, Ahaz had (1) to become a vassal of the King of Assyria; and (2) to send him a large present of gold and silver. This he could only obtain by emptying once more the often-ransacked treasuries of the temple and the palace. The accumulations of years of prosperity under Uzziah and Jotham were again dispersed, and the freedom of the country was sold to boot. God's people passed formally under the yoke of a Gentile conqueror. To such straits was the kingdom brought by Ahaz's godless policy. 3. *The Assyrian a broken reed.* The King of Assyria marched against Pekah and Rezin, and soon reduced them to his power. Damascus was severely dealt with. Its king was slain, and the people carried captive. Pekah was also chastised; his territory was ravaged, and considerable parts of the population were removed (ch. xv. 29). The instruments employed in punishing Ahaz were thus themselves punished. The fact that men are used as instruments in God's providence does not exonerate them from guilt. Ahaz, however, as we learn from the parallel narrative, reaped no benefit, for "Tiglath-pileser King of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not" (2 Chron. xxviii. 20). It was his own ends, not those of his foolish vassal, that the King of Assyria was serving. Ahaz leaned on a bruised reed, and only got his hand pierced. Thus it usually is with those who put their trust in the help of man. They reap from their assiduous sowing but the gall and wormwood of chagrin and disappointment.—J. O.

Vers. 10—20.—*Religious innovations.* The remaining events of the reign of Ahaz recorded in this chapter shed a strong light on the king's frivolous and arbitrary character.

I. THE DAMASCUS ALTAR. 1. *Ahaz at Damascus.* We are now introduced to Tiglath-pileser holding court in Damascus, and Ahaz is there as one of the vassals and tributaries of the Assyrian king. He does not seem to feel the humiliation of his position, but is probably pleased to figure as part of so brilliant an assemblage. Thus the sinner, renouncing true freedom in God's service, for a time positively hugs the chains which sin binds upon him. He counts them no dishonour, but delights to wear them. Yet in the end they shall eat into his very flesh. 2. *The new altar.* So lightly does his vassalage sit on Ahaz, that his mind is free to lose itself in admiration of the pattern and workmanship of an altar he chanced to behold in that city. It was, no doubt, an altar to some heathen deity, but that did not matter. He was charmed with its appearance, and nothing would serve him but to have the like of it set up in Jerusalem. What a measure of this man's soul—frittering away his interest upon the shape and decorations of an altar, while his kingdom is sold into servitude; toying with trifles, while doing obeisance to a conqueror! Yet is the conduct of Ahaz any more strange than that of multitudes whose sole concern is for the vanities of time, while the realities of eternity stand unheeded? When men who are at variance with God, and bondslaves of sin, are found eagerly amusing themselves with worldly trifles, what are they doing but repeating the error of this frivolous monarch? There is the same lack of the sense of proportion in things; the same sacrifice of substance to shadow; the same indifference to supreme interests. 3. *The pliant priest.* Having obtained a pattern of the coveted altar—its fashion and workmanship—Ahaz sent the same to Urijah the priest, to get a similar one made for the temple at Jerusalem. This priest was of a different mould from that Azariah, who, with four score other priests, resisted King Uzziah in his presumptuous attempt to usurp sacerdotal functions (2 Chron. xxvi. 17, 18). Urijah was a courtier first, and a priest of the Lord afterwards, and he at once set about executing the orders he had received from the king. Facile priests of Urijah's stamp have not been rare in history. The tendency of high dignitaries in many countries to follow court fashion, and put a king's pleasure in room of every higher law,

is notorious. Ecclesiastics cannot plead exemption, though in them the sin is greatest. When even ministers of the Lord cease to testify against evil, and willingly yield themselves as tools to the working out of a wicked king's purposes, religion is in bad case. But here most probably the proverb held true, "Like people, like priest" (Hos. iv. 9)—the general decay of religion reacted on the sacerdotal orders.

II. REVISED ORDINANCES. Like a child with a new toy, Ahaz, on his return home, pleased himself to the top of his bent with his new altar. 1. *He offered his own sacrifices upon it.* The event was made the occasion of a great display. Ahaz is thought by some to have mounted the altar, and himself performed the sacrifices; none of the priests, apparently, daring to remonstrate with him. He offered his burnt offering and his meat offering, and poured out his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings upon the altar. An artistic altar, however, does not make acceptable sacrifices. This pompous ritual was but an empty form, ministering, not to God's glory, but to a king's vanity. The motive was wrong; the method was unauthorized; the multitude of sacrifices but added to the magnitude of the hypocrisy. It is such ritual observances the prophet denounces: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord; I am full of the burnt offerings of rams," etc. (Isa. i. 11). The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord. The only acceptable worship is that which comes from the heart. 2. *He changed the position of the altar.* The altar which Solomon made for burnt offering—the brazen altar—was not good enough for King Ahaz. It must be shifted aside, and his brand-new altar take its place. This was to arrogate a right of altering the arrangements of the temple which no king had yet assumed. Ahaz was governed by a love of novelty, and perhaps by a desire to introduce the artistic into worship. Art has its legitimate place in the worship of God, but it is not to be the governing consideration. When a service degenerates into a mere artistic performance, intended to gratify the tastes of those who have no relish for spiritual worship, it is hateful in God's sight. The perfection of the art may conceal the utter absence of life. Most of all when central doctrines are removed—such doctrines as the atonement—to give place to rites and ceremonies which appeal to the carnal sense, is God mocked by the pretence of worship. 3. *He improvised new sacrificial arrangements.* The interference of Ahaz with the temple order did not yet cease. He altered the whole sacrificial usage, transferring the regular and occasional sacrifices to his new altar—now termed by him "the great altar"—and relegating the brazen altar, which still stood in the court, to a secondary condition. This usurpation by the king of the right to dictate the order of the temple services was tamely submitted to by Urijah, who did faithfully all that he was told. One is reminded of Wolsey's words, "Had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my king," etc. Happy for the nation had Urijah been as faithful in serving God as he was in carrying out the behests of Ahaz.

III. MINOR CHANGES. The history tells of other alterations effected by Ahaz in the temple. He cut off the borders of the bases of the lavers, and took down the sea from off the bronze oxen on which it had rested, substituting for the latter a pedestal of stone; he changed also the position of some other erections in the sacred courts. These changes are said to have been wrought "before," or for fear of, "the King of Assyria"—perhaps to hide any evidences of wealth. Other novelties introduced by Ahaz, such as "the altars which were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz" (ch. xxiii. 12), had for their motive *imitation* of Assyrian or Damascene idolatries. What a contemptible picture of the king is thus presented! On the one hand, cringing before the King of Assyria, and dismantling the temple to avoid exciting his cupidity; on the other, slavishly imitating the religion of the foreigners—if indeed this also was not an attempt to court Assyrian favour. How total the loss of self-respect and of the spirit of independence! Other instances of the folly and sin of Ahaz are given in Chronicles; *e.g.*, his worship of the gods of Damascus for the reason, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me" (2 Chron. xxviii. 23). One does not wonder after this to hear that Ahaz "shut up the doors of the house of the Lord," while he "made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem" (2 Chron. xxviii. 24). At length his sixteen years' reign ended, and the people, by this time sick of his doings, marked their sense of his unworthiness by refusing him a sepulchre in the tombs of the kings (2 Chron. xxviii. 27).—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVII.

Vers. 1—41.—THE REIGN OF HOSHEA OVER ISRAEL. DESTRUCTION OF THE ISRAELITE KINGDOM, AND THE GROUNDS OF IT. REPEOPLING OF THE KINGDOM BY ASSYRIAN COLONISTS.

Vers. 1—6.—REIGN OF HOSHEA. Hoshea, the last King of Israel, had a short reign of nine years only, during two of which he was besieged in his capital by the Assyrians. The writer notes that he was a bad king, but not so bad as most of his predecessors (ver. 2); that he submitted to Shalmaneser, and then rebelled against him (vers. 3, 4); that he called in the aid of So, King of Egypt (ver. 4); that he was besieged by Shalmaneser in Samaria (ver. 5); and that after three years, or in the third year of the siege, he was taken, and with his people carried off into captivity (ver. 6).

Ver. 1.—**In the twelfth year of Ahaz King of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria.** In ch. xv. 30 Hoshea was said to have smitten Pekah and slain him, and become king in his stead, "*in the twentieth year of Jotham.*" This has been supposed to mean "in the twentieth year from the accession of Jotham," or, in other words, in the fourth year of Ahaz, since Jotham reigned only sixteen years (ch. xv. 33). But now the beginning of his reign is placed eight years later. An interregnum of this duration has been placed by some between Pekah and Hoshea; but this is contradicted by ch. xv. 30, and also by an inscription of Tiglath-pileser ('Eponym Canon,' pp. 123, 124, lines 17, 18). If Ahaz reigned sixteen years, the present statement would seem to be correct, and the former one wrong. Hoshea's accession may be confidently dated as in B.C. 730. **Nine years** (comp. ch. xviii. 10). It is certain that Hoshea's reign came to an end in the first year of Sargon, B.C. 722, from which to B.C. 730 would be eight complete, or nine incomplete, years.

Ver. 2.—**And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him.** Hoshea's general attitude towards Jehovah was much the same as that of former kings of Israel. He maintained the calf-worship, leant upon "arms of flesh," and turned a deaf ear to the teaching of the prophets, *e.g.* Hoshea and Micah, who addressed their warnings to him. But he was not guilty of any special wickedness—**he set up no** new idolatry; he seems to have allowed his subjects, if they pleased, to attend the festival worship at Jerusalem (2 Chron. xxx. 11, 18). The rabbis add that when the golden calf of Bethel had been carried off by the Assyrians in one of their incursions, he did not replace it ('Seder Olam,' ch. xxii.); but it is not at all clear that the image was carried away until Hoshea's reign was over (see Dr. Pusey's comment on Hos. x. 6 in his 'Minor Prophets,' p. 64).

Ver. 3.—**Against him came up Shalmaneser King of Assyria.** Shalmaneser's succession to Tiglath-pileser on the throne of Assyria, once doubted, is now rendered certain by the Eponym Canon, which makes him ascend the throne in B.C. 727, and cease to reign in B.C. 722. It is uncertain whether he was Tiglath-pileser's son or a usurper. The name, Shalmaneser (*Sali-manu-uzur*) was an old royal name in Assyria, and signified "Shalman protects" (compare the names Nabu-kudur-uzur, Nergal-asar-uzur, Nabu-pal-uzur, etc.). **And Hoshea became his servant.** Hoshea had been placed on the throne by Tiglath-pileser ('Eponym Canon,' pp. 123, 124, lines 17, 18), and had paid him tribute (ibid., lines 18, 19). We must suppose that on Tiglath-pileser's death, in B.C. 727, he had revolted, and resumed his independence. Shalmaneser, having become king, probably came up against Hoshea in the same year, and forced him to resume his position of Assyrian tributary. This may have been the time when "Shalman spoiled Beth-Arbel in the day of battle" (Hos. x. 14), defeating Hoshea near that place (Arbela, now *Irbid*, in Galilee), and taking it. **And gave him presents;** or, *rendered him tribute*, as in the margin of the Authorized Version.

Ver. 4.—**And the King of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So, King of Egypt.** We learn from the Prophet Hosea that the expediency of calling in Egypt as a counterpoise to Assyria had long been in the thoughts of those who directed the policy of the Israelite state (see Hos. vii. 11; xii. 1, etc.). Now at last the plunge was taken. An Ethiopian dynasty of some strength and vigour had possession of Egypt, and held its court during some part of the year at Memphis (Hos. ix. 6). The king who occupied the throne was called Shabak or Shebek—a name which the Greeks represented by Sabakos or Sevechus, and the Hebrews by סוא. (The original vocalization of this word was probably סְוֵא, *Seveh;* but in later times this vocalization was lost, and

the Masorites pointed the word as סוֹא, *Soh* or *So*). The Assyrians knew the king as Sibakhi, and contended with him under Sargon. Hoshea now sent an embassy to this monarch's court, requesting his alliance and his support against the great Asiatic power by which the existence of all the petty states of Western Asia was threatened. Shalmaneser was at the time endeavouring to capture Tyre, and Hoshea might reasonably fear that, when Tyre was taken, his own turn would come. It is not clear how Shabak received Hoshea's overtures; but we may, perhaps, assume that it was with favour, since otherwise Hoshea would scarcely have ventured to withhold his tribute, as he seems to have done. It must have been in reliance on "the strength of Egypt" that he ventured to brave the anger of Assyria. **And brought no present**—or, *sent no tribute*—**to the King of Assyria, as he had done year by year: therefore the King of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison.** The ultimate result is mentioned at once, before the steps by which it was accomplished are related. Shalmaneser did not "summon Hoshea before his presence to listen to his explanations," and then, "as soon as he came, take him prisoner, put him in chains, and imprison him" (as Ewald thinks), but simply declared war, invaded Hoshea's country, besieged him in his capital, and ultimately, when he surrendered, consigned him to a prison, as Nebuchadnezzar afterwards did Jehoiachin (ch. xxiv. 15; xxv. 27). Otherwise Hoshea's reign would have come to an end in his sixth or seventh, and not in his ninth year.

Ver. 5.—**Then the King of Assyria**—rather, *and the King of Assyria*—**came up throughout all the land**—*i.e.* with an army that spread itself at once over the whole land, that came to conquer, not merely to strike a blow, and obtain submission, as on the former occasion (see ver. 3, and the comment)—**and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years.** From some time in Hoshea's seventh year (ch. xviii. 9) to some time in his ninth (ch. xviii. 10). According to the Hebrew mode of reckoning, parts of years are counted as years; and thus the siege need not have lasted much over a year, though it may have been extended to nearly three years. In either case, there was ample time for Shabak to have brought up his forces, had he been so minded; and his failure to do so, or in any way to succour his ally, showed how little reliance was to be placed on Egyptian promises (comp. ch. xviii. 21).

Ver. 6.—**In the ninth year of Hoshea the King of Assyria took Samaria.** In B.C. 722, the ninth year of Hoshea, there seems to have been a revolution at Nineveh. The reign of Shalmaneser came to an end, and Sargon seated himself upon the throne. There have been commentators on Kings (Keil, Bähr) who have supposed that Shalmaneser and Sargon were the same person, and have even claimed that the Assyrian inscriptions support their view. But the fact is otherwise. Nothing is more certain than that, according to them, Sargon succeeded Shalmaneser IV. in B.C. 722 by a revolution, and was the head of a new dynasty. He claims in his annals, among his earliest acts, the siege and capture of Samaria ('Eponym Canon,' p. 125). It is remarkable that Scripture, while in no way connecting him with the capture, never distinctly assigns it to Shalmaneser. Here we are only told that "the King of Assyria" took it. In ch. xviii. 9, 10, where we are distinctly told that Shalmaneser "came up against Samaria, and besieged it," the capture is expressed by the phrase, "*they* took it," not "he took it." Perhaps neither king was present in person at the siege, or, at any rate, at its termination. The city may have been taken by an Assyrian general, while Shalmaneser and Sargon were contending for the crown. In that case, the capture might be assigned to either. Sargon certainly claims it; Shalmaneser's annals have been so mutilated by his successors that we cannot tell whether he claimed it or not. The city fell in B.C. 722; and the deportation of its inhabitants at once took place. **And carried Israel away into Assyria.** The inscription of Sargon above referred to mentions only the deportation, from the city of Samaria itself, of 27,290 persons. No doubt a vast number of others were carried off from the smaller towns and from the country districts. Still, the country was not left uninhabited, and Sargon assessed its tribute at the old rate ('Eponym Canon,' *l. s. c.*). Nor was the city of Samaria destroyed, since we hear of it subsequently more than once in the Assyrian annals. **And placed them in Halah.** "Halah" (חֲלַח) has been supposed by some to be the old Assyrian city (Gen. x. 11) of Calah (כֶּלַח), which was, down to the time of Tiglath-pileser, the main capital; but the difference of spelling is an objection, and the Assyrians do not seem to have ever transported subject-populations to their capitals. It is moreover reasonable to suppose that Halah, Habor, Gozan, and Hara (1 Chron. v. 26) were in the same neighbourhood. This last consideration points to the "Chalcitis" of Ptolemy (v. 18) as the true "Halah," since it was in the immediate vicinity of the Khabour, of Gauzanitis, and of Haran. **And in Habor by the river of Gozan.** This is a

mistranslation. The Hebrew runs, "And on Habor (Khabor), the river of Gozan" (so also in ch. xviii. 11). "Habor, the river of Gozan," is undoubtedly one of the Khabours. Those who find Halah in Calah, or in Calacine (Calachene), generally prefer the eastern river which runs into the Tigris from Kurdistan a little below Jezireh. But there is no evidence that this river bore the name in antiquity. The Western Khabour, on the other hand, was well known to the Assyrians under that appellation, and is the Aborrhas of Strabo and Procopius, the Chaboras of Pliny and Ptolemy, the Aburas of Isadore of Charax, and the Abora of Zosimus. It adjoins a district called Chalcitis, and it drains the country of Gauzanitis or Mygdonia. The Western Khabour is a river of Upper Mesopotamia, and runs into the Euphrates from the north-east near the site of the ancient Circesion. The tract which it drains is called Mygdonia by Strabo, Gauzanitis by Ptolemy. **And in the cities of the Medes.** Media had been repeatedly invaded and ravaged by the Assyrians from the time of Vul-nirari IV. (about B.C. 810); but the first king to conquer any portion of it, and people its cities with settlers from other parts of his dominions, was Sargon (Oppert, 'Inscriptions des Sargonides,' pp. 25, 37). We learn from the present passage that a certain number of these settlers were Israelites (comp. ch. xviii. 11 and Tobit i. 14).

Vers. 7—23.—*The provocations which induced God to destroy the Israelite kingdom.* Here, for once, the writer ceases to be the mere historian, and becomes the religious teacher and prophet, drawing out the lessons of history, and justifying the ways of God to man. As Bähr says, he "does not carry on the narrative as taken from the original authorities, but himself here begins a review of the history and fate of Israel, which ends with ver. 23, and forms an independent section by itself." The section divides itself into four portions: (1) From ver. 7 to ver. 12, a general statement of Israel's wickedness; (2) from ver. 13 to ver. 15, a special aggravation of their guilt, viz. their rejection of prophets; (3) vers. 16 and 17 contain a specification of their chief acts of sin; and (4) from ver. 18 to ver. 23, a general summary, including some words of warning to Judah.

Ver. 7.—**For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God**; rather, *And it came to pass, when*, etc. The clauses from the present to the end of ver. 17 depend on the "when" of this verse; the apodosis does not come till ver. 18, "When the children of Israel had done all that is stated in vers. 7—17, then the result was that the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight." **Which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt.** So commencing his long series of mercies to the nation, and indicating his gracious favour towards it. "The deliverance from Egypt," as Bähr well says, "was not only the beginning, but the symbol, of all Divine grace towards Israel, and the pledge of its Divine guidance." Hence the stress laid upon it, both here and by the Prophet Hosea (comp. Hos. xi. 1; xii. 9, 13; xiii. 4). **From under the hand**—*i.e.* the oppression—**of Pharaoh King of Egypt, and had feared other gods**; *i.e.* reverenced and worshipped them.

Ver. 8.—**And walked in the statutes of the heathen.** The "statutes of the heathen" are their customs and observances, especially in matters of religion. The Israelites had been repeatedly warned not to follow these (see Lev. xviii. 3, 30; Deut. xii. 29—31; xviii. 9—14, etc.). **Whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel**—*i.e.* the Canaanitish nations, whose idolatries and other "abominations" were particularly hateful to God (see Lev. xviii. 26—29; Deut. xx. 18; xxix. 17; xxxii. 16, etc.)—**and of the kings of Israel.** The sins and idolatries of Israel had a double origin. The great majority were derived from the heathen nations with whom they were brought into contact, and were adopted voluntarily by the people themselves. Of this kind were the worship at "high places" (ver. 9), the "images" and "groves" (ver. 10), the causing of their children to "pass through the fire" (ver. 17), the employment of divination and enchantments (ver. 17), and perhaps the "worship of the host of heaven" (ver. 16). A certain number, however, came in from a different source, being imposed upon the people by their kings. To this class belong the desertion of the temple-worship, enforced by Jeroboam (ver. 21), the setting up of the calves at Dan and Bethel (ver. 16) by the same, and the Baal and Astarte worship (ver. 16), introduced by Ahab. This last and worst idolatry was not established without a good deal of persecution, as we learn from 1 Kings xviii. 4. **Which they had made.**

Ver. 9.—**And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God.** Most of the evil practices of the Israelites were open and flagrant, but some sought the veil of secrecy, as the use of divination and enchantments (ver. 17). It is doubtful, however, whether

the Hebrew words have the signification assigned to them in the Authorized Version. They may mean no more than that the Israelites made their evil deeds a barrier between themselves and God. **And they built them high places in all their cities** (comp. 1 Kings xiv. 23). "In *all* their cities" is probably rhetorical; but the gist of the charge is that, instead of keeping to the *one* temple and *one* altar commanded by God for the conservation of their belief in his unity, the Israelites "erected places of worship all over the country, after the fashion of the heathen" (Bähr), and so at once depraved their own faith, and ceased to be a perpetual protest to the surrounding nations. **From the tower of the watchman to the fenced city**; *i.e.* from the smallest and most solitary place of human abode to the largest and most populous (comp. ch. xviii. 8). The expression was no doubt proverbial, and (as used here) is a strong hyperbole.

Ver. 10.—**And they set them up images**; rather, *pillars* (comp. Gen. xxviii. 18, 22; xxxi. 13, 45, 51, 52; xxxv. 14, 20; Exod. xxiv. 4; Deut. xii. 3; 2 Sam. xviii. 18, where the same word is so rendered). The *matsêvôth* were stone pillars, anciently connected with the worship of Baal, but in Judah perhaps used in a debased and debasing worship of Jehovah with self-invented rites, instead of those which had the express sanction of God, being commanded in the Law (see the 'Speaker's Commentary,' vol. i. p. 417). **And groves** (compare the comment on 1 Kings xiv. 14 and 23, and see also that on ch. xiii. 6) **in every high hill**—rather, *on every high hill*—**and under every green tree.** Note that the "groves" (*ashêrim*) were "set up under green trees," and must therefore have been artificial structures of some kind, such as could stand beneath their boughs.

Ver. 11.—**And there they burnt incense in all the high places** (comp. 1 Kings iii. 3; xxii. 43; ch. xii. 3; xiv. 4; xv. 4, 35; xvi. 4). Incense symbolized prayer (Ps. cxli. 2), and ought to have been burnt only on the golden altar of incense within the veil. **As did the heathen whom the Lord carried away before them.** The offering of incense to their gods by the Canaanitish nations had not been previously mentioned; but the use of incense in religious worship was so widely spread in the ancient world, that their employment of it might have been assumed as almost certain. The Egyptians used incense largely in the worship of Ammon ('Records of the Past,' vol. x. p. 19). The Babylonians burnt a thousand talents' weight of it every year at the great festival of Bel-Merodach (Herod., i. 183). The Greeks and Romans offered it with every sacrifice. **And wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger** (see below, vers. 15—17).

Ver. 12.—**For they served idols**; rather, *and they served idols.* The sense flows on from ver. 7, each verse being joined to the preceding one by the *vau* connective. *Gillulîm*, the term translated "idols," is a word rarely used, except by Ezekiel, with whom it is common. "It contains," as Bähr says, "a subordinate contemptuous and abusive signification;" the primary meaning of *gâlal* being "dung," "ordure." **Whereof the Lord had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing** (see Exod. xx. 4, 5, 23; Deut. iv. 16—18, etc.).

Ver. 13.—**Yet the Lord testified**—rather, *and the Lord testified*—**against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers.** A "seer" is, properly, one who *sees visions*; a "prophet," one inspired to pour forth utterances. But the words were used as synonyms (see 1 Sam. ix. 9). Ever since the revolt of Jeroboam, there had been a succession of prophets in both countries whose office it had been to rebuke sin and to enforce the precepts of the Law. In Judah there had been Shemaiah, contemporary with Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi. 2; xii. 5); Iddo, contemporary with Abijah (2 Chron. xiii. 22); Azariah, with Asa (2 Chron. xv. 1); Hanani, with the same (2 Chron. xvi. 7); Jehu, the son of Hanani, with Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xix. 2); Jahaziel, the son of Zechariah, with the same (2 Chron. xx. 14); Eliezer, the son of Dodavah, also contemporary with the same (2 Chron. xx. 37); Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, contemporary with Joash (2 Chron. xxiv. 20); another Zechariah, contemporary with Uzziah (2 Chron. xxvi. 5); Joel, Micah, and Isaiah, besides several whose names are unknown. In Israel, the succession had included Ahijah the Shilonite, contemporary with Jeroboam (1 Kings xiv. 2); Jehu, the son of Hanani, with Baasha (1 Kings xvi. 1); Elijah, and Micaiah the son of Imlah, with Ahab (1 Kings xxii. 8) and Ahaziah (ch. i. 3); Elisha, with Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash (ch. iii. 11—xiii. 14); Jonah, with Jeroboam II. (ch. xiv. 25); Hosea and Amos, with the same (Hos. i. 1; Amos i. 1); and Oded (2 Chron. xxviii. 9), contemporary with Pekah. God had never left himself without living witness. Besides the written testimony of the Law, he had sent them a continuous series of prophets, who "repeated and enforced the teaching of the Law by word of mouth, breathing into the old words a new life, applying them to the facts of their own times, urging them on the consciences of their hearers, and authoritatively declaring to them that the terrible threatenings of the Law were directed against the very sins which they habitually practised."

The prophets continually addressed them in the Name of God, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the Law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. This was the general burden of the prophetical teaching, both in Israel and in Judah, both before the captivity of Israel and afterwards (see Hos. xii. 6; xiv. 2; Joel ii. 12, 13; Amos v. 4—15; Isa. i. 16—20; xxxi. 6; Jer. iii. 7, 14; Ezek. xiv. 6; xviii. 30, etc.).

Ver. 14.—**Notwithstanding they would not hear**; rather, *and they would not hear*. The construction still runs on without any change (see the comment on vers. 7 and 12). **But hardened their necks.** (On the origin of the phrase, see 'Homiletic Commentary' on Exod. xxxii. 9.) The obstinate perversity of the Israelites, which the phrase expresses, is noted through the entire history (see Exod. xxxiii. 3, 5; xxxiv. 9; Deut. ix. 6, 13; Ps. lxxv. 5; 2 Chron. xxx. 8; xxxvi. 13; Neh. ix. 16, 17, 29; Jer. vii. 26; xvii. 23; Acts vii. 51, etc.). **Like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God.** The reference is especially to the many passages in the Pentateuch where the Israelites are called "a stiff-necked people" (see, besides those already quoted, Deut. xxxi. 27).

Ver. 15.—**And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers.** The covenant made at Sinai, first by the people generally (Exod. xix. 5—8), and then by their formal representatives (Exod. xxiv. 3—8), was, on their part, a solemn promise that "all which the Lord commanded them they would do." Rejecting the "statutes" of God was thus rejecting the "covenant." **And his testimonies which he testified against them.** The "testimonies" of God are his commandments, considered as witnessing of him and setting forth his nature. The use of the term is common in Deuteronomy and in the Psalms, but otherwise rare. **And they followed vanity, and became vain.** False gods are "vanity;" false religions are "vanity;" there is nothing firm or substantial about them; they belong to the realm of futility and nothingness. And the followers of such religious derive weakness from them —they "become vain"—*i.e.* weak, futile, impotent. Their energies are wasted; they effect nothing of that which they wish to effect; they are completely powerless for good, at any rate; and they are not really powerful for evil. Their plans, for the most part, miscarry; and "their end is destruction." **And went after the heathen that were round about them.** Upon a neglect to keep God's commandments follows active revolt from him, and the doing of that which he has forbidden. When they rejected God's statutes, the Israelites adopted "the statutes of the heathen" (ver. 8), and "walked in them." Concerning **whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them** (see above, ver. 12, and compare the comment on ver. 8).

Vers. 16, 17.—The main sins of Israel are now specified, that they themselves may stand self-convicted, and that others may be warned against doing the like. First, generally.

Ver. 16.—**They left all the commandments of the Lord their God**; *i.e.* neglected them, rendered them no obedience, offered none of the stated sacrifices, attended none of the appointed feasts, broke the moral law (Hos. iv. 1, 2, 11; vii. 1, etc.) by swearing, and lying, and stealing, and committing adultery, by drunkenness, and lewdness, and bloodshed. **And made them molten images, even two calves.** These at least were undeniable—there they were at Dan and Bethel, until the Captivity came (Hos. viii. 5; x. 5, 6; xiii. 2; Amos viii. 14), worshipped, sworn by (Amos viii. 14), viewed as living gods (Amos viii. 14), offered to, trusted in. Every king had upheld them, so that Bethel was regarded as "the king's court," and "the king's chapel" (Amos vii. 13); all the people were devoted to them, and "brought their sacrifices to Bethel every morning" (Amos iv. 4), "and their tithes after three years." **And made a grove.** The "grove" (*asherah*) which Ahab set up at Samaria (1 Kings xvi. 33), and which remained there certainly to the time of Jehoahaz (see the comment on ch. xiii. 6). **And worshipped all the host of heaven.** This worship had not been mentioned before; and it is nowhere else ascribed to the Israelites of the northern kingdom. Manasseh seems to have introduced it into Judah (ch. xxi. 3; xxiii. 5, 11). Such knowledge as we have of the Western Asiatic religions seems to indicate that *astral* worship, strictly so called, was a peculiarity of the Assyro-Babylonian and Arabian systems only, and did not belong to the Syrian, or the Phœnician, or the Canaanite. It may be suspected that the present passage is somewhat rhetorical, and assigns to the Israelites the "worship of the host of heaven," simply because an astral character attached to Baal and Ashtoreth, who were associated in the religion of the Phœnicians with the sun and moon. On the other hand, it is just possible that the Assyro-Babylonian star-worship had been introduced into Israel under Menahem, Pekah, or Hoshea. **And served Baal.** The Baal-worship, introduced by Ahab (1 Kings xvi. 31), was not finally abolished by Jehu (ch. x. 28). Like other popular religions, it had a revival. Hosea,

writing under the later kings from Jeroboam II. to Hoshea, alludes to the Baal-worship (Hos. ii. 8, 17) as continuing.

Ver. 17.—**And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire.** (On this phrase, see the comment upon ch. xvi. 3.) The sin of child-murder had not been previously laid to the charge of Israel; but, as it had infected Judah (ch. xvi. 3), there is no reason why it should not have invaded also the sister kingdom. Perhaps it is alluded to by Hosea in iv. 2; v. 2; and vi. 8. It was an old sin of the Canaanitish nations (Lev. xviii. 21, etc.), and continued to be practised by the Moabites (ch. iii. 27; Amos ii. 1) and Ammonites, neighbours of Israel. **And used divination and enchantments.** The "witchcrafts" of Jezebel have been already mentioned (ch. ix. 22). Magical practices always accompanied idolatry, and were of many kinds. Sometimes divination was by means of staves or rods (rhabdomancy), which were manipulated in various ways (Herod., iv. 67; Schol. ad Nicandr., 'Theriac.,' 613; Tacit., 'German.,' § 10; Amm. Marc., xxxi. 2; Hos. iv. 12). Sometimes it was by arrows (Ezek. xxi. 21). Very often, especially in Greece and Rome, it was by inspecting the entrails of victims. Where faith in God wanes, a trust in magical practices, astrology, chiromancy, "sortes Virgilianæ," horoscopes, spirit-rapping, and the like, almost always supervenes. **And sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.** (On the expression, "sold themselves to do evil," see the comment upon 1 Kings xxi. 20.)

Ver. 18.—**Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel;** rather, *that then the Lord was very angry*, etc. We have here the apodosis of the long sentence beginning with ver. 7 and continuing to the end of ver. 17. When all that is enumerated in these verses had taken place, then the Lord was moved to anger against Israel, then matters had reached a crisis, the cup of their iniquity was full, and God's wrath, long restrained, descended on them. **And removed them out of his sight.** Removal out of God's sight is loss of his favour and of his care. "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous" (Ps. xxxiv. 15)—he "knoweth their way," "watcheth over them" (Jer. xxxi. 28), "careth for them" (Ps. cxlvi. 8); but "the countenance of the Lord is against them [averted from them] who do evil" (Ps. xxxiv. 16). He will not look upon them nor hear them. **There was none left but the tribe of Judah only.** The "tribe of Judah" stands for the kingdom of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin (see 1 Kings xi. 31—36; xii. 23; 2 Chron. xvii. 14—18), into which the greater part of Dan and Simeon had also been absorbed. This became now, exclusively, God's "peculiar people," the object of his love and of his care. The writer, it must be remembered, belongs to the period of the Captivity, and is not speaking of the restored Israel.

Ver. 19.—**Also Judah kept not the commandments of the Lord their God.** The sharp contrast which the writer has drawn between Israel and Judah in ver. 18 reminds him that the difference was only for a time. Judah followed in Israel's sins, and ultimately shared in her punishment. This verse and the next are parenthetic. **But walked in the statutes of Israel which they made;** *i.e.* followed Israel in all her evil courses, first in her Baal-worship, under Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah; then in her other malpractices under Ahaz (ch. xvi. 3, 4), Manasseh (ch. xxi. 2—9), and Amon (ch. xxi. 20—22). Of course, the calf-worship is excepted, Judah having no temptation to follow Israel in that.

Ver. 20.—**And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel.** God is no respecter of persons. As he had rejected the ten tribes on account of certain transgressions, which have been enumerated (vers. 8—17), so, when Judah committed the self-same sins, and transgressed equally, Judah had equally to be rejected. "All the seed of Israel" is the entire nation—Israel in the widest sense, made up of Judah and of Israel in the narrow sense. So Keil, rightly. **And afflicted them**—by the hands of Sargon, and Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11), and Pharaoh-Nechoh, and others—**and delivered them into the hands of spoilers.** The "spoilers" intended are probably, first, the "bands of the Chaldees, and of the Syrians, and of the Moabites, and of the children of Ammon," who were let loose upon Judæa by Nebuchadnezzar when Jehoiakim rebelled against him (ch. xxiv. 2), and secondly Nebuchadnezzar himself and Nebuzar-adan, who completed the spoliation of the country, and plundered Jerusalem itself, to punish the revolts of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah (ch. xxiv. 13—16 and xxv. 8—21), when all the treasures of the temple were carried off. **Until he had cast them out of his sight;** *i.e.* until he had punished Judah *as* he had previously punished Israel (ver. 18), which was what justice required.

Ver. 21.—**For he rent;** rather, *for he had rent.* The nexus of the verse is with ver. 18. The difference between the fates of Israel and Judah—the survival of Judah for a hundred and thirty-four years—is traced back to the separation under Rehoboam, and to the wicked policy which Jeroboam then pursued, and left as a legacy

to his successors. Israel could suffer alone, while Judah was spared, because the kingdom of David and Solomon had been rent in twain, and the two states had thenceforth continued separate. **Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king: and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the Lord.** The separation alone might not have had any ill result; but it was followed by the appointment of Jeroboam as king, and Jeroboam introduced the fatal taint of idolatry, from which all the other evils flowed, including the earlier destruction of the northern kingdom. Jeroboam not only introduced the worship of the calves, but he "drave Israel from following the Lord"—*i.e.* compelled the people to discontinue the practice of going up to worship at Jerusalem (2 Chron. xi. 13—16), and required them to take part in the calf-worship. **And** [thus] **made them sin a great sin.**

Ver. 22.—**For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did.** The nation, having been once persuaded to adopt Jeroboam's innovations, continued to "walk" in them—followed Jeroboam's example in "*all* his sins"—gave up the temple-worship altogether; accepted the ministrations of priests not of the seed of Aaron (1 Kings xiii. 33; 2 Chron. xiii. 9); brought their tithes to these idol-priests; sacrificed to the calves at Dan and Bethel (Amos iv. 4); and put their trust in the "similitude of a calf that eateth hay." **They departed not from them** (comp. 1 Kings xv. 26, 34; xvi. 2, 19, 26, 31; ch. iii. 3; x. 29; xiii. 6, 11; xiv. 24; xv. 9, 18, 28).

Ver. 23.—**Until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight** (see the comment on ver. 18) **as he had said by all his servants the prophets.** The destruction of the kingdom of Israel had been distinctly prophesied by Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kings xiv. 15, 16), Hosea (i. 4; ix. 3, 17), and Amos (vii. 17). General warnings and denunciations had been given by Moses (Lev. xxvi. 33; Deut. iv. 26, 27; xxviii. 36, etc.), by Isaiah (vii. 8; xxviii. 1—4), and probably by the entire series of prophets enumerated in the comment on ver. 13. **So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day**; *i.e.* up to the time that the Second Book of Kings was written, about B.C. 580—560, the Israelites remained within the limits of the country to which they were carried by the conqueror. Not long after this time, about B.C. 538, a considerable number returned with Zerubbabel to Palestine, and others with Ezra (see Ezra ii. 70; iii. 1; vi. 16, 17; vii. 13; viii. 35; 1 Chron. ix. 2, 3; Zech. viii. 13). What became of the rest has been a fertile subject of speculation. Probably the more religious united with the Jewish communities, which were gradually formed in almost all the cities of the East; while the irreligious laid aside their peculiar customs, and became blended indistinguishably with the heathen. There is no ground for expecting to find the "ten tribes" anywhere at the present day.

Vers. 24—41.—*Repeopling of the kingdom of Israel by Assyrian colonists, and formation of a mixed religion.* The writer, before dismissing the subject of the Israelite kingdom, proceeds to inform us of certain results of the conquest. Having removed the bulk of the native inhabitants, the Assyrians did not allow the country to lie waste, but proceeded to replace the population which they had carried off by settlers from other localities (ver. 24). These settlers were, after a short time, incommoded by lions, which increased upon them, and diminished their numbers (ver. 25). The idea arose that the visitation was supernatural, and might be traced to the fact that the newcomers, not knowing "the manner of the God of the land," displeased him by the neglect of his rites or by the introduction of alien worship (ver. 26). A remedy for this was sought in the sending to them from Assyria one of the priests who had been carried off, from whom it was thought they might learn how "the God of the land" was to be propitiated. This was the origin of the "mixed religion" which grew up in the country. While the nations who had replaced the Israelites brought in their own superstitions, and severally worshipped their own gods (vers. 30, 31), there was a general acknowledgment of Jehovah by all of them, and a continuance of Jehovistic worship in the various high places. The nations both "feared the Lord, and served their graven images," down to the time when the writer of Kings composed his work (vers. 33—41).

Ver. 24.—**And the King of Assyria brought men from Babylon.** It has been supposed, in connection with Ezra iv. 2, that no colonists were introduced into the country till the time of Esarhaddon, who began to reign in B.C. 681. But this, which would be intrinsically most improbable (for when did a king forego his tribute from a fertile country for forty-one years?), is contradicted by a statement of Sargon, that he placed colonists there in B.C. 715 ('Ancient

Monarchies,' vol. ii. p. 415). These were not necessarily the first; and, on the whole, it is probable that the repeopling of the country began earlier. Hamath was reduced by Sargon in B.C. 720, and punished severely. Its inhabitants were carried off, and replaced by Assyrians ('Eponym Canon,' p. 127). Probably some of them were at once settled in Samaria. The conquest of Babylon by Sargon was not till later. It occurred in B.C. 709, and was probably followed by the immediate deportation of some of its inhabitants to the same quarter. **And from Cuthah.** "Cuthah," or "Cutha," was an important Babylonian city, often mentioned in the Assyrian inscriptions ('Records of the Past,' vol. i. pp. 74, 75; vol. iii. p. 35; vol. v. pp. 93, 94, 102). Its ruins exist at the site now called Ibrahim, about fifteen miles north-east of Babylon. Sargon must have become master of it when he put down Merodach-Baladan and assumed the sovereignty of Babylonia, in B.C. 709. Why the later Jews called the Samaritans "Cuthæans," rather than Sepharvites, or Avites, or Hamathites, it is impossible to determine. Possibly the Cuthæan settlers preponderated in numbers over the others. **And from Ava.** "Ava" (עוא) is probably the same as the Ivah (עוה) of ch. xviii. 34 and xix. 13, and perhaps identical with the Ahava (אהוא) of Ezra (viii. 15, 21). The city intended is thought to be the "Is" of Herodotus (i. 179), and the modern Hit. Hit lies upon the Euphrates, about a hundred and thirty miles above Babylon, in lat. 33° 45′ nearly. It is famous for its bitumen springs. **And from Hamath** (see the comment on ch. xiv. 25). Hamath on the Orontes was conquered by Sargon in B.C. 720, two years after his capture of Samaria ('Eponym Canon,' pp. 126—128). Its rude inhabitants were carried off, and Assyrians were placed there. **And from Sepharvaim.** It is generally allowed that "Sepharvaim" is "Sippara," the dual form being accounted for by the fact that Sippara was a double town, partly on the right and partly on the left bank of a stream derived from the Euphrates. Hence Pliny speaks of it as "oppida Hipparenorum" ('Hist. Nat.,' vi. 30). The exact site, at Abu-Habba, sixteen miles south-west of Baghdad, has only recently been discovered (see the 'Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archæology' for 1885, vol. viii. pp. 172—176). **And placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.** Transplantation of nations, commenced by Tiglath-pileser, was practised on a still larger scale by Sargon. The following summary will illustrate this point: "In all his wars Sargon largely employed the system of wholesale deportation. The Israelites were removed from Samaria, and planted partly in Gozan or Mygdonia, and partly in the cities recently taken from the Medes. Hamath and Damascus were peopled with captives from Armenia and other regions of the north. A portion of the Tibareni were carried captive to Assyria, and Assyrians were established in the Tibarenian country. Vast numbers of the inhabitants of the Zagros range were also transported to Assyria; Babylonians, Cuthæans, Sepharvites, Arabians, and others were placed in Samaria; men from the extreme east (perhaps Media) in Ashdod. The Comukha were removed from the extreme north to Susiana, and Chaldæans were brought from the extreme south to supply their places. Everywhere Sargon 'changed the abodes' of his subjects, his aim being, as it would seem, to weaken the stronger races by dispersion, and to destroy the spirit of the weaker ones by severing at a blow all the links which unite a patriotic people to the country it has long inhabited. The practice had not been unknown to previous monarchs; but it had never been employed by any of them so generally or on so grand a scale as it was by this king" (see 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. p. 423).

Ver. 25.—**And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the Lord.** They were ignorant, *i.e.*, of Jehovah, and paid him no religious regard. They brought with them their own forms of heathenism (see vers. 30, 31). **Therefore the Lord sent lions among them.** Lions are not now found in Palestine, nor indeed in any part of Syria, though they are numerous in Mesopotamia; but anciently they appear to have been tolerably common in all parts of the Holy Land (see the comment on 1 Kings xiii. 24). We may gather from what is said here that, though new settlers had been brought into the country by the Assyrians, yet still there had been a considerable decrease in the population, which had been favourable to the lions multiplying. The new settlers, it is to be noted, were placed in the towns (ver. 24); and it is probable that many of the country districts lay waste and desolate. Still, the writer views the *great* increase in the number of the lions as a Divine judgment, which it may have been, though based upon a natural circumstance. **Which slew some of them.** (For the great boldness of the Palestinian lion, see I Kings xiii. 24; xx. 36; Prov. xxii. 13; Isa. xxxi. 4; xxxviii. 13; Jer. v. 6, etc.)

Ver. 26.—**Wherefore they spake to the King of Assyria, saying.** The meaning seems to be, not that the colonists made direct complaint to the king, but that some

of the persons about the court, having heard of the matter, reported it to him as one requiring consideration and remedy. Hence the use of the third person instead of the first. **The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria** (see ver. 24), **know not the manner of the God of the land.** It was the general belief of the heathen nations of antiquity that each country and nation had its own god or gods, who presided over its destinies, protected it, went out at the head of its armies, and fought for it against its enemies. Each god had his own "manner," or ritual and method of worship, which was, in some respects at any rate, different from that of all other gods. Unless this ritual and method were known, new-comers into any land were almost sure to displease the local deity, who did not allow of any departure from traditional usage in his worship. **Therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land.**

Ver. 27.—**Then the King of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence.** It does not appear that this was a suggestion of the colonists. Either it was the king's own idea, or that of one of his advisers. The priests, who ministered at the two national sanctuaries—those of Dan and Bethel—had, as important personages, been all carried off. Though a "remnant" of Israel was left in the land (2 Chron. xxxiv. 9), they were probably of the baser sort (comp. ch. xxv. 12), or at any rate could not be trusted to know the details and intricacies of the Samaritan ritual. Thus it was necessary to send back a priest. **And let them go and dwell there.** We should have expected, "Let him go;" but the writer assumes that the priest would have an *entourage*, assistant-ministers and servants, and so says, "Let *them* go;" but immediately afterwards, **And let him teach**—since he alone would be competent—**them the manner of the God of the land.**

Ver. 28.—**Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria**—the country, not the city, as in vers. 24 and 25—**came and dwelt in Bethel.** Bethel from a very early time greatly eclipsed Dan. While the allusions to Bethel, commonly called "Bethaven" ("House of nothingness" for "House of God"), are frequent in the Israelitish prophets (Hos. iv. 15; v. 8; x. 5, 8, 15; Amos iii. 14; iv. 4; v. 5, 6; vii. 10—13), there is but a single distinct allusion to Dan (Amos viii. 14). Bethel was "the king's chapel" and "the king's court" (Amos vii. 13). The priest selected by Sargon's advisers was a Bethelite priest, and, returning thither, took up the worship familiar to him. **And taught them**—*i.e.* the new settlers—**how they should fear the Lord.** This worship could only be that of the calf-priests instituted by Jeroboam, which was, however, most certainly a worship of Jehovah, and an imitation or travesty of the temple-worship at Jerusalem. Whether the returned priest set up a new calf-idol, to replace the one which had been carried off to Assyria (Hos. x. 5), is doubtful.

Ver. 29.—**Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt.** The several bands of settlers found in the cities assigned to them "houses of the high places," or high-place temples (ver. 9), which had been left standing when the inhabitants were carried off. These "houses" they converted to their own use, setting up in them their several idolatries.

Ver. 30.—**And the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth.** There is no deity of this name in the Assyrian or Babylonian lists. The explanation of the word as "tents" or "huts of daughters," which satisfied Selden, Calmet, Gesenius, Winer, Keil, and others, is rendered absolutely impossible by the context, which requires that the word, whatever its meaning, should be the name of a deity. The Septuagint interpreters, while as much puzzled as others by the word itself, at least saw this, and rendered the expression by τὴν Σουκχὼθ Βενίθ, showing that they regarded it as the name of a goddess. The Babylonian goddess who corresponds most nearly to the word, and is most likely to be intended, would seem to be Zirat-banit, the wife of Merodach ('Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archæology,' vol. iv. pp. 136—147). *Zirat-banit* means "the creating lady;" but the Hebrew interpreter seems to have mistaken the first element, which he confounded with *Zarat*, the Babylonian for "tents," and so translated by "Succoth." The goddess Zirat-banit was certainly one of the principal deities of Babylon, and would be more likely to be selected than any other goddess. Probably she was worshipped in combination with her husband, Merodach. **And the men of Cuth**—*i.e.* "Cuthah"—**made Nergal.** Nergal was the special deity of Cutha. He was the Babylonian war-god, and had a high position in the Assyrian pantheon also. His name appears as an element in the "Nergal-sharezer" of Jeremiah (xxxix. 3, 13) and the Neriglissar of Ptolemy and Berosus. **And the men of Hamath made Ashima.** Thenius conjectures that "Ashima" represents the Phœnician Eshmoun, one of the Cabiri, or eight "Great Ones." But the etymological resemblance of the two words is not close, and

it is not at all certain that the Hamathites at any time acknowledged the Phœnician deities. The Hamathite inscriptions are in the character now known as "Hittite;" and there is reason to believe that the people were non-Semitic. This identification, therefore, must be regarded as very doubtful. Perhaps "Ashima" represents Simi, the daughter of Hadad (see Melito, 'Apologia').

Ver. 31.—**And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak.** "Nibhaz" and "Tartak" are very obscure. The Sabians are said to have acknowledged an evil demon, whom they called Nib'az or Nabaz (Norberg, 'Onomasticon,' p. 100); and Tartak has been derived by Gesenius from the Pehlevi *Tar-thak*, "hero of darkness;" but these guesses cannot be regarded as entitled to much attention. We do not know what the religion of the Avites was, and need not be surprised that the names of their gods are new to us. The polytheism of the East was prolific of deities, and still more of divine names. Nibhaz and Tartak may have been purely local gods, or they may have been local names for gods worshipped under other appellations in the general pantheon of Babylonia. **And the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.** The god principally worshipped at Sippara was Shamas, "the sun." It is probable that "Adrammelech" (equivalent to *adir-melek*, "the glorious king," or *edir-malek*, "the arranging king") was one of his titles. Shamas, in the Babylonian mythology, was always closely connected with Anunit, a sun-goddess; and it is probably this name which is represented by Anammelech, which we may regard as an intentional corruption, derisive and contemptuous.

Ver. 32.—**So they feared the Lord**—rather, *and they (also) honoured Jehovah;* i.e. with their idolatrous worship they combined also the worship of Jehovah (comp. ver. 28)—**and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places**—*i.e.* followed the example of Jeroboam in taking for priests persons of all ranks, even the lowest (see the comment on 1 Kings xii. 31)—**which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places** (comp. ver. 29).

Ver. 33.—**They feared the Lord, and served their own gods.** This syncretism, this mixed religion, is so surprising to the writer, and so abhorrent to his religious sentiments, that he cannot but dwell upon it, not shrinking from repeating himself (see vers. 32, 33, 41), in order to arrest the reader's attention, and point out to him the folly and absurdity of such conduct. The practice was still going on in his own day (vers. 34, 41), and may have had attractions for the descendants of the small Israelite population which had been left in the land. **After the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence;** rather, *after the manner of the nations from whom they* (i.e. the authorities) *carried them away;* i.e. after the manner of their countrymen at home. The translation of the Revised Version gives the sense, while changing the construction—"after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away."

Ver. 34.—**Unto this day**—*i.e.* the time at which Kings was written (about B.C. 580—560)—**they do after the former manners**—that is, they maintain the mixed religion, which they set up on the coming of the Samaritan priest from Assyria a hundred and fifty or sixty years previously—**they fear not the Lord.** This statement seems directly opposed to the thrice-repeated one (vers. 32, 33, 41), "They feared the Lord;" but the apparent contradiction is easily reconciled. The new immigrants "feared Jehovah" in a certain sense, *i.e.* externally. They admitted him into their pantheon, and had ritual observances in his honour. But they did not really fear him in their hearts. Had they done so, they would have inquired what were his laws, statutes, and ordinances, and would have set themselves to obey them. This they did not think of doing. **Neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances**—either the "statutes" and "ordinances" are regarded as having become *de jure* "theirs" by their occupation of the Holy Land, or "their" refers by anticipation to "the children of Jacob" towards the close of the verse—**or after the Law**—rather, *and after the Law*—**and commandment which the Lord commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel** (see Gen. xxxii. 28).

Ver. 35.—**With whom the Lord had made a covenant, and charged them, saying, Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them** (see Exod. xx. 3; Deut. v. 7; vi. 14; xi. 28. For the "covenant," see Exod. xix. 5—8; xxiv. 3—8).

Ver. 36.—**But the Lord, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched-out arm** (comp. Exod. vi. 6; Deut. iv. 34; v. 15; vii. 19; ix. 29; Ps. cxxxvi. 12, etc.), **him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice** (see Deut. vi. 13; x. 20; xiii. 4; Josh. xxiv. 14, etc.).

Ver. 37.—**And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the Law, and the commandment, which he wrote for you**—*i.e.* which, by his Providence, were given you in a written form (comp. Exod. xxiv. 4; Deut. xxxi. 9; Josh. viii. 34)—**ye shall observe to do for evermore** (comp. Lev. xviii. 4, 5; xix. 37; Deut. iv. 6; v. 1; vi. 24, 25, etc.); **and ye**

shall not fear other gods (see the comment on ver. 35).

Ver. 38.—**And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget.** The "covenant" intended is not the covenant of circumcision, which God made with Abraham (Gen. xvii. 9—14), but the covenant of protection and obedience made at Sinai between God and the entire people (Exod. xix. 5—8), and most solemnly ratified by sprinkling with blood and by a covenant feast, as related in Exod. xxiv. 3—11. This was the covenant which Israel had been warned so frequently not to "forget" (Deut. iv. 23; viii. 11; xxvi. 13; Prov. ii. 17), yet which they had "forgotten," or, at any rate, "forsaken," as already declared in ver. 15. **Neither shall ye fear other gods.** The writer has probably a practical object in his reiteration. He expects his words to reach the ears of the mixed race inhabiting Samaria in his day, and would fain warn them against their idolatrous practices, and point them to the pure worship of Jehovah. It is pleasing to remember that ultimately the mixed race was won to the true faith, and that the Samaritans of our Lord's time were as true worshippers of Jehovah, and as zealous followers of the Law, as the Jews themselves. The interesting community at Nablous still maintains Samaritan forms, and reads the Samaritan Pentateuch.

Ver. 39.—**But the Lord your God ye shall fear** (comp. ver. 36); **and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.** This promise had been made repeatedly (see Exod. xxiii. 27; Lev. xxvi. 7, 8; Deut. vi. 18, 19; xx. 4; xxiii. 14; xxviii. 7, etc.). The writer of Chronicles aims at showing in detail that the promise was literally fulfilled in the history, victory in every case declaring itself in favour of God's people, when they were faithful and obedient, while reverses always befell them in the contrary case (see 1 Chron. v. 20—22; x. 13; **xiv.** 10—16; 2 Chron. xii. 1—12; xiii. 4—18; xiv. 9—12; xx. 5—30, etc.).

Ver. 40.—**Howbeit they did not hearken.** The mixed race, with their mixed religion, though professing to be worshippers of Jehovah, paid no attention to the warnings and threatenings of the Law (ver. 34), which were to them a dead letter. **But they did after their former manner;** *i.e.* they continued to maintain the syncretism described in vers. 28—33.

Ver. 41.—**So these nations**—*i.e.* the Babylonians, Cuthæans, Hamathites, Avites, and Sepharvites settled in Samaria—**feared the Lord, and served their graven images.** The rabbinical writers tell us that Nergal was worshipped under the form of a cock, Ashima under the form of a goat, Nibhaz under the form of a dog, Tartak under that of an ass, while Adrammelech and Anammelech were represented by a mule and a horse respectively. Not much confidence can be placed in these representations. The Babylonian gods were ordinarily figured in human forms. Animal ones—as those of the bull and the lion, generally winged and human-headed, were in a few cases, but only in a few, used to represent the gods symbolically. Other emblems employed were the winged circle for Asshur; the disc plain or four-rayed for the male sun, six or eight-rayed for the female sun; the crescent for the moon-god Sin; the thunderbolt for the god of the atmosphere, Vul or Rimmon; the wedge or arrow-head, the fundamental element of writing, for Nebo. Images, however, were made of all the gods, and were no doubt set up by the several "nations" in their respective "cities." **Both their children, and their children's children**—*i.e.* their descendants to the time of the writer of Kings—**as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.**

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*The unwisdom of worldly craft and policy.* Hoshea came to the throne at a time of great danger and difficulty. The Assyrian system of gradual expansion and annexation was settled and almost declared. The petty states upon her borders were first invaded and ravaged; then they were taken under her protection; finally they were absorbed. The process had been going on from the days of Tiglath-pileser I. (about B.C. 1130), and was still in operation. Damascus was a recent example of it. Under these circumstances, Hoshea could not but feel his throne precarious, and the independence of his country more than threatened. How would he act most wisely for his own security and that of his country? There were three courses open to him.

I. HE MIGHT LOOK SOLELY TO THE ASSYRIAN KING. Absolute submission, fidelity, watchful regard for the suzerain's interests, punctual payment of the fixed tribute, liberal donations to the court officials and the monarch beyond the sum appointed, generally secured to the protected state the continuance of its suzerain's favour, and a prolongation of its protected existence. Hoshea might have adopted this policy. He might have bent all his efforts to the propitiation of the Assyrian monarch, and

the obtaining of his favourable regard. In this way he would probably have secured to himself a long and quiet reign; and his country would have been spared for many a year the horrors of war, and his people the misery of being carried into captivity.

II. HE MIGHT LOOK FOR A HUMAN PROTECTOR AGAINST ASSYRIA. Human helps, negotiations, treaties, alliances, are the natural and ordinary resort of weak states when menaced by a stronger. Cannot a counterpoise be raised up against the monster community which threatens the existence of all its neighbours? Cannot a "balance of power" be established? Hoshea was particularly tempted at the time by the rise to greatness of a new dynasty in Egypt, which seemed to have greater strength and greater resources than had been possessed by its predecessors. It was probably regarded by his advisers as a wonderfully clever stroke of policy when they suggested that alliance with Shebek, the new King of Egypt, might be the salvation of Samaria under the circumstances. So Ætolia called in the aid of Rome against Macedon; and so recently, with better results, Sardinia called in the aid of France against Austria. Hoshea caught at the suggestion. Though pledged to Assyria, though actually owing his throne to an Assyrian monarch ('Eponym Canon,' pp. 123, 124), he accepted the advice, made alliance with Shebek, and broke with Shalmaneser, to his own destruction and that of his country.

III. HE MIGHT DISCARD "ARMS OF FLESH," AND LOOK WHOLLY TO JEHOVAH. The prophets were calling Israel to repentance. They were denouncing the calf-worship and the other idolatries. They were condemning reliance on either Egypt or Assyria (Hos. vii. 11; xii. 1). They were threatening the destruction of the kingdom unless Israel truly repented and turned to the Lord. They were pointing to a possible restoration to God's favour if these conditions were fulfilled (Hos. ii. 14—23; vii. 1—3; xiv. 1—9; Amos v. 4—9, and 14, 15), and urging compliance before it was too late. They taught that God could save by his own power, and "not by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen" (Hos. i. 7). True wisdom would have taught Hoshea and his advisers to look for salvation to this quarter; but they were so infatuated with their trust in the strength of Egypt that they seem not even to have given the alternative course a thought. The result showed that their (supposed) worldly wisdom was the extremest unwisdom, their perfection of policy the worst policy that could possibly have been adopted.

Vers. 7—23.—*The lessons to be learnt from the destruction of the kingdom of Samaria.* The first and main lesson is, of course, the great fact—

I. THAT NATIONS ARE TREATED BY GOD AS RESPONSIBLE UNITS, AND ARE PUNISHED, EVEN DESTROYED, FOR THEIR SINS. It was their "evil ways," their transgression against the commandments of God, that lay at the root of Israel's rejection. The prophets Hosea and Amos paint an awful picture of the condition of Samaria under its later kings. Luxury, oppression, lewdness, drunkenness, idolatry, prevailed. The service of God was a lip-service, which "his soul hated." There was no truth, no mercy, no real "knowledge of God," in the land (Hos. iv. 1). "By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing . . . they broke out, and blood touched blood" (Hos. iv. 2). "Whoredom and wine and new wine had taken away their heart" (Hos. iv. 11). "A man and his father would go in unto the same maid" (Amos ii. 7). False balances were employed (Amos viii. 5). "Companies of priests murdered in the way by consent" (Hos. vi. 9). *Therefore* was the doom pronounced against the nation—they should "go into captivity beyond Damascus" (Amos v. 27). "The Lord swore *by his holiness* . . . that he would take them away with hooks, and their posterity with fish-hooks" (Amos iv. 2). "The end came upon them; they could not be passed by any more" (Amos viii. 2). Minor lessons are—

II. THAT SINS ARE GREATLY AGGRAVATED IN GOD'S SIGHT WHEN THEY ARE INFRACTIONS OF A COVENANT MADE WITH HIM. Israel was under covenant with God—had been made God's "peculiar people" on the express condition of keeping his statutes, testimonies, commandments, and judgments (Exod. xix. 5—8). This they had bound themselves to do; but they had done the exact opposite. Hence the reproaches in vers. 15 and 35—40. It is the breach of the covenant by the northern kingdom that, in the view of the writer of Kings, is the main and special cause of its fall. All else might have been forgiven, but not that. A covenant is a holy thing,

even when it is only between man and man (Gal. iii. 15); but a covenant between man and God—how can anything be more holy? Must not the infraction of such a covenant entail fearful consequences?

III. THAT IT IS A FURTHER GREAT AGGRAVATION OF THE GUILT OF SIN TO COMMIT IT AGAINST FREQUENT WARNINGS. "Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways" (ver. 13). Comp. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, 16, "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy." The sin of Israel would have been far less, would not perhaps have been quite "without remedy," had they not for so long a time turned a deaf ear to the warnings and exhortations of the prophets, refusing to "hear the voice of the charmers, charmed they never so wisely," and persisting in their disobedience, their wickedness, their greed, their cruelty, their besotted idolatry, despite the scathing denunciations, the tender pleadings, the wise counsels, almost uninterruptedly addressed to them. "Stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears" (Acts vii. 51), they "resisted the Holy Ghost;" and their doom had to be pronounced.

Congregations in this country and at the present day may be reminded (1) that England is not without her national sins; (2) that the sins of Christians are, all of them, infractions of the covenant made in baptism between themselves and God; and (3) that the sins of Christians are committed against the constant warnings of God's appointed ministers, who stand to them as the prophets stood to the Israelites.

Vers. 24—41.—*The absurdity and uselessness of a mixed religion.* Syncretism has been at all times a form which religion is apt to assume in mixed communities. Theoretically, religions are antithetic, exclusive, mutually repulsive. Practically, where they coexist, they tend to give and take, to approximate one to the other, to drop differences, to blend together into an apparent, if not a real, union. Christianity had at first those who would sit in an idol-temple, and partake of idol-sacrifices (1 Cor. viii. 10). Judaism under the Seleucidæ, but for the rude impatience of Antiochus Epiphanes, was on the point of making terms with Hellenism. In Samaria, after the events related in vers. 24—28, a mixed religion—a "mingle-mangle," to use Reformation language—took its place as the religion of the mixed people. "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods." Jehovah was everywhere acknowledged, honoured, worshipped with sacrifice. But at the same time, heathen gods—partial, local, half-material, sacred, but not holy—were objects of a far more real and intense worship. Such a religion is (1) absurd, (2) useless.

I. SYNCRETISM IS ABSURD, since it is self-contradictory. "What concord has Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. vi. 15). Religions which are really different have contradictory first principles; and agreement can only be effected by a dropping, on one side or the other, or both, of what is vital and essential. In the particular case before us, absolute monotheism was the very core and essence of the Jehovah-worship; actual polytheism was the root and groundwork of the other. The two were logically inconsistent, incompatible. Practically, the contradiction may not always have been perceived, for man, though a rational, is not a logical animal; but the *general* result, no doubt, was that the monotheistic idea had to give way: Jehovah, the one only God of the whole earth, had to sink into a "god of the land," and to receive an occasional and grudging acknowledgment from those whose hearts were with their own gods, Nergal and Ashima and Adrammelech. But, in this case, the worship of Jehovah was superfluous. God does not thank men for dragging him into a pantheon, and setting him side by side with beings who are no gods, but the fantastic inventions of imaginations depraved and corrupted by sin.

II. SYNCRETISM IS USELESS. Contrary systems of religion will not amalgamate, let men do what they may. Either each neutralizes the other, and the result is no religion at all; or one gets the upper hand, and the other element might as well be absent. There is no serving "God *and* mammon," "Christ *and* Belial." The mind cannot really, at one and the same time, accept contradictories. The lips may do so, but religion is an affair of the heart. Syncretism is an apparent, not a real union. Theories

mutually destructive cannot coalesce. Thus, practically, syncretism is useless. It is either a mere nominal union or a mode of eliminating religion from human life. In the case before us it seems to have left the Samaritans just as much polytheists, just as much idolaters, as it found them. Zerubbabel did well to allow them no part in the building of the second temple, and to give them the curt answer, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God" (Ezra iv. 3). Had he done otherwise, he would have merged Judaism in a polytheistic and idolatrous pseudo-religion.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The reign of Hoshea.* I. A FOOLISH SERVICE. The life of every man is a service of some sort. We cannot, even if we would, be absolutely our own masters. Some men are the servants of self. Some are the servants of others. Some are the servants of good. Some are the servants of evil. Some are the servants of money, or of pleasure, or of their passions. What higher epitaph could be written over any man's tomb than the simple words, "A servant of God"? What higher choice could any man make than this, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"? But that was not the choice which Hoshea made. He thought the service of God was slavery. He chose the service of the King of Assyria. What fools men are sometimes! How blind to their own best interests! The prodigal son in his father's house had every comfort, consideration, and care. But he thought there was too much restriction. He would like to have more of his own way. And so he went away from his father's house. But he was glad enough to return. He did not find the service of the world and of sin quite so pleasant as he expected. So many discover, when it is too late, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

II. A FAITHLESS SERVANT. Hoshea was unfaithful to God. And the man who is unfaithful to the claims of God—the highest of all claims—is generally unfaithful to his fellow-men. So it was in this case. "The King of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea." Hoshea had entered into engagements which he did not fulfil. *The best security for right dealing between man and man is obedience to the Law of God.* The history of nations and individuals teaches us that. The nation where God is honoured, where the Word of God is read, is generally superior to others in the industry, contentment, and prosperity of its inhabitants. The man who fears God is the man who can be depended on. "He backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour."—C. H. I.

Vers. 6—23.—*Captivity and its cause.* Here is the beginning of the dispersion of Israel. Soon that favoured nation will be "a people scattered and peeled." These verses give us the explanation of Israel's exile. It is a solemn warning against the neglect of opportunities.

I. COMMANDS DISOBEYED. "They rejected his statutes" (ver. 15); "They left all the commandments of the Lord their God" (ver. 16); "They served idols, whereof the Lord had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing" (ver. 12). Consider: 1. *Whose commands they disobeyed.* The commands of the Lord their God. It was he who had brought them out of Egypt. It was he who had brought them into the promised land. It was he who had made of them—a race of humble shepherds—a great nation. When God gave the ten commandments, he prefaced them by reminding Israel of his claim upon them. "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." This was a strong reason for obedience. "The preface to the ten commandments teaches us that because God is the Lord, and our God and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments." God has a similar claim: (1) *Upon every human being.* This is the claim of creation and preservation and providence. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." Whether men like it or not, they cannot get rid of God's claim upon them. (2) *Upon every Christian.* He has brought us out of the house of bondage. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and

without blame before him in love." 2. *What commands they disobeyed.* All God's commandments were for their own good. They were rational and wise commandments. To forbid idolatry was to forbid a sin which in itself was ungrateful and dishonouring to the true God, and which was degrading and demoralizing in its consequences. Oh that men were wise, that they would consider the consequences of sin for time and for eternity! "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."

II. WARNINGS DISREGARDED. Note: 1. *God's forbearance and mercy.* God did not cut them off at once for their sin. Time after time he forgave them. He sent them his prophets to invite them to return to him, to give them promises of pardon and blessing, to point out to them what must be the inevitable consequence of perseverance in sin. *His anxiety to save them was very great.* The phrase used in Jeremiah is a remarkable one. "They have not hearkened to my words, saith the Lord, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, *rising up early* and sending them." What a wonderful and touching description of God's desire to save!—"Rising up early." As if he wanted to be before men. As if he wanted to anticipate their temptations by his messages of warning and of guidance. If we make God's Word our morning study, what a help we shall find it in the difficulties and temptations and duties of each day! 2. *Man's folly and blindness.* "Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God" (ver. 14). All the warnings were in vain. "They sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord" (ver. 17). Is it not a true description of the life of the sinner? He imagines that sin is freedom, and he finds it to be the most grinding and oppressive slavery. He is "led captive by the devil at his will." *The sinner serves a hard master.* "They caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire" (ver. 17). How cruel is heathenism! How it crushes out the tender feelings of humanity and kindness! Look upon the picture of it as presented in its Molochs, in its Juggernauts, in its suttees. See how the aged and the sick are left alone to die. Contrast with all this the spirit and work of Christianity, its care for the sick and the poor, its sympathy for the oppressed. Heathenism makes slaves; Christianity emancipates them. This is true alike of the slavery of the body and the slavery of the mind. 3. *Sin's bitter fruit.* "And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight." Calamity is never causeless. If we are afflicted, let us see whether the cause may not be in our own hearts, in our own lives. *What a warning is here to Churches!* What a warning against unfaithfulness, against setting up human ordinances in the worship of God! "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." *What a warning is here against neglect of opportunities!* If we fail to use our opportunities and privileges, they will be certainly taken from us. Let us give an attentive ear to the warnings of God's Word, to the everyday warnings of God's providence. "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. . . . They would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of *the fruit of their own way,* and be filled with their own devices."—C. H. I.

Vers. 24—41.—*Samaria and its religion.* I. ITS EARLY GODLESSNESS. The land of Samaria was now deprived of its Israelitish inhabitants. The King of Assyria colonized it with heathen immigrants. "At the beginning of their dwelling there, they feared not the Lord." What a mistake to go anywhere without taking God's presence with us! How many journeys are undertaken, how many a business is entered on, without ever a word of prayer being offered to God! How many a home life is commenced without a family altar! As the young Scotch lad said of a house where he stayed for some time, and where there was no family prayer, "There is no roof on that house." "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it."

II. ITS SUBSEQUENT JUDGMENTS. "Therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which slew some of them. Wherefore they spake to the King of Assyria, saying,

The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land" (vers. 25, 26). It was judgment that first made them think of God. It is often so in the history of human life. Men live without God, prayerless, godless lives, so long as all appears to be going well with them. But when sickness comes, or troubles overtake them, or death is drawing near, they cry to the Lord then. There is something mean about this. It is better to call upon God and to come to him in trouble than not to call on him at all; but how much better it is to serve him in health as well as in sickness, in prosperity as well as in trouble!

III. ITS MIXED RELIGION. Samaria tried the experiment of serving the true God and the gods of the heathen at the same time. It tried the impossible task of serving two masters. "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence" (ver. 33). In their case, as in every case, it proved to be an impossible task. "Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the Lord, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the Law and commandment which the Lord commanded the children of Jacob" (ver. 34); "So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day" (ver. 41). They "feared the Lord:" that was profession. "They served their graven images:" that was practice. Yet there are many who are trying the same impossible task. They have a certain amount of *fear* of God. They are afraid to die, afraid of the judgment to come. So they think it desirable to be "religious." They go to church. They read the Bible occasionally, perhaps. They bear the name of good Christians. But it is a name only. Their life cannot be called a Christian life. They serve God on the Sunday in a kind of way, and the world or sin the rest of the week. They try, perhaps, to serve God and mammon. They try to serve God and the world. They are liberal-minded Christians. But this kind of *mixed religion is no religion* in the sight of God. He cannot have a divided service. This is emphatically brought out in the first chapter of Isaiah. There the inconsistency and uselessness of a religious profession combined with a godless life is clearly shown. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?" "Bring no more vain oblations;" "Wash you, make you clean; *put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes*; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." Here it is plainly taught that a religious profession is worthless without a religious life. If we regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear us. It is interesting to remember that even this degraded people of Samaria, with their mixed and corrupt religion, were permitted twice at least to receive the gospel message. They were looked down upon with contempt and aversion by the Jews. But there is mercy even for the most degraded. A city of Samaria received Christ himself, and many of its people believed on him, for the saying of the woman who testified, "He told me all things that ever I did." It was even in the apostate city of Samaria that, when Philip went down and preached Christ unto them, "the people with one accord gave heed unto the things which Philip spake," and many of them believed and were baptized. And we read that "there was great joy in that city." Even to these Samaritans, aliens from the ancient Jewish faith, a people despised and hated by the Jews, the gospel of Christ brought great joy. Surely there is here an encouragement for the greatest sinner. Surely there is here a reason for us to hope and work for the salvation even of the most degraded. Surely an encouragement for Christian missions to the heathen.—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—8.—*Aspects of a corrupt nation.* "In the twelfth year of Ahaz King of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years," etc. Hoshea, the king here mentioned, was the nineteenth and last King of Israel. He lived about seven hundred and twenty years or more before Christ. After a reign of nine years his subjects were carried away captive to Assyria, and the kingdom of Israel came to an end. The selection we have made from this chapter presents to us—*Aspects of a corrupt nation.* A nation appears here as an unfortunate inheritor of wrong; as a guilty worker of wrong; and as a terrible victim of wrong.

I. AS AN UNFORTUNATE INHERITOR OF WRONG. Upon Hoshea and his age there came down the corrupting influence of no less than eighteen princes, all of whom were steeped in wickedness and fanatical idolatry. The whole nation had become completely immoral and idolatrous. This king—the last of the Israelitish—it is said, "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him." If one shade better than his predecessors, he was, notwithstanding, a man whose character seems unredeemed by one single virtue. It is one of not only the commonest, but the most perplexing, facts in history that one generation comes to *inherit*, to a great extent, the character of its predecessor. The thoughts, the principles, and the spirit that animated the men of the past, come down and take possession of the minds of the men of the present. Though the bodies of our predecessors are mouldering in the dust, they are still here in their thoughts and influences. This is an undoubted fact. It serves to explain three things. 1. *The vital connection between all the members of the race.* Though men are countless in number, and ever multiplying, *humanity is one.* All are branches of the same root, members of the same body, links in one chain. None can be affected without affecting others; the motion of one link propagates an influence to the end of the chain. None of us liveth unto himself. Solemn thought! Our very breathings may produce ripples upon the mighty lake of existence, which will spread in ever-widening circles to the very shores of eternity. There are mystic springs connecting us with the universe. Can we move without touching them? Can we give a touch that will not send its vibrations along the arches of the boundless future? The effects of a man's influence, either for good or evil, will be determined by his moral character. A bad man is a moral curse; the influence that streams from him will be moral poison. A good man, under God, is a blessing; his influence, like the living waters, will irrigate and beautify the mental districts through which it flows. 2. *The immense difficulty of improving the moral condition of the race.* There have been men in every age and land who have "striven even unto blood" to improve the race. Poets have depicted the charms of virtue, moralists have reasoned against wrong, martyrs have died for the right; and during the last eighteen centuries, throughout Christendom, the best men throughout all communions have struggled hard to bring the world's mind under the supreme reign of the true, the beautiful, and the good. But how miserable has been the result! Evil is everywhere the dominant force—dominant not merely in markets and governments, but even in Churches. Those of us who have lived longest in the world, looked deepest into its moral heart, and laboured most zealously and persistently for its improvement, feel, like Sisyphus in ancient fable, struggling to roll a large stone to the top of a mountain, which, as soon as we think some progress has been made, rolls back to its old position, and that with greater impetuosity. Scripture everywhere recognizes this difficulty, and speaks of the work as a "race," a "battle," a "crucifixion." I question whether the world is morally much better than it has ever been. 3. *The absolute need of superhuman agency spiritually to redeem the race.* Philosophy shows that a bad world cannot improve itself, cannot make itself good. Bad men can neither help themselves morally nor help others. If the world is to be improved, thoughts and influences from superhuman regions must be transfused into its heart. Moral goodness must come in a new form, and ply new agencies. Herein is the gospel: "When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."

II. AS A GUILTY WORKER OF WRONG. Hoshea and his people were not only the *inheritors* of the corruptions of past generations, but they themselves became agents in propagating and perpetuating the wickedness. See what is said of Hoshea here. "The King of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea." This is only one specimen or development of this man's wickedness. See what is said of his people. "The children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh King of Egypt, and had feared other gods." So that while they were the inheritors of a corrupt past, they were at the same time *guilty* agents in a wicked present. Strong as is the influence of the past upon us, it is not strong enough to *coerce* us into wrong. Gracious Heaven has endowed every man with the power of thought and resolve sufficient, if he uses it, to rise above the influence of the past, and to mount into a new moral orbit of life. He has the power to stand on the firm rock of his own individuality, and to say to the swelling sea of

depravity, as its waves are approaching him, "So far shalt thou come, and no further." Because the father has been bad, there is no *just* reason why the child should be bad also. Because all the generations that have gone have been bad, there is no reason why this generation should be wicked. We are not like logs of wood on the surging seas of past wickedness, but rather like those snowy birds that can at pleasure mount from the billows, and quit them for the wide fields of air.

III. AS A TERRIBLE VICTIM OF WRONG. What was the *judicial* outcome of all this wickedness? Retribution stern, rigorous, and crushing. "Then the King of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years." "This was the third and final expedition of Shalmaneser against the whole of Syria, and it seems to have been after the lapse of a year or two from his second expedition. What new offence had excited his wrath has not been recorded; but as a determined resistance was made by his refractory vassal, Shalmaneser prepared for a regular siege of Samaria, which, through the stubborn valour of the Israelites themselves, or with the aid of Egyptian troops, lasted for nearly three years. At length the city capitulated; or, if Josephus is correct, was taken by storm. But the glory of this conquest was not enjoyed by Shalmaneser, who had been suddenly recalled by the outbreak of a domestic revolution occasioned, or at least encouraged, by his protracted absences from his capital. He was dethroned by the insurrection of an ambitious subject, and he seems to have died also before the fall of Samaria" (Dr. Jameson). Thus the whole of the inhabitants, one and all, were carried away by tyrannic force. "From inscriptions in the palace at Khorasbad," says a modern expositor, "which record the number of Israelitish captives, it appears that 27,280 were transported into Assyria from Samaria and other parts of the kingdom of Israel. The removal of entire populations from vanquished countries to some other portion of the conqueror's dominions had not been adopted, so far as reliable history testifies, as the policy of any ancient sovereigns in the East until it was introduced and acted upon by the later Assyrian kings. Soldiers when taken captive in battle, women and children belonging to the conquered enemy, it had, indeed, for ages been the custom to carry into the land of the victor. And even numerous tribes of foreigners, resident within the territory, and reduced to a state of bondage, like the Israelites in Egypt, had frequently, by the arbitrary will of ancient kings, been dragged to different quarters of their kingdom to labour on the public works." Here is the *temporal* retribution, at any rate, of two hundred years of idolatry and wickedness. During this period Israel had sinned away its liberty, its property, its country. The ten tribes sinned themselves into slavery, destitution, and everlasting obscurity. For where are they? Two thousand years have rolled away since this terrible catastrophe, and none can tell us who they are or where they are. "Be sure your sins will find you out." Retribution may move silently and slowly, but ever with a resistless step. It follows the sins of a *nation* as well as of an individual. It was the crimes of the Israelites that ruined the kingdom, and made them the victims of this terrible catastrophe. So it ever is; the great dynasties and kingdoms of the past have met with the same fate by the same inexorable law of retribution. There are sins in our England that are working towards its ruin. The sins of a nation work, like the subterranean fires, underground. The nation may have arts lovely as the landscape, institutions apparently grand and firm as the old mountains. But whilst the people revel in their exuberance of resources, their natural beauties, and in the grandeur of their institutions, and that for ages, sin, like an ocean of fire underground, will one day break out in flames, that will destroy the whole, as in the case of the ten tribes.—D. T.

Vers. 9—23.—*A great privilege, wickedness, and ruin.* "For so it was," etc. We have used the first verses of this chapter, in our last sketch, to set forth the *aspects of a corrupt nation.* The Israelitish people appear in that fragment of their history as an unfortunate inheritor of wrong, a guilty worker of wrong, and a terrible victim of wrong. These fifteen verses now under our notice present to us three subjects of thought—a great national privilege; a great national wickedness; and a great national ruin.

I. A GREAT NATIONAL PRIVILEGE. We learn herefrom that the Infinite Governor of the world had given them at least three great advantages—political freedom, right to the

land, and the highest spiritual teaching. He had given them: 1. *Political freedom.* For ages they had been in political bondage, the mere slaves of despots; but here we are told that God had "brought them out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh King of Egypt" (ver. 7). When they crossed the Red Sea, entered the desert, and stepped into Palestine, they were civilly free; the chains that had bound them so long were then completely broken, and each had the common right of liberty. Political freedom is the inalienable right of all men, is one of the greatest blessings of a people, but one which in every age has been outraged by despots. The millions are groaning in many a land still under political disabilities. 2. *A right to the land.* Canaan was the common right of all; true, it was divided amongst the ten tribes, but this was not for the private interests of any, but for the good of all. What we call "landlordism" scarcely existed, and perhaps it would have been as well had it never existed; it bars the common rights of mankind. When one thinks that all the land in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and England is in the hands of eight thousand men, a number which could be crowded into Spurgeon's tabernacle, and that thirty millions have no portion in the land, it is impossible not to feel that the condition of things is anomalous. Archdeacon Paley, no mean authority, with his characteristic clearness and common sense, has the following remarkable words: "If you should see a flock of pigeons in a field of corn, and if (instead of each one picking where and what it liked, taking just as much as it wanted and no more) you should see ninety-nine of them gathering all they got in a heap, reserving nothing for themselves but the chaff and the refuse, keeping this heap for one, and that for the weakest, perhaps the worst pigeon of the flock, sitting round and looking on all the winter, whilst the one was devouring, throwing about, and wasting it; and if a pigeon more hardy or hungry than the rest touched a grain of the hoard, all the others instantly flying upon it and tearing it to pieces;—if you should see this, you would see nothing more than what is every day practised and established amongst men. Among men you see the ninety and nine toiling and scraping together a heap of superfluities for one (and this one too oftentimes the feeblest and worst of the whole set—a child, a woman, a madman, or a fool), getting nothing for themselves all the while but a little of the coarsest of the provision which their own industry produces, looking quietly on while they see the fruits of all the labour spent or spoiled, and if one of the number take or touch a particle of the hoard, the others joining against him and hanging him for the theft." What boots collecting and publishing facts concerning the sufferings of people, and entitling the tract the 'Bitter Cry of Outcast London,' unless something is done to put a greater share of the land into the hands of the people, not by violence or spoliation, but by a calm and just legislation? Alas! even good men, through a weakness of judgment and the workings of a traditional faith, seem to dream that by multiplying churches and chapels they will hush the "bitter cry." How absurd! 3. *The highest spiritual teaching.* "The Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the Law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets" (ver. 13). One of the fundamental needs of mankind is true *ethical* teaching; not the teaching of abstruse dogmas and vain ceremonies, but the teaching of immutable law—the "statutes of God." These statutes are not only written on paper, but on every page of Nature's magnificent volume, and on the tablets of human reason and conscience. "Do unto others as ye would have others do unto you." Genuine disciples of such teaching will evermore act rightly towards themselves, towards their fellow-men, and towards their God.

II. A GREAT NATIONAL WICKEDNESS. Possessing all these privileges, how acted these people—not merely the people of Israel, but the people of Judah as well? Was the sentiment of worship and justice regnant within them? Were they loyal to all that is beautiful, true, and good? Nay. 1. They *rejected God.* "They would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God," etc. (vers. 14, 15). They declined the study of his statutes, and renounced his claim on their devotion. 2. They *adopted idols.* Mark: (1) The *earnestness* of their idolatry. With what unremitting zeal they promoted the cause of idolatry! "The children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God, and they built them high places in all their cities" (ver. 9). It is also

stated, "They made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal" (ver. 16). Error on this earth is more active than truth, wrong is more industrious than right, the spirit of evil knows no rest, it goes to and fro on the face of the earth. Here, then, is national wickedness. Are we, as a country, less wicked than the nation of Israel? I trow not. True, we are all, for the most part, theoretical theists, but how many practical atheists? For England to a large extent ignores the Almighty. It might be said of most of us, "God is not in all our thoughts."

> "With lips they own him Master, in life oppose his Word;
> They every day deny him, and yet they call him 'Lord;'
> No more is their religion like his in life and deed
> Than painted grain on canvas is like the living seed."

(2) The *cruelty* of their idolatry. "And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord" (ver. 17).

III. GREAT NATIONAL RUIN. "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight" (ver. 18); "The Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight" (ver. 20). 1. Their ruin involved the entire loss of *their country*. "So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day" (ver. 23). Expatriation is an enormous trial. 2. Their ruin involved the loss of their *national existence*. "The Lord removed them out of his sight" (ver. 18). The ten tribes are gone, and it may be doubted whether they were ever worth looking after, for they were a miserable type of humanity. "The kingdom of the ten tribes," says Dr. Blackie, "was never restored, nor did the dispersed of Israel ever attempt to return in a body to their land." More than two hundred years of idolatry and wickedness have been followed by more than two thousand years of dispersion and alienation. Having said in their hearts to God, 'Depart from us!' God said to them, 'Depart from me!' The divorce was completed, and till a reconciliation shall take place, its sad, dark fruits must remain. 3. Their ruin involved the *retributive agency of Heaven*. The Assyrians were only the instruments. It is God's plan to punish the wicked by the wicked. No wonder that amid so gross a perversion of the worship of the true God, and the national propensity to do reverence to idols, the Divine patience was exhausted, and that the God whom they had forsaken by violating covenant, an adherence to which formed their title to the occupation of Canaan, permitted them to go into captivity, that they might learn the difference between his service and that of their despotic conquerors.—D. T.

Vers. 24—41.—*Subjects worth thinking about.* "And the King of Assyria brought men from Babylon," etc. This fragment of Israelitish history brings under our notice four subjects which run through all human history, and which find their illustration in the events of modern as well as ancient life.

I. THE TYRANNY OF MAN. Here we find the Assyrians committing two great enormities on the men of Israel—driving them out of their own land into Assyria, and taking possession of their own country and home. "And the King of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof." Who that King of Assyria was at this time who carried away the last remnant of the ten tribes into a foreign land, and brought from various parts of his own country men to occupy their property and their homes, whether Shalmaneser or Esarhaddon, is a question not worth debating. He was a tyrant. The places from which he selected the men whom he placed in the cities of Samaria are mentioned. Cuthah, a city about fifteen miles north-east from Babylon; Ava, situated on the Euphrates, to the north of Babylon; Hamath, the chief city of Upper Syria; and Sepharvaim, supposed to be on a branch stream from the Euphrates, lying about sixteen miles from Babylon. Now, there was tyranny in both cases. There was tyranny in taking the Assyrians from their own countries and placing them in the cities of Samaria; as well as tyranny in taking away the ten tribes from

Samaria into foreign regions. Had the exchange taken place with the mutual consent of both parties, there would have been no outrage on the rights of man, but it might, indeed, have conduced to the interests of both parties concerned. Men are constantly changing their countries, especially in this age, when facilities for travelling are increasing every day, when the old countries are becoming over-populated, their resources rapidly decreasing, and new and fertile regions opening up in every part of the globe. All this is right enough, as well as often necessary and truly expedient. But to be forced away from home, this is tyranny, and such tyranny is not extinct even in our England. The tens of thousands that leave our shores every year for strange and distant lands, for the most part do it by a terrible coercion. Not only is he a tyrant who inflicts positive injustice on another, but also he who withholds from another his due. Tyranny is not confined to the throne of despots, but it sits in every heart where there is not a practical regard for the rights of others. It is in Belgravian mansions and ducal castles, where the groans of starving millions around are disregarded, as well as in the palace of the Czar of Russia, where the rights of millions are trodden underfoot.

"Thinkest thou there is no tyranny but that
Of blood and chains? The despotism of vice,
The weakness and the wickedness of luxury,
The negligence, the apathy, the evils
Of sensual sloth—produce ten thousand tyrants,
Whose delegated cruelty surpasses
The worst acts of one energetic master,
However harsh and hard in his own bearing."
(Byron.)

II. THE RETRIBUTIONS OF LIFE. "And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the Lord: therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which slew some of them. Wherefore they spake to the King of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land." Probably the lions had been in the land of Samaria before the settlement of the Assyrian colonists, but after their settlement these furious beasts of prey seem to have been multiplied. Perhaps the colonists were too few in number to keep them down and to check their increase. Still, whatever the natural cause or causes of their increase, it was regarded by the new population as a retributive visitation. The statement of the courtiers to the king was, "The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them," etc. The law of retribution is ever at work in human history, not only in the lives of nations, but in the lives of individuals. No man can do a wrong thing without suffering for it in some form or other. Nemesis surely, though silently, treads on the heels of wrong. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The lions of retribution track our steps as sinners stealthily, and are ready to spring on us at any moment. We are far enough from saying that retribution here is adequate and complete; hence there is within all a "fearful looking for" of some future judgment. We do not fully discharge the debt; as we go on it accumulates, and there is a balance to be settled in the great hereafter. Albeit the retribution here is a foretaste and pledge of a judgment to come.

"Nature has her laws,
That will not brook infringement; in all time,
All circumstances, all state, in every clime
She holds aloft the same avenging sword,
And, sitting on her boundless throne sublime,
The vials of her wrath, with Justice stored,
Shall in her own good hour on all that's ill be poured."
(Percival.)

III. THE PROSTITUTION OF RELIGION. The Assyrian king, it would seem, in answer to the alarm which was felt concerning the colonists whom he had settled in the cities of Samaria, conceived the plan of adopting religion as the remedy. "Then the King of

Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land." The priest whom the king sent to them seems to have been one of the exiled priests who had formerly had his head-quarters at Bethel. It is not said this priest took a copy of the Pentateuch with him; perhaps he trusted to his religious intelligence and to his oral abilities. The fact of his being one of the exiled priests, and being settled in Bethel, would imply that he was not a Levite, but rather one of the calf-worshipping priests; his instructions, therefore, would most likely not be very sound or useful. Now, the question is, why did this Assyrian king introduce this religion? Not because he or his people *had any faith in it.* "Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt," etc. (vers. 29—31). Several of the gods of these people are here mentioned. "*Succoth-benoth.*" The meaning of this word, which is thought to be "tents or booths of daughters," might seem to point to the places where the Babylonians celebrated impure rites; but here it represents one of the deities. "*Nergal*" is said to have been worshipped under the form of a cock; and from Layard, in his work on Nineveh and Babylon, we find that a cock was sometimes associated with a priest on the Assyrian monuments. "*Ashima,*" according to some, was worshipped under the form of a he-goat, bald to the very skin. "*Nibhaz.*" This deity was represented in the figure of a dog. "*Tartak.*" According to the rabbis, this deity was represented in the form of an ass. "*Adrammelech.*" This means the "fire-king," who was worshipped as a sun-god. "*Anammelech,*" a deity worshipped, some say in the form of a hare, and some say in the form of a goat.[1] These were the gods in which the king and the colonists seem to have had faith, and not in the one true and living God. Why, then, did the king send this priest from Bethel to impart to them a knowledge of the God of Israel? Simply as a matter of *selfish policy.* The attention that they paid to any representation that the priest made of the true God was partial, insincere, and selfish. "So they feared the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence. Unto this day they do after the former manners," etc. Here you have one of the million examples of that *religion of policy* that has abounded in all lands and times. In every page in history, nay, in every scene of life, we find religion taken up as a means to an end, rather than as the grand end of being. Some use it as a means for secular advantage, others as a means for personal salvation—what is called the salvation of the soul. Rulers employ it as a means to govern the people, and priests employ it as a means to coerce men into ecclesiastical order or conventional morality. In such cases their own personal interests are by no means ignored. This is a prostitution of religion. True religion should ever be pursued as the supreme end of man. In it alone his highest obligations are fulfilled, his full powers employed, his true destiny realized. But, alas! everywhere we find it regarded as a subsidiary and partial element in man's calculations, experience, and life. What is here said applies to millions even in Christendom. "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods." The religion of policy will never rescue man from the rapacious jaws of the lions of retribution.

IV. THE THEISTIC HUNGER OF SOULS. All these men, both the colonists and the Israelites, would have their gods; a god seemed to them as necessary almost as their life. "So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day." The same hunger for worship which the generations that preceded them possessed and developed had been transmitted to these their children as an innate force in their spiritual constitution. The religious element in man is not a passing sentiment, not a traditional belief, not something superadded to his nature. It is the very core of his being, the substratum in which all his higher faculties inhere. He who has this element in him (and who has not?) needs no argument to prove the existence of a God. If it be alive within him, all such arguments are an impertinence. The existence of a Supreme Being is independent of all proof. It is written on the consciousness of human

[1] See Layard on Nineveh and Babylon; and Rawlinson's 'Ancient Monarchies.'

nature. Like the fact of our own being, it is too near, too evident, too much a matter of living self, for outward argument to have any force. Faith in God springs from within. It is based on those immutable sentiments of the soul that outlive all theories and defy all scepticism. To deny the existence of God is to offer violence to all that is great and sacred in human nature.—D. T.

VERS. 1—6.—*The end of the kingdom of Israel.* We learn from the inscriptions that Hoshea, the murderer of Pekah, only secured his throne by acknowledging the supremacy of the King of Assyria. It was not long, however, before he conspired to achieve his independence. This led to the final overthrow of the kingdom.

I. A LAST FLICKER. 1. *Hoshea's better character.* It is said of this last King of Israel that he did evil in the sight of the Lord, "but not as the kings of Israel that were before him." The testimony rather points to the great wickedness of the earlier kings than implies any exceptional virtue in Hoshea, who came to the throne by blood, and showed no more reliance on God than the others. His character, however, must have had some redeeming qualities. Possibly he tried to check some of the excesses of wickedness in the land, and to discountenance at least foreign idolatries. The unfavourable judgment we are sometimes compelled to pass on men's characters as a whole need not blind us to what is praiseworthy in them. 2. *A hopeless task.* It is both curious and pathetic to see this last flicker of a better disposition in the kings of Israel just before the end. But even had Hoshea been a better ruler than he was, it was probably now too late to do the nation any good. Every attempt to bring the people back to God had proved in vain, and corruption had reached a height which made a crisis inevitable. The carcase was there, and the vultures were preparing to descend upon it. We have a modern example in the state of the French nation prior to the great Revolution. A nation, like an individual, has its day of grace, and if that is sinned away there remains only "a fearful looking for of judgment" (Heb. x. 27).

II. BROKEN ENGAGEMENTS. 1. *A policy of double-dealing.* Hoshea's desire from the first was to free his land from the yoke of Assyria. Some attempt of this kind, probably at the death of Tiglath-pileser, brought down upon him the new king, Shalmaneser, who compelled his submission, and exacted tribute. But Hoshea was not faithful to his engagements. While still pretending loyalty to Shalmaneser, he was carrying on a system of intrigue with So, King of Egypt (Sabaco). They "made a covenant with the Assyrians," and at the same time "oil was carried into Egypt" (Hos. xii. 1). It was not God Hoshea trusted in, but an alliance with Egypt. He relied on treachery, on double-dealing, on clever intrigue, to get him out of his difficulties. This kind of policy never permanently succeeds. 2. *Open revolt.* When Hoshea thought himself strong enough, he threw off his allegiance to Shalmaneser. He brought him no present, as he had done year by year. He was playing a desperate game, but he seems to have thought himself secure. A people is justified in rebellion against foreign authority when it is strong enough to make success probable; but God's blessing could hardly be looked for on an attempt which was cradled in duplicity, and in which God himself was totally ignored. 3. *A bruised reed.* As might have been anticipated, So failed Hoshea in his hour of need. His "oil" and other presents had been sent in vain. The King of Assyria came against him; but there was no movement on the part of Egypt for his help. He had trusted in the staff of a bruised reed (ch. xviii. 21). How manifold are the disappointments of those who rely on "the help of man" (Ps. lx. 11), and put their "trust in princes" (Ps. cxlvi. 3)! Hoshea himself was captured, and shut up in prison. His ultimate fate we do not know.

III. FINAL RUIN. 1. *The siege of Samaria.* The King of Assyria now marched against Samaria, which bravely held out for three years. Had details been given us, it would no doubt have been found that this was one of the great sieges of history—great in its horrors, as well as in its after-results. We may picture the extremities of the famine of ch. vi. repeated with additional horrors of anarchy and bloodshed; or, with perhaps more truth, we may draw our ideas of this siege from the descriptions of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (cf. ch. xxiv., xxv.). That was the concluding act in the history of the southern kingdom, as this was the concluding act in the history of the northern. Both were long-delayed, and in the end terrible judgments of God. The cup of iniquity was full, and another cup—the cup of God's wrath—

was now put into the nation's hand (cf. Ps. lxxv. 8). The city at length fell, and the final blow descended. 2. *The captivity of the tribes.* We read on the monuments that, after the fall of Samaria, the King of Egypt, alarmed probably for his own safety, approached, and was defeated by Sargon, Shalmaneser's successor. In any case, help was now unavailing for the unhappy Israelites. The children of Israel were removed from their cities, and carried away captive into Assyria, being scattered up and down in the places named. 27,280, according to Sargon, were taken from Samaria alone. What sorrow was here! Torn from their land, exiles from house and home, forced to eat unclean things in Assyria (Hos. ix. 3, 4), their national existence extinguished, ruled by the heathen,—all because, when they knew God, they would not glorify him as God, but gave his glory to dumb idols, and defiled his land with their abominations, and misused the gifts he had so richly bestowed on them (cf. Hos. ii.).—J. O.

Vers. 7—23.—*Review of the history of Israel.* The Bible does not simply relate, but draws aside the veil and shows us the innermost springs of God's providence, and how they work. It teaches us to understand the deepest causes of the rise and fall of nations. The causes it insists on are not economical, or political, or intellectual, but religious, and its lessons are for all time. We may say of this survey of Israel's history—these things "are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. x. 11). We have here—

I. MANIFOLD PROVOCATIONS. 1. *Ingratitude to God.* This is put in the foreground. It was the Lord "their God" Israel had sinned against—the God who had brought them up from Egypt, who had delivered them from bondage, who had made a nation of them, who had given them a land to dwell in, who had bound them to himself by solemn covenant. What people were ever under stronger obligations to obedience! Yet they apostatized, and "feared other gods." Sin appears more heinous against a background of mercies received. It is worse for a nation that has known God, that has possessed pure ordinances, and has been graciously dealt with by him, to backslide, than for another that has been less favoured. Our own nation has been blessed in these respects as few have been or are. Correspondingly great are our responsibilities. The individual may reflect that the fact of spiritual redemption—salvation through Christ—places him under greater obligations than could spring from any temporal deliverance. 2. *Heathenish ways.* The positive wickedness of the people is next detailed. The heart of man cannot exist without an object to fill and occupy it; and if God is neglected, something else must be found to take his place. The Israelites rejected Jehovah, but they took to following idols. They would have none of his statutes, but they walked in the statutes of the heathen, and of the kings of Israel. It is to be remembered that the heathen worships here referred to were saturated through and through with lust and vileness. It was because of the nameless abominations connected with them that the Lord, after long forbearance, cast out the former inhabitants from Canaan (Lev. xviii. 24—32; xx. 1—6). Yet these were the ways into which Israel turned back in the land which God had given them. May we not fear as we think of the vices, the impurities, the filthy abominations, which abound in our own nation? 3. *Zeal in the service of idols.* Israel had no heart for the service of God, but they showed unbounded zeal in the service of their idols. Publicly, and in secret also, in every city, on every hill, and under every green tree, wherever even there was a watchman's solitary tower, there they set up their high places, burnt incense, and "wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger." The children of light may well learn a lesson from the children of this world in respect of zeal. If only one tithe of the earnestness with which men serve the devil were put into the service of God, how rapid would be the spread of true religion! The wicked throw the whole energy of their souls into their follies, their pursuit of pleasure, their service of the world, the devil, and the flesh. But how slack-handed and half-hearted oftentimes are Christians! What wonder God's cause suffers!

II. REJECTION OF PROPHETS. 1. *God's prophets sent.* God did not leave Israel to sin without trying every means to turn the people from their evil ways. Prophets were sent, and these not one or two, but "all the prophets" and "all the seers." They were sent both to Israel and to Judah. They spoke in God's Name to the people, testified against their sins, and exhorted them to return to the ways of right. They warned

them also of the consequences of disobedience (ver. 23). Thus it was shown that God has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth (Ezek. xviii. 32). The fact of warning being given is a great aggravation of guilt if sin is persisted in. It leaves the transgressor without excuse. In our own land warnings abound. The Bible is widely circulated, the gospel is faithfully preached; there is no lack of voices proclaiming the need and duty of repentance. If men perish, it is not in ignorance. They sin against light, and their blood is on their own heads. 2. *Their testimony rejected.* The efforts of the prophets to bring the people back to God proved unavailing. No heed was paid to their warnings; rather the people grew bolder and more daring in sin. If faithful counsel does not soften, it hardens. Judged by outward results, no class of preachers ever had less success than the Hebrew prophets. Their exhortations seemed as water spilt upon the ground. Yet through them was preserved and kept alive in the nation a remnant according to grace (Rom. xi. 5), and to it belonged the great future of God's promises. The stubbornness of the Jewish character was proverbial—they were, and had ever been, a stiff-necked people. The root of their evil was they "did not believe in the Lord their God." When they did believe, the same basis of character discovers itself in their unyielding tenacity and perseverance in serving God and obeying the dictates of their conscience (cf. Dan. iii.). 3. *Aggravated wickedness.* The people latterly threw off all restraint in the practice of their evil. It was no longer "secretly," but openly, that they rejected the statutes of the Lord their God and his covenant, and the testimonies which he testified against them. It but aggravated the evil that in name they still claimed him as their God, and professed to do him honour, while in reality they had "left all his commandments," and had changed the whole substance of his religion. The form is nothing if the heart is wanting (Matt. xv. 7—9); but the Israelites changed even the form. They went after vanity, and became vain, imitating the heathen who were round about them, and unblushingly introducing the worst heathen abominations into their own worship. (1) They changed the fundamental law of Israel in making molten images—intended to represent Jehovah, no doubt, but still idols—Baalim. (2) They imported the Phœnician Baal-worship, with its pillars and asheras, and its licentious rites—another direct violation of fundamental laws. (3) They went further afield, and imported from Babylonia or Assyria the worship of "the host of heaven"—another thing directly forbidden on pain of death (Deut. xvii. 2—7). (4) Still unsatisfied, they abandoned themselves to the horrid rites of Moloch, and to the practice of every kind of divination and enchantment—the last and lowest stage in a people's religious degradation. This also was most emphatically forbidden to the Israelites under the most severe penalties (Lev. xx. 1—6). Thus they literally "sold" themselves to do evil, throwing off all shame or pretence of regard for God's authority, and became confirmed and wedded to their evil ways. In heart and outward conduct they had absolutely and utterly apostatized from God, and seemed bent only on provoking him to anger. Instead of marvelling at their final rejection, one wonders how a holy God should have borne with them so long. But is not God's patience with sinners and peoples still just as wonderful? Their iniquities literally go up to heaven before he cuts them off.

III. JUSTICE NO LONGER TARRYING. If the Lord's justice tarries, it does not sleep. And when the blow does fall, it is all the more severe that it has been so long delayed. 1. *Israel rejected.* This people had rejected God, and God now rejected them, as he had from the first threatened he would do (Lev. xxvi. 14—29). He did not cast them off without the warning afforded by many premonitory judgments. But when neither judgment nor mercy was regarded, and the cup of their transgression was brimming over, he gave them up, and "cast them out of his sight." They were carried away out of their own land to Assyria, and never, as a nation, returned. 2. *Judah not taking warning.* The sad thing was that Judah also, which had begun to walk in the same paths, did not take warning by the fall of the sister kingdom. "The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound" (Hos. v. 10), and many warnings directed to Judah mingle with the prophetic denunciations of Israel. Yet, notwithstanding partial reformations, the people did not repent. The sight is not unparalleled. If wicked men could be deterred from sin, or led to repentance, by warnings, these are never wanting. History and experience bear uniform testimony that it is well with the righteous, ill with the wicked; men have daily examples of the ruinous effects of vice

before their eyes; yet they go on heedless and blinded. It is not a question of reason, but of evil inclination, and wrong bent of will. Sin is truly named folly—it is the absolute unwisdom. 3. *The origin of the mischief.* Again, the source of all these evils which came on Israel is traced to Jeroboam's fatal step in setting up the two calves. It was he who "drave Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin." One step in the wrong direction carries many others in its train. That act of Jeroboam had in the heart of it a principle which logically meant the overthrow of the theocracy. It was not only a violation of the fundamental law of the second commandment; but it was an act of self-will in religion; the assertion of the right to set human will above God's ordinances, and change and alter them at pleasure. Once a principle of that kind is introduced and acted on, it cannot be prevented from logically working itself out. The consequences of a wrong step stretch far beyond the results immediately seen or intended.—J. O.

Vers. 24—41.—*Heathen occupants of the land.* The narrative of the fall of the northern kingdom concludes with an account of the arrangements made by the King of Assyria for resettling the land of Israel.

I. THE NEW SETTLERS. 1. *Their foreign origin.* The policy of removing rebellious populations to distant parts—at this time a favourite one with the Assyrians—led not only to the Israelites being carried away to Assyria, but to foreign settlers being brought and put down in their place. The nationalities of the new inhabitants are mentioned. They were men from Babylon, and Cuthah, and Ava, and Hamath, and Sepharvaim. These took possession of the cities of Samaria, and dwelt in them. Behold now God's holy land in the possession of aliens, men without one glimmer of knowledge of the true God and his ways! The Israelites had become heathen in heart, and were removed, and now real heathen were put in their place. In the sight of God the latter were less objectionable than the former. They had never known anything better than heathenism; while the Israelites had sinned against the clearest light and the strongest love. In the judgment-day, the heathen will rise up to condemn those who have abused the light of revelation (Matt. xii. 41). 2. *The visitation of lions.* Thick darkness had now settled on the land. Even the outward worship of Jehovah had ceased, and the only gods known were those of the heathen colonists. Yet the land was Jehovah's, and however he might "wink" at the ignorance of a rude, uninstructed people, it was not meet that something should not be done to arouse them to inquiry. The removal of the former inhabitants seems to have led to the multiplication of lions, and these now began to attack the people in a way which convinced them that the God of the land was displeased with them. It is not only the colonists who took this view of the matter. The sacred writer gives the same interpretation. God has his own ways of speaking to the consciences of men, and this was the one now adopted. The people were right in seeing in the visitation a reminder of their neglect of "the manner of the God of the land;" they were wrong in thinking that all that was necessary to remedy this neglect was the performance of certain external rites. It was moral conduct, based on a right knowledge of himself, which "the God of the land" required. But their error was only part of their dark heathen superstition. 3. *Their request for instruction.* The people were much concerned about the visitation which had befallen them, and their case was reported at once to the King of Assyria, who sent them one of the priests who had been carried away captive, to teach them "how they should fear the Lord." Alas! how shall the blind lead the blind! This priest was himself one who had no right knowledge of Jehovah. He was doubtless one of the priests of Bethel, who had been mixed up with the calf-worship and all the other sins for which Israel had been carried away. It is evident from the results that he gave the people no right instruction. He probably set up again at the Bethel sanctuary the disused rites of the former idolatry, and taught the people some external observances connected with the Name of Jehovah. A religion so deeply corrupted was hardly better than those they already practised. Jehovah remained to them a local deity, of whose real character they knew nothing, and whom they served from motives of fear.

II. MIXED RELIGIONS. 1. *Extraordinary syncretism.* An extraordinary scene was now witnessed. The new-comers, once settled in their cities, lost no time in organizing their religions—in this, at all events, setting an example to more enlightened peoples.

The high places formerly used by the Israelites stood temptingly ready to receive the new idols. Whatever may have been the character of the priest's instructions, they had no influence in checking the multiplication of strange gods. In the mixture of peoples, each nationality adhered to its own deity. The Babylonians made Succoth-benoth, the Cuthites made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima, etc. The result was a chaotic confusion of religions, such as perhaps has never before or since been equalled. The new worships needed priests, and these were made from the lowest of the people. The whole is a sad but instructive picture of heathenism in its want of internal unity, its Babel-like confusion, its destitution of moral character, and its degrading and cruel practices, *e.g.* the burning of the children in the fire to Adrammelech, etc. Only monotheism can give true unity to life, religion, and worship. 2. *Jehovah and strange gods.* Meanwhile Jehovah was not overlooked, but had his place given him among the rest. The people "feared the Lord, and served their own gods." This showed, of course, that the first principles of the religion of Jehovah were not understood by them. But is it so uncommon a thing for men—not heathen, but professedly Christian—thus to attempt to combine incompatibilities? Is there not such a thing as attempting to combine the service of the Lord with the friendship of the world, which yet is declared to be "enmity with God" (Jas. iv. 4)? Is there no such thing as professing to serve God, yet giving the chief place in the heart to money, pleasure, fashion, or some other spiritual idol, which is duly worshipped upon its own high place? The less glaring idolatries are not always the least sinful. Ere condemning the irrational practices of these heathen, let us sit strictly in judgment on ourselves. 3. *The absence of true religion.* The cause of all this religious confusion was that the true God was not rightly known. Men may possess theoretically correct notions of God, and not act upon them; but it is impossible to base a right moral or religious life on conceptions of God which are fundamentally erroneous. These colonists did not know Jehovah's real character; they had not been properly instructed in his statutes; therefore they thought they were serving him when they were doing him the highest dishonour.

III. A PAST MEMORY. 1. *God's ancient covenant.* The sight of this indescribable chaos recalls to the historian the memory of that original covenant of God with Israel, by the terms of which the people were pledged not to serve strange gods, but to adhere to Jehovah, their Redeemer from Egypt, and to keep his holy statutes. Had they been faithful to that covenant, how different would have been the result! Instead of being in exile, the nation would have been safe, happy, and prosperous under Jehovah's care. 2. *The melancholy contrast.* As it was, the people had been driven from their land, and this motley crowd of heathen held possession of it. Their obedience was not better than that of the rejected Israelites, and, so far as experience had gone, they showed no sign of improvement. It is due, however, to the Samaritans to say that, when better instructed, they did improve, and, in Christ's time, they were as strict monotheists as the Jews, and more willing to receive the gospel.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

Ch. xviii.—xxv.—THE HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH AFTER THE FALL OF SAMARIA.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Ver. 1—ch. xix. 37.—THE ACCESSION OF HEZEKIAH. HIS SUCCESSES. HIS WAR WITH SENNACHERIB.

Vers. 1—8.—**THE EARLY YEARS OF HEZEKIAH.** From his narrative of the destruction of the kingdom of Samaria, the writer turns, with evident relief, to the accession of the good king Hezekiah in Judah, and to a brief account of (1) his religious reformation (vers. 3—6); (2) his revolt from Assyria (ver. 7); and (3) his war with the Philistines (ver. 8). The narrative is still exceedingly brief, and has to be filled out from the Second Book of Chronicles, where the religious reformation of Hezekiah is treated with great fulness (ch. xxix.—xxxi.).

Ver. 1.—Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah King of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz King of Judah began to reign. There can scarcely

be any doubt of this synchronism, which is in close accordance with the dates in vers. 9, 10 of this chapter, and agrees well with the Assyrian inscriptions. Hezekiah's accession may be placed almost certainly in B.C. 727.

Ver. 2.—**Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign** (on the difficulties connected with this statement, and the best mode of meeting them, see the comment upon ch. xvi. 1); **and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem.** So Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 3. § 1), and the author of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxix. 1). He reigned fourteen years before his severe illness, and fifteen afterwards. **His mother's name also was Abi.** *Abi*, "my father," is scarcely a possible name. We must, therefore, correct Kings by Chronicles, and regard her true name as Abijah, which means "Jehovah is my father" (compare "Abiel"). **The daughter of Zachariah.** Perhaps the Zechariah of Isa. viii. 2.

Ver. 3.—**And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did.** Such unqualified praise is only assigned to two other kings of Judah—Asa (1 Kings xv. 11) and Josiah (ch. xxii. 2). It is curious that all three were the sons of wicked fathers. Hezekiah was probably, at an early age, brought under the influence of Isaiah, who was on familiar terms with his father Ahaz (Isa. vii. 3—16), and would be likely to do all that lay in his power to turn Hezekiah from his father's evil ways, and to foster all the germs of good in his character.

Ver. 4.—**He removed the high places.** This was a comparatively late step in Hezekiah's religious reformation. He began, as we learn from Chronicles (2 Chron. xxix. 3, 17), "in the first year of his reign, the first month, and the first day," by reopening the temple, which Ahaz had shut up, removing from it all the "filthiness" which Ahaz had allowed to accumulate (2 Chron. xxix. 5), gathering together the priests and Levites and exhorting them (2 Chron. xxix. 4—11), restoring and renewing the vessels which Ahaz had cut in pieces (2 Chron. xxix. 19), and then re-establishing the temple-worship with all due solemnity (2 Chron. xxix. 20—35). He next resolved on holding a grand Passover-festival, in the second month, as it had not been possible to keep it in the first (2 Chron. xxx. 2, 3), and invited thereto, not only his own subjects, but the Israelites of the neighbouring kingdom who were not yet carried off, but were still under the rule of Hoshea (2 Chron. xxx. 10, 11, 18). It was not until this festival was over that the removal of the high places was taken in hand. Then, in a fit of zeal, which no doubt the king encouraged, a multitude of those who had kept the feast went forth from Jerusalem, first into the cities of Judah and Benjamin, and then into several of the cities of Israel, and "brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places and the altars, . . . and utterly destroyed them all" (see 2 Chron. xxxi. 1). **And brake the images, and cut down the groves**; literally, *the grove*, according to the present text; but, as all the versions have the plural, Thenius thinks אֲשֵׁרָה should be changed into אֲשֵׁרִים. Keil and Bähr, on the contrary, would retain the singular, but understand it "collectively." That idolatry was practised at some of the high places seems clear from this place, as well as from 1 Kings xiv. 23. **And brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made** (see Numb. xxi. 9). Difficulties are raised with respect to this statement. Some argue that the serpent, having served its purpose, would have been left hanging at the place where it was set up in the wilderness; others, that Moses would have destroyed it, lest the Israelites should make it an idol; others, again, that it was not likely to have lasted seven hundred years from the Exodus, even if it was brought into Palestine and taken care of. It is supposed, therefore, that an imitation of the original serpent had been made by the Jews in the reign of Ahaz, had been called "the serpent of Moses," and was now destroyed. But there is no sufficient reason for any of these suppositions. Considering what the serpent typified (John iii. 14), it is not surprising that Moses should have been instructed to preserve it with the furniture of the tabernacle, or that, when once attached to that structure, it should have been preserved as a religious relic for seven hundred years. Many Egyptian figures in bronze now exist which are from three thousand to four thousand years old. The statement of the writer of Kings, that Hezekiah did now destroy "the serpent *that Moses had made*," is of more weight than a thousand speculations concerning what is likely, or not likely, to have happened. **For unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it.** Not, certainly, "from Moses' time to Hezekiah's," but from a date left vague and undetermined to the time when Hezekiah took his religious reformation in hand. Hezekiah found the practice continuing; the writer is not concerned to say—perhaps does not know—when it began. He implies, however, that it was of long standing. Serpent-worship was widely spread in the East, and there was more excuse for directing religious regard toward this serpent than toward any other. **And he called it Nehushtan**; rather, *and it was called Nehushtan*. יִקְרָא is a singular with indefinite subject ("one called"), equivalent to "they called,"

or "it was called" (comp. Gen. xxv. 26; xxxviii. 29, 30). Nehushtan is not from נחש "serpent," but from נחשׁ, "brass," and means "the little brass thing," ן being a diminutive, expression of tenderness.

Ver. 5.—**He trusted in the Lord God of Israel.** Unlike Hoshea (see homiletics on ch. xvii. 1—4), unlike Ahaz (ch. xvi. 7—10), Hezekiah discarded trust in man, and—it may be after some hesitation—put his trust wholly in God. This was exactly what God required as the condition on which he would give his aid (Isa. xxx. 1—7), and what no previous king since the Assyrian troubles began could bring himself to do. **So that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.** It has been concluded from this statement that, "when the merits of the kings were summed up after the fall of the monarchy, Hezekiah was, by a deliberate judgment, put at the very top" (Stanley 'Lectures on the Jewish Church,' vol. ii. p. 397); but, as exactly the same words are used of Josiah in ch. xxiii. 25, the true conclusion would seem to be rather that Hezekiah and Josiah were selected from the rest, and placed upon a par, above all the others. At first sight there may seem to be contradiction between the two passages, since absolute pre-eminence over *all* the other kings is ascribed to Hezekiah in one of them, to Josiah in the other; but the context shows that the pre-eminence is not the same in the two cases. To Hezekiah is ascribed pre-eminence in *trust;* to Josiah, pre-eminence in an exact observance of the Law: one excels in faith, the other in works; Josiah's whole life is one of activity, Hezekiah's great merit lies in his being content, in the crisis of his fate, to "stand still, and see the salvation of God."

Ver. 6.—**For he clave to the Lord**—rather, *and he clave to the Lord;* i.e. he persevered through the whole of his life; he did not fall into sins at the last, like Asa and Azariah (see 2 Chron. xvi. 7—12; xxvi. 16—21)—and **departed not from following him.** The writer probably considers "the princes of Judah" answerable for the embassy to Egypt mentioned in Isa. xxx. 4, and excuses Hezekiah's ostentatious display of his treasures to the ambassadors of Merodach-Baladan (ch. xx. 13) as a weakness, not an actual breach of obedience. **But kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses.**

Ver. 7.—**And the Lord was with him.** Of no other King of Judah or Israel is this said, except only of David (2 Sam. v. 10). It was the promise made to Moses (Exod. iii. 12), repeated to Joshua (Josh. i. 5, 7), and by implication given in them to all those who would rule his people faithfully (comp. 2 Chron. xv. 2). **And he prospered whithersoever he went forth;** rather, *in all his goings—in cunctis ad quæ procedebat* (Vulgate). Hezekiah's prosperity is enlarged upon by the writer of Chronicles, who says (2 Chron. xxxii. 27—30), "And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels; storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance: for God had given him substance very much. . . . And Hezekiah prospered in all his works." Many brought presents to him to Jerusalem, and he was magnified in the sight of all the surrounding nations (see 2 Chron. xxxii. 23). **And he rebelled against the King of Assyria, and served him not.** Hezekiah's "rebellion" probably took place at the very commencement of his reign, B.C. 727, in the year that Shalmaneser ascended the throne. Most likely it consisted simply in his withholding his tribute, and neither going in person nor sending representatives to Nineveh, to congratulate the new monarch on his accession. This would be understood as an assertion of independence. That it was not at once resented must be ascribed to Shalmaneser's difficulties with Samaria and with Tyre, which were more pressing, as they lay nearer to Assyria. Before these were over, Sargon usurped the crown. There is reason to believe that he made at least one expedition against Hezekiah; but the date of it is uncertain. Rebellion met him on all sides, and had to be crushed near home before he could venture to deal with it on the remote outskirts of his empire. Meanwhile Hezekiah strengthened himself and built up a considerable power.

Ver. 8.—**He smote the Philistines.** Hezekiah's Philistine war seems to have followed on an attempt which Sargon made to bring the whole country under the Assyrian dominion. Sargon attacked Philistia in B.C. 720, made Gaza and the other towns subject, and committed the custody of them to tributary kings, in whom he had confidence. But opposition soon manifested itself. Sargon's creatures were expelled—Akhimiti from Ashdod, Padi from Ekron. Hezekiah assisted in this war of independence, attacked Sargon's viceroys, and helped the cities to free themselves. About the year B.C. 711 Sargon speaks of a league against Assyria, to which the parties were Philistia, Judæa, Edom, and Moab ('Eponym Canon,' p. 130). The Philistines, whom Hezekiah "smote," must be regarded as Assyrian partisans, whom he chastised in the interests of the national

party. He did not seek conquests in Philistia for himself. Even unto Gaza. Gaza seems to have remained faithful to Assyria from its capture in B.C. 720. And the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen unto the fenced city. (On this expression, see the comment upon ch. xvii. 9.)

Vers. 9—12.—THE PUNISHMENT OF SAMARIA FOR DISOBEDIENCE. In contrast with Hezekiah's piety and consequent prosperity, the author places the disobedience (ver. 12) and consequent extinction of the sister kingdom (vers. 9—11), which belonged to Hezekiah's earlier years, and was an event of the greatest importance to him, since it made his dominions conterminous with those of Assyria, and exposed his northern frontier to attack at any moment from the Assyrian forces. According to all probable human calculation, the fall of Samaria should have been followed *at once* by an attack on Judæa; and but for the change of dynasty, and troubles on all sides which ensued thereupon, this would naturally have taken place. As it was, Judæa was allowed a breathing-space, during which she strengthened her power in Philistia (see the comment on the preceding verse), and otherwise prepared herself to resist attack (see 2 Chron. xxxiii. 3—6; Isa. xxii. 8—11).

Ver. 9.—**And it came to pass in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah King of Israel.** Hezekiah began to reign before Hoshea had completed his third year (ver. 1). His first year thus ran parallel with part of Hoshea's third and part of his fourth; his fourth with part of Hoshea's sixth and part of his seventh; his sixth with part of Hoshea's eighth and part of his ninth. That **Shalmaneser King of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it** (see the comment on ch. xvii. 4, 5).

Ver. 10.—**And at the end of three years they took it.** The expression, "at the *end* of three years," does not show that the three years were complete. On the contrary, as the siege began in Hezekiah's fourth year, probably in the spring, and was over in his sixth, say, by the autumn, the entire duration was not more than two years and a half. The plural verb, וַיִּלְכְּדֻהָ, "they took it," is remarkable, since it would have seemed more natural to write וַיִּלְכְּדֶהָ, "he took it"—and so the LXX., the Vulgate, and the Syriac—but the writer seems to have known that Shalmaneser did not take it, but died during the siege, the capture falling into the first year of Sargon (see the 'Eponym Canon,' pp. 65, 66). Even **in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is the ninth year of Hoshea King of Israel** (see the comment on ver. 9), **Samaria was taken** (comp. ch. xvii. 6).

Ver. 11.—**And the King of Assyria**—*i.e.* Sargon—**did carry away Israel unto Assyria**—the empire, not the country—**and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes** (see the comment on ch. xvii. 6).

Ver. 12.—**Because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them** (compare the expanded version of this statement in ch. xvii. 7—23). The sin of Samaria may be summed up under three heads: (1) disobedience; (2) breach of the covenant; and (3) disregard of Moses, and the other "servants of the Lord."

Vers. 13—16.—FIRST EXPEDITION OF SENNACHERIB AGAINST HEZEKIAH. The writer now, as is his manner, omitting as comparatively unimportant all Hezekiah's dealings with Sargon, which were without positive result, proceeds to give a brief account of Sennacherib's first expedition against him, and of its unfortunate, if not disgraceful, issue: (1) the capture of all the important cities except Jerusalem; (2) the submission of Hezekiah to any terms which Sennacherib chose to impose; and (3) the purchase of peace by the payment of three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold out of the treasures of the temple and of the royal palace. The narrative obtains copious illustration from the inscriptions of Sennacherib.

Ver. 13.—**Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah did Sennacherib King of Assyria come up.** It is impossible to accept this note of time as genuine without rejecting altogether the authority of the Assyrian inscriptions. Sargon took Samaria in his first year, B.C. 722, and then had a reign of between seventeen and eighteen years, for fifteen of which we have his annals. He certainly did not associate Sennacherib with him on the throne, nor did the latter exercise any authority at all until B.C. 705, when, "on the 12th of Ab (July), he the throne ascended" ('Eponym Canon,' p. 67). Sennacherib places his first expedition against Hezekiah in his fourth year, B.C. 701. Thus, according to the Assyrian re

cords, which are very ample, and of which we have the actual originals, twenty years intervened between the capture of Samaria and the attack of Sennacherib on Hezekiah; according to the present passage, compared with vers. 9, 10, eight years only intervened. No contradiction can be more absolute. It has been proposed to alter the date from "the fourteenth year" to "the twenty-sixth year;" but it seems most probable that the original writer inserted no date, but simply said, "And Sennacherib, King of Assyria, came up," etc., just as he had said, without a date, "Pul the King of Assyria came up against the land" (ch. xv. 19); and "against him (Hoshea) came up Shalmaneser" (ch. xvii. 3); and, with a very vague date, if it may be called a date, "In the days of Pekah King of Israel came Tiglath-pileser King of Assyria" (ch. xv. 29. Comp. also ch. xxiv. 1, 11). Later on, a redactor—perhaps the same who inserted the whole series of synchronisms—introduced the words, "In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah," having obtained the number from ch. xx. 6, which he assumed to belong to the time of Sennacherib's attack. **Against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them.** Sennacherib himself says, "And of Hezekiah of Judah, who did not submit to my yoke, *forty-six* strong cities, fortresses, and smaller cities round about them without number, by the march of my troops, . . . by the force of battering-rams, mining, and missiles, I besieged, I captured" ('Eponym Canon,' p. 134, lines 6—12. Comp. also 2 Chron. xxxii. 1 and Isa. xxxvi. 1).

Ver. 14.—**And Hezekiah King of Judah sent to the King of Assyria to Lachish, saying.** (On the position of Lachish, see the comment upon ch. xiv. 19.) A bas-relief in the British Museum is thought to represent Sennacherib at the siege of Lachish. He is seated on a highly ornamented throne, and is engaged in receiving prisoners. The city is represented as strongly fortified, and as attacked with scaling-ladders and battering-rams. The surrender is taking place, and the captives of importance are being conducted from one of the tower-gates to the presence of the conqueror. An accompanying inscription is to the following effect: "Sennacherib, the great king, the King of Assyria, sitting on the throne of judgment before the city of Lakhisha (Lachish). I give permission for its destruction." It would seem that, while Sennacherib was personally engaged in this siege, a portion of his army had invested Jerusalem, and were pressing the siege (see Isa. xxii. 1—7). **I have offended; return from me. The tone of the submission** is abject. **In vain had Isaiah** counselled resistance, and promised deliverance if trust were placed in God (Isa. viii. 9—15; x. 24—26; xiv. 24, 25). When the siege commenced, all was dismay within the walls—it was "a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity" (Isa. xxii. 5). Some of the rulers fled (Isa. xxii. 3); others gave themselves up for lost, and resolved on "a short life and a merry one" (Isa. xxii. 13). Hezekiah found no encouragement to resist in any of his counsellors except Isaiah, and was therefore driven to despair—acknowledged himself in the wrong for rebelling, and besought Sennacherib to "return from him"—*i.e.* to retire and withdraw **his troops. That which thou puttest on me will I bear.** Whatever burden Sennacherib chooses to put upon him, Hezekiah says he will bear, be it tribute, be it cession of territory, be it indignity of any sort or kind. He makes no reservation; but of course he assumes that the terms about to be offered him will be such as, according to the usages of war at the time, would be regarded as reasonable. **And the King of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah King of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.** Sennacherib says that the payment made him by Hezekiah was thirty talents of gold and *eight* hundred talents of silver ('Records of the Past,' vol. i. p. 39, line 34). He has, perhaps, exaggerated, or he may have counted in all the silver that he carried off from the whole of Judæa; or, possibly, the payment to purchase peace was eight hundred talents, the fixed tribute three hundred. We learn from Sennacherib's inscription that, besides making this money payment, Hezekiah had to consent to (1) a cession of territory towards the south-west, which was apportioned between Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod; (2) the surrender of an Assyrian vassal king, detained in Jerusalem; and (3) the contribution to the harem at Nineveh of two if not more of his daughters.

Ver. 15.—**And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house.** Ahaz had exhausted both these stores of wealth about thirty years previously (ch. xvi. 8), and there could not have been very much accumulation since. Hence the stripping of the metal-plating from off the temple doors (see the next verse).

Ver. 16.—**At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which Hezekiah King of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the King of Assyria.** In the time of his great wealth and prosperity, Hezekiah, while engaged in restoring the temple (2 Chron. xxix. 17—19), had adorned the pillars and doors of the sanctuary with a metal covering, which was probably gold,

like Solomon's (1 Kings vi. 20—22, 28, 30, 32). To make up the "thirty talents of gold" he was now obliged to undo his own work, and strip the doors and pillars bare. Sennacherib tells us that, besides the two large sums of gold and silver, Hezekiah sent him at this time "woven cloth, scarlet, embroidered; precious stones of large size; couches of ivory; movable thrones of ivory; skins of buffaloes; horns of buffaloes; and two kinds of woods" ('Records of the Past,' vol. i. p. 39, lines 34—37). It was customary to accompany the fixed tribute with the more precious products of each country.

Vers. 17—37.—SECOND EXPEDITION OF SENNACHERIB. This section and ch. xix. form one continuous narrative, which can only have been divided on account of its great length (fifty-eight verses). The subject is one throughout, viz. Sennacherib's second expedition against Hezekiah. The narrative flows on without a break. It consists of (1) an account of the embassy of Rabshakeh (ch. xviii. 17—37; xix. 1—8); (2) an account of an insulting letter written by Sennacherib to Hezekiah, and of Hezekiah's "spreading it before the Lord" (ch. xix. 9—14); (3) the prayer of Hezekiah, and God's answer to it by the mouth of Isaiah (ch. xix. 15—34); (4) the destruction of Sennacherib's host, his flight to Nineveh, and his murder by two of his sons. The Assyrian inscriptions are absolutely silent with respect to this expedition and its result—it being a fixed rule with the historiographers of Assyria to pass over without notice all defeats and disasters.

Ver. 17.—**And the King of Assyria sent Tartan and Rabsaris and Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah with a great host against Jerusalem.** Sennacherib appears, by his great inscription, to have returned to Nineveh, with his Judæan captives (more than two hundred thousand in number) and his rich booty, towards the close of the year B.C. 701. In the following year he was called into Babylonia, where troubles had broken out, and Hezekiah, left to himself, seems to have made up his mind to revolt, and to have called in the assistance of Egypt (Isa. xxx. 4; ch. xviii. 21). Sabatok was probably the nominal sovereign, but Tirhakah, who held his court at Meroë, was lord paramount. An alliance was made; and hopes held out that, if Sennacherib again marched into Judæa, Hezekiah would receive effectual aid, especially in chariots and horsemen (ver. 24). Under these circumstances, Sennacherib made his second expedition, probably in B.C. 699. Regarding Egypt as his main enemy, and Judæa as of small account, he led his army by the ordinary route into the Philistian plain, pressing southward, while he detached a moderate force to hold Jerusalem in check, to threaten it, and, if an opportunity offered, to seize it. At the head of this force were three commanders, who seem to have borne, all of them, official titles; viz. the Tartan, or "commander-in-chief;" the Rabsaris, or "chief eunuch;" and the Rabshakeh, or "chief cupbearer." The Tartan was the highest of all the officials of the empire, and ranked next to the king. Sennacherib detached this force from Lachish, which seems to have revolted, and to have been undergoing a second siege. **And when they were come up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool.** It was, perhaps, this army which Isaiah saw in vision, advancing on Jerusalem from the pass of Michmash (x. 28—32), and "shaking its hand" at the city from the northern plateau outside the walls—the traditional "camp of the Assyrians." At any rate, the "upper pool" and the "fuller's field" were in this direction (see the comment on Isa. vii. 3). **Which is in the highway of the fuller's field.**

Ver. 18.—**And when they had called to the king**—*i.e.* when they had announced that they had a message to deliver to the king—**there came out to them**; by Hezekiah's order, doubtless. Learning that they were three of Sennacherib's highest officials, he sent out to them three of the chief officers of his own court. **Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household.** Recently promoted to that high position, instead of Shebna, according to the prophecy (Isa. xxii. 19—22), and perhaps by the influence of Isaiah. **And Shebna the scribe**; or, *secretary*—the official employed to draw up documents, such as treaties, protocols, despatches, and the like. He had been removed to this inferior position, to make room for Eliakim, but had not yet suffered the banishment with which Isaiah (xxii. 18) had threatened him. **And Joah the son of Asaph the recorder**; or, *remembrancer*—the person whose chief duty it probably was to chronicle events as they occurred, and finally to draw up the memoir of each reign at its close. (For another view, see the comment on 1 Kings iv. 3.)

Ver. 19.—**And Rabshakeh said unto them.** Although the third in order of dignity, Rabshakeh took the word, probably because he was familiar with the Hebrew language, and could speak it fluently (see ver. 26). His being spokesman made him appear to be the chief ambassador, and made Isaiah, in the parallel passage (xxxvi.), pass

over in silence the other two. **Speak ye now to Hezekiah.** It was a rude, almost an insulting commencement, to give Hezekiah no title—neither "the king," nor "King of Judah," nor even "your master," but to call him merely "Hezekiah." The same rudeness is persisted in throughout (vers. 22, 29, 30, 31, 32), and it is emphasized by the employment of some title or other, generally a lofty title, when Sennacherib is spoken of. Sennacherib himself is less rude in his inscriptions (see the 'Eponym Canon,' pp. 133, line 45; 134, line 6; 136, lines 21, 15). **Thus saith the great king, the King of Assyria.** The "great king"—*sarru rabu*—was the ordinary title assumed by Assyrian monarchs. It passed from them to the Babylonians and the Persians. Sennacherib calls himself, on Bellino's cylinder, "the great king, the powerful king, the King of Assyria, the king unrivalled, the pious monarch, the worshipper of the great gods, the protector of the just, the lover of the righteous, the noble warrior, the valiant hero, the first of all kings, the great punisher of unbelievers" (see 'Records of the Past,' vol. i. p. 25). **What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?** We may assume that Hezekiah had, at the beginning of the year, withheld his tribute. He had certainly not gone out to meet the "great king" as he approached his territories, to do homage, and place the forces of Judah at his disposal. On the contrary, he had taken up an attitude of hostility. He had fortified his capital (2 Chron. xxxii. 2—5); he had collected arms and soldiers, and had shut himself up in Jerusalem, having made every preparation for a siege. Sennacherib inquires why he has dared to do all this—on what strength does he rely? What is the ground of his confidence?

Ver. 20.—**Thou sayest** (**but they are but vain words**); literally, *words of lips;* i.e. words which the lips speak, without the heart having any conviction of their truth. We must suppose that Sennacherib has either heard from his spies that Hezekiah is speaking to the people as he represents him to be speaking, or conjectures what he is likely to say. According to the writer of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8), what he did say was very different. He neither boasted of "counsel" nor of material "strength;" but simply said, "There be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." **I have counsel and strength for the war.** Sennacherib imagines that Hezekiah's real trust is in the "fleshly arm" of Egypt, and in the counsellors who have advised and brought about the alliance. And perhaps **he is** not far wrong. Hezekiah, it would seem, "halted between two opinions." He hoped for aid from Egypt; but, if it failed, then he hoped for the Divine help promised by Isaiah. **Now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me?**

Ver. 21.—**Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt.** Sennacherib had good information. Hezekiah's embassy to Egypt (Isa. xxx. 2—7) was known to him; and he rightly judged that Hezekiah was expecting aid from this quarter. This expectation he ridicules. What is Egypt but a "bruised reed"? The Nile bulrush (גֹּמֶא) has a goodly show; it rears itself aloft, and looks strong and stately; but use it as a staff, lean upon it, and it snaps at once. Such is Pharaoh—nay, he is worse; he is a *bruised* reed, which can give no support at all, even for a moment. The Assyrian monarch was justified in his contempt. Egypt had never yet given any effectual support to the states attacked by Assyria. Shebek gave no manner of aid to Hoshea, but allowed Samaria to be conquered in B.C. 722 without making the slightest effort on her behalf. In B.C. 720 he came to the aid of Gaza ('Eponym Canon,' p. 126), but Gaza was captured notwithstanding. In B.C. 711 either he or Sabatok undertook the protection of Ashdod, but with the same lack of success (ibid., pp. 130, 131). "Kings of Egypt" assisted the Ascalonites against Sennacherib himself in B.C. 701, and were again completely defeated (ibid., pp. 133, 134). Sargon calls the King of Egypt, whose aid was invited by the Ashdodites (ibid., p. 130, line 37), "a monarch who could not save them." **On which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it;** *i.e.* trust in Egypt will not only bring a country no advantage, but it will bring positive injury. The sharp silicious casing of a reed might run into the hand and give an ugly wound. **So is Pharaoh King of Egypt unto all that trust on him.** Sargon in one place (ibid., p. 130, line 36) speaks of a King of Egypt under the title of "Pharaoh."

Ver. 22.—**But if ye say unto me, We trust in the Lord our God.** Sennacherib had also heard of this second ground of trust, which Hezekiah had certainly put forward with great openness (2 Chron. xxxii. 8). No doubt he thought it purely fantastical and illusory. But he was not unaware that it might inspire a determined resistance. He therefore condescended to argue against reliance on it. **Is not that he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away?** His counsellors have suggested to Sennacherib a specious argument—How can Hezekiah confidently rely on the protection of the God of the land, Jehovah, when he has been employing himself for

years in the destruction of this very God's high places and altars? Surely the God will not favour one who has been pulling down his places of worship! Putting out of sight the special requirements of the Jewish Law, the argument might well seem unanswerable. At any rate, it was calculated to have a certain effect on the minds of those who were attached to the high-place worship, and desired its continuance. **And hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem.** A weak argument, if addressed to Jews of Jerusalem only, but likely to have weight with the country Jews, if, as is probable, they had crowded into the city when the invasion began.

Ver. 23.—**Now therefore, I pray thee, give pledges to my lord the King of Assyria, and I will deliver thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them.** "Pledge thyself," *i.e.* "to find the men, and I will pledge myself to find the horses." It is a strong expression of contempt for the military power of the Jews. They have not only no trained cavalry, but, were any one to furnish them with two thousand horses, they could not find the men to ride them. The Jewish army does, in fact, appear to have consisted of infantry and chariots only.

Ver. 24.—**How then wilt thou turn away the face of**—*i.e.* "repulse," "cause to retreat"—**one captain of the least of my master's servants**; literally, *one governor*—the word used is that which in modern times takes the form of "pasha," or "pacha." It properly applies to the rulers of provinces; but as these were expected to collect and command, upon occasions, the troops of their province, it has a secondary sense of "commander" or "captain." **And put thy trust**; rather, *and thou puttest thy trust*—in this extremity of weakness, so far as thine own forces are concerned, thou art so foolish as to put thy trust in Egypt, and to expect that her strength will make up for thine own impotence. Vain hope! (see ver. 21). **On Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?** or, *chariots and chariot-men.*

Ver. 25.—**Am I now come up without the Lord against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.** The Assyrian monarchs constantly state that Asshur, their "great god," directs them to make war against this or that nation ('Records of the Past,' vol. i. pp. 48, 60, 70, 71, 82, etc.), but not that the god of the country to be attacked does so. It is difficult to account for Sennacherib's very exceptional boast, "Jehovah said to me, Go up against this land." Perhaps he identifies "Jehovah" with "Asshur." Perhaps he has heard of prophecies, uttered in the name of Jehovah, by Jewish prophets, which threatened the land with desolation at the hand of the Assyrians (*e.g.* Isa. vii. 17—24; x. 5—12; Joel ii. 1—11, etc.). Or he may have made the statement in mere bravado, as one that might frighten some, and at any rate could not be contradicted.

Ver. 26.—**Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian language**; literally, *in the Aramaic language.* Hebrew, Aramaic, and Assyrian were three cognate languages, closely allied, and very similar both in their grammatical forms and in their vocabularies, but still sufficiently different to be distinct languages, which were only intelligible to those who had learnt them. Rabshakeh had addressed the Jewish officials in Hebrew, probably as the language which they would best understand, if it were not even the only one that they would understand; not with the express "object of influencing the common people," as Bähr supposes. But the Jewish officials feared that the words uttered were influencing them. They proposed, therefore, that the further negotiations should be conducted in Aramaic, a tongue which they understood, and one which they supposed that Rabshakeh, as he knew Hebrew, would also know. Aramaic was spoken in most of the tract that lay between Assyria and Palestine, in Syria and Damascus certainly, in Upper Mesopotamia, along the line of the Euphrates, and perhaps as far as the Khabour river. **For we understand it.** It is not likely that the Jews of this time generally understood Aramaic; but high officials of the court, who might have to deal with embassies and negotiate treaties, found it necessary to understand it, just as such persons in our own country have to know French. **And talk not with us in the Jews' language in the ears of the people that are on the wall.** Besides the sentinels and other soldiers, there would probably be many idlers upon the wall, attracted by the unwonted spectacle of an ambassadorial *cortége*, and anxious to pick up intelligence. The loud voices of Orientals would be heard to a considerable distance.

Ver. 27.—**But Rabshakeh said unto them, Hath my master sent me to thy master, and to thee, to speak these words? hath he not sent me to the men which sit on the wall?** An intolerable speech on the part of an envoy, and one which might have justified an order to send an arrow through his head. Ambassadors are accredited by governments to governments, and the safe conduct granted to them is on the understanding that they will conduct themselves according to established usage. In no state of society can it have been allowable for envoys to intervene

between the governors and the governed, and endeavour to stir up discontent among the latter. Yet this is what Rabshakeh did, and boasted of doing. Well might Isaiah say of such an arrogant and lawless aggressor, "He hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man" (see Isa. xxxiii. 8). **That they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you?** Rabshakeh means to say that the effect of the men "sitting on the wall," and continuing the defence of the town, will be to bring them to the last extremity of hunger and thirst, when they will be forced even to consume their own excrement (comp. ch. vi. 25—29).

Ver. 28.—**Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spake, saying.** Rabshakeh had probably been sitting before. He now stood up to attract attention, and raised his voice to be the better heard. Still speaking Hebrew, and not Aramaic, he addressed himself directly to the people on the wall, soldiers and others, doing the very opposite to what he had been requested to do, and outraging all propriety. History scarcely presents any other instance of such coarse and barefaced effrontery, unless the affronts put upon a Danubian principality by the envoy of a "great Power" may be regarded as constituting a parallel. **Hear the word of the great king, the King of Assyria.** It is scarcely likely that Sennacherib had anticipated his envoy's action, much less directed it, and told him exactly what he was to say. But Rabshakeh thinks his words will have more effect if he represents them as those of his master.

Ver. 29.—**Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you.** Rabshakeh and his master, no doubt, both of them thought Hezekiah's grounds of confidence would prove fallacious, and that all who should trust in them would find themselves "deceived." There were but two grounds that Hezekiah could possibly put forward: (1) deliverance by human means—by his own armed strength and that of his allies; (2) deliverance by supernatural means—by some great manifestation of miraculous power on the part of Jehovah. Rabshakeh thinks both equally impossible. The first, however, is too absurd for argument, and he therefore takes no further notice of it; but the second he proceeds to combat, in vers. 33—35. **For he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand.** Correct grammar requires "out of *my* hand;" but Rabshakeh forgets that he is professing to report the words of Sennacherib.

Ver. 30.—**Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord.** Rabshakeh seems to be aware that this is the argument which Hezekiah is, in point of fact, mainly urging. If at one time he had trusted in Egypt, that trust was now quite or well-nigh gone. The tone of his exhortations was that recorded in Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxii. 6—9), "He set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying, Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him [see ch. vi. 16]; with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah King of Judah." **Saying, The Lord will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the King of Assyria.** Hezekiah's was, in part, a general conviction that God would not forsake his people, who had recently turned to him, if not with absolute sincerity, yet at any rate with public confession of sin, and public acknowledgment of his mercies, and public profession of an intention to serve him; in part, probably, a special reliance on some definite prophecies of Isaiah, that the city should not be taken (see Isa. xxxi. 4—6; xxxiiii. 20—22).

Ver. 31.—**Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the King of Assyria.** Rabshakeh, before concluding, tries the effect of blandishments. The King of Assyria is no harsh lord, as he has been represented to them. He will be a kinder master than Hezekiah. Hezekiah condemns them to all the hardships of a siege; and then, if they survive it, to a wasted land, ruined homes, broken cisterns. Sennacherib, if they will but yield to him, promises them peace and prosperity, a time of quiet enjoyment in their own land, and then removal to another equally good, where they will "live and not die," be happy and not miserable. It will be observed that none but material inducements are held out to them. They are expected to barter freedom, independence, religious privileges, country, home, for the sake of creature comforts—for ease, quiet, and security. Setting aside the question whether they could count on the performance of the promises made them, it will be felt that they did well not to be tempted. Better vigorous national life, with any amount of hardship, struggle, and suffering, than the gilded chains of the most peaceful servitude. **Make an agreement with me by a present**—rather, *make peace with me*, or "make *terms* with me" (Knobel, Thenius, Keil, Bähr); in other words, give in your submission—**and come out to me**; *i.e.* quit the town, surrender it (see 1 Sam. xi. 3; Jer. xxi. 9; xxxviii. 17), place yourselves at my mercy, "and then" see what great things I will do for

you." The tone, as Bähr says, is one of "wheedling" and cajolement. **And then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig tree.** Proverbial expressions for a peaceful, happy time (see 1 Kings iv. 25; Micah iv. 4; Zech. iii. 10), when there are no inroads, no ravages, no disturbances. Rabshakeh promises, in the name of Sennacherib, that they shall rest in their own land for a term—an indefinite term—in a blissful state of peace and quietness before any new resolution is taken about them. **And drink ye every one the waters of his cistern;** rather, *of his well* (בר). Every man who had a field or a vineyard was sure to have a well in it. Cisterns for the storage of rain-water were comparatively uncommon.

Ver. 32.—**Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land.** Rabshakeh did not dissemble the fact that they must look for a transplantation. Probably he felt that, if he did, he would not be believed. The transplantations had been too numerous and too recent, the examples of Samaria, Damascus, Hamath, Ashdod, etc., were too notorious, for it to be worth his while to pretend that Judæa would have any other fate. He therefore set himself the task of persuading the Jews that transplantation had nothing about it displeasing or even disagreable—that, in fact, they were to be envied rather than pitied for being about to experience it. The King of Assyria, in the goodness of his paternal breast, would select for them a land as nearly as possible "like their own land"—a land teeming with corn and wine and oil, full of rich arable tracts, of vineyards and of olive-grounds, which would yield them those fruits of the earth to which they were accustomed, in abundance. What security they had that these promises would be fulfilled, he did not attempt to show them; much less did he explain to them why, if they were to gain rather than lose, it was worth while transplanting them at all; how that transplanted nations lost all spirit and patriotism, sank into apathy, and gave no trouble to their masters. **A land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive and of honey** (comp. Deut. viii. 8, 9, which has, no doubt, affected the language of the reporter, who gives the general tenor of Rabshakeh's speech, but could not have taken down or have remembered his exact words) **that ye may live, and not die**—as you will if you follow Hezekiah's advice—**and** [therefore] **hearken not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth**—*i.e.* seeketh to persuade—**you, saying, The Lord will deliver us** (see the comment on ver. 30).

Ver. 33.—**Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the King of Assyria?** To Rabshakeh, and the Assyrians generally, this seemed a crushing and convincing, absolutely unanswerable, argument. It had all the force of what appeared to them a complete induction. As far back as they could remember, they had always been contending with different tribes and nations, each and all of whom had had gods in whom they trusted, and the result had been uniform—the gods had been unequal to the task of protecting their votaries against Assyria: how could it be imagined that Jehovah would prove an exception? If he was not exactly, as Knobel calls him, "the insignificant god of an insignificant people," yet how was he better or stronger than the others—than Chemosh, or Moloch, or Rimmon, or Baal, or Ashima, or Khaldi, or Bel, or Merodach? What had he done for the Jews hitherto? Nothing remarkable, so far as the Assyrians knew; for their memories did not reach back so far as the time of Asa and the deliverance from Zerah, much less to the conquest of Canaan or the Exodus. He had not saved the trans-Jordanic tribes from Tiglath-pileser, or Samaria from his successors. Was it not madness to suppose that he would save Judæa from Sennacherib? A heathen reasoner could not see, could not be expected to see, the momentous difference; that the gods of the other countries were "no gods" (ch. xix. 18), while Jehovah was "the Lord of the whole earth."

Ver. 34.—**Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad?** Hamath and Arpad had been recently conquered (about B.C. 720) by Sargon (see the 'Eponym Canon,' pp. 126—128). Of the latter city but little is known, not even its site. We find it generally connected with Damascus (Jer. xlix. 23; 'Eponym Canon,' pp. 68, 126) and Hamath (ch. xix. 13; Isa. x. 9; xxxvi. 19; xxxvii. 13; Jer. xlix. 23; 'Eponym Canon,' p. 126), and may conjecture that it lay between them, either in Cœlo-Syria or in the Anti-Libanus. (On Hamath, see the commentary upon ch. xiv. 25; and for its special god, Ashima, see that on ch. xvii. 30.) **Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?** (On the cities and gods of Sepharvaim and Ivah (or Ava), see the comment on ch. xvii. 24 and 31.) "Hena," mentioned always with Sepharvaim and Ivah (ch. xix. 13; Isa. xxxviii. 13), is probably Anah on the Euphrates, about seventy miles above Hit (Ivah). Nothing is known of its gods. Probably Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah had rebelled in conjunction, and been reconquered at no distant date. Sargon mentions in his annals that he besieged and took Sepharvaim (Sippara) in his twelfth year (B.C. 710). **Have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand?** There is probably some compression of the original narrative here. **The**

meaning is, "Have they delivered their several cities, or has the god of Samaria delivered his city out of my hand?" No god had hitherto delivered any city which the Assyrians had attacked.

Ver. 35.—**Who are they among all the gods of the countries**—*i.e.* the countries with which Assyria had been at war—**that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?** "Produce an example of deliverance," Rabshakeh means to say, "before you speak of deliverance as probable, or even possible. If you cannot, relinquish the hope, and submit yourselves." Rabshakeh cannot conceive the idea that Jehovah is anything but a local god, on a par with all the other gods of the countries.

Ver. 36.—**But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word.** All Rabshakeh's efforts to produce open disaffection failed. Whatever impression his arguments may have made, no indication was given that they had produced any. If, then, he had hoped to bring about a mutiny, or even to create a disturbance, he was disappointed. **For the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not.** Hezekiah had either anticipated Rabshakeh's tactics, and given an order beforehand that no word should be uttered, or he had promptly met them by sending such an order, on learning Rabshakeh's proceedings, The latter is more probable, since such an outrageous course as that which Rabshakeh had pursued can scarcely have been expected.

Ver. 37.—**Then came Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes rent.** They had rent their clothes, not so much in grief or in alarm, as in horror at Rabshakeh's blasphemies. They were blasphemies, no doubt, arising from "invincible ignorance," and not intended as insults to the one Almighty Being who rules the earth, of whose existence Rabshakeh had probably no conception; but they struck on Jewish ears as insults to Jehovah, and therefore as dreadful and horrible (comp. Gen. xxxvii. 29; 1 Sam. iv. 12; 2 Sam. i. 2; Ezra ix. 3, etc.). **And told him the words of Rabshakeh;** reported to him, *i.e.* as nearly as they could, all that Rabshakeh had said. The three envoys would supplement, and perhaps correct, one another; and Hezekiah would have conveyed to him a full and, on the whole, exact account of the message sent to him through Rabshakeh by the Assyrian king, and of Rabshakeh's method of enforcing it. The crisis of Hezekiah's life was reached. As he acted under it would be fixed his own fate, his character in the judgment of all future time, and the fate of his own country.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 4.—*Iconoclasm right or wrong, judicious or injudicious, according to circumstances.* The destruction of the brazen serpent of Moses by Hezekiah has always been a favourite argument with extreme iconoclasts for their extreme views. In the time of Henry VIII., and still more in that of Cromwell, statuary was destroyed or mutilated, precious pictures were burnt, priceless stained-glass windows were shivered to atoms, by those with whom a main justification of their conduct was the example of Hezekiah. Let that example, then, be considered, both in respect of what Hezekiah did, and of what he did not do.

I. WHAT HEZEKIAH DID. 1. He removed the high places, which were distinctly contrary to the Law, since the Law allowed sacrifice in one place only—before the ark of the covenant, in the tabernacle, or at Jerusalem. 2. He brake down the "images," or idolatrous emblems of Baal—mere *pillars* probably, which were the objects of an actual worship. 3. He cut down the groves, or idolatrous emblems of Ashtoreth—"sacred trees," also the objects of worship. 4. He brake in pieces the brazen serpent, to which the Israelites had for some time been in the habit of offering incense.

II. WHAT HEZEKIAH DID NOT DO. Hezekiah did not understand the second commandment in any other sense than Solomon. He allowed the ministry of art to religion. He left untouched the carved figures of cherubim and palm-trees and open flowers upon the walls of the temple (1 Kings vi. 29). He left untouched the brazen lavers, on the borders of which were lions, oxen, and cherubim (1 Kings vii. 29). He probably restored to their place, he certainly did not destroy, the twelve oxen (Jer. lii. 20) which Solomon had made to support his "brazen sea" (1 Kings vii. 25), and which Ahaz had removed from the temple (ch. xvi. 17). He himself added to the gold ornamentation of the doors and pillars (ch. xviii. 16). It is evident, therefore, that Hezekiah's iconoclasm was limited to those objects which were being actually

abused to idolatrous uses at the time when he destroyed them. He did not spy around him, scenting *peril* of idolatry in every image or other representation of natural forms that had come down to him from former ages, even when they were employed in the service of religion. He was on the side of a rich and gorgeous and artistic ceremonial, of a musical service (2 Chron. xxix. 25—27), a highly ornamented sanctuary, a "house" as "magnifical" as art could make it (1 Chron. xxii. 5). He recognized that the preservation of artistic objects devoted to religion was the rule, destruction of them the rare exception, only justified (1) where idolatrous abuse had actually crept in; and (2) where such idolatrous abuse still continued. An observance of these wise limitations would have saved much that is now irrevocably lost in the past, and may be required to save what remains to us of religious art in the future.

Vers. 5—7.—*God's service not really a hard service.* God's service is not the *hard* service that some suppose it to be. No doubt it involves a certain amount of pain and suffering. For, first, there is no true service of God without self-denial; and self-denial is painful. Secondly, it involves chastening at the hand of God; for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. xii. 6); and chastening is "not joyous, but grievous" (Heb. xii. 11). But there are to be set against these pains so many and so great compensations as leave a vast preponderance of advantage, and even enjoyment, to the godly over the ungodly.

I. THE SATISFACTION OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE. Just as there is nothing so painful, so depressing, so burdensome, as an evil conscience, the continually abiding sense of guiltiness and ill desert, so there is nothing which is a greater comfort to a man, more calculated to sustain him and maintain within him a perpetual quiet cheerfulness, than "the answer of a good conscience towards God" (1 Pet. iii. 21), the knowledge that one has striven and is striving to do God's will, and that by God's grace one has been kept from falling away from him. Notwithstanding their self-depreciation and self-distrust, good men have, on the whole, a self-approving conscience (Rom. ii. 15), which is a source of inward satisfaction and enjoyment.

II. THE ESTEEM AND APPROVAL OF GOOD MEN. There is implanted in man a love of approbation, the gratification of which is the source of a very positive pleasure. Godly men, good men, whatever amount of dislike they may arouse among those whose designs they thwart, or to whom their lives are a continual reproach, elicit from the better sort a much greater amount of very warm and cordial approval. This cannot but be a satisfaction to them. The praise of men is not what they seek; but when it comes to them unsought, as it will almost certainly come at last, it cannot fail to be grateful and acceptable.

III. TEMPORAL PROSPERITY ARISING FROM MAN'S RESPECT AND ESTEEM. The approval of our fellow-men naturally leads on to temporal advantages. Men place those whom they esteem in situations of trust, which are also, generally or frequently, situations of emolument. They make them presents or leave them legacies. They give them their custom, and recommend their friends to do the same. The worldly maxim, "Honesty is the best policy," witnesses to the worldly advantage which accrues, by mere natural causation, to the upright, honest man. "*All things* work together for good to them that love God;" and, generally speaking, even this world's goods seem to gather round them, and to cling to them, in spite of their slight esteem for earthly dross, and their proneness to scatter their riches on those around them.

IV. TEMPORAL PROSPERITY ARISING FROM THE DIRECT ACTION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE. Of this we have in Hezekiah a notable example. He "clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, . . . and the Lord was with him; and *he prospered whithersoever he went forth.*" The Divine blessing rested on all that he did; God "prospered him in all his works." When he seemed at the point of death, he miraculously recovered from his sickness, and God added to his life fifteen years (ch. xx. 6). When he provoked a judgment by indiscreet ostentation, the boon was granted him that the judgment should not fall in his days (ch. xx. 19). When an overwhelming calamity seemed about to fall upon him, and to crush both him and his nation, the catastrophe was averted by a stupendous miracle—the Assyrian host was destroyed, and the peril escaped (ch. xix. 35). "Riches and honour exceeding much" were given him (2 Chron. xxxii. 27), and he was "magnified in the sight of all the

nations" (2 Chron. xxxii. 23). It may be said that all this was abnormal, and belonged to "the age of miracles;" but the principles of God's action do not change, and if we examine human life at the present day dispassionately, we shall find that still, *as a general rule*, if men cleave to the Lord, and keep his commandments, and depart not from following him, he will be with them, and will, more or less, prosper them.

Vers. 13—17.—*The danger of trusting to a purchased peace.* I. IN THE HISTORY OF NATIONS a purchased peace is seldom more enduring or more trustworthy than this peace which Hezekiah bought of Sennacherib. Once successful in extorting money by threats, why should an enemy refrain from repeating the process? Why should he stop till he has squeezed the sponge dry, and there is no more to be got from his victim? Even then, why should he not step in and execute his original threat of destruction and ruin? So Samaria found when she gave her thousand talents to the Assyrians (ch. xv. 19). So Rome found when she bribed Attila and Alaric. So will all nations ever find who seek to prolong their lives a little bit by paying for being let alone. And so also—

II. IN THE HISTORY OF INDIVIDUALS. Persons frequently get themselves into some trouble or other, which they do not wish to be known, and their secret is discovered by some unscrupulous individual, who proceeds to trade upon it. What will they give him to remain silent? If they once consent to purchase a peace of their enemy, all peace in life is gone from them. A man's appetite is only whetted by the first bribe, and still more by the second. "Increase of appetite doth grow by what it feeds on." Demand follows demand, threat follows threat. The blood-sucker is insatiate. True wisdom consists in not yielding to the first threat, in declining to purchase peace, and defying the enemy. He may as well do his worst at once as at last. It will generally be found that his worst is not so very bad. Even if it is, it is the just penalty which has to be paid for our past transgression, and which must be paid in some way or other, and at some time, here or hereafter. It is best for us that it should be paid soon; for the penalty of sin, if not so paid, is apt to be demanded at last with a heavy accumulation of interest.

Vers. 20, 21.—*Bruised reeds.* It is astonishing what trust is still placed, by generation after generation of mankind, in "bruised reeds." Whatever may be the case with individuals, mankind, the human race, learns nothing from experience. Men still trust implicitly in such "bruised reeds" as these—

I. BIG BATTALIONS. They think they are safe if they have sufficient "strength for the war." They go on increasing their military establishments, adding regiment to regiment, and battery to battery, and *corps d'armée* to *corps d'armée*. They count the armies of their neighbours; they reckon up man against man, and gun against gun, and ship against ship; and calculate, and plan, and act, as if the "multitude of an host"—the number of troops capable of being brought at once into the field—was everything. They forget that "it is nothing to the Lord to help, whether with many or with them that have no power" (2 Chron. xiv. 11). They forget, or misread, history, and fail to note how often "the race has not been to the swift, nor the battle to the strong" (Eccles. ix. 11).

II. POWERFUL ALLIES. Weak powers have always some "Egypt" to which they look for succour. Strong powers count on "triple" or "quadruple" alliances to augment their strength, and render them irresistible. They forget how easily alliances are broken up, how sure they are to arouse discontents and jealousies, how little dependence can be placed on the promises of statesmen, or the persistence of a particular mood in a nation, or the view which a state may take of its interests. They forget that the friend of to-day may be the enemy of to-morrow, and may fail them at the moment of greatest need.

III. SAGACIOUS STATESMEN AND GENERALS. It is forgotten, or at any rate not borne steadily in mind, how intellect decays, how mental power lessens, as men grow old; how often under a prolonged strain the strongest intellect suddenly snaps and is no longer of any account. Nor is it generally felt and recognized how limited and imperfect even the greatest intellect always is—how incompetent to forecast all possibilities, or to deal with all emergencies. "The weakness of God is stronger than man,

and the foolishness of God is wiser than man" (1 Cor. i. 25). Man's wisdom is at best a poor purblind wisdom, apt to err, apt to fail when most needed—a very "bruised reed" to trust in.

IV. GOOD LUCK OR A FORTUNATE STAR. The trust of the first Napoleon in his "star" is well known. It is not so well known, but it is sufficiently attested, that the third Napoleon had nearly as implicit a trust. Thousands of persons deem themselves "lucky," and trust in their "good luck," as if it were an actual tangible possession. Otherwise there would be far less gambling than there is. The poor peasants of Italy and Germany would waste less money in lotteries, and the simpletons of England less in bets upon horses. Persons' "luck" is, on the whole, probably about equal, and if a man has been "lucky" hitherto, he should expect to be "unlucky" in the future.

V. SOMETHING TURNING UP. The phrase is a vulgar one, but it would need a long periphrasis to express the idea otherwise, and even then we might not make our meaning clear. Men who do not think themselves particularly lucky are still constantly waiting for "something to turn up," looking for it, trusting in it. The trust is made an excuse for idleness, for inaction, for waste of the best years of life, even for dissipated courses—for gambling, drinking, frequenting evil company. This "bruised reed" is more rotten even than most of the others. For the idler, the waster of his time, the haunter of smoking saloons, billiard-rooms, and race-courses, nothing ever does "turn up." He offers no temptation to steady business-like men to employ him. He does not seek work, and work is not very likely to seek him. He is an idler, and will remain an idler to the end of the chapter. There is no help for him, unless he gives up his silly trust, and betakes himself to a better one.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The secret of a successful life; or, trust in God, and its results.* What a refreshing contrast to some of the lives we have been considering, is this description of the life of Hezekiah! How pleasant it is to read of such a life as his, after we have read of so many kings of Judah and Israel, that "they did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin"! It is a pleasant contrast even to the life of Hezekiah's own father Ahaz. It is a somewhat strange thing that, brought up amid such evil surroundings, Hezekiah should have turned out so well. The chances were all against him. His father's example was anything but favourable to the development of religion in his son. How careful parents should be as to the example they set their children! The best help parents can give their children to begin life with is godly training and a Christian example. I read lately, "that of the anarchists at Chicago, who were executed for their crimes some time ago, almost all had either been deprived of their parents when young, or had never received any home training; they had never been to a Sunday school; the influences surrounding them had been utterly godless." What a responsibility rests on parents to train their children well! Much of their future happiness depends upon the home life of childhood and youth. Perhaps Hezekiah had a good mother. Perhaps he had been entrusted to the care of some one of the priests who remained faithful to God amid the prevailing unfaithfulness, idolatry, and sin. Perhaps he was early brought under the influence of Isaiah. At any rate, we read of him that he did right in the sight of the Lord. He is singled out for special praise. It is said of him that "*he trusted in the Lord God of Israel*; so that after him was none like him among the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (ver. 5). What was the consequence? Just what the consequence will be to all who put their trust in the Lord and walk in his ways: "*The Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth.*"

I. TRUST IN GOD LEADS TO PERSONAL RELIGION. Hezekiah's faith in God was not a mere idle profession. It did not consist in the mere belief of certain historical facts. It did not consist in the mere assent to certain doctrinal truths. It did not consist in the mere observance of certain outward forms and ceremonies. It was a real faith. It extended to his whole life. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did" (ver. 3). "He clave unto the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the

Lord commanded Moses" (ver. 6). *Such is true religion.* Religion is the dedication of the heart and life to God. A man may differ from me in creed, and in the way he worships the same God; but if he loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and serves God in sincerity, he is a truly religious man. "In every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." How expressive and instructive are some of these quaint old phrases! "*He clave unto the Lord.*" Hezekiah set before him one great aim at the commencement of his life, and that was to please God. Whatever it might cost, he made up his mind to keep close to God. It is a grand resolution for the young to make. It is a grand aim to keep before them in life. But Hezekiah had not merely a goal at which he aimed. *He had certain well-defined lines* along which he reached that goal. He knew that, to please God, he must keep his commandments. He did not set up his own will in opposition to the will of God, king though he was. He did not dispute the wisdom of God's commands. He felt that God knew much better than he did the path of wisdom and of duty. This is one of the best evidences of true faith—of real trust in God. We may not see the reason for a command of God, but let us obey it. A parent will give his child many commands, for which it is quite unnecessary, perhaps undesirable, that the child should know the reason. Obedience based on faith is one of the first principles of life. Here, then, was the beginning of Hezekiah's success in life. It began with the state of his own heart. He trusted in God. That trust in God moulded his whole character, and character is the foundation of all that is permanent in life.

II. TRUST IN GOD LEADS TO PRACTICAL EFFORT. Hezekiah very soon showed by his conduct that he was determined to serve God. He did not leave the people long in doubt as to which side he was on. In the very first year of his reign, and in the first month of it, he opened the doors of the temple of the Lord, which his father had closed, and repaired them (2 Chron. xxix. 3). As soon as the temple was set in proper order, he caused the priests and the Levites to commence at once the public service of God. Then, in the second month, he issued a proclamation throughout all the land of Israel and Judah, inviting the people to come to Jerusalem to keep the Passover in the house of the Lord. What a festival and time of rejoicing that was! For seven days they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread with great gladness, and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the Lord. Peace offerings were offered; confession of sin was made, not to the priests, but to the Lord God of their fathers; and the presence of the Lord was so manifested among the large congregation, that when the seven days of the Passover were ended, the whole assembly unanimously agreed to keep seven days more. "So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David King of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem." The effect of the service was electrical. When the Passover was finished, the people went out to all the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places and the altars until they had utterly destroyed them all. In all this work of destroying the symbols of idolatry, *Hezekiah the king took a leading part.* Even *the brazen serpent* which Moses had made did not escape the destroying hand. It was an interesting relic of Israel's journeying in the wilderness, and of their wonderful deliverance by God. But it had become a snare to the people. It had become an object of worship to some, as relics and images become to many professing Christians. They worshipped it and burnt incense to it. Hezekiah was not the man to destroy anything that was a help to true devotion. He encouraged the Levites to use the trumpets, the harp, and the psaltery, to stir up and stimulate the singing of the congregation, and to render to God a hearty and glorious service of praise. But he saw that the brazen serpent had become an idol in itself, and was leading the thoughts of the people away from the true Object of worship. So he broke it in pieces. All honour to the determined reformer, who destroyed everything that had become dishonouring to God! All honour to those stern reformers who from time to time have broken in pieces the symbols of idolatry in the Church of Christ! Would that in the Church of Rome to-day some such reformer would arise, who would denounce and overthrow its image-worship and Mariolatry! Such was the work of reformation which Hezekiah accomplished among his people. *It shows how God honours those who are determined to serve him,* and *how he blesses immediate and decided action.* Hezekiah might well have hesitated in

this work. The whole country was given over to idolatry. He might have dreaded a rebellion. In some parts of the country he got little sympathy in his efforts to restore the ancient religion. When the messengers inviting the people to the Passover passed through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh and Zebulon, the people there laughed them to scorn and mocked them. Such manifestations of popular feeling might have caused Hezekiah to falter in his decision. He might have thought that he would introduce his reforms gradually. But no! the idolatry was wrong, and it must be put down at once. The worship of the true God was right, and it must at once be resumed. *Hezekiah was right.* Had he waited, had he begun his reign by tolerating idolatry for a while, he would have found it much harder to overthrow afterwards. Is there not here a lesson for us all? *If you see the right path clearly pointed out to you, resolve to walk in it, though all men should be against you.* Remember the brave words of Athanasius. He was mocked at for his zeal for the truth. Some one said to him, "Athanasius, all the world is against you;" then said he, "Athanasius is against the world." Follow the light of conscience and of duty. What matter though you may incur danger or worldly loss by so doing?

"And because right is right, to follow right
Were reason in the scorn of consequence."

Furthermore, whatever work you see needs to be done, *do it at once.* Promptness and decision are two essential elements of success in life. Do you see that you need to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ if you are to be saved? *Then come to him to-day.* A more convenient season may never arrive. We know not what a day may bring forth. Do you hear God calling you by his Word to perform some act of kindness or forgiveness? *Then do it at once.* Do you hear God calling you to some work of usefulness in his Church? Begin at once to undertake it. If our trust in God is a real trust, it will lead us, not only to personal religion, *but also to practical effort.* We can trust him to take care of us when we are doing his work. "Therefore be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

III. TRUST IN GOD LEADS TO SUCCESS IN LIFE. "And the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth" (ver. 7). He was victorious over his enemies. *He threw off the yoke of the King of Assyria, and drove back the Philistines,* who had made great inroads during the previous reign. *When the people honoured God, their God honoured them and gave them victories over their enemies.* As a reward of Hezekiah's faith and faithfulness, God gave him much riches and honour. Hezekiah had trusted God at the *beginning* of his reign. He had done God's will, though he did not know what it might cost him, and before he was established on the throne. And God did not disappoint his trust, but made him greater and more honoured than all the kings of Judah before or after his time. Even in a temporal point of view, no one ever loses by trusting God and doing what is right. Christ promises that every one who is willing to give up every earthly possession for his sake will receive an hundredfold more in this life, and in the world to come life everlasting. We saw, above, the dangers of prosperity. Hezekiah's career shows us what is *the safeguard of prosperity.* "The Lord was with him." Where that can be said, there is no danger in prosperity. In the godless man, prosperity is often a curse. It hardens his heart. He thinks that he is rich and increased in goods and has need of nothing. But the prosperity of the Christian may be a great blessing to himself and others. Take with you into your business, into your social relations, into every plan you make and every work you undertake, the *presence of God,* the *fear of God,* the *commandments of God;* and then there will be no fear of your success. Trust in the Lord. Put your eternal interests into the hands of Jesus. He is worthy of your trust. They that trust themselves to him shall never perish. Trust in the Lord, that it may lead you to ***personal religion,*** to ***practical effort,*** to ***success in life.***

"Set thou thy trust upon the Lord,
And be thou doing good,
And so thou in the land shalt dwell,
And verily have food."

C. H. I.

Vers. 9—12.—*Captivity and its cause.* (See homily on preceding chapter, vers. 6—23.)—C. H. I.

Vers. 13—16.—*Hezekiah's weakness.* Hezekiah had now been for some time on the throne. God had been with him hitherto, and had prospered him. Perhaps Hezekiah began to trust too much to his own strength. In the seventh verse we are told that he rebelled against the King of Assyria, and served him not. It does not appear that Hezekiah sought God's guidance before taking this bold step. Perhaps it would have been wiser if he had waited a little longer. At any rate, now, when he begins to feel the consequences of his action, he is disposed to shrink from them. The King of Assyria "came up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them." Hezekiah was panic-stricken. He trembled for his throne. He sent a submissive message, saying, "I have offended; return from me; that which thou puttest on me will I bear." We learn here—

I. How weak even a good man is without the help of God. Hezekiah was a good man. He was a wise man. Yet when left to himself how weak he was! how foolishly he acted! "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." It becometh us all to walk humbly with our God. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

II. The evil results of want of faith. Hezekiah's faith in God failed him. When that went, he was helpless. Sennacherib, seeing his craven spirit, appointed him a tribute of "three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold" (ver. 14). Hezekiah was in a difficulty. He had no money to meet this demand. So he followed the very dangerous example set him by his father, and stripped the gold from the doors and pillars of the house of God, and sent it to the King of Assyria. *Want of faith often leads men to use questionable methods.* Men are in need of money, and they cannot trust God to provide for them in the way of honest industry, so they have recourse to speculation and fraud. If we are doing God's will, we may trust him to take care of us.

"It may not be *my* way;
It may not be *thy* way;
But yet in his own way the Lord will provide."

C. H. I.

Vers. 17—37.—*The tempter and his methods: Rabshakeh's address to the leaders and people of Jerusalem.* Hezekiah's gift to the King of Assyria had not saved him. The weakness he showed was rather an encouragement to Sennacherib to continue his attacks upon Judæa. And now a detachment of Sennacherib's army, headed by three officers of rank, comes up to Jerusalem. Their first effort is to induce the people of Jerusalem to surrender. Rabshakeh is the spokesman. His speech is like the speech of a Mephistopheles. It may fairly be taken as an illustration of how the wily tempter himself proceeds in his desire to allure to sin and destruction the souls of men.

I. He pretends to be doing God's work. 1. *He ridicules their confidence in Egypt.* Isaiah himself could hardly have warned them more strongly against the vanity of alliance with other nations. "Thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt" (ver. 21). 2. *He censures Hezekiah for disrespect toward God.* "If ye say unto me, We trust in the Lord God: is not this he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away?" (ver. 22). So Satan sometimes appears as an angel of light. Men of sin and worldliness sometimes show a remarkable interest in the Church of God. 3. *He represents himself as having a commission from God.* "Am I now come up without the Lord against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it" (ver. 25). It is thus that sin constantly presents itself to men and women. It masks its real features. It presents itself in a religious garb. A debased theatre professes to be the teacher of morality. But for one whose life it has changed for the better, there are thousands whom it has changed for the worse. Perhaps we should be justified in going the length of Pollok, in his 'Course of Time,' and in saying, "It might do good, but never did." How many questionable practices defend themselves on the ground that they are sanctioned and encouraged by "religious" people!

II. HE MAKES LIGHT OF TRUST IN GOD. But soon the cloven foot appears. The tempter soon begins to wean the soul from that religion of whose interests he professes to be so jealous. See here the inconsistency of Rabshakeh's speech. He first of all made it appear that he was commissioned by God, and that therefore all their efforts to resist him would be futile. But now he proceeds to ridicule the idea of trusting to God's power. "Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, The Lord will surely deliver us" (ver. 30). "Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the King of Assyria?" (vers. 33—35). So it is in the progress of sin. He who is led away by the allurements of the world and pleasure, first begins with pleasures which lie on the border-land between the bad and the good. These are the pleasures or pursuits about which men say, "Oh! there is *no harm* in *that*." "No harm" is a very dangerous phrase. When we hear it, we may generally doubt its truth. It usually refers to pursuits or pleasures which are the stepping-stones to worse sins. Many a man crosses the bridge of "no harm," and enters for ever the land of "no good." Let us never be induced to waver in our trust in God and obedience to him. His way is the way of safety and peace. There are many whose work seems to be like that of Rabshakeh—to weaken the trust of others in God, to diminish the respect of others for the Law of God. "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." Where God and conscience say to us, "You ought not," let not the tempter ever persuade us by saying, "You may."

III. HE MAKES FALSE PROMISES. How fair-spoken is Rabshakeh! How very alluring his promises! If the people of Jerusalem would only make an agreement with the King of Assyria by a present, then they would eat every man of his own vine and fig tree, until he would afterwards take them away to a land like their own land, "a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive and of honey, that ye may live and not die." In this specious way he held before them an attractive prospect. But it was as empty as the bubble in the summer breeze. It was the pleasant euphemism by which he sought to gloss over the prospect of conquest and captivity. So with the pleasures of sin. How bright and how attractive, to outward appearance, are the haunts of wickedness and vice! The bright lights of the gin-palace—how they allure its unhappy victims, often by the contrast with the dreariness and misery of their homes! What a pleasant prospect sin in various forms presents! But how terrible is the reality! How grim is the skeleton at the feast! "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." *Such are the tempter's methods still.* The thirty-sixth verse contains a very good suggestion as to the way of meeting temptation. "But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word; for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not." *It is a wise rule not to parley with the tempter.* If we pray, "Lead us not into temptation," then we ought to be careful not to put ourselves in temptation's way.—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—37.—*A striking reformation, a ruthless despotism, and an unprincipled diplomacy.* "Now it came to pass," etc. Amongst the incidents recorded and the characters mentioned in this chapter, there stand out in great prominence three subjects for practical contemplation: (1) *a striking reformation;* (2) *a ruthless despotism;* and (3) *an unprincipled diplomacy.* The many strange and somewhat revolting historic events that make up the bulk of this chapter will come out in the discussion of these three subjects.

I. A STRIKING REFORMATION. Hezekiah, who was now King of Judah, and continued such for about twenty-nine years, was a man of great excellence. The unknown historian here says that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did," etc. (vers. 3—8). This is high testimony, and his history shows that on the whole it was well deserved. Compared with most of his predecessors and contemporaries, he appears to have been an extraordinarily good man. He lived in a period of great national trial and moral corruption. Israel, Judah's sister-kingdom, was in its death-throes, and his own people had fallen into idolatry of the grossest kind. In the very dawn of his reign he sets himself to the work of reformation. We find in 2 Chron. xxix. 2—36 a description of the desire for a thorough reformation which displayed itself. But the point of his reformative work, on which

we would now fasten our attention, is that mentioned in ver. 4, "He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan." His method for extirpating idolatry from his country is detailed with minuteness in 2 Chron. xxix. 3; xxx. 1—9. In this destruction of the brazen serpent we are struck with two things. 1. *The perverting tendency of sin.* The brazen serpent (we learn from Numb. xxi. 9) was a beneficent ordinance of God to heal those in the wilderness who had been bitten by the fiery serpents. But this Divine ordinance, designed for a good purpose, and which had accomplished good, was now, through the forces of human depravity, become a great evil. The Jews turned what was a special display of Divine goodness into a great evil. I am disposed to honour them for preserving it for upwards of seven hundred years, and thus handing it down from sire to son as a *memorial* of heavenly mercy; but their conduct in establishing it as an object for worship must be denounced without hesitancy or qualification. But is not this the great law of depravity? Has it not always perverted the good things of God, and thus converted blessings into curses? It has ever done so. It is doing so now. See how this perverting power acts in relation to such Divine blessings as (1) health; (2) riches; (3) genius; (4) knowledge; (5) governments; and (6) religious institutions.[1] 2. *The true attributes of a reformer.* Here we observe: (1) spiritual insight. Hezekiah (if our translation is correct) saw in this serpent, which appeared like a god to the people, nothing but a piece of brass—"Nehustan." What is grand to the vulgar is contemptible to the spiritually thoughtful. The true reformer peers into the heart of things, and finds that the gods of the people are but of common brass. (2) Invincible honesty. He not only saw that it was brass, but said so—declared it in the ears of the people. How many there are who have eyes to see the vile and contemptible in the objects which popular feeling admires and adores, but who lack the honesty to express their convictions! A true man not only sees the wrong, but exposes it. (3) Practical courage. This reformer not only had the insight to see, and the honesty to expose the worthlessness of the people's gods, but he had the courage to strike them from their pedestal. "He brake in pieces the brazen serpent." I have no hope of any man doing any real spiritual good who has not these *three* instincts. He must not only have an eye to penetrate the seeming and to descry the real, nor merely be honest enough to speak out his views, but he must have also the manly hand to "break in pieces" the false, in order to do the Divine work of *reform.* The man that has the three combined is the reformer. Almighty Love! multiply amongst us men of this threefold instinct—men which the age, the world demands![2] 3. *The true soul of a reformer.* What is that which gave him the true insight and attributes of a reformer—which in truth was the soul of the whole? (1) Entire consecration to the right. "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses. He trusted in and clave to the One true and living God, and kept his commandments. And this is right, and there is no right but this. (2) Invincible antagonism to the wrong. "And he rebelled against the King of Assyria, and served him not." "The yearly tribute his father had stipulated to pay, he withheld. Pursuing the policy of a truly theocratic sovereign, he was, through the Divine blessing which rested on his government, raised to a position of great public and national strength. Shalmaneser was dead; and assuming, consequently, that full independent sovereignty which God had settled on the house of David, he both shook off the Assyrian yoke, and, by an energetic movement against the Philistines, recovered the credit which his father Ahaz had lost in his war with that people (2 Chron. xxviii. 18)."

II. A RUTHLESS DESPOTISM. There are two despots mentioned in this chapter—Shalmaneser and Sennacherib, both kings of Assyria. A brief description of the former we have in vers. 9, 10, 12. What is stated in these verses is but a repetition of what we have in the preceding chapter, and the remarks made on it in our last homily preclude the necessity of any observations here. This Shalmaneser was a tyrant of the

[1] See *Homilist*, vol. ii. p. 193.

[2] See a full discourse of this subject in 'Septem in Uno,' p. 96.

worst kind. He invaded and ravaged the land of Israel, threw Hoshea into prison, laid siege to Samaria, carried the Israelites into Assyria, and located in their homes strangers from various parts of the Assyrian dominions. Thus he utterly destroyed the kingdom of Israel. The other despot is Sennacherib (vers. 13—16). Shalmaneser is gone, and this Sennacherib takes his place. The ruthlessness of this man's despotism appears in the following facts, recorded in the present chapter. 1. *He had already invaded a country in which he had no right.* "Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah did Sennacherib King of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them." "The names of the principal of these cities are perhaps enumerated by Micah (i. 11—16), viz. *Saphir*, lying between Ashdod and Eleutheropolis (Eusebius and Jerome, 'Onomast.,' Saphir; cf. Robinson, 'Bibl. Researches,' ii. p. 370); *Zaanan* or *Zenan* (Josh. xv. 37), (Septuagint Σενναὰρ); *Beth-Ezel* or *Azel* (Zech. xiv. 5), near Saphir and Zaanan; *Maroth* or *Maarath* (Josh. xv. 59), between these towns and Jerusalem; *Lachish* (*Um Lâkis*); *Moresheth-Gath*, situated in the direction of Gath; *Achzib*, between Keilah and Mareshah (Josh. xv. 44); *Mareshah*, situated in the low country of Judah (Josh. xv. 44); *Adullam*, near Mareshah (cf. Isa. xxiv. 1—12). Overrunning Palestine, Sennacherib laid siege to the fortress of Lachish, which lay seven Roman miles from Eleutheropolis, and, therefore, south-west of Jerusalem on the way to Egypt. Amongst the interesting illustrations of sacred history, furnished by the recent Assyrian excavations, is a series of bas-reliefs representing the siege of a town—a fenced town—among the uttermost cities of Judah (Josh. xv. 39; Robinson's 'Biblical Researches')." Now mark, he now determines on another invasion, although: 2. *He had received from the king most humble submission and large contributions to leave his country alone.* Mark his humiliating appeal, "And Hezekiah King of Judah sent to the King of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear." Alas! herein is a yielding of this great man's courage. Why did he apologize, pay the tribute which his ancestor had immorally pledged? Up to this point he had been bold in withholding it. But here, in crouching fear, he makes an apology. And more than this, he unrighteously promises a large contribution in answer to the despot's demands. "And the King of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah King of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold." The sum that he promised was extravagant, amounting to three hundred and fifty thousand pounds; but what was worse, this sum was abstracted from the public funds, to which he had no right, and was also rifled from the temple, which was a desecration. "And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which Hezekiah King of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the King of Assyria." The conduct of Hezekiah in this matter cannot be justified. Inasmuch as Sennacherib accepted the offering, he was in honour bound to abandon all idea of another invasion. Albeit, contrary to every principle of justice and kindness, not to say honour, he despatches his army again into Judæa. "And the King of Assyria sent Tartan," etc. (ver. 17). What monsters are such despots! and yet they are not rare. Is there a nation existing on the face of the earth to-day, whatever its form of government, that has not at one time or another played this part?

III. AN UNPRINCIPLED DIPLOMACY. On behalf of Hezekiah, "Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder," appeared before the invading soldiers, and they are thus addressed by Rabshakeh, one of the leaders of the invading host: "And Rabshakeh said unto them, Speak ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the King of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" etc. He appears as the diplomatist of the Assyrian war-king, and what does he do? By an impassioned harangue, fraught with insolence, falsehood, and blasphemy, he urges Hezekiah and his country to surrender. In doing this: 1. *He represents his master, the King of Assyria, to be far greater than he is.* "Thus saith the great king, the King of Assyria." Great, indeed! A flashing meteor and a gorgeous bubble, nothing more! A diplomatist is ever tempted to make his own country fabulously great in the presence of the one with whom he seeks to negotiate. 2. *He seeks to terrify them with a sense of their*

utter inability to resist the invading army. "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?"—D. T.

Vers. 1—8.—*Hezekiah the good.* It is with a sense of relief that we emerge from the dark and oppressive atmosphere of the time of Ahaz into the "clear shining" (2 Sam. xxiii. 4) of a reign like that of Hezekiah. Once more Divine mercy gave Judah a king in whom the best traditions of the theocracy were revived.

I. RIGHT CONDUCT. 1. *An evil upbringing belied.* As if to set laws of heredity at defiance, the worst King of Judah hitherto is succeeded by one of the best—*the* best after David. It is difficult on human principles to account for such a phenomenon. Hezekiah had every disadvantage in inherited tendency, in evil example, and in adverse surrounding influences. But Divine grace triumphed over all, and made out of him "a chosen vessel" (Acts ix. 15). Doubtless some human agency unknown to us was employed in moulding the young prince's character. It may have been his mother, "Abi, the daughter of Zachariah;" or perhaps the Prophet Isaiah, who had afterwards so much to do with him. 2. *A good example followed.* Hezekiah took as his model, not his own father, but David, the founder of his line, of whom God had said, "I have found David the son of Jesse a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will" (Acts xiii. 22). Hezekiah is the new David. Of no other since the times of Asa is it affirmed that he did "according to all that David his father did;" and even of Asa the testimony is less emphatic than here (1 Kings xv. 11). Hezekiah mounted to the original model. David was the model for the kings of Judah; we have a yet higher one—Christ. It is well in ordering our lives to go back to this ultimate standard, judging ourselves, not by the degree of likeness or unlikeness to our neighbours, but by the measure of conformity to him.

II. REFORMING ZEAL. Hezekiah evidenced the reality of his piety by his works. In carrying out his reforms Hezekiah would no doubt be strengthened and assisted by the prophets; and the people were perhaps prepared to acquiesce in them by their disgust at the extravagant idolatries of Ahaz (cf. 2 Chron. xxviii. 27). 1. *Temptation removed.* Hezekiah early took the step which had hitherto been neglected by even the best kings—he "removed the high places." This centralized the worship at Jerusalem, and did away with the temptations to idolatry which the local altars afforded. It was further important as an evidence of his thorough-going determination to carry out the provisions of God's Law. We may wonder how Hezekiah could venture on such a step without awakening widespread resistance and disaffection; but the Book of Chronicles shows that it happened while the wave of enthusiasm created by the great Passover was yet at its height—a sufficient explanation (2 Chron. xxxi. 1). 2. *Destruction of monuments of idolatry.* Hezekiah next proceeded to clear the land of those idols of which Isaiah, at an earlier period, had said that it was full (Isa. ii. 8). He brake the images, and cut down the asherah. These vigorous measures were indispensable if true religion was to be re-established. It is not otherwise with the individual heart. True repentance is a stripping the soul of its idols—love of money, fashion, gaiety, dress, etc. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. vi. 24). "Covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. iii. 5).

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only thee."

3. *Breaking of the brazen serpent.* Another noteworthy act of Hezekiah was his breaking in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made. This is the first and last glimpse we get of this venerable relic since the time when it was set up in the wilderness. Its preservation was natural; it had done a wonderful work in its day; it was the symbol of a great deliverance; it had clustered around it the associations of miracle; it was the type even of the salvation of Messiah. We cannot marvel that it was reverenced as a sacred object. Yet now it had become a snare to the people, who burnt incense to it, and Hezekiah ruthlessly destroyed it, calling it (or it was called) contemptuously Nehushtan—"a piece of brass." We see from this how things originally sacred may become a snare and a temptation. Superstition is a fungus of rank growth,

and fastens on nothing more readily than on the objects which call forth a natural reverence. Cf. the story of Gideon's ephod (Judg. viii. 24—27). Thus from the veneration of martyrs in the Christian Church there grew the worship of relics. So with all other aids to devotion, conceptions that fitly invest religious feelings, which, as Carlyle says ('On Heroes') are *eidola*, things seen, symbols of the invisible. When the sense and spiritual meaning goes out of these, and they become objects of superstitious reverence in themselves, it is time for them to be broken up. Even an object so sacred as the serpent which Moses made sinks to the level of a mere "piece of brass." We are reminded of Knox's reply when a prisoner in the galleys, and the image of the Virgin was presented to him to kiss. "Mother? Mother of God?" he said. "This is no mother of God; this is *a painted brodd*"—a piece of painted wood—and flung the thing into the river.

III. PRE-EMINENT GODLINESS. 1. *Hezekiah the best of his line.* Additional emphasis is given to the commendation of Hezekiah by the statement, "After him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him." It is good to be pre-eminent, but most of all to be pre-eminent for godliness. When we remember that among the kings with whom Hezekiah is here compared are such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Uzziah before him, and Josiah after him, we see that the praise is very great. 2. *The praise particularized.* The general statement is expanded into its particulars. Hezekiah trusted in the Lord; he clave to the Lord; he departed not from following him; he kept his commandments, as given to Moses. Trust, fidelity, obedience, and perseverance, in all these were his distinctive characteristics. Some kings had trusted, but not with so entire a heart; some had been obedient, but not so fully; some had been faithful for a time, but had failed to persevere. Hezekiah had the better record. God puts special honour on whole-hearted service. We are to see, however, that, exceptional as his goodness was, Hezekiah was not perfect. He had his flaws, his sins, his failures too. The intention of the text is not to represent him as sinless, but only as pre-eminently great and good. "There is not a just man on earth that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccles. vii. 20).

IV. DIVINE REWARD. Hezekiah's piety won for him Divine favour, protection, and success. 1. *Freedom from servitude.* "He rebelled against the King of Assyria, and served him not." He thus rescued the kingdom from the humiliating dependence into which it had been brought by Ahaz. 2. *Victory over enemies.* Hezekiah had also important victories over the Philistines, and was prospered "whithersoever" he went forth. Spiritually, God gives to those who fear him deliverance from the power of sin within, and victory over the world, the devil, and the flesh.—J. O.

Vers. 13—17.—*Sennacherib's first assault.* We enter in this passage on the consideration of one of the most memorable crises Judah ever passed through. The Assyrian, the rod of God's anger (Isa. x. 4), hung over Jerusalem, showing how near destruction it was if God did not interpose. A mighty deliverance was vouchsafed, showing how inviolable was its security if only fleshly confidence was renounced, and the people put their trust in the living God.

I. SENNACHERIB'S EARLY SUCCESSES. 1. *Connection with the moral state of the people.* Despite the efforts of Hezekiah and Isaiah, the moral state of the people continued at bottom unchanged. The enthusiasm enkindled by Hezekiah's great Passover (2 Chron. xxx.) passed away, and things reverted very much to their former state. The idols which Hezekiah had destroyed were brought back (cf. Isa. x. 10, 11). The nation is pointedly described as "an hypocritical nation," and pictures of the saddest kind are drawn of its wickedness (Isa. x. 6; cf. ch. i., xxii.; Micah iii.). At one point, indeed, the Prophet Micah was sent with a direct announcement of judgment, and the fulfilment was only postponed by the earnest repentance of the king (Jer. xxvi. 18, 19; cf. Micah iii. 12). Hezekiah was not faultless, but had himself transgressed through pride on the occasion of the visit of the messengers from Babylon, which falls before this period (ch. xx. 12—19; 2 Chron. xxxii. 31). He had besides been seeking to strengthen himself by political alliance with Egypt (Isa. xxx.). What wonder that chastisement should be allowed to descend on a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers" (Isa. i. 4)! As we forget God, and abuse his favours, God withdraws from us. 2. *Extent of his successes.* (1) Sennacherib took all the fenced

cities of Judah. His own annals mention forty-six strong cities, and lesser cities without number. He claims to have taken also 200,150 prisoners. This was a fearful blow to the prosperity and resources of the kingdom. (2) At this stage, moreover, Sennacherib invested Jerusalem. The text speaks only of Hezekiah paying tribute, and entreating Sennacherib to depart from him; but it is morally certain that at this time Jerusalem endured a severe siege, and was saved only by the submission referred to. (*a*) In 2 Chron. xxxii. 1—8 we have an account of Hezekiah's vigorous preparations for the siege. (*b*) Sennacherib, in his own annals, describes the siege. (*c*) The prophecy in Isa. xxii., which belongs to this period, depicts the state of Jerusalem during the siege, and a fearful picture of demoralization it is. The theory that this prophecy refers to an earlier siege under Sargon seems to us to have little probability. The hand of God was thus lying heavily on the people. Only by leading men to feel their own weakness does God train them to rely upon his help. When Hezekiah's trust in man was shattered, and he was led to look to God alone, Sennacherib's campaign came to an ignominious end.

II. HEZEKIAH'S SUBMISSION. 1. *The failure of the arm of flesh.* Hezekiah had been seeking alliances with Egypt and Ethiopia, but no help reached him in his hour of extremity. Isaiah had warned him of this (Isa. xxx.). The act of seeking such an alliance implied a distrust of God. Astute politicians no doubt thought an alliance with Egypt a much more tangible affair than an alliance with the invisible Jehovah. So long, however, as Hezekiah looked in this quarter for aid he was doomed to disappointment. Neither the King of Egypt nor strongly fortified walls availed to save him. He had to learn the lesson: "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (Isa. xxx. 15). 2. *The humiliating tribute.* Despairing of help from his ally, and faltering in his faith in God, Hezekiah made an unworthy submission. It may be gathered from Isa. xxii. that affairs in the city had reached an awful height of wickedness. Pestilence was sweeping off the people in crowds; and Hezekiah may have felt that he could stand it no longer. The King of Assyria accepted his submission, and appointed him three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold as tribute. To obtain this large sum he had not only to empty once more the often-ransacked treasuries of the temple and the king's house, but had to cut off the gold from the very doors and pillars of the temple. It was himself who had overlaid these pillars with the precious metal, but now they had to be stripped of their adornment, and all given to the rapacious Assyrian. Truly it was "a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity" (Isa. xxii. 5). What humiliations men are willing to endure rather than submit themselves heartily to the sway of the living God! After all, "willing" is not the word, for they would fain escape these humiliations, but find they cannot. Yet they do not return. 3. *His submission no advantage.* Sennacherib withdrew to Lachish, and Hezekiah was left to hope that by this great sacrifice he had got rid of him. He was soon to be undeceived. What happened we do not know; possibly some rumours reached the King of Assyria of the march of Tirhakah alluded to in ch. xix. 9, and he may have suspected further treachery on the part of Hezekiah. In any case, a new host was despatched against Jerusalem, and fresh demands were made for surrender (ver. 17). Hezekiah's distress must have been unspeakable. He had paid his tribute, and was no better than before. Waters of a full cup were wrung out to him (Ps. lxxiii. 10). It is thus evermore till men turn from the help of man to the help of God.—J. O.

Vers. 17—37.—*Rabshakeh's boastings.* From Lachish Sennacherib sent an army to Jerusalem, and with it some of his highest officers, the Tartan, Rabsaris, and Rabshakeh. Taking their stand by "the conduit of the upper pool," where they could be heard from the walls, they called for the king to come to them. Hezekiah did not come, but sent three envoys, Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah, to whom Rabshakeh, the orator of the party, addressed himself. His speech is a very skilful one from his own point of view, and falls into two parts. It is pervaded by the utmost arrogancy and contempt of the God of the Jews.

I. HIS ADDRESS TO THE ENVOYS. The question Rabshakeh had been sent by his master to ask of Hezekiah was—"What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" He proceeds to demolish one by one Hezekiah's supposed confidences, and to show how

vain it was for him to hope to carry on the war. 1. *Hezekiah's confidence in Egypt.* Rabshakeh answers his own question by declaring, first, that Hezekiah's confidence was placed in Egypt. This was true; and it was also true that, as the speaker next went on to say, this confidence was in a "bruised reed." The policy of relying on Egypt, instead of seeking help from God, was Hezekiah's great mistake. Rabshakeh did not denounce the worthlessness of this ground of confidence too scornfully. Pharaoh King of Egypt was indeed a bruised reed, on which, if a man leant, it would go into his hand, and pierce it. Isaiah's language had been not less strong (Isa. xxx.). The metaphor may be applied to any reliance on mere human wisdom, human power, or human help. Often it has proved so in individual experience and the history of nations. Through some overlooked factor in the calculations, some unexpected turn in providence, some treachery, self-interest, or delay on the part of allies, the best-laid schemes break down, the strongest combinations dissolve like smoke. 2. *Hezekiah's confidence in Jehovah.* Rabshakeh next deals with Hezekiah's trust in the Lord. He does not at this point urge the plea afterwards put forth, viz. that no gods can stand before the King of Assyria. Indeed, he claims (ver. 25) to be commissioned by Jehovah—either an idle boast or an allusion to what he had heard of Isaiah's prophecies (cf. Isa. vii. 17—25; x. 5—19). But he skilfully makes use of Hezekiah's action in destroying the high places and altars. "Is not this he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?" This sweeping away of the high places is represented as an outrage on the religion of Jehovah, which that Deity might be expected to avenge. How, then, could Hezekiah expect any help from him? The argument was a skilful one as directed to the body of the people. The high places were of long-standing sanctity, and they at least were disposed to regard them with superstitious reverence. What if, after all, Hezekiah had displeased Jehovah by suppressing them? Calamity upon calamity was falling on the nation: was there not a cause? A reformer must ever lay his account with charges of this kind. Any political, social, or religious change is apt to be blamed for troubles that arise on the back of it. *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc.* The early Christians were blamed for the calamities of the Roman empire; the Reformation was blamed for the civil convulsions that followed it; when drought or trouble falls on tribes which have been persuaded to abandon idolatry, they are apt to think the idols are angry, and to go back to their old worship. In this argument, however, Rabshakeh was as wrong as he was right in his first one. The fault was that the people did not trust God enough, and what he thought was a provocation of Jehovah was an act done in his honour, and in obedience to his will. 3. *Hezekiah's confidence in his resources.* Lastly, Rabshakeh ridicules the idea that Hezekiah can resist his master by force. Where are his chariots and horsemen? Or, if he had horses, where are the riders to put on them? He undertakes to give two thousand horses, if Hezekiah will furnish the men; and he knows he cannot. How, then, can he hope to put to flight even the least of Sennacherib's captains? Rabshakeh again was right in assuming that Hezekiah had not material forces wherewith to contend with Sennacherib, and Hezekiah himself was too well aware of the fact. He had not confidence in his forces, and therein the orator was wrong. But Rabshakeh's whole speech shows that he was himself committing the error he denounced in Hezekiah. If the question were retorted, "What confidence is this wherein *thou* trustest?" the answer could only be—In chariots and horses, in the proved might of the Assyrian arms. His speech breathes throughout the spirit of the man who has unbounded trust in armaments, provided only they are gigantic enough. Because Sennacherib has such immense armies, valiant soldiers, and such numbers of them, therefore he is invincible in war, and can defy God and man. The arm of flesh—"big battalions"—is everything here. Herein lay *his* profound mistake; and it was soon to be demonstrated. The might of the *Invisible* was to be declared against the power of the *visible.* Philistinism was to receive another overthrow—this time without even the sling and stones (1 Sam. xvi. 40—51).

II. ADDRESS TO THE JEWS. At this point Hezekiah's officers interposed, and requested Rabshakeh to speak, not in the Hebrew, but in the Syrian tongue, that his language might not be understood by the people on the wall. Rabshakeh had come on a mission of diplomacy, and it was proper that in the first instance only the king's representatives

should be consulted with. The envoy, however, insolently broke through all customary bounds, and declared that it was the common people he wished to address. Taking up, therefore, a yet better position, he now spoke directly, and in louder tones, to the people, who by this time may be supposed to have crowded the battlements. Again declaring that he bears a message from "the great king, the King of Assyria," he bids them not let Hezekiah deceive them, and urges: 1. *The advantages of submission.* As it was, they were in evil case. But if they surrendered to Sennacherib, they had nothing to fear. Here Rabshakeh touches on delicate ground. He cannot deny that they will lose their liberty, and be transported as captives to Assyria. All he can do is to attempt to gild the pill. He tells them, first, that in the mean time they will be allowed the utmost freedom—to eat every man of his own vine and of his own fig tree, and to drink every man the waters of his own cistern. When the time does come that they must be removed—and he tries to represent this as a privilege—it will be to a land like their own, a land of corn and wine, of bread and vineyards, of oil and olives and honey; a land where they shall live, and not die. The promises were alluring only by contrast with the worse fate that awaited them if they did not submit to the Assyrian; but more than this, they were deceitful. They were promises which, if the people had trusted to them, would never have been fulfilled. Sennacherib was not in the habit of treating his captives tenderly. His good faith had just been tested by his perfidy towards Hezekiah. Is it not always so with the promises of the tempter? When a soul capitulates, and yields to sin, what becomes of the bright prospects that are opened up beforehand? Are they ever realized? There is a brief period of excitement, of giddy delight, then satiety, loathing, the sense of degradation, the dying out of all real joy. What, if by yielding to sin, some present evil be avoided, some immediate good gained? Is the good ever what was anticipated? or can it compensate for the exile from God and holiness which is its price? At all hazards the wise course is to adhere to God and duty. The visions of corn and wine, of bread and vineyards, of oil and olives, by which the soul is tempted from its allegiance, are illusions—as unsubstantial as the desert mirage. 2. *The futility of resistance.* To enforce his argument for submission, Rabshakeh returns to what is undeniably his strongest point, viz. the futility of resistance. Can they hope to be delivered? He had argued this before from the side of Hezekiah's weakness, showing the baselessness of his grounds of confidence; he now argues it from the side of Sennacherib's strength. Here undoubtedly he has a plausible case. (1) From the military point of view. "Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand." Since the days of Tiglath-pileser the Assyrian arms had swept on in a tide of almost uninterrupted conquest. Not only Hamath and Arpad and Sepharvaim, but Babylon, Damascus, Israel, Philistia, and Egypt, had felt the force of their resistless might. Judah had already severely suffered. What hope had Hezekiah, with his little handful of men, caged like a bird in Jerusalem, of rolling back this tide of conquest! The thing, on natural grounds, seemed an impossibility. (2) From a religious point of view. "Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, The Lord will surely deliver us." Here the position of the Assyrian conqueror seemed—from the heathen standpoint, but of course only from that—equally strong. In heathen view, the contest was not only a contest of man with man, but of Asshur and the other Assyrian gods, with the gods of other nations. And how had that contest gone? The gods of Assyria had in every case proved the stronger in the battle. Where were the gods of the conquered nations? What had they been able to do for their worshippers? What had even Jehovah been able to do for Samaria? Who among them all had delivered their country out of the hand of Sennacherib? What hope was there that Jerusalem would fare any better than Samaria had done? The validity of this conclusion depends entirely upon the soundness of the premises. If the gods of these nations had a real existence, and Jehovah was but one more local deity among the rest, it would be difficult to resist the inference that the chances were strongly in favour of Asshur. But the case was altered if these idol-gods were nullities, and Jehovah was the one Ruler of heaven and earth, in whose providence the movements even of Sennacherib and his all-conquering armies were embraced. And this, of course, was the faith of Isaiah and Hezekiah and the godly part of Judah. That it was the right one was shown by the result. We see from this example how a false view-point compels a false

and mistaken reading of the whole facts of history and of human life. The view which history presents to one who denies the postulates of revelation will differ entirely from the view which it presents to a Christian believer. Belief in God is the right centre for understanding everything.

III. THE ANSWER OF SILENCE. To these harangues of Rabshakeh the people "answered not a word." Hezekiah had given this instruction to his officers, and they, when the people gathered, doubtless spread among them the knowledge of the king's wish. Accordingly they "held their peace." There were many reasons why this answer of silence was a wise one. 1. *Rabshakeh's words did not deserve an answer.* His address to the people on the wall was a breach of all diplomatic courtesy; it had for its object to sow the seeds of mutiny, and set the people against their king; it was obviously insincere in its tone and promises, scrupling at nothing which would induce the people to surrender their liberties; in relation to Jehovah, it was profane and blasphemous. Speeches of that kind are best left unanswered. A tempter is fittingly met with silence. A man who makes insincere proposals does not deserve to be reasoned with. Profanity and blasphemy should be left without reply (Matt. vii. 6). 2. *From Rabshakeh's point of view no reply was possible.* This has freely to be conceded. What would it have availed to point out to him that the gods of these other nations were no gods, and that Jehovah was the one living and true God? Such statements would have but provoked a new burst of mockery. It was better, therefore, to say nothing. In all reasoning with an opponent there must be a basis of common ground. When we reach a fundamental divergence of first principles, it is time to stop. At least, if argument is to proceed, it must go back on these first principles, and try to find a deeper unity. Failing in that, it must cease. Between the Christian and unchristian views of the world, *e.g.*, there is no middle term. 3. *Even from the Jewish point of view no reply was ready.* God was to be trusted, but would he indeed save? What if the iniquities of the people had provoked him to deliver them up, as he had delivered up Samaria? Deliverance was conditional on repentance: did the state of morals in the city show much sign of repentance? Or, if God meant to deliver them, how would he do it? They seemed fast in the lion's jaws. The way of escape from their present predicament was not obvious, yea, no way seemed possible. What, then, should they answer? At most, their belief in Jehovah's interposition was an act of faith, for which no justification could be given in outward appearances. In such crises, when all rests on faith, nothing on sight, the best attitude of the soul, at least in presence of the worldly, is silence. "Be still, and know that I am God," is the counsel given in the psalm supposed to commemorate this deliverance (Ps. xlvi. 10).—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIX.

Vers. 1—37.—SECOND EXPEDITION OF SENNACHERIB AGAINST HEZEKIAH (*continued*). The chapter falls into four portions: (1) The sequel to the embassy of Rabshakeh (vers. 1—8); (2) the insulting letter of Sennacherib (vers. 9—14); (3) Hezekiah's prayer, and God's answer to it by the mouth of Isaiah (vers. 15—34); and (4) the destruction of Sennacherib's host, his hurried flight, and his murder at Nineveh by his sons (vers. 35—37). The narrative runs parallel with that in Isa. xxxvii., with which it corresponds almost word for word.

Ver. 1.—**And it came to pass, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes**—following the example of his chief officers, who came into his presence "with their clothes rent" (see ch. xviii. 37)—**and covered himself with sackcloth.** A sign of grief and self-humiliation (comp. Gen. xxxvii. 34; 2 Sam. iii. 31; xxi. 10; 1 Kings xx. 31; xxi. 27; ch. vi. 30, etc.). It was natural that the king should be even more strongly affected than his ministers. **And went into the house of the Lord;** to open his griefs, ask counsel, and beg for aid.

Ver. 2.—**And he sent Eliakim, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests.** "The elders of the priests" are aged men holding the priestly office, not necessarily the high priest, or the most notable or most dignified of the priests. The king felt that his best hope, so far as man was concerned, lay in the prophetical order. Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Micah, and perhaps Obadiah, were the prophets of the time; but it is not clear that

any of them were accessible except **Isaiah.** He had been Ahaz's counsellor (Isa. vii. 4—16), and was now certainly among the regular counsellors of Hezekiah. Moreover, he was in Jerusalem, and could readily be consulted. Hezekiah, therefore, sends to him in his distress, and sends a most honourable and dignified embassy. It is his intention to treat the prophet with the utmost respect and courtesy. No doubt, at this period the prophetical order stood higher than the priestly one in general estimation; and not unworthily. If any living man could give the king sound advice under the circumstances, it was the son of Amoz. **Covered with sackcloth.** Probably by the king's command. Hezekiah wished to emphasize his own horror and grief in the eyes of the prophet, and could only do so by making his messengers assume the garb which he had judged suitable for himself on the occasion. **To Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz.** Nothing more is known of Amoz beyond his being Isaiah's father. He is not to be confounded with the Prophet Amos, whose name is spelt quite differently: עָמוֹס, not אָמוֹץ.

Ver. 3.—**And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy.** Of "trouble," or "distress," manifestly—a day on which the whole nation is troubled, grieved, alarmed, distressed, made miserable. It is also a day of "rebuke," or rather of "chastisement"—a day on which God's hand lies heavy upon us and chastises us for our sins. And it is a day, not of "blasphemy," but of "abhorrence" or of "contumely"—a day on which God contumeliously rejects his people, and allows them to be insulted by their enemies (see the comments of Keil and Bähr). **For the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.** A proverbial expression, probably meaning that a dangerous crisis approaches, and that the nation has no strength to carry it through the peril.

Ver. 4.—**It may be the Lord thy God**—still "*thy* God," at any rate, if he will not condescend to be called *ours*, since we have so grievously offended him by our many sins and backslidings—**will hear all the words of Rabshakeh.** "The words of Rabshakeh" (Isa. xxxvii. 4); but the expression here used is more emphatic. Hezekiah hoped that God would "hear" Rabshakeh's words, would note them, and punish them. **Whom the King of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God.** (For the "reproaches" intended, see ch. xviii. 30—35. For the expression, "the living God," אֱלֹהִים חַי, see Deut. v. 26; Josh. iii. 10; 1 Sam. xvii. 26; Ps. xlii. 2; lxxxiv. 2; Hos. i. 10, etc.) A contrast is intended between the "living" God, and the dead idols whom Rabshakeh has placed on a par with him. **And will reprove the words which the Lord thy God hath heard.** The "words of Rabshakeh," his contemptuous words concerning Jehovah (ch. xviii. 33—35) and his lying words (ch. xviii. 25), constituted the new feature in the situation, and, while a ground for "distress," were also a ground for hope: would not God in some signal way vindicate his own honour, and "reprove" them? **Wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left.** Sennacherib, in his former expedition, wherein he took forty-six of the Judæan cities, besides killing vast numbers, had, as he himself tells us ('Eponym Canon,' p. 134), carried off into captivity 200,150 persons. He had also curtailed Hezekiah's dominions, detaching from them various cities with their territories, and attaching them to Ashdod, Gaza, and Ekron (ibid., p. 135). Thus it was only a "remnant" of the Jewish people that was left in the land (comp. Isa. i. 7—9).

Ver. 5.—**So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah.** Superfluous, according to modern notions, but rounding off the paragraph commenced with ver. 2.

Ver. 6.—**And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master.** Isaiah seems to have been ready with a reply. The news of the words spoken by Rabshakeh had probably flown through the city, and reached him, and he had already laid the matter before God, and received God's instructions concerning it. He was therefore able to return an answer at once. **Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants**—rather, *lackeys*; the term used is not the common one for "servants," viz. עַבְדֵי, but a contemptuous one, נַעֲרֵי, "foot-boys," or "lackeys"—**of the King of Assyria have blasphemed me.**

Ver. 7.—**Behold, I will send a blast upon him.** The meaning is doubtful. Most modern critics translate, with the LXX., "I will put a spirit within him," and understand "a spirit of cowardice," or "a despondent mood" (Thenius), or "an extraordinary impulse of Divine inspiration, which is to hurry him blindly on" (Drechsler). But the idea of our translators, that the blast (רוּחַ) is external, and sent *upon* him, not put *in* him—that, in fact, the destruction of his army is referred to, seems defensible by such passages as Exod. xv. 8 and Isa. xxv. 4. The prophecy was, no doubt, intentionally vague—enough for its immediate purpose, which was to comfort and strengthen Hezekiah—but not intended to gratify man's curiosity by revealing the exact mode in which God would work. **And**

he shall hear a rumour; literally, *he shall hear a hearsay*; i.e. he shall be told something, which shall determine him on a hasty retreat. It is best, I think, to understand, not news of Tirhakah's advance (Knobel, Keil, Bähr), much less news of an insurrection in some other part of the empire (Cheyne), but information of the disaster to his army. It is no objection to this that Sennacherib was "with his army." No doubt he was. But he would learn the catastrophe from the mouth of some one who came into his tent and told him—he would "hear a hearsay." **And shall return to his own land** (see ver. 36), **and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.** (On Sennacherib's murder, see the comment upon ver. 37.)

Ver. 8.—**So Rabshakeh returned.** Rabshakeh's embassy came to an end with the retirement of Hezekiah's officers from their conference with the three envoys of Sennacherib. No further communication was held with him. He had outraged all propriety by his appeal to the "men upon the wall" (ch. xviii. 27—35); and it seems to have been thought most dignified to give him no answer at all. He had offered no terms—he had simply delivered a summons to surrender, and the closed gates and guarded walls were a sufficient reply. So he felt, and returned to his master, *re infecta*. **And found the King of Assyria warring against Libnah.** The position of Libnah relatively to Lachish is uncertain. The site of Lachish may be regarded as fixed to *Um-Lakis*; but that of Libnah rests wholly on conjecture. It has been placed at *Tel-es-Safieh*, twelve miles north-east of *Um-Lakis*; at *Arak-el-Menshiyeh*, about five miles nearly due east of the same; and near *Umm-el-Bikar*, four miles south-east of *Um-Lakis*. A removal from Um-Lakis to Tel-el-Safieh would mean a retreat. A march from Um-Lakis to either of the other sites would be quite compatible with an intention to push on to Egypt. **For he had heard that he was departed from Lachish.** Whether Lachish had been taken or not cannot be determined from these words. But we can scarcely suppose that a place of such slight strength can have defied the Assyrian arms successfully. It is best therefore to suppose, with Keil and Thenius, that Lachish had been taken.

Vers. 9—14.—*Sennacherib's letter to Hezekiah.* Sennacherib seems to have been induced to write to Hezekiah by the fact that he could not march against him at once. A forward movement on the part of Tirhakah was reported to him (ver. 9), and he thought it necessary to meet, or at least watch it. But he must vent his anger on the rebel Judæan monarch in some way. He sends a letter, therefore, as more weighty and impressive than a mere message. He warns Hezekiah against being himself deceived by Jehovah (ver. 10); and he expands his inductive argument in proof of the irresistible might of Assyria, by an enumeration of four more recent conquests (ver. 12). Otherwise, he does little but repeat what Rabshakeh had already urged.

Ver. 9.—**And when he heard say of Tirhakah King of Ethiopia.** Tirhakah was one of the most distinguished of the later Egyptian monarchs. An Ethiopian by birth, and originally ruling from Napata over the Upper Nile valley from the First Cataract to (perhaps) Khartoum, he extended his dominion over Egypt probably about B.C. 700, maintaining, however, Shabatok, as a sort of puppet-king, upon the throne. About B.C. 693 he succeeded Shabatok, and held the throne till B.C. 667, being engaged in many wars with the Assyrians. The native form of his name is "Tahrak" or "Tahark," the Assyrian "Tarku" or "Tarqu," the Greek "Taracos" or "Tearchon." He has left numerous memorials in Egypt and Ethiopia, and was regarded by the Greeks as a great conqueror. At the time of Sennacherib's second attack on Hezekiah (about B.C. 699) he was, as appears in the text, not yet King of Egypt, but only of Ethiopia. Still, he regarded Egypt as practically under his suzerainty, and when it was threatened by Sennacherib's approach, he marched to the rescue. **Behold, he is come out to fight against thee.** He may have regarded himself as bound in honour to come to the relief of Hezekiah, or he may have been simply bent on defending his own territory. **He sent messengers again unto Hezekiah, saying,**

Ver. 10.—**Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah King of Judah, saying.** The messengers brought a "letter" (סֵפֶר), as we see from ver. 14; but still they were to "speak to Hezekiah"—*i.e.* they were first to read the contents to him, and then to hand him the copy. **Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the King of Assyria.** Sennacherib drops the fiction that he himself is sent by Jehovah to attack Judæa and destroy it (ch. xviii. 25), and contents himself with suggesting that any announcements which Hezekiah may have received from his God are untrustworthy. Probably he spoke his convictions. He did not think it possible that Jerusalem could resist or escape him (comp. Isa. x. 8—11 and 13, 14).

Ver. 11.—**Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly** (see the comment on ch. xviii. 33). The fact was indisputable (see ver. 17). The question remained—Would this triumphant career of success necessarily continue? **And shalt thou be delivered?** A perfect induction is impossible in practical matters. Anything short of a perfect induction is short of a proof.

Ver. 12.—**Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed?** The Assyrian kings always speak of all their predecessors as their ancestors. In point of fact, Sennacherib had had only one "father" among the previous kings, viz. Sargon. As **Gozan** (see the comment on ch. xvii. 6). It is uncertain at what time Gozan was finally conquered and absorbed. It was frequently overrun by the Assyrians from the reign of Tiglath-pileser I. (about B.C. 1100); but it was probably not absorbed until about B.C. 809. The Prefect of Gozan first appears in the list of Assyrian Eponyms in B.C. 794. **And Haran.** "Haran" is generally admitted to be the city of Terah (Gen. xi. 32), and indeed there is no rival claimant of the name. Its position was in the western part of the Gauzanitis region, on the Belik, about lat. 36° 50′ N. It was probably conquered by Assyria about the same time as Gozan. **And Rezeph.** A town called "Razappa," probably "Rezeph," appears in the Assyrian inscriptions from an early date. It is thought to have been in the near vicinity of Haran, but had been conquered and absorbed as early as B.C. 818. Whether it is identical with the Resapha of Ptolemy ('Geograph.,' v. 15) is doubtful. **And the children of Eden.** Probably the inhabitants of a city called "Bit-Adini" in the Assyrian inscriptions, which was on the Middle Euphrates, not far from Carchemish, on the left bank ('Records of the Past,' vol. iii. pp. 69, 71, etc.). This place was conquered by Asshur-nazir-pal, about B.C. 877. **Which were in Thelasar.** "Thelasar" is probably the Hebrew equivalent of "Tel-Asshur," "the hill or fort of Asshur," which may have been the Assyrian name of Bit-Adini, or of a city dependent on it. Asshur-nazir-pal gave Assyrian names to several cities on the Middle Euphrates (see 'Records of the Past,' vol. iii. p. 55, line 48; p. 69, line 50).

Ver. 13.—**Where is the King of Hamath.** Ilu-bid, King of Hamath, raised a rebellion against Sargon in B.C. 720, and was taken prisoner the same year and carried to Assyria (see the 'Eponym Canon,' p. 127). **And the King of Arpad.** Arpad revolted in conjunction with Hamath, and was reduced about the same time ('Eponym Canon,' p. 126). Its "king" is not mentioned, but he probably shared the fate of Ilu-bid. **And the King of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?** It is probably not meant that these three cities were all of them under the dominion of one and the same king. "King" is to be taken *distributively*. (On the sites of the cities, see the comment upon ch. xviii. 34.)

Ver. 14.—**And Hezekiah received the letter.** It had not been previously stated that Sennacherib had written a letter. But the author forgets this, and so speaks of "*the* letter." Kings generally communicated by letters, and not merely by messages (see ch. v. 5; xx. 12; 2 Chron. ii. 11; Neh. i. 9, etc.). **Of the hand of the messengers, and read it.** Probably Sennacherib had caused it to be written in Hebrew. **And Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.** Not as if God would not otherwise know the contents of the letter, but to emphasize his detestation of the letter, and to make it silently plead for him with God. Ewald rightly compares what Judas Maccabæus did with the disfigured copies of the Law at Maspha (1 Macc. iii. 48), but incorrectly calls it ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 183, note 1, Eng. trans.) "a laying down of the object *in the sanctuary*." Maspha was "over against" the temple, at the distance of a mile or more.

Ver. 15.—**And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said, O Lord God of Israel.** In the parallel passage of Isaiah (xxxvii. 16) we find, "O Lord of hosts, God of Israel." Our author probably abbreviates. **Which dwellest between the cherubims;** or, *on the cherubim*—"which hast thy seat," *i.e.*, "behind the veil in the awful holy of holies, consecrated to thee, and where thou dost manifest thyself." Hezekiah, as Keil observes, calls into prominence "the covenant relation into which Jehovah, the Almighty Creator and Ruler of the whole world, had entered towards Israel. As the covenant God, who was enthroned above the cherubim, the Lord was bound to help his people, if they turned to him with faith in the time of their distress and entreated his assistance." **Thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth.** Thou art not, *i.e.*, as Sennacherib supposes, a mere local god, presiding over Judæa, and protecting it; but thou art the God of all the earth and of all its kingdoms, including his own, equally. Moreover, thou *alone* art the God of the kingdoms. Their supposed gods are no gods, have no existence, are the mere fictions of an idle and excited imagination, are mere "breath" and "nothingness." **Thou hast made heaven and earth.** Whereas *they* have done nothing, have given no proof of their existence (see Isa. xli. 23, 24).

Ver. 16.—**Lord, bow down thine ear, and**

hear. "Bow down thine ear" is a Hebrew idiom for "give ear," "attend" (see Ps. xxxi. 2; lxxi. 2; lxxxvi. 1; Prov. xxii. 17, etc.). It is based upon the fact that, when men wish to catch exactly what another says to them, they bend themselves towards him, and bring *one ear* as near to him as they can. **Open, Lord, thine eyes, and see.** Take cognizance both with eye and ear; *i.e.* take *full* cognizance—let nothing escape thee. **And hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God;** rather, *which he has sent to reproach.* The suffix translated "him" in our version really means "it"—*i.e.* the speech or letter of Sennacherib, which Hezekiah has "spread before the Lord."

Ver. 17.—**Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria**—*i.e.* Sennacherib, and his predecessors—the long line of monarchs who have sat on the Assyrian throne for many past ages—**have destroyed the nations and their lands;** rather, *have laid waste,* as in the parallel passage of Isaiah (xxxvii. 18). "Destroyed" is too strong a word. Hezekiah fully admits the boast of the Assyrian monarch, that he and his predecessors have had a wonderful career of success (comp. Isa. x. 5—14); but he refuses to regard this past success as ensuring success in the future. All is in the hand of God, and will be determined as God pleases. It is not an iron necessity that rules the world, but a personal will, and this will may be affected by prayer, to which (ver. 19) he therefore has recourse.

Ver. 18.—**And have cast their gods into the fire.** The images worshipped by the various nations are regarded as "their *gods,*" which they were, at any rate in the minds of the common people. The ordinary practice of the Assyrians was to carry off the images taken from a conquered people, and to set them up in their own country as trophies of victory (see Isa. xlvi. 1, 2, where a similar practice is ascribed by anticipation to the Persians). But there are places in the inscriptions where the gods are said to have been "destroyed" or "burnt." It is reasonable to suppose that the images destroyed were those of wood, stone, and bronze, which had little or no intrinsic value, while the gold and silver idols were carried off to the land of the conqueror. No doubt idols of the former far outnumbered those of the latter kind, and, at each sack of a city the "gods" which it contained were mostly burnt. **For they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone** (comp. Isa. xlii. 17; xliv. 9—20; xlvi. 6, 7). Wooden images (the Greek ξόανα) were probably the earliest that were made, and, on account of their antiquity, were often especially reverenced. They were "carved, but rude, with undivided feet, and eyes indicated by a line, the face coloured red, or white, or gilt. It was only later that ivory and gold plates were commonly laid over the wood, vested and decked out with ornaments" (Dollinger, 'Jew and Gentile,' vol. i. p. 240). Stone idols were at first shapeless masses, then pillars or cones, finally imitations of the human form, varying from the rudest representations to the priceless statues of Phidias. In Assyrian times, neither the wooden nor the stone idols were possessed of any artistic beauty. **Therefore they have destroyed them.** "Gods" of this kind could not help themselves, much less save their devotees or the cities supposed to be under their protection. It was not to be wondered at that the Assyrians had triumphed over such gods.

Ver. 19.—**Now therefore, O Lord our God.** Hezekiah draws the strongest possible contrast between Jehovah and the idols. Sennacherib had placed them upon a par (ch. xviii. 33—35; xix. 10—13). Hezekiah insists that the idols are "no gods," are "nothing"—at any rate are mere blocks of wood and stone, shaped by human hands. But Jehovah is "the God of all the kingdoms of the earth" (ver. 15), the Maker of heaven and earth (ver. 15), the one and only God (ver. 19)—answering to his name, self-existing, all-sufficient, the groundwork of all other existence. And he is "*our* God"—the special God of Israel, bound by covenant to protect *them* against all enemies. **I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand;** *i.e.* "do that which this proud blasphemer thinks that thou canst not do" (ch. xviii. 35); show him that thou art far mightier than he supposes, wholly unlike those "no-gods," over whom he has hitherto triumphed—a "very present Help in trouble"—potent to save. **That all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God.** The glory of God is the end of creation; and God's true saints always bear the fact in mind, and desire nothing so much as that his glory should be shown forth everywhere and always. Moses, in his prayers for rebellious Israel in the wilderness, constantly urges upon God that it will not be for his glory to destroy or desert them (Exod. xxxii. 12; Numb. xiv. 13—16; Deut. ix. 26—29). David, in his great strait, asks the destruction of his enemies, "*that men may know* that thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth" (Ps. lxxxiii. 18); and again (Ps. lix. 13), "Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be; and *let them know* that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth." Hezekiah prays for a signal vengeance on Sennacherib, not for his own sake, not even for his people's sake, so much as for the vindication of God's honour among

the nations of the earth—that it may be known far and wide that Jehovah is a God who can help, the real Ruler of the world, against whom earthly kings and earthly might avail nothing. Even thou only. It would not satisfy Hezekiah that Jehovah should be acknowledged as *a* mighty god, one of many. He asks for such a demonstration as shall convince men that he is unique, that he stands alone, that he is the *only* mighty God in all the earth.

Ver. 20.—**Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying.** As Hezekiah prays, Isaiah is by Divine revelation made cognizant of his prayer, and commissioned to answer it favourably. That he *sends* his answer, instead of taking it, is indicative of the high status of the prophets at this period, which made it not unseemly that, in spiritual matters, they should claim at least equality with the monarch. **Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib King of Assyria I have heard.** First of all, Hezekiah is assured that his prayer has been "heard." God has "bowed down his ear" to it (ver. 16)—has taken it into his consideration, and has sent a reply. Then the reply follows, in fourteen verses arranged in four strophes or stanzas. The first (vers. 21—24) and second (vers. 25—28) are addressed to Sennacherib, and breathe a tone of scorn and contempt. The third (vers. 29—31), is addressed to Hezekiah, and is encouraging and consolatory. The fourth (vers. 32—34) is an assurance to all whom it may concern, that Jerusalem is safe, that Sennacherib will not take it, that he will not even commence its siege.

Ver. 21.—**This is the word that the Lord hath spoken concerning him.** "Him" is, of course, Sennacherib. It adds great liveliness and force to the opening portion of the oracle, that it should be addressed directly by Jehovah to Sennacherib, as an answer to his bold challenge. The only address at all similar in Scripture is that to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. iv. 31, 32), spoken by "a voice from heaven." But the present passage is one of far greater force and beauty. **The virgin the daughter of Zion;** rather, *the virgin daughter of Zion*, or *the virgin daughter, Zion.* Cities were commonly personified by the sacred writers, and represented as "daughters" (see Isa. xxiii. 10, 12; xlvii. 1, 5, etc.). "Virgin daughter" here may perhaps represent "the consciousness of impregnability" (Drechsler); but the phrase seems to have been used rhetorically or poetically, to heighten the beauty or pathos of the picture (Isa. xxiii. 12; xlvii. 1; Jer. xlvi. 11; Lam. ii. 13), without any reference to the question whether the particular city had or had not been previously taken. Jerusalem certainly had been taken by Shishak (1 Kings xiv. 26), and by Joash (ch. xiv. 13); but Zion, if it be taken as the name of the eastern city (Bishop Patrick, *ad loc.*), may have been still a "virgin fortress." **Hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn;** or, *despises thee and laughs thee to scorn.* The Hebrew preterite has often a present sense. Whatever was the case a little while ago (see Isa. xxii. 1—14), the city now laughs at thy threats. **The daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee;** or, *wags her head at thee*—in scorn and ridicule (comp. Ps. xxii. 7).

Ver. 22.—**Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed?** *i.e.* "Against whom hast thou been mad enough to measure thyself? Whom hast thou dared to insult and defy?" Not an earthly king—not a mere angelic being—but the Omnipotent, the Lord of earth and heaven. What utter folly is this! What mere absurdity? **And against whom hast thou exalted thy voice?** *i.e.* "spoken proudly"—in the tone in which a superior speaks of an inferior—**and lifted up thine eyes on high?**—*i.e.* "looked down upon"—treated with contempt, as not worth consideration—even against **the Holy One of Israel.** Isaiah's favourite phrase—used by him twenty-seven times, and only five times in the rest of Scripture—marks this entire prophecy as his genuine utterance, not the composition of the writer of Kings, but a burst of sudden inspiration from the Coryphæus of the prophetic band. The oracle bears all the marks of Isaiah's elevated, fervid, and highly poetic style.

Ver. 23.—**By thy messengers**—literally, *by the hand of thy messengers*—Rabshakeh and others (see ch. xviii. 30, 35; xix. 10—13)—**thou hast reproached the Lord, and hast said.** Sennacherib had not *said* what is here attributed to him, any more than Sargon had *said* the words ascribed to him in Isa. x. 13, 14. But he had *thought* it; and God accounts men's deliberate thoughts as their utterances. Isaiah's "oracle" brings out and places in a striking light the pride, self-confidence, and self-sufficiency which underlay Sennacherib's messages and letters. **With the multitude of my chariots;** or, *with chariots upon chariots.* The chariot-force was the main arm of the Assyrian military service—that on which most dependence was placed, and to which victory was commonly attributed. The number of chariots that could be brought into the field by the Assyrians is nowhere stated; but we find nearly four thousand hostile chariots collected to oppose an ordinary Assyrian invasion, and defeated (see 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. p. 362, note 8). The estimates of Cterias—eleven thousand for Ninus, and a hundred thousand for Semiramis (Diod. Sic., ii. 5. § 4)—are, of course, unhistorical.

I am come up to the height of the mountains. "The height of the mountains" is here the high ground which an army would have to traverse in passing from the Cœle-Syrian valley into Palestine. It is not exactly Lebanon, which runs parallel with the coast, and certainly does not "guard Palestine to the north," as Keil supposes; but it may be viewed as a "side" or "flank" of Lebanon. In point of fact, Lebanon and Hermon unite their roots to form a barrier between the Cœle-Syrian plain (*El Bukâ'a*) and the valley of the Jordan, and an invader from the north must cross this barrier. It is not so difficult or rugged but that the Assyrians could bring their chariots over it. They were accustomed to traverse far more difficult regions in Zagros and Niphates and Taurus, and to carry their chariots with them, dismounting when necessary, and having the vehicles lifted over obstacles by human hands (see 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. p. 74). **To the sides of Lebanon.** An army which invades Palestine by the Cœle-Syrian valley—quite the easiest and most usual line of invasion—necessarily passes along the entire eastern "side," or "flank," of Lebanon, which is the proper meaning of יַרְכָה, and not "loftiest height" (Keil), or "innermost recess" (Revised Version). The plural, יַרְכְתֵי, is natural when a mountain *range*, like Lebanon, is spoken of. **And will cut down the tall cedar trees thereof, and the choice fir trees thereof.** The felling of timber in the Syrian mountain-chains was a common practice of the Assyrian invaders, and had two quite distinct objects. Sometimes it was mere cruel devastation, done to injure and impoverish the inhabitants; but more often it was done for the sake of the timber, which the conqueror carried off into his own country. "The mountains of Amanus I ascended," says Asshur-nazir-pal; "wood for bridges, pines, box, cypress, I cut down . . . cedar-wood from Amanus I destined for Bit-Hira and my pleasure-house called Azmaku, and for the temple of the moon and sun, the exalted gods. I proceeded to the land of Iz-mehri, and took possession of it throughout: I cut down beams for bridges, and carried them to Nineveh" ('Records of the Past,' vol. iii. p. 74). The cedar (*erez*) and the pine, or juniper (*bĕrôsh*), were in special request. **And I will enter into the lodgings of his borders**—rather, *the lodge of its border*—perhaps a palace or hunting-lodge on the outskirt of the Lebanon forest region (comp. Cant. vii. 4)—and into **the forest of his Carmel**; rather, *the forest of its orchard*; i.e. the choicest part of the Lebanon forest region—the part which is rather park or orchard than mere forest.

Ver. 24.—**I have digged and drunk strange waters**; rather, perhaps, *I dig, and drink . . . and dry up*—the preterite having again a present sense. Sennacherib means that this is what he is wont to do. As mountains do not stop him (ver. 23), so deserts do not stop him—he digs wells in them, and drinks water "strange" to the soil—never before seen there. **And with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged places**; rather, *will I dry up all the rivers of Egypt* (compare the Revised Version. "Mazor" is used for "Egypt" in Isa. xix. 6 and Micah vii. 12). It is the old singular from which was formed the dual Mizraim. Whether it meant "land of strength" (Pusey), or "land of distress" (Ewald), may be doubted, since we have no right to assume a Hebrew derivation. There was probably a native word, from which the Hebrew *Mazor*, the Assyrian *Muzr*, and the Arabic *Misr* were taken. Sennacherib's boast is that, as he makes deserts traversable by digging wells, so, if rivers try to stop him, he will find a way of drying them up. Compare the boasts of Alaric in Claudian ('Bell. Get.,' pp. 525—532), who had probably this passage of Kings in his thoughts—

"Te patior suadente fugam, cum cesserit omnis
Obsequiis natura meis? Subsidere *nostris*
Sub pedibus montes, *arescere vidimus amnes.*
Fregi Alpes, galeisque Padum victricibus hausi."

Ver. 25.—**Hast thou not heard long ago how I have done it?** The strain suddenly changes—the person of the speaker is altered. It is no longer Sennacherib who reveals the thoughts of his own heart, but Jehovah who addresses the proud monarch. "Hast thou not heard, how from long ago I have acted thus? Hast thou never been taught that revolutions, conquests, the rise and fall of nations, are God's doing, decreed by him long, long ago—ay, from the creation of the world? Art thou not aware that this is so, either from tradition, or by listening to the voice of reason within thine own heart?" It is implied that such knowledge ought to be in the possession of every man. **And of ancient times that I have formed it?** A rhetorical repetition of the previous question, needful for the balance of clauses, in which Hebrew poetry delights, but adding nothing to the sense. **Now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous heaps.** The idea was very familiar to Isaiah and his contemporaries. Years before, when Assyria first became threatening, Isaiah, speaking in the person of Jehovah, had exclaimed, "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff

in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (Isa. x. 5, 6). But the heathen kings whom God made his instruments to chasten sinful nations imagined that they conquered and destroyed and laid waste by their own strength (see Isa. x. 7—14).

Ver. 26.—**Therefore their inhabitants were of small power**; literally, *were short of hand* —unable, *i.e.*, to make an effectual resistance. When God has decreed a change in the distribution of power among the nations, his providence works doubly. It infuses confidence and strength into the aggressive people, and spreads dismay and terror among those who are attacked. Unaccountable panics seize them—they seem paralyzed; instead of making every possible preparation for resistance, they fold their hands and do nothing. They are like fascinated birds before the stealthy advance of the serpent. **They were dismayed and confounded.** Historically, the prophet declares, this was the cause of the general collapse of the nations whom the Assyrians attacked. God put a craven fear into their hearts. **They were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the house-tops.** The "grass of the field" is one of the most frequent similes for weakness. "All flesh is grass" (Isa. xl. 6); "They shall soon be cut down like the grass" (Ps. xxxvii. 2); "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth" (Isa. xl. 8); "I am withered like grass" (Ps. cii. 11). In the hot sun of an Eastern sky nothing faded more quickly. But this weakness was intensified in the "grass of the house-tops." It "withered before it grew up" (Ps. cxxix. 6). The depth of earth was so slight, the exposure so great, the heat so scorching, that it sank in death almost as soon as it had sprung to life. Such has been the weakness of the nations given over as a prey to the Assyrians. **And as corn blasted before it be grown up.** Corn blasted before it shoots into a stalk is as frail as grass, or frailer. It dwindles and disappears without even asserting itself.

Ver. 27.—**But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in.** "Resting in peace, going out, and coming in, cover all the activity of a man" (Bähr), or rather, cover his whole life, active and passive. Jehovah claims an absolute knowledge of all that Sennacherib does or thinks, both when he is in action and when he is at rest. Nothing is hid from him (comp. Ps. cxxxix. 1—16). Human pride should stand abashed before such absolute knowledge. **And thy rage against me.** Opposition to their will fills violent men with fury and rage. Sennacherib's anger was primarily against Hezekiah, but when once he was convinced that Hezekiah really trusted in Jehovah (ver. 10), his fury would turn against God himself (comp. Ps. ii. 1—3, where the Lord's anointed is primarily David).

Ver. 28.—**Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult**—rather, *thy arrogancy* (see the Revised Version); שַׁאֲנָן is rather the quiet security of extreme pride and self-confidence than "tumult"—**is come up into mine ears**—*i.e.* has attracted my notice—**therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips.** The imagery is most striking. Captive kings were actually so treated by the Assyrians themselves. A hook or split-ring was thrust through the cartilage of the nose, or the fleshy part of the under lip, with a rope or thong attached to it, and in this guise they were led into the monarch's presence, to receive their final sentence at his hands. In the sculptures of Sargon at Khorsabad we see three prisoners brought before him in this fashion, one of whom he seems to be about to kill with a spear ('Ancient Monarchies,' vol. i. p. 367). In another sculpture set up by a Babylonian king, his vizier brings before him two captives similarly treated, but with the ring, apparently, passed through the cartilage of their noses (ibid., vol. iii. p. 436). Manasseh seems to have received the same treatment at the hands of the "captains" (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11) who brought him a prisoner to Esarhaddon at Babylon. Other allusions to the practice in Scripture will be found in Isa. xxx. 28; Ezek. xxix. 4; xxxviii. 4. The threat in the present passage was, of course, not intended to be understood literally, but only as a declaration that God would bring down the pride of Sennacherib, humiliate him, and reduce him to a state of abject weakness and abasement. **And I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest** (comp. ver. 33). The meaning is clear. Sennacherib would not be allowed to come near Jerusalem. He would hurry back by the low coast route (ch. xviii. 17), by which he had made his invasion.

Ver. 29.—**And this shall be a sign unto thee.** Another sudden change in the address. The prophet turns from Sennacherib to Hezekiah, and proceeds to give him a sign, and otherwise speak to him encouragingly. Signs were at the time freely offered and given by God both to the faithful and the unfaithful (see ch. xx. 4; Isa. vii. 11, 14). They generally consisted in the prediction of some near event, whose occurrence was to serve as a pledge, or evidence, of the probable fulfilment of another prediction of an event more distant. **Such signs are not necessarily miraculous. Ye shall eat this year such**

things as grow of themselves. The Assyrian invasion, coming early in the spring, as was usual, had prevented the Israelites from sowing their lands. But they would soon be gone, and then the Israelites could gather in such self-sown corn as they might find in the corn-lands. The next year, probably a sabbatical year, they were authorized to do the same, notwithstanding the general prohibition (Lev. xxv. 5); the third year they would return to their normal condition. The sign was not given with reference to Sennacherib's departure, which belonged to the first year, and must take place before the ingathering of the self-sown corn could begin, but with reference to the promise that Jerusalem should be free from any further attack on his part. Sennacherib reigned seventeen years longer, but led no further expedition into Palestine. **And in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof.**

Ver. 30.—**And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah.** Sennacherib, who in his first expedition had carried away out of Judæa 200,150 prisoners ('Eponym Canon,' p. 134, line 12), had in his second probably done considerable damage to the towns in the south-west of Palestine—Lachish, for instance, which was a city of Judah (Josh. xv. 39; ch. xiv. 19). The open country had been wasted, great numbers killed, and many probably carried off by famine and pestilence. Thus both Hezekiah (ver. 4) and Isaiah regard the population still in the land as a mere "remnant." **Shall yet again take root downward**—*i.e.* be firmly fixed and established in the land, like a vigorous tree that strikes its roots into the soil deeply—**and bear fruit upward**; *i.e.* exhibit all the outward signs of prosperity. The reign of Josiah, when the Jewish dominion embraced the whole of Palestine (ch. xxiii. 15—20), was the special fulfilment of this prophecy.

Ver. 31.—**For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant.** The march of Sennacherib and the raid of Rabshakeh had driven the mass of the escaped population of Judæa to take refuge within the walls of Jerusalem, from which, on the retirement of the invaders, they would gladly "go forth," to recultivate their lands (ver. 29) and restore their ruined homes. **And they that escape**—rather, *that shall escape*—**out of Mount Zion**—"Mount Zion" is a variant for Jerusalem, as in ver. 21, and in Isaiah and the Psalms so continually—**the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this.** So in Isa. **ix.** 7 and xxxvii. 32. Here most manuscripts have "the zeal of the Lord," omitting "of hosts;" and this is probably the right reading. The meaning is that God's zealous love and care for his people will effect their complete restoration to prosperity and glory, difficult as it was at the time to imagine such a restoration.

Ver. 32.—**Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the King of Assyria.** The oracle concludes with a general announcement, addressed to all whom it may concern, not to any one individually, concerning the existing distress. First, it is laid down what shall not be the issue. **He**—*i.e.* Sennacherib—**shall not come into**—rather, *unto*—**this city**—*i.e.* Jerusalem—**nor shoot an arrow there**—*i.e.* he shall not begin the attack, as was usually done, with discharges of arrows, to clear the walls of their defenders, and make it safe for the sappers and miners and the siege artillery to draw near—**nor come before it with shield**—*i.e.* advance close, to raise the scaling-ladders, or mine the walls, or fire the gates, under the protection of huge shields—**nor cast a bank against it.** Much less shall he proceed to the last extremity of raising mounds against the walls, and planting upon them his *balistæ* and his battering-rams, with the object of effecting a breach. Each of the successive stages of a siege is touched, and negatived. None of these things shall be done. There shall be no siege. (For representations of the Assyrian sieges, banks, and engines, see Layard, 'Monuments of Nineveh,' second series, plates 21, 31, 39, 43, etc.; and Rawlinson, 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. i. p. 303; vol. ii. p. 81.)

Ver. 33.—**By the way that he came, by the same shall he return** (see ver. 28). Not merely, "he shall fail of his object" (Bähr, Keil), "he shall return disappointed;" but, literally, *he shall retrace his steps*, he shall quit Palestine by the same route by which he entered it—the coast route along the maritime plain, which left Jerusalem on the right at a distance of forty miles. **And shall not come into**—rather, *unto*—**this city, saith the Lord.** An emphatic ending (comp. Isa. xxii. 14; xlv. 13; liv. 17; lv. 8; lix. 20; lxv. 25; lxvi. 21, 23).

Ver. 34.—**For I will defend this city, to save it**—not merely with a view of saving it, but in such sort as effectually to save it—**for mine own sake**—*i.e.* because my own honour is concerned in its preservation, especially after the taunts of Sennacherib (ch. xviii. 32—35; xix. 10—13)—**and for my servant David's sake.** Not so much on account of the promises made to David, as on account of the love which God bore towards him for his faithfulness and earnest devotion.

Vers. 35—37.—Destruction of Sennacherib's Host, and his own Violent Death at Nineveh. The sequel is told in a few words. That night destruction came down on the host of Sennacherib, as it lay encamped at some distance from Jerusalem, silently and swiftly. Without noise, without disturbance, the sleeping men slept the sleep of death, and in the morning, when the survivors awoke, it was found that a hundred and eighty-five thousand were slain. Upon this, with the remnant of his army, Sennacherib hastily returned to Nineveh. There, some time after—about seventeen years according to our reckoning—a conspiracy was formed against him by two of his sons, who murdered him as he was worshipping in a temple, and fled into Armenia. Another son, Esarhaddon, succeeded.

Ver. 35.—**And it came to pass that night.** The important expression, "that night," is omitted from the narrative of Isaiah (xxxvii. 36), but is undoubtedly an original portion of the present history. It can have no other meaning—as Keil and Bähr have seen—than "the night following the day on which Isaiah had foretold to Hezekiah the deliverance of Jerusalem." God's word "runneth very swiftly." No sooner was the promise given than the destroying angel received his orders, and "that night" the terrible stroke fell. **That the angel of the Lord went out**; or, *an angel* (ἄγγελος Κυρίου, LXX.). We cannot say, with Bähr, that it was "the same one who smote the firstborn in Egypt, and inflicted the pestilence after the census under David." Revelation does not tell us that there is definitely one destroying angel. "*The* angel of death" is a rabbinical invention. It accords rather with the analogy of God's dealings that he should use at one time the services of one minister, at another time those of another. **And smote.** Imagination has been over-busy in conjecturing the exact manner of the smiting. Some critics have suggested pestilence, or more definitely "the plague" (Gesenius, Dathe, Maurer, Ewald, Winer, Thenius, Keil, etc.); others a terrible storm (Vitringa, Stanley); others the simoom (Prideaux, Milman); others a nocturnal attack by Tirhakah (Ussher, Preiss, Michaelis). Some of these the text altogether precludes, as the attack of Tirhakah, which must have aroused the whole host, and not left the disaster to be discovered by those who "awoke early in the morning." Others are improbable, as the simoom, or a terrible storm with thunder and lightning, which have never been known to accomplish such a destruction. Pestilence is no doubt possible, but a pestilence of a strange and miraculous character, to which men succumbed without awaking or disturbing others. But the narrative rather points to sudden and silent death during sleep, such as often happens to men in the course of nature singly, and here on this occasion was made to happen in one night to a hundred and eighty-five thousand men by the Divine omnipotence acting abnormally. **In the camp of the Assyrians.** The destruction was not only at one time, but in one place. "The camp of the Assyrians" cannot mean half a dozen camps situated in half a dozen different places, as Keil supposes. Sennacherib was somewhere with his main army, encamped for the night, and there, wherever it was, the blow fell. But the exact locality is uncertain. All that the narrative makes clear is that it was not in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem. Herodotus places the catastrophe at Pelusium (ii. 141). Bähr thinks it was probably before Libnah. I should incline to place it between Libnah and the Egyptian frontier, Sennacherib, when he heard that Tirhakah was coming against him (ver. 9), having naturally marched forward to meet and engage his army. **An hundred four score and five thousand.** These figures do not pretend to exactness, and can scarcely have been more than a rough estimate. They are probably the Assyrians' own estimate of their loss, which the Jews would learn from such of the fugitives as fell into their hands. **And when they**—*i.e.* the survivors—**arose early in the morning, they**—*i.e.* the hundred and eighty-five thousand—**were all dead corpses**—absolutely dead, that is; not merely sick or dying. The fact makes against the theory of a pestilence.

Ver. 36.—**So Sennacherib King of Assyria departed, and went and returned.** The original is more lively, and more expressive of haste. Sennacherib, it is said, "decamped, and departed, and returned"—the heaping up of the verbs expressing the hurry of the march home (Keil); comp. 1 Kings xix. 3. **And dwelt at Nineveh.** Nineveh was Sennacherib's favourite residence. He had built himself a palace there, marked by the modern mound of Koyunjik. Sargon, his father, had dwelt mainly at Dur-Sargina or Khorsabad, Tiglath-pileser and Shalmaneser at Calah or Nimrud. Sennacherib's palace and his other buildings at Nineveh are described in his annals at some length (see 'Records of the Past,' vol. i. pp. 50—52). The expression, "dwelt at Ninoveh," does not mean that he never quitted it, but merely

implies that he dwelt there for some considerable time after his return, as he appears to have done by his annals. The Eponym Canon makes his last year B.C. 682.

Ver. 37.—**And it came to pass**—seventeen or eighteen years afterwards; not "fifty-five days" after, as the author of Tobit (i. 21) says—**as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god.** The word "Nisroch" offers considerable difficulty. It has been connected with *nesher* (נֶשֶׁר), "eagle," and explained as a reference to the eagle-headed genius sometimes seen in the Assyrian sculptures ('Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. p. 265). But there is no evidence that the genii were ever worshipped in Assyria, much less that they had temples of their own, nor is any name resembling "Nisroch" attached to any of them. The word itself is somewhat doubtful, and different manuscripts of the Septuagint, here and in Isa. xxxvii. 38, have the variants of *Nasarach*, *Esorach*, *Meserach*, and *Asarach*, while Josephus has *Araskas*. Asarach might conceivably be a strengthened form of Asshur; but the substitution of *samech* for *shin* is against this explanation. Still, Asshur was certainly Sennacherib's favourite god, the deity whom he principally worshipped. Josephus regards the name as belonging, not to the god, but to the temple (ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ ναῷ Ἀράσκῃ λεγομένῳ), which is perhaps the true solution of the difficulty. Translate—"as he was worshipping his god in the house Nisroch." **That Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons.** Adrammelech is called "Adrammeles" by Abydenus, "Ardamazanes" by Polyhistor. Neither form resembles any known Assyrian name, but *Adrammelech* has a good Semitic derivation (see the comment on ch. xviii. 31). "Sharezer" is probably a shortened form of Nergal-shar-ozer (comp. "Shalman," Hos. x. 14), which was a name in use at the time ('Eponym Canon,' p. 68). Abydenus seems to have called him Nergilus. **Smote him with the sword.** So Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 1. § 5) and Mos. Chor. ('Hist. Armen.,' i. 22). A mutilated inscription of Esarhaddon's seems to have described his war with his brothers ('Records of the Past,' vol. iii. p. 103) at the commencement of his reign, but the earlier part is wanting. **And they escaped into the land of Armenia**; literally, *of Ararat*. The Hebrew "Ararat" is the Assyrian "Urarda"—the ordinary name for the country about Lakes Van and Urumiyeh. The name "Armenia" is not found earlier than the inscriptions of Darius Hystaspis. **And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.** Esarhaddon (the *Sarchedon* of Tobit i. 21, and the Asshur-akh-iddin of the Assyrian inscriptions) succeeded his father in B.C. 681, and was engaged for some time in a war with his brothers on the Upper Euphrates, after which he made himself master of Nineveh. He reigned from B.C. 681 to B.C. 669, when he was succeeded by his son, Asshur-bani-pal. Assyria reached the acme of her prosperity in his time.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—35.—*The wisdom of trust in God, and the foolishness of trust in self.* The contrast between the devout, God-fearing, God-trusting Hezekiah, and the proud, self-trusting, self-asserting Sennacherib is one of the most striking and instructive in Scripture. The two are set one over against the other in the most graphic way.

I. THE PICTURE OF HEZEKIAH shows him: 1. *Jealous of God's honour.* Sennacherib's words against God strike him with horror, appear to him such shocking blasphemy, that he rends his clothes and covers himself with sackcloth (ver. 1), as if he would wipe out the insult offered to God by one of his creatures' arrogancy, by causing to be presented before him the profoundest self-abasement and self-humiliation on the part of another. 2. *Sensible of his own weakness.* The day is "a day of trouble, of rebuke, and of contumely." Israel is despised, insulted, disgraced, and yet can do nothing. The time of her utmost trial has come, and she has "no strength" to carry her through the crisis. 3. *Trustful in God's power to save.* If God will, Hezekiah does not doubt he can "reprove" Sennacherib's words—disperse them, scatter them, show them to be vain words, words of nought. 4. *Reliant on the power of prayer.* "Wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left." Prayer is the only key that can unlock a door of escape. He himself resorts to prayer (ver. 15), and he exhorts Isaiah to do the same. If he himself is sinful, Isaiah is a righteous man, God's prophet, and "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. v. 16).

II. THE PICTURE OF SENNACHERIB shows him: 1. *A hater and reviler of God.*

"Let not thy God . . . deceive thee" (ver. 10). As though God ever deceived, as though he were not the Truth itself. Sennacherib represents him as either a poor braggart who could not do what he had promised, or a malevolent being intentionally beguiling men to their ruin. "Jehovah," he says, "has sent *him* against Jerusalem," has bidden *him* "go up and destroy it" (ch. xviii. 25), while at the same time he was deluding Hezekiah with promises of deliverance. 2. *Absolutely confident in his own strength.* Who can stand against the Assyrians? Who has ever been able to resist them? "Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the King of Assyria?" (ver. 33). And if not, "shalt thou be delivered?" He sets his own strength against Hezekiah's weakness (vers. 23, 24), and regards himself as irresistible. His will is law. What can hinder it? Not armies—least of all Egyptian armies—not mountains, not rivers, not deserts. Intoxicated with success, he thinks there is no power equal to him either in earth or heaven. The gods of the nations have all failed. Hezekiah's God will fail equally. 3. *Secure of the future, and without any thought of suing for Divine aid.* Why should Sennacherib sue? Success had always attended him in the past; surely "to-morrow would be as to-day," only "yet more abundant." He does not appear to give even his own gods a thought. Conventional ascription of his victories to Asshur may be found in his inscriptions; but, as Isaiah lays bare to us the workings of his innermost soul (ver. 23, 24), there is no leaning on any higher power, no recognition of anything behind his own greatness and material strength, no suspicion even of the possibility of a reverse. He is a god to himself; he commands the future; everything must necessarily go well with him.

The event shows the wisdom of Hezekiah's trust and the utter folly of Sennacherib's. "Out of the depths" Hezekiah "cries unto the Lord," and "the Lord hears his voice." "With the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." Hezekiah may in the past have wavered, have listened to evil counsellors, have paid his court to Pharaoh, and put his trust in the broken reed Egypt; but now, at any rate, he has repented of such evil courses, he has put them away from him, and thrown himself wholly upon God. His words (vers. 15—19) have the unmistakable ring of sincerity and truth. To God he looks, and to him only. His strength is become perfected in his weakness; with the result that God hears his prayer (ver. 20), and grants the unparalleled deliverance related in ver. 35. Sennacherib, on the other hand, finds in a moment the whole ground of his self-confidence fail. It was as the master of many legions that he had thought to bend all things to his will. Bereft of his legions, he is nothing. To-day a mighty conqueror carrying everything before him, unfeignedly astonished that any one should dare to disobey his commands; on the morrow he is a wretched fugitive, hurrying homewards as fast as his chariot-steeds will bear him, only anxious to escape from the foes whom he so lately despised, and to bury his shame and his disgrace within the walls of his distant palace. In his pride and his self-trust he had thrown out a challenge to God. God took up the challenge, and struck him down to the earth. The circumstances of the catastrophe are unique in the world's history; but the lesson is one that the events of history have taught again and again. At the height of his pride and arrogancy and self-trust, the ungodly conqueror is stricken with failure, humiliated, beaten down to the ground, shown that, after all, he is a mere man, and that the fates of nations are not in his power, but in the hand of One whose name is "the Most High," and who ruleth in all the kingdoms of the earth.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7.—*A good man's prayers sought.* Hezekiah is in deep distress of spirit at the haughty, defiant, confident tone of Rabshakeh. He wants help in his trouble. He sends not to his men of war, not to his statesmen, for advice, but to the man of God.

I. CHARACTER GIVES CONFIDENCE. Isaiah was known to live near to God. Therefore Hezekiah had confidence in him. *Here is a good test of the character of your companions and associates.* Would you go to them in time of trouble? Would you expect them to give you any comfort? Would you tell them the inner secrets of your heart? If not, is it not because you have no confidence in them? Their

character does not command your respect. Choose the company, seek the counsel, of good men.

II. CHARACTER GIVES POWER IN PRAYER. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." The man who expects an answer to his prayers is the man who habitually lives near to God. Mary Queen of Scots said she feared the prayers of John Knox more than an army of ten thousand men. Therefore: 1. *Live near to God if you would influence others.* Power for service comes from fellowship with God. Men like Isaiah have that quiet power that enables them to inspire others with confidence. "Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard" (ver. 6). So with St. Paul on his perilous voyage to Rome. "I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul. . . . Wherefore, sirs, *be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*" 2. *Live near to God if you would have power in prayer.* The man who prays most is the man who knows the power of prayer.

"Thrice blest whose lives are faithful prayers,
Whose loves in higher love endure;
What souls possess themselves so pure,
Or is there blessedness like theirs?"

C. H. I.

Vers. 8—37.—*Our difficulties, and how to deal with them.* We have seen that Hezekiah was a man distinguished by his trust in God. We have seen how his trust in God led him to act in times of peace. His trust in God led to *personal religion*, to *practical effort*, and to *prosperity in life*. We see here how he acted when *troubles* came. Depend upon it, the man who makes his peace with God when all is going well with him—he will have peace within his spirit when *the time of trouble comes*. The man who does not allow the flowing tide of worldly prosperity or worldly pleasure to draw him away from God, he will find that God is near *to him* in the hour of danger and of need. It was certainly an hour of danger and anxiety with Hezekiah. With a vast army, Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, was threatening Jerusalem. The very name of Assyria was at that time a terror to the nations, just as for a long time the name of Napoleon was a terror to Europe. One by one, nation after nation had gone down before the triumphal progress of the Assyrian arms. Sennacherib, conscious of his past successes, conscious of the mighty host that accompanies him, looks down with contempt upon Hezekiah and his attempt at resistance. He sends him a letter, in which he points out how futile his efforts at resistance must prove. The gods of the other nations had not been able to deliver *them*, and let him not think that his God whom he served would deliver him. This letter and Hezekiah's action regarding it suggest to us some instructive lessons.

I. SENNACHERIB'S LETTER, AND THE TEMPTATION IT BROUGHT. (Vers. 9—13.) The drift of Sennacherib's letter was entirely to lead Hezekiah *to distrust God*. Sennacherib was confident of victory; but he wanted Hezekiah to surrender to him, so that he might obtain as much tribute as he could, and at the same time incur no loss of life in his own army. So he turns into ridicule Hezekiah's faith in his God. "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the King of Assyria. *Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered?* Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed? . . . Where is the King of Hamath, and the King of Arpad, and the King of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?" In a similar way Rabshakeh, one of Sennacherib's generals, had already spoken to the people of Jerusalem. He had sought to influence their fears. He had sought to tempt them by bribes. He had said, "Let not Hezekiah deceive you: . . . neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord. . . . Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the King of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come ye out to me, and then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern: until I come and take you away into a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive and of honey, that ye may live, and not die: and hearken

not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth you, saying, The Lord will deliver us." It is easy to imagine the effect of such statements upon a people few in number compared with the Assyrian's mighty host. The horrors of a protracted siege were in prospect. The longer they continued their resistance, the more desolation and devastation would be committed by the Assyrian army in their fields and homesteads. Many of them doubtless were already murmuring at Hezekiah, and some of them perhaps ready to make an agreement with the enemy. It was a trying position for Hezekiah. Both the letter of Sennacherib, and the circumstances in which he was placed, were a strong temptation to him to distrust God. *He might have said,* "Is this the reward which my service of God has brought me? I have been faithful to God's commands. I have restored the temple; I have restored the service of God. I have thrown down the altars and high places, and broken the images in pieces. Even the brazen serpent, which the people valued so highly as a relic of the past, I have ground to powder, because their idolatry of it was dishonouring to God. And now is it thus that God rewards me?" This is just the temptation that our difficulties and troubles constantly bring to us. They tempt us to distrust God. 1. It is so in the *growth of our own spiritual life.* How often the young beginner in the Christian life is discouraged by the difficulties which arise, and which he did not calculate on! He finds that there is still an old nature within him which has to be grappled with and conquered. He meets, perhaps, with opposition and discouragements from the world without, and perhaps even from those from whom he expected sympathy and help. These difficulties tempt many a one to distrust God. Many there are still who, like the disciples when difficulties arose, "go back, and walk no more with" God. One of the common difficulties which tempts us to distrust God is *the prosperity of the wicked.* Everything seems to prosper with men who have no respect for the Law of God. The temptation is for us, in distrust of God's promises, to imitate their godless practices. We begin to say, "There is no use in our being too scrupulous." Ah! what a mistake that is! Supposing we had all their prosperity, would it compensate us for the loss of a quiet conscience? Prosperity is dearly bought, business is dearly bought, for which we have to sacrifice one commandment of God, or silence the still small voice of conscience that speaks within. "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Whenever this difficulty of the prosperity of godless men troubles you, and success which seems to be reached by questionable and unscrupulous means, remember the grand words of the thirty-seventh psalm, "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. *Commit thy way unto the Lord:* trust also in him; and he will bring it to pass." 2. In the same way there are *difficulties in Christian work.* How common a thing it is for Christians, who make much profession of their faith in God, to be dismayed and discouraged by difficulties that arise! Very often they are hindered from engaging in Christian work at all just by the difficulties that exist. I do not mean to say every person will suit every kind of work. There may be many kinds of work in which a man should not engage, because he has no fitness for them. But every Christian ought to be engaged in *some* work. If you *are doing nothing for the Master,* may we ask you why? What is your reason? What difficulty is in your way? *No difficulty is an excuse for idleness.* You may think yourself too young, or too inexperienced, or too humble; you may find others hard to work with; you may meet with discouragement and opposition; but *no one of these things is any excuse for idleness.* If difficulties were a reason for doing nothing, no Christian work would ever have been done—no churches built, no missionaries sent forth, no schools erected—for there never was a Christian work yet that had not its difficulties. Let us learn to take as our motto in Christian work, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Each one of you, no doubt, has his or her own difficulties to contend with—difficulties in your daily employment, difficulties from those you come in contact with, troubles and anxieties of spirit, cares and worries of various kinds. My message to you is this. Be not unduly cast down by your difficulties. Don't make too much of them. Just do with them as Hezekiah did, and you will see how soon they will disappear altogether, or at any rate they will be very considerably diminished.

II. HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER. (Vers. 14—19.) Hezekiah had learned by experience. As

he grew older he became wiser. A short time before, when Sennacherib was capturing his cities, and had advanced upon Jerusalem, Hezekiah sent a message to him, saying, "I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear." Sennacherib appointed him the exorbitant tribute of three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Hezekiah was in great straits for means to meet this demand. In his difficulty he imitated the foolish action of his own father Ahaz, and took the silver that was found in the house of the Lord, besides cutting off the gold from the doors and pillars of the temple, and then sent this as a peace offering to Sennacherib. But notwithstanding all this, *Sennacherib did not give up his warlike intentions.* He once more threatened Jerusalem. This time Hezekiah acts differently. *He had learned now the mistake of rashly yielding to difficulties.* It is a *lesson we all need to learn.* If we *yield to our difficulties*, they will return again, and with renewed force. One difficulty yielded to makes the next one harder to resist. One difficulty resisted makes the next one far easier to overcome. 1. Hezekiah's first act, after he had read Sennacherib's letter, *was to go up into the house of the Lord.* There he showed his wisdom. If we want advice in sickness, advice as to our bodily health, we go to the house of our physician. If we want to purchase food or clothing, we go where these necessaries of life are to be obtained. Hezekiah was now in a difficulty where human help could be of little or no use to him. So he goes to the one place where alone he might expect help—to the house of the Lord. *The very act of going to the house of the Lord* is a wise one. It reminds us that there is another world than that which is seen—the world of spirits, the world of the invisible. It reminds us that there is One in whose hand every human life is, One to whom in all ages human hearts have turned, in every time of sorrow, of difficulty, and of helplessness, and One whose power and whose goodness men have acknowledged by raising temples for his honour and for their own and others' good. Every true Christian must testify what a blessing the house of the Lord has been to him. How should we have fared without its precious privileges? How often have we felt, when the Sunday morning came round, and we joined in the song of praise, and approached the mercy-seat in company with other anxious, sinful, troubled, human hearts like our own; as we listened to the words of everlasting life; as we heard of him who is the "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," as we heard him saying to us, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;"—how often have we felt that the difficulties of the week vanished; the burdens of the week were lightened; the cloud of sorrow that hung over us seemed suddenly to lift; we went forth again with new hope in our hearts, and with new strength in our lives; and upon our lips, perhaps, were such words as these—

"Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me,
And in God's house for evermore
My dwelling-place shall be"!

Hezekiah, then, did a wise thing in going to the place where blessing was to be found. But he did more than that. 2. *He spread the letter before the Lord.* What a *faith* in God's presence that showed!—a real presence, indeed, not of body, but of that ever-present Spirit, in whom we live and move and have our being! What a confidence it showed in God's interest in the affairs of all his people! What a lesson it is for us all! *The best thing we can do with our difficulties is to spread them out before God.* Perhaps when we begin to spread them out before him, some of them will seem hardly worth talking about, hardly worth spreading, and the very act of doing so will bring us relief. But whatever it may be that gives us trouble, even though it be a small matter—something unkind that has been said about us, an unpleasant letter that we have received, an unexpected loss in business, *let us spread it out before God.* Your Sunday morning, before you go into God's house, would be well spent in thinking over the mercies you have to thank God for, the sins you have to confess, and the difficulties which trouble you, and then you would go into God's house asking just for what you need. I know a servant of God who told me that he always made it a rule to be in his place in church at least five minutes before the service began. That gave him time, he said, to calm his mind, and to look into his own heart. The good seed then

fell on prepared ground, and he said that whenever he did not do so, he did not get at all so much benefit from the service.

"What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!"

Hezekiah's confidence in God had two results. (1) *It encouraged others.* He gathered the captains of war together in the street, and said to them, "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: *for there be more with us than with him:* with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is *the Lord our God* to help us, and to fight our battles" (2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8). And so great was the confidence which the words of the king inspired, that we are told that all the people *rested themselves* upon the words of Hezekiah King of Judah. What a power the quiet influence of one believing man can exercise! What a power it gives us to live near to God! (2) Their *confidence was not misplaced.* God's people never trust in him in vain. *Hezekiah's prayer was answered.* That very night the angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and eighty-five thousand men.

"Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay wither'd and strown.

"For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he pass'd;
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever were still!

"And the widows of Asshur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!"

Let us learn from this lesson that there is nothing too hard for God. Let us ask his help and guidance in every undertaking and event of life. Let us abide in his presence continually. Let us cling closer to the Rock of Ages. And then, come weal or come woe, come sickness or come health, come adversity or come success, we shall always be resigned to our Father's will, and shall possess within our hearts the peace which passeth all understanding.—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—37.—*A nation's calamities, counsellor, and God.* "And it came to pass, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes," etc. Our purpose in our sketches on this book has not allowed us to inquire into all the minute particulars of the characters or events recorded, or into the authorship of the book, or into the right of the prophet or prophets so frequently to say, "Thus saith the Lord," but simply in the briefest way to develop for practical purposes the truths either expressed or suggested. In this chapter we have three momentous events recorded—the terrible calamity to which Jerusalem was exposed; the utter destruction of the Assyrian army; and the death of Sennacherib the Assyrian despot. The whole should be read in connection with Isa. xxxvii. We have here for notice four subjects of thought—the exposure of a nation to an overwhelming calamity; the blessing to a nation of a ruler who looks to Heaven for help; the advantage to a nation of a truly wise counsellor; and the strength of a nation that has the true God on its side.

I. THE EXPOSURE OF A NATION TO AN OVERWHELMING CALAMITY. 1. The *nature* of the threatened calamity. It was the invasion of the King of Assyria. This was announced in startling terms and in a haughty and ruthless spirit by the messengers

of Sennacherib. "Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah King of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the King of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed?" (vers. 10—13). The danger was near at hand. Sennacherib was on his way with his hundred and four score and five thousand men. The tramplings of the war-horses and the rattling of the armour would soon be heard in Jerusalem. The utter destruction of the city was contemplated, and seemed rapidly approaching. In a far worse position was the kingdom of Judah at this moment than was England when the Spanish Armada was approaching our shores. 2. *The influence of the threatened calamity.* (1) It struck the kingdom with a crushing terror. "And it came to pass, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. And he sent Eliakim, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble" (vers. 1—3). The rending of the "clothes" and the arraying in "sackcloth" were symbols to express the horror of the heart. (2) It struck the kingdom with a helpless feebleness. "This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth" (ver. 3). "The image is that of a parturient woman whose strength is exhausted, whose powers are paralyzed, at the moment when she required to put forth a vigorous effort. The expression in which the message was conveyed to the prophet described, by a strong figure, the desperate condition of the kingdom, together with the utter inability of the people to help themselves; and it intimated also a hope that the blaspbemous defiance of Jehovah's power by the impious Assyrian might lead to some direct interposition for the vindication of his honour and supremacy to all heathen gods." Here is utter national helplessness in a terrible national calamity.

II. THE BLESSING TO A NATION OF A RULER WHO LOOKS TO HEAVEN FOR HELP. What, in the wretched condition of his country, does King Hezekiah do? He invokes the merciful interposition of Heaven. When the messengers came to Hezekiah with a threatening letter from the King of Assyria (see vers. 10—13), what did the monarch do? He took it into the house of the Lord, and there prayed. "And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said, O Lord God of Israel," etc. (vers. 14—19). In this wonderful prayer: 1. *He adores the God whom Sennacherib had blasphemed.* He addresses him as the "God of all the kingdoms of the earth," the Maker of "heaven and earth," the one and only Lord. 2. *He implores the Almighty for his own sake to deliver the country.* "Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only." "The best pleas in prayer," says an old author, "are those that are taken from God's own honour; therefore the Lord's prayer begins with 'Hallowed be thy Name,' and concludes, 'Thine be the glory.'" Who is the greatest human king? Not the man who relies on his own power and skill to protect his nation from danger, and seeks to secure it in the possession and enjoyment of all its rights; nor the king who looks to his armies and navies in time of need; but he who practically realizes his dependence upon the "Lord" that made heaven and earth. Reverence for the Infinite is the soul of true royalty.

III. THE ADVANTAGE TO A NATION OF A TRULY WISE COUNSELLOR. Apart from his inspiration, Isaiah may be fairly taken in this case as the representative of a wise counsellor, and that for two reasons. 1. *He looked to heaven rather than to earth for his wisdom.* "Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib King of Assyria I have heard. This is the word that the Lord hath spoken concerning him" (vers. 20, 21). The counsel which he had to give he here declares to have come from the Lord God of Israel. How the wisdom was conveyed to him, whether by an outward voice or an inner vision, does not appear; he had it from heaven. He only

is the true counsellor of men who gets his wisdom from above. Whence do the advisers of sovereigns get their instructions? From hoary precedents or the fallible conclusions of their own feeble minds; and not directly from above. Hence the incessant blunders of cabinets, and the scandal in these days of one political party denouncing the blunders and professing to correct the mistakes of the other. 2. *What he received from heaven he communicated to men.* In the communication: (1) "Sennacherib is apostrophized in a highly poetic strain admirably descriptive of the turgid vanity, haughty pretensions, and heartless impiety of this despot. 'The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee,' etc. (vers. 21—28). (2) Hezekiah himself is personally addressed, and a sign given him of coming deliverance. He is told that for two years the presence of the enemy would interrupt the peaceful pursuits of husbandry, but in the third year the people would be in circumstances to till the earth, plant the vineyards, and reap the fruits, as formerly. 'And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof,' etc. (vers. 29—31). (3) The issue of Sennacherib's invasion is announced. 'Thus saith the Lord concerning the King of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return,' etc. (vers. 32—34)" (Dr. Jamieson). Such was the communication which, in language passionate, poetic, and powerful, Isaiah made to this perplexed and terrified nation. It involves two things: (*a*) the deliverance of his country; (*b*) the ruin of the despot.

IV. THE STRENGTH OF A NATION THAT HAS GOD ON ITS SIDE. Who delivered the imperilled nation? Who overwhelmed the despot? "The zeal of the Lord of hosts." "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred four score and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses," etc. (vers. 35—37). Who was the "angel of the Lord"? Was it some transcendent personality, or some tremendous force in nature, such as a pestiferous blast, or an electric bolt? It matters not; the "angel" was but the instrument in the hand of God. 1. *How swiftly was the deliverance effected!* "That night." What a night was that!—one of the most memorable nights of the world. Perhaps the whole was effected even in one single hour, or even in one instant of that night. 2. *How terrible the ruin which that deliverance effected!* "An hundred four score and five thousand men" destroyed. At night, a glittering array; in the morning, "dead corpses."

> "Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
> That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
> Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
> That host on the morrow lay wither'd and strown."

How rapidly God can do his work! he can annihilate a universe in the twinkling of an eye. Behold a mystery! Why should these hundred and eighty-five thousand be thus destroyed on account of the conduct of one man—Sennacherib?

> "God is his own Interpreter,
> And he will make it plain."

The forty-sixth psalm is supposed to be the triumphant outburst of the delivered people. "God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble. . . . The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted." This Sennacherib, this ruthless despot, does not seem to have fallen with the others. His body was not found amongst the dead corpses. Albeit, he did not escape. "So Sennacherib King of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his God, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead" (vers. 36, 37). What greater calamity could befall a man than to be murdered by his own sons?—D. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*Hezekiah and Isaiah.* The messengers whom Hezekiah had sent having returned and reported to him the words of Rabshakeh (ch. xviii. 37), the king was plunged in unspeakable distress. We have now to observe his behaviour in his trouble.

I. HEZEKIAH'S GRIEF. 1. *He assumed the signs of deepest mourning.* The messengers had come to him with their clothes rent. Hezekiah now rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth. His humiliation was sincere. The words he had heard had knocked from under him his last hope of help from man. He felt that God's "chastisement" (ver. 3) was upon him, and that God alone could deliver. This moment of the realization of his helplessness was also the moment of the return of God's favour to him. To this point it had been God's aim to bring him, and now that he threw himself in his utter weakness on God's strength, deliverance was assured. 2. *He sought God in his sanctuary.* He "went into the house of the Lord." Thither also Asaph had gone in his hour of trouble, and there his difficulties were removed (Ps. lxxiii. 17). Hezekiah no doubt sought the sanctuary for purposes of prayer. We see him do the same thing on receipt of Sennacherib's letter (ver. 14). We have every encouragement to come to God with our troubles (Ps. xci. 15), and nothing soothes the heart like pouring out all our sorrows before him (Phil. iv. 6, 7). Prayer is the soul's best resort in times of extremity.

II. THE DEPUTATION TO ISAIAH. In addition to praying himself to God, Hezekiah sent an honourable deputation to Isaiah, to request his intercession for the city. 1. *He sends to God's prophet.* Possibly for some time Hezekiah and Isaiah had not seen much of each other. The prophet's counsels had proved distasteful. His denunciations of the alliance with Egypt cannot have been received with favour (Isa. xxx.). His advice certainly had not been taken; nor can it have been with his approval that Hezekiah made his ill-fated submission to Sennacherib. Now, in the hour of trouble, Hezekiah sends once more to him. He sends his highest officers—the same who had conferred with Rabshakeh—and the elders of the priests. All went covered with sackcloth, in token of their grief, penitence, and humiliation of heart. This is what often happens. God's servants are not appreciated till the hour of real need comes; then men are glad to get their counsels and their prayers. It would be well if, in the conduct of state affairs, respect were paid to the counsels of religion earlier. It would save many a bitter hour afterwards. 2. *He makes full confession of his sad estate.* A crisis had come in which there was no ray of human hope. From Hezekiah's side it was a day of "trouble"—of deep distress and mortification; from God's side it was a day of "chastisement" (Hos. v. 2, "I am a Rebuker of them all"); from the side of the Assyrian, it was a day of "blasphemy"—of impious vaunting against Jehovah. And like a woman in pains of childbirth, without strength for delivery, they had no means of bringing themselves out of their perilous position. "The metaphor expresses in the most affecting manner, the ideas of extreme pain, imminent danger, critical emergency, utter weakness, and entire dependence on the aid of others" (Alexander). The spirit of self-trust is now utterly slain. In making this confession, Hezekiah owned that Isaiah was right, and he had all along been wrong. 3. *He entreats the prophet's prayers.* Hezekiah's one hope now was that, for his own glory's sake, Jehovah would "reprove" the blasphemous words which Rabshakeh had uttered, and he besought Isaiah to lift up his prayer for the remnant of Jews still left. It is a true instinct of the soul which leads us to seek the intercession on our behalf of those who stand nearer to God than ourselves. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. v. 16). Thus Pharaoh besought Moses to intercede for him (Exod. viii. 8, 28; x. 16); Moses on various occasions interceded for the people (Exod. xxxii. 30—33; Deut. ix. 12—20); Elijah interceded for the land of Israel (1 Kings xviii. 11—45); the high priest interceded for the tribes; and Christ now intercedes for us (Rom. viii. 34; 1 John ii. 1). We cannot lay too much stress on the power of prayer, nor be too anxious to get an interest in the prayers of the holy. Hezekiah did well in joining with his own prayers this request for the intercession of Isaiah.

III. THE PROPHET'S REPLY. We have already and frequently seen how ready God is to respond to the faintest movements of the soul towards him. The prophet did not send those who now sought him away without comfort. He gave them: 1. *A*

word of encouragement. "Be not afraid," etc. In his own heroic trust Isaiah had never faltered. Such trust is contagious. The words which Isaiah spoke would send a new thrill of hope to the hearts of the messengers. How marvellous a thing is faith in God! How it supports a man's own soul, lifts him above ordinary, and even extraordinary, discouragements, and makes him firm as a rock when others are trembling and despairing around (cf. Ps. xlvi.)! 2. *An assurance of deliverance.* In the name of God, Isaiah was able to give them, further, an assurance that Sennacherib would do them no hurt. God would put a spirit in him, and would cause him to hear tidings which would make him depart into his own land, and there he would perish with the sword. Nothing is said as yet of the destruction of the army, unless, indeed, it is the tidings of that which Sennacherib was to hear. Another boasting message of Sennacherib and another prayer of Hezekiah come in between this promise and the final and fuller one.—J. O.

Vers. 8—19.—*Sennacherib's letter.* While the foregoing events were taking place, Rabshakeh had returned to his royal master. The siege of Lachish had been concluded—adding another to the score of victories—and Sennacherib was now at Libnah, Here the news came that Tirhakah was on his march against him, and naturally Sennacherib wished to secure the capitulation of Jerusalem before the Ethiopian could arrive. To this end he sent another message to Hezekiah—this time in the form of a letter—renewing the attempt to frighten the Jewish king into surrender.

I. SENNACHERIB'S PROUD BOASTINGS. The letter is an echo of the speech of Rabshakeh, and is couched in the same boastful spirit. 1. *He makes light of the power of Jehovah.* "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee," etc. Sennacherib assumes that Hezekiah may have received true oracles from his God, but he warns him not to trust them. In his arrogance, he defies all gods as well as men. To him Jehovah was but one god among many—the god of one small nation—not for a moment to be compared with the powerful Asshur. His idea of the morality of the gods is seen in the supposition that they practised deceit upon their worshippers. 2. *He extols his own prowess.* He again recounts the victories which he and previous kings of Assyria had gained. Their conquests had extended to all lands; gods and kings had everywhere gone down before them: how should Hezekiah escape? As an induction, Sennacherib's argument seems very complete. The countries he names *had* been conquered; their gods had not availed to save them; their kings had been overthrown. Logic seemed on his side. Only faith could furnish a sufficient answer. 3. *He is certain beforehand of victory.* In his assurance that he would overcome Hezekiah, Sennacherib is the type of many boasters. Often has the voice of the adversary been raised in exultation at his prospective victory over the people of God. Paganism, Mohammedanism, and infidelity have each boasted that they would extinguish Christianity. Voltaire predicted that in a century from his time the Bible would be found only in antiquarian libraries. The same scoffer said that it took twelve men to found Christianity, but he would show that one man was sufficient to overthrow it. Modern unbelieving science sometimes speaks in the same strain. The argument *per enumerationem* is often employed, as it was by Sennacherib. All other religions show a tendency to collapse; their miracles are exploded, belief in witchcraft, etc., disappears before the march of enlightenment; therefore Christianity cannot hope to stand. But arrogance is a bad prophet. "Before honour is humility;" but "pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. xvi. 18; xviii. 12). It was so with Sennacherib, and it will be found to be so by his modern imitators.

II. HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER. When Hezekiah received this insulting epistle, he went as before to the temple, and spread it out before the Lord. He did as we should all do with our troubles, carried it straight to the presence-chamber. God in truth knows all we have need of before we ask him; but that is no reason why we should not present our petitions. God knew all that was in this boastful letter; but that was no reason why Hezekiah should not place it before him, and make its contents the basis of his prayer. The prayer he offered contained: 1. *An acknowledgment of God's supremacy.* To Sennacherib's false idea of Jehovah, Hezekiah opposes the true one, The Lord God of Israel was no local deity, but the God of the whole earth. (1) He is the God of revelation. "O Lord God of Israel, which sittest upon the cherubim." It was because

God had revealed himself to Israel, and dwelt in glory above the mercy-seat whereon stood the cherubim, that Hezekiah had come to the temple to offer up this supplication. Communion with God rests on God's revelation of himself to man. Only as God has revealed his Being to us, and dwells among us in mercy, are we able to approach him. An unknown or unknowable God can call forth no trust. (2) He is the God of providence. "Thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth." This is involved in the name Jehovah, which denotes God as the Being who is, and remains one with himself in all that he thinks, purposes, and does. His rule is unlimited; all events, great and small, are under his control; his counsel is the one stable factor in history. This conception of the supremacy of God in providence is involved in the knowledge he has given us of himself in grace. (3) He is the God of nature. "Thou hast made heaven and earth." This again is involved in the truth of God's unlimited rule in providence, for only the Maker of the world can be its absolute Ruler. Reversing the order of thought—only because God is the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth, is he the Lord in providence; and because he is Lord in nature and providence, he can do all things for us in grace (Ps. cxxi. 1, 2; cxxxv. 5, 6). 2. *An exposure of Sennacherib's fallacy.* Hezekiah does not dispute the facts recited by Sennacherib, nor does he attempt to belittle them in any way. "Of a truth, Lord," he says, "the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands." No good can come of refusing to look facts in the face. It has often happened in apologetics that the attempt has been made to deny, explain away, or minimize the force of facts which were supposed to conflict with religious truth—facts of geology, *e.g.*, or facts of history or human nature which did not square with religious doctrine. This procedure is unwise, and invariably recoils to the injury of religion. We are entitled to ask for proof of alleged facts, and to suspend our judgment till such proof is given; but when the facts are established, they should be frankly admitted, and our theories widened to find room for them. Truth in one department can never conflict with truth in another, and religion, resting on its own strong foundations, can afford to deal fairly with every class of evidence. Hezekiah did not dispute Sennacherib's facts; but he put his finger at once upon the fallacy of Sennacherib's argument. The Assyrians had indeed conquered these many nations, and cast their gods into the fire; but why? Because they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they had destroyed them. It was different when they had to deal with the true God, the Maker of heaven and earth. The error of modern unbelief is distinguishable from, yet kindred with, the error of Sennacherib. Sennacherib attributed a reality to his gods; unbelief allows none. Yet it agrees with Sennacherib in denying to Jehovah his true character as the one living God of nature, providence, and grace. Faith, coming to God, believes "that he is, and that he is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. xi. 6). Denying this truth, unbelief scoffs at religion, at the Bible revelation, at prayer, providence, miracles, redemption. It treats the confidence of Christians in their God as illusory, anticipates the downfall of their system, and mocks at their hopes of immortality. Its arguments, often cogent enough if there is no living God, lose all force the moment faith in God reasserts itself. 3. *An argument for God's interposition.* Having shown his grounds for the belief that God *can* interpose, Hezekiah urges two reasons why he *should* interpose. (1) The first is the honour of his own Name. The fact that Sennacherib had in his pride and ignorance thus "reproached the living God" was a reason why God should reveal himself in his true character for Sennacherib's discomfiture. The blasphemous pride of the creature exalting itself against the Creator should be brought low. (2) A second reason was that, by saving his people from Sennacherib, Jehovah would give a grand lesson of his sole Deity to all the nations of the earth: "That all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only." It is God's glory which Hezekiah puts in the foreground. He had no plea of merit to urge, either his own or the nation's; therefore he can but ask God to be merciful to them for his own Name's sake.—J. O.

Vers. 20—34.—*Isaiah's oracle.* God is the Hearer of prayer. As in the case of Daniel (Dan. ix. 20), while Hezekiah was still speaking, an answer was sent to him through Isaiah the prophet (cf. ch. xx. 4). Thus also answers to prayer were sent in the cases of Paul (Acts ix. 10—18) and Cornelius (Acts x. 1—8). Isaiah was the one

person whose faith had remained unshaken through all this crisis. But it is not merely Isaiah's confidence which speaks in this composition. He brought to the king a direct "word of God." His oracle is one of surpassing beauty, grand and sustained in style, and expressing the greatest truths.

I. ZION'S DERISION OF THE INVADER. The introductory picture is very striking. The city Jerusalem is represented as a maiden, standing on a height, derision imprinted on every feature, shaking her head, and sending out bursts of mocking laughter after the retreating Sennacherib. Is she insane? So to the world it might have seemed. Insane at least it might appear to draw such a picture at a time when the condition of the city seemed past salvation. But faith's manifestations often seem like madness to the worldly (Acts xxvi. 24; 2 Cor. v. 13). Faith triumphs beforehand over all the power of the enemy (Luke x. 19, 20). It does not need to wait to see their overthrow; it is assured of it as if it had already happened. The strength of faith is seen in the degree in which it enables its possessor to rise above adverse circumstances. In its higher reaches it can not only hope and wait, but exults and treats the threats of the enemy with ridicule and scorn (cf. Ps. ii. 4).

II. SENNACHERIB AS GLASSED IN HIS OWN EYES. Jehovah next asserts himself as "the Holy One of Israel," and takes Sennacherib to task for his blasphemies against him. He puts language into Sennacherib's lips poetically expressive of that monarch's lofty ideas of his own power. Alluding both to what he has done and to what he intends to do, Sennacherib boasts, "With the multitude of my chariots I am come up to the height of the mountains. . . . I have digged and drunk strange waters; and with the sole of my feet will I dry up all the rivers of Egypt." The meaning is that no obstacles of nature can prevent the accomplishment of his designs. Mountains like Lebanon cannot stop his march; he will find water even in the desert; Egypt's rivers will be trodden disdainfully underfoot. His chariots pass over all heights; cedar trees and fir trees fall before him; he penetrates to the farthest lodging-place and most fruitful region of the country. It is "I," Sennacherib says, "who do all this." Such boasting is: 1. *Extravagant.* In his inflated self-consciousness, Sennacherib sets no bounds to what he can accomplish. His language is exaggerated and hyperbolical. It is a man puffing himself up to the dimensions of a god (cf. Isa. x. 13, 14; xiv. 13, 14; Dan. iv. 30). Napoleon was accustomed to use similar language to impress the minds of his ignorant enemies (Bähr's 'Commentary on 2 Kings,' p. 226). Only in part is this extravagant self-assertion delusion. Those who give vent to it know very well that much of it is theatrical and unreal—mere froth and foam. But it gratifies their pride to indulge in it. 2. *Irrational.* This on two grounds: (1) Even granting that these boastings rested on real exploits, such self-exaltation is unbecoming in any mortal. The mightiest conqueror has only to reflect how soon he will become weak as other men (Isa. xiv. 10—17), to see how foolish is his self-glorying. (2) The past is an unsafe ground for boasting as to the future. Because his arms had hitherto been so uniformly successful, Sennacherib imagined that it was impossible any reverse could now befall him. He had got into his head the idea of his own invincibility. Napoleon had the same confidence in the invincibility of his arms. Experience shows the baselessness of such confidence. A long run of victories, intoxicating the conqueror with his own success, is generally followed by a disastrous calamity. The castle gets built up too high, and in the end topples over. Napoleon learnt this at Moscow and Waterloo. Excess of pride usually ends in an overthrow. 3. *Impious.* Sennacherib's boastings, finally, were impious. It was the creature arrogating to himself the power of God. Any reference to Asshur Sennacherib may have made in his inscriptions was but a thin veil to cover his self-glorying. His particular blasphemies against the God of Israel arose from ignorance of Jehovah's true character. He thought he was contending against the petty god of a small tribe, whereas he had to deal with "the Holy One" who made heaven and earth. Men's mistakes as to God do not alter the realities of their relation to him. Because God is "the Holy One," he cannot overlook men's impieties. Holiness is the principle which guards the Divine honour. It "guards the eternal distinction between Creator and creature, between God and man, in the union effected between them; it preserves the Divine dignity and majesty from being infringed upon" (Martensen).

III. SENNACHERIB AS BEHELD BY GOD. Vastly different from Sennacherib's view of himself was the view taken of him by God his Maker. 1. *Sennacherib a mere*

instrument in God's hands for the execution of his purposes. "Hast thou not heard how I have done it long ago, and formed it of ancient times? Now have I brought it to pass that thou shouldest be to lay waste," etc. Sennacherib was defying Jehovah, but it was this God who from everlasting had decreed the events that were taking place, and had assigned to Sennacherib the part he was to bear in them. Here was a strange reversal of Sennacherib's ideas! It was the axe boasting itself against him that heweth herewith, and the saw magnifying itself against him that shaketh it, and the rod shaking itself against them that lift it up (Isa. x. 16). This is the truth which ungodly men constantly ignore. They exalt themselves against God, forgetful that, without God, they could not think a thought or move a finger; that it is he who gave them their being, and continually sustains them; that his providence girds them round, and uses them as executors of its purposes; and that they have only as much power as he chooses to give them. 2. *His successes due to God.* "Therefore their inhabitants were of small power," etc. Sennacherib ascribed all his victories to his own prowess, and founded on them an argument for despising Jehovah, whereas it was because Jehovah had prospered him that he had gained these victories. It is God who brings low, and lifts up (1 Sam. ii. 7). When he is against a people, their strength is small, they are dismayed and confounded, they are like grass that withers, and blasted grain. Sennacherib did not understand this, and took all the glory to himself. 3. *God prescribes the limits of his power.* As the Assyrian was thus an instrument in God's hand, it was for God to say how far he would be permitted to go. The limit was reached when he began to rage and blaspheme against the power which controlled him. God had heard his words and seen his doings. "I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me." He had done enough. The curb was now to be applied. Drawing a metaphor from Sennacherib's own treatment of his captives, the oracle declared, "I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest." The prediction was soon to be fulfilled. No comfort can be greater, in times of "trouble, and rebuke, and blasphemy," than to know that the hostile powers are under absolute Divine control, and that they cannot take one step beyond what God allows. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (Ps. lxxvi. 10). When men turn against God in open blasphemy, their power is nearly at an end.

IV. A SIGN TO THE PEOPLE. 1. *A pledge of God's favour.* The immediate sign of the truth of this oracle would be the destruction of the invading army, which was to take place that very night. But as a further pledge of complete deliverance from the Assyrian—a token that he would not return—it was foretold that within three years the whole land would be again under cultivation. In the interval the people would be provided for by that which grew of itself. Material blessings are withdrawn when God frowns; restored when he smiles. 2. *The remnant would take root and increase.* The land had been deplorably thinned by invasion and captivity. Had the process gone on much longer, Judah would have disappeared, as Israel had done. A remnant, however, would be saved, and this, taking root downward, and bearing fruit upward, would by God's blessing so multiply and strengthen as speedily to renew the population. 3. *God's zeal engaged for the fulfilment of his promises.* They were great things which God had promised, but the "zeal" of the Lord of hosts—his jealousy for his own honour, and for his people and his land—would perform it. When God's "zeal" is engaged in any undertaking, can we doubt that it will prosper? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. viii. 39). God's zeal *is* engaged in giving effect to all efforts for the extension of his gospel, the salvation of men, and the triumph of righteousness in the world.

V. THE SAFETY OF THE CITY. Finally, a definite assurance is given that, let Sennacherib rage as he may, the city would not be harmed. He should neither come into it, nor shoot an arrow into it, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it, as once before he had done. Instead, he would return by the way he came. This God would do (1) for his own sake, *i.e.* for the vindication of his own honour from the reproaches of Sennacherib; and (2) for his servant David's sake. Succeeding generations little know how much they owe to God's regard for his holy servants in days past. As was Jerusalem, so is the Church safe under God's protection (Matt. xvi. 18). For the higher David's sake, he will not let it perish. But for God's care and shielding power, it would long ere this have been destroyed.—J. O.

Vers. 35—37.—*The mighty deliverance.* God's word was not long in being fulfilled. That very night the angel of the Lord smote a hundred and eighty-five thousand of the host of the Assyrians. In few words—for the end is as good as reached with Isaiah's oracle—the sacred narrator sums up the facts of the catastrophe.

I. THE DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB'S ARMY. 1. *Its historic truth.* On all hands, though Sennacherib's own annals pass over the event in silence, this seems to be admitted. "Thus," says Wellhausen, "it proved in the issue. By a still unexplained catastrophe, the main army of Sennacherib was annihilated on the frontier between Egypt and Palestine, and Jerusalem thereby freed from all danger. The Assyrian king had to save himself by a hurried retreat to Nineveh; Isaiah was triumphant." 2. *Its miraculous character.* Granting that the event happened, it seems impossible, in view of Isaiah's distinct prediction, to deny its supernatural character. God's hand is almost seen visibly stretched out for the deliverance of his city, and the bringing low of Sennacherib's pride. Allow that the sweeping off of this great army was in any way connected with Isaiah's faith, hope, and prayers, and a supernatural government of the world is established. 3. *Its spiritual lessons.* (1) We see the end which commonly overtakes worldly boasters. Greek story delights to dwell on the Nemesis which overtakes inordinate pride. Napoleon, the modern Sennacherib, met with a discomfiture not dissimilar to that here recorded. (2) We learn not to be afraid of spiritual boasters. The nations may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing; the kings of the earth may set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed. But "he that sits in the heavens will laugh; the Lord will have them in derision" (Ps. ii. 4). Scientific and philosophic boasters have not prevailed against the Church yet, and are not likely to do so. (3) We learn the advantage of entire reliance on God. While Hezekiah leaned on the help of man, he could accomplish nothing. When he cast himself on God's help, he was saved. God has all power in heaven and earth at his command, and is able to do all things for us.

II. THE END OF SENNACHERIB. 1. *The great king's retreat.* At this point "the great king," the King of Assyria, his boasting effectually silenced, disappears for ever from Jewish history. He "departed, and went and returned, and dwelt in Nineveh." No more is heard of his exploits in these pages. 2. *His miserable end.* His end was a fitting satire on his boasts. Two of his own sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer, conspired against him, and slew him while he was worshipping in the house of his god. This is the god to whose power, it may be presumed, he attributed all his conquests. Poor god! that could not save his own worshipper. *Sic transit gloria mundi.* The sons who slew him could not keep the throne, which was taken by Esarhaddon.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XX.

Vers. 1—21.—ILLNESS OF HEZEKIAH AND EMBASSY OF MERODACH-BALADAN. HEZEKIAH'S DEATH. The writer proceeds to relate an illness and a recovery of Hezekiah, which happened about the middle of his reign, probably in B.C. 713, and which was accompanied by strange, if not miraculous, circumstances (vers. 1—11). Hezekiah's recovery was followed by an embassy of congratulation from Merodach-Baladan, King of Babylon, which led Hezekiah into an act of folly, and brought upon him the rebuke of Isaiah (vers. 12—19). The narrative terminates with a notice of some of Hezekiah's great works and of his decease (vers. 20, 21).

Vers. 1—11.—*The illness and recovery of Hezekiah.*

Ver. 1.—**In those days.** This is a very vague note of time, and cannot be regarded as determining the position of the events here related with respect to the preceding narrative. Ver. 6, however, shows that a time anterior to Sennacherib's discomfiture is intended; and the same verse also fixes the date to Hezekiah's fourteenth year, which was B.C. 713. If the date in ch. xviii. 13 be regarded as genuine, we must consider that the illness happened in the year of Sennacherib's first expedition against Palestine; but if we regard that date as interpolated, and accept the Assyrian inscriptions as our chronological authorities, we must place the events of the present chapter twelve years earlier than that ex-

pedition, in the reign of Sargon over Assyria, and in the first reign of Merodach-Baladan over Babylon. It belongs, at any rate, to the middle part of Hezekiah's reign, while his treasures were intact (vers. 13—17), and had not been carried off to Nineveh. **Was Hezekiah sick unto death**; stricken, *i.e.*, by a malady which, in the ordinary course of nature, would have been fatal. **And the Prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him.** The designation of Isaiah as "the prophet," and "the son of Amoz," as if previously unknown to the reader, indicates the original independency of the narrative, which the writer of Kings probably obtained from a separate source. **And said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.** The statement was a warning, not a prophecy. It is parallel to that of Jonah to the Ninevites, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

Ver. 2.—**Then he turned his face to the wall**—*i.e.* away from those who were standing beside his bed, and might have distracted his attention, to pray with more concentration and earnestness—**and prayed unto the Lord, saying** (comp. ch. xix. 15). It was natural to Hezekiah, in every kind of affliction and distress, to take his trouble direct to God.

Ver. 3.—**I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart.** There is no Pharisaical self-righteousness here. Hezekiah is conscious that he has honestly endeavoured to serve God, and to do his will—that, whatever may have been his shortcomings, his heart has been right towards God. He ventures, therefore, on something like expostulation. Why is he to be cut off in the midst of his days, at the age of thirty-nine, when such a wicked king as Uzziah has lived to be sixty-eight (ch. xv. 2), and Rehoboam to be fifty-eight (1 Kings xiv. 21)? It is to be remembered that, under the old covenant, length of days was expressly promised to the righteous (Prov. iii. 2; ix. 11; x. 27, etc.), and that a shortened life was the proclaimed penalty of wicked-doing (Job xv. 32, 33; xxii. 16; Ps. lv. 23; Prov. x. 27). Hezekiah's self-assertion is thus a sort of laying hold of God's promises. **And have done that which is good in thy sight**; comp. ch. xviii. 3—6; and note the similar pleadings of David, "*With my whole heart* have I sought thee" (Ps. cxix. 10); "I have remembered thy Name, O Lord, and have *kept thy Law*. This I had because I kept thy commandments" (Ps. cxix. 55, 56), and the like. **And Hezekiah wept sore.** Human nature shrinks from death instinctively, and it requires a very vivid imagination for even the Christian in middle life to feel, with St. Paul, that "it is better for him to depart and to be with Christ." The Hebrew of Hezekiah's time had far more reason to regard death as an evil. His hopes of a life beyond the grave were feeble—his conceptions of the life, if life there were, faint and unattractive. *Sheôl*, like Hades, was a vague, awful, terrible thing. If we consider Hezekiah's words, "The grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee" (Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19), we may understand how the Hebrew shrank from the fearful change. And in Hezekiah's case there was a yet further reason for grief. Hezekiah had as yet no male offspring (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 2. § 1). Manasseh was as yet unborn (comp. ver. 6 with ch. xxi. 1). If he died now, his house would be cut off, he would be without posterity—a sore grief to every Hebrew. Ewald's references to Isa. xxxviii. 19 and xxxix. 7, as indicative of Hezekiah having sons at the time, are absolutely without value.

Ver. 4.—**And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court.** The narrative in Isaiah (xxxviii. 4) does not contain this touch, which is very graphic, and indicative of the eye-witness. "The middle court" is probably the second or intermediate court of the royal palace. Isaiah had not gone further than this, when he was arrested in his course by a Divine communication. **That the word of the Lord came to him, saying.** How the word of the Lord came to the prophets is an inscrutable mystery. Sometimes, no doubt, it came in vision, which to a certain extent we can understand. But how, when the prophet was secularly engaged, as in this instance, walking across a court, he knew that the thought which occurred to him was a Divine message, it is almost impossible to conceive. Still, we cannot doubt that if God determines to communicate his will to man, he must be able, with the message, to impart an absolute certainty of its source, an assured conviction that it is his word, which precludes all question, hesitation, or dubiety. Isaiah, in the middle of his walk, finds his steps arrested, a new injunction laid upon him, with a necessity of immediately obeying it.

Ver. 5.—**Turn again**—or, *turn back*—"retrace thy steps, and enter once more into the bedchamber of the king"—**and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people.** An unusual title for the Jewish monarch, but one applied in 1 Sam. ix. 16 and x. 1 to Saul, and in 1 Sam. xiii. 14 and 2 Sam. v. 2 to David. The proper meaning of נָגִיד is "leader"—"one who goes in front." **Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy**

father—**Hezekiah** obtains mercy, both as David's son and as David's imitator (see ch. xviii. 3)—**I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears** (comp. Exod. ii. 24; iii. 7; Ps. lvi. 8). There is not a cry, not a groan, not a tear, not a sigh of his faithful ones, to which the heart of God is not open, which does not touch him, move him, draw forth his sympathy. If he does not always grant our prayers, it is because we "ask amiss"—without faith, or without fervour, or things not good for us. Hezekiah's earnest, faithful, and not unwise prayer was, as such prayers always are, effectual. **Behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord**; *i.e.* thou shalt be so completely recovered as to be able to quit thy palace and pay thy vows in the courts of the Lord's house. God knows that to do this will be Hezekiah's first wish, as soon as his sickness is past (comp. Isa. xxxviii. 20).

Ver. 6.—**And I will add unto thy days fifteen years.** God "does exceeding abundantly more than we either ask or think" (Eph. iii. 20). Hezekiah had asked for nothing more than immediate escape from death. God grants him fifteen additional years of life, *i.e.* more than doubles the length of his reign. **And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the King of Assyria.** If Hezekiah's illness took place in B.C. 713, and Jerusalem was then in danger of being attacked by the Assyrians, the king who threatened the attack must have been Sargon. Sargon made an expedition into Palestine in B.C. 720, another in B.C. 713, and a third in B.C. 711. In none of them does he seem to have invaded Judæa; but in the third he counts the Jews among his enemies ('Eponym Canon,' p. 130, line 32). Hezekiah, who had revolted from him (ch. xviii. 7), may well have felt alarm both in B.C. 713 and 711. **And I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake** (comp. ch. xix. 34). The promise given in B.C. 713 in respect of Sargon was repeated in B.C. 699 (?) with respect to Sennacherib in almost the same words.

Ver. 7.—**And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs.** Figs were the usual remedy for boils. Dioscorides says of the fig, διαφορεῖ σκληρίας; Pliny, "Ulcera aperit;" while Jerome, in his commentary on Isaiah, has the following: "Juxta artem medicorum omnis sanies siccioribus ficis atque contusis in cutis superficiem provocatur." The remedy is said to be still in use among Easterns. It can scarcely be supposed to have cured a malignant boil by its intrinsic force; but under the Divine blessing it was made effectual, and the cure followed. **And they took and laid it on the boil.** The royal attendants obtained a lump of figs, and applied it to the inflamed boil or carbuncle, as Isaiah had suggested. It is impossible to say what exactly was the nature of the "boil," since diseases change their characters, and every age has its own special disorders; but modern medical science knows of more than one kind of pustular swelling, which, as soon as it is detected, is regarded as fatal. **And he recovered.** Not suddenly, but by degrees; after the manner of natural remedies. It was three days before he was well enough to quit the palace, and offer thanks in the temple for his miraculous cure (see ver. 5).

Ver. 8.—**And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me?** Having regard to the weakness of human faith, God, under the old covenant, often gave, or offered, near "signs" of promised blessings that were more remote, in order to sustain and encourage the doubtful and the wavering (comp. Exod. iii. 12; ch. xix. 29; Isa. vii. 11, 14, etc.). Hezekiah assumes that a near "sign" will now be granted to him, and simply asks what the sign is to be. **And that I shall go up into the house of the Lord the third day?** Three days would be a long and weary time to wait. It was not unnatural that Hezekiah should crave some more immediate assurance that his prayer was indeed heard. Neither God nor the prophet was angry at his request.

Ver. 9.—**And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that he hath spoken.** Hezekiah is no more reproved for asking for a sign than was Gideon (Judg. vi. 37, 39). Ahaz, his father, had been reproved for *not* asking (Isa. vii. 13). It would be faithless now for Christians to demand signs; but in an age of miracles, when there were prophets upon the earth empowered to give signs, faithful men might request them without incurring God's displeasure. **Shall the shadow go forward ten degrees?** The Hebrew text will scarcely bear this translation, which, however, seems to be required by Hezekiah's answer. Perhaps for הֲיֵלֵךְ we should read הֲיַחֲלֹךְ. **Or go back ten degrees?** literally, in both clauses, *ten steps*. There are abundant reasons for believing that the early dials consisted of a gnomon set up on the top of a flight of steps, and that time was measured by the number of steps on which the shadow of the gnomon fell (see a paper by Mr. Bosanquet, in the 'Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archæology' for 1874, pp. 1—82).

Ver. 10.—**And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees.** Hezekiah views it as a comparatively easy thing for the shadow, which is

already descending the steps, to accelerate its pace and rapidly descend fifteen degrees instead of slowly traversing them; and therefore accepts Isaiah's other offer. **Nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees.** Let it, *i.e.*, change its direction, and having descended a certain distance, suddenly return and ascend again. This will be no "light thing," but a great marvel, which will thoroughly convince him. The thought was natural, though perhaps not strictly logical.

Ver. 11.—**And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord.** Though the sign had been promised, Isaiah regarded his own intercessional prayer as not out of place, and "cried unto the Lord," *i.e.* prayed with energy, that the king's wish might be accomplished. So, though we have God's promise to care for us, and keep us from want (Matt. vi. 25—30), yet we must daily beseech him to "give us this day our daily bread." **And he brought the shadow ten degrees backward.** How this was done, we are not told, and can therefore only conjecture. The earlier commentators imagined that the revolution of the earth upon its axis was actually reversed for a time; but this idea is now generally rejected. It is clear from 2 Chron. xxxii. 31 that the phenomenon, whatever may have been its cause, was local, "done in the land" of Judah, and not visible elsewhere. Some moderns have suggested an earthquake affecting the gnomon; some a trick on the part of Isaiah; others, and the generality, a very abnormal refraction of the sun's rays. An observed instance of something similar, which took place at Metz, in Lotheringia, in the year 1703, is on record. Two scientists, Professor Seyffarth and Mr. J. W. Bosanquet, think that the phenomenon was due to an eclipse, in which the upper limb of the sun was obscured temporarily. In such a case a slight recession of the shadow would certainly take place; but it would scarcely be such as to attract attention from any one but a scientific observer (Stanley, 'Lectures on the Jewish Church,' vol. ii. p. 537). On the whole, the most probable cause would seem to be refraction, which is accepted by Keil, Bähr, and Kay. **By which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz**; literally, *on the steps of Ahaz*. Sun-dials were invented by the Babylonians (Herod., ii. 109), and were no doubt in use at Babylon long before the time of Hezekiah. They were of various kinds, and in some of them the gnomon was made to cast its shadow upon steps. There are still two dials in India—one at Benares, known as the Mânmandir, and the other at Delhi—where this is the case (see Mr. Bosanquet's paper, already quoted, plate opp. p. 35).

Vers. 12—19.—*The embassy of Merodach-Baladan.* Soon after his recovery, Hezekiah received an embassy from a new quarter. Hitherto Babylon and Judæa had been isolated from one another, and had perhaps scarcely known of each other's existence. Assyria had stood between them, and Babylonia had been for the most part an Assyrian dependency. But recently Babylonia had asserted herself. In B.C. 722, on the death of Shalmaneser, a native Chaldean named Merodach-Baladan had made himself king of the country, and maintained his independence against all the efforts of Sargon to reduce him. His position, however, was precarious, and it was probably in the hope of concluding an alliance with Hezekiah—also an enemy of Sargon's (see the comment on ver. 6)—that he sent his embassy. He had two excuses for it. A neighbouring king might well congratulate his brother monarch on his recovery; and a Chaldean prince might well inquire into an astronomical marvel (2 Chron. xxxiii. 31). The date of the embassy appears to have been B.C. 712, the year following on Hezekiah's illness.

Ver. 12.—**At that time Berodach-Baladan.** Isaiah gives the name more correctly as "Merodach-Baladan" (Isa. xxxix. 1). The native form is Marduk-pal-iddin, *i.e.* "Merodach a son has given." This king makes his first appearance in an inscription of Tiglath-pileser's, where he is one of many chieftains among whom Babylonia is divided. Subsequently he is mentioned as revolting from Sargon in the latter's first year, B.C. 722 ('Records of the Past,' vol. vii. p. 29), and holding the throne of Babylon for twelve years (ibid., p. 41), when Sargon conquered him, deposed him, and took the kingdom (ibid., p. 48). This twelve-years' reign is acknowledged by Ptolemy in his Canon, but the name of the king is given as Mardoc-Empadus. On the death of Sargon, in B.C. 705, Merodach-Baladan again revolted, and reigned for six months, when he was driven out of the country by Sennacherib, B.C. 704. He continued, however, to give trouble even after this ('Records of the Past,' vol. vii. p. 63); and his sons and grandsons were pretenders to the Babylonian throne in the reigns of Esarhaddon and his successor, Assur-bani-pal (see 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. pp. 469 and 490). **The son of Baladan.** In the Assyrian inscriptions Merodach-Baladan is always called "the son of Yakin" ('Re-

cords of the Past,' vol. vii. p. 40; vol. ix. p. 13, etc.). Yakin, however, may have been his grandfather, as Nimshi was the grandfather of Jehu, and Baladan (Beldaan?) his father. **King of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah.** Thus opening diplomatic communication. It has been almost universally felt that the object of the embassy must have been to conclude, or at any rate to pave the way for, an alliance. So Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 2. § 2), Ewald, Von Gerlach, Thenius, Keil, Bähr, and others. Assyria menaced both countries, and the common danger produced naturally a mutual attraction. But it was prudent to disguise this motive. **For he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick.** Assyria could not take umbrage at an embassy of congratulation, nor at one for scientific purposes (2 Chron. xxxiii. 31). So these two objects were paraded.

Ver. 13.—**And Hezekiah hearkened unto them.** Hezekiah was dazzled by the prospect that opened upon him. It was a grand thing that his fame should have reached so far as Babylon, a still grander thing to be offered such an alliance. It must be remembered that he and his counsellors were inclined from the first to meet Assyrian menace by calling in foreign aid (ch. xviii. 21—24; Isa. xx. 6; xxx. 2—7; xxxvi. 6). He had not yet accepted the view of Isaiah, that human aid was vain, and that the only reasonable ground of hope or confidence was in Jehovah. **And showed them all the house of his precious things;** *i.e.* his treasury. Hezekiah did not do this in mere ostentation, though he may have had a certain pride in exhibiting his wealth. His main wish, no doubt, was to make known his resources, and show that he was a valuable ally. So Orœtes acted towards Polycrates (Herod., iii. 123), and Hannibal towards the Gortynians (Corn. Nep., 'Vit. Hannib.,' § 9). It is to be borne in mind that Hezekiah's treasures were, in B.C. 712, still intact, and included all that ample store which he sacrificed to save Jerusalem at the time of the first expedition of Sennacherib (see ch. xviii. 14—16, and comp. 'Eponym Canon,' p. 135, where we find enumerated among the treasures given up, besides gold and silver, "precious carbuncles, couches of ivory, elevated thrones of ivory, skins of buffaloes, horns of buffaloes, and weapons"). **The silver, and the gold, and the spices.** Compare the description of the wealth of Solomon (1 Kings x. 25). "Spices" always form an important portion of the treasure of Oriental kings (comp. Herod., iii. 97, *sub fin.*). **And the precious ointment;** rather, *the precious oil*—שֶׁמֶן, not רֹקַח (compare the Septuagint, τὸ ἔλαιον τὸ ἀγαθόν). **It** is thought (Keil, Bähr) **that** the valuable balsam oil, which was obtained from the royal gardens, is intended. **And all the house of his armour;** or, *of his vessels;* but arms and armour are probably intended. It would be almost as important to show that he had abundant arms in store, as that he had abundant riches. **And all that was found in his treasures**—a clause implying that there was much more which had not been specified, as precious stones, ivory, ebony, and the like—**there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not.** This is a manifest hyperbole; but it can scarcely mean less than that he gave orders for them to be shown the collections of arms and stores which existed in his other strongholds besides Jerusalem. Hezekiah, no doubt, had many "store cities," as Solomon (2 Chron. viii. 6) and Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi. 5—12) had.

Ver. 14.—**Then came Isaiah the prophet unto King Hezekiah, and said unto him.** When a prophet came, unsummoned, into a king's presence, it was usually to rebuke him (comp. 2 Sam. xii. 1; xxiv. 11—13; 1 Kings xiii. 1, 2; xviii. 15—18; xxi. 18—22; ch. i. 15, 16; 2 Chron. xii. 5; xvi. 7; xx. 37; xxv. 7, 15, etc.). **What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee?** Isaiah does not ask because he does not know, but to obtain a confession, on which he may base the message that he has to deliver. **And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country,** even **from Babylon.** Note first, that Hezekiah does not give any answer to the prophet's first question, "What said these men?" being unwilling probably to make known the overtures that he had received from them, since he knows that Isaiah is opposed to any reliance on an "arm of flesh;" and secondly, that he answers the second question, not with shame, but with complacency, "They are come to me from a very far country, whither my fame has reached—even from Babylon are they come, 'the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency' (Isa. xiii. 19)." Self-satisfaction shows itself in the answer. He thinks it redounds to his honour that he has been sought out from so great a distance, and by so great a city.

Ver. 15.—**And he said, What have they seen in thine house?** *i.e.* What hast thou showed them? Hast thou treated them like ordinary ambassadors, or hast thou gone out of thy way to court an alliance with their master? **And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not showed them.** The reply is open and straightforward. Hezekiah is not ashamed of what he has done, or at any rate, will not, to escape blame, take refuge in lies

or concealment. He readily acknowledges that he has shown the ambassadors *everything*.

Ver. 16.—**And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord.** This is a phrase of warning very common in the mouth of the prophets, when they are about to deliver a rebuke or solemn condemnation (comp. 1 Kings xxii. 19; 2 Chron. xviii. 18; Isa. i. 10; xxviii. 14; Jer. vii. 2; ix. 20; x. 1; xix. 3, etc.; Ezek. xv. 35; xxxiv. 9; Hos. iv. 1; Amos iii. 1, etc.).

Ver. 17.—**Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon.** These treasures of thy royal house, whereof thou art so proud, and which thou hast of thine own accord made known to the Babylonians, to obtain their alliance, will in fact excite their cupidity, and the time will come when they, or what remains of them and represents them, will be carried off as plunder to Babylon by a conquering monarch, who will strip thy palace of its valuables, and drag thy descendants into captivity, and degrade them to the condition of slaves or servants, and make them discharge menial offices about his court. The revelation was now, it would seem, for the first time made that Babylon, and not Assyria, was the true enemy which Judæa had to fear, the destined foe who would accomplish all the threats of the prophets from Moses downwards, who would destroy the holy city and the glorious temple of Solomon, and carry away the ark of the covenant, and tear the people from their homes, and bring the kingdom of David to an end, and give Jerusalem over as a prey to desolation for seventy years. Henceforth it was Babylon and not Assyria which was feared, Babylon and not Assyria whereto the prophetic gaze of Isaiah himself was directed, and which became in his later prophecies (xl.—lxvi.) the main object of his denunciations. Considering the circumstances of the time, the prophecy is a most extraordinary one. Babylonia was at the time merely one of several kingdoms bordering on Assyria which the Assyrians threatened with destruction. From the time of Tiglath-pileser she had been continually diminishing, while Assyria had been continually increasing, in power. Tiglath-pileser had overrun the country and established himself as king there. Shalmaneser's authority had been uncontested. If just at present a native prince held the throne, it was by a very uncertain tenure, and a few years later Assyria regained complete mastery. No *human* foresight could possibly have anticipated such a complete reversal of the relative positions of the two countries as was involved in Isaiah's prophecy—a reversal which was only accomplished by the appearance on the scene of a new power, Media, which hitherto had been regarded as of the very slightest account. **Nothing shall be left, saith the Lord** (comp. ch. xxv. 13—17 and Jer. lii. 12—23).

Ver. 18.—**And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget.** Under "sons" are included by the Hebrew idiom all descendants, however remote (Pusey's 'Lectures on Daniel,' pp. 406—409). The princes carried off from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar were Hezekiah's descendants, either in the fourth or the fifth generation. **Shall they take away.** Among the descendants of Hezekiah taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar were Jehoiachin (ch. xxiv. 15), Zedekiah (ch. xxv. 7), Daniel (Dan. i. 3), and others. **And they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the King of Babylon.** Keil and Bähr translate סָרִיסִים in this place by "chamberlains" or "footmen;" but there is no reason why the word should not have its ordinary sense of "eunuchs" (see the Septuagint ἔσονται εὐνοῦχοι, and for the fulfilment, comp. Dan. i. 3—18).

Ver. 19.—**Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken.** Hezekiah accepts the rebuke, thereby acknowledging himself to have been in the wrong, and submits without remonstrance to his punishment. "Good is the word of the Lord"—who "in his wrath has thought upon mercy." The king feels that God might, in justice, have visited him, in his own person, with some immediate affliction or calamity. It is a relief to hear that the blow will not fall during his lifetime. There may be a tinge of selfishness in his acquiescence, but it is not very pronounced, and does not call for any severe animadversion. The Old Testament saints were not faultless, and are not set before us as perfect patterns. There is one only "Ensample" given us whose steps we are to follow in all things. **And he said**—apparently after a pause, perhaps turning to his courtiers, whose looks may have expressed astonishment at the words which he had just spoken—Is it **not good, if peace and truth be in my days?** *i.e.* Am I not right to acquiesce in the sentence and pronounce it "good," if it promises me "peace and truth," or "tranquillity and steadfastness"? Ought I not to accept with thankfulness the immediate boon, instead of troubling myself about a remote future? The sentiment is not far removed from that of the well-known lines—

"I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

Vers. 20, 21.—*The great works of Hezekiah, and his decease.* Hezekiah was known, not

only as a pious king, and the king in whose reign the pride of the Assyrians was dashed to the ground, but also as one who, by works of great importance, conferred permanent benefit on Jerusalem (see 2 Chron. xxxii. 3–5 and 30; Ecclus. xlviii. 17). The writer feels that he cannot conclude his notice of Hezekiah's reign without some mention of these works. He enters, however, into no description, but, having referred the reader for details to the "book of the chronicles," notes in the briefest possible way the decease of Hezekiah, and the accession of his son and successor.

Ver. 20.—**And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might.** Hezekiah's "might" was chiefly shown in the earlier portion of his reign, when he "smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof" (ch. xviii. 8). Against Assyria he was unsuccessful, and must have succumbed, but for the miraculous destruction of Sennacherib's host. **And how he made a pool;** rather, *the pool*, or *the reservoir*. The writer of Kings either knows of one pool only in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, or regards one as so superior that it deserves to be called κατ' ἐξοχήν, "*the* pool." Recent discoveries make it highly probable that the "pool" intended is that of Siloam, or, if not the present Siloam reservoir, a larger one, a little below it, now known as *Birket el Hamra* (see the 'Quarterly Statement' of the Palestine Exploration Fund for April, 1886, p. 88). That there was at least one other pool in Hezekiah's time is evident from Isa. xxii. 9, 11. **And a conduit;** rather, *the conduit*. If "the pool" is Siloam, "the conduit" must almost certainly be that which was excavated under Ophel for the purpose of conveying the water from the Well of the Virgin in the Kedron valley to the Siloam reservoir on the western side of the spur. This conduit, which is curiously twisted, has a length of 1708 feet, with a height varying from two feet to four or five, and a width of about two feet. The roof is flat, the sides perpendicular, and the floor hollowed into a groove for the more rapid passage of the water. About nineteen feet from the southern extremity, where the channel opens upon the Siloam pool, a niche has been cut in the right-hand wall in the shape of a square tablet, and smoothed to receive an inscription of six lines, the greater part of which has been recovered. The letters are of the old Hebrew or Phœnician type, and by their forms indicate a date "between the eighth and the sixth centuries" (Sayce). The inscription, so far as it is legible, appears to have run as follows: "Behold the tunnel! Now, this is the history of the tunnel. As the excavators were lifting up the pick, each towards the other, and while there were yet three cubits to be broken through . . . the voice of the one called to his neighbour, for there was an excess (?) of the rock on the right. Then they rose up . . . they struck on the west of the excavators; the excavators struck, each to meet the other, pick to pick. And the waters flowed from their outlet to the pool for a distance of a thousand cubits; and three-fourths (?) of a cubit was the height of the rock over the head of the excavation here." We learn from it that the workmen began at either end, and tunnelled through the rock until they met in the middle—a result which their previous divergences from the straight line force us to attribute more to good fortune than to engineering science. **And brought water into the city.** The Well of the Virgin was without, the Pool of Siloam within, the city—the wall of the town being carried across the Tyropœon valley from the extreme point of Ophel to the opposite hill (see Neh. iii. 15). **Are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?** Hezekiah's fame rested very much upon these works, as we see by what is said of him by the son of Sirach (see the comment on vers. 20, 21).

Ver. 21.—**And Hezekiah slept with his fathers.** The writer of Chronicles adds, "And they buried him in the chiefest," or rather, in the topmost, "of the sepulchres of the sons of David" (2 Chron. xxxii. 33). The catacomb of David being now full, Hezekiah and his descendants (ch. xxi. 18, 26; xxiii. 30) had to be buried elsewhere. The tomb of Hezekiah was either over the catacomb of David, or on the ascent which led to it. **And Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.** So 2 Chron., *l. s. c.*; and Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 3. § 1.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Aspects of death.* We may look on death from three points of view—that of the natural man, unenlightened by Divine revelation; that of the Israelite under the Law; and that of the Christian. The contemplation will be wholesome, for we are all too apt to turn our thoughts away from any consideration of the grim enemy, who will certainly have to be met and encountered one day.

I. DEATH FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE NATURAL MAN. By nature man has

an absolute horror of death. Self-preservation is the first law of his being. He will suffer anything, he will do anything, to avoid death. Death is in his eyes a fierce monster, cruel, relentless, detestable. To live may be hard, grievous, wretched, scarcely tolerable; but to die is wholly intolerable. It is to exchange the bright pure light of day for absolute darkness, or at best for a dim, dull, murky region in which souls wander without aim or hope. It is to be cut off from all that is known, customary, intelligible, and to be thrown into a world unknown, unfamiliar, full of terrors. It is to lose all energy, all vigour, all robustness, all sense of power. In the "happy hunting-fields," the shade of the living man may still pursue the unsubstantial forms of elk, or deer, or antelope; but the sport is a poor and colourless *replica* of that pursued on earth, and is anticipated with but little satisfaction. Better, in the eyes of the natural man, to live on earth, even as slave or hireling, the hardest of all possible earthly lives, than to hold the kingship of the world below and rule over the entire realm of shadows (Hom., 'Od.,' 489—491). In the vigour of his youth and early manhood the natural man forgets death, views it as so distant that the fear of it scarcely affects him sensibly; but let the shadow be suddenly cast across his path, and he starts from it with a cry of terror. He can, indeed, meet it without blenching in the battle-field, when his blood is hot, and to the last he does not know whether he will slay his foe, or his foe him; but if he has to die, he accepts his death as a miserable necessity. It is hateful to him to die; it is still more hateful to be cut off in his prime, while he is still strong, vigorous, lusty. It is not till old age comes on, and his arm grows weak, and his eye dim, that he can look on death without loathing. Then, perhaps, he may accept the necessity without protest, feeling that actual death can be little worse than the death-in-life whereto he has come.

II. DEATH FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE ISRAELITE. The Israelite had not very much advantage over the natural man in respect of the contemplation of death. But little was revealed to him concerning the life beyond the grave. He *knew*, indeed, that his life did not end everything, that he would certainly go down to Sheol when he died, and there have a continued existence; but Sheol presented itself to him in as dismal colours as Hades did to the Greek. "The living, the living shall praise thee; Sheol cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee," cried Hezekiah from his bed of sickness (Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19). Thus the Israelite too shrank from death, not merely instinctively, but as a sad and poor condition compared with life. And untimely death was even more hateful to him than to the natural man, since under the Mosaic dispensation it was declared to be a mark of the displeasure of God. "The fear of the Lord prolongeth days; but the years of the wicked shall be shortened," said Solomon (Prov. x. 27). "Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days," sang David (Ps. lv. 23). "Long life" was a gift repeatedly promised to the righteous (Prov. iii. 2, 16; ix. 10, 11; Ps. xci. 16, etc.); and when a man found himself struck down by a dangerous disease in his middle age, it seemed to him, and to those about him, that he must have sinned grievously, and so brought down upon himself God's anger. Still more bitter was the feeling of one who was cut off in mid life, if he was childless. Then the man's name was "clean put out;" his memorial perished with him; he had no more part or lot in Israel, no more inheritance among his brethren. Thus death remained a terror and a calamity, even to the most religious Jew, until, about the time of Daniel, the doctrine of the resurrection began to be preached (Dan. xii. 1—3), and the life beyond the grave to take a more cheerful aspect.

III. DEATH FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE CHRISTIAN. The whole relation of death to life and of life to death became changed by the revelation made to man in Christ. Then for the first time were "life and immortality" fully "brought to light." Then first it appeared that earth was a mere sojourning-place for those who were here as "strangers and pilgrims" upon it, having "no continuing city." Then first were the joys of heaven painted in glowing hues, and men told that "eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither had it entered into the heart of man [to conceive], the things which God had prepared for those that love him" (1 Cor. ii. 9). No sensuous Paradise of earthly joys was depicted, no "Castle of Indolence," no mere haven of rest, but man's true home, the place and state for which he was created, where is his citizenship, where he will be reunited to those whom in life he loved, where his nature will be perfected, and where, above all, he will "be with Christ" (Phil. i. 23), will "see God" (1 John

iii. 2), and "know even as he is known" (1 Cor. xiii. 12). The prospect of death thus, to the true Christian, lost all its terrors. "I am in a strait betwixt two," says St. Paul, "*having a desire to depart*, and be with Christ, *which is far better*" (Phil. i. 23); and again, "I am willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. v. 8). Natural shrinking there may be, for "the flesh is weak;" but thousands have triumphed over it, have sought martyrdom, have gone gladly to their deaths, and preferred to die. Even when there is no such exaltation of feeling, death is contemplated with calmness, as a passage to a better world—a world where there is no sorrow nor sighing (Isa. xxxv. 10), where there is no sin, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest" (Job iii. 17). Untimely death from natural disease or accident is to the Christian no sign of God's displeasure, but rather an indication of the contrary. God takes to himself those whom he recognizes as fit to die, of whom it may be said that τελειωθέντες ἐν ὀλίγῳ ἐπλήρωσαν χρόνους μακρούς. He takes them in love, not in wrath, to join the company of "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. xii. 23), to be among his "jewels" (Isa. lxi. 10; Mal. iii. 17).

Vers. 12—18.—*The sunshine of prosperity a greater danger than the storms of adversity.* When Sennacherib threatens, when his messengers blaspheme, when the huge battalions of the most powerful kingdom in the world have entered his territory and are about to march upon his capital, the Jewish monarch remains firm; his faith is unshaken; he casts his care upon God, looks to him and him only; believes in him, trusts in him, regards prayer as the only door of safety. Similarly, when disease prostrates him, when a painful and dangerous malady confines him to his bed, and the prophet, instead of bringing him words of comfort, is commissioned to bid him "set his house in order; for he shall die, and not live" (ver. 1), his faith fails not, in God is still his refuge, to God alone he betakes himself, and prays and weeps sore (vers. 2, 3). The blasts of calamity cannot tear away from him the cloak of faith; he clutches it the tighter the more the storm rages; nothing will induce him to let it go. But the danger past, health restored, the admiration of foreign kings attracted, his ear besieged by congratulations and flatteries, his court visited by envoys from "a far country," and at once his grasp relaxes, the thought of God fades from his heart, his faith slips from him, and he is a mere worldling, bent on winning to himself a great alliance, and obtaining the aid of an "arm of flesh" against his enemies. And so it is and will ever be with most of us. We can bear the world's frowns, the buffets of fortune, the cruelty of oppressors, the open attacks of rivals and enemies; we can resist them, defy them, and still maintain our integrity; but let the world smile, let fortune favour us, let riches increase, let friends spring up on all sides, and how few of us can stand the sunshine! How few of us can remain as close to God as we were before! How few of us but drop the habits of prayer, of communing with God, of constant reliance upon him, which were familiar to us in the darker time, and substitute a mere occasional and perfunctory acknowledgment of his goodness! Alas, how few! Oh! may *our* cry, the cry of our heart, ever be, "In all time of our tribulation, *in all time of our wealth*, . . . good Lord, deliver us!"

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—11.—*Hezekiah's sickness.* Every changing scene of life is depicted for us in the Bible. Whatever our circumstances may be, we can get some guidance, help, or comfort from that treasure-house of wisdom and experience. We have here—

I. A SOLEMN MESSAGE. "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." 1. *It was a solemn message for Hezekiah.* His kingdom seemed now to be securely established. God had helped him against the Philistines, and had overthrown them. He was doubtless looking forward to many years of rest and quietness, when he might enjoy for himself the benefits of peace, and develop the resources of the nation, so long desolated by invading armies. How startling, then, the announcement of his approaching death! 2. *It is a solemn message for every one.* It is a solemn thing for a human soul to pass from time into eternity, to enter into the immediate presence of the Eternal,

to stand before God. 3. *It is a message which may be truly spoken to every one.* "Thou shalt die, and not live." There is an hour of death in store for every one of us. Somewhere in the unknown future there waits for us—

"The shadow feared of man."

We know not what a day may bring forth. "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." 4. *The certainty of death suggests the necessity for immediate preparation.* "Set thine house in order." Can you say that you are prepared to meet your God? Is your heart right with God? Have you set your house in order? *The time for preparation is "now."* Scripture is very clear on that point. It is nowhere said, "See that you make ready when death comes." It is nowhere said, "Look forward to being prepared for death." No; that would only be deceiving us, because death might come before we were prepared, though we might intend to be prepared if we knew that death was near. No; but it is said, "*Be* ready." It is said, "Prepare to meet thy God." "*Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation."

II. A SORROWFUL KING. "Hezekiah wept sore." 1. *He was not sorrowful because of a guilty conscience.* He had endeavoured to serve God faithfully. No doubt he had made mistakes. But his heart was right with God. "I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight." It is well to have a good conscience when the hour of death draws nigh. It is well when we can say with St. Paul, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men." Such a man is always "ready to depart." 2. *He was sorrowful only because of the shortening of his life.* How little we know what is best for us! It was after this that Hezekiah was led astray, as we shall see, by the pride of his heart. Though God lengthened Hezekiah's life in answer to his piteous request, perhaps it would have been better for him if he had been content to go when God first sent for him. There is often a great mystery to us when good men seem prematurely taken away. But God knows the reason why, and he doeth all things well. Let us leave the time of our own departure, and the departure of our friends, contentedly in God's hands.

III. A SPARED LIFE. The life was spared in answer to prayer; and yet this case gives no encouragement to what is commonly known as "healing by faith." Isaiah directed the attendants to take a lump of figs and lay it for a plaster on the boil, and Hezekiah recovered (ver. 7; Isa. xxxviii. 21). We believe in the power of faith and prayer to heal the sick, and yet we believe in using the means. We use food to preserve and sustain our life from day to day. There is no lack of faith in that. And it shows no lack of faith if we use means to restore our life, asking all the time that God's blessing may accompany the means we use. How many of our lives has God spared? How many of us has he brought back again from the gates of death? Let the goodness of God lead us to repentance. Let the lives that he has spared be dedicated to him.—C. H. I.

Vers. 12—21.—*Hezekiah and the ambassadors.* Friendly greetings are always welcome. They are especially so after a time of sickness. Hezekiah's illness, no doubt, called forth many expressions of sympathy, and, among the rest, a message and present from Merodach-Baladan King of Babylon. The ambassadors who bore the message and the present were very courteously received by Hezekiah. Unfortunately, he allowed himself to be unduly elated by the honour done to him by the heathen king. He showed the messengers all the house of his precious things, and all his treasures of gold and silver and armour; "there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not." We see here—

I. FOOLISH PRIDE. Hezekiah's prosperity for once led him astray. 1. *He gave not glory to God.* It was God who had prospered him, and crowned all his labours with success. But there is no word of this to the ambassadors. He takes all the honour and glory to himself. He might have, perhaps, excused himself, as many do, by saying that there is no use in obtruding our religion upon strangers. But why should he have been ashamed to acknowledge God's bountiful hand, if he was not ashamed to take his bounties? Why should any of us be ashamed to confess Christ? To be ashamed of Christ is not only weak and cowardly; it is unreasonable. 2. We see also how

foolish Hezekiah's pride was, when we remember *his recent sickness.* It was not so long since Hezekiah, now so vain and boastful, turned his face to the wall, and wept sore. The memory of that should have humbled him. Not only so, but when he was recovered of his sickness, he made special promises of praise to God and humility of spirit. "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day." Where was Hezekiah's praise of God's goodness when these Babylonish ambassadors came to him? "I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul" (Isa. xxxviii. 15). Where now is Hezekiah's humility? On the contrary, as it is said in 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, "Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up." 3. We see here *how watchful we need to be over our own hearts.* We read in 2 Chron. xxxii. 31, "Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, *God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.*" We cannot tell how we may act until the temptation comes. Such a crisis as this may come to each of us. Let us watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation. "Above all treasure guard thy heart, for out of it are the fountains of life."

II. A FAITHFUL PROPHET. Isaiah did not delay in the path of duty. Hezekiah had humbled himself and his nation, and he had dishonoured God, before these heathen ambassadors. Isaiah at once proceeds to the king's presence, and rebukes him for his folly and pride (vers. 14—18). Not only so, but he foretells that Babylon, whose avarice had thus been aroused, would one day take advantage of this act of weakness, and take possession of the treasures of Jerusalem. Hezekiah's answer was wise and humble. He was a God-fearing, if mistaken, man. "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken." So let us receive God's judgments, in humility, submission, and patience, and not in rebellion and defiance. What a blessing to a king to have a faithful and wise counsellor! What a blessing to a nation and to a Church to have faithful ministers! They who fear God need not fear the face of man.—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—21.—*Death.* "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death," etc. A thoughtful man might raise many questions on this chapter—indeed, on all the chapters in this book. He might ask—Who was the writer of this chapter, ay, and of the entire Books of Kings? A question this which has not been settled, and, perhaps, never will be. He might ask on what authority certain men, called prophets, such as Isaiah, speak as from heaven, and say, "Thus saith the Lord." Priests and leaders of all sects profess to speak in the name of the Lord, and say, "Thus saith the Lord." Such questions might open up discussions of critical and speculative interest, but would be of no practical benefit whatever. Anyhow, I forego them. My purpose all along has been to turn whatever I find in this or any other book of the Old Testament to some practical use. Some years before the overwhelming destruction of Sennacherib and his army, as recorded in the preceding chapter, Hezekiah was seized with some severe disease which threatened the extinction of his life: death was before him. The account leads us to consider death in three aspects: as (1) *consciously approaching;* as (2) *temporarily arrested;* and as (3) *ultimately triumphant.*

I. AS CONSCIOUSLY APPROACHING. "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the Prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." Mark here three things. 1. *When* he became conscious of its approach. "In those days." "By this expression," says Dr. Keil, "the illness of Hezekiah is merely assigned in a general manner to the same time as the events previously described. That it did not occur after the departure of the Assyrians, . . . is evident from the sixth verse, both from the fact that, in answer to his prayer, fifteen years more of life were promised him, and that he, nevertheless, reigned only twenty-nine years (ch. xviii. 2); and also from the fact that God promised to deliver him out of the hand of the Assyrians, and to defend Jerusalem." 2. *How* he became conscious of its approach. "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." It needs no Isaiah, or any other prophet, to deliver this message to man. It comes to him from all history, from every graveyard, from every funeral procession, as well as from the inexorable law of decay working ever in his constitution. Yes; and not merely the announcement, but the duty: "Set thine house in order." (1) Men have

much to do in this life. The "house" is out of order. (2) Unless the work is done *here*, it will not be done *yonder*. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," etc. 3. How he *felt* in the consciousness of its approach. "Then he turned his face to the wall." (1) He seems to have been overwhelmingly distressed. "He wept sore." He turned away from the world, with all its multiplex concerns, from all his regal pomp, and peered into the invisible and the infinite. (2) He cried earnestly to heaven. "He prayed unto the Lord, saying, I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight." In his prayer we note the cry of nature. All men, even those who are atheistic in theory, are urged by the law of their spiritual nature to cry to heaven in great and conscious danger. In his prayer we also note something of self-righteousness. "Remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight." Though he had been free from most sins, and had displayed some virtues, he had not done this. Perhaps no man that ever appeared on this earth, save the "Son of man," could say, "I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart." Moral self-deception is one of the most prevalent sins of the human heart. Like the Pharisee in the temple, we exult in virtues we have not. Now, death is approaching all men, whether we are *conscious* of the fact or not. The decree has gone forth, "Thou shalt die, and not live." Death is ever coming with stealthy steps, yet with resistless force. He is coming always, whether we are at home or abroad, on ocean or on land, in society or in solitude; asleep or awake, he, the king of terrors, is coming.

II. AS TEMPORARILY ARRESTED. Five things are to be observed here. 1. The *primary Author* of its arrest. "And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee." How came Isaiah into possession of this knowledge, this "word of the Lord," concerning Hezekiah's restoration? Was it by a dream, or through some other supernatural communication? On this point I confess my utter ignorance. The grand practical idea is that God can arrest death, and he only. Our times are in his hands. His constant visitation preserveth us. He is the absolute Master of death. At his bidding the most fragile creature may live for ever, the most robust expire. 2. The *secondary means* of its arrest. "Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered." It would seem that the ancients, in the case of boils, abscesses, and such like, frequently applied figs to the affected parts, and no doubt there was remedial virtue in the figs. For aught we know, there may be an antidote sleeping in plants and minerals for all our physical complaints. The man who lives by the medical art is untrue to his mission, and unfaithful to his patient, unless he, with an independent mind and a devoted heart, searches Nature for those remedial elements with which she is charged. 3. The *extraordinary sign* of its arrest. "And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the Lord the third day? And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz." Perhaps it was natural for a man, who when he felt himself on the brink of eternity was told he would recover, to desire some assurance of the fact so unexpected and yet so acceptable. Hezekiah desired a sign, and he had it. But what was the sign? We are told that the shadow on the dial-plate "returned ten degrees backwards." How was this? Did the sun recede, or, in other words, was the rotation of the earth reversed? I know not; neither does it matter. It is sufficient to know that, whether it was an illusion, or a natural eclipse of the sun, which some astronomers say did actually take place at this time (B.C. 689), or a physical miracle, it seems to have satisfied the king. It seems to be a law of mind, that phenomena which it earnestly expects often occur. "Be it to thee according to thy faith." 4. The *exact extension* of its arrest. "I will add unto thy days fifteen years." The addition

of fifteen years to man's brief existence in this life is a considerable item, and the more so when that fifteen years is added at a period when the man has fully reached middle life, and passed through the chief training experiences. He who can add fifteen years to a man's life can add eternity. "Our times are in his hands." 5. The *mental inefficiency* of its arrest. What spiritual good did these additional fifteen years accomplish for the king? They might have done much; they ought to have done much. But did they make him a *morally better man*, or an intellectually wiser man? Not the former, I trow, for mark his vanity. The letters which the King of Babylon, Merodach-Baladan, despatched to him, together with a present, so excited his egotism that he "hearkened [or, as Isaiah puts it, 'was glad'] unto them," that is, the Babylonian deputies; and "showed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not." At this time he had enormous possessions. We find from 2 Chron. xxxii. 23 that presents were brought to Hezekiah from various quarters. "He had," says the Chronicler, "exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels; storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks" (2 Chron. xxxii. 27, 28). All this, with an elated vanity, he exposed to the Babylonian magnates. Vanity, for many reasons, is one of the worst of all the bad elements of depravity; it is a species of moral evil, hideous to all beholders, and damnable to its possessor. Did these fifteen years added to his life make Hezekiah an *intellectually wiser man?* No; his judgment was not improved. In sooth, he seems to have lost that penetration, that insight into things and men, which he had previously possessed. How blind was he not to see that, by exposing his treasures, he was exciting the avarice of the Babylonians, tempting them to make an invasion of his country! This Isaiah told him: "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord." Affliction does not always improve men, either morally or intellectually. Ah me! how many have I known who, when they have "turned their face to the wall," writhing in agony, with grim death before them, have solemnly vowed improvement should they ever recover? They have recovered, and become worse in every respect than before. What boots a term of fifteen years, or even a thousand years, added to our existence, if our souls are not improved thereby?

III. AS ULTIMATELY TRIUMPHANT. "And Hezekiah slept with his fathers." The end of the fifteen years came, and he meets with the common destiny of all. The unconquered conqueror is not to be defrauded of his prey, however long delayed. Since death cannot be escaped by any, whether young or old, it has been asked, is there any advantage in longevity? Rather, would it not be better to die in the first dawn of infancy, than in any subsequent period? "Whom the gods love die young," was said of yore. We may go a step further, and say, "Why live at all?"—D. T.

Vers. 1—11.—*Hezekiah's sickness.* In order of time, this recovery of King Hezekiah from sickness stands before the destruction of Sennacherib, though in order of narration it comes after it. So with the Babylonian embassy (see on ch. xviii. 1—13).

I. WARNING OF DEATH. 1. *Unexplained sickness.* "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death." His disease was some ulcerous growth, called in the narrative "a boil." We have been accustomed in this history to see troubles of body, and calamities in the state, connected with sin, as part of its temporal punishment. But there is no reason to believe that Hezekiah was guilty of any special transgression which led to his being visited with this sickness. His own conscience was clear, and there is no indication of blame in the narrative. Affliction is sent for other reasons than the punishment of sin, and we grievously err, and do great injustice to the sufferers, if we insist on always interpreting it in this light. Job's friends committed this error (Job xlii. 7, 8; cf. Luke xiii. 1—5; John ix. 1—3). In Hezekiah's case affliction was no doubt sent as a purificatory and strengthening discipline, intended to try his faith, and lead him to new experience of the grace of God. 2. *The announcement of death.* It was while Hezekiah's mind was troubled about his sickness that the Prophet Isaiah

came to him, and brought the message, "Thus saith the Lord, . . . thou shalt die, and not live." In its natural course the sickness would have had a fatal issue. The fact of our mortality is one we should often have before us. Every ache, pain, and trouble of body, reminds us that we are here but for a time—that this is not our rest. They are prophetic of the end. A time, however, comes when the near approach of the end is unmistakable, if not to the individual himself, yet to others. If a man is dying, it is the truest kindness to let him know it. Isaiah might have withheld this information from Hezekiah on the ground that it would agitate him, might hasten his death, could do no good, etc.,—the usual pleas for keeping back from a patient the news of his hopeless condition. We have only to put the matter to ourselves: would we like to be within a few weeks or days of our death, and not be made aware of the fact? Would we in such circumstances like to be buoyed up by false hopes? Then why buoy up others? By acquainting a patient with his real state, we give him opportunity for setting his house in order; for prayer to God that might, as in Hezekiah's case, lead to his recovery; in any case, for suitably preparing his mind in view of departure. 3. *The duty of preparation.* "Set thine house in order," said Isaiah; "for thou shalt die." It is a duty incumbent on us, even in health, to have our worldly affairs so arranged that, if we should be unexpectedly removed, they would be found in order. The neglect of this simple duty—the putting it off under the idea that there is still plenty of time—leads in numberless cases to confusion, heartburning, strife, and loss. If the putting the house in order has not been attended to, the approach of death is a solemn call to do it. In any case, there will be final arrangements, last words, loving directions which belong peculiarly to the dying hour. If it is important to set our worldly affairs in order in view of death, how much more to have every *spiritual* preparation made!

II. PRAYER FOR LIFE. 1. *Hezekiah's distress.* The announcement that he was soon to die filled Hezekiah with deep grief. He turned his face to the wall, prayed earnestly to God, and wept sore. The grounds of his distress may be inferred from the hymn composed by him after his recovery (Isa. xxxviii. 9—20). (1) The natural love of life. This is implanted in every one. It has its root in a true instinct, for death in the case of the human being is unnatural. It was not a part of the primal order. Man as made by God was destined for immortality, not immortality of the soul only, but immortality of the whole person. Death is the violent wrenching asunder of two parts of his personality which were meant to be inseparable. It is the fruit of sin, and abnormal (Rom. v. 12). (2) The want of a clear hope of immortality. The experience of the Old Testament saints teaches us to distinguish between a mere idea of future existence, and such a hope of immortality as is now possessed by Christians. The Hebrew believed in the after-existence of the soul. But this of itself brought no comfort to them. Sheol was uniformly pictured as a region of gloom, silence, and inaction. Its shadowy life was no compensation for the loss of the rich, substantial joys of earthly existence. In hours of depression this was the view of Sheol that prevailed. Only in moments of strong faith did the believer rise to the confidence that God would be with him even in Sheol, and would deliver his soul out of these gloomy abodes. The Hebrew hope of immortality was really a hope of resurrection (Ps. xvi. 10; xlix. 14, 15). It is Jesus Christ who, in the full sense of the words, has brought life and immortality to light (2 Tim. i. 10). (3) The thought that death would cut him off from the comforts of God's presence, and the privilege of waiting on God and serving him. This is implied in his view of Sheol, and is expressed in his song (Isa. xxxviii. 11). It was, therefore, no unmanly fear of death which Hezekiah showed, but one resting on good and substantial reasons. 2. *Hezekiah's prayer.* Cut off from earthly help, Hezekiah betook himself in earnest prayer to God. The fact that he did pray, and that his prayer was answered, is an encouragement to us to pray for recovery from sickness. The New Testament also holds out this encouragement (Jas. v. 13—16). In his pleadings with God, Hezekiah adopted a tone which may seem to us to savour too much of self-righteousness. "I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart," etc. It was not, however, in a spirit of self-righteousness that he urged this plea. He was conscious of many sins (cf. Isa. xxxviii. 17). His meaning was that he had endeavoured to serve God faithfully, and with an undivided heart, and had the claim which God's own promises gave him of life

and blessing to those who acted thus. A good conscience is a great encouragement in prayer to God, though, with the deeper views of sin which the gospel gives, there is rightly a greater shrinking from pleading anything that might seem like one's own merit (see Perowne's 'Introduction to the Book of Psalms,' ch. iii. sect. 3, "Assertions of innocence in the Psalms").

III. RECOVERY FROM SICKNESS. 1. *The promptitude of God's answer.* Scarcely had the prayer left Hezekiah's lips than the answer was communicated to Isaiah. The prophet had not yet left the palace, but was still within its precincts, "in the middle court," when word came to him to return to Hezekiah, and assure him of recovery. God in this case, as always, was "waiting to be gracious" (Isa. xxx. 18). The answer was given (1) out of regard to Hezekiah himself, "Tell Hezekiah the captain of my people;" (2) in answer to his supplication, "I have heard thy prayer;" (3) for the sake of David, "The Lord, the God of David thy father" (and cf. ver. 6). This recovery was one of "the sure mercies of David" (Isa. lv. 3). For similar examples of prompt answer to prayer, see on ch. xix. 20. 2. *The promise of lengthened life.* The message which Isaiah was to carry to Hezekiah contained three parts: (1) a promise that he would be healed, and able to go up to the house of the Lord on the third day. "A striking instance of the conditionalness of prophecy" (Cheyne). Hezekiah's first use of his recovered health is assumed to be a visit to God's house. (2) A promise of fifteen years more added to his life. God thus exceeds his servants' askings. The king sought only healing; God assures him of a prolonged term of life (cf. Eph. iii. 20). (3) A promise that the city would be defended against the Assyrians. This was another word to Hezekiah through which God caused him to hope (Ps. cxix. 49). Yet he nearly forfeited it by his subsequent worldly policy (see previous chapters). 3. *The king's recovery.* Isaiah's word was fulfilled, and the king recovered. Whether "the lump of figs" was a simple remedy or a mere sign need not be discussed. In our case the duty of using means in connection with prayer is plain.

IV. THE SIGN OF THE SUN-DIAL. 1. *The request for a sign.* When Isaiah communicated his message to Hezekiah, the king said, "What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me," etc.? One wonders that to so good a man the prophet's word should not have been sufficient, and that he should have asked for this additional confirmation. But (!) It was an age of signs (Isa. vii. 10—12; viii. 18; ch. xix. 29). (2) The thing promised was very wonderful and hard to believe, especially after the announcement, "Thou shalt die, and not live," made a few minutes before. There is no doubt a greater blessing on those that have not seen, and yet have believed (John xx. 29); but weak faith too has its rights, and God shows his condescension in stooping to give it the needed supports. 2. *The sign given.* Isaiah had offered Ahaz a sign, either "in the depth, or in the height above" (Isa. vii. 11). Hezekiah had now proposed to him a sign in the height. The shadow on the steps of Ahaz's sun-dial would be made either to go forward ten degrees or go back ten degrees, according as Hezekiah should desire. As the more wonderful phenomenon of the two, Hezekiah asked that it might go back ten degrees, and at Isaiah's prayer it was done. We inquire in vain as to how the wonder was produced. The fact that it seems to have been a local sign, though widely noised abroad, suggests a miracle connected with the laws of refraction.—J. O.

Vers. 12—19.—*The Babylonian embassy.* Berodach-Baladan, or as he is more correctly termed in Isaiah, Merodach-Baladan (Isa. xxxix. 1), at this time held possession of the throne of Babylon, and was everywhere casting about for alliances to strengthen him against Assyria. We have here the account of his embassy to Hezekiah.

I. RECEPTION OF THE BABYLONIAN MESSENGERS. 1. *Hezekiah's visitors.* In the streets of Jerusalem were seen strange men, in princely robes, with servants bearing costly presents. They were the envoys of the King of Babylon, ostensibly come to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery from sickness, and to inquire into the wonder that had been done in the land (2 Chron. xxxii. 31). This, however, was, it is probable, only a pretext to cover their real object, which was to establish an offensive and defensive alliance with Hezekiah against Assyria. Professions of friendship veiled the designs of a merely selfish policy. Does not much of what is called diplomacy consist of deceit, insincere profession, intrigue, subtle designs, covered by fair appearances? 2. *Hezekiah's*

vanity. Hezekiah seems to have been completely imposed on by the fair words of his visitors. He felt flattered at being singled out for notice by this king of "a far country," and spared no pains to impress the ambassadors with ideas of his own greatness. He showed them all his treasures, all the resources of his kingdom, his silver, his gold, his precious things, everything he had. This love of display, this vain desire to stand well in the estimation of a foreign potentate, this boasting of mere worldly wealth as the distinction of his kingdom, shows a weakness we should not have expected in this good king. No man is perfect. The best character has its side of weakness, and men are singularly apt to be led astray when skilful appeals are made to their vanity. 3. *Hezekiah's sin.* It was not a mere weakness of human nature that Hezekiah was guilty of when he "hearkened" unto the ambassadors, and showed them all his precious things. It was not for a mere yielding to vanity that Isaiah afterwards so severely rebuked him. His offence was of a graver kind. The ambassadors had come with proposals for an alliance, and in hearkening to them on this subject Hezekiah had really been unfaithful to his position as a theocratic king. He was departing from the example set him by David. As king of the holy nation, it was his duty to keep himself free from entangling worldly alliances, to make God his boast, to rely on him for defence and help, and to resist solicitations to worldly pride and vanity. From this ideal he had fallen. Flattered by the attention of his visitors, deceived by their specious proposals, and led away with the idea of figuring as an important political personage, he consented, or was disposed to consent, to the alliance sought. In displaying his treasures, he was practically placing them before God, as the glory and defence of his kingdom. In reciprocating the friendship of the foreigners, accepting their gifts, and encouraging their advances, he was taking a first step in that direction of forming worldly alliances, which afterwards brought such trouble on the state. It was this policy, indeed, which ultimately led to the Captivity, as already a similar policy had wrought the ruin of Israel. The lessons for the Christian are obvious. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God" (Jas. iv. 4). It is his duty to avoid worldly display, to guard against being ruled by worldly motives and ambitions, and to avoid ensnaring worldly alliances. He who gives way to these things is laying the foundations of his own spiritual overthrow.

II. PREDICTION OF THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY. 1. *The prophet confronts the king.* In the theocracy the prophet stood beside the king, to be his friend, guide, and counsellor if he did right, and his accusing conscience if he did wrong. Thus Nathan confronted David (2 Sam. xii. 1—14), Elijah confronted Ahab (1 Kings xviii. 17; xxi. 17—24), Zechariah confronted Joash (2 Chron. xxiv. 20). Here Isaiah confronts Hezekiah, and calls him to account for his transgression. The king did not seem aware of his wrong-doing, for he answered the prophet's questions with the utmost frankness. (1) The questions Isaiah asked were searching ones. He made Hezekiah tell out of his own mouth who the men were that had come to him, whence they came, and how he had received them. The object of these interrogations was to make Hezekiah aware of his sin. Many a thing is done, of which we do not at first perceive the criminality, but the sin of which is obvious enough when we have had the deed set objectively before us. (2) Hezekiah's answers revealed the folly he had committed. In the very stating of what he had done, Hezekiah must have perceived the magnitude of his error. It is God's design in his questioning of us to bring us to conviction. He would have us judge ourselves. It does not follow, that because we are unconscious of sin, therefore we have no sin. The object of Divine discipline is to make us conscious. Every sinner will at the last be convicted out of his own mouth. 2. *The prophet predicts the Captivity.* If doubt remained in Hezekiah's mind as to his wrong-doing, it was speedily dispelled by Isaiah's stern answer to him. The prophet, without further parley, announced God's punishment for the sin committed. The penalty answered, as so many of God's penalties do, to the nature of the transgression. The messengers had come from Babylon; into Babylon should Hezekiah's sons (descendants) be carried away. He had displayed his treasures; these treasures would be carried to Babylon. He desired union with Babylon; he should have it in a way he did not look for. A prophecy of this nature implied a collapse of the kingdom of Judah as complete as that which had overtaken Israel. Such a collapse was, of course, the product of many causes, most of them already in operation. But not the least potent was the species of worldly

policy of which Hezekiah's action was a typical example. As an outstanding and contributory cause, God fixes on it as the point of connection for the prophecy. We must take our share of the responsibility of every event which our actions have contributed to produce. 3. *The king's reply.* Hezekiah was no doubt shocked and startled by Isaiah's message. The only ray of consolation he derived was in the thought that the predicted evil was not to fall in his days, but in that of his descendants. His language on this point, "Is it not good, if peace and truth shall be in my days?" may seem selfish and even cynical. It is doubtful, however, if there is much room for blame. Hezekiah gathered that a period of respite was granted, and that the fulfilment of the threatening was somewhat remote. He rightly took this as an act of mercy to himself. There are probably few who would not feel relieved to know that, though calamities were to fall upon their land in future days, there would be peace and truth in their own lifetime. With lapse of time, too, opportunity was given for repentance; and who knew but that the sentence of doom might be reversed?—J. O.

Vers. 20, 21 sum up briefly the good deeds of Hezekiah for the city, and narrate his end (see 2 Chron. xxxii. 1—5).—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXI.

Vers. 1—26.—THE REIGNS OF MANASSEH AND AMON.

Vers. 1—18.—THE REIGN OF MANASSEH. Hezekiah's good and glorious reign was followed by one of exactly the opposite character. His son and successor, Manasseh, reversed Hezekiah's entire religious policy, and returned to the wicked practices of his grandfather Ahaz. In vers. 3—9 and ver. 16 his various abominations are enumerated, while in vers. 10—15 God's sentence is pronounced upon them. The account of his reign terminates with a brief summary (vers. 17, 18).

Ver. 1.—**Manasseh was twelve years old.** Manasseh was thus not born till three years after Hezekiah's dangerous illness, or till the year B.C. 710. Hezekiah may have given him the name in the spirit in which Joseph gave it to his firstborn (Gen. xli. 51), because God, in at last blessing him with a son, had "made him forget" his dangerous illness, with the griefs and regrets that accompanied it. "Manasseh" means "Forgetting." **When he began to reign**—in B.C. 698 or 697, the seventh or eighth year of Sennacherib—**and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem.** So the author of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxiii. 1) and Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 3. § 2). The reign exceeds in length that of any other King of Judah or Israel. **And his mother's name was Hephzibah.** "Hephzibah" means "My delight is in her." Isaiah gives it as a name of honour to the restored Jerusalem (Isa. lxii. 4). It has been conjectured that, as queen-mother, Hephzibah was regent during her son's minority. But there is no trace of her regency either in Kings or Chronicles.

Ver. 2.—**And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.** Manasseh was too young at the death of his father for his character to have been then definitively formed. He probably fell under the influence of the "princes of Judah," who, supported by many of the priests, had maintained themselves as a party antagonistic to Isaiah during the whole of Hezekiah's reign. Hezekiah's reformation had been carried out against their wishes. They had always leant towards foreign alliances (Isa. xx. 5; xxx. 1—7) and foreign rites (Isa. ii. 6—9; lxv. 3). The accession of a boy-king would be joyfully hailed by them, and they would make every effort to draw him to their side. It would seem that they were successful. **After the abominations of the heathen**—the details which follow in vers. 3—9 sufficiently explain this strong expression—**whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel.** It was solely because of their abominations that they were cast out (see Gen. xv. 16; Lev. xviii. 25; xx. 23; Deut. ix. 5; xviii. 12, etc.).

Ver. 3.—**For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed** (comp. ch. xviii. 4, 22). On the high-place worship, see the comment upon 1 Kings xiv. 23. It is quite clear that the people were deeply attached to it, and gladly saw it restored. **And he reared up altars for Baal;** *i.e.* he reintroduced the Phœnician Baal-worship, the special abomination of the house of Ahab (1 Kings xvi.

31; xxii. 53; ch. viii. 18, 27, etc.), which Athaliah had been the first to introduce into Judah (ch. xi. 18), which Joash had put away (ch. xi. 18), but which Ahaz (2 Chron. xxviii. 2) had recalled. **And made a grove**; literally, *an Asherah*, or emblem of Astarte (compare the comment on 1 Kings xiv. 23) —**as did Ahab King of Israel** (see 1 Kings xvi. 33) **and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.** The worship of the host of heaven, or the entire multitude of the heavenly bodies, commonly known as Sabæanism or Ssabianism, was an ancient Babylonian, Arabian, and Syrian practice. It had, perhaps, been introduced among the Jews by Ahaz (ch. xxiii. 12). At any rate, it was from the time of Manasseh one of the favourite idolatries of the Jewish people. The stars were believed to guide the destiny of men, and astrology was cultivated as a main part, or even as the essence, of religion. Astrological tracts form an important element in the literature of the Babylonians (see 'Records of the Past,' vol. i. pp. 153—163). The chief objects of adoration in this worship were the sun and moon, the five planets, and the signs of the zodiac.

Ver. 4.—**And he built altars in the house of the Lord.** He created, *i.e.*, altars to other gods in the very temple of Jehovah (see ver. 5). This was a pollution beyond any that either Athaliah or Ahaz had ventured on. **Of which the Lord had said, In Jerusalem will I put my Name** (see 1 Kings viii. 29; ix. 3; xiv. 21). Where Jehovah "put his Name," making the place his, and condescending, in a certain sense, to dwell there, it might at least have been expected that he would not find himself confronted with rivals.

Ver. 5.—**And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord.** The temple of Solomon had two courts only, an inner and an outer. The outer court was for the people, the inner for the priests and Levites. Manasseh desecrated the temple to the extent of setting up in each of these two courts an idolatrous altar, dedicated to the worship of the host of heaven. In the inner court his altar was a rival to the great brazen altar of Solomon (1 Kings ix. 64; 2 Chron. iv. 1), which Ahaz had for a time removed from its place in front of the porch (ch. xvi. 14), but which Hezekiah had most certainly reinstated.

Ver. 6.—**And he made his son pass through the fire.** The author of Chronicles says, "his sons" (2 Chron. xxxiii. 6); but this is, perhaps, rhetorical. It was usually the eldest son, who, as the most precious possible offering, was sacrificed to Moloch (see ch. iii. 27; xvi. 3; and, for the true nature of the sacrifice, see the comment on this latter passage). **And observed times.** If this translation is right, the reference would be to a superstitious regard for lucky and unlucky days, such as we note in the accounts left of themselves by the Babylonian kings, who begin their buildings "in a happy month, on an auspicious day" (see the author's 'Herodotus,' vol. ii. p. 487). But probably the true meaning is, "he exercised *βασκανία*," or, "had regard to the evil eye," a common superstition in the East. **And used enchantments.** A use of spells is perhaps intended, such as those by which serpents (נְחָשִׁים) were charmed (see the comment on Isa. xlvii. 9). **And dealt with familiar spirits and wizards** — rather, *he placed in office necromancers* (literally, *a necromancer*) *and wizards*; i.e. he gave such persons official positions at his court, instead of putting them to death, as the Law (Lev. xx. 27) required—**he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger**; literally, *he multiplied to work wickedness*; i.e. he sought out every possible way; he not only restored all the different kinds of heathen sacrifices and idolatrous customs which had been in use under Ahaz, but carried his opposition to Jehovah a great deal further. As Ewald says ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 208), "He endeavoured to become acquainted with all the heathen religions he could find and introduce them into Judah. For this purpose he sent into the most distant lands where there was any famous cultus, and grudged no pains for his one object."

Ver. 7.—**And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house.** He introduced into the temple, and set up there for adoration, an elaborately wrought Asherah, or "sacred tree," probably copied from the elaborate sacred trees of the Assyrians ('Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. p. 236). These had, in the centre, the essential *stelé*, or pillar, ornamented with rams' horns, symbols of fecundity, and crowned with a representation of a palm tree, the whole being encircled by a framework of metal, twined about it, and throwing out from the circumference, at intervals, either palms or blossoms, or in some instances pomegranates or fir-cones. All the parts represented either animal or vegetable productiveness. **Of which the Lord said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put my Name for ever.** It was the extremest aggravation of Manasseh's wickedness that he was not content to introduce his new religions into the land in other places, but brought them to God's special city which he had chosen, namely, Jerusalem, and there established them, not

on the opposite hills, as Solomon had done (1 Kings xi. 7), or in a rival temple within the walls, as had been done by Athaliah (ch. xi. 18), but within God's holy temple itself. In each of the two courts he placed an idolatrous altar, whereon the people were invited to deposit their offerings; and probably in the temple building itself, perhaps in the very holy of holies, he placed that lust-exciting emblem of Astarte, which was the most horrible profanation of all true religion, turning the truth and grace of God into lasciviousness (Jude 4). What practical consequences followed on this profanation, we are not distinctly told; but we may readily surmise, especially in the light of ch. xxiii. 7.

Ver. 8.—**Neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers.** The writer's argument is that Manasseh, by these impieties, annulled God's promises, brought about the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem, and caused the entire people to be carried off into captivity. The promises of permanence to the city and temple, and of the continued possession of the land by the people, were, he notes, conditional; and Manasseh, by breaking through the conditions, forfeited them (comp. ch. xxiv. 3). **Only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all that my servant Moses commanded them.** The words are not taken from any single passage, but express the general sense of numerous passages, as for example of Deut. iv. 25—27; xxx. 15—19; Ps. lxxxix. 28—32; 1 Kings ix. 4—9, etc.

Ver. 9.—**But they hearkened not.** The people, and not Manasseh alone, were disobedient. Had they remained faithful, Manasseh's sin would not have affected their future. **And Manasseh seduced them.** The influence of a young and gay king, always great, is in the East immense. When such a king succeeds one of strict and rigid principles, he easily carries away the multitude with him, and leads them on to any excess of profligacy and irreligion. The beginnings of sin are delightful, and the votaries of pleasure, readily beguiled into evil courses, know not where to stop. Manasseh seduced them, we are told, **to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel**; that is, than the Hivites, Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Gergashites, and Jebusites (Deut. vii. 1, etc.). The sin of Israel exceeded that of the Canaanitish nations, not so much in any outward and tangible features, as in the fact that it was committed against light, in spite of the Law, and against all the warnings and denunciations of the prophets (comp. ch. xvii. 13, 14).

Ver. 10.—**And the Lord spake by his servants the prophets, saying.** It is uncertain who were the prophets of Manasseh's time. Probably Isaiah was one of them (see 'Introduction to Isaiah,' p. iii.). Habakkuk is thought to have been another (Keil). Nahum and Zephaniah seem also to belong, in part, to his reign.

Ver. 11.—**Because Manasseh King of Judah hath done these abominations** (comp. ver. 2), **and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him** (comp. ver. 9). The "Amorites" are put here (as in Gen. xv. 16; 1 Kings xxi. 26; and Amos ii. 9, 10) for the Canaanitish nations generally. Next to the Hittites, they were the most important of the seven nations. **And hath made Judah also to sin with his idols** (see the comment on ver. 9).

Ver. 12.—**Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle.** "As a sharp discordant note," says Bähr, "pains one's ears, so the news of this harsh punishment shall give pain to all who hear of it." The phrase is one never uttered by any other lips than those of Jehovah (1 Sam. iii. 11; Jer. xix. 3). "It denotes" (Keil) "such a judgment as has never been heard of before, and excites alarm and horror." Not the Jews only, but the other neighbouring nations, when they heard of the sufferings endured in the siege (ch. xxv. 3), and the severities exercised upon the king (ver. 7) and the city (vers. 9, 10) and the inhabitants (ver. 11), would have a thrill of pain go through them at the hearing, partly unselfish, partly perhaps selfish, since the treatment that was dealt out to others might also be reserved for them.

Ver. 13.—**And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria**; *i.e.* "I will do to Jerusalem as I have done to Samaria; I will execute upon it a similar judgment." God applies his measuring-line, a perfectly uniform standard, to all nations, as to all individuals, and metes out to them an equal measure of justice. Jerusalem will be presently treated as Samaria has been recently treated; and a similar destruction will overtake it. The metaphor is not to be pressed, as if cities were destroyed with as much care as they are built, by constant use of the measuring-line and the plummet. **And the plummet of the house of Ahab.** The justice meted out to the house of Ahab shall be meted out also to the house of David. The ways of God are equal (Ezek. xviii. 25), and he is no "respecter of persons." He has one law for all; and, as the house of David has sinned in the same way, and to the same extent, as the house of Ahab had sinned, one and the same punishment will fall upon

both of them. **And I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.** Jerusalem will be emptied, as a man empties his dish of the refuse scraps remaining on it, and will be then put away, as done with. The metaphor expresses contempt as well as condemnation.

Ver. 14.—**And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance.** "The remnant" here is not the remnant left of Judah after the deportation of two hundred thousand souls by Sennacherib (as in ch. xix. 4), but the remnant that is left of the whole people of Israel—the two tribes as distinct from the ten. The ten tribes were forsaken when the Assyrians took and destroyed Samaria (ch. xvii. 18, 23); the two remained. Now the two also would be forsaken, and the last remnant of God's inheritance cast out. **And deliver them into the hand of their enemies.** Not the Chaldeans only, who were not yet "their enemies," but their persistent and inveterate enemies, the Syrians, Moabites, Ammonites (see ch. xxiv. 2), and Edomites (Ezek. xxv. 12; Joel iii. 19), who all joined with Nebuchadnezzar at the last, and (as Ewald says, 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 270) "indulged their ancient hatred by taking a very active part in the final war." **And they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies** (comp. Jer. xli. 2—10; xlviii. 27; Obad. 10—14; Zeph. ii. 8, etc.). The years which immediately followed the Captivity were years of terrible suffering to the remnant whom Nebuchadnezzar left in the land (ch. xxv. 12). Every petty power in the neighbourhood felt itself at liberty to make incursions with Judæa at its pleasure, to plunder and ravage, and drive off captives, or massacre them in cold blood, or commit any other atrocity. Some critics regard the description of Isaiah in ch. xlii. 22—24 as prophetic of these sufferings.

Ver. 15.—**Because they have done that which was evil in my sight.** The chief sins of the people were the following: Altars for the worship of the host of heaven were erected upon almost every roof (Jer. xix. 13; Zeph. i. 5); offerings of cakes were made in the very streets to Astarte (Jer. vii. 18); the fire of Tophet—a huge furnace in the valley of Hinnom—was kept constantly burning, and the sacrifice of innocent children to the bloody sun-god, Moloch, was perpetual (Jer. vii. 31; Ezek. xxiii. 37); it was as common to swear by the name of Moloch as by that of Jehovah (Zeph. i. 5). Lascivious rites were practised. Close by the temple the unchaste priestesses of Venus had their habitations, and their wretched male attendants, the Galli of the classical writers, plied their trade (ch. xxiii. 7). Cruelty and oppression increased among the upper classes (Zeph. iii. 1—3); the prophets were "light and treacherous persons;" the priests "polluted the sanctuary, and did violence to the Law" (Zeph. ii. 1—3). "Spoiling and violence," "strife and contention;" were rife throughout the city (Hab. i. 3). Ewald sums up the state of things as follows: "The atmosphere of the age was poisoned from above; and the leaders of the people of every class, whose moral decline had already become a subject of lament in the preceding century, sank into an almost incredible degeneracy. The prophets, who ought to have been ever the most loyal guardians of the truth, were for the most part like dumb and greedy dogs; many of the priests allowed themselves to be seduced into offering heathen sacrifices; the judges and nobles paid little heed to the eternal right. Equivocation and hypocrisy spread among those who ought to have ministered most austerely to public truthfulness of life; while those who were engaged in commerce and trade sank into the harshest indifference to every higher aim, and thought only of the acquisition and enjoyment of wealth. So terrible was the demoralization which set in under Manasseh, that those who remained faithful to the ancient religion were either scoffed at as fools, or allowed to perish in cold contempt without any effort being made to save them, and were even derided after their death." **And have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day.** The moral and spiritual depravity of Judah, though it only came to a head in the time of Manasseh, had its roots in a long-distant past. As St. Stephen pointed out to the Sanhedrin (Acts vii. 39—43), it began in the wilderness with the worship of the golden calf, and went on to the worship of the host of heaven, of Moloch, and of Remphan; it was shown markedly in the terrible sin of Peor (Numb. xxv. 1—3); it stinted God's hand when the nations had to be driven out from Canaan (Judg. ii. 1—5); it provoked God's anger greatly during the whole period of the Judges (Judg. ii. 11—19); checked under David and Solomon, it broke out afresh on the accession of Rehoboam (1 Kings xiv. 22—24), and showed itself, more or less, under every subsequent king, culminating at last in that fearful condition of things which has been described above (see the comment on the first clause of this verse).

Ver. 16.—**Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much.** We must not understand this of his own offerings to Moloch, for these have been already put on record against him (ver. 6), and this is something additional (note the strong expression, גַּם), nor even of the multitudinous sacrifices of

the same kind which were the result of his influence on the people. Some culminating horror is required, something not touched upon before, and something specially attaching to the monarch himself. These conditions are answered by supposing a bloody persecution of the faithful to be intended. Josephus declares positively that Manasseh "cruelly put to death all the righteous among the Hebrews, and did not even spare the prophets" ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 3. § 1). A tradition, very widely received, declared Isaiah to have been one of the victims ('Gemara Jebam.,' iv. 13; 'Sanhedr.,' f. 103; Tertullian, 'De Patientia,' § 14; Augustine, 'De Civ. Dei,' xviii. 24, etc.). Stanley says, "A reign of terror commenced against all who ventured to resist the reaction. Day by day a fresh batch of the prophetic order were ordered for execution. It seemed as if a devouring lion were let loose against them. From end to end of Jerusalem were to be seen traces of their blood. The nobles who took their part were thrown headlong from the rocky cliffs of Jerusalem" ('Lectures on the Jewish Church,' pt. ii. p. 492). The persecution has been compared to that of Anglicans under Mary Tudor. **Till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another**—*i.e.* "till he had filled it with blood and slaughter" (comp. ch. xxiv. 4)—**beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord** (see ver. 9).

Ver. 17.—**Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh.** Important additions to the history of Manasseh are made by the writer of Chronicles. From him we learn that, after prophetical warnings had been in vain addressed to him and to his people (2 Chron. xxxiii. 10), he was visited with a Divine judgment, an Assyrian army under "captains" being sent against him, who took him prisoner, and carried him to Babylon—the city where Esarhaddon, the successor of Sennacherib, and contemporary of Manasseh, ordinarily held his court. Here he remained for some considerable time "in affliction" (ver. 12), and, becoming convinced of sin and deeply penitent for his manifold transgressions, he turned to God in sincerity and truth, and being restored by the Assyrians to his kingdom, he put away the idolatrous practices and emblems which he had previously introduced, "repaired the altar of the Lord" which had gone to decay, and re-established, so far as he could, the worship of Jehovah (ver. 16). A special prophet, Hosai, seems to have chronicled his sins and his repentance in a work which survived the Captivity, and is twice quoted by the compiler of the Books of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxiii. 18, 19). The submission of Manasseh to Esarhaddon is noted in the latter's annals, about the year B.C. 680 (see 'Eponym Canon,' p. 139, line 13). Other "acts" of Manasseh were the fortification of Jerusalem "on the west side of Gihon in the valley," the strengthening of the defences of Ophel, and the occupation with strong garrisons of the various fortresses within his dominions. He thus played his part of tributary ally to Assyria with zeal, placing the south-eastern frontier in an excellent condition to resist the assaults of Egypt. Manasseh outlived Esarhaddon, and was for many years contemporary with Asshur-bani-pal, his son, whose inscriptions, however, contain no mention of him. Most likely his name occurred on Cylinder C, line 3, which is now illegible (see G. Smith's 'History of Asshur-bani-pal,' p. 31, line *c*). **And all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?** The "sin which he sinned" is probably his persecution, which was viewed as his worst sin (see ver. 16; and comp. ch. xxiv. 4).

Ver. 18.—**And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house.** We have already seen reason for believing that the catacomb of David was full, and that Hezekiah was buried outside it, though in the neighbourhood, on this account (see the comment on ch. xx. 21). Manasseh seems to have made a new family tomb in a garden belonging to his house (see ver. 26; and comp. ch. xxiii. 30). It is quite impossible to fix its site. **In the garden of Uzza.** Probably an addition to the old palace garden; perhaps a purchase made by Manasseh with the object of converting it into a burial-ground. "Uzza," or "Uzzah," was a common name among the Jews (2 Sam. vi. 8; Ezra ii. 49; Neh. vii. 51; 1 Chron. vi. 29; viii. 7; xiii. 7—11), and does not point to any definite individual. **And Amon his son reigned in his stead.** "Amon" in Hebrew means "Nursling," or "Darling," and it is quite possible that Manasseh gave his son the name in this sense. But it is also the ordinary Hebrew form of the term ("Amen," or "Amun") by which the Egyptians designated the great god of Thebes, whom the Greeks and Romans called "Ammon." It has therefore been thought by many that it was given by Manasseh to his son "in an idolatrous spirit." So Bishop Cotton in Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' vol. i. p. 61, and others.

Vers. 19—26.—REIGN OF AMON. The short reign of Amon, the son and successor of Manasseh, was distinguished by only two events: (1) his restoration of all the idolatrous and wicked practices which his father

had upheld during the earlier portion of his reign; and (2) his untimely death, in consequence of a conspiracy which was formed against him among the officers of his court. The writer of Kings is therefore able to despatch his history in eight verses.

Ver. 19.—**Amon was twenty and two years old when he began to reign.** So Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 4. § 1), and the author of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxiii. 21). He must have been born in B.C. 664, early in the reign of Asshur-bani-pal, probably in the year of that monarch's expedition against Tyre. **And he reigned two years in Jerusalem.** The "twelve years" assigned to Amon by the Duke of Manchester ('Times of Daniel') are wholly devoid of foundation, and would throw the entire chronology into confusion. As it is, there is a very exact accordance in this part of the history between the profane and the scriptural dates. **And his mother's name was Meshullemeth, the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah.** Jotbah is probably the same city as the "Jotbath" of Deut. x. 7, and the "Jotbathah" of Numb. xxxiii. 33, which was in the neighbourhood of Ezion-geber, and therefore probably in the Arabah. Josephus, however, says that Jotbah was "a city of Judah."

Ver. 20.—**And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh did** (comp. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 22, and Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 4. § 1).

Ver. 21.—**And he walked in all the way that his father walked in.** There was not a single one among the early wickednesses of Manasseh which Amon did not imitate. The details of Josiah's reformation (ch. xxiii. 4—24) show that under Amon (1) the Asherah or "grove" maintained its place in the temple building; (2) the two idolatrous altars stood in the two courts; (3) the temple was the scene of the worship of Baal, Ashtoreth, and the host of heaven; (4) the unchaste priestesses of the Syrian goddess, with the male partners in their guilt, were lodged in houses close by the house of the Lord; (5) chariots and horses dedicated to the sun were maintained at one of the temple gates; (6) the fire of Tophet burnt continually in the valley of Hinnom, and children were there "passed through the fire to Moloch;" (7) an idolatrous worship held possession of all the high places all over Judæa and Samaria, and idolatrous priests, deriving their appointment from the king, burnt incense in the high places to Baal, to the sun, the moon, the planets, and all the host of heaven; and (8) magic and necromancy were practised openly under royal sanction throughout the length and breadth of the land. **And served the idols that his father served**—as Baal, Ashtoreth, Moloch, the Asherah, and others—**and worshipped them.**

Ver. 22.—**And he forsook the Lord God of his fathers.** Other kings, as Ahaz, had made a sort of compromise between the worship of Jehovah and idolatry (ch. xvi. 10—15). Manasseh and Amon forsook the worship of Jehovah altogether. **And walked not in the way of the Lord**; *i.e.* did not even maintain an outward observance of the Law of Moses, but set it wholly aside.

Ver. 23.—**And the servants of Amon**—*i.e.* his attendants, the officers of his court—**conspired against him, and slew the king in his own house.** Conspiracies in the palace, frequent in Israel (see 1 Kings xvi. 9; ch. ix. 32—37; xi. 10, 25, 30), were not unknown in Judah (see ch. xii. 21). They naturally arose from various causes, as insults, injuries, hopes of advantage, ambition, etc. Where, as in the present case, no clue is given, it is idle to conjecture the motives by which the conspirators were actuated. Religious motives can scarcely have come into play.

Ver. 24.—**And the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against King Amon.** We certainly, therefore, cannot attribute Amon's murder to a popular reaction against his idolatries. Everything unites to prove that the foreign worships were in favour with the people at this period, and that the kings who patronized them were more generally popular than those who pursued the opposite course. **And the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead.** The prestige of the house of David was still strong. The conspirators may have intended a change of dynasty; but the mass of the people could not contemplate with equanimity the occupation of the throne by a stranger—one not of David's house. They there, in a tumultuary manner, having punished the conspirators with death, sought out the true heir, and, having found him, though he was a boy of but eight years of age, placed him upon his father's throne (comp. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 25).

Ver. 25.—**Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?** No other acts of Amon have come down to us. He was probably, during his short reign of two years, a submissive tributary of Asshur-bani-pal.

Ver. 26.—**And he was buried in his sepulchre in the garden of Uzza**—*i.e.* in the same place as his father (see ver. 18)—**and Josiah his son reigned in his stead.** So the writer of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxiii. 25), and Josephus (*l. s. c.*).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—18.—*The lesson of Manasseh's life, that it is far easier to do than to undo evil.* Manasseh, carried away by the impetuosity of youth, and under the advice of evil counsellors, threw himself into a movement the direct opposite of that instituted by his father, and in a short time completely changed in all respects the whole religion of the kingdom. His idea, so far as we can trace it, seems to have been a welcoming of heathen and idolatrous creeds and rites of all kinds and from all quarters, together with a stern repression of the religion of Jehovah. The bloody rites of Moloch, the licentious orgies of the Syrian goddess, the Phœnician Baal-worship, the Arabian astrology, the magic and necromancy of Babylon, were all regarded as equally worthy of his patronage, all given a home in his capital; one single cult was disallowed, and its exercise punished with death—the worship of "the Holy One of Israel." In all these respects Manasseh found it easy enough to work his will; no one resisted him; the awful child-sacrifices suited well with one side of the national temperament, the wild sensualism of Syrian and Phœnician orgies harmonized with another. Manasseh easily "seduced" the mass of the people to do as he would have them; and, when he met with recalcitrants, had a "short and easy method" with them—the method of instant execution. All went smoothly and satisfactorily with him, probably for near thirty years of his reign, when by some act—we know not what—he displeased his Assyrian suzerain, was carried captive to Babylon, and there, in the bitterness of confinement, brought to see the error of his ways. Restored to his throne, he thought to undo his evil work as easily and completely as he had done it. Again, outwardly no one resisted his will. The external changes were made. "The strange gods" were "put away" (2 Chron. xxxiii. 15); the idols cleared out of the house of the Lord; the idolatrous altars banished; the formal worship of Jehovah reintroduced; the brazen altar of Solomon "repaired" (2 Chron. xxxiii. 16) and used for sacrifice; Judah commanded to serve Jehovah, the God of Israel. But the spirit of true and pure religion could not be brought back. Thirty years of idolatry had debauched the heart of the nation. Jehovah's faithful followers had been martyred. The rest of the people could only give to Jehovah a lip-service. And thus no sooner was Manasseh dead than everything reverted into its former condition. The idols were restored—the altars to the host of heaven replaced in the temple courts—the flames of Tophet relighted—the filthy rites of the Dea Syria re-established. When Josiah came to the throne, the state of things was as bad as it had ever been, even in the worst years of Manasseh. Baal was the god chiefly worshipped in Jerusalem (Zeph. i. 4); altars to the host of heaven covered the housetops; men commonly swore by Moloch; the whole nation had "turned back from Jehovah" (Zeph. i. 6), and the city was filled with "violence and deceit" (Zeph. i. 9). Not even could all Josiah's efforts remedy the evil which Manasseh had brought about. The corruption was too deep-seated; and it was Manasseh's evil-doing, which he could not undo, that caused the final destruction of the kingdom (ch. xxiii. 26, 27; xxiv. 3, 4).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—16.—*Manasseh's wicked reign.* Two thoughts are brought before us by the reign of Manasseh. They are a striking contrast to one another.

I. THE POWER OF SIN. 1. We see *how sin perpetuates itself.* The deeds of Manasseh were just a repetition of the worst deeds of his predecessors. "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen." He built up again the high places. He made altars for Baal. He worshipped all the host of heaven. He made his son pass through the fire to Moloch. (What we have already said on these sins applies here.) 2. We see also *the progressive power of sin.* There is a progress in sin from bad to worse. Manasseh imitated the sins of his predecessors. But he went further than any of them. "He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord" (ver. 5). Worse than all, he set up a carved image, the idol that he had made, in the very temple of the living God. It is also

stated that he shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem with blood from one end to the other (ver. 16). Let us beware of the beginnings of evil. 3. We see also *the power of sin to harden men's hearts.* We read in 2 Chronicles that "God spake to Manasseh and his people; but they would not hearken." How often God still speaks to men by his Word, by his providences, and yet sin has so hardened their hearts, that they pay no attention to his warnings, remonstrances, and appeals!

II. THE POWER OF PRAYER. There is no reference in this account of Manasseh to any prayer of his. And yet, strange though it may seem, prayer played an important part in Manasseh's history. When we turn to the summary of his life which is given in 2 Chron. xxxiii., we read (vers. 18, 19), "Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, *and his prayer unto his God,* and the words of the seers that spake unto him in the name of the Lord God of Israel, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel. *His prayer also, and how God was entreated of him,* and all his sins, and his trespass . . . before he was humbled: behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers." Now, what was this prayer of Manasseh? It was simply a prayer for pardon. *Observe how Manasseh learned to pray.* For all his wickedness the Lord brought judgments upon him (vers. 10—15). He brought upon him and his people "the captains of the host of the King of Assyria, which took Manasseh prisoner, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon." It was then, in his extremity and calamity, that Manasseh learned to pray. "And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, *and prayed unto him:* and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God" (2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13). Often it is affliction and trial that first teach men to pray, to turn to God. *We see here the power of penitent prayer.* We see here that no one is too great a sinner to pray to God for mercy. Your past life may have been given up to sin. So was Manasseh's. You may have dishonoured and disobeyed God. So did Manasseh. Yet he obtained mercy. The greatest, guiltiest sinner may get pardon at the cross. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."—C. H. I.

Vers. 19—24.—*Amon's wicked reign.* We have here more than one instructive lesson.

I. THE POWER OF EVIL OFTEN COUNTERACTS THE GOOD. Manasseh had humbled himself before God. He obtained pardon. But he could not undo the guilty past. He could not undo the effects of his evil example and influence. We see how his sins were imitated and continued by his son Amon. How careful we should be what influence we exercise, what an example we leave behind us! Many a penitent sinner would give worlds if he could undo the consequences to others of his own past sins.

II. THE LAW OF RETRIBUTION ONCE MORE. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Every case of disobedience against God on the part of Israel and her kings brought its corresponding penalty. Amon was very defiant in his sin. "He humbled not himself before the Lord, . . . but trespassed more and more" (2 Chron. xxxiii. 23). He cast off the authority of God. The day came when his own servants rose in rebellion against his authority, and conspired against him, and slew him. The conspirators also met with their punishment. "The people of the land slew all them that had conspired against King Amon" (ver. 24). Amid all its corruptions, the nation had not yet utterly lost the sense of justice. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—18.—*Manasseh; or, the material and moral in human life.* "Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzibah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," etc. "Manasseh," says Keil, "having begun to reign at an early age, did not choose his father's ways, but set up the idolatry of his grandfather Ahaz again, since the godless party in the nation, all whose chief priests, and (false) prophets stood, and who would not hearken to the Law of the Lord, and in the time of Hezekiah had sought help against Assyria, not from Jehovah, but from the Egyptians, had obtained control of the young and inexperienced king. He built again

'the high places which Hezekiah had destroyed, erected altars for Baal, and Asherah, like Ahab of Israel.'" There are two great mistakes prevalent amongst men—one is an over-estimation of the secular; the other, a depreciation of the spiritual. Many theoretically hold, and more practically indicate, that man should attend mainly, if not entirely, to his secular interests, as a citizen of time; that the present, the palpable, and the certain should engage a far greater portion of his attention than the future, the unseen, and the probable. It is bad to hold these ideas, but it is worse to practise them. More respect, perhaps, is due to the mistaken men who theoretically adopt them, than to those who denounce in no very measured terms their votaries and yet practically carry them out in their daily life. And yet such characters abound in Christian England, abound in our congregations, and in our clergy too. The religionist who gives more of his thought, energy, and time to the secular than the spiritual, is carrying out in his everyday conduct the principles of those secular and infidel teachers against whom he is ever ready to thunder his condemnation. Far more distressed am I at the practical secularism of the Christian than at the theoretical secularism of the sceptic. The other mistake is overrating the spiritual at the expense of the secular. It is not very uncommon for religious teachers to profess to despise secular interests, and so to enforce the claims of piety as if they required the sacrifice of our corporeal and secular happiness. I have no faith in such representations of moral duty. Man is one, and all his duties and interests are concurrent and harmonious; the end of Christianity is to make man happy, body and soul, here and hereafter. These remarks are suggested by the history of Manasseh. He was the son of Hezekiah; was born upwards of seven hundred years before Christ; began to reign when he was twelve years of age; continued his rulership for fifty-five years, died at the age of sixty-eight, and was buried in a sepulchre which he had prepared for himself in his own garden (see 2 Chron. xxxiii. 1—20). His inner life or character will appear as we proceed in the illustration of our subject. In his biography we have three instructive views of the *secular* and *spiritual*. We have here—

I. THE ELEVATION OF THE SECULAR AND THE DEGRADATION OF THE SPIRITUAL. "He built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab King of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them," etc. Here is a man at the height of the secular elevation. He is raised to a throne, called to bear sway over a people the most enlightened, and in a country as fertile and lovely as any on the face of the earth. In the person of this Manasseh you have secular greatness in its highest altitude and most attractive position. But in connection with this you have spiritual degradation. Penetrate the gaudy trappings of his royalty, look within, and what see you? A low, wretched, infamous spirit, a spirit debased almost to the lowest point in morals. Few names in the history of our sinful world stand out with more prominent features of depravity and vice than this of Manasseh. Look at him: 1. *Socially.* How acted he as a son? His father, Hezekiah, was a man of undoubted piety—a monarch of distinguished worth. Many earnest prayers he offered, no doubt, for his son, and many tender counsels on religious subjects had he addressed to him. Yet what was the return for all this? His sire was scarcely cold in his grave before the son commenced undoing in the kingdom all that his pious father had for years endeavoured to accomplish. His insane fanaticism in the cause of debased religion was not surpassed even by the king in modern times who most resembled him, Philip II. of Spain. How did he act as a *parent?* Was he anxious for the virtue and happiness of his children? *No;* "he caused his children to pass through the fire of the son of Hinnom." History represents the god Moloch, to which this Manasseh presented his children, as a brazen statue, which was ever kept burning hot, with its arms outstretched. Into these outstretched arms the idolatrous parent threw his children, which soon fell down into the raging furnace beneath. 2. *Religiously.* A dupe of the most stupid imposture. "He observed times, and used enchantments [and used witchcraft], and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards." He was the maddened votary of the most cruel and monstrous superstition. 3. *Politically.* Ruining his own country, provoking the indignation of Heaven. "So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel." The elevation of the secular and the degradation of the spiritual,

so manifest, alas! in all times and lands, is not destitute of many grave and startling suggestions. 1. It shows the *moral disorganization of the human world.* This state of things can never be according to the original plan of the creation. Can it be accordant with the original purpose of the Creator that wickedness should sit on thrones and hold the sceptres of the world in its grasp? Can it be that Infinite Purity intended to endow depravity with such worldly wealth and power? Impossible. A terrible convulsion has happened to the human world, a convulsion that has thrown every part into disorder. "All the foundations of the earth are out of course." The social world is in a moral chaos. The Bible traces the cause and propounds the remedy of this terrible disorganization. 2. It shows the *perverting capability of the soul.* The greater the amount of worldly good a man possesses, the stronger is the appeal of the Creator for his gratitude and devotion. These earthly mercies urge self-consecration. Moreover, the larger the amount of worldly wealth and power, the greater the facilities as well as the obligations to a life of spiritual intelligence, holiness, and piety. But here, in the case of this monarch, you have, what indeed you find in different degrees everywhere in human life past and present, the soul turning these advantages to the most fiendish iniquity. The perverting capability of the soul within us may well fill us with amazement and alarm. We can darken the light of truth, make the tree of life drop poison, and cause the very breath of God to be pestilential. 3. It shows the *high probability of a judgment.* Under the government of a righteous monarch, will vice always have its banquets, its purple, and its crown? Will the *great Mechanician* always allow the human engine thus to ply its wondrous energies in confusion? Will the great Lord allow his stewards to misappropriate his substance, and never call them to account? It cannot be! There must come a day for balancing long-standing accounts; a day for making all that has been irregular in human history chime harmoniously with the original law of the universe.

II. THE DEGRADATION OF THE SECULAR AND THE ELEVATION OF THE SPIRITUAL. The judgment of God, which must ever follow sin, at length overtook the wicked monarch. The Assyrian army, under the direction of Esarhaddon, invaded the country, and carried all before it. The miserable monarch can make no effectual resistance. He is seized, bound in chains, transported to Babylon, and then cast into prison. Here is secular degradation. Here, away in exile, chains, and prison, like the prodigal, he began to think. His guilty conduct passed under sad review—memory brought past crimes and abused mercies in awful and startling forms before him, and his heart is smitten with contrition. He prays; his prayer is heard; and here, bereft of every vestige of secular greatness, he begins to rise spiritually, to become an intellectual and moral man (2 Chron. xxxiii. 12). We may learn from this: 1. That *man's circumstances are no necessary hindrances to conversion.* If the question were asked—What circumstances are the most inimical to the cultivation of piety? I should unhesitatingly answer—*Adversity.* I am well aware, indeed, that adversity, as in the case before us, often succeeds in inducing religious thoughtfulness and penitence, when prosperity has failed; that afflictions have often broken the moral slumber of the soul, and led the careless to consider his ways. But, notwithstanding this, I cannot regard adversity itself as the most suited to the cultivation of the religious character. Sufferings are inimical to that grateful feeling and spiritual effort which religious culture requires. It is when the system bounds with health, when Providence smiles on the path, when the mind is not necessarily pressed with anxieties about the means of worldly subsistence, when leisure and facilities for religious reflection and effort are at command, that men are in the best position to discipline themselves into a godly life. But here we find a man in the most unfavourable position, away from religious institutions and friends and books, an imprisoned exile in a pagan land, beginning to think of his ways, and directing his feet into the paths of holiness. Such a case as this meets all the excuses which men offer for their want of religion. It is often said, "Were we in such and such circumstances we would be religious." The rich man says, "Were I in humble life, more free from the anxieties, cares, responsibilities, and associations of my position, I would live a godly life." Whilst the poor, on the other hand says, with far more reason, "Were my spirit not pressed down by the crushing forces of poverty; had I sufficient of worldly goods to remove me from all necessary anxiety, I would give my mind to religion, and serve my God." The man in the midst of the excitement and

bustle of commercial life says, "Were I in a more retired situation, in some rural region away from the eternal din of business—away in quiet fields and under clear skies, amidst the music of birds and brooks, I would serve my Maker." Whilst on the contrary, and with greater reason, the tenant of these quiet scenes says, "Were I distant from this eternal monotony, amidst scenes of mental stimulus and social excitement, I should be roused from the apathy which oppresses me, and I would be a religious man." The fact, after all, is that circumstances are no necessary hindrances or helps to a religious life. 2. That *Heaven's mercy is greater than man's iniquities.* When conscience-stricken with the enormity of his wickedness, this one of the chief of human sinners betakes himself to his knees in humble prayer "before the God of his fathers," how is he treated? Is he scathed with a flash of retributive displeasure? Who would have wondered if he had been so? But no. Is he upbraided for his past wickedness? Who would have been surprised if he had been stunned with thunders of reproof? But no. Is he received with cold indifference? No. "He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom." What a confirmation is here of that promise, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon"! "Abundantly!" This is a glorious word, a word that, like the boundless heavens of God, towers and expands over a universe of sin.

III. THE CONCURRENT ELEVATION BOTH OF THE SPIRITUAL AND THE SECULAR. The Almighty hears his prayer. He is emancipated from bondage, brought back to his own country, and restored to the throne of Israel. There he is now with a true heart, in a noble position—a real great man occupying a great office. This is a rare scene; and yet the only scene in accordance with the real constitution of things and the will of God. It seems to me that if man had remained in innocence, his outward position would always have been the product and type of his inner soul; that he who got a throne would do so because of the moral nobility of his nature, and that in all cases secular circumstances, whether elevated, affluent, or otherwise, would ever be the effects and exponents of spiritual character. Manasseh's restoration to the throne, and the work of reformation to which he sets himself, suggest two subjects of thought. 1. The *tendency of godliness to promote man's secular elevation.* The monarch comes back in spirit to God, and God brings him back to his throne. As the material condition of men depends upon their moral condition, improve the latter, and you improve the former. As the world gets spiritually holier, it will get secularly happier. Godliness is material as well as moral "gain." The system that best promotes godliness is the system that best promotes man's temporal well-being. And that system is the gospel. Hence, let philanthropists adopt this as their grand instrument. When Christianity shall have won its triumph over all souls, men's bodies will be restored to their lost inheritance of health, elasticity, force, and plenty, as Manasseh was now restored to his lost throne. There is a physical millennium for the world as well as a spiritual; the former will grow out of and reveal the latter, as trees and flowers their hidden life. 2. The *tendency of penitence to make retribution.* Concerning Manasseh, it is thus written: "Now after this he built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah. And he took away the strange gods," etc. Here is restitution, and an earnest endeavour to undo the mischief which he had wrought. Thus Zacchæus acted, and thus all true penitents have ever acted and will ever act. True penitence has a restitutionary instinct. But how little, alas! of the mischief done can ever be undone! What can we do? We cannot destroy the fact of wrong. That fact will never be erased from the moral annals of the universe; it is chronicled with unfading ink on an imperishable substance. What can we do? We cannot destroy the influence of our wrong. The wrong that is gone out from us will roll its pestilential streams down through the ages. What can we do? We can "cease to do evil;" and, thank God! we can do more—we can make some compensation for the injury we have done the creation. We can, by Heaven's grace, open up within us a fountain for the washing away of sin and uncleanness—a fountain whose streams will bless with life and beauty many generations yet to come.—D. T.

Vers. 19—26.—*Amon.* "Amon was twenty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem." This is a short account of the brief and wicked reign of Amon the son of Manasseh.

I. HIS REIGN WAS VERY SHORT. "He reigned two years," etc. The wonder is that such a man should have been permitted to breathe the breath of life. The sooner a bad king dies the better. 1. The better *for his own sake.* It restrains his own responsibilities and the aggravation of his guilt. 2. The better *for his race.* A fountain of moral poison has been dried up for him; the social air is less poisonous.

II. HIS REIGN WAS VERY WICKED. "And he walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them." Of the wickedness of kings we have had abundant examples in these sketches. It is, indeed, a fire that burns athwart the ages.

III. THE REIGN WAS VERY TRAGICAL. "And the servants of Amon conspired against him, and slew the king in his own house." How tragic the end of this man! His "servants," who should have guarded him, murdered him. "His own house," that should have been his castle of defence, was the place of his execution. In this verse the people: 1. *Did justice to the traitors who murdered their king.* 2. *Did kindness to themselves in preparing the way for Josiah.*—D. T.

Vers. 1—9, 16.—*The reaction under Manasseh.* Light and dark alternate strangely in the later history of Judah. Overlooking the brief reign of Amon, Hezekiah alternates with Ahaz, and Josiah with Manasseh. The good kings are very good, the bad kings very bad. The climax of wickedness is reached in Manasseh. He had a good father, as Hezekiah had a wicked one, yet he outstripped in daring ungodliness all the kings before and after him.

I. HIS PRECOCITY IN EVIL. 1. *His tendencies were evil.* Manasseh's tender years when he became king do not wholly explain the strong bent he showed towards evil. He became king, it is true, when he was but twelve, a mere boy, with character unformed, and open to the seductions of wicked courtiers; but Josiah, his grandson, was only eight when he ascended the throne, and he showed a disposition the very opposite. Nor does environment explain everything. Josiah had far fewer advantages than Manasseh. Evil influences were round the young prince, but there were good ones also. Hezekiah his father would give him the best of training; his mother, Hephzibah, if it was she that suggested the prophet's allusion in Isa. lxii. 5, seems to have left a fragrant memory behind her; Isaiah was still living to be his instructor, if he had been willing to be guided as Josiah was (ch. xii. 2); there were also the remarkable mercies God had shown to his father and to the nation but a few years before. Contrast Josiah's position, with Amon for a father, and the country in the state to which it was reduced after half a century of heathenism. There is no accounting for these differences through heredity, environment, or in any other way which ignores personality. While as a rule the children of the good turn out well, and the children of the wicked badly, there are startling exceptions on either side. Some from their childhood seem to be the subjects of an innate, virulent depravity, which only needs opportunity to break out into violent forms of evil. 2. *His environment was evil.* At the same time, it is to be admitted that the circumstances in which he was placed only afforded too much encouragement to the development of Manasseh's ungodly tendencies. It was undeniably a disadvantage to be so early deprived of a father's guidance, and saddled with the responsibilities of a throne. The courtly aristocratic party had never been in real sympathy with Hezekiah's reforms, and they doubtless eagerly embraced the opportunity afforded by the accession of a young king of influencing him to a different line of conduct. Throughout the country also Hezekiah's reformation had been largely external, and people were tired of the restraints which it imposed. The reaction which ensued has been compared to that of Queen Mary's reign after the death of Edward VI., or of the Restoration after the Puritan strictness of the Commonwealth. The upper and aristocratic classes of a country have seldom been marked by their fondness for earnest religion. The way of the world and fashion are far more ruling influences with them, and as at this time "Nineveh was to Western Asia what the Paris of Louis XIV. was to Europe," it can easily be understood that "not to imitate it was to be provincial and vulgar" (Geikie). The moment the heathen spirit got the

upper hand, and secured the countenance of the king, it was sure to prevail. The earnest followers of Jehovah shrank down into an inconsiderable minority.

II. HIS EXCESSES IN IDOLATRY. The account given of Manasseh's doings shows to what lengths he went in undoing the arrangements of his father. He seems, in fact, to have aimed at nothing less than a complete suppression of the worship of Jehovah, and the reorganization of the religious cult of the nation upon foreign models. 1. *He rebuilt the high places.* These Hezekiah had pulled down—a point of attainment to conformity with God's Law not reached by any previous king. Manasseh now reversed that action of his father, and rebuilt the shrines. The centralization of worship in Jerusalem may have been felt to be irksome; perhaps, too, the bad character of many of the priests added to its unpopularity. Manasseh may have claimed to be going back to old custom, with the end of making religion more free, popular, and joyous in its character. In this he had the mass of the people, and most of the official classes with him, as "in England the bulk of the nation and of the clergy returned at once to Romanism, when restored by Mary, after the death of Edward VI." It is a sad thing to see a nation going back from any high point of attainment—Reformation or other—as, again, it is a sad thing to see one individual building again the things which he destroyed (Gal. ii. 18). 2. *His wholesale importation of idolatries.* (1) Foreign idolatries. Manasseh exceeded even Ahaz in the zeal with which he imported idolatries of every kind from foreign nations. Baal and Astarte worship, of course, was introduced after the pattern of Ahab, and the Asherah symbol again reared itself in public view in Jerusalem. The taste of Ahaz for new altars was more than surpassed under the auspices of his successor. There was imported also, in grander style than ever, the worship of the sun and moon and heavenly bodies—the white horses and chariots of the sun being now one of the institutions of the temple (ch. xxiii. 10, 11). "Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods?" asks a prophet (Jer. ii. 11); but Judah had changed her God for senseless idols. A policy of this kind is bound to end in the dissolution of a nation. The deepest bond of nationality is religion, and when a people renounces its traditional faith, and becomes a mere receptacle for a chaos of foreign religious ideas, it is sure, ere long, to fall to pieces. The Roman Empire was in this condition before its fall. (2) The worst idolatries. It was not merely foreign idolatries which Manasseh introduced, but the worst, the vilest, and the most cruel of these idolatries. In particular, licence was given to the practice of the worst and vilest rites of the Astarte-worship, and that close by the very house of the Lord (ch. xxiii. 6, 7); while the fearful worship of Moloch, with its human sacrifices, was revived, and the king himself gave sanction to it by devoting at least one of his sons to the fire. These were the abominations for which God had cast out the original inhabitants of the land, and now they were reintroduced in full force. (3) The attendant superstitions of idolatry. Idolatry here, as elsewhere, brought in its train a host of other baleful superstitions. Those who forsake God have ever been prone to fall a prey to the most childish delusions and impostures. The worship of the heavenly bodies brought with it the practice of astrology; the craving for communion with the unseen world led to necromancy, witchcraft, and enchantments; boasting a false freedom, the mind fell into an abject slavery to demonism (cf. the development of spiritualism in our own day). The movers in this new introduction of idolatry would no doubt claim the praise due to minds enlightened and emancipated from the narrow ideas in which the people of Judah hitherto had been bound. They were bringing in a new era of toleration, culture, breadth of view and sentiment, and the result was to be a great improvement in the state of the nation. In reality they were loosening all religious and social bonds, and opening the floodgates to corruption. 3. *His desecration of the temple.* The tale of Manasseh's iniquities is not yet ended. Not content with bringing new idolatries into vogue, Manasseh set to work systematically to overthrow the worship of Jehovah, and put his foreign gods in the place devoted to Jehovah's honour. Neither Athaliah nor Ahaz had ventured to introduce idolatry into the temple, but Manasseh took this step beyond either of them. He set up his numerous altars in the house of the Lord. Specially he erected altars for the worship of the host of heaven in the two courts of the temple. Then, to cap all, he introduced into the very building itself an image of the Asherah he had made, replete as that was with vile associations. Insult to Jehovah could go no further. In that

very place of which Jehovah had said, "In Jerusalem will I put my Name there;" "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my Name for ever;"—even there, in the very dwelling-place of the holy God among men, this impure symbol was erected. The Asherah-image in the temple was, as it were, the summing-up in symbol of the whole apostasy of the people, the formal token of their breach of the covenant, on fidelity to which depended their possession of the land, and as such, the desecration is frequently alluded to (Jer. vii. 30; xix. 3—5). 4. *His shedding of innocent blood.* This is the final and culminating charge against Manasseh, "He shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." The words speak to a deliberate and organized persecution of Jehovah's servants—perhaps a massacre such as that of St. Bartholomew in France, a determined attempt to crush out in blood all dissent from and opposition to the king's measures. This is the persecution in which it is said that Isaiah perished. It is the shedding of innocent blood which, we are told further, "the Lord would not pardon" (ch. xxiv. 4). "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps. cxvi. 15). We see from this example what the spirit of false toleration, of spurious culture, of the breadth of view which confounds truth and error, leads to; what real intolerance and hatred of God underlie it. Rights of conscience will meet with scant recognition under any system which denies the true God.

III. HIS LATE REPENTANCE. It is a valuable appendix to this history which we find in the Book of Chronicles. There we are told what we should not have suspected from the narrative before us, that Manasseh late in life repented of his sin, and obtained mercy from God (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—17). We have had instances of kings reigning well through the greater parts of their lives and failing at the close; this is the first and only case of a Jewish king reigning ill and finally repenting. We are taught by the story of Manasseh's repentance: 1. *The seeds of early instruction may blossom after many days.* Who can doubt but that it was the impressions received in early days which at last revived, and brought Manasseh back to Jehovah. 2. *There is hope for the worst sinners.* After Manasseh, surely any one. Nor did his conversion take place till his course was nearly run. We should despair of none. Miracles of grace as great as this have perhaps rarely been witnessed, but they have been witnessed. 3. *God subdues men to himself by affliction.* It was while a prisoner in Babylon—taken there by the captains of the King of Assyria—that Manasseh found the Lord. 4. *Repentance does not always secure the reversal of the temporal effects of sin.* The wickedness of Manasseh through a long reign wrought out its effects independently of him. His conversion came too late to undo them. The blood he had shed "the Lord would not pardon." The nation was inculpated as well as he, and though he repented, it did not. It is an awful thought that no after-repentance can obliterate the effects of words spoken and deeds done while sin still had dominion over us. Nor can the effects of sin on our own health, characters, usefulness, etc., ever be completely recalled.—J. O.

Vers. 10—18.—*Prophetic denunciations.* In all that he had done, Manasseh had not only sinned himself, but had "seduced" others to sin (ver. 9). Persons in high positions have this great influence. They are the natural social leaders, and their example tells powerfully for good or evil. The prophets, however, though as it proved at the risk of their lives, did not fail to warn him. It was no doubt their faithful denunciations, and the terrible evils they predicted, which brought down upon them the king's wrath, and led to the great persecution.

I. MANASSEH MORE WICKED THAN THE CANAANITES. He had "done wickedly above all that the Amorites did." His deeds may have been the same, but his guilt was greater than theirs, inasmuch as: 1. *His light was greater than theirs.* The Canaanites had the light of nature, and that, indeed, sufficed to render them inexcusable (Rom. i. 18—32; ii. 14, 15). But Manasseh had the light of revelation. He was king of a nation to which God had made fully known the truth of his Being, character, and attributes; which had laws and statutes given to it such as no other nation possessed (Deut. iv. 6—8); and which enjoyed the living ministry of holy prophets. He had also had the advantage of a pious father's example and training. For such a one to go back to the sins of the Amorites was a heinous offence. It made his wickedness greater than theirs. We shall be judged by the light we possess (Luke xii. 47, 48),

and if our light is not improved it will be more tolerable for heathen nations than for us (Matt. xi. 21—24; xii. 41, 42). 2. *He was guilty of apostasy; they were not.* If the Amorities did these abominations, and served these idols, it could at least be said that they had never lived under any other system. God had suffered them to walk in their own way (Acts xiv. 16; xvii. 30). But in his evil Manasseh was guilty of a direct act of apostasy. He was going back from past attainments. He was violating a covenant made at Sinai, and repeatedly renewed. It is a different thing for a heathen to commit the vile acts in which he has been brought up, and for a Christian to renounce Christian training and baptismal engagements, and do the same acts. 3. *The corruption of the best is the worst.* This is another principle which explains why Manasseh's abominations are represented as worse than those of the Amorites. A nation, being once enlightened, cannot sin as the semi-ignorant heathen do. It develops worse and more virulent evils. As a brute cannot sin in the same way as a man, or a child in the same way as an adult, so a nation enlightened by revelation can no longer sin as a nation does which has not this light. The higher consciousness reacts upon the sin and modifies it. There are evils possible under a Christian civilization which surpass anything known in heathenism. If our great cities show higher heights of virtue, they could also reveal lower depths of vice than Nineveh, Rome, Pekin, or Calcutta.

II. THE SEVERITY OF JERUSALEM'S PUNISHMENT. 1. *The grounds of the punishment.* These are twofold: (1) Manasseh's sins as above described. "Because Manasseh King of Judah hath done these abominations," etc. (ver. 11). In this sin of the king, however, the people shared. He "made Judah also to sin with his idols." King and people, therefore, must suffer together. There is a corporate responsibility, which involves a community in common guilt, whether the sin proceeds from the head or the members. (2) The entail of past transgression. "Because they have done evil in my sight . . . since the day their fathers came forth from Egypt, unto this day" (ver. 15). That entail would have been cut off by timely repentance, but, in default of repentance, the guilt continues to be handed down. This is another phase of corporate responsibility. The life of the nation is continuous, and one generation has to accept its responsibilities from another. We see the same principle, *e.g.*, in the handing down of national doubt. Christ views the Jewish nation of his day as chargeable with all the righteous blood that had been shed from the days of Abel downwards (Matt. xxiii. 35). 2. *The character of the punishment.* It would be: (1) Startling. "Such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle." Wars, sieges of cities, and captivities, with the horrors attendant on them, were common enough in those days, but this vengeance of God on Jerusalem would be so awful as to shock and amaze even those familiarized with such scenes. The very report of it would produce a stinging sound in their ears. The fulfilment of the threat was partly under Nebuchadnezzar, but completely under the Romans (Matt. xxiv. 21). (2) Measured. "I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab." The idea is that God would take strict account of Judah's sin, as already he had done of that of Samaria. The measuring-line and plummet are introduced for purposes of precision. God would measure exactly the transgression of the people; would note precisely the degree of their deviation from righteousness (cf. Amos vii. 7—9); and to this measured guilt the punishment would be proportioned. The reason of measurement was that judgment was no more to be qualified by mercy. The nation was to bear the full load of its iniquity. It is a terrible thing when God thus "marks iniquity" (Ps. cxxx. 3); for then the case of the sinner is hopeless. (3) Complete. "I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish," etc. "I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance," etc. The figure of cleansing out a dish till it is as clean as wiping can make it is a very graphic one for the utter emptying and desolation that was to overtake Jerusalem. The city would not simply be humbled, as on many previous occasions, but would be completely destroyed, and the people led away by their enemies as a prey and a spoil. The predictions, as we know, were fulfilled to the letter. Manasseh might kill the men who uttered them, but he could not hinder their words from coming true; nay, his violence put a new seal on the certainty of their fulfilment. In the temporal calamities that were to overtake Jerusalem, we find a proof that verily there "is a God

that judgeth in the earth" (Ps. lviii. 11), and we are warned lest we provoke his "wrath to the uttermost" (1 Thess. ii. 16) by our own impenitence.

III. MANASSEH'S DEATH. The reign of more than half a century came at length to a close, and, though the last years of it were marked by repentance, it left indelible traces of evil on the condition of the people. That by which Manasseh was specially remembered was "his sin that he sinned." He was buried in "the garden of his own house, the garden of Uzza." Amon also was buried in this garden (ver. 26). There was another garden which had a sepulchre in it (John xix. 41); but how different the sleepers!—J. O.

Vers. 19—26.—*The reign of Amon.* In this king we have—

I. A PALER COPY OF HIS FATHER. The only noteworthy facts about Amon, during his brief two years' reign, are: 1. *His imitation of Manasseh's wickedness.* His father, during the greater part of his reign, had set an evil example, but towards its close he had repented. Amon did not imitate the repentance, but imitated the sin. He walked in all the ways his father had walked in, apparently setting up again the idols which his father had latterly removed (2 Chron. xxxiii. 15). 2. *He was the father of a good son*, viz. Josiah, his successor. This is another of the surprising alternations of character already alluded to. How Josiah came out of such a home with the character he did must remain inexplicable, unless we are to attribute it to his grandfather's influence after his return from Babylon.

II. ANOTHER VICTIM OF COURT CONSPIRACY. Joash and Amaziah among the kings of Judah had met their death by conspiracy (ch. xii. 20, 21; xiv. 19), and many of the kings of Israel had thus perished. But no king of Judah came to this end till he had first fallen away from God. Amon had a like miserable death. His servants conspired against him, and slew him in his own house. The fact that they dared to do so may indicate a tendency to reaction in the public mind against the excesses of idolatry in which the king indulged. The people, however, had no intention of allowing conspirators to seize the throne, so they slew the murderers, and set up Josiah as king. This, again, for a time led to a great reaction for the better.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXII.

Vers. 1—20.—ACCESSION OF JOSIAH. REPAIR OF THE TEMPLE. RECOVERY OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW.

Vers. 1—7.—GENERAL CHARACTER OF JOSIAH'S REIGN. *His repair of the temple.* The writer begins his account of Josiah's reign with the usual brief summary, giving his age at his accession, the length of his reign, his mother's name and birthplace (ver. 1), and the general character of his rule (ver. 2). He then proceeds to mention some circumstances connected with the repair of the temple, which Josiah had taken in hand (vers. 3—7).

Ver. 1.—Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign. So the writer of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxiv. 1) and Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 4. § 1). He must have been born, therefore, when his father was no more than sixteen years of age, and Amon must have married when he was only fifteen. **And he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem.** Probably from B.C. 640 to B.C. 609—a most important period of the world's history, including, as it does, (1) the great Scythic invasion; (2) the fall of Assyria; (3) the formation of the Median empire; and the foundation of the Babylonian empire by Nabopolasar. **And his mother's name** was **Jedidah**—*i.e.* "Darling"—**the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath.** Boscath is mentioned as among the cities of Judah (Josh. xv. 39). It lay in the Shefelah (Josh. xv. 33), not far from Lachish and Eglon. The recent explorers of Palestine identify it with the modern *Um-el-Bikar*, two miles and a half south-east of Ajlun (Eglon). (See the 'Map of Western Palestine,' published by Mr. Trelawny Saunders.)

Ver. 2.—**And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David his father.** This is a stronger expression than any which has been used of any previous king of Judah except Hezekiah, and indicates a very high degree of approval. The son of Sirach says of Josiah, "The remembrance of Josias is

like the composition of the perfume that is made by the art of the apothecary: it is sweet as honey in all mouths, and as music at a banquet of wine. He behaved himself uprightly in the conversion of the people, and took away the abominations of iniquity. He directed his heart unto the Lord, and in the time of the ungodly he established the worship of God. *All, except David and Ezekias and Josias, were defective:* for they forsook the Law of the Most High, even the kings of Judah failed" (see Ecclus. xlix. 1—4). **And turned not aside to the right hand or to the left;** *i.e.* he never deviated from the right path (comp. Deut. v. 32; xvii. 11, 20; xxviii. 14; Josh. i. 7; xxiii. 6).

Ver. 3.—**And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of King Josiah** (comp. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 8). The writer of Kings, bent on abbreviating as much as possible, omits the early reforms of Josiah, which are related in 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3—7, with perhaps some anticipation of what happened later. The young king gave marked indications of personal piety and attachment to true religion as early as the eighth year of his reign, when he was sixteen, and had just attained his majority (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 232, note). Later, in his twelfth year, he began the purging of the temple and of Jerusalem, at the same time probably commencing the repairs spoken of in ver. 9. Jeremiah's prophesying, begun in the same or in the next year (Jer. i. 2), must have been a powerful assistance to his reformation. **That the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the Lord, saying.** Shaphan held the office which Shebna had held in the later part of Hezekiah's reign (ch. xviii. 18), an office of much importance and dignity. According to the author of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxiv. 8), there were associated with him on this occasion two other personages of importance, viz. Maaseiah, the governor of the city (comp. 1 Kings xxii. 26), and Joah the son of Joahaz, the "recorder," or "remembrancer."

Ver. 4.—**Go up to Hilkiah the high priest.** Hilkiah is mentioned again in the genealogy of Ezra (Ezra vii. 1). He is there called "the son of Shallum." **That he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the Lord.** A collection must have been progressing for some time. As in the reign of Joash, after the impieties and idolatry of Athaliah, it was found necessary to collect money for the repair of the temple (ch. xii. 4—14), so now, after the wicked doings of Manasseh and Amon, a renovation of the sacred building was required, and the money needed was being raised by a collection. Great care was taken in all such cases that an exact account should be kept and rendered. **Which the keepers of the door**—literally, *of the threshold*—**have gathered of the people.** The money had, apparently, been allowed to accumulate in a box or boxes (see ch. xii. 9), from the time when the collection was first authorized, probably six years previously. The high priest was now required to count it, to take the sum of it, and undertake the distribution.

Ver. 5.—**And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the Lord.** The "doers that have the oversight" are not the actual workmen, but the superintendents or overseers of the workmen, who hired them, looked after them, and paid them. **And let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the Lord**—let the overseers, *i.e.*, give out the money to the actual workmen, the carpenters, etc., of the next verse—**to repair the breaches of the house;** rather, *the dilapidation of the house.* It is not implied that any violence had been used, such as is required to make a "breach." The "house" had simply been allowed to fall into disrepair.

Ver. 6.—**Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber, and hewn stone to repair the house** (comp. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 11). The money had to be expended, partly in labour, partly in materials. The materials consisted of both wood and stone, since it was of these that Solomon's temple had been built (see 1 Kings v. 18; vi. 7, 9, 10, 15, 36).

Ver. 7.—**Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully** (comp. ch. xii. 15). The superintendents or overseers were persons of position, in whom full confidence was placed. Their names are given in 2 Chron. xxxiv. 12. They were, all of them, Levites.

Vers. 8—14.—*Discovery of the book of the Law.* When Shaphan had transacted with Hilkiah the business entrusted to him by the king, Hilkiah took the opportunity of sending word by him to the king with respect to a discovery that he had recently made, during the investigations connected with the repairs. He had found a book, which he called without any doubt or hesitation, "the book of the Law"—סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה—and this book he put into the hands of Shaphan, who "read it," *i.e.* some of it, and found it of such importance that he took it back with him to the palace, and

read a portion to the king. Hereupon the king "rent his clothes," and required that special inquiry should be made of the Lord concerning the words of the book, and particularly concerning the threatenings contained in it. The persons entrusted with this task thought it best to lay the matter before Huldah, a prophetess, who lived in Jerusalem at the time, and proceeded to confer with her at her residence.

Ver. 8.—And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the Law in the house of the Lord. There has been great difference of opinion as to what it was which Hilkiah had found. Ewald believes it to have been the Book of Deuteronomy, which had, he thinks, been composed some thirty or forty years before in Egypt by a Jewish exile, and had found its way, *by a sort of chance*, into Palestine, where "*some priest*" had placed a copy of it in the temple ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. pp. 233—235). Thenius suggests "a collection of the laws and ordinances of Moses, which was afterwards worked up into the Pentateuch;" Bertheau, "the three middle books of the Pentateuch, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers;" Gramberg, "Exodus by itself." But there seem to be no sufficient grounds for questioning the ancient opinion—that of Josephus, and of the Jews generally—that it was a copy of the entire Pentateuch. (So De Wette, 'Einleitung in das Alt. Test.,' § 162 *a*; Keil, 'Commentary on Kings,' pp. 477, 478; Bähr, 'Commentary,' vol. vi. p. 257; and others). The words, סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה, "*the* book of the Law," are really sufficient to decide the point; since, as Keil says, they "cannot mean anything else, either grammatically or historically, than the Mosaic book of the Law (the Pentateuch), which is so designated, as is generally admitted, in the Chronicles and the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah." The same conclusion follows from the expression, "the book of the covenant" (סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית), in ch. xxiii. 2, and also from ch. xxiii. 24, 25, and 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14. Whether or no the copy was the actual original deposited in the ark of the covenant by Moses (Deut. xxxi. 26), as Keil believes, is doubtful. As Egyptian manuscripts which are from three to four thousand years old still exist in good condition, there can be no reason why a manuscript of Moses' time should not have been found and have been legible in Josiah's. But, if not the actual handwriting of Moses, it was probably its lineal descendant—the copy made for the temple service, and kept ordinarily "in the side of the ark"—which may well have been lost in the time of Manasseh or Amon, and which was now happily "found." **And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.** We need not suppose that Shaphan read the whole. But he read enough to show him how important the work was, and how necessary it was to make it known to the king.

Ver. 9.—**And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was in the house** (see above, vers. 4—6), **and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the Lord**; *i.e.* "We have carried out the king's orders exactly, in every particular."

Ver. 10.—**And Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book.** Shaphan does not venture to characterize the book, as Hilkiah has done. He is not officially learned in the Law. And he has only read a few passages of it. To him, therefore, it is only "a book," the authorship and value of which he leaves it to others to determine. **And Shaphan read it before the king.** It is most natural to understand here, as in ver. 8, that Shaphan read portions of the book. Where the author intends to say that the whole book was read, he expresses himself differently (see ch. xxiii. 2, "The king read in their ears *all the words* of the book of the covenant").

Ver. 11.—**And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the Law, that he rent his clothes.** To Josiah the book was evidently, as to Hilkiah, in some sort a discovery. It was not, however, a wholly new thing; rather, he accepted it as the recovery of a thing that was known to have been lost, and was now happily found. And in accepting it he regarded it as authoritative. It was not to him "*a* book of Law" (Ewald), but "*the* book of *the* Law." We can well imagine that, although the book may have been lost early in Manasseh's reign, yet echoes of it had lingered on (1) in the liturgies of the Jehovistic worship; (2) in the teachings of the prophets; (3) in the traditional teaching of religious families; so that the pious ear recognized its phrases as familiar. It is also probable that there were external tokens about the book indicative of its character, which caused its ready acceptance.

Ver. 12.—**And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan.** "Ahikam the son of Shaphan" is almost certainly Jeremiah's protector at the court of Jehoiakim (Jer. xxvi. 24), the father of the Gedaliah who was made go-

vernor of Judæa on Nebuchadnezzar's final conquest (Jer. xxxix. 14; xl. 7). "Shaphan," his father, is no doubt "Shaphan the scribe." **And Achbor the son of Michaiah.** The parallel passage of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxiv. 20) has "Abdon the son of Micah," which is probably a corrupt reading. Achbor was the father of El-nathan, one of the "princes of Judah" (Jer. xxxvi. 12) in Jehoiakim's reign. **And Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's**—or *Asaiah*, as the name is given in Chronicles, *l. s. c.*—**saying,**

Ver. 13.—**Go ye, inquire of the Lord for me.** Inquiry of the Lord, which from the time of Moses to that of David was ordinarily "by Urim and Thummim," was after David's time always made by the consultation of a prophet (see 1 Kings xxii. 5—8; ch. iii. 11; viii. 8; Jer. xxi. 2; xxxvii. 7; Ezek. xiv. 7; xx. 1, etc.). The officers, therefore, understood the king to mean that they were to seek out a prophet (see ver. 14), and so make the inquiry. **And for the people, and for all Judah**—the threats read in the king's ears were probably those of Deut. xxviii. 15—68 or Lev. xxvi. 16—39, which extended to the whole people—**concerning the words of this book that is found.** Not "whether they are authentic, whether they are really the words of Moses" (Duncker), for of that Josiah appears to have had no doubt; but whether they are words that are to have an immediate fulfilment, "whether," as Von Gerlach says, "the measure of sin is already full, or whether there is yet hope of grace?" (compare Huldah's answer in vers. 16—20, which shows what she understood the king's inquiry to be). **For great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us.** Josiah recognized that Judah had done, and was still doing, exactly those things against which the threatenings of the Law were directed—had forsaken Jehovah, and gone after other gods, and made to themselves high places, and set up images, and done after the customs of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before them. He could not, therefore, doubt but that the wrath of the Lord "was kindled;" but would it blaze forth at once? **Because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.** Josiah assumes that their fathers have had the book, and might have known its words, either because he conceives that it had not been very long lost, or because he regards them as having possessed other copies.

Ver. 14.—**So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah.** The principal prophets at or very near the time were Jeremiah, whose mission had commenced in Josiah's thirteenth year (Jer. i. 2), and Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, whose prophecy appears by internal evidence to have belonged to the earliest part of Josiah's reign (Pusey, 'Minor Prophets,' p. 438). It might have been expected that the matter would have been laid before one of these two persons. Possibly, however, neither of them was at Jerusalem. Jeremiah's early home was Anathoth, and Zephaniah may have finished his course before Josiah's eighteenth year (see Pusey, *l. s. c.*). Huldah may thus have been the only possessor of the prophetic gift who was accessible. **The son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe;** literally, *keeper of the garments* (comp. ch. x. 22). In Chronicles the name of the keeper is given as "Hasrah." **Now she dwelt at Jerusalem in the college**—rather, *in the lower city* (comp. Zeph. i. 10 and Neh. xi. 9; literally, in each place, "the *second* city")—**and they communed with her;** literally, *spoke with her;* ἐλάλησαν πρὸς αὐτήν, LXX.

Vers. 15—20.—*The prophecy of Huldah.* The word of the Lord comes to Huldah with the arrival of the messengers, or perhaps previous to it, and she is at once ready with her reply. It divides itself into two parts. In vers. 15—17 the inquiry made is answered—answered affirmatively, "Yes, the fiat is gone forth; it is too late to avert the sentence; the anger of the Lord is kindled, and *shall not be quenched.*" After this, in vers. 18—20, a special message is sent to the king, granting him an arrest of judgment, on account of his self-humiliation and abasement. "Because his heart was tender, and he had humbled himself before Jehovah, the evil should not happen in his day."

Ver. 15.—**And she said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel.** Huldah is the only example of a prophetess in Israel, who seems to rank on the same footing with the prophets. Miriam (Exod. xv. 20), Deborah (Judg. iv. 4), Isaiah's wife (Isa. viii. 2), and Anna (Luke ii. 36) are called "prophetesses," but in a secondary sense, as holy women, having a certain gift of song or prediction from God. Huldah has the full prophetic afflatus, and delivers God's oracles, just as Isaiah and Jeremiah do. The case is a remarkable exception to the general rule that women should "keep silence in the Churches." **Tell the man that sent you to me.** The contrast between this unceremonious phrase and that used in ver. 18 is best explained by Thenius, who

says, "In the first part Huldah has only the subject-matter in mind, while in ver. 18, in the quieter flow of her words, she takes notice of the state of mind of the particular person who sent to make the inquiry."

Ver. 16.—**Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place**—*i.e.* Jerusalem—**and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the King of Judah hath read.** In the parallel passage of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxiv. 24) the expression used is stronger, viz. "Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even *all the curses* that are written in the book which they have read before the King of Judah." The passage which most strongly affected Josiah was probably that, already mentioned, in Deut. xxviii., which began with a series of curses.

Ver. 17.—**Because they have forsaken me.** This was the gist of their offence, the thing that was unpardonable. Against this were all the chief warnings in the Law (Deut. xii. 19; xxix. 25—28; xxxi. 16, 17; xxxii. 15, etc.) and the prophets (Judg. x. 13; 1 Sam. viii. 8; xii. 9; 1 Kings ix. 9; xi. 33; xviii. 18; Isa. i. 4; lxv. 11; Jer. i. 16; ii. 13, etc.). It was not merely that they broke the commandments, but they turned from God altogether, and "cast him behind their back." **And have burned incense unto other gods** (comp. ch. xxiii. 5; and see also Jer. i. 18; vii. 9; xi. 13; xliv. 19, etc.), **that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands**; *i.e.* "with the idols that they have made for themselves" (Keil) (comp. 1 Kings xvi. 7). **Therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place**—*i.e.* against Jerusalem—**and shall not be quenched.** Here lies the whole point of the answer. God's threatenings against nations are for the most part conditional, and may be escaped, or at least their fulfilment may be deferred indefinitely, by repentance, as we learn from the example of Nineveh (Jonah iii. 1—10). But if a nation persists long in evil-doing, there comes a time when the sentence can be no longer averted. A real repentance has become impossible, and a mock one does but provoke God the more. For such a state of things there is "no remedy" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 16), and this was the state of things reached by the Jews. God's anger against them could not be quenched.

Ver. 18.—**But to the King of Judah which sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him** (see the comment on ver. 15), **Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard**; *i.e.* the words that were read to thee by Shaphan (ver. 10)—the awful threats which caused thee to rend thy clothes and to make inquiry of me.

Ver. 19.—**Because thine heart was tender**—or, *faint, timid* (comp. Deut. xx. 3; Isa. vii. 4)—**and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord.** Rending the garments (ver. 11) was an outward act of humiliation. Josiah had accompanied it by inward repentance and self-abasement. He had even been moved to tears (see the last clause but one of this verse). **When thou heardest what I spake against this place.** The book was, therefore, a record of what God had really spoken, not a fraud imposed on the king by the high priest, or on the high priest (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 235) by an unknown Egyptian exile. **And against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse.** This is not a direct quotation from the Law, but a summary, in pregnant language, of the general effect of such passages as Lev. xxvi. 31—35 and Deut. xxviii. 15—20. The language is like that of Jeremiah in xxvi. 6; xli. 18; xliv. 22. **And hast rent thy clothes** (see ver. 11), **and wept before me.** This had not been previously stated, but might have been gathered from Josiah's evident sincerity, and from the ordinary habits of Orientals (comp. ch. viii. 11; xiii. 14; xx. 3). **I also have heard thee, saith the Lord** The general sense of vers. 18, 19 is, as Bähr notes, "Because thou hast heard me and taken heed to my threats, I also have heard thee, and will delay their fulfilment."

Ver. 20.—**Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace.** There is a seeming contradiction between these words and the fact of Josiah's violent death in battle against Pharaoh-Nechoh (ch. xxiii. 29). But the contradiction is not a real one. Huldah was commissioned to assure Josiah that, though the destruction of his kingdom and the desolation of Judæa and Jerusalem, threatened in the Law, were at hand, yet they would not come in his day. He would not see the evil time. Before it came he would be "gathered to his fathers"—buried, *i.e.*, in Jerusalem, as his predecessors had been (ch. xxiii. 30), and not hurried off into captivity, to die in a foreign land, or given "the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth before the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. xxii. 19). The promise given him was fulfilled. He died in battle; but he was buried in peace (2 Chron. xxxv. 24, 25); and the fated enemy who was to destroy Jerusalem, and carry the Jewish nation into captivity, did not make any attack upon the land until three years later, when he was departed to his rest, and the throne was occupied by Jehoiakim (see ch. xxiv. 1). **And thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place**; *i.e.* the three sieges of Nebuchadnezzar, the destruction of the

temple and city by Nebuzar-adan (ch. xxv. 9, 10), the deportation of the bulk of the inhabitants (ch. xxv. 11), and the calamities which happened to the remnant left (ch. xxv. 22—26). Josiah did not witness any of this. He was "taken away from the evil to come." **And they brought the king word again**; *i.e.* Hilkiah, Shaphan, and their companions (ver. 14) reported to Josiah the message which Huldah had sent by them.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—13.—*A righteous branch from a wicked root.* Josiah is the most astonishing instance that is contained in Scripture of goodness springing up, and attaining high perfection under the most extraordinarily unfavourable circumstances. Josiah was—

I. THE SON OF AN EXTRAORDINARILY WICKED FATHER. Amon, Josiah's father, did evil in the sight of the Lord to an extent scarcely equalled even by any of the Israelite monarchs. "He forsook the Lord God of his fathers" (ch. xxi. 22), and gave himself wholly up to idolatry. And he did this notwithstanding the example of his father's fall, punishment, and repentance. As the writer of Chronicles says (2 Chron. xxxiii. 23), "he trespassed more and more." Every idolatry of every neighbouring country was adopted by him and reintroduced into Judah; the temple was defiled afresh; the fires of Tophet were relighted; sodomites polluted the temple precincts (ch. xxiii. 7). Wickedness of every kind was encouraged, not only idolatry and debauchery, but "violence and deceit" (Zeph. i. 9), profane swearing (Zeph. i. 5), luxury in apparel (Zeph. i. 8), covetousness (Zeph. i. 18), oppression (Zeph. iii. 1), injustice (Zeph. iii. 2), treachery (Zeph. iii. 3), and utter shamelessness (Zeph. iii. 5).

II. THE GRANDSON OF A STILL MORE WICKED GRANDFATHER. Manasseh was worse than Amon in that he set at nought all the restraints of his bringing up, the example of his saintly father, and the instruction of Isaiah, whom he is said to have executed. He was worse, again, as the original introducer of many most corrupting idolatries which, but for his example, Amon might never have thought of. And he was worse as enforcing his false and impure religion on those who were reluctant to adopt it by means of persecution, and so "filling Jerusalem with innocent blood from one end to another" (ch. xxi. 16)—a sin which is never laid to the charge of Amon. If heredity be indeed the strong predisposing cause which modern biologists assert it to be, what depths of depravity might not a prince have been expected to sound, who had such a father as Amon, such a grandfather as Manasseh!

III. BROUGHT UP IN A CORRUPT COURT. Manasseh's court, even after his repentance, was probably but half-purified. Amon's must have been a sink of corruption. Childish innocence is soon lost in an atmosphere of profligacy; and Josiah, ere he was eight years of age, had probably been made to witness many of the worst forms of human depravity. "Nil dictu fœdum facture hæc limina tangat intra quæ puer est" was a maxim not likely to obtain much observance in a palace where the rites of the Syrian goddess were approved and practised.

IV. WITHOUT, SO FAR AS WE KNOW, ANY RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTOR. Isaiah had been martyred in the earlier portion of Manasseh's reign. Micah had gone to his rest even earlier. Jeremiah did not receive his call until Josiah's thirteenth year (Jer. i. 2). Habakkuk and Zephaniah lived, perhaps, under Amon, but are not likely to have been allowed access to his court, much less opportunity for influencing the heir to the throne. Josiah's official tutors and instructors under Amon must undoubtedly have been persons devoted to the court religion, which was the syncretic idolatry conceived by Manasseh and maintained by his successor. It is not quite easy to see how the young prince would come into contact with any of the professors of true religion, or obtain any knowledge of the Jehovistic worship.

Such, however, was the natural purity and strength of character by God's grace implanted in the young prince from the first, that to none of the evil influences within him or without him did he succumb. It is declared of him in the infallible Word, that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in *all* the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left" (ver. 2). As soon as he had any power to show what his inclinations were, as soon (that is) as

he was free from the trammels which confined a Jewish prince during his minority, he courageously set himself to undo the ill that his father and grandfather had done, to abolish the strange rites, to drive out the foul idolatries, and to restore the worship of Jehovah. And he earned the praise that "Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him" (ch. xxiii. 25). We may learn from this history not to assign too much weight to a man's surroundings, but to hold firm to the belief that there is in each man a sufficient force of personality and will to enable him, if his heart be set on well-doing, to resist any amount of external circumstances, and to mould his life and character for himself, even in the exact opposite shape to that whereto all the external circumstances pointed, and which they might have seemed to have rendered necessary.

Vers. 8—13.—*A strange loss, and a strange recovery.* The loss by a nation of its sacred book is a strange and extraordinary occurrence. Books deemed sacred are naturally so highly valued and so deeply reverenced that the utmost care is taken of them. Generally, copies are multiplied and are in so many hands that the loss of all, while the nation itself survives, is practically impossible. It is practically impossible, nowadays, that the Christians should lose their Bible, or the Mohammedans their Korán, or the Hindoos their Vedas, or the Parsees their Zendavesta, or the Chinese their Shu-King or their Taou-tih-King. To understand what had taken place in Palestine shortly before Josiah came to the throne, we must consider the peculiar circumstances of the Jewish religion, and the place which "the book of Law" occupied in it. The following points are especially worthy of note.

I. THE ORIGINAL BOOK OF THE LAW WAS DEPOSITED BESIDE THE ARK, AND KEPT THERE. "It came to pass," we are told, "when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this Law in a book, until they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the Law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against them" (Deut. xxxi. 24—26).

II. THERE WAS NO PROVISION FOR MAKING COPIES OF IT UNTIL SUCH TIME AS ISRAEL SHOULD HAVE KINGS. Then indeed each king was to "write him a copy of the Law in a book out of that which was before the priests the Levites" (Deut. xvii. 18). But, except on such occasions, the book, it would seem, remained in the ark, and was not lent about to be copied.

III. THE DESIGN WAS TO MAKE THE LAW KNOWN TO THE PEOPLE BY READING IT TO THEM PUBLICLY. Such reading was prescribed once in each seven years, in the sabbatical year, at the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. xxxi. 10—13). Under Nehemiah certainly (Neh. viii. 2—5), perhaps at other times, the precept was acted on.

IV. MULTIPLICATION OF COPIES WAS NOT NEEDED FOR SYNAGOGUES, WHICH DID NOT AS YET EXIST. The result was that probably, besides the temple copy, very few copies of the Law had at any time existed. Irreligious kings, as Rehoboam, Abijah, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon, would, as a matter of course, disobey the precept to make a copy; and it is not even certain that all religious kings would carry out the precept. David, whose delight was in the Law (Ps. cxix. 77), Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, would almost certainly have made copies; but Solomon may not have done so, nor Amaziah, nor Uzziah, nor Jotham. If the prophets seem to show such a familiarity with the Law as implies constant study, it may well be that the "schools of the prophets" were in possession of some of the royal autograph copies, or the prophets may have been allowed access as often as they required it to the temple copy. Passages of the Law, as the Decalogue and other precepts regarding conduct, or, again, the promises made to the patriarchs, and to the nation at large through Moses, may have been widely known, being fixed in the memory of the people, and passed on from father to son by word of mouth. And these well-known passages may also have sometimes taken a written shape. But entire copies of the Law must, even in the time of the later kings, have been exceedingly scarce. Thus when an irreligious king like Manasseh set aside the Jehovistic worship, and thrust, it may be, into lumber-rooms, the old furniture of the temple, so that the book of the Law, *i.e.* the temple copy, became mislaid or lost, there was no very ready way of replacing it. Nor, perhaps, did there seem to be any

absolute necessity of so doing. Except once in seven years, the reading of the Law does not appear to have formed a part of any temple service. The precepts of the Law were inculcated orally by priests and Levites, who had received them from their predecessors. Hilkiah and the priests generally were probably content to carry on the traditional teaching, and did not feel the need of seeking the water of life from the fountain-head. But suddenly a discovery was made. There had been no wanton or malignant destruction of the book of the Law. It had merely been thrust out of sight, and then forgotten. As the repair and restoration of the temple proceeded, and even lumber-rooms and closets were searched, that the whole building might be brought into proper order, those employed in the work came upon the lost volume. It was, probably, very easily recognized. As Bähr says, it may have been "distinguished by its external appearance, size, material, beauty of the writing," etc., as the Samaritan copy of the Pentateuch at Nablous is distinguished. Or it may have had for its title, "The Book of the Law of the Lord *by the hand of Moses*" (2 Chron. xxxiv. 14). There may even have been priests living who had seen the book before it was lost, and knew it as the volume with which, fifty years before, they had been familiar. At any rate, priests, king, and people unanimously, though with much grief and fear, accepted it. The prophetess, who was God's mouthpiece at the time, confirmed their view; and it remained for nineteenth-century critics to throw a doubt upon the conclusion thus come to, and to brand the work as a forgery of Hilkiah's, or as a *chance* production of a *chance* author, who had amused himself by composing a code of laws for a Utopia.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1—ch. xxiii. 30.—*The reign of King Josiah.* The last days of Judah as an independent kingdom are fast hastening to a close. The people, in spite of all God's merciful dealings with them, in spite of all the judgments and warnings which he had sent to their fathers, in spite of the influence and example of good kings and holy prophets whom he had raised up, were becoming worse and worse. More than a hundred years before, God had already abolished the kingdom of Israel, when the ten tribes were led away into captivity. And now for their great idolatries the destruction of the kingdom of Judah also is close at hand. In the midst of this period of decline and decay Josiah came to the throne to redeem for a time the history of his nation, and for a time to save it from its impending doom.

I. JOSIAH'S EARLY DEVOTION. We read that in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father. He was then sixteen years of age. 1. He began to seek after God *in a time of almost universal godlessness and corruption.* It is almost impossible for us to conceive the depth of degradation to which the nation had sunk. Two wicked kings in succession had undone all the reforms of good King Hezekiah. The first of these was Hezekiah's own son, Manasseh, the second was Manasseh's son, Amon. Manasseh worshipped all the host of heaven, and built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. He set up the worship of Moloch, which is almost too terrible to describe (see above on ch. xvi. 1—20). He made his own son to pass through the fire to Moloch. He introduced not only the horrid *cruelty* of heathenism, but also its most filthy *lusts.* The reign of Amon was no better, but worse. He revived and continued all the idolatries and all the corruption of his father's reign. It was at such a time as this that, when Amon died, his son Josiah, then only eight years old, came to the throne. At such a time as this he began to seek after the Lord his God. 2. *Moreover, he was the son of a godless and wicked father.* All the influences which surrounded him seem to have been unfavourable to the growth of true religion and the fear of God. But Josiah determined that, as for him, he would not bow down to idols, that he would serve the Lord only. And God gave him strength to serve him, and crowned his subsequent efforts with blessing and success. Learn here *the folly of excusing yourself from serving God by the circumstances in which you are placed.* You are responsible to God for your *own* life, and for your own conduct, no matter how others may act. It may cost us many a hard struggle to resist the temptations that surround us on every side; but it always succeeds in the end. You may be children of ungodly parents; you may be at service in ungodly households;

you may be thrown by your business among ungodly companions and surroundings;—no matter! God expects you to be faithful unto him. Young men, Josiah's early devotion is a bright example for you to follow. Never suffer yourselves to be led astray by the notion that religion is an unmanly thing. The truly religious man is the noblest and most perfect man. He is great in all that constitutes true manhood. And if you want to find the greatest heroes in the world's history, you will find them, not among the followers of the world's fashion and the world's pleasure, but among the prophets, apostles, martyrs, and humble Christians in the Church of God. It is the highest aim any young man can set before him to be a humble and devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Never mind what circumstances or companions surround you, except to try and make them better. Joseph was faithful to God in Egypt. His faithfulness sent him to a prison for a time; but afterwards it raised him to be the greatest man in Egypt after the king. Daniel was faithful to God in Babylon, though he knew well it was at the risk of his life. His faithfulness brought him for a little while to the lions' den; but it afterwards made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon. It is true heroism to be ready to suffer—to suffer bodily pain, to suffer the loss of worldly goods, yes, to suffer even the loss of reputation itself, for the sake of truth and purity and right. Like Josiah, the sooner you begin to serve God the better. You will never regret it. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth."

II. JOSIAH'S WORK OF REFORMATION. (Ver. 3—ch. xxiii. 25.) Here also he began *very early* to do what he believed to be right. It was in the *twelfth year* of his reign—when he was only *twenty years old*—that he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places and the idols. Then in the eighteenth year of his reign—when he was *twenty-six years old*—he began to repair the house of the Lord, which had been long disused and neglected. God so prospered him in this work, that the people brought large sums of money for the repairing of the temple. It was when this was being done that *Hilkiah the priest found in the temple the book of the Law.* There it lay, probably all covered with dust, like the unused Bible in many a home, a silent reproof to those who should have known what was right but did not do it. When the book of the Law was read to the king, he rent his clothes, in sorrow and in shame, when he thought of how the Law of God had been broken and neglected. It was determined that it should be so no longer, and, having gathered all the people together, he read in their ears all the words of the Law. Then, standing on a pillar, he made a covenant that they would serve the Lord and keep his commandments, and all the people agreed to it. After this was done, he appointed a solemn Passover to be kept by all the people. And it is said, "Surely there was not holden such a Passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; but in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, wherein this Passover was holden to the Lord in Jerusalem" (ch. xxiii. 22, 23). It was a marvellous work for a young king to have accomplished in the twenty-sixth year of his age. He found the land full of idolatry and corruption. But he had already pulled down the altars, and burned the idols, and swept away the dens of vice. He found the temple closed, neglected, and in decay. He had already repaired it and restored the worship of the true God. He found the Law of God forgotten, forsaken, and unknown—the temple copy of it hidden away out of sight. He had already restored it to its proper place as the ruling principle of his government and of the nation's life. Truly a marvellous work for a young king of twenty-six. We see here, as we have seen in the life of Hezekiah, the *power of decision for what is right.* Josiah was not content merely to know God and serve him by himself. He was determined that, so far as he had any influence, others should know and serve God too. He might have said, in the spirit of many lukewarm Christians of modern times, "What matters it? They have their religion, and I have mine." He might have said that, as a ruler, he had nothing to do with his people's religion, but only with their conduct as members of the state. Not so. *He knew* that it is religion, or the want of it, which makes or mars the happiness and prosperity of the nation. *He knew* that, as a servant of God, he was bound to bear his testimony and to use every influence in his power against sin and in favour of what was right. *And so he acted,* not with half-measures, not with half-hearted hesitation, but with firmness, fearlessness, promptness, and determination, as becomes one who is doing the work of God. And so, also, *God stood by him,* and gave him success

in all his work. Such an example is full of instruction for our modern life. Never be a consenting party, even by your silence, to what your conscience tells you is wrong. Never consent, even by your silence, to anything dishonouring to God or not in accordance with his will. Never be a consenting party to anything that you would be ashamed of in the sight of God and men—to acts of injustice to others, to dishonesty or unfairness of any kind, to profanity, to neglect of Sunday observance, or any other form of prevailing wickedness. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; with their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united." Like Josiah, we can never begin too soon, not only to serve God ourselves, but also *to bring others to him*. Like Josiah, let every servant of God show the reality of his and her religion by deeds of usefulness, by bearing testimony against sin, and by unwavering firmness in the cause of Christ and duty.

III. JOSIAH'S EARLY DEATH. Josiah died at an early age. *He was mourned for with great lamentation.* Some think that it is of him that Jeremiah, in his Book of Lamentations, speaks when he says, "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of Jehovah, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen." The passage perhaps indicates how great was the influence for good which Josiah exercised, and how much the people depended upon him as their leader and defender. His early death, before he had completed his fortieth year, must have caused many to wonder at God's mysterious providence. But his work was done. He had really done the work of many lives in one. And so when servants of God are taken away in the prime of life—or prematurely, as we say—let us remember that God's ways are not our ways. In *his* sight their work is done. They have finished the work which he gave them to do. Let us so use the precious time which God has given us, that in our dying hour we shall not have to look back upon a wasted life. But let us live, as Josiah lived, a life of holiness, of usefulness, "redeeming the time." And then when we are drawing near to the gates of death, we shall feel that for us they are the gates of heaven. We shall be able humbly and thankfully to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—20.—*A monarch of rare virtue, and a God of retributive justice.* "Josiah was eight years old," etc. There are two subjects in this chapter that arrest our attention, and which are fertile with suggestions.

I. A MONARCH OF RARE VIRTUE. "Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem," etc. In this monarch we discover four distinguished merits. 1. *Religiousness of action.* "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." This is the testimony of the historian, whoever he may be, and we are further told, "Josiah walked in all the way of David his father." Elsewhere we have given the biblical account of David's life.[1] From that account it might, perhaps, be questioned whether to "walk in the way of David" was a morally creditable life. But undoubtedly in the opinion of this writer, Josiah was a man whose activity was inspired by true religious feeling. Here we find him providing for the repairs of the temple. "And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the Lord, saying, Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the Lord, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people: and let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the Lord: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the Lord, to repair the breaches of the house." The king who provides for the religious *instruction* and *worship* of his people proves thereby that he is under the influence of the religious sentiment. In repairing the temple, Josiah honours his people, not only by allowing, but by encouraging them to co-operate with him in the noble work. He coerces none; all were left free, and they did their work honestly and honourably. "Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully." 2. *Docility of mind.* "And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the Law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. And

[1] See 'Commentary: Book of Psalms,' vol. iii.

Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again. . . . And Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the Law, that he rent his clothes." What book was this? Old time buries the choicest books; volumes that once moved the intellects and fired the hearts of men are sunk in the black waves of oblivion. In all probability the book here was the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. A copy of this, it seems, having been laid beside the ark in the most holy place (Deut. xxxi. 25, 26), had been lost, and now, during the repairing of the temple, it was discovered. Was this a Divine book? If so, why should its Author have suffered it to have been lost, perhaps for generations? A human author, had he the power to prevent it, would not suffer his productions to meet with such a fate. But the thoughts of God are independent of books; they are not only written on the pages of nature, but in imperishable characters on the souls of men. But how did Josiah act towards this discovered book? Did he reject it, or was he indifferent to it? No. "It came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the Law, that he rent his clothes." Herein how unlike is this man, not only to ordinary mortals, but also to ordinary kings! How many kings have been ready to receive new light? Are they not for the most part so mailed in traditions and prejudices as to render the admission of a new truth well-nigh impossible? If the modern occupants of thrones would but universally open their eyes to those old truths of eternal right which come flashing from their graves, all oppressions would cease, and kingdoms would march on to freedom and light. "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth." 3. *Tenderness of heart.* See how the discovery of the book affected him. "He rent his clothes." It is also said, in ver. 19, "Thine heart was tender." Sensibility of heart gives life, worth, and power to intellect. Where sensibility and intellect are not in their due proportion, the character is defective. Where the sensibility is stronger than the intellect, the man is likely to become a morbid pietist or a reckless fanatic. Where the intellect is stronger in proportion to the sensibility, the man is likely to become a cold theorist, living in the frigid abstractions of his own brain. But where both are properly combined, you have a man fit for great things. A man who, if he be a friend, will give counsels that will tell alike on your understanding and heart. Sensibility feathers the arrows of argument, gives poetry and power to thought. 4. *Actualization of conviction.* When this discovered document came under Josiah's attention, and its import was realized, he was seized with a conviction that he, his fathers, and his people, had disregarded, and even outraged, the written precepts of Heaven. He exclaims, "Great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us." With this new conviction burning within him, what does he do? Does he strive to quench it? or does he allow it to burn itself out without any effort on his part? No; he at once commands his servants to make an effort on behalf of himself and his people. "Go ye, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found." The new emotions that rushed into his tender heart prompted him to seek immediate counsel how to avert the curses under which his kingdom lay. They obeyed his behests. "So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college); and they communed with her. And she said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the King of Judah hath read: because they have forsaken me," etc. (vers. 14—18). Here the prophetess spoke the universal sentiment of mankind, viz. that where wrong is, suffering must follow. All experience, all history, attests the truth of the sentiment. But the noteworthy point here is that this tender-hearted man *translated his emotions into actions.* He did not allow his new feelings to pass away as the morning cloud, nor did he expend them in sentimental sighs and groans. Well would it be for all men if they acted thus; for this, in truth, is the only method of spiritual progress. It is only as men embody true thoughts and feelings in actions that they rise to true manhood.

II. A GOD OF RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE. Such a God the prophetess here reveals.

"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the King of Judah hath read." The government over us, and to which we are bound with chains stronger than adamant, is retributive; it never allows evil to go unpunished. It links in indissoluble bonds sufferings to sin. Sorrows follow sin by a law as immutable and resistless as the waves follow the moon. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." In this retribution (1) the wicked are treated with severity, and (2) the good are treated with favour. In the name of God this prophetess declares concerning Josiah, "As touching the words which thou hast heard; because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place." Though righteous judgments were soon to descend upon his country on account of its manifold and heinous sins, he, Josiah, who had proved faithful amongst the faithless, would be spared the terrible storm. He should neither feel it nor see it; his body would be sleeping in the quiet grave, and his spirit be gathered to his "fathers," with all the true men of past times. We are prone to think of death as an evil; it is an event that often appals us with the ghastly aspects that it assumes before our imagination. There are circumstances that make it appear especially sad. For example: when a man like Josiah, of immense influence for good, dies in the zenith of life, and in the midst of usefulness, we deem it an occasion of special sadness. But it is not so, either to the man himself or to his generation. He is taken away from the evil that is coming, and the circumstance of his death, and the loss caused by his departure, tend to rouse his contemporaries to serious and salutary thought. Death is no respecter of persons. The Divine government of the world is like a stream that rolls under us; men are only as bubbles that rise to its surface; some are brighter and larger, and sparkle longer in the sun than others: but all must break, whilst the mighty current rolls on in its wonted majesty. We are shadows, and following shadows. There is nothing real but God.—D. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*Josiah: the temple again repaired.* The reign of Josiah affords another example of the law of action and reaction in national life. Dr. R. Payne Smith says, "The nation itself had gradually swung round, as nations now do, and had begun to be as dissatisfied with Baal and Moloch as their fathers had been with Jehovah" ('Introduction to Jeremiah'); and Dean Stanley remarks, "The popular election which placed Josiah on the throne, of itself marks some strong change of public feeling" (Jewish Church,' vol. ii. p. 435). It is safer, however, to infer this change in public feeling from the support afterwards given to Josiah in his measures of reform, than from the mere fact of his accession; for as yet his disposition was quite uncertain. The craving for a *change* of some kind, with a secret weariness of the policy and extreme doings of the pagan party, had perhaps more to do with the young king's popularity than any real desire to serve Jehovah.

I. THREE BEGINNINGS. 1. *The beginning of a reign.* Josiah was but a boy of eight years old when he was placed upon the throne. At this age he was in danger, like his grandfather Manasseh, of being a mere puppet in the hands of the godless aristocracy. But God's providence seems to have watched over Josiah, and to have caused some care to be taken to guide the young king right. The queen-mother, Jedidah ("the beloved of God"), daughter of Adaiah ("the honoured of God"), "may perhaps have deserved her lofty name, and given her boy the priceless benefit of a godly mother's example and counsels" (Geikie). She may even have acted as regent during his minority, and in that capacity have gathered around her the worthy persons who afterwards figure in the narrative, Shaphan the scribe, etc. 2. *The beginning of grace.* Josiah from the first must have shown good dispositions, and a willingness to be guided and taught by godly counsellors. But it is to the eighth year of his reign, that is, his sixteenth year, that the Book of Chronicles attributes the first decided evidence of his determination to seek Jehovah. "For

in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek after the God of David his father" (2 Chron. xxxiv. 3). From this period his career seems to have been a singularly straightforward and consistent one: "He walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left." What led to this decision in his eighth year we cannot tell. The age at which he had now arrived marks the time about which independent thought commonly begins; possibly some increase of responsibility led him to deeper reflection; it may well be that his mind had long been secretly brooding on religion, and he now took some public step which showed decidedly which side he was on. Nothing seems so beautiful as early piety. A character like Josiah's appearing after reigns like those of Manasseh and Amon is as a snowdrop at the close of winter. It is the piety which begins early that lasts longest, and shows the most blameless record. Beautiful in all, early grace is specially beautiful in those who occupy high positions, and are destined to exercise a wide influence. With many young men the sixteenth year of life is a turning-point in a different direction. Josiah then "began" to seek the Lord. Too often it is the period when the restraints of home religion are thrown off, and young men "begin" to think and act for themselves in forbidden ways. 3. *The beginning of reforms.* The chronicler gives us another date, viz. the twelfth year of Josiah's reign, as that in which he began to effect a religious reformation in the land. "In the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the Asherim, and the graven images, and the molten images," etc. He was then twenty years of age, and the reforms mentioned, though begun in that year, extended on till after his eighteenth year. He had probably to begin cautiously, dealing with the more obvious abuses, and gradually feeling his way to bolder changes. A strong party, no doubt, were opposed to his reforms, and it is difficult to say how far they had advanced before the repair of the temple and the finding of the Law-book. The narratives of neither Chronicles nor Kings adhere strictly to chronological order, but we may suppose that before the projected repairs on the temple building were undertaken, both "the land and the house" had been purged of their worst abominations (2 Chron. xxxiv. 8). The Baal-altars, idols, and Asherim would be removed; idolatrous worship on the high places stopped, though the people may still have sacrificed on them, as in the latter days of Manasseh, "yet unto the Lord their God only" (2 Chron. xxxiii. 17); the sacrifices to Moloch in the valley of Hinnom put an end to. If this was so, it is certain that the temple, in which the worship of Jehovah, with a priest like Hilkiah at its head, had been restored, would not be left uncleared of its Baal-images, its horses of the sun, its prostitutes, etc. (ch. xxiii. 6, 7, 11). Things, in short, would be brought back to the state in which they had been left at Manasseh's death (2 Chron. xxxiii. 15—18). This Josiah might safely attempt, though passages in the prophets show that much idolatry still remained. Earnest religion invariably brings forth its appropriate fruits in zeal for the honour of God, the purification of his worship, and the purging away of evils and abuses.

II. THE EIGHTEENTH YEAR. Hitherto, whatever Josiah had done had been more or less the result of his individual action. The conscience of the nation had not been touched, nor had any enthusiasm been awakened in favour of the new reforms. On the contrary, these had probably aroused not a little bitterness and sullen hostility. At the head of this narrative in Kings, therefore, is placed the date of "the eighteenth year of King Josiah," when the movement enters on an altogether new phase, and swells to national dimensions. The immediate occasion of this change was the finding of the Law-book in the temple, and this again was owing to the repairs which the king had ordered to be executed on the sacred edifice. Glancing at present only at the narrative of these repairs on the temple, we find that they were: 1. *Much needed.* There is no record of repairs on the temple since the days of King Hezekiah (2 Chron. xxix. 3). In the interval the building had frequently suffered from total neglect, and idolatrous kings had made changes in its structure to suit their own purposes. There were "breaches" to repair (ver. 5), roofs to fit with "beams" (2 Chron. xxxiv. 11), and much carpentry and mason work to do with timber and hewn stone throughout the house. It is strange how indifferent those who dwell in their own "cieled houses" can often be to the state of the house wherein God is worshipped (Hag. i. 4). It is the sign of a true zeal for God when there is a proper desire shown to maintain

even the outer fabric of ecclesiastical buildings in a decent condition of repair. 2. *Already collected for.* The means for executing the repairs on the Lord's house had been obtained by voluntary collections at the door of the temple. It is by the king's order, sent through Shaphan the scribe to Hilkiah the high priest, to sum up the money which had been thus gathered, that the matter first comes before us in the narrative. These collections from the people, which must have been going on for some time, show that the worship of Jehovah was now regularly conducted. They also afford us a lesson as to the mode of meeting the expense connected with church building and repairs. (1) The money was raised before the repairs were commenced. This was a sound principle, and, if more frequently acted upon, would save a good deal of trouble with Church debt. The temple was sorely in need of repair, and it might have been pleaded that the case was too urgent to admit of delay till the money was collected. It was resolved, however, to collect the money before a single workman was put upon the building. (2) It was raised by voluntary subscription. The people were not taxed, or forced in any way, to give this money. It was their own free-will offering. Yet apparently the sums required were raised without difficulty. The modern Church expedients of bazaars, etc., are surely inferior to this Old Testament plan. If the appeal to voluntary liberality sometimes does not yield all that we could wish, it is, on the whole, the surest source of income to rely on, and reacts, as no other does, on the heart of the giver. 3. *After a good precedent.* Alike in the collecting of the money, the distribution to the workmen, and the reliance placed in the fidelity of the overseers, those in charge of this business seem to have followed closely the precedents of the reign of Joash. It is good to learn from those who have gone before us.—J. O.

Vers. 8—20.—*The finding of the Law-book.* The finding of the book of the Law by Hilkiah in the temple marks a distinct turning-point in Josiah's reformation. It is admitted generally that this Law-book included, if it did not exclusively consist of, the Book of Deuteronomy. As it is further allowed that some of the main narrative documents of our present Pentateuch, and the book of the covenant (Exod. xxi.—xxiii.), if not also collections of priestly laws, were then in existence, and had long been, we see no reason to doubt that the "book of the Law" discovered by Hilkiah included the bulk of the writings which make up "the five books of Moses." Several legitimate inferences may be drawn from the narrative. 1. A "book of the Law" was known to have been once in existence. Hilkiah speaks of it as "*the* book of the Law"—a book long lost, now found, and at once recognized. 2. The copy found was the complete, standard, authoritative copy. It was this which gave it its peculiar value. 3. It would seem as if no other copies of the book were then known to exist, at any rate none were in possession of the parties named in this chapter. If they had been, we can hardly doubt that the contents would have been in some way communicated to the king. This last inference, however, must not be pushed too far. Complete copies of the Law would at all times be rare, and amidst the troubles and persecutions of Manasseh's long reign may well have been lost, especially as there do not seem to have been in Judah organized prophetic guilds such as existed in Israel, or at least the prophets we know, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Huldah, etc., did not belong to them (cf. the state of matters before the Reformation in Europe, and the finding of the Latin Bible by Luther in the convent at Erfurt). But it does not follow that in prophetic circles no parts or fragments of the Law were in existence. The narrative parts of the Law would be more frequently copied than the legislative, and abstracts or summaries of the book of the covenant, or of the laws in Deuteronomy, perhaps selected passages from these books, may have been in circulation. There was even an order of "scribes" whom Jeremiah accuses of using their false pens to falsify the Law. "How do ye say, We are wise, and the Law of the Lord is with us? But, behold, the false pen of the scribes hath wrought falsely" (Jer. viii. 8). The scribes may have falsified the Law itself, altering its text, expunging its denunciations against idolatry, or making unauthorized additions to it; or they may have falsified it by their comments and interpretations of its meaning. The only thing certain is that the portions of the Law which so affected the conscience of the king were not in any current summaries or copies.

I. FINDING GOD'S WORD. "And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the Law in the house of the Lord." This Law-book—

"the book of the Law of Moses" (ch. xiv. 6)—had undergone strange vicissitudes. We see it: 1. *Sinfully lost.* What treasure, one would think, so precious as the words which God had spoken to this nation through their great law-giver Moses—the statutes and judgments and commandments he had ordered them to keep, and which constituted their great glory as a people (Deut. iv. 5—8)? "What advantage then hath the Jew? . . . Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. iii. 1, 2). Yet this Law of God had been so sinfully neglected that the very knowledge of it had well-nigh perished out of the land, and the book which contained it, from which this knowledge might be revived, had disappeared. The king had neglected it, he who should have been its chief defender; the official classes of the court had neglected it; the priests who had charge of God's house had neglected it, and allowed it to remain unused till it had got into some corner or room where it was covered up with rubbish and lost sight of; the scribes used what knowledge they retained of it only to falsify it. What sin! It was as if there were a deliberate conspiracy to hunt this first Bible out of existence. If to-day there is not the same danger of the knowledge of the Bible being lost as at some past periods of history, it is not because among many classes there is not as strong a hatred of it or as great neglect. With how many is the Bible an unopened book from one week's end to the other! Multitudes are as ignorant of its contents as the far-off heathen; multitudes more have lost whatever knowledge they once had of it through neglect and misuse; in the case of yet greater multitudes its truths are as inoperative as if the book were indeed lost. 2. *Providentially found.* God's providence is seen in nothing more remarkably than in the care he has exercised over the written Word. He has wonderfully protected it through all ages alike from the neglect and the fury of men. If for a time the knowledge of it seemed lost, it was again revived at the most favourable juncture for the execution of his purposes. Thus at the Reformation we see a preparation for the new movement in the revival of learning, the invention of printing, the emergence into light of important manuscripts of the New Testament, etc. That was practically a finding of the Law-book of the Church, as marvellous and as providential as this discovery in the reign of Josiah. It was Josiah's zeal in the repairing of the temple which prepared the way for the discovery here; and the book was found just in time to give a new impetus to the reforming movement. In Divine providence, all things fit together in time and place. 3. *Reverently examined.* Hilkiah knew the book when he saw it, and he gave it to Shaphan the scribe, and he read it. It would be with trembling, eager hand that Shaphan turned over the pages, and, with his scribe's professional instinct, satisfied himself that this was the veritable lost copy of the Law. Taking it with him, he read it more leisurely, not completely, of course, but parts of it, those parts especially which were new to him. This was the right way to treat God's Word. Our chief anxiety, if we possess the sacred volume, should be to know what God the Lord will speak to us (Ps. lxxxv. 8). Cf. Edward Irving's lectures on "The Word of God"—(1) the preparation for consulting the Word of God; (2) the manner of consulting the Word of God; (3 and 4) the obeying of the Word of God ('Lectures,' vol. i.).

II. TREMBLING AT GOD'S WORD. 1. *Shaphan's announcement.* Having ascertained the contents of the book for himself, Shaphan lost no time in bringing it under the notice of the king. He seems to have felt the need of care in his manner of doing this. The book contained strong denunciations and terrible threatenings (cf. Deut. xxviii.), and he was not sure how the king would receive the ancient message. He resolved, therefore, not to prejudice its reception by any statements of his own, but simply to make the announcement of the discovery, and leave the book to speak for itself. He begins, accordingly, by stating the fulfilment of his commission in regard to the monies of the temple. Then he showed the book to the king, saying merely, "Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book." Critics have detected subtle meanings in the studiously simple way in which this announcement is made; but the above, probably, is the true explanation of it. 2. *The book read.* The king, whose interest was at once awakened, naturally asked to have part of the book read to him. Shaphan began to read, selecting apparently parts towards the close of the roll—Deut. xxviii., xxix., and the like. How much he read we are not informed, but the effect produced was instantaneous and profound. Our aim in reading the Scriptures should be to

ascertain from it the whole counsel of God. We must not dwell on the promise to the exclusion of the threatening, or think that any part is without its use "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction," etc. (2 Tim iii. 16). 3. *Conviction by the Word.* "The Spirit of God," say the Westminster Divines, "maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners." Remarkable revivals of religion have often been produced by the reading of the Word alone. It was so in the case of Josiah. The book of the Law was the only preacher, but, as Shaphan read it aloud, its words went like sharp swords to the heart of the king. He knew previously that the nation had committed great sins, with which God was displeased, and he had done what he could to institute reforms. Now for the first time he learned what direful woes were predicted on those who should commit such sins, and he saw the enormity of the nation's evil as he had never before realized it. In deepest emotion he rent his clothes, and sent at once an honourable deputation "to inquire of the Lord concerning the words of the book" of the Prophetess Huldah. We see: (1) The power of the Word to convince men of sin. This power belongs to the words of Scripture as to those of no other book. "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul," etc. (Ps. xix. 7). "The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," etc. (Heb. iv. 12). The fact that it is so is an evidence of the divineness of Scripture. The power of the Bible is derived from the nature of the truths it declares, from the inspired grandeur of its utterances, from the "thus saith the Lord" which stands behind them and drives them home with authority, and from the inward attestation which its words find in the conscience (2 Cor. iv. 2). Great reformations have always been accompanied with an extended circulation of the Bible (Wickliffe, Tyndale, Luther, etc.). (2) An example of the right reception of the Word. Josiah did not act like the profane Jehoiakim, who, when God's threatenings were read to him, took his penknife and cut the prophet's roll to pieces, casting it into the fire (Jer. xxxvi. 20—24). He trembled at God's Word (Isa. lxvi. 2). He was, like Noah, "moved with fear," when he heard of the dreadful evils God would bring upon the nation. He did not dispute the justice of God's threatenings, but acknowledged that he was righteous, and the people wicked. He included himself in the general condemnation: "Great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against *us*, because our fathers have not hearkened," etc. This is how God's Word ought always to be received—with humility, with faith, with trembling of heart at his threatenings, if also with joy and hope at his promises.

III. LIGHT SOUGHT ON GOD'S WORD. 1. *A holy woman.* The king, as above stated, sent "to inquire of the Lord" at the hands of an accredited prophet, with the view of ascertaining what means should be adopted to reverse, if possible, the curse which the sins of long generations had brought upon the nation. The persons sent were five—Hilkiah the priest, Shaphan the scribe, and his son Ahikam, Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Asahiah a servant of the king's,—an honourable deputation. The person to whom they went was a prophetess named Huldah, who dwelt in Jerusalem. This holy woman was no recluse, but the wife of Shallum, the keeper of the royal (or priestly) wardrobe. In the distribution of God's gifts, woman is not less honoured than man. We learn from Huldah that religion and the duties of common life do not stand apart. 2. *The Word confirmed.* On the general question the prophetess had little to give them in the way of comfort. Probably she had already learned the tenor of the threatenings in the sacred book, or its words were now read to her; but she could only speak to give the threatenings emphatic confirmation. "Tell the man that sent you, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place," etc. The words of the Law would be fulfilled, because the people had committed the sins which the Law denounced: "They have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods," etc. This is not contrary to Jeremiah's word, "If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" (Jer. xviii. 8; cf. ch. xxvi. 3). It was the knowledge and foresight that Judah would not truly repent which gave the absoluteness to the prophecy. Jeremiah, while exhorting to repentance, also gives expression to the other side of the truth, that the nation's condition is hopeless (Jer. vii. 16; xv. 1, etc.). 3. *Mercy to the king.* To the "man" Huldah had no message of comfort; but to "the King of Judah" she had a word of mercy to send. Because Josiah's heart was tender, and he had humbled

himself when he had heard of the desolation and the curse that would come upon the land, therefore God had heard him, and would spare him the experience of the evil that was to come. He would be taken away "from the evil to come" (Isa. lvii. 1). Had the nation as a whole repented in like manner, we cannot doubt that it would have been similarly spared. God never rejects the humble and contrite heart (Isa. lxvi. 2). It is noteworthy that this prediction was fulfilled in a way which externally was a great calamity to the nation, viz. Josiah's defeat and death at Megiddo, in battle with Pharaoh-Nechoh (ch. xxiii. 29, 30). God's mercy veils itself under strange disguises.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Vers. 1—37.—JOSIAH'S RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT. HIS REFORMS AND DEATH. REIGN OF JEHOAHAZ. ACCESSION OF JEHOIAKIM.

Vers. 1—3.—*Josiah's renewal of the covenant.* The first care of Josiah, on receiving Huldah's message, which stamped the book found as the true "book of the covenant," was to call together a great assembly of the nation, which should be sufficiently representative of it, and renew the covenant between God and his people made originally at Horeb (Exod. xix. 5—8; xxiv. 3—8), which it was apparent, by the words of the book, that he and his people had broken. His proceedings may be fitly compared with those of Jehoiada, the high priest after the reign of the idolatrous Athaliah, recorded in ch. xi. 17; but they were still more formal and solemn, inasmuch as the recent alienation of the people from Jehovah had been so much more prolonged, and so much more complete, than the alienation under Athaliah.

Ver. 1.—**And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem**; *i.e.* all the elders of Jerusalem and of the rest of Judah. (On the important position held by "the elders" in the undivided kingdom, see 1 Kings viii. 1, and the comment *ad loc.*; and on their position in the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, see 1 Kings xx. 7, 8; xxi. 8, 11; ch. x. 1, etc.)

Ver. 2.—**And the king went up into the house of the Lord.** No place could be so suitable for the renewal of the covenant between God and his people as the house of God, where God was in a peculiar way present, and the ground was, like the ground at Horeb, holy. Josiah "went up" to the temple from the royal palace, which was on a lower level (comp. 1 Kings x. 5). **And all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him.** Not only the "elders," who had been summoned, but of the people, as many as chose to attend, besides. The gathering was no doubt great; but the expressions used are (as with the Orientals generally) hyperbolical. **And the priests, and the prophets.** The representation would have been incomplete without these two classes—the priests, the ordinary and regular readers (Deut. xxxi. 11) and teachers (Deut. xxxiii. 10) of the Law; and the prophets, the extraordinary and occasional teachers, inspired from time to time, and commissioned to enforce the Law, and further to declare God's will to the people. **And all the people, both small and great**; *i.e.* without distinction of classes—all ranks of the people, high and low, rich and poor, noble and base-born. All were concerned, nay, concerned equally, in a matter which touched the national life and the prospects of each individual. **And he read in their ears.** There is no reason for translating, with Keil, "he caused to be read in their ears," as though either the Jewish kings could not read, or would be usurping the functions of the priests in publicly reading the Law to the people. If a king might, like Solomon (1 Kings viii. 22—61), lead the prayers of the congregation of Israel in the temple, much more might he read the Law to them. The readers in the Jewish synagogues are ordinarily lay people. **All the words of the book of the covenant.** Perhaps there is here some exaggeration, as in the phrases, "*all* the men of Judah," and "*all* the inhabitants of Jerusalem." The entire Pentateuch could scarcely be read through in less than ten hours. Possibly, the Book of Deuteronomy was alone read. **Which was found in the house of the Lord** (see above, ch. xxii. 8).

Ver. 3.—**And the king stood by a pillar**—עַל הָעַמּוּד is not "by the pillar," but (as in ch. xi. 14) "on the platform" (see the comment on that place)—**and made a covenant before the Lord**; literally, *made the covenant* (as in **ch. xi. 17**); *i.e.* made, or renewed, the old covenant with God (Exod. xxiv. 5—8), which had been broken by the complete neglect of the Law, and the manifold idola-

tries of Manasseh and Amon. He renewed this covenant "before the Lord," *i.e.* from his platform in the court, directly opposite the entrance to the temple, through which he could, perhaps, see the veil hanging in front of the holy of holies—at any rate being, and feeling himself to be, in the immediate presence of God. **To walk after the Lord**—*i.e.* to be his true follower and servant—**and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes.** (On the multiplication of such terms, see the comment upon 1 Kings ii. 3.) They are intended to express "the totality of the Law," all its requirements without exception. **With all their heart and all their soul**—obedience was worthless, unless paid from the heart and soul (see Deut. iv. 29; xxx. 2; Joel ii. 12, 13)—**to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.** The representatives of the people, one and all, were parties to the promise made on their behalf by the king, and signified their consent, probably as they had done in Horeb, when "Moses took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people; and they said, All that the Lord has said will we do, and be obedient" (see Deut. xxiv. 7).

Vers. 4—27.—*Josiah's reformation of religion.* The reformation of religion by Josiah next engages the writer's attention, and is treated, not chronologically, but rather geographically, under the three heads of (1) reforms in Jerusalem; (2) reforms outside Jerusalem, but in the kingdom of Judah; and (3) reforms in the territory which had belonged to the kingdom of Samaria (vers. 4—20). The celebration of the Passover is then briefly noticed (vers. 21—23); and the section concludes with a eulogy of Josiah (vers. 24, 25), who, however, it is noticed could not, with all his piety, obtain a revocation of the sentence passed on Judah in consequence of the sins of Manasseh. The fate of Judah was fixed (vers. 26, 27).

Ver. 4.—**And the king commanded Hilkiah e high priest, and the priests of the second der.** Not the "deputy-high priests," of whom there seems to have been only one at this period of the history (ch. xxv. 18); nor the "heads of the courses," who were not recognized as a distinct class of priests till much later; but merely the common priests, as distinguished from the high priest. (So Keil, Bähr, and others.) **And the keepers of the door**; literally, *the keepers of the threshold*; i.e. the Levites, whose duty it was to keep watch and ward at the outer temple gates (see 1 Chron. xxvi. 13—18). Their importance at this time appears again in ch. xxv. 18. **To bring forth out of the temple of the Lord all the vessels that were made for Baal.** The reformation naturally began with the purging of the temple. So the reformation under Jehoiada (ch. xi. 18) and that of Manasseh (2 Chron. xxxiii. 15). Under "the vessels" (הַכֵּלִים) would be included the entire paraphernalia of worship, even the two altars which had been set up in honour of Baal in the outer and the inner courts (comp. ch. xxi. 5). **And for the grove** (see ch. xxi. 3), **and for all the host of heaven.** The three worships are here united, because there was a close connection between them. Baal was, in one of his aspects, the sun; and Astarte, the goddess of the "grove"-worship, was, in one of her aspects, the moon. The cult of "the host of heaven," though, perhaps, derived from a different source, naturally became associated with the cults of the sun and moon. **And he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron.** The Law required that idols should be burnt with fire (Deut. vii. 25), and likewise "groves" (Deut. xii. 3). It was enough to "overthrow" altars (Deut. xii. 3) and to "break" pillars. But Josiah seems to have thought it best to destroy by fire, *i.e.* in the completest possible way, all the objects, of whatever kind, which had been connected with the idol-worship (see vers. 6, 12, 15, 16). The burning took place in "the fields of Kidron," *i.e.* in the upper part of the Kidron valley, to the north-east of Jerusalem, in order that not even the smoke should pollute the town (comp. 1 Kings xv. 13). **And carried the ashes of them unto Bethel.** This was a very unusual precaution, and shows Josiah's extreme scrupulousness. He would not have even the ashes of the wooden objects, or the calcined powder of the metal ones, remain even in the vicinity of the holy city, but transported them to a distance. In selecting Bethel as the place to convey them to, he was no doubt actuated by the circumstance that that village was in some sense the fount and origin of all the religious impurities which had overflowed the land. That which had proceeded from Bethel might well be taken back thither.

Ver. 5.—**And he put down the idolatrous priests**; literally, *the chemarim.* The same word is used of idolatrous priests in Hos. x. 5 and Zeph. i. 4. It is best connected with the Arabic root *chamar, colere deum,* and with the Syriac *cumro,* "priest" or "sacrificer." The Syrian priests were probably so called at the time, and the Hebrews took the word, and applied it to all false priests or idolatrous priests, reserving their own *cohanim* (כֹּהֲנִים) for true Jehovistic priests only. **Whom the kings of Judah**

had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem. This practice had not been mentioned previously, and can scarcely have belonged to the earlier kingdom of Judah, when "the *people*" (as we are told so often) "worshipped and burnt incense in the high places." But it is quite in harmony with the other doings of Manasseh and Amon, that, when they re-established the high places (ch. xxi. 3, 21), they should have followed the custom of the Israelite monarchs at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings xii. 28—32), and have "ordained priests" to conduct the worship at them. **Them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon** (on the Baal-worship of Manasseh and Amon, see ch. xxi. 3; on the sun-worship, compare below, ver. 11; the moon-worship was probably a form of the worship of Astarte), **and to the planets; rather,** *to the twelve signs.* The constellations or signs of the zodiac are, no doubt, intended (comp. Job xxxviii. 32, where the term מַזָּרוֹת may be regarded as a mere variant form of the מַזָּלוֹת of this passage). The proper meaning of the term is "mansions," or "houses," the zodiacal signs being regarded as the "mansions of the sun" by the Babylonians (see 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. iii. p. 419). **And to all the host of heaven** (see the comment on ch. xxi. 3).

Ver. 6.—**And he brought out the grove from the house of the Lord.** The Asherah set up by Manasseh (ch. xxi. 3 and 7), and if removed (2 Chron. xxxiii. 15), then replaced by Amon (2 Chron. xxxiii. 22), is intended. (On its probable form, see the comment upon ch. xxi. 7.) **Without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron** (see the comment on ver. 4), **and burned it at the brook Kidron.** After the example of Asa, who had treated in the same way the idol of the queen-mother Maachah (1 Kings xv. 13). Asa followed the example of Moses (Exod. xxxii. 20), when he destroyed the golden calf. **And stamped it small to powder.** Metals may be calcined by intense heat, and reduced into a state in which a very small application of force will crush them into a fine powder. It is clear from the present passage, that Manasseh's Asherah was made of metal, at any rate in part. **And cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people;** *i.e.* "upon the graves of the common people" (comp. Jer. xxvi. 23, where the expression used in the Hebrew is the same). The common people were not buried, like the better sort, in rock-hewn sepulchres, but in graves of the ordinary description. Burial-places were regarded as unclean, and were thus fit receptacles for any kind of impurity.

Ver. 7.—**And he brake down the houses of the sodomites;** literally, *of the consecrated ones.* (See the comment on 1 Kings xiv. 24; and note that the male prostitutes, or Galli, who consecrated themselves to the Dea Syra, formed an essential element in the Astarte-worship, and accompanied it wherever it was introduced.) Döllinger says ('Jew and Gentile,' vol. i. pp. 430, 431) of these wretched persons, "To the exciting din of drums, flutes, and inspired songs, the Galli cut themselves on the arms; and the effect of this act, and of the music accompanying it, was so strong upon mere spectators, that all their bodily and mental powers were thrown into a tumult of excitement, and they too, seized by the desire to lacerate themselves, deprived themselves of their manhood by means of potsherds lying ready for the purpose. Thereupon they ran with the mutilated part through the city, and received from the houses which they threw them into, a woman's gear. Not chastity, but barrenness, was intended by the mutilation. In this the Galli only desired to be like their goddess. The relation of foul lust, which they thenceforward occupied towards women, was regarded as a holy thing, and was tolerated by husbands in their wives." **That were by the house of the Lord.** The near vicinity is an indication that the Galli took part in the foreign rites introduced into the temple by Manasseh and Amon. The awful profanation of the house of God by such orgies is too terrible to dwell on. **Where the women wove hangings for the grove.** "The women" are no doubt the priestesses of the Dea Syra, who are constantly mentioned with the Galli, and, indeed, lived with them. They employed themselves, among other occupations, in weaving "hangings" (literally, "houses," *i.e.* "coverings") for the Asherah. It may be gathered from Ezek. xvi. 16 that these "coverings" were dainty fabrics of many colours.

Ver. 8.—**And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah.** Here the writer diverges from his proper subject—the reforms in and near Jerusalem—to speak of changes which were made in other parts of Judæa. The Levitical priests, who in various cities of Judah had conducted the worship at the high places, were summoned to Jerusalem by Josiah, and forced to remain there, that the unauthorized worship which they had conducted might be brought to an end. **And defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense.** Hezekiah had "removed the high places, and broken the images, and cut down the groves" throughout his dominions (ch. xviii. 4), but he had not in any way "defiled the high places;" and therefore no sooner did a king take a different view of his duties than the worship was at once restored (ch. xxi. 3), and

flourished as before. Josiah conceived the idea that, if the high places were "defiled," it would be impossible to renew the worship at them. **From Geba to Beersheba.** Geba takes here the place of Bethel as the northern limit of Judah. It was situated at a very short distance from Bethel, and was made to supersede it on account of the idolatries by which Bethel had been disgraced. The exact site is probably the modern *Jeba*, on the southern edge of the Wady Suweinit. **And brake down the high places of the gates.** The high-place worship had, it would seem, invaded Jerusalem itself. In some of the gates of the city, which were "large open buildings for public meetings and intercourse" (Bähr), altars, or more elaborate places of worship, had been established, and an unauthorized ritual of the high-place type had been set up. **That were**—rather, *that which was*—**in the entering in of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city.** This and the succeeding clauses are limitations of the general statement concerning the "high places of the gates," and indicate that two gates only had been polluted by high-place worship, viz. "the gate of Joshua," and the gate known κατ' ἐξοχήν as "the city gate." Neither of these can be determinately fixed, since they are only mentioned in the present passage. **Which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city**; rather, *and also that which was on the left-hand side in the gate of the city.* (So Thenius, Keil, and Bähr.)

Ver. 9.—**Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem.** Though Josiah recalled to Jerusalem the Levitical priests who had recently been attached to the various high places, yet he did not attach them to the temple, or assign them any part in its services. Their participation in a semi-idolatrous service had disqualified them for the temple ministrations. **But they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren.** They were allowed, *i.e.*, their maintenance out of the priestly revenues, as were priests disqualified by a personal blemish (Lev. xxi. 21, 22). Practically they lived on the altar gifts intended for the priests (Lev. vi. 9, 10, 22), in which it was unlawful to mix leaven.

Ver. 10.—**And he defiled Topheth.** "Topheth" or "Tophet" was the name given to the place in the valley of Hinnom where the sacrifices were offered to Moloch. The root of the word is thought by some to be *taph* (תֹּף), "a drum," because the cries of the children burnt there were drowned by the beating of drums. Others suggest as the root, *tuph* (תּוּף), "to spit," because the place was "spat at" by the orthodox. But Gesenius and Böttcher derive it from an Aryan root, *taph*, or *tap*, "to burn," whence Greek θάπτειν, τέφρα, Latin *tepidus*, Mod. Persian *táftan*, Sanskrit *tap*, etc., and regard the meaning as simply "the place of burning" (see the comment on Isa. xxx. 33). **Which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom.** The valley of Hinnom, or of the sons of Hinnom, is generally allowed to be that which sweeps round the more western of the two hills whereon Jerusalem was built, in a direction at first south and then east, uniting itself with the Kidron valley a little to the south of Ophel. The origin of the name is uncertain; but it is most likely that the Beni-Hinnom were a tribe of Canaanites, settled on this side of Jerusalem in the time of Joshua (Josh. xv. 8). The "valley" is a ravine, deep and narrow, with steep, rocky sides. When the Moloch-worship first began in it we cannot say; but it was probably before the time of Solomon, who built a high place for Moloch (1 Kings xi. 11), on one of the heights by which the valley is enclosed. (On the horrible profanations of the Moloch-worship, see Jer. vii. 31, 32; xix. 4—13; xxxii. 35.) After the Captivity, the valley of Hinnom—Ge-Hinnom—was reckoned an accursed and abominable place, a sort of earthly counterpart of the place of final punishment, which thence derived its name of "Gehenna" (Γέεννα); (see Matt. v. 22, 29, etc.). **That no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Moloch** (see the comment on ch. xvi. 3).

Ver. 11.—**And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun.** The custom of dedicating horses to the sun was practised by many ancient nations; but it is only in Persia that we find horses *and chariots* so dedicated (Xen., 'Cyrop.,' viii. 3. § 12). The idea of the sun-god as a charioteer, who drove his horses daily across the sky, is one common to several of the Aryan nations, as the Greeks, the Romans, the Hindoos, and others; but we do not find it either in Egypt or among the Semitic peoples. The sacrifice of the horse to the sun was more general (Herod., i. 216; Xen., 'Cyrop.,' viii. 3. § 24; 'Anab.,' iv. 5. § 35; Rig Veda, vol. ii. pp. 112, *et seqq.*, etc.), but does not seem to have been adopted by the Hebrews. It is not at all clear whence the "kings of Judah"—*i.e.* Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon—derived the idea of maintaining sacred chariots and horses to be used in their sun-worship. They certainly could not have received it, as Keil thinks, "through the Assyrians." **At the entering in of the house of the Lord**—the horses, *i.e.*, were kept near one of the entrances to the temple, to be ready for use in sacred processions—**by the chamber of Nathan-melech the**

chamberlain, which was in the suburbs. There were many "chambers" attached to the temple, which were sometimes used as store-rooms for different materials (1 Chron. ix. 26; 2 Chron. xxxi. 11, 12; Neh. x. 38; xiii. 5), sometimes as residences (Neh. xiii. 7). In Josiah's time, "Nathan-melech the chamberlain," or rather "the *eunuch*," occupied one of these. It was situated בִּפְרָוָרִים —"in the outskirts" or "purlieus" of the temple. **And burned the chariots of the sun with fire** (comp. vers. 4, 6, 15, etc.). Josiah burnt all the material objects that had been desecrated by the idolatries; the persons and animals so desecrated he "removed," or deprived of their functions.

Ver. 12.—**And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz.** It would seem that "the upper chamber of Ahaz" was within the temple precincts, since the pollutions spoken of, both before and after, are pollutions belonging to the temple. It may have been erected on the flat roof of one of the gates, or on the top of a store-chamber. Altars upon roofs were a new form of idolatry, apparently connected with the worship of the "host of heaven" (see Jer. xix. 13; Zeph. i. 5). **Which the kings of Judah**—*i.e.* Manasseh and Amon, perhaps also Ahaz—**had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the Lord** (see above, ch. xxi. 4, 5). As Manasseh, on his repentance, merely "cast these altars out of the city" (2 Chron. xxxiii. 15), it was easy for Amon to replace them. They belonged to the worship of the "host of heaven." **Did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron** (comp. ver. 6, and the comment *ad loc.*).

Ver. 13.—**And the high places that were before Jerusalem.** The high places which Solomon established in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem for the use of his wives, and in the worship at which he became himself entangled in his old age, appear to have been situated on the ridge of the mountain which lies over against Jerusalem to the east, a part of which is Olivet. The southern summit, the traditional *mons offensionis*, was probably the high place of Moloch (Milcom), while the most northern summit (now called *Karem-es-Seyad*) has some claim to be regarded as the high place of Chemosh. (So Brocardus in A.D. 1280.) The site of the high place of Ashtoreth is doubtful. **Which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption.** The name "mount of corruption" seems to have been given after Solomon's time to the entire ridge of hills which lies over against Jerusalem to the east, on account of the rites which he had allowed to be established on it. **The** "right hand" of the mountain would, according to Jewish notions, be the more southern part. **Which Solomon the King of Israel**—rather, *King of Israel*, since there is no article—**had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians** (see 1 Kings xi. 7). Though Ashtoreth, or Astarte, or Ishtar, or the Dea Syra, was worshipped generally throughout Phœnicia, and perhaps even more widely, yet she was in a peculiar way "the abomination of the Zidonians," being the deity to whom the city of Sidon was especially dedicated (see the inscription on the tomb of Eshmunazar, published in the 'Records of the Past,' vol. ix. pp. 113, 114). **And for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites.** Chemosh appears as the special god of the Moabites on the famous Moabite Stone in eleven places. The stone itself was dedicated to Chemosh (line 3). The Moabites are spoken of as "the people of Chemosh" (lines 5, 6). Success in war comes from him, and defeat is the result of his anger. One of his designations is "Ashtar-Chemosh" (line 17), or "Chemosh, who is also Ashtar," Ashtar being the male principle corresponding to the female Astarte or Ashtoreth. **And for Milcom.** Moloch was called by the Jews "Milcom," or "Malcam"—"their king"—*i.e.* the king of the Ammonite people, since he was the sole god whom they acknowledged (see 1 Kings xi. 5; Jer. xlix. 3 compared with Jer. xlviii. 7; Amos i. 15; Zeph. i. 5). **The abomination of the children of Ammon** (see 1 Kings xi. 5, 7; and compare the comment on 1 Kings in the 'Pulpit Commentary,' p. 222). **Did the king defile.** The manner of the defilement is stated in the next verse.

Ver. 14.—**And he brake in pieces the images**—or, *pillars* (see the comment on 1 Kings xiv. 23)—**and cut down the groves**—*i.e.* the *asherim*, or "sacred trees"—**and filled their places with the bones of men.** Whatever spoke of death and dissolution was a special defilement to shrines where the gods worshipped were deities of productivity and generation. Bones of men had also the actual taint of corruption about them. The "uncleanness" of dead bodies arose first out of man's natural shrinking from death, and was then further confirmed by the horrors accompanying decay. The notion was probably coeval with death itself. It received a sanction from the Law, which made it a legal defilement to touch a corpse (Numb. xix. 11, 16), and placed under a sentence of uncleanness all that was in the tent where a man died (Numb. xix. 14, 15).

Ver. 15.—**Moreover the altar that** was **at Bethel, and the high place**; rather, *the altar that was at Bethel, the high place*, without any "and." הַבָּמָה is in apposition with הַמִּזְבֵּחַ,

By setting up an altar at Bethel, Jeroboam constituted Bethel a "high place." **Which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made** (comp. 1 Kings xii. 33; xiii. 2), **both that altar and the high place he brake down.** "The high place" is *here* equivalent to the "house of high places" in 1 Kings xii. 31, and designates "the buildings of this sanctuary" (Keil). At such a national centre as Bethel a temple would, of course, accompany the altar. Whether the temple and altar were in use or not at the time when Josiah destroyed them, is uncertain. The mixed race which had superseded the Israelites in the country (ch. xvii. 24—41) may have continued the worship, or may have set it aside. **And burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder.** It is not clear that this latter clause applies to the high place. Perhaps we should translate—*And stamped small to powder*, **and burned, the grove.** It is for the most part only comparatively small objects that are "stamped small to powder" (see vers. 6, 12, and comp. 2 Chron. xv. 21).

Ver. 16.—**And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount.** The Israelite sepulchres, excavated in the rocky sides of hills, are everywhere conspicuous. Those of Bethel may have been in the low hill on which the town stands, or in the sides of the Wady Suweinit, a little further to the south. His *accidentally* "spying the sepulchres" gave Josiah the thought of completing his desecration of Bethel by having bones brought from them and burnt upon the altar—whereby he exactly accomplished the old prophecy (1 Kings xiii. 2), which was not at all in his mind. **And sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it** (see the comment on ver. 14), **according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words**; rather, *who prophesied these things*. The reference is to 1 Kings xiii. 2, and the meaning is, not that Josiah acted as he did in order to fulfil the prophecy, but that in thus acting he unconsciously fulfilled it.

Ver. 17.—**Then he said, What title is that that I see?** rather, *What pillar is that that I see?* Josiah's eye caught sight of a "pillar" or obelisk (צִיּוּן) among the tombs, or in their neighbourhood, and he had the curiosity to ask what it was. **And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah** (see 1 Kings xiii. 1). The "pillar" could not have been the actual "sepulchre," but was no doubt a monument connected with it. Many of the Phœnician excavated tombs are accompanied by monuments above ground, which are very conspicuous (see Renan's 'Mission de Phénicie,' pls. xi., *et seqq.*). **And proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel** (see 1 Kings xiii. 2). According to the present text of Kings, Josiah was prophesied of *by name*, as the king who would defile the altar; but it is possible that the words, "Josiah by name" (יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ שְׁמוֹ), have crept in from the margin.

Ver. 18.—**And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones.** Josiah remembered the circumstances when they were recalled to him, and, in order to show honour to the "man of God" (1 Kings xiii., *passim*), commanded that his tomb should be undisturbed. **So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria**; *i.e.* with the bones of the Israelite prophet, who had taken care to be buried with him. The reference is to 1 Kings xiii. 31.

Ver. 19.—**And all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria.** The writer of Chronicles enters into more detail. Josiah, he says, carried out his destruction of the high places, the groves, and the images "in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali" (2 Chron. xxxiv. 6)—*i.e.* to the northern limit of the Holy Land, which was occupied by Naphtali and Asher. By what right Josiah exercised sovereign authority in the old kingdom of Samaria, which the Assyrians had conquered and attached to their empire, can only be conjectured. Some have supposed that the Assyrians had enlarged his sovereignty, and placed Samaria under his rule; others regard him as having transferred his allegiance to Nabopolassar, and having been made by him viceroy over Palestine. But it is, perhaps, most probable that he merely took advantage of the political commotions of the time to extend his dominion so far as it seemed safe to do so. Asshur-bani-pal, the last energetic King of Assyria, appears to have ceased to reign in Josiah's fourteenth year, when he was succeeded by a weak monarch, Asshur-ebil-ili. Great troubles now broke out. The Scythians ravaged Western Asia far and wide. Assyria was attacked by the Medes and Babylonians in combination. Under these circumstances, Josiah found himself practically independent, and began to entertain ambitious projects. He "extended his dominion from Jerusalem over Samaria" (Ewald). Assyria was too much occupied to take any notice. Babylonia was in the thick of the struggle. Josiah found himself able to reunite under his own headship all the scattered portions of the old Israelite kingdom, except, perhaps, the trans-Jordanic district. He levied

taxes in Samaria as freely as in Judæa (2 Chron. xxxiii. 9). He reformed on the same mode the religions of both countries. Whe'. finally he had to fight for his throne, he marched his army into the northern portion of Samaria, and there fought the battle which cost him his life. **Which the kings of Israel had made to provoke** the Lord to anger. The earlier kings of Israel had simply allowed the "high places" to continue, without actively increasing or multiplying them; but Manasseh had re-established them after their destruction by Hezekiah (ch. xxi. 3), and Amon had probably done the same after Manasseh's tardy reformation. **Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel** (see above, ver. 15).

Ver. 20.—**And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars.** It is not directly said that he had done this at Bethel, though it had been prophesied that he would do so (1 Kings xiii. 2). Possibly there were no priests at Bethel at the time, since the "calf" set up by Jeroboam had been carried off (Hos. x. 6) by the Assyrians. The difference between the treatment of the high-place priests in Israel and in Judah (ver. 9) clearly implies that the former were attached to the worship of false gods, while the latter were priests of Jehovah who worshipped him with superstitious and unauthorized rites and ceremonies. **And burned men's bones upon them** (comp. ver. 16), **and returned to Jerusalem.**

Ver. 21.—**And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the Passover.** The account given of Josiah's Passover is much more full in Chronicles than in Kings. In Chronicles it occupies nineteen verses of 2 Chron. xxxv. We learn from Chronicles that all the rites prescribed by the Law, whether in Exodus, Leviticus, or Deuteronomy, were duly observed, and that the festival was attended, not only by the Judæans, but by many Israelites from among the ten tribes, who still remained intermixed with the Assyrian colonists in the Samaritan country (see 2 Chron. xxxv. 17, 18). **Unto the Lord your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant.** The ordinances for the due observance of the Passover feast are contained chiefly in Exodus (xii. 3—20; xiii. 5—10). They are repeated, but with much less fulness, in Deut. xvi. 1—8. The "book of the covenant" found by Hilkiah must, therefore, certainly have contained Exodus (see below, ver. 25).

Ver. 22.—**Surely there was not holden such a Passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah.** *Such* a Passover, one so numerously attended (2 Chron. xxxv. 18), and so exactly kept according to every ordinance of the Law of Moses (2 Chron. xxxv. 6), had not been celebrated during all the period of the judges, from Joshua to Samuel, nor under the kings of all Israel, Saul, David, and Solomon, nor under those of the separated kingdom of Judah, from Rehoboam to this year (the eighteenth) of Josiah. It is an extraordinary perversity which concludes (as do De Wette and Thenius), from this comparison of the present with former Passovers under the judges and the kings, that there had been no such former Passovers at all! Two, at any rate, are recorded (Josh. v. 10, 11; 2 Chron. xxx. 13—26). Ewald has the good sense to express his dissent from this view, and to declare the meaning of the writer to be simply that "since the time of the judges there had never been such a celebration of the Passover, in such strict accordance, that is, with the prescriptions of a sacred book as that which now took place" (see his 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 239, Eng. trans.).

Ver. 23.—**But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, wherein this Passover was holden to the Lord in Jerusalem** (compare, on the date, ch. xxii. 3 and 2 Chron. xxxv. 19). The eighteenth year of Josiah corresponded probably, in part to B.C. 622, in part to B.C. 621.

Ver. 24.—**Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards.** Persons of these classes had been encouraged by Manasseh, in his earlier reign (ch. xxi. 6), and probably by Amon (ch. xxi. 21). As Josiah designed a thorough reformation, it was necessary for him to put them down. **And the images**; literally, *the teraphim*, which are thought to have been small images kept as household gods in many Israelite families from a very ancient date (see Gen. xxxi. 19—35). The superstition was exceedingly persistent. We find it under the judges (Judg. xviii. 14), under Saul (1 Sam. xix. 13), here under the later kings, and it is still mentioned after the return from the Captivity (Zech. x. 2). The superstition was, apparently, Babylonian (Ezek. xxi. 21), and brought from Ur of the Chaldees by the family of Abraham. Besides being regarded as household gods, the teraphim were used in divination. **And the idols, and all the abominations that were spied.** The "idols," *gillulim*, are probably, like the teraphim, of a private nature, figures used as amulets or talismans. Excepting in Ezekiel, the word is an uncommon one. By the "abominations that were spied" are meant secret defilements and superstitious practices in households, which needed to be searched out. (So Thenius and Bähr.)

In the land of Judah and in Jerusalem. Not, apparently, in the cities of Samaria, where such a rigid inquisition would perhaps have provoked a stubborn resistance. **Did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the Law**; rather, *that he might establish the words of the Law.* Laws against such practices as Josiah now put down will be found in Exod. xxii. 18; Lev. xix. 31; xx. 27; Deut. xviii. 10—12. **Which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord** (see ch. xxii. 8).

Ver. 25.—**And like unto him was there no king before him** (see the comment on ch. xviii. 5). The writer of Kings cannot be said to place Josiah above Hezekiah, or Hezekiah above Josiah. He accords them the same degree of praise, but, in Hezekiah's case, dwells upon his trust in God; in Josiah's, upon his exact obedience to the Law. On the whole, his judgment accords very closely with that of the son of Sirach (Ecclus. xlix. 4). "All, except David and Ezekias and Josias, were defective: for they forsook the Law of the Most High." **That turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might.** This triple enumeration is intended to include the whole moral and mental nature of man, all the energies of his understanding, his will, and his physical vitality (see the comment on Deut. vi. 5—a passage which is in the writer's mind). **According to all the Law of Moses.** This is an indication that, in the writer's view, the *whole* Law was contained in the book found by Hilkiah. **Neither after him arose there any like him.** This is but moderate praise, since the four kings who reigned after him—Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah—were, one and all, wicked princes.

Ver. 26.—**Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath.** It was too late, not for God to forgive upon repentance, but for the nation to repent sincerely and heartily. Sin had become engrained in the national character. Vain were the warnings of Jeremiah, vain were his exhortations to repentance (iii. 12—14, 22; iv. 1—8; vii. 3—7, etc.), vain his promises that, if they would turn to God, they would be forgiven and spared. Thirty years of irreligion and idolatry under Manasseh had sapped the national vigour, and made true repentance an impossibility. How weak and half-hearted must have been the return to God towards the close of Manasseh's reign, that it should have had no strength to resist Amon, a youth of twenty-two, but should have disappeared wholly on his accession! And how far from sincere must have been the present conformity to the wishes of Josiah, the professed renewal of the covenant (ver. 3), and revival of disused ceremonies (vers. 21—23)! Jeremiah searched in vain through the streets of Jerusalem to find a man that executed judgment, or sought the truth (Jer. v. 1). The people had "a revolting and rebellious heart; they were revolted and gone" (Jer. v. 23). Not only idolatry, but profligacy (Jer. v. 3) and injustice and oppression everywhere prevailed (Jer. v. 25—28). "From the least to the greatest of them, every one was given to covetousness" (Jer. vi. 13); even the prophets and the priests "dealt falsely" (Jer. vi. 13). The state of things was one which necessarily brought down the Divine judgment, and all that Josiah's efforts could do was a little to delay it. **Wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal.** Manasseh's provocations lived in their consequences. God's judgment upon Israel was not mere vengeance for the sins that Manasseh had committed, or even for the multitudinous iniquities into which he had led the nation (ch. xxi. 9). It was punishment rendered necessary by the actual condition of the nation—the condition whereto it had been reduced by Manasseh's evil doings.

Ver. 27.—**And the Lord said**—God said in his secret counsels, came to the determination, and pronounced the sentence in his thoughts—**I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel** (comp. ch. xvii. 18, "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and *removed them out of his sight*"). The sins of Judah were now as great as those of Israel had been; therefore her punishment must be the same, as God is no respecter of persons. **And I will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen** (comp. 1 Kings viii. 44, 48; xi. 13, 32, 36, etc.). God "chose" Jerusalem when he put it into the heart of David to bring up the ark thither (2 Sam. vi. 1—17). **And the house of which I said, My Name shall be there** (see Deut. xii. 11; 1 Kings viii. 29, etc.). A visible confirmation was given to all that David and Solomon had done in establishing the temple at Jerusalem as the head-quarters of the national religion, when "fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices" made there, and "the glory of the Lord filled the house" (2 Chron. vii. 1; comp. 2 Chron. v. 13, 14).

Vers. 28—30.—The events of Josiah's reign from his eighteenth to his thirty-first year are left a blank, both here and in Chronicles. Politically, the time was a stirring one. The great invasion of Western Asia by the Scythic hordes (Herod., i. 103

—106), which is alluded to by Jeremiah (vi. 1—5), Ezekiel (xxxviii., xxxix.), and perhaps by Zephaniah (ii. 6), probably belongs to it; as also the attack of Psamatik I. upon Philistia (Herod., ii. 105), the fall of the Assyrian empire (circ. B.C. 617), and the destruction of Nineveh; the establishment of the independence of Babylon, and her rise to greatness; together with the transfer of power in the central part of Western Asia, from the Assyrians to the Medes. Amid the dangers which beset him, Josiah appears to have conducted himself prudently, gradually extending his power over Samaria and Galilee, without coming into hostile collision with any of the neighbouring nations, until about the year B.C. 609 or 608, when his land was invaded by Pharaoh-Nechoh, the Neku of the Egyptian monuments. Josiah felt himself called upon to resist this invasion, and, in doing so, met his death (vers. 29, 30).

Ver. 28.—**Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did.** Josiah was reckoned a good rather than a great king. No mention is made of his "might." The writer of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxv. 26) commemorates his "kindnesses" or "his good deeds." The son of Sirach speaks of his "upright" behaviour (Ecclus. xlix. 2). Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 4. § 1) praises his "justice" and his "piety," and says (ibid., x. 4. § 5) his later years were passed "in peace and opulence." **Are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?** (see 2 Chron. xxxv. 27).

Ver. 29.—**In his days Pharaoh-Nechoh King of Egypt went up against the King of Assyria.** Neku, the "Pharaoh-Nechoh" of this passage, and the Necôs of Herodotus (ii. 158, 159), was the son of Psamatik I., and succeeded his father on the throne of Egypt, probably in B.C. 610. He was one of the most enterprising of the later Egyptian kings, and appears to have made this expedition in his second or third year. The unsettled condition of Western Asia after the Scythic invasion, and the fall of the Assyrian empire, seemed to give an opportunity for Egypt to reclaim her old dominion over Syria and Mesopotamia. The "King of Assyria," against whom Pharaoh-Nechoh "went up," was probably Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar. His proper title was "King of Babylon," which is what Nebuchadnezzar always calls him ('Records of the Past,' vol. v. p. 113, line 22; vol. vii. p. 71, line 6; p. 75, line 9); but the Jews not unnaturally regarded him as the inheritor of the Assyrian empire, as indeed they regarded the Persian monarchs also (Ezra vi. 22), and therefore gave him the title of "King of Assyria." **To the river Euphrates.** The author of Chronicles says that "Necho King of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish" (or "at Carchemish") "by Euphrates," which shows that his design was to penetrate into Northern Syria, where Carchemish (now *Jerabus*) was situated, with a view probably of crossing the Euphrates by the ford at Bir, or by that at Balis, into Mesopotamia. **And King Josiah went against him.** It is possible that Josiah had accepted the position of Babylonian tributary after the fall of the Assyrian kingdom, and thought himself bound to resist an attack upon his suzerain. Or he may simply have resented the violation of his territory, without his permission, by a foreign army. Certainly, if he had allowed the free passage of the Egyptian troops, backwards and forwards, through his country, he would in a short time have lost even the shadow of independence. Nechoh's assurance that his expedition was not against him (Josiah), but against the Assyrians (2 Chron. xxxv. 21), was not a thing to be relied upon, any more than his declaration that God had commanded his expedition. **And he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him.** Megiddo is, beyond all doubt, the present *El-Ledjun* on the northern outskirt of the range of hills which separates the Plain of Esdraelon from that of Sharon. It is certainly surprising to find that Josiah had taken up a position so far to the north, leaving Jerusalem, and, indeed, all Judæa, unprotected. But he may have thought the advantages of the position such as to compensate for any risk to the Judæan cities, in which he would, of course, have left garrisons. Or, possibly, as Keil and Bähr suppose, Nechoh may have conveyed his troops to the Syrian coast by sea, and have landed in the Bay of Acre, close to the Plain of Esdraelon. In this case Josiah would have no choice, but, if he opposed the Egyptian monarch at all, must have met him where he did, in the Esdraelon plain, as he entered it from the Plain of Acre.

Ver. 30.—**And his servants carried him in a chariot**—his "second chariot," according to the writer of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxv. 24), which was probably one kept in reserve in case flight should be necessary, of lighter construction, and drawn by fleeter horses, than his war-chariot—**dead from Megiddo.** Wounded to death, that is. From Chronicles we gather that his wound, which was from an arrow, was not immediately fatal (2 Chron. xxxv. 23, 24); but that he died of it on his way to Jerusalem, or directly

after his arrival. **And brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre** (comp. ch. xxi. 18 and 26). The writer of Chronicles says, "in the sepulchre of his fathers," apparently meaning the burial-place in which were interred the bodies of Manasseh and Amon. We learn from Chronicles that a great lamentation was made for Josiah, the only King of Judah slain in battle, the last good king of David's line, the pious prince whose piety had not sufficed to avert the anger of Jehovah. Jeremiah "lamented for him" (2 Chron. xxxv. 25), perhaps in a set composition (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 5. § 1); though that composition is certainly not either the Book of Lamentations or the fourth chapter of that book. He was further mourned by "all the singing men and the singing women" (2 Chron., *l. s. c.*), who "spake of him in their lamentations," and "made them an ordinance in Israel," and entered these "lamentations," apparently in a book, which was called 'The Book of Lamentations,' or 'of Dirges.' **And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah.** Jehoahaz was otherwise named "Shallum" (1 Chron. iii. 15; Jer. xxii. 11). On what grounds the people preferred him to his elder brother, Eliakim, we do not know. Perhaps Eliakim had accompanied his father to Megiddo, and been made prisoner by Nechoh in the battle. **And anointed him** (see the comment on 1 Kings i. 34, and *supra*, ch. xi. 12), **and made him king in his father's stead.**

Vers. 31—33.—SHORT REIGN OF JEHOAHAZ. Pharaoh-Nechoh, having defeated Josiah, left Jerusalem and Judæa behind him, while he pressed forward on his original enterprise (see ver. 29) into Northern Syria and the district about Carchemish, or the tract north-east of Aleppo. It was three months before he had completed his conquests in these quarters, and, having arranged matters to his satisfaction, set out on his return to Egypt. During these three months Jehoahaz bore rule at Jerusalem (ver. 31), and "did evil in the sight of the Lord" (ver. 32). Ezekiel compares him to "a young lion," which "learned to catch the prey, and devoured men" (xix. 3). It may be suspected that he re-established the idolatries which Josiah had put down; but this is uncertain. Pharaoh-Nechoh, on his return from Carchemish, learning what the Jews had done, sent envoys to Jerusalem, and summoned **Jehoahaz to his presence at Riblah, in the territory of Hamath** (ver. 33; comp. Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 5. § 2). Jehoahaz obeyed the summons; and Nechoh, having obtained possession of his person, "put him in bands," and carried him off to Egypt, where he died (ver. 34; comp. Jer. xxii. 10—12; Josephus, *l. s. c.*).

Ver. 31.—**Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign.** He was, therefore, younger than his brother Eliakim, who, three months later, was "twenty-five years old" (ver. 36). His original name seems to have been "Shallum," as above noticed (see the comment on ver. 30). Probably he changed it to "Jehoahaz" ("Possession of Jehovah") on his accession. **And he reigned three months in Jerusalem**—three months *and ten days*, according to Josephus—**and his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.** The father of Hamutal was not, therefore, Jeremiah the prophet, who was a native of Anathoth (see Jer. i. 1).

Ver. 32.—**And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord** (see the comment on vers. 31—33). Josephus says that he was ἀσεβὴς καὶ μιαρὸς τὸν τρόπον (*l. s. c.*)—"irreligious and of impure habits." Ezekiel (xix. 3) seems to call him a persecutor. **According to all that his fathers had done.** As idolatry was the chief sin of his "fathers," Jehoahaz must have been an idolater.

Ver. 33.—**And Pharaoh-Nechoh put him in bands at Riblah.** "Riblah," which retains its name, was situated in the Cœle-Syrian plain, on the right bank of the Orontes, in lat. 34° 23′ N. nearly. It commanded a ford over the river (Conder, 'Heth and Moab,' p. 17), and is in the midst of a rich, corn-producing country. Hamath, to which it was regarded as belonging, is situated more than fifty miles further down the river. Riblah was well placed as a centre for communication with the neighbouring countries. As Dr. Robinson says ('Researches,' vol. iii. p. 545), "From this point the roads were open by Aleppo and the Euphrates to Nineveh, or by Palmyra (Tadmor) to Babylon, by the end of Lebanon and the coast to Palestine (Philistia) and Egypt, or through the Buka'a and the Jordan valley to the centre of the Holy Land." Nebuchadnezzar followed the example of Nechoh in making Riblah his head-quarters during his sieges of Tyre and Jerusalem (see ch. xxv. 21; Jer. xxxix. 5; lii. 9, 10, 26, 27). **In the land of Hamath.** The "land of Hamath" was the upper part of the Cœle-Syrian valley from about lat. 34° to lat. 35° 30′ N. **That he might not reign in Jerusalem.** Nechoh might naturally distrust the people's choice. He might also

regard the setting up of *any* king at Jerusalem without his sanction as an act of contumacy on the part of a nation which had been practically conquered by the complete defeat of Josiah at Megiddo. Whether his conduct in seizing Jehoahaz after inviting him to a conference was justifiable or not may be questioned; but, in point of fact, he did but use the right of the conqueror somewhat harshly. **And put the land to a tribute of an hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold.** (So Josephus, *l. s. c.*) The tribute was a very moderate one. A century earlier Sennacherib had enacted a tribute of *three* hundred talents of silver, and *thirty* of gold (see above, ch. xviii. 14). We may conjecture that Nechoh wished to conciliate the Jews, regarding them as capable of rendering him good service in the struggle, on which he had entered, with Babylon.

Vers. 34—37.—ACCESSION AND EARLY YEARS OF JEHOIAKIM. Pharaoh-Nechoh, when he deposed Jehoahaz, at once supplied his place by another king. He had no intention of altering the governmental system of Palestine, or of ruling his conquests in any other way than through dependent monarchs. His choice fell on Josiah's eldest surviving son (1 Chron. iii. 15), Eliakim, who was the natural successor of his father. Eliakim, on ascending the throne, changed his name, as Jehoahaz appears to have done (see the comment on ver. 31), and reigned as Jehoiakim. For three years (B.C. 608—605) he continued a submissive vassal of the Egyptian monarch, and remitted him his tribute regularly (ver. 36). But his rule was in all respects an evil one. He "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (ver. 37). He leant towards idolatry (2 Chron. xxxvi. 8); he was oppressive and irreligious (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 5. § 2); he "shed innocent blood" (Jer. xxii. 17); he was luxurious (Jer. xxii. 14, 15), covetous (Jer. xxii. 17), and tyrannical (Ezek. xix. 6).

Ver. 34.—**And Pharaoh-Nechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father.** (On the general inclination of Oriental monarchs to support the hereditary principle, and to establish sons in their fathers' governments, even when the father's had been rebels or enemies, see Herod., iii. 15.) **And turned his name to Jehoiakim.** We may understand that Nechoh required him to take a new name, as a mark of subjection (comp. Gen. xli. 45; Ezra v. 14; Dan. i. 7; and also ch. xxiv. 17), but left the choice of the name to himself. He made the change as slight as possible, merely substituting "Jehovah" for "El" as the initial element. The sense of the name remained the same, "God will set up." The idea that Nechoh was pleased with the new name on account of its apparent connection with the Egyptian moon-god, Aah (Menzel), is very fanciful. **And took Jehoahaz away**—*i.e.* carried him captive to Egypt (see Jer. xxii. 10, 11; Ezek. xix. 4), a very common practice of Egyptian conquerors, and one often accompanied by extreme severities—**and he came to Egypt, and died there** (see Jer. xxii. 12, where this is prophesied).

Ver. 35.—**And Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh.** Jehoiakim, *i.e.*, paid the tribute, which Nechoh had fixed (ver. 33), regularly. He did not, however, pay it out of the state treasury, which was exhausted. **But he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh: he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give it unto Pharaoh-Nechoh**; rather, *he had the land valued* (comp. Lev. xxvii. 8), and "exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his *valuation*."

Ver. 36.—**Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign**—he was therefore two years older than his brother Jehoahaz (see the comment on ver. 31)—**and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem**—probably from B.C. 608 to B.C. 597—**and his mother's name was Zebudah**—he was, therefore, only *half*-brother to Jehoahaz and Zedekiah, whose mother was "Hamutal" (see ver. 31 and ch. xxiv. 18)—**the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah.** "Rumah" is probably the same city as the "Arumah" of Judg. ix. 41, which was in the vicinity of Shechem.

Ver. 37.—**And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done.** Jeremiah says of Jehoiakim, "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; that saith, I will build me a large house and wide chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know

me? saith the Lord. But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it" (Jer. xxii. 13—17). Josephus calls him "an unjust man and an evil-doer, neither pious in his relations towards God, nor equitable in his dealings with his fellow-men" ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 5. § 2). His execution of Urijah, the son of Shemaiah, for prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. xxvi. 20—23), was an act at once of cruelty and impiety. It is suspected (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 252) that, besides reintroducing into Judah all the foreign rites extirpated by his father, he added Egyptian rites to their number. The tyranny which he practised was likewise of an Egyptian cast, including, as it did, the exaction of forced labour from his subjects (Jer. xxii. 13), an old custom of the Pharaohs, and it is quite possible that his "passion for building splendid and costly houses" (Ewald) was awakened by his knowledge of the magnificence which characterized the monarchs of the Saitic dynasty, who revived in Egypt the architectural glories of the Ramessides (see Herod., ii. 153, 175, 176).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Standing to the covenant.* With a heart stirred up to intense zeal for God by the words which he had heard read out of the newly found book—the precious "book of the Law," thrust into temporary oblivion by his wicked grandfather and father—Josiah felt that a great act of national repentance and national profession of faith was called for; and summoning "the men of Judah" by their representatives, and all the whole mass of the people of Jerusalem, he proceeded to call upon them to "stand to the covenant." The idea was well conceived and well carried out. After a national apostasy—an open, evident, and flagrant turning away from God, and adoption of idolatrous worships most abominable in his sight—it was only fitting, only decent, that there should be a sort of public reparation of the wrong done—a turning to God as open, evident, and manifest as the turning away had been. Accordingly, this was what Josiah determined on; and the public act of reparation resolved itself into three parts.

I. A PUBLIC RECITATION OF THE COVENANT. As the Law had been put out of sight, neglected, forgotten, during the space of two reigns, or the greater part of them, so now it was solemnly and publicly recited, proclaimed, declared to be the basis of the national life, the law of the community. The utmost possible honour was done to it by the king reading it himself in the ears of the people—reading it from first to last, "all the words of it," while the priests and the prophets and "all the people" stood attent, listening to the words so long unheard, so long forgotten, so long treated with contempt.

II. A DECLARATION OF ASSENT AND CONSENT TO THE WORDS OF THE COVENANT BY THE KING. The king was the federal head of the nation, and, in pledging himself to the keeping of the covenant, performed not a mere personal, but a representative and federal act. He pledged the nation as a whole to the acceptance and performance of the covenant, undertaking for them that they should "walk after the Lord, and keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul."

III. A DECLARATION OF ASSENT AND CONSENT TO THE WORDS OF THE COVENANT BY THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES INDIVIDUALLY. Nations cannot be saved *in the lump.* It is necessary that each individual come into personal relations with his Maker and Redeemer and Saviour. So "all the people," each of them severally, with one accord and one acclaim, "stood to the covenant"—pledged themselves to keep all the words of it henceforth with all their heart and with all their soul. A great wave of religious feeling seems to have passed over the people, and with a sincerity that was for the moment quite real and unfeigned, they declared their willing acceptance of the whole covenant, of its terrible threats as well as of its gracious promises, of its stern commands no less than of its comforting assurances. They bound themselves individually to observe all the words that were written in the book; so renewing their federal relation with God, and again becoming—what they had well-nigh ceased to be—his people. But something more was wanting. It is in no case enough to make a resolution unless

we keep to it. Performance must follow upon promise. The people were bound, not merely to "stand to the covenant," in the way of profession, just once in their lives, but to stand to it, in the way of action, thenceforward perpetually. It was here that they failed; and it is here that men most commonly fail. To resolve is easy; to stick to our resolutions, difficult. The writings of Jeremiah prove to us that, within a very few years of their acceptance of the covenant in the eighteenth year of Josiah, the people of Judah cast it behind them, became a backsliding people, returned to their idolatries and abominations, forsook God, and swore by them that were no gods, committed adultery, assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses—were "as fed horses in the morning, every one neighing after his neighbour's wife" (Jer. v. 7, 8). A righteous God could not but "visit for these things"—could not but "be avenged upon such a nation as this" (Jer. v. 29).

Vers. 4—27.—*The inability of the best intentions and the strongest will to convert a nation that is corrupt to the core.* Josiah's reformation was the most energetic and the most thorough-going that was ever carried out by any Jewish king. It far transcended, not only the efforts made by Jehoiada in the time of Joash (ch. xi. 17—21; xii. 1—16), and the feeble attempts of Manasseh on his return from Babylon (2 Chron. xxxiii. 15—19), but even the earnest endeavours of Hezekiah at the beginning of his reign (ch. xvii. 3—6). "It extended not only to the kingdom of Judah, but also to the former kingdom of Israel; not only to the public, but also to the private, life of the people. The evil was everywhere to be torn out, roots and all. Nothing which could perpetuate the memory of heathen or of illegitimate Jehovah-worship remained standing. All the places of worship, all the images, all the utensils, were not only destroyed, but also defiled; even the ashes were thrown into the river (?) at an unclean place, that they might be borne away for ever. The idol-priests themselves were slain, and the bones of those who were already dead were taken out of the graves and burnt. The priests of Jehovah, who had performed their functions upon the heights, were deposed from their office and dignity, and were not allowed to sacrifice any more at the altar of Jehovah" (Bähr). It may be added to this account that private superstitions, the use of *teraphim* and *gillulim*, together with the practice of witchcraft and magic arts, were put a stop to, and the rightful ordinances of the Mosaic religion restored and re-established with the utmost strictness and exactitude (vers. 24, 25). Josiah did all that a godly king could do to check the downward course of his nation and recall it to piety and virtue. And for his efforts the sacred writers give him the highest praise (ch. xxii. 2; xxiii. 25; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 2; xxxv. 26; Ecclus. xlix. 1—3). It has been reserved for modern criticism to discover that he defeated his own ends by the violence of his methods, and injured the cause of true religion by making a book—"especially such an imperfect law-book and history as the Pentateuch"—the fundamental law of the nation (Ewald, Eisenlohr). It has not, however, been as yet shown that Josiah's methods were any more violent than the Law required (Exod. xxii. 20; Deut. xiii. 5, 9, 15), much less that injury is done to the cause of true religion by the adoption of a sacred book as the standard of religious truth and morality. The real reason for the failure of his reformation was "the irreformability of the people." When they professed to turn to God, they did not do it "with their whole heart, but feignedly" (Jer. iii. 10)—at any rate, with but half their heart, moved by a gust of sentiment, not by any deep strong tide of religious feeling. And so they soon relapsed into their old ways. The severe religion, the stern morality, which Josiah sought to impose, had no attraction for them. They shrank from Mosaïsm as cold, hard, austere. They preferred the religions of the nations, with their lax morality, their gay rites, their consecration of voluptuousness. So they "slid back by a perpetual backsliding" (Jer. viii. 5); they reintroduced all the old abominations; they sinned in secret when they were unable to sin in public; they "proceeded from evil to evil" (Jer. ix. 4). It has been argued (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. iv. pp. 242, 243) that if Josiah's life had not been cut short within thirteen years of his undertaking the great national reform, if he had been permitted to carry on for some years longer in the same spirit the work which he had initiated, there might have been a complete removal of all the ancient and deep-rooted evils, and a lasting impression might have been made upon the character of the whole people. But this seems too

favourable a forecast. The nation was rotten to the core; the "whole head was sic and the whole heart faint;" "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there was no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores." When such is the case, no human efforts can avail anything—not the strongest will, not the wisest measures, not the purest and best intentions; the time for repentance and return to God is gone by, and nothing remains but "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall destroy God's adversaries" (Heb. x. 27).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 31—ch. xxiv. 7.—*Two royal brothers: the reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim.* I. THEY WERE BROTHERS IN WICKEDNESS. Of each of them it is said, "He did evil in the sight of the Lord." What the particular sins of Jehoahaz were we are not told. But the sins of Jehoiakim are fully and fearlessly stated and denounced by Jeremiah. "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; that saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. . . . Thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it" (Jer. xxii. 13—17). Injustice, fraudulence, selfishness, covetousness, oppression, violence, murder,—such were the main characteristics of him who should have been an example of the people. Selfishness and covetousness were at the bottom of all the rest. And are they not common sins? In the rich they lead to injustice and oppression; in the poor they lead to discontent and envy and violence. The spirit of the gospel, by promoting unselfishness, would lead to fair and upright dealing between man and man.

II. THEY WERE BOTH WICKED, THOUGH THE SONS OF A GOOD FATHER. Even a good man may have bad sons. Perhaps the home training they received was defective. Josiah may have been so much engrossed with the cares of his kingdom, and the reformation of his people, that he neglected the state of his own household. But nevertheless, they had a good example, which they neglected to follow. Jeremiah reminds Jehoiakim of this. "Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the Lord" (Jer. xxii. 15, 16). The privileges and the example they had received increased their guilt. "To whom much is given, of him shall much be required." If we have great privileges, we have also great responsibilities. Those who have been brought up in a Christian land or in a godly home will be expected to know better than those who have been brought up in a heathen country or amid careless and godless surroundings.

III. THEY WERE BOTH WICKED, THOUGH THE ONE HAD THE OTHER'S FATE AS A WARNING. Jehoahaz was sent into exile for his sins. Yet Jehoiakim, who succeeded him, did not profit by the warning. None of us are without many warnings against sin. We have the plain warnings of God's Word. We have the terrible warnings of his providence. How fearful, even in this life, are the consequences of many sins! We have warnings against putting off the offer of salvation to a more convenient season. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh."

IV. THEY BOTH HAD A MISERABLE END. *Jehoahaz died in exile.* Pharaoh-Nechoh put him in prison at Riblah, and he died in captivity. Speaking of him, Jeremiah says, "Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country" (Jer. xxii. 10). What a pathetic strain! The love of the Jews for their native land was most intense. "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" "Yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion." But, after all, what a profitless kind of patriotism theirs was! They loved their native land, but they were blind to its best interests. They did not remember the secret of true prosperity and well-being. They did not remember that "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." They forsook him who was their nation's best Defender and unfailing Friend. A patriotism without righteousness will not benefit a nation much. *Jehoiakim died at Jerusalem. But*

what an ignominious fate was his! Jeremiah had foretold it when he said, "They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! . . . He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. xxii. 18, 19). It was Jehoiakim who cut with his penknife the roll on which were written the words of the Lord, and cast the leaves into the fire (Jer. xxxvi.). For this God said, regarding Jehoiakim, that he should have none to sit upon the throne of David; "and his dead body should be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost." Jehoiakim perished, but the Word of God, which he sought to destroy, was fulfilled. God's Word cannot be destroyed. Roman emperors sought to destroy it. The Church of Rome, for the exaltation of the priesthood, kept it from the people. "But the Word of God is not bound." Contrast the fate of Jehoiakim, who despised and dishonoured the Word of God, with the universal lamentation that followed the death of his father Josiah, who honoured God's Word and obeyed its teachings.—C. H. I.

Vers. 1—25.—*Good aims and bad methods.* "And the king sent," etc. Did the world ever contain a people more morally corrupt than that of the Jews? When we mark them journeying in the wilderness forty years, a more murmuring, disorderly, rebellious set of men where else could we discover? When settled in Palestine, a "land flowing with milk and honey," we find them committing every crime of which humanity is capable—adulteries, suicides, murders, ruthless wars, gross idolatries, their priests impostors, their kings bloody tyrants. Even David, who is praised the most, was guilty of debauchery, falsehood, and blood. They were a nation steeped in depravity. They were "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears;" they did "always resist the Holy Ghost" (see Acts vii. 51). No doubt there was always a true "Church of God" within the nation (1 Kings xix. 18); but to call the whole nation "the Jewish Church" is a misnomer, and far from a harmless one. It has encouraged Christian nations to fashion their communities after the Jewish model instead of after the Christian one. The verses I have selected record and illustrate *good aims* and *bad methods.*

I. GOOD AIMS. Josiah's aims, as here presented, were confessedly high, noble, and good. I offer two remarks concerning his purposes as presented in these verses. 1. *To reduce his people to a loyal obedience to Heaven.* His aim was to sweep every vestige of religious error and moral crime from his dominion. Truly, what more laudable purpose could any man have than this, to crush all evil within his domain, to crush it not only in its form but in its essence? This was indeed the great end of Christ's mission to the world. He came "to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." 2. *Generated within him by the discovery of the Divine will.* Somehow or other, as was seen in the last chapter, the book of the Law which was to regulate the lives of the Jewish people had been lost in the temple, lost probably for many years, but Hilkiah the high priest had just discovered it, and Josiah becomes acquainted with its contents. What is the result? He is seized with the burning conviction that the whole nation is gone wrong, and forthwith he seeks to flash the same conviction into the souls of his people. "And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant." Thus sprang his noble purpose. It was not a capricious whim or the outcome of a sudden and fitful impulse; it was rooted in an enlightened conviction. A noble purpose must be righteously founded.

II. BAD METHODS. Real good work requires not only a good purpose, but a good method also. Saul sought to honour the God of his fathers, and this was good; but his method, viz. that of persecuting the Christians, was *bad.* How did Josiah now seek to realize his purpose to sweep idolatry from the face of his country? Not by

argument, suasion, and moral influence, but by brute *force* and *violence* (vers. 4—28). "All the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove" (ver. 4), that is, all the apparatus for idol-worship, these he ordered to be burnt outside Jerusalem, "in the fields of Kidron." He "stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. And he brake down the houses of the sodomites" (vers. 6, 7). He also "brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men" (ver. 14). Moreover, "he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them" (ver. 20). In this way, the way of force and violence, he essayed to work out his grand purpose. I offer two remarks concerning his method. 1. *It was unphilosophic.* Moral evils cannot be put down by force; coercion cannot travel to a man's soul. The fiercest wind, the most vivid lightnings, cannot reach the moral Elijah in his cave. The "still small voice" alone can touch him, and bring him out to light and truth. After all this, were the people less idolatrous? Before Josiah was cold in his grave idolatry was as rife as ever. You may destroy to-day all heathen temples and priests on the face of the earth, but in doing this you have done nothing towards quenching the spirit of idolatry—that will remain as rampant as ever; phœnix-like, it will rise with new vitality and vigour from the ashes into which material fires have consumed its temples, its books, and its feasts. Ay, and you might destroy all the monastic orders and theological tomes of the Roman Catholic Church, and leave the spirit of popery as strong, nay, stronger than ever. Truth alone can conquer error, love alone can conquer wrath, right alone can conquer wrong. 2. *It was mischievous.* The evil was not extinguished; it burnt with fiercer flame. Persecution has always propagated the opinions it has sought to crush. The crucified Malefactor became the moral Conqueror and Commander of the people. Violence begets violence, anger begets anger, war begets war. "He that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword."—D. T.

Vers. 26—37.—*Lamentable unskilfulness and incorrigibility.* "Notwithstanding the Lord," etc. This short fragment of Jewish history reflects great disgrace on human nature, and may well humble us in the dust. It brings into prominence at least two subjects suggestive of solemn and practical thought.

I. THE WORTHLESSNESS OF UNWISELY DIRECTED EFFORTS TO BENEFIT MEN, HOWEVER WELL INTENDED. Josiah, it seems from the narrative, was one of the best of Israel's kings. "Like unto him was there no king before him." Most strenuous were his efforts to improve his country, to raise it from the worship of idols to the worship of the true God. He sacrifices his very life to his endeavours; and what was his success? *Nil.* "Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My Name shall be there. Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?" All the efforts of this noble king seemed to be abortive. But why? Because, as shown in our preceding homily, while his motive was good, his methods were bad. Instead of depending upon argument and suasion, moral influence, and the embodiment of moral goodness, he uses force. "He slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them," etc. Here is a principle in the Divine government of man. No man, however good, can accomplish a good thing unless he employs wise means. The Church of Rome is an example. Its aim, the bringing of the world into the one fold, is sublimely good, but the means it has employed not only neutralize the purpose, but drive large masses of the population away into the wilderness of infidelity and careless living. It is not enough for a Church to have good aims; it must have wise methods: not enough for preachers to desire the salvation of their people; they must use means in harmony with the laws of thought and feeling. Hence fanatical Churches and preachers have always done more harm than good. "If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct." Indeed, this man's unwise efforts not only failed to benefit his country, they brought ruin on himself. He lost his life. "In his days Pharaoh-Nechoh King of Egypt went up

against the King of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and King Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him. And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo." No doubt Josiah was inspired with patriotic and religious purposes in going forth against Pharaoh-Nechoh, and in seeking to prevent the march of a bloody tyrant and a hostile force through his territory in order to attack the King of Assyria. But where was his wisdom? What chance had he to hurl back such a formidable invasion? None whatever. Single-handed, of course, he could do nothing. And what help could he obtain from his subjects, most of whom had fallen into that moral degradation which robs the soul of all true courage and skill?

II. THE AMAZING INCORRIGIBILITY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE. Do we find that the men of Israel were improved by the efforts of such kings as Hezekiah and Josiah? Nay. They seemed to grow worse. Scarcely was Josiah in his grave before his son Jehoahaz, who was twenty-three years old, ascended the throne, and during the three months of his reign he "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord;" and when he is struck down another son of Josiah, Eliakim, who was afterwards named Jehoiakim, received the throne, and, after a reign of twenty-five years, the record is, "He did that which is evil in the sight of the Lord." Here, then, is moral incorrigibility! In all history, ancient or modern, I know no people whose doings were of a baser type. With all the lofty advantages which they had, and with the interpositions of Heaven vouchsafed to them, they seemed to grow worse from age to age. The little springs of depravity that broke forth from their great ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, seemed to deepen, swell in volume, and widen as time rolled on. It was at last a kind of Stygian stream. You can scarcely point to one pellucid wave rising on its surface. It was foul from top to bottom. How sadly have many professed disciples of Christ misinterpreted Jewish history! So much so that they have Judaized the very gospel, and made Judaism a model after which they have shaped communities professedly Christian.

CONCLUSION. 1. A word *to those who desire to be useful.* Unless you practically recognize the truly scientific adaptation of means to ends, and understand the eternal principles by which the human mind can be rightly influenced, you will "labour in vain, and spend your strength for nought." There is no way by which coercion can travel to a man's soul, no way by which cruelties and persecutions can enlighten, strengthen, and ennoble souls. 2. A word, next, *to those who desire to be benefited.* You may have seers from heaven working among you, endeavouring to improve you and elevate you. But unless you yield to the influences and attend to the counsels, you will grow worse and worse. Pharaoh's heart grew harder under the ministry of Moses on the banks of the Nile; the Jewish people became worse and worse under the forty years' ministry in the wilderness, and the contemporaries of Christ filled up their measure of iniquity under his benign and enlightening ministrations. The things that belong to your peace may become the elements of your ruin.—D. T.

Vers. 1—14.—*Josiah's great reformation.* The narrative of Josiah's reforms contained in this chapter incorporates several particulars which, if the Book of Chronicles is to be regarded as giving the true chronology, belong to an earlier period. It is next to incredible that, after Jehovah's worship had been regularly established, such scandals as the prostitution alluded to in ver. 7, and the horses and chariots of the sun in ver. 11, should have been allowed to continue. The narrative in Kings seems specially designed to bring all Josiah's reforms into one view. We have—

I. SOLEMN COVENANTING. After the example of Jehoiada in the reign of Joash (2 Chron. xxiii. 16), and the still more ancient example of Moses (Deut. xxix.), Josiah convened the people together to renew the covenant made with them by God at Sinai (Exod. xxiv. 1—8). The covenanting took place appropriately in the house of the Lord—another evidence that the worst abominations had by this time been removed from the temple. All classes were assembled, high and low, priests, prophets, and people. In proposing to them to enter on this solemn engagement, in which he set them the example: 1. *The king asked them to do a right thing.* It was Israel's distinction among the peoples of the earth that they stood in covenant with God. God had chosen them as a people for himself, that they should serve him alone in the land he had given them. If they had failed to do this, and now repented of their

disobedience, it was meet that they should acknowledge their transgressions, and anew pledge themselves to be the Lord's. This was what Josiah desired Judah and Jerusalem—"the remnant of God's inheritance"—to do. Standing on a raised platform, he set them the example of covenant. It is a good thing when nations have leaders who are themselves conspicuous examples of godliness, and who point the way in what is right to their people. The propriety of national covenants is a question to be settled by the circumstances of each particular age. The individual Christian, at least, is called to frequent renewal of his vows to God, and such an exercise is peculiarly suitable after seasons of backsliding. 2. *He did it on a right basis.* The covenant was based on the declarations of "the book of the covenant," the words of which were first read in the hearing of all the people. Then the people, following the example of their monarch, pledged themselves to walk after the Lord, to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and soul, and to perform the words that were written in the book. Their covenant thus rested on the right foundation, viz. God's Word. It is God who, in his Word, draws near to us, declares to us his will, holds out his promises, invites us to engagement with himself, and lays down the rule of our obedience. A covenant means nothing save as it springs from faith in, acceptance of, and submission to the revealed Word of God. Our covenanting is to be (1) intelligent—based on the study of God's Word, and understanding of its requirements; (2) cordial—with all the heart and soul; and (3) dutiful—in the spirit of obedience, "to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book." 3. *Yet the engagement was not sincere.* It was so in the case of Josiah, but not in the case of the people generally, though it is written, "All the people stood to the covenant." In lip they honoured God, but in heart they were far from him (Isa. xxix. 13). This is evident from the descriptions in the prophets. The movement was not a spontaneous one originating in the hearts of the people themselves, but came down to them from above through the king's command. The formal ceremonies of covenanting were gone through, and some temporary, and perhaps genuine, enthusiasm was awakened. But there was no real heart-change of the people. Their goodness was like the morning cloud and the early dew (Hos. vi. 4). This is too often the fate of movements originating with kings, princes, and those in high positions, and not springing from the people's own initiative. They are popular and fashionable, and draw many after them who have no real sympathy with their aims. But the effects do not endure. Rank, fashion, royalty, the adhesion of the great and mighty and noble of this world (1 Cor. i. 26), do not of themselves make a movement religious, though they may secure for it *éclat.* The Lord looketh on the heart (1 Sam. xvi. 7), and if the essence of religion is wanting, imposing external forms count for little.

II. THE TEMPLE CLEANSED. In the covenant they had just made, the people bound themselves in the most solemn manner to rid the land of all visible traces of idolatry (Exod. xxiii. 24; Deut. xii. 1—3). Josiah took this work in hand more systematically than any king who had gone before him (ver. 25). He began with the temple, the thorough purification of which had probably been left over till the repairs above referred to (ch. xxii.) could be overtaken. Similar zeal for the destruction of idols was manifested at the conclusion of the previous covenant under Joash (2 Chron. xxiii. 17). 1. *A cleansing away of the traces of Baal-worship.* In the first place, a careful clearing out was made of all the vessels and utensils that had been used in the service of Baal, or of the Asherah, or of the host of heaven. These were burned in the valley of Kidron, and the ashes of them carried to Bethel, as the appropriate source of this idolatry. The sacred tree itself—the Asherah—was then cut down, burned in the same valley, and its ashes sprinkled on the graves of the people, many of whom had shared in the guilt of its worship. Afterwards the altars erected to Baal in the temple courts were broken down, and the dust of them cast also into the valley of Kidron (ver. 12). Possibly the Asherah and these altars had been removed, and treated as described, at an earlier date. 2. *A cleansing away of the traces of Venus-worship.* The Asherah was devoted to the licentious Astarte, and rites the most shameless and abominable had been conducted in the temple courts in honour of this goddess. Houses, even, had been reared close to the sacred enclosure for the bands of depraved men and women who took part in these orgies. Doubtless the worship ere this had been stopped, and the filthy actors driven out, but the houses which remained as a reminder of its existence were

now broken down. 3. *A cleansing away of the traces of sun-worship.* To the worship of the sun and of the host of heaven belonged the sacred horses and chariots (ver. 11), probably ere this removed, and the chariots burned; and the altars on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which successive kings had set up. These, like the altars of Manasseh, were broken down, and their dust scattered in the adjoining valley. Every vestige of idolatry was thus cleansed out of the house of which the Lord had said, "In Jerusalem will I put my Name" (ch. xxi. 4).

III. IDOLATRY PUT AWAY. Judgment began at the house of God (1 Pet. iv. 17), but it spread thence throughout the whole land. 1. *Degradation of the priests.* The land apparently had been already "purged" of the idols, Asherahs, and sun-images, which were worshipped at the high places (2 Chron. xxxiv. 3, 4). Measures were now taken to degrade the priests who had ministered at these forbidden altars, and through whom, perhaps, the worship was still in many places carried on. These priests were of different kinds. (1) Some were "idolatrous priests"—chemarim—after the fashion of the priests of the northern kingdom. They do not appear to have been of Levitical descent at all, but were "ordained" of the kings of Judah to burn incense in the high places, and may have been drawn, like Jeroboam's chemarim, from "the lowest of the people" (1 Kings xii. 31). Some of them were ostensibly priests of Jehovah, serving him, probably, with idolatrous symbols; others served Baal, and the sun, moon, and planets. The whole of this illegitimate class of priests Josiah put sternly down—suppressing their order as contrary to the Law of Moses. (2) The second class of priests were true Levites, but they ministered at the high places. These were brought from their several cities to Jerusalem, and there provided for out of the temple revenues. They were not, however, permitted to minister at the altar of Jehovah, though, like the other priests, they received their support from the temple offerings. These stringent regulations effectually broke the power of this class throughout the country. God must be served by a pure ministry. 2. *Defilement of the high places.* The next part of Josiah's policy was to destroy and defile the high places themselves. One way in which this was done was by covering them with dead men's bones, or burning dead bones upon them. The high places were thus rendered unclean, and became hateful to the people. Two special acts of defilement are mentioned in addition to that of "the mount of corruption" next referred to, viz. (1) the defilement of the high places at the entrance of the gate of Joshua; and (2) the defilement of Topheth in the valley of Hinnom. The real defilement was in the idolatrous and murderous rites with which these places were associated, but Josiah put a special brand of pollution on them, and stamped them as spots to be held in abhorrence for their vileness. 3. *The defilement of "the mount of corruption."* Such was the appropriate name given to the hill on which Solomon, long before, had reared altars to the heathen gods worshipped by his wives—Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Moloch, etc. The high places of that mount, which directly overlooked Jerusalem, did Josiah now defile. Idolatry is none the less pernicious that it has the sanction of a great name, and flaunts itself under the guise of a spurious toleration. Any spot where God is not worshipped, but idols are set up in his place, soon becomes a mount of corruption. Heathenism is a mount of corruption. Godless civilization will become a mount of corruption. Our very hearts will turn to mounts of corruption if we allow God to be dethroned in them.

IV. LESSONS OF THE REFORMATION. 1. *From what it did accomplish.* Josiah's was a true "zeal for the Lord." He was actuated by a right motive, guided himself strictly by God's Word, and directed his efforts unswervingly to execute God's will. He wrought earnestly to purify his state from the evils that afflicted it, and to restore the influence of pure and undefiled religion. He deserves our highest admiration for the (1) determination, (2) energy, (3) method, and (4) thoroughness with which he did God's work. Externally, his work was a success. He cleansed the land from idolatry, We, too, have a call to labour for the purification of society, the dethronement of idols, and the spread of true religion. The age of idolatry is not past. Church, state, literature, science, art, have all their idols. There is self-idolatry, nature-idolatry, wealth-idolatry, art-idolatry, the idolatry of genius, and many more worships besides. Our own hearts are abodes of idols. We do well to imitate Josiah in the energy and thoroughness with which he laboured to uproot these false gods. We should be unsparing in our judgment of whatever vice, error, evil lusts, or passions, or inclinations,

or tendencies, we discover in ourselves. Let high thoughts be mercilessly brought low, and proud imaginations abased (2 Cor. x. 5). Wherever sin is detected, let it be judged. Thus it was with the Corinthians, "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!" 2. *From what it did not accomplish.* This reformation of Josiah wrought, after all, only on the exterior of the nation's life. It lacked power to reach the heart. Therefore it failed to regenerate or save the nation. We are thus pointed to the need of a better covenant, that which Jeremiah predicts in ch. xxxi. 31—34 of his prophecies, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. . . . I will put my Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts," etc.—J. O.

Vers. 15—20.—*The altar at Bethel.* From Judah Josiah passed on to Israel, continuing his work of idol-demolition. Everywhere he went he proved himself a veritable "hammer of God"—levelling, defacing, dishonouring, destroying.

I. AN ANCIENT PROPHECY FULFILLED. 1. *Iconoclasm at Bethel.* Bethel had been the chief scene of Israel's idolatry—the head and front of its offending (cf. Hos. iv. 15; x. 4—9, etc.). On it Josiah's zeal first expended itself. Hosea had prophesied its desolation, the destruction of its high places, the carrying away of its calf, the cessation of its mirth and feasts, its abandonment to thorns and nettles (Hos. ii. 11; ix. 6; x. 8, etc.). But an older voice had foretold the end from the beginning. Scarcely had the schismatic altar, with its calf, been set up, when a prophet out of Judah denounced Jeroboam's sin to his face, and proclaimed that a future king would stain the altar-stones with the blood of the priests, and defile it by burning dead men's bones upon it. A sign had been given in confirmation of the truth of the prediction (1 Kings xiii. 1—10). That oracle stood at the head of the way of transgression, warning men away from it; but its voice had been unheeded. Now, centuries after, the prediction was fulfilled. Idolatry in some form still held its ground on the ancient spot, but Josiah put an end to it. The altar and high place he broke down, and burned the high place, and reduced it to powder, and burned the Asherah. The idolatry at Bethel had wrought out its effects in the ruin of the state. That evil was irremediable, but Josiah could show at least his detestation of the sin, and his determination that no more evil should be wrought, by totally demolishing the sanctuary. Special regard should be paid to the removal of centres of wickedness. It is useless to capture outworks, if strongholds are left standing. We should not rest content till the very name and memory of sin has perished in places that were conspicuous for it. 2. *The sepulchre invaded.* Josiah would have no half-measures. It was part of his settled policy, not simply to break down the high places, but to defile them, and unfit them for future use. In looking round him at Bethel for means to accomplish this end, he spied the sepulchres that were in the mount, and sent and took bones out of the sepulchres, and polluted the altar by burning them upon it. His immediate design was to defile the altar, but in taking the bones to burn, he dishonoured also the ashes of the dead. In his consuming zeal against idolatry he felt that no respect was due to the bones of those who, by their sins, had brought death upon the nation. It is easy to blame the act, and to compare it with the ruthless violations of the sanctity of the grave of which persecutors have often been guilty. It seems a paltry and vindictive proceeding to wreak one's vengeance on the dead. To Josiah, however, no sanctity attached to these graves, but only a curse. His very object was to do deeds which would make men feel, as they had never felt before, the hateful nature of idolatry, and the certainty of a Nemesis attending it. In having their bones dragged out and burned upon the altar, the dead idolaters were, in a sense, making atonement to God's insulted majesty (cf. Jer. viii. 1—3). The feeling, nevertheless, is one which might easily go too far, and be mixed up with mean and purely spiteful motives. However it might be under Jewish law, it can hardly be right now. None the less is it the case that a curse rests upon the very bones of the wicked dead. Death to them is the penal stroke of God's displeasure, and, when they rise, it is to the resurrection of damnation (John v. 29).

II. THE BONES OF THE PROPHET RESPECTED. 1. *A monument in a wicked place to a*

good man. Among the tombs which Josiah beheld was one with a monument before it. He asked whose it was, and was told it was the monument of the man of God who prophesied of these things which had been done to the altar. That monument had, perhaps, been built by the hands of the very men whose sins the prophet had denounced, so great oftentimes is human inconsistency (cf. Matt. xxiii. 28—30). In any case, it stood there for centuries a silent witness against the iniquities that were perpetrated in its presence. Monuments to prophets, martyrs, saints, still crowd our burial and public places; we pay external honour to their memories; but what God will ask of us is—Do we imitate their spirit? As great men recede into the distance, it becomes easy to pay them reverence. These idolatrous Israelites no doubt magnified their descent from Abraham, and boasted of their great lawgiver Moses, at the very time that they were breaking his commandments. When the prophets were among them, they sought to kill them; then they built monuments in their honour. 2. *A solitary witness for truth justified by the event.* This prophet in his day stood alone. Even among the dead he lay alone. The multitudes around him were not those who believed, but those who had disregarded his word. If ever man was in a minority, he was. Century after century rolled by, and still the word he had spoken remained unfulfilled. Did it not seem as if the oracle were about to fail? But Wisdom in the end is justified of her children (Matt. xi. 19). The prophet's word came true at last, and it was seen and acknowledged of all that he was right. Thus is it with all God's true servants. We should not concern ourselves too much with man's gainsaying. We have but to bear our testimony and leave the issues with God. He will at length vindicate us. 3. *Discrimination between good and bad.* When Josiah learned whose the sepulchre was, he gave command that his bones should not be touched, nor yet the bones of the old prophet who was buried along with him (1 Kings xiii. 31). The righteous was discriminated from the sinners. So shall it be at the last day. No confusion will be made in the resurrection between good and bad. While the wicked come forth to the resurrection of judgment, the good shall come forth to the resurrection of life (John v. 29). A gracious Saviour watches over their dust.

III. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE PRIESTS. 1. *General demolition.* The wave of destruction spread from Bethel over all the other high places in the cities of Samaria. Josiah's procession through the land was the signal for the overthrow of every species of idolatry. "So did he," we are told, "in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, in their ruins round about" (2 Chron. xxxiv. 6). 2. *Priests of the high places slain.* In connection with this progress of Josiah through Israel is mentioned the fact that "he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars." If this stern policy had been confined to Israel, it would have been difficult to exculpate Josiah from partiality in his carrying out of the provisions of the Law; but the words in Chronicles imply that the like was, at least in some places, done in Judah also (2 Chron. xxxiv. 5). In what he did he was no doubt strictly within the letter of the Law, which he and the people had sworn to obey, for that undeniably denounced death against idolaters (Deut. xiii., etc.). To equal his act, therefore, with Manasseh's shedding of innocent blood is to miss the essential fact of the situation. This was not innocent blood by the fundamental law of the constitution. It is probably with reference to this, as to other parts of his conduct, that Josiah gets special praise for the fidelity of his obedience to the Law of Moses (ver. 25). It does not follow that his conduct is such as Christians, living under a milder and better dispensation, should now imitate. It does not even follow that every individual act which Josiah did was beyond blame. His human judgment may have erred at times on the side of severity. The holiest movements are not free from occasional excesses; but we should judge the movement by the soul which actuates it, and not by its superficial excrescences. —J. O.

Vers. 21—28.—*The reformation completed, yet Israel's sin not pardoned.* We have in these verses—

I. THE GREAT PASSOVER. 1. *A seal of the covenant.* This great year of reformation began with a covenant, and ended with a Passover. The ceremonies of the occasion are fully described in 2 Chron. xxxv. The Passover in the Old Testament was in some respects very much what the Lord's Supper is in the New. It took the people back to the origin

of their history, revived vivid memories of the deliverance from Egypt, and ratified their engagement to be the Lord's. It reminded of the past, set a seal upon the present, and gave a pledge for the future. The Christian sacrament seals God's promises to the believer, and, at the same time, seals the believer's covenant with God. It establishes, nourishes, and strengthens the life received in the new birth. 2. *An historic celebration.* "Surely there was not holden such a Passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel," etc. A true religious awakening shows itself (1) in increased interest in God's ordinances; (2) in stricter fidelity in observing them; and (3) in joyful alacrity in taking advantage of them.

II. FIDELITY TO MOSES. 1. *Cleansing away the concomitants of idolatry.* Together with the idols, Josiah cleansed out of the land the tribes of wizards, necromancers, soothsayers, etc., who found their profit in the ignorance and superstition of the people. Where Bible religion returns, sanity returns. The hideous spectres begotten of fear and superstition vanish. Josiah further carefully eradicated any remaining traces of idol-worship that could be "spied." 2. *Pre-eminent fidelity.* In these deeds, and by his whole course as a reformer, Josiah earned for himself the distinction of being the most faithful king that had yet reigned. He and Hezekiah stand out pre-eminent the one for trust in God (ch. xviii. 5), the other for fidelity to the Law of Moses. "Like unto him was there no king before him," etc. Like gems, each of which has its special beauty and excels in its own kind, these two kings shine above all the rest. Only *one* character exhibits all spiritual excellences in perfection.

III. ISRAEL'S SIN YET UNPARDONED. 1. *God's unappeased anger.* "Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath," etc. The sole reason of this was that, notwithstanding the zealous Josiah's reforms, the people had not in heart turned from their great sins. The spirit of Manasseh still lived in them. They were unchanged in heart, and, with favouring circumstances, were as ready to break out into idolatry as ever. The outward face of things was improved as regards religion, but social injustice and private morals were as bad as ever. Hence the Lord could not, and would not, turn from his wrath. It is real, not lip, repentance that God requires to turn away his anger from us. We see: (1) The posthumous influence of evil. "One sinner destroyeth much good" (Eccles. ix. 18). Manasseh's deeds lived after him. His repentance could not recall the mischief they had done to the nation. They went working on after his decease, propagating and multiplying their influence, till the nation was destroyed. (2) The righteousness of individuals cannot save an unrighteous people. Not even though these righteous persons are high in rank, are deeply concerned for the revival of religion, and labour with all their hearts to stem the tide of corruption. Their piety and prayers may *delay* judgment, but if impenitence is persisted in, they cannot finally avert it (cf. Jer. xv. 1, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people"). 2. *God's unshaken purpose.* "I will remove Judah also out of my sight," etc. Terrible is the severity of God when his forbearance is exhausted. Moral laws are inexorable. If the spiritual conditions, by which only a change could be effected, are wanting, they work on till the sinner is utterly destroyed.—J. O.

Vers. 29—37.—*Pharaoh-Nechoh and the Jewish kings.* A new power had risen in Egypt which was to play a temporary, but influential, part in the evolution of God's purposes towards Judah. Assyria was at this time in its death-agonies. The sceptre of empire was soon to pass to Babylon. But it was Pharaoh-Nechoh who, following the designs of his own ambition, was to set in motion a train of events which had the effect of bringing Judah within the power of the King of Babylon.

I. THE DEATH OF JOSIAH. 1. *Circumstances of his death.* Taking advantage of the troubles in the East, Pharaoh-Nechoh was bent on securing his own supremacy over Syria and extending it as far as the river Euphrates. He disclaimed all intention of interfering with Josiah (2 Chron. xxxv. 21), but that monarch thought it his duty to oppose him. It was a perilous venture, and Josiah seems to have entered upon it somewhat rashly. He certainly had not prophetic sanction for the enterprise. The issue was as might have been anticipated. He encountered Pharaoh-Nechoh at Megiddo, and was disastrously defeated. Wounded by the archers, he bade his servants carry him away, and, placing him in another chariot, they drove him off. It is to be inferred from Zech.

xii. 11 that he died at "Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo," and that his dead body was afterwards brought to Jerusalem. By this defeat Judah was brought into subjection to Pharaoh-Nechoh, and the way prepared for its subjection to Nebuchadnezzar, when he, in turn, became master of the situation. It is wise not unduly to meddle with the quarrels of other nations. 2. *Mourning for his death.* The untimely death of Josiah was a cause of unexampled mourning throughout the whole land. The affection with which his people regarded him, and the confidence they placed in him, are strikingly shown by the sorrow felt at his loss. The mourning at Hadadrimmon is used by the prophet to illustrate the mourning which will take place at the national repentance of Israel in the times of the Messiah (Zech. xii. 9—14). It was as the mourning for a firstborn. Jeremiah composed an elegy for the good king departed, and the singing-men and singing-women kept up the practice of lamenting for him even unto the Captivity (2 Chron. xxxv. 24, 25). Well might Judah mourn. Josiah was the last great and good king they would see. But infinitely better would it have been if their sorrow had been the "godly sorrow" which "worketh repentance" (2 Cor. vii. 10). This unfortunately it was not, as the result showed. It is because it was not that, the mourning of Hadadrimmon will have to be done over again (Zech. xii. 10), next time in a very different spirit. We see that it is possible to lament good men, yet not profit by their example. The best tribute we can pay the just is to live like them. 3. *Providential aspects of his death.* (1) An irreparable loss to the nation, Josiah's death was yet great gain to himself. It was God's way of taking him away from the evil to come, and so of fulfilling the promise given by Huldah (ch. xxii. 20). Josiah, perhaps, erred in taking the step he did, but while God punished him for his error, he providentially overruled the event for his good. Death is sometimes a blessing. It may hide things from our eyes we had rather not see; as, in the case of the good, it translates to scenes of bliss beyond human conception. The "dark things" of God's providence are those in which we may ultimately recognize the greatest mercy. "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense," etc. (2) In regard to the nation, the providential aspects of this death were widely different. It took from them a gift which they had failed to prize, or at least to profit by. It was, moreover, a step in Providence towards the fulfilment of the threatenings of captivity. Pharaoh-Nechoh's conquest was the gate through which Nebuchadnezzar entered.

II. THE DEPOSITION OF JEHOAHAZ. 1. *A brief reign.* In virtue of the defeat of Josiah, Judah became *ipso facto* a dependency of Pharaoh-Nechoh. The people, however, were in no mood to acknowledge this subjection, and immediately set about making a king for themselves. They passed by Eliakim, Josiah's eldest son, and raised the next son, Shallum (Jer. xxii. 11), to the throne under the name of Jehoahaz. The younger son was probably the more spirited and warlike of the two. Ezekiel compares him to a young lion (xix. 3). Under him the nation cast off the restraints of the reign of Josiah, and reverted to its former sinful ways. It does not suffice to make a good king that he has (1) a good father—"the son of Josiah;" (2) a good name—Jehoahaz, "he whom the Lord sustains;" or (3) a solemn anointing—they "anointed him." The people probably thought otherwise, for it was they, apparently, who gave him this name, and took the step of formally consecrating him with the anointing oil. Anointing oil, without the grace which it symbolizes, is of little use. Jehoahaz was permitted to possess his throne only for three brief months. 2. *A hard captivity.* By the end of the period named, Pharaoh-Nechoh was sufficiently free to attend to the proceedings at Jerusalem. The city had flouted his supremacy, and he did not let it escape. His own camp was at Riblah, but he sent to Jerusalem, required Jehoahaz to attend his court at Riblah, there put him in chains, and carried him with him into Egypt (Ezek. xix. 4). This was a worse fate than Josiah's. "Weep ye not for the dead," said Jeremiah, "neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country" (xxii. 10). This captivity of Jehoahaz was a prelude to the captivity of the nation—the first drop of the shower soon about to fall. Yet the people would not hearken. 3. *A heavy tribute.* In addition to removing the king, Pharaoh-Nechoh put the land under a tribute. He exacted a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. Again we see how sin works out bondage, misery, and disgrace. An oft-read lesson, but how impossible, apparently, for this people to learn!

III. JEHOIAKIM'S VASSALAGE. 1. *Egypt dictates a king.* Once again, as in the earliest period of their history, Israel was in bondage to Egypt. Pharaoh-Nechoh used his power unsparingly. The eldest son of Josiah, who seems not to have been a favourite with the people, was willing to accept the throne as a vassal, and him, accordingly, Nechoh made king, changing his name, in token of subjection, from Eliakim to Jehoiakim. How bitter the satire—Jehoiakim, "he whom Jehovah has set up"! 2. *Jehoiakim becomes Egypt's tool.* Jehoiakim had, perhaps, no alternative but to give "the silver and the gold to Pharaoh," but in his manner of exacting it he showed himself the willing tool of the oppressor. To obtain the money, he put heavy taxation on the people. His rule was a bitter, ignominious, and oppressive one for Judah. Jeremiah says of him, "But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it" (xxii. 17). But such are the kings men must submit to when they reject God for their Sovereign. In a moral respect Jehoiakim's reign was "evil," and in a temporal respect it was the stumbling on from one misfortune to another.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Vers. 1—20.—REIGNS OF JEHOIAKIM, JEHOIACHIN, AND ZEDEKIAH.

Vers. 1—7.—REST OF THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM. Troubles now fell thick and fast upon Judæa. Within three years of the invasion of the country by Pharaoh-Nechoh, another hostile army burst in from the north. In B.C. 605, the last year of Nabopolassar, he sent his eldest son, Nebuchadnezzar, into Syria, to assert the dominion of Babylon over the countries lying between the Euphrates and the frontier of Egypt. Nechoh sought to defend his conquests, but was completely defeated at Carchemish in a great battle (Jer. xlvi. 2—12). Syria and Palestine then lay open to the new invader, and, resistance being regarded as hopeless, Jehoiakim made his submission to Nebuchadnezzar (ver. 1). But, three years later (B.C. 602), sustained by what hope we know not, he ventured on an act of rebellion, and declared himself independent. Nebuchadnezzar did not at once march against him, but caused him to be attacked, as it would seem, by his neighbours (ver. 2). A war without important result continued for four years. Then Nebuchadnezzar came up against him in person for a second time (2 Chron. xxxvi. 6), took Jerusalem, and made Jehoiakim prisoner. He designed at first to carry him to Babylon; but seems to have afterwards determined to have him executed, and to have treated his corpse with indignities (Jer. xxii. 30; xxxvi. 30). The writer of Kings throws a veil over these transactions, closing his narrative with the customary phrase—Jehoiakim "slept with his fathers" (ver. 6).

Ver. 1.—**In his days Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came up.** The Hebrew נְבוּכַדְנֶאצַּר (*Nebuchadnezzar*) or נְבוּכַדְרֶאצַּר (*Nebuchadrezzar*, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) represents the Babylonian *Nabu-kudur-uzur* ("Nebo is the protector of landmarks"), a name very common in the Babylonian and Assyrian inscriptions. It was borne by three distinct kings of Babylon, the most important of whom was Nebuchadnezzar III., the son of Nabopolassar, the monarch of the present passage. According to Berosus, he was not at the time of this expedition the actual sovereign of Babylonia, but only the crown prince, placed by the actual king, Nabopolassar, at the head of his army. It is possible that his father may have associated him in the kingdom, for association was not unknown at Babylon; or the Jews may have mistaken his position; or the historian may call him king by *prolepsis*, as a modern might say, "The Emperor Napoleon invaded Italy and defeated the Austrians at Marengo" (see Pusey's 'Daniel,' p. 400). His father had grown too old and infirm to conduct a military expedition, and consequently sent his son in his place, with the object of chastising Nechoh, and recovering the territory whereof Nechoh had made himself master three years before (see ch. xxiii. 29—33, and compare below, ver. 7). **And Jehoiakim became his servant**—*i.e.* submitted to him, and became a tributary king—**three years** (from B.C. 605 to B.C. 602): **then he turned and rebelled against him.** How Jehoiakim came to venture on this step we are not told, and can only con-

jecture. It is, perhaps, most probable that (as Josephus says, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 6. § 2) he was incited to take this course by the Egyptians, who were still under the rule of the brave and enterprising Nechoh, and who may have hoped to wipe out by fresh victories the disaster experienced at Carchemish. There is, perhaps, an allusion to Jehoiakim's expectation of Egyptian succours in the statement of ver. 7, that "the King of Egypt came not again any more out of his land."

Ver. 2.—**And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldees.** That Nebuchadnezzar did not promptly march against Jehoiakim to suppress his rebellion, but contented himself with sending against him a few "bands" (גְּדוּדִים) of Chaldeans, and exciting the neighbouring Syrians, Ammonites, and Moabites to invade and ravage his territory, can scarcely be otherwise accounted for than by supposing that he was detained in Middle Asia by wars or rebellions nearer home. It may have been a knowledge of these embarrassments that induced Jehoiakim to lend an ear to the persuasions of Nechoh. **And bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon** (comp. Ezek. xix. 8, "Then the nations set against him on every side from the provinces, and spread their net over him: he was taken in their pit"), **and sent them against Judah to destroy it**—*i.e.* to begin that waste and ruin which should terminate ultimately in the complete destruction and obliteration of the Judæan kingdom—**according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servants the prophets.** As Isaiah, Micah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Huldah (see ch. xxii. 16—20).

Ver. 3.—**Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah;** literally, *only at the mouth of the Lord did this come upon Judah;* i.e. there was no other cause for it but the simple "mouth" or "word" of the Lord. The LXX., who translate πλὴν θυμὸς Κυρίου ἦν ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰούδαν, seem to have had אַף instead of פִּי in their copies. **To remove them out of his sight** (comp. ch. xxiii. 27; and see also the comment on ch. xvii. 18) **for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did.** The meaning is not that the nation was punished for the personal sins and crimes of the wicked Manasseh forty or fifty years previously, but that the class of sins introduced by Manasseh, being persisted in by the people, brought the stern judgments of God upon them. As W. G. Sumner well observes, "The sins of Manasseh had become a designation for a certain class of offences, and a particular form of public and social depravity, which was introduced by Manasseh, but of which generation after generation continued to be guilty." The special sins were (1) idolatry, accompanied by licentious rites; (2) child-murder, or sacrifice to Molech; (3) sodomy (ch. xxiii. 7); and (4) the use of enchantments and the practice of magical arts (ch. xxi. 6).

Ver. 4.—**And also for the innocent blood that he shed** (comp. ch. xxi. 16, and the comment *ad loc.*). Like the other "sins of Manasseh," the shedding of innocent blood continued, both in the Moloch offerings (Jer. vii. 31) and in the persecution of the righteous (Jer. vii. 6, 9, etc.). Urijah was actually put to death by Jehoiakim (Jer. xxvi. 23); Jeremiah narrowly escaped. **For he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the Lord would not pardon.** Blood "cries to God from the ground" on which it falls (Gen. iv. 11), and is "required" at the hands of the bloodshedder (Gen. ix. 5) unfailingly. Especially is the blood of saints slain for their religion avenged and exacted by the Most High (see Rev. vi. 10; xi. 18; xvi. 6; xix. 2, etc.).

Ver. 5.—**Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?** Among the acts of Jehoiakim recorded elsewhere in the Old Testament, the most remarkable are the following: (1) His execution of Urijah the son of Shemaiah (Jer. xxvi. 23); (2) his destruction of the first collection of the early prophecies made by Jeremiah, in a fit of anger at hearing its contents (Jer. xxxvi. 20—23); (3) his order that Jeremiah and Baruch should be arrested (Jer. xxxvi. 26); (4) his capture by some of the "nations" which Nebuchadnezzar had stirred up against him, and delivery into the hands of that monarch (Ezek. xix. 9), probably at Jerusalem. How Nebuchadnezzar treated him is uncertain. Josephus says ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 6. § 3) that he put him to death, and cast him out unburied beyond the walls of the city. But from the biblical notices we can only gather that he died prematurely after a reign of no more than eleven years (B.C. 608 to B.C. 597), and was unlamented, "buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. xxii. 18, 19). Conjecture has filled up the blanks of this history in several ways, the most purely imaginative being, perhaps, that of Ewald, who says ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 262), "When the Chaldean armies presented themselves at the gates of the capital, Jehoiakim seems to have been betrayed into the same error as his brother (Jehoahaz), eleven years before. He gave ear to a crafty invitation of the enemy to repair for negotiations to their camp, where,

in sight of his own city, he was made prisoner. He offered a frantic resistance, and was dragged away in a scuffle, and miserably cut down; while even an honourable burial for his corpse, which his family certainly solicited, was refused."

Ver. 6.—**So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers.** It is not certain that the writer means anything more by this than that "Jehoiakim died." His body may, however, possibly have been found by the Jews after the Babylonians had withdrawn from before Jerusalem, and have been entombed with those of Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah. **And Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead.** Josephus says (*l. s. c.*) that Nebuchadnezzar placed him upon the throne, which is likely enough, since he would certainly not have quitted Jerusalem without setting up some king or other. Jehoiachin has in Scripture the two other names of Jeconiah (1 Chron. iii. 16, 17; Jer. xxvii. 20; xxviii. 4; xxix. 2) and Coniah (Jer. xxii. 24, 28; xxxvii. 1). Jehoiachin and Jeconiah differ only, as Jehoahaz and Ahaziah, by a reversal of the order of the two elements. Both mean "Jehovah will establish (him)." "Coniah" cuts off from "Jeconiah" the sign of futurity, and means "Jehovah establishes." It is used only by Jeremiah, and seems used by him to signify that though "Jehovah establishes," Jeconiah he would *not* establish.

Ver. 7.—**And the King of Egypt came not again any more out of his land.** Nechoh's two expeditions were enough for him. In the first he was completely successful, defeated Josiah (ch. xxiii. 29), overran Syria as far as Carchemish, and made Phœnicia, Judæa, and probably the adjacent countries tributary to him. In the second (Jer. xlvi. 2—12) he suffered a calamitous reverse, was himself defeated with great slaughter, forced to fly hastily, and to relinquish all his conquests. After this, he "came not any more out of his land." Whatever hopes he held out to Judæa or to Tyre, he was not bold enough to challenge the Babylonians to a third trial of strength, but remained peaceably within his own borders. **For the King of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt.** The נַחַל מִצְרַיִם is not the Nile, but the Wady el Arish, the generally dry watercourse, which was the ordinarily accepted boundary between Egypt and Syria (see 1 Kings viii. 65; Isa. xxvii. 12). The Nile is the יְאֹר מִצְרַיִם. **Unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the King of Egypt;** *i.e.* all that he had conquered and made his own in his first expedition in the year B.C. 608.

Vers. 8—16.—REIGN OF JEHOIACHIN. The short reign of Jehoiachin is now described. It lasted but three months. For some reason which is unrecorded, Nebuchadnezzar, who had placed him on the throne, took offence at his conduct, and sent an army against him to effect his deposition. Jehoiachin offered scarcely any resistance. He "went out" of the city (ver. 12), with the queen-mother, the officers of the court, and the princes, and submitted himself to the will of the great king. But he gained nothing by his pusillanimity. The Babylonians entered Jerusalem, plundered the temple and the royal palace, made prisoners of the king, his mother, the princes and nobles, the armed garrison, and all the more skilled artisans, to the number altogether of ten thousand souls (Josephus says 10,832, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 7. § 1), and carried them captive to Babylon. Zedekiah, the king's uncle, was made monarch in his room.

Ver. 8.—**Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign.** In 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9 he is said to have been only eight years old, but this is probably an accidental corruption, the *yod*, which is the Hebrew sign for ten, easily slipping out. As he had "wives" (ver. 15) and "seed" (Jer. xxii. 28), he could not well be less than eighteen. **And he reigned in Jerusalem three months.** "Three months *and ten days*," according to 2 Chron. (*l. s. c.*) and Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' *l. s. c.*). **And his mother's name was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem.** Elnathan was one of the chief of the Jerusalem princes under Jehoiakim (Jer. xxvi. 22; xxxvi. 12, 25). His daughter, Nehushta—the Nosté of Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 6. § 3)—was probably the ruling spirit of the time during her son's short reign. We find mention of her in Jer. xxii. 26; xxix. 2; and in Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 6. § 3, and x. 7. § 1. Ewald suggests that she "energetically supported" her son in the policy whereby he offended Nebuchadnezzar.

Ver. 9.—**And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done** (see ch. xxiii. 37; and comp. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9). Josephus says that Jehoiachin was *φύσει χρηστὸς καὶ δίκαιος* ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 7. § 1); but Jeremiah calls him "a despised broken idol," and "a vessel wherein is no pleasure" (Jer. xxii. 28). The present passage probably does not mean more than that he made no attempt at a religious reformation, but allowed the idolatries and superstitions which had prevailed under Jehoahaz and

Jehoiakim to continue. It is in his favour that he did not actively persecute Jeremiah.

Ver. 10.—**At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came up against Jerusalem.** This siege fell probably into the year B.C. 597, which was "the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar" (ver. 12). Nebuchadnezzar himself was, at the time, engaged in the siege of Tyre, which had revolted in B.C. 598 (see 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. iii. p. 51), and therefore sent his "servants"—*i.e.* generals—against Jerusalem. **And the city was besieged.** Probably for only a short time. Jeconiah may at first have had some hope of support from Egypt, still under the rule of Nechoh; but when no movement was made in this quarter (see the comment on ver. 7), he determined not to provoke his powerful enemy by an obstinate resistance, but to propitiate him, if possible, by a prompt surrender.

Ver. 11.—**And Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it;** rather, *his servants were besieging it.* While the siege conducted by his generals was still going on, Nebuchadnezzar made his appearance in person before the walls, probably bringing with him an additional force, which made a successful resistance hopeless. A council of war was no doubt held under the new circumstances, and a surrender was decided on.

Ver. 12.—**And Jehoiachin the King of Judah went out to the King of Babylon** (for the use of the expression, "went out to," in this sense of making a surrender, see 1 Sam. xi. 3; Jer. xxi. 9; xxxviii. 17, etc.), **he, and his mother** (see the comment on ver. 8), **and his servants, and his princes, and his officers**—rather, *his eunuchs* (see the comment on ch. xx. 18)—**and the King of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.** Nebuchadnezzar succeeded his father, Nabopolassar, in B.C. 605; but his first year was not complete till late in B.C. 604. His "eighth year" was thus B.C. 597.

Ver. 13.—**And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord.** "Thence" means "from Jerusalem," which he entered and plundered, notwithstanding Jehoiachin's submission, so that not much was gained by the voluntary surrender. A beginning had been made of the carrying off the sacred vessels of the temple in Jehoiakim's third (fourth?) year (Dan. i. 1), which was the first of Nebuchadnezzar. The plundering was now carried a step further; while the final complete sweep of all that remained came eleven years later, at the end of the reign of Zedekiah (see ch. xxv. 13—17). **And the treasures of the king's house** (comp. ch. xx. 13). If the treasures which Hezekiah showed to the envoys of Merodach-Baladan were carried off by Sennacherib (ch. xviii. 15), still there had probably been fresh accumulations made during their long reigns by Manasseh and Josiah. **And cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon King of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord.** (For an account of these vessels, see 1 Kings vii. 48—50.) They consisted in part of articles of furniture, like the altar of incense and the table of shewbread, which were thickly covered with plates of gold; in part of vessels, etc., made wholly of the precious metal, as candlesticks, or rather candelabra, snuffers, tongs, basins, spoons, censers, and the like. **As the Lord had said** (comp. ch. xx. 17; Isa. xxxix. 6; Jer. xv. 13; xvii. 3; xx. 5, etc.).

Ver. 14.—**And he carried away all Jerusalem.** The expression has to be limited by what follows. "All Jerusalem" means all that was important in the population of Jerusalem—all the upper classes, the "princes" and "nobles," all the men trained to the use of arms, and all the skilled craftsmen and artisans of the city. The poor and weak and unskilled were left. The number deported, according to our author, was either ten or eleven thousand. The whole population of the ancient city has been calculated from its area at fifteen thousand. The largest estimate of the population of the modern city is seventeen thousand. **And all the princes.** The *sarim*, or "princes," are not males of the blood royal, but the nobles, or upper classes of Jerusalem (comp. Jer. xxv. 18; xxvi. 10—16, etc.). **And all the mighty men of valour**—*i.e.* "all the trained troops" (Ewald); not "all the men of wealth," as Bähr renders—**even ten thousand captives.** As the soldiers are reckoned below (ver. 16) at seven thousand, and the craftsmen at one thousand, the upper-class captives would seem to have been two thousand; unless, indeed, the "craftsmen" are additional to the ten thousand, in which case the upper-class captives would have numbered three thousand, and the prisoners have amounted altogether to eleven thousand. **And all the craftsmen and smiths.** Ewald understands "the *military* workmen and siege engineers" to be intended ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 263, note 9); but the term חָרָשׁ in Hebrew includes all workers in stone, metal, or wood (Gen. iv. 22; Isa. xliv. 12; 1 Kings vii. 14), and there is nothing to limit it here to *military* craftsmen. It was an Oriental practice to weaken a state by the deportation of all the stronger elements of its population. **None remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land.** These words must be taken with some latitude. There are still "princes" in Jerusalem under Zedekiah (Jer. xxxviii.

4, 25, 27), and courtiers of rank (Jer. xxxviii. 7), and "captains of forces" (Jer. xl. 7), and "men of war" (Jer. lii. 7). But the bulk of the inhabitants now left behind in Jerusalem were poor and of small account.

Ver. 15.—**And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon** (comp. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 10; Jer. xxii. 26; xxiv. 1; lii. 31; Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.' x. 7. § 1). Jehoiachin continued a captive in Babylon during the remainder of Nebuchadnezzar's reign—a space of thirty-seven years (see the comment on ch. xxv. 27). **And the king's mother** (see above, ver. 12), **and the king's wives**—this is important, as helping to determine Jehoiachin's age (see the comment on ver. 8)—**and his officers**—rather, *his eunuchs* (comp. Jer. xxxviii. 7; xxxix. 16)—**and the mighty of the land.** Not only the "princes" and the trained soldiers and the skilled artisans (ver. 14), but all who were of much account, as the bulk of the priests and the prophets (see Jer. xxix. 1—24). Those **carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon.** "Babylon" (בָּבֶל) is the city, not the country (as Thenius imagines). It was the practice for the conquering kings to carry their captives with them to their capital, for ostentation's sake, before determining on their destination. The Jewish prisoners were, no doubt, *ultimately* settled in various parts of Babylonia. Hence they are called (Ezra ii. 1; Neh. vii. 6) "the children of the *province.*"

Ver. 16.—**And all the men of might**—*i.e.* "the mighty men of valour" (or, "trained soldiers") of ver. 14—**even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war**—the craftsmen and smiths would be pressed into the military service in the event of a siege—**even them the King of Babylon brought captive to Babylon**; *i.e.* he brought to Babylon, not only the royal personages, the officials of the court, and the captives who belonged to the upper classes (ver. 15), but also the entire military force which he had deported, and the thousand skilled artificers. All, without exception, were conducted to the capital.

Vers. 17—20.—EARLIER PORTION OF ZEDEKIAH'S REIGN. Nebuchadnezzar found a son of Josiah, named Mattaniah, still surviving at Jerusalem. At his father's death he must have been a boy of ten, but he was now, eleven years later, of the age of twenty-one. This youth, only three years older than his nephew Jehoiachin, he appointed king, at the same time requiring him to change his name, which he did from "Mattaniah" to "Zedekiah" (ver. 17). Zedekiah pursued nearly the same course of action as the other recent kings. He showed no religious zeal, instituted no reform, but allowed the idolatrous practices, to which the people were so addicted, to continue (ver. 19). Though less irreligious and less inclined to persecute than Jehoiakim, he could not bring himself to turn to God. He was weak and vacillating, inclined to follow the counsels of Jeremiah, but afraid of the "princes," and ultimately took their advice, which was to ally himself with Egypt, and openly rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. This course of conduct brought about the destruction of the nation (ver. 20).

Ver. 17.—**And the King of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead.** Josiah had four sons (1 Chron. iii. 15)—Johanan, the eldest, who probably died before his father; Jehoiakim, or Eliakim, the second, who was twenty-five years old at his father's death (ch. xxiii. 36); Jehoahaz, the third, otherwise called Shallum (1 Chron., *l. s. c.*; Jer. xxii. 11), who, when his father died, was aged twenty-three (ch. xxiii. 31); and Mattaniah, the youngest, who must have been then aged ten or nine. It was this fourth son, now grown to manhood, whom Nebuchadnezzar appointed king in Jehoiachin's room. **And changed his name to Zedekiah.** (On the practice of changing a king's name on his accession, see the comment upon ch. xxiii. 31, 34.) Mattaniah means "Gift of Jehovah;" Zedekiah, "Righteousness of Jehovah." Josiah had called his son the first of these names in humble acknowledgment of God's mercy in granting him a fourth son. So other pious Jews called their sons "Nathaniel," and Greeks "Theodotus" or "Theodorus," and Romans "Deodatus." Mattaniah, in taking the second of the names, may have had in his mind the prophecy of Jeremiah (xxiii. 5—8), where blessings are promised to the reign of a king whose name should be "*Jehovah-tsidkenu*," i.e. "The Lord our Righteousness." Or he may simply have intended to declare that "the righteousness of Jehovah" was what he aimed at establishing. In this case it can only be said that it would have been happy for his country, had his professions been corroborated by his acts.

Ver. 18.—**Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.** Probably from B.C. 597 to B.C. 586. He was thus contemporary with Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, with Cyaxares and Astyages in Media, and with Psamatik II. and Ua-ap-ra

(Pharaoh-Hophra) in Egypt. **And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.** He was thus full brother of Jehoahaz (ch. xxiii. 31), but only half-brother to Jehoiakim (ch. xxiii. 36). His father-in-law, "Jeremiah of Libnah," is not the prophet, who was of Anathoth.

Ver. 19.—**And he did** that which was **evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done.** Keil says, "His attitude towards the Lord exactly resembled that of his brother Jehoiakim, except that Zedekiah does not appear to have possessed so much energy for that which was evil." He allowed the people to continue their "pollutions" and "abominations" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 14). He let the "princes" have their way, and do whatever they pleased (Jer. xxxviii. 5), contenting himself with sometimes outwitting them, and counteracting their proceedings (Jer. xxxviii. 14—28). He fell into the old error of "putting trust in Egypt" (Jer. xxxvii. 5—7), and made an alliance with Apries (Pharaoh-Hophra), which was an act of rebellion, at once against God and against his Babylonian suzerain. He was, upon the whole, rather weak than wicked; but his weakness was as ruinous to his country as active wickedness would have been.

Ver. 20.—**For through the anger of the Lord it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah.** It was "through the anger of the Lord" at the persistent impenitence of the people, that *that* came to pass which actually came to pass—the rejection of the nation by God and the casting of it out of his presence. In his anger he suffered the appointment of another perverse and faithless monarch, who made no attempt at a reformation of religion, and allowed him to run his evil course unchecked, and to embroil himself with his suzerain, and to bring destruction upon his nation. God's anger, long provoked (ch. xxi. 10—15; xxiii. 26, 27; xxiv. 3, 4), lay at the root of the whole series of events, not causing men's sins, but allowing them to go on until the cup of their iniquities was full, and the time had arrived for vengeance. **Until he had cast them out from his presence** (comp. ch. xvii. 18, 20; xxiii. 27; xxiv. 3). To be "cast out of God's presence" is to lose his protecting care, to be separated off from him, to be left defenceless against our enemies. When Israel was once finally cast off, its fate was sealed; there was no further hope for it; the end was come. **That Zedekiah rebelled against the King of Babylon**; rather, *And Zedekiah rebelled*, etc. The sentence is a detached one, and would, perhaps, better commence ch. xxv. than terminate, as it does, ch. xxiv. Zedekiah, when he received his investiture at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (ver. 17), took a solemn oath of allegiance and fidelity (2 Chron. xxxvi. 13; Ezek. xvii. 13) to him and to his successors; but almost immediately afterwards he began to intrigue with Egypt, sent a contingent of troops to help Psamatik II. in his wars (Wiedlemann, 'Geschichte Ægyptens,' p. 159), and thus sought to pave the way for an Egyptian alliance, on the strength of which he might venture upon a revolt. It was probably owing to the suspicions which these acts aroused that, in the fourth year of his reign, B.C. 594, he had to visit Babylon (Jer. li. 59), where, no doubt, he renewed his engagements and assured the Babylonian monarch of his fidelity. But these proceedings were nothing but a blind. On the accession of Hophra (Apries) to the throne of Egypt in B.C. 591, Zedekiah renewed his application to the Egyptian court, openly sending ambassadors (Ezek. xvii. 15), with a request for infantry and cavalry. Thus was his rebellion complete, his "oath despised," and his "covenant broken" (Ezek. xvii. 15, 16). The war with Babylon, and the siege of Jerusalem, were the natural consequences.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Conquering kings and nations instruments in God's hands to work out his purposes.* The sudden disappearance of Assyria from the scene, and the sudden appearance of Babylon upon it at this point of the history, are very remarkable. Without a word upon the circumstances that had brought it about, the writer of Kings shows us that a great crisis in the world's history has come and gone; that the mighty state which had dominated Western Asia for centuries is no more, and has been superseded by a new, and hitherto scarce heard of, power. "In his [Jehoiakim's] days Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came up." We have thus presented to us, by implication—

I. ASSYRIA'S FALL. For nearly a thousand years Assyria had been "the rod of God's anger" (Isa. x. 5). She had been sent against nation after nation, to execute God's wrath, with "a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (Isa. x. 6). As Hezekiah confessed in his prayer (ch. xix. 17, 18), their success had been continual: "Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria *have* destroyed the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire," etc. But

why and whence was this? Because God had used Assyria as his instrument. God had brought it to pass that Assyria should exist "to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous heaps. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the house-tops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up" (ch. xix. 25, 26). But this time was now gone. Assyria had offended God by her pride and self-trust. She had said, "By the strength of my hand I have done this, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man" (Isa. x. 13). The axe had "boasted itself against him that hewed therewith; and the saw had magnified itself against him that moved it to and fro" (Isa. x. 15). Therefore God thought it time to vindicate his own honour, and Assyria fell. Two other nations were raised up to break in pieces the proud and haughty conqueror; and, after a short struggle, Assyria sank, to rise no more (Nah. iii. 19).

II. BABYLON'S RISE TO GREATNESS. Babylon had in remote days (Gen. x. 8—10) been a powerful state, and had even possessed an empire; but for the last seven hundred years or more she had been content to play a very secondary part in Western Asia, and had generally been either an Assyrian feudatory or an integral part of the Assyrian monarchy. But in the counsels of God it had been long decreed that she, and not Assyria, should be God's instrument for the chastisement of his people (ch. xx. 16—19). Therefore, as the appointed time for Assyria's fall approached, Babylon was made to increase in power and greatness. A wave of invasion (Herod., i. 104, 105), which passed over the rest of Western Asia, left her untouched. A great monarch was given her in the person of Nabopolassar, who read aright the signs of the times, saw in Media a desirable ally, and, having secured Median co-operation, revolted against the long-established sovereign power. A short, sharp struggle followed, ending in the utter collapse of the great Assyrian empire, and the siege and fall of Nineveh. The two conquering states partitioned between them the Assyrian dominions—Media taking the countries which lay to the north-west and north, Babylon those towards the south-west and south. Thus, so far as the Jews were concerned, Babylon, between B.C. 625 and B.C. 608, had stepped into Assyria's place. She had become "the hammer of the whole earth" (Jer. l. 23); God's battle-axe and weapons of war (Jer. li. 20), wherewith he brake in pieces nations and kingdoms, man and woman, old and young, captains and rulers (Jer. li. 20—23). The prophecy of Isaiah to Hezekiah (ch. xx. 16—19), which seemed so unlikely of fulfilment at the time that it was uttered, found a natural and easy accomplishment, the course of events in the latter part of the seventh century B.C. having transferred to Babylonia, under Divine direction and arrangement, that grand position and dignity which had previously been Assyria's. When she had served God's purpose, Babylon's turn came; and she sank as suddenly as she had risen, because she too had been "proud against the Lord" (Jer. l. 29), and had provoked his indignation.

Vers. 1—6.—*The beginning of the end.* It has been already observed (see the homiletics to ch. xvi.) that God's punishment of a nation, though often long-deferred, when it comes at last comes suddenly, violently, and at once. Nineteen years only intervened—a brief space in the life of a nation—between the first intimation which the Jews received of danger impending from a new enemy, and the entire destruction, by that enemy, of temple, city, and nation. Peril first showed itself in B.C. 605; Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews carried into captivity in B.C. 586. From first to last they were scarcely given a breathing-space. Blow was struck upon blow; calamity followed close upon calamity. "The beginning of the end" is to be dated from Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion—when "Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came up" against Jehoiakim, "and Jehoiakim became his servant three years" (ver. 1). When an iron vessel and an earthen one come into contact and collision, it is not difficult to foresee the result. Nebuchadnezzar's first campaign proved his absolute superiority over all the forces that could be brought against him by the nations of the west. Could the Jews have accepted, honestly and loyally, the position which Jehoiakim professedly took up—that of a faithful vassal and feudatory, who would keep watch over the interests of his suzerain, and aid him to the best of his power—a prolonged though inglorious existence would have been possible for the people. But the nation was too

proud to submit itself. Neither king nor people had any intention of putting up with the loss of independence or becoming loyal Babylonian subjects, however strongly the duty might be pressed upon them by Jeremiah and the other Jehovistic prophets. A profound antagonism was developed from the first. Nebuchadnezzar probably carried off the captives "of the king's seed, and of the princes" (Dan. i. 3), from Jerusalem by way of hostages. Jehoiakim meditated revolt from the moment of his submission; and within three years threw off the mask, and rebelled openly. Five years of struggle followed. Prompted by Nebuchadnezzar, "the nations set upon him on every side from the provinces, and spread their net over him" (Ezek. xix. 8; comp. ch. xxiv. 2), ravaged his territory far and wide, "destroyed" multitudes of the people, and, at last, "took the king in their snare" (Ezek. xix. 8), and "brought him to the King of Babylon" (Ezek. xix. 9). Nebuchadnezzar punished him with death, cast out his body unburied, and took as hostages to Babylon three thousand more of the upper classes of the citizens (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 6. § 3). Distrust and suspicion on the one side, hatred and sense of cruel wrong on the other, must, under these circumstances, have grown and increased; the antagonism, instead of dying away with the lapse of time, must have become accentuated. "The end" already approached, though it "was not yet." The weaker party could not but go to the wall; and events were evidently hastening to a *dénouement*. With the death of Jehoiakim the first scene of the last act had terminated.

Vers. 8—16.—*Blow upon blow.* A mild and conciliatory policy might, perhaps, have won the Jews to acquiescence in their subjection. But Nebuchadnezzar's policy was the reverse, and could only tend to their exasperation. With what exact intention or expectation he made Jehoiachin king after executing his father, it is difficult to conjecture. Perhaps he thought he had nothing to fear from a youth of eighteen. Perhaps he trusted to the known mildness of the youth's disposition (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 7. § 1). In either case, the experiment failed. Jehoiachin, within a few weeks, gave him cause of offence, or, at any rate, furnished him with some pretext for reopening the quarrel. Then blow was struck upon blow. An army was sent to besiege the city (ver. 10); soon the great king came up against it in person (ver. 11). In vain did Jehoiachin make submission. He was seized and carried off to Babylon, and there shut up in prison. The temple and the royal palace were plundered, and at least ten thousand of the inhabitants—the noblest, wealthiest, bravest, and most skilled—torn from their homes and led into captivity (vers. 12—16). A remnant only, consisting chiefly of "the poorest of the people of the land" (ver. 14), were left behind. Jerusalem, denuded of more than half her population, can scarcely have known herself. She "sat solitary" (Lam. i. 1) and "wept sore in the night" (Lam. i. 2), and felt that her total destruction was nigh at hand. So ended the second scene of the last act.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1—ch. xxv. 17.—*Wickedness, retribution, and Divine control, as revealed in Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah.* "In his days Nebuchadnezzar," etc. In glancing through these chapters there are two objects that press on our attention. 1. *A national crisis.* The peace, the dignity, the wealth, the religious privileges of Judah are converging to a close. Israel has already been carried away by a despot to a foreign land, and now Judah is meeting the same fate. All nations have their crises—they have their rise, their fall, their dissolution. 2. *A terrible despot.* The name of Nebuchadnezzar comes for the first time under our attention. Who is he? He is a prominent figure in the histories and the prophecies of the old Scriptures. He was the son and successor of Nabopolassar, who, having revolted from Assyria and helped to destroy Nineveh, brought Babylon at once into pre-eminence. The victories of Nebuchadnezzar were stupendous and many. Egypt, Syria, Phœnicia, Palestine, all bowed to his triumphant arms. He made Babylon, his capital, one of the most wonderful cities of the world. The walls with which he fortified it contained, we are told, no less than five hundred million tons of masonry. He was at once the master and the terror of the age he lived in, which was six hundred years before Christ. There is no character in all history

more pregnant with practical suggestions than his—a mighty fiend in human form. We have in these two chapters a view of (1) *the wickedness of man*; (2) *the retribution of Heaven*; (3) and *the supremacy of God*. Here we have—

I. THE WICKEDNESS OF MAN. The wickedness here displayed is marked: 1. *By inveteracy*. It is here said of Jehoiachin, "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done." In ver. 19 the same is also said of Zedekiah: "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done." This has, indeed, been said of many kings of Judah, as of all the kings of Israel. What a hold, then, had wickedness taken on the Jewish people! It had so deeply struck its roots into their very being that neither the mercies nor the judgments of Heaven could uproot it. It was a cancer transmitted from sire to son, poisoning their blood and eating up their nature. Thus, then, from generation to generation the wickedness of the Jewish people seemed to be a disease hereditary, ineradicable, and incurable. 2. *By tyranny*. "At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it." This is seen in the conduct of Nebuchadnezzar. What right had Nebuchadnezzar to leave his own country, invade Judah, plunder it of its wealth, and bear away by violence its population? None whatever. It was tyranny of the worst kind, an outrage on every principle of humanity and justice. Sin is evermore tyrannic. We see it everywhere. On all hands do we see men and women endeavouring to bring others into subjection—masters their servants, employers their *employés*, rulers their subjects. Tyranny everywhere is the evidence, the effect, and the instrument of wickedness. 3. *By inhumanity*. "And the King of Babylon . . . carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon King of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, and all that were strong and apt for war, even them the King of Babylon brought captive to Babylon." He rifled the country of its people and its property, and inflicted untold misery on thousands. Thus wickedness transforms man into a fiend, and turns society into a pandemonium. 4. *By profanity*. We read here that Nebuchadnezzar carried away all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon had made in the temple thereof. We also read here that "he burnt the house of the Lord. . . . And the pillars of brass that were in the house of the Lord, and the bases, and the brazen sea that was in the house of the Lord, did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon. And the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away. . . . The two pillars, one sea, and the bases which Solomon had made for the house of the Lord; the brass of all these vessels was without weight." Thus this ruthless despot, becoming a scourge in God's hands, desecrated the most holy things in the city of Jerusalem and in the memory of millions. He reduced the magnificent pile of buildings to ashes, and rifled it of its sacred and priceless treasures. Wickedness is essentially profane. It has no reverence; it crushes every sentiment of sanctity in the soul. O sin, what hast thou done? Thou hast quenched the divinest instincts in human nature, and poisoned the fountain of religious and social sympathies, substituted cruelty for love, tyranny for justice, blind superstition and blasphemous profanity for devotion.

II. THE RETRIBUTION OF HEAVEN.

III. THE SUPREMACY OF GOD.—D. T.

Vers. 1—9.—*The advent of Nebuchadnezzar*. It had been predicted that the final blow on Judah would be delivered, not by the Assyrians, but by the Chaldeans. "The days come, that all that is in thine house . . . shall be carried into Babylon: nothing

shall be left" (ch. xx. 17; cf. Micah iv. 10). That prediction now hasted to its accomplishment. Babylon had emerged as the successor to Assyria in the undisputed possession of imperial power. Its second king was Nebuchadnezzar, God's chosen instrument for the chastisement of Judah and surrounding nations (Jer. xxvii.).

I. JEHOIAKIM'S SUBMISSION. 1. *The defeat of Nechoh.* It was through Pharaoh-Nechoh, as previously stated, that Nebuchadnezzar was brought into relations with Judah, which did not end till the final ruin of the latter state. Nechoh had advanced to Carchemish on the Euphrates, when Nebuchadnezzar, finding his hands free, met him in battle, and completely defeated him (B.C. 605). All the country between Egypt and the Euphrates, which Nechoh had conquered, thus fell under the power of Babylon (ver. 7). Egypt might intrigue, but was thereafter powerless to help. Wonderful are the combinations of circumstances by which, in providence, God works out his ends. 2. *Nebuchadnezzar's advance on Jerusalem.* It was now the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jer. xxv. 1), and, as Nechoh's vassal, he had probably contributed his contingent to the defeated Egyptian army. Nebuchadnezzar speedily came against him. We learn from other passages (2 Chron. xxxvi. 6, 7; Dan. i. 1, 2) that Jerusalem actually was besieged, and Jehoiakim bound in fetters, with the intention of being sent to Babylon. The king saved himself by submission; but the temple was plundered of its sacred vessels, and certain princes, among them Daniel, were taken away captive. This is the beginning of the seventy years' captivity (Jer. xxv. 11). 3. *The three years' servitude.* For three years Jehoiakim bore the heavy yoke of the King of Babylon, as before he had borne that of Nechoh. During that period his character underwent no improvement. He still proved himself the tyrant and oppressor of his people, was obstinate and headlong in his courses, and sought the life of God's prophets. He built magnificent palaces by forced labour (Jer. xxii. 13—17). When Jeremiah's roll was read to him, he cut it up with his penknife, and threw it in the fire (Jer. xxxvi. 20—23). He slew Urijah the prophet, and would have put Jeremiah also to death if he had dared (Jer. xxvi. 12—24). Under his reign heathenism underwent a great revival, and the moral condition of the people rapidly deteriorated. Judah, like Israel of former days, had become a hopelessly corrupt carcase, and nothing remained but to remove it from the face of the earth.

II. JEHOIAKIM'S REBELLION. 1. *Its motives.* Three years Jehoiakim served the King of Babylon, then "he turned and rebelled against him." Not much light is thrown on the motives of this rebellion beyond the fact that Nebuchadnezzar was at this time at a distance, and Jehoiakim may have thought he might assert his independence with impunity. Pharaoh-Nechoh was still intriguing to stir up disaffection; plots were always hatching to get the subject-nations to combine against their common oppressor (cf. Jer. xxvii. 3: on this occasion, however, Moab and Ammon were on the side of Nebuchadnezzar, ver. 2); and false prophets were never wanting to predict success (cf. Jer. xxviii.). Jeremiah gave a steady voice to the contrary, but it was unheeded. The proverb was again to be fulfilled—whom the gods wish to destroy, they first madden. Jehoiakim was given up to the delusions of his own vain and foolish notions, and the people cherished extravagant hopes based on their possession of the temple and the Law (Jer. vii. 4; viii. 8). But neither temple nor Law will avail those who refuse to "thoroughly amend" their "ways" and their "doings" (Jer. vii. 5). 2. *Human instruments of punishment.* "And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians," etc. Nebuchadnezzar could not at the time attend to Jehoiakim in person; but he could lay his commands on neighbouring peoples, and these were ordered to keep up a galling and harassing attack on Judah by means of marauding bands. Detachments of his own Chaldeans were assisted by Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, and gave Jehoiakim no peace. God's heritage is compared by Jeremiah to "a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her" (Jer. xii. 9). Troubles rise on every side against those who forsake God. 3. *God over all.* It was the "Lord" who sent these hostile bands "against Judah to destroy it"—"surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight." In sacred history everything is looked at from the standpoint of Divine providence. From second causes it mounts invariably to the supreme cause. Nebuchadnezzar is God's "servant—his instrument for the chastisement of the nations" (Jer. xxvii. 4—7); and what, from the purely historical point of view, seems a lawless play

of forces, is, from the Divine point of view, a scene full of meaning, interest, and purpose. The rejection of Judah is again in these verses connected with the sin of Manasseh, only, however, as before shown, because people and rulers made these sins their own, and would not depart from them. Heathenism was again rampant (cf. Ezek. viii.), and Jehoiakim, like Manasseh, was shedding "innocent blood" (Jer. xxii. 17). Scripture knows no fatalism beyond that which springs from the incorrigibleness of a people wedded to their sins. Neither is there any sin which, if sincerely repented of, God will not pardon, though its temporal effects may still have to be endured. But there is the awful possibility of getting beyond pardon through our own obduracy. Both sides of the truth are seen in Jeremiah—on the one hand exhortations to repentance, with assurances of forgiveness (Jer. xviii. 7—10; xxvi. 1—3; xxxv. 15); and on the other declarations that the time for pardon was past (Jer. vii. 13—16, 27, 28; xi. 11—14; xv. 1; xviii. 11, 12; xxxvi. 16, 17, etc.). It was not because the fathers had eaten sour grapes that the children's teeth were set on edge (Ezek. xviii. 2); but the children had walked in the fathers' ways.

III. JEHOIAKIM'S SON. 1. *Jehoiakim's end.* Like so many other wicked kings, Jehoiakim came to a miserable end, for there is no reason to doubt that Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled regarding him, "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. xxii. 18, 19). The circumstances are unknown. 2. *Jehoiachin's character.* Jehoiachin succeeded to the throne of his father, but, like Jehoahaz, he only held it for three months. Of him, too, the record is borne that he "did evil." He is, perhaps, the "young lion" of Ezek. xix. 5—9, whom the nations took in their net, and brought to the King of Babylon. There seem to have been some elements of nobleness in his nature, and, after a long captivity, he became the friend and companion of the Babylonian king who succeeded Nebuchadnezzar (ch. xxv. 27—30).—J. O.

Vers. 10—20.—*The first general captivity.* Some captives had been taken to Babylon on occasion of Nebuchadnezzar's first advance against Jerusalem (Dan. i. 1, 2). The full storm of predicted judgment was now, however, to descend. What prophets had so long foretold amidst the scoffing and incredulity of their godless contemporaries was now at length to be accomplished. The final tragedy falls into two parts, of which the first is before us.

I. JEHOIACHIN MAKES SURRENDER. 1. *The city besieged.* The attacks of the Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, etc., mentioned in ver. 2, had served an immediate purpose in weakening the strength and exhausting the resources of Judah. The great king, whose fame was already equalling that of a Sargon or a Sennacherib, was now able to send his main army against the city, and soon after appeared upon the scene in person. Again, as in the days of Hezekiah, the city was closely invested; but this time there was no Isaiah to hurl back scorn for scorn, and assure the trembling king of the complete discomfiture of the enemy. Neither was there a king of Hezekiah's stamp to lay the blasphemous messages of the invader before the Lord, and entreat his interposition (ch. xix. 14—19). It was another kind of message Jeremiah the prophet had to bear to king and people. The day for mercy was past; and in default of a general repentance, which was not to be expected, there remained nothing but "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" (Heb. x. 27). The day of final reckoning surely comes for every sinner. It had come for Israel a hundred and twenty years before; it was now come for Israel's sister Judah. 2. *Jehoiachin's voluntary surrender.* Seeing resistance to be hopeless, Jehoiachin did what, on the most favourable interpretation of his conduct, was a noble thing. The city could not hold out; but if he and the other members of the royal house went and made voluntary surrender of themselves to Nebuchadnezzar, the worst horrors might be spared. This, indeed, was what Jeremiah always counselled. Jehoiachin accordingly went forth, with Nehushta his mother, and his servants, princes, and officers, and delivered themselves up to the Babylonian king. He might feel, with the lepers of Samaria, "If they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die" (ch. vii. 4). Or he may have been actuated by the nobler impulse to save the people, and may have thought, "It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John xi. 50). His submission did avert the worst from the nation. His

own life was spared, though he was led away a prisoner; the city was not sacked and burned, as afterwards; and no massacre of the inhabitants took place. A tender tone pervades Jeremiah's references to this unfortunate king (Jer. xxii. 24—30). Ezekiel likens him to "the highest branch of the cedar," which the "great eagle, with great wings, long-winged, full of feathers, which had divers colours," crops off (Ezek. xvii. 3, 4); and again (according to some) to "a young lion," who had "learned to catch the prey, and devoured men," but "the nations set against him on every side," and "he was taken in their pit," and put in chains, and brought to the King of Babylon (Ezek. xix. 5—9). We may share with Jeremiah in his sympathy for the unhappy young king in his exile (Jer. xxii. 28). Had his circumstances been more favourable, better things might have been hoped of him. The nobility of self-sacrifice redeems a character from many faults.

II. THE CITY DESPOILED. If Jehoiachin's surrender saved the people from slaughter, it could not save the city from plunder, nor its inhabitants from captivity. Nebuchadnezzar was no kid-gloved conqueror; where his mailed hand fell, he let it be felt. This city had rebelled against him, and he would effectually cripple its power to rebel again by impoverishing, degrading, and weakening it to the utmost. Nebuchadnezzar was intent only on his own ends, yet unconsciously he was carrying out to the letter the predictions which God's prophets had been dinning into the people's ears with so little result during all the years of their backsliding. The city was despoiled: 1. *Of its wealth and sacred vessels.* "He carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon . . . had made," etc. Jehoiakim had saved his treasures at the expense of exactions from the people, and his "covetousness" had doubtless filled them still more (Jer. xxii. 17). These ill-gotten gains were now carried away, and with them such of the temple vessels as were made of, or plated with, gold, the "cutting to pieces" being probably confined to the latter, with such large articles as the golden candlestick, etc. Of the smaller articles some few were spared (ch. xxv. 15), and the rest were preserved in Babylon, and restored on the return (Ezra i. 7—11). Judgment thus again began at the house of God. As, with the wealth of the city, the wealth-producers were also taken (ver. 14), it is easy to see to what poverty it was reduced. 2. *Of its royal family and nobles.* "And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives," etc. The land was thus deflowered of its king and aristocracy. The nobles, indeed, had proved no source of strength to the nation, but had set an example of luxury, oppression, corruption, and idolatry. Still, they were the representatives of its old hereditary families; they had high social position and great influence; and they ought to have been, if they were not, patrons and examples of everything good and great. Those who have rank, fortune, and leisure may be of the highest service to a state, if only they devote their powers to its true welfare. They contribute elements of refinement, culture, and wealth to it, which cannot be lost without impoverishment. If, however, they abuse their opportunities, and grow luxurious, idle, and wicked, they have generally to suffer severely in the end. 3. *Of its artisans and warriors.* "And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war," etc. Besides removing from the city the wealth that enriched it, and the nobles who adorned it, Nebuchadnezzar took away the skilful hands that did its work, and the strong arms that fought for it. He left none "save the poorest sort of the people of the land." This was to drain the city dry of every element of its prosperity. The middle classes of a nation—its wealth-producers and skilled labourers—even more than its aristocracy—are the source of its strength. By them is created the capital of the country; through them that capital undergoes constant renewal and increase; they supply the wants of every other class; without them the nobles would be helpless, and on them "the poorest sort of people"—too often the unfortunate, the shiftless, the inefficient classes—depend for casual employment and support. Nebuchadnezzar looked well to his own interests when he deported these classes, and not the poor, the less able, less thrifty, to Babylon. But their departure was ruinous to Jerusalem, and this also Nebuchadnezzar intended. It was, indeed, an irretrievable, crushing blow which had fallen on the nation, none the less ruinous and terrible that it had been so long predicted, and was so richly deserved. Piety tends to the enrichment and strengthening of a nation, as of

an individual, even temporally; but a course of ungodliness ends in the loss of temporal and spiritual possessions together.

III. ZEDEKIAH MADE KING. 1. *Accession of Zedekiah.* Jehoiachin was a man of spirited character, and Nebuchadnezzar seems to have thought that he would be better served by putting a weaker man upon the throne. The person chosen was an uncle of the young king's, a brother of Jehoiakim, whose name, Mattaniah, Nebuchadnezzar changed to Zedekiah—"the Righteousness of Jehovah." There was little honour now in being King of Judah; but at least the city and temple still stood; the priesthood had not been carried away; there were a few nobles left to grace the court; and by degrees new artisans and soldiers might have been got in, and the state again built up. It was the last chance, and was given only to show clearly how hopeless the moral condition of the people was. For if anything could have sobered them, and convinced them of the truth of the words of the prophets, it was such a catastrophe as had descended upon them. Deaf to all warnings, however, whether of mercy or judgment, the people only went on from bad to worse. 2. *His weak character.* The outstanding feature in Zedekiah's character was weakness—lack of courage and strength of will. He was not without good impulses. He showed a friendly disposition to Jeremiah; on various occasions he sought his advice and intercession (Jer. xxi. 1, 2; xxxvii. 3; xxxviii. 14—17); at Jeremiah's instigation he made a covenant with the people of Jerusalem, pledging them to give liberty to their bondmen (Jer. xxxiv, 8, 11), and once at least he refrained from entering into a proposed league against Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. xxvii. 3). But his timid, faithless, unstable nature reveals itself at every turn. He was like Herod, who did many things at the bidding of John the Baptist, and heard him gladly, yet at last beheaded him to please a wicked woman (Mark vi. 20). Zedekiah knew what was right, but did not do it (Jer. xxxvii. 2); he weakly allowed himself to be overruled by his nobles—when they broke through his covenant he had no power to resist (Jer. xxxiv. 11); when they urged him to put Jeremiah to death, he consented, saying, "Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do anything against you" (Jer. xxxviii. 4, 5); then, when Ebed-Melech pleaded for the prophet, he gave orders for his deliverance (ver. 10); he disobeyed Jeremiah in throwing off his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, and in seeking an alliance with Egypt; and when Nebuchadnezzar again came up against him, he sought Jeremiah's counsel, but did not take it when it was given (Jer. xxxviii. 14—28), etc. Meanwhile idolatry had firmly established itself in the holy city, and within the very precincts of the temple (Ezek. viii.). Fitly, therefore, is the reign of this last king described, like the rest, as "evil." His weakness and vacillation, his unfaithfulness to his own best convictions, his sinful yielding to others in what he knew to be wrong, were his ruin. He was in a hard and difficult position, and he had no strength of mind to cope with it. 3. *His rebellion.* At length, yielding to the solicitations of his nobles, and hopeful of help from Egypt (Ezek. xvii. 15), he broke his oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, an act which Ezekiel strongly condemns (Ezek. xvii. 16—19). The cup was full, and the Lord left him thus far to himself, that the nation might be destroyed. Men who will not follow light, lose light. A blindness, as from heaven, falls upon them. They are left to the bent of their own hearts, and their own counsel is their ruin. Sin is the supreme folly, as righteousness is the supreme wisdom.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXV.

Vers. 1—30.—THE LAST SIEGE OF JERUSALEM. THE JEWS LED INTO CAPTIVITY. HISTORY OF THE REMNANT LEFT BEHIND. RELEASE FROM PRISON OF JEHOIACHIN.

Vers. 1—10.—LAST SIEGE AND CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM. The open rebellion of Zedekiah was followed almost immediately by the advance into Judæa of a Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar in person, and the strict investment of the capital. We learn the circumstances of the siege from Jeremiah, in the prophecy which bears his name, and in the Book of Lamentations. It lasted one year and seven months, and was accompanied by a blockade so strict that the defenders were reduced to the last

extremity, and, as in Samaria under Jehoram (ch. vi. 29), and again in Jerusalem during the siege by Titus (Josephus, 'Bell. Jud.,' vi. 3. § 4), mothers ate their children (see Lam. ii. 20; iv. 10). When resistance was no longer possible, Zedekiah, with his men-at-arms, attempted to escape by night, and fled eastward, but were overtaken and captured in the plain of Jericho (Jer. xxxix. 4, 5). Meanwhile the city fell into the enemy's hands, and was treated with all the rigours of war. The temple, the royal palace, and the great houses of the rich men were first plundered and then delivered to the flames (ver. 9). The walls of the city were broken down (ver. 10), and the gates laid even with the ground (Lam. ii. 9). A great massacre of the population took place in the streets (Lam. ii. 3, 4).

Ver. 1.—**And it came to pass in the ninth year of his**—*i.e.* Zedekiah's—**reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month.** Extreme exactness with respect to a date indicates the extreme importance of the event dated. In the whole range of the history contained in the two Books of the Kings, there is no instance of the year, month, and day being all given excepting in the present chapter, where we find this extreme exactness three times (vers. 1, 4, and 8). The date in ver. 1 is confirmed by Jer. lii. 10 and Ezek. xxiv. 1. **That Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem.** According to the description of the eye-witness, Jeremiah, the army was one of unusual magnitude. Nebuchadnezzar brought against Jerusalem at this time "*all his army,* and *all the kingdoms of the earth of his dominion,* and *all the people*" (Jer. xxxiv. 1). The march of the army was not direct upon Jerusalem; it at first spread itself over Judæa, wasting the country and capturing the smaller fortified towns (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 7. § 3) —among them Lachish, so famous in the war against Sennacherib (ch. xviii. 14, 17; xix. 8), and Azekah (Jer. xxxiv. 7). The capture of these two places was important as intercepting Zedekiah's line of communication with Egypt. Having made himself master of them, Nebuchadnezzar proceeded to invest the capital. **And pitched against it**—*i.e.* encamped, and commenced a regular siege—**and they built forts against it round about.** It has been argued that דָּיֵק does not mean a "fort" or "tower," but a "line of circumvallation" (Michaëlis, Hitzig, Thenius, Bähr). Jerusalem, however, can scarcely be surrounded by lines of circumvallation, which, moreover, were not employed in their sieges by the Orientals. *Dâyek* (דָּיֵק) seems to be properly a "watch-tower," from דּוּק, *speculari,* whence it passed into the meaning of a "tower" generally. The towers used in sieges by the Assyrians and Babylonians were movable ones, made of planks, which were pushed up to the walls, so that the assailants might attack their adversaries, on a level, with greater advantage. Sometimes they contained battering-rams (see Layard, 'Monuments of Nineveh,' first series, pl. 19; and comp. Jer. lii. 4; Ezek. iv. 2; xvii. 17; xxvi. 8; Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 8. § 1).

Ver. 2.—**And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.** The writer omits all the details of the siege, and hastens to the final catastrophe. From Jeremiah and Ezekiel we learn that, after the siege had continued a certain time, the Egyptian monarch, Hophra or Apries, made an effort to carry out the terms of his agreement with Zedekiah, and marched an army into Southern Judæa, with the view of raising the siege (Jer. xxxvii. 5; Ezek. xvii. 17). Nebuchadnezzar hastened to meet him. With the whole or the greater part of his host he marched southward and offered battle to the Egyptians. Whether an engagement took place or not is uncertain. Josephus affirms it, and says that Apries was "defeated and driven out of Syria" ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 7. § 3). The silence of Jeremiah is thought to throw doubt on his assertion. At any rate, the Egyptians retired (Jer. xxxvii. 7) and took no further part in the struggle. The Babylonians returned, and the siege recommenced. A complete blockade was established, and the defenders of the city soon began to suffer from famine (Jer. xxi. 7, 9; Lam. ii. 12, 20). Ere long, as so often happens in sieges, famine was followed by pestilence (Jer. xxi. 6, 7; Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' *l. s. c.*), and after a time the place was reduced to the last extremity (Lam. iv. 3—9). Bread was no longer to be had, and mothers devoured their children (Lam. iv. 10). At length a breach was effected in the defences; the enemy poured in; and the city fell (see the comment on ver. 4).

Ver. 3.—**And on the ninth day of the fourth month.** The text of Kings is here incomplete, and has to be restored from Jer. lii. 6. Our translators have supplied the missing words. **The famine prevailed in the city** (see the comment on ver. 2). As I have elsewhere observed, "The intensity of the suffering endured may be gathered from Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Josephus. The complexions of the men grew black with famine (Lam. iv. 8; v. 10); their skin was shrunk and parched (Lam. iv. 8); the rich

and noble women searched the dunghills for scraps of offal (Lam. iv. 5); the children perished for want, or were even devoured by their parents (Lam. ii. 20; iv. 3, 4, 10; Ezek. v. 10); water was scarce, as well as food, and was sold at a price (Lam. v. 4); a third part of the inhabitants died of the famine, and the plague which grew out of it (Ezek. v. 12)" (see the 'Speaker's Commentary,' vol. ii. p. 147). **And there was no bread for the people of the land.** Bread commonly fails comparatively early in a siege. It was some time before the fall of the city that Ebed-Melech expressed his fear that Jeremiah would starve, since there was no more bread in the place (see Jer. xxxviii. 9).

Ver. 4.—**And the city was broken up;** rather, *broken into;* i.e. a breach was made in the walls. Probably the breach was on the north side of the city, where the ground is nearly level (see Ezek. ix. 2). According to Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 8. § 2), the enemy entered through the breach about midnight. **And all the men of war**—*i.e.* all the soldiers who formed the garrison—**fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls;** rather, *between the two walls,* as in Jer. lii. 7. As the enemy broke in on the north, the king and garrison quitted the city on the south by a gate which opened into the Tyropœon valley, between the two walls that guarded the town on either side of it. **Which is by the king's garden.** The royal gardens were situated near the Pool of Siloam, at the mouth of the Tyropœon, and near the junction of the Hinnom with the Kidron valley (see Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' vii. 11). (**Now the Chaldees were against the city round about.**) The town, *i.e.*, was guarded on all sides by Chaldean troops, so that Zedekiah and his soldiers must either have attacked the line of guard, and broken through it, or have slipped between two of the blockading posts under cover of the darkness. As no collision is mentioned, either here or in Jeremiah, the latter seems the more probable supposition. **And the king went the way toward the plain;** literally, *and he went.* The writer supposes that his readers will understand that the king left the city with his troops; and so regards "*he* went" as sufficiently intelligible. Jeremiah (lii. 7) has "*they* went." By "the plain" (literally, "the Arabah") the valley of the Jordan is intended, and by "the way" to it the ordinary road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Ver. 5.—**And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king.** When the escape of Zedekiah and the soldiers of the garrison was discovered, hot pursuit was made, since the honour of the great king required that his enemies should be brought captive to his presence. The commanders at Jerusalem would feel this the more sensibly, since Nebuchadnezzar had for some time retired from the siege, and left its conduct to them, while he himself exercised a general superintendence over military affairs from Riblah (see ver. 6). They were liable to be held responsible for the escape. **And overtook him in the plains of Jericho.** The "plains of Jericho" (עַרְבוֹת יְרֵחוֹ) is the fertile tract on the right bank of the Jordan near its embouchure, which was excellently watered, and cultivated in gardens, orchards, and palm-groves. It is probable, though not certain, that Zedekiah intended to cross the Jordan, and seek a refuge in Moab. **And all his army were scattered from him** (comp. Ezek. xii. 14). This seems to be mentioned in order to account for there being no engagement. Perhaps, thinking themselves in security, and imagining that they were not followed, the troops had dispersed themselves among the farmhouses and homesteads, to obtain a much-needed refreshment.

Ver. 6.—**So they took the king** [Zedekiah], **and brought him up to the King of Babylon.** The presentation of rebel kings, when captured, to their suzerain, seated on his throne, is one of the most common subjects of Assyrian and Babylonian sculptures (see 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. i. p. 292; vol. iii. p. 7; Layard, 'Monuments of Nineveh,' second series, pls. 23, 36, etc.). The Egyptian and Persian artists also represent it. **To Riblah.** (For the situation of Riblah, see the comment on ch. xxiii. 33.) As Nebuchadnezzar was engaged at one and the same time in directing the sieges both of Tyre and of Jerusalem, it was a most convenient position for him to occupy. **And they gave judgment upon him.** As a rebel, who had broken his covenant and his oath (Ezek. xvii. 16, 18), Zedekiah was brought to trial before Nebuchadnezzar and his great lords. The facts could not be denied, and sentence was therefore passed upon him, nominally by the court, practically by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. lii. 9). By an unusual act of clemency, his life was spared; but the judgment was still sufficiently severe (see the next verse).

Ver. 7.—**And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes** (comp. Herod., iii. 14, and 2 Macc. vii., for similar aggravations of condemned persons' sufferings). As Zedekiah was no more than thirty-two years of age (ch. xxiv. 18), his sons must have been minors, who could not justly be held responsible for their father's doings. It was usual, however, in the East, and even among the Jews, to punish children for the sins of their fathers (see Josh. vii. 24, 25;

ch. ix. 26; xiv. 6; Dan. vi. 24). **And put out the eyes of Zedekiah.** This, too, was a common Oriental practice. The Philistines blinded Samson (Judg. xvi. 21). Sargon, in one of his sculptures, seems to be blinding a prisoner with a spear (Botta, 'Monumens de Ninive,' pl. 18). The ancient Persians often blinded criminals (Xen., 'Anab.,' i. 9. § 13; Ammian. Marc., xxvii. 12; Procop., 'De Bell. Pers.,' i. 11. p. 30). In modern Persia, it was, until very lately, usual for a king, on his accession, to blind all his brothers, in order that they might be disqualified from reigning. The operation was commonly performed in Persia by means of a red-hot iron rod (see Herod., vii. 18). Zedekiah's loss of eyesight reconciled the two apparently conflicting prophecies—that he would be carried captive to Babylon (Jer. xxii. 5, etc.), and that he would never see it (Ezek. xii. 13)—in a remarkable manner. **And bound him with fetters of brass**; literally, *with a pair of brazen fetters.* Assyrian fetters consisted of two thick rings of iron, joined together by a single long link (Botta, *l. s. c.*); Babylonian were probably similar. Captives of importance are usually represented as fettered in the sculptures. **And carried him to Babylon.** Jeremiah adds (lii. 11) that Nebuchadnezzar "put him in prison till the day of his death;" and so Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 8. § 7). The latter writer further tells us that, at his death, the Babylonian monarch gave him a royal funeral (comp. Jer. xxxiv. 5).

Ver. 8.—**And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month.** Jeremiah says (lii. 12) that it was on the *tenth* day of the month; and so Josephus ('Bell. Jud.,' vi. 4. § 8). The mistake probably arose from a copyist mistaking י (ten) for ז (seven). According to Josephus, it was on the same day of the same month that the final destruction of the temple by the soldiers of Titus was accomplished. **Which is the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon.** Nebuchadnezzar ascended the throne in B.C. 605, which was the fourth year of Jehoiakim, who began to reign in B.C. 608. The seven remaining years of Jehoiakim, added to the eleven of Zedekiah, and the three months of Jehoiachin, produce the result of the text—that the last year of Zedekiah was the nineteenth of Nebuchadnezzar. **Came Nebuzar-adan.** Nebuchadnezzar had apparently hesitated as to how he should treat Jerusalem, since nearly a month elapsed between the capture of the city and the commencement of the work of destruction. He was probably led to destroy the city by the length of the resistance, and the natural strength of the position. The name, Nebuzar-adan, is probably a Hebraized form of the Babylonian Nebu-sar-iddina, "Nebo has given (us) a king." **Captain of the guard**; literally, *chief of the executioners*; but as the king's guard were employed to execute his commissions, and especially his death-sentences, the paraphrase is quite allowable. **A servant of the King of Babylon**—*i.e.* a subject—**unto Jerusalem.** He came doubtless with instructions, which he proceeded to carry out.

Ver. 9.—**And he burnt the house of the Lord.** After it had stood, according to Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 8. § 5), four hundred and seventy years six months and ten days. This calculation, however, seems to exceed the truth. Neither the Assyrians nor the Babylonians had any regard for the gods of other nations. They everywhere burnt the temples, plundered the shrines, and carried off the images as trophies of victory. In the temple of Jerusalem they would find no images except those of the two cherubim (1 Kings vi. 23—28), which they probably took away with them. **And the king's house** (see 1 Kings vii. 1, 8—12; ch. xi. 16). The royal palace was, perhaps, almost as magnificent as the temple; and its destruction was almost as great a loss to art. It doubtless contained Solomon's throne of ivory (1 Kings x. 18), to which there was an ascent by six steps, with two sculptured lions on each step. **And all the houses of Jerusalem.** This statement is qualified by the words of the following clause, which show that only the houses of the princes and great men were purposely set on fire. Many of the remaining habitations may have perished in the conflagration, but some probably escaped, and were inhabited by "the poor of the land." **And every great man's house burnt he with fire** (comp. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 19, where the Chaldeans are said to have burnt "all the palaces").

Ver. 10.—**And all the army of the Chaldees, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about.** A complete demolition is not intended. When the exiles returned, and even in the time of Nehemiah (ii. 13, 15), much of the wall was still standing, and the circuit was easily traced. Probably the Babylonians did not do more than break one or two large breaches in the wall, as Joash had done (ch. xiv. 13) when he took Jerusalem in the reign of Amaziah.

Vers. 11—21.—*Fate of the inhabitants of Judah, and of the contents of the temple.* Having burnt the temple, the royal palace, and the grand residences of the principal

citizens, Nebuzar-adan proceeded to divide the inhabitants of the city and country into two bodies—those whom he would leave in the land, and those whom he would carry off. The line of demarcation was, in a general way, a social one. The rich and well-to-do he would take with him; the poor and insignificant he would leave behind (vers. 11, 12). Among the former were included the high priest, the "second priest," three of the temple Levites, the commandant of the city, a certain number of the royal councillors, the "principal scribe of the host," and sixty of the "princes" (vers. 18, 19). The latter were chiefly persons of the agricultural class, who were left to be "vinedressers and husbandmen." From the temple, which had been already plundered twice (2 Chron. xxxvi. 7, 10), he carried off such vessels in gold and silver and bronze as were still remaining there, together with the bronze of the two pillars Jachin and Boaz, of the great laver, or "molten sea," and of the stands for the smaller lavers, all of which he broke up (ver. 13). Having reached Riblah, where Nebuchadnezzar still was, he delivered up to him both the booty and the prisoners. Rather more than seventy of the latter Nebuchadnezzar punished with death (ver. 21). The rest were taken to Babylon.

Ver. 11.—**Now the rest of the people that were left in the city**—*i.e.* that remained behind when the king and the garrison fled—**and the fugitives that fell away to the King of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude**; rather, *both the fugitives that had fallen away to the King of Babylon, and the remnant of the multitude.* The writer means to divide "the rest of the people" into two classes: (1) those who during the siege, or before it, had deserted to the Babylonians, as no doubt many did, and as Jeremiah was accused of doing (Jer. xxxvii. 13); (2) those who were found inside the city when it was taken. **Did Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carry away.**

Ver. 12.—**But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land.** It was inconvenient to deport persons who had little or nothing. In the Assyrian sculptures we see the captives, who are carried off, generally accompanied by their own baggage-animals, and taking with them a certain amount of their own household stuff. Pauper immigrants would not have been of any advantage to a country. **To be vinedressers and husbandmen.** Jeremiah adds that Nebuzar-adan "gave" these persons "vineyards and fields at the same time" (Jer. xxxix. 10). The Babylonians did not wish Judæa to lie waste, since it could then have paid no tribute. On the contrary, they designed its continued cultivation; and Gedaliah, the governor of their appointment, made great efforts to have cultivation resumed and extended (see Jer. xl. 10, 12).

Ver. 13.—**And the pillars of brass that were in the house of the Lord.** The two columns, Jachin and Boaz, cast by Hiram under the directions of Solomon (1 Kings vii. 15—22), are intended. They were works of art of an elaborate character, but being too bulky to be carried off entire, they were "broken in pieces." **And the bases.** "The bases" were the stands for the lavers, also made by Hiram for Solomon (1 Kings vii. 27—37), and very elaborate, having "borders" ornamented with lions, oxen, and cherubim. **And the brazen sea that was in the house of the Lord.** This was the great laver, fifteen feet in diameter, emplaced originally on the backs of twelve oxen, three facing each way (1 Kings vii. 23—26), which King Ahaz had taken down from off the oxen (ch. xvi. 17) and "put upon a pavement of stones," but which Hezekiah had probably restored. The oxen are mentioned by Jeremiah (lii. 20) among the objects which Nebuzar-adan carried off. **Did the Chaldees break in pieces**—thus destroying the workmanship, in which their value mainly consisted—**and carried the brass of them to Babylon.** Brass, or rather bronze, was used by the Babylonians for vessels, arms, armour, and implements generally.

Ver. 14.—**And the pots.** The word used, סִירוֹת, is translated by "caldrons" in Jer. lii. 18, and "ash-pans" in Exod. xxvii. 3. The latter is probably right. **And the shovels**—appurtenances of the altar of burnt sacrifice — **and the snuffers** — rather, *the knives*—**and the spoons**—or, *incense-cups*—**and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered.** It appears that after the two previous spoliations of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, in B.C. 605 and in B.C. 597, wherein so many of the more costly vessels had been carried off (Dan. i. 2; ch. xxiv. 13), the ministrations had to be performed mainly with vessels of bronze. **Took they away.** Soldiers are often represented in the Assyrian sculptures as carrying off vessels from temples, apparently on their own account (see 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. i. p. 475, 2nd edit.).

Ver. 15.—**And the firepans, and the bowls**; rather, *the snuff-dishes* (Exod. xxv. 38; 1 Kings vii. 50) *and the bowls*, or *basins* (Exod

xii. 22; 1 Kings vii. 50; 2 Chron. iv. 8). Of these Solomon made one hundred, all in gold. **And such things as were of gold, in gold.** The "and" supplied by our translators would be better omitted. The writer means that of the articles enumerated some were in gold and some in silver, though probably the greater part were in bronze. **And of silver, in silver, the captain of the guard took away** (comp. Jer. lii. 19).

Ver. 16.—**The two pillars** (see the comment on ver. 13), **one sea**—rather, *the one sea*—**and the bases which Solomon had made for the house of the Lord; the brass of all these vessels was without weight**; *i.e.* the quantity of the brass was so large that it was not thought to be worth while to weigh it. When gold and silver vessels were carried off, their weight was carefully taken by the royal scribes or secretaries ('Ancient Monarchies,' vol. i. p. 476), who placed it on record as a check upon embezzlement or peculation.

Ver. 17.—**The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits** (comp. 1 Kings vii. 15 and Jer. lii. 21, in which latter place an even more elaborate account of the pillars is given), **and the chapiter upon it was brass**; rather, *and there was a chapiter* (or *capital*) *upon it of brass*—**and the height of the chapiter three cubits.** The measure given, both in 1 Kings vii. 16 and Jer. lii. 22, is "*five* cubits," which is generally regarded as correct; but the proportion of 3 to 18, or one-sixth, is far more suitable for a capital than that of 5 to 18, or between a third and a fourth. **And the wreathen work**—rather, *and there was wreathen work*, or *network*—**and pomegranates upon the chapiter round about, all of brass** (comp. 1 Kings vii. 18, 19): **and like unto these had the second pillar with wreathen work.** The ornamentation of the second pillar was the same as that of the first (see Jer. lii. 22).

Ver. 18.—**And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest.** The "chief priest" is a new expression; but it can only mean the "high priest." Seraiah seems to have been the grandson of Hilkiah (1 Chron. vi. 13, 14), and an ancestor (grandfather or great-grandfather) of Ezra (Ezra vii. 1). He had stayed at his post till the city was taken, and was now seized by Nebuzar-adan as one of the most important personages whom he found in the city. **And Zephaniah the second priest.** Keil and Bähr translate "a priest of the second order," *i.e.* a mere ordinary priest; but something more than this must be intended by Jeremiah, who calls him (lii. 24), כֹּהֵן הַמִּשְׁנֶה, *i.e.* distinctly "*the* second priest." It is conjectured that he was the high priest's substitute, empowered to act for him on occasions. Possibly he was the Zephaniah, son of Maaseiah, of whom we hear a good deal in Jeremiah (see Jer. xxi. 1; xxix. 25—29; xxxvii. 3). **And the three keepers of the door**; rather, *and three keepers of the threshold.* There were twenty-five "gate-keepers" of the temple (1 Chron. xxvi. 17, 18), all of them Levites. On what principle Nebuzar-adan selected three out of the twenty-four is uncertain, since we have no evidence that the temple had, as Bähr says it had, "three main entrances." Jer. xxxviii. 14 certainly does not prove this.

Ver. 19.—**And out of the city he took an officer**—literally, *a eunuch*—**that was set over the men of war**—eunuchs were often employed in the East as commanders of soldiers. Bagoas, general of the Persian monarch, Ochus, is a noted example—**and five men of them that were in the king's presence**—literally, *of them that saw the king's face*; i.e. that were habitually about the court; Jeremiah says (lii. 25) "seven men" instead of five—**which were found in the city**—the majority of the courtiers had, no doubt, dispersed, and were not to be found when Nebuzar-adan searched for them—**and the principal scribe of the host**; rather, as in the margin, *the scribe of the captain of the host* (τὸν γραμματέα τοῦ ἄρχοντος τῆς δυνάμεως, LXX.). "Scribes" or "secretaries" always accompanied the march of Assyrian armies, to count and record the number of the slain, to catalogue the spoil, perhaps to write despatches and the like. We may gather that Jewish commandants were similarly attended. **Which mustered the people of the land**—*i.e.* enrolled them, or entered them upon the army list, another of the "scribe's" duties—**and threescore men of the people of the land** that were **found in the city.** Probably notables of one kind or another, persons regarded as especially responsible for the revolt.

Ver. 20.—**And Nebuzar-adan captain of the guard took these, and brought them to the King of Babylon to Riblah** (see the comment on ver. 6). Two batches of prisoners seem to have been brought before Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah—first, the most important of all the captives, Zedekiah and his sons (vers. 6, 7); then, a month later, Seraiah the high priest, and the other persons enumerated in vers. 18 and 19. The remaining prisoners were no doubt brought also by Nebuzar-adan to Riblah, but were not conducted into the presence of the king.

Ver. 21.—**And the King of Babylon smote them, and slew them at Riblah in the land of Hamath.** Severities of this kind characterized all ancient warfare. The Assyrian sculptures show us prisoners of war impaled on crosses, beheaded, beaten on the head with maces, and sometimes extended on the ground and flayed. The inscriptions

speak of hundreds as thus executed, and mention others as burnt in furnaces, or thrown to wild beasts, or cruelly mutilated. Herodotus says (iii. 159) that Darius Hystaspis crucified three thousand prisoners round about Babylon after one of its revolts. That monarch himself, in the Behistun inscription, speaks of many cases where, after capturing rebel chiefs in the field or behind walls, he executed them and their principal adherents (see Col. ii. Par. 13; Col. iii. Par. 8, 11). If Nebuchadnezzar contented himself with the execution of between seventy and eighty of the rebel inhabitants of Jerusalem, he cannot be charged with cruelty, or extreme severity, according to the notions of the time. **So Judah was carried away out of their land.** Jeremiah adds an estimate of the number carried off. These were, he says (lii. 28—30), in the captivity of the seventh (query, seventeenth?) year, 3023; in the captivity of the eighteenth year, 832; and in that of the twenty-third, five years later, 745, making a total of 4600. If we suppose these persons to be men, and multiply by four for the women and children, the entire number will still be no more than 18,400.

Vers. 22—26.—*History of the remnant left in the land by Nebuzar-adan.* Nebuchadnezzar, when he carried off Zedekiah to Babylon, appointed, as governor of Judæa, a certain Gedaliah, a Jew of good position, but not of the royal family. Gedaliah made Mizpah, near Jerusalem, his residence; and here he was shortly joined by a number of Jews of importance, who had escaped from Jerusalem and hidden themselves until the Babylonians were gone. Of these the most eminent were Johanan the son of Kareah, and Ishmael, a member of the royal house of David. Gedaliah urged the refugees to be good subjects of the King of Babylon, and to settle themselves to agricultural pursuits. His advice was accepted and at first followed; but presently a warning was given to Gedaliah by Johanan that Ishmael designed his destruction; and soon afterwards, as Gedaliah took no precautions, the murder was actually carried out. Other atrocities followed; but after a time Johanan and the other leading refugees took up arms, forced Ishmael to fly to the Ammonites, and then, fearing that Nebuchadnezzar would hold them responsible for Ishmael's act, against Jeremiah's remonstrances, fled, with the great mass of the Jews that had been left in the land, from Judæa into Egypt. Here our writer leaves them (ver. 26), without touching on the calamities which befell them there, according to the prophetic announcements of Jeremiah (xliv. 2—28).

Ver. 22.—**And as for the people that remained in the land of Judah.** These consisted of Gedaliah and his court, which included Jeremiah, Baruch, and some princesses of the royal house (Jer. xliii. 6); the poor of the land, whom Nebuzar-adan had intentionally left behind; and a considerable number of Jewish refugees of a better class, who came in from the neighbouring nations, and from places in Judæa where they had been hiding themselves (Jer. xl. 7—12). For about two months all went well with this "remnant," who applied themselves to agricultural pursuits, in which they prospered greatly. **Whom Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon had left** (see ver. 12), **even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam.** Ahikam had protected Jeremiah in his earlier days (Jer. xxvi. 24); Gedaliah protected him in the latter part of the siege (Jer. xxxix. 14). Nebuchadnezzar's choice of Gedaliah for governor was probably made from some knowledge of his having sided with Jeremiah, whose persistent endeavours to make the Jews submit to the Babylonian yoke seem to have been well known, not only to the Jews, but to the Babylonians; most likely by reason of the letter he sent to his countrymen already in captivity (Jer. xxix.). **The son of Shaphan, ruler.** Probably not "Shaphan the scribe" (ch. xxii. 3, 12), but an unknown person of the same name.

Ver. 23.—**And when all the captains of the armies**; rather, *the captains of the forces* (Revised Version); *i.e.* the officers in command of the troops which had defended Jerusalem, and, having escaped from the city, were dispersed and scattered in various directions, partly in Judæa, partly in foreign countries. **They and their men**—apparently, each of them had kept with him a certain number of the men under his command—**heard that the King of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor.** The news was gratifying to them. It was something to have a Jewish ruler set over them, and not a Babylonian; it was, perhaps, even more to have a man noted for his justice and moderation (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' x. 9. § 12), who had no selfish aims, but desired simply the prosperity and good government of the country. **There came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan the son of Careah**—Jeremiah (xl. 8) has "Johanan and Jonathan, the sons of Kareah"—**and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite.** In Jer. xl. 8 we read, "And Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, *and*

the sons of Ephai the Netophathite," by which it would seem that some words have fallen out here. By "Netophathite" is to be understood "native of Netophah," now Antubah, near Bethlehem (see Ezra ii. 22; Neh. vii. 26). **And Jaazaniah the son of a Maachathite.** Called *Jezaniah* by Jeremiah, and said by him (xlii. 1) to have been the son of a certain Hoshaiah. Hoshaiah was a native of the Syrian kingdom, or district, known as Maachah, or Maachathi (Deut. iii. 14; 1 Chron. xix. 6, 7), which adjoined Bashan towards the north. **They and their men.** The persons mentioned, that is, with the soldiers under them, came to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and placed themselves under him as his subjects.

Ver. 24.—**And Gedaliah sware to them, and to their men.** As rebels, their lives were forfeit; but Gedaliah granted them an amnesty, and for their greater assurance swore to them that, so long as they remained peaceful subjects of the King of Babylon, they should suffer no harm. Jeremiah adds (xl. 10) that he urged them to apply themselves diligently to agricultural pursuits. **And said unto them, Fear not to be the servants of the Chaldees: dwell in the land, and serve the King of Babylon; and it shall be well with you;** rather, *and said unto them, Fear not because of the servants of the Chaldeans*, etc. "Do not be afraid," *i.e.*, "of the Chaldean officials and guards (Jer. xlii. 3) that are about my court. Be assured that they shall do you no hurt."

Ver. 25.—**And it came to pass in the seventh month** — two months only after Gedaliah received his appointment as governor, which was in the fifth month— **that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama**—"Nethaniah" is otherwise unknown; "Elishama" may be the "scribe" or secretary of Jehoiakim mentioned in Jer. xxxvi. 12, 20—**of the seed royal.** So Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 9. § 2) and Jeremiah (xli. 1). Josephus adds that he was a wicked and most crafty man, who, during the siege of Jerusalem, had made his escape from the place, and fled for shelter to Baalim (Baalis, Jer. xl. 14), King of Ammon, with whom he remained till the siege was over. **Came, and ten men with him—as his retinue—and smote Gedaliah, that he died.** Gedaliah had been warned by Johanan and the other captains (Jer. xl. 13—15) of Ishmael's probable intentions, but had treated the accusation as a calumny, and refused to believe that his life was in any danger. When Ishmael and his ten companions arrived, he still suspected nothing, but received them hospitably (Jer. xli. 1), entertained them at a grand banquet, according to Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' x. 9. § 4), and being overtaken with drunkenness, was attacked and killed without difficulty. **And the Jews and the Chaldees that were with him at Mizpah** (comp. Jer. xli. 3, "Ishmael also slew all the Jews that were with him, even with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans that were found there, and the men of war"). It is evident from this that Gedaliah had a Chaldean guard.

Ver. 26.—**And all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the armies** (see above, ver. 23). The leader of the movement was Johanan, the son of Careah. Having first attacked Ishmael, and forced him to fly to the Ammonites (Jer. xli. 15), he almost immediately afterwards conceived a fear of Nebuchadnezzar, who would, he thought, resent the murder of Gedaliah, and even avenge it upon those who had done all they could to prevent it. He therefore gathered together the people, and made a preliminary retreat to Chimham, near Bethlehem (Jer. xli. 17), on the road to Egypt, whence he subsequently, against the earnest remonstrances and prophetic warnings of Jeremiah (xlii. 9—22), carried them on into Egypt itself (Jer. xliii. 1—7). The first settlement was made at Tahpanhes, or Daphnæ. **Arose, and came into Egypt: for they were afraid of the Chaldees** (see Jer. xli. 18; xliii. 3). There does not appear to have been any real reason for this fear. Nebuchadnezzar might have been trusted to distinguish between the act of an individual and conspiracy on the part of the nation.

Vers. 27—30.—*Fate of Jehoiachin.* The writer of Kings, whose general narrative, since the time of Hezekiah, has been gloomy and dispiriting, seems to have desired to terminate his history in a more cheerful strain. He therefore mentions, as his last incident, the fate of Jehoiachin, who, after thirty-six years of a cruel and seemingly hopeless imprisonment, experienced a happy change of circumstances. The king who succeeded Nebuchadnezzar, his son, Evil-Merodach, in the first year of his sovereignty had compassion upon the miserable captive, and releasing him from prison, changed his garments (ver. 29), and gave him a place at his table, among other dethroned monarchs, even exalting him above the rest (ver. 28), and making him an allowance for his support (ver. 30). This alleviation of their king's condition could not but be felt by the captive Jews as a happy omen—a portent of the time when *their* lot too would be alleviated, and the Almighty Disposer of events, having punished them sufficiently for their

sins, would relent at last, and put an end to their banishment, and give them rest and peace in their native country.

Ver. 27.—**And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin King of Judah.** According to Berosus and the Canon of Ptolemy, Nebuchadnezzar reigned forty-four years. He carried off Jehoiachin to Babylon in his eighth year (ch. xxiv. 12), and thus the year of his death would exactly coincide with the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of the Jewish prince. **In the twelfth month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month.** The *five* and twentieth day, according to Jeremiah (lii. 31). (On the rarity of such exact dates in the historical Scriptures, see the comment on ver. 1.) That **Evil-Merodach King of Babylon.** The native name, which is thus expressed, seems to have been "Avil-Marduk." The meaning of *avil* is uncertain; but the name probably placed the prince under the protection of Merodach, who was Nebuchadnezzar's favourite god. Avil-Marduk ascended the Babylonian throne in B.C. 561, and reigned two years only, when he was murdered by Neriglissar, or Nergal-sar-uzur, his brother-in-law. **In the year that he began to reign**—the year B.C. 561—**did lift up the head of Jehoiachin King of Judah out of prison.** (For the phrase used, see Gen. xl. 13, 19, 20.) The act was probably part of a larger measure of pardon and amnesty, intended to inaugurate favourably the new reign.

Ver. 28.—**And he spake kindly to him;** literally, *he spake good things with him;* but the meaning is well expressed by our rendering. Evil-Merodach compassionated the sufferings of the unfortunate monarch, who had grown old in prison, and strove by kind speech to make up to him for them in a certain measure. **And set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon.** Evil-Merodach had at his court other captured kings besides Jehoiachin, whose presence was considered to enhance his dignity and grandeur (comp. Judg. i. 7). An honourable position and probably a seat of honour was assigned to each; but the highest position among them was now conferred on Jehoiachin. Whether he had actually a more elevated seat, is (as Bähr observes) a matter of no importance.

Ver. 29.—**And changed his prison garments.** The subject to "changed" may be either "Jehoiachin" or "Evil-Merodach." Our translators preferred the latter, our Revisers the former. In either case the general meaning is the same. Evil-Merodach supplied suitable garments to the released monarch instead of his "prison garments," and Jehoiachin arrayed himself in the comely apparel before taking his seat among his equals. Dresses of honour are among the most common gifts which an Oriental monarch makes to his subjects (see Gen. xli. 42; Esth. vi. 8, 11; viii. 15; Dan. v. 29; Xen., 'Cyrop.,' v. 1. § 1). **And he**—*i.e.* Jehoiachin—**did eat bread continually before him.** Besides giving occasional great feasts (see Esth. i. 3—9), Oriental monarchs usually entertain at their table daily a large number of guests, some of whom are specially invited, while others have the privilege of daily attendance (see 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. iii. pp. 214, 215). It was to this latter class that Jehoiachin was admitted. Comp. 2 Sam. ix. 7—13, which shows that the custom was one not unknown at the Jewish court. **All the days of his**—*i.e.* Jehoiachin's—**life.** Jehoiachin enjoyed this privilege till his death. Whether this fell in the lifetime of Evil-Merodach or not, is scarcely in the writer's thoughts. He merely means to tell us that the comparative comfort and dignity which Jehoiachin enjoyed after the accession of Evil-Merodach to the throne was not subsequently clouded over or disturbed. He continued a privileged person at the Babylonian court so long as he lived.

Ver. 30.—**And his allowance was a continual allowance.** Keil supposes that this "allowance" was a daily "ration of food," intended for the maintenance of a certain number of servants or retainers. But it is quite as likely to have been a money payment. The word translated by "allowance"—אֲרֻחַת—does not point necessarily to food. It is a "portion" of any kind. **Given him of the king**—*i.e.* out of the privy purse, by the king's command—**a daily rate for every day**—or, *a certain amount day by day*—**all the days of his life** (see the comment on the preceding verse). Both the privileges accorded to Jehoiachin, his sustenance at the king's table, and his allowance, whether in money or in kind, continued to the day of his death. Neither of them was ever revoked or forfeited. Thus this last representative of the Davidic monarchy, after thirty-six years of chastisement, experienced a happy change of circumstances, and died in peace and comfort. Probably, as Keil says, "this event was intended as a comforting sign to the whole of the captive people, that the Lord would one day put an end to their banishment, if they would acknowledge that it was a well-merited punishment for their sins that they had been driven away from before his face, and would turn again to the Lord their God with all their heart."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*The fall of Judah and Jerusalem a warning for all time to all nations.* Jerusalem had defied Zerah with his host of a million men (2 Chron. xiv. 9—15), and had triumphed over Sennacherib at the head of all the armed force of Assyria (ch. xix. 35, 36): why did she succumb to Nebuchadnezzar? It is quite certain that Babylon was not a stronger power than either Egypt or Assyria when in their prime. There is no reason to believe that Nebuchadnezzar was a better general than Sennacherib, or even than Zerah. The ground of the difference in the result of Judah's struggle with Babylon, and her earlier struggles with Egypt and Assyria, is certainly not to be sought in the greater strength of her assailant, but in her own increased weakness. What, then, were the causes of this weakness?

I. IT WAS NOT THE RESULT OF ANY DECLINE IN MILITARY STRENGTH, AS ORDINARILY ESTIMATED. The population of Judæa may have diminished, but under Josiah her dominion had increased (ch. xxiii. 15—20), and it is probable that she could still put into the field as many men as at any former period. Even if there were a diminution in the number of her troops, the fact would not have been one of much importance, since her military successes had never been dependent upon the numerical proportion between her own forces and those of her adversaries, but had been most signal and striking where the disproportion had been the greatest (see Numb. xxxi. 3—47; Judg. vii. 7—22; viii. 4—12; xv. 15; 1 Sam. xiv. 11—16; 2 Chron. xiv. 8—12; xx. 15—24, etc.).

II. IT WAS NOT PRODUCED BY INTERNAL QUARREL OR DISSENSION. Ewald attributes the fall of Judah and Jerusalem mainly to the antagonism between the monarchy and the prophetical order, and to the violence employed by each against the other. "The kingdom of Judah was torn," he says, "with less and less hope of remedy, by the most irreconcilable internal divisions; and the sharpest dissensions at length made their way into the sanctity of every house." Violence on the part of the kings was met by violence on the part of the prophets; and "the sacred land went to ruin under the development of the element of force" ('History of Israel,' vol. iv. p. 289). It is difficult to discover any sufficient support for this view in the sacred narrative, which shows us Hezekiah on the most friendly terms with Isaiah, Josiah on the same terms with Huldah, and Zedekiah certainly not on unfriendly terms with Jeremiah. In the closing scene the antagonism is not between prophetism and monarchy, but between prophetism and an aristocratical clique. Nor is it at all clear that the final result was seriously affected by the antagonism in question. It may have somewhat relaxed the defence; but we cannot possibly imagine that, if there had been no difference of view, no sharp dissension, a successful resistance could have been made. The resistance might, perhaps, have been prolonged had all Israelites been of one mind; but still Babylon would have prevailed in the end.

III. IT WAS NOT FROM ANY TREACHERY OR DESERTION ON THE PART OF ALLIES. Allies had never done Judæa much good; and dependence on them was regarded as an indication of want of faith in Jehovah. But, so far as the matter of alliances went, Judah was in a superior, rather than in an inferior, position now than formerly. Her natural allies in any struggle with the dominant power of Western Asia were Phœnicia and Egypt; and at this time both Phœnicia and Egypt rendered her aid. Tyre was in revolt against Babylon from B.C. 598 to B.C. 585, and gave occupation to a considerable portion of the Babylonian forces while Jerusalem was being besieged. Egypt, under the enterprising Hophra (Apries), took the field soon after the siege began, and for a time succeeded in raising it. Babylon had to contend with the three allies, Tyre, Egypt, and Judæa, at one and the same time, but proved equal to the strain, and overcame all three antagonists.

Judæa's weakness lay in this—that she had offended God. From the time of Moses to that of Zedekiah, it was not her own inherent strength, or vigour, or energy, that had protected and sustained her, but the supporting hand of the Almighty. God had ever "gone forth with her armies" (Ps. lx. 10). God had given her "help from trouble." Through God she had "done valiantly." He it was who had "trodden down her enemies" (Ps. lx. 11, 12). Many of their deliverances had been through

actual miracle; others were the result of a divinely infused courage pervading their own ranks, or a panic falling upon their adversaries. It was only as God's "peculiar people," enjoying his covenanted protection, that they could possibly hold their place among the nations of the earth, so soon as great empires were formed and mighty monarchs devised schemes of extensive conquests. God's arm had saved them from Egypt and from Assyria; he could as easily have saved them from Babylon. "It is nothing with God to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power" (2 Chron. xiv. 11). He could have bridled Nebuchadnezzar as easily as Zerah or Sennacherib, and have saved the Jews under Zedekiah as readily as under Asa or Hezekiah. But Judah's sins came between him and them. The persistent transgressions of the people from the time of Manasseh, their idolatries, immoralities, cruelties, and wickedness of all kinds, shortened God's arm, that he could not interpose to save them. As the author of Chronicles puts it, "there was no remedy" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 16). "They had transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem; . . . they had mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 14—16); and so "filled up the measure of their iniquities." Under such circumstances, God could not spare even his own children (Isa. i. 4; lxiii. 16)—his own people. Can, then, any sinful nation hope to escape? Ought not each to feel the fate of Judah a warning to itself? a warning to repent of its evil ways, and turn from them, and walk in the paths of righteousness, according to the exhortation of Isaiah?—"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isa. i. 16—20).

Vers. 27—30.—"*The loving-kindness of the Lord.*" God, "in his wrath, thinketh upon mercy." The captive king, and the captive nation, each of them suffered a long and severe punishment. Each of them must have been inclined to sink into a state of hopelessness and apathy. Each may have thought that God had forgotten them altogether, or at any rate had forgotten, and would forget, to be gracious. Thirty-six years—how long a space is this in the life of a man! Jehoiachin had grown from a youth into a man of full age, and from a man of full age almost into an old man, for he was in his fifty-fifth year, and Jewish monarchs rarely reached the age of sixty. Yet he had not really been forgotten. God had had his eye upon him all the while, and had kept in reserve for him a happy change of circumstances. The Disposer of events brought Evil-Merodach to the throne, and put it into the heart of that monarch to have compassion upon the aged captive. Jehoiachin passed from a dungeon to a chair of state (ver. 28), from prison food and prison dress to royal banquets and apparel fitting his rank, from the extreme of misery to happiness, dignity, and honour. This was the doing of the Almighty Father, using men as his instruments; and it was a strong evidence of his loving-kindness. Would not the nation likewise experience his mercy? The penal sentence passed upon it was well deserved, and might, in strict justice, have been final. But would God exact the uttermost farthing? No. By the release and restoration to honour of Jehoiachin, he sufficiently indicated to his people that for them too there was a place of repentance, a day of grace, a restoration to his favour. A ray of light thus broke in upon the long darkness of the Captivity. God's gracious intent was indicated. The nation felt a stir of hope, and woke up to the expectation of a new life; Isaiah's later prophecies (xl.—lxvi.), which had seemed a dead letter, became living words, speaking to the heart of the people; and the later years of the Captivity were cheered by the prospect—ever becoming brighter and clearer—of a reinstatement in God's favour, a return to the Holy Land, and a restoration of the sanctuary (Dan. ix. 2—19).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—21.—*The last days of Jerusalem.* The shameful story of Judah's disobedience and sin is now drawing to a close. Here we have an account of the capture of Jerusalem and its king by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon. Zedekiah, the king, was taken prisoner. His sons were first put to death before his eyes. Then his own eyes were put out. He was bound in fetters of brass, and carried away to Babylon. Jerusalem itself, the city of David and Solomon, was a scene of desolation. Nebuzar-adan, captain of the Babylonian guard, burnt with fire the house of the Lord and the king's house and all the principal houses of the city. The men of war had deserted their posts and fled from the city. All who remained there were taken captive. The poor of the land only were left to be vinedressers and husbandmen. What were the causes of this sad downfall?

I. THE WICKEDNESS OF ITS RULERS. One after the other, the kings of Judah had done evil in the sight of the Lord. 1. *They disobeyed God's commands.* They imitated the idolatry and the vices of the heathen. 2. *They ill-treated God's prophets.* When men begin to despise and ill-treat God's messengers, those who are trying to lead them to what is right, they are blind to their own true interests. The treatment which the Prophet Jeremiah in particular received showed how low in degradation the kingdom of Judah had sunk. After the prophet's fearless denunciations of national sin (Jer. xiii.—xix.), Pashur, who was chief governor of the temple, smote Jeremiah, and put him in the stocks, or pillory, that was in the high gate of Benjamin, near the temple, where all men might see him and mock at his disgrace. We have seen how Jehoiakim cut the roll of Jeremiah's prophecies with his penknife, and burned its leaves. Jeremiah's last years at Jerusalem were years of increased suffering and persecution. Zedekiah actually put him in prison. The princes cast him to perish in a hideous pit in the prison-house, where he sank in the mire, but at the intercession of an Ethiopian officer, Ebed-Melech, the king rescued him. *Wickedness in high places soon proves to be a nation's ruin.*

II. THE CORRUPTION OF ITS PEOPLE. Unhappily, the people were just as corrupt and as godless as their rulers. A nation is responsible for its national sins. The sins of Judah cried aloud to Heaven for vengeance. And in the days of the Captivity they were taught to feel that there is a God that reigneth in the earth. We learn from the fate of Judah and Jerusalem: 1. *The danger of forsaking God.* They forsook God in the day of their prosperity. And when the hour of their need came, the gods whom they served were not able to deliver them. 2. *The danger of disregarding God's Word.* How often, in these later years of Judah's history, was the Law of God utterly neglected and forgotten! No life can be truly happy which is not based on the Word of God. No home can be truly happy where the Bible is not read. No nation can expect prosperity which disregards the Word of God. 3. *The danger of despising God's warnings.* Every message God sends us is for our good. If it is worth his while to speak to us, it is worth our while to listen. Neglected warnings—what guilt they involve! what danger they threaten! "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; . . . I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."—C. H. I.

Vers. 18—21.—*Space for repentance.* "And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door," etc. This piece of history may be usefully employed to illustrate that space which Heaven allows to be given men for improvement in this life. Notice here—

I. SPACE FOR IMPROVEMENT. "And the captain of the guard," etc. Though we have reason to think that the army of Chaldeans were much enraged against the city for holding out with so much stubbornness, yet they did not therefore put all to fire and sword as soon as they had taken the city (which is too commonly done in such cases), but three months after Nebuzar-adan was sent with orders to complete the destruction of Jerusalem. This space God gave them to repent after all the foregoing days of his patience; but in vain. Their hearts were still hardened. Thus wicked men constantly ignore "things that belong to their peace."

II. SPACE FOR IMPROVEMENT NEGLECTED. "And out of the city he took an officer that was set over the men of war," etc. These men, to whom time had been given to do the work required, day after day neglected it. No effort was put forth to avoid the threatened calamity. It is ever thus. Men are waiting for a more "convenient season." The cry, "Unless ye repent ye shall all likewise perish," was neglected.

III. NEGLECTED SPACE FOR IMPROVEMENT AVENGED. "And Nebuzar-adan captain of the guard took these, and brought them to the King of Babylon to Riblah." "Be sure your sins will find you out." "Rejoice, O, young man, in thy youth; . . . but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

IV. THE AVENGEMENT OF THIS NEGLECT WAS TERRIBLE IN THE EXTREME. "And the King of Babylon smote them, and slew them at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away out of their land." The city and the temple were burnt. The walls were never repaired until Nehemiah's time; and Judah was carried out of their land, etc. The history of this calamity is too well known to record here. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."—D. T.

Vers. 22—26.—*Rulers and their enemies.* "And as for the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon had left," etc. By this fragment of Jewish history two observations are suggested.

I. MEN ARE SOMETIMES ELEVATED INTO RESPONSIBLE POSITIONS. *Gedaliah*, a friend of Jeremiah's, and acting under the prophet's counsel, took the government of Judæa, and fixed his court at Mizpah. He seemed on the whole qualified for the office he assumed. The people committed to his charge were those who were left in the country after Judah had been carried away into Babylonian captivity. They were, perhaps, considered too insignificant to be removed. However, being peasantry, who could till the land and dress the vineyards, he counselled them to submit to his rule, promising them that they should retain their possessions and enjoy the produce of the land. Such was the responsible position to which this Gedaliah was elevated. In every age and land there are some men thus distinguished—men that rise to eminence and obtain distinction and power. Sometimes it may be by the force of their own genius and character, and sometimes by the force and patronage of others. Hence in Church and state, literature, commerce, and art, we have rulers ecclesiastical, political, scholastic, and mercantile. This arrangement in our social life has many signal advantages, although often exposed to many terrible evils.

II. MALIGNANT ENMITY SOMETIMES FRUSTRATES THE PURPOSE OF SUCH MEN. "But it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nathaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, came, and ten men with him, and smote Gedaliah, that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldees that were with him at Mizpah." Thus envy is always excited by superiority, and one of the most cruel of human passions terminated the life of Gedaliah and the purpose of his mission a few brief months after his elevation to office. Envy murdered Gedaliah, and drove back those poor scattered Jews to Egypt, which they loathed. Thus envy is ever at work, blasting the reputations and degrading the positions of distinguished men. "Envy is the daughter of Pride, the author of murder and revenge, the beginner of secret sedition, and the perpetual tormentor of virtue. Envy is the filthy slime of the soul; a worm, a poison or quicksilver which consumeth the flesh, and drieth up the marrow of the bones" (Socrates).—D. T.

Vers. 27—30.—*Jehoiachin as a victim of tyrannic despotism, and as an object of delivering mercy.* "And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year," etc. The life of this man has been already sketched. The incident here recorded presents him—

I. AS A VICTIM OF TYRANNIC DESPOTISM. He had been in prison for thirty-seven years, and was fifty-five years of age. It was Nebuchadnezzar, the tyrannic King of Babylon, that stripped this man of liberty and freedom, and shut him up in a dungeon for this long period of time. Such despotism has prevailed in all ages and lands.

II. AS AN OBJECT OF DELIVERING MERCY. We are told that as soon as *Evil-Merodach* came to the throne on the death of his father Nebuchadnezzar, mercy stirred

his heart and relieved this poor victim of tyranny. Corrupt as this world is, the element of mercy is not entirely extinct. This mercy gave honour and liberty to the man who had been so long in confinement and disgrace. Let not the victims of tyranny—and they abound everywhere—despair. Mercy will ere long sound the trump of jubilee over all the land. "The Spirit of the Lord," said the great Redeemer of the race, "is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised."—D. T.

Vers. 1—10.—*The fall and destruction of Jerusalem.* With this account of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar should be compared the narrative of its later destruction by Titus (A.D. 70). History does not always repeat itself; but in this instance it does so with marvellous fidelity. The close investment of the city, the desperate resistance, the horrors of famine within, the incidents of the capture, the burning of the temple, the demolition of the walls, and the captivity of the people, present striking parallels in the two cases. By one of those rare coincidences that sometimes occur, it was on the very same month and day of the month on which the temple was burned by Nebuchadnezzar, that the sanctuary was fired by the soldiers of Titus. The earlier destruction fulfilled the predictions of the prophets; the later the predictions of our Lord (Matt. xxiv.).

I. THE LAST SIEGE. 1. *Fatal dates.* The days which mark the different stages of this terrible siege of Nebuchadnezzar are minutely recorded and carefully remembered. "The ninth year" of Zedekiah, "in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month," Nebuchadnezzar came, he and his host, against Jerusalem (ver. 1); in the eleventh year of Zedekiah "on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city" (ver. 3), and a breach was effected; "in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar," the temple and other buildings were burned by Nebuzar-adan (ver. 8). We have the same careful dating in Jer. xxxix. 1, 2; lii. 4, 12 (in the latter passage "tenth" for "seventh" as above). These were dates which burned themselves into the very memories of the wretched people crowded in the city, and could never be forgotten. Indirectly they testify to the intensity of misery which was endured, which made them so well remembered. They were observed afterwards as regular days of fasting (Zech. vii. 3, 5; viii. 19). 2. *The enemy without.* Nebuchadnezzar's army came up against the city, and closely invested it, building forts against it round about. Ezek. xxi. is a vivid prophecy of what was about to happen. The prophet announces the impending capture of the holy city. A sword was furbished which would work terrible destruction. Ezekiel is directed to mark off two ways along which this sword was to travel—the one leading to Jerusalem, and the other to Rabbath of Ammon. The scene changes, and we see the King of Babylon standing at the head of the ways, deliberating which one he shall choose. He shakes the arrows, consults images, looks for omens in the liver of dead beasts. The decision given is for advancing first against Jerusalem. Now he is at its gates, and has appointed captains "to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the voice with shouting, to appoint battering-rams against the gates, to cast a mount, and to build a fort" (Ezek. xxi. 21, 22). 3. *The famine within.* For a year and five months the weary siege dragged itself on, the people within well knowing that, when once it was captured, they could expect no mercy. The writings of Jeremiah give us a vivid picture of the city during this period. From the first the prophet held out no hope. When Zedekiah, at the beginning of the siege entreated him, "Inquire, I pray thee, of the Lord for us," Jeremiah plainly told him that the city was delivered to the Chaldeans, and that Nebuchadnezzar would not spare them, "neither have pity, nor have mercy" (Jer. xxi. 1—7). Life was promised, however, to those who should surrender themselves to the enemy (vers. 8—10). This strain was kept up throughout, in spite of imprisonment, threats, and the contrary testimony of false prophets (cf. Jer. xxxii. 1—5; xxxiv. 1—7; xxxvii. 6—21; xxxviii., etc.). At one point an Egyptian army came forth against the Chaldeans, and great hopes were raised, but Jeremiah bade the people not deceive themselves, for the Chaldeans would prevail, as indeed they did, in spite of a temporary raising of the siege (Jer. xxxvii. 5—11). By-and-by, as in the previous long siege of Samaria by the Syrians (ch. vi. 24—33), the misery

of the people became extreme. The bread was "spent" in the city (Jer. xxxvii. 21). The Book of Lamentations gives vivid glimpses of the horrors—the young children fainting for hunger at the top of every street (Lam. ii. 11, 19); crying to their mothers, Where is corn and wine? (Lam. ii. 12); and asking bread, and no man breaking it to them (Lam. iv. 4); the delicately nurtured lying on dunghills (Lam. iv. 5); women eating their own offspring (Lam. ii. 20), etc.

II. THE FATE OF ZEDEKIAH. As the vigour of the defence slackened, the besiegers redoubled their energies, till, on the ninth day of the fourth month, a breach was made in the walls, and Nebuchadnezzar's princes penetrated as far as the middle gate (Jer. xxix. 1—3). The stages that follow are, as respects Zedekiah, those of: 1. *Flight.* The besiegers had entered by the north side of the city, and the king, with his men of war, feeling that all was lost, made their escape by night through a gate of the city on the south—"the gate between the two walls, which is by the king's garden"—and, evading the Chaldeans in the darkness, fled towards the Jordan. By a symbolic action Ezekiel had foretold this flight, and the actual manner of the escape, down to its minutest details—a singular instance of the unerring prescience of these inspired prophets (Ezek. xii. 1—16). What the king's thoughts were as he fled that night with beating heart and covered face, who can tell? Jeremiah had been vindicated, and the prophets who had buoyed the people up with so many false hopes were now shown to be miserable deceivers. 2. *Capture.* The flight of the king was soon discovered, and a contingent of Chaldeans was despatched in pursuit. It was not long ere they overtook the fleeing monarch, no doubt faint with hunger, unnerved by fear, and exhausted with the miles he had already traversed, unable therefore to make any defence. If his followers made any stand, they were speedily scattered, and the king was taken on the plains of Jericho. His hopes, his plans, his intrigues with Egypt, all had come to nothing. He stood there, a prisoner of the Chaldeans, as Jeremiah declared he would be. It is God's Word that always comes true. Would that Zedekiah had believed it in time! 3. *Punishment.* The fate which awaited Zedekiah was not long deferred. With his sons, and the nobles who were with him (Jer. xxxix. 6; lii. 10), he was taken to Riblah, to have judgment passed on him by Nebuchadnezzar. Little mercy had he to look for from the haughty, infuriate king, who had given him his throne, and whose covenant he had broken, entailing on him the trouble and delay of a sixteen months' siege. Tortures, perhaps, and death in protracted agonies. The wonder is that Zedekiah escaped as mercifully as he did. But his punishment was, nevertheless, heart-breaking in its severity. (1) He saw his own sons slain before his eyes. It was the last spectacle he ever beheld; for (2) his own eyes were next put out. Then (3) he was bound with fetters of brass, and carried to Babylon, where he remained a prisoner all the rest of his life (Jer. lii. 11; cf. xxxiv. 5—8). The nobles of Judah were at the same time slain (Jer. xxxix. 6; lii. 10). Life thus ended for Zedekiah when he was yet a young man of little over thirty years of age. His sons must have been mere boys, and their pitiable death would be a pang in his heart greater even than the pain of the iron which pierced his eyes. The joy of life was lost to him, like the darkness which had now fallen for ever on the outer world. The dreary living death of the prison was all that was left to him. Miserable man, how bitterly he had to expiate his sin, and mourn over past errors and self-willed courses! Will it be otherwise with those who stand at the last before the judgment-seat of God, if their lives are spent in disobedience? If it was hard to face Nebuchadnezzar when he was "full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed" (Dan. iii. 19), how shall men endure "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. vi. 16)?

III. JERUSALEM DESTROYED. A month elapsed before the destruction of the now captured city was carried out. It was probably during this interval that Jeremiah composed his passionate and pathetic Lamentations. When at length the work was taken in hand by Nebuzar-adan, an officer deputed for the purpose, it was done with characteristic thoroughness, amidst the glee of Judah's hereditary enemies, whose shouts, "Rase it, rase it, even to the foundations thereof!" (Ps. cxxxvii. 7), stimulated the work of demolition. We see: 1. *The temple burned.* "He burnt the house of the Lord," etc. Thus came to an end the great and beautiful house of God, built by Solomon, consecrated by so many ceremonies and prayers (1 Kings viii.), and whose courts had so often resounded with the psalms and shouts of the multitude that kept

holy day (Ps. xlii. 5). But idolatry and hypocrisy had made "the house of prayer" into "a den of robbers" (Isa. lvi. 7; Jer. vii. 11; Matt. xxi. 13), and God's glory had been seen by the prophet on the banks of the Chebar departing from it (Ezek. xi. 22, 23). The temple had been the special boast of the godless people. They had trusted in lying words, saying, "The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these" (Jer. vii. 4). This was to make the temple a fetish, and, as Hezekiah had broken the brazen serpent in pieces when it began to be worshipped (ch. xviii. 4), it had become necessary to destroy the temple also. 2. *The buildings burned.* "The king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire." When the central glory of the city had perished, secular palaces and houses could not expect to escape. They also were set on fire, and the ruddy blaze, spreading from street to street, would consume most of the humbler houses as well. How faithfully had all this been foretold, yet none would believe it! Literally had Jerusalem now become heaps (Micah iii. 12). 3. *The walls broken down.* "All the army of the Chaldeans . . . brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about." This completed the catastrophe, made the holy city a heap of ruins, and rendered it impossible for inhabitants any longer to dwell in it. Gedaliah made his headquarters at Mizpah (ver. 23). The centre of Judah's nationality was destroyed. Jerusalem had been emptied, "as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down" (ch. xxi. 13). One stands appalled at so complete a wreck of a city which God had once honoured by making it the place of his abode, and for which he had done such great things in the past. But the lesson we are to learn from it is that nothing can reverse the action of moral laws. God is terrible in his justice. Though a person or place is as "the signet upon his right hand," yet will he pluck it thence, if it abandons itself to wickedness (Jer. xxii. 24, 28).—J. O.

Vers. 11—21.—*The final deportation.* An end having been made of the city, the next step was to complete the conquest by deporting to Babylon the remnant of the population, and carrying away the spoil. To this task Nebuzar-adan now addressed himself.

I. THE PEOPLE CARRIED AWAY. 1. *The gleanings taken.* Ten or eleven thousand persons had been carried away in the earlier captivity (ch. xxiv. 14), including amongst them the best part of the population (cf. Jer. xxiv. 3—10). The remnant had since been thinned by famine, pestilence, and war (Jer. xxi. 7; xxiv. 10). On the most probable view of Jer. lii. 28 ("seventeenth" for "seventh"), a further large deportation of captives—over three thousand—took place a year before the conclusion of the siege. Now there were only the gleanings to take away, and these amounted to but eight hundred and thirty-two persons (Jer. lii. 29). They were but a small handful compared with those who had perished, but they would comprise all the people of any position and influence. They consisted of those who were in the city, of those who had previously deserted to the Chaldeans, and of the pickings of the multitude outside. The mourning and lamentation occasioned by these captivities is poetically represented by Jeremiah in the well-known description of Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, as she sees the long trains defile away (Jer. xxxi. 15). 2. *The poor left.* As before, it was only the poorest of the land, those "which had nothing" (Jer. xxxix. 10) who were left behind, to till the fields and care for the vineyards. With the exception of these, the country was depopulated. The best even of this poorer class had been removed in the last sifting of the population, so that the residue must have been poor indeed. They formed but a scant remnant; but even they, as we shall see, were unable to hold together, and were soon to be expatriated, leaving the land utterly desolate.

II. THE BRAZEN VESSELS CARRIED AWAY. *The temple plunder.* The more valuable of the temple vessels had been carried away in the first captivity (ch. xxiv. 13), but there remained a large number of articles and utensils of brass, together with some of the precious metals (ver. 15), either formerly overlooked or subsequently replaced. All these had been gathered out before the temple was burnt, and were now carried away as spoil. They consisted (1) of the two brazen pillars, Jachin and Boaz, which stood in the porch of the temple, and by their symbolical names, "He shall establish," "In it is strength," witnessed to the fact that God's dwelling-place was now established

in the midst of his people, and that its stability was secured by his presence. (2) The bases, with their lavers, for washing the sacrifices; and the molten sea for the use of the priests. (3) The common utensils connected with the service of the altar and sanctuary—pots, shovels, etc. These brazen pillars, vessels, and utensils were the work of Hiram of Tyre, and were wrought with the utmost artistic skill (1 Kings vii. 13—51). The pillars were masterpieces of strength and ornamental beauty; the sea and bases were also exquisitely carved and adorned with figures of cherubim, palms, and flowers. They were the pride and glory of the temple, and as mere works of art stood in the highest place. 2. *Treatment of the vessels.* The more grievous, for the above reasons, was the treatment to which these beautiful objects were now subjected. Not only were they torn from their places and uses in the temple, but they were ruthlessly broken to pieces, that they might be the more easily carried away. Hiram's masterpieces had sunk to the level of common brass, and were treated only as such. The lesser vessels were, of course, taken away whole. What could more significantly tell of the departure of God from his house, the rejection of its worship, and the reversal of the promises of stability, etc., he had given in connection with it, than this ignominious treatment of its sacred vessels? They had, indeed, when his presence was withdrawn, become mere "pieces of brass," as did the brazen serpent of Moses, when men turned it into an occasion for sin (ch. xviii. 4). Their house was left unto them desolate (Matt. xxiii. 38).

III. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE CHIEF MEN. A final act of vengeance was yet to be perpetrated. Singling out a number of the chief men, Nebuzar-adan brought them to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, and there "the King of Babylon smote them, and slew them." The victims were contributed by: 1. *The temple.* "Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and three keepers of the door." 2. *The army and court.* "An officer that was set over the men of war, and five men of them that were in the king's presence . . . and the principal scribe of the host." 3. *The citizens.* "Three score men of the people of the land that were found in the city." All classes were thus represented, and bore their share in the expiation of the common guilt. The slaughter was no doubt partly intended to inspire terror in those who were left.—J. O.

Vers. 22—26.—*Gedaliah and the remnant.* Nothing could more effectually show the hopeless condition of the people, and their unfitness for self-government, than this brief narrative of events which followed the destruction of Jerusalem. The detailed history is given in Jer. xl.—xliii.

I. GEDALIAH MADE GOVERNOR. It was necessary to appoint a governor over the land, and for this purpose Nebuchadnezzar chose "Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan." The country was desolate, and had been robbed of its chief elements of strength; but, had the people chosen to hold together, they might still have subsisted with a reasonable degree of comfort, and gradually again built up a prosperous community. 1. *They had a good governor.* Gedaliah was one of themselves, a man of an honourable and godly stock, a sincere patriot, and of a kindly and generous nature. Under his rule they had nothing to fear, and were assured of every help and encouragement. 2. *They had a good company.* In numbers the population was probably still not inconsiderable, and it was soon reinforced by many Jews, "who returned out of all places whither they were driven, and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah, unto Mizpah" (Jer. xl. 12). They came from Moab, from Ammon, from Edom, and "all the countries," attracted by the prospect of the fields and vineyards which were to be had for the asking (Jer. xxxix. 10; xl. 11). A number of captains with their men also, who had been hiding in the fields, came to Gedaliah, and took possession of the cities (cf. Jer. xl. 10). Their names are given—Ishmael, Johanan, Seraiah, Jaazaniah, etc. There were here the elements of a community which, with proper cohesion, might soon have come to something. 3. *They had good promises.* To those who came to him Gedaliah gave ready welcome and reassuring promises. He swore to the captains that they need fear no harm. Let them dwell in the land, and serve the King of Babylon, and it would be well with them. Let them gather wine, and summer fruits, and oil, and dwell in the cities they had occupied (Jer. xl. 10). It may, indeed, be affirmed that the bulk of the people now left in the land were better off materially than they had been for some time. Formerly they were poor and starving,

ground down by oppression, and many of them bondmen; now they had liberty, land, the choice of fields and vineyards, and the advantage of keeping to themselves the fruits of their labour.

II. GEDALIAH'S MURDER, AND THE FLIGHT UNTO EGYPT. What the people might have come to under Gedaliah's benevolent rule, time was not given to show. It soon became fatally evident that the people were incapable of making the best of their situation, and of working heartily and loyally together for the general good. Among the leaders there was a want of faith, of patriotism, of principle; among the people the sense of nationality was utterly broken. This hopeless want of cohesion and absence of higher sentiment was shown: 1. *In the murder of Gedaliah.* Turbulent spirits were among the captains, who had no concern but for their own advantage, and were utterly unscrupulous as to the means they took to gain it. Intrigue, treachery, and violence were more congenial to them than the restraints of settled government. One of these captains, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, was of the seed royal, and naturally resented the elevation of a commoner like Gedaliah to the position of governor. Instigated by Baalis King of the Ammonites, he formed a plot for Gedaliah's assassination, and with the help of ten men he secretly carried it out, slaying not only the unsuspicious governor, but all the Jews and Chaldeans and men of war that were with him at Mizpah (cf. Jer. xl. 13—16; xli. 1—3). Ishmael gained nothing by his treachery, for he was immediately afterwards pursued, and his captives taken from him (Jer. xli. 11—18). What a picture of the wickedness of the human heart is given in his dastardly deed, and in the manner of its accomplishment! Ishmael's moving principle was envy, the source of so much crime. To gratify a base grudge against one whom he regarded as his rival, he was willing to become the tool of an enemy of his people, to break sacred pledges, to repay kindness with murder, and to plunge the affairs of a community that needed nothing so much as peace into irretrievable confusion. "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" etc. (Jas. iv. 1, 2). 2. *The flight into Egypt.* The narrative here only tells that, for fear of the vengeance of the Chaldeans, "all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose, and came to Egypt." From Jeremiah, however, we learn, that first the leaders consulted the prophet as to what they should do, promising faithfully to abide by his directions; that he counselled them from the Lord to abide where they were, and not go down to Egypt; and that then they turned against him—"all the proud men"—and said, "Thou speakest falsely: the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there" (Jer. xlii.; xliii. 1—7). They then took their own way, and compelled Jeremiah and all the people to go with them. Here the same unchastened, wayward, stubborn spirit reveals itself which had been the cause of all their troubles. Had they obeyed Jeremiah, they were assured that it would be well with them; while, if they went down to Egypt, it was foretold that the sword and famine, which they feared, would overtake them (Jer. xlii. 16), as from the recently disinterred ruins at Tahpanhes we know it actually did. But through this self-willed action of their own, God's Word was fulfilled, and the land of Judah swept clean of its remaining inhabitants.—J. O.

Vers. 27—30.—*Jehoiachin's restoration.* We have here—

I. A LONG CAPTIVITY. "In the thirty-seventh year of the reign of Jehoiachin King of Judah." 1. *Weary years.* Thirty-seven years was a long time to spend in prison. The king was but eighteen years of age when he was taken away, so that now he would be fifty-five. Existence must have seemed hopeless, yet he went on enduring. He was suffering even more for his fathers' sins, and for the nation's sins, than for his own. Life is sweet, and hard to part with, and the love of it is nowhere more strongly seen than when men go on clinging to it under conditions which might, if anything could, suggest the question, "Is life worth living?" Jehoiachin must have had a stout heart to endure so long. 2. *A change of rulers.* Nebuchadnezzar at length died, and his son Evil-Merodach ascended the throne. Possibly this prince may have formed a friendship with Jehoiachin in prison, and this may have contributed to sustain the captive king's hopes. A change of government usually brings many other changes in its train.

II. A GLIMPSE OF SUNSHINE AT THE CLOSE. 1. *At the close of Jehoiachin's life.*

The new ruler treated Jehoiachin as a human being, a friend, and a king. (1) He took him out of prison, changing the policy of harshness for one of kindness. (2) He set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon. It was a shadowy honour; but is any earthly throne more than a shadow? Evil-Merodach himself kept his for only two years, and was then murdered. (3) He gave him suitable provision. The ignominy of prison garments was changed for honourable clothing; the scarcity and hard fare of the dungeon was altered for the royal bounty of the king's own table. Jehoiachin, in short, had now everything but freedom. But how much does that mean! He was still an exile. All he enjoyed was but an alleviation of captivity. 2. *At the close of the book.* It is not without purpose that the Book of Kings closes with this glimpse of brightness. The story it has had to tell has been a sad one—a story of disappointment, failure, rejection, exile. But there is unshaken faith, even amidst the gloom, that God's counsel will stand, and that he hath not cast off his people whom he foreknew (Rom. xi. 2). Jeremiah had predicted the exile, but he had also predicted restoration after seventy years (Jer. xxv. 11, 12; xxix. 10). That period had but half elapsed, but this kindness shown to Jehoiachin seemed prophetic of the end, and is inserted to sustain faith and hope in the minds of the exiles. The history of the world, like the history in this book, will close in peace and brightness under Christ's reign.—J. O.

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TO

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