



Sermons on the book of Jonah, the prophet

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SERMONS

ON THE

BOOK OF JONAH,

THE PROPHET ;

BY THE LATE

REV. H. F. KOHLBRUEGGE, D.D.

Pastor of the Reformed Church, Elberfeld.

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SERMONS on the BOOK of JONAH.

I.

FIRST CHAPTER OF JONAH THE PROPHET.

THE first chapter of the Prophecies of Jonah runs as follows :

1 Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

4 But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

5 Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

6 So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

7 And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

8 Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country; and of what people art thou?

9 And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

14 Wherefore they cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee.

15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.

17 Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Here is an instructive story, which teaches the following truths:

(1.) We are never ready, either to do God's will, or to do it in God's way, (v. 1, 2.)

(2.) Rather than do His will we move as far away from Him as our feet will carry us, and pay a heavy price so that they may take us out to sea, (v. 3.)

(3.) But the Lord knows where to find us, and sends His mighty tempest to fetch us back, (v. 4.)

(4.) Then we hide ourselves in the darkest corner, and lie still, and pretend to be fast asleep, as if nothing were wrong, (v. 5.)

(5.) The things that surround us will not suffer us to rest, and force us to face our real condition, (v. 6—8.)

(6.) When we are driven into a corner, it becomes manifest to the world what manner of spirit we are of, (v. 9.)

(7.) But when we are thus reduced to an alternative, if we really are God's own, we do not greatly regard our own lives, but suffer ourselves to be cast forth into the sea, (v. 10—15.)

(8.) When we have been cast forth into the sea we must needs descend into hell, but underneath are the everlasting arms to receive us.

(1.) WE ARE NEVER READY EITHER TO DO GOD'S WILL, OR TO DO IT IN GOD'S WAY.

"By grace ye are saved, and not through works, lest any man should boast." How many of those who highly esteem this truth do really understand it, and lay it to heart? It is God's will that we should believe in Him, but how manifold and varied were the dealings of God with Abraham before He could get him to acknowledge that God was true, and that he himself was a liar, that God was justified in all His sayings, and that he himself was full of wickedness. The same reluctance to be loyal to this truth we find in Jonah, the prophet. A prophet he certainly was, and a servant of the Lord—of that we are assured in 2 Kings xiv. 25, where it is said of Jeroboam, the son of Joash: "He restored the coast of Israel from

the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He spake by the hand of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher." But though he was a prophet and a servant of God he did not choose to follow the guidance of God. His name was Jonah, that is "Dove," and his father's name was Amittai, or "Truthful." But this man Jonah would not have believed, before he had come to be tried, that he would run away from the place where he was told to preach,—he would not understand that the name of his Father in the heavens was "Truthful," who carries out what He declares through His word, and makes good His word by whatever means He may ordain. Jonah thought that God would not really do that which He commanded him to proclaim. He did not consider how mighty a weapon preaching becomes in the hand of the Lord, and he forgot the great things that are wrought by the power of the word. He thought, "Whatever I, Jonah, preach or say must prove valid, and since I know well that this message will never come true, I will take myself away, and refuse to deliver it." But the word of the Lord had come to him, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it: for their wickedness is come up before me." The Lord willed that Jonah should "cry against Nineveh," in order that by his preaching that city might be led to repentance, and thus saved. Jonah was ready to preach, but on terms with which the devil himself must have been perfectly satisfied. He was willing to say, "Nineveh, thou art doomed"—but then Nineveh was to remain under that doom.

I daresay you have often thought that this man Jonah must have been a strangely perverse missionary. Yet Peter, who several centuries later lived in the same sea-port where Jonah went on board, was at first quite as unwilling to go to Cornelius, the centurion, and when he had at length gone, was at great pains to justify his conduct to all the brethren, which he did not by simply referring to the word of the Lord, "Go ye forth into all the world," but by an account of the vision which God had shown him.

But let us look at home, my friends, and ask ourselves the all important question: Do we desire our own and our neighbour's salvation or destruction? Do we really and sincerely believe that all depends on the preaching of the Word, or do we in the pride of our self-love and of our self-willed lives rebel against God's word and guidance? Of course, we are called in a different way and to a different work from that allotted to Jonah; and yet to us, too, it is said, "Go to the Nineveh of thine own heart, and cry against it, for the wickedness of that city is come up before me." Will you listen to this as a matter

not to be trifled with, as God's own message to each and all of you? Will you constantly keep this message before the eye of your soul? Will you yield to the grace of God who worketh in you both to will and to do, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling? Will you humble that great king, self, in your hearts, and all his subject throng in dust and ashes before God? Or do you not rather lull yourself to sleep with some reasoning such as this: God is merciful and good, and will never execute those threats of His; I am saved and safe, and have no further need to cry against myself? Look well into your hearts whether this or that be true of you. Meanwhile, I will give you the result of my soul's experience, and that in a few short words: God's will is that we should be saved by accepting His message of repentance and faith, but this message we will not accept; we will not suffer the grace of God to be all in all, because it is necessary to this end that our proud self should be humbled and perish, and we fearfully shrink back from such self-annihilation. Here our will is most grievously opposed to the will of God, although daily our lips utter the prayer, "Thy will be done."

(2.) RATHER THAN DO HIS WILL WE MOVE AS FAR AWAY FROM HIM AS OUR FEET WILL CARRY US, AND PAY A HEAVY PRICE TO BE TAKEN OUT TO SEA.

This is what Jonah did. He rose up not to do the will of the Lord, but to flee from His presence, and turned his face towards the sea, although he must have known from his very youth the inspired words of the poet king: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea: even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me." First he went two or three days' journey to get to the port of Joppa where he thought he was most likely to find a ship ready, and having found one bound for a distant shore, he immediately betook himself on board. He could not exactly have said where he wanted to go, but he wanted to get away to the remotest part of the world, as far as ever a ship of those days would carry him, just as, in our days, a man might endeavour to escape to America or to India; he was eager to be as far away from Nineveh as the east is from the west. If the mariners questioned him more closely as to what particular city or country he wanted to go to, and as to the aim and object of his journey, he was unable to give any account of himself. Far beyond the seas, to some distant country, some unknown shore, he wished to go,—that was the only answer he had for them. Perhaps this strange passenger became the laughing-stock of the sailors, and anyhow, he had to submit to pay the fare for the whole distance to the port for which the ship was

bound. Perhaps, since he did not know what account to give of himself, he discoursed to the mariners on the unwillingness and inability of man to do the will of God, and on the perverseness of the human heart in being ever drawn to do the opposite of that which God has commanded; and perhaps, as he saw that they did not believe him, he at length concluded by pointing to himself as a living illustration of that truth. For the natural man thinks that if he could only discover the real will of God concerning himself, he would obey it on the spot, even though he had to sacrifice himself and all that is his.

A strange prophet you will think this man Jonah. There he sits between the thwarts, preaching to the mariners of man's impotence to do that which is good, and yet he thinks he will be strong enough to escape from doing the will of God. Perhaps he has also given his whole stock of money to the captain of the ship. But let us look at home, my dear friends, that is what I always say. "Go into the great Nineveh of thine own heart, and cry against it: for thy wickedness is come up before the Lord." Let each man see whether he can accomplish this. Jonah had to preach, "Nineveh, thou art doomed of God," and then he was to leave the fate of Nineveh in God's hands. But he was more zealous for the letter of his message than for the end towards which it was directed, the manifestation of the lovingkindness of God. And so we likewise are entirely absorbed in the letter, and pay no heed to the spirit of mercy. Of course we are quite ready to admit, in general terms, that we all have need of God's mercy and grace; but you and I are very loth to apply this to ourselves individually, and to realize for ourselves that we and all the labour of our hands are worthy of condemnation. We refuse to submit ourselves to the righteousness of God, and to admit to ourselves that we are liars and wicked men; we will not shed the light of the Word on our own lives so that our own unrighteousness might be discovered to us, and that grace might really come to us through the Word, and be truly a gift of God to us. Nay, we much sooner move to as great a distance as our feet will carry us, rather than submit to the grace of God in the Word, or surrender our reason to the Word, and being guided by the Word, and not our own thoughts. We much sooner put out to sea, and flee from the presence of the Lord, like Adam, when the Lord called him, saying, "Adam, where art thou?" Much sooner do we launch our frail bark on the wide sea of doubt, of fearfulness, of unbelief, yea, upon the sea of the world, in order to escape from obedience to the gracious will of God. We think no price too heavy, we risk all we have, only to have our own will, and vindicate our own independence. We are even content to

help the mariners to row, as though that were our only means of gaining a livelihood, and discourse to others of the will and gracious purposes of God. And though what we say may be quite true, yet it proceeds from an evil conscience ; we pretend to believe it, and yet we do not frame our lives in accordance with it.

(3.) BUT THE LORD KNOWS WHERE TO FIND US, AND SENDS HIS MIGHTY TEMPEST TO FETCH US BACK.

If we will not carry God's message to the Nineveh of our hearts, that its wickedness is come up before God, and that it is to repent and flee for refuge to Divine grace ; if we will not submit to the Word, and suffer the Word to glorify God's grace in our hearts, there is nothing to prevent our following the example of Jonah. But if it be God's will that His Word, and His Word only, shall be glorified in us, then our perverseness in putting out to sea on the wide ocean of worldliness and self-righteousness, for which we pay so heavy a price, is sure to bring on the fulfilment in more respects than one of the words, "The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken." When God has once appointed a man to be a messenger of His kingdom, it will not avail that man anything to hide among the trees, like Adam, or, like Jonah, to go on board a ship, and to take an oar, only in order the quicker to get away from the land, and out upon the high sea ; he will experience in the end the irresistible force of what our Lord said to St. Paul, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." We are not opposed to the doctrine that our salvation is from beginning to end the work of God's mercy and grace ; but we shrink from the means by which we become partakers of this grace, and are loth personally to accept what is said concerning repentance, or practically to acknowledge our utter dependence on God's mercy. For the doctrine of repentance and our need of forgiveness strikes at the very root of all human pride, vanity, self-love, and self-righteous piety—and to such self-destruction we will not submit. Therefore we try to escape the necessity of accepting God's grace for ourselves by launching forth upon the boundless ocean of self-sanctification and the works of the law, and the deeper we get into it, the better are we pleased, and thus put forward and assert our own-selves more and more, and get further and further away from God. But happily there is but poor hope of a prosperous voyage for us and our feeble craft. God is well able to visit our ocean with a sudden mighty tempest, by which that in which we hoped to be safe, is utterly shattered and broken to pieces. Such strong winds and tempests are our sins and passions, our pangs of conscience, our inward sense of God's wrath against us, and of being cut off from Him,

and that mighty inward voice which terribly avenges our red-handed rebellion against God. Such are also our outward trials, all manner of sorrow, suffering, and affliction, heart-aches, embarrassments, and cares of every kind. For with these God visits us, that He may confound our ways which are not His ways, and make us feel weary of them, and that at length He may bring us into His own way, and teach us from our hearts to confess that grace is all in all, and steadfastly to cling to His grace alone, and abide in this faith and frame our lives by it.

(4.) WHEN THE LORD PURSUES US WITH HIS TEMPEST, AND HIDE OURSELVES IN THE DARKEST CORNER, AND LIE STILL, AND PRETEND TO BE ASLEEP, AS IF NOTHING WERE WRONG.

We read that "Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep." At the first glance this fact of his sleeping during the storm seems strange enough. As soon as the tempest arose and the waves began to beat into the ship, Jonah went down "into the sides of the ship." His conscience must indeed have told him that God who made the sea as well as the dry land had arisen to pursue His disobedient servant. But instead of crying to the Lord, he dismissed all thought of the danger, and hid himself in the ship's hold, as though that were a place of perfect safety. He remained quite unmoved by the agonized cries and groans of the mariners, and whilst they called upon their gods, and cast forth their precious wares into the sea, he lay down there and slept so soundly, as if there was not the least danger of his sinking together with the ship. The thought of the poor mariners and their toilsome endeavours to keep the ship afloat never for a moment crossed his mind. In the midst of their extremity he lay there as on a downy bed, and if God had suffered it, he would have been engulfed by the waves, and have met with his death even while he slept. The mariners are abandoning their precious things to be a prey to the waves—and he fancies himself beyond the reach of the tempest down there in the hold of the ship. The mariners are watching and praying, whilst the servant of God seems to be hardening his heart more and more, and to have yielded himself to the Evil One, to be charmed and lulled by him into a deep sleep. He is weary of disobeying and fighting against God, weary of the thought that he has pitted himself against God, and presumed to resist God's holy will, weary too of all his willing and running against God's authority and command—but though he sees that he has done amiss he is not thereby brought any nearer to God; God's visitation finds him heavy with sleep; he has so hidden himself away in the recesses of the carnal mind that he does not even seem to be aware of the tempest, but quietly sleeps and slumbers as though he were altogether beyond the reach of danger.

From this we may learn a good deal about our own condition, and perhaps gain some insight into our own motives in refusing to apply the word of grace to our own lives, and to submit ourselves to the word of God. We will not go into the Nineveh of our own hearts, and there proclaim God's sentence of condemnation, in order that thereby we might obtain salvation through obedience to God's message of repentance and grace—and when to escape this necessity we flee from the presence of God, we do not ask what will be the goal of our head-long flight. And then, when God visits us with the mighty tempest of His wrath, we remain calm and unmoved; yea, though those who are dearest to our hearts may do their very utmost to save the ship, though they may sacrifice their all, and cry, and pray, and call aloud, and grievously labour to save their souls alive—we creep deeper and deeper down into the crevice of our own righteousness, quiet as best we can the reproachful voice of our conscience, turn a deaf ear to God's knocking at the door of our hearts, cease to give ourselves any thought or trouble about our neighbour, quietly sleep and slumber in secure reliance on the law and the works of the law, and feign utter ignorance of the fact, that God has caused the mighty tempest of affliction to wreak its fury upon us, in order that we may at last be willing to let the sun of God's gracious love shine upon the Nineveh of our hearts, into which we have refused to admit its healing rays, out of self-willed stubbornness and selfish pride.

(5.) BUT HOWEVER CAREFULLY WE MAY HAVE CONCEALED OURSELVES IN OUR ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE FROM GOD'S GRACIOUS PURPOSES, THE THINGS THAT SURROUND US WILL NOT SUFFER US TO REST, AND CONSTRAIN US TO COME FACE TO FACE WITH REALITIES.

At last the shipmaster went down into the hold of the ship; the heathen man had to rouse the prophet. "What meanest thou, O sleeper,"—such were his words, shouted roughly, no doubt, into Jonah's ear,—“Arise, call upon thy God, if so it be that God will think upon us that we perish not.” We can imagine that Jonah was anything but pleased to be thus rudely wakened from his sweet slumber, and to open his eyes upon such a scene of danger and distress, and moreover to have to submit to a well-merited rebuke for not watching and calling upon God, from the lips of a heathen man. The same thing will befall us if we persist in refusing to let God's grace alone occupy the throne of our hearts. Though we may have hidden ourselves away and be fast asleep, yet God can send many a shipmaster to discover to us our true condition, and to open our eyes and make us see what manner of people we really are, and though, after the fashion of dogs, we may fiercely bite the stone that is thrown

at us, yet God has no lack of stones, and one will at last hit us, and fell us to the ground. If we would quiet our misgivings with the thought of the grace of God, whilst refusing to confess to ourselves the depraved wickedness of the Nineveh of our hearts, and to turn from this wickedness to the Lord our God. God employs the law to be *our* shipmaster, that it may at last be with us according to the words of St. Paul, "I had not known sin except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet.'" For this purpose God stirs up now one now another of our friends and acquaintances, people who are sailing in the same vessel with us, or in whose company we have undertaken our journey, and whom we have paid a heavy fare in order that in their society we may be enabled to keep far away from God ; or, He stirs up those who are nearest and dearest to us, and sometimes even those whom we regard as our enemies, and though we may fly into a rage with them, and call them children of the Evil One, because they will give us no peace—yet they will surely at the last succeed in shaking us out of our sleep, and our guilt and folly in constantly speaking of the necessity of being saved by faith, and yet refusing to submit ourselves to the righteousness of faith and the grace of God, will at last be fully brought home to us. Such was the bitter experience of St. Peter in the porch of the high priest's palace, when the wickedness of his heart had been brought home to him by the importunate questioning of the Lord's enemies. And this is the course of training that the Lord has in store for us whether we like it or not. The mariners soon divined on whose account they were placed in so perilous a strait, and therefore they said every man to his fellow, "Come, and let us cast lots that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us." God had put this thought into their hearts, and so when they cast lots, the lot fell upon Jonah. And there that holy prophet had to stand forth as the only sinner before heaven among the crowd of heathen men upon the deck—he the only guilty one among them all ! And not a stain of his guilt was suffered to remain hidden ; "Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us ? What is thine occupation ? And whence comest thou ? What is thy country ? And of what people art thou ?" By questioning quite as strict as this the Lord brings the whole of our guilt to light—through His law, through all manner of outward circumstances, through persons whom we would fain look upon as no better than heathens. He gives the sinner no rest, finds him out, and forces him to confess his guilt, lays his secret sins bare to the eyes of the whole world, and his unrighteousness as clear as the noon-day—yea, till at length the sinner gives in to God, and understands and owns the utter worthlessness of his own righteousness. All this God does because

man in spite of all his eloquent acknowledgment of the excellence of grace, yet will not allow the grace of God to bear rule in the wicked Nineveh of his heart.

(6.) WHEN WE ARE THUS DRIVEN INTO A CORNER, IT BECOMES MANIFEST TO THE WORLD WHAT MANNER OF SPIRIT WE ARE OF.

Now when we are obliged to confess before heaven and before the heathen, that we have been unwilling to march against the wicked Nineveh of our heart, in order that it might be saved through the Word—when we stand forth as guilty men in the face of heaven and hell, because we have resisted God's message of grace, and have *practically* refused to admit the necessity of being saved by grace and by grace alone—when this our unrighteousness has at length come to light and put us to shame and confusion, then it will appear what manner of spirit we are of. If that spirit be an evil spirit, we at once lose heart; our spiritual courage and strength is all crushed out of us; we bow down to the god of the world, and fall in with the ways of the world, and deny God and His grace. But if we are born of the Holy Spirit, we staunchly determine to give God the praise in spite of all our short-comings, and manfully uphold His glory in the face of all flesh, notwithstanding our own helpless condition. Though our unrighteousness have found us out, and we stand convicted of the grievous sin of rebellion against God, yet we give no praise to the flesh or the idols, as though there were more good in one form of the fleshly mind than another, or as though idols could save us. Therefore Jonah makes answer, in the face of his sin, in the face of the heathen, in the face of death, and in the presence of God whom he was conscious of having grievously offended, "I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land." By confessing himself to be an Hebrew, he implies that he is holy, and one of the Lord's elect, and that he has passed from death unto life eternal. He says he fears the Lord, and therewith declares that he has no fear of the devil and death, of his own folly, or of the yawning abyss, but that in his heart of hearts he dreads, loves, honours, and serves the Lord his God alone, although his deeds may seem to belie his words. He adds that the God whom he fears has made the sea and the dry land, and thus upholds the honour of his God before the heathen, and gives them to understand that their idols will not avail them anything, because the Lord alone rules all things with the strong power of His arm.

What lesson does the Holy Spirit teach the Church by this manful confession of Jonah? That we are to proclaim the righteousness of God, and not to let our mouth be stopped by the devil's casting in our teeth our own unrighteousness—

and that we are to do this fearlessly, even though our sins be laid bare in all their blackness by the light of the law to heaven and earth, friend and foe, and even though we be standing without any hope of escape at the very verge of the precipice. If I really could feel quite sinless and holy it would be easy for me to say, "I am an Hebrew, and fear the Lord." But when I stand there as a miserable sinner who has resisted God's grace, and rebelled against His will, then is the time for me to "profess a good profession," unshrinkingly to face both my own sin, and the danger in which it has placed me, and to give the heathen no excuse for clinging to their idols. For my wickedness is my own fault, and not the fault of my God. Therefore I must, as far as in me lies, take care that His glory remains un sullied, and His mercy and power unimpeached—though I may thereby appear all the blacker and all the more guilty. Hereby it shall be seen that "I am an Hebrew, and fear the Lord." By this test a child of God may at once be known; for a child of God does not mind acknowledging that he has been a disobedient child, but he will not hear of any lessening of the glory of his Father.

(7.) WHEN WE ARE THUS REDUCED TO AN ALTERNATIVE, IF WE REALLY ARE GOD'S OWN, WE DO NOT GREATLY REGARD OUR OWN LIVES, BUT SUFFER OURSELVES TO BE CAST FORTH INTO THE SEA.

The mariners have listened to Jonah's frank confession. They are astonished and ask, "Why hast thou done this?" The very same question that Abimelech asked of Abraham, although he knew that Abraham was a prophet. Jonah does not reproach them. They ought to have blamed themselves for having taken on board a man who had told them that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. While they were still in the harbour they did not pay much heed to what Jonah told them, and really did not seem to care whether he was sinning against the Lord or not. They thought that all they had to consider was the payment of his fare—the rest was his own business. This is the constant practice of self-righteous men in this world, who afterwards, in the hour of danger and affliction, make the Holy Spirit answerable for all that is amiss, and never consider that they are suffering the just punishment of their covetousness. The mariners are thus bent on getting rid of Jonah. "What shall we do unto thee," they ask him, "that the sea may be calm unto us?" For the sea would not be calm, but "wrought and was tempestuous," and the masts, the thwarts, and the rigging creaked and groaned with the violence of the angry gusts of wind. Hereupon the prophet Jonah, who has just avowed himself a Hebrew and a servant of the true God, answers with a remarkable and ever-memorable proposal, "Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so

shall the sea be calm unto you." How? Is Jonah going to commit a kind of suicide by voluntarily submitting to a violent death, in order that he may after all escape from the omnipresent arm of God? Such a purpose was very far from his mind, my Christian friends. He made this proposal because he thought he was the one that deserved to be punished, and not the mariners, and because he wanted to save the lives of those who on his account were in great trouble and danger, by sacrificing his own. Jonah acted like David, when he saw that the angel of the Lord had smitten seventy thousand men with a pestilence and exclaimed, "Was it not I who caused this people to be numbered? Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? Let Thine hand, I pray Thee, be against me, and against my father's house, but not on Thy people that they should be plagued." Not to destroy his own life and thus to escape the more easily from the anger of God, but in order to save the lives of the ship's company, did Jonah cause them to cast him into the sea; for long experience had led him to believe that however grievously he had sinned he would be safely received in the arms of God. Here is another test by which the children of God may be distinguished from the self-righteous children of the world. When children of God are reduced to an alternative they do not cloke their guilt, or attempt to justify their unrighteousness, but own their transgressions and their guilt before God and men, and sacrifice themselves with all their possessions and hopes, and suffer themselves to be cast overboard, lest they should be a burden to God and to their fellow-men. The hypocrites, on the other hand, never will consent to plead guilty, and though they cannot very well help singing the praises of the Gospel with their lips, yet they never lift up their voices against the wickedness of the Nineveh of their hearts. They never will frankly own their unrighteousness, though it may have been brought home to them a thousand times. They may be compared to the mariners, who at first made a pretence of being actuated by motives of pity and compassion, and a desire to spare Jonah's life, and tried to bring the ship to the land by dint of hard rowing. But when they had failed in this attempt they did not resolve, as they ought to have done, to throw in their lot with that of Jonah, because they had been partakers of his guilt and of his rebellion against the Lord, had bowed down to idols, and accepted his fare as the price of their companionship in his guilt. They did not acknowledge themselves to be as deserving of punishment as Jonah, neither did they ask Jonah to implore the Lord's forgiveness for their common guilt, and in His mercy to save both him and them. But, strange to say, they all at once became godly people, and prayed to the true God

to be merciful unto them, and to pardon them for throwing Jonah over-board, and compassing his death, seeing that they must needs resign themselves to God's will and pleasure, and that Jonah had brought it all upon himself. With a prayer pretty much to the same effect the self-righteous hypocrite casts forth Christ into the sea, in order that he himself may remain safely in the ship, and be delivered from the avenging tempest.

(8.) IF, HOWEVER, WE SUFFER OURSELVES TO BE CAST FORTH INTO THE SEA, WE MAY INDEED HAVE TO DESCEND INTO HELL, BUT BENEATH ARE THE EVERLASTING ARMS TO RECEIVE US.

Let us be careful to remember that Jonah did not of his own accord leap over-board, did not cast himself into the sea, but waited for the ship's crew to cast him forth, and trusted that God, if He delighted in him, would spread out His arms to receive him in the midst of the raging billows. Observe how vast a difference there is in the relations of men towards God. The mariners feared the Lord because they had been guilty of a murder, and offered sacrifices unto the Lord and made vows, lest He should visit them with heavy punishment for having, in defence of their own lives, consigned a prophet to the bottomless sea; and then, when all was safe once more, when the sea was once more as smooth as a mirror, and their ship was once more gliding along before a favourable breeze, they turn back again to their old idols, and continue to ply their trade of taking passengers for hire, till at last death and everlasting destruction come upon them unawares. Jonah, on the other hand, who had given his own life to save the lives of others, has quickly been swallowed up by the waves, and sunk down to the bottom of the sea. Beyond the view of every human eye, his head covered with sea-weed, he is still watched over by the eye of God. What a descent into hell that was for the Lord's servant! But he has not trusted in vain, for even there the arms of everlasting love are stretched out to receive him, and though they may outwardly wear a semblance of terror—for the Lord prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah—yet it was nevertheless the arm of God that received him, and this very descent into hell, this very fact of being swallowed up by a monster of the sea, proved the means of his deliverance.

The lesson which we are taught by these things, my Christian brethren, is a very simple one, and yet one that we are very slow to learn. When our sin, and the law which is the strength of sin, have risen up against us, and God assails our rebellious souls with the mighty tempest of His wrath, when blow after blow falls upon our guilty heads, and men, too, at last set themselves in array against our unrighteousness

and when through our refusal to submit ourselves to the righteousness of God, all our short-comings are closely scanned and sifted by those around us, and we are forced to a point-blank confession of our utter unworthiness—then we should learn by the example of Jonah, when this necessity is come upon us, not to spare ourselves, not to make any attempt to justify our self-willed wickedness—for such an attempt would only plunge ourselves and our dear ones into more hopeless ruin ; we should rather learn, in such a case, freely to acknowledge the justice of God and of His law concerning sin, and to make willing sacrifice of our own goodness and virtue. And although we may be obliged to strip ourselves quite bare of everything that is good, and to sink down into the deepest abyss of utter self-annihilation, yet we are not to shrink from being cast forth into the ocean of our hopeless corruption and letting all its billows go over our souls, in order that God and His law, His righteousness, and His truth, may be justified, and remain unshaken for ever and ever. Such a condemnation and unreserved abandonment of ourselves, however terrible a descent into hell it may seem, will bear precious fruit. For then God will surely put forth His hand to deliver us. God's means of deliverance may, at first sight, appear to be fraught with terror and destruction, but in good time it will prove the best way of opening our eyes to a right knowledge of God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The sea monster that swallowed up Jonah shows us, in a parable, the transition from the dead works of the law and of self-righteousness to the rule of grace, and the true service of the living God. It seems a terrible and cruel thing for us to be cast forth from the ship of self-wrought salvation, and self-made holiness, into the sea of grace. It seems a terrible fate to be surrounded and enclosed, and, as it were, swallowed up in that which alone can give us a right knowledge of ourselves and of God ! For then we seem to be, as it were, in the belly of a great fish, and seem cut off altogether from the light and from God ; in that great darkness we cannot even see ourselves, can stir neither hand nor foot, and are hopelessly beyond the reach of any living thing. But just then, when we are at the worst, and when our condition seems most terrible, the Lord is very near to us with all the comfort and all the blessedness of heaven.

Let us therefore cast ourselves over-board into the sea of Divine grace ! As by a miracle we shall again rise to the light after three days and three nights.

II.

TEXT—JONAH ii. 1—6.

VERSE 1.—“AND JONAH PRAYED UNTO THE LORD, HIS GOD, OUT OF THE FISH’S BELLY.”

The saints of the flesh, and of the devil, have always been able to keep their heads above water, even though very heavy in their nature. But the true saints of God, and of the Holy Spirit, would have to fall a prey to the raging billows if they were not under the miraculous protection of the Lord. He is never at a loss for ways and means of delivering them out of their danger. Let us carefully notice the words, “The Lord *prepared* or *ordained* a great fish,” for they prove that the Lord has ordained the deliverance as well as the danger, and that He is ready with His help at the very moment when it is needed. He shews His faithfulness in ever being at hand with *His* life to swallow up *our* death, when the strength of *our* life has come to an end. All His children can bear witness that God has never been a single second too late with His salvation. And thus it will ever prove a comforting reflection to Christian people that the Lord was so promptly at hand, as it were, with a great fish to receive Jonah, and to swallow him up without hurting a hair of his head. And yet, when Jonah beheld the fish, he may have thought within himself that it was all over with him. That which seemed about to compass his destruction proved the means of his deliverance, and the fish that swallowed him preserved his life. God’s people have to enter with Christ for three days and three nights into the darkness of the tomb, and into the very jaws of destruction. There comes a time for them, when their eyes cease to behold the glorious light of day, when a horror of great darkness falls upon their souls, and they taste drop for drop the bitterness of death; and again there comes a time for them when the light suddenly bursts forth from the darkness. These are the ups and the downs, the sweets and the bitters, of a Christian’s life. But the darkness of hell cannot hold him. From the womb of misery and of hell he begins to pray to the Lord his God. The Holy Spirit of God mightily stirs his soul; his sorest need is the point at which his deliverance begins; his deep sorrow for sin is the dawn of his salvation; when the gloom of hell is blackest the soul breaks forth from it, and flees to its

God and Saviour. It is forced to do so, it cannot abide in the darkness. For whatever has life must have air and light from above, and shrinks from that which chokes and stifles it. Thus it was that Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. Let us more closely consider this prayer which he prayed in the belly of the fish, and which he wrote down after his miraculous escape. The verbs are all in the past tense, and are rather an account of the manner in which he wrestled with the Lord in prayer in the belly of the fish, than a literal reproduction of the exact words that he uttered forth in the agony of his soul.

That was a strange closet in which Jonah uttered this prayer. But in the last agony of soul we forget our surroundings, and cry unto God wherever we may be. We do not wait till we reach the four walls of our closet, for God has walled us in above and beneath, before and behind, and on all sides: the hell in which our souls are held imprisoned becomes our house of prayer. For there, even there also, the Lord can hear the loud weeping of His child, as a mother's ear is quick to catch the wailing of her child, even though she be far away. And even so God heard Jonah's cry that rose out of the fish's belly. Now this prayer of Jonah, his thoughts, his wrestlings, and the lesson which the Lord taught him in that fearful place, the Holy Spirit has written down through him for our comfort and edification. The first petition of that prayer is hardly to be called a prayer, but rather a thankful reminiscence of God's goodness.

VERSE 2.—“I CRIED BY REASON OF MINE AFFLICTION UNTO THE LORD, AND HE HEARD ME; OUT OF THE BELLY OF HELL CRIED I, AND THOU HEARDEST MY VOICE.”

Here we have a prayer which bears a great family likeness to the prayers of David. One and the same spirit governs and guides all the saints of God. They know not how to pray, but the Holy Spirit puts the right words into their mouths. “We were in great fear and anguish of heart, and we cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard our prayer,” that is the tale all God's saints have to tell, and tell one another with joy. He that is crying to God lets the others know that he is hard pressed with fear, and he who has received a gracious answer tells it forth to the others that he has cried to God. Then the others begin to take heart when they hear that other children of God have, like themselves, been in sore distress, and have cried to their Father, and that He has hearkened unto their cry. And thus it comes to pass that these others also begin to cry to the Lord out of the anguish of their souls. Jonah's heart must have been paralysed with the icy chillness of terror, when the crew at length really laid violent hands upon him, and cast him into the sea. He may have offered his life a willing sacrifice, but when the close nearness of death began to

overshadow him, terror must have leapt upon him suddenly like an armed man. The Captain of our salvation Himself willingly gave Himself to be led to the slaughter for our sakes, and yet we all remember that awful scene in Gethsemane. We may ask God in our hymns to deal with us after His own good pleasure, if only thereby we are prepared and fitted for His kingdom; but the manner in which we are thus fitted, the way in which we become partakers of the righteousness of God, leads through the valley of *self*-destruction. When Jonah was about to be cast forth into the sea he was seized with fear. But his firm belief, that, whatever he was called upon to endure, his almighty heavenly Father was both willing and able to shape into a means for his own good, makes him cry unto the Lord. For those who are the Lord's, whatever their distress may be, instinctively turn for help to their God. It is the Holy Spirit in their hearts that makes them turn to God when crushed beneath the burden of grief, often with nothing but an inarticulate cry of pain. For our intensest prayer rarely finds expression in many words, and is frequently made up of fervent interjections.

Jonah was in a most grievous strait, in the deepest agony of soul, and out of this agony he cried to Him for whom nothing is too hard, and nothing too wonderful, and God hearkened to his prayer. God does not answer the prayers of sinners who go about to establish their own righteousness; He heeds not the tears of men who, like Esau, do not care for the blessing, but only for the outward prosperity which is attached to it. But Jonah felt as one hopelessly lost, and that on account of his sins, and yet he turned to the grace of Christ; in spite of the condemnation which he confessed to have deserved, he cried to the Lord for salvation. And because God was pleased at this, He answered Jonah's prayer. Jonah did not at the time understand that, in procuring a fish to swallow him up, the Lord was answering his prayer in very deed. At the moment when he saw the fish open its mouth, Jonah may have thought that, instead of receiving an answer, he had been plunged in still lower depths of affliction, and that it was now all over with him. And so it always happens, that when we are overtaken by calamity, and we begin to cry to the Lord, and He procures the means of deliverance, we are blinded to the true nature of what God is doing for us; we seem to have made up our minds at the very outset that we are inevitably doomed to destruction, and whatever God may do, we go on complaining that we are sinking deeper and deeper. The way of salvation is, to our thinking, a going down into hell, and we conceive that we are in the midst of hell, when all the while God's arms are stretched out to keep and protect us. So we find Jonah bearing witness that he cried out of the belly of

hell, and God heard his voice. In his eyes the belly of the fish was the belly of hell. He had lifted up his voice to the Lord when the raging waves began to cover him, and was the fish that swallowed him God's answer to his prayer, then? Yea, and his danger seemed to grow more terrible every moment. However, even out of the very heart of hell, he cried for deliverance; he complained, it may be, that God's ear had been closed to his prayer, and that now, at length, all hope was gone of his ever being delivered from the jaws of destruction. But then he goes on to tell us that the Lord remembered him, and inclined His ear to the voice of his wailing, and to his piteous cry. These things should teach us never to give way to doubt when we are asking anything of the Lord, and not to be confounded, even though matters seem to have grown even more desperate than they were before, for the sequel will show that however hopeless our condition may appear, the Lord is very near at hand with His help. Nor should we allow ourselves to be disheartened by the thought that now that we are in the midst of hell our prayer is no longer of any avail, or that we *may* not pray any longer, because our present evil plight is no less than we deserve on account of our sins. For here the Holy Spirit shows all who long for mercy by the example of Jonah, that however deep may be the depths of hell, yet the God of Heaven both can and will listen to the voice of those who, out of hell, cry to Him for deliverance, salvation, and everlasting life. Jonah bears witness that God "heard his voice." This answer he had long ceased to hope for; but he has told us of it as a comforting assurance to all upright hearts who despair of delivering themselves out of hell. He assures them that if they continue in earnest prayer for salvation and everlasting life, the Lord will deliver them when they least expect it, although all the evidence may seem to point to the conclusion that the Lord has cast them into hell on account of their sins, that He has banished them from His presence, and withdrawn from them the light of His countenance. Let all such take courage. Jonah has gone through the same terrible trial. Let us look at the words in which he tells of his grievous distress.

VERSES 3—4.—"THOU HADST CAST ME INTO THE DEEP, IN THE MIDST OF THE SEAS; AND THE FLOODS COMPASSED ME ABOUT: ALL THY BILLOWS AND THY WAVES PASSED OVER ME. THEN I SAID, I AM CAST OUT OF THY SIGHT; YET WILL I LOOK AGAIN TOWARD THY HOLY TEMPLE."

The soul of a man, when he is hardly beset with affliction, rashly concludes that all this affliction was sent by God for his destruction, and not with the purpose of helping and delivering him out of it. Such a man finds it impossible to believe that God's heart still yearns towards him in the midst of his

affliction, or to see in the burden which is laid upon him anything but a proof of God's consuming wrath and indignation. Jonah was in this state of mind when he said, "Thou didst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas." For though it was the mariners who had actually cast him forth, they would not have had the power of doing so if God had not suffered them. And though his own sin in not submitting to God's gracious Word had been the immediate cause of his distress, he no doubt thought that God might easily have arranged things in a different way, and freely forgiven that which he had done amiss. And now that this fearful danger had overtaken him he believed that it was God visiting him in His wrath, and because he did not perceive what would be the end of God's dealings, he said, "Thou didst cast me forth," Thou didst cease to uphold me and steady me with Thine hand, Thou didst hurl me forth to be sucked in by the eddy whirlpools, and though there I came to stand upon my feet, it was not that I might remain standing, but that I might be carried down to a still greater depth and be swept away, not towards the dry land, but ever further into the vast abysses of the sea; yea, even "into the midst of the seas," where there was no help either at the right hand or at the left. "The floods compassed me about"—all was lost and over; I lay as one stunned, without hope of deliverance. I cried, yea, loudly did I cry, but there was no answer, except the deafening roar of the billows and the waves, which with irresistible force passed over me; and when I thought—there, *that* wave has spent its fury, and I may perhaps escape after all, Thou didst call unto a still mightier wave to gather all its force, and to sweep over me, so that I despaired of my life. I said: it were vain to hope for salvation, God has turned His eyes away from me; He has shut His ears against me; He will not suffer me to come to Him any more. He will no longer cause the light of His countenance to shine upon me. "I am cast out of His sight." This, then, is the bitter fruit of my grievous sin: God refuses to have anything more to do with me. He himself has sent this tempest to be the messenger of His wrath, and to execute vengeance upon me for all my wickedness. Death has lifted up his arm for the fatal stroke, and God will not stay his hand. The last gleam of hope has vanished. Here I am left to wrestle with death, and to face destruction alone; never again shall I see God, or behold the light of His countenance, as in the happy days of old—all is hopelessly over, hopelessly gone for ever.

Such are our desponding thoughts as we are tossed to and fro on the sea of passion, of sin, and of unspeakable distress of body and soul, in days when we are made to feel the heavy hand of calamity, when the last support of our lives seems to

vanish from under us, and when even that which we deemed our one comfort in life and in death, is swallowed up in darkness. Sins without number there are staring us in the face, heavy transgressions, tribulation, and death, hem us in on every side, destruction and ruin encompass us all about; but the blessed conviction which but yesterday was firmly rooted in our souls, that we have a faithful God and a loving Father in heaven, has altogether forsaken us to-day. Loud peals of thunder rend the skies, flames of fire dart forth to consume us, the earth is cleft asunder and is like to swallow us up, our ears are filled, as it were, with the sound of the trump of doom; or again, there is a dead unbroken stillness in the heavens above, we see and hear nothing but the thickening of our troubles around us, God smites us, like the Egyptians of old, with His ten plagues, and that which is most dear to us, and which we cherish as a mother would her first-born child, is lost and sucked up by the raging waves. When all these things come upon us, and we seem to be, in a very real sense of the words, "cast out of God's sight," how is a man that is a child of God enabled to bear up through it all?

Ye who would know the secret of a Christian's strength, in the very thick of all his troubles, listen to the words of comfort which the Holy Spirit put into Jonah's mouth, and by which he was enabled to defy the heavy tribulation and despair that had fallen upon him, and to carry off the victory over the flesh, and over death, and hell, and safely to rest his soul on the goodness of the Lord in the midst of the waves, and in the very belly of the fish,—“Yet will I look again toward (or upon) Thy holy temple.”

These words “yet,” or “in spite of all” I shall once more look upon the temple of Thy holiness, have never failed to brace and strengthen the troubled Christian soul. To those who know not God, all hope may seem to be gone for ever. But experience encourages us to hope; and when faith is utterly borne down by some rude shock, it is raised from the dust by hope. In the last extremity of danger, when he seems utterly cut off from hope, a child of God still retains in his heart the Holy Spirit, of whom it is said by the apostle that he upholds our weakness. One that is dead can make no moan; but where the love of God has quickened a man's soul, there arises loud moaning under the pressure of tribulation, and there is heard the reproachful pleading of love, and an anxious questioning, both in thought and in word, regarding the affliction which God has sent. And then again, when the well-nigh irresistible power of unbelief tempts such a one to blaspheme God, and despairing thoughts, the brood of hell, draw a fearful picture of the wrath and unrelenting indignation of God—wherever there is this life of the Spirit, it will burst

forth in the midst of lamentation, into the triumphant song "Yet will I look again upon Thy holy temple." This was Jonah's experience. Although he was in a most desperate plight, yet suddenly a heavenly light flashed in upon his soul, and he knew that he would be delivered. And therefore, though all around was doubtful and uncertain, he gave utterance to the conviction that he would again look upon God's holy temple. The danger is extreme, and yet, shining out with perfect clearness, above all the darkness I read the words, "I shall look upon the temple of Thy holiness." The temple he spoke of was not so much the cedarn structure at Jerusalem, as that which therein was set forth to the spiritual vision of believers, and therefore he calls it in the Hebrew "God's temple of holiness." He means the wonderful structure of salvation which God has set up for His people; and his words signify that he will not cease to wait for that salvation which God has promised to grant him out of the fulness of Christ, His Anointed One. It was the same grandeur of faith which taught Job to say, "Though He kill me, yet will I trust Him." The expression, "God's holiness," is an eyesore and an earsore to all those who, in spite of a professed admiration for the Word of God, believe in a self-made righteousness. Only one who has tasted the bitter dregs of self-knowledge can experience the full sweetness and pleasantness of these words; for only when I see that I am utterly impure, can I rejoice that God's holiness is sufficient to cleanse me to the very uttermost. Only my own utter need teaches me to rejoice that God has set up and established a temple of His own holiness. This temple is the whole scheme of God for the salvation in Christ Jesus of that which is lost. According to this counsel of God, the holiness of God is enthroned upon the mercy-seat, and this holiness is communicated to the lost one in the blood of the atonement by the spirit of grace in the forgiveness of sins. Whosoever has once tasted of this holiness, and known its sweetness after the bitterness of his own corruption, will never again turn his eyes backward; but even in the very last extremity, and when sorely beset on every side, will never cease to hope against hope, and, in defiance of all difficulties, will cling to the belief that he "will yet look upon the temple of God's holiness," and he will join in the psalmist's prayer, (Psalm cxix. 175.) "Let my soul live, and it shall praise Thee, and let Thy judgments help me."—(cp. also Psalm xlii.)

These words "Yet will I look again upon the temple of Thy holiness," in their firm assurance of God's faithfulness, forcibly remind us of that which St. Paul says in regard to the whole Church in the face of the united power of Satan and hell, (Rom. viii. 38—9,) "I am persuaded that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Thus Jonah unfolds to us in a few short words the whole

mystery of faith. In his person, too, it was made manifest that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a power of God unto salvation. It is true there are many children of God who, at times, allow themselves to be carried away by the violence of their affliction to reverse the words of the prophet, and to exclaim, "I deemed I should *never* more look upon the temple of Thy holiness,"—I weened that for me there was no longer any hope of deliverance, of holiness, of salvation, or of final conquest, and that there was no Saviour mighty enough to grapple with the vastness of my need. I can no more renew myself unto repentance, for I have put the Son of God to an open shame; I have sinned too wilfully, and despised the voice of God's Spirit, and now I am like Esau, and all my tears will not avail to recover the forfeited blessing; my sins are too grievous to be pardoned, and God will no longer look upon me. He has cast me out of His sight, and has caused all His billows and His waves to pass over me. Alas, why was I ever privileged to gaze into the temple of His holiness? Far better it would have been for me never to have been born than that I should have thus fallen from my high estate. Of two men that are in the same bed, or in the same tribulation, the one shall be taken, but I shall be the one that is left. All these things are against me.

And yet again the case of Jonah clearly shows that the more down-hearted and despairing children of God feel, the more strongly does the Spirit of God in their hearts stir up their faith, their hope, and their love; that love ministers unto hope, and hope unto faith, and thus hope, faith, and love are kindled in the soul, so that the sorrowful one looks away from the raging waves to the promise of God, and does not doubt, but waxes strong in faith, gives God the honour and glory, and rests most firmly assured that what God has promised that will He also perform. And with his heart full of the sweetness of the Gospel, and the power of God unto salvation, he triumphs over his outward circumstances and the darkness with which he is enclosed and compassed about on every side, and bursts forth into the shout of victory, "Yet will I look again upon the temple of Thy holiness." For where this promise that "goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever," has once been firmly planted in the heart of a man by the hand of God, there, even in the night of darkness, and amidst the raging of the flood, this song is sure to rise up, "The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

The strong spirit of the child of God is never crushed down by the weight of adversity, but in spite of all the waves, and billows, and floods of God that sweep over his soul, is ever found clinging to the "nevertheless" and "but" of faith. And though the thought that he is cast off by God may sometimes be very clamorous to be admitted into his soul, though at times he may feel amazed at his own assurance and confidence, yet in the latter end he will experience that this "nevertheless" can never be shaken, just like Job, who, sitting among the ashes, exclaimed in the midst of an agony of pain, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

VERSES 5—6.—"THE WATERS COMPASSED ME ABOUT, EVEN TO THE SOUL: THE DEPTH CLOSED ME ROUND ABOUT, THE WEEDS WERE WRAPPED ABOUT MY HEAD. I WENT DOWN TO THE BOTTOMS OF THE MOUNTAINS; THE EARTH WITH HER BARS WAS ABOUT ME FOR EVER: YET HAST THOU BROUGHT UP MY LIFE FROM CORRUPTION, O LORD MY GOD."

Perseverance in prayer unto God, though we may feel tempted to think that we are "cast away out of His sight," is sure in due season to bear most precious fruit—is certain to bear the fruit of righteousness. This comfortable assurance Jonah gives to all who are afflicted, or in trouble, as the fruit of his own experience in the hour of tribulation. "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul." Even to the soul, so that he was well-nigh at the point of death. For when the fish swallowed him, he at the same time swallowed a great quantity of water, which brought Jonah nigh unto the gates of death. At such times we, too, are tempted to think, "Now it is all over, now I am about to perish; God himself stands aloof and will not help me." "The depth closed me round about." The powers of darkness sometimes, in the hour of despair, claim a troubled child of God as their own. Now you are altogether in our power: do not be so foolish as to think that God any longer looks upon you as one of His children. You can never again escape from us, we hold you fast; you remain our bondman for ever on account of your sins.

"The weeds were wrapped about my head," or "were a fillet round my head;" for the weeds which the fish swallowed twisted themselves round his head. That is a very different kind of diadem from that of which the Church sings, "Thou settest a crown of pure gold on my head." Oh, that all who shall be wearers of crowns in heaven above, would understand that here below, where Christ, the head of the body to which they belong, was decked with a crown of thorns, they themselves must needs wear weeds as a diadem round their heads, so that the devil seems to have good reason for scorn and mockery. "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains" in the belly of the fish, that is, so that he sunk

lower down than that which is the foundation of everything else. So an afflicted soul at times sinks down so deep in the slough of despond, that it seems impossible for him ever to rise up again to the hill of God, and to the high place of his salvation. That is why the prophet adds "The earth with her bars was about me for ever," that is, I was shut up in the belly of the fish at the bottom of the sea as in a prison house whose bars are fastened, so that the prisoner has no hope of ever escaping from his place of confinement. Ah, those are terrible times when we feel so utterly crushed by the weight of trouble that we seem to be, as it were, buried alive, when all manner of doubts violently take possession of us, when every door of access to the heart and the mercy of God seems bolted and barred against us, when everything seems to tell us but this one message of despair,—that we shall never more see the light of God's presence, never behold the brightness of His salvation, that we are lost and cast out for ever; that though the hour of deliverance may strike for others, yet *we* must remain a prey to affliction for ever. The saints of God have passed through many a terrible experience, have sunk to the very lowest depths of despair, and there without any light or comfort from above, have been face to face with an anguish of affliction and with death.

But now comes a "yet," which is a "yet" of quite a different kind from the "yet" of the devil, of affliction, and of our own despairing heart,—"*Yet* hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God."

So then God has in reserve for His afflicted children a "yet" which, in itself, is a hymn of triumph. Destruction has its course: it is a consuming pit.—(Job xxxiii. 15—22.) Everything is destroyed in the day of trouble: our flesh is consumed away from our bones, and our bones are drained of their marrow. Yet while our heart is suggesting one "but" after the other, "*but* our trouble"—*but* sin—*but* death—*but* hell—*but* wrath and damnation, the spirit of confidence at last gains the upper hand, the voice of the suffering one reaches the ear of God, the cross of Christ, which had been lost to his sight through the surrounding darkness, bursts full on his view in the glorious brightness of the renewed love of God. The thunder tones of wrath are still, unbelief has grown weak and powerless, and suddenly our eyes are opened and we plainly behold Him who has borne our sins. We are escaped from death, our soul once more stands in a secure place, we are delivered out of the pit, we behold God our Saviour, and with our eyes upon His wounds and His risen body, we exclaim with Thomas, "My Lord and my God;" and with Jonah in our present text, "O Lord my God."

He is our *Lord*, for He has *purchased* us to Himself, and

He is after all *mightier* than the great fish, than the yawning deep, and the raging waves, and stronger than the prison house which has fastened its bars behind us. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

"*My God.*" He has at last come to see that God is *his* God. God has answered, He has hearkened to the voice of our complaint, and we have at length plainly seen His faithfulness, the unchangeableness of His love, the truth of His word and of all his promises. We felt as if we were cast out from His presence, and shut out from the temple of His holiness. We lay cast away in the deep, but even in hell He visits those who are his. We have not been confounded because of our trust in Him. Just when it seemed that we were lost, and when we were about to sink, we took hold on *Him* with both hands, and our whole soul with all its fears and hopes found utterance in the words, "*My God.*" A God who visits us in the midst of our misery must be the God of those that feel themselves lost and despairing.

Dear Christian friends! Have not these words been written down for our comfort, "Yet Thou hast brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God?" Should we not then be "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might," and that especially in the time of our affliction? Jonah does not stand alone. His experience was the experience of David, and has been the experience of all God's saints, and above all, of our dear Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ. All through the Psalms we hear His agonized cry that all God's billows and waves are gone over Him. But He has also borne witness that God has not left His soul in hell, and has not suffered His Holy One to see corruption. Christ is risen, and has cast off the chains of death. Our sins hath He borne, and all our afflictions. Therefore we are assured that He will never fail us. We shall be answered when we call upon Him; He will honour our prayer when we cry unto Him from the realms of death. We shall not be confounded if amidst the darkest and most discouraging outward circumstances we firmly cling to the belief that "yet we shall look again upon the temple of His holiness." Yea, even though the earth with her bars have closed upon the children of God, they have Him for their helper, to whom are committed the keys of hell and of death. He is our Samson, and He does not suffer Himself or His people to be closed in with bars and bolts. He has pledged us His word, and that word is more certain and more real than all things visible, and all the powers of death and destruction. Therefore, let us take hold on Him, and cling to Him, and then His strength will bear us up through all trials, and at length we shall be enabled to say in very truth, "Thou hast redeemed my soul, O Lord my God."

III.

JONAH ii. 7—9.

“I have gone astray like a lost sheep, seek Thy servant ; for I do not forget Thy commandments.” This confession and prayer we read in the last verse of the 119th Psalm. The several parts of this verse seem to contradict each other ; for how can he be gone astray like a lost sheep, and yet assert that he does not forget God’s commandments ? The difficulty is only apparent, and is easily solved. For every soul that has life must have communion with God, and is unable to subsist without the comfort of the Holy Ghost and His presence in our hearts assuring us that the God above is *our* God. But when a soul has like a ship been cast away from the harbour where it was safely moored, and is being tossed about by the tempest of tribulation and sin,—when like a sheep it is straying about alone and forsaken, and cannot find its way back to the fold of God’s flock, when it feels that it is far away from the great Shepherd of the sheep, and has to remain hungry and despairing in the wilderness—then, whatever elements of God-given life there are in it, will most eagerly turn towards the commandments of the great Shepherd. When I am in trouble and cast away from the safe place where my soul had fastened its anchor, when mine eyes no longer behold my Lord, my Shepherd, and the Bridegroom of my soul, I feel as if I were given over to death and ruin, I feel like a sheep that has wandered astray from the fold. There are many ravening wolves in the woods and in the fields, I am too weak and too fearful to take one single step alone. Wherever I look I am threatened with danger and destruction—but my Shepherd I cannot discover ; I cannot go to seek Him, neither can I find Him if He does not Himself come to look for me. So the poor wandering thing bleats aloud for fear, “I am Thy sheep, I am Thy servant, I am Thine handmaid.” Nay, this feeling of assurance that “I am *Thine*” comes from the very heart, and that under the most discouraging outward circumstances. For the Spirit enables us, in spite of our sins and unworthiness, to fix our eyes upon Him who has purchased us for His own ; and so the poor wandering sheep never ceases to bleat “Seek Thou me, seek Thou me,” and is not at a loss for

a reason why its Lord should seek it, namely, because it has kept in remembrance the commandments of its Lord. And this reason is a true one. It is not possible that one who confesses that "he has gone astray like a lost sheep" should forget the commandments of God. And what commandments are they which are so indelibly imprinted on his soul? The Lord has commanded the blessing upon Jacob, even life for evermore. The blessing and life—these are the things which God has commanded upon him. Can any soul that has once been assured by the Lord that "My grace shall be with thee," forget these commandments? Can it lose the remembrance of these promises, even when sin has caused it to wander away from God, and robbed it of all grace and communion with God? No; this memory can never depart from such a soul, even though it be compassed with trouble, and harassed within by fear of the curse and condemnation—no, not even then can it forget that the Lord has commanded the blessing and life. Amidst terrors of death and damnation, amidst fear and trembling, and manifold dangers from without and within—this one thing it clings to with the grasp of despair that God has commanded the blessing. But to be actually surrounded with trouble and the fear of death, to be shrouded in the darkness of sin and damnation, and yet to know that it ought to be walking in the light of the blessing and life, makes the soul to fear and tremble, and at times almost to give way to despair. And then it bleats aloud for its Shepherd, and bleats again and again, as if its heart would break. It *must* get back to where it can have the blessing and life; however far it may have wandered away from the Lord, however ill at ease it may feel, however dark and lonesome its path may be, that soul is mightily thrilled with the memory of the blessing and life, and of the promise of God. And at length, though the time of waiting, may be long, God redeems the promise He has given. Whoever is of God must prevail in the end, just when his own natural strength is exhausted. Jonah, too, bears witness from his own experience that God's children are strongest when they are most sensible of their own weakness: "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine Holy Temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgivings: I will pay that *which I have vowed*. Salvation is of the Lord,"—ii. 7—9.

VERSE 7.—"WHEN MY SOUL FAINTED WITHIN ME, I REMEMBERED THE LORD: AND MY PRAYER CAME IN UNTO THEE, INTO THINE HOLY TEMPLE."

Jonah shewed his kinship to the struggling men and women of our own day, when his soul fainted within him. Let us

whose souls often wax faint in the battle of life remember that we have had brothers and sisters in suffering in the children of God that were before us. The condition of one of God's people, when his soul faints within him, is almost beyond endurance. Such an one is an object of scorn and mockery, and a laughing stock of all the devils, and he has no means of refuting their scoffs and their sneers. He stands quite forsaken and alone amidst a swarming multitude of cruel and triumphant enemies. To have beheld God's numberless promises of the blessing and eternal life, and then to see them all burst like unsubstantial bubbles is too hard to bear. For the soul to see the wedding-ring by which it was to have been married to Christ hurled far beyond its reach into the unfathomable deep, and to know that it has itself only to blame for the loss, is enough to raise the pale spectre of despair. To hold a promise of blessing from God, and yet actually to be under the curse like Judas ; to have life for ever more, and yet to feel like Peter when he had denied the Lord, and did not know whether he would ever see Him again, fills the soul with a sense of unspeakable uncertainty and desolation. Once to have beheld the glory of God, and then to have to stand among the jeering company of hell tied to the stake of shame, or to lie wounded and helpless among the bodies of dead men, is almost more than the strength of the strongest can bear.

God's way with His elect is in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known till long afterwards. Full of silent and unspeakable grief you stand over the grave that has swallowed up all your hopes, and God's promises seem to be "no for ever" instead of "yea, and amen." Then misfortunes begin to pour in more thickly still, as if God Himself were set on your destruction. There you stand like a tree with all its green boughs lopped off, and all its glory withering in the dust. Thought after thought rises from the lowest depth of hell to torment your soul, and all the fiery darts of the Evil One flash through your mind. In vain do you look for pity. The fiery bolts fall stroke upon stroke. An unending agony presses upon your soul, and you feel that the very breath of life is being crushed out of you, your soul grows faint and giddy, and a fearful darkness and an agony of suffocation takes possession of it ; all the vital parts seem crushed and pressed down by an irresistible weight. There you find yourself alone with the cold, lifeless remains of all your heavenly hopes, on a bare rock in the midst of the sea, whose waves leap up and threaten to engulf you for ever. No one knows of our danger, and we are helplessly shut out from all hope of deliverance.

When their soul thus waxes faint within them, what do God's chosen people do ? Do they altogether give way to

despair? Do they fall a prey to trouble, sin, and the powers of hell? God forbid. When Jonah's soul fainted within him, he "remembered the Lord." This is the last refuge of all honest, straight-forward souls. It is when trouble has reached its highest level, or when they have sunk down to the very bottom of the abyss that we "remember the Lord," as we never remembered Him before. It is true that this "remembering of the Lord" utters itself in a loud cry of distress, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken, why hast Thou cast me away, why hast Thou filled me with sorrow, why dost Thou hide Thy face from me?" Their very words of lamentation and complaint show that they have not forgotten Him who is able to help. In the life of every child of God the promise of our Lord is redeemed, "The Comforter, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." The Holy Ghost is at work in the soul, and the more forsaken and bereft of all comforts He finds it, the more diligently does He bring to its remembrance all God's kind loving words and gracious promises of blessing and life. The devil tries to rob the soul of its comfort by ridiculing and discrediting these promises, but the Holy Spirit makes the soul to cling all the more firmly to God's assurances, and the more steadily to believe that God's promises will be fulfilled, and that He will once more bestow the blessing of a heavenly life. Thus the Spirit teaches us to *pray* as Jonah prayed, "And my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine Holy Temple." The Spirit helps us to pray without ceasing though we be surrounded with darkness and uncertainty. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered," (Rom. viii. 26.) The Spirit continues to pray in our souls, even when we "know not what to pray for," yea, even when prayer seems hopeless, and the flesh bids us be silent, since God hears not sinners, and will not hear us. The word of the Lord Jesus is mightier than all our enemies, both bodily and spiritual, His promises speak of life and blessing, His love He has shed abroad in our hearts, and therefore nothing can prevail against the prayer of His elect. Although a thousand voices may cry "No," though we may feel as if we had "made our bed in hell," yet all this can never quench the spirit of prayer in a child of God, "Out of the pit do I cry unto Thee—hearken to the bleating of Thy sheep, O Thou great Shepherd of men." And the Holy Spirit of God Almighty is in this prayer, and He knows how to pacify the heart of an offended Father, and how to recover the grace, the blessing, and the life that was lost. Therefore it is said, "My prayer *came in* unto Thee;" all the powers of the

deep could not keep it back, it rose victorious above the unbelief of my own heart; it *came*; it irresistibly made its way through every obstacle up to God's throne; it came in unto Thee, into the Temple of Thy holiness. Through the Holy Spirit prayer gains the ear of the Father of all mercies; the Holy Spirit teaches the afflicted one by prayer to cast himself down before the throne of God. In the temple of God's holiness there is sanctification and spotless whiteness for the unclean, restitution for the lost, honour for the degraded, glory for him that is trodden down. And he that has lain in the pit knows by experience that his cry to the God of his life has not been in vain. From the house of His holiness and glory the Father Himself hastens to meet the prodigal child, from the mercy-seat he receives forgiveness and all manner of gracious help, and his soul is healed of all her diseases. The holiness, the glory, the honour which had been promised her, and after which she thirsted, she has abundantly received at the very moment of her deepest degradation, and she has been satisfied with the mercy of the God of heaven and earth.

Jonah bears his testimony to the truth of this spiritual fact when he says that his prayer came in unto God, into the temple of His holiness. And it is most natural that one who has just experienced the power and the goodness of God, should go on to add, as it were in the same breath, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy."

Oh, that ye might all understand this, and lay it to heart. The difference between a real life and the mere outward semblance of it soon becomes apparent. Wherever there is real spiritual life there will be no indifference and apathetic acquiescence in the time of tribulation and of chastisement for sin. Such a soul will take its stand on God's promise of the blessing and life. It does not cease to struggle and to labour until it has become once more assured of this promise. It wants to be *sure* of God's forgiveness, and cannot rest contented under any kind of affliction. It looks for the fulfilling of all its needs to the Lord alone. It has a real thirst for holiness, and never despairs of obtaining it. It defies the power of sin, the devil, the world, and death, and yet it cannot rest till it has conquered them all. God's word must abide for ever, and every tittle of it must be fulfilled. Heaven and earth may pass away, but it will never believe that the promise of the complete victory of God's grace over sin should ever prove false, or that God will allow its salvation to remain imperfect. The soul may be besieged on all sides, but it can never forswear its allegiance to God's law and commandments. When a soul has been once enlightened and come to know the love of God, and tasted the sweetness of His grace, then death, the world, and sin may try all their terrors and blandishments, and the devil

may do his very utmost to rob it of its faith by threats and sneers—it will refuse to pay any heed to lying vanities. Lying vanities may deceive and carry away such an one for a time, but the Divine life within him soon makes him loathe and despise them, and, after having been enticed away from it for a time, he returns to God's eternal covenant of grace and faith for the love of Christ has stolen his heart, and the fear of the Lord has gained possession of him for ever.

The words of the prophet embody the experience of a whole life, during which a man has wearied himself in looking for happiness in all manner of places where it is not to be found, and happy is he who can make this experience his own without going through all the disappointments that have led up to it. The prophet had not been so fortunate. He *had* partly himself observed lying vanities, thereby forsaking his own mercy (*i. e.* his state of favour with God), and partly he had been a companion of such as had forsaken their own mercy and observed lying vanities. All things are lying vanities that are repugnant to God's word, the word which contains the blessing and the life, and yet are so looked upon as though the blessing and the life were contained in them. The Hebrew word which is here rendered by "lying vanities" properly signifies "the vapours caused by a purposeless movement." That men do observe such vapours, and in them look for life, blessings, and happiness, and observe them so perseveringly that they can be turned from them only by the all-powerful grace of God, and the chastening virtue of affliction is matter of daily experience. And you find too many Christians who do not sufficiently guard against such temptations, or avoid such stumbling-blocks, by cutting off, as it were, their right hand, and their right foot, or plucking out their right eye, and who prefer being enticed away by these "vapours," to denying themselves and taking up their cross daily. As such "vapours" we regard the works of our own righteousness, the works of our own choice, the idea that we can gain the blessing and everlasting life for ourselves; such "vapours" again are all our efforts to rise up to God by our own strength, and to bridge over the gulf of sin by our own endeavours. Every movement caused by such vapours as these is aimless and leads to no result. It is a fruitless and purposeless effort. Among such vapours we may also class all such things as our fathers and mothers, our wives and children, honours and riches, and all worldly and visible possessions, if on them we concentrate our lives, and by them suffer ourselves to be cheated of that which alone can save our souls. And still there are many who are moved by such vapours, and put themselves to much trouble in order to gain them, and yet all the while think that this does not interfere with their claim on the grace of God, or

with their observance of the Gospel covenant. But that is not true. The prophet says that they forsake their own mercy. This may either mean that for the sake of those lying vanities they forfeit their share of God's grace and love, and forsake God of whom alone they can obtain grace, and who has showered on them many mercies and benefits. Or, it may signify that on account of those vanities they betray their own godliness, and defeat their own real purpose to serve the Lord only, and to obey Him and believe in Him alone. Those who observe lying vanities are constantly resolving to serve God and love their neighbour, and are as regularly breaking their resolution. Sometimes they succeed for a time; by a sudden impulse they give themselves a strong impetus in the direction of that which pleases God, they violently tear themselves away from the world and its pleasures, and seem to succeed most marvellously for a time. But soon the "vapours" again rise before their eyes, and beguile them, and make them forsake their own mercy. There are but too many who with their lips confess the Lord Jesus and His Gospel, but in their hearts and in their lives they silence the reproving voice of the Spirit, and observe lying vanities, and are moved and influenced by unsubstantial unrealities.

I am anxious that you should earnestly examine yourselves, and apply to your own lives the truth to which the prophet here gives expression. If even in this world men again and again discover that the fruit of the lying vanities to which they either rashly or in deliberate foolishness sacrifice God's favour and their eternal life and happiness, is gall and bitterness, how terrible will their waking be in the world to come! "Their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." How dreadful to have the worm of remorse constantly gnawing at your heart, because you have observed lying vanities, and for them have forsaken your own mercy. How fearful with Dives to stand far off and listen to the song of praise that is sung to God and the Lamb by those who have come out of great tribulation, and then to be haunted by an everlasting self-reproach, because you have forsaken such glorious privileges for the service of lying vanities. For that they are vanities, all those visible things in which a man seeks his happiness and the end of his life—I adjure you to lay this to heart—that will become very evident to a man when he finds himself in hell, and knows that the glory is at a hopeless distance above him, and that far away from the place to which he is doomed, is the happy, heavenly home of all the redeemed, and that between him and all this glory and happiness there is a great and unbridgeable gulf fixed.

Happy is he who listens to the warning voice of him to whom God has said, "Son of man, I have made thee a watch-

man unto the house of Israel, and thou shalt give them warning from Me." He will rejoice that he has been shown the folly of this service of lying vanities, and again he will rejoice that God has commanded the preaching of salvation, and of freedom from the service of vain unsubstantial earthly things.

What then are we to observe? The prophet has provided an answer to this question in what follows:

"BUT I WILL SACRIFICE UNTO THEE WITH THE VOICE OF THANKSGIVING; I WILL PAY THAT WHICH I HAVE VOWED. SALVATION IS OF THE LORD."

I, says the prophet, contrasting his religious position with that of those who observe lying vanities—I can do no other but follow the Lord my God. I, too, have wandered away from Him, I have walked in paths of my own choosing, I have refused to submit to the gracious reign of the Gospel. But, thank God, I now perceive the folly of observing unsubstantial vanities. I see the fearful danger of spending this life in the pursuit of things that can never satisfy, and of having a motive for all I do that is directly at variance with God's holy will and with His righteous law. *I will sacrifice*, I will kill, I will give up all my own methods and my own aims; no longer will I bring before Thee works of my own choosing, or of my own contriving; no longer will I give to Thee only what I can spare, and keep all the fat things for myself. I will no longer seek to please Thee with works of my own willing or running; I will offer unto Thee the only sacrifice with which Thou art well pleased, Jesus Christ the Righteous and His sacrifice, and I will plead its everlasting efficacy. I will sacrifice unto *Thee*, for Thou alone art worthy of sacrifice; I will not burn incense to myself and to my own virtue; Thou alone art righteous, Thou alone art holy, Thou alone art good and merciful and faithful. I will offer myself soul and body unto Thee, and not unto lying vanities. I will sacrifice unto Thee *with the voice of thanksgiving*. For I myself have nothing to offer. The sacrifice which is my salvation is Thine from beginning to end; Thou hast commanded, ordained, and perfected it. Christ and the satisfaction which He has given, His righteousness and holiness, is the source of all blessing and of all life. I will confess that Thou alone art the Author and Finisher of all that is good; for by Thy great love Thou hast taught me humility. Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back; Thou hast cast them all upon the Lamb which bears the sins of the world. This I will joyfully confess before all the world, and before all the company of hell: I am a sinner who had become a prey to destruction, and could not deliver myself. I will confess that though I with all my wickedness and sin have caused Thee nothing but travail and anguish, yet Thou hast delivered my life from destruction, and with a yearning heart hast sought

me. When I lay in hell, Thou hast taken me out of the pit, and therefore I do confidently from this time forth look to Thee alone for everything, for Thou wilt perform the good work which Thou hast begun. I no longer take any account of anything that I myself might be or do; all the purposes of the flesh, all the thoughts and aims and strength of my own reason, of my own understanding, of my earthly will, are even as nothing in my sight. My noblest aims and my purest thoughts, though the world may call them virtuous, are to me nothing but shadowy, unsubstantial vanities. Yea rather, with all the strength of my soul, I will honour, praise, and proclaim abroad Thy righteousness, and declare the glory of Thy name, for Thy name is even as a rock that is established with everlasting foundations, and beside Thee there is none. *I will pay that which I have vowed.* My gracious Lord and Saviour, I have freely vowed in my trouble and affliction that if Thou wouldst deliver me out of it, I should not be ashamed openly to confess that I am the chief of sinners, and that yet Thou hast stooped down to one who could not help himself, who was athirst for holiness and for deliverance from sin, and yet saw himself mastered again and again by the power of the devil, and found sin lurking in the very inmost recesses of his nature. I will confess that Thou in Thine unspeakable love dost condescend even to such as I, and in Divine compassion dost cover their sinfulness with Thy grace, and clothe them without and within with the shining robe of Thy holiness, and deck them with Thy glory. This is the vow that I have freely vowed unto Thee.—My God, my Maker, here I lie in helpless prostration in a deep pit; if Thou wilt deliver me who through my sin have sunk below the beasts, and am become a companion of evil spirits, if Thou wilt grant me Thy salvation, justification, and holiness, if Thou wilt assure me that I am truly saved, if Thou wilt appoint me a safe standing place on which I can set my foot, and assure me that is a righteousness which has passed the test of Thy holy eye, if Thou wilt let a vile sinner like me dwell with Thee for ever; then I will joyfully carry the glad tidings of Thy great love to all those afflicted ones who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death: “Fear not, thou daughter of Zion, thy God is King.” I will declare Thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee. This will I do; this vow will I pay unto Thee. I will not suffer my mouth to be stopped, and that, O Lord, Thou knowest right well. The meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the Lord that seek Him; your heart shall live for ever.

It is not really hard to keep such a vow, although the devil immediately takes the alarm, and thinks to put all manner of obstacles in our way, and makes us wish that we had never pledged ourselves to such a work. For he who has really

seen the light of God's salvation light up the night of hopeless misery, is not in the dark as to the ground of his vow, and feels that he can do no other than keep such a vow. For what is the ground of his confidence, and what is the substance of his preaching? He proclaims that of which he himself has experienced the truth in the hour of trouble, of temptation, and trial, and the truth of which God is still shewing unto him in his daily spiritual life; he preaches in the words of Jonah, that "*Salvation is of the Lord.*" Poor, weak man, dead in trespasses and sins, subject to condemnation, the slave of sin, the enemy of God and of his neighbour, unfit for any good thing, ready for every evil thing, with a desperately wicked heart, from which proceed all manner of abominations, needs an *all-powerful* grace, a grace which overcomes all obstacles, and is able, by that irresistible power which belongs to God alone, to quicken him, to turn him from the darkness to the light, to justify, to cleanse and sanctify him, to make him a partaker of eternal happiness, and to assure him, and keep him in possession of, eternal salvation. Salvation and deliverance from the worst and most desperate condition has become possible and is close at hand; it is truly granted to the poor and afflicted through God's great mercy, and for the sake of Christ's great sacrifice once made upon the cross. This salvation and deliverance is to be obtained of none but the Lord, and is accomplished by Him alone in a perfect and final manner.

Happy are ye, my dear friends, if you have experienced and are able joyfully to confess the truth of the words, "*Salvation is of the Lord.*" Happy are ye if you seek and expect it of the Lord alone, and do not look to receive it from any creature, from the works of the law, or from any other lying vanities, by which those who walk after the flesh are deceived. He who has learned of the Lord that salvation is of the Lord alone, he issues a death-warrant against everything else, and his whole life in the flesh is lived in the faith of the Son of God. Let us rejoice because salvation is of the Lord, for only so can we be assured of complete deliverance from death and all evil things, only so can there be absolute certainty of everlasting salvation to the people whom He has chosen and created for the glory of His name. What will our happiness be when the salvation of which we are here reaping the first-fruits, shall be clearly and perfectly revealed to us in the eternal light of His glory! Then let us patiently bear the burden for yet a little while; soon we shall be lifted up high above sin, trouble, and suffering, and shall evermore rejoice in happiness that knows no end. Honour and praise be unto Thee, O God, alone, for we had gone astray and corrupted our paths, but Thou alone hast delivered us with a perfect deliverance. Amen.

IV.

JONAH ii. 10.

You will now be glad to hear from the Word of God, my dear Christian friends, how Jonah was at length delivered, and carried back to the dry land. The story of Jonah's deliverance is intended to stir up our hearts; it may prove a comfort to this one, and assure him that he, too, has reached the shore; it may encourage that one and show him that there is still hope for him of being at length rescued from the stormy sea of unbelief and sinfulness, and of being made to join in the song of the redeemed, though as yet he is still struggling with the waves of doubt. Therefore it is a great satisfaction to me to be able to speak to you concerning God's answer to Jonah's prayer.

God has promised never to withdraw His hand from His afflicted children: "My hand has made all things, saith the Lord; I behold the poor and him that is of a broken spirit, and Him that fears My word." Two instances out of Holy Scripture—the one the case of a woman, the other the case of a man—occur to me as exemplifying the truth of these words. Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, herself a prophetess, had in her zeal for the law of outward observances, rebelled against Moses because he had married an Ethiopian woman. By doing this, Miriam was rising in rebellion against the law of liberty, against the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and in this crime she was aided and abetted by Aaron. Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, the cloud departed from the tabernacle, and Miriam stood smitten with the most terrible of all plagues; she became leprous, and white as snow. Moses, who had had experience of the sufferings of those who do not submit themselves, as they are, to the grace of Christ, cried unto the Lord, saying, "Heal her now, I beseech Thee!" and the Lord was willing to heal her. But He first wanted indelibly to impress upon her soul the truth that it is the *broken-hearted* who are regarded of God. Therefore she had to incur the sentence of the very law, for which she had shown so much undue zeal, and be shut out from the camp seven days, just as Jonah was shut up three days in the belly of the fish. During these seven days she was to learn to enter

into the Sabbath rest of God as one smitten with the leprosy. She was to be saved, indeed, and therefore the people did not journey till she was brought in again, but she was to be saved as a leper, as one cast out from the congregation; she was to be saved, as Aaron said, "as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed, when he cometh out of his mother's womb."

Saul, afterwards called Paul, that is, the man of small account, who was a man mighty in the Scriptures, had been carried away by zeal for the law of Moses, the law of sin, death, and dead works, and had rebelled against the law of grace. He looked upon the Church of God as an Ethiopian woman that must be sent away or killed. And yet in his zeal for the law of Moses he was rebelling against the spirit of that law. For Moses had said: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thy brethren like unto me: unto him ye shall hearken." He was an enemy of the law itself, the very end and fulfilment of which was this prophet, Jesus of Nazareth. But after he had been thrown down to the ground, he became like unto Miriam and Jonah: for three days he was without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And do you know what knowledge of himself he gained during these three days? How comforting is the confession which he has made concerning himself. Hear to what he compares himself in that chapter where he proves to the Corinthians that Christ has risen from the dead, and after His resurrection has been repeatedly seen by His disciples: "Last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Those words "born out of due time" refer back to what had been said of Miriam. When the Lord Jesus appeared to me—thus runs his argument—and when the law of freedom was revealed to me, I was "as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed, when he cometh out of his mother's womb."

These two examples may serve to show, how vile and of no account are those whom the Lord makes receivers of His grace, and in what condition they safely reach the shore. Now we will proceed to fix our attention more specially on the case of Jonah.

JONAH ii. 10.—"AND THE LORD SPAKE UNTO THE FISH, AND IT VOMITED OUT JONAH UPON THE DRY LAND."

Thus Jonah's prayer to the God of his life was not in vain, and our history is a fresh demonstration of the truth, to which Hannah, who had been delivered from great sorrow, gave expression in her song of praise, "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the underworld, and bringeth up." It was the Lord who moved Jonah to pray in the belly of the fish, and the answer to his prayer had been provided, long before Jonah was born. A sure sign of life, and a sure sign that the afflicted soul will obtain its quest of the Lord, is to be

found in the very fact of its beginning to call upon the Lord, and earnestly and unceasingly to cry unto Him, and to pour out the whole tale of its sorrow and distress, "Let me live, that I may praise Thee: what profit is there in my death?" When the worst has come to the worst, and there seems to be no longer any hope of deliverance, if the Lord Himself does not interfere, then the Lord Himself puts this vow into the heart of His child, "If Thou wilt save me out of this my evil case—although a desperately wicked and sinful man like myself is altogether unworthy of receiving anything from a just and holy God—but if Thou wilt bring me up from the terrible darkness of the underworld, Thou shalt be my God all my life long, and in all eternity." Those who are to behold the glory of God, and in His light are to see light, must first become altogether vile, worthless and powerless in their own eyes, and confess that salvation is of the Lord alone. And though there is nothing good or sound in their natural man, yet God will raise them up, and make them partakers for ever of His holiness and of His salvation, and keep them in His ways. If we are to be really and truly persuaded, that we are saved not by our own strength, or by the strength of the flesh, that salvation is not of him that willeth or runneth, but by the mercy of God alone, we must first have been taught by bitter experience not to look for salvation from any other quarter. We shall then have gone through the same experience as Jonah; for when he lay in the belly of the fish, and had well-nigh fallen a prey to death and the grave, he could look for deliverance only to that God whose billows and waves had gone over him. But that God is willing to save, and He saves after a marvellous fashion. He saves for the sake of His dear Son, who has said, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell;" and again, "Thou dost make known unto me the way of life." He who was made like unto His brethren in all things, that He might be merciful, and a faithful high priest, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people, who was in all points tempted like as we are, in the days of His flesh, was taught by the story of Jonah, that He too must for the sake of His poor, sinful brethren, remain three days and three nights in the heart of the earth which God had cursed, and Himself be made a curse for sin, and become a prey to death and the grave, and undergo all the terrors of death for our sakes. But He knew that He was doing all this for the sake of God's chosen people who were under the power of sin and death, and He also knew that it was the will of the Father that His being swallowed up of hell should prove the means of hell and death themselves being swallowed up in victory, and of the deliverance of all His poor brethren from the bondage of hell and death. It was with reference to this that He said to His Father through the eternal Spirit,

"Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell," as who should say, "Thou knowest that in obedience to Thy will, and for the salvation of men, I go down into hell: therefore Thou wilt preserve my soul in the midst of hell." And this I know that Thou wilt do, although I myself cannot see my way out of the prison house of death. Thou wilt make known unto me the path of life, that by it I may bring up with me my redeemed ones that sit in the darkness and shadow of death.

With this conviction, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, and "Thou makest known unto me the way of life," He by His Holy Spirit fills the hearts of all those whom he has purchased with His precious blood, so that they are able, by faith in Him, even though with fear and trembling, to say after their victory-crowned Head, in the midst of the terrors of the underworld, "Thou wilt not leave my soul—yet shall I look again toward Thy temple." And so it becomes almost a natural necessity for them to begin to call upon God, and when at length, after all hope of deliverance had been given up, the Lord shows Himself to them once more, the faint spark of hope is kindled into a flame, and now it is the Lord alone from whom they expect to learn the path of life, and the way of deliverance out of the prison house of death. And to have it borne in upon your soul with irresistible force that salvation is of the Lord alone, is to make the same experience as Jonah when "the Lord spake unto the fish." Could the monster which had no sense for perceiving God's voice, yet understand what God was saying to it? To be sure it could; for in the same way as a dog can hear the voice of his master, and understand his meaning, so the sea monster could hear the voice of its Maker, and understand His command. So the end of Jonah's trial had now come, the end of that dark desperate struggle, the end of the time when "his soul fainted within him," and when he felt like one forsaken of God and man. He had emptied the dregs of the wine of God's wrath, and the hour of deliverance had come. Let all who have grown faint and weary in the struggle, remember that Jonah's God is still the same mighty deliverer that He has proved Himself in the days of old, Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. We must all march forth into the battle field of life. The hand of suffering will be laid upon us with unrelenting grasp. We shall be in such an evil case that we shall not know what to do or whither to turn. Trouble will weigh heavily upon our souls, and almost crush the life out of us. The sun of hope will be hidden from our view by black and lowering thunder clouds. But if in the last extremity we turn to our Almighty Father, who, in the midst of His wrath, does not forget His mercy and loving kindness, then suddenly the bolts of our prison will fly back, the doors will burst open,

hell will give up her spoils, and the devil his prey; the daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound, is loosed of her bonds, and is made straight and sound by the laying-on of the hands of her mighty Saviour. For His power unto salvation is infinitely greater than the power of all the host of hell unto destruction. If He will forgive the sins of any man, no man will from thenceforth be able to convince that man of sin.

No sea monster, no power of death or hell, no chains of sins have strength to resist God's all-victorious word, and when He says "Release me my captives," the gates of hell itself must burst open and give them up. This faith ought to fill our hearts with joy, and our lives with brightness and sunshine. For we know that hell feels quite uneasy when it has swallowed up God's afflicted saints: those who are purchased with the blood of Christ can by no possibility become fit inmates of hell. Even while hell is congratulating itself on the capture it has made, it begins to feel disturbed and uneasy. Hell cannot bear the presence of a living Saviour. She may swallow up sinners, but a redeemed sinner will cause her more sharp pain and anguish than he himself endures. When he begins to cry aloud, and to confess that salvation is of the Lord, hell begins to feel sick unto death; and when He who is called "Their Redeemer is strong" bids her give up her prey, the mighty leviathan writhes in terrible anguish at His feet, asks that its life may be spared, and though sore against its will, and with great reluctance, vomits forth the redeemed one who has prevailed by wrestling with God in prayer. It cannot choose but give him up, for the word is gone forth, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."

The fish vomited out Jonah upon the dry land. From these words we see how Jonah reached the shore, and that he reached it in the same manner in which Miriam was received back into the camp of God, for she was received as one whose father has spit in her face, and who has thus undergone the very utmost disgrace. Jonah's condition resembled that of Paul when the Lord had appeared unto him. Jonah, Miriam, and Paul, like all who belong to the little flock of the saints of God, have come to the land "as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb." Jonah reached the land as one vomited out as an outcast from the underworld. How different was the Jonah who escaped to the shore from the Jonah who had fled from the Lord! In those days he was a stout man and a portly, and would walk along with a grave and saintly step with his head among the clouds. In those days he wore a prophet's garb after the most approved and saintly fashion, and had the hem of his robe hung

with golden bells, so that all might hear the holy sound and say, "Behold, there he goes," or, "here he comes." But how did he look now? Had he any form or comeliness now? If his own people, the Jews, had seen him in his present condition, would they not have asked, Is that Jonah? Is that the man of God? Is that one of the children of the covenant? Gone was all his beauty and all his glory. How altogether unlike his former self he had become within three days and three nights! His once portly form had wasted away, and was like unto a moth-fretted garment; he was emaciated with grief, and fasting, and the fear of death. The holy prophet looked like one that has come forth from the grave: his clothes and his whole body were covered with filth, and ooze, and slime, and he was drenched to the skin by the great wave that had swept him ashore. And so his appearance was viler and more repulsive than it had ever been before. He was more sinful, more unclean, and more helpless than he had been when he was first converted. Alas, he dared not open his mouth for very shame and confusion. He was like a bare, unfruitful tree that has twice withered and dried up down to the very roots, and, like the pleasure-loving widow of whom St. Paul speaks, he was dead while he yet lived. It is not strange that a man when he is first converted, should be dead in trespasses and sins, and loaded with the chains of death and hell; but that one who has been born again, should be swept away from the rock on which he stood, and carried to a lower depth than he has ever known before, and that he should be swallowed up, and become a helpless bondman of Satan, and unable to do anything for himself, or to take a single step towards the recovery of that freedom which he longs for, is in the last degree shameful and ignominious.

Thus Jonah reached the shore as one vomited out of hell; he had had to leave behind his sanctity in hell, and lay there upon the dry land covered all over with ooze and slime. Hell had been unwilling to give him up, but had been forced to do so, for the word of life had gone forth in answer to the prayer of the distressed man of God. It had vomited him out, and, in doing so, had covered him all over with its venomous slaver. There he lay, like an untimely birth, like the young one of some animal which its mother has just brought forth and left to its fate, like a helpless forsaken child that does not know what to do; and yet he was not an unreasoning child, but a wise and thinking man, who knew God, who had held communion with God and the holy angels, who had been enlightened, and had received the Spirit of God; and this man was covered with all the defilements of the nethermost deep, so that he must feel utterly disgraced in the sight of men, and ready to flee from them; and yet he was fain to ask their help

like the most wretched beggar, with a degraded feeling of his own unworthiness. He would have to be thankful to anyone who, without sneering remarks, would give him a little water to cleanse himself with, and a few clothes to replace the garments which had now become worse than useless.

I should like to have listened to the conversations which he must have held subsequently with godly men and ungodly, with men rich and men poor in spirit, with hypocrites and genuine believers, with false teachers and their victims, with enlightened saints, and with babes in the knowledge of God, after he had been so marvellously delivered from the very jaws of death. I should also like to have heard his testimony concerning himself and the grace of God. I wonder what kind of account he gave of himself to the first people whom he met in his state of filthy disfigurement. Of course they asked him his name and his country, and the cause of his unfortunate condition. And then he must have confessed the whole truth, how he had thought to be more righteous than God, and thus had committed a dreadful sin; but that he had at length come to see that he himself was not holy at all, and that God alone was holy, and that therefore he now was really and truly holy, whatever his outward appearance might be, because "Salvation is of the Lord."

My dear friends,—We have seen how Jonah reached the shore, and that he reached it as one vomited out by hell. It happened very fortunately for Jonah that he was cast forth into the sea, and swallowed up of hell for a short time, for it is better to be swallowed up of hell for a short time than for all eternity. He was highly favoured in having it made clear to him that that which is born of the flesh, even though it be a prophet of God, will not submit to the free grace of God, for he thereby was brought to the knowledge of the sweetness of grace, and made partaker of its unchanging benefits. Though he must have felt terribly desolate in the belly of the fish, he cannot even there have been altogether shrouded in the darkness of despair; for in the midst of his terror a voice within him suddenly cried, "Yet will I look again upon Thy holy temple." And then in the midst of his fear and anguish of soul he received in abundant measure the spirit of prayer, and the Spirit of God made intercession for him with groanings which cannot be uttered, and he thus experienced that God's mercy has set up its throne in the midst of our weakness. It was a good thing for him that he was cast ashore in such a forlorn and evil plight, for it was a humiliation which he could not forget as long as he lived: his pride was thoroughly humbled and brought very low, and thenceforth he was ever ready to give the praise unto God.

Moreover, the manner in which he reached the dry land

was for his best; for since it was accomplished by the Lord speaking to the fish, he was taught thereby that whoever we may be we can never do anything towards our own salvation. From that day forth he could say from experience that God alone saves us according to His own free grace and pleasure, and that we are the worst obstacles in the way of our own happiness, and are constantly crossing God's loving purposes through our waywardness and folly.

It was not only for his own good that Jonah was brought ashore as one vomited out by hell; it happened so for our benefit also. If anyone thinks that *after* his conversion his salvation depends on his own holiness and his own good works, let him learn from Jonah that it is the humble and the lowly whom God approves. If anyone thinks that God must do whatever *he* likes, and that God must save him in spite of all his self-willed perverseness, let the story of Jonah teach him that there is one above who is stronger than he. If there be anyone who lies imprisoned in the nether darkness of sin and trouble, let him understand that the God who delivered Jonah out of the belly of the fish is the same God as of old, and still hearkens to the cry of the perishing, and gives them confidence to approach Him with the petition of David, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation," and to cry with their last breath, when stifled by the heavy weight of overpowering affliction, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, for if I have fallen I shall arise; though I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold His righteousness." And you who know what it is to come to the land as men cast up from hell, do not listen to the devil who wants to make you proud of your own righteousness, and do not let him rob you of the one great thing in which you have learnt to glory, but cling to the mighty grace of God, which ever remains the same, whether we are weak or whether we are strong. To God and to the Lamb be the honour and the glory of our salvation for ever and ever. Amen.

V.

JONAH iii.

However strongly and confidently human reason may set itself against the eternal truth that virtue and goodness is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but that we are able to do that which is good only when we are led by the hand of grace, and in ourselves are unfit to do any good thing,—yet, at the last, human reason will be put to confusion, and God will be justified in all His words and works. The prophet Jeremiah has struck the right note when he says, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” Every effort of the human will to strike out a path for itself will only serve to set forth more clearly the old truth that “the Lord hath made all things for Himself,” and that “though a man’s heart may devise his own way” yet, after all, “it is the Lord that directeth his steps, (Prov. xvi. 4, 9.) Happy is he who yields due honour and loyal allegiance to God’s holy law, and humbles himself under the holy, just, and beautiful law of his God. This law will produce in him a feeling of utter humiliation and self-contempt, and constrain him to confess with St. Paul, “The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do; how to perform the good I find not.” Ever since the foundation of the world and the fall of Adam, men have continued to grieve the Holy Spirit by deeming themselves wiser than God, and because everyone thinks that unless he can understand and control the good thing that is being done, unless it is done in a manner which he perceives to be good, there can be no goodness in it at all. Each man thinks that if he does not work, neither does God work; if he does not do anything, then nothing will be done. But let our reason erect as proud a structure as it likes on the foundation of the law, God will make it even like unto Babel, and confound men’s minds that they may not understand one another, and they shall bite and devour one another, till at length they are consumed one of another. Whatever men may think of it, the fact will remain for ever unshaken, that man by the works of the law works his own destruction, and that life and communion with God is to be had by Divine

grace alone. The glorious words shall stand for ever, "By *grace* are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God—not of works lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them," (Ephes. ii. 8—10.) Men may scornfully call such following of Christ by the name of passive Christianity. But it is this *passive* Christianity alone that brings forth lasting fruits; this form of Christianity alone is effectually productive of life, because it is effectual in and through God—whilst so-called *active* Christianity is fruitful only unto death, because God is left out of it. In the new creation, in the creation of grace which is by Christ Jesus, all that belongs to the natural and carnal self of man is utterly abolished; there God is all in all, and for His own name's sake He mightily and effectually works in and by the human soul. And since it is God's work, and not the work of the man himself, nothing can retard or hinder it. Though a man's will and thoughts may not always fall in with God's purpose, though man's thoughts are not God's thoughts, nor man's ways God's ways, yet a man who is moved by the Spirit of God will be strong for everything that is good, and nothing that he does will be good, unless the Spirit of God supplies the spring of his actions. If we look at the third chapter of the book of Jonah we shall meet with abundant proof of this spiritual fact. May God open our eyes that we may understand the true meaning of God's Holy Word, and that we may be thereby comforted, and His holy name glorified.

1 And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water:

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

There are three things in this chapter calling for special consideration:

- (1.) God's repeated command to Jonah.
- (2.) Jonah's mission and message.
- (3.) The fruit of Jonah's preaching.

I.

AND THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME UNTO JONAH THE SECOND TIME, SAYING, "ARISE, GO UNTO NINEVEH, THAT GREAT CITY, AND PREACH UNTO IT THE PREACHING THAT I BID THEE."

The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time. It was the same word that had come unto him before. God's will must be done, and His counsel executed, by us; we have to obey His command, to fulfil His law. Jonah had at first taken counsel with flesh and blood, and flesh and blood are not subject to the law of God: neither, indeed, can be, since the wisdom of the Divine will can be perceived only by that which is spiritual in man. On the former occasion Jonah had said within him himself, "What is the use of my preaching? God is too merciful to execute His threat." But he had not considered that his preaching was intended as a means of showing to men the goodness of God, neither had he borne in mind what great things his preaching was to bring about. He had applied to God's command the logic of the flesh, and had lost sight of the power and the mighty working of the Word of God.

But his resistance to God's command has been all in vain. At length he is forced to yield an unquestioning obedience to the word of God. At first his self-willed decision seemed rational enough, but in its results it brought him nothing but suffering and danger. He might have saved himself much trouble and agony if he had immediately obeyed God's word when it came unto him the first time. And yet surely it is no small proof of God's goodness and long suffering, that he was sustained in the midst of all his troubles, and delivered out of his danger, and that "the word of the Lord came unto him the *second* time." God might have dealt with him as He did with the children of Israel, whom he had led up out of Egypt with a stretched-out arm, and who, on account of their disobedience, perished in the wilderness. God did not forsake Jonah; He did not inflict the punishment which Jonah had merited by his wilfulness and disobedience; but rather He came to him where he lay upon the sea-shore like one cast up from the underworld, and repeated His command that he should arise and preach in Nineveh.

Should we not learn from this that all resistance to the grace of God is of no avail. Well do we know them, the commandments, the judgments, and the ordinances of God. We know very well that the whole duty of man is summed up in this one commandment that we are to seek after the Lord our God, and to fear, serve, and love Him, and Him alone. Nor can we plead that we do not know what good works are, or that they consist in our dealing with our neighbour in the same way in which God deals with us. God has given us power to discern that faith is the only, the best, and the highest good work, that it is the crown of all good works, and the only one that is well-pleasing unto God. We have also been made to understand that God is an almighty God, and that it is our duty not to criticise, but to obey, His word when it comes unto us. On the other hand, we are taught by the facts of daily experience that in spite of all our knowledge of good and evil, we do not after all really know what is good and evil in the sight of God. Seeing that we are aware of all these things, must we not appear guilty of foolish and culpable arrogance, if we presume to improve upon the way in which He has told us to order our lives in this world, or to find out a better way than that which He has pointed out to us in which we may fear Him, serve and obey Him, and be God-fearing, pure, and holy men and women? We know that we have to take His word upon trust, to follow it blindly, and leave the consequences to Him. We may twist and turn the word of God as much as we like, we may call in all the subtleties of theological learning in order to escape from the necessity of a straightforward surrender to the will and command of God, but we shall not enter into God's rest, we shall not have true peace with God, nor a good conscience before our Lord, so long as we seek to make our religion a compromise between the law and the gospel, so long as we look for salvation to our own works as well as to the grace of God. The Holy One in heaven insists on a complete and whole-hearted surrender to His word and to His will,—all we can do is to give up ourselves, just as we are, to His grace, and to let God's Holy Spirit execute His will in our hearts. Let Jonah's example serve for our warning as well as for our comfort: for our warning, in order that we may learn that all the presumptuous efforts of a self-made holiness must come to naught, and cause us to sink ever lower and lower, just as they dragged down Jonah, first to the bottom of the sea, then into the belly of the whale, and then cast him up as one loathed and rejected by the very underworld. Jonah's example should teach us that all the anxious labour and weary striving of self-righteousness must prove in vain. Jonah's example will teach us a lesson very full of comfort if we will but learn from it that we shall bear abundant and lasting fruit, if

we will but give up the old man that is dead in trespasses and sins, and have done with the works of the law, and regard ourselves as dead according to that law, and cling to the word of the Son of the living God. Thus, indeed, all good works are taken out of our own hands, we shall have nothing left to be proud of, or to look at with complacency; we shall have to let our ship drift on the sea of God's grace, but it will take no hurt or harm. Adam had the issues of life in his own hand, and he lost it. Lest we should lose it over again, God has put our whole life and holiness, and the issues of salvation, in the hand of Christ, that being moved by His Holy Spirit alone, we might live in utter dependence upon Him, and thus might be able to persevere unto the end. It was this lesson that Jonah was to learn when it was said to him, "*Arise, go forth: arise, though thou mayest be worn out with the strokes of my punishing hand, not in thine own strength, but in my strength, go forth by my Holy Spirit unto Nineveh that great city.*" In that great city thou shalt see how much a weak man and a worm of the earth like thyself, who nevertheless didst dare presumptuously to thwart my wise counsel with thy thoughts of good and evil, can accomplish by the strength of God after having perceived the blind unreasonableness of his former choice. Wilt thou have any great thing of thine own for so great a city, any great word of human eloquence, any great power of persuasion, any great and overpowering weight of personal holiness? To Nineveh shalt thou go, though to thee Samaria or Jerusalem may seem a more fitting sphere of labour, and thou shalt go with nothing in thine hand—without even a fine and persuasive speech upon thy lips—thou shalt go and not know what thou shalt speak: when thou hast entered the city I will put the right words in thy mouth, and the words shall be not of thy choosing, but of mine. *Preach unto that city the preaching that I bid thee.*"

Thus everything had been taken out of Jonah's hands. He did not go whither he would, but whither he would not, thither he had to go. He was not suffered to preach what he would, but what he would not, that he was forced to preach. This has ever been God's way. For those things which we have carefully considered beforehand we find no utterance, and we say that of which we had never thought. When we are minded to pray we cannot do it; when we go about to be holy, and to do good works, we cannot accomplish it. But when we are not minded to pray, then will God's Spirit mightily constrain us. When nothing is further from our thoughts than the doing of good works, then God will enable us to be holy and to do good works according to His will, and according to His pleasure, although we know it not. We shall be driven by His grace alone, and shall experience His faith-

fulness and the power of His word, whether we desire it or not. That which God has called holy must be holy in our eyes also ; and if He would have us go to any place, to that place we shall most certainly have to go. Let us listen to what follows :

II.

“SO JONAH AROSE, AND WENT UNTO NINEVEH, ACCORDING TO THE WORD OF THE LORD. NOW NINEVEH WAS AN EXCEEDING GREAT CITY OF THREE DAYS’ JOURNEY. AND JONAH BEGAN TO ENTER INTO THE CITY A DAY’S JOURNEY, AND HE CRIED AND SAID : ‘ YET FORTY DAYS, AND NINEVEH SHALL BE OVERTHROWN.’ ”

We may be sure that Jonah was under a necessity of acting as he did, and that God had shut off all other possibilities. We keep our vows, and yield obedience unto God, only when God Himself puts the Spirit of obedience into our souls ; but then we are quite content to be subject to the will of God, and would not be free from it even though we could, though, indeed, we could not even though we would. Jonah went to Nineveh in the same spirit in which Peter went to Cornelius. Peter, too, had, at first, been unwilling to go. He had thought that he must confine his preaching to his own people, which alone was the people of God, and he could not conceive that God could really want him to enter the house of a heathen man. But the lesson which God taught him was to a very different purpose. This he himself acknowledges in the speech in which he defends his conduct against those of the circumcision, “ Who was I,” he says, “ that I should fight against God.” Even so, Jonah was at first sorely prejudiced against the work which was given him to do in Nineveh. But now he has to be content to do it, and he has learned true obedience, since God has taught him to see that in spite of all his fancied obedience he has been a rebel against God’s holy will. For so long as we live unto the old Adam, and unto the law, we are continually and anxiously desirous to obey God, and try to prove our obedience by all manner of good works. We are constantly coming to God with those dead works of ours, and asking, “ Have I not done this thing well, and now, oh God, wilt Thou not help me to accomplish and perfect that good thing which I have begun for Thy glory ? ” But the answer which God gives us is not the one we expected, “ Thy works profit nothing, they are not that which I have asked of thee, they are not in accordance with that will which I have made known unto thee.” There are those who are not led to repentance by God’s rebuke, and will not submit to His will, and flee from His presence, and will not understand that obedience to God does not consist in choosing that which is good in our own eyes, and that all the ways of self-righteousness are ways of

death. Others there are, again, who are taught by God's reproving answer that that which we call obedience, but which is really an obedience to precepts of our own choosing, is nothing but Pharisaism and obstinate rebellion. And when a man has learnt this lesson he is thenceforth willing to be led by God's Spirit in the way which God has commanded. There we are led along we know not how. Our feet are guided by the Spirit of faith, and we blindly and readily follow along the road which God maps out for us, even though formerly we looked upon that road as unholy, and should do so still were it not that our every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, which assures us that this or that road must be holy simply because God has commanded us to walk therein. God has taught Jonah this unquestioning obedience, and it is this that constrains him to go to Nineveh, even though his whole people in its arrogant assumption of exclusive holiness, yea, even though his own heart may reprove him for entering a heathenish and godless city. But what man, or what city, can claim to be righteous in the presence of Him who, by the mouth of His apostle, has imputed unrighteousness to His faithful servant Abraham, and of whom it is said that "He put no trust in His servants, and His angels He charged with folly: how much less in them that dwell in houses of clay?" When God has compassion on a man for Christ's sake, that man will be righteous and holy, for he shall be clothed with the righteousness and holiness of God. But in himself that man is still an unrighteous man, and if he in any way exalts himself above his poor, sinning brethren, he will be an abomination in the eyes of Him who is not ashamed to be called the God of the sinful and of the lost. Was Nineveh more wicked than Samaria or Jerusalem? The last day will furnish an answer to this question. But thus much is certain, that, on our Lord's own showing, the judgment of the men of Nineveh who repented at the preaching of Jonah, shall be less hard than that of Jerusalem. It is significant that the same city of which it is said that her wickedness was come up before God, is nevertheless called (according to the correct rendering of the Hebrew of iii. 3) a "great city of God." However great the city might be,—and it was a city of three days' journey—yet throughout the length and breadth thereof it was a "city of God." Though the devil seemed to have it all his own way in that city, yet it was "a city of God," for "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof;" and though its wickedness was great, yet it was a "city of God," and all the more a fitting object of God's almighty grace. Our great God and Saviour, who is not ashamed to call those brethren who really deserve quite a different name, is not ashamed to call a city His own, even though its wickedness may constrain Him to

overthrow it. There is no wickedness too great for God's mercy, and He shows the wonders of His salvation among those who are utterly lost and given over to destruction.

And how wonderfully God brings it about that His will shall be irresistibly carried out by one who has nothing to say for himself, and who has now been in open rebellion against God. How victoriously is God's will carried out by one who has been made to feel his own weakness and unfitness for any good thing. There he stands at the gate of the "great city of God." How strange he must have felt! Perhaps he felt like an animal that is offered up for the good of others, or like a silent and unresisting instrument in the hand of God, which the skilled master hand has taken up and uses for its own purposes.

What is Jonah to preach now that he has entered the great city? He must have felt ready to faint at the sight of so great a multitude of living souls. But God had said unto him, "Preach the preaching that I bid thee," and now God's promise would be fulfilled to him—"Open thy mouth and I will fill it." Jonah had entered upon his first day's journey through the city, when the Lord opened his mouth, and bade him say, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." And the words had hardly passed his lips when they fell among the people like a thunderbolt, and made them tremble and quake with a mighty and sudden terror. This preaching was not the outcome of his own will. It was with great reluctance that he uttered the word "overthrown," thinking within himself that such a thing would never come to pass. Nor could he have predicted the exact day of Nineveh's overthrow with such bold confidence unless God Himself had given him authority to do so.

Should we not apply Jonah's experience to our own case? Let us live according to the law, let us follow the promptings of the old man, whom Christ has crucified and utterly abolished, and we shall speak much and often of obedience to God, but we shall never be obedient. Let us live by grace, and place ourselves body and soul in the hands of our Lord, and let us take no thought for good works and holiness, and then the Lord will make us find holiness where we do not look for it, and He will provide works enough for our hands to do, yea, more than we think we can accomplish. For where God's works are done, man with his faith, his goodwill, and all that he most prides himself upon, must utterly perish, and his eyes must wait upon the hand of his Master, and look for orders from Him day after day, so that he feels as though he should like to flee away from the presence of the Lord, if the Lord's arm did not keep him back. Whatever such a man does is not his own work, but the work of the Lord alone.

And this identification of our work with the work of the Lord is the secret of all success, as is strikingly shown by the effect of Jonah's preaching.

III.

The effect of his preaching was marvellous. It produced in the minds of the men who were threatened with condemnation and destruction, faith in God's word, repentance, and contrition. It made the hearers to humble themselves in sackcloth and ashes. Word of Jonah's preaching came unto the king, and he issued a decree that man and beast, rich and poor, young and old, should fast, and be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God, and that they should turn away every one from his evil way, and from the violence that was in their hands. So the whole city gave God the praise, and did that which God commanded; they all justified God, and condemned themselves and all their evil ways, and turned from them, if by any means God should have compassion upon them. This refusal to despair of God's mercy is the beginning of salvation. They did not question God's right either to destroy or to spare them. Nevertheless, though God's words were very definite and positive, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," they did not give themselves up as lost, they ceased not to cry mightily unto God for pardon and deliverance. They showed their belief in God's goodness: "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not." Such was the fruit of the preaching which God had put into Jonah's mouth. The people of Nineveh believed God, and when God saw their works, that is, their genuine faith, by which they had really turned from their evil way, He repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them, and He did it not. And thus the "great city of God" was for that once saved from overthrow and destruction.

Here human reason raises many futile objections. And there are even some Christians who join in these objections, and are thus put to shame by the Ninevites, even as Jonah was put to shame by the Ninevites. For they feared the word of God, and believed His message, whilst Jonah set up his own wisdom against the will and command of God. Reason presumes to ask whether the repentance and conversion of these Ninevites was genuine and sincere. Our natural reason is constantly bent upon decrying the glory of the works that are done in and through God, and on praising up her own works as alone perfect and good. But this question is not worth an answer. God is justified in all he does—that is enough: and when God saw the works of the Ninevites, He repented of the evil that He had said that he would do unto them. Our

natural reason regards with suspicion all genuine repentance and conversion, but never entertains the least misgiving of its own carnal conversions, and never wearies of praising them. These conversions must instantly be made known to all the world, and whoever ventures to cast any doubt on their genuineness is called an enemy of the Christian religion. These men tell us that the Ninevites could have no knowledge of God, simply because they do not really believe in the Holy Spirit and His work upon earth, which is to reprove all men, and to quicken in men's hearts the consciousness of the living God, and of His justice and holiness. Men who allow no standard of truth but the voice of reason are sorely puzzled by this account, and the supposed difficulty of reconciling it with what we know of God's providential dealings, just as if the preaching of the word were not the chief way in which God's providential purposes are carried out. They cannot understand that God's wrath is not a passionate feeling, but a calm and unchanging hatred, not of sinners, but of sin; and that His threats are in reality for those on whom they have their due effect only a call to repentance, and thus a revelation of His mercy. When God says "Thou shalt die," then turn from thy wickedness and plead the cross of Christ, and thou shalt live, and behold God's gracious countenance throughout all eternity.

But we have said enough of the pretensions of human reason. This third chapter of the book of Jonah proves to all who have ears to hear, in the most striking and convincing manner, that truth with which we began this meditation—that however weak and incapable we may be in ourselves, we are immediately filled with strength for every good work as soon as we approach it under the guidance of grace. St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, "Ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you unto the end that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." He that would have love, hope, faith, meekness, lowliness, purity, sincerity, he who covets the crown of holiness, and all manner of good works, he who would fain be assured of his salvation, who would be fervent in his prayer, and God-fearing in his life, who longs for a heart that is honest and true, and void of guile; in short, whoever would walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, and would have his life bear the marks of a child and servant of God, let him renounce all thought of attaining these things by his own strength. Release thy hold upon self, says God, and I will hold thee. He that believeth in the Son of God hath everlasting life. He that has eternal life must needs have all the characteristic signs, marks, and aims of this life. Jonah at first had tried to stand on his own feet, and be

wiser than God, and this obstinacy had landed him on the verge of ruin. But when he had come to have nothing, and know nothing, but God and His word, he prospered so wonderfully, that within the entire compass of Scripture there is nothing to match the marvellous success of his preaching. For a great city of God was brought to faith and repentance by a single preaching, on which Jonah had been unable to meditate beforehand, and by a single journey which the prophet had at first been reluctant to undertake.

It certainly seems a hazardous step, and, as it were, a desperate leap into the depth of hell, to give up all attempts at our own salvation, to cling to grace alone, and to be justified and saved as one of the wicked. But God's word and His promise can never fail us, and the power of His grace cannot be hindered. Happy is he who has given up, surrendered his self, soul and body, to God's word, and has ceased to follow his own guidance. The power of God's word is the secret of success, and any man, though he be an outcast of hell, who takes his stand upon God's word, and at His word lets down the net, albeit in a deep place, where to the human reason there seems to be no hope of taking anything, shall bring his ship to land, filled even unto sinking, with good works that are done in God. The fishes have been given by God, not made by man, and the successful draught is the Lord's doing, and no cause for any man to boast. And then, is it not God who keeps the net from breaking? All things are of God. Unto God and the Lamb alone be all honour and praise both now and in all eternity. Amen.

VI.

SERMON PREACHED ON THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF THE BOOK
OF JONAH.

We have learned from the last chapter that a man must get on, and get on wonderfully well, so long as he submits himself to the reign of grace; for the power of God prepares the way before him, and removes all difficulties, so that a weak and helpless man may accomplish the good and perfect will of God in a manner that is well-pleasing unto Him. We have furthermore heard that as soon as we have by the teaching of the Spirit come to believe that we are dead unto the law and free from it, and that we are married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, we straightway bring forth fruit, not, as formerly, unto death, but unto God, fruit according to the law of the spirit of life. We have heard that if we suffer grace to take us by the hand and guide us, we shall straightway have all the beautiful Christian virtues and good works, and that fair smiling cluster of the fruits of the spirit, which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, which obey the prompting of an inward, not of an outward, law.

But let us be careful to bear in mind that the fruit which we bring forth unto God, is the fruit of the spirit. "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily: From me is thy fruit found." Such are the words spoken of God by the prophet Hosea (xiv., 6, 9.) For the fruit of the spirit certainly does not grow in the natural soil of our hearts. We please God, but we please Him only in the person of Christ. We have nothing that is not derived from our fellowship with Christ. The fruit that we bring forth unto God is of Him, by Him, and to Him. God is our God and our shepherd, and we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. If we think, even after our conversion, that we can do anything of ourselves, we shall soon have to find out our mistake. Let us then know ourselves to be but men. While we are yet in the body we have to be satisfied with the place that has been appointed us, we must be content to be "men," and give all the glory and

ascribe all the power to the grace of Jesus Christ. There is no peace for him who seeks it by any other way. There is not a page of Scripture but is instinct with the truth, that Christ's righteousness alone is accepted before God, and that our unrighteousness only serves all the more to exalt and glorify the righteousness of Christ. The body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if Christ be in us, the spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead shall quicken our mortal bodies according to the pleasure of His will. But if, according to St. Paul's teaching, we are by the spirit made one with the law, and if the righteousness of faith is imputed unto us by God, how is it that human misery, of which each one of us has his share, still remains, when sin, the cause of that misery, has been taken away? This question is asked in turn by the fearful Christian and by the hardened unbeliever. How does St. Paul answer this question? Does he shirk it by simply denying the existence of that misery? Nay, rather he staunchly faces the difficulty, and triumphantly answers it. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, he says, has made us free from the law of sin and death. And then he deals with the problem of human misery. "Who is he that condemneth?" he asks. "It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren." If He is the first-born, He is also the heir, and we know to our joy and our comfort that we are fellow-heirs with Him. Thus we have a claim to receive all we need from the riches of the treasures of His grace, and this should be a source of unfailling comfort to all those "who are waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body." For those who long for this redemption thereby acknowledge that they are but men, and nothing more, but they acknowledge it as a reason not for joy, but for sorrow, and therefore they hail with gladness the comforting assurance of Scripture, that, though they are but men, yet they shall not be condemned as men, but that the Lord will bear with them in all patience and longsuffering, and shew them a Father's love and care. May the Lord shed abroad this comfort in our hearts, and strengthen our faith in Him by the consideration of that portion of His holy Word which is contained in the fourth chapter of the book of Jonah.

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

2 And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

3 Therefore, now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

4 Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?

5 So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

6 And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

8 And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

9 And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

10 Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

We may briefly sum up the contents of this chapter as follows:

(1.) Jonah was displeased because God did not inflict the punishment which He had told him to proclaim.

(2.) Jonah seeks to justify his foolish anger before God, finds fault with God's mercy, and asks God to take his life from him.

(3.) God asks him to consider whether he does well to be angry.

(4.) Jonah pays no heed to God's words, and makes him a booth outside the city, in the hope that God may yet carry out his threat.

(5.) God makes a gourd to spring up to be a shadow over Jonah's head, and smites it the next day that it withers. Jonah shows his love of self in preferring that the gourd should remain for his own comfort, rather than that the Ninevites should be spared to the praise of God's mercy.

(6.) The loss of the gourd so exasperates Jonah that he wishes for death a second time.

(7.) In His great long-suffering God deigns to teach Jonah by the type of the gourd that Jonah has no real practical knowledge of God's nature and doings, and is altogether unlike God.

I.

"BUT IT DISPLEASED JONAH EXCEEDINGLY AND HE WAS VERY ANGRY."

What displeased Jonah, and why was he angry? For this reason he was displeased exceedingly, and for this reason he

was very angry, because God repented of the evil that He said that He would do unto the Ninevites, and did it not. How is this, Jonah? Art thou a prophet of God, a messenger of peace, and art thou angry because God does not carry out His threat? Dost thou then esteem thine own preaching more highly than the safety of a whole city?—Yes, my dear friends, this is what Jonah did. Who would have believed it if he did not find it written in the Bible? But by this we know that the Bible is in reality God's Word—for it shows us God's saints as they really were, and not as our carnal imagination would paint them. For the natural man, when he is oppressed with a sense of his sin, thinks that if he were only like this or that saint he would be quite perfect, and know for certain that God was pleased with him. Well, if we will only be like the saints of God in being sinners, as they were sinners, then we shall also be like them as saints of God. Men should look at God's holiness, and His grace, and not at the law and the holiness of the flesh. Jonah learned to confess of himself that he could not for a moment stand the test of God's law, although he was a prophet of God, and had been thoroughly converted and saved from hell. "The law is spiritual, but I am carnal," that was the confession which he had to make concerning himself.

Yet we must beware of misjudging Jonah. He was not a man of diabolical egotism, who would rather have seen the destruction of a great city of God than that his preaching should seem to have been false. He was perplexed at God's failure to do that which He had said He would do. God had instructed him to preach unconditionally that after forty days Nineveh would be overthrown. God had pledged His word, and had not redeemed it. And thus he himself had been made to appear a liar. He had faithfully and obediently delivered his message, and now he thought that God had failed to keep faith with him, since He did not bring to pass that which He had told him to preach. This attitude of God he understood quite as little as Job understood God's dealing with him. Of course Jonah should not have given way to indignation and wrath at the discovery that God had changed His purpose. When a royal ambassador has delivered the message entrusted to him, he should leave the rest to his master the king. But Jonah thought that if God through him had denounced destruction and death against the Ninevites, that which he had preached should also come to pass. He entirely, or to a very great extent, failed to take into account the effect that had been produced by his preaching, and which had changed the whole state of the case. He might have described himself, in the words of Agur, as the most foolish among men, and as one who had not the understanding of a man, or he

might have applied to himself God's words to Job: "Job hath spoken without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom." When he afterwards remembered his foolish anger, he may have exclaimed with Asaph: "I was as a beast before Thee." For Jonah is a most striking illustration of our Lord's saying, that "out of the heart of man cometh forth foolishness." Not that this kind of foolishness was confined to Jonah. Have not some of you, my Christian friends, felt as Jonah did when God did not overthrow the great city, and left His prophet to be pointed at by men as a charlatan and an impostor. Human nature is always the same, and that is why what is said of Jonah applies to us as well as to him. It is a dreadful sin to presume to pronounce upon God's doings and ways. That is what Jonah did, and that is what we cannot refrain from doing, whoever we may be, and whatever may have been our past experiences. This foolish tendency is deeply ingrained in our nature. Whatever we say and teach, must come true, and if it is God's word that we are teaching, we would rather that the whole world should perish, than that that which we have been teaching out of God's Word should not come to pass. In our holy zeal for God's Word we would turn everything upside down. If that which we look upon as good and fitting is not brought about, we are displeased and angry.—Nor is this all. If God's ways do not happen to fall in with our notions of fitness, we think that we have a perfect right to complain, and to fly into a passion with God, and would rather die and go hence than remain any longer upon earth, where we can do nothing, and our wisdom is quite thrown away. It was in this spirit of peevish remonstrance that Jonah now began to pray.

II.

"AND HE PRAYED UNTO THE LORD, AND SAID: I PRAY THEE, O LORD, WAS NOT THIS MY SAYING WHILE I WAS YET IN MY COUNTRY? THEREFORE I FLED BEFORE UNTO TARSHISH: FOR I KNEW THAT THOU ART A GRACIOUS GOD, AND MERCIFUL, SLOW TO ANGER, AND OF GREAT KINDNESS, AND REPENTEST THEE OF THE EVIL. THEREFORE NOW, O LORD, TAKE, I BESEECH THEE, MY LIFE FROM ME. FOR IT IS BETTER FOR ME TO DIE THAN TO LIVE."

Many a one would fain be a different man from what he is, simply in order that his relation to the law may be different from what God wills that it should be. For God wills that we should be devoid of all merit according to the law, and that His grace alone should be the ground of our rejoicing, and the power which enables us to do good works, for which the praise is due to God, and not to us. So there are some who desire that their prayer should be entirely their own, and would take credit to themselves for the devoutness and fervency of their

prayers. But it is not God's will that our prayers should be of our own devising, and for this reason the Lord's Prayer has been given us, in which we are told continually to pray that our own name, kingdom, and will may be utterly brought to nought and abolished, in which we are also made to confess that we cannot by our own strength even so much as obtain daily bread for ourselves, that we can never trust ourselves in the hour of temptation, and need to be delivered from it by God, and that we are always in danger of giving ourselves up to the evil one, if the Lord's arm were not continually stretched out to save us and protect us. Is it not foolish of us to desire to make our own prayers instead of being taught by God. We ought to know that all the prayers that we make for ourselves are worthless and blind. St. Paul truly says: "We know not what we should pray for as we ought." We have two prayers by Jonah. They both were the outgrowth of a troubled mind. The first prayer he made in the belly of the fish, and that was a good prayer, because he did not pray it of himself, but the Holy Ghost taught it him word for word, and Jonah repeated it after Him. And though Jonah did not even thoroughly understand all he was saying, yet God heard him and answered his prayer. Here we have a second prayer, but it is a bad prayer, of which it is true in a very different sense that Jonah knew not what he was saying. If God had answered this prayer as He had answered the other, Jonah would have been in a very evil plight, for in this last prayer he unwittingly asked to be stripped of all the good things that he had gained by affliction, and he renounced the salvation of God which had come to him as the fruit of great tribulation. "I pray Thee, O Lord," he said, "was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish." His deliverance from the belly of the fish has suddenly passed clean out of his mind. He utterly fails to remember how God has cleansed him of his former sins. A peculiar way this, of shewing his gratitude for his late deliverance. He is so far from being sorry for his recent disobedience, that he boldly attempts to justify it before God. He was right, then, in fleeing from the presence of the Lord, and in seeking to escape beyond the seas. He is justified in his words which he spake before God, while he was yet in his country. He exhibits himself as a forgetful hearer of the Word, as a babe that needs to be fed with milk, as a little child that cannot yet bear solid food, as a dull and sluggish disciple of the Holy Spirit, who thinks that God seeks to be glorified by His attributes of mercy and love, and not by justice, which nevertheless is the only channel through which God makes men to feel His love and His mercy. In short, Jonah has been right and God has been wrong. And now Jonah wants to be relieved of his post at

once, and to go straightway to heaven, for God has sent him on a fool's errand, and has made him take this journey and preach this preaching to no purpose whatsoever.

I wonder whether we who have, like Jonah, been marvellously delivered from great tribulation, and carried back from the gates of hell, shew a deeper sense of the debt we owe to God than he. Let us be thankful to God that He has caused this truthful picture of one of His saints to be drawn for us, in order that we may see how the best of men are in constant need of His mercy. Let us ask Him to anoint our eyes with eye-salve, and to let us see ourselves as we are, and we shall find that we are daily committing the sin for which Jonah was reprov'd. Let us ask God to make us heartily ashamed of our obstinate unwillingness to confess ourselves in the wrong; for, in this respect, we resemble naughty children, who always think they know better than their parents. We are the slaves of every passing impression, and if things do not turn out according to our notions, we straightway begin to murmur against God, and this murmuring is often a chief ingredient in what we call our prayer. We ask God why He has done this or that, and speak as if He owed us an account of His doings. But we do not bear in mind His former mercies, we do not recall the great agony of body and soul in which we once found ourselves, we do not remember the anguish which wrung from us that piteous cry unto God, we forget the help which God sent us, and the vows that we made unto Him. Our eyes have ceased to behold, and our hearts have ceased to care for, His marvellous dealings in the past, and because we do not immediately get what we want, we are ready to give up life as a hopeless thing. It is better for me to die than to live. Perhaps we do not always mean what we say, but sometimes death seems to us preferable to the decisions of God's providence, of which we understand so little. We find Elijah giving expression to the same foolish wish, when he found that the glorious manifestation of God, and the slaying of the priests of Baal, did not hinder wicked Jezebel from seeking his life,—although, shortly before, he had been with the mighty force of conviction proclaiming, that "the Lord is God."

III.

But the Lord is wonderfully patient and long suffering, and He does not disdain to answer the sinful and rebellious words of His erring servant. The Lord is like a wise mother. He does not inflict chastisement at once, and yet never departs from the strict rule of justice. The Lord said: "Doest thou well to be angry?" That was a question intended gently to point Jonah back to the right path. This is how our great

God deals with His children. He might cast us away for ever in His wrath, and impose on us an everlasting silence. He doth not deal with us after our sins, and remembereth that we are dust. He does not slay us because we do not understand Him, and He does not cast us away because we think we are justified in finding fault with His dispensations. You know that God who said to Jonah : "Doest thou well to be angry?" —He is the same of whom it is said that He took upon Himself all our sins, and that He was made like unto His brethren in all things, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. He does not disdain to listen even to the foolish utterances of His people, and to their foolish prayers, and he instructs them patiently and with quiet dignity, which makes him who is thus convinced of his folly feel as though he would like to sink into the ground with shame. But man in his pettish waywardness pays no heed to God's instruction, and it is only after a long time that his soul is opened to the conviction that right and justice are always on God's side, and that it is man who is always hopelessly in the wrong.

Jonah did not take God's remonstrance to heart. For he thought that he had a right to be angry. Till then he had been satisfied with the effect of his preaching. He had been pleased with the appearance of the city, where all, from the king on his throne to the beggar in the street, were sitting in sackcloth and ashes, and contrition and broken-hearted repentance had filled the souls of all. The word of the prophet had wrought a marvellous and a mighty work. But now the prophet's satisfaction had come to a sudden end, for that which he had said about the overthrow of the city, was not fulfilled, and the event had given the lie to his preaching. Yes, he is sure he has a right to be angry. And without attending to God's gentle reproof, he leaves the city.

IV.

"SO JONAH WENT OUT OF THE CITY, AND SAT ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE CITY, AND THERE MADE HIM A BOOTH, AND SAT UNDER IT IN THE SHADOW, TILL HE MIGHT SEE WHAT WOULD BECOME OF THE CITY."

It seems incredible that Jonah's heart should have been so hardened, and that he should have paid so little attention to the voice of the Lord and the teaching of the Holy Spirit. And yet so we read. God has said : "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh," and because God has said so we must believe that that change has been wrought in us. The Lord has said it, and therefore we believe that in the bosom of His elect there beats a soft heart, a merciful and compassionate heart, that is full of love to our

fellow-men. Yet we who think we stand should take heed lest we fall, and remember that in ourselves we still retain the old stony, unmerciful, unloving heart. It was a cruel thing of Jonah to sit down and deliberately nurse a hope, that after all, the city might yet be overthrown, and that all the mighty crying of the people of Nineveh, and of their poor little children, and of their cattle, might have profited them nothing. In his sullenness he did not at first heed the scorching rays of the sun. Because God's wrath had not waxed hot against Nineveh to destroy it, Jonah had made up his mind that he would either himself perish by the heat of the sun, or see God overthrow the city. But when the heat became too great for him to bear, he made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow. There he is partly sheltered from the burning rays of the sun, and goes on waiting for the overthrow of Nineveh, which he had predicted.

The feeling which at that time agitated the soul of Jonah, is not altogether unknown to some of us. We sometimes have occasion to denounce God's wrath against hardened sinners ; and then we are apt to lose sight of God's purpose in pronouncing those threats, and expect things to come about exactly in accordance with our predictions, and desire to root up the wheat with the tares.

There Jonah is sitting and anxiously waiting for fire to come down from heaven and consume the city. Does it not seem as if a demon had taken possession of him ? How very unlike God he has become ! How completely he answers St. Paul's description : " Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." Just conceive a man, himself a sinner, who knew that no one can receive anything, except it be given him from above, a man to whom so much had been forgiven, gazing upon that mighty city, as it humbled itself in sackcloth and ashes, and yet not feeling moved with compassion towards so many thousands of miserable men, but rather impatiently waiting to see the whole city consumed by fire ! Do not the philanthropists of the present day rise up against him, and condemn him ? What a pity that these very philanthropists would rather see whole cities and kingdoms brought to the brink of ruin, than give up one of their pet theories. But to those who feel sad and discouraged because they find no love in their hearts, Jonah's case may serve as a comforting assurance, that they may know that men of God are still men, and that they may cease to expect to have any love which is not given them by God. For the love of believers is in Christ Jesus, it is quickened by the will of God, and its springs are supplied by the Spirit. Without God all the love which they themselves may possess, must come to nought. For without God their love cannot

work that which is good, without Him all our good deeds are evil deeds, and our mercy is cruelty.

And yet we must admit that Jonah's position was not without difficulty. For might it not be said that if God did not fulfil the word that Jonah had preached, that word was not God's word, and he was no man of God, God was not with him, his whole life was a mistake, and he himself was still in his sins. He might with great show of reason argue that he had been mistaken when he thought that he had the right faith, that his whole life had been built up upon a mere illusory imagination of his own brain, that God was against him and for the Ninevites, and that he himself was not yet saved, but still lay bound in the darkness of sin and doubt.

Thus man is constantly deceiving himself in the face of the plainest lessons of experience, and because he is not careful to bear in mind all that lies between the beginning and the end, the starting-point and the goal, of his spiritual life, he is often tempted to doubt God and his own past, or to condemn the spiritual condition and the God of his brother. He stands perplexed unless God orders all things exactly as he thinks they should be ordered.

V.

But the great Father of the household well knows the peculiarities of His children, and the best way of training them to habits of self-distrust, and of making them acknowledge the wisdom of all His ways, and feel heartily ashamed of their foolish criticism, and confess that as He alone is all powerful, so He alone is a "wonderful Counsellor," and the fountain-head of all wisdom. The booth which Jonah had put up for himself hardly afforded sufficient protection against the vertical rays of the sun, and the more intolerable the heat grew, and the more his hope waned of seeing Nineveh overthrown, the more sullen and angry Jonah must have become. Then "THE LORD GOD PREPARED A GOURD, AND MADE IT TO COME UP OVER JONAH THAT IT MIGHT BE A SHADOW OVER HIS HEAD, TO DELIVER HIM FROM HIS GRIEF. SO JONAH WAS EXCEEDING GLAD OF THE GOURD." God, the Creator of heaven and earth, could easily make a green thing to spring up where nothing grew before, and so He spread over His child the shade of a gourd. And this gourd gave great joy to Jonah. Now he was more satisfactorily sheltered from the heat, and his temper brightened up a little, and he could afford to wait with a little more patience for the overthrow of the city. The Father has given His child a little toy to make it forget its pain for a short time. The more immediate delight at seeing the gourd spring up may have made Jonah for a moment forget all about Nineveh, his zeal for God's word and

truth may have slightly cooled down for a season, when he felt the delicious coolness of the shady creeper. So he lies down to rest in a more contented and a more placid frame of mind. But the Lord, who had prepared a fish to save him from the consequences of his perverse obstinacy, who had prepared the gourd that Jonah might know from his own experience how grateful it is to a man to be delivered from the evil, now "PREPARED A WORM WHEN THE MORNING ROSE THE NEXT DAY, AND IT SMOTE THE GOURD THAT IT WITHERED." Jonah's complacent delight had suddenly come to an abrupt termination, and once more he was helplessly exposed to the merciless rays of the sun. But even that was not the worst. Stroke follows upon stroke. Not only is his booth spoiled, the gourd withered, not only has his shady arbour ceased to afford him any protection, but "IT CAME TO PASS WHEN THE SUN DID ARISE, THAT GOD PREPARED A VEHEMENT EAST WIND, AND THE SUN BEAT UPON THE HEAD OF JONAH, THAT HE FAINTED." Did God take any pleasure in doing this? Ah no, it never gives our Father pleasure to vex and trouble his children. Only we want to be not ministers, but masters, of the word. It seems sometimes as though the Lord dealt very cruelly and harshly with us. Hardly has he given us some good and pleasant thing to enjoy, when suddenly a vehement east wind blows upon it, and God's promise that the sun should not smite us by day, nor the moon by night, seems to fail. But is the fault God's or ours? Is it His fault that we have to complain, "He hath inclosed my way with hewn stone; He hath made my paths crooked. He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, as a lion in secret places. He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me to pieces; He hath made me desolate?" (Lam. iii. 9—11.) Whereunto doth it serve, this sudden overthrow of all our joys, the vehement east wind, and the beating and smiting of the sun? In all these things the Lord is carrying out His faithful and loving purpose to teach us that He alone is all in all and that we are nothing, though we be prophets, men of God, or the most saintly among the saints. Let us look within, dear friends. In Christ Jesus is life, and in Him do we bear fruit; and according to God's law all our strength, thoughts, purposes, and works must flow from Him alone. But all we the rest, whatever may be our capacities, talents, and attainments, can do nothing of ourselves but expose our folly by the most perverse and unreasonable actions, and that is what all our aspirations, apart from Christ, must come to. This fact is sufficiently patent to all whose eyes are not blinded by spiritual pride, but we should be more ready to admit it. Of course we all have a due respect for God's word, but practically we only care for the dictates of our own spurious wisdom, and our own vanity, and do not greatly trouble ourselves

about the rest. But God will not suffer us to do this quietly ; He shakes us out of our sleep, and by His wise and wonderful dispensations forces us to confess that He alone is great, wise, and holy ; that He is the righteous governor and king of all the earth, and that salvation and eternal life are of Him alone, that no flesh may glory in His presence. This is God's purpose in sending us the vehement east wind, and in making the sun continually to beat upon our heads, so that we faint.

VI.

Do we understand this purpose of God at the time of our tribulation? Nay rather, at the time, it is as dark to us as it was to Jonah. "HE WISHED WITHIN HIMSELF TO DIE, AND SAID : IT IS BETTER FOR ME TO DIE THAN TO LIVE." Was that patient submission to the chastisement of the Lord, or meek resignation to the punishing hand of God? Certainly not. Hypocrites indeed are so exhaustively furnished with all the virtues, that it is impossible to detect any flaw in them. But sincere children of God give themselves as they are, they do not feign to have any virtue which they do not really possess. They exhibit themselves not as models of virtue, but as weak, sinful men. Jonah knows of no patience under affliction. Now that the gourd is gone, he wishes himself dead, and when God tries to bring him to reason with the question, "DOEST THOU WELL TO BE ANGRY FOR THE GOURD?" he answers in a tone which shows that he is no more amenable to rational conviction : "I do well to be angry, even unto death." Now these words are not intended to countenance those foolish persons, who, whenever they are crossed in any of their worldly aspirations, thoughtlessly give vent to their vexation by saying that they "wish they were dead," but are for the comfort of vexed and afflicted souls, that they may understand the unreasonableness of insisting upon our own carnal aspirations, and that they may see that even those dispensations which are so painful and hard to bear, that even death seems sweet in comparison, are sent by a faithful and loving Father, and work together for their good. They should remember that it is only their own ignorance which makes them look to death as a relief from their troubles, because they do not comprehend God's ways. For this reason a man should indeed humble himself before God, on account of his sin, and his disloyal thoughts, but yet he should not, on the other hand, despair of salvation. In the end he will come to feel heartily ashamed that he knew so little of God's ways, and that he was not satisfied with them, but in his wicked folly undertook to improve on them. And yet at the last his soul will be filled with gladness, and his mouth with laughter, and he will rejoice that the Lord Himself stood at the helm, and that

it was his Father, who carried him in His bosom, as the shepherd carries the tender lamb.

VII.

For such was God's way with Jonah. He said, "THOU HAST PITY ON THE GOURD, FOR THE WHICH THOU HAST NOT LABOURED NOR MADEST IT GROW ; WHICH CAME UP IN A NIGHT, AND PERISHED IN A NIGHT ; AND SHOULD NOT I SPARE NINEVEH, THAT GREAT CITY, WHEREIN ARE MORE THAN SIX SCORE THOUSAND PERSONS THAT CANNOT DISCERN BETWEEN THEIR RIGHT HAND AND THEIR LEFT HAND, AND ALSO MUCH CATTLE ?"

These words are so clear that any child can understand them. A man of God, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, has pity upon a gourd which he has neither planted nor caused to grow, which came up in a night, and perished in a night, but he has no pity upon so great a city of God as Nineveh. If Nineveh had perished, he would have praised God ; the gourd withers, and he is angry even unto death. He would have gladly seen the fire of God's wrath coming down upon the Ninevites—but himself cannot bear the heat of the sun. The word which God has spoken through him of the overthrow of Nineveh, he demands shall be strictly fulfilled ; but the question whether such an event would justify God's love, or whether the message was not rather intended for the salvation of so many of his fellow sinners, never crosses his mind. Though he be a prophet of the Lord, yet his heart is clearly void of love to God, and of love to his neighbour. The Lord appeals to his sense of shame by reminding him of his want of consideration for others, even for the innocent children, and the poor cattle, whom he would gladly have doomed to destruction, only that his own love of self might be gratified, and that his credit as a prophet might remain unshaken. A prophet has more pity upon a gourd than upon a great city.

And with this question of the Lord, intended to point out to Jonah the error of his way, the book concludes. It does not record Jonah's answer, or the further events of his life. It does not tell us what became either of him or of Nineveh. "And also much cattle,"—with these words the book closes.

In it the Holy Ghost teaches us, that only in Christ Jesus is a man accounted righteous before God. In Him alone does God justify a sinful man, and lead him by the hand of grace along the path of God's commandments. In Him alone a sinful man is holy, for the power of grace makes the most difficult things easy for him, and clears away all obstacles. But it is a rough path, and one that leads through the valley of the shadow of death, by which men are brought to the knowledge of God's salvation. God takes them by the hand against their

will, and gives them a heart to love His good and perfect will. All these things are the fruit and work of the Holy Spirit, and against such as are led by the Spirit, there is no law. And yet all the time they remain poor, weak, ignorant, men, and have no right understanding of God's word and ways, and therefore, in themselves they have nothing which could stand the severe test of God's law. If things do not run on as smoothly as they imagined, they stand confounded and perplexed, and fancy they have a right to be angry, and that God is not doing the right thing by them, and in their foolish anger they are ready to despair of everything, and to throw up the hope of everlasting salvation. It is only visible things that have a really firm grasp on a man's affections, and if his outward circumstances are good, he cares nothing for God or men. But the Lord does not suffer His children to continue in this perverse way of thinking, and like a loving Father, gently teaches them the error of their position. Thus He makes them feel more and more ashamed of their self-willed choice, and of their foolish aims, so that at last they are forced to confess, "God alone is wise and good, He alone has the knowledge of good and evil, and I am not as God."

In conclusion, let me remind you what a good thing it is that we men, though we be prophets and men of God, do not hold the sceptre of the world, and do not possess God's almighty power. For if we did, we should long ago have ruined the Church and the world, and one child of God would have been compassing the destruction of the other. Let us thank God, that it is He who rules in infinite wisdom over Jews and barbarians, the pure and the impure, honest men and publicans, saints and sinners, and deals with each one of us according to His wisdom and good pleasure.

Both Jonah and Job came to doubt the wisdom of their King, because they did not understand that a loyal soldier must never suspect the good faith of his commander, and must be ready to rush in where the bullets fall thickest, even though he cannot perceive the necessity of such a movement, simply because his commander has ordered it. Surely, God's ways are too deep and wonderful for us; we cannot understand them. There is only One who knew them, understood them, and followed them with unquestioning obedience, although God led Him along paths of sorrow and anguish, such as man had never walked on earth before—and His name is Jesus. Praise be unto God through Him, that, while we exclaim, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"—we yet need not blench at the thought of the judgment to come.

The saints of this world will find that their system of works, and of a self-made virtue and holiness, is not the key which

will fit the story of the prophet Jonah. But the saints of God as they read the story of Jonah's human weakness, recognise their own features, and rejoice in God's comforting assurance that though they are men, yet He will be their God. Those of you who belong to this latter class, may well rejoice because of the unspeakable patience and longsuffering of His love, with which He is continually teaching and correcting us. If we know what it is to be merciful, we possess that knowledge in and through Christ. Apart from Him, we could have no pity even upon the brute beasts that perish, much less upon our brethren who have immortal souls like ourselves. In His presence let no flesh glory. He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. To Him alone belongs righteousness, and wisdom, and strength. He alone is full of faithfulness, and love, and kindness, towards the lost. He will make us carry out His counsel so that His name alone shall be glorified thereby. At the last, it will be ours to feel ashamed, and to marvel at His mercy and goodness. Amen.

CONCLUDING SERMON.

We have finished our consideration of the story of Jonah. We will not bid farewell to the prophet, without retracing the chief features of the lesson which he has to teach us. I implore you to take heed to yourselves, and not to suffer the birds of the air, that is, the Evil One, to catch away that which these meditations have sown in your hearts, or if the seed be sprung up, take care lest the heat of the sun scorch it, or lest it be choked by the desire of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, and by the cares of this world, and the pursuit of earthly vanities. There is so much in your hearts that is not good ground for the seed of the word. You must realise these things in your own individual experience. The words of God are like the waves of the sea, they beat upon our heart in never-ending succession, and try to carry away all the impurities of the flesh, till at last a man is thoroughly convinced of his own abandoned condition, and of the righteousness of God, and firmly lays hold upon the strength of the Lord, and flees for refuge to the righteousness of God.

How humiliating God's last words must have sounded to Jonah, "*And also much cattle.*" Those words must have continued to ring in his ears for a long time after they had been spoken, and must have proved the death sentence of all his arrogance. The brute beasts were of more account in God's sight than Jonah, and his foolish wish. May these words continue to ring in our ears also. Thou shalt be unable to open thy mouth for very shame and confusion, in the day that I shall forgive thee all these things. Such are the terms of God's covenant with His people. God is glorious in all His works, and is the Maker of the brute beasts as well as of men. He hears the young ravens which cry to Him, as surely as He hears the cry of the young children. God in His goodness has created all things for the sake of man, not only the beasts, but also the angels, the strong spirits which surround His throne. But when man presumptuously rises in rebellion against God, God puts no difference between him and the cattle, nay He even places the cattle above him.

Jonah has, at last, understood God's meaning, with all the readiness of a guilty conscience. And that is the reason why he does not add a single syllable. When any one feels himself

guilty in the presence of God, when he is forced to confess, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight, that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest,"—when he has come to this, he is full ready to let God have the last word, to shroud himself in silence, and to kneel down, and worship, and believe. This is now the third time that Jonah stood before the Lord, and had to own that he himself was utterly weak and helpless, and that the Lord alone was wise and holy. Why had he not perished from the way, when he fled before God? Why did God prepare a fish, and let him pray and believe in the belly of the fish, and be vomited forth upon the dry land? Why did God not call him to account for his anger and weariness of life, and why did he not perish when he had heard the last words of God? I will tell you the reason. It is surely not sufficient for us to know that the saints were men like unto us, but we should also learn how we, although we are men, can yet be righteous and holy in the sight of God. I will tell you the reason, not only that you may know it, but that you may be built up on the same foundation. May God grant unto you grace to apply to *yourselves* the story of Jonah, and to obtain from it a blessing that shall last you in all eternity.

TEXT—"FOR AS JONAS WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE WHALE'S BELLY, SO SHALL THE SON OF MAN BE THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE HEART OF THE EARTH."—Matth. xii. 40.

These words were spoken by our Lord under the following circumstances. Some of the Scribes and Pharisees had clearly been touched by the sayings of our Lord in vv. 35—37, and felt that He must be the Christ. But they did not wish to submit themselves to the words of Jesus, of which they could not help feeling the power and the truth. Now the heart of man is very cunning in devising pretexts for not obeying a disagreeable command, and always ready to doubt the authority of an unpleasant ordinance, especially where it claims to be received upon the bare word of him who delivers it. And so the Pharisees come to Jesus, and in an insinuating tone of voice, as if they were anxious to accept His words, if they could only satisfy themselves as to the Divine authority of Him who uttered them, they say to Him, "Master, we would see a sign from Thee." If Jesus had granted their wish, they would have continued in their unbelief all the same. For they had just been told of a wonderful miracle. There had been brought unto Jesus one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb; and He had healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. When the Pharisees heard this, they had said in scornful disdain of the people who were

amazed at it, and in scornful rejection of the Lord, "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils." But still there were some among the Pharisees who thought that if they saw some one of His miracles with their own eyes, they would be better able to judge whether His signs, and therefore, also the doctrine which He taught, were really of God, and then they might decide whether they should recognise Him as the Messiah or not. Their real purpose was to set aside the power of the word. They overlooked and despised the mightiest of all signs, that is to say, the demeanour of our Lord, which so well agreed with the word of the prophet, "He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory." There was no hunger after righteousness, no sorrow of heart, in those Pharisees. They were righteous, they were saints, they were the elect of God in their own eyes, their salvation was certain; they were not like a bruised reed, or smoking flax, and therefore, they could not receive the word of life. They thought they were nobler and more righteous than Jesus, and that they were nearer heaven than He. They could see nothing uncommon in Him. The promise of righteousness was foolishness to them; they did not want it.

The Lord saw through them, and therefore He said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah." The Lord calls the Pharisees *evil*, because in the pride of their self-righteousness they laid all manner of heavy burdens, all manner of galling obligations on men, which resulted in a still greater alienation from God, and *adulterous*, because, while professing to love the Lord their God, and to worship none but Him, they secretly went a whoring after their own covetous and lascivious desires and lusts. The sign which should be given unto them, would be of such a nature that they could never deny it, and such as would rise up in judgment against them, because it was to be wrought not by the Lord Himself, but by God the Father, and because though it was the only possible source of salvation, they nevertheless would reject it.

We may suppose that Jonah told the Ninevites, that he had spent three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, and had been vomited out upon the dry land, or perhaps the report went before him, and had spread throughout the city before his arrival in Nineveh, and the effect of his preaching was greatly intensified by the wonderful antecedents of the preacher who told them that after forty days Nineveh should be overthrown. Jonah himself was a sign unto the Ninevites, and

went a long way to accredit his preaching. In the same way it was to be preached of Christ Himself, that He had been three days and three nights in the earth, but Israel and the Pharisees would not believe the message. This sign should be given unto them, in order that they might have no excuse, for it would be the sign of His having been offered up for the salvation of those that were lost, and it would condemn them, because in their presumptuous pride they did not reckon themselves among those who needed salvation.

This is what our Lord meant by the words, "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." We see that Jesus had read the story of Jonah and applied it to Himself. And though He is here only speaking by comparison, yet the words "the Son of man" and "the heart of the earth" clearly point to a deeper and more solemn meaning.

They were intended to be a source of consolation to God's Church, and to serve to warn us, that the story of Jonah as well as our Lord's sayings, admit of an interpretation other than that which lies on the surface.

Whenever Jesus predicted the sufferings that should come upon Him, He referred back to the Old Testament prophecies concerning His passion. In the accomplishment of the work which the Father had sent Him to do, He sought and found strength and comfort in the writings of the prophets. He was conscious of being, not only the Son of God, but also the Son of man. As Son of man, He read the story of Jonah, and applied it to Himself, and drew from it much strength and consolation. He felt Himself as the second Adam, who had taken upon Himself all the sins, the guilt, and the punishment of the first Adam, and bore them in the body of His flesh as the Head of God's elect among mankind. Although He was a righteous man, righteous in spirit, and perfectly willing to do the Father's will, yet He felt Himself tempted more keenly than His brethren, as one that was come in the flesh. So He was not only exposed to the bitter enmity of the devil and death, but He also felt in His own members the opposition of the flesh to the law of God. And He Himself was without sin, yet He was for sin shaped in the likeness of sinful flesh, and in this His flesh the old Adam had to be struggled with and utterly destroyed. For St. Paul tells us, in the 8th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, that God, for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that is, in the flesh of Christ. This struggle of the flesh against the will of God caused our Lord many an hour of agony and sadness. The alienation of Adam, and of all flesh, from God, lay upon Him with its whole weight, and in all its fearful effects. David had a foretaste of the anguish that was

to thrill the heart of the Son of David, when he says, "Let not them that wait on Thee be ashamed for my sake, O Lord God of hosts; let not those that seek Thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel. I wept, and there was no helper. O God, Thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from me."—(Ps. lxxix.) Innumerable evils have compassed me round about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head.—(Ps. xl.) All this indicates a mighty opposition of His flesh to the will of God. For we cannot understand the words of actual foolishness, sins, and iniquities, but must refer them to the mighty struggle, that was constantly going on in the flesh which He had taken upon Himself for us, against His Father's will, which His spirit was so ready to accomplish. This struggle is described in the Epistle to the Hebrews, when it is said that it behoved our Lord to be made like unto His brethren in all things, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, that He was in all points tempted like as we are, and that in the days of His flesh, He offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and though he were a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. This is borne out by the evidence of the Gospels. For there we are told that the Lord very frequently went apart to pray, and that He thus spent many a cold night in mountain solitudes. There we also have an account of His bitter agony in the garden of Gethsemane, and of the three fearful hours upon the cross.

In this struggle and fearful agony, which our Lord suffered in His soul, while He was in the body, in the course of this opposition of the flesh to the will of the Father, in the midst of the mighty temptations which He had to encounter for our sakes, in the midst of all these hard wrestlings—can we wonder that He, the Uncreated Word, who was wont to look to the written word for strength and consolation, sought and found such strength and consolation in the book of Jonah, as well as in other portions of God's word? How quickly must He, who was anointed above His fellows with the Spirit of God, have discovered, that it is the nature of the flesh to strive against the law of God. He must have said within Himself: This struggle I must face for the sake of my brethren; the flesh must perish, it must be blotted out from the face of the earth, it must be hidden away in the heart of the earth, and become dust and ashes. Three days and three nights I must remain in the heart of the earth, just as Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, but on the third day I shall rise again. I must die in the flesh, and be quickened in the spirit. But even My flesh shall not see corruption; on

the third day it shall come forth from the earth an immortal and incorruptible body, and thus, in the mortified body of my flesh, I shall have destroyed him who has the power of death, and I shall have put an end to the rule of sin in the flesh for all my brethren.

That the matter is even so, my dear friends, must be evident to every one who loves the truth, and is content that his flesh, and his conversation in the flesh, should perish, and that his spirit should be quickened in Christ.

This is also the reason why Jonah was delivered three times, twice from the righteous indignation of God, and once out of the belly of the fish.

The fact that the flesh lusts always contrary to the spirit, is due to our natural enmity against God, and to our disobedience and unbelief, and we know that by nothing do we incur God's wrath so much as by this opposition to His holy will which is the only source of our salvation. Jonah yielded to the flesh, and we all are, like him, constantly giving way to carnal influences. Like him, we should all have been consumed long since by God's fiery wrath, if the cause of God's forbearance and of our deliverance did not lie outside ourselves. In Christ the opposition of the flesh to the Spirit did not flow from the common source of enmity towards God, inasmuch as He was the Holy One of God, but He has nevertheless deeply felt the actual struggle in His flesh against the will of God, and that on our behalf. But He alone did not yield to the will of the flesh, He remained obedient to the will of the Father unto death, even the death of the cross. So the Apostle tells us that He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. For though in the Psalms He is made to complain of the opposition of the flesh as *His* sin, guilt, and foolishness, yet all this was not really His own, but was the sin, guilt, and foolishness, of our flesh, which were laid upon Him while He for us was in the flesh. But by the Eternal Spirit He refused to yield to the flesh in a single point, and carried off the victory over it, and gave over His flesh unto death, and wrath, and condemnation, simply in order to deliver human flesh from these things. Thus He has rescued all things from corruption, and brought them back to God, and by His righteousness has satisfied God's justice and reconciled us with God, and by His righteousness we are accepted in the sight of God.

This is the foundation on which Jonah stood, as surely as he knew and believed the promise of a Saviour, and as surely as, according to St. Peter, the Spirit of Christ was in him. If we try Jonah by the holy law of God, which a man cannot transgress without forfeiting the life of his soul, we must say that he was lost, just as we all are condemned by this holy law.

of God. For when first told to go to Nineveh, he was disobedient, and when he had gone there, he openly and foolishly murmured against God and His holy will. All these sins the devil could fairly plead against him in the presence of God, and allege as reasons why he should not partake of everlasting happiness. For how can a disobedient and an unmerciful man, and one that has foolishly murmured against God's counsel, dwell with a holy and wise God, and how would it be in harmony with God's holiness to have anything further to do with such a man ?

God is love, and He asks no more than He finds, and Himself supplies that which He does not find. But, on the other hand, He is also just, and as such must punish the inward rebellion, the revolt of the carnal self against His will which alone is good and holy, and against His word and commandment, with everlasting death.

We are most seriously concerned about our more flagrant outward sins, those sins which are so manifest that they cannot be denied, and which most strikingly convince us of our sinful state ; but we do not remember that the most fearful of our sins and the root of all our other sins is just this constant enmity against God's word and will. The origin and consequences of this most clearly appeared in the case of our first parents in Paradise.

How God must punish, and sometimes has actually punished, this sin which we all have sinned in Adam, we see in the account of the deluge, of the sedition of Korah, and above all, of the destruction of Jerusalem. This sin, from which none of us is void, was also Jonah's sin. Why then did God not slay him, and why has He not slain us that even now are committing this very sin ?

Jonah had a surety for his debt, a merciful High Priest, who had been tempted in all points like as he was, the promised Messiah, and He has abolished, slain, and destroyed, for Jonah, as well as for us, the effects of sin in the flesh in the body of His flesh, and covered Jonah with His righteousness. He remembered that Jonah was dust and ashes, and dealt not with him after his sins, but had mercy on him with an everlasting mercy. Through Him Jonah was three times delivered from God's wrath.

Moreover, for the sake of the Anointed One, Jonah, too, was anointed with the Holy Ghost, so that in spite of his foolish waywardness, he was still led and guided in God's ways and commandments by the Spirit of God. By this Spirit Jonah was moved to deny himself, and to sacrifice his own safety to that of his fellow-men, when he saw the mariners in great fear and danger for his sake, and suffered himself to be cast forth into the sea. By this Spirit he was strengthened

not to deny his faith, when his sin was found out by the mariners, but boldly to confess his Lord before the heathen, saying, "I am an Hebrew, and fear the Lord, the God of heaven." By this Spirit he preserved this faith even in the belly of the fish, and was encouraged with a believer's steadfastness to speak in the midst of the darkness, "Yet will I look again upon the temple of Thy holiness." By this Spirit he was obedient to the word of God, when it came unto him the second time, and by his preaching changed a city of hell into a city of the Lord. By this Spirit he held fast to the Lord, even in the midst of his angry disappointment; and sought to the Lord, and fell down at the feet of the Lord, whom he did not understand. Even then he showed himself as he was, and did not lie unto the Lord like Cain, but bore himself, like a naughty child indeed, but yet like a child that is sure of its inheritance. And, finally, by this Spirit he was silent at the last rebuke of the Lord, and opened not his mouth, and his silence was an eloquent confession, "I am not as Thou art; there is no God like unto Thee; my flower is cast off, but Thy word abideth for ever."

MY DEAR FRIENDS! St. Paul thus solemnly addresses the Colossian Christians, "Christ in you is the hope of glory, Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." It has been my endeavour and my earnest prayer, to do something towards presenting every one of you perfect in Christ by putting before you the story of the prophet Jonah. May the seed have fallen into good ground in many hearts. Indeed, there is salvation in no other, neither is any other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved than the name of Jesus. And there is really no other perfection than the perfection we attain in Christ. The existence of suffering and death, and of the fearful enmity of the flesh against the salvation of God is an undeniable fact. And so there is one thing needful—that out of this suffering and death, and the revolt of the flesh, and a nature entirely alienated from God, a new man should be evolved, that we should be quickened, created anew, reconciled, and presented before God, holy and blameless. Thus are we saved and brought to God, the God of the fulness of salvation, and miserable sinners once more behold the face of God, from whom they had fallen away, and live for ever before Him in the contemplation of His glory and the enjoyment of everlasting happiness. This happy consummation all the commands of the law, and all the works of the flesh are unable to

procure for us. For such outward works do not touch our inward alienation from God, nor do they abolish that hypocritical tendency of our nature, which remains as a fatal taint in the very best that we can do. So we saw that the mariners called upon God, and offered sacrifices, and made vows, but all this was a preparation for the murder of their brother. Let us therefore turn to Christ, and cling to Him with unwavering confidence, and then we shall be safely carried through all difficulties, and attain to perfection in spite of our own imperfection. We shall abound in good works even while we are sinning, as Jonah still had *love* and was capable of a wonderful act of self-sacrifice while he was fleeing from the presence of God, and still had *hope* though he lay in the belly of the fish, and even when he had been vomited out, still remained unshaken in his *faith*. For though he does not understand God's dealings, yet in his heart, faith, love and hope struggle with his vain and foolish imaginations, until he is enlightened and satisfied of the justice of God's decision concerning Nineveh, and as soon as he has had his doubts cleared away his faith in God shines out once more in unclouded brightness, and the wayward child once more turns to his Father in trustful love, and is once more fed with the milk of His goodness, and satisfied with the honey of His love.

This precious story of the prophet Jonah is very full of comfort for all afflicted Christians who come to the Lord and say: If I am really holy, as Thou hast said that I am, why is there such a mighty conflict raging within me, such a fierce struggle between two opposing forces, that hardly suffers me to enjoy a single moment of peace and happiness, and why do I feel tempted to exclaim: "Put an end to this struggle or let me die?" All these are comforted by God's assurance: My grace is sufficient for thee; thou art nevertheless holy and dost continue holy in mine eyes, and walkest in my ways; for I myself guide thee." In the end all the saints of God will confess that "It has all been God's work: Thanks be unto God through Jesus Christ my Lord."—And these saints, who in themselves are nothing but miserable sinners, may take heart and be comforted when they read the story of Jonah, and especially the last chapter. For the story of our lives is briefly the same as his: We do not understand the Lord, and are filled with anger and indignation, even unto death. But the Lord's goodness and faithful mercy is constantly constraining us to fall down on our knees and keep silence. He does so for the sake of His dear Son, who in His own self bare our sins in His body on the tree, that we being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness.

Let us all take to heart this last word "righteousness." The Judge is at hand. It is not enough to say that we are

men, and our weakness is the weakness of men, but we must "be living unto righteousness." This will be the great and solemn question in the day of His appearing: Hast thou lived unto righteousness? He that would stand before Him with a clear conscience on that day of judgment upon all wickedness, and of condemnation for those who have not sought the Lord—let him seek justification by the blood of Christ, let him seek to be found in Christ Jesus; only he that is found in Christ can live unto righteousness. For they that are in Christ do not think to be righteous by the works of the law, but trust in the righteousness which is by faith in Christ Jesus, which alone bears the fruit of holiness. In Him alone we have perfection, and deliverance from the sin of the flesh, and the corruption of the spirit. Arise, ye that do not yet know Him, arise and kiss the Son, lest even the men of Nineveh rise up against you and condemn you. And ye that fear His word, and are sighing to be delivered from evil, look up to Him, and take refuge with Him who has said: "Come unto Me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

May He who has given us this precious book of Jonah, in order that we might examine our own lives by it, may He, the merciful God and Saviour of His people, pursue and bring back each one of you that is fleeing from His presence. May He reveal Himself to each one of you who cries to Him from the depth of his sinfulness and misery. May He take you, who are ready to submit yourselves to His word, and enable you to do greater things than you can either think or conceive. And may He correct and teach each erring, murmuring child, as He alone is able, and may He satisfy it with the abundance of His goodness and grace.

He has shrunk from God's command, the sea rages, the deep yawns, hell opens its mouth,—but he goes in the strength of the Almighty. Man does not understand God's way, and wishes to desert his post—but he that is found in Christ Jesus passes safely and blamelessly through it all, and he cannot forget the song of the redeemed: "Thou hast washed us from our sins in Thy blood."

Praise be unto God, the Three-in-One, for His threefold and eternal deliverance of all those who in spite of their folly and perverseness, are yet found in Him, and love the Word that He has given us. Amen.