

HOME PREACHER OR CHURCH IN THE HOUSE.

FORTY-SIXTH WEEK.

MORNING WORSHIP.

O GOD, who in the beginning didst cause the light to shine out of darkness, be pleased at this time to shine in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Let our prayers proceed from hearts purified by Thy Spirit from all hypocrisy and guile, and come up with acceptance before Thee, through the merits of Thy Son. *Amen.*

HYMN, *or Psalm* cxix. 169-175.

O MAY my heart, by grace renew'd
Be my Redeemer's throne!
And be my stubborn will subdued
His government to own!

Let deep repentance, faith, and love,
Be join'd with godly fear;
And all my conversation prove
My heart to be sincere!

Preserve me from the snares of sin
Through my remaining days;
And in me let each virtue shine
To my Redeemer's praise.

Let lively hope my soul inspire;
Let warm affections rise;
And may I wait, with strong desire,
For bliss above the skies!

2 CHRONICLES XXIV. 1-2, 9-22.

JOASH was seven years old when he began to reign; and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem: his mother's name also was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. 2. And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest. 9. And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the Lord the collection that Moses, the servant of God, laid upon Israel in the wilderness. 10. And all the princes, and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end. 11. Now it came to pass, that at what time the chest was brought into the king's office by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, the king's scribe and the high priest's officer came and emptied the

chest, and took it, and carried it to his place again. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance. 12. And the kings and Jehoaida gave it to such as did the work of the service of the house of the Lord, and hired masons and carpenters to repair the house of the Lord, and also such as wrought iron and brass to mend the house of the Lord, &c.

Prayer.

O GOD, in whose hand our breath is, we render thanks unto Thee for life and health and for all the varied blessings which we enjoy. Not a moment passes over our heads in which we are not partakers of Thy goodness; for in Thee we live and move and have our being. With shame and contrition we acknowledge that we have not only failed to requite Thy kindness by yielding a grateful and loving homage unto Thee; but we have forgotten the God who made us, and lightly esteemed the Rock of our salvation. For Thy mercy's sake, O God, hide Thy face from our sins, and give us grace to love Thee more, and to serve Thee better than we have yet done. May the remembrance of our manifold shortcomings in the past, or the numberless sins of

which our own consciences accuse us, of the duties which we have failed to perform, of the opportunities of doing good to ourselves and to others, which we have allowed to slip away unimproved, lead us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and to seek earnestly of Him that grace wherein alone we can stand.

Grant, O gracious Father, that this day we may enter upon a course of new obedience. May the Spirit of Him who is Lord of the sabbath quicken our faith in Thee, and our love to Thee. May He beget and sustain in us the frame and temper of spirit suited to that day which Thou hast specially consecrated to Thy service. May every unholy feeling and principle be repressed in our minds; above every influence which causeth to err may we be raised; may our souls follow hard after Thee, whose right hand upholdeth us; may each one of us, wrestling with Thee in earnest supplication, say with him of old, who as a prince had power with God, and prevailed, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me;" and in the strength of the grace thus imparted may we glorify Thee in our bodies and in our spirits, which are Thine.

Bless the children of God, of every kindred and tongue, who are scattered abroad throughout the earth, and gather them together in one. May Thy servants this day preach the word in simplicity and godly sincerity, and may all who hear it receive it gladly. May the careless and the scorers

be moved by Thy grace to think upon their ways, and to turn their feet unto Thy testimonies. Bless those in the dwellings of Jacob who, through unavoidable causes, are prevented from waiting upon Thee in the gates of Sion; and graciously hear these our prayers for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

THE CHURCH IN THE HOUSE.

O LORD, when the righteous perisheth, and merciful men are taken away, give us wisdom to lay it to heart. While we have them with us, dispose us to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake; and grant that we may neither by word nor by deed weaken their influence or hinder the success of their labours in Thy cause. *Amen.*

HYMN, *or Psalm* lxxiii. 23-26.

JESUS! my redeeming Lord!
In the hour of death be near;
Let thy smile of love afford
Full relief from all my fear.

Firmly trusting in thy blood,
Nothing shall my heart confound;
Safely I shall pass the flood --
Safely reach Immanuel's ground.

When I touch the blessed shore,
Back the closing waves shall roll;
Death's dark stream shall never more
Part from thee my ravish'd soul.

Thus, O thus, an entrance give
To the land of cloudless sky!
Having known it, 'Christ to live,'
Let me know it 'Gain to die.'

MICAH VII. 1-13.

WOE is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer-fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat; my soul desired the first ripe fruit. 2. The good man is perished out of the earth; and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net. 3. That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up. 4. The best of them is as a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge: the day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh; now shall be their perplexity. 5. Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide; keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. 6. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. 7. Therefore I will

look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation:
my God will hear me. 8. Rejoice not against me, O mine
enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the
Lord shall be a light unto me. 9. I will bear the indignation
of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he
plead my cause, and execute judgement for me: he will bring
me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.
10. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame
shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy
God? mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden
down as the mire of the streets, &c.

SERMON XLVI.

“THE RIGHTEOUS PERISHETH, AND NO MAN LAYETH IT TO HEART: AND MERCIFUL MEN ARE TAKEN AWAY, NONE CONSIDERING THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS TAKEN AWAY FROM THE EVIL TO COME.” -- Isa. lvii. 1.

THE connection of this verse with the preceding is striking and significant; for the prophetic division, or section, or song, of which both of them form a part, properly begins at chapter lvi.9; it is manifestly there that the prophet “changes his hand.” He has just closed a bright and joyous strain; full of gracious invitations and glorious prospects. Abruptly, as usual, he “checks his pride.” He opens at once a very different dirge. He speaks of sin and woe. He seems emphatically to intimate, that both the free grace and the full glory he has been celebrating must, as to their complete development and accomplishment, stand over, unfulfilled, until a course of guilt and wrath be run. And as it is the gospel grace and the gospel glory, ushered in by God manifest in the flesh, and completed at the second coming of the Lord, that the Spirit doubtless has in view, in the cheering revelation that is there ended; so it is evidently, in the first instance, that degeneracy of manners, which, after

the restoration from Babylon, went on increasing till the era of the cross and the destruction of Jerusalem, that is graphically and ominously described in the picture which follows. In that picture, the fact recorded in the text stands prominently out. "The righteous perisheth:" "merciful men" (men of kindness or godliness) "are taken away." And this feature, let it be observed, comes in at an early stage of the melancholy decline here traced; and it comes in, moreover, as, at that stage, the almost single and solitary harbinger of evil.

There are but three or four verses of the preceding description, immediately before the text. The low spiritual state of the nation and of the church is touched in a single sentence. The watchmen are blind and ignorant, dumb and loving to sleep, selfish and self-seeking. That of itself is a sore calamity; and it is the cause, as well as the sign, of calamities still sorer. But it is not very palpable and apparent. It is consistent with much comfortable plausibility of profession in the church, and much indifference and secure unconcern in the world. Even the people of God, ready always to hope the best, which usually is alike their duty and their safety -- for, alas! if they ever become desponding! hope against hope -- sanguine, trustful hope -- being under God their strength -- the people of God, generously confident, are, as it would seem, imposed upon. They think they see a great deal of earnestness and energy

in the age, and they look for indefinite progress in the right way. And the world, too, says that all is, or that all soon will be, well. Temporary disasters and drawbacks on the advancing career of prosperity, will soon be over. “Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.”

In the midst of this treacherous calm, so apt to deceive both the church and the world, when all that can be charged against the church is the somewhat relaxed watchfulness of her shepherds -- a collapse probably, or an exhaustion, not unnatural after great excitement -- and when the world sees no serious obstacle in the way of its continued anticipation of prosperity, one only omen stands out, “The righteous perisheth, and merciful men are taken away.”

The fact itself that the “righteous perisheth, and merciful men are taken away,” is awful enough. But the explanation of it is more awful still. Well might the world lay to heart the perishing of the righteous man, if they would only consider that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.”

For the Lord speaks here by the prophet, as he were reduced to straits, and brought to a stand. He does not willingly take the righteous away. There is, if we may dare so to speak, a conflict in the Divine Mind. Evil is coming, irremediable and inevitable evil. For the sake of the

righteous, mingled with the wicked, the Lord would fain avert the evil; that he might avert the evil, he would fain leave the righteous among the wicked. For ten righteous, he would have spared Sodom; and to spare Sodom, he would have left the ten among its inmates. But the limit of forbearance is passed. Eight souls only are found in Sodom to be saved. Evil must come. But before it comes, the righteous must be taken away from it. "Haste thee," says the Lord, with his flaming hand stretched out over Sodom, as he points Lot's way to the little city of refuge, "haste thee, escape thither, for I cannot" -- as if now impatient to have his strange work of judgment over, now that the righteous is taken away from it -- "I cannot do anything till thou be come thither."

I. There is a natural and very discernable connection, in the removal of the righteous and the progress of evil: the two things mutually act and re-act upon one another, and are mutually cause and effect to one another. Thus --

1. The advancing tide of evil tends of itself to sweep the righteous off the stage. An evil generation becomes impatient of what is good and holy; and the good and the holy, becoming weary of contending with a degenerate age, retire from the public view to mourn in private, or broken-hearted, quit the field by death. What examples has the world seen of men's perverse ingratitude and infatuation in their treatment of the excellent of the earth -- the very

salt that preserves the earth for them to tread on and pollute! And they whom men have put away from among them, have been not the sterner and more rigid upholders of righteousness merely, but the meek, the gentle, the amiable, the lovely. “The righteous man perisheth” -- “merciful men are taken away.”

The two qualities that form a perfect man are here associated together; the same two qualities that are distinguished and contrasted in that saying of the apostle, “Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.” For the term “merciful,” or kind, pious, godly, implies generally the possession of that sweet and serene benignity of temper which springs from a heart right first of all with God, and right also with men. It is the superadded grace and beauty of what is “pure, lovely, and of good report,” engrafted on the firmer stem or stock of what is “true, and venerable, and just.” But even the combination, in their highest perfection, of both of these elements of holy virtue, will not always make the righteous and the merciful tolerable to an evil age. Nay, it would almost seem as if, not unfrequently, it was this very feature of mild benignity and kindliness of disposition, that disqualified its possessor for coping with the perverse generation of his fellows.

Hence, perhaps, an illustration may be drawn of the wisdom and goodness of God, in raising up, for critical

times, men not destitute at all of the genial quality, nay possessing it in ample measure -- for none ever did good without it -- but yet distinguished in the eyes of men rather for hardier and more rugged features. It was Luther, and not Melancthon; it was Calvin at Geneva, and Knox among ourselves; and at a later era, it was not Leighton, with all his holy beauty, but such men as Henderson, and Rutherford, and George Gillespie, that the Great Head of the Church raised up and fitted, for doing is hard work, fighting his desperate battle, and maintaining His persecuted cause. True, these worthies were, one and all of them, men of large heart and fine feeling, as well as of indomitable courage and resolution. But in their own times, and to their own contemporaries, in the church as well as in the world, they stood out as sternly righteous rather than merely kind and good -- to be feared, rather than to be loved; and this very impression contributed to their success: they persevered when souls less resolute would have given in; they commanded awe, where others might have been contemned.

And yet, is not this very thing a proof of the evil of the age that has them -- that no soft voice will win its ear, that sons of thunder must be sent to shake it, that if God has any good work to do in it, it must be by men with nerve enough to make all softer sentiments give place to the stern defiance of the patriot, the confessor's bold front, and the martyr's

tearless eye? Ah! they are indeed the meek and the merciful of the earth -- they whom an evil age will not tolerate, and on whom, as it hastens to get rid of them, it would fain try, for its own apology or defence, to fasten the imputation of violence and severity. It was when Stephen was in the very act of crying, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," that, buried beneath the shower of stones, he fell asleep. And in the case of a greater than Stephen, even of Him who alone is, by way of eminence, the Righteous Man -- when He perished, it was with the accents lingering on his lips, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do."

It was thus, with their own hands, that the Jews weeded out from among them the righteous and the merciful. Beginning with the Lord of glory himself, who "came unto his own, and his own received him not," they "denied the holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be given to them." Thereafter "the blood of his martyr Stephen was shed;" and at that time "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem, and the disciples were all scattered abroad."

O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee! Couldst thou not suffer that wholesome leaven of the infant church but a little while within thy bosom? And even of the apostles remaining behind, must James be slain with the sword to please thee, and Peter be cast into prison? Alas! alas! It is to

be thy policy to the end. The righteous pass from within thee -- merciful men are taken away -- and so far thou gainest thy desire. But evil comes more and more. Crimes, disorders, and dissensions increase. Yes! and soon the Roman armies are round about thee: the roman eagle is in the holy place. But of the righteous, of the merciful, there are some that are still with thee; even yet thou hast believers in Jesus in the midst of thee. But all in vain. Still the evil comes more and more; every man's hand is against his brother; lawless lust reigns; blood is spilt like water; there is great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world till this time, no, nor ever shall be: when, lo! As at a signal from above, warned by their Master's prophecies, the last remnant of the Christians pass out and pass away. And as they enter their city of refuge, on a hill apart -- suddenly, in a moment, the final ruin descends; Jerusalem is a desolation, and "the righteous have been taken from the evil to come."

Surely these things are written for our learning. It may not be by violence that the age now seeks to get rid of the righteous and the godly. Ay, but there are other ways of thrusting them aside; yes! and of so crushing their spirits that they feel as if they had nothing for it but to sigh and cry in secret, or to droop and pine away and die. Examples may be found in abundance in society, both in private and in public life, to illustrate this natural law, so to speak, of

action and re-action between the removal of the righteous and the advance of evil.

We might illustrate the principle as applicable to the family, to the social circle, to the church in its several branches and congregations, to the state, the senate, the cabinet, the council-board and election-room, everywhere throughout the kingdom. Thus Isaiah denounces “the rebellious people which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things; speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits.” Jeremiah also exclaims: “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?” And Paul predicts concerning hearers of the gospel, that “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” Thus, also, Ahab sent Micaiah to the prison, and Zedekiah consigned Jeremiah to the pit. It is a common expedient of all bodies of men, to put away, whether by fair means or by foul, what disturbs and reproves their doings. Thus under various pretences and by various contrivances, society contrives to exclude from its entertainments and its ordinary transactions of business, the name and the spirit of Christ. Thus a church contrives to rid herself of the presence of the best and holiest of her ministers and people, because the standard set up by them is too high, and their

attachment to their only Head and King is too uncompromising. In all such instances, the parties taking this course may gain their end; they may have their reward. The more sensitive and timid may shrink from the rude strife, and even the boldest may seem to stagger. And when the day is won, when the righteous and the godly are silenced and removed, evil may come as it pleases -- iniquity may rush in as a flood. The only tolerated watchmen will be "the blind, the dumb, the sleepers who lie down longing to slumber, the greedy who can never have enough;" and men at last rejoicing in having the field all to themselves, exulting in their unbroken and undisturbed impunity, may cry to one another, "Come ye, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."

Before leaving this view of the subject suggested by the text, two practical remarks may be made: --

1. The righteous and the merciful or meek themselves should be aware of accepting too soon or too easily their dismissal from the arena -- their discharge from the stern strife of principle and duty. The righteous perisheth at his post -- he does not quit it: merciful men are taken away -- they go not willingly, at their own discretion or by their own choice. It may be a weary and irksome task, to persevere in forcing our intimacy on a reluctant friend, or our warning on undutiful children, or domestics, or

neighbours, or our testimony on a declining church, or our remonstrance on societies that treat us and it alike with contumely and scorn. It is a thankless toil, to continue plying with holy means and influences an age and generation that will neither appreciate our endeavours, nor repay them; and often, very often, may the man of spiritual taste and refinement long to shrink into himself, and bury in the calm repose of a meditative or domestic quietude the vexations and disappointments of his active struggle with the world's sin and woe. "Oh! that I had wings like a dove, that I might flee away, and be at rest." But if we consider that our retirement will be just the signal for evil coming -- that our retreat will only precipitate the impending ruin -- we will not, we cannot, turn and flee. And let us not say that our presence can do but little, that our co-operation is a small matter, that we, from our insignificance, will scarcely be missed at all. That is not the question. The righteous, however weak, stands till he perisheth. Merciful men, however little they can do, wait upon the doing of it till they are taken away. Would we have the coming of evil hastened? Is the chariot of sin moving too slowly? If not, then be up and doing: whatever our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might: and let no provocation, however irritating; no resistance, however obstinate; no ill-success, however protracted; no disappointments, no reproaches, no coldness of friends, or violence of foes, ever tempt us to the

sin of spiritual suicide or self-murder, by making us weary of well-doing, or preventing us from continuing “stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

2. To those who may be putting away from themselves, or contributing to put away from society, and from the influence they ought to have in society, the righteous and the merciful, a single word of expostulation may be addressed. It is surely a serious matter to trifle with one of God’s best gifts to an evil world. Others we have always with us -- of the profane and the ungodly there will always be enough in the world -- but these we have not always. Oh! remember, how precious on this earth is the influence of a righteous man; and how precarious! A single whisper of calumny, a breath of suspicion, may cause it to perish for ever; a hasty word of passion, a careless smile of ridicule, a jest, an idle story, may take from the character, the example, the testimony of a man of God, all their power to move or to melt the hearts of his fellow-men. Ah! do Christians never thus destroy or mar one another’s means of doing good? Alas! are good men so plentiful in the world that the cause can afford to sacrifice the reputation of any one of them? The righteous will perish soon enough without our casting a stone at him. Merciful men will not tarry too long for our good or the world’s. There are men

enough to kill the prophets, though we hold our hand -- to kill their characters, though we hold our peace.

II. But there is more in the text than an ordinary rule, or law, or principle of human affairs: there is in it a very special providence of God; and it is that providence that the Spirit would have us to lay to heart; it is the reasons of that providence that he would have us to consider when he speaks of the righteous perishing and merciful men being taken away.

In the first place, this perishing of the righteous, and taking away of the godly, is evidently a dispensation of mercy to themselves: they are taken from the evil; they rest from their labours; they fall asleep in Jesus; they depart to be with Christ; they go to be where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. It is true they are taken from the good, as well as from the evil to come: and hence they may often be in a strait betwixt the two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, while, nevertheless, to abide still in the flesh may, for some good end, be needful. Nay, in ordinary circumstances, the people of God are represented in scripture as loving many days, and desiring life, that they may see good. "Truly, the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days. O spare me, that I may recover strength before I go hence and be no more." This is almost the invariable

language of the saints in scripture. Early death is deprecated as a calamity; prolonged life is anxiously, importunately, and well-nigh impatiently, solicited as a boon (Isa. xxxviii.) Nor is this strain of thought peculiar to the Old Testament; there are traces of it also in the New. Aged Simeon, indeed, gladly sings, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." But, at all events, he had already seen a good old age; and it is simple acquiescence and contentment, not by any means vehement desire, that his hymn expresses. Paul, again, speaks of its being "far better" -- and of his "desire -- to depart and to be with Christ;" but not to speak of his entire willingness to remain, even in suffering and bonds, and of the state of absolute indifferency to which he ultimately brings his mind -- "To me to live is Christ, and to die gain" -- we must remember the trying circumstances of the church and of the times, which might well recall to Paul's mind the very privilege of our text, and make him wish to be taken from the evil to come. On the other hand, John, narrating the Lord's saying to Peter concerning him, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me;" and the impression which, in consequence, went abroad that he was not to die, seems to represent such a destiny as an object of envy; and

Paul himself tacitly recognizes a certain advantage in being alive and remaining unto the coming of the Lord, when he thinks it necessary, as it were, to counterbalance that advantage by the assurance that such as enjoy it shall not prevent, or have the start of, the buried saints, for “the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

But, however this may be, and however even believers may naturally and lawfully desire length of days, their removal at any stage of their pilgrimage can never be untimely. They perish; their mortal bodies rest in the gloomy grave, they go the way of all flesh; we have taken our last look at the beloved face, we have heard the last accents of the familiar voice, we have received the latest sigh of the departing spirit, he whom we loved sleepeth -- Lazarus is dead. But the dust in the tomb is still united to Christ; and the free soul has gone to the Saviour's bosom. Would we bring back the lost one to this weary world? Has he entered into rest too soon? Too soon, alas! for us; but surely not too soon for himself! Could we have the heart to wish him here again? Good he might have seen -- good he might have done -- in the land of the living. But the evil -- oh! the evil he might have had to witness and endure, especially in these ominous times on which we have fallen! Yea, Lord, thou doest well to take away the righteous from

the evil to come. He had his own share of the evil that has come already: he had his own share of the common sin and sorrow, and his own share also of his Master's cross. It was time for him to depart; he was ripe for rest and glory. Yes! Our sorrow is neither joyless nor hopeless when it is the righteous that perisheth, and the merciful men that are taken away. In their case, there is an ample compensation and equivalence for what we lose in what they gain. Even as to the work and service for which we might most have wished them to be spared, they may really be taken from the evil to come. They might have lived to see their fondest hopes of usefulness blighted, and their best and fairest plans disconcerted. They might have lived to endure the contradiction of sinners against themselves, to be vexed and wounded by the inconsistent profession and unsteadfast walk of the people whom they sought to guide in the right way. They might have lived to go on sowing in tears, without ever sensibly reaping in joy. They might have lived, still all day long to stretch forth their hands to a gainsaying and perverse generation.

For such to be taken away is a blessing indeed. The righteous, the merciful, are ready to go. But what shall we say of the ungodly and sinners? where shall they appear? They, too, are taken away prematurely, and, in a sense, they are taken from the evil to come: from seeing many of the fruits and consequences of their sin, from many a broken

heart and many a ruined soul, from degradation, disease, and slow decay, inevitable had they been spared -- they are suddenly and abruptly taken away. But, alas! from all good also they are taken away for ever -- from their corn and wine and oil; from a preached Christ, a striving Spirit, a waiting God, from all means of grace and hope of glory, they are taken away for ever. Oh! that they were wise, that they would consider this, that they would remember their latter end! Blessed are they who are taken *only* from the evil to come.

But, secondly, the pith and substance of the lesson in the text is the solemn and mysterious announcement implied in it, that evil is to be expected when the righteous is taken away. And when at any time, and in any circumstances, the removal of the righteous becomes more than ordinarily frequent, the coming evil may be apprehended as likely to be all the greater. It may be evil of a temporal kind -- such as visitations of disease and famine as God has sometimes suspended over us, in these lands, for anxious months or years; or it may be spiritual evil -- such as the evil of faithless watchmen, and a secure and carnal and contented people. We profess not to prophesy, we presume not to guess; we merely note the fact of the righteous perishing, and merciful men being taken away. And, in conclusion, if these things be signs of coming evil; if the falling of our standard-bearers is, indeed, judicial and ominous; if darker

trials and harder struggles are before us; or if spiritual deadness threatens us: is this a time for lethargy or supineness? Are we to fold our hands in helpless and desponding inactivity? Nay, rather to your tents, O Israel. Let us ply the throne of grace; let us ply the hearts of men. If the fall of our champions and captains is to be the signal for a fiercer onset of the foe -- if the taking away of the righteous is the presage of coming evil -- then let us, as the forlorn hope, if need be, cast ourselves into the breach; and if we perish, we perish taken ourselves from the evil; while if we altogether hold our peace, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise from another place, but we shall be destroyed. -- R. S. CANDLISH, D. D.

THE CHILDREN'S SERVICE.

HOW PAUL CAME TO BE SENT TO ROME.

SOME five days after Paul had been brought to Caesarea, his enemies followed him for the purpose of accusing him before Felix the governor. They brought an orator down with them, and he made a swelling speech full of big words, and charged Paul with being a very bad man indeed. But the apostle told Felix the truth so calmly and clearly, that the governor would not condemn him, but put the case off till Lysias should be able to come down to Caesarea. So he gave Paul in charge to a centurion, but said he was to have every freedom that could be given him, so that he was kept safely. All his friends that pleased were to be allowed to see him, and do him any kindness they had in their power. The governor even sent for him often, and talked with him. One day especially, his wife, who was a Jewess, was with him, when Felix asked Paul to tell him about the faith in Christ. And when Paul was speaking, and setting before his two hearers the great truths and duties of Christianity, particularly when he talked solemnly about being just and temperate, and about the future judgment, the governor began to tremble, and said, For this time, Paul, leave me; when I have leisure I will send for you again. He did call him often, but I do not think that he ever found the hour

convenient for hearing Paul on the same subject. He rather had a thought that perhaps the apostle would offer him money, to bribe him to let him go free, and so liked frequently to see him. Two years passed in this way, and then one Festus came into the room of Felix; and Felix, wishing to please the Jews when leaving his place, left Paul a prisoner.

The new governor having gone to visit Jerusalem, the high priest and chief Jews went to him, and told him about Paul, and asked him to bring him up to Jerusalem to be judged. They intended to kill him by the way. The governor, however, said No: he would keep him still at Caesarea; he would himself very soon be returning to that town, and he would lose no time in hearing the case. He bade them therefore go down as many of them as could, and say there what they had against him. Festus returned to Caesarea in about ten days, and number of the Jews also went down. The very next day, Paul was brought to trial. A great many complaints were brought against him; but he answered clearly, and showed that he had done his enemies no wrong, neither had he committed any offence against the Roman power. After a time, Festus asked him if he would go up to Jerusalem, and be judged there. Paul said at once he would not go. He said he had done no hurt to the Jews, and that Festus must know that quite well. He was quite ready to be tried if he had been guilty of any crime, but,

being innocent, he would not agree to be given up to his foes. He said he was at Caesar's judgment-seat, and he would not go to any other tribunal. Then knowing that if he appealed to the emperor himself the governor durst not lawfully send him to any other place than Rome, he said, I appeal unto Caesar. Festus talked with his counsel for a little, and then answered, You shall go to Caesar; I will make preparations to send you. But before an opportunity came, an interesting thing happened.

There was a Jewish ruler, called Agrippa, who had succeeded his father as king, not over all his dominions, but a part of them, and had been acknowledged by the Roman emperor, and had also been appointed to look after the temple in Jerusalem, with the right of naming the high priest. He knew very well about the laws and customs of the Jews. He was one of the family of the Herods. One day, not long after Paul had appealed to Caesar this King Agrippa, with his wife, came to pay Festus a visit. They stayed with him a long time, and no doubt there was a great deal of feasting and pomp. At last Festus thought he would speak to Agrippa about Paul. So he told the story, and Agrippa was so much interested that he said he would like himself to hear a man like that. You shall hear him to-morrow, said Festus. Next day, accordingly, there was a gathering of the chief men of the place, and Roman officers, in a great hall; and King Agrippa and his queen came in

great state, and Paul was brought out and set before them. Festus made a little speech to Agrippa and all around, saying that, not knowing very well what to write to his master the emperor about this prisoner, he had brought him here to-day, that he might be fully examined before them all, especially the king, in order by their help to find out what should be said to Caesar. King Agrippa, on hearing that, said to Paul, You are allowed to speak and tell us all about yourself.

The good and brave apostle held out his hand -- while a chain hung from his arm, by which he was fastened to a soldier standing by -- and began his speech. He said he was happy to answer for himself before the king, because he knew him to be well acquainted with what the Jews believed and practised. He went on to say, that he was now found fault with on account of his believing in what all their fathers hoped for. He asked, looking at all around, Why should you think that God is not able to raise the dead? And then he went on to tell the story of his own conversion. He told it so clearly, so earnestly, so powerfully, that every one hearing him was struck. Festus could not understand his story, or his zeal in telling it. He called out at the end, You are beside yourself, Paul; your great learning has made you mad. No, no, said Paul, I am not mad, most noble Festus; every word I speak is the simple, sober truth. The king knows about these things; for they were not done in a

corner, and I speak, therefore, boldly before him. He then looked straight to the king, and said right out, King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do. Agrippa was much moved, and said, Paul, in a little you would persuade me to be a Christian. Some people think he said this with a sneer; some think he was quite in earnest. Paul answered as if he took his words to be in earnest. He said, I would to God, that not only you, O king, but all that are here to-day and have heard me speak, were in a little or a longer time just what I myself am, except for these bonds. With that he showed again his chained arm. As he did this, speaking so fervently, the king rose up, and the governor and all the rest followed his example. We do not know whether any of them did become Christians, but we may hope that Paul the prisoner did not preach in vain that day. At all events he produced an impression on mens' minds, that he was no criminal deserving of punishment. For when those who had heard him had gone aside to talk among themselves, the common opinion was that he had done nothing deserving death or imprisonment. Agrippa said to Festus, You might have set him at liberty without the least hesitation, if it had not been that he has appealed to the emperor. So it turned out that Paul's own words came to settle the matter of his going to Rome. The providence of God was bringing it it about; for there was work waiting for

the apostle in the great city, and after that, rest from his work by martyrdom.

A short time after these things, it was resolved to send Paul off to Italy, and a centurion with a company of soldiers took him in charge, and embarked aboard a ship that was going to set sail. But there were changes and dangers to be gone through before he should reach the Roman capital. The next story will be about storm and shipwreck.

QUESTIONS FROM THE BIBLE STORY.

1. What was the name of the orator that was taken by the Jews to Caesarea, for the purpose of making a speech against Paul?
2. Where in the Gospels, do we meet with the story of a pious centurion, whom Jesus commended greatly?
3. Where do we read about a pious centurion that lived in Caesarea, and was much favoured by God?
4. Who was it that often heard a preacher and prisoner gladly, and did much that he bade him, but ended by putting him to death in his prison?
5. Can you tell how many rulers of the family of Herod are mentioned in the new Testament?
6. What was the name of Agrippa's queen?

7. Where do we read of the preaching of the Saviour producing astonishment among his hearers, for the power it possessed?

8. Where do we read of the preaching of an apostle piercing a great many hearts?

9. What two persons appeared before kings to explain things that had perplexed them, and were rewarded with chains of gold?

10. When were two good men set at liberty when they were prisoners, by the magistrates coming and entreating them to go free, and leave the place?

11. When, and by whom, was Christ supposed to have gone out of his mind?

12. By what little word are we enabled to know that Paul had some companion when he sailed away from Caesarea to Italy?

13. Where does Paul himself refer to his coming martyrdom?

14. What other apostle refers beforehand to his approaching death?

15. When did Jesus foretel the manner of that other apostle's death?

ANSWERS to these questions will be found in the following chapters. -- Acts xxiv.; Matt. viii.; Acts x.; Mark vi.; Matt. ii., Luke iii., Acts xii. and xxvi.; Acts xxv.; Matt. vii.; Acts ii.; Gen xli. and Dan. v.; Acts xvi.; Mark iii.; Acts xxvii.; 2 Tim. iv.; 2 Pet. i.; John xxi.

Prayer.

O GOD, who hast said that it is pleasing to Thee that Thy people should pray for all men, for king and all in authority, hear us when we ask Thee to bless our beloved Queen, and all the members of her royal family. Bless also, we pray Thee, all judges and magistrates in our land, all governors of our colonies, and all that in any way are called to be rulers over our fellow-subjects. Bless all rulers on the earth, emperors, kings, presidents, and make them just and good. Bless all that may be prisoners for conscience' sake. If Thine eye sees them in prison, or brought before the judgment-seat of men, because they love that which is right, help Thou them to be faithful and true, and deliver them from their foes. Pity those who are in prison for their crimes. Lead them to think upon their sins, and to repent. Bring them to Him who saved the thief dying on the cross beside Him. Lord, we thank Thee for the protection of laws in our own and other countries. May the laws of men be more and more made to be just and right, like thine. We thank Thee that if Thy children suffer for good deeds, Thy judgment will put all to rights. Lord, help us to bear in mind that we must all stand at the judgment-seat of Christ.

In view of this may we always be found on the watch, since we know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of man cometh. May we earnestly strive to do the work which God requires of us, that we may hear our great Saviour and Lord at last say to us, Well done, good servants, enter into the joy of your Lord. All we ask is for His sake. *Amen.*

THE EVENING SERVICE.

ALMIGHTY and gracious Father, Thou art rich in mercy, and infinitely more wise in giving than we are in asking. Grant us now the Spirit of wisdom to guide us, that so we may not fail of receiving because of our asking amiss. Thou knowest what is truly good for us, and that we humbly beseech Thee to bestow, for Jesus' sake. *Amen.*

HYMN, *or Psalm* xxiii.

DREAD Sov'reign, let my evening song
Like holy incense rise;
Assist the offerings of my tongue
To reach the lofty skies.

Through all the dangers of the day
Thy hand was still my guard;
And still to drive my wants away
Thy mercy stood prepared.

Perpetual blessings from above
Encompass me around;
But O how few returns of love
Hath my Creator found!

Sprinkled afresh with pard'ning blood,
I lay me down to rest,
As in the everlasting arms
Or on my Saviour's breast.

LUKE XXIII. 8-46.

AND when Herod saw Jesus he was exceedingly glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. 9. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. 10. And the chief priests and scribes stood, and vehemently accused him. 11. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. 12. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves. 13. And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, and the rulers, and the people, 14. Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people; and behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him; 15. No, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. 16. I will therefore chastise him, and release him. 17. (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) 18. And they cried out all at once saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: 19. (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) 20. Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. 21. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. 22. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and

let him go. 23. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified, and the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. 24. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. 25. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will. 26. And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus. 27. And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. 28. But Jesus, turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. 30. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. 31. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry? 32. And there were also two others, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. 33. And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors; one on the right hand, and the other on the left, &c .

Prayer.

O GOD, we thank Thee that unto us hath come this great mercy once again, to hear the blessed invitations of Thy gospel: at the table of our Father's bounty we have received the children's bread. For the cold hearts with which we have heard of Thy mercy, and the hardened pride with which we have hearkened to Thy faithful warnings; for the wandering thought and the rebellious desire that filled our souls when our lips were opened in praise and prayer -- we entreat Thy pardon, O God of all compassion. Thou willest not the death of the sinner; Thou hast no profit in them that go down into the pit; and we now therefore beseech Thee, O God of our salvation, to deliver us and purge away our sins for Thy name's sake.

We render Thee thanks for all the proofs of Thy tender mercy that Thou hast given us. Thou compassest our path and our lying down. By Thy unceasingly fatherly care we have been preserved in peace and in safety through this day. Let us not be forgetful of Thee who hast guided us, and guarded us, and fed us, but help us to look up unto Thee in every hour of every day for present blessings, and for their everlasting fruit in the good of our souls. Help us day by day to cherish gratitude for Thy mercies, that have been bestowed on us the unthankful and the evil; which have

come to us when we looked not for them yea, although our hearts were regardless of Thy love, and our minds were estranged from Thy truth, and our strength was given to the cares and vanities of the present world.

Above all, make us deeply thankful for the gift of Thy Son, through whom thou art reconciling the world unto Thyself, not imputing unto men their trespasses. We are persuaded that God, who spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, will with Him also freely give us all things. O that we could realize Him as Thy best gift unto the children of men, and thank Thee with all our hearts, that the things which even the prophets and wise men of old desired to see and have not seen, and to hear but have not heard them, our eyes have seen and our ears have heard. We know that in Christ Jesus all fulness dwells; and we beseech Thee to put it into our hearts to draw largely on those supplies of grace He is ever ready to impart, so that we may grow up unto Him in all things.

Grant, O Lord, that those who have heard Thy word this day may be doers of it, and may show their faith by their works. Make our native land a habitation of mercy, showing unto the darkened nations of the earth how blessed are the people whose God is the Lord. Prepare for their departure those who are drawing near to death. Have mercy on the fatherless and the widow; preserve all lawful travellers by land and sea; and every where make the

dealings of Thy providence speedily to compass the great ends of Thy grace, in the coming of Thy kingdom of righteousness and peace. To these our prayers send a gracious answer for Jesus' sake. *Amen.*

MORNING AND EVENING MEDITATIONS.

MONDAY.

Morning.

For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.

And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name.

Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.

Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.

Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken.

Isa lxii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 12.

Evening.

For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land; a land of brooks of water, of fountains, and depths that spring out of valleys and hills.

When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint;

Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not; that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end.

Deut. viii. 7, 10, 15, 16.

TUESDAY.

Morning.

Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more:

That which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.

For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.

Look upon mine affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins.

Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore.

For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever; but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.

Job xxxiv. 31, 32. Ps. xxv. 11, 18. Ps. xxxvii. 27, 28.

Evening.

Thou God seest me.

There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.

For he will not lay upon man more than right, that he should enter into judgment with God.

He shall break in pieces mighty men without number, and set others in their stead.

When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only.

Gen. xvi. 13. Job. xxxiv. 21, 22, 23, 24, 29.

WEDNESDAY.

Morning.

He stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.

Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which he hath made crooked?

In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes; but the Lord pondereth the hearts.

Isa. xxvii. 8. Eccles. vii. 13, 14. Prov. xxi. 1, 2.

Evening.

Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not any thing neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

Prov. xxvii. 1. Eccles. ix. 5, 6. Num. xxiii. 10. Ps. cxvi. 15.

THURSDAY.

Morning.

Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!

For these things I weep: mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed.

Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her.

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, he shall testify of me.

Jer. ix. 1. Lam. i. 16, 17. John xv. 26.

Evening.

Arise, cry out in the night; in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him.

For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

Lam. ii. 19. Ps. xxx. 5. Jer. xxxi. 16. Ps. cxxvi. 5.

FRIDAY.

Morning.

Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.

Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself, and discover not a secret to another.

Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city.

For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee:

For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

Prov. xxv. 8, 9. Eccles. vii. 19, 20, 21, 22.

Evening.

I said I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.

He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.

The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

Lie not to one another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.

Ps. xxxix. 1. Prov. xiv. 29. Prov. xv. 3, 4. Col. iii. 8, 9.

SATURDAY.

Morning.

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

Whoso keepeth the commandments shall feel no evil thing; and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand:
repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Eph. v. 15, 16, 17. Eccles. viii. 5. Hos. x. 12. Mark i. 15.

Evening.

**These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should
not be offended.**

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea the time
cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth
God service.

And these things will they do unto you, because they
have not known the Father, nor me.

But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow
hath filled your heart.

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you
that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not
come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

John xvi. 1, 2, 3, 6, 7.