

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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“MAKE THIS VALLEY FULL OF DITCHES.”

## A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 28TH, 1867, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

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“And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.”—2 Kings iii. 16—18.

MANY useful lessons might be gathered from this narrative if we had but time. Upon the very surface we are led to observe the weakness of man when at his utmost strength. Three kings, with three armies well-skilled in war, were gathered to subdue Moab, and lo, the whole of the leaguered hosts were brought to a dead-lock and a standstill by the simple circumstance that there was a want of water. How easily can God nonplus and checkmate all the wisdom and the strength of mankind! In circumstances of need how utterly without strength men become! A sere leaf in the hurricane is not more helpless than an army when it finds itself in a wilderness and there are no springs of water. Now they may call their soothsayers, but these cannot deliver them. The allied sovereigns may sit in solemn conclave, but they cannot command the clouds. In vain your shields, O ye mighty! In vain your banners, ye valiant hosts! The armies must perish, perish painfully, perish without exception, and all for want of so simple but so necessary a thing as water. Man would fain play the god, and yet a little water will lay him low.

We may also learn here how easily men in times of difficulty which they have brought upon themselves, will lay their distress upon providence rather than honestly see it to be the result of their own foolish actions. Hear the king of Israel cast the blame upon Jehovah: “For the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.” Providence is a most convenient horse to bear the saddles of our folly. As I said in the reading, if we prosper and succeed, we proudly sacrifice to our own wisdom; but if shame and loss follow our folly, then we complain of an unpropitious providence. Alas! for man, that he will even rail against his God, rather than acknowledge himself to be in error. Yet we see, on the other hand, that the truly spiritual are by their misfortunes and their necessities

No. 747.

driven nearer to God. I do not find Jehoshaphat himself enquiring for a prophet of God until there was no water, and then he said, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him?" When tribulation drives us to the Lord, it is an unspeakable blessing, and makes affliction prove to us one of our greatest mercies. It is a good wave that washes the mariner on to the rock: it is a blessed trouble which wafts the Christian nearer to his God. If thou art led to set loose by the world through thy losses and thy crosses, be thankful for them; for, if thou hast lost silver, thou hast gained that which is better than gold. If, like the dove to the cleft of the rock, thy soul flies to God, driven homeward by stress of weather, then be thankful for tempest, for it is safer and better for thee than the calm. But we have no time to dwell on these topics. I rather call your attention to the three kings standing at the door of Elisha's tent. They had paid him no deference before; he had not been made chaplain to the forces, but he had followed the camp as a volunteer, and lived in obscurity. The poor wise man is precious in the hour of peril. God knows how to bring his servants to honour; and he who poured water on the hands of the Lord's servant, Elijah, has three kings waiting at his door. Observe that he addressed the king of Israel very sharply indeed, for sinners can claim but little respect from the servants of God, any more than rebels can expect to be treated with profound courtesy by loyal soldiers. The prophet evidently was much disturbed in his mind by the sight of the son of Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah never spoke better than when his fiery soul was thoroughly excited; but Elisha was a man of a milder mood and a gentler spirit, and therefore feeling that his blood was hot and his soul stirred, he did not venture to prophesy. He felt within himself, "I am not in the right mood. If I were to speak, I might utter my own words rather than the words of my Master. I feel so angry at the very sight of that wicked Jehoram, that I might perhaps say what I should be sorry for in after days." Therefore Elisha makes a pause. "Bring me a minstrel," saith he; and there was doubtless in the camp some holy songster, some Asaph, some Heman, some sweet psalmist of Israel; and when he laid his fingers among the harp-strings, and began to sing one of David's wondrous strains, the prophet grew more calm and composed. "Sing us one of the songs of Zion," was doubtless his request to the minstrel; and, when the soft sweet strain had soothed the tumult of his storm-tossed passions, the prophet rose to declare the will of Jehovah. His words were short, but full of force: "Make this valley full of ditches, for thus saith the Lord, that valley shall be filled with water." He would not speak until he felt the divine flame: in the same spirit as those disciples who tarried at Jerusalem until they had received power from on high, he waited until his mind was in a fit state to receive the Holy Spirit, and be the vehicle of the divine mind to those who were round about him. It is well for us, if we have to preach or pray, always to ask the Spirit to help our infirmity, and tune our hearts to the right key, for though our God can use us in any frame of mind, yet we must all be aware that there are certain states in which we become more adapted to be the vehicle of blessing to our fellow men.

The whole of this story may be made useful to ourselves, and therefore we shall notice, first, *our position as set forth by the condition of these kings*; secondly, *our duty as told to us by the prophet*; thirdly, *the Lord's modes of operation as here described*; and then, fourthly, *our further desire for something yet greater than the supply of our merely pressing necessities*.

I. First, then, let us review OUR PRESENT POSITION.

The armies of these kings were in a position of abject dependence: they were dying of thirst; they could not supply their need; they must have from God the help required, or they must perish. My brethren, this is just the position of every Christian church. Every truly Christian church not only is dependent upon God, but feels it, and there is a grave difference between the two; for some churches whose creed is orthodox upon this point, nevertheless act as if they could do as well without the Holy Spirit as with him. I trust we may never be brought into such a condition. Remember, my brethren, unless our religion be altogether hypocrisy and a lie, we have the Holy Spirit. It is not we *may* have him and be thankful, but we *must* have the Holy Spirit's power and presence, and the assistance of the Most High, otherwise our religion will become a mockery before God, and a misery to ourselves. We *must* have the aid of the Holy Spirit, for ours is not a mechanical religion. If our worship consisted in the reading of forms "appointed by authority," we could do exceedingly well without the assistance of the Spirit of God. If we believed in the manipulations of priestcraft, and thought that after certain words, and genuflections, and ceremonials, all was done, it would matter little to us whether we had the conscious presence of God or no. If we could regenerate by water, applied by hands saturated with the oil of apostolical succession, we should have no particular need to pray for the benediction of the Holy Ghost; and if the utterance of certain words, it may be by profane lips, could turn bread and wine—oh, horrible dogma!—into the flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, we could wondrously well afford to dispense with the Spirit of God. But *we* cannot thus deceive ourselves. Ours is not a religion of mechanics and hydrostatics: it is spiritual, and must be sustained by spiritual means. If our religion were, on the other hand, one of mere intellectualism, we should only need a well-trained minister, who had passed through all the grades of human learning, who had stored himself with the best biblical criticism, and was able to instruct and illuminate our understandings, and we, if we be men of judgment ourselves, could profit exceedingly well. Our faith standing in the wisdom of man, the wisdom of man could easily be found, and our faith could be confirmed. But if, my brethren, our faith standeth not in the wisdom of man nor in the eloquence of human lips, but in the power of God, then in vain do we make a profession, unless the Holy Ghost dwelleth in our inner man.

So dependent is the Christian church upon the Holy Ghost, that there never was an acceptable sigh heaved by a penitent apart from him; never did holy song mount to heaven except he gave it wings; never was there true prayer or faithful ministry except through the power and might of the Holy Ghost. Sinners are never saved apart from the Spirit of God. No moral suasion, no force of example, no potence

of logic, no might of rhetoric, ever changed the heart. The living Spirit alone can put life into dead souls. And when those souls are quickened, we are still as dependent as ever upon the Spirit of God. To educate a soul for heaven is as much a divine task as to emancipate a soul from sin. To comfort a desponding Christian, to strengthen his weak hands and confirm his feeble knees, to brighten the eyes of his hope and to give him nerve to hold the shield of his faith—all these are the work of the Spirit of the living God. O Christian, with all the power thou hast received, thou hast not strength enough to live for another second, except as the Spirit of God quicken thee. All thy past experience, all that thou hast learned and acquired, must go for nothing, except, daily and perpetually, moment by moment, the Spirit of God shall dwell in thee, and work in thee mightily, to keep thee still a pilgrim to the gate of heaven. Thus, as each individual is dependent, the whole church is dependent in a ten-thousandfold measure. Without the Spirit of God, we are like to a ship stranded on the beach; when the tide has receded, there is no moving her until the flood shall once again lift her from the sands. We are like that frozen ship, of which we read the other day, frostbound in the far-off Arctic Sea: until the Spirit of God shall thaw the chilly coldness of our natural estate, and bid the lifefloods of our heart flow forth, there we must lie, cold, cheerless, lifeless, powerless. The Christian, like the mariner, depends upon the breath of heaven, or his barque is without motion. We are like the plants of the field, and this genial season suggests the metaphor: all the winter through vegetation sleeps wrapped up in her frost garments, but when the mysterious influence of spring is felt, she unbinds her cloak to put on her vest of many colours, while every bud begins to swell and each flower to open. And so a church lies asleep in a long and dreary winter until God the Holy Ghost looseth the bands of lethargy, and hearts bud and blossom, and the time of the singing of birds is come. This doctrine has been preached hundreds of times, and we all know it, but for all that, we all forget it; and especially when we are in earnest about our work, and perceive our personal responsibility, there is no truth that needs to be insisted upon more thoroughly than this, "Without me, ye can do nothing." Until we are utterly empty of self, we are not ready to be filled by God; until we are conscious of our own weakness, we are not fit platforms for the display of the divine omnipotence. Until the arm of flesh is paralysed, and death is written upon the whole natural man, we are not ready to be endowed with the divine life and energy.

II. We now proceed to note OUR DUTY as the prophet tells it to us.

The prophet did not tell the kings that they were to procure the water—that, as we have already said, was out of their power—but he did say, "Make this valley full of ditches," that when the water came there might be reservoirs to contain it. They that pass "through the valley of Baca make it a well"—that is their business; "the rain also filleth the pools"—that is God's business. If we expect to obtain the Holy Spirit's blessing, we must *prepare for his reception*. "Make this valley full of trenches" is an order which is given me this morning for the members of this church; make ready for the Holy Ghost's power; be prepared to receive that which he is about to

give; each man in his place and each woman in her sphere, make the whole of this church full of trenches for the reception of the divine waterfloods. Before the Nile begins to rise, you see the Egyptians on either side of the banks making ready first the deep channel, and then the large reservoir, and afterwards the small canals, and then the minor pools, for unless these are ready the rising of the Nile will be of little value for the irrigation of the crops in future months; but when the Nile rises, then the water is received and made use of to fertilise the fields; and so, when the treasury of the Spirit is open by his powerful operations, each one of us should have his trench ready to receive the blessed flood which is not always at its height. Have you never noticed the traders by the river's side? If they expect a barge of coals, or a vessel laden with other freight, the wharf is cleared to receive it. Have you not noticed the farmer just before the harvest-time—how the barn is emptied, or the rick yard is made ready for the stacks? Men will, when they expect a thing, prepare for the reception of it; and, if they expect more than usual, they say, "I will pull down my barns and build greater, that I may have where to bestow my goods." The text says to us, "*Prepare for the Spirit of God.*" Do not pray for it, and then fold your arms and say, "Well, *perhaps* he will work;" we ought to act as though we were certain he would work mightily—we must *prepare in faith*. Have you never read that text, "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes"? What for? "For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left." You are to enlarge your tent first, and then God will send those that will fill it. But the most of people say, "Well, you know, of course, if God sends a blessing, we must then enlarge." Yes, that is the way of unbelief, and the road to the curse. But the way of faith and the road to the blessing is this: God has promised it—we will get ready for it; God is engaged to bless, now let us be prepared to receive the boon. Act not on the mere strength of what you have, but in expectation of that which you have asked. Act for God on the faith of what he *will* give, rather than on the faith of what you have as yet obtained. Count God's notes of hand as cash. Believe that, with God, a promise is as good as the fulfilment, and act when you have the promise as you would have acted if you had already seen the promise fulfilled.

Prepare for a blessing: *prepare largely*. "Make this valley *full* of ditches," not make *one* trench, but as many as possible. For God, when he worketh, worketh like a God. As a king gives not stintedly, like a beggar, so God, in his gifts, is not restrained. Giving will not impoverish him, and withholding will not enrich him. Expect great things from a great God. "Make this valley full of ditches." Have a holy covetousness of the divine blessing. Never be satisfied with what God is doing in the conversion of souls; be grateful, but hunger after more. If he give ten souls, ask for a hundred; if he give a hundred, ask for a thousand; if a thousand, ask for ten thousand. Insatiable as the grave ought the Christian's heart to be with regard to the glory of God. Here we may swallow the horse-leech indeed, and say, "Give, give, give," with greater vehemence every day, and yet shall not God chide us for the largeness or the importunity of our

street corners, anywhere, proclaim Christ. Some of you ought to be teaching in Sabbath schools, but you are putting that talent by; it is rusting, it is spoiling, and you will have no interest to bring to your Master for it. I want that Sabbath school talent to be used. I long to see the Sabbath school trench deepened and lengthened, by every one doing his share. Many of you might do good service by teaching senior classes at your own houses. This work might be most profitably extended. If our intelligent Christian brethren and matrons would try to raise little classes, of six, eight, ten, or twelve, at home, I know not what good might come of it. You would not be interfering with anyone else, for in such a city as this, we may all work as hard as we will, and there is no chance of interfering with each other's labours. This sea is too large here for us to be afraid of other folks running away with our fish. I want to see our whole system of trenches enlarged. Some, of you, perhaps, will do best in tract distribution: well, do it—keep it up; but mind there is something in the tract—and that is not always the case—mind there is something worth reading which will be of use when read. Do not give away somnolent tracts, which are more likely to send the readers to sleep than to prayer. Some of them might be useful to physicians, when they cannot get their patients to sleep by any other means. Get something useful, interesting, telling, scriptural, and give it away largely out of love to Jesus; and if these labours do not suit your taste, talk personally to individuals. Christ at the well! What a schoolmaster for us! Talk to the one woman, the one child, the one carter, the one labourer, whoever he may be. He who makes one blade of grass grow that would not otherwise have grown, is a benefactor to his race; and he who scatters one good thought which would not else have been disseminated, has done something for the kingdom of Christ. I cannot tell you what is most fit for everybody to do; but if your heart is right, there is something for each one. There are so many niches in the temple, and so many statues of living stone to fill those niches, to make it a complete temple of heavenly architecture. You and I must each find our own niche. Remember, Christian, your time is going. Do not be considering always what you ought to do, but get to work; shut your eyes and put your hand out, and "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." The very first Christian effort will do, only do it with your might; do it in the name and strength of God. "Make this valley full of ditches." I would ask God to make this church full of workers, to turn out the drones and multiply the bees. We do not want drones here: we want only those who will bring their share of honey to the common hive—I mean their share of glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are not saved, we will long for your salvation, and be glad that you come among us, and hope that God will bless you; but if you are a church member, and do nothing, the Lord have mercy upon your miserable soul.

One thing more, and I leave this point. With all the work that the church does in making the valley full of ditches, we must take care that we do it in a spirit of holy confidence and faith. These ditches were to be dug, not because the water *might* come, but because they were *sure* it would come. So we must work for Christ, not because we

may win souls, but because we *must*. A minister was asked to what point he reached in his faith when he was preaching; he said he prayed, and he *hoped* God would bless the word, and God did bless the word in a measure, according to his faith. But there was another whose conversions were about ten times as numerous in one month as the other good man's in a year, and when he was asked in what style he preached, whether he hoped he would have a blessing, he said, "No, I do not hope anything about it; when I go into the pulpit, I am sure of being blessed, because I am preaching God's word, and have in faith sought his help." Preaching in faith is sure to be honoured of God, and all Christian work ought to be done in the spirit of confidence. Who are the soldiers that win a battle? Not those who walk to the fight half afraid of defeat, but those men who are like the English trumpeter, who could sound a charge, but had never learned to sound a retreat. Those are true Christians who do not know how to be beaten, who cannot doubt God's promise, who do not understand how the gospel can be preached in vain, who do not know how it is possible that Jesus Christ, with his omnipotent arm, can fail to see of the travail of his soul, but who believe that "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand," and who expect Jehovah to follow with a divine result that which is done to his glory. Oh! to dig ditches with the confidence that God, who bade us dig them, will be quite sure to fill them! This is faith's true place, may we not be slow to occupy it.

### III. Thirdly, a few words about the DIVINE OPERATIONS.

Observe, my brethren, how sovereign the operations of God are. When Elijah wanted rain, there was a cloud seen, and he heard a sound as of abundance of rain, and by-and-by the water descended in floods; but when God would send the water to Elisha, he heard no sound of rain, nor did a drop descend. I know not how it was that the trenches were filled. Whether adown some deep ravine, the ancient bed of a dried-up torrent, God made the mighty flood to return, as he did along the bed of Kishon of old, I do not know, but by the way of Edom the waters came obedient to the divine command. God is not tied to this or that mode or form. He may in one district work a revival, and persons may be stricken down, and made to cry aloud; but in another place there may be great crowds, and yet all may be still and quiet, as though no deep excitement existed at all. God blesses often by the open ministry, and frequently by the personal and more secret action of his people. He *can* bless as he wills, and he *will* bless as he wills. Let us not dictate to God. Many a blessing has been lost by Christians not believing it to be a blessing, because it did not come in the particular shape which they had conceived to be proper and right. To some the divine work is nothing, unless it assumes the form which their prejudice has selected. Oh, be thankful if it comes anyhow. I have been greatly rejoiced at some of the conversions at the Agricultural Hall. I hoped to have heard of many who never went to a place of worship getting a blessing; I dare say we shall hear of them, but curiously enough, the most of those I have heard of, are those who have been here before, or who have been regular attendants elsewhere for years. I did not go abroad to look after my own children, but it is very odd—they say if you want to know something about your own house, you must go away from

home; and so, I suppose, in order to be the means of conversion of some of you, it must needs be that I go afield. Well, so long as God sends blessing, it is not for you or I to have any choice about it. Perhaps if I pray for my own children, he may bless somebody else's children. If I am seeking the good of a child, perhaps that may be blessed to an old man, for many a sermon to the young has been made useful to the old. I do not know that prayer does always fall in the same place from which it ascends. Prayer is like a cloud rising from the earth, sure to come back again in rain, but not always bound to return to the same spot. Many of you are praying for a husband or a wife: God has never blessed your husband or wife, but he has remembered others out of regard to your prayer; and, when you come to heaven, you will be content so long as your prayer was answered. Be thankful for revival, brethren; but do not set up your will as to how it shall come. "Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water."

Notice, next, that as the blessing comes sovereignly, so it comes *sufficiently*: there was enough for all the men, for all the cattle, and all the beasts. They might drink as they would, but there was quite enough for all. Let us wait then in prayer upon God, and prepare to be heard, for God has great floods of grace to give, according to his riches in glory; by Christ Jesus will he deal out large things to those whose faith is large.

Observe, that this flood came *very soon*, for the Lord is a punctual paymaster. Moreover, it came certainly; there was no mistaking it, no doubting it; and so shall God's blessing wait upon the earnest prayers and faithful endeavours of Christian people—a blessing such as the greatest sceptic shall not be able to deny, such as shall make the eyes of timidity to water, while he says to himself, "Who hath begotten me these?" You have only to look up to God and work for God, and you shall have such a blessing as shall make you wonder at it. Did you notice the word "Behold" in one of the verses following my text? It is a hint that the whole host were amazed at it. God will amaze his church with what he will bestow, if they only have the confidence to act as though they believed his promise, and could not think that he would be less gracious than his word.

Thus I have spoken to you about your duty and about the divine mode of operation. Brethren and sisters, we *must* have the blessing in this particular church: it were enough to break one's heart even to suppose it possible that we should not. God knows with what earnest desires and endeavours I went to the Agricultural Hall to preach the gospel, and with how simple and sincere a motive you went there too: we certainly did not journey so far for our own comfort, but for the honour and glory of the Master. And God's word *must* be followed with a blessing. "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life." But I cannot and will not harbour a mistrustful suspicion about the blessing of God resting upon that

action, and knowing, as I do, that many of you are really solemnly in earnest with an apostolical earnestness. I am no prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I am certain God will not withhold the dew, nor keep back the rain; for he never did say to his people, "Seek ye my face" in vain. Zion hath not conceived the wind, nor shall she bring forth a dream. As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth children. The earnest agony of a living church must bring forth fruit unto God, or else the Bible is no longer reliable, and the promise of God no longer sure. But he changes not, and therefore we will look for the blessing, knowing that it must come.

IV. Lastly, the Lord bade his servant tell them that not only should there be water, but he said, "This is but a light thing in the sight of God. He will deliver the Moabites also into your hand." GREATER THINGS are behind, and are to be expected. If the Christian church universal were prepared for a blessing, God would not only give to it a revival in its own border, but make short work, by its means, of all his enemies. At the present moment the Moabites are exceedingly bold, they invade us on all sides; especially do they prevail in the form of Romanists, sneaking into a Protestant church that they may be fed upon the fat of the land. Ah! my brethren, a revived church will soon make short work of Puseyism. Let the church of God be cold, and dead, and powerless, and Popery will soon spread. Look at Holland. Thirty or forty years ago how little there was of Romanism in that fine old Protestant country, and now, because philosophy and rationalism have entered into so many of the pulpits, and put away the gospel, Romanists have multiplied like the grass of the field. But only give us the old-fashioned gospel which they used to preach under the "Gospel Oak," and out in the open fields, where thousands flocked to hear it, only give us the truth as it is in Jesus, and as Samson rent the lion, so would the church tear heresy in pieces. Behold, the evil of the day shall disappear as a moment's foam melts back into the wave that bears it, if Jehovah doth but visit us. These forgers of lies are but of yesterday, and a thing of nought; their doctrines, the baseless fabric of a vision, without even reason, much less Scripture, to back them up. No, let Israel dig the trenches, and the swords of her warriors will soon find out the hearts of Moab's mightiest one. So with sin, there is no way of putting down sin except by getting the church of God revived. I am ashamed of some Christians, because they have so much dependence upon parliament and the law of the land. Much good may parliament ever do to true religion except by mistake. As to getting the law of the land to touch our religion, we earnestly cry, "Hands off! leave us alone!" Your Sunday bills and all other forms of act-of-parliament-religion, seem to me to be all wrong. Give us a fair field and no favour, and our faith has no cause to fear. Christ wants no help from Cæsar. Let our members of parliament repent of the bribery and corruption so rife in their own midst before they set up to be protectors of the religion of our Lord Jesus. I should be afraid to borrow help from government, it would look to me as if I rested on an arm of flesh instead of depending on the living God. Let the Lord's day be respected by all means, and may the day soon come when every shop shall be closed on the Sabbath; but let it be by the force of

conviction and not by force of the policeman; let true religion triumph by the power of God in men's hearts, and not by the power of fines and punishments. Oh, for more dependence upon the living God, and less reliance upon an arm of flesh, and we shall see yet greater victories won by King Jesus! So, my brethren, let us dig the trenches, and continue to ask God to send us the water, and as for the Moabites out yonder, whatever shape the sin may take; let us depend upon it, the church of God is enough, through the power of God who dwells in her, to put down sin, and win the kingdom for Christ. I would to God that some here who belong to the Moabites, I mean you unconverted people, might be brought to know the Saviour. Some of you know the way well enough, but want the will to run in it. O may the Spirit of God give you that will! A simple trust in Jesus will save you; God grant it to you. After faith, you shall work out of love to Jesus; but all your workings before you trust in him will do no good. Come to him, trust in him; make your heart this morning full of trenches, full of great desires, longings and prayings. If so, God will fill your soul; for he heareth the humble, and despiseth not their tears. May God bless you, one and all. Amen.

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PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxxxii.;  
2 Kings iii. 1 to 20.

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CONTENTS FOR MAY, 1867.

<p>Love, Joy, Hope; or, the Fruits of Faith. By the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne.</p> <p>Master Henry Smith. By C. H. Spurgeon.</p> <p>Out with Tobiah.</p> <p>A Fifth Monarchy Man. By Edward Leach.</p> <p>Moravian Brethren. A Sketch by J. A. Spurgeon (continued).</p> <p>Scraps.</p> <p>Exposition of the Psalms. By C. H. Spurgeon. Psalm XXVII.</p>	<p>The Higher Private Life in the Minister of the Gospel. By Pastor F. H. White.</p> <p>Carlton Chapel, Southampton.</p> <p>Our Own Hymn Book.</p> <p>Our Orphanage.</p> <p>Free Thoughts. By Pastor Gordon, of Darlington (continued).</p> <p>Reviews.</p> <p>Pastor's College.</p>
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