

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WOE AND WEAL.

A Sermon

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"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."—Micah vii. 9.

Those who expect to find the road to heaven smooth and unobstructed will discover little in the experience of the ancient saints to support the expectation. The Lord's people have, in all ages, been a tried people. Cowper well says,—

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

Though, perhaps, to the youthful mind this may sound rather harsh, yet there is a large amount of comfort in it to the more advanced saint, for he says to himself, "Then my difficulties, my distresses, my tribulations, are no new thing; I am in the footsteps of the dock; I can see that I am travelling in the good old way that leads to God,—

"The way the holy prophets went,
The road that leads from banishment."

"Did I meet with no chastisement, I might fear that I was not a child of God; but inasmuch as I am made to smart under the rod, I may hopefully infer from it, if I feel the Spirit of adoption within, that my Father has not forgotten me."

All sorts of trials have beset the saints of God. Rough winds have blown upon them from all points of the compass, and they have had bad weather in all seasons of the year. They have been plagued from within, and assailed from without. The arrows of temptation have come upwards from the pit, and often the blows of

No. 3,239.

the rod have come downward from the throne. There is no form of sorrow, I suppose, which has not been experienced by the chosen of the Lord, though, blessed be his name, the Lord hath delivered them out of it all.

Micah appears to have been troubled by a combination of difficulties and afflictions. He was grieved at the low estate of the Church,—a lamentation which ought to affect some of us a great deal more than it does. Alas! there are some who will always be contented enough if their own house shall flourish, though God's house should be utterly ruined. Micah loved the Church of God, and the low estate of it cut him to the quick. Moreover, the generation among whom he lived added to his grief. "The best of them," he said, "is as a brier: the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge." Doubtless he sympathized with the cry of David when he said, "Woe is me, that I sojourn Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" Ill company vexed his soul as the Sodomites vexed the soul of the righteous Lot; and it appears, from reading the chapter through, that he also had a personal difficulty, probably in the matter of slander. He speaks of "her that is mine enemy." You may notice how he dwells upon it,—upon himself being persecuted and maligned, and he implies his belief that God would arise, and plead his righteous cause. Slander is no uncommon injury for the children of God to bear. That which false tongues glibly utter, ungenerous minds easily credit; and a pure conscience is exquisitely sensitive. The birds will pluck at the ripe fruits, whatever they may do with the sour ones. The loftiest trees cast the longest shadows, and those who stand the highest are often said by men of the world to be the most base. God was slandered in paradise; why should we expect to escape being slandered in the midst of this world of sinners?

It seems that, in the midst of all this affliction which had befallen Micah,—affliction far heavier than any words of mine can describe,—the prophet was led into meditation, and in this meditation he penned the words of our text, in which we may discern, first, *what the prophet felt*. He says, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." Secondly, *what he believed*: "until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me;" and, thirdly, *what he expected*: "He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness."

I. While tracing out **WHAT THE PROPHET FELT**, if we happen to be feeling the same, it may comfort us to hear the voice of a fellow-pilgrim passing through the valley of death-shade.

Doubtless *he felt the smart of the rod*. The tone of his utterance shows this. He speaks like a man who could not be callous, for he had been touched in his inmost soul. I think God intends that his people should feel the rod. If we had manifold temptations, but were never depressed in spirit by them, I question whether they would answer any good design. The "needs be" is not only for the trial, but for the "heaviness" which results from the trial; for you remember that the apostle saith, "If need be, ye are in heaviness

through manifold temptations." There is a "needs be" that the rod should make the child smart. To play the Stoic under trouble is a very different thing from playing the Christian; in fact, it is the very opposite of it. Our great Saviour did not stand at the grave of Lazarus, and say coldly, "It is well," without any show of emotion; but "Jesus wept;" so we are permitted, nay, expected, to weep when God chastens us. Do not ask, dear friends, that your nerves may become steel and your sinews of iron. This would be no excellence; it is rather an excellence to be sensitive under the hand of God. I see not how, excepting by the blueness of the wound, the hurt can be made better. It is when the trouble really stings that it blesses, when the flail falls heavily upon the wheat that it separates the chaff from the pure grain. Expect not to play the bravado with God; expect rather to have to humble thyself before him, and out of the depths to cry out, as others have done, unto the Most High. It is clear, from the language he uses, that the prophet felt the smart of the rod.

It is equally clear that *he readily perceived that the rod was held in the hand of God.* Not all Christians can see this, especially in the case of slander. We generally exhaust our thoughts upon the second cause, and vent our indignation upon the framer of mischief. We are angry with the person who has caused us our loss, or put us to shame, instead of knowing that God uses even the wicked to chastise his people. Beat a small dog, and it will try to bite the stick; if it were a reasoning creature, it would try to bite you. Sometimes you and I are doggish, and we snap at the instrument that makes us smart. We are irritated with the missile which has smitten us to our grief. Oh, that we would but look up, and see that there is a hand, an unseen hand, that wields the agencies of providence, and realize that not a stroke comes upon the Christian but is given by his heavenly Father's will. Would to God we were not so accustomed generally to stop at second causes! I am afraid that this is a part of the philosophy of the age. When the world was very ignorant, men used to pray for rain, and thank God for it when it came; they believed that thunder was the voice of God, and lightning was the glittering of his spear. Now we have grown so wise that we attribute all startling visitations to natural causes. We will scarcely pray to have cholera or plague removed, or ask for anything desirable as the bountiful gift of heaven. The philosophy that puts God farther off from us than he used to be, would be better unlearned, and a truer philosophy known. At any rate, so far as personal sorrows are concerned, it would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by him, nor sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity. Oh, that were bitterness indeed! But, on the contrary, the prophet here sees the hand of God in all his trials, and I pray that you and I may do the same. May we see that our heavenly Father fills the cup with loving tenderness, and holds it out, and says, "Drink, my child;

bitter as it is, it is a love-potion which is meant to do thee permanent good." The discerning of the hand of God is a sweet lesson in the school of experience.

As he felt the smart, and traced that smart to the hand of God, *the prophet discerned that he had sinned.* "Because I have sinned," said he. We do not always see that quite so clearly in health as we do in sickness. A night or two of weary tossings upon our bed will do more for us as to heart-work and as to the depravity of our nature than a hundred sermons. To be despised and misrepresented, to have to creep into a corner away from one's best friends because they are alienated from you, or to have to go to the grave with one after another of the dearest objects of our affection,—these are sermons under which we cannot sleep, and sermons the responsibility of which we cannot shift to another. God's children, if they be as they should be, are greatly profited and benefited in the discovery of sin by the affliction which God sendeth them. I had never known the loathsomeness there was in my heart if the spade of tribulation had not turned over the green sods of my profession, and made me see therein holes and places where loathsome things did creep and crawl within. Do not shun the furnace, dear friends. You need not certainly pray for it; you will have enough of it without praying for it; but if God sends it, do not be afraid of it. There is no more enriching place in the world to go to than to the Egypt of bondage, for ye shall come up out of it with jewels of silver and of gold. I am of Rutherford's mind when he said that, "Of all the wine in God's cellar, birch-wine may be the bitterest, but it is the best." And so it is. You shall never see the stars shine with such splendour as at the Northern pole, where the sharp frosts and the long winter have taken away the light of the natural day. All the Arctic voyagers tell us that there seems to be an excessive sparkle about the stars there; so is it in the winter of trouble. We then see the sparkling of the grace of God as a contrast to the evil which we discover in our own hearts.

Another thing the prophet felt was, *the trouble he then experienced from God dealing with his sin.* We must always discriminate between things that differ. God never punishes his people for sin in the sense of a legal and vindictive infliction. That would be unjust, for Christ, their Substitute, was once for all punished in their stead. They owe no debts to divine justice, for all their debts were paid by Christ to the utmost farthing. But now they are placed under a different government. They are not summoned before a judge, but they are put under parental care; and like as a father chastens every child whom he loveth, so our heavenly Father chastens us; again, I say, not with a legislative punishment for sin, but with a father's chastisement for our offences.

Antinomians have gone the length of saying that there is no such thing as even chastisement for sin. Very likely not, as far as they are concerned. I do not suppose that they were ever worth chastening, or that God ever took the trouble to chastise them. But he does chastise his own children, and I think those who know

their adoption will not be long before they get a very clear realization of it in the tingling of their flesh under the rod of the covenant. Why, of all the blessings of the covenant, the sharpest, but one of the best, is the rod. "Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept thy Word," says David; and that testimony of David's is the testimony of all the saints. They will all tell you that they have to bless the hand of a chastening God quite as much as they have to bless the lips of a caressing God when he kisses them with the kisses of his mouth. No, the children of God cannot sin without smarting for it, even as God said to the children of Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." If some boys were breaking windows in the street to-night, and you went by, you might let them all alone save and except your own boy if you saw him there, and most likely you would make him smart for it; and when God goeth through the world, as this is not the day of judgment, he winks at the sins of many sinners; but if he sees his people transgressing, he will not wink at them. I have often felt very glad when I have seen some of God's people come down in the world to poverty. I have not rejoiced at their misfortunes, but I have been glad of the gracious discipline it indicated. I have sometimes said of such-and-such a man, "If that man prospers, acting as he does in business, I shall know that he is not a child of God; if he be a child of God, he cannot do as other men do without making a terrible misadventure of it ere long." If you only want gain in this world, do not be a Christian; nor pretend to be one. You cannot expect God and mammon to agree together. If you be a Christian, God will watch you more narrowly than others. If you be a king's counsel, a little thing will be treason in you which would not have been treason in an ordinary subject. God expects great things where he gives great things; and if he honours us so much as to tell us the secret of his covenant, he expects us to walk with the greatest possible circumspection. So, Christian, whenever you are in trouble, though it may not be distinctly the result of sin, yet you may well enquire whether it be so or not. Say with Job, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." At the bottom of our sorrow there is generally a sin; at the roots of our grief we shall find our guilt.

Observe one more point. *The prophet felt that, since he could connect his suffering with his sin, he could bear it.* "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." 'Twas a grand point in Aaron when he "held his peace." In that case, "silence" was "golden" indeed; and when we distinctly see our trouble coming upon us, and springing out of our wrong-doing, what can we say, what can we do, but put our hand upon our mouth, and humbly bow before God? I am persuaded, dear friends, that we often make more trouble for ourselves by holding an argument with God about our trouble. When your child is stubborn, as long as he holds out, and brazens it out with you, you will not put away the rod; but when, with broken heart and weeping eyes,

he confesses that you have done right, and that he has been wrong, then your heart moves towards him, and your bowels yearn with compassion. It is so with our God, so let us cast ourselves into his arms. It is a sweet thing to be able to say, "Well, Lord, do as thou wilt with me." It is not easy to say it when the pain is acute, or when the inward grief is very heavy; but it is a sweet relief to let the lancet, as it were, into the gathering, and it gives us ease to say, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." You are not far from liberty when you are content to sit there in the dungeon till he wills to let you out; when you can say in your spirit, "Strike, Lord, if thou wilt, only sanctify the rod to me; but go on striking if so thou wilt, I will not say a single word against all that thou doest. 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him.'" Have you ever read Brooks's *Mute Christian under a Smarting Rod*? If you have not, you might do so with great profit, if you can get a copy of it; but better than reading that will be to go out yourselves, and be "mute Christians under a smarting rod."

If some of you do not know anything about this infliction now, you will one day. You need not wish that the day may be very soon; but when it comes, remember what has been said to you to-night, and "bear the indignation of the Lord" as the prophet Micah did.

II. Let us enquire, briefly, in the second place, WHAT DID THE PROPHET BELIEVE?

He believed that he had an Advocate above. Though he would not plead for himself, yet he says, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, . . . until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me." Every believer has at least two Advocates in heaven. His Father himself is his Advocate. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Have you never felt your own heart plead for your child when you have said to him, "Now you are under my displeasure; go away, I shall not want to see you again; go to your bed-chamber, and stop there"? And if you have heard him moaning there, and sighing and crying, oh, your heart has ached to be with him. You have said to yourself, "Have I been too severe?" And though you may have come to the conclusion that you were not, but that it was necessary for his good, still your child does not need to plead for himself, for your heart pleads for him. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." Oh, the tenderness of God's heart, even when you feel the roughness of God's hand! Oh to believe, Christian, that God is, as it were, doing despite to himself when he smites you; that, although his wisdom and his highest love appoint it, the tenderness of love would fain let you go unchastened, unless the knowledge and prudence of love recognized that it was for your welfare that you should feel the smart! You have an Advocate in your Father himself, and then you have another Advocate whose office it is to plead for you, your blessed Lord Jesus. Could you want a better? In all your afflictions he

is afflicted. He can sympathize with every pang that torments you, with every doubt that oppresses you.

"He takes you through no darker rooms
Than he went through before."

And at the everlasting throne, when you are being sifted like wheat, he is praying that your faith fail not, and so the rod passes away; and full often, what is worse than the rod, the axe, too, because the Intercessor pleads for us. Yes, we have an Advocate above to plead our cause.

And do you notice that *the prophet puts, with the pleading above, activity on earth?* He looks at his present trouble, which seems in his case to have been slander, and he says that the Lord himself would execute judgment for him. When David took his sword in his hand, and declared that not a single man of the house of Nabal should be alive by morning light, how furious was the son of Jesse as he marched at the head of his clan; and what a blessing it was when Abigail, the wise woman, knelt before him, and stopped him, and said, "My lord fighteth the battles of the Lord." David stopped, and bethought himself that, when he became a king, it would be no small consideration to be able to feel that he had not shed blood in haste; so he put up his sword, and went his way. There was no need for David to slay Nabal, for ten days afterwards the Lord smote him, and he died. Why, oh why, should we be in such a great hurry to fight our own battles?

Brethren and sisters, if anybody should speak hard words of us, we are up in arms directly. "Oh!" says one, "I will have this wrong righted; my character is too precious to be lost in that way." "Yes," says another, "I will see the thing through; I will have the law of such-and-such people." Well, now, be still; or go and fight the Lord's battles, let God fight for you. What is your name or your character, after all? Who will be any the better for your caring about such an insignificant creature as you are? Why, when you are dead and gone, the world will not miss you! It is wonderful what great beings we are in our own esteem, and yet what little beings we really are, after all! When Mr. Whitelock was much troubled about the peril of England, his servant said to him, "Mr. Whitelock, did England get on pretty well before you were born?" "Oh, yes, John! very well indeed." "And do you think it will get on all right when you are dead?" "Yes, I think it will, John." "Very well, then; if I were you, sir, I'd leave it to God now without troubling yourself about it." The fact is, the longer I live, the more I feel that the very things which I fret about are the things that go wrong; but the other matters that I can just put on the shelf, and leave with God, always go right. A line in one of our hymns says,—

"'Tis mine to obey; 'tis his to provide."

While we are trying to provide, we neglect to obey, and so the obeying and the providing both go awry. If it be a battle of your own, leave it alone. In everything else, if you want a thing done, do it yourself; but in the matter of your own character, if you want it defended, leave it alone. God will take care of it; and the less you stir in that matter, the better will it be for you, and the more for God's glory.

What a sweet thing it is, then, to believe that you have One to plead for you above, and that the same Lord will vindicate your cause below! How blessed it is for you to live with the consciousness that you have left everything in his hands, casting your burden upon the Lord, and making it your only burden to pray to him and serve him all the days of your life!

III. Now, lastly, WHAT WAS IT THAT THE PROPHET EXPECTED?

He says, "He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness." Believer, will you also expect this,—*that God will bring you forth to the light?* "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart." But if you are not of good courage, your heart will be weak. If Satan can persuade you that the night will never give place to the morning, then he can make an easy prey of you; but if you can say, with Micah, "He will bring me forth to the light;" if you can still feel persuaded that God never did cast one of his own chosen ones down without intending to lift him up again, that he never did kill without making alive, and never did wound without intending to heal, why then your worst and multiplied afflictions can be borne with holy cheerfulness and confidence. "He will bring me forth to the light." Oh, what a mercy it is to come forth to the light after you have been in the dark! How sweet the light is then! I have heard people, who have been very sick, say that, after they have recovered, life has been a perfect joy to them. Nay, I know one who very seldom has a day free from pain; and when she does have such a day, it is a day indeed. You can see, by the very sparkling of her eye, how good a thing it is to live. It is almost worth while to suffer pain to have the joy of being delivered from it. And so, when a child of God has been tried, tempted, afflicted, and he once gets out of it, what joy and peace he has! If you are baptized in trouble, when you lift your head up again, you shall come out all the fairer and the brighter for the washing, and thank each billow that breaks over you for the good it has brought you, as you come forth to the light. Then you shall be able to sing,—

"For yet I know I shall him praise
Who graciously to me,
The health is of my countenance,
Yea, mine own God is he."

"Aforetime, he has succoured me, so I can say to him, 'Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.' If I cannot get the light of thy face, the very shadow of

thy wings shall make me glad, for I shall feel that I am safe even under their shadow. O God, thou wilt bring forth thy people to the light, and they shall triumph in thine exalted right arm, O my delivering God!"

Then the prophet added, "*and I shall behold his righteousness.*" One might have half-forgiven him if he had said, after being slandered, "I shall behold my own righteousness; men shall see it too, and they shall honour me the more because they treated me so unjustly for a time." Oh, no, it is not so written; but "I shall behold his righteousness." To see the righteousness of God in having tried us, to discern clearly his wisdom, his goodness, his truth, his faithfulness in having afflicted us, and more and more to see how suited to our case is the fulness of righteousness which is treasured up in Christ Jesus, this is the divine result from all our troubles. So may it be with us till the last wave of trouble breaks over us, and we enter into everlasting rest!

Dear friends, I commend the text to you. May you live in the spirit of it, and may the Lord help you to glorify him even as the prophet Micah did.

Alas! I know that there are some here who have their troubles, and they have no God to go to! How I pity you! The snow that falls to-night makes it very cheerless for you who have to be out in it, and the thaw makes the snow press through your boots till your very bones and marrow seem chilled. Thank God, we can get the curtains drawn, and sit around the fire; and if the blast blows outside, it is all warm within. But what must it be to have no home to go to? What must it be to be a houseless wanderer on such a night as this? What must it be to pass by houses all alight and cheerful, and to say, "There is no home, sweet home for me; I am an outcast, and must tread all night these snowy streets"? I hope there is no such creature in London who will have to do so. One could pity such a poor wretch indeed! But think, my dear friends, what it must be for your soul to have no home at the last; when the storm of wrath shall fall, to have nothing to comfort you; to be driven from God's presence; to have no Father in heaven, to find no warmth of love in the divine heart; to see the happiness of angels and the joy of glorified spirits; perhaps to see your own children in heaven, and to be yourselves shut out; dear ones, whom you loved on earth, divided from you by a great gulf for ever? Happily, the day of grace is not over yet, the day of mercy is not yet past, the long eternal night has not yet set in! Hasten, sinner! There is a home for thee if thou hast grace to knock at this door. The door is Mercy; to knock is Prayer; to step across the threshold is Faith. Trust the Lord Jesus, and thou needest not fear, though all thy life long thou shouldst be tried. Thou needest not fear the accumulated terrors of the latter days, whatever they may be, nor fear the dread trump of judgment, nor the last tremendous day. Fly to Jesus! Fly to Jesus! Fly to Jesus now! May his Spirit draw you this night! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

MICAH VII.

The prophet begins in a sorrowful strain, and there is much that is sad in the chapter, yet there is also much of holy confidence in God.

Verse 1. *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 firstripe fruit.*

It is a terrible thing for a good man to find good men growing very scarce, and to see wicked men becoming more wicked than ever. It makes him feel his loneliness very keenly, and joy seems to be banished from his heart.

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.*

Those were sad times in which Micah lived; and yet, under some aspects, one might be willing and even glad to live in such times; for, if ever one could be useful to one's fellows, surely it would be then. God had need of a voice like that of the prophet Micah in the days when his worship was forsaken, and the true faith had almost died out among men. Unless God had left a Micah here and there, the land would have been as Sodom, and have been made like unto Gomorrah. So the more unpleasant the age was to the good man, the more necessary and profitable was he to that age.

3. *That they may do evil with both hands earnestly,*

I wish the professed followers of Christ did good with both hands, that is, with every faculty, with every capacity, in every way, and at every opportunity, just as wicked men "do evil with both hands earnestly."

3. *The prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up.*

Honesty seemed to have died out of the nation; the highest people in the land, who ought to have been beyond the power of bribery, sold the administration of justice to the highest bidder. Ah! those were ill times indeed.

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.*

Sin brings sorrow in its train; and, as nations will have no future as nations, God deals with national sin here upon earth, and visits it with national punishments. Now that sin had become so rampant in Israel, it would be the time of their perplexity, and when sins, like chickens, come home to roost, then will be the time of the sinner's perplexity. He lets his sins fly abroad, and thinks that, like the wandering birds of the air, they will soon be gone, and he shall never see them again; but they will all come home to him, and he shall be made bitterly to rue the day in which he thought that he could make a profit by transgressing the righteous law of the Lord.

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.*

So saturated with dishonesty had the nation become that the evil had penetrated even into domestic life; so that, where all should have been in a state of mutual happy confidence, the prophet felt bound to tell them that such confidence could not exist between those who appeared to be friends, or even between husbands and wives.

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.*

And this is true in a measure still, for, without the fear of God, you will find that even the nearest and dearest relationships will not keep the unconverted from being the enemies of the godly. In that respect, a gracious man cannot trust her that lieth in his bosom, if she be not a true child of God.

Now mark the grandeur of faith. Set this white spot right in the middle of the black darkness of which we have been reading:—

7. *Therefore I will look unto the LORD;—*

There was nowhere else for the prophet to look. According to what he tells us, all men had become false; “therefore,” says he, “I will look unto Jehovah;”—

7, 8. *I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.* 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.*

And this is all the light that God's people need. Even if it be the darkness of a black Egyptian night into which our spirit has fallen, yet, if God shall but appear to us, there shall soon be light for us. Dr. Watts truly sang,—

“In darkest shades, if he appear,
My dawning is begun;
He is my soul's sweet morning star,
And he my rising sun.”

9. *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.*

Listen to this testimony of the prophet, tried child of God; even when in your own household you find enemies, put your trust in God, for he will yet appear to deliver you. Let this be your joy. Sit still in humble patience, and “bear the indignation of the Lord;” for, even though trouble is laid upon you, it is not so heavy as it might have been, and it is not so severe as it would have been if the Lord had dealt with you in strict justice. Therefore in patience possess your soul, and wait quietly before your God. Be not without hope; expect that he will plead your cause, and that he will execute judgment for you; watch for his light, which will most surely come, and in which you shall behold, not your own righteousness, but his.

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.*

This verse relates to the nation which, at that time, was oppressing Israel. She should have her turn of suffering, for she should be crushed beneath Jehovah's foot as the mire is trodden in the streets.

11, 12. *In the day that thy walls are to be built, in that day shall the decree be far removed. In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortress even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain.*

This is what was to befall those who had sinned against God, and oppressed his people; he would let loose the oppressors upon them, and they should find foes in every quarter.

13. *Nowithstanding the land shall be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.*

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 2,069, “My own Personal Holdfast.”

That is a wonderful expression, "the fruit of their doings." All doings bear fruit of one kind or another, and sinful doings bear bitter and deadly fruit. Woe to the man who is made to eat the fruit of his own doings! That which men eat on earth they may have to digest in hell; and there shall they lie for ever digesting the terrible morsels which they ate with so much gusto here below.

14. *Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.*

Sometimes, there are pastures in the very centre of woods, and God's people in Micah's day were like a little flock of sheep hidden away from their enemies in the midst of a wood, but God will bring them out by-and-by to far larger liberty. They shall yet have Bashan and Gilead to be their pasture, "as in the days of old;" and so the little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a great nation; and they that were hidden away because of their many enemies shall have such liberty that every where they shall worship and praise the Lord their God.

15—17. *According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvelous things. The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee.*

The day will come when there shall be such a fear of the people of God upon those who formerly persecuted them that they shall tremble before the Lord, and be afraid of the very people whom once they derided and oppressed.

18. *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.*

He never delights in anger, especially in anger against his own people. That is but temporary anger, and is, after all, only another form of love, for the parental anger which hates sin in a dear child is but love on fire. May God never permit us to sin without being thus angry with us! We might almost beseech him never to tolerate sin in us, but to smite us with the rod rather than suffer us to be happy in the midst of evil. Perhaps the worst of horrors is peace in the midst of iniquity, happiness while yet sin is all round about us.

19. *He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities;* and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*

We read about their sins in the earlier part of the chapter; and what a horrible catalogue of evils it was; yet here we read, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?" Even those mountainous sins of which the prophet writes, the Lord will tear up by their roots, and cast them into the depths of the sea.

20. *Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.*

There is our comfort; our God is the covenant-keeping God who will perform every promise that he has made. Even "if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." Blessed be his holy name.

* See Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No. 1,577, "Sin Subdued."