

11. Lay up thy treasures according to the commandments of the Most High, and it shall bring thee more profit than gold.
12. Shut up alms in thy store-houses, and it shall deliver thee from affliction.
13. It shall fight for thee against thine enemies better than a mighty shield and strong spear.
15. Forget not the friendship of thy surety, for he hath given his living for thee.
16. A sinner will overthrow the good estate of his surety ;
17. And he that is of an unthankful mind will leave him in danger that delivered him.
18. Suretiship hath undone many of good estate, and shaken them as a wave of the sea. Mighty men hath it driven from their houses, so that they wandered among strange nations.
20. Help thy neighbour according to thy power, but beware that thou thyself fall not into the same need.
22. Better is the life of a poor man in a mean cottage, than delicate fare in the house that is another's.
23. Be it little or much, hold thee contented, so that thou hear not reproach.

THE

DUTIES

OF HARD TIMES.

SERMON,

PREACHED TO THE FIRST CHURCH,

ON SUNDAY MORNING,

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BY ITS MINISTER,

N. L. FROTHINGHAM.

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I CHRONICLES xii. 32.

*Men that had understanding of the times, to know what  
Israel ought to do.*

THE times were disturbed and wild that are alluded to here ; not dark merely, but tempestuous ; not hard, but iron. They were times of anarchy and of war ; and not of those transient depressions and anxieties, and simple changes of fortune, which we are accustomed to call public distress. Israel had no financial system to be deranged, no trade to be paralysed, no wealth to be put at hazard or lost. It remained faithful as yet, in its weakness and

poverty, to those regulations of Moses its great lawgiver, which discountenanced all the uses of money, that make so important a figure in modern civilization. It had never even thought of foreign enterprise. No sail of its weaving had been spread upon any of the waters of the neighbouring seas. And while it was wholly without commerce abroad, its dealings within its own borders were equalized by the return of the year of jubilee ; when, at every half century, all debts were cancelled, the bond-servant was freed, and the landed property that had been alienated was restored to its former possessors. It was altogether an agricultural and a manufacturing people ; and even that, only within the narrow limits, which its small territory, its ignorance of ships, and its non-intercourse with strangers, prescribed.

At the period, of which we are now speaking, the trouble that arose was not from any failure of the regular harvest ;—for then they who gathered it must have done with less, and there would have been the end. Neither did it proceed from any interference with domestic industry, whether from one or another quarter ;

for the system of the plain Hebrews was too simple to admit of being easily discomposed. But the tribes had been put to the worse before the enemy they had often repelled ; and Saul, the first monarch they had ever elected, had fallen in the lost battle ; and Jonathan, the noble son who should have succeeded him, “ the beauty of Israel,” was “ slain in his high places ;” and there was every where dismay. At this crisis arose David,—the child of a rustic, and the son-in-law of a king,—he who had tended the sheep and smitten the giant. His character was composed as strangely as his fortunes. He was a harper and a chieftain, though but a youth ;—an active warrior, and yet the author of psalms, that modern invention can do little better than translate and paraphrase. He arose, as the leading star ; and the question was whether the people would follow him. The chapter, from which the text is taken, records the muster-roll of his forces ;—and among those were “ expert in war,” and “ bare shield and spear,” we find those also, who “ had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.” They were men of discernment

and forecast and moral perceptions. They read wisely the past. They considered what was just and becoming. They looked at principles, as well as to chances. They deliberated "what Israel ought to do." And when they decided to adhere to the son of Jesse, there could have been no help to him like theirs. The public welfare was better protected by their counsel, than by all the captains and armed bands, that had come from every part of the country to make him king in Hebron.

My brethren, though the social condition of the Hebrews was every way unlike our own, and the causes that affected the general prosperity were widely apart from those that disturb ours; yet the mind passes easily from one kind of hard times to any other. They all teach similar admonitions to those whom they afflict. They inspire thoughtfulness. They show the need of a discreet guidance. They demand to be put to some moral uses. They call upon the aid of those, who shall have a true "understanding" of them; who shall inquire and "know what Israel ought to do."

The duties of such seasons are unhappily an appropriate subject for our present consideration. The discourse can attempt but to touch on a few of these, and that but slightly; rather suggesting such thoughts as are plainest, than fully unfolding any, much less discussing them.

The first duty of those, who would be like king David's men,—having understanding of the times and knowing what ought to be done,—will be, according to the opinion of many, to study and ascertain the causes that have produced the trouble. For the chief object in view, they may say, is to deliver ourselves from the evils of our condition; and we cannot do this till we have learned how they were brought on. How can we apply the remedy till we have come to understand the source and character of the disease? And doubtless it would be in many cases wise so to consider it. There is always a degree of attention due in that direction. But then, on the other hand, there will be cases, in which little is to be gained by such investigations; when it will be of more consequence to contemplate the im-

mediate obligations that are upon us, than to speculate on the irremediable past; and it will not be so wise to dispute about distant causes, as to put in practice what is "good for the present distress." Without entering into questions that are of an intricate sort, involving nice points in the philosophy of wealth, and mixed up perhaps with political partialities, every one may judge for himself what improvement his own should be from the circumstances, in which the community is placed. If he will give his mind to that, he may be more usefully occupied, than in attempting to explain or to influence those great processes of public fortune, which must be left to the intelligence and control of comparatively few persons, and above all to the hands of a disciplinary Providence;—that Providence, which always teaches when it strikes; which visits in the line of regular laws, and not by starts and arbitrary inflictions; and, when it sends its "judgments," intends that "the people shall learn righteousness."

In the instance now before us, the question is not how we shall make the times any better;

—that were a hopeless undertaking;—but how we shall make ourselves better by reason of the times. This is within each one's personal province, and let him look to it. He may then be dispensed, if he chooses, from the search into those strangely twisted occasions of the evil, which it may not be easy fully to unravel.

In such a simple and rude state of society as that spoken of in our text, there was no difficulty in discerning at once the origin of any of the straits, or the scourges, to which the land could be put. Disease might infect its air and thin its inhabitants; and no one could then doubt why the people wept and trembled. The drought and the mildew, the locust and the caterpillar, might make its supplies scanty of the common necessaries of life; and no one could then mistake the messengers of famine. A border tribe might invade its territory, or a civil convulsion rend its peace; and then the shining armour would show, and the blast of the trumpet would tell, the nature of its suffering. One could see with his eyes the

desolations of the earthquake, the tempest, the flood.

But widely different is it, when we come to the complicated movements of social interests at the present day, to the laws of currency, to the fluctuations of trade, to the vexed questions concerning credit and capital, and to the various phenomena of a nation's interests. We use a phrase that is of constant occurrence, when we speak of the commercial world. But few are aware how full of meaning that term is, and how well it characterizes the thing that it describes. It is indeed a world,—a world of itself. It embraces within its dominion the kingdoms both of nature and of art ; the earth and its productions ; the sea, with what moves upon its surface or dwells in its deeps ; the air, from the small wings that flutter through it, up to the very princes of its powers ; and the whole industry of man however exercised. Steam, smoke, wind,—human strength, skill, invention,—are in some degree its agents and its subjects. And, while it is thus extensive and multiform in its dominion, it is governed by rules that are peculiar to itself. Its operations

must be studied apart from every thing else. It has its own elements with their changeful play. It has its own laws with their secret forces. There are its special impulses, and hindrances, and disturbances from innumerable quarters, forming alone a vast system. It requires various knowledge to comprehend it. It constitutes a peculiar study. The science of it is itself as yet new. How, then, should we expect to penetrate, with a superficial glance, the mysteries of so wide an empire ; and certify with exactness, and easily, all the causes that may have concurred to produce any particular pressure in the times ?

Instead of endeavouring to do any thing like it, let us but settle these few conclusions in our minds ;—that, in our artificial age and free country, natural accidents can be very little concerned with it ;—that political enactments are not likely to have been such mighty masters of the dark spell, as many will imagine ;—and that moral causes have been chiefly operative in the disastrous result. Those causes may be founded in greedy passions, and ambitious



indulgences, and the haste to be rich, and headlong schemes, and strange delusions.

Let us listen, then, to the voice of these times, as they are sweeping aloft over our lives and their fortunes. What it would say has been already indistinctly implied. But let us take up a few particular points of its speech. Let us make them clear, though our limits will not allow us to give them any fulness.

I. It warns us, in the first place, against having too high a conceit of uncertain treasures; making them the chief object of heated pursuit; coveting them as the principal good; and looking to sheltering ourselves behind them as the strongest security. "Say not to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence." Vain trust! See how wealth changes hands, and accumulates but to disappear. Evil chances waste it. Other thieves than those who are called such break through and will have their part. The moth is in its wardrobes. The rust is upon its splendour. Calamities, that could not be foreseen, and cannot with certainty be traced, may make its boasted defences totter. Its ship

is on a fickle element. Its cargoes are brought to a doubtful mart. What it holds may depreciate, as well as what it must risk be lost. Its warehouse is watched by secret foes, who may work it a harm, sometimes in the shape as of a worm in the timbers, and sometimes as of a bursting flame through the roof. Let your treasure rather be there, where your whole heart, without a reproach, can "be also." In the chambers of a mind, both furnished and fortified. In the resources of pleasant remembrances and upright intents. In the "heaven" of a peaceful conscience and an imperishable hope.

II. The voice utters itself again. Be moderate in your desires. Be circumspect in your walk. Aspire not beyond your measure. Strive not beyond your strength. "Seek not great things for thyself;" but be patient, be persevering, and be content. Let your industry work within its own lines, and be satisfied with regular and steady advances, however slow. Run not because you see others running. Pursue quietly the labours of your

proper sphere, without impatience or envy or rash emulation. Let not the troubles and the wrecks around you be an indifferent, or an uninteresting spectacle, but, while they make you compassionate, teach you to take heed. Keep within your means. Use not what is another's as if it were your own; and press not covetously upon another's shrinking finances in order to make them your own. Avoid the pretension of appearing what you are not, and be not anxious to enlarge your real condition too fast. Remember that the growth which is gradual is the likeliest to endure. Be not misled by dazzling prospects; or by the stratagems and eager scheming, that would substitute themselves for sober and well-understood employments. Beware, lest avarice on the one hand, or extravagance on the other, should seduce you to throw at hazard what you can make to be enough, through the hope of making it suddenly or greatly more.

III. Again speaks the voice of the times, and tells us—what we might not have expected

to hear—that we should be thankful. And do you ask with some surprise, why you should be thankful in a season of affliction and alarm? Among the several good reasons that might be given in reply, I will name but one. It is, because you can call such a season of impediments and reverses, as is now upon us, by such severe epithets as you have just used. I have no wish to represent as less than they are the sufferings of the mercantile community, which are now the theme of all tongues;—sufferings, with which I would deeply sympathize, although set aloof from a familiar acquaintance with them, and incapable of forming concerning them any very accurate judgment. But in the midst of them all what a crowd there is of blessings, privileges, distinctions! No people on earth so exempt from every manner of imposed burthens as we. At peace with the whole world, bound together among ourselves in general amity,—there is “none to molest, or make us afraid.” There is an abundance of resources. Intelligence, skill, activity, reign among us. They have the widest scope, and the utmost possible



freedom, for their exercise. On every side are the signs of cultivated life, and the materials—all the materials—of public prosperity. Think what the word “distress” meant, when David numbered his warriors and counsellors at Hebron. Or if you are unwilling to go back so far for a comparison, look at what one of the fairest portions of Europe is at this moment,—and has been for many a dreary month, many a bloody year. There would be small mention in poor Spain of the derangements of trade, where the exchange is of blows and hate; where the fields are ploughed with the wheels of baggage-waggons, and cannon shot; and the sickle is often the sword. On the very last Christmas day, while we were celebrating the birth of “the prince of peace,” with rejoicing on all sides of us, the battle had been raging round the walls of one of its large towns\*, and none of the miseries of civil war were left unendured, none of its atrocities unperpetrated. And not three weeks since, when on what we called our Fast we took our “pleasure,”† I doubt not we shall learn, when

\* Bilboa.

† Isaiah lviii. 3.

tidings reach us from those distracted shores, that many did there fast indeed, from the scarcity of life’s supplies, and the anguish of breaking hearts. Let no one, when he thinks of such things, exaggerate our present trials, or deny that we have innumerable causes to be grateful. Who were ever called upon to give thanks, if the people of these united Commonwealths have a right to be silent?

IV. The voice of the times addresses us with one exhortation more. Hope. Droop not. Give not up every thing for lost or irreparably injured, because a chastising change is going on among you; in the course of which many will be hurt for their misdeeds; and many who are innocent will be hurt to prevent others from misdoing; and some, who are as distinguished for their worth as they had been for their prosperity, will be caught away in the whirl of the general disaster, as if to teach anew the uncertainty of fortune. Be not forward to play the alarmist. Increase not a general panic by unreal terrors. Extend not wider

that want of confidence, which is one of the worst features of the day. Take counsel from the past, that you may take courage for the future. That is among the things that our "Israel ought to do." The ebbing tide will return to its flow again. The sky will show its blue and gold after the clouds are scattered. Doubt not of that. Hope in the restorative powers of a quick-sighted, quick-handed people. Hope in that great law of alternations, which will never be repealed, but, in all the domains of human sight and experience, streaks the darkness at last with its beaming appointments. It is so with the night of the twenty-four hours, with the wintry night of the year, with the night of adverse accidents, and all the gloomy nights of the mind. Hope, above all, in the righteous administration of heaven. It forsakes not honest and earnest endeavours. It will establish the right, and recompense to the deserving. And, when the times of adversity and the times of success shall roll away together, with the vanishing scenes of all time, it will provide mansions of endless glory for those, whom no temptations here could seduce and no threats terrify.

## SCRIPTURE LESSON.

### ECCLESIASTICUS, CHAP. XXIX.

1. He that is merciful will lend unto his neighbour ; and he that strengtheneth his hand keepeth the commandments.
2. Lend to thy neighbour in time of his need, and pay thou thy neighbour again in due season.
3. Keep thy word, and deal faithfully with him, and thou shalt always find the thing that is necessary for thee.
4. Many, when a thing is lent them, count it as something found, and put to trouble him that helped them.
5. Till they have received, they will kiss his hand, and for their neighbour's money will speak submissly ; but, when they should repay, they will prolong the day, and return words of grief, and complain of the times.
7. Many, therefore, have refused to lend, for other men's ill dealing, fearing to be defrauded.
8. Yet have thou patience with a man in poor estate, and delay not to show him mercy.
9. Help the poor for the commandment's sake, and turn him not away in his poverty.
10. Rather lose thy money for thy brother and thy friend, than let it rest under a stone to be lost.