

soul. They swallowed up the needy, and made the poor of the land to fail. Such was their greed that they panted after the dust on the poor man's head—the man whom they had, themselves, impoverished by fraud.

And the poor man had no chance whatever of obtaining justice. All the power of riches was against him. The judge before whom he went to plead his case accepted bribes. Prince, priest, prophet, judge, all combined, in a hateful combine, to defraud him of his rights. He was cheated also by the merchant, who made the ephah great and the sheckel small, and who falsified the balances of deceit. He was daily exposed to robbery and murder, the city being full of violence, brother hunting brother with a net, the very priest adopting the calling of murderer. It was a time, surely, when oppression made the wise man mad. It reminds us of the period in the history of France when a deputation visited those in authority to urge their grievances, and were told they might satisfy their hunger with grass. All the elements of anarchy were there; and, had it not been for the arms of Assyria, Israel would have probably been convulsed by a revolutionary war.

These remarks reveal to us, to a partial extent, the moral condition of the nation. Never surely was a people in a more deplorable condition morally than the inhabitants of the northern kingdom of Israel immediately before the conquest by Assyria. This moral condition was similar to that of the heathen as described in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Our three prophets give a terrible catalogue of their sins. They are liars; they are pitilessly cruel; they are addicted to swearing, to deeds of murder and violence, to robbery, to adultery: so that they store up robbery and violence in their palaces. They are addicted to bribery and injustice. "They afflict the just; they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor from the right." They "abhor judgment and pervert all equity." Further, as we have seen, their commerce is utterly rotten and fraudulent. The whole moral or rather immoral condition of the people reminds us of the moral decay of