

The closer our communion is with God the more does it separate us from evil, but the affections of the saints' hearts towards their brethren are not blunted by this separation, as we see here. For the third time the people went up to the house of God, for this place having been found again, became indispensable to them. Defeat first drove them on that road, victory led them on to it again. "And they abode there till even before God." On the previous visit, "they *wept and sat there* before Jehovah;" on this occasion, the *first* thing was to abide there. "When thou saidst, seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face Jehovah will I seek" (Ps. xxvii. 8). It is our happiness, amid the evil and the sorrow of the present day, to seek the face of the Lord and abide till even before Him. Tears then flowed and such tears! "They lifted up their voices and wept *sore*." For the first time feeling all the bitterness they said: "O Jehovah, God of Israel, why is it come to pass in Israel, that there should be to-day one tribe lacking in Israel?" They did not say: The evil is put away, we are at length in quietness and tranquility. The bitterness was in proportion to their recovery of their affections for Jehovah and for their brethren. The breach had been made, one tribe was wanting; it was like the body suffering from the loss of a limb. Israel's God had been dishonoured, the God before whose eyes, in His tabernacle, was the golden table with the twelve loaves of shew bread thereon. Israel no longer thought of their own dishonour as they had before their humiliation, for the tears of bitterness were shed before Jehovah; and it was when the unity seemed hopelessly lost, that its realization was