

they neglecting their opportunities of serving God and their nation, but indulging in criminal luxury and pride. While yielding to the slavery of base appetites they cherish an unwarrantable spirit of self-security. They trust in [Zion and the mountain of Samaria as strongholds which cannot be overthrown. And this they do in spite of their knowledge of God's judgments in the past.

The prophet's picture of their conduct is most vivid. Their moral decay is simply appalling. They are not only at ease, but they put off the day of calamity, and draw near the sessions of injustice. They lie on ivory divans and sprawl on their couches. They eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall. They prate or babble to the sound of the viol, and as if they were David himself, invent for them instruments of song. They drink wine by ewerfuls—water-potfuls, and anoint with the finest of oil, yet never do they grieve for the havoc of Joseph!

What a description of moral depravity among the upper classes, the rich, the rulers, who have wealth and power and a form of religion, but no conscience, or true patriotism, or fear of God or regard for man! So that John Calvin truly says of them that they practised "tyranny and took the liberty to steal, to rob, to plunder, to oppress. When, therefore, they hardened themselves in all kinds of of licentiousness, they then drew nigh the throne of iniquity."

They were so bewitched by their own arrogance and debased by their gross intemperance that they laughed to scorn the most pointed and solemn warnings addressed to them. Hence Isaiah represents them as treating God with contempt. When he called them to repentance and sorrow for their abominable sins, they indulged all the more in "joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine, and saying, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die." (Isa. 22: 12-13.)

3. The lessons taught them.—

The first is a lesson of warning from the past. The prophet bids those who feel secure in Zion and the mountain of Samaria learn a lesson from the experience of others. "Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines," etc. (v. 2.)

If these strong fortresses were not sufficient to arrest the wrath of God, if his vengeance was executed against these fortified cities, then let no infatuation deceive you as to the impregnable nature of Zion and Samaria.

"Pass over into Calneh, and see," etc. "Consider, as in a mirror, what men can gain by their pride and haughtiness; when they harden themselves against God." Calneh, Hamath and Gath were laid waste because they had multiplied their iniquities and abused God's patience, and now how merciful and kind he is in teaching his own people and warning them by the righteous retribution which fell upon others.

This is often his method of instruction, turning our eyes to what others endure for their sins before his hand is laid upon us personally, in chastisement or judgment. Surely his tender mercies are over all his works; but the stroke of justice must ultimately descend upon the obdurately impenitent. This is the testimony of universal experience and of God's word.

Accordingly the prophet teaches these intemperate and debauched rulers a second and more stern lesson, viz., that the judgments of God shall certainly and speedily overtake them. "Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive," etc., (vs. 7-8). And to put this beyond the possibility of all uncertainty it is added: "The Lord hath sworn by himself."

The word of the Lord is as sure as his oath. Why then is the latter employed? To intimate that there can be absolutely no change or failure in regard to the matter referred to. To make assurance doubly sure—to afford the faith of man the strongest warrant.

Thus the priesthood of Christ (Psal. 110: 4,) the promises to Abraham and David, were confirmed by an oath on the part of Jehovah (Heb. 6: 13 and Acts 2: 29-30). No subsequent revelation could change or set aside what was thus established.

A divine announcement without the oath might be added to and so modified by a later disclosure of God's purpose. Thus, for example: the threatened destruction of Nineveh declared by Jonah (3: 4-10) was not confirmed by an oath, and was averted by the faith and repentance of the people.

No such issue is contemplated by Amos. The wickedness of the rulers of the people ha-