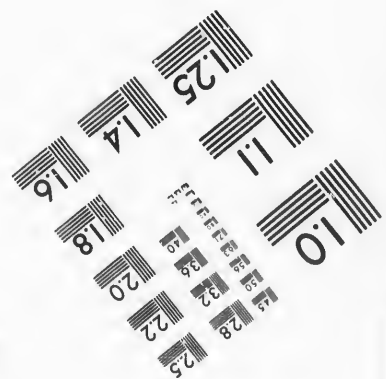
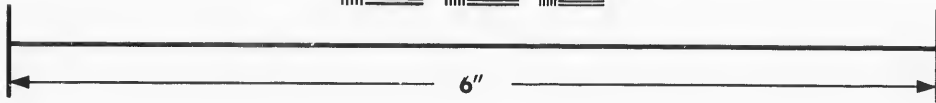
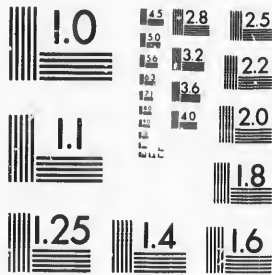


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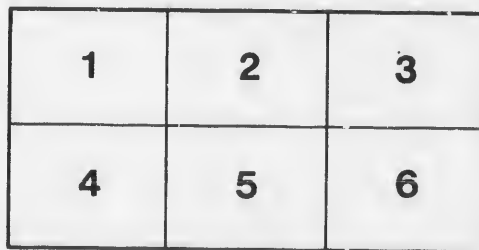
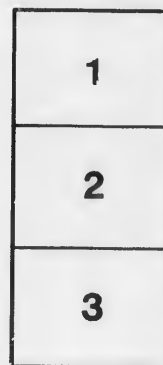
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ISAIAH LAMENTING THE DEATH OF HIS CHILDREN.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE METHODIST CHURCH,

HALIFAX, N. S., ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 6, 1842.

During a season of unusual mortality
among children.

BY WILLIAM COGSWELL, M. A.
CURATE.

"Now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I
bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall
return to me." 2 SAM. xii. 23.

HALIFAX, N. S.

PRINTED AT THE MORNING HERALD OFFICE.

1842.

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ISRAEL BEREAVED OF HIS CHILDREN.

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“ IN Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation and great mourning ; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children because they are not.” It is a precious portion of the duty of the Minister of Christ to offer the consolations of the Gospel to those that are thus bereaved, to attempt to comfort those that mourn, and to bind up the hearts that are broken by the heavy pressure of calamity. The topics suggested in this discourse have proved consolatory to some afflicted ones : and the hope that their solace may be further diffused has led to its publication. May that Spirit which was without measure upon Him who was anointed “ to bind up the broken hearted,” vouchsafe in measure to bless this feeble instrument, and, through its means, to pour the oil and wine of spiritual comfort into the smarting wounds of some brother or sister in the Lord.

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GENESIS XLIII. 14.

"IF I BE BEREAVED OF MY CHILDREN, I AM
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"As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man."* And who can look upon those sketches of the heart of man, taken under all its various aspects of prosperity and calamity, of joy and grief, which are presented to us fresh from the Master's hand in the Book of God, and not find depicted there, under some form or other, the workings of his own? Never hath mirror more faithfully reflected back the image that was placed before it, than the faithful volume dictated by Almighty Wisdom, and penned by Heavenly Truth, displays to every variety of

* Prov. xxvii. 19.

observers an exact picture of their own emotions in trouble and in joy.

There are few cases, perhaps, which present to us a view of the workings of the human heart under a greater variety of circumstances than that of the patriarch Jacob. His history is recorded with a degree of minuteness which scarcely marks the record of any other individual's existence in the pages of the Old Testament; and it presents him to us as the subject of so continual fluctuations of prosperity and distress, as could be scarcely found in the more brief career of any one of our fallen race now. We have the comfort of hoping, that, grievous as was the sin which marked his early years, and led to his becoming for a time an outcast from his father's house, he was yet, from the time that the Lord manifested himself to him in the wilderness of

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Paran, a true servant of the living God : and we may conclude therefore, notwithstanding the many inconsistencies which subsequently appear, that his character and conduct generally were those of a child of God, founded upon true principles, aiming at a holy practice. His life, then, while it exhibits many beacons to warn us against similar errors, displays also many bright and beautiful examples of meekness, patience, tenderness and love, which the most advanced Christian may find it well to imitate.

The circumstances under which the words of the text were spoken were of a sorely trying nature. Some years had now passed, since the patriarch had bowed his head as a bulrush before the tidings of his beloved Joseph's death, and had mourned, in bitterness of spirit, the heavy stroke, which, as he supposed,

had bereft him, by a miserable fate, of a child in whom the affections of an old man's heart were centred. Constrained by the necessity which fell upon his family and household in the land of Canaan, he, some twenty years after, sent forth ten of his remaining sons to Egypt to buy corn, and retained with him the son of his old age, his Benjamin, the now only remaining child of the fondly loved Rachel. Nine only of his sons returned; and his heart bled as they told of the harshness which they had experienced at the hands of the Governor of Egypt, and his spirit sank within him as they spoke of having left Simeon in prison, as a pledge that on their next application for food their youngest brother should go with them. "And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and

ye will take Benjamin away : all these things are against me." * He saw not that all these things were accomplishing the Lord's purposes of mercy, and working together for his good, and in the darkness of a momentary distrust he perceived in them only the grievous strokes of a hard but inevitable fate. And O ! what Christian is there, has there ever been, in whom, as the waves of accumulated woe come rolling towards him, nature has not for some moment at least resumed its sway ; and whose faith has not sometimes sunk baffled by the attempt to pierce the dark clouds which hang around the Providence of God. It was thus with Jacob when the stroke was in anticipation. But the time drew near at which he must meet the blow. Again was the supply of his family expended. Again must his sons go down to Egypt, as they

* Genesis xlii. 36.

would avert from their numerous precious ones the horrors of starvation. But to go without their brother they knew would be a fruitless errand; and they respectfully but firmly refused to stir a step, unless Benjamin were with them. And now, in the hour of real trial, the faith of Jacob triumphed. He found in his own experience the preciousness of the truth, which, in a prophetic spirit, was announced by Moses the man of God to Asher, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."* He realized in his own case the precious truth by which the soul of an Apostle was afterwards sustained, "My grace is sufficient for thee."† He saw the hand of God in his trials; he placed himself in the Lord's hands; and, in the spirit of meek submission to whatever might be the Lord's will concerning him,

* Deut. xxxiii. 25.

† 2 Cor. xii. 9.

exclaimed, "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

How many are the souls in this community, that have been placed by the dealings of God's good providence in the same furnace of trial, from which Jacob thus came forth as gold! How many a heart among us hath known the same pressure of bitter sorrow as bore the patriarch down, and, in the anticipation of some coming stroke, hath fainted, as his did, in the weakness of mere nature's strength! How many, alas! are they, who, if the workings of their inmost spirits were laid bare, would be found replying in the depth of their distress to God, "Me you have bereaved of my children; one is not, and you will take another from me; all these things are against me." O that among the many thus sorely, sadly tried by late events

among us, there may not be one, who shall not, in recognizing the Lord's hand in his distress, and in meek acknowledgment of His wisdom and His love, be enabled to exclaim, "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good."* "It is the Lord that gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." †

It is my desire, dearly beloved, and shall, under the Lord's blessing, be my endeavour, to apply this expression of Israel's submission to the circumstances in which the afflictive hand of God hath placed many members of this flock; and I would pray the Lord, that, if there be those here, whose hearts have bled beneath any of the varied strokes that His providence hath of late inflicted, they may be

* 1 Sam. iii. 18.

† Job. i. 21.

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led, under the teachings of His word, to a fuller recognition of His wisdom, a sweeter reliance upon His love ; and that they, whom the thick-falling strokes of bereavement have left for the present unscathed, may be led, in the exercise of true Christian sympathy, to "bear one another's burdens,"* and to "weep with those that weep."†

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In taking the expression of Israel's submission as the guide of our present meditations, let us consider, **FIRST, THAT THE LOSS OF CHILDREN IS INDEED A BEREAVEMENT ;** **SECONDLY, OBSERVE THE SPIRIT IN WHICH A CHILD OF GOD BOWS BENEATH THE STROKE ;** and **THIRDLY, REMARK UPON SOME OF THE PECULIAR TOPICS OF CONSOLATION, WHICH, IN THE CASE OF DEPARTED LITTLE ONES, MAY MINISTER TO THIS SPIRIT OF SUBMISSION.** And may the

* Gal. vi. 2.

† Rom. xii. 15.

good Spirit of our God be with us to apply and sanctify the teachings of His word.

I. We shall confine our present remarks entirely to the subject of such visitations as have of late so abounded in this community, the strokes which have removed so many children from their fond parents' arms, and may observe, *in the first place*, that THE LOSS OF SUCH PRECIOUS ONES IS IN TRUTH A BEREAVEMENT. What I mean is not the mere trivial remark, that such a stroke inflicts a wound ; but that there is nothing in the Gospel, in the motives it inculcates, or the consolations it suggests, which urges upon any one to look upon such a visitation in any other light than as a sore affliction, a heavy bereavement. There is nothing in the Gospel inconsistent with such an expression as that of the text, even if it conveyed no more than

to apply and an exclamation of bitter grief, "*If I be bereaved of my children, I am indeed bereaved.*"

at remarks It is no part of the Gospel teaching to inculcate that stoical hardness of heart, which imitations as would enable one to bear the strokes of community, would enable one to bear the strokes of heaviest calamity unmoved. The heart that so many is most truly influenced by Christian principles, far from being hardened against the arms, and affections of earth, runs over with a peculiar THE LOSS fondness for all whom the Lord hath bound WITH A BE- upon it. The charities of domestic life are the mere enlarged and not contracted by the saving inflicts a influence of the Gospel. The roots of those aff g in the strike deeper and deeper in the heart that has s, or the been warmed with the love of Christ, and wa ges upon tered with the dew of His spirit. And can it on in any be ;—I appeal not to the conceptions of the a heavy mere natural heart concerning God, but to ne Gospel what the Lord has Himself revealed concern n as that ore than

ing His own character ;— can it be that the heart, which has become most truly alive to the ties with which He hath bound it, must suffer the bitter rending of those ties asunder, and neither mourn nor weep? Nay, not so ! There is nothing in the revealed character of God, there is nothing in the teachings of His word, that can lead us to imagine such callousness as this to be the demand of God. There is a difference indeed between the sorrow of the Christian's heart under the pressure of such strokes as these, and the sorrow of the world ; but if there be any difference in the tenderness of feeling which such a visitation awakens in the heart of one and of the other, it is that the heart of the Christian feels more deeply than the world.

What can be sweeter than the tie which binds a parent's love to the little ones whom the Lord hath lent him ? What can be fonder

than the hold with which the affections, which the gift of these precious ones awakens, cling to a father's or a mother's heart? And are they called upon to look upon these little ones, laid low before their eyes by the swift stroke of death, and not feel that the heart is wounded, its affections torn? Are they bidden to resign without a tear the precious babes snatched from the fond embrace of love, even though it be to transfer them to a heavenly home? Oh no! What stricken parent shall be afraid, that to sorrow for the loss of those so dear to him is sinful? What mother's heart need fear, that the tears, which flow beneath the anguish of, perhaps, a first bereavement such as this, can be displeasing unto Him, who drew near to the weeping widow of Nain,* to dry her tears by the restoration of her child, and who wept in genuine bitterness of grief

* Luke vii. 13.

with those to whose embrace He was even on the point of restoring the lost one whom they mourned?*

II. Yet we are led, *in the second place*, to remark, that, though THE SORROW OF THE CHRISTIAN'S HEART under such a bereavement differs only, as regards its bitterness, from that of the worldly, in its deeper intensity, yet it IS MARKED BY A DIFFERENT SPIRIT, EVEN THAT OF MEEK SUBMISSION TO HIS HEAVENLY FATHER'S WILL. This appears to be the meaning of the patriarch's declaration in the text. Long as he could, he put off from him the dread necessity of parting with his beloved Benjamin;—and what Christian is forbidden to use every means which science can suggest or skill employ to avert a stroke which threatens to deprive him of his child?—but when he saw that the necessity could be no long-

* John xi. 33--35.

er controlled, he placed his son in the Lord's hands, exclaiming, "If I be bereaved, I am, or, let me be, bereaved! If such be the Lord's will, Amen! So let it be! I bow to His wisdom; I kiss the rod which His love inflicts. It is His hand: let Him do what seemeth Him good."

And such is the spirit which the Gospel inculcates upon all that profess to be aware how God hath loved them in Christ Jesus. It forbids not sorrow,—nay, if no sorrow be felt, how can submission be exercised? It roots not out the tender affections which bind man's heart to the loved ones that surround him,—for if these affections were eradicated, where would the power of the Holy Spirit be displayed in bringing every thought into captivity to the will of God? But it speaks through those affections to his inmost soul; it appeals

through these very sorrows to the mourner's heart ; and enjoins on him, even in the midst of his sorrows, a meek acquiescence in the Father's will, and inculcates a sweet submission to His dispensations who ordereth all things wisely, and doeth all things well.

All sorrow, then, beneath the stroke of the Lord's hand is not repining ; the bursts of bitter grief, with which the heart of the afflicted one breaks out in the time of its bereavement, are not all murmurs. It may be feared, that many, though they cannot avert the stroke with which the Lord afflicts them, and are therefore compelled to submit to His sovereign will, yet are ready to charge Him with unkindness, to question the reality of His love, and to complain of the hardness of their fate. This is repining ; these are the workings of a murmuring spirit ; these the

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complaining of a rebellious heart. There are those, it may be hoped, who, though they would strive as anxiously as others to avert the blow, and put off, as Jacob did, by every possible means, the threatened dispensation, yet, when they see that it is the Lord's will, bow the head before His visitation, and resign the precious ones the Lord hath lent them, again to Him, in meek acquiescence with His wisdom and His love, as well as His sovereignty and power. This is the submission which the Gospel teaches ;—this the spirit in which the true Christian meets the chastenings of his Father's hand.

III. In the case, however, of the removal of such little ones, as those of whom so many have been lately gathered into the cold grave, there is something more than that persuasion of the Father's love which the Christian's heart

enjoys, to comfort those that mourn. Let us contemplate, *in the third place*, SOME OF THE TOPICS OF CONSOLATION WHICH SURROUND AN INFANT'S DEATH, and teach submission to the will of God to the bereaved parents' hearts.

1. And *how consoling is the consciousness, that the little ones thus removed are delivered from all apprehension of future evil, and placed in a condition of safety from all harm.* I speak not of those anxieties for the personal beauty, and the worldly prospects of their children, which too often form the substance of the mere worldly parents' cares for the little ones that surround them. To such anxieties as these there is no solace in the thought of their departure. But what Christian parent can look upon his happy child, and not tremble with anxious apprehension of the many

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dangers that shall beset his opening path, of the many temptations that shall lure him into a forgetfulness of the teachings of a parent's love, and urge him, by the exaggerated charms of sin, to exchange the innocence and happiness of heaven for the fascinations of ungodly pleasure, and the haunts of vice? Alas! that there can scarcely be a community anywhere found, in which there is more room for such apprehensions, than in this? And will a parent find no consolation, under the stroke with which the Lord hath visited him in the reflection that these fears are forever silenced, these anxieties for ever hushed,—in the thought, that the little ones, who have been the subject of so much anxiety, are there safely housed, where sin cannot enter, where temptation cannot lure them, where no false pleasures can seduce them from the fountain-head of joy? Beloved, are there those

among you, that have been called to mourn your bereavement by some of the late numerous strokes,—and doth it minister to you no comfort amid your tears, to think that your loved, your precious ones, are taken away from so much evil to come ?

2. *How yet more comforting is, secondly, the assurance, in the case of such little ones the certainty, of their being, not only removed from evil, but of their being transplanted in their early bloom to the garden of the Lord, the family of the blessed ones above.* However bright the hopes which sometimes cheer the hearts of the bereaved in the case of those cut off in riper years, yet there are perhaps few cases in which in hours of depression a fear will not creep in, whether they had indeed so taken hold of Christ, whether they had been indeed so sanctified by His Spirit, as to be made

meet for the enjoyment of His kingdom. But what doubt can possibly find entrance into the heart, that the little ones, removed ere yet they have known how to refuse the evil and to choose the good,* are transferred from the arms that cling to them on earth to the joys which greet them in the bosom of the Father? "Of such," saith the blessed Jesus, "is the kingdom of Heaven;"† and who can even question, that takes the Scripture for his guide, that the children, so lately snatched from the tearful embraces of mourning friends, are now, in the perfection of glorified spirits, hymning the eternal praises of the Lamb that was slain for them? Early admitted into covenant with God through Him who commanded infants to be brought to Him, can any doubt that they are now transplanted from the temptations and trials of the Church

* Isaiah vii. 15.

† Matt. xix. 14

on earth to the radiant glories of the Church in heaven? And is a parent's love that selfish thing, which seeks only its own gratification in the presence of these precious ones on earth, and does not rather find its highest joy in the greatest happiness of those so dear to it? And can a parent's heart but contemplate that blessed portion, which is now his child's unchanging lot in heaven, and compare it with the largest purest fund of happiness that could have been its portion upon earth, and not feel, amid the tears which the bereavement calls forth, that his beloved one might address to him the words of the blessed Jesus to His followers, "If you loved me you would rejoice, because I go to my Father."* "Mother!" was not long since the sweet remonstrance of a dying child, "why do you weep? If I were spared, I shall pro-

* John xiv. 28.

bably be separated from you, and then how incessant would be your anxiety to hear of my well-being, how continual your fears lest some ill tidings of me should reach your ear ! Now I am going where you *know* I shall be blest ; you will need no letter to assure you of my happiness ; you will dread no tidings which can tell you ill of me. And do you weep that God is able to make me so much happier than you, with all your fond affection, can even conceive ?” May not each little one transferred to the bliss of heaven urge on his parents’ heart the adoption of these sweet reflections of a Christian poet* as he thinks of his departed child :

“ When we think of what our darling is, and what we still must be ;
 When we muse on that world’s perfect bliss, and this world’s misery ;
 When we groan beneath this load of sin, and feel this grief and pain,
 Oh ! we’d rather lose the other two, than have him back again !”

* Rev. J. Moultrie.

Let us, in conclusion, turn our attention, dearly beloved, to one or two of the lessons which the sufferings and death of young children address to every heart.

1. And, *first*, HOW SOLEMN IS THE PROOF THUS AFFORDED OF THE NATURAL CORRUPTION, THE INBORN SIN, OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL OF OUR RACE. Who can look upon the sufferings of a dying child, often apparently greater in the merest infant than would have brought down many a well-nerved frame, and as he gazes can withhold his assent from the remark, "Thou wast shapen in iniquity, conceived in sin, born into the world a polluted creature." "Sin came into the world, and death by sin;"* and such is the connexion between sin and suffering, that, where there is no sin, there can be no death. The Lord Jesus himself is no exception to this rule; for, though in Him there was no sin, yet He was made sin for

* Romans v. 12.

us, and under the burden of our sins He died. And when we see death pass, sometimes in its most frightful form, upon those little ones that have not sinned wilfully, after the similitude of Adam's transgression,* we see there a proof that the nature is polluted, and the soul of the mere infant of an hour is stained with sin. Are there then any souls, that, almost questioning God's mercy, ask, "Why is it that these infants should be subject to such agonies,—how is it that such innocents should die?" Dear fellow-sinners! when ye are called again to gaze upon some dying child, O learn from its sufferings the solemn truth of your own innate depravity. Learn, as ye look upon its anguish, that *ye too* were born in sin, and leave not the sight, I pray you, till ye have put to yourselves and answered the momentous question, "Have I been born again to newness and holiness of life?"

* Romans v. 14.

2. HOW STRIKING IS, *secondly*, THE PICTURE WHICH THE SIGHT OF A DYING CHILD PRESENTS OF THE CHARACTER OF THOSE THAT ALONE SHALL ENTER INTO THE LORD'S KINGDOM. "Verily, I say unto you," are the words of the Lord Jesus, "whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."* We look indeed upon the simplicity, the faith, the dependance upon a parent's teaching and help, which are manifested in a young child's *life* as the leading features in which this resemblance may be traced. But we may look also upon the calm sweet beauty of a little one's repose in death, as a picture of the peace that the Lord Jesus gives His people,—of the rest upon which they enter who have faith in Christ, and which remaineth in the fulness of its enjoyment for the future portion of God's people.

* Mark x. 15.

Are there any, in whose minds the question has been awakened, how far the child, cut off in the first hours of its brief career, has answered the end of its being, or the doubt aroused, whether the tender infant's soul is capable of appreciating and bearing its part in the glories of Eternity? O! rather, dearly beloved, when ye hear in what terms the Lord hath spoken, ask, as ye gaze upon its silent form, whether ye have been so changed into its image, that ye could have as good hope for yourselves of going, where its spirit hath winged its flight, to the mansions of the blest.

3. HOW SWEET IS, *thirdly*, THE ADDITIONAL MOTIVE WHICH THE DEPARTURE OF SOME PRECIOUS LITTLE ONE ADDRESSES TO A CHRISTIAN PARENT'S HEART for greater diligence in making his own calling and election sure. I say, *the additional motive*;—for that heart is not

truly warmed with the love of Christ that does not look forward to His presence as the chief charm of heaven, the great motive for diligence in seeking an entrance there. Yet other and subordinate motives may not improperly be urged in their due place, and what sweeter thought can mingle its influence with the motives to watchfulness and zeal than this, "I have a little one in heaven. Some precious babe hath gone before me thither; some darling child hath found its rest in the mansions of our Father's house. And shall I not strive to keep in the strait path that leads to the same home? Shall I not aim to be found meet to be greeted by my glorious child to the paradise of its joys?" Dearly beloved! have ye, have any of you, some precious ones in heaven; and O! shall not the sweet thought urge you on to greater zeal for Christ,

that you may meet your little ones above ?
Then, if ye be bereaved of your children, the
very bereavement shall be turned into a blessing,
and the separation which hath torn your hearts
on earth shall minister to your reunion with
your loved ones in that blissful scene,
whither no sin, no sorrow, and no death shall
come. AMEN.

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