

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE HOPE OF A NEW CHAPEL AND OF A BETTER WORLD.

Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 16TH, 1863, BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build."—Nehemiah ii. 20.

WE have here, when the Jews returned from captivity, a remnant among them who were much concerned to build the temple of the Lord, and the walls of Jerusalem; for they were but a remnant, and that remnant seemed themselves to be somewhat neutralized by the worldly-mindedness and carnal policy of those who were seeking more their own earthly ease and aggrandizement than the honour and glory of God, or the true welfare of the Israel of God.

Our text divides itself into three parts. First, here is *the answer to the adversaries*,—to those who opposed the work of the Lord. Here is, secondly, *the confidence expressed*; "the God of heaven, he will prosper us." Here is, thirdly and lastly, *the resolution to work*; and "therefore we his servants will arise and build."

I notice then, first, *the answer to the adversaries*. Now these people were but very few, and undertook to do that in the name of the Lord which the people, and especially some of the enemies, supposed that they could not do; and therefore it was, you will find, that these few people were despised. So it is said, "When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?" Yes; against *ten thousand* earthly kings, rather than rebel against our God. We will rebel against the greatest men, and look at them as thorns, and briars, and brambles, and chaff, that set themselves in opposition to God's truth, or in any way whatever to God's cause. And, therefore, the people of God have been, more or less, in all ages thus despised.

Now, I could not, this morning, enter upon the subject without taking notice of our present position; and I shall make the first part of my discourse to consist of some remarks upon the same. Well, then, in the first place, our meeting last Monday evening was a meeting which will not be easily forgotten. If ever the Lord was in an assembly, I am sure he was in the assembly in this place last Monday evening. And may the Lord stir you up, and make you of one mind, even as the heart of one man. You have adopted a principle, and you have taken a position; and that principle you must abide by, and that position you are not the people, if I rightly understand you, easily to give up. The principle that you have adopted is to raise a building fund sufficient to build a chapel, on freehold ground, that shall accommodate little, if any, less than *two thousand* persons. This is the principle that you have adopted. And though it is anticipated we shall require *ten thousand pounds* to enable us to reach that end, what is that? If the Lord be on our side, it

matters not. And even if nine-tenths of you should become faint-hearted, and go away, why, Gideon had *thirty-two thousand*, and they all left him except *three hundred*, and with that *three hundred* he went triumphantly on; and then the others were glad to come cringing in, when the *three hundred* had gained the victory. And, therefore, never be discouraged because we may seem to be few. Also, I say, you have taken a certain position, and you mean, by the grace of God, as far as you can see the hand of the Lord with you, you mean to keep that position. And you must, also, beware of all opposers and enemies. Now the word Sanballat signifies "a secret enemy;" and the word Tobiah signifies "a good man;" one that comes under the pretence of being a real friend. And you see that these adversaries, when they found they could not by violence stop the people, they then adopted the other plan, and invited Nehemiah into some village in the district Ono; and he pretty soon made an Oh no of it, and said Oh no, and would not come. And then they said, Well, you had better come into the temple, and let us consult about the matter there. No. What, such a man as I go into the temple to consult you? I will not go. And so he made, I say, an Oh no of it. And so, my hearers, you that have adopted the principle and position which you adopted last Monday evening at that glorious and never-to-be-forgotten meeting, beware of these sly enemies; for if they can once mesmerize you, or chloroform you, when they once get you off to sleep they will do as they like with you. And therefore, keep awake; keep your weather eye open, and be determined to work out, as far as God shall help you, the principle that you have adopted, and keep the noble position which you have taken. Why, it is ten times more encouraging now than it was when we built this chapel. We had a meeting then, on entering upon that, and we got up about *fifty pounds* towards a chapel that was to cost near *three thousand pounds*; and we all went home so thankful to think we had got *fifty pounds*. Now, we had a meeting last Monday evening, and here we are already in possession of *one thousand one hundred pounds*. Why, you have something to set out with, and nothing in reality to discourage you. But there will be a people, and there may be some among us,—the Lord have mercy upon them if there be any, that is all I can say,—who will say, "What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves?" Of course they will. "Will they sacrifice?"—be fools enough to make sacrifices? Of course they will. "Will they make an end in a day?" Of course they will. "Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" They hope to do so; they hope to be the means of the raising up of poor sinners that are burned in the fire of sin, and, if grace prevent not, will be burned in the fire of hell. These are noble ends, that every one has in view that is of a right mind. And then Tobiah, in order to quiet Sanballat, for there were two of them, said, Oh, don't be uneasy, for that which they build, even if a fox go up upon their stone wall it shall break down. This is the way in which the people of God were treated at that time. Well now, I have to remind you of three characters, that if they cannot be heart and soul, thoroughly converted to the principle and to the position you have taken, they must be cast out. There must be no milk-sop answers; there must be no palavering, no surrender, no compromise, no softness, no mock sympathy; you must take your position and go right on. What was the answer of Nehemiah? Did he come hat in hand to these Sanballats and Tobiahs? Did he say, Well, gentlemen, I hope you will not oppose us? Well, gentlemen, I hope you will help us. No; he took his stand before God, and he said, "Hear, O our God, for we are despised; and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity; and cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee; for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders." But however, the builders went on, for they had a mind to work, and the work

was finished. This was the way Nehemiah answered. and this is the way I will answer every man and every woman, in private or in public, in the sight of the living God, that shows the least antipathy against the principle and the position which you have adopted. Such is my feeling, and such I will stand to, grace enabling me, to my latest breath. I never did flinch yet, nor ever will, for all the great men, or lordly men, or little men, that ever existed. I know what I am saying. Now, if there are any among us that stand thus opposed, if their eyes be not opened to see their error, and they are not converted, heart, and soul, and mind, to join with us, we will have nothing to do with them,—cast them out,—done with you, walk by yourselves. Hence it was these adversaries, when they found they could not stop them by opposing them by force or fraud, they wanted to help; but their help would be more dangerous than their opposition. Get an enemy into the camp, under the pretence that he wants to help, he will then do more mischief than if he remained an openly avowed adversary. Thus, then, we must have oneness of mind. If there be an adversary, we must find him out, and hunt him out,—hunt the fox out,—just teach him whether, if a fox go up a stone wall, he will break it down. We will break him down, and break him out too. Then the second character we must be aware of and cast out is not only the determined opposer, but the neutral. One says, Ah, I do not oppose it, but I shall be neutral. Ah, we shall serve you just the same; for if you are not altogether with us, you are against us. Neutrals are drones; and when the bees intend to have a good hive of honey, they divide themselves into three companies; one company is employed to bring the materials,—that is you people,—you must bring the materials, or else we cannot get on. And then there is another company that has to construct the cells,—that is your committee that you have appointed to adopt the plans, and contrive the way for you. And then the third company is to bring the honey,—that is the collectors. Those are the three companies into which you are divided; and so the people will bring all the materials they can, and the committee will construct their plan as well as they can, and the collectors will bring all the honey they can; and we must, therefore, have no neutrals. You will have no peace in that position. The neutrals are drones. Walk past that apiary, and dost thou see lying there half-a-dozen, or ten, or a dozen dead bees? What were they? Why, they were drones, sir,—that is what they were,—and the working, busy bees threw them out. Such is the way we must treat neutrals. Now I come with sword in hand—Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? If you are not for us, you are against us. We must have no neutrals; they are drones, and they must be cast out. And then the third character we should be very much aware of is the doubting one. We must have no doubting, no fearing. No. Only imagine a collector, for instance,—I should not like to have such an evil thought of any one of the ladies who shall be collectors, that when they come to struggle, which they must,—hard work, of course, it will be; you will need faith and patience. Remember the persons here in this book; they wrought with one hand, and a weapon of war in the other, and at the hazard of their lives. And suppose then a subscriber says, Well, how are you getting on? Oh, I rather doubt whether we shall do it. Oh, you will not do for a collector,—that will not do. We must put you into Doubting Castle Hospital, and leave you there till you learn better manners,—that is what we must do with you. Why, when a subscriber asks you, Do you think you will succeed? you must look up and smile—as a lady knows how—as none but a lady knows how,—look up and smile, and say, Do it, sir? To be sure. Accomplish it, sir? To be sure. Reach the end, sir? To be sure. Why, you will get *ten shillings* directly, and perhaps *ten pounds*, by speaking in that way. And thus, then, we must have no adversaries, we must have no neutrals, we must have no doubting ones,—

" No doubting or fearing,
With Christ on our side;
But go on believing
The Lord will provide."

And you must let the subscribers give in their *own way*. You remember the old lady, who was asked if she could give a guinea, answered that it was out of all reason to suppose she could give such a sum as that; she would give a shilling a week for *twelve months*. So, when you cannot get the guinea, tell them that a shilling a week for twelve months will do as well.

Now I shall not, of course, frequently have occasion to trouble you with a long account like this; but I cannot help it this morning, and your thoughts run this way, and I am only running with them in running this way. Well, now, hitherto we have helped ourselves, I was going to say, sustained ourselves, by the good hand of the Lord, and we have helped others for many, many years; and I have by my labours, nearly all over England, been the means of helping others, and now, for the first time in our history, in our present circumstances, we will make an appeal to all England, to all the churches in England, to people at home and to people abroad as well, to help us to get up our *ten thousand pounds*. And I have not the slightest doubt but ministers, and churches, and christian friends in different parts of the country, will respond and help us beyond your expectations. Why, a minister the other day said to one of our hearers, Well, then, you are going on with the new chapel, are you? Yes, we think about it. Then, said he, you shall have a collection in my chapel as soon as ever you like. Now that is what I call business. And so with what we shall be able to do, and what others will be able to do, we shall get on. They speak sometimes, perhaps, a little unkindly about you as a people; for they will have their grumble. It is a little relief to an Englishman to have a grumble at somebody; and if he has nothing else to grumble at, he will grumble at his friends. But notwithstanding these occasional faults they find with you, they are ready to say, O Surrey Tabernacle, with all thy faults I love thee still! And they will prove it on the present occasion by coming forward to your advantage and to the glory of God. Thus, then, I have given you my mind upon this matter. People tell me they wish I was not so violent. I am not more violent than Nehemiah was. I wish you were not so determined. Then nothing would be done. I wish you were not quite so severe towards those that differ from you. Then they would pay no respect to me. I will be respected. I will make the devil himself respect me. I will be respected, some way or another. I will stick to my principle, through thick and thin too. Principle has done wonders, and will do wonders. Thus, then, this is the spirit and this is the position in which the people of God of old stood. They set out upon this principle; the Lord was with them; the buildings were completed, the enemy was confounded, hypocrites were ashamed, God was glorified, his counsels stood, his truth was maintained, his word fulfilled, and all was well with those who had the Lord on their side. We have nothing to do with calculating upon what we are, and upon what we can do; we have to calculate upon the Lord's strength, and providence, and goodness. "The silver and the gold are his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills."

We can turn this into prayer, as this same prophet doth a little farther back; he prays the Lord to hear them. "O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants who desire to fear thy name; and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant." We can say that we do desire to fear his name, and to prosper. And I am sure, the Lord keeping us in this spirit, we shall be the means in his blessed hands of bringing the gospel, I hope, to hundreds, if not to thousands. And I should reckon it one of the softest feathers in my dying pillow to leave as a legacy

to the cause of God and truth a strong and noble structure, built upon freehold ground, which the people without let or hindrance could call their own; to leave a noble structure large enough to accommodate *two thousand* people. It would be one of the softest feathers in my dying pillow that I have been the means of raising such a structure to the good of souls. Oh, the more I look at it, the more and more I see the nobleness of the end you have in view. And, as I have before hinted, how pleasing the thought to be the means of thus bringing many, many, many of our fellow creatures into the knowledge of that eternal life by which we are for ever saved! I am not aiming to make anything my own; no, my hearer, my aim would be to make the chapel yours, to make the property yours, and to build it under what is now almost a common saying, a model trust deed, that you may possess and enjoy it, and that the adversaries, in spite of all they may do, may not be able to hinder you from having a beautiful place in which to meet to worship the God of your fathers. And you will look back and never regret the hundreds that you have advanced for such an object. As I already have hinted, last Monday evening the generosity of many of you, giving your hundreds, was to me beyond all expectation. May the Lord reward and bless you *ten thousand* fold.

I now proceed to make a few concise remarks of a spiritual kind. Now, "the God of heaven, he will prosper us." "When we come to spiritual prosperity, that spiritual prosperity must be, of course, by the Lord Jesus Christ. What a beautiful representation of this spiritual prosperity is given in the 53rd of Isaiah, that "it pleased the Lord to bruise him." Here is our escape from the threatenings of heaven, due unto us. "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin;" here is our escape from that lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. "Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin;" the fire shall light upon him; "he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." And the dear Saviour saith, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." The Lord gave the kingdom of Canaan in olden time; but it was not through a medium by which the possession of that kingdom was sure. But here, by Christ Jesus, he giveth unto us an everlasting kingdom; an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; by a medium wherein the possession is sure, for the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in the Saviour's hands. It was God's pleasure that Christ should magnify the law, and Jesus Christ did do so. It was God's pleasure that Christ should put away sin, should lay down his infinitely precious life to obtain for us eternal redemption; and the dear Saviour hath done so. It was God's pleasure that the dear Saviour should found a kingdom that cannot be moved, and he hath done so. It was God's pleasure that Jesus should gather in the sheep. "Other sheep," he himself saith, "I have which are not of this *Jewish* fold"—I presume his meaning there; "them also I must bring, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd." And so it is that this part, as well as all other departments of the Lord's pleasure, prosper in his hands. So, my hearer, if you and I would prosper spiritually, it must be thus by Christ Jesus. It is precious faith in his dear name that gives us victory over sin. He is victory over sin. It is faith in him that giveth us victory over the curse; he hath borne the curse away. It is faith in him, oneness with him, that giveth us victory over death; he hath swallowed up death in victory. It is in oneness with him that everything must work together for our good; all must be subservient to our spiritual and eternal advantage. So "the God of heaven," then, "he will prosper us." If, therefore, we can pray earnestly, if we are favoured to behold the glory of the Lord clearly, and if we are strong in the inner man, and if we are going on from time to time glorying in the Lord, then it is the Lord that giveth us this prosperity. He it is that has given us all the prosperity we have had so many years in this place; and as I have said to you in times past, and not

many weeks or months ago, and those words have followed me up with great power, "Thou shalt see greater things than these." And when the Holy Scriptures come in that suggestive, and I was going to say stealing sort of way over the mind, like dew, and whisper something to the soul, it always means something. And so, when any part of the Lord's word comes into your mind softly, like a still, small voice, and whispers soothingly, and consolingly, and strengtheningly to you, whether it relate to the pardon of your sins, whether it relate to the salvation of your soul, whether it relate to the welfare of your body, whether it relate to your temporal circumstances, whether it relate to death, or let it relate to what it may, I was going to say, you need not be afraid to depend upon the sure fulfilment of it. And perhaps you will say, I am afraid it was not of the Lord. Then try another scripture, and see if you can make another scripture so sweet to you as that one is; see if you can make another scripture come to you in the same way, and you will find you cannot do it. And if there are other scriptures beautiful, which there are, of course, and expressive scriptures, that though you read them, and try to be comforted by them the same that you are by that one, you cannot, you may then safely conclude that this is nothing else but the fulfilment of that scripture, "I will water it every moment;" this is nothing else but the Lord gently carrying on his work. He will not quench the smoking flax, nor will he break the bruised reed. Oh, then, thrice happy the man who is brought to feel that sin contains nothing but adversity; our adversity lies in sin, and—

"If sin be pardoned, I'm secure,
Death has no sting beside;
The law gave sin its damning power,—

and our plea is,—

But Christ our ransom died."

And as the root is thus taken away, namely, sin, all the consequences must in due time fail. So that not any tribulation now, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Oh, may the Lord help you, each of you, to look at your own soul as a kind of Paradise in which the Lord walks, as a kind of garden in which he dwells, and that you may be led to pray that your soul may be more and more as a watered garden whose waters fail not, and that the spices thereof may flow out, that you may be ready to say, "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." And while thus ruminating and meditating of the loving kindness and mercy of the Lord, heavenly showers will descend, rays from the sun of righteousness will reach the darkest parts of your soul, and you will feel refreshed, you will feel revived, and you will then say, Ah, now I have learnt that it is the God of heaven that maketh us to prosper. And therefore, if we prosper in spiritual things, this prosperity is of the Lord. And I am sure that if you are alive from the dead you will not be content without this. When a sermon helps you on sometimes, comes to just where you are, takes up your feelings, and your case, and your experiences, and describes just where you are, and there is a light upon the soul, why, it is like the dew upon the branch, it is indeed like cold waters to a thirsty soul; it is indeed as good news from a far country; and it has sometimes been so that you have been ready to say, Well, that discourse ran along so nicely with my feelings, and so nicely with my circumstances, and so nicely with my necessities, I could have sat for another hour to hear those blessed truths repeated, that seemed to banish the things from me that I wished to forget, and brought the loving-kindness of the Lord before mine eyes, that brought the salvation of the Lord into my heart, and that made my heart bound with gratitude and love to God. So that all prosperity must be thus by Christ Jesus the Lord. "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands." And how pleasing the thought that Jesus Christ did prosper, in the days of his humiliation,

in everything he put his hand to! There was not anything he put his hand to in which he did not succeed. I wonder how some of you that are Wesleyans—for I know you will come here sometimes, and of course I am glad to see you, because the gospel will do you no harm, it will do you good—but I sometimes wonder that you Wesleyans can look upon the Saviour succeeding in all his miracles, and his succeeding in calling people to him, and his going up into a mountain, and calling to him whosoever he would, and they came unto him. I sometimes wonder how you can thus read, and see his success, and yet believe that he now tries to do what he cannot do; as though he was weaker now he has not our sins upon his shoulders than he was in his humiliation—as though he was not so strong in his infinite majesty on the throne as he was when he tabernacled among us here below—I say I wonder sometimes how you can look at those things, and yet hold the doctrine that you do. May the Lord open your eyes, bring you out of all error, and bring you into that perfection that is in Christ Jesus, and then thou wilt indeed prosper, as some of the Christians in olden times did to whom John was writing. They were nicely versed in these things. They looked at election as an act of amazing love in choosing them; and they looked at salvation as an act of amazing love in saving them; and they looked at regeneration as an act of amazing love in calling them; and they looked at all their afflictions as so many expressions of God's love, to preserve them, and to discipline them, and to humble them, and to teach them. And by this experience, and this knowledge of things, the consequence was, that those people were happy in God's love, that John had to write to them thus. Oh, if that should be my lot—if I can speak to you like that when I come to die! John saith, when writing in his third epistle, "I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." We have to reverse it now with some Christians that we know, and to say, Would that thy soul were prospering as thy health is prospering! would that thy soul were prospering as thy circumstances are prospering! But John was favoured to put the essential into the pre-eminence, and say, "I wish that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." So they were brought into the perfection of Christ, brought into the everlasting love of God, brought into the living and lively hope of salvation, the hope of eternal glory, and they saw that by Christ Jesus all adversity was eternally terminated, and there was nothing but eternal prosperity for them. Hence Jacob, when he came to die—only think of it, that's just where the wicked man's adversity begins, just where the adversity of the man that knows not God commences—Jacob said, "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil;" he had now got to the end of it, to the end of all his adversity; and "the God which fed me all my life long." So, then, my hearer, if we are brought to know that Jesus, and Jesus only, could put an end to our adversity, and that it is by faith in Jesus, and Jesus only, it is by him we can be saved and prosper,—if brought to know this, then other things shall be added. So here, in this spiritual sense, then, we can with confidence say, "The God of heaven, he will prosper us." He hath prospered us, and he doth prosper us. And remember, my hearer, there is no prosperity without decision. There is nothing like decision. I would rather have a man err on the side of decision than on the side of compromise. I say there is no prosperity without decision. Why, in human life you can't get on without decision. Suppose you are trying one business to-day, and very undecided whether you won't try another business to-morrow, and then very undecided whether you won't try another the next day; what would become of you? Why, say you, I should soon be in the workhouse. Worse than that, very likely in prison. And so with the word of God, we must be decided for the truth. I am, as a minister, independent of every man; and those that are with me must be as independent of me as I am of them. If I

were to see them saying things because I say them, I should call them to account directly; and if I saw them following blindly after me, I should turn round and say, Do not follow me blindly; understand for yourselves. I can't die for you; I can't die with you—let us have none of that; let each know for himself,—“They shall all know me, from the least to the greatest.” I would ten times rather preach to such a people as you are, that know the truth for yourselves, than preach to an undecided people, whom, if I had the gift, which I have not, of pleasing people, I could so please as to get them to follow in any path I pointed out. I would rather preach to a people that see where I am, that see where they themselves are, and stand decided. The strength of a congregation lies not in its temporal wealth, nor in its numbers, but in the character of the people. If the people be a spiritual people, a people divinely taught, each man is a host in himself, each woman is a double host, I was going to say, in herself. Why, the ladies will so appeal to you that you will not be able to withstand them, and you will not only give your handsome donations, but you will have to give week after week. You cannot look them in the face and refuse. Each man is a host in himself. Why, if I were an officer, I should not like to march into the field with an army of awkward squads; I should like to have an army such as David had, “men of might, and men of war fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains.” So, where there is this decision, with a perfect heart, the God of heaven will prosper all such. He loves decision; he himself is a decided God, rests in his love; will never alter his counsels, but carry those counsels out for the salvation of untold millions, and to the eternal glory of his name.

But I must hasten to the last part of our subject—“Therefore we his servants will arise and build.” First, how are we to build? Why, our hope upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us hear the word of the Lord upon this part of the subject. “Beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith.” These are beautiful words—“most holy faith;” what does it mean? Why, it means that even angels do not possess the holiness that the saints possess; that Adam before the fall never possessed the holiness the saints possess. “Building up yourselves on your *most* holy faith”—there is the superlative. Faith there stands as the representative of the truth altogether. Christ your sanctification; a holiness that as far surpasses angelic holiness as Christ surpasseth the archangel; Christ your righteousness, Christ your strength. Here, then, it is “*most* holy faith.” Not your most holy flesh, pious flesh; no; the apostle was better taught. “Building up yourselves on your most holy faith.” Praying in “the Holy Ghost,” the Holy Spirit; praying in the testimonies and according to the testimonies of the Holy Spirit; praying in the Spirit of Christ, in the Spirit of God the Father; praying in a right spirit. “Keep yourselves in the love of God;” as Christ saith, “Continue in my love;” that is it—decision. Do not go away from that; and that love is in Christ Jesus. “Looking for”—what I am sure you will need—“the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” So, then, as taught of God, thou wilt arise and pray; thou wilt arise and test thyself from time to time by the word of God; thou wilt look for the mercy of God in and by Christ Jesus. And then the rains may descend, the winds may blow, and beat upon your soul, but it shall not be moved, it is built upon a rock. And also these builders here of the walls of Jerusalem, they were stopped several times, but they went on again, they did not give it up. So the Christian sometimes is stopped, as it were; he feels as though his hope was gone; but he does not give it up. And just so, what these take in hand; they will have their difficulties to test their sincerity, no doubt about that.