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# Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE RIGHT VINEYARD.

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## A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 20TH DECEMBER, 1868,

BY MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSBY STREET.

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“Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.”—Matthew xxi. 28.

THE two sons in this parable are intended, it seems, in the first place to represent Jew and Gentile. The Jew professed to be a labourer in God's service, and therefore he said, “I go;” but he went not; he thought he did. And so there have been in all ages a large number who thought that they were serving God, as Saul of Tarsus thought he was. They thought they went, but did not. Then the Gentile that has no will to go, the command comes to him, “Go work in my vineyard;” but his unwillingness is manifest; but the command overcame the unwillingness, and so he afterwards repented and went. Secondly, these two sons are intended, it seems, to represent the mere professor and the real possessor. Because, if a man make a profession, then he ought to do the will of God in order to prove the reality of his profession; and if a man do the will of God, he does thereby prove the reality of his profession. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” So, then, here is the mere professor, also, that professes a great deal;—he is a wonderful man to do, he is always doing, and yet with all his doing he does not come into God's spirit nor into God's truth. And then here is the real child of God, or the one that the Lord does by his quickening power make a real Christian; he afterwards, when the command comes, repents and goes into the vineyard, and is all that the Master wishes. Thus it is, then, that the Lord's will of command is that which none can, ever did, or ever will understand but the people of God themselves. So, then, “Whether of them twain did the will of his father?” They both professed to be children of God, but which did the will of God? The one that went somewhere else, and was led by some other spirit, and by some other doctrine? or the one that did not go somewhere else, but was led by the Spirit of the Lord and the doctrine and command of the Lord, and did that which was well pleasing in his sight? And you observe that the vineyard here is only one of the representations of the New Testament dispensation; for by the vineyard here it is evident we must understand the kingdom of Christ, the New Testament dispensation.

Hence you will find a little further on in this chapter that what in our text is called a vineyard is called the kingdom of God.

Now, taking the vineyard to represent the New Testament dispensation, or the economy of grace that is by the Lord Jesus Christ—taking that view of it, I shall not confine myself to the mere idea here presented of the New Testament dispensation as a vineyard, but I shall take those circumstances which the word of God presents, to represent to us this New Testament dispensation. And in so doing I notice, first, *the vineyard*; secondly, *obedience to the command*; thirdly, *the fruit which such bring forth*.

First, *the vineyard*. The vine stands as the representative of peace, plenty, and prosperity; therefore we have here presented to us that peaceful and prosperous state of things established by the Saviour. I will take the first paradise to help me out with the description of this vineyard; because the first paradise is spoken of and spiritualized in several places in the Scriptures. Before I enter upon the subject I may say that there is one very pleasurable feeling which I have this morning, and that is this, that while I am going through the vineyard I shall meet with a great many of you as I describe what the vineyard is, which I will do very carefully; I think the majority of you will be able to say, Well, then, if this is the vineyard, I am in the vineyard, I am brought into it. And if I should meet you in the vineyard, then let us bless the Lord for that mercy that opened our eyes, and has brought us to where no adversary, no evil, can ever be occurrent. Now you will see how beautifully, even in the first paradise, one thing after another represents the state of things established by the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us begin with these beautiful words:—"The heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." With these words we go to Calvary's cross, and we hear the Saviour say, "It is finished." By his atoning death the new heavens are finished; by his atoning death a place is prepared for us in that house where there are many mansions; by his atoning death all the hosts of heaven are completed; there they all stand in their shining completeness—completeness in holiness and righteousness; completeness of safety and glory. "The heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." So Jesus Christ spiritually hath brought about this state of things; and Christians will never be weary of being reminded of that completeness that is in Christ. Now let us trace out in detail this vineyard, this paradisiacal state of things established by the Lord Jesus Christ. I said I should meet with you; and oh, how many of you can truly say that you are here, that you have no hope but in the finished work of Christ, that you are looking nowhere else, expecting access to God, expecting his mercy to be with you now, and when you die, and to be brought to glory at last, in no other way;—that you have through grace obeyed the command, and you are come thus into the vineyard by the finished work of Christ! though we shall presently descend to describe what it is experimentally to be brought in. What is the next thing that follows us? It is what we should imagine—namely, rest. "And God rested on the seventh day, and sanctified it," or set it apart; "and blessed it; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." Now hear what the Saviour saith. Here is a poor man trying to make himself good, knowing that none but good people can enter heaven; trying to make himself righteous, knowing that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God; here is a man trying to make himself acceptable to God, knowing that unless God accepts him he cannot be saved; here is a man trying to make himself pleasing to God, knowing that if God is not pleased with him he will not be received. He labours and toils, but the Ethiopian is still the Ethiopian; the leopard is still the leopard; and he sighs and groans, and says, What shall I do? Presently a voice comes, "Come unto me, all ye

that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you release;”—my blood shall release you, and make you holy; my blood shall make you pleasing in the sight of God; my righteousness shall make you pleasing in his sight; my mediatorial work shall release you from every spot, wrinkle, fault, and sin, and shall justify you eternally. “I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you;” be united to me; let me be your life, your sanctification, your salvation, your all in all. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek.” Are you humbled down? Are you a broken-hearted sinner? I am a broken-hearted Saviour. Are you made to submit to God? So have I; I have submitted to him, I have done his will. “I am meek and lowly in heart.” If my heart were not lifted up above you when you were dead in sin, much less shall my heart be lifted up above you now that you are humbled down to my feet, and seeking that very mercy which I died to bring. “And ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” You will find the work very easy, as we shall see when we come to what the work is. What comes next? God’s forethought of you, God’s foreknowledge of you. The Lord made the heavens and the earth, “and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew.” Is it so, then? What, did he make you in the counsels of eternity before he planted you by his regenerating grace? Did he love you before you grew, when you were but a root in the dry ground, and deliver you out of the dry ground? Ah, cannot you look back and say, “God, who is rich in mercy, and for his great love wherewith he loved me, even when I was dead in sin?” He had formed me in his own purpose, in his own covenant; there I stood, a plant of his right-hand planting from all eternity; there I stood, as one of the plants which were to be planted in due time in the likeness of the death of his dear son, and to grow up in all the savour and fragrance of Immanuel’s name. When you see this, what will you do? You will join with the church, and say, “The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting;” you will join with the church again, and say, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting.” Here is the state of things that was beforehand. And what a mercy for us, that there is nothing between this and our dying hour that our God is not beforehand with! We often have to pray to him concerning the unseen. As one of your hymns beautifully expresses it—

“I know not what may soon betide;  
But Jesus knows, and he’ll provide.”

He knows every plant before it is in the earth, he knows every plant before it grows. And if there be some thistles and thorns to rise in your path—and of course there will be; some of us have had plenty of them, and we shall have some more yet—he knows them, he knows all about it. What a mercy it is, then, to have a God that we can thus trust, not only for the present, but for the future! Hence the apostle looks forward, and saith, “He shall preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom.” There is something sweet in the thought that the Lord is beforehand with everything; so that we may indeed be—

“Calm amidst tempestuous motion,  
Knowing that the Lord is nigh.”

Let us also notice here the Edenic river; the description of it is very beautiful. That river was to water the garden. And the gospel is that river that has watered the garden of God, from the fall of man down to the present time. Hence ministers are spoken of as though they were carrying a pitcher, or a water-pot of water, to water the Lord’s garden. We read, “He that watereth shall also himself be watered.” But let us take the river as a beautiful representation of the future spread of the gospel. Now it parted into four heads, to remind us of the great mission,

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” I will pass by the names, for, except the name “Euphrates,” they are very uncertain as to their etymological meaning, upon which learned men so differ that we can place no dependence whatever upon it. The first river is “that which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; there is bdellium and the onyx stone.” What bdellium is, also, the learned very much differ upon, and therefore I shall pass by that. “The gold of that land is good;” meaning it is worth searching for, it is worth digging and labouring for, and well worth possessing when obtained. And the onyx stone is only another representation of the same things. Now what is this gold but the souls of men? What are these precious stones but the immortal souls of the people? Do you not read of the promise being given of treasures hid in the sand? What is the very first business of the gospel? To find out this mystic gold, these precious stones, these treasures. There was when you and I did not think our souls were of such value as to be worth even our anxiety, much less worth the blood of Immanuel; we did not think our souls were of so much value as to require us to sacrifice what we called all our pleasures and comforts to their welfare. But the happy time came when God made us feel that our soul had in it immortality, and that the soul in that sense, as to value, is good; and our God thought it so well worth saving as to send his dear Son to save it. Jesus Christ thought it so valuable, that he did not think it too much to lay down his precious life to obtain our eternal redemption; the Holy Spirit has thought it so valuable that he dwells in the soul. Therefore the Lord’s people are spoken of as his treasures and his jewels. Oh, if you are right in your soul with God, then I will tell you what you will do. You will work in this vineyard, as the Saviour describes. Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and other things will certainly be added. “The second river is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia”—Ethiopia meaning black. This represents the people as being black, in their condition as sinners. Said the Church, “I am black.” And so, when a sinner finds out how sin has blackened him, he reads in the 7th of Revelation a secret. “Ah,” he says, “I am blackened by sin within and without—everything that is contrary to God!” But here is the secret. “What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they? These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.” The third river “goeth toward the east of Assyria.” The margin reads it “eastward.” Let us take the word “eastward,” we can all understand that—that it is towards the sun-rising. And this is what the Lord does with the soul: he finds it out, and teaches the man the value of his soul; and then he shows him how the blackness is taken away, and then he brings him into the sunrising—brings him into his presence; for what is the sunrising but the rising Sun of righteousness, Christ Jesus? And if I have the presence of Christ, I have the presence of God; for God is in Christ, reconciling us to himself. When we have the presence of God by Jesus Christ, we have him in the presence of his love to us, of his choice of us, of his entire approbation of us; we have him in his presence of decision for us, in his presence of eternity for us. “And the fourth river is Euphrates,” which signifies “fulness,” or “fruitfulness.” This life ends with emptiness, but the life we have in Christ ends with fulness, or rather, never ends at all, but lives on to fulness. Presently I shall have to lay my head on a dying pillow, and I shall say, Where is the Surrey Tabernacle now? It is gone; the people, the congregation, are gone, my life is gone, everything pertaining to me is gone; here am I with a poor dying body; all is empty, all is void, all is vague; the sun is gone down, the stars darkened, the moon turned

into blood; the end of the world with me is come. But then, while we are in this state in the body, at the same time there is a sun that will never go down, stars that will never cease to shine; a moon that will always be fair; a river that will always flow; a tide that will never ebb; a God that will ever love me; yea, as I pass from this empty cistern, there is awaiting me in the presence of a dear covenant God a fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

Now see how this paradise is spiritualized. 51st of Isaiah:—"Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness;"—you have none of your own; you have heard of mine, and so you are following after it;—"ye that seek the Lord; look unto the rock"—the sunken quarry of nature—"whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged"—the pit of spiritual death, called in Ezekiel the grave. I opened your grave, I brought life, and I said, Come forth, and go work to-day in my vineyard; I said, Live, and thou didst live. And then, when you have looked at what you are, look at the pattern of what you are to be. "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah," the new covenant, "that bare you; for I called him alone," and he came when I called him, because I called him with that kind of calling that he was sure to come; so I have you; "and blessed him, and increased him;" so I have you, and will increase you yet more and more, until you are comforted on every side. "For the Lord shall comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden;" and what was Eden? A very pleasant place; not an adversary nor an evil occurrent. The adversary did get in; but here is a vineyard into which the adversary can never get. Leviathan, the piercing serpent, can never enter here. "He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord." How happy were Adam and Eve! their joy was God's presence, and not a fault to be found. And so in Christ Jesus there is God's presence, and not a fault to be found. "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." If that is the testimony of God, then let us despise every doctrine that stands at all opposed to the glorious testimony of the blessed God. "He will make her wilderness like Eden;" but if there be one adversary, one sin, one trouble, any death, it is not like Eden. "He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein;" no mourning, no sorrow, no complaining; there shall be nothing there but "thanksgiving, and the voice of melody." Our mourning is in self, not in Christ; our troubles are in ourselves, and in the world, not in Christ. Our mourning is a great blessing to us; "it is better," in our present state, "to go to the house of mourning than to the house of laughter;" for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is sometimes made better; that is, better prepared to reflect upon eternal things, and to profit thereby. When brought into many trials, we can understand the tribulatory paths that the saints have travelled, and we are hereby made acquainted with ourselves, and that will make us loathe ourselves, and increasingly long to be acquainted with those remedial provisions that are in Christ Jesus the Lord. One more scripture upon this subject. In Amos this paradisiacal state of things is represented as a wonderfully fertile state. And here I am afraid of myself; I have the highest opinion of you, but in what I am going to say, while I think it applies to you, I am afraid of myself. What does it say? Why, that the people shall be so industrious that they shall go on from favour to favour, from blessing to blessing, working and going on in such a merry, joyful sort of way that one cannot describe it; we must take the prophet's own words, "The ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed;" such is the rapid rotation of crops. What does it mean? Well, perhaps you will smile at the idea, but it looks to me like a harvest or a vintage every month. Well, if that is not the meaning, it is said of the tree of life that it yielded its fruit

every month; up the corn springs, and ripens directly to the harvest; then comes the reaper; then comes the ploughman; then comes the sower of seed; then comes the treader of grapes. Here is a glorious rotation of crops. There is crop after crop, blessing after blessing. And then mark, "the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt." Ah, dear Immanuel, one drop of thy blood can melt that sin away; another drop of thy blood can melt that sin away; another drop of thy blood can melt that sin away; one drop of thy blood can melt this trouble away; another drop can melt that trouble away. Ah, if the Lord sprinkle us with the precious blood of Christ, mountainous sins and tribulations melt away; all is levelled to a plain, and ere we are aware our souls are made like the chariots of Ammi-nadib; we leap into God's presence and feel that we are as welcome there as Immanuel's blood can make us, as welcome as everlasting love, boundless compassion and mercy, and infinite delight can make us. "And all the hills shall melt." These mountains and hills may be very rocky, and rugged, and frightful to look at, and you may be afraid some of these craggy rocks will ere long fall upon you, and put an end to all hope; no, not while Immanuel lives. "The mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards," the blessed truths of the gospel, "and drink the wine thereof." When Christ becomes planted, as it were, he will never cease to supply the pure blood of the grape, that cheers, but not inebriates. "They shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up." It does not say they shall be no more pulled *at*. The devil may get hold of God's plants, and try to pull them up; he may pull and tug as long as he likes, but he will never get one up. You might as well try to tear up an old oak tree with your little finger; cannot do it. "They shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God." Here, then is no adversary, no evil, no fault. I was going to say, what more would you have? Ah, the poet is right when he says,—

"What more can he say than to you he hath said,  
Ye who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?"

But I must notice, secondly, *the obedience to the command*,—"Son, go work in my vineyard." "I will not." I don't mind that vineyard, or that vineyard; but the vineyard that I am now directed to I have heard a bad name of. Mark the language, "Son, go work in *my* vineyard," it is *mine*. Why, everybody speaks against it, it is the sect everywhere spoken against. "I will not." Very well, then go to work somewhere else. So he went off to Hagar, and took a little of her advice; and worked on, worked on, and worked on. Ah, dear, he says, this is all work and no pay, and it is all work and no play; and this is all work and no good. I rather wish I had gone into that free grace vineyard now; I rather wish I had gone to where there shall be no evil or adversary occurring. I have a great mind to go. But then perhaps I may not go now, because I have been rebellious; I said I would not. I never liked those high doctrine people and their religion. Do you know the reason of that? There are two reasons; the one is because you are not poor enough to know your need of it; and the second is because you do not understand it; if you understood them and their religion you would love both. Well, can I get in? We will just put you to the test. "In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it. I will keep it night and day." Ah, then, I am to work with the Lord. That's it. Did you think you were to work by yourself? Yes, I thought so. No, you will work with the Lord; he will be there, and he will give you

strength. Well, but how am I to get there? You hear what he says, that while you have been a briar and a thorn, and would not go, he says, "Or let him" that does repent and is willing to go, "take hold of my strength." Christ is God's strength. Christ is the power of God; "that he may," by the atonement and righteousness of my dear Son, "make peace with me; and shall make peace with me." Such a one, then, is thus made willing, and he enters into the faith; for you must come into the faith in order to be in this vineyard. He comes into this reconciliation, this freedom, this paradisiacal state of things. Again, it is said, "Ask, and ye shall receive." But then you must ask aright. You may ask wrongly, and if you ask amiss you shall not receive. "Seek, and ye shall find;" that is, if you seek aright. "Knock, and it shall be opened;" that is, if you knock in the right spirit. "Ask, and it shall be given you." It depends upon whether you ask aright or not. The Pharisee asked the favour of God on the ground of his own doing—the Pharisee's own doing. Now you see that man asked amiss, and therefore he did not receive. The Jews asked God to interpose and save them from the Roman armies; but God mocked at their fear, and laughed when their calamity came; for while they were asking God to interpose, they were at the same time in a state of enmity against God's Christ; they asked amiss. But the publican asked aright, he breathed out, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" and went down to his house carrying with him the best robe, carrying with him the peace of God, carrying with him the pardon of his sins, carrying with him eternal salvation, carrying with him the Spirit of God, the Christ of God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Never more was the publican without Christ, without hope, or without God in the world. He asked aright. He that thus asketh receiveth; he that seeketh findeth; that is, if he seek aright. "Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness;" therefore they sought wrong, did not seek aright. But the Gentile, like the thief on the cross, followed after the righteousness of faith. The thief sought in the right way, and he found his way into that paradise, this very vineyard in its glorified department—he entered there the same day. "Knock, and it shall be opened." It depends upon what spirit you knock in. You read of certain persons that went and knocked. Did you ever receive my truth? Didn't like it at all. Not free grace truth? Didn't like it at all. It is true, Lord, some of those foolish virgins told us to go to them that sold, and buy for ourselves; we are not going to buy such doctrines as these. Why, you call them the foolish virgins? Of course they were the foolish virgins—that is, in the eyes of the foolish. So the foolish thought the wise were foolish, and the wise knew that the foolish were foolish; there is the difference. Just so now; the world thinks us fools, and we know them to be; that is just the difference. The spiritual man is a fool in the eyes of the world; the world thinks him a fool, but the Christian knows that he himself was a fool all the time he was not a Christian, and that he was never wise until he was made wise unto salvation. "Open to us;"—come, open the door. When people come with a great bouncing knock, you may be sure there is something wrong. And so these virgins went, "Lord, open to us." Who are you? Well, we are very pious creatures; we kept clear of that free grace oil. Oh, your lamps are gone out. Well, yes, Lord; we didn't think that much mattered; we thought they were better out than not; we thought the less said about these doctrines the better; and we thought that those who did light up their lamps with that free grace oil, their lamps ought to be put out, and they themselves ought to be put out too. No, says the Saviour, I know nothing about you; depart from me, I know you not. Why, we are the most pious creatures in the world; we have kept our lamps clean, you wou't find a spot on them; whereas we have seen many spots on the lamps of

these other virgins ; we have kept our profession perfectly clean ; whereas these others we know they had some spots about them, and yet they are received. Ah, we see the spirit of the elder brother towards the prodigal constantly exhibited. "Knock," then, "and it shall be opened." It depends upon the spirit in which he knocks. If he knock a gentle knock, in the spirit of faith,—Lord, canst thou admit a lost, ruined, helpless sinner, that deserves the lowest hell? Ah, then, if thou art thus made willing to receive him, "Behold," says Jesus, "I stand at the door, and knock ; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in unto him." There never was a case yet of a poor sinner being thoroughly willing to receive the Saviour that the Saviour did not receive, because it is the Lord that has made him willing. Thus they enter in by experimental reconciliation to God ; they enter in by asking in the right way, seeking in the right way, knocking in the right spirit, the spirit of faith.

Lastly, *the fruit which such bring forth.* The first thing you are to do is to hold fast the vineyard. You are not to give up the truth. This vineyard, now you have got it you must keep it. Good morning, Mr. Naboth. Good morning, my lord the king. I want your vineyard. Then you won't have it. God forbid I should give up the inheritance of my fathers ; it is what God has allotted them, and what he has allotted me. I know the vineyard he brought Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob into, and he has brought me into the same, I shall not give it up. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are now in heaven, and I shall get to heaven too. But I will give you a vineyard that is better. Yes, you will give me your damnable Popery, will you, and call that better? Popery and Puseyism are nothing but the twin brothers of hell—both of them rank idolatry ; and I have no doubt if the people of God would give up the truth, these systems would say, We will give you something better. Of course—their monkey doings and infernal contrivances are better in their eyes than God's vineyard. Well, Naboth, what are you going to do? Not going to be a fool. They can but kill my body—that is all they can do ; I will not give up my vineyard ;—a type of the martyrs. Now, Naboth, we are seeking your good ; it is out of mercy to you if we burn you—of course it is ; it is out of love to you ; we are seeking your good. Now come, Naboth, don't be in a passion ; I will give thee the worth of it in money. You will give me the worth in money ! the worth in money, sir ! Why, God's truth is above all price ; it is more precious than rubies ; it cannot be gotten for silver or for gold ; and all things thou canst desire are not to be compared to it ; and you will give me the worth in money ! You deceptive old liar ; why, all the money in the universe would not buy one corner of this vineyard, much less buy the whole. Judas did not know its value, he sold it for a trifle ; but no money shall bribe me to give up God's eternal truth. The worth of it in money ! A pretty story, is it not ?

Ah, good Naboth would say, thy money perish with thee, because thou thoughtest that the inheritance of God could be bought by human money. Then I will go and consult Mrs. Jezebel. So you may. He did consult Mrs. Jezebel, and Mrs. Jezebel had her way. And what was this high doctrine, Antinomian, stubborn Naboth? Why, an iron pillar ; not like some of the parsons, iron and clay, but all iron—could not move him at all. So "they proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people ;" and two false witnesses came and accused him, saying, "Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died." But, nevertheless, Naboth did not give up the vineyard, though he lost his life ; he kept it to eternal life. Well, Ahab, you are all right now ; presently, sir, the dogs will lick your guilty blood. Ah, Jezebel, you are all right now ; you may paint your face, and try to make yourself look nice, and winning, and handsome ; but thou hast shed the blood of the prophets of God.