

THE FRUITFUL BOUGH AND THE STRONG BOW

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 27th, 1856.

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."- [Ge 49:22-24](#).

IN reading the Old Testament records we are struck with this circumstance, that in the case of many of those who were raised up for signal purposes in the Church of God, there was that in their birth, or in their life, which was marked by some peculiar divine interposition. One feature of this nature is particularly remarkable in some of the most eminent saints and servants of God -that their mothers were naturally sterile. It was so, you know, with the mother of Isaac, the heir of promise, of Jacob, of Samson, in a very marked instance. It was so **to come to New Testament times** with the mother of John the Baptist. The mothers of all these eminent servants of God were naturally barren; and as a desire for offspring amounted, in Eastern wives, almost to a passion, God seems to have taken occasion thereby to manifest His prerogative, and display the sovereignty of His power, even in the circumstances of their natural birth.

You find this in the case of Joseph also. As he was to be a marked instrument in the hands of God, eminent as a saint, and eminent as a preserver of God's people in Egypt, he had to spring in the same way from a barren mother. You well know that Rachel was sterile, and that, in answer to prayer, God gave her a son, whom she named Joseph, as a pledge **the name signifying "he shall add"** of further offspring.

Now Jacob, before he dies, assembles his sons around him, and pronounces over them what we cannot exactly call blessings, because to some no blessing was given -but he bids them "gather themselves together that he may tell them that which shall befall them in the last days." Having spoken of one, and then another, he comes down at last to Joseph; and upon him he pronounces this special benediction, which we shall now endeavour to open up, as the Lord may enable. "Joseph," says he, "is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall. The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him; but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."

I shall, with God's blessing, in endeavouring to unfold the mind and meaning of the Holy Spirit in these words, show:

I. First, Joseph's fruitfulness; for he is specially marked out here, by the finger of God, as being "a fruitful bough."

II. Secondly, the source of that fruitfulness; that it was not in himself, but that "he was a fruitful bough by a well, and his branches ran over the wall."

III. Thirdly, Joseph's persecutions and bitter afflictions, "for the archers sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him."

IV. Fourthly, Joseph's victory: "But his bow abode in strength."

V. Fifthly, the source of that strength: "The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."

1. "**Joseph is a fruitful bough.**" You cannot but remember that striking parable which issued from the lips of Him that cannot lie [Joh 15](#), where the Lord uses those solemn words, "I am the Vine, ye are the branches. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." Thus in the vine -the visible Church of Christ -there are unfruitful as there are fruitful branches. I need not dwell at any length upon the circumstance that these unfruitful branches never had a living union with the stem. No man that knows truth for himself can believe for a single moment that the unfruitful branches which were cut off by the judgment of God, had the same union with the living stem that the fruitful branches had. It would be an insult to the doctrines of grace, and to that God who revealed them, to say that the branches, which bore no fruit were in the vine in the same vital way as those that did bear fruit. But Joseph was eminently "a fruitful bough;" and when the husbandman or vine-dresser came and looked at the bough, under the verdant leaves his searching eye beheld the rich, ripe clusters.

What is **fruit**? There may be much fruit that is worthless; nay, more, really poisonous. A few years ago a man took his station upon Blackfriars bridge, and held in his hands a basket of fruit, very tempting to look at; many persons bought of it, and some went home and died. What had that man in his basket? Why, the fruit of the belladonna, or "deadly night-shade," the berries of which have all the appearance of beautiful fruit; and yet to eat them is death. Thus it is not the appearance of fruit **for the eye, unless skilled, cannot discern the good from the bad** that stamps it as good and genuine. There may be much fruit **hedge fruit, for instance** called by that name, but not fit to be put upon the king's table. When, then, the blessed Spirit speaks of fruit, and calls Joseph "a fruitful bough," He means fruit produced by the grace of God, fruit which weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and judged by the scrutiny of an unerring eye, claims and deserves the name. The only fruit, then, that is worthy the name, is that which is produced by the Holy Ghost, and springs out of a vital union with the Son of God. And all fruit, called such, that does not spring out of this vital union, and is not brought forth by the operations and influences of the Holy Ghost upon the heart -men may call it what they will. God will never put it upon His table. But Joseph was "a fruitful bough," inasmuch as the fruit that he bare was of God's own producing.

Let us spend a few moments in looking at this fruit; for it is a very important matter to know whether we are fruitful boughs or not. But bear in mind that the bough is not always or often conscious itself of the fruit it bears; nay, the more the bough is loaded with fruit, the more it droops and sinks; the heavier the fruit, the lower the bough. But, assuming that the saints of God cannot often nor always see in themselves that fruit which is visible to others, we may take a glance at what the Holy Ghost, in the Word of God, calls by that name.

1. **The fear of God** in a tender conscience is a special fruit that grows upon the gospel bough. This fruit is found in every living child of God, for God's own promise is, "I will plant my fear in their heart, that they shall not depart from me." "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Some of you may be mourning, as you will ever have reason to mourn, over your own barrenness and unfruitfulness in the things of God. But have you godly fear? Has the Lord planted that divine fruit in your soul? That is the first grace; all others will come as the Lord is pleased to bring them in, and to make them manifest.

2. **Faith in God**; faith in His Word, truthfulness, greatness, power, glory, justice, and majesty, which ever is accompanied by a godly reverence of His great name; that living faith of which He is the author, and which is exercised upon His divine perfections, is a fruit of the Spirit; for "faith is the gift of God." No man can produce faith in his own soul; it is the special work of God to produce faith in Himself; and when this faith -for it is the same faith that believes in God that believes in Jesus **as the Lord said, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me"** -when this faith believes in a revealed Jesus, in Christ made known by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, in blood sprinkled, in a righteousness brought near, in a love made known, in a Surety discovered and made manifest; when faith not only embraces God in His terrible majesty, but Christ in His Person and work, what a special fruit and gift this is of the blessed Spirit.

3. When "**a good hope** through grace" is raised up in the soul, through some testimony, smile, promise, word, or inward evidence of interest in a precious Christ -when this "good hope" is opened up in a believer's heart -and this door is often opened in the valley of Achor, amidst much confusion and trouble -this is also a fruit that hangs upon the gospel bough.

4. When **love**, too, is shed abroad in the believer's heart, and he can say with Peter, "Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love thee," because he has felt and found Christ very precious to his soul -that love is a fruit which hangs as a rich cluster upon the gospel branch; for love is expressly mentioned by the Apostle as part of the fruit of the Spirit.

5. Where there is **peace** also with God, through believing in Jesus Christ, and peace with the dear children of God; when the Prince of Peace sways the sceptre of His grace in the realm of peace, the believer's heart; that is a blessed gospel fruit.

6. When the blessed Lord is pleased to manifest His loving-kindness, and to swell the tide **of joy** in the soul, so that it is able to joy in God, and rejoice in Christ Jesus "with joy unspeakable, and full of glory;" that is a fruit that grows upon the gospel bough; for "love, joy, peace" are preeminent in the catalogue of spiritual fruit, given by the Apostle [Ga 5:22](#).

7. Shall I not add, also, **resignation** and **submission** to the will of God, with tenderness of conscience, humility of mind, brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, love to the dear children of God? Are not all these gospel fruits? But time would fail me to enumerate and describe one by one the blessed fruits that hang upon the gospel bough, and by the possession of which a man becomes manifested as a fruitful branch.

We are very imperfect judges of the fruit as regards ourselves. Many of the dear saints of God, in whom the eyes of others can see the rich, ripe clusters, hidden, it may be, by the verdant leaves of profession, mourn and sigh daily over their leanness and barrenness. "My leanness, my leanness! Woe unto me!" is their continual cry, when they examine themselves as in the sight of God. As the gardener looks under the leaves to find the rich clusters, so they take up, so to speak, the leaves of their profession, one by one, and say, "Do I bring forth fruit? Do I live to His praise? Is my walk consistent? Is my conscience tender? Do I manifest any godly fear? Is the blessed Spirit producing in me those fruits which are to the honour and praise of God?" And when we feel, as we do feel at times, so much in our carnal mind to sink us low, and so little in our spiritual mind to lift us high, we are ready to faint, and say, "Lord, is there **any** fruit produced in my heart, in my lips, or in my life?" Yet, with all the complaints that the dear saints of God make of their barrenness and want of fruitfulness, in the sight of a holy God they are fruitful boughs, for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. The tears you shed, the sighs you heave, the desires you utter, the brokenness you experience, the contrition that is working in your heart when looking unto the Lord for some manifestation of His love to your soul -all these are so many precious fruits of the Holy Ghost hanging on your bough; and yet you see them not. You want to be different, to live a holy life, not to have a sinful thought, not to speak an idle word, not to do a foolish or sinful action. But you are hampered and hindered in running the race; and with all your desires to live to God's glory, what with your carnal mind, what with the snares spread for your feet, what with the temptations of Satan, the cares of life, and the anxieties of business, your mind seems to droop as falling so short of being what you would be, and producing what you fain would produce.

II. I pass on to our second point -the **source** of Joseph's fruitfulness. There is one sentence from the mouth of God, written by the pen of the prophet Hosea, that shows us what is the source of all real fruitfulness: "From me" **not from** thee "is thy fruit found." And there is another sentence written by the

same inspired pen, in which God, speaking of Ephraim, says, "Ephraim bringeth forth fruit unto himself." Self was the ruling source of all the apparent fruit that grew upon Ephraim's bough, and as he bore fruit only to himself, God despised it and rejected it.

We have the secret **source** of gospel fruit here pointed out. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough **by a well.**" In Eastern climes, and in fact to some degree in our own more humid climate, trees, shrubs, or flowers cannot grow unless they are continually watered; in the East more particularly the vine requires a perennial spring in order to make it even live, much more blossom, and bring forth fruit. Thus Joseph's fruitfulness sprang from this source, that he was planted "by a well." And what was this well? What said the Lord to the Samaritan woman? "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a **well of water** springing up into everlasting life." You well know that the operations and influences of the Holy Ghost are compared again and again in Scripture to water. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth in me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly **or heart** shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit." Again, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." I need not, therefore, occupy your time with showing that the well is a scriptural emblem of the Holy Ghost, who alone makes us fruitful in every good word and work. Yet there is something in the emblem that casts a sweet light upon the source of all fruitfulness. A well is hidden from view; it lies deep. Men may pass it by, and not know its existence; but it is there.

The vine, then, dipped its roots in quest of the well. There is in trees and plants naturally and instinctively a search after food; and the food of the plant is the source of its fruit. Plant a tree upon a barren spot, and it will spread its roots till it finds a fruitful soil; a shrub upon a wall will drop its roots down till it reaches the ground; a sapling planted a little distance from a stream will spread its roots till it reaches the water, as though there were an instinct in the very tree itself, to find out that which shall be a source of life and fruitfulness. If, then, a tree, a vegetable, can from some instinct go in quest of that which shall sustain its natural life, shall not much more a child of God go in quest of that which shall sustain his life, and maintain his fruitfulness? As, then, the vine dips its roots into the well, and keeps drawing up continual supplies of moisture to make the leaf green and the fruit rich and ripe, so a child of God who feels his poverty and necessity, and yet knows something of the sweet operations of the Holy Ghost in his heart, spreads out the roots of his faith, hope and love in quest of this perennial supply. The thirstier the vine is, the more room there is in its tubes and veins to draw up the moisture in the well; so the more a Christian feels his dryness and barrenness, the more room there is for the supplies of living water to keep him alive and to bring forth every good word and work.

The source of all fruitfulness is the well. If he be a minister, he never can bear fruit to be a blessing to the people, unless he dip his roots well therein. And if, my hearer, you be a gospel bough, you must dip the roots of your faith and love into the same living well. The Holy Ghost must be the supply of all divine life, and the source of all divine fruitfulness. Now, every secret desire that springs up in your bosom, every longing petition for the operations of God's grace in your heart, every yearning longing after the bedewing of His mercy upon your soul, every mournful complaint, every trickling tear, every lamenting sigh that you are what you are; as Hart says, "Tis winter all the year with me;" these lamentations, what are they? They are the going forth of the roots of your religion after the well; they are the instinctive movements of the life of God in your soul to get supplies out of the fulness of Christ; and every complaint, sigh, cry, and lamentation over your barrenness and want of fruitfulness, is really the putting forth of the life of God in your heart, which life of God is in quest of this ever-flowing supply.

Not so with those not acquainted with the depths of the Fall and the barrenness of man. They can do without the well; they want no Holy Ghost to begin, no Holy Ghost to maintain, no Holy Ghost to complete the work of faith with power; they want no faith of God's giving, hope of God's inspiring, love

of God's shedding abroad; they want no God-given prayer, or God-given answer; nor do they wish for the Lord. and for the Lord alone, to work in them. They can manage their religion for themselves; they can manufacture some imitation of the holy anointing oil; they do not want the Spirit to drop it into their breast; they can get the pestle and mortar, and the drugs, and compound a counterfeit that will be good enough for them. Not so with the saint of God; he must have the holy anointing oil; he must have the well into which he may dip the roots of his faith, and from which he may draw living supplies; for without them he has nothing and is nothing but barrenness and death.

But there is another thing very noteworthy spoken of Joseph: "**His branches run over the wall.**" You see there was that fruitfulness put forth in him which developed itself not merely in leaves and fruit, but also in the length and strength of the branch. Of all trees and shrubs the vine is the weakest; as the prophet Ezekiel says. "Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?" it is helpless and prostrate; and as such needs a trellis or wall on which to hang and expand itself to its utmost length. What is this wall? Need I answer? You have answered it already in your own bosom: **Jesus Christ, the Son of God!** He is the wall, as the Holy Ghost is the well; and as the branches of Joseph, the fruitful bough, ran over the wall and rested with all their weight upon it, so do faith, hope, love, and all the spreading tendrils and branches of divine religion rest and hang upon the wall. Christ.

Now, there is no limit to the extension of the vine but the length of the wall. I have seen a vine, which has covered ten or twelve houses. It can spread itself as far as the wall extends; and the branches run over it as though they delighted in spreading themselves as far as they can go. So with the faith, hope, and love of a child of God. When he finds the solid foundation that the Person of the Son of God, God and man in one complex Person, Immanuel, God with us, affords faith, he expands his whole soul upon Him. What is the vine without a wall? Prostrate, lying on the ground. And what is the fruit without it? Crushed in the dust; trampled upon by the foot of every passer-by; trailing in the mud and dirt; but when supported by a wall, the fruit is not crushed, not trodden down, but stands forth in all its luxuriance and beauty. We bear no fruit to the honour of God, to the good of His people, and the profit of His Church, except as we rest upon Christ. When we hang our all upon His glorious Person as God-Man, on His atoning blood, justifying righteousness, dying love, and risen power, and feel what a solid foundation Jesus affords us to rest our weary souls upon, then we may spread; there is no let or hindrance then. If we spread upon the ground, we only spread in the dust; if we bear fruit upon the soil, it is only mingled with mire and mud. Let us be raised on the wall; then we may extend our length and breadth, and reach as far as the Holy Ghost may lengthen our branch and cause it to bear fruit.

Bear this in mind, as indispensable to all fruit -the **well** and the **wall**. If no well, no fruit; if no wall, what fruit there is will trail upon the ground and be tarnished with the dust. The two go together. Where there is no well there is no wall; and where there is no wall there is also no well. Where the Holy Ghost is at work upon the heart, there alone is Christ; for He takes of the things of Christ and reveals them to the soul. His delight, His covenant office, is to form Christ in the heart the hope of glory; so that wherever there is the well there is the wall. It is through these two things, or rather two Persons- the operations, influences, and teachings of God the Holy Ghost, the third Person of the glorious Trinity, and the finished work of the Son of God -that all the fruitfulness of the Church is produced.

III. I pass on to show Joseph's **afflictions**, and bitter enemies with their **cruel persecutions**. Now, one would have thought that Joseph being so eminent a saint, and having conferred such benefits upon his brethren, would have escaped their malicious shafts. But no, it was not so; nay, it was his very fruitfulness that drew it forth. Be a barren bough, and you will not be worth shooting at; it is only wasting powder to shoot at you. Be a fruitful bough, be an honour to the Church of God; manifest in your families, in your business, and in your movements generally, that the grace of God is operative and bringing forth fruit in you, you will have archers; and these archers, as in the case of Joseph, will hate you, and shoot at you, and sorely grieve you.

1. But who are these archers? They would not be spoken of in the plural number unless they were many and diverse.

i. The **profane world** carries a bow, and arrows in the quiver, and often shoots against the saints of God. The profane world hates the Church of God; the more it sees of the image of Christ in the Church the more it hates it, for the "carnal mind is enmity against God;" and where the carnal mind reigns and rules, there will be bitter enmity against all who bear God's image. Such will ever shoot at you words of slander, calumny, malice, unkindness; there is no arrow in their quiver which they will not discharge against you. Yet, after all, they are but indifferent marksmen -they rarely know where to hit us; their arrows, for the most part, go wide, and very few hit the bull's eye.

ii. Not so with the next archers of whom I shall speak, the **professing world**. These are, many of them, the bitterest enemies that the Church of God has to encounter, for they hate power, they hate the life of God in the soul. They like well enough the fruitfulness that springs from themselves; but not that which springs from the operations of the grace of God. They hate a religion which their very conscience tells them they do not possess; they abhor an experimental, vital work of God upon the soul, because it condemns them, and makes them feel that they are destitute of that which they see in the saints of God. Their enmity, therefore, being drawn forth by the power displayed in their hearts and the fruit manifested in their lives, they shoot at them arrows, even bitter words, and often sorely grieve them. Place two servants in the same house, one a child of God, and the other, a professor; take two daughters in the same family, one a living soul, and the other dead in profession; and you will see how Peninnah can vex Hannah, how the professor can vex the possessor. What grievous words and unkind speeches will be continually uttered to harass and distress the mind.

iii. These are not the only archers. Sorry I am to say that some of the keenest archers that shoot at Joseph and sorely grieve him are the **saints of God** themselves. As Hart said, no doubt from painful experience:

From sinner and from saint
He meets with many a blow.

The children of God are, for the most part, very tender in their feelings; and many of the dear saints of God have many questionings and fears as to their own sincerity and uprightness before Him. Many also are deeply exercised with powerful temptations, and are pained and grieved with the hidings of God's face and the workings of sin in the carnal mind. Now, all these feelings give, so to speak, a butt and target for the arrows to be shot at. We do not fear **them**, but we fear lest what they say is true; we do not fear the archer, but we fear the arrow that he shoots, because **according to an ancient simile, which has been well versified by a modern poet** it is often tipped with a feather from one's own wing:

Keen were his pangs, but keener far to feel
He owned the pinion which impelled the steel;
While the same plumage which had warmed his nest.
Drank the last life-drop of his bleeding breast.

It is when the arrow is feathered from our own wing that it strikes most home. Now, have you not sometimes been guilty of an inconsistency, an infirmity, a slip, a foolish word, of something that has been taken to feather the arrow? And has any dart quivered in your wounded soul so sorely and deeply as the arrow the flight of which has been guided to the mark by the feather you yourself have afforded from your own breast?

iv. **Satan** is the very prince of archers, the Robin Hood of bowmen. He knows where to hit, and his target is the carnal mind. The rebellion, the blasphemy, the filth, the wickedness that he can stir up, what Scripture calls his "fiery darts," how these stick when they are shot by this infernal archer!

v. Then there are the arrows discharged from our **own carnal mind**- the infidel workings and base imaginations of our deeply fallen nature, and these discharged from our own bow. How keenly they stick in our conscience, in our new man of grace, and what work they often make.

2. Now, one would have thought that Joseph being a fruitful bough could have looked with complacency, almost with holy scorn, upon these archers, but it was not so; "they sorely grieved him." To be sold by his own brethren into Egypt; the dreams and visions God had given him to be derided; to be cast into prison as an ungodly man through the very person who was tempting him to ungodliness, and there to be neglected and forsaken; how these archers had shot their arrows against his bosom, and sorely grieved him! It was because he had the fear of God, because his feelings were tender, that the arrows found a place. Had he a bosom of steel, had he a heart of stone, the arrows would have fallen off blunted and pointless; but it was because he had tender feelings, a living conscience, warm affections, godly fear, and a work of grace upon his soul, that he presented a tender spot for these arrows to stick in; therefore the archers not only "hated him, but shot at him, and sorely grieved him."

IV. Did they prove Joseph's destruction? Did any one drain his life blood? Did he sink and die like a wounded hart? Did he fall upon the plain and gasp out his forlorn life? No; for "his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." He then had a bow; he could shoot too. And what was his bow? and how did he direct the arrow? He picked up the arrows that were shot at him, or rather he took them out of his own wounded bosom; and instead of aiming these shafts against those who had so sorely grieved him, he shot upward; he launched his arrows towards the throne of the Majesty on high; he turned their bitter shafts into prayers, supplications, and petitions. Thus the very arrows shot at him he turned into petitions wherewith to approach the throne of God. He drew his bow even up to the heaven of heavens; and that is what you should do. Never return evil for evil; never return railing for railing. When you are shot at by the archers, do not shoot at them again. Take your arrows and bring them before the throne; present your feelings wounded as they are, your groans and sighs, with your warm petitions, and spread them before God who hears and answers prayer; and you will find the benefit and blessing of it. They will beat you at shooting if you shoot at them. They can use language that you cannot. A man of birth and education, drawn into collision with a street ruffian, cannot bandy words with him; he must pass on -he would soon be beaten in the strife of words. So you must never shoot arrow against arrow with those archers who sorely grieve you. You have a tender conscience; you have the fear of God; you weigh your words; you know what will grieve your mind when it comes back upon you; and you are therefore sparing of your speech. Cease from that war; return not a single arrow. Let them shoot away; take their arrows; direct your bow upward; turn them all into prayers and supplications; and in due time sweet answers of mercy and peace will come into your bosom. Thus Joseph's bow "abode in strength," and all their arrows neither struck his bow out of his hand, nor broke it asunder. He could shoot as well as they, but not in the same way, nor at the same object.

Perhaps the words may apply to a minister whose "bow abides in strength." He has to shoot the arrows of God; as we read, "Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies." It is good when his bow abides in strength, and the arrows of truth, which he shoots reach hearts. O, this evening, if God should have directed an arrow from my bow into any heart, what a mercy for that soul will it be! The arrows of truth may stick deep and wound for a time, and yet they are blessed arrows, because in due time healing, pardon, and peace come to repair the wounds which they make.

V. We come to **the source of Joseph's strength**. We have seen the source of his fruitfulness, and now we see the source of his strength: "The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." It is a singular expression, "the arms of his hands:" yet to my mind there is great beauty in it. Look at a man's arm and a man's hand; and ask yourself, which is the stronger, a man with a strong arm and a weak hand, or a man with a strong hand and a weak arm? "Why, of course," you say, "the man with the strong arm, for there, all the muscles are; there are the levers of motion." So "the arms of his hands" is to my mind a beautiful idea, because if the arm is strong, the hand is but the means the arm makes use of to do what it requires. So "the arms of Joseph's hands were made strong;" and then he could hold the bow, direct the arrow, and shoot to some good purpose.

I am here reminded of what I once read in Latimer's sermons. Our ancestors, you know, were celebrated bowmen; victories were won at Cressy and Agincourt by the English yeomanry, who were skilled in the use of the bow. Latimer says, in a sermon preached before the king, that no man could be a good archer who did not learn from his boyhood; and the custom, he tells, us, was for the father to put his hands upon the son's hands, to teach him how to shoot, and throw the whole strength of his body into the bow. Looking at this as explaining the expression, it seems to me replete with sweetness and beauty. When the boy drew the bow, it was not the strength of his own arm that drew the string, nor was it the keenness of his eye that directed the arrow to the mark. The child appeared to draw the bow and to direct the arrow; but the hand of the father was upon the hand of the child, and the eye of the father was guiding the eye of the child; thus though the child seemed to draw the bow, it was the strength of the father that really pulled the string. So "the arms of Joseph's hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." God put His hands upon the hands of Joseph, drew the bow for him, directed the arrow, and hit effectually the mark.

Apply this to your experience. When you pray effectually it is not you that pray; it is the Spirit of God that prays in you; for He helpeth our infirmities, and intercedeth for us with groanings, which cannot be uttered. When you believe, it is the Spirit of God that works faith in you; when you hope, it is the Spirit of God that produces hope in you; when you love, it is the Spirit of God that sheds abroad love in you; it is the arms of His hands that are put upon your hands, and they are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. We seem to pray, though God prays in us. We seem to believe and hope and love; but it is the work of the Spirit upon our hearts. So the secret of Joseph's handling the bow to good purpose was that the hands of God were upon his hands, and they were made strong by the mighty God of Jacob.

Now, no minister can ever be blessed to the saints of God unless he holds Joseph's bow, and unless his arms are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. We read of a man who shot a bow at a venture, and the arrow hit a king's breast. Who prompted the man to draw the bow? Who guided the arrow that reached Ahab's guilty heart? Was it the man that drew the bow, or was it God that prompted him and aimed the shaft? Clearly it was God. So it is with every servant of God. If his arrow reach the conscience of any of the election of grace, it is God who sends the arrow into that sinner's heart. Unless God give him Joseph's bow, and make the arms of his hands strong, he may shoot away -the shot will only be a random one; it will never hit the mark, never bring a sinner down, never lift a saint up, never profit the Church of God. If ministers be fruitful boughs, the source of their fruitfulness is a well, and they rest upon the wall; and though the archers may shoot at them and sorely grieve them, yet their bow abides in strength, and they never let it go. The bow of prayer and supplication they never let fall out of their hands; the weapons of their warfare are not carnal, but spiritual; they shoot the arrows of truth, for the arms of their hands are ever made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

We see, then, Joseph's fruitfulness; we see the source of it; we see the persecutions his soul was grieved by; and we see the final victory that he gained. God of His infinite mercy lead our souls into the same blessed track, apply His truth to our hearts, that our bow may abide in strength, and that the arms of our hands may be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

