His own Kingdom and Office.

**8. But**] i.e. what was it, if it was not  
that?

**what went ye out**] The repetition of this question, and the order  
of the suggestive answers, are remarkable.  
The first sets before them the scene of  
their desert pilgrimage—the banks of Jordan with its reeds, but no such trifles  
were the object of the journey: this suggestion is rejected without an answer.  
The second reminds them that it was a  
*man*—but not one in soft clothing, for  
such are not found in deserts. The third  
brings before them the real object of their  
pilgrimage in his holy office, and even  
amplifies that office itself. So that the  
great Forerunner is made to rise gradually  
and sublimely into his personality, and  
thus his preaching of repentance is revived  
in their minds.

**in soft raiment**]  
Contrast this with the garb of John as  
described ch. iii. 4. Such an one, in soft  
raiment, might be the forerunner of a  
proud earthly prince, but not the preacher  
of repentance before a humble and suffering Saviour; might be found as the courtly  
flatterer in the palaces of kings, but not  
as the stern rebuker of tyrants, and  
languishing in their fortress dungeons.

**9.**] We read, ch. xxi. 26, that  
‘all accounted John as a prophet.’—  
John was more than a prophet, because  
he did not write of, but *saw* and *pointed  
out*, the object of his prophecy;—and because of his proximity to the kingdom of God. He was moreover more than a prophet, because he himself was the subject  
as well as the vehicle of prophecy. But  
with deep humility he applies to himself  
only that one, of two such prophetic passages, which describes him as *a voice of  
one crying*, and omits the one which gives  
him the title of *my messenger*, here cited  
by our Lord.

**10. thy**] Our Lord here  
changes the person of the original prophecy, which is *my*. And that He  
does so, making that which is said by Jehovah  
of Himself, to be addressed to the Messiah, is, if such were needed (compare also  
Luke i. 16, 17, and 76), no mean indication of His own eternal and co-equal God-head. It is worthy of remark that all  
three Evangelists quote this prophecy  
*similarly changed*, although St. Mark has  
it in an entirely different place. Also,  
that the high dignity and honor, which  
our Lord here predicates of the Baptist,  
has a further reference: He was thus  
great above all others, *because he was the  
forerunner of Christ*. How great then  
above all others and him, must HE be.

**11. hath . . . risen**] Not merely a  
word of course, but especially used of prophets and judges, see reff., and once of our Saviour Himself, Acts v. 30.

**he that is least**] This has been variously rendered and understood. Chrysostom and other ancient interpreters, put the pause  
after “*least,*” and take the words “*in the  
Kingdom of heaven*” with what follows:  
understanding “*he that is least*” of our  
Lord. But such an interpretation is  
surely adverse to the spirit of the whole  
discourse. We may certainly say that our  
Lord in such a passage as this would not  
designate Himself as “*he that is least*”  
compared with John, in any sense: nor  
again is it our Lord’s practice to speak of  
Himself as one *in the Kingdom of heaven*,  
or of His own attributes as belonging to  
or dependent on that new order of things  
which this expression implies, and which  
was *in Him* rather than He in it. Again,  
the analogy of such passages as Matt. v.  
19; xviii. 1, would lead us to connect the  
preceding adjective *least* with *in the Kingdom of heaven*, and not the following.  
The other, the usual interpretation, I  
am convinced, is the right one: **but he  
that is least in the of heaven, is  
greater than he**.

There is very likely  
an allusion to Zech. xii. 8: “He that is  
feeble among them at that day shall be as  
David.”

Thus the parallelism is complete: *John*, not inferior to any born of  
women—but *these, even the least of them*,  
are born of *another birth* (John i. 12, 13;  
iii. 5). *John*, the nearest to the King and