

The Treasury of David (Abridged)

by Charles Spurgeon

Psalm 1

Verse 1. "BLESSED"—see how this Book of Psalms opens with a benediction, even as did the famous Sermon of our Lord upon the Mount! The word translated "blessed" is a very expressive one. The original word is plural, and it is a controverted matter whether it is an adjective or a substantive. Hence we may learn the multiplicity of the blessings which shall rest upon the man whom God hath justified, and the perfection and greatness of the blessedness he shall enjoy. We might read it, "Oh, the blessednesses!" and we may well regard it (as Ainsworth does) as a joyful acclamation of the gracious man's felicity. May the like benediction rest on us!

Here the gracious man is described both negatively (verse 1) and positively (verse 2). He is a man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. He takes wiser counsel, and walks in the commandments of the Lord his God. To him the ways of piety are paths of peace and pleasantness. His footsteps are ordered by the Word of God, and not by the cunning and wicked devices of carnal men. It is a rich sign of inward grace when the outward walk is changed, and when ungodliness is put far from our actions. Note next, he standeth not in the way of sinners. His company is of a choicer sort than it was. Although a sinner himself, he is now a blood-washed sinner, quickened by the Holy Spirit, and renewed in heart. Standing by the rich grace of God in the congregation of the righteous, he dares not herd with the multitude that do evil. Again it is said, "nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." He finds no rest in the atheist's scoffings. Let others make a mock of sin, of eternity, of hell and heaven, and of the Eternal God; this man has learned better philosophy than that of the infidel, and has too much sense of God's presence to endure to hear His name blasphemed. The seat of the scorner may be very lofty, but it is very near to the gate of hell; let us flee from it, for it shall soon be empty, and destruction shall swallow up the man who sits therein. Mark the gradation in the first verse:

He walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor standeth in the way of sinners,
Nor SITTETH in the SEAT of SCORNFUL.

When men are living in sin they go from bad to worse. At first they merely walk in the counsel of the careless and ungodly, who forget God—the evil is rather practical than habitual—but after that, they become habituated to evil, and they stand in the way of open sinners who wilfully violate God's commandments; and if let alone, they go one step further, and become themselves pestilent teachers and tempters of others, and thus they sit in the seat of the scornful. They have taken their degree in vice, and as true Doctors of Damnation they are installed, and are looked up to by others as Masters in Belial. But the blessed man, the man to whom all the blessings of God belong, can hold no communion with such characters as these. He keeps himself pure from these lepers; he puts away evil things from him as garments spotted by the flesh; he comes out from among the wicked, and goes without the camp, bearing the reproach of Christ. O for grace to be thus separate from sinners. And now mark his positive character. "His delight is in the law of the Lord." He is not under the law as a curse and condemnation, but he is in it, and he delights to be in it as his rule of life; he delights, moreover, to meditate in it, to read it by day, and think upon it by night. He takes a text and carries it

with him all day long; and in the night-watches, when sleep forsakes his eyelids, he museth upon the Word of God. In the day of his prosperity he sings psalms out of the Word of God, and in the night of his affliction he comforts himself with promises out of the same book. "The law of the Lord" is the daily bread of the true believer. And yet, in David's day, how small was the volume of inspiration, for they had scarcely anything save the first five books of Moses! How much more, then, should we prize the whole written Word which it is our privilege to have in all our houses! But, alas, what ill-treatment is given to this angel from heaven! We are not all Berean searchers of the Scriptures. How few among us can lay claim to the benediction of the text! Perhaps some of you can claim a sort of negative purity, because you do not walk in the way of the ungodly; but let me ask you—Is your delight in the law of God? Do you study God's Word? Do you make it the man of your right hand—your best companion and hourly guide? If not, this blessing belongeth not to you.

Verse 3. "And he shall be like a tree planted"—not a wild tree, but "a tree planted," chosen, considered as property, cultivated and secured from the last terrible uprooting, for "every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up:" Matthew 15:13. "By the rivers of water;" so that even if one river should fail, he hath another. The rivers of pardon and the rivers of grace, the rivers of the promise and the rivers of communion with Christ, are never-failing sources of supply. He is "like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season;" not unseasonable graces, like untimely figs, which are never full-flavored. But the man who delights in God's Word, being taught by it, bringeth forth patience in the time of suffering, faith in the day of trial, and holy joy in the hour of prosperity. Fruitfulness is an essential quality of a gracious man, and that fruitfulness should be seasonable. "His leaf also shall not wither;" his faintest word shall be everlasting; his little deeds of love shall be had in remembrance. Not simply shall his fruit be preserved, but his leaf also. He shall neither lose his beauty nor his fruitfulness. "And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Blessed is the man who hath such a promise as this. But we must not always estimate the fulfillment of a promise by our own eye-sight. How often, my brethren, if we judge by feeble sense, may we come to the mournful conclusion of Jacob, "All these things are against me!" For though we know our interest in the promise, yet we are so tried and troubled, that sight sees the very reverse of what that promise foretells. But to the eye of faith this word is sure, and by it we perceive that our works are prospered, even when everything seems to go against us. It is not outward prosperity which the Christian most desires and values; it is soul prosperity which he longs for. We often, like Jehoshaphat, make ships to go to Tarshish for gold, but they are broken at Ezion-geber; but even here there is a true prospering, for it is often for the soul's health that we would be poor, bereaved, and persecuted. Our worst things are often our best things. As there is a curse wrapped up in the wicked man's mercies, so there is a blessing concealed in the righteous man's crosses, losses, and sorrows. The trials of the saint are a divine husbandry, by which he grows and brings forth abundant fruit.

Verse 4. We have now come to the second head of the Psalm. In this verse the contrast of the ill estate of the wicked is employed to heighten the coloring of that fair and pleasant picture which precedes it. The more forcible translation of the Vulgate and of the Septuagint version is—"Not so the ungodly, not so." And we are hereby to understand that whatever good thing is said of the righteous is not true in the case of the ungodly. Oh! how terrible is it to have a double negative put upon the promises! and yet this is just the condition of the ungodly. Mark the use of the term "ungodly," for, as we have seen in the opening of the Psalm, these are the beginners in evil, and are the least offensive of sinners. Oh! if such is the sad state of those who quietly continue in their morality, and neglect their God, what must be the condition of open sinners and shameless infidels?

The first sentence is a negative description of the ungodly, and the second is the positive picture. Here is their character — "they are like chaff," intrinsically worthless, dead, unserviceable, without substance, and easily carried away. Here, also, mark their doom, — "the wind driveth away;" death shall hurry them with its terrible blast into the fire in which they shall be utterly consumed.

Verse 5. They shall stand there to be judged, but not to be acquitted. Fear shall lay hold upon them there; they shall not stand their ground; they shall flee away; they shall not stand in their own defence; for they shall blush and be covered with eternal contempt.

Well may the saints long for heaven, for no evil men shall dwell there, "nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." All our congregations upon earth are mixed. Every Church hath one devil in it. The tares grow in the same furrows as the wheat. There is no floor which is as yet thoroughly purged from chaff. Sinners mix with saints, as dross mingles with gold. God's precious diamonds still lie in the same field with pebbles. Righteous Lots are this side heaven continually vexed by the men of Sodom. Let us rejoice then, that in "the general assembly and church of the firstborn" above, there shall by no means be admitted a single unrenewed soul. Sinners cannot live in heaven. They would be out of their element. Sooner could a fish live upon a tree than the wicked in Paradise. Heaven would be an intolerable hell to an impenitent man, even if he could be allowed to enter; but such a privilege shall never be granted to the man who perseveres in his iniquities. May God grant that we may have a name and a place in his courts above!

Verse 6. Or, as the Hebrew hath it yet more fully, "The Lord is knowing the way of the righteous." He is constantly looking on their way, and though it may be often in mist and darkness, yet the Lord knoweth it. If it be in the clouds and tempest of affliction, he understandeth it. He numbereth the hairs of our head; he will not suffer any evil to befall us. "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:10.) "But the way of the ungodly shall perish." Not only shall they perish themselves, but their way shall perish too. The righteous carves his name upon the rock, but the wicked writes his remembrance in the sand. The righteous man ploughs the furrows of earth, and sows a harvest here, which shall never be fully reaped till he enters the enjoyments of eternity; but as for the wicked, he ploughs the sea, and though there may seem to be a shining trail behind his keel, yet the waves shall pass over it, and the place that knew him shall know him no more for ever. The very "way" of the ungodly shall perish. If it exist in remembrance, it shall be in the remembrance of the bad; for the Lord will cause the name of the wicked to rot, to become a stench in the nostrils of the good, and to be only known to the wicked themselves by its putridity. May the Lord cleanse our hearts and our ways, that we may escape the doom of the ungodly, and enjoy the blessedness of the righteous!

Psalm 2

Verse 1. We have, in these first three verses, a description of the hatred of human nature against the Christ of God. No better comment is needed upon it than the apostolic song in Acts 4:27, 28: "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." The Psalm begins abruptly with an angry interrogation; and well it may: it is surely but little to be wondered at, that the sight of creatures in arms against their God should amaze the psalmist's mind. We see the heathen raging, roaring like the sea, tossed to and fro with restless waves, as the ocean in a storm; and then we mark the people in their hearts imagining a vain thing against God. Where there is much rage there is generally some folly, and in this case there

is an excess of it. Note, that the commotion is not caused by the people only, but their leaders foment the rebellion. "The kings of the earth set themselves." In determined malice they arrayed themselves in opposition against God. It was not temporary rage, but deep-seated hate, for they set themselves resolutely to withstand the Prince of Peace. "And the rulers take counsel together." They go about their warfare craftily, not with foolish haste, but deliberately. They use all the skill which art can give. Like Pharaoh, they cry, "Let us deal wisely with them." O that men were half as careful in God's service to serve him wisely, as his enemies are to attack his kingdom craftily. Sinners have their wits about them, and yet saints are dull. But what say they? what is the meaning of this commotion? "Let us break their bands asunder." "Let us be free to commit all manner of abominations. Let us be our own gods. Let us rid ourselves of all restraint." Gathering impudence by the traitorous proposition of rebellion, they add—"let us cast away;" as if it were an easy matter — "let us fling off 'their cords from us.'" What! O ye kings, do ye think yourselves Samsons? and are the bands of Omnipotence but as green withs before you? Do you dream that you shall snap to pieces and destroy the mandates of God—the decrees of the Most High—as if they were but tow? and do ye say, "Let us cast away their cords from us?" Yes! There are monarchs who have spoken thus, and there are still rebels upon thrones. However mad the resolution to revolt from God, it is one in which man has persevered ever since his creation, and he continues in it to this very day. The glorious reign of Jesus in the latter day will not be consummated, until a terrible struggle has convulsed the nations. His coming will be as a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap, and the day thereof shall burn as an oven. Earth loves not her rightful monarch, but clings to the usurper's sway: the terrible conflicts of the last days will illustrate both the world's love of sin and Jehovah's power to give the kingdom to his only Begotten. To a graceless neck the yoke of Christ is intolerable, but to the saved sinner it is easy and light. We may judge ourselves by this, do we love that yoke, or do we wish to cast it from us?

Verse 4. Let us now turn our eyes from the wicked counsel-chamber and raging tumult of man, to the secret place of the majesty of the Most High. What doth God say? What will the King do unto the men who reject his only-begotten Son, the Heir of all things?

Mark the quiet dignity of the Omnipotent One, and the contempt which he pours upon the princes and their raging people. He has not taken the trouble to rise up and do battle with them—he despises them, he knows how absurd, how irrational, how futile are their attempts against him—he therefore laughs at them.

Verse 5. After he has laughed he shall speak; he needs not smite; the breath of his lips is enough. At the moment when their power is at its height, and their fury most violent, then shall his Word go forth against them. And what is it that he says?—it is a very galling sentence— "Yet," says he, "despite your malice, despite your tumultuous gatherings, despite the wisdom of your counsels, despite the craft of your lawgivers, 'yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion'." Is not that a grand exclamation! He has already done that which the enemy seeks to prevent. While they are proposing, he has disposed the matter. Jehovah's will is done, and man's will frets and raves in vain. God's Anointed is appointed, and shall not be disappointed. Look back through all the ages of infidelity, hearken to the high and hard things which men have spoken against the Most High, listen to the rolling thunder of earth's volleys against the Majesty of heaven, and then think that God is saying all the while, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." Yet Jesus reigns, yet he sees the travail of his soul, and "his unsuffering kingdom yet shall come" when he shall take unto himself his great power, and reign from the river unto the ends of the earth. Even now he reigns in Zion, and our glad lips sound forth the praises of the Prince of Peace. Greater conflicts may here be foretold, but we may be confident that victory will be given to our Lord and King. Glorious triumphs are yet to come;

hasten them, we pray thee, O Lord! It is Zion's glory and joy that her King is in her, guarding her from foes, and filling her with good things. Jesus sits upon the throne of grace, and the throne of power in the midst of his church. In him is Zion's best safeguard; let her citizens be glad in him.

"Thy walls are strength, and at thy gates
A guard of heavenly warriors waits;
Nor shall thy deep foundations move,
Fixed on his counsels and his love.

Thy foes in vain designs engage;
Against his throne in vain they rage,
Like rising waves, with angry roar,
That dash and die upon the shore."

Verse 7. This Psalm wears something of a dramatic form, for now another person is introduced as speaking. We have looked into the council-chamber of the wicked, and to the throne of God, and now we behold the Anointed declaring his rights of sovereignty, and warning the traitors of their doom. God has laughed at the counsel and ravings of the wicked, and now Christ the Anointed himself comes forward, as the Risen Redeemer, "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Romans 1:4. Looking into the angry faces of the rebellious kings, the Anointed One seems to say, "If this sufficeth not to make you silent, 'I will declare the decree'." Now this decree is directly in conflict with the device of man, for its tenour is the establishment of the very dominion against which the nations are raving. "Thou art my Son." Here is a noble proof of the glorious Divinity of our Immanuel. "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" What a mercy to have a Divine Redeemer in whom to rest our confidence! "This day have I begotten thee." If this refers to the Godhead of our Lord, let us not attempt to fathom it, for it is a great truth, a truth reverently to be received, but not irreverently to be scanned. It may be added, that if this relates to the Begotten One in his human nature, we must here also rejoice in the mystery, but not attempt to violate its sanctity by intrusive prying into the secrets of the Eternal God. The things which are revealed are enough, without venturing into vain speculations. In attempting to define the Trinity, or unveil the essence of Divinity, many men have lost themselves: here great ships have foundered. What have we to do in such a sea with our frail skiffs?

Verse 8. "Ask of me." It was a custom among great kings, to give to favoured ones whatever they might ask. (See Esther 5:6; Matthew 14:7.) So Jesus hath but to ask and have. Here he declares that his very enemies are his inheritance. To their face he declares this decree, and "Lo! here," cries the Anointed One, as he holds aloft in that once pierced hand the sceptre of his power, "He hath given me this, not only the right to be a king, but the power to conquer." Yes! Jehovah hath given to his Anointed a rod of iron with which he shall break rebellious nations in pieces, and, despite their imperial strength, they shall be but as potters' vessels, easily dashed into shivers, when the rod of iron is in the hand of the omnipotent Son of God. Those who will not bend must break. Potters' vessels are not to be restored if dashed in pieces, and the ruin of sinners will be hopeless if Jesus shall smite them.

"Ye sinners seek his grace,
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of his cross,

And find salvation there."

Verse 10. The scene again changes, and counsel is given to those who have taken counsel to rebel. They are exhorted to obey, and give the kiss of homage and affection to him whom they have hated. "Be wise."—It is always wise to be willing to be instructed, especially when such instruction tends to the salvation of the soul. "Be wise now, therefore;" delay no longer, but let good reason weigh with you. Your warfare cannot succeed, therefore desist and yield cheerfully to him who will make you bow if you refuse his yoke. O how wise, how infinitely wise is obedience to Jesus, and how dreadful is the folly of those who continue to be his enemies! "Serve the Lord with fear;" let reverence and humility be mingled with your service. He is a great God, and ye are but puny creatures; bend ye, therefore, in lowly worship, and let a filial fear mingle with all your obedience to the great Father of the Ages. "Rejoice with trembling,"—There must ever be a holy fear mixed with the Christian's joy. This is a sacred compound, yielding a sweet smell, and we must see to it that we burn no other upon the altar. Fear, without joy, is torment; and joy, without holy fear, would be presumption. Mark the solemn argument for reconciliation and obedience. It is an awful thing to perish in the midst of sin, in the very way of rebellion; and yet how easily could his wrath destroy us suddenly. It needs not that his anger should be heated seven times hotter; let the fuel kindle but a little, and we are consumed. O sinner! Take heed of the terrors of the Lord; for "our God is a consuming fire." Note the benediction with which the Psalm closes:—"Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." Have we a share in this blessedness? Do we trust in him? Our faith may be slender as a spider's thread; but if it be real, we are in our measure blessed. The more we trust, the more fully shall we know this blessedness. We may therefore close the Psalm with the prayer of the apostles:—"Lord, increase our faith." The first Psalm was a contrast between the righteous man and the sinner; the second Psalm is a contrast between the tumultuous disobedience of the ungodly world and the sure exaltation of the righteous Son of God. In the first Psalm, we saw the wicked driven away like chaff; in the second Psalm we see them broken in pieces like a potter's vessel. In the first Psalm, we beheld the righteous like a tree planted by the rivers of water; and here, we contemplate Christ the Covenant Head of the righteous, made better than a tree planted by the rivers of water, for he is made king of all the islands, and all the heathen bow before him and kiss the dust; while he himself gives a blessing to all those who put their trust in him. The two Psalms are worthy of the very deepest attention; they are, in fact, the preface to the entire Book of Psalms, and were by some of the ancients, joined into one. They are, however, two Psalms; for Paul speaks of this as the second Psalm. (Acts 13:33.) The first shows us the character and lot of the righteous; and the next teaches us that the Psalms are Messianic, and speak of Christ the Messiah—the Prince who shall reign from the river even unto the ends of the earth. That they have both a far-reaching prophetic outlook we are well assured, but we do not feel competent to open up that matter, and must leave it to abler hands.

Psalm 3

Verse 1. The poor broken-hearted father complains of the multitude of his enemies: and if you turn to 2 Samuel 15:12, you will find it written that "the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom," while the troops of David constantly diminished! "Lord how are they increased that trouble me!" Here is a note of exclamation to express the wonder of woe which amazed and perplexed the fugitive father. Alas! I see no limit to my misery, for my troubles are enlarged! There was enough at first to sink me very low; but lo! my enemies multiply. When Absalom, my darling, is in rebellion against me, it is enough to break my heart; but lo! Ahithophel hath forsaken me, my faithful counsellors have turned their backs on me; lo! my generals and soldiers have

deserted my standard. "How are they increased that trouble me!" Troubles always come in flocks. Sorrow hath a numerous family.

"Many are they that rise up against me." Their hosts are far superior to mine! Their numbers are too great for my reckoning!

Let us here recall to our memory the innumerable host which beset our Divine Redeemer. The legions of our sins, the armies of fiends, the crowd of bodily pains, the host of spiritual sorrows, and all the allies of death and hell, set themselves in battle against the Son of Man. O how precious to know and believe that he has routed their hosts, and trodden them down in his anger! They who would have troubled us he has removed into captivity, and those who would have risen up against us he has laid low. The dragon lost his sting when he dashed it into the soul of Jesus.

Verse 2. David complains before his loving God of the worst weapon of his enemies' attacks, and the bitterest drop of his distresses. "Oh!" saith David, "many there be that say of my soul, There is no help for him in God." Some of his distrustful friends said this sorrowfully, but his enemies exultingly boasted of it, and longed to see their words proved by his total destruction. This was the unkindest cut of all, when they declared that his God had forsaken him. Yet David knew in his own conscience that he had given them some ground for this exclamation, for he had committed sin against God in the very light of day. Then they flung his crime with Bathsheba into his face, and they said, "Go up, thou bloody man; God hath forsaken thee and left thee." Shimei cursed him, and swore at him to his very face, for he was bold because of his backers, since multitudes of the men of Belial thought of David in like fashion. Doubtless, David felt this infernal suggestion to be staggering to his faith. If all the trials which come from heaven, all the temptations which ascend from hell, and all the crosses which arise from earth, could be mixed and pressed together, they would not make a trial so terrible as that which is contained in this verse. It is the most bitter of all afflictions to be led to fear that there is no help for us in God. And yet remember our most blessed Saviour had to endure this in the deepest degree when he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He knew full well what it was to walk in darkness and to see no light. This was the curse of the curse. This was the wormwood mingled with the gall. To be deserted of his Father was worse than to be the despised of men. Surely we should love him who suffered this bitterest of temptations and trials for our sake. It will be a delightful and instructive exercise for the loving heart to mark the Lord in his agonies as here portrayed, for there is here, and in very many other Psalms, far more of David's Lord than of David himself.

"Selah." This is a musical pause; the precise meaning of which is not known. Some think it simply a rest, a pause in the music; others say it means, "Lift up the strain—sing more loudly—pitch the tune upon a higher key—there is nobler matter to come, therefore retune your harps." Harp-strings soon get out of order and need to be screwed up again to their proper tightness, and certainly our heart-strings are evermore getting out of tune, Let "Selah" teach us to pray

"O may my heart in tune be found
Like David's harp of solemn sound."

At least we may learn that wherever we see "Selah," we should look upon it as a note of observation. Let us read the passage which precedes and succeeds it with greater earnestness, for surely there is always something excellent where we are required to rest and pause and meditate, or when we are required to lift up our hearts in grateful song. "SELAH."

Verse 3. Here David avows his confidence in God. "Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me." The word in

the original signifies more than a shield; it means a buckler round about, a protection which shall surround a man entirely, a shield above, beneath, around, without and within. Oh! what a shield is God for his people! He wards off the fiery darts of Satan from beneath, and the storms of trials from above, while, at the same instant, he speaks peace to the tempest within the breast. Thou art "my glory." David knew that though he was driven from his capital in contempt and scorn, he should yet return in triumph, and by faith he looks upon God as honouring and glorifying him. O for grace to see our future glory amid present shame! Indeed, there is a present glory in our afflictions, if we could but discern it; for it is no mean thing to have fellowship with Christ in his sufferings. David was honoured when he made the ascent of Olivet, weeping, with his head covered; for he was in all this made like unto his Lord. May we learn, in this respect, to glory in tribulations also! "And the lifter up of mine head"—thou shalt yet exalt me. Though I hang my head in sorrow, I shall very soon lift it up in joy and thanksgiving. What a divine trio of mercies is contained in this verse!—defence for the defenceless, glory for the despised, and joy for the comfortless. Verily we may well say, "there is none like the God of Jeshurun."

Verse 4. "I cried unto the Lord with my voice." Why doth he say, "with my voice?" Surely, silent prayers are heard. Yes, but good men often find that, even in secret, they pray better aloud than they do when they utter no vocal sound. Perhaps, moreover, David would think thus:—"My cruel enemies clamour against me; they lift up their voices, and, behold, I lift up mine, and my cry outsoars them all. They clamour, but the cry of my voice in great distress pierces the very skies, and is louder and stronger than all their tumult; for there is one in the sanctuary who hearkens to me from the seventh heaven, and he hath, heard me out of his holy hill." Answers to prayers are sweet cordials for the soul. We need not fear a frowning world while we rejoice in a prayer-hearing God. Here stands another Selah. Rest awhile, O tried believer, and change the strain to a softer air.

Verse 5. David's faith enabled him to lie down; anxiety would certainly have kept him on tiptoe, watching for an enemy. Yea, he was able to sleep, to sleep in the midst of trouble, surrounded by foes. "So he giveth his beloved sleep." There is a sleep of presumption; God deliver us from it! There is a sleep of holy confidence; God help us so to close our eyes! But David says he awaked also. Some sleep the sleep of death; but he, though exposed to many enemies, reclined his head on the bosom of his God, slept happily beneath the wing of Providence in sweet security, and then awoke in safety. "For the Lord sustained me." The sweet influence of the Pleiades of promise shone upon the sleeper, and he awoke conscious that the Lord had preserved him. An excellent divine has well remarked—"This quietude of a man's heart by faith in God, is a higher sort of work than the natural resolution of manly courage, for it is the gracious operation of God's Holy Spirit upholding a man above nature, and therefore the Lord must have all the glory of it."

Verse 6. Buckling on his harness for the day's battle, our hero sings, "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about." Observe that he does not attempt to under-estimate the number or wisdom of his enemies. He reckons them at tens of thousands, and he views them as cunning huntsmen chasing him with cruel skill. Yet he trembles not, but looking his foeman in the face he is ready for the battle. There may be no way of escape; they may hem me in as the deer are surrounded by a circle of hunters; they may surround me on every side, but in the name of God I will dash through them; or, if I remain in the midst of them, yet shall they not hurt me; I shall be free in my very prison. But David is too wise to venture to the battle without prayer; he therefore betakes himself to his knees, and cries aloud to Jehovah.

Verse 7. His only hope is in his God, but that is so strong a confidence, that he feels the Lord hath but to arise and he is saved. It is enough for the Lord to stand up, and all is well. He compares his enemies to wild beasts, and he declares that God hath broken their jaws, so that they could not injure him; "Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly." Or else he alludes to the peculiar temptations to which he was then exposed. They had spoken against him; God, therefore, has smitten them upon the cheek bone. They seemed as if they would devour him with their mouths; God hath broken their teeth, and let them say what they will, their toothless jaws shall not be able to devour him. Rejoice, O believer, thou hast to do with a dragon whose head is broken, and with enemies whose teeth are dashed from their jaws!

Verse 8. This verse contains the sum and substance of Calvinistic doctrine. Search Scripture through, and you must, if you read it with a candid mind, be persuaded that the doctrine of salvation by grace alone is the great doctrine of the word of God: "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord." This is a point concerning which we are daily fighting. Our opponents say, "Salvation belongeth to the free will of man; if not to man's merit, yet at least to man's will;" but we hold and teach that salvation from first to last, in every iota of it, belongs to the Most High God. It is God that chooses his people. He calls them by his grace; he quickens them by his Spirit, and keeps them by his power. It is not of man, neither by man; "not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." May we all learn this truth experimentally, for our proud flesh and blood will never permit us to learn it in any other way. In the last sentence the peculiarity and speciality of salvation are plainly stated: "Thy blessing is upon thy people." Neither upon Egypt, nor upon Tyre, nor upon Ninevah; thy blessing is upon thy chosen, thy blood-bought, thine everlastingly-beloved people. "Selah:" lift up your hearts, and pause, and meditate upon this doctrine. "Thy blessing is upon thy people." Divine, discriminating, distinguishing, eternal, infinite, immutable love, is a subject for constant adoration. Pause, my soul, at this Selah, and consider thine own interest in the salvation of God; and if by humble faith thou art enabled to see Jesus as thine by his own free gift of himself to thee, if this greatest of all blessings be upon thee, rise up and sing—

"Rise, my soul! adore and wonder!
Ask, 'O why such love to me?'
Grace hath put me in the number
Of the Saviour's family:
Hallelujah!
Thanks, eternal thanks, to thee!"

Psalm 4

Verse 1. This is another instance of David's common habit of pleading past mercies as a ground for present favour. Here he reviews his Ebenezers and takes comfort from them. It is not to be imagined that he who has helped us in six troubles will leave us in the seventh. God does nothing by halves, and he will never cease to help us until we cease to need. The manna shall fall every morning until we cross the Jordan.

Observe, that David speaks first to God and then to men. Surely we should all speak the more boldly to men if we had more constant converse with God. He who dares to face his Maker will not tremble before the sons of men.

The name by which the Lord is here addressed, "God of my righteousness," deserves notice, since it

is not used in any other part of Scripture. It means, Thou art the author, the witness, the maintainer, the judge, and the rewarder of my righteousness; to thee I appeal from the calumnies and harsh judgments of men. Herein is wisdom, let us imitate it and always take our suit, not to the petty courts of human opinion, but into the superior court, the King's Bench of heaven.

"Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress." A figure taken from an army enclosed in a defile, and hardly pressed by the surrounding enemy. God hath dashed down the rocks and given me room; he hath broken the barriers and set me in a large place. Or, we may understand it thus:—"God hath enlarged my heart with joy and comfort, when I was like a man imprisoned by grief and sorrow." God is a never-failing comforter.]

"Have mercy upon me." Though thou mayest justly permit my enemies to destroy me, on account of my many and great sins, yet I flee to thy mercy, and I beseech thee hear my prayer, and bring thy servant out of his troubles. The best of men need mercy as truly as the worst of men. All the deliverances of saints, as well as the pardons of sinners, are the free gifts of heavenly grace.

Verse 2. In this second division of the Psalm, we are led from the closet of prayer into the field of conflict. Remark the undaunted courage of the man of God. He allows that his enemies are great men (for such is the import of the Hebrew words translated—sons of men), but still he believes them to be foolish men, and therefore chides them, as though they were but children. He tells them that they love vanity, and seek after leasing, that is, lying, empty fancies, vain conceits, wicked fabrications. He asks them how long they mean to make his honour a jest, and his fame a mockery? A little of such mirth is too much, why need they continue to indulge in it? Had they not been long enough upon the watch for his halting? Had not repeated disappointments convinced them that the Lord's anointed was not to be overcome by all their calumnies? Did they mean to jest their souls into hell, and go on with their laughter until swift vengeance should turn their merriment into howling? In the contemplation of their perverse continuance in their vain and lying pursuits, the Psalmist solemnly pauses and inserts a *Selah*. Surely we too may stop awhile, and meditate upon the deep-seated folly of the wicked, their continuance in evil, and their sure destruction; and we may learn to admire that grace which has made us to differ, and taught us to love truth, and seek after righteousness.

Verse 3. "But know." Fools will not learn, and therefore they must again and again be told the same thing, especially when it is such a bitter truth which is to be taught them, viz.:—the fact that the godly are the chosen of God, and are, by distinguishing grace, set apart and separated from among men. Election is a doctrine which unrenewed men cannot endure, but nevertheless, it is a glorious and well-attested truth, and one which should comfort the tempted believer. Election is the guarantee of complete salvation, and an argument for success at the throne of grace. He who chose us for himself will surely hear our prayer. The Lord's elect shall not be condemned, nor shall their cry be unheard. David was king by divine decree, and we are the Lord's people in the same manner: let us tell our enemies to their faces, that they fight against God and destiny, when they strive to overthrow our souls. O beloved, when you are on your knees, the fact of your being set apart as God's own peculiar treasure, should give you courage and inspire you with fervency and faith. "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him?" Since he chose to love us he cannot but choose to hear us.

Verse 4. "Tremble and sin not." How many reverse this counsel and sin but tremble not. O that men would take the advice of this verse and commune with their own hearts. Surely a want of thought must be one reason why men are so mad as to despise Christ and hate their own mercies. O that for once their passions would be quiet and let them be still, that so in solemn silence they might review

the past, and meditate upon their inevitable doom. Surely a thinking man might have enough sense to discover the vanity of sin and the worthlessness of the world. Stay, rash sinner, stay, ere thou take the last leap. Go to thy bed and think upon thy ways. Ask counsel of thy pillow, and let the quietude of night instruct thee! Throw not away thy soul for nought! Let reason speak! Let the clamorous world be still awhile, and let thy poor soul plead with thee to bethink thyself before thou seal its fate, and ruin it for ever! Selah. O sinner! pause while I question thee awhile in the words of a sacred poet,—

"Sinner, is thy heart at rest?
Is thy bosom void of fear?
Art thou not by guilt oppress'd?
Speaks not conscience in thine ear?

Can this world afford thee bliss?
Can it chase away thy gloom?
Flattering, false, and vain it is;
Tremble at the worldling's doom!

Think, O sinner, on thy end,
See the judgment-day appear,
Thither must thy spirit wend,
There thy righteous sentence hear.

Wretched, ruin'd, helpless soul,
To a Saviour's blood apply;
He alone can make thee whole,
Fly to Jesus, sinner, fly!"

Verse 5. Provided that the rebels had obeyed the voice of the last verse, they would now be crying,—“What shall we do to be saved?” And in the present verse, they are pointed to the sacrifice, and exhorted to trust in the Lord. When the Jew offered sacrifice righteously, that is, in a spiritual manner, he thereby set forth the Redeemer, the great sin-atoning Lamb; there is, therefore, the full gospel in this exhortation of the Psalmist. O sinners, flee ye to the sacrifice of Calvary, and there put your whole confidence and trust, for he who died for men is the LORD JEHOVAH.

Verse 6. We have now entered upon the third division of the Psalm, in which the faith of the afflicted one finds utterance in sweet expressions of contentment and peace. There were many, even among David's own followers, who wanted to see rather than to believe. Alas! this is the tendency of us all! Even the regenerate sometimes groan after the sense and sight of prosperity, and are sad when darkness covers all good from view. As for worldlings, this is their unceasing cry. “Who will shew us any good?” Never satisfied, their gaping mouths are turned in every direction, their empty hearts are ready to drink in any fine delusion which impostors may invent; and when these fail, they soon yield to despair, and declare that there is no good thing in either heaven or earth. The true believer is a man of a very different mould. His face is not downward like the beasts', but upward like the angels'. He drinks not from the muddy pools of Mammon, but from the fountain of life above. The light of God's countenance is enough for him. This is his riches, his honour, his health, his ambition, his ease. Give him this, and he will ask no more. This is joy unspeakable, and full of glory. Oh, for more of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that our fellowship with the Father and with his

Son Jesus Christ may be constant and abiding!

Verse 7. "It is better," said one, "to feel God's favour one hour in our repenting souls, than to sit whole ages under the warmest sunshine that this world affordeth." Christ in the heart is better than corn in the barn, or wine in the vat. Corn and wine are but fruits of the world, but the light of God's countenance is the ripe fruit of heaven. "Thou art with me," is a far more blessed cry than "Harvest home." Let my granary be empty, I am yet full of blessings if Jesus Christ smiles upon me; but if I have all the world, I am poor without him.

We should not fail to remark that this verse is the saying of the righteous man, in opposition to the saying of the many. How quickly doth the tongue betray the character! "Speak, that I may see thee!" said Socrates to a fair boy. The metal of a bell is best known by its sound. Birds reveal their nature by their song. Owls cannot sing the carol of the lark, nor can the nightingale hoot like the owl. Let us, then, weigh and watch our words, lest our speech should prove us to be foreigners, and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.

Verse 8. Sweet Evening Hymn! I shall not sit up to watch through fear, but I will lie down; and then I will not lie awake listening to every rustling sound, but I will lie down in peace and sleep, for I have nought to fear. He that hath the wings of God above him needs no other curtain. Better than bolts or bars is the protection of the Lord. Armed men kept the bed of Solomon, but we do not believe that he slept more soundly than his father, whose bed was the hard ground, and who was haunted by blood-thirsty foes. Note the word "only", which means that God alone was his keeper, and that though alone, without man's help, he was even then in good keeping, for he was "alone with God." A quiet conscience is a good bedfellow. How many of our sleepless hours might be traced to our untrusting and disordered minds. They slumber sweetly whom faith rocks to sleep. No pillow so soft as a promise; no coverlet so warm as an assured interest in Christ.

O Lord, give us this calm repose on thee, that like David we may lie down in peace, and sleep each night while we live; and joyfully may we lie down in the appointed season, to sleep in death, to rest in God!

Dr. Hawker's reflection upon this Psalm is worthy to be prayed over and fed upon with sacred delight. We cannot help transcribing it.

"Reader! let us never lose sight of the Lord Jesus while reading this Psalm. He is the Lord our righteousness; and therefore, in all our approaches to the mercy seat, let us go there in a language corresponding to this which calls Jesus the Lord our righteousness. While men of the world, from the world are seeking their chief good, let us desire his favour which infinitely transcends corn and wine, and all the good things which perish in the using. Yes, Lord, thy favour is better than life itself. Thou causest them that love thee to inherit substance, and fillest all their treasure.

"Oh! thou gracious God and Father, hast thou in such a wonderful manner set apart one in our nature for thyself? Hast thou indeed chosen one out of the people? Hast thou beheld him in the purity of his nature,—as one in every point Godly? Hast thou given him as the covenant of the people? And hast thou declared thyself well pleased in him? Oh! then, well may my soul be well pleased in him also.

Now do I know that my God and Father will hear me when I call upon him in Jesus' name, and when I look up to him for acceptance for Jesus' sake! Yes, my heart is fixed, O Lord, my heart is fixed; Jesus is my hope and righteousness; the Lord will hear me when I call. And henceforth will I both lay me down in peace and sleep securely in Jesus, accepted in the Beloved; for this is the rest wherewith the Lord causeth the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing."

Psalm 5

Verse 1. There are two sorts of prayers—those expressed in words, and the unuttered longings which abide as silent meditations. Words are not the essence but the garments of prayer. Moses at the Red Sea cried to God, though he said nothing. Yet the use of language may prevent distraction of mind, may assist the powers of the soul, and may excite devotion. David, we observe, uses both modes of prayer, and craves for the one a hearing, and for the other a consideration. What an expressive word! "Consider my meditation." If I have asked that which is right, give it to me; if I have omitted to ask that which I most needed, fill up the vacancy in my prayer. "Consider my meditation." Let thy holy soul consider it as presented through my all-glorious Mediator: then regard thou it in thy wisdom, weigh it in the scales, judge thou of my sincerity, and of the true state of my necessities, and answer me in due time for thy mercy's sake! There may be prevailing intercession where there are no words; and alas! there may be words where there is no true supplication. Let us cultivate the spirit of prayer which is even better than the habit of prayer. There may be seeming prayer where there is little devotion. We should begin to pray before we kneel down, and we should not cease when we rise up.

Verse 2. "The voice of my cry." In another Psalm we find the expression, "The voice of my weeping." Weeping has a voice—a melting, plaintive tone, an ear-piercing shrillness, which reaches the very heart of God; and crying hath a voice—a soul-moving eloquence; coming from our heart it reaches God's heart. Ah! my brothers and sisters, sometimes we cannot put our prayers into words: they are nothing but a cry: but the Lord can comprehend the meaning, for he hears a voice in our cry. To a loving father his children's cries are music, and they have a magic influence which his heart cannot resist. "My King, and my God." Observe carefully these little pronouns, "my King, and my God." They are the pith and marrow of the plea. Here is a grand argument why God should answer prayer—because he is our King and our God. We are not aliens to him: he is the King of our country. Kings are expected to hear the appeals of their own people. We are not strangers to him; we are his worshippers, and he is our God: ours by covenant, by promise, by oath, by blood. "For unto thee will I pray." Here David expresses his declaration that he will seek to God, and to God alone. God is to be the only object of worship: the only resource of our soul in times of need. Leave broken cisterns to the godless, and let the godly drink from the Divine fountain alone. "Unto thee will I pray." He makes a resolution, that as long as he lived he would pray. He would never cease to supplicate, even though the answer should not come.

Verse 3. Observe, this is not so much a prayer as a resolution, "'My voice shalt thou hear;' I will not be dumb, I will not be silent, I will not withhold my speech, I will cry to thee for the fire that dwells within compels me to pray." We can sooner die than live without prayer. None of God's children are possessed with a dumb devil.

"In the morning." This is the fittest time for intercourse with God. An hour in the morning is worth two in the evening. While the dew is on the grass, let grace drop upon the soul. Let us give to God the mornings of our days and the morning of our lives. Prayer should be the key of the day and the lock of the night. Devotion should be both the morning star and the evening star.

If we merely read our English version, and want an explanation of these two sentences, we find it in the figure of an archer, "I will direct my prayer unto thee," I will put my prayer upon the bow, I will direct it towards heaven, and then when I have shot up my arrow, I will look up to see where it has gone. But the Hebrew has a still fuller meaning than this—"I will direct my prayer." It is the word that is used for the laying in order of the wood and the pieces of the victim upon the altar, and it is used also for the putting of the shewbread upon the table. It means just this: "I will arrange my prayer before thee;" I will lay it out upon the altar in the morning, just as the priest lays out the morning

sacrifice. I will arrange my prayer; or, as old Master Trapp has it, "I will marshall up my prayers," I will put them in order, call up all my powers, and bid them stand in their proper places, that I may pray with all my might, and pray acceptably.

"And will look up," or, as the Hebrew might better be translated, "'I will look out,' I will look out for the answer; after I have prayed, I will expect that the blessing shall come." It is a word that is used in another place where we read of those who watched for the morning. So will I watch for thine answer, O my Lord! I will spread out my prayer like the victim on the altar, and I will look up, and expect to receive the answer by fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice.

Two questions are suggested by the last part of this verse. Do we not miss very much of the sweetness and efficacy of prayer by a want of careful meditation before it, and of hopeful expectation after it? We too often rush into the presence of God without forethought or humility. We are like men who present themselves before a king without a petition, and what wonder is it that we often miss the end of prayer? We should be careful to keep the stream of meditation always running; for this is the water to drive the mill of prayer. It is idle to pull up the flood-gates of a dry brook, and then hope to see the wheel revolve. Prayer without fervency is like hunting with a dead dog, and prayer without preparation is hawking with a blind falcon. Prayer is the work of the Holy Spirit, but he works by means. God made man, but he used the dust of the earth as a material: the Holy Ghost is the author of prayer, but he employs the thoughts of a fervent soul as the gold with which to fashion the vessel. Let not our prayers and praises be the flashes of a hot and hasty brain, but the steady burning of a well-kindled fire.

But, furthermore, do we not forget to watch the result of our supplications? We are like the ostrich, which lays her eggs and looks not for her young. We sow the seed, and are too idle to seek a harvest. How can we expect the Lord to open the windows of his grace, and pour us out a blessing, if we will not open the windows of expectation and look up for the promised favour? Let holy preparation link hands with patient expectation, and we shall have far larger answers to our prayers.

Verse 4. And now the Psalmist having thus expressed his resolution to pray, you hear him putting up his prayer. He is pleading against his cruel and wicked enemies. He uses a most mighty argument. He begs of God to put them away from him, because they were displeasing to God himself. "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee." "When I pray against my tempters," says David, "I pray against the very things which thou thyself abhorrest." Thou hatest evil: Lord, I beseech thee, deliver me from it!

Let us learn here the solemn truth of the hatred which a righteous God must bear toward sin. He has no pleasure in wickedness, however wittily, grandly, and proudly it may array itself. Its glitter has no charm for him. Men may bow before successful villainy, and forget the wickedness of the battle in the gaudiness of the triumph, but the Lord of Holiness is not such-an-one as we are. "Neither shall evil dwell with thee." He will not afford it the meanest shelter. Neither on earth nor in heaven shall evil share the mansion of God. Oh, how foolish are we if we attempt to entertain two guests so hostile to one another as Christ Jesus and the devil! Rest assured, Christ will not live in the parlour of our hearts if we entertain the devil in the cellar of our thoughts.

Verse 5. "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight." Sinners are fools written large. A little sin is a great folly, and the greatest of all folly is great sin. Such sinful fools as these must be banished from the court of heaven. Earthly kings were wont to have fools in their trains, but the only wise God will have no fools in his palace above. "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity." It is not a little dislike, but a thorough hatred which God bears to workers of iniquity. To be hated of God is an awful thing. O let us be very faithful in warning the wicked around us, for it will be a terrible thing for them to fall into the

hands of an angry God!

Verse 6. Observe, that evil speakers must be punished as well as evil workers, for "thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing." All liars shall have their portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. A man may lie without danger of the law of man, but he will not escape the law of God. Liars have short wings, their flight shall soon be over, and they shall fall into the fiery floods of destruction. "The Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man." Bloody men shall be made drunk with their own blood, and they who began by deceiving others shall end with being deceived themselves. Our old proverb saith, "Bloody and deceitful men dig their own graves." The voice of the people is in this instance the voice of God. How forcible is the word abhor! Does it not show us how powerful and deep-seated is the hatred of the Lord against the workers of iniquity?

Verse 7. With this verse the first part of the Psalm ends. The Psalmist has bent his knee in prayer; he has described before God, as an argument for his deliverance, the character and the fate of the wicked; and now he contrasts this with the condition of the righteous. "But as for me, I will come into thy house." I will not stand at a distance, I will come into thy sanctuary, just as a child comes into his father's house. But I will not come there by my own merits; no, I have a multitude of sins, and therefore I will come in the multitude of thy mercy. I will approach thee with confidence because of thy immeasurable grace. God's judgments are all numbered, but his mercies are innumerable; he gives his wrath by weight, but without weight his mercy. "And in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple,"—towards the temple of thy holiness. The temple was not built on earth at that time; it was but a tabernacle; but David was wont to turn his eyes spiritually to that temple of God's holiness where between the wings of the Cherubim Jehovah dwells in light ineffable. Daniel opened his window toward Jerusalem, but we open our hearts toward heaven.

Verse 8. Now we come to the second part, in which the Psalmist repeats his arguments, and goes over the same ground again.

"Lead me, O Lord," as a little child is led by its father, as a blind man is guided by his friend. It is safe and pleasant walking when God leads the way. "In thy righteousness," not in my righteousness, for that is imperfect, but in thine, for thou art righteousness itself. "Make thy way," not my way, "straight before my face." Brethren, when we have learned to give up our own way, and long to walk in God's way, it is a happy sign of grace; and it is no small mercy to see the way of God with clear vision straight before our face. Errors about duty may lead us into a sea of sins, before we know where we are.

Verse 9. This description of depraved man has been copied by the Apostle Paul, and, together with some other quotations, he has placed it in the second chapter of Romans, as being an accurate description of the whole human race, not of David's enemies only, but of all men by nature. Note that remarkable figure, "Their throat is an open sepulchre," a sepulchre full of loathsomeness, of miasma, of pestilence and death. But, worse than that, it is an open sepulchre, with all its evil gases issuing forth, to spread death and destruction all around. So, with the throat of the wicked, it would be a great mercy if it could always be closed. If we could seal in continual silence the mouth of the wicked it would be like a sepulchre shut up, and would not produce much mischief. But, "their throat is an open sepulchre," consequently all the wickedness of their heart exhales, and comes forth. How dangerous is an open sepulchre; men in their journeys might easily stumble therein, and find themselves among the dead. Ah! take heed of the wicked man, for there is nothing that he will not say to ruin you; he will long to destroy your character, and bury you in the hideous sepulchre of his own wicked throat. One

sweet thought here, however. At the resurrection there will be a resurrection not only of bodies, but characters. This should be a great comfort to a man who has been abused and slandered. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun." The world may think you vile, and bury your character; but if you have been upright, in the day when the graves shall give up their dead, this open sepulchre of the sinner's throat shall be compelled to give up your heavenly character, and you shall come forth and be honoured in the sight of men. "They flatter with their tongue." Or, as we might read it, "They have an oily tongue, a smooth tongue." A smooth tongue is a great evil; many have been bewitched by it. There be many human ant-eaters that with their long tongues covered with oily words entice and entrap the unwary and make their gain thereby. When the wolf licks the lamb, he is preparing to wet his teeth in its blood.

Verse 10. "Against thee:" not against me. If they were my enemies I would forgive them, but I cannot forgive thine. We are to forgive our enemies, but God's enemies it is not in our power to forgive. These expressions have often been noticed by men of over refinement as being harsh, and grating on the ear. "Oh!" say they, "they are vindictive and revengeful." Let us remember that they might be translated as prophecies, not as wishes; but we do not care to avail ourselves of this method of escape. We have never heard of a reader of the Bible who, after perusing these passages, was made revengeful by reading them, and it is but fair to test the nature of a writing by its effects. When we hear a judge condemning a murderer, however severe his sentence, we do not feel that we should be justified in condemning others for any private injury done to us. The Psalmist here speaks as a judge, ex officio; he speaks as God's mouth, and in condemning the wicked he gives us no excuse whatever for uttering anything in the way of malediction upon those who have caused us personal offence. The most shameful way of cursing another is by pretending to bless him. We were all somewhat amused by noticing the toothless malice of that wretched old priest of Rome, when he foolishly cursed the Emperor of France with his blessing. He was blessing him in form and cursing him in reality. Now, in direct contrast we put this healthy commination of David, which is intended to be a blessing by warning the sinner of the impending curse. O impenitent man, be it known unto thee that all thy godly friends will give their solemn assent to the awful sentence of the Lord, which he shall pronounce upon thee in the day of doom! Our verdict shall applaud the condemning curse which the Judge of all the earth shall thunder against the godless.

In the following verse we once more find the contrast which has marked the preceding Psalms.

Verse 11. Joy is the privilege of the believer. When sinners are destroyed our rejoicing shall be full. They laugh first and weep ever after; we weep now, but shall rejoice eternally. When they howl we shall shout, and as they must groan for ever, so shall we ever shout for joy. This holy bliss of ours has a firm foundation, for, O Lord, we are joyful in thee. The eternal God is the well-spring of our bliss. We love God, and therefore we delight in him. Our heart is at ease in our God. We fare sumptuously every day because we feed on him. We have music in the house, music in the heart, and music in heaven, for the Lord Jehovah is our strength and our song; he also is become our salvation.

Verse 12. Jehovah has ordained his people the heirs of blessedness, and nothing shall rob them of their inheritance. With all the fulness of his power he will bless them, and all his attributes shall unite to satiate them with divine contentment. Nor is this merely for the present, but the blessing reaches into the long and unknown future. "Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous." This is a promise of infinite length, of unbounded breadth, and of unutterable preciousness. As for the defence which the believer needs in this land of battles, it is here promised to him in the fullest measure. There were vast shields used by the ancients as extensive as a man's whole person, which would surround him entirely. So

says David, "With favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield." According to Ainsworth there is here also the idea of being crowned, so that we wear a royal helmet, which is at once our glory and defence. O Lord, ever give to us this gracious coronation!

Psalm 6

Verse 1. Having read through the first division, in order to see it as a whole, we will now look at it verse by verse. "O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger." The Psalmist is very conscious that he deserves to be rebuked, and he feels, moreover, that the rebuke in some form or other must come upon him, if not for condemnation, yet for conviction and sanctification. "Corn is cleaned with wind, and the soul with chastenings." It were folly to pray against the golden hand which enriches us by its blows. He does not ask that the rebuke may be totally withheld, for he might thus lose a blessing in disguise; but, "Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger." If thou remindest me of my sin, it is good; but, oh, remind me not of it as one incensed against me, lest thy servant's heart should sink in despair. Thus saith Jeremiah, "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." I know that I must be chastened, and though I shrink from the rod yet do I feel that it will be for my benefit; but, oh, my God, "chasten me not in thy hot displeasure," lest the rod become a sword, and lest in smiting, thou shouldest also kill. So may we pray that the chastisements of our gracious God, if they may not be entirely removed, may at least be sweetened by the consciousness that they are "not in anger, but in his dear covenant love."

Verse 2. "Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak." Though I deserve destruction, yet let thy mercy pity my frailty. This is the right way to plead with God if we would prevail. Urge not your goodness or your greatness, but plead your sin and your littleness. Cry, "I am weak," therefore, O Lord, give me strength and crush me not. Send not forth the fury of thy tempest against so weak a vessel. Temper the wind to the shorn lamb. Be tender and pitiful to a poor withering flower, and break it not from its stem. Surely this is the plea that a sick man would urge to move the pity of his fellow if he were striving with him, "Deal gently with me, 'for I am weak.'" A sense of sin had so spoiled the Psalmist's pride, so taken away his vaunted strength, that he found himself weak to obey the law, weak through the sorrow that was in him, too weak, perhaps, to lay hold on the promise. "I am weak." The original may be read, "I am one who droops," or withered like a blighted plant. Ah! beloved, we know what this means, for we, too, have seen our glory stained, and our beauty like a faded flower.

Verse 3. "O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed." Here he prays for healing, not merely the mitigation of the ills he endured, but their entire removal, and the curing of the wounds which had arisen therefrom. His bones were "shaken," as the Hebrew has it. His terror had become so great that his very bones shook; not only did his flesh quiver, but the bones, the solid pillars of the house of manhood, were made to tremble. "My bones are shaken." Ah, when the soul has a sense of sin, it is enough to make the bones shake; it is enough to make a man's hair stand up on end to see the flames of hell beneath him, an angry God above him, and danger and doubt surrounding him. Well might he say, "My bones are shaken." Lest, however, we should imagine that it was merely bodily sickness— although bodily sickness might be the outward sign—the Psalmist goes on to say, "My soul is also sore vexed." Soul-trouble is the very soul of trouble. It matters not that the bones shake if the soul be firm, but when the soul itself is also sore vexed this is agony indeed. "But thou, O Lord, how long?" This sentence ends abruptly, for words failed, and grief drowned the little comfort which dawned upon him. The Psalmist had still, however, some hope; but that hope was only in his God. He therefore cries, "O Lord, how long?" The coming of Christ into the soul in his priestly robes of grace is

the grand hope of the penitent soul; and, indeed, in some form or other, Christ's appearance is, and ever has been, the hope of the saints.

Calvin's favourite exclamation was, "Domine usquequo"—"O Lord, how long?" Nor could his sharpest pains, during a life of anguish, force from him any other word. Surely this is the cry of the saints under the altar, "O Lord, how long?" And this should be the cry of the saints waiting for the millennial glories, "Why are his chariots so long in coming; Lord, how long?" Those of us who have passed through conviction of sin knew what it was to count our minutes hours, and our hours years, while mercy delayed its coming. We watched for the dawn of grace, as they that watch for the morning. Earnestly did our anxious spirits ask, "O Lord, how long?"

Verse 4. "Return, O Lord; deliver my soul." As God's absence was the main cause of his misery, so his return would be enough to deliver him from his trouble. "Oh save me for thy mercies' sake." He knows where to look, and what arm to lay hold upon. He does not lay hold on God's left hand of justice, but on his right hand of mercy. He knew his iniquity too well to think of merit, or appeal to anything but the grace of God.

"For thy mercies' sake." What a plea that is! How prevalent it is with God! If we turn to justice, what plea can we urge? but if we turn to mercy we may still cry, notwithstanding the greatness of our guilt, "Save me for thy mercies' sake."

Observe how frequently David here pleads the name of Jehovah, which is always intended where the word LORD is given in capitals. Five times in four verses we here meet with it. Is not this a proof that the glorious name is full of consolation to the tempted saint? Eternity, Infinity, Immutability, Self-existence, are all in the name Jehovah, and all are full of comfort.

Verse 5. And now David was in great fear of death—death temporal, and perhaps death eternal. Read the passage as you will, the following verse is full of power. "For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?" Churchyards are silent places; the vaults of the sepulchre echo not with songs. Damp earth covers dumb mouths. "O Lord!" saith he, "if thou wilt spare me I will praise thee. If I die, then must my mortal praise at least be suspended; and if I perish in hell, then thou wilt never have any thanksgiving from me. Songs of gratitude cannot rise from the flaming pit of hell. True, thou wilt doubtless be glorified, even in my eternal condemnation, but then O Lord, I cannot glorify thee voluntarily; and among the sons of men, there will be one heart the less to bless thee." Ah! poor trembling sinners, may the Lord help you to use this forcible argument! It is for God's glory that a sinner should be saved. When we seek pardon, we are not asking God to do that which will stain his banner, or put a blot on his escutcheon. He delighteth in mercy. It is his peculiar, darling attribute. Mercy honours God. Do not we ourselves say, "Mercy blesseth him that gives, and him that takes?" And surely, in some diviner sense, this is true of God, who, when he gives mercy, glorifies himself.

Verse 6. The Psalmist gives a fearful description of his long agony: "I am weary with my groaning." He has groaned till his throat was hoarse; he had cried for mercy till prayer became a labour. God's people may groan, but they may not grumble. Yea, they must groan, being burdened, or they will never shout in the day of deliverance. The next sentence, we think, is not accurately translated. It should be, "I shall make my bed to swim every night" (when nature needs rest, and when I am most alone with my God). That is to say, my grief is fearful even now, but if God do not soon save me, it will not stay of itself, but will increase, until my tears will be so many, that my bed itself shall swim. A description rather of what he feared would be, than of what had actually taken place. May not our forebodings of future woe become arguments which faith may urge when seeking present mercy?

Verse 7. "I water my couch with my tears. Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all my enemies." As an old man's eye grows dim with years, so, says David, my eye is grown red and feeble through weeping. Conviction sometimes has such an effect upon the body, that even the outward organs are made to suffer. May not this explain some of the convulsions and hysterical attacks which have been experienced under convictions in the revivals in Ireland? Is it surprising that some souls be smitten to the earth, and begin to cry aloud; when we find that David himself made his bed to swim, and grew old while he was under the heavy hand of God? Ah! brethren, it is no light matter to feel one's self a sinner, condemned at the bar of God. The language of this Psalm is not strained and forced, but perfectly natural to one in so sad a plight.

Verse 8. Hitherto, all has been mournful and disconsolate, but now—

"Your harps, ye trembling saints,
Down from the willows take."

Ye must have your times of weeping, but let them be short. Get ye up, get ye up, from your dunghills! Cast aside your sackcloth and ashes! Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

David has found peace, and rising from his knees he begins to sweep his house of the wicked.

"Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." The best remedy for us against an evil man is a long space between us both. "Get ye gone; I can have no fellowship with you." Repentance is a practical thing. It is not enough to bemoan the desecration of the temple of the heart, we must scourge out the buyers and sellers, and overturn the tables of the money changers. A pardoned sinner will hate the sins which cost the Saviour his blood. Grace and sin are quarrelsome neighbours, and one or the other must go to the wall.

"For the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping." What a fine Hebraism, and what grand poetry it is in English! "He hath heard the voice of my weeping." Is there a voice in weeping? Does weeping speak? In what language doth it utter its meaning? Why, in that universal tongue which is known and understood in all the earth, and even in heaven above. When a man weeps, whether he be a Jew or Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, it has the same meaning in it. Weeping is the eloquence of sorrow. It is an unstammering orator, needing no interpreter, but understood of all. Is it not sweet to believe that our tears are understood even when words fail? Let us learn to think of tears as liquid prayers, and of weeping as a constant dropping of importunate intercession which will wear its way right surely into the very heart of mercy, despite the stony difficulties which obstruct the way. My God, I will "weep" when I cannot plead, for thou hearest the voice of my weeping.

Verse 9. "The Lord hath heard my supplication." The Holy Spirit had wrought into the Psalmist's mind the confidence that his prayer was heard. This is frequently the privilege of the saints. Praying the prayer of faith, they are often infallibly assured that they have prevailed with God. We read of Luther that, having on one occasion wrestled hard with God in prayer, he came leaping out of his closet crying, "Vicimus, vicimus;" that is, We have conquered, we have prevailed with God." Assured confidence is no idle dream, for when the Holy Ghost bestows it upon us, we know its reality, and could not doubt it, even though all men should deride our boldness. "The Lord will receive my prayer." Here is past experience used for future encouragement. He hath, he will. Note this, O believer, and imitate its reasoning.

Verse 10. "Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed." This is rather a prophecy than an

imprecation, it may be read in the future, "All my enemies shall be ashamed and sore vexed." They shall return and be ashamed instantaneously,—in a moment;—their doom shall come upon them suddenly. Death's day is doom's day, and both are sure and may be sudden. The Romans were wont to say, "The feet of the avenging Deity are shod with wool." With noiseless footsteps vengeance nears its victim, and sudden and overwhelming shall be its destroying stroke. If this were an imprecation, we must remember that the language of the old dispensation is not that of the new. We pray for our enemies, not against them. God have mercy on them, and bring them into the right way. Thus the Psalm, like those which precede it, shews the different estates of the godly and the wicked. O Lord, let us be numbered with thy people, both now and forever!

Psalm 7

Verse 1. David appears before God to plead with him against the Accuser, who had charged him with treason and treachery. The case is here opened with an avowal of confidence in God. Whatever may be the emergency of our condition we shall never find it amiss to retain our reliance upon our God. "O Lord my God," mine by a special covenant, sealed by Jesus' blood, and ratified in my own soul by a sense of union to thee; "in thee," and in thee only, "do I put my trust," even now in my sore distress. I shake, but my rock moves not. It is never right to distrust God, and never vain to trust him. And now, with both divine relationship and holy trust to strengthen him, David utters the burden of his desire—"save me from all them that persecute me." His pursuers were very many, and any one of them cruel enough to devour him; he cries, therefore, for salvation from them all. We should never think our prayers complete until we ask for preservation from all sin, and all enemies. "And deliver me," extricate me from their snares, acquit me of their accusations, give a true and just deliverance in this trial of my injured character. See how clearly his case is stated; let us see to it, that we know what we would have when we are come to the throne of mercy. Pause a little while before you pray, that you may not offer the sacrifice of fools. Get a distinct idea of your need, and then you can pray with the more fluency of fervency.

Verse 2. "Lest he tear my soul." Here is the plea of fear co-working with the plea of faith. There was one among David's foes mightier than the rest, who had both dignity, strength, and ferocity, and was, therefore, "like a lion." From this foe he urgently seeks deliverance. Perhaps this was Saul, his royal enemy; but in our own case there is one who goes about like a lion, seeking whom he may devour, concerning whom we should ever cry, "Deliver us from the Evil One." Notice the vigour of the description—"rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver." It is a picture from the shepherd-life of David. When the fierce lion had pounced upon the defenceless lamb, and had made it his prey, he would rend the victim in pieces, break all the bones, and devour all, because no shepherd was near to protect the lamb or rescue it from the ravenous beast. This is a soul-moving portrait of a saint delivered over to the will of Satan. This will make the bowels of Jehovah yearn. A father cannot be silent when a child is in such peril. No, he will not endure the thought of his darling in the jaws of a lion, he will arise and deliver his persecuted one. Our God is very pitiful, and he will surely rescue his people from so desperate a destruction. It will be well for us here to remember that this is a description of the danger to which the Psalmist was exposed from slanderous tongues. Verily this is not an overdrawn picture, for the wounds of a sword will heal, but the wounds of the tongue cut deeper than the flesh, and are not soon cured. Slander leaves a slur, even if it be wholly disproved. Common fame, although notoriously a common liar, has very many believers. Once let an ill word get into men's mouths, and it is not easy to get it fully out again. The Italians say that good repute is like the cypress, once cut it never puts forth leaf again; this is not true if our character be cut by a

stranger's hand, but even then it will not soon regain its former verdure. Oh, 'tis a meanness most detestable to stab a good man in his reputation, but diabolical hatred observes no nobility in its mode of warfare. We must be ready for this trial, for it will surely come upon us. If God was slandered in Eden, we shall surely be maligned in this land of sinners. Gird up your loins, ye children of the resurrection, for this fiery trial awaits you all.

Verses 3-5. The second part of this wandering hymn contains a protestation of innocence, and an invocation of wrath upon his own head, if he were not clear from the evil imputed to him. So far from hiding treasonable intentions in his hands, or ungratefully requiting the peaceful deeds of a friend, he had even suffered his enemy to escape when he had him completely in his power. Twice had he spared Saul's life; once in the cave of Adullam, and again when he found him sleeping in the midst of his slumbering camp: he could, therefore, with a clear conscience, make his appeal to heaven. He needs not fear the curse whose soul is clear of guilt. Yet is the imprecation a most solemn one, and only justifiable through the extremity of the occasion, and the nature of the dispensation under which the Psalmist lived. We are commanded by our Lord Jesus to let our yea be yea, and our nay, nay: "for whatsoever is more than this cometh of evil." If we cannot be believed on our word, we are surely not to be trusted on our oath; for to a true Christian his simple word is as binding as another man's oath. Especially beware, O unconverted men! of trifling with solemn imprecations. Remember the woman at Devizes, who wished she might die if she had not paid her share in a joint purchase, and who fell dead there and then with the money in her hand.

Selah. David enhances the solemnity of this appeal to the dread tribunal of God by the use of the usual pause.

From these verses we may learn that no innocence can shield a man from the calumnies of the wicked. David had been scrupulously careful to avoid any appearance of rebellion against Saul, whom he constantly styled "the Lord's anointed;" but all this could not protect him from lying tongues. As the shadow follows the substance, so envy pursues goodness. It is only at the tree laden with fruit that men throw stones. If we would live without being slandered we must wait till we get to heaven. Let us be very heedful not to believe the flying rumors which are always harassing gracious men. If there are no believers in lies there will be but a dull market in falsehood, and good men's characters will be safe. Ill-will never spoke well. Sinners have an ill-will to saints, and therefore, be sure they will not speak well of them.

Verse 6. We now listen to a fresh prayer, based upon the avowal which he has just made. We cannot pray too often, and when our heart is true, we shall turn to God in prayer as naturally as the needle to its pole.

"Arise, O Lord, in thine anger." His sorrow makes him view the Lord as a judge who had left the judgment-seat and retired into his rest. Faith would move the Lord to avenge the quarrel of his saints. "Lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies"—a still stronger figure to express his anxiety that the Lord would assume his authority and mount the throne. Stand up, O God, rise thou above them all, and let thy justice tower above their villainies. "Awake for me to the judgment that thou hast commanded." This is a bolder utterance still, for it implies sleep as well as inactivity, and can only be applied to God in a very limited sense. He never slumbers, yet doth he often seem to do so; for the wicked prevail, and the saints are trodden in the dust. God's silence is the patience of longsuffering, and if wearisome to the saints, they should bear it cheerfully in the hope that sinners may thereby be led to repentance.

Verse 7. "So shall the congregation of the people compass thee about." Thy saints shall crowd to thy

tribunal with their complaints, or shall surround it with their solemn homage: "for their sakes therefore return thou on high." As when a judge travels at the assizes, all men take their cases to his court that they may be heard, so will the righteous gather to their Lord. Here he fortifies himself in prayer by pleading that if the Lord will mount the throne of judgment, multitudes of the saints would be blessed as well as himself. If I be too base to be remembered, yet, "for their sakes," for the love thou bearest to thy chosen people, come forth from thy secret pavilion, and sit in the gate dispensing justice among the people. When my suit includes the desires of all the righteous it shall surely speed, for, "shall not God avenge his own elect?"

Verse 8. If I am not mistaken, David has now seen in the eye of his mind the Lord ascending to his judgment-seat, and beholding him seated there in royal state, he draws near to him to urge his suit anew. In the last two verses he besought Jehovah to arise, and now that he is arisen, he prepares to mingle with "the congregation of the people" who compass the Lord about. The royal heralds proclaim the opening of the court with the solemn words, "The Lord shall judge the people." Our petitioner rises at once, and cries with earnestness and humility, "Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me." His hand is on an honest heart, and his cry is to a righteous Judge.

Verse 9. He sees a smile of complacency upon the face of the King, and in the name of all the assembled congregation he cries aloud, "Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just." Is not this the universal longing of the whole company of the elect? When shall we be delivered from the filthy conversation of these men of Sodom? When shall we escape from the filthiness of Mesech and the blackness of the tents of Kedar?

What a solemn and weighty truth is contained in the last sentence of the ninth verse! How deep is the divine knowledge!—"He trieth." How strict, how accurate, how intimate his search!—"he trieth the hearts," the secret thoughts, "and reins," the inward affections. "All things are naked and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

Verse 10. The judge has heard the cause, has cleared the guiltless, and uttered his voice against the persecutors. Let us draw near, and learn the results of the great assize. Yonder is the slandered one with his harp in hand, hymning the justice of his Lord, and rejoicing aloud in his own deliverance. "My defense is of God, which saveth the upright in heart." Oh, how good to have a true and upright heart. Crooked sinners, with all their craftiness, are foiled by the upright in heart. God defends the right. Filth will not long abide on the pure white garments of the saints, but shall be brushed off by divine providence, to the vexation of the men by whose base hands it was thrown upon the godly. When God shall try our cause, our sun has risen, and the sun of the wicked is set for ever. Truth, like oil, is ever above, no power of our enemies can drown it; we shall refute their slanders in the day when the trumpet wakes the dead, and we shall shine in honour when lying lips are put to silence. O believer, fear not all that thy foes can do or say against thee, for the tree which God plants no winds can hurt.

Verse 11. "God judgeth the righteous," he hath not given thee up to be condemned by the lips of persecutors. Thine enemies cannot sit on God's throne, nor blot thy name out of his book. Let them alone, then, for God will find time for his revenge.

"God is angry with the wicked every day." He not only detests sin, but is angry with those who continue to indulge in it. We have no insensible and stolid God to deal with; he can be angry, nay, he is angry to-day and every day with you, ye ungodly and impenitent sinners. The best day that ever dawns on a sinner brings a curse with it. Sinners may have many feast days, but no safe days. From

the beginning of the year even to its ending, there is not an hour in which God's oven is not hot, and burning in readiness for the wicked, who shall be as stubble.

Verse 12. "If he turn not, he will whet his sword." What blows are those which will be dealt by that long uplifted arm! God's sword has been sharpening upon the revolving stone of our daily wickedness, and if we will not repent, it will speedily cut us in pieces. Turn or burn is the sinner's only alternative. "He hath bent his bow and made it ready."

Verse 13. Even now the thirsty arrow longs to wet itself with the blood of the persecutor. The bow is bent, the aim is taken, the arrow is fitted to the string, and what, O sinner, if the arrow should be let fly at thee even now! Remember, God's arrows never miss the mark, and are, every one of them, "instruments of death." Judgment may tarry, but it will not come too late. The Greek proverb saith, "The mill of God grinds late, but grinds to powder."

Verse 14. In three graphic pictures we see the slanderer's history. A woman in travail furnishes the first metaphor. "He travaileth with iniquity." He is full of it, pained until he can carry it out, he longs to work his will, he is full of pangs until his evil intent is executed. "He hath conceived mischief." This is the original of his base design. The devil has had doings with him, and the virus of evil is in him. And now behold the progeny of this unhallowed conception. The child is worthy of its father, his name of old was, "the father of lies," and the birth doth not belie the parent, for he brought forth falsehood. Thus, one figure is carried out to perfection; the Psalmist now illustrates his meaning by another, taken from the stratagems of the hunter.

Verse 15. "He made a pit, and digged it." He was cunning in his plans, and industrious in his labours. He stooped to the dirty work of digging. He did not fear to soil his own hands, he was willing to work in a ditch if others might fall therein. What mean things men will do to wreak revenge on the godly. They hunt for good men, as if they were brute beasts; nay, they will not give them the fair chase afforded to the hare or the fox, but must secretly entrap them, because they can neither run them down nor shoot them down. Our enemies will not meet us to the face, for they fear us as much as they pretend to despise us. But let us look on to the end of the scene. The verse says, he "is fallen into the ditch which he made." Ah! there he is, let us laugh at his disappointment. Lo! he is himself the beast, he has hunted his own soul, and the chase has brought him a goodly victim. Aha, aha, so should it ever be. Come hither and make merry with this entrapped hunter, this biter who has bitten himself. Give him no pity, for it will be wasted on such a wretch. He is but rightly and richly rewarded by being paid in his own coin. He cast forth evil from his mouth, and it has fallen into his bosom. He has set his own house on fire with the torch which he lit to burn a neighbour. He sent forth a foul bird, and it has come back to its nest.

Verse 16. The rod which he lifted on high, has smitten his own back. He shot an arrow upward, and it has "returned upon his own head." He hurled a stone at another and it has "come down upon his own pate." Curses are like young chickens, they always come home to roost. Ashes always fly back in the face of him that throws them. "As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him." (Psalm 109:17.) How often has this been the case in the histories of both ancient and modern times. Men have burned their own fingers when they were hoping to brand their neighbour. And if this does not happen now, it will hereafter. The Lord has caused dogs to lick the blood of Ahab in the midst of the vineyard of Naboth. Sooner or later the evil deeds of persecutors have always leaped back into their arms. So it will be in the last great day, when Satan's fiery darts shall all be quivered in his own heart, and all his followers

shall reap the harvest which they themselves have sown.

Verse 17. We conclude with the joyful contrast. In this all these Psalms are agreed; they all exhibit the blessedness of the righteous, and make its colours the more glowing by contrast with the miseries of the wicked. The bright jewel sparkles in a black foil. Praise is the occupation of the godly, their eternal work, and their present pleasure. Singing is the fitting embodiment for praise, and therefore do the saints make melody before the Lord Most High. The slandered one is now a singer: his harp was unstrung for a very little season, and now we leave him sweeping its harmonious chords, and flying on their music to the third heaven of adoring praise.

Psalm 8

Verse 1. Unable to express the glory of God, the Psalmist utters a note of exclamation. O Jehovah our Lord! We need not wonder at this, for no heart can measure, no tongue can utter, the half of the greatness of Jehovah. The whole creation is full of his glory and radiant with the excellency of his power; his goodness and his wisdom are manifested on every hand. The countless myriads of terrestrial beings, from man the head, to the creeping worm at the foot, are all supported and nourished by the Divine bounty. The solid fabric of the universe leans upon his eternal arm. Universally is he present, and everywhere is his name excellent. God worketh ever and everywhere. There is no place where God is not. The miracles of his power await us on all sides. Traverse the silent valleys where the rocks enclose you on either side, rising like the battlements of heaven till you can see but a strip of the blue sky far overhead; you may be the only traveler who has passed through that glen; the bird may start up affrighted, and the moss may tremble beneath the first tread of human foot; but God is there in a thousand wonders, upholding yon rocky barriers, filling the flowercups with their perfume, and refreshing the lonely pines with the breath of his mouth. Descend, if you will, into the lowest depths of the ocean. where undisturbed the water sleeps, and the very sand is motionless in unbroken quiet, but the glory of the Lord is there, revealing its excellence in the silent palace of the sea. Borrow the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, but God is there. Mount to the highest heaven, or dive into the deepest hell, and God is in both hymned in everlasting song, or justified in terrible vengeance. Everywhere, and in every place, God dwells and is manifestly at work. Nor on earth alone is Jehovah extolled, for his brightness shines forth in the firmament above the earth. His glory exceeds the glory of the starry heavens; above the region of the stars he hath set fast his everlasting throne, and there he dwells in light ineffable. Let us adore him "who alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea; who maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south." (Job 9:8, 9.) We can scarcely find more fitting words than those of Nehemiah, "Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee." Returning to the text we are led to observe that this Psalm is addressed to God, because none but the Lord himself can fully know his own glory. The believing heart is ravished with what it sees, but God only knows the glory of God. What a sweetness lies in the little word our, how much is God's glory endeared to us when we consider our interest in him as our Lord. How excellent is thy name! no words can express that excellency; and therefore it is left as a note of exclamation. The very name of Jehovah is excellent, what must his person be. Note the fact that even the heavens cannot contain his glory, it is set above the heavens, since it is and ever must be too great for the creature to express. When wandering among the Alps, we felt that the Lord was infinitely greater than all his grandest works, and under that feeling we roughly wrote these few lines:—

Yet in all these how great soe'er they be,
We see not Him. The glass is all too dense
And dark, or else our earthborn eyes too dim.

Yon Alps, that lift their heads above the clouds
And hold familiar converse with the stars,
Are dust, at which the balance trembleth not,
Compared with His divine immensity.
The snow-crown'd summits fail to set Him forth,
Who dwelleth in Eternity, and bears
Alone, the name of High and Lofty One.
Depths unfathomed are too shallow to express
The wisdom and the knowledge of the Lord.
The mirror of the creatures has no space
To bear the image of the Infinite.
'Tis true the Lord hath fairly writ his name,
And set his seal upon creation's brow.
But as the skilful potter much excels
The vessel which he fashions on the wheel,
E'en so, but in proportion greater far,
Jehovah's self transcends his noblest works.
Earth's ponderous wheels would break, her axles snap,
If freighted with the load of Deity.
Space is too narrow for the Eternal's rest,
And time too short a footstool for his throne.
E'en avalanche and thunder lack a voice,
To utter the full volume of his praise.
How then can I declare him? Where are words
With which my glowing tongue may speak his name?
Silent I bow, and humbly I adore.

Verse 2. Nor only in the heavens above is the Lord seen, but the earth beneath is telling forth his majesty. In the sky, the massive orbs, rolling in their stupendous grandeur, are witnesses of his power in great things, while here below, the lisping utterances of babes are the manifestations of his strength in little ones. How often will children tell us of a God whom we have forgotten! How doth their simple prattle refute those learned fools who deny the being of God! Many men have been made to hold their tongues, while sucklings have borne witness to the glory of the God of heaven. It is singular how clearly the history of the church expounds this verse. Did not the children cry "Hosannah!" in the temple, when proud Pharisees were silent and contemptuous? and did not the Saviour quote these very words as a justification of their infantile cries? Early church history records many amazing instances of the testimony of children for the truth of God, but perhaps more modern instances will be the most interesting. Fox tells us, in the Book of Martyrs, that when Mr. Lawrence was burnt in Colchester, he was carried to the fire in a chair, because through the cruelty of the Papists, he could not stand upright, several young children came about the fire, and cried as well as they could speak, "Lord, strengthen thy servant, and keep thy promise." God answered their prayer, for Mr. Lawrence died as firmly and calmly as any one could wish to breathe his last. When one of the Popish chaplains

told Mr. Wishart, the great Scotch martyr, that he had a devil in him, a child that stood by cried out, "A devil cannot speak such words as yonder man speaketh." One more instance is still nearer to our time. In a postscript to one of his letters, in which he details his persecution when first preaching in Moorfields, Whitfield says, "I cannot help adding that several little boys and girls, who were fond of sitting round me on the pulpit while I preached, and handed to me people's notes—though they were often pelted with eggs, dirt, &c., thrown at me—never once gave way; but on the contrary, every time I was struck, turned up their little weeping eyes, and seemed to wish they could receive the blows for me. God make them, in their growing years, great and living martyrs for him who, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, perfects praise!" He who delights in the songs of angels is pleased to honour himself in the eyes of his enemies by the praises of little children. What a contrast between the glory above the heavens, and the mouths of babes and sucklings! yet by both the name of God is made excellent.

Verses 3, 4. At the close of that excellent little manual entitled "The Solar System," written by Dr. Dick, we find an eloquent passage which beautifully expounds the text:—A survey of the solar system has a tendency to moderate the pride of man and to promote humility. Pride is one of the distinguishing characteristics of puny man, and has been one of the chief causes of all the contentions, wars, devastations, systems of slavery, and ambitious projects which have desolated and demoralized our sinful world. Yet there is no disposition more incongruous to the character and circumstances of man. Perhaps there are no rational beings throughout the universe among whom pride would appear more unseemly or incompatible than in man, considering the situation in which he is placed. He is exposed to numerous degradations and calamities, to the rage of storms and tempests, the devastations of earthquakes and volcanoes, the fury of whirlwinds, and the tempestuous billows of the ocean, to the ravages of the sword, famine, pestilence, and numerous diseases; and at length he must sink into the grave, and his body must become the companion of worms! The most dignified and haughty of the sons of men are liable to these and similar degradations as well as the meanest of the human family. Yet, in such circumstances, man—that puny worm of the dust, whose knowledge is so limited, and whose follies are so numerous and glaring—has the effrontery to strut in all the haughtiness of pride, and to glory in his shame. When other arguments and motives produce little effect on certain minds, no considerations seem likely to have a more powerful tendency to counteract this deplorable propensity in human beings, than those which are borrowed from the objects connected with astronomy. They show us what an insignificant being— what a mere atom, indeed, man appears amidst the immensity of creation! Though he is an object of the paternal care and mercy of the Most High, yet he is but as a grain of sand to the whole earth, when compared to the countless myriads of beings that people the amplitudes of creation. What is the whole of this globe on which we dwell compared with the solar system, which contains a mass of matter ten thousand times greater? What is it in comparison of the hundred millions of suns and worlds which by the telescope have been descried throughout the starry regions? What, then, is a kingdom, a province, or a baronial territory, of which we are as proud as if we were the lords of the universe and for which we engage in so much devastation and carnage? What are they, when set in competition with the glories of the sky? Could we take our station on the lofty pinnacles of heaven, and look down on this scarcely distinguishable speck of earth, we should be ready to exclaim with Seneca, "Is it to this little spot that the great designs and vast desires of men are confined? Is it for this there is so much disturbance of nations, so much carnage, and so many ruinous wars? Oh, the folly of deceived men, to imagine great kingdoms in the compass of an atom, to raise armies to decide a point of earth with the sword!" Dr. Chalmers, in his *Astronomical Discourses*, very truthfully says, "We gave you but a feeble image of our comparative insignificance,

when we said that the glories of an extended forest would suffer no more from the fall of a single leaf, than the glories of this extended universe would suffer though the globe we tread upon, 'and all that it inherits, should dissolve.'"

Verses 5-8. These verses may set forth man's position among the creatures before he fell; but as they are, by the apostle Paul, appropriated to man as represented by the Lord Jesus, it is best to give most weight to that meaning. In order of dignity, man stood next to the angels, and a little lower than they; in the Lord Jesus this was accomplished, for he was made a little lower than the angels by the suffering of death. Man in Eden had the full command of all creatures, and they came before him to receive their names as an act of homage to him as the viceregent of God to them. Jesus in his glory, is now Lord, not only of all living, but of all created things, and, with the exception of him who put all things under him, Jesus is Lord of all, and his elect, in him, are raised to a dominion wider than that of the first Adam, as shall be more clearly seen at his coming. Well might the Psalmist wonder at the singular exaltation of man in the scale of being, when he marked his utter nothingness in comparison with the starry universe.

Thou madest him a little lower than the angels—a little lower in nature, since they are immortal, and but a little, because time is short; and when that is over, saints are no longer lower than the angels. The margin reads it, "A little while inferior to." Thou crownest him. The dominion that God has bestowed on man is a great glory and honour to him; for all dominion is honour, and the highest is that which wears the crown. A full list is given of the subjugated creatures, to show that all the dominion lost by sin is restored in Christ Jesus. Let none of us permit the possession of any earthly creature to be a snare to us, but let us remember that we are to reign over them, and not to allow them to reign over us. Under our feet we must keep the world, and we must shun that base spirit which is content to let worldly cares and pleasures sway the empire of the immortal soul.

Verse 9. Here, like a good composer, the poet returns to his key-note, falling back, as it were, into his first state of wondering adoration. What he started with as a proposition in the first verse, he closes with as a well proven conclusion, with a sort of quod erat demonstrandum. O for grace to walk worthy of that excellent name which has been named upon us, and which we are pledged to magnify!

Psalm 9

Verse 1. With a holy resolution the songster begins his hymn; I will praise thee, O Lord. It sometimes needs all our determination to face the foe, and bless the Lord in the teeth of his enemies; vowing that whoever else may be silent we will bless his name; here, however, the overthrow of the foe is viewed as complete, and the song flows with sacred fulness of delight. It is our duty to praise the Lord; let us perform it as a privilege. Observe that David's praise is all given to the Lord. Praise is to be offered to God alone; we may be grateful to the intermediate agent, but our thanks must have long wings and mount aloft to heaven. With my whole heart. Half heart is no heart. I will show forth. There is true praise to the thankful telling forth to others of our heavenly Father's dealings with us; this is one of the themes upon which the godly should speak often to one another, and it will not be casting pearls before swine if we make even the ungodly hear of the loving-kindness of the Lord to us. All thy marvellous works. Gratitude for one mercy refreshes the memory as to thousands of others. One silver link in the chain draws up a long series of tender remembrances. Here is eternal work for us, for there can be no end to the showing forth of all his deeds of love. If we consider our own sinfulness and nothingness, we must feel that every work of preservation, forgiveness, conversion, deliverance, sanctification, etc., which the Lord has wrought for us, or in us is a marvellous work. Even in heaven,

divine loving-kindness will doubtless be as much a theme of surprise as of rapture.

Verse 2. Gladness and joy are the appropriate spirit in which to praise the goodness of the Lord. Birds extol the Creator in notes of overflowing joy, the cattle low forth his praise with tumult of happiness, and the fish leap up in his worship with excess of delight. Moloch may be worshipped with shrieks of pain, and Juggernaut may be honoured by dying groans and inhuman yells, but he whose name is Love is best pleased with the holy mirth, and sanctified gladness of his people. Daily rejoicing is an ornament to the Christian character, and a suitable robe for God's choristers to wear. God loveth a cheerful giver, whether it be the gold of his purse or the gold of his mouth which he presents upon his altar. I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High. Songs are the fitting expression of inward thankfulness, and it were well if we indulge ourselves and honoured our Lord with more of them. Mr. B. P. Power has well said, "The sailors give a cheery cry as they weigh anchor, the ploughman whistles in the morning as he drives his team; the milkmaid sings her rustic song as she sets about her early task; when soldiers are leaving friends behind them, they do not march out to the tune of the 'Dead March in Saul,' but to the quick notes of some lively air. A praising spirit would do for us all that their songs and music do for them; and if only we could determine to praise the Lord, we should surmount many a difficulty which our low spirits never would have been equal to, and we should do double the work which can be done if the heart be languid in its beating, if we be crushed and trodden down in soul. As the evil spirit in Saul yielded in olden time to the influence of the harp of the son of Jesse, so would the spirit of melancholy often take flight from us, if only we would take up the song of praise.

Verse 3. God's presence is evermore sufficient to work the defeat of our most furious foes, and their ruin is so complete when the Lord takes them in hand, that even flight cannot save them, they fall to rise no more when he pursues them. We must be careful, like David, to give all the glory to him whose presence gives the victory. If we have here the exultings of our conquering Captain, let us make the triumphs of the Redeemer the triumphs of the redeemed, and rejoice with him at the total discomfiture of all his foes.

Verse 4. One of our nobility has for his motto, "I will maintain it;" but the Christian has a better and more humble one, "Thou hast maintained it." "God and my right," are united by my faith: while God lives my right shall never be taken from me. If we seek to maintain the cause and honour of our Lord we may suffer reproach and misrepresentation, but it is a rich comfort to remember that he who sits on the throne knows our hearts, and will not leave us to the ignorant and ungenerous judgment of erring man.

Verse 5. God rebukes before he destroys, but when he once comes to blows with the wicked he ceases not until he has dashed them in pieces so small that their very name is forgotten, and like a noisome snuff their remembrance is put out for ever and ever. How often the word "thou" occurs in this and the former verse, to show us that the grateful strain mounts up directly to the Lord as doth the smoke from the altar when the air is still. My soul send up all the music of all thy powers to him who has been and is thy sure deliverance.

Verse 6. Here the Psalmist exults over the fallen foe. He bends as it were, over his prostrate form, and insults his once vaunted strength. He plucks the boaster's song out of his mouth, and sings it for him in derision. After this fashion doth our Glorious Redeemer ask of death, "Where is thy sting?" and of the grave, "Where is thy victory?" The spoiler is spoiled, and he who made captive is led into

captivity himself. Let the daughters of Jerusalem go forth to meet their King, and praise him with timbrel and harp.

In the light of the past the future is not doubtful. Since the same Almighty God fills the throne of power, we can with unhesitating confidence, exult in our security for all time to come.

Verse 7. The enduring existence and unchanging dominion of our Jehovah, are the firm foundations of our joy. The enemy and his destructions shall come to a perpetual end, but God and his throne shall endure for ever. The eternity of divine sovereignty yields unfailing consolation. By the throne being prepared for judgment, are we not to understand the swiftness of divine justice. In heaven's court suitors are not worn out with long delays. Term-time lasts all the year round in the court of King's Bench above. Thousands may come at once to the throne of the Judge of all the earth, but neither plaintiff nor defendant shall have to complain that he is not prepared to give their cause a fair hearing.

Verse 8. Whatever earthly courts may do, heaven's throne ministers judgment in uprightness. Partiality and respect of persons are things unknown in the dealings of the Holy One of Israel. How the prospect of appearing before the impartial tribunal of the Great King should act as a check to us when tempted to sin, and as a comfort when we are slandered or oppressed.

Verse 9. He who gives no quarter to the wicked in the day of judgment, is the defence and refuge of his saints in the day of trouble. There are many forms of oppression; both from man and from Satan oppression comes to us; and for all its forms, a refuge is provided in the Lord Jehovah. There were cities of refuge under the law, God is our refuge-city under the gospel. As the ships when vexed with tempest make for harbour, so do the oppressed hasten to the wings of a just and gracious God. He is a high tower so impregnable, that the hosts of hell cannot carry it by storm, and from its lofty heights faith looks down with scorn upon her enemies.

Verse 10. Ignorance is worst when it amounts to ignorance of God, and knowledge is best when it exercises itself upon the name of God. This most excellent knowledge leads to the most excellent grace of faith. O, to learn more of the attributes and character of God. Unbelief, that hooting nightbird, cannot live in the light of divine knowledge, it flies before the sun of God's great and gracious name. If we read this verse literally, there is, no doubt, a glorious fulness of assurance in the names of God. We have recounted them in the "Hints for Preachers," and would direct the reader's attention to them. By knowing his name is also meant an experimental acquaintance with the attributes of God, which are every one of them anchors to hold the soul from drifting in seasons of peril. The Lord may hide his face for a season from his people, but he never has utterly, finally, really, or angrily forsaken them that seek him. Let the poor seekers draw comfort from this fact, and let the finders rejoice yet more exceedingly, for what must be the Lord's faithfulness to those who find if he is so gracious to those who seek.

"O hope of every contrite heart,
O joy of all the meek,
To those who fall how kind thou art,
How good to those who seek.

"But what to those who find, ah, this

Nor tongue nor pen can show
The love of Jesus what it is,
None but his loved ones know."

Verse 11. Being full of gratitude himself, our inspired author is eager to excite others to join the strain, and praise God in the same manner as he himself vowed to do in the first and second verses. The heavenly spirit of praise is gloriously contagious, and he that hath it is never content unless he can excite all who surround him to unite in his sweet employ. Singing and preaching, as means of glorifying God, are here joined together, and it is remarkable that, connected with all revivals of gospel ministry, there has been a sudden outburst of the spirit of song. Luther's Psalms and Hymns were in all men's mouths, and in the modern revival under Wesley and Whitefield, the strains of Charles Wesley, Cennick, Berridge, Toplady, Hart, Newton, and many others, were the outgrowth of restored piety. The singing of the birds of praise fitly accompanies the return of the gracious spring of divine visitation through the proclamation of the truth. Sing on brethren, and preach on, and these shall both be a token that the Lord still dwelleth in Zion. It will be well for us when coming up to Zion, to remember that the Lord dwells among his saints, and is to be had in peculiar reverence of all those that are about him.

Verse 12. When an inquest is held concerning the blood of the oppressed, the martyred saints will have the first remembrance; he will avenge his own elect. Those saints who are living shall also be heard; they shall be exonerated from blame, and kept from destruction, even when the Lord's most terrible work is going on; the man with the inkhorn by his side shall mark them all for safety, before the slaughtermen are permitted to smite the Lord's enemies. The humble cry of the poorest saints shall neither be drowned by the voice of the thundering justice nor by the shrieks of the condemned.

Verse 13. Memories of the past and confidences concerning the future conducted the man of God to the mercy seat to plead for the needs of the present. Between praising and praying he divided all his time. How could he have spent it more profitably? His first prayer is one suitable for all persons and occasions, it breathes a humble spirit, indicates self-knowledge, appeals to the proper attributes, and to the fitting person. Have mercy upon me, O Lord. Just as Luther used to call some texts little bibles, so we may call this sentence a little prayer-book; for it has in it the soul and marrow of prayer. It is multum in parvo, and like the angelic sword turns every way. The ladder looks to be short, but it reaches from earth to heaven.

What a noble title is here given to the Most High. Thou that liftest me up from the gates of death! What a glorious lift! In sickness, in sin, in despair, in temptation, we have been brought very low, and the gloomy portal has seemed as if it would open to imprison us, but, underneath us were the everlasting arms, and, therefore, we have been uplifted even to the gates of heaven. Trapp quaintly says, "He commonly reserveth his hand for a dead lift, and rescueth those who were even talking of their graves."

Verse 14. We must not overlook David's object in desiring mercy, it is God's glory: "that I may show forth all thy praise." Saints are not so selfish as to look only to self; they desire mercy's diamond that they may let others see it flash and sparkle, and may admire Him who gives such priceless gems to his beloved. The contrast between the gates of death and the gates of the New Jerusalem is very striking; let our songs be excited to the highest and most rapturous pitch by the double consideration of whence we are taken, and to what we have been advanced, and let our prayers for mercy be made more energetic and agonizing by a sense of the grace which such a salvation implies. When David

speaks of his showing forth all God's praise, he means that, in his deliverance grace in all its heights and depths would be magnified. Just as our hymn puts it:—

"O the length and breadth of love!
Jesus, Saviour, can it be?
All thy mercy's height I prove,
All the depth is seen in me.

Here ends the first part of this instructive Psalm, and in pausing awhile we feel bound to confess that our exposition has only flitted over its surface and has not digged into the depths. The verses are singularly full of teaching, and if the Holy Spirit shall bless the reader, he may go over this Psalm, as the writer has done scores of times, and see on each occasion fresh beauties.

Verse 15. In considering this terrible picture of the Lord's overwhelming judgments of his enemies, we are called upon to ponder and meditate upon it with deep seriousness by the two untranslated words, Higgsaion, Selah. Meditate, pause. Consider, and tune your instrument. Bethink yourselves and solemnly adjust your hearts to the solemnity which is so well becoming the subject. Let us in a humble spirit approach these verses, and notice, first, that the character of God requires the punishment of sin.

Verse 16. Jehovah is known by the judgment which he executeth; his holiness and abhorrence of sin is thus displayed. A ruler who winked at evil would soon be known by all his subjects to be evil himself, and he, on the other hand, who is severely just in judgment reveals his own nature thereby. So long as our God is God, he will not, he cannot spare the guilty; except through that one glorious way in which he is just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. We must notice, secondly, that the manner of his judgment is singularly wise, and indisputably just. He makes the wicked become their own executioners. "The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made," etc. Like cunning hunters they prepared a pitfall for the godly and fell into it themselves: the foot of the victim escaped their crafty snares, but the toils surrounded themselves: the cruel snare was laboriously manufactured, and it proved its efficacy by snaring its own maker. Persecutors and oppressors are often ruined by their own malicious projects. "Drunkards kill themselves; prodigals beggar themselves;" the contentious are involved in ruinous costs; the vicious are devoured with fierce diseases; the envious eat their own hearts; and blasphemers curse their own souls. Thus, men may read their sin in their punishment. They sowed the seed of sin, and the ripe fruit of damnation is the natural result.

Verse 17. The justice which has punished the wicked, and preserved the righteous, remains the same, and therefore in days to come, retribution will surely be meted out. How solemn is the seventeenth verse, especially in its warning to forgetters of God. The moral who are not devout, the honest who are not prayerful, the benevolent who are not believing, the amiable who are not converted, these must all have their own portion with the openly wicked in the hell which is prepared for the devil and his angels. There are whole nations of such; the forgetters of God are far more numerous than the profane or profligate, and according to the very forceful expression of the Hebrew, the nethermost hell will be the place into which all of them shall be hurled headlong. Forgetfulness seems a small sin, but it brings eternal wrath upon the man who lives and dies in it.

Verse 18. Mercy is as ready to her work as ever justice can be. Needy souls fear that they are

forgotten; well, if it be so, let them rejoice that they shall not always be so. Satan tells poor tremblers that their hope shall perish, but they have here the divine assurance that their expectation shall not perish for ever. "The Lord's people are a humbled people, afflicted, emptied, sensible of need, driven to a daily attendance on God, daily begging of him, and living upon the hope of what is promised;" such persons may have to wait, but they shall find that they do not wait in vain.

Verse 19. Prayers are the believer's weapons of war. When the battle is too hard for us, we call in our great ally, who, as it were, lies in ambush until faith gives the signal by crying out, "Arise, O Lord." Although our cause be all but lost, it shall be soon won again, if the Almighty doth but bestir himself. He will not suffer man to prevail over God, but with swift judgments will confound their gloryings. In the very sight of God the wicked will be punished, and he who is now all tenderness will have no bowels of compassion for them, since they had no tears of repentance while their day of grace endured.

Verse 20. One would think that men would not grow so vain as to deny themselves to be but men, but it appears to be a lesson which only a divine schoolmaster can teach to some proud spirits. Crowns leave their wearers but men, degrees of eminent learning make their owners not more than men, valour and conquest cannot elevate beyond the dead level of "but men;" and all the wealth of Croesus, the wisdom of Solon, the power of Alexander, the eloquence of Demosthenes, if added together, would leave the possessor but a man. May we ever remember this lest like those in the text, we should be put in fear.

Before leaving this Psalm, it will be very profitable if the student will peruse it again as the triumphal hymn of the Redeemer, as he devoutly brings the glory of his victories and lays it down at his Father's feet. Let us joy in his joy, and our joy shall be full.

Psalm 10

Verse 1. To the tearful eye of the sufferer the Lord seemed to stand still, as if he calmly looked on, and did not sympathize with his afflicted one. Nay, more, the Lord appeared to be afar off, no longer "a very present help in trouble," but an inaccessible mountain, into which no man would be able to climb. The presence of God is the joy of his people, but any suspicion of his absence is distracting beyond measure. Let us, then, ever remember that the Lord is nigh us. The refiner is never far from the mouth of the furnace when his gold is in the fire, and the Son of God is always walking in the midst of the flames when his holy children are cast into them. Yet he that knows the frailty of man will little wonder that when we are sharply exercised, we find it hard to bear the apparent neglect of the Lord when he forbears to work our deliverance.

"Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?" It is not the trouble, but the hiding of our Father's face, which cuts us to the quick. When trial and desertion come together, we are in as perilous a plight as Paul, when his ship fell into a place where two seas met (Acts 27:41). It is but little wonder if we are like the vessel which ran aground, and the fore-part stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, while the hinder part was broken by the violence of the waves. When our sun is eclipsed, it is dark indeed. If we need an answer to the question, "Why hidest thou thyself?" it is to be found in the fact that there is a "needs-be," not only for trial, but for heaviness of heart under trial (1 Peter 1:6); but how could this be the case, if the Lord should shine upon us while he is afflicting us? Should the parent comfort his child while he is correcting him, where would be the use of the chastening? A smiling face and a rod are not fit companions. God bares the back that the blow may be felt; for it is only felt affliction which can become blest affliction. If we were carried in the arms of God over every stream, where would be the

trial, and where the experience, which trouble is meant to teach us?

Verse 2. The second verse contains the formal indictment against the wicked: "The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor." The accusation divides itself into two distinct charges,—pride and tyranny; the one the root and cause of the other. The second sentence is the humble petition of the oppressed: "Let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined." The prayer is reasonable, just, and natural. Even our enemies themselves being judges, it is but right that men should be done by as they wished to do to others. We only weigh you in your own scales, and measure your corn with your own bushel. Terrible shall be thy day, O persecuting Babylon! when thou shalt be made to drink of the winecup which thou thyself hast filled to the brim with the blood of saints. There are none who will dispute the justice of God, when he shall hang every Haman on his own gallows, and cast all the enemies of his Daniels into their own den of lions.

Verse 3. The indictment being read, and the petition presented, the evidence is now heard upon the first count. The evidence is very full and conclusive upon the matter of pride, and no jury could hesitate to give a verdict against the prisoner at the bar. Let us, however, hear the witnesses one by one. The first testifies that he is a boaster. "For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire." He is a very silly boaster, for he glories in a mere desire: a very brazen-faced boaster, for that desire is villainy; and a most abandoned sinner, to boast of that which is his shame. Bragging sinners are the worst and most contemptible of men, especially when their filthy desires,—too filthy to be carried into act,—become the theme of their boastings. When Mr. Hate-Good and Mr. Heady are joined in partnership, they drive a brisk trade in the devil's wares. This one proof is enough to condemn the prisoner at the bar. Take him away, jailor! But stay, another witness desires to be sworn and heard. This time, the impudence of the proud rebel is even more apparent; for he "blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth." This is insolence, which is pride unmasked. He is haughty enough to differ from the Judge of all the earth, and bless the men whom God hath cursed. So did the sinful generation in the days of Malachi, who called the proud happy, and set up those that worked wickedness (Malachi 3:15). These base pretenders would dispute with their Maker; they would—

"Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge his justice, be the god of God."

How often have we heard the wicked man speaking in terms of honour of the covetous, the grinder of the poor, and the sharp dealer! Our old proverb hath it,—

"I wot well how the world wags;
He is most loved that hath most bags."

Pride meets covetousness, and compliments it as wise, thrifty, and prudent. We say it with sorrow, there are many professors of religion who esteem a rich man, and flatter him, even though they know that he has fattened himself upon the flesh and blood of the poor. The only sinners who are received as respectable are covetous men. If a man is a fornicator, or a drunkard, we put him out of the church; but who ever read of church discipline against that idolatrous wretch,—the covetous man? Let us tremble, lest we be found to be partakers of this atrocious sin of pride, "blessing the covetous, whom Jehovah abhorreth."

Verse 4. The proud boastings and lewd blessings of the wicked have been received in evidence

against him, and now his own face confirms the accusation, and his empty closet cries aloud against him. "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God." Proud hearts breed proud looks and stiff knees. It is an admirable arrangement that the heart is often written on the countenance, just as the motion of the wheels of a clock find their record on its face. A brazen face and a broken heart never go together. We are not quite sure that the Athenians were wise when they ordained that men should be tried in the dark lest their countenances should weigh with the judges; for there is much more to be learned from the motions of the muscles of the face than from the words of the lips. Honesty shines in the face, but villainy peeps out at the eyes.

See the effect of pride; it kept the man from seeking God. It is hard to pray with a stiff neck and an unbending knee. "God is not in all his thoughts:" he thought much, but he had no thoughts for God. Amid heaps of chaff there was not a grain of wheat. The only place where God is not is in the thoughts of the wicked. This is a damning accusation; for where the God of heaven is not, the Lord of hell is reigning and raging; and if God be not in our thoughts, our thoughts will bring us to perdition.

Verse 5. "His ways are always grievous." To himself they are hard. Men go a rough road when they go to hell. God has hedged-up the way of sin: O what folly to leap these hedges and fall among the thorns! To others, also, his ways cause much sorrow and vexation; but what cares he? He sits like the idol god upon his monstrous car, utterly regardless of the crowds who are crushed as he rolls along. "Thy judgments are far above out of his sight:" he looks high, but not high enough. As God is forgotten, so are his judgments. He is not able to comprehend the things of God; a swine may sooner look through a telescope at the stars than this man study the Word of God to understand the righteousness of the Lord. "As for all his enemies, he puffeth at them." He defies and domineers; and when men resist his injurious behaviour, he sneers at them, and threatens to annihilate them with a puff. In most languages there is a word of contempt borrowed from the action of puffing with the lips, and in English we should express the idea by saying, "He cries, 'Pooh! Pooh!' at his enemies." Ah! there is one enemy who will not thus be puffed at. Death will puff at the candle of his life and blow it out, and the wicked boaster will find it grim work to brag in the tomb.

Verse 6. The testimony of the sixth verse concludes the evidence against the prisoner upon the first charge of pride, and certainly it is conclusive in the highest degree. The present witness has been prying into the secret chambers of the heart, and has come to tell us what he has heard. "He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity." O impertinence runs to seed! The man thinks himself immutable, and omnipotent too, for he, he is never to be in adversity. He counts himself a privileged man. He sits alone, and shall see no sorrow. His nest is in the stars, and he dreams not of a hand that shall pluck him thence. But let us remember that this man's house is built upon the sand, upon a foundation no more substantial than the rolling waves of the sea. He that is too secure is never safe. Boastings are not buttresses, and self-confidence is a sorry bulwark. This is the ruin of fools, that when they succeed they become too big, and swell with self-conceit, as if their summer would last for ever, and their flowers bloom on eternally. Be humble, O man! for thou art mortal, and thy lot is mutable.

The second crime is now to be proved. The fact that the man is proud and arrogant may go a long way to prove that he is vindictive and cruel. Haman's pride was the father of a cruel design to murder all the Jews. Nebuchadnezzar builds an idol; in pride he commands all men to bow before it; and then cruelly stands ready to heat the furnace seven times hotter for those who will not yield to his imperious will. Every proud thought is twin brother to a cruel thought. He who exalts himself will despise others, and one step further will make him a tyrant.

Verse 7. Let us now hear the witnesses in court. Let the wretch speak for himself, for out of his own mouth he will be condemned. "His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud." There is not only a little evil there, but his mouth is full of it. A three-headed serpent hath stowed away its coils and venom within the den of its black mouth. There is cursing which he spits against both God and men, deceit with which he entraps the unwary, and fraud by which, even in his common dealings, he robs his neighbours. Beware of such a man: have no sort of dealing with him: none but the silliest of geese would go to the fox's sermon, and none but the most foolish will put themselves into the society of knaves. But we must proceed. Let us look under this man's tongue as well as in his mouth; "under his tongue is mischief and vanity." Deep in his throat are the unborn words which shall come forth as mischief and iniquity.

Verse 8. Despite the bragging of this base wretch, it seems that he is as cowardly as he is cruel. "He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor." He acts the part of the highwayman, who springs upon the unsuspecting traveller in some desolate part of the road. There are always bad men lying in wait for the saints. This is a land of robbers and thieves; let us travel well armed, for every bush conceals an enemy. Everywhere there are traps laid for us, and foes thirsting for our blood. There are enemies at our table as well as across the sea. We are never safe, save when the Lord is with us.

Verse 9. The picture becomes blacker, for here is the cunning of the lion, and of the huntsman, as well as the stealthiness of the robber. Surely there are some men who come up to the very letter of this description. With watching, perversion, slander, whispering, and false swearing, they ruin the character of the righteous, and murder the innocent; or, with legal quibbles, mortgages, bonds, writs, and the like, they catch the poor, and draw them into a net. Chrysostom was peculiarly severe upon this last phase of cruelty, but assuredly not more so than was richly merited. Take care, brethren, for there are other traps besides these. Hungry lions are crouching in every den, and fowlers spread their nets in every field.

Quarles well pictures our danger in those memorable lines,—

"The close pursuers' busy hands do plant
Snares in thy substance; snares attend thy wants;
Snares in thy credit; snares in thy disgrace;
Snares in thy high estate; snares in thy base;
Snares tuck thy bed; and snares surround thy board;
Snares watch thy thoughts; and snares attack thy word;

Snares in thy quiet; snares in thy commotion;
Snares in thy diet; snares in thy devotion;
Snares lurk in thy resolves; snares in thy doubt;
Snares lie within thy heart; and snares without;
Snares are above thy head, and snares beneath;
Snares in thy sickness; snares are in thy death.

O Lord! keep thy servants, and defend us from all our enemies!

Verse 10. "He croucheth and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones." Seeming humility is often armour-bearer to malice. The lion crouches that he may leap with the greater force,

and bring down his strong limbs upon his prey. When a wolf was old, and had tasted human blood, the old Saxon cried, "Ware, wolf!" and we may cry, "Ware fox!" They who crouch to our feet are longing to make us fall. Be very careful of fawners; for friendship and flattery are deadly enemies.

Verse 11. As upon the former count, so upon this one; a witness is forthcoming, who has been listening at the keyhole of the heart. Speak up, friend, and let us hear your story. "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it." This cruel man comforts himself with the idea that God is blind, or, at least, forgetful: a fond and foolish fancy, indeed. Men doubt Omniscience when they persecute the saints. If we had a sense of God's presence with us, it would be impossible for us to ill-treat his children. In fact, there can scarcely be a greater preservation from sin than the constant thought of "Thou, God, seest me."

Thus has the trial proceeded. The case has been fully stated; and now it is but little wonder that the oppressed petitioner lifts up the cry for judgment, which we find in the following verse:—

Verse 12. With what bold language will faith address its God! and yet what unbelief is mingled with our strongest confidence. Fearlessly the Lord is stirred up to arise and lift up his hand, yet timidly he is begged not to forget the humble; as if Jehovah could ever be forgetful of his saints. This verse is the incessant cry of the Church, and she will never refrain therefrom until her Lord shall come in his glory to avenge her of all her adversaries.

Verse 13. In these verses the description of the wicked is condensed, and the evil of his character traced to its source, viz., atheistical ideas with regard to the government of the world. We may at once perceive that this is intended to be another urgent plea with the Lord to show his power, and reveal his justice. When the wicked call God's righteousness in question, we may well beg him to teach them terrible things in righteousness. In verse 13, the hope of the infidel and his heart-wishes are laid bare. He despises the Lord, because he will not believe that sin will meet with punishment: "he hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it." If there were no hell for other men, there ought to be one for those who question the justice of it.

Verse 14. This vile suggestion receives its answer in verse 14. "Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand." God is all-eye to see, and all-hand to punish his enemies. From Divine oversight there is no hiding, and from Divine justice there is no fleeing. Wanton mischief shall meet with woeful misery, and those who harbour spite shall inherit sorrow. Verily there is a God which judgeth in the earth. Nor is this the only instance of the presence of God in the world; for while he chastises the oppressor, he befriends the oppressed. "The poor committeth himself unto thee." They give themselves up entirely into the Lord's hands. Resigning their judgment to his enlightenment, and their wills to his supremacy, they rest assured that he will order all things for the best. Nor does he deceive their hope. He preserves them in times of need, and causes them to rejoice in his goodness. "Thou art the helper of the fatherless." God is the parent of all orphans. When the earthly father sleeps beneath the sod, a heavenly Father smiles from above. By some means or other, orphan children are fed, and well they may when they have such a Father.

Verse 15. In this verse we hear again the burden of the psalmist's prayer: "Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man." Let the sinner lose his power to sin; stop the tyrant, arrest the oppressor, weaken the loins of the mighty, and dash in pieces the terrible. They deny thy justice: let them feel it to the full. Indeed, they shall feel it; for God shall hunt the sinner for ever: so long as there is a grain of sin in him it shall be sought out and punished. It is not a little worthy of note, that very few great

persecutors have ever died in their beds: the curse has manifestly pursued them, and their fearful sufferings have made them own that divine justice at which they could at one time launch defiance. God permits tyrants to arise as thorn-hedges to protect his church from the intrusion of hypocrites, and that he may teach his backsliding children by them, as Gideon did the men of Succoth with the briers of the wilderness; but he soon cuts up these Herods, like the thorns, and casts them into the fire. Thales, the Milesian, one of the wise men of Greece, being asked what he thought to be the greatest rarity in the world, replied, "To see a tyrant live to be an old man." See how the Lord breaks, not only the arm, but the neck of proud oppressors! To the men who had neither justice nor mercy for the saints, there shall be rendered justice to the full, but not a grain of mercy.

Verses 16, 17, 18. The Psalm ends with a song of thanksgiving to the great and everlasting King, because he has granted the desire of his humble and oppressed people, has defended the fatherless, and punished the heathen who trampled upon his poor and afflicted children. Let us learn that we are sure to speed well, if we carry our complaint to the King of kings. Rights will be vindicated, and wrongs redressed, at his throne. His government neglects not the interests of the needy, nor does it tolerate oppression in the mighty. Great God, we leave ourselves in thine hand; to thee we commit thy church afresh. Arise, O God, and let the man of the earth—the creature of a day—be broken before the majesty of thy power. Come, Lord Jesus, and glorify thy people. Amen and Amen.

Psalm 11

Verse 1. These verses contain an account of a temptation to distrust God, with which David was, upon some unmentioned occasion, greatly exercised. It may be, that in the days when he was in Saul's court, he was advised to flee at a time when this flight would have been charged against him as a breach of duty to the king, or a proof of personal cowardice. His case was like that of Nehemiah, when his enemies, under the garb of friendship, hoped to entrap him by advising him to escape for his life. Had he done so, they could then have found a ground of accusation. Nehemiah bravely replied, "Shall such a man as I flee?" and David, in a like spirit, refuses to retreat, exclaiming, "In the Lord put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?" When Satan cannot overthrow us by presumption, how craftily will he seek to ruin us by distrust! He will employ our dearest friends to argue us out of our confidence, and he will use such plausible logic, that unless we once for all assert our immovable trust in Jehovah, he will make us like the timid bird which flies to the mountain whenever danger presents itself.

Verse 2. How forcibly the case is put! The bow is bent, the arrow is fitted to the string: "Flee, flee, thou defenceless bird, thy safety lies in flight; begone, for thine enemies will send their shafts into thy heart; haste, haste, for soon wilt thou be destroyed!" David seems to have felt the force of the advice, for it came home to his soul; but yet he would not yield, but would rather dare the danger than exhibit a distrust in the Lord his God. Doubtless the perils which encompassed David were great and imminent; it was quite true that his enemies were ready to shoot privily at him.

Verse 3. It was equally correct that the very foundations of law and justice were destroyed under Saul's unrighteous government: but what were all these things to the man whose trust was in God alone? He could brave the dangers, could escape the enemies, and defy the injustice which surrounded him. His answer to the question, "What can the righteous do?" would be the counter-question, "What cannot they do?" When prayer engages God on our side, and when faith secures the fulfillment of the promise, what cause can there be for flight, however cruel and mighty

our enemies? With a sling and a stone, David had smitten a giant before whom the whole hosts of Israel were trembling, and the Lord, who delivered him from the uncircumcised Philistine, could surely deliver him from King Saul and his myrmidons. There is no such word as "impossibility" in the language of faith; that martial grace knows how to fight and conquer, but she knows not how to flee.

Verse 4. David here declares the great source of his unflinching courage. He borrows his light from heaven—from the great central orb of deity. The God of the believer is never far from him; he is not merely the God of the mountain fastnesses, but of the dangerous valleys and battle plains.

"Jehovah is in his holy temple." The heavens are above our heads in all regions of the earth, and so is the Lord ever near to us in every state and condition. This is a very strong reason why we should not adopt the vile suggestions of distrust. There is one who pleads his precious blood in our behalf in the temple above, and there is one upon the throne who is never deaf to the intercession of his Son. Why, then, should we fear? What plots can men devise which Jesus will not discover? Satan has doubtless desired to have us, that he may sift us as wheat, but Jesus is in the temple praying for us, and how can our faith fail? What attempts can the wicked make which Jehovah shall not behold? And since he is in his holy temple, delighting in the sacrifice of his Son, will he not defeat every device, and send us a sure deliverance?

"Jehovah's throne is in the heavens;" he reigns supreme. Nothing can be done in heaven, or earth, or hell, which he doth not ordain and over-rule. He is the world's great Emperor. Wherefore, then, should we flee? If we trust this King of kings, is not this enough? Cannot he deliver us without our cowardly retreat? Yes, blessed be the Lord our God, we can salute him as Jehovah-nissi; in his name we set up our banners, and instead of flight, we once more raise the shout of war.

"His eyes behold." The eternal Watcher never slumbers; his eyes never know a sleep. "His eyelids try the children of men:" he narrowly inspects their actions, words, and thoughts. As men, when intently and narrowly inspecting some very minute object, almost close their eyelids to exclude every other object, so will the Lord look all men through and through. God sees each man as much and as perfectly as if there were no other creature in the universe. He sees us always; he never removes his eye from us; he sees us entirely, reading the recesses of the soul as readily as the glancings of the eye. Is not this a sufficient ground of confidence, and an abundant answer to the solicitations of despondency? My danger is not hid from him; he knows my extremity, and I may rest assured that he will not suffer me to perish while I rely alone on him. Wherefore, then, should I take wings of a timid bird, and flee from the dangers which beset me?

Verse 5. "The Lord trieth the righteous:" he doth not hate them, but only tries them. They are precious to him, and therefore he refines them with afflictions. None of the Lord's children may hope to escape from trial, nor, indeed, in our right minds, would any of us desire to do so, for trial is the channel of many blessings.

"Tis my happiness below
Not to live without the cross;
But the Saviour's power to know,
Sanctifying every loss.

* * * * *

Trials make the promise sweet;
Trials give new life to prayer;

Trials bring me to his feet—
Lay me low, and keep me there.

Did I meet no trials here—
No chastisement by the way—
Might I not, with reason, fear
I should prove a cast-away?

Bastards may escape the rod,
Sunk in earthly vain delight;
But the true-born child of God
Must not—would not, if he might."

William Cowper.

Is not this a very cogent reason why we should not distrustfully endeavour to shun a trial?—for in so doing we are seeking to avoid a blessing.

Verse 6. "But the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth:" why, then, shall I flee from these wicked men? If God hateth them, I will not fear them. Haman was very great in the palace until he lost favour, but when the king abhorred him, how bold were the meanest attendants to suggest the gallows for the man at whom they had often trembled! Look at the black mark upon the faces of our persecutors, and we shall not run away from them. If God is in the quarrel as well as ourselves, it would be foolish to question the result, or avoid the conflict. Sodom and Gomorrah perished by a fiery hail, and by a brimstone shower from heaven; so shall all the ungodly. They may gather together like Gog and Magog to battle, but the Lord will rain upon them "an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone:" Ezekiel 38:22. Some expositors think that in the term "horrible tempest," there is in the Hebrew an allusion to that burning, suffocating wind, which blows across the Arabian deserts, and is known by the name of Simoom. "A burning storm," Lowth calls it, while another great commentator reads it "wrathwind;" in either version the language is full of terrors. What a tempest will that be which shall overwhelm the despisers of God! Oh! what a shower will that be which shall pour out itself for ever upon the defenceless heads of impenitent sinners in hell! Repent, ye rebels, or this fiery deluge shall soon surround you. Hell's horrors shall be your inheritance, your entailed estate, "the portion of your cup." The dregs of that cup you shall wring out, and drink for ever. A drop of hell is terrible, but what must a full cup of torment be? Think of it—a cup of misery, but not a drop of mercy. O people of God, how foolish is it to fear the faces of men who shall soon be faggots in the fire of hell! Think of their end, their fearful end, and all fear of them must be changed into contempt of their threatenings, and pity for their miserable estate.

Verse 7. The delightful contrast of the last verse is well worthy of our observation, and it affords another overwhelming reason why we should be steadfast, unmoveable, not carried away with fear, or led to adopt carnal expedients in order to avoid trial. "For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness." It is not only his office to defend it, but his nature to love it. He would deny himself if he did not defend the just. It is essential to the very being of God that he should be just; fear not, then, the end of all your trials, but "be just, and fear not." God approves, and, if men oppose, what matters it? "His countenance doth behold the upright." We need never be out of countenance, for God countenances us. He observes, he approves, he delights in the upright. He sees his own image in them, an image of

his own fashioning, and therefore with complacency he regards them. Shall we dare to put forth our hand unto iniquity in order to escape affliction? Let us have done with by-ways and short turnings, and let us keep to that fair path of right along which Jehovah's smile shall light us. Are we tempted to put our light under a bushel, to conceal our religion from our neighbours? Is it suggested to us that there are ways of avoiding the cross, and shunning the reproach of Christ? Let us not hearken to the voice of the charmer, but seek an increase of faith, that we may wrestle with principalities and powers, and follow the Lord, fully going without the camp, bearing his reproach. Mammon, the flesh, the devil, will all whisper in our ear, "Flee as a bird to your mountain;" but let us come forth and defy them all. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." There is no room or reason for retreat. Advance! Let the vanguard push on! To the front! all ye powers and passions of our soul. On! on! in God's name, on! for "the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

Psalm 12

Verse 1. "Help, Lord." A short but sweet, suggestive, seasonable, and serviceable prayer; a kind of angel's sword, to be turned every way, and to be used on all occasions. Ainsworth says the word rendered "help," is largely used for all manner of saving, helping, delivering, preserving, etc. Thus it seems that the prayer is very full and instructive. The Psalmist sees the extreme danger of his position, for a man had better be among lions than among liars; he feels his own inability to deal with such sons of Belial, for "he who shall touch them must be fenced with iron;" he therefore turns himself to his all-sufficient Helper, the Lord, whose help is never denied to his servants, and whose aid is enough for all their needs. "Help, Lord," is a very useful ejaculation which we may dart up to heaven on occasions of emergency, whether in labour, learning, suffering, fighting, living, or dying. As small ships can sail into harbours which larger vessels, drawing more water, cannot enter, so our brief cries and short petitions may trade with heaven when our soul is wind-bound, and business-bound, as to longer exercises of devotion, and when the stream of grace seems at too low an ebb to float a more laborious supplication. "For the godly man ceaseth;" the death, departure, or decline of godly men should be a trumpet-call for more prayer. They say that fish smell first at the head, and when godly men decay, the whole commonwealth will soon go rotten. We must not, however, be rash in our judgment on this point, for Elijah erred in counting himself the only servant of God alive, when there were thousands whom the Lord held in reserve. The present times always appear to be peculiarly dangerous, because they are nearest to our anxious gaze, and whatever evils are rife are sure to be observed, while the faults of past ages are further off, and are more easily overlooked. Yet we expect that in the latter days, "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold," and then we must the more thoroughly turn from man, and address ourselves to the Churches' Lord, by whose help the gates of hell shall be kept from prevailing against us. "The faithful fail from among the children of men;" when godliness goes, faithfulness inevitably follows; without fear of God, men have no love of truth. Common honesty is no longer common, when common irreligion leads to universal godlessness. David had his eye on Doeg, and the men of Ziph and Keilah, and perhaps remembered the murdered priests of Nob, and the many banished ones who consorted with him in the cave of Adullam, and wondered where the state would drift without the anchors of its godly and faithful men. David, amid the general misrule, did not betake himself to seditious plottings, but to solemn petitionings; nor did he join with the multitude to do evil, but took up the arms of prayer to withstand their attacks upon virtue.

Verse 2. "They speak vanity every one with his neighbour." They utter that which is vain to hear, because of its frivolous, foolish, want of worth; vain to believe, because it was false and lying; vain to

trust to, since it was deceitful and flattering; vain to regard, for it lifted up the hearer, filling him with proud conceit of himself. It is a sad thing when it is the fashion to talk vanity. "Ca'me, and I'll ca'thee." is the old Scotch proverb; give me a high sounding character, and I will give you one. Compliments and fawning congratulations are hateful to honest men; they know that if they take they must give them, and they scorn to do either. These accommodation-bills are most admired by those who are bankrupt in character. Bad are the times when every man thus cajoles and cozens his neighbour. "With flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak." He who puffs up another's heart, has nothing better than wind in his own. If a man extols me to my face, he only shows me one side of his heart, and the other is black with contempt for me, or foul with intent to cheat me. Flattery is the sign of the tavern where duplicity is the host. The Chinese consider a man of two hearts to be a very base man, and we shall be safe in reckoning all flatteries to be such.

Verses 3, 4. Total destruction shall overwhelm the lovers of flattery and pride, but meanwhile how they hector and fume! Well did the apostle call them "raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame." Free-thinkers are generally very free-talkers, and they are never more at ease than when railing at God's dominion, and arrogating to themselves unbounded license. Strange is it that the easy yoke of the Lord should so gall the shoulders of the proud, while the iron bands of Satan they bind about themselves as chains of honour: they boastfully cry unto God, "Who is lord over us?" and hear not the hollow voice of the evil one, who cries from the infernal lake, "I am your lord, and right faithfully do ye serve me." Alas, poor fools, their pride and glory shall be cut off like a fading flower! May God grant that our soul may not be gathered with them. It is worthy of observation that flattering lips, and tongues speaking proud things, are classed together: the fitness of this is clear, for they are guilty of the same vice, the first flatters another, and the second flatters himself, in both cases a lie is in their right hands. One generally imagines that flatterers are such mean parasites, so cringing and fawning, that they cannot be proud; but the wise man will tell you that while all pride is truly meanness, there is in the very lowest meanness no small degree of pride. Caesar's horse is even more proud of carrying Caesar, than Caesar is of riding him. The mat on which the emperor wiped his shoes, boasts vaingloriously, crying out, "I cleaned the imperial boots." None are so detestably domineering as the little creatures who creep into office by cringing to the great; those are bad times, indeed, in which these obnoxious beings are numerous and powerful. No wonder that the justice of God in cutting off such injurious persons is matter for a psalm, for both earth and heaven are weary of such provoking offenders, whose presence is a very plague to the people afflicted thereby. Men cannot tame the tongues of such boastful flatterers; but the Lord's remedy if sharp is sure, and is an unanswerable answer to their swelling words of vanity.

Verse 5. In due season the Lord will hear his elect ones, who cry day and night unto him, and though he bear long with their oppressors, yet will he avenge them speedily. Observe that the mere oppression of saints, however silently they bear it, is in itself a cry to God: Moses was heard at the Red Sea, though he said nothing; and Hagar's affliction was heard despite her silence. Jesus feels with his people, and their smarts are mighty orators with him. By-and-by, however, they begin to sigh and express their misery, and then relief comes post-haste. Nothing moves a father like the cries of his children; he bestirs himself, wakes up his manhood, overthrows the enemy, and sets his beloved in safety. A puff is too much for the child to bear, and the foe is so haughty, that he laughs the little one to scorn; but the Father comes, and then it is the child's turn to laugh, when he is set above the rage of his tormentor. What virtue is there in a poor man's sighs, that they should move the Almighty God to arise from his throne. The needy did not dare to speak, and could only sigh in secret, but the Lord heard, and could rest no longer, but girded on his sword for the battle. It is a fair day when our

soul brings God into her quarrel, for when his bare arm is seen, Philistia shall rue the day. The darkest hours of the Church's night are those which precede the break of day. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. Jesus will come to deliver just when his needy ones shall sigh, as if all hope had gone for ever. O Lord, set thy now near at hand, and rise up speedily to our help. Should the afflicted reader be able to lay hold upon the promise of this verse, let him gratefully fetch a fulness of comfort from it. Gurnall says, "As one may draw out the wine of a whole hogshead at one tap, so may a poor soul derive the comfort of the whole covenant to himself through one promise, if he be able to apply it." He who promises to set us in safety, means thereby preservation on earth, and eternal salvation in heaven.

Verse 6. What a contrast between the vain words of man, and the pure words of Jehovah. Man's words are yea and nay, but the Lord's promises are yea and amen. For truth, certainty, holiness, faithfulness, the words of the Lord are pure as well-refined silver. In the original there is an allusion to the most severely-purifying process known to the ancients, through which silver was passed when the greatest possible purity was desired; the dross was all consumed, and only the bright and precious metal remained; so clear and free from all alloy of error or unfaithfulness is the book of the words of the Lord. The Bible has passed through the furnace of persecution, literary criticism, philosophic doubt, and scientific discovery, and has lost nothing but those human interpretations which clung to it as alloy to precious ore. The experience of saints has tried it in every conceivable manner, but not a single doctrine or promise has been consumed in the most excessive heat. What God's words are, the words of his children should be. If we would be Godlike in conversation, we must watch our language, and maintain the strictest purity of integrity and holiness in all our communications.

Verse 7. To fall into the hands of an evil generation, so as to be baited by their cruelty, or polluted by their influence, is an evil to be dreaded beyond measure; but it is an evil foreseen and provided for in the text. In life many a saint has lived a hundred years before his age, as though he had darted his soul into the brighter future, and escaped the mists of the beclouded present: he has gone to his grave unreverenced and misunderstood, and lo! as generations come and go, upon a sudden the hero is unearthed, and lives in the admiration and love of the excellent of the earth; preserved for ever from the generation which stigmatised him as a sower of sedition, or burned him as a heretic. It should be our daily prayer that we may rise above our age as the mountain-tops above the clouds, and may stand out as heaven-pointing pinnacle high above the mists of ignorance and sin which roll around us. O Eternal Spirit, fulfil in us the faithful saying of this verse! Our faith believes those two assuring words, and cries, "Thou shalt," "thou shalt."

Verse 8. Here we return to the fount of bitterness, which first made the psalmist run to the wells of salvation, namely, the prevalence of wickedness. When those in power are vile, their underlings will be no better. As a warm sun brings out noxious flies, so does a sinner in honour foster vice everywhere. Our turf would not so swarm with abominables if those who are styled honourables did not give their countenance to the craft. Would to God that the glory and triumph of our Lord Jesus would encourage us to walk and work on every side; as like acts upon like, since an exalted sinner encourages sinners, our exalted Redeemer must surely excite, cheer, and stimulate his saints. Nerved by a sight of his reigning power we shall meet the evils of the times in the spirit of holy resolution, and shall the more hopefully pray, "Help, Lord."

Verse 1. "How long?" This question is repeated no less than four times. It betokens very intense desire for deliverance, and great anguish of heart. And what if there be some impatience mingled therewith; is not this the more true a portrait of our own experience? It is not easy to prevent desire from degenerating into impatience. O for grace that, while we wait on God, we may be kept from indulging a murmuring spirit! "How long?" Does not the oft-repeated cry become a very HOWLING? And what if grief should find no other means of utterance? Even then, God is not far from the voice of our roaring; for he does not regard the music of our prayers, but his own Spirit's work in them in exciting desire and inflaming the affections.

"How long?" Ah! how long do our days appear when our soul is cast down within us!

"How wearily the moments seem to glide
O'er sadness! How the time
Delights to linger in its flight!"

Time flies with full-fledged wing in our summer days, but in our winters he flutters painfully. A week within prison-walls is longer than a month at liberty. Long sorrow seems to argue abounding corruption; for the gold which is long in the fire must have had much dross to be consumed, hence the question "how long?" may suggest deep searching of heart. "How long wilt thou forget me?" Ah, David! how like a fool thou talkest! Can God forget? Can Omniscience fail in memory? Above all, can Jehovah's heart forget his own beloved child? Ah! brethren, let us drive away the thought, and hear the voice of our covenant God by the mouth of the prophet, "But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." "For ever?" Oh, dark thought! It was surely bad enough to suspect a temporary forgetfulness, but shall we ask the ungracious question, and imagine that the Lord will for ever cast away his people? No, his anger may endure for a night, but his love shall abide eternally. "How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" This is a far more rational question, for God may hide his face, and yet he may remember still. A hidden face is no sign of a forgetful heart. It is in love that his face is turned away; yet to a real child of God, this hiding of his Father's face is terrible and he will never be at ease until, once more he hath his Father's smile.

Verse 2. "How long shall I take counsel, in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?" There is in the original the idea of "laying up" counsels in his heart, as if his devices had become innumerable but unavailing. Herein we have often been like David, for we have considered and reconsidered day after day, but have not discovered the happy device by which to escape from our trouble. Such store is a sad sore. Ruminating upon trouble is bitter work. Children fill their mouths with bitterness when they rebelliously chew the pill which they ought obediently to have taken at once. "How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" This is like wormwood in the gall, to see the wicked enemy exulting while our soul is bowed down within us. The laughter of a foe grates horribly on the ears of grief. For the devil to make mirth of our misery is the last ounce of our complaint, and quite breaks down our patience; therefore let us make it one chief argument in our plea with mercy.

Thus the careful reader will remark that the question "how long?" is put in four shapes. The writer's grief is viewed, as it seems to be, as it is, as it affects himself within, and his foes without. We are all prone to play most on the worst string. We set up monumental stones over the graves of our joys, but who thinks of erecting monuments of praise for mercies received? We write four books of Lamentations and only one of Canticles, and are far more at home in wailing out a Misere than in

chanting a Te Deum.

Verse 3. But now prayer lifteth up her voice, like the watchman who proclaims the daybreak. Now will the tide turn, and the weeper shall dry his eyes. The mercy-seat is the life of hope and the death of despair. The gloomy thought of God's having forsaken him is still upon the psalmist's soul, and he therefore cries, "Consider and hear me." He remembers at once the root of his woe, and cries aloud that it may be removed. The final absence of God is Tophet's fire, and his temporary absence brings his people into the very suburbs of hell. God is here entreated to see and hear, that so he may be doubly moved to pity. What should we do if we had no God to turn to in the hour of wretchedness? Note the cry of faith, "O Lord MY God!" Is it not a very glorious fact that our interest in our God is not destroyed by all our trials and sorrows? We may lose our gourds, but not our God. The title-deed of heaven is not written in the sand, but in eternal brass.

"Lighten mine eyes:" that is, let the eye of my faith be clear, that I may see my God in the dark; let my eye of watchfulness be wide open, lest I be entrapped, and let the eye of my understanding be illuminated to see the right way. Perhaps, too, here is an allusion to that cheering of the spirits so frequently called the enlightening of the eyes because it causes the face to brighten, and the eyes to sparkle. Well may we use the prayer, "Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord!" for in many respects we need the Holy Spirit's illuminating rays. "Lest I sleep the sleep of death." Darkness engenders sleep, and despondency is not slow in making the eyes heavy. From this faintness and dimness of vision, caused by despair, there is but a step to the iron sleep of death. David feared that his trials would end his life, and he rightly uses his fear as an argument with God in prayer; for deep distress has in it a kind of claim upon compassion, not a claim of right, but a plea which has power with grace. Under the pressure of heart sorrow, the psalmist does not look forward to the sleep of death with hope and joy, as assured believers do, but he shrinks from it with dread, from which we gather that bondage from fear of death is no new thing.

Verse 4. Another plea is urged in the fourth verse, and it is one which the tried believer may handle well when on his knees. We make use of our arch-enemy for once, and compel him, like Samson, to grind in our mill while we use his cruel arrogance as an argument in prayer. It is not the Lord's will that the great enemy of our souls should overcome his children. This would dishonour God, and cause the evil one to boast. It is well for us that our salvation and God's honour are so intimately connected, that they stand or fall together.

Our covenant God will complete the confusion of all our enemies, and if for awhile we become their scoff and jest, the day is coming when the shame will change sides, and the contempt shall be poured on those to whom it is due.

Verse 5. What a change is here! Lo, the rain is over and gone, and the time of the singing of birds is come. The mercy-seat has so refreshed the poor weeper, that he clears his throat for a song. If we have mourned with him, let us now dance with him. David's heart was more often out of tune than his harp, He begins many of his psalms sighing, and ends them singing; and others he begins in joy and ends in sorrow; "so that one would think," says Peter Moulin, "that those Psalms had been composed by two men of a contrary humour." It is worthy to be observed that the joy is all the greater because of the previous sorrow, as calm is all the more delightful in recollection of the preceding tempest.

"Sorrows remembered sweeten present joy."

Here is his avowal of his confidence: "But I have trusted in thy mercy." For many a year it had been

his wont to make the Lord his castle and tower of defence, and he smiles from behind the same bulwark still. He is sure of his faith, and his faith makes him sure; had he doubted the reality of his trust in God, he would have blocked up one of the windows through which the sun of heaven delights to shine. Faith is now in exercise, and consequently is readily discovered; there is never a doubt in our heart about the existence of faith while it is in action: when the hare or partridge is quiet we see it not, but let the same be in motion and we soon perceive it. All the powers of his enemies had not driven the psalmist from his stronghold. As the shipwrecked mariner clings to the mast, so did David cling to his faith; he neither could nor would give up his confidence in the Lord his God. O that we may profit by his example and hold by our faith as by our very life!

Now hearken to the music which faith makes in his soul. The bells of the mind are all ringing, "My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation." There is joy and feasting within doors, for a glorious guest has come, and the fatted calf is killed. Sweet is the music which sounds from the strings of the heart. But this is not all; the voice joins itself in the blessed work, and the tongue keeps tune with the soul, while the writer declares, "I will sing unto the Lord."

"I will praise thee every day,
Now thine anger's past away;
Comfortable thoughts arise
From the bleeding sacrifice."

Verse 6. The Psalm closes with a sentence which is a refutation of the charge of forgetfulness which David had uttered in the first verse, "He hath dealt bountifully with me." So shall it be with us if we wait awhile. The complaint which in our haste we utter shall be joyfully retracted, and we shall witness that the Lord hath dealt bountifully with us.

Psalm 14

Verse 1. "The fool." The Atheist is the fool pre-eminently, and a fool universally. He would not deny God if he were not a fool by nature, and having denied God it is no marvel that he becomes a fool in practice. Sin is always folly, and as it is the height of sin to attack the very existence of the Most High, so it is also the greatest imaginable folly. To say there is no God is to belie the plainest evidence, which is obstinacy; to oppose the common consent of mankind, which is stupidity; to stifle consciousness, which is madness. If the sinner could by his atheism destroy the God whom he hates there were some sense, although much wickedness, in his infidelity; but as denying the existence of fire does not prevent its burning a man who is in it, so doubting the existence of God will not stop the Judge of all the earth from destroying the rebel who breaks his laws; nay, this atheism is a crime which much provokes heaven, and will bring down terrible vengeance on the fool who indulges it. The proverb says, "A fool's tongue cuts his own throat," and in this instance it kills both soul and body for ever: would to God the mischief stopped even there, but alas! one fool makes hundreds, and a noisy blasphemer spreads his horrible doctrines as lepers spread the plague. Ainsworth, in his "Annotations," tells us that the word here used is Nabal, which has the signification of fading, dying, or falling away, as a withered leaf or flower; it is a title given to the foolish man as having lost the juice and sap of wisdom, reason, honesty, and godliness. Trapp hits the mark when he calls him "that sapless fellow, that carcase of a man, that walking sepulchre of himself, in whom all religion and right reason is withered and wasted, dried up and decayed. Some translate it the apostate, and others the wretch. With what earnestness should we shun the appearance of doubt as to the presence, activity, power and love of God, for all such mistrust is of the nature of folly, and who among us would wish to

be ranked with the fool in the text? Yet let us never forget that all unregenerate men are more or less such fools.

The fool "hath said in his heart." May a man with his mouth profess to believe, and yet in heart say the reverse? Had he hardly become audacious enough to utter his folly with his tongue? Did the Lord look upon his thoughts as being in the nature of words to Him though not to man? Is this where man first becomes an unbeliever?—in his heart, not in his head? And when he talks atheistically, is it a foolish heart speaking, and endeavouring to clamour down the voice of conscience? We think so. If the affections were set upon truth and righteousness, the understanding would have no difficulty in settling the question of a present personal Deity, but as the heart dislikes the good and the right, it is no wonder that it desires to be rid of that Elohim, who is the great moral Governor, the Patron of rectitude and the Punisher of iniquity. While men's hearts remain what they are, we must not be surprised at the prevalence of scepticism; a corrupt tree will bring forth corrupt fruit. "Every man," says Dickson, "so long as he lieth unrenewed and unreconciled to God is nothing in effect but a madman." What wonder then if he raves? Such fools as those we are now dealing with are common to all time, and all countries; they grow without watering, and are found all the world over. The spread of mere intellectual enlightenment will not diminish their number, for since it is an affair of the heart, this folly and great learning will often dwell together. To answer sceptical cavillings will be labour lost until grace enters to make the mind willing to believe; fools can raise more objections in an hour than wise men can answer in seven years, indeed it is their mirth to set stools for wise men to stumble over. Let the preacher aim at the heart, and preach the all-conquering love of Jesus, and he will by God's grace win more doubters to the faith of the gospel than any hundred of the best reasoners who only direct their arguments to the head.

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God," or "no God." So monstrous is the assertion, that the man hardly dared to put it as a positive statement, but went very near to doing so. Calvin seems to regard this saying, "no God," as hardly amounting to a syllogism, scarcely reaching to a positive, dogmatical declaration; but Dr. Alexander clearly shows that it does. It is not merely the wish of the sinner's corrupt nature, and the hope of his rebellious heart, but he manages after a fashion to bring himself to assert it, and at certain seasons he thinks that he believes it. It is a solemn reflection that some who worship God with their lips may in their hearts be saying, "no God." It is worthy of observation that he does not say there is no Jehovah, but there is no Elohim; Deity in the abstract is not so much the object of attack, as the covenant, personal, ruling and governing presence of God in the world. God as ruler, lawgiver, worker, Saviour, is the butt at which the arrows of human wrath are shot. How impotent the malice! How mad the rage which raves and foams against Him in whom we live and move and have our being! How horrible the insanity which leads a man who owes his all to God to cry out, "No God"! How terrible the depravity which makes the whole race adopt this as their hearts desire, "no God!"

"They are corrupt." This refers to all men, and we have the warrant of the Holy Ghost for so saying; see the third chapter of the epistle to the Romans. Where there is enmity to God, there is deep, inward depravity of mind. The words are rendered by eminent critics in an active sense, "they have done corruptly:" this may serve to remind us that sin is not only in our nature passively as the source of evil, but we ourselves actively fan the flame and corrupt ourselves, making that blacker still which was black as darkness itself already. We rivet our own chains by habit and continuance.

"They have done abominable works." When men begin with renouncing the Most High God, who shall tell where they will end? When the Master's eyes are put out, what will not the servants do? Observe the state of the world before the flood, as portrayed in Genesis 6:12, and remember that human nature is unchanged. He who would see a terrible photograph of the world without God must read that most painful of all inspired Scriptures, the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans. Learned

Hindoos have confessed that the description is literally correct in Hindostan at the present moment; and were it not for the restraining grace of God, it would be so in England. Alas! it is even here but too correct a picture of things which are done of men in secret. Things loathsome to God and man are sweet to some palates.

"There is none that doeth good." Sins of omission must abound where transgressions are rife. Those who do the things which they ought not to have done, are sure to leave undone those things which they ought to have done. What a picture of our race is this! Save only where grace reigns, there is none that doeth good; humanity, fallen and debased, is a desert without an oasis, a night without a star, a dunghill without a jewel, a hell without a bottom.

Verse 2. "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men." As from a watchtower, or other elevated place of observation, the Lord is represented as gazing intently upon men. He will not punish blindly, nor like a tyrant command an indiscriminate massacre because a rumour of rebellion has come up to his ears. What condescending interest and impartial justice are here imaged! The case of Sodom, visited before it was overthrown, illustrates the careful manner in which Divine Justice beholds the sin before it avenges it, and searches out the righteous that they perish not with the guilty. Behold then the eyes of Omniscience ransacking the globe, and prying among every people and nation, "to see if there were any that did understand and seek God." He who is looking down knows the good, is quick to discern it, would be delighted to find it; but as he views all the unregenerate children of men his search is fruitless, for of all the race of Adam, no unrenewed soul is other than an enemy to God and goodness. The objects of the Lord's search are not wealthy men, great men, or learned men; these, with all they can offer, cannot meet the demands of the great Governor: at the same time, he is not looking for superlative eminence in virtue, he seeks for any that understand themselves, their state, their duty, their destiny, their happiness; he looks for any that seek God, who, if there be a God, are willing and anxious to find him out. Surely this is not too great a matter to expect; for if men have not yet known God, if they have any right understanding, they will seek him. Alas! even this low degree of good is not to be found even by him who sees all things: but men love the hideous negation of "No God," and with their backs to their Creator, who is the sun of their life, they journey into the dreary region of unbelief and alienation, which is a land of darkness as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death without any order and where the light is as darkness.

Verse 3. "They are all gone aside." Without exception, all men have apostatized from the Lord their Maker, from his laws, and from all the eternal principles of right. Like stubborn heifers they have sturdily refused to receive the yoke, like errant sheep they have found a gap and left the right field. The original speaks of the race as a whole, as a totality; and humanity as a whole has become depraved in heart and defiled in life. "They have altogether become filthy;" as a whole they are spoiled and soured like corrupt leaven, or, as some put it, they have become putrid and even stinking. The only reason why we do not more clearly see this foulness is because we are accustomed to it, just as those who work daily among offensive odours at last cease to smell them. The miller does not observe the noise of his own mill, and we are slow to discover our own ruin and depravity. But are there no special cases, are all men sinful? "Yes," says the Psalmist, in a manner not to be mistaken, "they are." He has put it positively, he repeats it negatively, "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." The Hebrew phrase is an utter denial concerning any mere man that he of himself doeth good. What can be more sweeping? This is the verdict of the all-seeing Jehovah, who cannot exaggerate or mistake. As if no hope of finding a solitary specimen of a good man among the unrenewed human family might be harboured for an instant. The Holy Spirit is not content with saying all and altogether, but adds the crushing threefold negative, "none, no, not one." What say the opponents to the doctrine

of natural depravity to this? Rather what do we feel concerning it? Do we not confess that we by nature are corrupt, and do we not bless the sovereign grace which has renewed us in the spirit of our minds, that sin may no more have dominion over us, but that grace may rule and reign?

Verse 4. Hatred of God and corruptness of life are the motive forces which produce persecution. Men who having no saving knowledge of divine things, enslave themselves to become workers of iniquity, have no heart to cry to the Lord for deliverance, but seek to amuse themselves with devouring the poor and despised people of God. It is hard bondage to be a "worker of iniquity;" a worker at the galleys, or in the mines of Siberia, is not more truly degraded and wretched; the toil is hard and the reward dreadful: those who have no knowledge choose such slavery, but those who are taught of God cry to be rescued from it. The same ignorance which keeps men bondsmen to evil, makes them hate the freeborn sons of God; hence they seek to eat them up "as they eat bread,"—daily, ravenously, as though it were an ordinary, usual, every-day matter to oppress the saints of God. As pikes in a pond, eat up little fish, as eagles prey on smaller birds, as wolves rend the sheep of the pasture, so sinners naturally and as a matter of course, persecute, malign, and mock the followers of the Lord Jesus. While thus preying, they forswear all praying, and in this act consistently, for how could they hope to be heard while their hands are full of blood?

Verse 5. Oppressors have it not all their own way, they have their fits of trembling and their appointed seasons of overthrow. There—where they denied God and hectorred against his people; there—where they thought of peace and safety, they were made to quail. "There were they"—these very loud-mouthed, iron-handed, proud-hearted Nimrods and Herods, those heady, high-minded sinners—"there were they in great fear." A panic terror seized them: "they feared a fear," as the Hebrew puts it; an undefinable, horrible, mysterious dread crept over them. The most hardened of men have their periods when conscience casts them into a cold sweat of alarm. As cowards are cruel, so all cruel men are at heart cowards. The ghost of past sin is a terrible spectre to haunt any man, and though unbelievers may boast as loudly as they will, a sound is in their ears which makes them ill at ease.

"For God is in the generation of the righteous." This makes the company of godly men so irksome to the wicked because they perceive that God is with them. Shut their eyes as they may, they cannot but perceive the image of God in the character of his truly gracious people, nor can they fail to see that he works for their deliverance. Like Haman, they instinctively feel a trembling when they see God's Mordecais. Even though the saint may be in a mean position, mourning at the gate where the persecutor rejoices in state, the sinner feels the influence of the believer's true nobility and quails before it, for God is there. Let scoffers beware, for they persecute the Lord Jesus when they molest his people; the union is very close between God and his people, it amounts to a mysterious indwelling, for God is in the generation of the righteous.

Verse 6. Notwithstanding their real cowardice, the wicked put on the lion's skin and lord it over the Lord's poor ones. Though fools themselves, they mock at the truly wise as if the folly were on their side; but this is what might be expected, for how should brutish minds appreciate excellence, and how can those who have owl's eyes admire the sun? The special point and butt of their jest seems to be the confidence of the godly in their Lord. What can your God do for you now? Who is that God who can deliver out of our hand? Where is the reward of all your praying and beseeching? Taunting questions of this sort they thrust into the faces of weak but gracious souls, and tempt them to feel ashamed of their refuge. Let us not be laughed out of our confidence by them, let us scorn their scorning and defy their jeers; we shall need to wait but a little, and then the Lord our refuge will

avenge his own elect, and ease himself of his adversaries, who once made so light of him and of his people.

Verse 6. Natural enough is this closing prayer, for what would so effectually convince atheists, overthrow persecutors, stay sin, and secure the godly, as the manifest appearance of Israel's great Salvation? The coming of Messiah was the desire of the godly in all ages, and though he has already come with a sin-offering to purge away iniquity, we look for him to come a second time, to come without a sin-offering unto salvation. O that these weary years would have an end! Why tarries he so long? He knows that sin abounds and that his people are down-trodden; why comes he not to the rescue? His glorious advent will restore his ancient people from literal captivity, and his SPIRITUAL seed from spiritual sorrow. Wrestling Jacob and prevailing Israel shall alike rejoice before him when he is revealed as their salvation. O that he were come! What happy, holy, halcyon, heavenly days should we then see! But let us not count him slack, for behold he comes, he comes quickly! Blessed are all they that wait for him.

Psalm 15

Verse 1. THE QUESTION. Jehovah. Thou high and holy One, who shall be permitted to have fellowship with thee? The heavens are not pure in thy sight, and thou chargest thine angels with folly, who then of mortal mould shall dwell with thee, thou dread consuming fire? A sense of the glory of the Lord and of the holiness which becomes his house, his service, and his attendants, excites the humble mind to ask the solemn question before us. Where angels bow with veiled faces, how shall man be able to worship at all? The unthinking many imagine it to be a very easy matter to approach the Most High, and when professedly engaged in his worship they have no questionings of heart as to their fitness for it; but truly humbled souls often shrink under a sense of utter unworthiness, and would not dare to approach the throne of the God of holiness if it were not for him, our Lord, our Advocate, who can abide in the heavenly temple, because his righteousness endureth for ever. "Who shall abide in thy tabernacle?" Who shall be admitted to be one of the household of God, to sojourn under his roof and enjoy communion with himself? "Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" Who shall be a citizen of Zion, and an inhabitant of the heavenly Jerusalem? The question is raised, because it is a question. All men have not this privilege, nay, even among professors there are aliens from the commonwealth, who have no secret intercourse with God. On the grounds of law no mere man can dwell with God, for there is not one upon earth who answers to the just requirements mentioned in the succeeding verses. The questions in the text are asked of the Lord, as if none but the Infinite Mind could answer them so as to satisfy the unquiet conscience. We must know from the Lord of the tabernacle what are the qualifications for his service, and when we have been taught of him, we shall clearly see that only our spotless Lord Jesus, and those who are conformed unto his image, can ever stand with acceptance before the Majesty on high.

Impertinent curiosity frequently desires to know who and how many shall be saved; if those who thus ask the question, "Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" would make it a soul-searching enquiry in reference to themselves they would act much more wisely. Members of the visible church, which is God's tabernacle of worship, and hill of eminence, should diligently see to it, that they have the preparation of heart which fits them to be inmates of the house of God. Without the wedding-dress of righteousness in Christ Jesus, we have no right to sit at the banquet of communion. Without uprightness of walk we are not fit for the imperfect church on earth, and certainly we must not hope to enter the perfect church above.

Verse 2. THE ANSWER. The Lord in answer to the question informs us by his Holy Spirit of the character of the man who alone can dwell in his holy hill. In perfection this holiness is found only in the Man of Sorrows, but in a measure it is wrought in all his people by the Holy Ghost. Faith and the graces of the Spirit are not mentioned, because this is a description of outward character, and where fruits are found the root may not be seen, but it is surely there. Observe the accepted man's walk, work, and word. "He that walketh uprightly," he keeps himself erect as those do who traverse high ropes; if they lean on one side over they must go, or as those who carry precious but fragile ware in baskets on their heads, who lose all if they lose their perpendicular. True believers do not cringe as flatterers, wriggle as serpents, bend double as earth-grubbers, or crook on one side as those who have sinister aims; they have the strong backbone of the vital principle of grace within, and being themselves upright, they are able to walk uprightly. Walking is of far more importance than talking. He only is right who is upright in walk and downright in honesty. "And worketh righteousness." His faith shows itself by good works, and therefore is no dead faith. God's house is a hive for workers, not a nest for drones. Those who rejoice that everything is done for them by another, even the Lord Jesus, and therefore hate legality, are the best doers in the world upon gospel principles. If we are not positively serving the Lord, and doing his holy will to the best of our power, we may seriously debate our interest in divine things, for trees which bear no fruit must be hewn down and cast into the fire. "And speaketh the truth in his heart." The fool in the last psalm spoke falsely in his heart; observe both here and elsewhere in the two psalms, the striking contrast. Saints not only desire to love and speak truth with their lips, but they seek to be true within; they will not lie even in the closet of their hearts, for God is there to listen; they scorn double meanings, evasions, equivocations, white lies, flatteries, and deceptions. Though truths, like roses, have thorns about them, good men wear them in their bosoms. Our heart must be the sanctuary and refuge of truth, should it be banished from all the world beside, and hunted from among men; at all risk we must entertain the angel of truth, for truth is God's daughter. We must be careful that the heart is really fixed and settled in principle, for tenderness of conscience toward truthfulness, like the bloom on a peach, needs gentle handling, and once lost it were hard to regain it. Jesus was the mirror of sincerity and holiness. Oh, to be more and more fashioned after his similitude!

Verse 3. After the positive comes the negative. "He that backbiteth not with his tongue." There is a sinful way of backbiting with the heart when we think too hardly of a neighbour, but it is the tongue which does the mischief. Some men's tongues bite more than their teeth. The tongue is not steel, but it cuts, and its wounds are very hard to heal; its worst wounds are not with its edge to our face, but with its back when our head is turned. Under the law, a night hawk was an unclean bird, and its human image is abominable everywhere. All slanderers are the devil's bellows to blow up contention, but those are the worst which blow at the back of the fire. "Nor doeth evil to his neighbour." He who bridles his tongue will not give a licence to his hand. Loving our neighbour as ourselves will make us jealous of his good name, careful not to injure his estate, or by ill example to corrupt his character. "Nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour." He is a fool if not a knave who picks up stolen goods and harbours them; in slander as well as robbery, the receiver is as bad as the thief. If there were not gratified hearers of ill reports, there would be an end of the trade of spreading them. Trapp says, that "the tale-bearer carrieth the devil in his tongue, and the tale-hearer carries the devil in his ear." The original may be translated, "endureth;" implying that it is a sin to endure or tolerate tale-bearers. "Show that man out!" we should say of a drunkard, yet it is very questionable if his unmanly behaviour will do us so much mischief as the tale-bearers insinuating story. "Call for a policeman!" we say if we see a thief at his business; ought we to feel no indignation when we hear a gossip at her work? Mad dog! Mad dog!! is a terrible hue and cry, but there are few curs whose bite is

so dangerous as a busybody's tongue. Fire! fire!! is an alarming note, but the tale-bearer's tongue is set on fire of hell, and those who indulge it had better mend their manners, or they may find that there is fire in hell for unbridled tongues. Our Lord spake evil of no man, but breathed a prayer for his foes; we must be like him, or we shall never be with him.

Verse 4. "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord." We must be as honest in paying respect as in paying our bills. Honour to whom honour is due. To all good men we owe a debt of honour, and we have no right to hand over what is their due to vile persons who happen to be in high places. When base men are in office, it is our duty to respect the office; but we cannot so violate our consciences as to do otherwise than condemn the men; and on the other hand, when true saints are in poverty and distress, we must sympathize with their afflictions and honour the men none the less. We may honour the roughest cabinet for the sake of the jewels, but we must not prize false gems because of their setting. A sinner in a gold chain and silken robes is no more to be compared with a saint in rags than a rushlight in a silver candlestick with the sun behind a cloud. The proverb says, that "ugly women, finely dressed, are the uglier for it," and so mean men in high estate are the more mean because of it. "He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." Scriptural saints under the New Testament rule "swear not at all," but their word is as good as an oath: those men of God who think it right to swear, are careful and prayerful lest they should even seem to overshoot the mark. When engagements have been entered into which turn out to be unprofitable, "the saints are men of honour still." Our blessed Surety swore to his own hurt, but how gloriously he stood to his suretyship! what a comfort to us that he changeth not, and what an example to us to be scrupulously and precisely exact in fulfilling our covenants with others! The most far-seeing trader may enter into engagements which turn out to be serious losses, but whatsoever else he loses, if he keeps his honour, his losses will be bearable; if that be lost all is lost.

Verse 5. "He that putteth not out his money to usury." Usury was and is hateful both to God and man. That a lender should share with the borrower in gains made by his money is most fitting and proper; but that the man of property should eat up the poor wretch who unfortunately obtained a loan of him is abominable. Those who grind poor tradesmen, needy widows, and such like, by charging them interest at intolerable rates, will find that their gold, and their silver are cankered. The man who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord must shake off this sin as Paul shook the viper into the fire. "Nor taketh reward against the innocent." Bribery is a sin both in the giver and the receiver. It was frequently practised in Eastern courts of justice; that form of it is now under our excellent judges almost an unheard-of thing; yet the sin survives in various forms, which the reader needs not that we should mention; and under every shape it is loathsome to the true man of God. He remembers that Jesus instead of taking reward against the innocent died for the guilty.

Verse 5. "He that doeth these things shall never be moved." No storm shall tear him from his foundations, drag him from his anchorage, or uproot him from his place. Like the Lord Jesus, whose dominion is everlasting, the true Christian shall never lose his crown. He shall not only be on Zion, but like Zion, fixed and firm. He shall dwell in the tabernacle of the Most High, and neither death nor judgment shall remove him from his place of privilege and blessedness. Let us betake ourselves to prayer and self-examination, for this Psalm is as fire for the gold, and as a furnace for silver. Can we endure its testing power?

Verse 1. "Preserve me," keep, or save me, or as Horsley thinks, "guard me," even as bodyguards surround their monarch, or as shepherds protect their flocks. Tempted in all points like as we are, the manhood of Jesus needed to be preserved from the power of evil; and though in itself pure, the Lord Jesus did not confide in that purity of nature, but as an example to his followers, looked to the Lord, his God, for preservation. One of the great names of God is "the Preserver of men," (Job 7:20,) and this gracious office the Father exercised towards our Mediator and Representative. It had been promised to the Lord Jesus in express words, that he should be preserved, Isaiah 49:7, 8. "Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people." This promise was to the letter fulfilled, both by providential deliverance and sustaining power, in the case of our Lord. Being preserved himself, he is able to restore the preserved of Israel, for we are "preserved in Christ Jesus and called." As one with him, the elect were preserved in his preservation, and we may view this mediatorial supplication as the petition of the Great High Priest for all those who are in him. The intercession recorded in John 17 is but an amplification of this cry, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are." When he says, "preserve me," he means his members, his mystical body, himself, and all in him. But while we rejoice in the fact that the Lord Jesus used this prayer for his members, we must not forget that he employed it most surely for himself; he had so emptied himself, and so truly taken upon him the form of a servant, that as man he needed divine keeping even as we do, and often cried unto the strong for strength. Frequently on the mountain-top he breathed forth this desire, and on one occasion in almost the same words, he publicly prayed, "Father, save me from this hour." (John 12:27.) If Jesus looked out of himself for protection, how much more must we, his erring followers, do so! "O God." The word for God here used is EL (Heb.), by which name the Lord Jesus, when under a sense of great weakness, as for instance when upon the cross, was wont to address the Mighty God, the Omnipotent Helper of his people. We, too, may turn to El, the Omnipotent One, in all hours of peril, with the confidence that he who heard the strong crying and tears of our faithful High Priest, is both able and willing to bless us in him. It is well to study the name and character of God, so that in our straits we may know how and by what title to address our Father who is in heaven. "For in thee do I put my trust," or, I have taken shelter in thee. As chickens run beneath the hen, so do I betake myself to thee. Thou art my great overshadowing Protector, and I have taken refuge beneath thy strength. This is a potent argument in pleading, and our Lord knew not only how to use it with God, but how to yield to its power when wielded by others upon himself. "According to thy faith be it done unto thee," is a great rule of heaven in dispensing favour, and when we can sincerely declare that we exercise faith in the Mighty God with regard to the mercy which we seek, we may rest assured that our plea will prevail. Faith, like the sword of Saul, never returns empty; it overcomes heaven when held in the hand of prayer. As the Saviour prayed, so let us pray, and as he became more than a conqueror, so shall we also through him; let us when buffeted by storms right bravely cry to the Lord as he did, "in thee do I put my trust."

Verse 2. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord." In his inmost heart the Lord Jesus bowed himself to do service to his Heavenly Father, and before the throne of Jehovah his soul vowed allegiance to the Lord for our sakes. We are like him when our soul, truly and constantly in the presence of the heart-searching God, declares her full consent to the rule and government of the Infinite Jehovah, saying, "Thou art my Lord." To avow this with the lip is little, but for the soul to say it, especially in times of trial, is a gracious evidence of spiritual health; to profess it before men is a small matter, but to declare it before Jehovah himself is of far more consequence. This sentence may also be viewed as the utterance of appropriating faith, laying hold upon the Lord by personal covenant and

enjoyment; in this sense may it be our daily song in the house of our pilgrimage.

"My goodness extendeth not to thee." The work of our Lord Jesus was not needful on account of any necessity in the Divine Being. Jehovah would have been inconceivably glorious had the human race perished, and had no atonement been offered. Although the life-work and death-agony of the Son did reflect unparalleled lustre upon every attribute of God, yet the Most Blessed and Infinitely Happy God stood in no need of the obedience and death of his Son; it was for our sakes that the work of redemption was undertaken, and not because of any lack or want on the part of the Most High. How modestly does the Saviour here estimate his own goodness! What overwhelming reasons have we for imitating his humility! "If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand?" (Job 35:7.)

Verse 3. "But to the saints that are in the earth." These sanctified ones, although still upon the earth, partake of the results of Jesus' mediatorial work, and by his goodness are made what they are. The peculiar people, zealous for good works, and hallowed to sacred service, are arrayed in the Saviour's righteousness and washed in his blood, and so receive of the goodness treasured up in him; these are the persons who are profited by the work of the man Christ Jesus; but that work added nothing to the nature, virtue, or happiness of God, who is blessed for evermore. How much more forcibly is this true of us, poor unworthy servants not fit to be mentioned in comparison with the faithful Son of God! Our hope must ever be that haply some poor child of God may be served by us, for the Great Father can never need our aid. Well may we sing the verses of Dr. Watts:

"Oft have my heart and tongue confess'd
How empty and how poor I am;
My praise can never make thee blest,
Nor add new glories to thy name.
Yet, Lord, thy saints on earth may reap
Some profit by the good we do;
These are the company I keep,
These are the choicest friends I know."

Poor believers are God's receivers, and have a warrant from the Crown to receive the revenue of our offerings in the King's name. Saints departed we cannot bless; even prayer for them is of no service; but while they are here we should practically prove our love to them, even as our Master did, for they are the excellent of the earth. Despite their infirmities, their Lord thinks highly of them, and reckons them to be as nobles among men. The title of "His Excellency" more properly belongs to the meanest saint than to the greatest governor. The true aristocracy are believers in Jesus. They are the only Right Honourables. Stars and garters are poor distinctions compared with the graces of the Spirit. He who knows them best says of them, "in whom is all my delight." They are his Hephzibah and his land Beulah, and before all worlds his delights were with these chosen sons of men. Their own opinion of themselves is far other than their Beloved's opinion of them; they count themselves to be less than nothing, yet he makes much of them, and sets his heart towards them. What wonders the eyes of Divine Love can see where the Hands of Infinite Power have been graciously at work. It was this quicksighted affection which led Jesus to see in us a recompense for all his agony, and sustained him under all his sufferings by the joy of redeeming us from going down into the pit.

Verse 4. The same loving heart which opens towards the chosen people is fast closed against those who continue in their rebellion against God. Jesus hates all wickedness, and especially the high crime

of idolatry. The text while it shows our Lord's abhorrence of sin, shows also the sinner's greediness after it. Professed believers are often slow towards the true Lord, but sinners "hasten after another god." They run like madmen where we creep like snails. Let their zeal rebuke our tardiness. Yet theirs is a case in which the more they haste the worse they speed, for their sorrows are multiplied by their diligence in multiplying their sins. Matthew Henry pithily says, "They that multiply gods multiply griefs to themselves; for whosoever thinks one god too little, will find two too many, and yet hundreds not enough." The cruelties and hardships which men endure for their false gods is wonderful to contemplate; our missionary reports are a noteworthy comment on this passage; but perhaps our own experience is an equally vivid exposition; for when we have given our heart to idols, sooner or later we have had to smart for it. Near the roots of our self-love all our sorrows lie, and when that idol is overthrown, the sting is gone from grief. Moses broke the golden calf and ground it to powder, and cast it into the water of which he made Israel to drink, and so shall our cherished idols become bitter portions for us, unless we at once forsake them. Our Lord had no selfishness; he served but one Lord, and served him only. As for those who turn aside from Jehovah, he was separate from them, bearing their reproach without the camp. Sin and the Saviour had no communion. He came to destroy, not to patronize or be allied with the works of the devil. Hence he refused the testimony of unclean spirits as to his divinity, for in nothing would he have fellowship with darkness. We should be careful above measure not to connect ourselves in the remotest degree with falsehood in religion; even the most solemn of Popish rites we must abhor. "Their drink offerings of blood will I not offer." The old proverb says, "It is not safe to eat at the devil's mess, though the spoon be never so long." The mere mentioning of ill names it were well to avoid,—"nor take up their names into my lips." If we allow poison upon the lip, it may ere long penetrate to the inwards, and it is well to keep out of the mouth that which we would shut out from the heart. If the church would enjoy union with Christ, she must break all the bonds of impiety, and keep herself pure from all the pollutions of carnal will-worship, which now pollute the service of God. Some professors are guilty of great sin in remaining in the communion of Popish churches, where God is as much dishonoured as in Rome herself, only in a more crafty manner.

Verse 5. "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup." With what confidence and bounding joy does Jesus turn to Jehovah, whom his soul possessed and delighted in! Content beyond measure with his portion in the Lord his God, he had not a single desire with which to hunt after other gods; his cup was full, and his heart was full too; even in his sorest sorrows he still laid hold with both his hands upon his Father, crying, "My God, my God;" he had not so much as a thought of falling down to worship the prince of this world, although tempted with an "all these will I give thee." We, too, can make our boast in the Lord; he is the meat and the drink of our souls. He is our portion, supplying all our necessities, and our cup yielding royal luxuries; our cup in this life, and our inheritance in the life to come. As children of the Father who is in heaven, we inherit, by virtue of our joint heirship with Jesus, all the riches of the covenant of grace; and the portion which falls to us sets upon our table the bread of heaven and the new wine of the kingdom. Who would not be satisfied with such dainty diet? Our shallow cup of sorrow we may well drain with resignation, since the deep cup of love stands side by side with it, and will never be empty. "Thou maintainest my lot." Some tenants have a covenant in their leases that they themselves shall maintain and uphold, but in our case Jehovah himself maintains our lot. Our Lord Jesus delighted in this truth, that the Father was on his side, and would maintain his right against all the wrongs of men. He knew that his elect would be reserved for him, and that almighty power would preserve them as his lot and reward for ever. Let us also be glad, because the Judge of all the earth will vindicate our righteous cause.

Verse 6. Jesus found the way of obedience to lead into "pleasant places." Notwithstanding all the sorrows which marred his countenance, he exclaimed, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." It may seem strange, but while no other man was ever so thoroughly acquainted with grief, it is our belief that no other man ever experienced so much joy and delight in service, for no other served so faithfully and with such great results in view as his recompense of reward. The joy which was set before him must have sent some of its beams of splendour a-down the rugged places where he endured the cross, despising the shame, and must have made them in some respects pleasant places to the generous heart of the Redeemer. At any rate, we know that Jesus was well content with the blood-bought portion which the lines of electing love marked off as his spoil with the strong and his portion with the great. Therein he solaced himself on earth, and delights himself in heaven; and he asks no more "GOODLY HERITAGE" than that his own beloved may be with him where he is and behold his glory. All the saints can use the language of this verse, and the more thoroughly they can enter into its contented, grateful, joyful spirit the better for themselves, and the more glorious to their God. Our Lord was poorer than we are, for he had not where to lay his head, and yet when he mentioned his poverty he never used a word of murmuring; discontented spirits are as unlike Jesus as the croaking raven is unlike the cooing dove. Martyrs have been happy in dungeons. "From the delectable orchard of the Leonine prison the Italian martyr dated his letter, and the presence of God made the gridiron of Laurence pleasant to him." Mr. Greenham was bold enough to say, "They never felt God's love, or tasted forgiveness of sin, who are discontented." Some divines think that discontent was the first sin, the rock which wrecked our race in paradise; certainly there can be no paradise where this evil spirit has power, its slime will poison all the flowers of the garden.

Verse 7. "I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel." Praise as well as prayer was presented to the Father by our Lord Jesus, and we are not truly his followers unless our resolve be, "I will bless the Lord." Jesus is called Wonderful, Counsellor, but as man he spake not of himself, but as his Father had taught him. Read in confirmation of this, John 7:16; 8:28; and 12:49, 50; and the prophecy concerning him in Isaiah 11:2, 3. It was our Redeemer's wont to repair to his Father for direction, and having received it, he blessed him for giving him counsel. It would be well for us if we would follow his example of lowliness, cease from trusting in our own understanding, and seek to be guided by the Spirit of God. "My reins also instruct me in the night seasons." By the reins understand the inner man, the affections and feelings. The communion of the soul with God brings to it an inner spiritual wisdom which in still seasons is revealed to itself. Our Redeemer spent many nights alone upon the mountain, and we may readily conceive that together with his fellowship with heaven, he carried on a profitable commerce with himself; reviewing his experience, forecasting his work, and considering his position. Great generals fight their battles in their own mind long before the trumpet sounds, and so did our Lord win our battle on his knees before he gained it on the cross. It is a gracious habit after taking counsel from above to take counsel within. Wise men see more with their eyes shut by night than fools can see by day with their eyes open. He who learns from God and so gets the seed, will soon find wisdom within himself growing in the garden of his soul; "Thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left." The night season which the sinner chooses for his sins is the hallowed hour of quiet when believers hear the soft still voices of heaven, and of the heavenly life within themselves.

Verse 8. The fear of death at one time cast its dark shadow over the soul of the Redeemer, and we read that, "he was heard in that he feared." There appeared unto him an angel, strengthening him; perhaps the heavenly messenger reassured him of his glorious resurrection as his people's surety,

and of the eternal joy into which he should admit the flock redeemed by blood. Then hope shone full upon our Lord's soul, and, as recorded in these verses, he surveyed the future with holy confidence because he had a continued eye to Jehovah, and enjoyed his perpetual presence. He felt that, thus sustained, he could never be driven from his life's grand design; nor was he, for he stayed not his hand till he could say, "It is finished." What an infinite mercy was this for us! In this immovableness, caused by simple faith in the divine help, Jesus is to be viewed as our exemplar; to recognize the presence of the Lord is the duty of every believer; "I have set the Lord always before me;" and to trust the Lord as our champion and guard is the privilege of every saint; "because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." The apostle translates this passage, "I foresaw the Lord always before my face;" Acts 2:25; the eye of Jesus' faith could discern beforehand the continuance of divine support to his suffering Son, in such a degree that he should never be moved from the accomplishment of his purpose of redeeming his people. By the power of God at his right hand he foresaw that he should smite through all who rose up against him, and on that power he placed the firmest reliance.

Verse 9. He clearly foresaw that he must die, for he speaks of his flesh resting, and of his soul in the abode of separate spirits; death was full before his face, or he would not have mentioned corruption; but such was his devout reliance upon his God, that he sang over the tomb, and rejoiced in vision of the sepulchre. He knew that the visit of his soul to Sheol, or the invisible world of disembodied spirits, would be a very short one, and that his body in a very brief space would leave the grave, uninjured by its sojourn there; all this made him say, "my heart is glad," and moved his tongue, the glory of his frame, to rejoice in God, the strength of his salvation. Oh, for such holy faith in the prospect of trial and of death! It is the work of faith, not merely to create a peace which passeth all understanding, but to fill the heart full of gladness until the tongue, which, as the organ of an intelligent creature, is our glory, bursts forth in notes of harmonious praise. Faith gives us living joy, and bestows dying rest. "My flesh also shall rest in hope."

Verse 10. Our Lord Jesus was not disappointed in his hope. He declared his Father's faithfulness in the words, "thou wilt not leave my soul in hell," and that faithfulness was proven on the resurrection morning. Among the departed and disembodied Jesus was not left; he had believed in the resurrection, and he received it on the third day, when his body rose in glorious life, according as he had said in joyous confidence, "neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Into the outer prison of the grave his body might go, but into the inner prison of corruption he could not enter. He who in soul and body was pre-eminently God's "Holy One," was loosed from the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. This is noble encouragement to all the saints; die they must, but rise they shall, and though in their case they shall see corruption, yet they shall rise to everlasting life. Christ's resurrection is the cause, the earnest, the guarantee, and the emblem of the rising of all his people. Let them, therefore, go to their graves as to their beds, resting their flesh among the clods as they now do upon their couches.

"Since Jesus is mine, I'll not fear undressing,
But gladly put off these garments of clay;
To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing,
Since Jesus to glory through death led the way."

Wretched will that man be who, when the Philistines of death invade his soul, shall find that, like Saul, he is forsaken of God; but blessed is he who has the Lord at his right hand, for he shall fear no ill, but shall look forward to an eternity of bliss.

Verse 11. "Thou wilt shew me the path of life." To Jesus first this way was shown, for he is the first begotten from the dead, the first-born of every creature. He himself opened up the way through his own flesh, and then trod it as the forerunner of his own redeemed. The thought of being made the path of life to his people, gladdened the soul of Jesus. "In thy presence is fulness of joy." Christ being raised from the dead ascended into glory, to dwell in constant nearness to God, where joy is at its full for ever: the foresight of this urged him onward in his glorious but grievous toil. To bring his chosen to eternal happiness was the high ambition which inspired him, and made him wade through a sea of blood. O God, when a worldling's mirth has all expired, for ever with Jesus may we dwell "at thy right hand," where "there are pleasures for evermore;" and meanwhile, may we have an earnest by tasting thy love below. Trapp's note on the heavenly verse which closes the Psalm is a sweet morsel, which may serve for a contemplation, and yield a foretaste of our inheritance. He writes, "Here is as much said as can be, but words are too weak to utter it. For quality there is in heaven joy and pleasures; for quantity, a fulness, a torrent whereat they drink without let or loathing; for constancy, it is at God's right hand, who is stronger than all, neither can any take us out of his hand; it is a constant happiness without intermission: and for perpetuity it is for evermore. Heaven's joys are without measure, mixture, or end."

Psalm 17

Verse 1. "Hear the right, O Lord." He that has the worst cause makes the most noise; hence the oppressed soul is apprehensive that its voice may be drowned, and therefore pleads in this one verse for a hearing no less than three times. The troubled heart craves for the ear of the great Judge, persuaded that with him to hear is to redress. If our God could not or would not hear us, our state would be deplorable indeed; and yet some professors set such small store by the mercy-seat, that God does not hear them for the simple reason that they neglect to plead. As well have no house if we persist like gipsies in living in the lanes and commons; as well have no mercy-seat as be always defending our own cause and never going to God. There is more fear that we will not hear the Lord than that the Lord will not hear us. "Hear the right;" it is well if our case is good in itself and can be urged as a right one, for right shall never be wronged by our righteous Judge; but if our suit be marred by our infirmities, it is a great privilege that we may make mention of the righteousness of our Lord Jesus, which is ever prevalent on high. Right has a voice which Jehovah always hears; and if my wrongs clamour against me with great force and fury, I will pray the Lord to hear that still louder and mightier voice of the right, and the rights of his dear Son. "Hear, O God, the Just One;" i.e., "hear the Messiah," is a rendering adopted by Jerome, and admired by Bishop Horsley, whether correct or not as a translation, it is proper enough as a plea. Let the reader plead it at the throne of the righteous God, even when all other arguments are unavailing.

"Attend unto my cry." This shows the vehemence and earnestness of the petitioner; he is no mere talker, he weeps and laments. Who can resist a cry? A real hearty, bitter, piteous cry, might almost melt a rock, there can be no fear of its prevalence with our heavenly Father. A cry is our earliest utterance, and in many ways the most natural of human sounds; if our prayer should like the infant's cry be more natural than intelligent, and more earnest than elegant, it will be none the less eloquent with God. There is a mighty power in a child's cry to prevail with a parent's heart. "Give ear unto my prayer." Some repetitions are not vain. The reduplication here used is neither superstition nor tautology, but is like the repeated blow of a hammer hitting the same nail on the head to fix it the more effectually, or the continued knocking of a beggar at the gate who cannot be denied an alms. "That goeth not out of feigned lips." Sincerity is a sine qua non in prayer. Lips of deceit are detestable

to man and much more to God. In intercourse so hallowed as that of prayer, hypocrisy even in the remotest degree is as fatal as it is foolish. Hypocritical piety is double iniquity. He who would feign and flatter had better try his craft with a fool like himself, for to deceive the all-seeing One is as impossible as to take the moon in a net, or to lead the sun into a snare. He who would deceive God is himself already most grossly deceived. Our sincerity in prayer has no merit in it, any more than the earnestness of a mendicant in the street; but at the same time the Lord has regard to it, through Jesus, and will not long refuse his ear to an honest and fervent petitioner.

Verse 2. "Let my sentence come forth from thy presence." The psalmist has now grown bold by the strengthening influence of prayer, and he now entreats the Judge of all the earth to give sentence upon his case. He has been libelled, basely and maliciously libelled; and having brought his action before the highest court, he, like an innocent man, has no desire to escape the enquiry, but even invites and sues for judgment. He does not ask for secrecy, but would have the result come forth to the world. He would have sentence pronounced and executed forthwith. In some matters we may venture to be as bold as this; but except we can plead something better than our own supposed innocence, it were terrible presumption thus to challenge the judgment of a sin-hating God. With Jesus as our complete and all-glorious righteousness we need not fear, though the day of judgment should commence at once, and hell open her mouth at our feet, but might joyfully prove the truth of our hymn writer's holy boast—

"Bold shall I stand in that great day;
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
While, through thy blood, absolved I am,
From sin's tremendous curse and shame."

"Let thine eyes behold the things that are equal." Believers do not desire any other judge than God, or to be excused from judgment, or even to be judged on principles of partiality. No; our hope does not lie in the prospect of favouritism from God, and the consequent suspension of his law; we expect to be judged on the same principals as other men, and through the blood and righteousness of our Redeemer we shall pass the ordeal unscathed. The Lord will weigh us in the scales of justice fairly and justly; he will not use false weights to permit us to escape, but with the sternest equity those balances will be used upon us as well as upon others; and with our blessed Lord Jesus as our all in all we tremble not, for we shall not be found wanting. In David's case, he felt his cause to be so right that he simply desired the Divine eyes to rest upon the matter, and he was confident that equity would give him all that he needed.

Verse 3, "Thou hast proved mine heart." Like Peter, David uses the argument, "Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." It is a most assuring thing to be able to appeal at once to the Lord, and call upon our Judge to be a witness for our defence. "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." "Thou hast visited me in the night." As if he had said, "Lord, thou hast entered my house at all hours; and thou hast seen me when no one else was nigh; thou hast come upon me unawares and marked my unrestrained actions, and thou knowest whether or no I am guilty of the crimes laid at my door." Happy man who can thus remember the omniscient eye, and the omnipresent visitor, and find comfort in the remembrance. We hope we have had our midnight visits from our Lord, and truly they are sweet; so sweet that the recollection of them sets us longing for more of such condescending communings. Lord, if indeed, we had been hypocrites, should we have had such fellowship, or feel such hungerings after a renewal of it? "Thou hast tried

me, and shalt find nothing." Surely the Psalmist means nothing hypocritical or wicked in the sense in which his slanderers accused him; for if the Lord should put the best of his people into the crucible, the dross would be a fearful sight, and would make penitence open her sluices wide. Assayers very soon detect the presence of alloy, and when the chief of all assayers shall, at the last, say of us he has found nothing, it will be a glorious hour indeed—"They are without fault before the throne of God." Even here, as viewed in our covenant Head, the Lord sees no sin in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel; even the all-detecting glance of Omniscience can see no flaw where the great Substitute covers all with beauty and perfection. "I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress." Oh those sad lips of ours! we had need purpose to purpose if we would keep them from exceeding their bounds. The number of diseases of the tongue is as many as the diseases of all the rest of the man put together, and they are more inveterate. Hands and feet one may bind, but who can fetter the lips? iron bands may hold a madman, but what chains can restrain the tongue? It needs more than a purpose to keep this nimble offender within its proper range. Lion-taming and serpent-charming are not to be mentioned in the same day as tongue-taming, for the tongue can no man tame. Those who have to smart from the falsehoods of others should be the more jealous over themselves; perhaps this led the Psalmist to register this holy resolution; and, moreover, he intended thereby to aver that if he had said too much in his own defence, it was not intentional, for he desired in all-respects to tune his lips to the sweet and simple music of truth. Notwithstanding all this David was slandered, as if to show us that the purest innocence will be bemired by malice. There is no sunshine without a shadow, no ripe fruit unpecked by the birds.

Verse 4. "Concerning the works of men." While we are in the midst of men we shall have their works thrust under our notice, and we shall be compelled to keep a corner of our diary headed "concerning the works of men." To be quite clear from the dead works of carnal humanity is the devout desire of souls who are quickened by the Holy Spirit. "By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer." He had kept the highway of Scripture, and not chosen the bye-paths of malice. We should soon imitate the example of the worst of men if the grace of God did not use the Word of God as the great preservative from evil. The paths of the destroyer have often tempted us; we have been prompted to become destroyers too, when we have been sorely provoked, and resentment has grown warm; but we have remembered the example of our Lord, who would not call fire from heaven upon his enemies, but meekly prayed, "Father, forgive them." All the ways of sin are the paths of Satan,—the Apollyon or Abaddon, both of which words signify the destroyer. Foolish indeed are those who give their hearts to the old murderer, because for the time he panders to their evil desires. That heavenly Book which lies neglected on many a shelf is the only guide for those who would avoid the enticing and entangling mazes of sin; and it is the best means of preserving the youthful pilgrim from ever treading those dangerous ways. We must follow the one or the other; the Book of Life, or the way of death; the word of the Holy Spirit, or the suggestion of the Evil Spirit. David could urge as the proof of his sincerity that he had no part or lot with the ungodly in their ruinous ways. How can we venture to plead our cause with God, unless we also can wash our hands clean of all connection with the enemies of the Great King?

Verse 5. Under trial it is not easy to behave ourselves aright; a candle is not easily kept alight when many envious mouths are puffing at it. In evil times prayer is peculiarly needful, and wise men resort to it at once. Plato said to one of his disciples, "When men speak ill of thee, live so that no one will believe them;" good enough advice, but he did not tell us how to carry it out. We have a precept here incorporated in an example; if we would be preserved, we must cry to the Preserver, and enlist divine support upon our side. "Hold up my goings"—as a careful driver holds up his horse when going down

hill. We have all sorts of paces, both fast and slow, and the road is never long of one sort, but with God to hold up our goings, nothing in the pace or in the road can cast down. He who has been down once and cut his knees sadly, even to the bone, had need redouble his zeal when using this prayer; and all of us, since we are so weak on our legs through Adam's fall, had need use it every hour of the day. If a perfect father fell, how shall an imperfect son dare to boast? "In thy paths." Forsaking Satan's paths, he prayed to be upheld in God's paths. We cannot keep from evil without keeping to good. If the bushel be not full of wheat, it may soon be once more full of chaff. In all the appointed ordinances and duties of our most holy faith, may the Lord enable us to run through his upholding grace! "That my footsteps slip not." What! slip in God's ways? Yes, the road is good, but our feet are evil, and therefore slip, even on the King's highway. Who wonders if carnal men slide and fall in ways of their own choosing, which like the vale of Siddim, are full of deadly slime-pits? One may trip over an ordinance as well as over a temptation. Jesus Christ himself is a stumbling-block to some, and the doctrines of grace have been the occasion of offence to many. Grace alone can hold up our goings in the paths of truth.

Verse 6. "I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God." Thou hast always heard me, O my Lord, and therefore I have the utmost confidence in again approaching thine altar. Experience is a blessed teacher. He who has tried the faithfulness of God in hours of need, has great boldness in laying his case before the throne. The well of Bethlehem, from which we drew such cooling draughts in years gone by, our souls long for still; nor will we leave it for the broken cisterns of earth. "Incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech." Stoop out of heaven and put thine ear to my mouth; give me thine ear all to myself, as men do when they lean over to catch every word from their friend. The Psalmist here comes back to his first prayer, and thus sets us an example of pressing our suit again and again, until we have a full assurance that we have succeeded.

Verse 7. "Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness." Marvellous in its antiquity, its distinguishing character, its faithfulness, its immutability, and above all, marvellous in the wonders which it works. That marvellous grace which has redeemed us with the precious blood of God's only begotten, is here invoked to come to the rescue. That grace is sometimes hidden; the text says, "Shew it." Present enjoyments of divine love are matchless cordials to support fainting hearts. Believer, what a prayer is this! Consider it well. O Lord, shew thy marvellous lovingkindness; shew it to my intellect, and remove my ignorance; shew it to my heart, and revive my gratitude; shew it to my faith, and renew my confidence; shew it to my experience, and deliver me from all my fears. The original word here used is the same which in Psalm 4:3 is rendered set apart, and it has the force of, Distinguish thy mercies, set them out, and set apart the choicest to be bestowed upon me in this hour of my severest affliction. "O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them." The title here given to our gracious God is eminently consolatory. He is the God of salvation; it is his present and perpetual habit to save believers; he puts forth his best and most glorious strength, using his right hand of wisdom and might, to save all those, of whatsoever rank or class, who trust themselves with him. Happy faith thus to secure the omnipotent protection of heaven! Blessed God, to be thus gracious to unworthy mortals, when they have but grace to rely upon thee! The right hand of God is interposed between the saints and all harm; God is never at a loss for means; his own bare hand is enough. He works without tools as well as with them.

Verse 8. "Keep me as the apple of the eye." No part of the body more precious, more tender, and more carefully guarded than the eye; and of the eye, no portion more peculiarly to be protected than the central apple, the pupil, or as the Hebrew calls it, "the daughter of the eye." The all-wise Creator

has placed the eye in a well-protected position; it stands surrounded by projecting bones like Jerusalem encircled by mountains. Moreover, its great Author has surrounded it with many tunics of inward covering, besides the hedge of the eyebrows, the curtain of the eyelids, and the fence of the eyelashes; and, in addition to this, he has given to every man so high a value for his eyes, and so quick an apprehension of danger, that no member of the body is more faithfully cared for than the organ of sight. Thus, Lord, keep thou me, for I trust I am one with Jesus, and so a member of his mystical body. "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings." Even as the parent bird completely shields her brood from evil, and meanwhile cherishes them with the warmth of her own heart, by covering them with her wings, so do thou with me, most condescending God, for I am thine offspring, and thou hast a parent's love in perfection. This last clause is in the Hebrew in the future tense, as if to show that what the writer had asked for but a moment before he was now sure would be granted to him. Confident expectations should keep pace with earnest supplication.

Verse 9. "From the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about." The foes from whom David sought to be rescued were wicked men. It is hopeful for us when our enemies are God's enemies. They were deadly enemies, whom nothing but his death would satisfy. The foes of a believer's soul are mortal foes most emphatically, for they who war against our faith aim at the very life of our life. Deadly sins are deadly enemies, and what sin is there which hath not death in its bowels? These foes oppressed David, they laid his spirit waste, as invading armies ravage a country, or as wild beasts desolate a land. He likens himself to a besieged city, and complains that his foes compass him about. It may well quicken our business upward, when all around us, every road, is blockaded by deadly foes. This is our daily position, for all around us dangers and sins are lurking. O God, do thou protect us from them all.

Verse 10. "They are inclosed in their own fat." Luxury and gluttony beget vainglorious fatness of heart, which shuts up its gates against all compassionate emotions and reasonable judgments. The old proverb says that full bellies make empty skulls, and it is yet more true that they frequently make empty hearts. The rankest weeds grow out of the fattest soil. Riches and self-indulgence are the fuel upon which some sins feed their flames. Pride and fulness of bread were Sodom's twin sins. (Ezekiel 16:49.) Fed hawks forget their masters; and the moon at its fullest is furthest from the sun. Eglon was a notable instance that a well-fed corporation is no security to life, when a sharp message comes from God, addressed to the inward vitals of the body. "With their mouth they speak proudly." He who adores himself, will have no heart to adore the Lord. Full of selfish pleasure within his heart, the wicked man fills his mouth with boastful and arrogant expressions. Prosperity and vanity often lodge together. Woe to the fed ox when it bellows at its owner, the poleax is not far off.

Verse 11. "They have now compassed us in our steps." The fury of the ungodly is aimed not at one believer alone, but at all the band; they have compassed us. All the race of the Jews were but a morsel for Haman's hungry revenge, and all because of one Mordecai. The prince of darkness hates all the saints for their Master's sake. The Lord Jesus is one of the us, and herein is our hope. He is the Breaker, and will clear a way for us through the hosts which environ us. The hatred of the powers of evil is continuous and energetic, for they watch every step, hoping that the time may come when they shall catch us by surprise. If our spiritual adversaries thus compass every step, how anxiously should we guard all our movements, lest by any means we should be betrayed into evil! "They have set their eyes bowing down to the earth." Trapp wittily explains this metaphor by an allusion to a bull when about to run at his victim; he lowers his head, looks downward, and then concentrates all his force in the dash which he makes. It most probably denotes the malicious jealousy with which the

enemy watches the steps of the righteous; as if they studied the ground on which they trod, and searched after some wrong foot-mark to accuse them for the past, or some stumbling-stone to cast in their future path to trip them in days to come.

Verse 12. Lions are not more greedy, nor their ways more cunning than are Satan and his helpers when engaged against the children of God. The blood of souls the adversary thirsts after, and all his strength and craft are exerted to the utmost to satisfy his detestable appetite. We are weak and foolish like sheep; but we have a shepherd wise and strong, who knows the old lion's wiles, and is more than a match for his force; therefore will we not fear, but rest in safety in the fold. Let us beware, however, of our lurking foe; and in those parts of the road where we feel most secure, let us look about us lest, peradventure, our foe should leap upon us.

Verse 13. "Arise, O Lord." The more furious the attack, the more fervent the Psalmist's prayer. His eye rests singly upon the Almighty, and he feels that God has but to rise from the seat of his patience, and the work will be performed at once. Let the lion spring upon us, if Jehovah steps between we need no better defence. When God meets our foe face to face in battle, the conflict will soon be over. "Disappoint him." Be beforehand with him, outwit and outrun him. Appoint it otherwise than he has appointed, and so disappoint him. "Cast him down." Prostrate him. Make him sink upon his knees. Make him bow as the conquered bows before the conqueror. What a glorious sight will it be to behold Satan prostrate beneath the foot of our glorious Lord! Haste, glorious day! "Deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword." He recognizes the most profane and oppressive as being under the providential rule of the King of kings, and used as a sword in the divine hand. What can a sword do unless it be wielded by a hand? No more could the wicked annoy us, unless the Lord permitted them so to do. Most translators are, however, agreed that this is not the correct reading, but that it should be as Calvin puts it, "Deliver my soul from the ungodly man by thy sword." Thus David contrasts the sword of the Lord with human aids and reliefs, and rests assured that he is safe enough under the patronage of heaven.

Verse 14. Almost every word of this verse has furnished matter for discussion to scholars, for it is very obscure. We will, therefore, rest content with the common version, rather than distract the reader with divers translations. "From men which are thy hand." Having styled the ungodly a sword in his Father's hand, he now likens them to that hand itself, to set forth his conviction that God could as easily remove their violence as a man moves his own hand. He will never slay his child with his own hand. "From men of the world," mere earthworms; not men of the world to come, but mere dwellers in this narrow sphere of mortality; having no hopes or wishes beyond the ground on which they tread. "Which have their portion in this life." Like the prodigal, they have their portion, and are not content to wait their Father's time. Like Passion in the "Pilgrim's Progress," they have their best things first, and revel during their little hour. Luther was always afraid lest he should have his portion here, and therefore frequently gave away sums of money which had been presented to him. We cannot have earth and heaven too for our choice and portion; wise men choose that which will last the longest. "Whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure." Their sensual appetite gets the gain which it craved for. God gives to these swine the husks which they hunger for. A generous man does not deny dogs their bones; and our generous God gives even his enemies enough to fill them, if they were not so unreasonable as never to be content. Gold and silver which are locked up in the dark treasuries of the earth are given to the wicked liberally, and they therefore roll in all manner of carnal delights. Every dog has his day, and they have theirs, and a bright summer's day it seems; but ah! how soon it ends in night! "They are full of children." This was their fondest hope, that a race from their loins would

prolong their names far down the page of history, and God has granted them this also; so that they have all that heart can wish. What enviable creatures they seem, but it is only seeming! "They are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes." They were fat housekeepers, and yet leave no lean wills. Living and dying they lacked for nothing but grace and alas! that lack spoils everything. They had a fair portion within the little circle of time, but eternity entered not into their calculations. They were penny wise, but pound foolish; they remembered the present, and forgot the future; they fought for the shell, and lost the kernel. How fine a description have we here of many a successful merchant, or popular statesman; and it is, at first sight, very showy and tempting, but in contrast with the glories of the world to come, what are these paltry molehill joys. Self, self, self, all these joys begin and end in basest selfishness; but oh, our God, how rich are those who begin and end in thee! From all the contamination and injury which association with worldly men is sure to bring us, deliver thou us, O God!

Verse 15. "As for me." "I neither envy nor covet these men's happiness, but partly have and partly hope for a far better." To behold God's face and to be changed by that vision into his image, so as to partake in his righteousness, this is my noble ambition; and in the prospect of this I cheerfully waive all my present enjoyments. My satisfaction is to come; I do not look for it as yet. I shall sleep awhile, but I shall wake at the sound of the trumpet; wake to everlasting joy, because I arise in thy likeness, O my God and King! Glimpses of glory good men have here below to stay their sacred hunger, but the full feast awaits them in the upper skies. Compared with this deep, ineffable, eternal fulness of delight, the joys of the worldlings are as a glowworm to the sun, or the drop of a bucket to the ocean.

Psalm 18

Verse 1. "I will love thee, O Lord." With strong, hearty affection will I cling to thee; as a child to its parent, or a spouse to her husband. The word is intensely forcible, the love is of the deepest kind. "I will love heartily, with my inmost bowels." Here is a fixed resolution to abide in the nearest and most intimate union with the Most High. Our triune God deserves the warmest love of all our hearts. Father, Son and Spirit have each a claim upon our love. The solemn purpose never to cease loving naturally springs from present fervour of affection. It is wrong to make rash resolutions, but this when made in the strength of God is most wise and fitting. "My strength." Our God is the strength of our life, our graces, our works, our hopes, our conflicts, our victories. This verse is not found in 2 Samuel 22, and is a most precious addition, placed above all and after all to form the pinnacle of the temple, the apex of the pyramid. Love is still the crowning grace.

Verse 2. "The Lord is my rock and my fortress." Dwelling among the crags and mountain fastnesses of Judea David had escaped the malice of Saul, and here he compares his God to such a place of concealment and security. Believers are often hidden in their God from the strife of tongues and the fury of the storm of trouble. The clefts of the Rock of Ages are safe abodes. "My deliverer," interposing in my hour of peril. When almost captured the Lord's people are rescued from the hand of the mighty by him who is mightier still. This title of "deliverer" has many sermons in it, and is well worthy of the study of all experienced saints. "My God;" this is all good things in one. There is a boundless wealth in this expression; it means, my perpetual, unchanging, infinite, eternal good. He who can say truly "my God," may well add, "my heaven, my all." "My strength;" this word is really "my rock," in the sense of strength and immobility. My sure, unchanging, eternal confidence and support. Thus the word rock occurs twice, but it is no tautology, for the first time it is a rock for concealment, but here a rock for firmness and immutability. "In whom I will trust." Faith must be exercised, or the

preciousness of God is not truly known; and God must be the object of faith, or faith is mere presumption. "My buckler," warding off the blows of my enemy, shielding me from arrow or sword. The Lord furnishes his warriors with weapons both offensive and defensive. Our armoury is completely stored so that none need go to battle unarmed. "The horn of my salvation," enabling me to push down my foes, and to triumph over them with holy exultation. "My high tower," a citadel high planted on a rocky eminence beyond the reach of my enemies, from the heights of which I look down upon their fury without alarm, and survey a wide landscape of mercy reaching even unto the goodly land beyond Jordan. Here are many words, but none too many; we might profitably examine each one of them had we leisure, but summing up the whole, we may conclude with Calvin, that David here equips the faithful from head to foot.

Verse 3. In this verse the happy poet resolves to invoke the Lord in joyful song, believing that in all future conflicts his God would deal as well with him as in the past. It is well to pray to God as to one who deserves to be praised, for then we plead in a happy and confident manner. If I feel that I can and do bless the Lord for all his past goodness, I am bold to ask great things of him. That word So has much in it. To be saved singing is to be saved indeed. Many are saved mourning and doubting; but David had such faith that he could fight singing, and win the battle with a song still upon his lips. How happy a thing to receive fresh mercy with a heart already sensible of mercy enjoyed, and to anticipate new trials with a confidence based upon past experiences of divine love!

"No fearing or doubting with Christ on our side,
We hope to die shouting, 'The Lord will provide.'"

Verses 4-19. In most poetical language the Psalmist now describes his experience of Jehovah's delivering power. Poesy has in all her treasures no gem more lustrous than the sonnet of the following verses; the sorrow, the cry, the descent of the Divine One, and the rescue of the afflicted, are here set to a music worthy of the golden harps. The Messiah our Saviour is evidently, over and beyond David or any other believer, the main and chief subject of this song; and while studying it we have grown more and more sure that every line here has its deepest and profoundest fulfilment in Him; but as we are desirous not to extend our comment beyond moderate bounds, we must leave it with the devout reader to make the very easy application of the passage to our once distressed but now triumphant Lord.

Verse 4. "The sorrows of death compassed me." Death like a cruel conqueror seemed to twist round about him the cords of pain. He was environed and hemmed in with threatening deaths of the most appalling sort. He was like a mariner broken by the storm and driven upon the rocks by dreadful breakers, white as the teeth of death. Sad plight for the man after God's own heart, but thus it is that Jehovah dealeth with his sons. "The floods of ungodly men made me afraid." Torrents of ungodliness threatened to swamp all religion, and to hurry away the godly man's hope as a thing to be scorned and despised; so far was this threat fulfilled, that even the hero who slew Goliath began to be afraid. The most seaworthy bark is sometimes hard put to it when the storm fiend is abroad. The most courageous man, who as a rule hopes for the best, may sometimes fear the worst. Beloved reader, he who pens these lines has known better than most men what this verse means, and feels inclined to weep, and yet to sing, while he writes upon a text so descriptive of his own experience. On the night of the lamentable accident at the Surrey Music Hall, the floods of Belial were let loose, and the subsequent remarks of a large portion of the press were exceedingly malicious and wicked; our soul was afraid as we stood encompassed with the sorrows of death and the blasphemies of the cruel. But

oh, what mercy was there in it all, and what honey of goodness was extracted by our Lord out of this lion of affliction! Surely God hath heard me! Art thou in an ill plight? Dear friend, learn thou from our experience to trust in the Lord Jehovah, who forsaketh not his chosen.

Verse 5. "The sorrows of hell compassed me about." From all sides the hell-hounds barked furiously. A cordon of devils hemmed in the hunted man of God; every way of escape was closed up. Satan knows how to blockade our coasts with the iron war-ships of sorrow, but, blessed be God, the port of all prayer is still open, and grace can run the blockade bearing messages from earth to heaven, and blessings in return from heaven to earth. "The snares of death prevented me." The old enemy hunts for his prey, not only with the dogs of the infernal kennel, but also with the snares of deadly craft. The nets were drawn closer and closer until the contracted circle completely prevented the escape of the captive:

"About me the cords of hell were wound,
And snares of death my footsteps bound."

Thus hopeless was the case of this good man, as hopeless as a case could be, so utterly desperate that none but an almighty arm could be of any service. According to the four metaphors which he employs, he was bound like a malefactor for execution; overwhelmed like a shipwrecked mariner; surrounded and standing at bay like a hunted stag; and captured in a net like a trembling bird. What more of terror and distress could meet upon one poor defenseless head?

Verse 6. "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God." Prayer is that postern gate which is left open even when the city is straitly besieged by the enemy; it is that way upward from the pit of despair to which the spiritual miner flies at once when the floods from beneath break forth upon him. Observe that he calls, and then cries; prayer grows in vehemence as it proceeds. Note also that he first invokes his God under the name of Jehovah, and then advances to a more familiar name, "my God;" thus faith increases by exercise, and he whom we at first viewed as Lord is soon seen to be our God in covenant. It is never an ill time to pray; no distress should prevent us from using the divine remedy of supplication. Above the noise of the raging billows of death, or the barking dogs of hell, the feeblest cry of a true believer will be heard in heaven. "He heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears." Far up within the bejewelled walls, and through the gates of pearl, the cry of the suffering suppliant was heard. Music of angels and harmony of seraphs availed not to drown or even to impair the voice of that humble call. The king heard it in his palace of light unsufferable, and lent a willing ear to the cry of his own beloved child. O honoured prayer, to be able thus through Jesus' blood to penetrate the very ears and heart of Deity. The voice and the cry are themselves heard directly by the Lord, and not made to pass through the medium of saints and intercessors; "My cry came before Him;" the operation of prayer with God is immediate and personal. We may cry with confident and familiar importunity, while our Father himself listens.

Verse 7. There was no great space between the cry and its answer. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, but is swift to rescue his afflicted. David has in his mind's eye the glorious manifestations of God in Egypt, at Sinai, and on different occasions to Joshua and the judges; and he considers that his own case exhibits the same glory of power and goodness, and that, therefore, he may accommodate the descriptions of former displays of the divine majesty into his hymn of praise. "Then the earth shook and trembled." Observe how the most solid and immovable things feel the force of supplication. Prayer has shaken houses, opened prison doors, and made stout hearts to quail. Prayer

rings the alarm bell, and the Master of the house arises to the rescue, shaking all things beneath his tread. "The foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because of his wrath." He who fixed the world's pillars can make them rock in their sockets, and can upheave the corner-stones of creation. The huge roots of the towering mountains are torn up when the Lord bestirs himself in anger to smite the enemies of his people. How shall puny man be able to face it out with God when the very mountains quake with fear? Let not the boaster dream that his present false confidence will support him in the dread day of wrath.

Verse 8. "There went up a smoke out of his nostrils." A violent oriental method of expressing fierce wrath. Since the breath from the nostrils is heated by strong emotion, the figure portrays the Almighty Deliverer as pouring forth smoke in the heat of his wrath and the impetuosity of his zeal. Nothing makes God so angry as an injury done to his children. He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye. God is not subject to the passions which govern his creatures, but acting as he does with all the energy and speed of one who is angry, he is here aptly set forth in poetic imagery suitable to human understandings. The opening of his lips is sufficient to destroy his enemies; "and fire out of his mouth devoured." This fire was no temporary one but steady and lasting; "Coals were kindled by it." The whole passage is intended to depict God's descent to the help of his child, attended by earthquake and tempest: at the majesty of his appearing the earth rocks, the clouds gather like smoke, and the lightning as flaming fire devours, setting the world on a blaze. What grandeur of description is here! Bishop Mant very admirably rhymes the verse thus:—

"Smoke from his heated nostrils came,
And from his mouth devouring flame;
Hot burning coals announced his ire,
And flashes of careering fire."

Verse 9. Amid the terror of the storm Jehovah the Avenger descended, bending beneath his foot the arch of heaven. "He bowed the heavens also, and came down." He came in haste, and spurned everything which impeded his rapidity. The thickest gloom concealed his splendour, "and darkness was under his feet;" he fought within the dense vapours, as a warrior in clouds of smoke and dust, and found out the hearts of his enemies with the sharp falchion of his vengeance. Darkness is no impediment to God; its densest gloom he makes his tent and secret pavilion. See how prayer moves earth and heaven, and raises storms to overthrow in a moment the foes of God's Israel. Things were bad for David before he prayed, but they were much worse for his foes so soon as the petition had gone up to heaven. A trustful heart, by enlisting the divine aid, turns the tables on its enemies. If I must have an enemy let him not be a man of prayer, or he will soon get the better of me by calling in his God into the quarrel.

Verse 10. There is inimitable grandeur in this verse. Under the Mosaic system the cherubim are frequently represented as the chariot of God; hence Milton, in "Paradise Lost," writes of the Great Father,—

"He on the wings of cherubim
Uplifted, in paternal glory rode
Far into chaos."

Without speculating upon the mysterious and much-disputed subject of the cherubim, it may be

enough to remark that angels are doubtless our guards and ministering friends, and all their powers are enlisted to expedite the rescue of the afflicted. "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly." Nature also yields all her agents to be our helpers, and even the powers of the air are subservient: "yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind." The Lord comes flying when mercy is his errand, but he lingers long when sinners are being wooed to repent. The flight here pictured is as majestic as it is swift; "flying all abroad" is Sternhold's word, and he is not far from correct. As the eagle soars in easy grandeur with wings outspread, without violent flapping and exertion, so comes the Lord with majesty of omnipotence to aid his own.

Verse 11. The storm thickened, and the clouds pouring forth torrents of rain combined to form the secret chamber of the invisible but wonder-working God. "Pavilioned in impervious shade" faith saw him, but no other eye could gaze through the "thick clouds of the skies." Blessed is the darkness which encurtains my God; if I may not see him, it is sweet to know that he is working in secret for my eternal good. Even fools can believe that God is abroad in the sunshine and the calm, but faith is wise, and discerns him in the terrible darkness and threatening storm.

Verse 12. Suddenly the terrible artillery of heaven was discharged; the brightness of lightning lit up the clouds as with a glory proceeding from him who was concealed within the cloudy pavilion; and volleys of hailstones and coals of fire were hurled forth upon the enemy. The lightnings seemed to cleave the clouds and kindle them into a blaze, and then hailstones and flakes of fire with flashes of terrific grandeur terrified the sons of men.

Verse 13. Over all this splendour of tempest pealed the dread thunder. "The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice." Fit accompaniment for the flames of vengeance. How will men bear to hear it at the last when addressed to them in proclamation of their doom, for even now their hearts are in their mouths if they do but hear it muttering from afar? In all this terror David found a theme for song, and thus every believer finds even in the terrors of God a subject for holy praise. "Hailstones and coals of fire" are twice mentioned to show how certainly they are in the divine hand, and are the weapons of Heaven's vengeance. Horne remarks that "every thunderstorm should remind us of that exhibition of power and vengeance, which is hereafter to accompany the general resurrection;" may it not also assure us of the real power of him who is our Father and our friend, and tend to assure us of our safety while he fights our battles for us. The prince of the power of the air is soon dislodged when the cherubic chariot is driven through his dominions; therefore let not the legions of hell cause us dismay. He who is with us is greater than all they that be against us.

Verse 14. The lightnings were darted forth as forked arrows upon the hosts of the foe, and speedily "scattered them." Boastful sinners prove to be great cowards when Jehovah enters the lists with them. They despise his words, and are very tongue-valiant, but when it comes to blows they fly apace. The glittering flames, and the fierce bolts of fire "discomfited them." God is never at a loss for weapons. Woe be unto him that contendeth with his Maker! God's arrows never miss their aim; they are feathered with lightning, and barbed with everlasting death. Fly, O sinner, to the rock of refuge before these arrows stick fast in thy soul.

Verse 15. So tremendous was the shock of God's assault in arms that the order of nature was changed, and the bottoms of rivers and seas were laid bare. "The channels of waters was seen;" and the deep cavernous bowels of the earth were upheaved till "the foundations of the world were discovered." What will not Jehovah's "rebuke" do? If "the blast of the breath of thy nostrils," O Lord,

be so terrible, what must thine arm be? Vain are the attempts of men to conceal anything from him whose word unbars the deep, and lifts the doors of earth from their hinges! Vain are all hopes of resistance, for a whisper of his voice makes the whole earth quail in abject terror.

Verse 16. Now comes the rescue. The Author is divine, "He sent;" the work is heavenly, "from above;" the deliverance is marvellous, "He drew me out of many waters." Here David was like another Moses, drawn from the water; and thus are all believers like their Lord, whose baptism in many waters of agony and in his own blood has redeemed us from the wrath to come. Torrents of evil shall not drown the man whose God sitteth upon the floods to restrain their fury.

Verse 17. When we have been rescued, we must take care to ascribe all the glory to God by confessing our own weakness, and remembering the power of the conquered enemy. God's power derives honour from all the incidents of the conflict. Our great spiritual adversary is a "strong enemy" indeed, much too strong for poor, weak creatures like ourselves, but we have been delivered hitherto and shall be even to the end. Our weakness is a reason for divine help; mark the force of the "for" in the text.

Verse 18. It was an ill day, a day of calamity, of which evil foes took cruel advantage, while they used crafty means utterly to ruin him, yet David could say, "but the Lord is my stay." What a blessed but which cuts the Gordian knot, and slays the hundred-headed hydra! There is no fear of deliverance when our stay is in Jehovah.

Verse 19. "He brought me forth also into a large place." After pining awhile in the prison-house Joseph reached the palace, and from the cave of Adullam David mounted to the throne. Sweet is pleasure after pain. Enlargement is the more delightful after a season of pinching poverty and sorrowful confinement. Besieged souls delight in the broad fields of the promise when God drives off the enemy and sets open the gates of the environed city. The Lord does not leave his work half done, for having routed the foe he leads out the captive into liberty. Large indeed is the possession and place of the believer in Jesus, there need be no limit to his peace, for there is no bound to his privilege. "He delivered me, because he delighted in me." Free grace lies at the foundation. Rest assured, if we go deep enough, sovereign grace is the truth which lies at the bottom of every well of mercy. Deep sea fisheries in the ocean of divine bounty always bring the pearls of electing, discriminating love to light. Why Jehovah should delight in us is an answerless question, and a mystery which angels cannot solve; but that he does delight in his beloved is certain, and is the fruitful root of favours as numerous as they are precious. Believer, sit down, and inwardly digest the instructive sentence now before us, and learn to view the uncaused love of God as the cause of all the lovingkindness of which we are the partakers.

Verse 20. "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness." Viewing this psalm as prophetic of the Messiah, these strongly-expressed claims to righteousness are readily understood, for his garments were as white as snow; but considered as the language of David they have perplexed many. Yet the case is clear, and if the words be not strained beyond their original intention, no difficulty need occur. Albeit that the dispensations of divine grace are to the fullest degree sovereign and irrespective of human merit, yet in the dealings of Providence there is often discernible a rule of justice by which the injured are at length avenged, and the righteous ultimately delivered. David's early troubles arose from the wicked malice of envious Saul, who no doubt prosecuted his persecutions under cover of charges brought against the character of "the man after God's own

heart." These charges David declares to have been utterly false, and asserts that he possessed a grace-given righteousness which the Lord had graciously rewarded in defiance of all his calumniators. Before God the man after God's own heart was a humble sinner, but before his slanderers he could with unblushing face speak of the "cleanness of his hands" and the righteousness of his life. He knows little of the sanctifying power of divine grace who is not at the bar of human equity able to plead innocence. There is no self-righteousness in an honest man knowing that he is honest, nor even in his believing that God rewards him in providence because of his honesty, for such is often a most evident matter of fact; but it would be self-righteousness indeed if we transferred such thoughts from the region of providential government into the spiritual kingdom, for there grace reigns not only supreme but sole in the distribution of divine favours. It is not at all an opposition to the doctrine of salvation by grace, and no sort of evidence of a Pharisaic spirit, when a gracious man, having been slandered, stoutly maintains his integrity, and vigorously defends his character. A godly man has a clear conscience, and knows himself to be upright; is he to deny his own consciousness, and to despise the work of the Holy Ghost, by hypocritically making himself out to be worse than he is? A godly man prizes his integrity very highly, or else he would not be a godly man at all; is he to be called proud because he will not readily lose the jewel of a reputable character? A godly man can see that in divine providence uprightness and truth are in the long run sure to bring their own reward; may he not, when he sees that reward bestowed in his own case, praise the Lord for it? Yea rather, must he not show forth the faithfulness and goodness of his God? Read the cluster of expressions in this and the following verses as the song of a good conscience, after having safely outridden a storm of obloquy, persecution, and abuse, and there will be no fear of our upbraiding the writer as one who sets too high a price upon his own moral character.

Verse 21. Here the assertion of purity is repeated, both in a positive and a negative form. There is "I have" and "I have not," both of which must be blended in a truly sanctified life; constraining and restraining grace must each take its share. The words of this verse refer to the saint as a traveler carefully keeping to "the ways of the Lord," and "not wickedly," that is, designedly, wilfully, persistently, defiantly forsaking the ordained pathway in which God favours the pilgrim with his presence. Observe how it is implied in the expression, "and have not wickedly departed from my God," that David lived habitually in communion with God, and knew him to be his own God, whom he might speak of as "my God." God never departs from his people, let them take heed of departing from him.

Verse 22. "For all his judgments were before me." The word, the character, and the actions of God should be evermore before our eyes; we should learn, consider, and reverence them. Men forget what they do not wish to remember, but the excellent attributes of the Most High are objects of the believer's affectionate and delighted admiration. We should keep the image of God so constantly before us that we become in our measure conformed unto it. This inner love to the right must be the main spring of Christian integrity in our public walk. The fountain must be filled with love to holiness, and then the streams which issue from it will be pure and gracious. "I did not put away his statutes from me." To put away the Scriptures from the mind's study is the certain way to prevent their influencing the outward conversation. Backsliders begin with dusty Bibles, and go on to filthy garments.

Verse 23. "I was also upright before him." Sincerity is here claimed; sincerity, such as would be accounted genuine before the bar of God. Whatever evil men might think of him, David felt that he had the good opinion of his God. Moreover, freedom from his one great besetting sin he ventures

also to plead, "I kept myself from mine iniquity." It is a very gracious sign when the most violent parts of our nature have been well guarded. If the weakest link in the chain is not broken, the stronger links will be safe enough. David's impetuous temper might have led him to slay Saul when he had him within his power, but grace enabled him to keep his hands clean of the blood of his enemy; but what a wonder it was, and how well worthy of such a grateful record as these verses afford! It will be a sweet cordial to us one of these days to remember our self-denials, and to bless God that we were able to exhibit them.

Verse 24. God first gives us holiness, and then rewards us for it. We are his workmanship; vessels made unto honour; and when made, the honour is not withheld from the vessel; though, in fact, it all belongs to the Potter upon whose wheel the vessel was fashioned. The prize is awarded to the flower at the show, but the gardener reared it; the child wins the prize from the schoolmaster, but the real honour of his schooling lies with the master, although instead of receiving he gives the reward.

Verse 25. The dealings of the Lord in his own case, cause the grateful singer to remember the usual rule of God's moral government; he is just in his dealings with the sons of men, and metes out to each man according to his measure. "With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright." Every man shall have his meat weighed in his own scales, his corn meted in his own bushel, and his land measured with his own rod. No rule can be more fair, to ungodly men more terrible, or to the generous man more honourable. How would men throw away their light weights, and break their short yards, if they could but believe that they themselves are sure to be in the end the losers by their knavish tricks! Note that even the merciful need mercy; no amount of generosity to the poor, or forgiveness to enemies, can set us beyond the need of mercy. Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner.

Verse 26. "With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward." The sinner's frowardness is sinful and rebellious, and the only sense in which the term can be applied to the Most Holy God is that of judicial opposition and sternness, in which the Judge of all the earth will act at cross-purposes with the offender, and let him see that all things are not to be made subservient to wicked whims and wilful fancies. Calvin very forcibly says, "This brutish and monstrous stupidity in men compels God to invent new modes of expression, and as it were to clothe himself with a different character." There is a similar sentence in Leviticus 26:21-24, where God says, "and if ye walk contrary unto (or perversely with) me, then I will also walk contrary unto (or perversely, or roughly, or at random with) you." As if he had said that their obstinacy and stubbornness would make him on his part forget his accustomed forbearance and gentleness, and cast himself recklessly or at random against them. We see then what the stubborn at length gain by their obduracy; it is this, that God hardens himself still more to break them in pieces, and if they are of stone, he causes them to feel that he has the hardness of iron." The Jewish tradition was that the manna tasted according to each man's mouth; certainly God shows himself to each individual according to his character.

Verse 27. "For thou wilt save the afflicted people." This is a comforting assurance for the poor in spirit whose spiritual griefs admit of no sufficient solace from any other than a divine hand. They cannot save themselves nor can others do it, but God will save them. "But will bring down high looks." Those who look down on others with scorn shall be looked down upon with contempt ere long. The Lord abhors a proud look. What a reason for repentance and humiliation! How much better to be humble than to provoke God to humble us in his wrath! A considerable number of clauses occur in this passage in the future tense; how forcibly are we thus brought to remember that our present joy or

sorrow is not to have so much weight with us as the great and eternal future!

Verse 28. "For thou wilt light my candle." Even the children of the day sometimes need candle-light. In the darkest hour light will arise; a candle shall be lit, it will be comfort such as we may fittingly use without dishonesty—it will be our own candle; yet God himself will find the holy fire with which the candle shall burn; our evidences are our own, but their comfortable light is from above. Candles which are lit by God the devil cannot blow out. All candles are not shining, and so there are some graces which yield no present comfort; but it is well to have candles which may by and by be lit, and it is well to possess graces which may yet afford us cheering evidences. The metaphor of the whole verse is founded upon the dolorous nature of darkness and the delightfulness of light; "truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun;" and even so the presence of the Lord removes all the gloom of sorrow, and enables the believer to rejoice with exceeding great joy. The lighting of the lamp is a cheerful moment in the winter's evening, but the lifting up of the light of God's countenance is happier far. It is said that the poor in Egypt will stint themselves of bread to buy oil for the lamp, so that they may not sit in darkness; we could well afford to part with all earthly comforts if the light of God's love could but constantly gladden our souls.

Verses 29-45. Some repetitions are not vain repetitions. Second thoughts upon God's mercy should be and often are the best. Like wines on the lees our gratitude grows stronger and sweeter as we meditate upon divine goodness. The verses which we have now to consider are the ripe fruit of a thankful spirit; they are apples of gold as to matter, and they are placed in baskets of silver as to their language. They describe the believer's victorious career and his enemies' confusion.

Verse 29. "For by thee have I run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall." Whether we meet the foe in the open field or leap upon them while they lurk behind the battlements of a city, we shall by God's grace defeat them in either case; if they hem us in with living legions, or environ us with stone walls, we shall with equal certainty obtain our liberty. Such feats we have already performed, hewing our way at a run through hosts of difficulties, and scaling impossibilities at a leap. God's warriors may expect to have a taste of every form of fighting, and must by the power of faith determine to quit themselves like men; but it behoves them to be very careful to lay all their laurels at Jehovah's feet, each one of them saying, "by my God" have I wrought this valiant deed. Our spolia optima, the trophies of our conflicts, we hereby dedicate to the God of Battles, and ascribe to him all glory and strength.

Verse 30. "As for God, his way is perfect." Far past all fault and error are God's dealings with his people; all his actions are resplendent with justice, truth, tenderness, mercy, and holiness. Every way of God is complete in itself, and all his ways put together are matchless in harmony and goodness. Is it not very consolatory to believe that he who has begun to bless us will perfect his work, for all his ways are "perfect." Nor must the divine "word" be without its song of praise. "The word of the Lord is tried," like silver refined in the furnace. The doctrines are glorious, the precepts are pure, the promises are faithful, and the whole revelation is superlatively full of grace and truth. David had tried it, thousands have tried it, we have tried it, and it has never failed. It was meet that when way and word had been extolled, the Lord himself should be magnified; hence it is added, "He is a buckler to all those that trust in him." No armour of proof or shield of brass so well secures the warrior as the covenant God of Israel protects his warring people. He himself is the buckler of trustful ones; what a thought is this! What peace may every trusting soul enjoy!

Verse 31. Having mentioned his God, the psalmist's heart burns, and his words sparkle; he challenges heaven and earth to find another being worthy of adoration or trust in comparison with Jehovah. His God, as Matthew Henry says, is a None-such. The idols of the heathen he scorns to mention, snuffing them all out as mere nothings when Deity is spoken of. "Who is God save the Lord?" Who else creates, sustains, foresees, and overrules? Who but he is perfect in every attribute, and glorious in every act? To whom but Jehovah should creatures bow? Who else can claim their service and their love? "Who is a rock save our God?" Where can lasting hopes be fixed? Where can the soul find rest? Where is stability to be found? Where is strength to be discovered? Surely in the Lord Jehovah alone can we find rest and refuge.

Verse 32. Surveying all the armour in which he fought and conquered, the joyful victor praises the Lord for every part of the panoply. The girdle of his loins earns the first stanza: "It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect." Girt about the loins with power from heaven, the warrior was filled with vigour, far above all created might; and, whereas, without this wondrous belt he would have been feeble and effeminate, with relaxed energies and scattered forces, he felt himself, when braced with the girdle of truth, to be compact in purpose, courageous in daring, and concentrated in power; so that his course was a complete success, so undisturbed by disastrous defeat as to be called "perfect." Have we been made more than conquerors over sin, and has our life hitherto been such as becometh the gospel? Then let us ascribe all the glory to him who girt us with his own inexhaustible strength, that we might be unconquered in battle and unwearied in pilgrimage.

Verse 33. The conqueror's feet had been shod by a divine hand, and the next note must, therefore, refer to them. "He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places." Pursuing his foes the warrior had been swift of foot as a young roe, but, instead of taking pleasure in the legs of a man, he ascribes the boon of swiftness to the Lord alone. When our thoughts are nimble, and our spirits rapid, like the chariots of Amminadib, let us not forget that our best Beloved's hand has given us the choice favour. Climbing into impregnable fortresses, David had been preserved from slipping, and made to stand where scarce the wild goat can find a footing; herein was preserving mercy manifested. We, too, have had our high places of honour, service, temptation, and danger, but hitherto we have been kept from falling. Bring hither the harp, and let us emulate the psalmist's joyful thanksgiving; had we fallen, our wailings must have been terrible; since we have stood, let our gratitude be fervent.

Verse 34. "He teacheth my hands to war." Martial prowess and skill in the use of weapons are gratefully acknowledged to be the result of divine teaching; no sacrifice is offered at the shrine of self in praise of natural dexterity, or acquired skilfulness; but, regarding all warlike prowess as a gift of heavenly favour, thankfulness is presented to the Giver. The Holy Spirit is the great Drillmaster of heavenly soldiers. "So that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms." A bow of brass is probably meant, and these bows could scarcely be bent by the arms alone, the archer had to gain the assistance of his foot; it was, therefore, a great feat of strength to bend the bow, so far as even to snap it in halves. This was meant of the enemies' bow, which he not only snatched from his grasp, but rendered useless by breaking it in pieces. Jesus not only destroyed the fiery suggestions of Satan, but he broke his arguments with which he shot them, by using Holy Scripture against him; by the same means we may win a like triumph, breaking the bow and cutting the spear in sunder by the sharp edge of revealed truth. Probably David had by nature a vigorous bodily frame; but it is even more likely that, like Samson, he was at times clothed with more than common strength; at any rate, he ascribes the honour of his feats entirely to his God. Let us never wickedly rob the Lord of his due, but

faithfully give unto him the glory which is due unto his name.

Verse 35. "Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation." Above all we must take the shield of faith, for nothing else can quench Satan's fiery darts; this shield is of celestial workmanship, and is in all cases a direct gift from God himself; it is the channel, the sign, the guarantee, and the earnest of perfect salvation. "Thy right hand hath holden me up." Secret support is administered to us by the preserving grace of God, and at the same time Providence kindly yields us manifest aid. We are such babes that we cannot stand alone; but when the Lord's right hand upholds us, we are like brazen pillars which cannot be moved. "Thy gentleness hath made me great." There are several readings of this sentence. The word is capable of being translated, "thy goodness hath made me great." David saw much of benevolence in God's action towards him, and he gratefully ascribed all his greatness not to his own goodness, but to the goodness of God. "Thy providence" is another reading, which is indeed nothing more than goodness in action. Goodness is the bud of which providence is the flower; or goodness is the seed of which providence is the harvest. Some render it, "thy help," which is but another word for providence; providence being the firm ally of the saints, aiding them in the service of their Lord. Certain learned annotators tell us that the text means, "thy humility hath made me great." "Thy condescension" may, perhaps, serve as a comprehensive reading, combining the ideas which we have already mentioned, as well as that of humility. It is God's making himself little which is the cause of our being made great. We are so little that if God should manifest his greatness without condescension, we should be trampled under his feet; but God, who must stoop to view the skies and bow to see what angels do, looks to the lowly and contrite, and makes them great. While these are the translations which have been given to the adopted text of the original, we find that there are other readings altogether; as for instance, the Septuagint, which reads, "thy discipline"—thy fatherly correction—"hath made me great;" while the Chaldee paraphrase reads, "thy word hath increased me." Still the idea is the same. David ascribes all his own greatness to the condescending goodness and graciousness of his Father in heaven. Let us all feel this sentiment in our own hearts, and confess that whatever of goodness or greatness God may have put upon us, we must cast our crowns at his feet and cry, "thy gentleness hath made me great."

Verse 36. "Thou hast enlarged my steps." A smooth pathway leading to spacious possessions and camping-grounds had been opened up for him. Instead of threading the narrow mountain paths, and hiding in the cracks and corners of caverns, he was able to traverse the plains and dwell under his own vine and fig tree. It is no small mercy to be brought into full Christian liberty and enlargement, but it is a greater favour still to be enabled to walk worthily in such liberty, not being permitted to slip with our feet. To stand upon the rocks of affliction is the result of gracious upholding, but that aid is quite as much needed in the luxurious plains of prosperity.

Verse 37. The preservation of the saints bodes ill for their adversaries. The Amelekites thought themselves clear away with their booty, but when David's God guided him in the pursuit, they were soon overtaken and cut in pieces. When God is with us sins and sorrows flee, and all forms of evil are "consumed" before the power of grace. What a noble picture this and the following verses present to us of the victories of our glorious Lord Jesus!

Verse 38. The destruction of our spiritual enemies is complete. We may exult over sin, death, and hell, as disarmed and disabled for us by our conquering Lord; may he graciously give them a like defeat within us.

Verses 39 and 40. It is impossible to be too frequent in the duty of ascribing all our victories to the God of our salvation. It is true that we have to wrestle with our spiritual antagonists, but the triumph is far more the Lord's than ours. We must not boast like the ambitious votaries of vainglory, but we may exult as the willing and believing instruments in the Lord's hand of accomplishing his great designs.

Verse 41. "They cried, but there was none to save them; even unto the Lord, but he answered them not." Prayer is so notable a weapon that even the wicked will take to it to in their fits of desperation. Bad men have appealed to God against God's own servants, but all in vain; the kingdom of heaven is not divided, and God never succours his foes at the expense of his friends. There are prayers to God which are no better than blasphemy, which bring no comfortable reply, but rather provoke the Lord to greater wrath. Shall I ask a man to wound or slay his own child to gratify my malice? Would he not resent the insult against his humanity? How much less will Jehovah regard the cruel desires of the enemies of the church, who dare to offer their prayers for its destruction, calling its existence schism, and its doctrine heresy!

Verse 42. The defeat of the nations who fought with King David was so utter and complete that they were like powders pounded in a mortar; their power was broken into fragments and they became as weak as dust before the wind, and as mean as the mire of the roads. Thus powerless and base are the enemies of God now become through the victory of the Son of David upon the cross. Arise, O my soul, and meet thine enemies, for they have sustained a deadly blow, and will fall before thy bold advance.

"Hell and my sins resist my course,
But hell and sin are vanquish'd foes
My Jesus nail'd them to his cross,
And sung the triumph when he rose."

Verse 43. "Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people." Internal strife is very hard to deal with. A civil war is war in its most miserable form; it is a subject for warmest gratitude when concord rules within. Our poet praises Jehovah for the union and peace which smiled in his dominions, and if we have peace in the three kingdoms of our spirit, soul, and body, we are in duty bound to give Jehovah a song. Unity in a church should assuredly excite like gratitude. "Thou hast made me the head of the heathen; a people whom I have not known shall serve me." The neighbouring nations yielded to the sway of Judah's prince. Oh, when shall all lands adore King Jesus, and serve him with holy joy? Surely there is far more of Jesus than of David here. Missionaries may derive rich encouragement from the positive declaration that heathen lands shall own the Headship of the Crucified.

Verse 44. "As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me." Thus readily did the once struggling captain become a far-renowned victor, and thus easy shall be our triumphs. We prefer, however, to speak of Jesus. In many cases the gospel is speedily received by hearts apparently unprepared for it. Those who have never heard the gospel before, have been charmed by its first message, and yielded obedience to it; while others, alas! who are accustomed to its joyful sound, are rather hardened than softened by its teachings. The grace of God sometimes runs like fire among the stubble, and a nation is born in a day. "Love at first sight" is no uncommon thing when Jesus is the wooer. He can write Caesar's message without boasting, Veni, vidi, vici; his gospel is in some cases no sooner heard than believed. What inducements to spread abroad the doctrine of the cross!

Verse 45. "The strangers shall fade away." Like sear leaves or blasted trees our foes and Christ's foes shall find no sap and stamina remaining in them. Those who are strangers to Jesus are strangers to all lasting happiness; those must soon fade who refuse to be watered from the river of life. "And be afraid out of their close places." Out of their mountain fastnesses the heathen crept in fear to own allegiance to Israel's king, and even so, from the castles of self-confidence and the dens of carnal security, poor sinners come bending before the Saviour, Christ the Lord. Our sins which have entrenched themselves in our flesh and blood as in impregnable forts, shall yet be driven forth by the sanctifying energy of the Holy Spirit, and we shall serve the Lord in singleness of heart. Thus with remembrance of conquests in the past, and with glad anticipations of victories yet to come, the sweet singer closes the description, and returns to exercise of more direct adoration of his gracious God.

Verse 46. "The Lord liveth." Possessing underived, essential, independent and eternal life. We serve no inanimate, imaginary, or dying God. He only hath immortality. Like loyal subjects let us cry, Live on, O God. Long live the King of kings. By thine immortality do we dedicate ourselves afresh to thee. As the Lord our God liveth so would we live to him. "And blessed be my rock." He is the ground of our hope, and let him be the subject of our praise. Our hearts bless the Lord, with holy love extolling him.

Jehovah lives, my rock be blessed!
Praised be the God who gives me rest!

"Let the God of my salvation be exalted." As our Saviour, the Lord should more than ever be glorified. We should publish abroad the story of the covenant and the cross, the Father's election, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's regeneration. He who rescues us from deserved ruin should be very dear to us. In heaven they sing "Unto him that loved us and washed us in his blood;" the like music should be common in the assemblies of the saints below.

Verse 47. "It is God that avengeth me, and subdueth the people under me." To rejoice in personal revenge is unhallowed and evil, but David viewed himself as the instrument of vengeance upon the enemies of God and his people, and had he not rejoiced in the success accorded to him he would have been worthy of censure. That sinners perish is in itself a painful consideration, but that the Lord's law is avenged upon those who break it is to the devout mind a theme for thankfulness. We must, however, always remember that vengeance is never ours, vengeance belongeth unto the Lord, and he is so just and withal so longsuffering in the exercise of it, that we may safely leave its administration in his hands.

Verse 48. From all enemies, and especially from one who was pre-eminent in violence, the Lord's anointed was preserved, and at the last over the head of Saul and all other adversaries he reigned in honour. The like end awaits every saint, because Jesus who stooped to be lightly esteemed among men is now made to sit far above all principalities and powers.

Verse 49. Paul cites this verse (Romans 15:9): "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name." This is clear evidence that David's Lord is here, but David is here too, and is to be viewed as an example of a holy soul making its boast in God even in the presence of ungodly men. Who are the despisers of God that we should stop our mouths for them? We will sing to our God whether they like it or no, and

force upon them the knowledge of his goodness. Too much politeness to traitors may be treason to our King.

Verse 50. This is the winding up verse into which the writer throws a fulness of expression, indicating the most rapturous delight of gratitude. "Great deliverance." The word "deliverance" is plural, to show the variety and completeness of the salvation; the adjective "great" is well placed if we consider from what, to what, and how we are saved. All this mercy is given to us in our King, the Lord's Anointed, and those are blessed indeed who as his seed may expect mercy to be built up for evermore. The Lord was faithful to the literal David, and he will not break his covenant with the spiritual David, for that would far more involve the honour of his crown and character.

The Psalm concludes in the same loving spirit which shone upon its commencement; happy are they who can sing on from love to love, even as the pilgrims marched from strength to strength.

Psalm 19

Verse 1. "The heavens declare the glory of God." The book of nature has three leaves, heaven, earth, and sea, of which heaven is the first and the most glorious, and by its aid we are able to see the beauties of the other two. Any book without its first page would be sadly imperfect, and especially the great Natural Bible, since its first pages, the sun, moon, and stars, supply light to the rest of the volume, and are thus the keys, without which the writing which follows would be dark and undiscerned. Man walking erect was evidently made to scan the skies, and he who begins to read creation by studying the stars begins the book at the right place.

The heavens are plural for their variety, comprising the watery heavens with their clouds of countless forms, the aerial heavens with their calms and tempests, the solar heavens with all the glories of the day, and the starry heavens with all the marvels of the night; what the Heaven of heavens must be hath not entered into the heart of man, but there in chief all things are telling the glory of God. Any part of creation has more instruction in it than human mind will ever exhaust, but the celestial realm is peculiarly rich in spiritual lore. The heavens declare, or are declaring, for the continuance of their testimony is intended by the participles employed; every moment God's existence, power, wisdom and goodness, are being sounded abroad by the heavenly heralds which shine upon us from above. He who would guess at divine sublimity should gaze upward into the starry vault; he who would imagine infinity must peer into the boundless expanse; he who desires to see divine wisdom should consider the balancing of the orbs; he who would know divine fidelity must mark the regularity of the planetary motions; and he who would attain some conceptions of divine power, greatness, and majesty, must estimate the forces of attraction, the magnitude of the fixed stars, and the brightness of the whole celestial train. It is not merely glory that the heavens declare, but the "glory of God," for they deliver to us such unanswerable arguments for a conscious, intelligent, planning, controlling, and presiding Creator, that no unprejudiced person can remain unconvinced by them. The testimony given by the heavens is no mere hint, but a plain, unmistakable declaration; and it is a declaration of the most constant and abiding kind. Yet for all this, to what avail is the loudest declaration to a deaf man, or the clearest showing to one spiritually blind? God the Holy Ghost must illuminate us, or all the suns in the milky way never will.

"The firmament sheweth his handy-work;" not handy in the vulgar use of that term, but hand-work.

The expanse is full of the works of the Lord's skilful, creating hands; hands being attributed to the great creating Spirit to set forth his care and workmanlike action, and to meet the poor comprehension of mortals. It is humbling to find that even when the most devout and elevated minds are desirous to express their loftiest thoughts of God, they must use words and metaphors drawn

from the earth. We are children, and must each confess, "I think as a child, I speak as a child." In the expanse above us God flies, as it were, his starry flag to show that the King is at home, and hangs out his escutcheon that atheists may see how he despises their denunciations of him. He who looks up to the firmament and then writes himself down an atheist, brands himself at the same moment as an idiot or a liar. Strange is it that some who love God are yet afraid to study the God-declaring book of nature; the mock-spirituality of some believers, who are too heavenly to consider the heavens, has given colour to the vaunts of infidels that nature contradicts revelation. The wisest of men are those who with pious eagerness trace the goings forth of Jehovah as well in creation as in grace; only the foolish have any fears lest the honest study of the one should injure our faith in the other. Dr. M'Cosh has well said, "We have often mourned over the attempts made to set the works of God against the Word of God, and thereby excite, propagate, and perpetuate jealousies fitted to separate parties that ought to live in closest union. In particular, we have always regretted that endeavours should have been made to depreciate nature with a view of exalting revelation; it has always appeared to us to be nothing else than the degrading of one part of God's work in the hope thereby of exalting and recommending another. Let not science and religion be reckoned as opposing citadels, frowning defiance upon each other, and their troops brandishing their armour in hostile attitude. They have too many common foes, if they would but think of it, in ignorance and prejudice, in passion and vice, under all their forms, to admit of their lawfully wasting their strength in a useless warfare with each other. Science has a foundation, and so has religion; let them unite their foundations, and the basis will be broader, and they will be two compartments of one great fabric reared to the glory of God. Let one be the outer and the other the inner court. In the one, let all look, and admire and adore; and in the other, let those who have faith kneel, and pray, and praise. Let the one be the sanctuary where human learning may present its richest incense as an offering to God, and the other the holiest of all, separated from it by a veil now rent in twain, and in which, on a blood-sprinkled mercy-seat, we pour out the love of a reconciled heart, and hear the oracles of the living God."

Verse 2. "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." As if one day took up the story where the other left it, and each night passed over the wondrous tale to the next. The original has in it the thought of pouring out or welling over, with speech; as though days and nights were but as a fountain flowing evermore with Jehovah's praise. Oh to drink often at the celestial well, and learn to utter the glory of God! The witnesses above cannot be slain or silenced; from their elevated seats they constantly preach the knowledge of God, unawed and unbiased by the judgment of men. Even the changes of alternating night and day are mutely eloquent, and light and shade equally reveal the Invisible One; let the vicissitudes of our circumstances do the same, and while we bless the God of our days of joy, let us also extol him who giveth "songs in the night."

The lesson of day and night is one which it were well if all men learned. It should be among our day-thoughts and night-thoughts, to remember the flight of time, the changeful character of earthly things, the brevity both of joy and sorrow, the preciousness of life, our utter powerlessness to recall the hours once flown, and the irresistible approach of eternity. Day bids us labour, night reminds us to prepare for our last home; day bids us work for God, and night invites us to rest in him; day bids us look for endless day, and night warns us to escape from everlasting night.

Verse 3. "There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard." Every man may hear the voices of the stars. Many are the languages of terrestrials, to celestials there is but one, and that one may be understood by every willing mind. The lowest heathen are without excuse, if they do not discover the invisible things of God in the works which he has made. Sun, moon, and stars are God's traveling preachers; they are apostles upon their journey confirming those who regard the Lord, and

judges on circuit condemning those who worship idols.

The margin gives us another rendering, which is more literal, and involves less repetition; "no speech, no words, their voice is not heard;" that is to say, their teaching is not addressed to the ear, and is not uttered in articulate sounds; it is pictorial, and directed to the eye and heart; it touches not the sense by which faith comes, for faith cometh by hearing. Jesus Christ is called the Word, for he is a far more distinct display of Godhead than all the heavens can afford; they are, after all, but dumb instructors; neither star nor sun can arrive at a word, but Jesus is the express image of Jehovah's person, and his name is the Word of God.

Verse 4. "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." Although the heavenly bodies move in solemn silence, yet in reason's ear they utter precious teachings. They give forth no literal words, but yet their instruction is clear enough to be so described. Horne says that the phrase employed indicates a language of signs, and thus we are told that the heavens speak by their significant actions and operations. Nature's words are like those of the deaf and dumb, but grace tells us plainly of the Father. By their line is probably meant the measure of their domain which, together with their testimony, has gone out to the utmost end of the habitable earth. No man living beneath the copes of heaven dwells beyond the bounds of the diocese of God's Court-preachers; it is easy to escape from the light of ministers, who are as stars in the right hand of the Son of Man; but even then men, with a conscience yet unseared, will find a Nathan to accuse them, a Jonah to warn them, and an Elijah to threaten them in the silent stars of night. To gracious souls the voices of the heavens are more influential far, they feel the sweet influences of the Pleiades, and are drawn towards their Father God by the bright bands of Orion.

"In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun." In the heavens the sun encamps, and marches like a mighty monarch on his glorious way. He has no fixed abode, but as a traveler pitches and removes his tent, a tent which will soon be taken down and rolled together as a scroll. As the royal pavilion stood in the centre of the host, so the sun in his place appears like a king in the midst of attendant stars.

Verse 5. "Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber." A bridegroom comes forth sumptuously apparelled, his face beaming with a joy which he imparts to all around; such, but with a mighty emphasis, is the rising Sun. "And rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race." As a champion girt for running cheerfully addresses himself to the race, so does the sun speed onward with matchless regularity and unwearying swiftness in his appointed orbit. It is but mere play to him; there are no signs of effort, flagging, or exhaustion. No other creature yields such joy to the earth as her bridegroom the sun; and none, whether they be horse or eagle, can for an instant compare in swiftness with that heavenly champion. But all his glory is but the glory of God; even the sun shines in light borrowed from the Great Father of Lights.

"Thou sun, of this great world both eye and soul,
Acknowledge Him thy greater; sound his praise
Both when thou climb'st, and when high noon hast gained,
And when thou fall'st."

Verse 6. "His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it." He bears his light to the boundaries of the solar heavens, traversing the zodiac with steady motion, denying his light to none who dwell within his range. "And there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." Above, beneath, around, the heat of the sun exercises an influence. The bowels of the earth are stored with

the ancient produce of the solar rays, and even yet earth's inmost caverns feel their power. Where light is shut out, yet heat and other more subtle influences find their way.

There is no doubt a parallel intended to be drawn between the heaven of grace and the heaven of nature. God's way of grace is sublime and broad, and full of his glory; in all its displays it is to be admired and studied with diligence; both its lights and its shades are instructive; it has been proclaimed, in a measure, to every people, and in due time shall be yet more completely published to the ends of the earth. Jesus, like a sun, dwells in the midst of revelation, tabernacling among men in all his brightness; rejoicing, as the Bridegroom of his church, to reveal himself to men; and, like a champion, to win unto himself renown. He makes a circuit of mercy, blessing the remotest corners of the earth; and there are no seeking souls, however degraded and depraved, who shall be denied the comfortable warmth and benediction of his love—even death shall feel the power of his presence, and resign the bodies of the saints, and this fallen earth shall be restored to its pristine glory.

In the three following verses (7, 8, 9) we have a brief but instructive hexapla containing six descriptive titles of the word, six characteristic qualities mentioned and six divine effects declared. Names, nature, and effect are well set forth.

Verse 7. "The law of the Lord is perfect;" by which he means not merely the law of Moses but the doctrine of God, the whole run and rule of sacred Writ. The doctrine revealed by God he declares to be perfect, and yet David had but a very small part of the Scriptures, and if a fragment, and that the darkest and most historical portion, be perfect, what must the entire volume be? How more than perfect is the book which contains the clearest possible display of divine love, and gives us an open vision of redeeming grace. The gospel is a complete scheme or law of gracious salvation, presenting to the needy sinner everything that his terrible necessities can possibly demand. There are no redundancies and no omissions in the Word of God, and in the plan of grace; why then do men try to paint this lily and gild this refined gold? The gospel is perfect in all its parts, and perfect as a whole: it is a crime to add to it, treason to alter it, and felony to take from it.

"Converting the soul." Making the man to be returned or restored to the place from which sin had cast him. The practical effect of the Word of God is to turn the man to himself, to his God, and to holiness; and the turn or conversion is not outward alone, "the soul" is moved and renewed. The great means of the conversion of sinners is the Word of God, and the more closely we keep to it in our ministry the more likely we are to be successful. It is God's Word rather than man's comment on God's Word which is made mighty with souls. When the law drives and the gospel draws, the action is different but the end is one, for by God's Spirit the soul is made to yield, and cries, "Turn me, and I shall be turned." Try men's depraved nature with philosophy and reasoning, and it laughs your efforts to scorn, but the Word of God soon works a transformation.

"The testimony of the Lord is sure." God bears his testimony against sin, and on behalf of righteousness; he testifies of our fall and of our restoration; this testimony is plain, decided, and infallible, and is to be accepted as sure. God's witness in his Word is so sure that we may draw solid comfort from it both for time and eternity, and so sure that no attacks made upon it however fierce or subtle can ever weaken its force. What a blessing that in a world of uncertainties we have something sure to rest upon! We hasten from the quicksands of human speculations to the terra firma of Divine Revelation.

"Making wise the simple." Humble, candid, teachable minds receive the word, and are made wise unto salvation. Things hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes. The persuadable grow wise, but the cavillers continue fools. As a law or plan the Word of God converts, and then as a testimony it instructs; it is not enough for us to be converts, we must continue to be disciples; and if

we have felt the power of truth, we must go on to prove its certainty by experience. The perfection of the gospel converts, but its sureness edifies; if we would be edified it becomes us not to stagger at the promise through unbelief, for a doubted gospel cannot make us wise, but truth of which we are assured will be our establishment.

Verse 8. "The statutes of the Lord are right." His precepts and decrees are founded in righteousness, and are such as are right or fitted to the right reason of man. As a physician gives the right medicine, and a counsellor the right advice, so does the Book of God. "Rejoicing the heart." Mark the progress; he who was converted was next made wise and is now made happy; that truth which makes the heart right then gives joy to the right heart. Free-grace brings heart-joy. Earthborn mirth dwells on the lip, and flushes the bodily powers; but heavenly delights satisfy the inner nature, and fill the mental faculties to the brim. There is no cordial of comfort like that which is poured from the bottle of Scripture.

"Retire and read thy Bible to be gay."

"The commandment of the Lord is pure." No mixture of error defiles it, no stain of sin pollutes it; it is the unadulterated milk, the undiluted wine. "Enlightening the eyes," purging away by its own purity the earthly grossness which mars the intellectual discernment: whether the eye be dim with sorrow or with sin, the Scripture is a skilful oculist, and makes the eye clear and bright. Look at the sun and it puts out your eyes, look at the more than sunlight of Revelation and it enlightens them; the purity of snow causes snow-blindness to the Alpine traveller, but the purity of God's truth has the contrary effect, and cures the natural blindness of the soul. It is well again to observe the gradation; the convert becomes a disciple and next a rejoicing soul, he now obtains a discerning eye and as a spiritual man discerneth all things, though he himself is discerned of no man.

Verse 9. "The fear of the Lord is clean." The doctrine of truth is here described by its spiritual effect, viz., inward piety, or the fear of the Lord; this is clean in itself, and cleanses out the love of sin, sanctifying the heart in which it reigns. Mr. Godly-fear is never satisfied till every street, lane, and alley, yea, and every house and every corner of the town of Mansoul is clean rid of the Diablolonians who lurk therein. "Enduring for ever." Filth brings decay, but cleanness is the great foe of corruption. The grace of God in the heart being a pure principle, is also an abiding and incorruptible principle, which may be crushed for a time, but cannot be utterly destroyed. Both in the Word and in the heart, when the Lord writes, he says with Pilate, "What I have written, I have written;" he will make no erasures himself, much less suffer others to do so. The revealed will of God is never changed; even Jesus came not to destroy but to fulfil, and even the ceremonial law was only changed as to its shadow, the substance intended by it is eternal. When the governments of nations are shaken with revolution, and ancient constitutions are being repealed, it is comforting to know that the throne of God is unshaken, and his law unaltered.

"The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether;"—jointly and severally the words of the Lord are true; that which is good in detail is excellent in the mass; no exception may be taken to a single clause separately, or to the book as a whole. God's judgments, all of them together, or each of them apart, are manifestly just, and need no laborious excuses to justify them. The judicial decisions of Jehovah, as revealed in the law, or illustrated in the history of his providence, are truth itself, and commend themselves to every truthful mind; not only is their power invincible, but their justice is unimpeachable.

Verse 10. "More to be desired are they than fine gold, yea, than much fine gold." Bible truth is enriching to the soul in the highest degree; the metaphor is one which gathers force as it is brought out;—gold—fine gold—much fine gold; it is good, better, best, and therefore it is not only to be desired with a miser's avidity, but with more than that. As spiritual treasure is more noble than mere material wealth, so should it be desired and sought after with greater eagerness. Men speak of solid gold, but what is so solid as solid truth? For love of gold pleasure is forsworn, ease renounced, and life endangered; shall we not be ready to do as much for love of truth? "Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Trapp says, "Old people are all for profit, the young for pleasure; here's gold for the one, yea, the finest gold in great quantity; here's honey for the other, yea, live honey dropping from the comb." The pleasures arising from a right understanding of the divine testimonies are of the most delightful order; earthly enjoyments are utterly contemptible, if compared with them. The sweetest joys, yea, the sweetest of the sweetest falls to his portion who has God's truth to be his heritage.

Verse 11. "Moreover by them is thy servant warned." We are warned by the Word both of our duty, our danger, and our remedy. On the sea of life there would be many more wrecks, if it were not for the divine storm-signals, which give to the watchful a timely warning. The Bible should be our Mentor, our Monitor, our Memento Mori, our Remembrancer, and the Keeper of our Conscience. Alas, that so few men will take the warning so graciously given; none but servants of God will do so, for they alone regard their Master's will. Servants of God not only find his service delightful in itself, but they receive good recompense; "In keeping of them there is great reward." There is a wage, and a great one; though we earn no wages of debt, we win great wages of grace. Saints may be losers for a time, but they shall be glorious gainers in the long run, and even now a quiet conscience is in itself no slender reward for obedience. He who wears the herb called heart's-ease in his bosom is truly blessed. However, the main reward is yet to come, and the word here used hints as much, for it signifies the heel, as if the reward would come to us at the end of life when the work was done;—not while the labour was in hand, but when it was gone and we could see the heel of it. Oh the glory yet to be revealed! It is enough to make a man faint for joy at the prospect of it. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Then shall we know the value of the Scriptures when we swim in that sea of unutterable delight to which their streams will bear us, if we commit ourselves to them.

Verse 12. "Who can understand his errors?" A question which is its own answer. It rather requires a note of exclamation than of interrogation. By the law is the knowledge of sin, and in the presence of divine truth, the psalmist marvels at the number and heinousness of his sins. He best knows himself who best knows the Word, but even such an one will be in a maze of wonder as to what he does not know, rather than on the mount of congratulation as to what he does know. We have heard of a comedy of errors, but to a good man this is more like a tragedy. Many books have a few lines of errata at the end, but our errata might well be as large as the volume if we could but have sense enough to see them. Augustine wrote in his older days a series of Retractations; ours might make a library if we had enough grace to be convinced of our mistakes and to confess them. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." Thou canst mark in me faults entirely hidden from myself. It were hopeless to expect to see all my spots; therefore, O Lord, wash away in the atoning blood even those sins which my conscience has been unable to detect. Secret sins, like private conspirators, must be hunted out, or they may do deadly mischief; it is well to be much in prayer concerning them. In the Lateran Council of the Church of Rome, a decree was passed that every true believer must confess his sins, all of them, once a year to the priest, and they affixed to it this declaration, that there is no hope of pardon but in complying with that decree. What can equal the absurdity of such a decree as that? Do

they suppose that they can tell their sins as easily as they can count their fingers? Why, if we could receive pardon for all our sins by telling every sin we have committed in one hour, there is not one of us who would be able to enter heaven, since, besides the sins that are known to us and that we may be able to confess, there are a vast mass of sins, which are as truly sins as those which we lament, but which are secret, and come not beneath our eye. If we had eyes like those of God, we should think very differently of ourselves. The transgressions which we see and confess are but like the farmer's small samples which he brings to market, when he has left his granary full at home. We have but a very few sins which we can observe and detect, compared with those which are hidden from ourselves and unseen by our fellow-creatures.

Verse 13. "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me." This earnest and humble prayer teaches us that saints may fall into the worst of sins unless restrained by grace, and that therefore they must watch and pray lest they enter into temptation. There is a natural proneness to sin in the best of men, and they must be held back as a horse is held back by the bit or they will run into it. Presumptuous sins are peculiarly dangerous. All sins are great sins, but yet some sins are greater than others. Every sin has in it the very venom of rebellion, and is full of the essential marrow of traitorous rejection of God; but there be some sins which have in them a greater development of the essential mischief of rebellion, and which wear upon their faces more of the brazen pride which defies the Most High. It is wrong to suppose that because all sins will condemn us, that therefore one sin is not greater than another. The fact is, that while all transgression is a greatly grievous and sinful thing, yet there are some transgressions which have a deeper shade of blackness, and a more double scarlet-dyed hue of criminality than others. The presumptuous sins of our text are the chief and worst of all sins; they rank head and foremost in the list of iniquities. It is remarkable that though an atonement was provided under the Jewish law for every kind of sin, there was this one exception: "But the soul that sinneth presumptuously shall have no atonement; it shall be cut off from the midst of the people." And now under the Christian dispensation, although in the sacrifice of our blessed Lord there is a great and precious atonement for presumptuous sins, whereby sinners who have erred in this manner are made clean, yet without doubt, presumptuous sinners, dying without pardon, must expect to receive a double portion of the wrath of God, and a more terrible portion of eternal punishment in the pit that is digged for the wicked. For this reason is David so anxious that he may never come under the reigning power of these giant evils. "Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." He shudders at the thought of the unpardonable sin. Secret sin is a stepping-stone to presumptuous sin, and that is the vestibule of "the sin which is unto death." He who is not wilful in his sin, will be in a fair way to be innocent so far as poor sinful man can be; but he who tempts the devil to tempt him is in a path which will lead him from bad to worse, and from the worse to the worst.

Verse 14. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my Redeemer." A sweet prayer, and so spiritual that it is almost as commonly used in Christian worship as the apostolic benediction. Words of the mouth are mockery if the heart does not meditate; the shell is nothing without the kernel; but both together are useless unless accepted; and even if accepted by man, it is all vanity if not acceptable in the sight of God. We must in prayer view Jehovah as our strength enabling, and our Redeemer saving, or we shall not pray aright, and it is well to feel our personal interest so as to use the word my, or our prayers will be hindered. Our near Kinsman's name, our Goel or Redeemer, makes a blessed ending to the Psalm; it began with the heavens, but it ends with him whose glory fills heaven and earth. Blessed Kinsman, give us now to meditate acceptably upon thy most sweet love and tenderness.

Psalm 20

Verse 1. "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble." All loyal subjects pray for their king, and most certainly citizens of Zion have good cause to pray for the Prince of Peace. In times of conflict loving subjects redouble their pleas, and surely in the sorrows of our Lord his church could not but be in earnest. All the Saviour's days were days of trouble, and he also made them days of prayer; the church joins her intercession with her Lord's, and pleads that he may be heard in his cries and tears. The agony in the garden was especially a gloomy hour, but he was heard in that he feared. He knew that his Father heard him always, yet in that troublous hour no reply came until thrice he had fallen on his face in the garden; then sufficient strength was given in answer to prayer, and he rose a victor from the conflict. On the cross also his prayer was not unheard, for in the twenty-second Psalm he tells us, "thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns." The church in this verse implies that her Lord would be himself much given to prayer; in this he is our example, teaching us that if we are to receive any advantage from the prayers of others, we must first pray for ourselves. What a mercy that we may pray in the day of trouble, and what a still more blessed privilege that no trouble can prevent the Lord from hearing us! Troubles roar like thunder, but the believer's voice will be heard above the storm. O Jesus, when thou pleadest for us in our hour of trouble, the Lord Jehovah will hear thee. This is a most refreshing confidence, and it may be indulged in without fear.

"The name of the God of Jacob defend thee;" or, as some read it, "set thee in a high place." By "the name" is meant the revealed character and Word of God; we are not to worship "the unknown God," but we should seek to know the covenant God of Jacob, who has been pleased to reveal his name and attributes to his people. There may be much in a royal name, or a learned name, or a venerable name, but it will be a theme for heavenly scholarship to discover all that is contained in the divine name. The glorious power of God defended and preserved the Lord Jesus through the battle of his life and death, and exalted him above all his enemies. His warfare is now accomplished in his own proper person, but in his mystical body, the church, he is still beset with dangers, and only the eternal arm of our God in covenant can defend the soldiers of the cross, and set them on high out of the reach of their foes. The day of trouble is not over, the pleading Saviour is not silent, and the name of the God of Israel is still the defence of the faithful. The name, "God of Jacob," is suggestive; Jacob had his day of trouble, he wrestled, was heard, was defended, and in due time was set on high, and his God is our God still, the same God to all his wrestling Jacobs. The whole verse is a very fitting benediction to be pronounced by a gracious heart over a child, a friend, or a minister, in prospect of trial; it includes both temporal and spiritual protection, and directs the mind to the great source of all good. How delightful to believe that our heavenly Father has pronounced it upon our favoured heads!

Verse 2. "Send thee help from the sanctuary." Out of heaven's sanctuary came the angel to strengthen our Lord, and from the precious remembrance of God's doings in his sanctuary our Lord refreshed himself when on the tree. There is no help like that which is of God's sending, and no deliverance like that which comes out of his sanctuary. The sanctuary to us is the person of our blessed Lord, who was typified by the temple, and is the true sanctuary which God has pitched, and not man: let us fly to the cross for shelter in all times of need and help will be sent to us. Men of the world despise sanctuary help, but our hearts have learned to prize it beyond all material aid. They seek help out of the armoury, or the treasury, or the buttery, but we turn to the sanctuary. "And strengthen thee out of Zion." Out of the assemblies of the pleading saints who had for ages prayed for their Lord, help might well result to the despised sufferer, for praying breath is never spent in vain. To the Lord's mystical body the richest comes in answer to the pleadings of his saints assembled for holy

worship as his Zion. Certain advertisers recommend a strengthening plaster, but nothing can give such strength to the loins of a saint as waiting upon God in the assemblies of his people. This verse is a benediction befitting a Sabbath morning, and may be the salutation either of a pastor to his people, or of a church to its minister. God in the sanctuary of his dear Son's person, and in the city of his chosen church is the proper object of his people's prayers, and under such a character may they confidently look to him for his promised aid.

Verse 3. "Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice. Selah." Before war kings offered sacrifice, upon the acceptance of which they depended for success; our blessed Lord presented himself as a victim, and was a sweet savour unto the Most High, and then he met and routed the embattled legions of hell. Still does his burnt sacrifice perfume the courts of heaven, and through him the offerings of his people are received as his sacrifices and oblations. We ought in our spiritual conflicts to have an eye to the sacrifice of Jesus, and never venture to war until first the Lord has given us a token for good at the altar of the cross, where faith beholds her bleeding Lord. "Selah." It is well to pause at the cross before we march onward to battle, and with the psalmist cry "Selah." We are too much in a hurry to make good haste. A little pausing might greatly help our speed. Stay, good man, there is a haste which hinders; rest awhile, meditate on the burnt sacrifice, and put thy heart right for the stern work which lieth before thee.

Verse 4. "Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel." Christ's desire and counsel were both set upon the salvation of his people; the church of old desired for him good speed in his design, and the church in these latter days, with all her heart desires the complete fulfilment of his purpose. In Christ Jesus sanctified souls may appropriate this verse as a promise; they shall have their desire, and their plans to glorify their Master shall succeed. We may have our own will, when our will is God's will. This was always the case with our Lord, and yet he said, "not as I will, but as thou wilt." What need for submission in our case; if it was necessary to him, how much more for us?

Verse 5. "We will rejoice in thy salvation." In Jesus there is salvation; it is his own, and hence it is called thy salvation; but it is ours to receive and ours to rejoice in. We should fixedly resolve that come what may, we will rejoice in the saving arm of the Lord Jesus. The people in this psalm, before their king went to battle, felt sure of victory, and therefore began to rejoice beforehand; how much more ought we to do this who have seen the victory completely won! Unbelief begins weeping for the funeral before the man is dead; why should not faith commence piping before the dance of victory begins? Buds are beautiful, and promises not yet fulfilled are worthy to be admired. If joy were more general among the Lord's people, God would be more glorified among men; the happiness of the subjects is the honour of the sovereign. "And in the name of our God we will set up our banners." We lift the standard of defiance in the face of the foe, and wave the flag of victory over the fallen adversary. Some proclaim war in the name of one king, and some of another, but the faithful go to war in Jesu's name, the name of the incarnate God, Immanuel, God with us. The times are evil at present, but so long as Jesus lives and reigns in his church we need not furl our banners in fear, but advance them with sacred courage.

"Jesu's tremendous name
Puts all our foes to flight;
Jesus, the meek, the angry Lamb
A lion is in fight."

The church cannot forget that Jesus is her advocate before the throne, and therefore she sums up the desires already expressed in the short sentence, "The Lord fulfil all thy petitions." Be it never forgotten that among those petitions is that choice one, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am."

Verse 6. "Now know I that the Lord saveth his anointed." We live and learn, and what we learn we are not ashamed to acknowledge. He who thinks he knows everything will miss the joy of finding out new truth; he will never be able to cry, "now know I," for he is so wise in his own conceit that he knows all that can be revealed and more. Souls conscious of ignorance shall be taught of the Lord, and rejoice as they learn. Earnest prayer frequently leads to assured confidence. The church pleaded that the Lord Jesus might win the victory in his great struggle, and now by faith she sees him saved by the omnipotent arm. She evidently finds a sweet relish in the fragrant title of "anointed;" she thinks of him as ordained before all worlds to his great work, and then endowed with the needful qualifications by being anointed of the Spirit of the Lord; and this is evermore the choicest solace of the believer, that Jehovah himself hath anointed Jesus to be a Prince and a Saviour, and that our shield is thus the Lord's own anointed. "He will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand." It is here asserted confidently that God's holiness and power would both come to the rescue of the Saviour in his conflict, and surely these two glorious attributes found congenial work in answering the sufferer's cries. Since Jesus was heard, we shall be; God is in heaven, but our prayers can scale those glorious heights; those heavens are holy, but Jesus purifies our prayers, and so they gain admittance; our need is great, but the divine arm is strong, and all its strength is "saving strength;" that strength, moreover, is in the hand which is most used and which is used most readily—the right hand. What encouragements are these for pleading saints!

Verse 6. Contrasts frequently bring out the truth vividly, and here the church sets forth the creature confidences of carnal men in contrast with her reliance upon the Prince Immanuel and the invisible Jehovah. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses." Chariots and horses make an imposing show, and with their rattling, and dust, and fine caparisons, make so great a figure that vain man is much taken with them; yet the discerning eye of faith sees more in an invisible God than in all these. The most dreaded war-engine of David's day was the war-chariot, armed with scythes, which mowed down men like grass: this was the boast and glory of the neighbouring nations; but the saints considered the name of Jehovah to be a far better defence. As the Israelites might not keep horses, it was natural for them to regard the enemy's calvary with more than usual dread. It is, therefore, all the greater evidence of faith that the bold songster can here disdain even the horse of Egypt in comparison with the Lord of hosts. Alas, how many in our day who profess to be the Lord's are as abjectly dependent upon their fellow-men or upon an arm of flesh in some shape or other, as if they had never known the name of Jehovah at all. Jesus, be thou alone our rock and refuge, and never may we mar the simplicity of our faith. "We will remember the name of the Lord our God." "Our God" in covenant, who has chosen us and whom we have chosen; this God is our God. The name of our God is JEHOVAH, and this should never be forgotten; the self-existent, independent, immutable, ever-present, all-filling I AM. Let us adore that matchless name, and never dishonour it by distrust or creature confidence. Reader, you must know it before you can remember it. May the blessed Spirit reveal it graciously to your soul!

Verse 8. How different the end of those whose trusts are different! The enemies of God are uppermost at first, but they ere long are brought down by force, or else fall of their own accord. Their foundation is rotten, and therefore when the time comes it gives way under them; their chariots are

burned in the fire, and their horses die of pestilence, and where is their boasted strength? As for those who rest on Jehovah, they are often cast down at the first onset, but an Almighty arm uplifts them, and they joyfully stand upright. The victory of Jesus is the inheritance of his people. The world, death, Satan, and sin, shall all be trampled beneath the feet of the champions of faith; while those who rely upon an arm of flesh shall be ashamed and confounded for ever.

Verse 9. The Psalm is here recapitulated. That Jesus might himself be delivered, and might then, as our King, hear us, is the two-fold desire of the Psalm. The first request is granted, and the second is sure to all the seed; and therefore we may close the Psalm with the hearty shout, "God save the King." "God save King Jesus, and may he soon come to reign."

Psalm 21

Verse 1. "The king shall joy in thy strength, O Lord." Jesus is a Royal Personage. The question, "Art thou a King then?" received a full answer from the Saviour's lips: "Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this purpose came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto the truth." He is not merely a King, but the King; King over minds and hearts, reigning with a dominion of love, before which all other rule is but mere brute force. He was proclaimed King even on the cross, for there, indeed, to the eye of faith, he reigned as on a throne, blessing with more than imperial munificence the needy sons of earth. Jesus has wrought out the salvation of his people, but as a man he found his strength in Jehovah his God, to whom he addressed himself in prayer upon the lonely mountain's side, and in the garden's solitary gloom. That strength so abundantly given is here gratefully acknowledged, and made the subject of joy. The Man of Sorrows is now anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. Returned in triumph from the overthrow of all his foes, he offers his own rapturous Te Deum in the temple above, and joys in the power of the Lord. Herein let every subject of King Jesus imitate the King; let us lean upon Jehovah's strength, let us joy in it by unstaggering faith, let us exult in it in our thankful songs. Jesus not only has thus rejoiced, but he shall do so as he sees the power of divine grace bringing out from their sinful hiding-places the purchase of his soul's travail; we also shall rejoice more and more as we learn by experience more and more fully the strength of the arm of our covenant God. Our weakness unstrings our harps, but his strength tunes them anew. If we cannot sing a note in honour of our own strength, we can at any rate rejoice in our omnipotent God.

"And in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!" Everything is ascribed to God; the source is thy strength and the stream is thy salvation. Jehovah planned and ordained it, works it and crowns it, and therefore it is his salvation. The joy here spoken of is described by a note of exclamation and a word of wonder: "how greatly!" The rejoicing of our risen Lord must, like his agony, be unutterable. If the mountains of his joy rise in proportion to the depth of the valleys of his grief, then his sacred bliss is high as the seventh heaven. For the joy which was set before him as he endured the cross, despising the shame, and now that joy daily grows, for he rests in his love and rejoices over his redeemed with singing, as in due order they are brought to find their salvation in his blood. Let us with our Lord rejoice in salvation, as coming from God, as coming to us, as extending itself to others, and as soon to encompass all lands. We need not be afraid of too much rejoicing in this respect; this solid foundation will well sustain the loftiest edifice of joy. The shoutings of the early methodists in the excitement of the joy were far more pardonable than our own lukewarmness. Our joy should have some sort of inexpressibleness in it.

Verse 2. "Thou hast given him his heart's desire." That desire he ardently pursued when he was on

earth, both by his prayer, his actions, and his suffering; he manifested that his heart longed to redeem his people, and now in heaven he has his desire granted him, for he sees his beloved coming to be with him where he is. The desires of the Lord Jesus were from his heart, and the Lord heard them; if our hearts are right with God, he will in our case also "fulfil the desires of them that fear him."

"And hast not withholden the request of his lips." What is in the well of the heart is sure to come up in the bucket of the lips, and those are the only true prayers where the heart's desire is first, and the lip's request follows after. Jesus prayed vocally as well as mentally; speech is a great assistance to thought. Some of us feel that even when alone we find it easier to collect our thoughts when we can pray aloud. The requests of the Saviour were not withheld. He was and still is a prevailing Pleader. Our Advocate on high returns not empty from the throne of grace. He asked for his elect in the eternal council-chamber, he asked for blessings for them here, he asked for glory for them hereafter, and his requests have speeded. He is ready to ask for us at the mercy-seat. Have we not at this hour some desire to send up to his Father by him? Let us not be slack to use our willing, loving, all-prevailing Intercessor.

"Selah." Here a pause is very properly inserted that we may admire the blessed success of the king's prayers, and that we may prepare our own requests which may be presented through him. If we had a few more quiet rests, a few more Selahs in our public worship, it might be profitable.

Verse 3. "For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness." The word prevent formerly signified to precede or go before, and assuredly Jehovah preceded his Son with blessings. Before he died saints were saved by the anticipated merit of his death, before he came believers saw his day and were glad, and he himself had his delights with the sons of men. The Father is so willing to give blessings through his Son, that instead of his being constrained to bestow his grace, he outstrips the Mediatorial march of mercy. "I say not that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you." Before Jesus calls the Father answers, and while he is yet speaking he hears. Mercies may be bought with blood, but they are also freely given. The love of Jehovah is not caused by the Redeemer's sacrifice, but that love, with its blessings of goodness, preceded the great atonement, and provided it for our salvation. Reader, it will be a happy thing for thee if, like thy Lord, thou canst see both providence and grace preceding thee, forestalling thy needs, and preparing thy path. Mercy, in the case of many of us, ran before our desires and prayers, and it ever outruns our endeavours and expectancies, and even our hopes are left to lag behind. Prevenient grace deserves a song; we may make one out of this sentence; let us try. All our mercies are to be viewed as "blessings;" gifts of a blessed God, meant to make us blessed; they are "blessings of goodness," not of merit, but of free favour; and they come to us in a preventing way, a way of prudent foresight, such as only preventing love could have arranged. In this light the verse is itself a sonnet!

"Thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head." Jesus wore the thorn-crown, but now wears the glory-crown. It is a "crown," indicating royal nature, imperial power, deserved honour, glorious conquest, and divine government. The crown is of the richest, rarest, most resplendent, and most lasting order—"gold," and that gold of the most refined and valuable sort, "pure gold," to indicate the excellence of his dominion. This crown is set upon his head most firmly, and whereas other monarchs find their diadems fitting loosely, his is fixed so that no power can move it, for Jehovah himself has set it upon his brow. Napoleon crowned himself, but Jehovah crowned the Lord Jesus; the empire of the one melted in an hour, but the other has an abiding dominion. Some versions read, "a crown of precious stones;" this may remind us of those beloved ones who shall be as jewels in his crown, of whom he has said, "They shall be mine in the day when I make up my jewels." May we be set in the golden circlet of the Redeemer's glory, and adorn his head for ever!

Verse 4. "He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever." The first words may suit King David, but the length of days for ever and ever can only refer to the King Messiah. Jesus, as man, prayed for resurrection and he received it, and now possesses it in immortality. He died once, but being raised from the dead he dieth no more. "Because I live, ye shall live also," is the delightful intimation which the Saviour gives us, that we are partakers of his eternal life. We had never found this jewel, if he had not rolled away the stone which covered it.

Verse 5. "His glory is great in thy salvation." Immanuel bears the palm; he once bore the cross. The Father has glorified the Son, so that there is no glory like unto that which surroundeth him. See his person as it is described by John in the Revelation; see his dominion as it stretches from sea to sea; see his splendour as he is revealed in flaming fire. Lord, who is like unto thee? Solomon in all his glory could not be compared with thee, thou once despised Man of Nazareth! Mark, reader: salvation is ascribed to God; and thus the Son, as our Saviour, magnifies his Father; but the Son's glory is also greatly seen, for the Father glorifies his Son.

"Honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him." Parkhurst reads, "splendour and beauty." These are put upon Jesus as chains of gold, and stars and tokens of honour are placed upon princes and great men. As the wood of the tabernacle was overlaid with pure gold, so is Jesus covered with glory and honour. If there be a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory for his humble followers, what must there be for our Lord himself? The whole weight of sin was laid upon him; it is but meet that the full measure of the glory of bearing it away should be laid upon the same beloved person. A glory commensurate with his shame he must and will receive, for well has he earned it. It is not possible for us to honour Jesus too much; what our God delights to do, we may certainly do to our utmost. Oh for new crowns for the lofty brow which once was marred with thorns!

"Let him be crowned with majesty
Who bowed his head to death,
And be his honours sounded high
By all things that have breath."

Verse 6. "For thou hast made him most blessed for ever." He is most blessed in himself, for he is God over all, blessed for ever; but this relates to him as our Mediator, in which capacity blessedness is given to him as a reward. The margin has it, thou hast set him to be blessings; he is an overflowing wellspring of blessings to others, a sun filling the universe with light. According as the Lord swore unto Abraham, the promised seed is an everlasting source of blessings to all the nations of the earth. He is set for this, ordained, appointed, made incarnate with this very design, that he may bless the sons of men. Oh that sinners had sense enough to use the Saviour for that end to which he is ordained, viz., to be a Saviour to lost and guilty souls.

"Thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance." He who is a blessing to others cannot but be glad himself; the unbounded good-doing of Jesus ensures him unlimited joy. The loving favour of his Father, the countenance of God, gives Jesus exceeding joy. This is the purest stream to drink of, and Jesus chooses no other. His joy is full. Its source is divine. Its continuance is eternal. Its degree exceeding all bounds. The countenance of God makes the Prince of Heaven glad; how ought we to seek it, and how careful should we be lest we should provoke him by our sins to hide his face from us! Our anticipations may cheerfully fly forward to the hour when the joy of our Lord shall be shed abroad on all the saints, and the countenance of Jehovah shall shine upon all the blood-bought. So shall we "enter into the joy of our Lord."

So far all has been "the shout of them that triumph, the song of them that feast." Let us shout and

sing with them, for Jesus is our King, and in his triumphs we share a part.

Verse 7. "For the king trusteth in the Lord." Our Lord, like a true King and leader, was a master in the use of the weapons, and could handle well the shield of faith, for he has set us a brilliant example of unwavering confidence in God. He felt himself safe in his Father's care until his hour was come, he knew that he was always heard in heaven; he committed his cause to him that judgeth right, and in his last moments he committed his spirit into the same hands. The joy expressed in the former verses was the joy of faith, and the victory achieved was due to the same precious grace. A holy confidence in Jehovah is the true mother of victories. This psalm of triumph was composed long before our Lord's conflict began, but faith overleaps the boundaries of time, and chants her "Io triumphe," while yet she sings her battle song.

"Through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved." Eternal mercy secures the mediatorial throne of Jesus. He who is Most High in every sense, engages all his infinite perfections to maintain the throne of grace upon which our King in Zion reigns. He was not moved from his purpose, nor in his sufferings, nor by his enemies, nor shall he be moved from the completion of his designs. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Other empires are dissolved by the lapse of years, but eternal mercy maintains his growing dominion evermore; other kings fail because they rest upon an arm of flesh, but our monarch reigns on in splendour because he trusteth in Jehovah. It is a great display of divine mercy to men that the throne of King Jesus is still among them: nothing but divine mercy could sustain it, for human malice would overturn it to-morrow if it could. We ought to trust in God for the promotion of the Redeemer's kingdom, for in Jehovah the King himself trusts: all unbelieving methods of action, and especially all reliance upon mere human ability, should be for ever discarded from a kingdom where the monarch sets the examples of walking by faith in God.

Verse 8. "Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee." The destruction of the wicked is a fitting subject for joy to the friends of righteousness; hence here, and in most scriptural songs, it is noted with calm thanksgiving. "Thou hast put down the mighty from their seats," is a note of the same song which sings, "and hast exalted them of low degree." We pity the lost for they are men, but we cannot pity them as enemies of Christ. None can escape from the wrath of the victorious King, nor is it desirable that they should. Without looking for his flying foes he will find them with his hand, for his presence is about and around them. In vain shall any hope for escape, he will find out all, and be able to punish all, and that too with the ease and rapidity which belong to the warrior's right hand. The finding out relates, we think, not only to the discovery of the hiding places of the haters of God, but to the touching of them in their tenderest parts, so as to cause the severest suffering. When he appears to judge the world hard hearts will be subdued into terror, and proud spirits humbled into shame. He who has the key of human nature can touch all its springs at his will, and find out the means of bringing the utmost confusion and terror upon those who aforetime boastfully expressed their hatred of him.

Verse 9. "Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger." They themselves shall be an oven to themselves, and so their own tormentors. Those who burned with anger against thee shall be burned by thine anger. The fire of sin will be followed by the fire of wrath. Even as the smoke of Sodom and Gomorrah went up to heaven, so shall the enemies of the Lord Jesus be utterly and terribly consumed. Some read it, "thou shalt put them as it were into a furnace of fire." Like faggots cast into an oven they shall burn furiously beneath the anger of the Lord; "they shall be cast into a furnace of fire, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." These are terrible words, and those teachers do not well who endeavour by their sophistical reasonings to weaken their force. Reader,

never tolerate slight thoughts of hell, or you will soon have low thoughts of sin. The hell of sinners must be fearful beyond all conception, or such language as the present would not be used. Who would have the Son of God to be his enemy when such an overthrow awaits his foes? The expression, "the time of thine anger," reminds us that as now is the time of his grace, so there will be a set time for his wrath. The judge goes upon assize at an appointed time. There is a day of vengeance of our God; let those who despise the day of grace remember this day of wrath. "The Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them." Jehovah will himself visit with his anger the enemies of his Son. The Lord Jesus will, as it were, judge by commission from God, whose solemn assent and co-operation shall be with him in his sentences upon impenitent sinners. An utter destruction of soul and body, so that both shall be swallowed up with misery, and be devoured with anguish, is here intended. Oh, the wrath to come! The wrath to come! Who can endure it? Lord, save us from it, for Jesu's sake.

Verse 10. "Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth." Their life's work shall be a failure, and the result of their toil shall be disappointment. That in which they prided themselves shall be forgotten; their very names shall be wiped out as abominable, "and their seed from among the children of men." Their posterity following in their footsteps shall meet with a similar overthrow, till at last the race shall come to an end. Doubtless the blessing of God is often handed down by the righteous to their sons, as almost a heirloom in the family, while the dying sinner bequeaths a curse to his descendants. If men will hate the Son of God, they must not wonder if their own sons meet with no favour.

Verse 11. "For they intended evil against thee." God takes notice of intentions. He who would but could not is as guilty as he who did. Christ's church and cause are not only attacked by those who do not understand it, but there are many who have the light and yet hate it. Intentional evil has a virus in it which is not found in sins of ignorance; now as ungodly men with malice aforethought attack the gospel of Christ, their crime is great, and their punishment will be proportionate. The words "against thee" show us that he who intends evil against the poorest believer means ill to the King himself: let persecutors beware.

"They imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform." Want of power is the clog on the foot of the haters of the Lord Jesus. They have the wickedness to imagine, and the cunning to devise, and the malice to plot mischief, but blessed be God, they fail in ability; yet they shall be judged as to their hearts, and the will shall be taken for the deed in the great day of account. When we read the boastful threatenings of the enemies of the gospel at the present day, we may close our reading by cheerfully repeating, "which they are not able to perform." The serpent may hiss, but his head is broken; the lion may worry, but he cannot devour: the tempest may thunder, but cannot strike. Old Giant Pope bites his nails at the pilgrims, but he cannot pick their bones as aforetime. Growling forth a hideous "non possumus," the devil and all his allies retire in dismay from the walls of Zion, for the Lord is there.

Verse 12. "Therefore shalt thou make them turn their back, when thou shalt make ready thine arrows upon thy strings against the face of them." For a time the foes of God may make bold advances, and threaten to overthrow everything, but a few ticks of the clock will alter the face of their affairs. At first they advance impudently enough, but Jehovah meets them to their teeth, and a taste of the sharp judgment of God speedily makes them flee in dismay. The original has in it the thought of the wicked being set as a butt for God to shoot at, a target for his wrath to aim at. What a dreadful situation! As an illustration upon a large scale, remember Jerusalem during the siege; and for a specimen in an individual, read the story of the death-bed of Francis Spira. God takes sure aim; who would be his

target? His arrows are sharp and transfix the heart; who would wish to be wounded by them? Ah, ye enemies of God, your boastings will soon be over when once the shafts begin to fly!

Verse 13. "Be thou exalted, Lord, in thine own strength." A sweet concluding verse. Our hearts shall join in it. It is always right to praise the Lord when we call to remembrance his goodness to his Son, and the overthrow of his foes. The exaltation of the name of God should be the business of every Christian; but since such poor things as we fail to honour him as he deserves, we may invoke his own power to aid us. Be high, O God, but do thou maintain thy loftiness by thine own almightiness, for no other power can worthily do it.

"So will we sing and praise thy power." For a time the saints may mourn, but the glorious appearance of their divine Helper awakens their joy. Joy should always flow in the channel of praise. All the attributes of God are fitting subjects to be celebrated by the music of our hearts and voices, and when we observe a display of his power, we must extol it. He wrought our deliverance alone, and he alone shall have the praise.

Psalm 22

Verse 1. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This was the startling cry of Golgotha: Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani. The Jews mocked, but the angels adored when Jesus cried this exceeding bitter cry. Nailed to the tree we behold our great Redeemer in extremities, and what see we? Having ears to hear let us hear, and having eyes to see let us see! Let us gaze with holy wonder, and mark the flashes of light amid the awful darkness of that midday-midnight. First, our Lord's faith beams forth and deserves our reverent imitation; he keeps his hold upon his God with both hands and cries twice, "My God, my God!" The spirit of adoption was strong within the suffering Son of Man, and he felt no doubt about his interest in his God. Oh that we could imitate this cleaving to an afflicting God! Nor does the sufferer distrust the power of God to sustain him, for the title used—"Ei"—signifies strength, and is the name of the Mighty God. He knows the Lord to be the all-sufficient support and succour of his spirit, and therefore appeals to him in the agony of grief, but not in the misery of doubt. He would fain know why he is left, he raises that question and repeats it, but neither the power nor the faithfulness of God does he mistrust. What an enquiry is this before us! "Why hast thou forsaken me?" We must lay the emphasis on every word of this saddest of all utterances. "Why?" what is the great cause of such a strange fact as for God to leave his own Son at such a time and in such a plight? There was no cause in him, why then was he deserted? "Hast:" it is done, and the Saviour is feeling its dread effect as he asks the question; it is surely true, but how mysterious! It was no threatening of forsaking which made the great Surety cry aloud, he endured that forsaking in very deed. "Thou:" I can understand why traitorous Judas and timid Peter should be gone, but thou, my God, my faithful friend, how canst thou leave me? This is worst of all, yea, worse than all put together. Hell itself has for its fiercest flame the separation of the soul from God. "Forsaken:" if thou hadst chastened I might bear it, for thy face would shine; but to forsake me utterly, ah! why is this? "Me:" thine innocent, obedient, suffering Son, why leavest thou me to perish? A sight of self seen by penitence, and of Jesus on the cross seen by faith will best expound this question. Jesus is forsaken because our sins had separated between us and our God. "Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" The Man of Sorrows had prayed until his speech failed him, and he could only utter moanings and groanings as men do in severe sicknesses, like the roarings of a wounded animal. To what extremity of grief was our Master driven? What strong crying and tears were those which made him too hoarse for speech! What must have been his anguish to find his own beloved and trusted Father standing afar off, and neither

granting help nor apparently hearing prayer! This was good cause to make him "roar." Yet there was reason for all this which those who rest in Jesus as their Substitute well know.

Verse 2. "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not." For our prayers to appear to be unheard is no new trial, Jesus felt it before us, and it is observable that he still held fast his believing hold on God, and cried still, "My God." On the other hand his faith did not render him less importunate, for amid the hurry and horror of that dismal day he ceased not his cry, even as in Gethsemane he had agonized all through the gloomy night. Our Lord continued to pray even though no comfortable answer came, and in this he set us an example of obedience to his own words, "men ought always to pray, and not to faint." No daylight is too glaring, and no midnight too dark to pray in; and no delay or apparent denial, however grievous, should tempt us to forbear from importunate pleading.

Verse 3. "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." However ill things may look, there is no ill in thee, O God! We are very apt to think and speak hardly of God when we are under his afflicting hand, but not so the obedient Son. He knows too well his Father's goodness to let outward circumstances libel his character. There is no unrighteousness with the God of Jacob, he deserves no censure; let him do what he will, he is to be praised, and to reign enthroned amid the songs of his chosen people. If prayer be unanswered it is not because God is unfaithful, but for some other good and weighty reason. If we cannot perceive any ground for the delay, we must leave the riddle unsolved, but we must not fly in God's face in order to invent an answer. While the holiness of God is in the highest degree acknowledged and adored, the afflicted speaker in this verse seems to marvel how the holy God could forsake him, and be silent to his cries. The argument is, thou art holy, Oh! why is it that thou dost disregard thy holy One in his hour of sharpest anguish? We may not question the holiness of God, but we may argue from it, and use it as a plea in our petitions.

Verse 4. "Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them." This is the rule of life with all the chosen family. Three times over is it mentioned, they trusted, and trusted, and trusted, and never left off trusting, for it was their very life; and they fared well too, for thou didst deliver them. Out of all their straits, difficulties, and miseries faith brought them by calling their God to the rescue; but in the case of our Lord it appeared as if faith would bring no assistance from heaven, he alone of all the trusting ones was to remain without deliverance. The experience of other saints may be a great consolation to us when in deep waters if faith can be sure that their deliverance will be ours; but when we feel ourselves sinking, it is poor comfort to know that others are swimming. Our Lord here pleads the past dealings of God with his people as a reason why he should not be left alone; here again he is an example to us in the skilful use of the weapon of all prayer. The use of the plural pronoun "our" shows how one with his people Jesus was even on the cross. We say, "Our Father which art in heaven," and he calls those "our fathers" through whom we came into the world, although he was without father as to the flesh.

Verse 5. "They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded." As if he had said, "How is it that I am now left without succour in my overwhelming griefs, while all others have been helped? We may remind the Lord of his former lovingkindnesses to his people, and beseech him to be still the same. This is true wrestling; let us learn the art. Observe, that ancient saints cried and trusted, and that in trouble we must do the same; and the invariable result was that they were not ashamed of their hope, for deliverance came in due time; this same happy portion shall be ours. The prayer of faith can do the deed when nothing else can. Let us wonder when we see

Jesus using the same pleas as ourselves, and immersed in griefs far deeper than our own.

Verse 6. "But I am a worm, and no man." This verse is a miracle in language. How could the Lord of glory be brought to such abasement as to be not only lower than the angels, but even lower than men. What a contrast between "I AM" and "I am a worm"! yet such a double nature was found in the person of our Lord Jesus when bleeding upon the tree. He felt himself to be comparable to a helpless, powerless, down-trodden worm, passive while crushed, and unnoticed and despised by those who trod upon him. He selects the weakest of creatures, which is all flesh; and becomes, when trodden upon, writhing, quivering flesh, utterly devoid of any might except strength to suffer. This was a true likeness of himself when his body and soul had become a mass of misery—the very essence of agony—in the dying pangs of crucifixion. Man by nature is but a worm; but our Lord puts himself even beneath man, on account of the scorn that was heaped upon him and the weakness which he felt, and therefore he adds, "and no man." The privileges and blessings which belonged to the fathers he could not obtain while deserted by God, and common acts of humanity were not allowed him, for he was rejected of men; he was outlawed from the society of earth, and shut out from the smile of heaven. How utterly did the Saviour empty himself of all glory, and become of no reputation for our sakes! "A reproach of men" —their common butt and jest; a byword and a proverb unto them: the sport of the rabble, and the scorn of the rulers. Oh the caustic power of reproach, to those who endure it with patience, yet smart under it most painfully! "And despised of the people." The vox populi was against him. The very people who would once have crowned him then contemned him, and they who were benefited by his cures sneered at him in his woes. Sin is worthy of all reproach and contempt, and for this reason Jesus, the Sinbearer, was given up to be thus unworthily and shamefully entreated.

Verse 7. "All they that see me laugh me to scorn." Read the evangelistic narrative of the ridicule endured by the Crucified One, and then consider, in the light of this expression, how it grieved him. The iron entered into his soul. Mockery has for its distinctive description "cruel mockings;" those endured by our Lord were of the most cruel kind. The scornful ridicule of our Lord was universal; all sorts of men were unanimous in the derisive laughter, and vied with each other in insulting him. Priests and people, Jews and Gentiles, soldiers and civilians, all united in the general scoff, and that at the time when he was prostrate in weakness and ready to die. Which shall we wonder at the most, the cruelty of man or the love of the bleeding Saviour? How can we ever complain of ridicule after this?

"They shoot out the lip, they shake the head." These were gestures of contempt. Pouting, grinning, shaking of the head, thrusting out of the tongue, and other modes of derision were endured by our patient Lord; men made faces at him before whom angels veil their faces and adore. The basest signs of disgrace which disdain could devise were maliciously cast at him. They punned upon his prayers, they made matter for laughter of his sufferings, and set him utterly at nought. Herbert sings of our Lord as saying,—

"Shame tears my soul, my body many a wound;
Sharp nails pierce this, but sharper that confound;
Reproaches which are free, while I am bound.
Was ever grief like mine?"

Verse 8. "Saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." Here the taunt is cruelly aimed at the sufferer's faith in God, which is the tenderest

point in a good man's soul, the very apple of his eye. They must have learned the diabolical art from Satan himself, for they made rare proficiency in it. According to Matthew 27:39-44, there were five forms of taunt hurled at the Lord Jesus; this special piece of mockery is probably mentioned in this psalm because it is the most bitter of the whole; it has a biting, sarcastic irony in it, which gives it a peculiar venom; it must have stung the Man of Sorrows to the quick. When we are tormented in the same manner, let us remember him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, and we shall be comforted. On reading these verses one is ready, with Trapp, to ask, Is this a prophecy or a history? for the description is so accurate. We must not lose sight of the truth which was unwittingly uttered by the Jewish scoffers. They themselves are witnesses that Jesus of Nazareth trusted in God: why then was he permitted to perish? Jehovah had aforetime delivered those who rolled their burdens upon him: why was this man deserted? Oh that they had understood the answer! Note further, that their ironical jest, "seeing he delighted in him," was true. The Lord did delight in his dear Son, and when he was found in fashion as a man, and became obedient unto death, he still was well pleased with him. Strange mixture! Jehovah delights in him, and yet bruises him; is well pleased, and yet slays him.

Verse 9. "But thou art he that took me out of the womb." Kindly providence attends with the surgery of tenderness at every human birth; but the Son of Man, who was marvelously begotten of the Holy Ghost, was in an especial manner watched over by the Lord when brought forth by Mary. The destitute state of Joseph and Mary, far away from friends and home, led them to see the cherishing hand of God in the safe delivery of the mother, and the happy birth of the child; that Child now fighting the great battle of his life, uses the mercy of his nativity as an argument with God. Faith finds weapons everywhere. He who wills to believe shall never lack reasons for believing. "Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts." Was our Lord so early a believer? Was he one of those babes and sucklings out of whose mouths strength is ordained? So it would seem; and if so, what a plea for help! Early piety gives peculiar comfort in our after trials, for surely he who loved us when we were children is too faithful to cast us off in our riper years. Some give the text the sense of "gave me cause to trust, by keeping me safely," and assuredly there was a special providence which preserved our Lord's infant days from the fury of Herod, the dangers of travelling, and the ills of poverty.

Verse 10. "I was cast upon thee from the womb." Into the Almighty arms he was first received, as into those of a loving parent. This is a sweet thought. God begins his care over us from the earliest hour. We are dandled upon the knee of mercy, and cherished in the lap of goodness; our cradle is canopied by divine love, and our first totterings are guided by his care. "Thou art my God from my mother's belly." The psalm begins with "My God, my God," and here, not only is the claim repeated, but its early date is urged. Oh noble perseverance of faith, thus to continue pleading with holy ingenuity of argument! Our birth was our weakest and most perilous period of existence; if we were then secured by Omnipotent tenderness, surely we have no cause to suspect that divine goodness will fail us now. He who was our God when we left our mother, will be with us till we return to mother earth, and will keep us from perishing in the belly of hell.

Verses 11-21. The crucified Son of David continues to pour out his complaint and prayer. We need much grace that while reading we may have fellowship with his sufferings. May the blessed Spirit conduct us into a most clear and affecting sight of our Redeemer's woes.

Verse 11. "Be not far from me." This is the petition for which he has been using such varied and

powerful pleas. His great woe was that God had forsaken him, his great prayer is that he would be near him. A lively sense of the divine presence is a mighty stay to the heart in times of distress. "For trouble is near; for there is none to help." There are two "fors," as though faith gave a double knock at mercy's gate; that is a powerful prayer which is full of holy reasons and thoughtful arguments. The nearness of trouble is a weighty motive for divine help; this moves our heavenly Father's heart, and brings down his helping hand. It is his glory to be our very present help in trouble. Our Substitute had trouble in his inmost heart, for he said, "the waters have come in, even unto my soul;" well might he cry, "be not far from me." The absence of all other helpers is another telling plea. In our Lord's case none either could or would help him, it was needful that he should tread the winepress alone; yet was it a sore aggravation to find that all his disciples had forsaken him, and lover and friend were put far from him. There is an awfulness about absolute friendlessness which is crushing to the human mind, for man was not made to be alone, and is like a dismembered limb when he has to endure heart-loneliness.

Verse 12. "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round." The mighty ones in the crowd are here marked by the tearful eye of their victim. The priests, elders, scribes, Pharisees, rulers, and captains bellowed round the cross like wild cattle, fed in the fat and solitary pastures of Bashan, full of strength and fury; they stamped and foamed around the innocent One, and longed to gore him to death with their cruelties. Conceive of the Lord Jesus as a helpless, unarmed, naked man, cast into the midst of a herd of infuriated wild bulls. They were brutal as bulls, many, and strong, and the Rejected One was all alone, and bound naked to the tree. His position throws great force into the earnest entreaty, "Be not far from me."

Verse 13. "They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion." Like hungry cannibals they opened their blasphemous mouths as if they were about to swallow the man whom they abhorred. They could not vomit forth their anger fast enough through the ordinary aperture of their mouths, and therefore set the doors of their lips wide open like those who gape. Like roaring lions they howled out their fury, and longed to tear the Saviour in pieces, as wild beasts raven over their prey. Our Lord's faith must have passed through a most severe conflict while he found himself abandoned to the tender mercies of the wicked, but he came off victorious by prayer; the very dangers to which he was exposed being used to add prevalence to his entreaties.

Verse 14. Turning from his enemies, our Lord describes his own personal condition in language which should bring the tears into every loving eye. "I am poured out like water." He was utterly spent, like water poured upon the earth; his heart failed him, and had no more firmness in it than running water, and his whole being was made a sacrifice, like a libation poured out before the Lord. He had long been a fountain of tears; in Gethsemane his heart welled over in sweat, and on the cross he gushed forth with blood; he poured out his strength and spirit, so that he was reduced to the most feeble and exhausted state. "All my bones are out of joint," as if distended upon a rack. Is it not most probable that the fastenings of the hands and feet, and the jar occasioned by fixing the cross in the earth, may have dislocated the bones of the Crucified One? If this is not intended, we must refer the expression to that extreme weakness which would occasion relaxation of the muscles and a general sense of parting asunder throughout the whole system. "My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels." Excessive debility and intense pain made his inmost life to feel like wax melted in the heat. The Greek liturgy uses the expression, "thine unknown sufferings," and well it may. The fire of Almighty wrath would have consumed our souls for ever in hell; it was no light work to bear as a substitute the heat of an anger so justly terrible. Dr. Gill wisely observes, "if the heart of Christ, the

Lion of the tribe of Judah, melted at it, what heart can endure, or hands be strong, when God deals with them in his wrath?"

Verse 15. "My strength is dried up like a potsherd." Most complete debility is here portrayed; Jesus likens himself to a broken piece of earthenware, or an earthen pot, baked in the fire till the last particle of moisture is driven out of the clay. No doubt a high degree of feverish burning afflicted the body of our Lord. All his strength was dried up in the tremendous flames of avenging justice, even as the paschal lamb was roasted in the fire. "My tongue cleaveth to my jaws;" thirst and fever fastened his tongue to his jaws. Dryness and a horrible clamminess tormented his mouth, so that he could scarcely speak. "Thou hast brought me into the dust of death;" so tormented in every single part as to feel dissolved into separate atoms, and each atom full of misery; the full price of our redemption was paid, and no part of the Surety's body or soul escaped its share of agony. The words may set forth Jesus as having wrestled with Death until he rolled into the dust with his antagonist. Behold the humiliation of the Son of God! The Lord of Glory stoops to the dust of death. Amid the mouldering relics of mortality Jesus condescends to lodge!

Bishop Mant's version of the two preceding verses is forcible and accurate:—

"Pour'd forth like water is my frame;
My bones asunder start;
As wax that feels the searching flame,
Within me melts my heart.
My wither'd sinews shrink unstrung
Like potsherd dried and dead:
Cleaves to my jaws my burning tongue
The dust of death my bed."

Verse 16. We are to understand every item of this sad description as being urged by the Lord Jesus as a plea for divine help; and this will give us a high idea of his perseverance in prayer. "For dogs have compassed me." Here he marks the more ignoble crowd, who, while less strong than their brutal leaders, were not less ferocious, for there they were howling and barking like unclean and hungry dogs. Hunters frequently surround their game with a circle, and gradually encompass them with an ever-narrowing ring of dogs and men. Such a picture is before us. In the centre stands, not a panting stag, but a bleeding, fainting man, and around him are the enraged and unpitying wretches who have hounded him to his doom. Here we have the "hind of the morning" of whom the psalm so plaintively sings, hunted by bloodhounds, all thirsting to devour him. The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: thus the Jewish people were unchurched, and that which called itself an assembly of the righteous is justly for its sins marked upon the forehead as an assembly of the wicked. This is not the only occasion when professed churches of God have become synagogues of Satan, and have persecuted the Holy One and the Just. They pierced my hands and my feet. This can by no means refer to David, or to any one but Jesus of Nazareth, the once crucified but now exalted Son of God. Pause, dear reader, and view the wounds of thy Redeemer.

Verse 17. So emaciated was Jesus by his fastings and sufferings that he says, "I may tell all my bones." He could count and recount them. The posture of the body on the cross, Bishop Horne thinks, would so distend the flesh and skin as to make the bones visible, so that they might be numbered. The zeal of his Father's house had eaten him up; like a good soldier he had endured hardness. Oh that we cared less for the body's enjoyment and ease and more for our Father's business! It were

better to count the bones of an emaciated body than to bring leanness into our souls.

"They look and stare upon me." Unholy eyes gazed insultingly upon the Saviour's nakedness, and shocked the sacred delicacy of his holy soul. The sight of the agonizing body ought to have ensured sympathy from the throng, but it only increased their savage mirth, as they gloated their cruel eyes upon his miseries. Let us blush for human nature, and mourn in sympathy with our Redeemer's shame. The first Adam made us all naked, and therefore the second Adam became naked that he might clothe our naked souls.

Verse 18. "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." The garments of the executed were the perquisites of the executioners in most cases, but it was not often that they cast lots at the division of the spoil; this incident shows how clearly David in vision saw the day of Christ, and how surely the Man of Nazareth is he of whom the prophets spake: "these things, therefore, the soldiers did." He who gave his blood to cleanse us gave his garments to clothe us. As Ness says, "this precious Lamb of God gave up his golden fleece for us." How every incident of Jesus' griefs is here stored up in the treasury of inspiration, and embalmed in the amber of sacred song; we must learn hence to be very mindful of all that concerns our Beloved, and to think much more of everything which has a connection with him. It may be noted that the habit of gambling is of all others the most hardening, for men could practise it even at the cross-foot while besprinkled with the blood of the Crucified. No Christian will endure the rattle of the dice when he thinks of this.

Verse 19. "But be thou not far from me, O Lord." Invincible faith returns to the charge, and uses the same means, viz., importunate prayer. He repeats the petition so piteously offered before. He wants nothing but his God, even in his lowest state. He does not ask for the most comfortable or nearest presence of God, he will be content if he is not far from him; humble requests speed at the throne. "O my strength, haste thee to help me." Hard cases need timely aid: when necessity justifies it we may be urgent with God as to time, and cry, "make haste;" but we must not do this out of willfulness. Mark how in the last degree of personal weakness he calls the Lord "my strength;" after this fashion the believer can sing, "when I am weak, then am I strong."

Verse 20. "Deliver my soul from the sword." By the sword is probably meant entire destruction, which as a man he dreaded; or perhaps he sought deliverance from the enemies around him, who were like a sharp and deadly sword to him. The Lord had said, "Awake, O sword," and now from the terror of that sword the Shepherd would fain be delivered as soon as justice should see fit. "My darling from the power of the dog." Meaning his soul, his life, which is most dear to every man. The original is, "my only one," and therefore is our soul dear, because it is our only soul. Would that all men made their souls their darlings, but many treat them as if they were not worth so much as the mire of the streets. The dog may mean Satan, that infernal Cerberus, that cursed and cursing cur; or else the whole company of Christ's foes, who though many in number were as unanimous as if there were but one, and with one consent sought to rend him in pieces. If Jesus cried for help against the dog of hell, much more may we. Cave canem, beware of the dog, for his power is great, and only God can deliver us from him. When he fawns upon us, we must not put ourselves in his power; and when he howls at us, we may remember that God holds him with a chain.

Verse 21. "Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns." Having experienced deliverance in the past from great enemies, who were strong as the unicorns, the Redeemer utters his last cry for rescue from death, which is fierce and mighty as the lion. This prayer was heard, and the gloom of the cross departed. Thus faith, though sorely beaten, and even cast

beneath the feet of her enemy, ultimately wins the victory. It was so in our Head, it shall be so in all the members. We have overcome the unicorn, we shall conquer the lion, and from both lion and unicorn we shall take the crown.

Verses 22-31. The transition is very marked; from a horrible tempest all is changed into calm. The darkness of Calvary at length passed away from the face of nature, and from the soul of the Redeemer, and beholding the light of his triumph and its future results the Saviour smiled. We have followed him through the gloom, let us attend him in the returning light. It will be well still to regard the words as a part of our Lord's soliloquy upon the cross, uttered in his mind during the last few moments before his death.

Verse 22. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren." The delights of Jesus are always with his church, and hence his thoughts, after much distraction, return at the first moment of relief to their usual channel; he forms fresh designs for the benefit of his beloved ones. He is not ashamed to call them brethren, "Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." Among his first resurrection words were these, "Go to my brethren." In the verse before us, Jesus anticipates happiness in having communication with his people; he purposes to be their teacher and minister, and fixes his mind upon the subject of his discourse. The name, i.e., the character and conduct of God are by Jesus Christ's gospel proclaimed to all the holy brotherhood; they behold the fulness of the Godhead dwelling bodily in him, and rejoice greatly to see all the infinite perfections manifested in one who is bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. What a precious subject is the name of our God! It is the only one worthy of the only Begotten, whose meat and drink it was to do the Father's will. We may learn from this resolution of our Lord, that one of the most excellent methods of showing our thankfulness for deliverances is to tell to our brethren what the Lord has done for us. We mention our sorrows readily enough; why are we so slow in declaring our deliverances? "In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." Not in a little household gathering merely does our Lord resolve to proclaim his Father's love, but in the great assemblies of his saints, and in the general assembly and church of the first-born. This the Lord Jesus is always doing by his representatives, who are the heralds of salvation, and labour to praise God. In the great universal church Jesus is the One authoritative teacher, and all others, so far as they are worthy to be called teachers, are nothing but echoes of his voice. Jesus, in this second sentence, reveals his object in declaring the divine name, it is that God may be praised; the church continually magnifies Jehovah for manifesting himself in the person of Jesus, and Jesus himself leads the song, and is both precentor and preacher in his church. Delightful are the seasons when Jesus communes with our hearts concerning divine truth; joyful praise is the sure result.

Verse 23. "Ye that fear the Lord praise him." The reader must imagine the Saviour as addressing the congregation of the saints. He exhorts the faithful to unite with him in thanksgiving. The description of "fearing the Lord" is very frequent and very instructive; it is the beginning of wisdom, and is an essential sign of grace. "I am a Hebrew and I fear God" was Jonah's confession of faith. Humble awe of God is so necessary a preparation for praising him that none are fit to sing to his honour but such as reverence his word; but this fear is consistent with the highest joy, and is not to be confounded with legal bondage, which is a fear which perfect love casteth out. Holy fear should always keep the key of the singing pew. Where Jesus leads the tune none but holy lips may dare to sing. "All ye the seed of Jacob glorify him." The genius of the gospel is praise. Jew and Gentile saved by sovereign grace should be eager in the blessed work of magnifying the God of our salvation. All saints should unite in the song; no tongue may be silent, no heart may be cold. Christ calls us to glorify God, and

can we refuse? "And fear him, all ye the seed of Israel." The spiritual Israel all do this, and we hope the day will come when Israel after the flesh will be brought to the same mind. The more we praise God the more reverently shall we fear him, and the deeper our reverence the sweeter our songs. So much does Jesus value praise that we have it here under his dying hand and seal that all the saints must glorify the Lord.

Verse 24. "For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted." Here is good matter and motive for praise. The experience of our covenant Head and Representative should encourage all of us to bless the God of grace. Never was man so afflicted as our Saviour in body and soul from friends and foes, by heaven and hell, in life and death; he was the foremost in the ranks of the afflicted, but all those afflictions were sent in love, and not because his Father despised and abhorred him. 'Tis true that justice demanded that Christ should bear the burden which as a substitute he undertook to carry, but Jehovah always loved him, and in love laid that load upon him with a view to his ultimate glory and to the accomplishment of the dearest wish of his heart. Under all his woes our Lord was honourable in the Father's sight, the matchless jewel of Jehovah's heart. "Neither hath he hid his face from him." That is to say, the hiding was but temporary, and was soon removed; it was not final and eternal. "But when he cried unto him, he heard." Jesus was heard in that he feared. He cried in extremis and de profundis, and was speedily answered; he therefore bids his people join him in singing a Gloria in excelsis.

Every child of God should seek refreshment for his faith in this testimony of the Man of Sorrows. What Jesus here witnesses is as true to-day as when it was first written. It shall never be said that any man's affliction or poverty prevented his being an accepted suppliant at Jehovah's throne of grace. The meanest applicant is welcome at mercy's door:—

"None that approach his throne shall find
A God unfaithful or unkind."

Verse 25. "My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation." The one subject of our Master's song is the Lord alone. The Lord and the Lord only is the theme which the believer handleth when he gives himself to imitate Jesus in praise. The word in the original is "from thee,"—true praise is of celestial origin. The rarest harmonies of music are nothing unless they are sincerely consecrated to God by hearts sanctified by the Spirit. The clerk says, "Let us sing to the praise and glory of God;" but the choir often sing to the praise and glory of themselves. Oh when shall our service of song be a pure offering? Observe in this verse how Jesus loves the public praises of the saints, and thinks with pleasure of the great congregation. It would be wicked on our part to despise the twos and threes; but, on the other hand, let not the little companies snarl at the greater assemblies as though they were necessarily less pure and less approved, for Jesus loves the praise of the great congregation. "I will pay my vows before them that fear him." Jesus dedicates himself anew to the carrying out of the divine purpose in fulfilment of his vows made in anguish. Did our Lord when he ascended to the skies proclaim amid the redeemed in glory the goodness of Jehovah? And was that the vow here meant? Undoubtedly the publication of the gospel is the constant fulfilment of covenant engagements made by our Surety in the councils of eternity. Messiah vowed to build up a spiritual temple for the Lord, and he will surely keep his word.

Verse 26. "The meek shall eat and be satisfied." Mark how the dying Lover of our souls solaces himself with the result of his death. The spiritually poor find a feast in Jesus, they feed upon him to the satisfaction of their hearts, they were famished until he gave himself for them, but now they are

filled with royal dainties. The thought of the joy of his people gave comfort to our expiring Lord. Note the characters who partake of the benefit of his passion; "the meek," the humble and lowly. Lord, make us so. Note also the certainty that gospel provisions shall not be wasted, "they shall eat;" and the sure result of such eating, "and be satisfied." "They shall praise the Lord that seek him." For a while they may keep a fast, but their thanksgiving days must and shall come. "Your heart shall live for ever." Your spirits shall not fail through trial, you shall not die of grief, immortal joys shall be your portion. Thus Jesus speaks even from the cross to the troubled seeker. If his dying words are so assuring, what consolation may we not find in the truth that he ever liveth to make intercession for us! They who eat at Jesus' table receive the fulfilment of the promise, "Whosoever eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

Verse 27. In reading this verse one is struck with the Messiah's missionary spirit. It is evidently his grand consolation that Jehovah will be known throughout all places of his dominion. "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord." Out from the inner circle of the present church the blessing is to spread in growing power until the remotest parts of the earth shall be ashamed of their idols, mindful of the true God, penitent for their offences, and unanimously earnest for reconciliation with Jehovah. Then shall false worship cease, "and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee," O thou only living and true God. This hope which was the reward of Jesus is a stimulus to those who fight his battles.

It is well to mark the order of conversion as here set forth; they shall "remember"—this is reflection, like the prodigal who came unto himself; "and turn unto Jehovah"—this is repentance, like Manasseh who left his idols and "worship"—this is holy service, as Paul adored the Christ whom once he abhorred.

Verse 28. "For the kingdom is the Lord's." As an obedient Son the dying Redeemer rejoiced to know that his Father's interests would prosper through his pains. "The Lord reigneth" was his song as it is ours. He who by his own power reigns supreme in the domains of creation and providence, has set up a kingdom of grace, and by the conquering power of the cross that kingdom will grow until all people shall own its sway and proclaim that "he is the governor among the nations." Amid the tumults and disasters of the present the Lord reigneth; but in the halcyon days of peace the rich fruit of his dominion will be apparent to every eye. Great Shepherd, let thy glorious kingdom come.

Verse 29. "All they that be fat upon earth," the rich and great are not shut out. Grace now finds the most of its jewels among the poor, but in the latter days the mighty of the earth "shall eat," shall taste of redeeming grace and dying love, and shall "worship" with all their hearts the God who deals so bountifully with us in Christ Jesus. Those who are spiritually fat with inward prosperity shall be filled with the marrow of communion, and shall worship the Lord with peculiar fervour. In the covenant of grace Jesus has provided good cheer for our high estate, and he has taken equal care to console us in our humiliation, for the next sentence is, "all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him." There is relief and comfort in bowing before God when our case is at its worst; even amid the dust of death prayer kindles the lamp of hope.

While all who come to God by Jesus Christ are thus blessed, whether they be rich or poor, none of those who despise him may hope for a blessing. "None can keep alive his own soul." This is the stern counterpart of the gospel message of "look and live." There is no salvation out of Christ. We must hold life, and have life as Christ's gift, or we shall die eternally. This is very solid evangelical doctrine, and should be proclaimed in every corner of the earth, that like a great hammer it may break in pieces all self-confidence.

Verse 30. "A seed shall serve him." Posterity shall perpetuate the worship of the Most High. The kingdom of truth on earth shall never fail. As one generation is called to its rest, another will arise in its stead. We need have no fear for the true apostolic succession; that is safe enough. "It shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation." He will reckon the ages by the succession of the saints, and set his accounts according to the families of the faithful. Generations of sinners come not into the genealogy of the skies. God's family register is not for strangers, but for the children only.

Verse 31. "They shall come." Sovereign grace shall bring out from among men the bloodbought ones. Nothing shall thwart the divine purpose. The chosen shall come to life, to faith, to pardon, to heaven. In this the dying Saviour finds a sacred satisfaction. Toiling servant of God, be glad at the thought that the eternal purpose of God shall suffer neither let nor hindrance. "And shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born." None of the people who shall be brought to God by the irresistible attractions of the cross shall be dumb, they shall be able to tell forth the righteousness of the Lord, so that future generations shall know the truth. Fathers shall teach their sons, who shall hand it down to their children; the burden of the story always being "that he hath done this," or, that "It is finished." Salvation's glorious work is done, there is peace on earth, and glory in the highest. "It is finished," these were the expiring words of the Lord Jesus, as they are the last words of this Psalm. May we by living faith be enabled to see our salvation finished by the death of Jesus!

Psalm 23

Verse 1. "The Lord is my shepherd." What condescension is this, that the infinite Lord assumes towards his people the office and character of a Shepherd! It should be the subject of grateful admiration that the great God allows himself to be compared to anything which will set forth his great love and care for his own people. David had himself been a keeper of sheep, and understood both the needs of the sheep and the many cares of a shepherd. He compares himself to a creature weak, defenceless, and foolish, and he takes God to be his Provider, Preserver, Director, and, indeed, his everything. No man has a right to consider himself the Lord's sheep unless his nature has been renewed for the scriptural description of unconverted men does not picture them as sheep, but as wolves or goats. A sheep is an object of property, not a wild animal; its owner sets great store by it, and frequently it is bought with a great price. It is well to know, as certainly David did, that we belong to the Lord. There is a noble tone of confidence about this sentence. There is no "if" nor "but," nor even "I hope so;" but he says, "The Lord is my shepherd." We must cultivate the spirit of assured dependence upon our heavenly Father. The sweetest word of the whole is that monosyllable, "My." He does not say, "The Lord is the shepherd of the world at large, and leadeth forth the multitude as his flock," but "The Lord is my shepherd;" if he be a Shepherd to no one else, he is a Shepherd to me; he cares for me, watches over me, and preserves me. The words are in the present tense. Whatever be the believer's position, he is even now under the pastoral care of Jehovah.

The next words are a sort of inference from the first statement—they are sententious and positive—"I shall not want." I might want otherwise, but when the Lord is my Shepherd he is able to supply my needs, and he is certainly willing to do so, for his heart is full of love, and therefore "I shall not want." I shall not lack for temporal things. Does he not feed the ravens, and cause the lilies to grow? How, then, can he leave his children to starve? I shall not want for spirituals, I know that his grace will be sufficient for me. Resting in him he will say to me, "As thy day so shall thy strength be." I may not possess all that I wish for, but "I shall not want." Others, far wealthier and wiser than I, may want, but "I shall not." "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want

any good thing." It is not only "I do not want," but "I shall not want." Come what may, if famine should devastate the land, or calamity destroy the city, "I shall not want." Old age with its feebleness shall not bring me any lack, and even death with its gloom shall not find me destitute. I have all things and abound; not because I have a good store of money in the bank, not because I have skill and wit with which to win my bread, but because "The Lord is my shepherd." The wicked always want, but the righteous never; a sinner's heart is far from satisfaction, but a gracious spirit dwells in the palace of content.

Verse 2. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters." The Christian life has two elements in it, the contemplative and the active, and both of these are richly provided for. First, the contemplative. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." What are these "green pastures" but the Scriptures of truth—always fresh, always rich, and never exhausted? There is no fear of biting the bare ground where the grass is long enough for the flock to lie down in it. Sweet and full are the doctrines of the gospel; fit food for souls, as tender grass is natural nutriment for sheep. When by faith we are enabled to find rest in the promises, we are like the sheep that lie down in the midst of the pasture; we find at the same moment both provender and peace, rest and refreshment, serenity and satisfaction. But observe: "He maketh me to lie down." It is the Lord who graciously enables us to perceive the preciousness of his truth, and to feed upon it. How grateful ought we to be for the power to appropriate the promises! There are some distracted souls who would give worlds if they could but do this. They know the blessedness of it, but they cannot say that this blessedness is theirs. They know the "green pastures," but they are not made to "lie down" in them. Those believers who have for years enjoyed a "full assurance of faith" should greatly bless their gracious God.

The second part of a vigorous Christian's life consists in gracious activity. We not only think, but we act. We are not always lying down to feed, but are journeying onward toward perfection; hence we read, "he leadeth me beside the still waters." What are these "still waters" but the influences and graces of his blessed Spirit? His Spirit attends us in various operations, like waters—in the plural—to cleanse, to refresh, to fertilise, to cherish. They are "still waters," for the Holy Ghost loves peace, and sounds no trumpet of ostentation in his operations. He may flow into our soul, but not into our neighbour's, and therefore our neighbour may not perceive the divine presence; and though the blessed Spirit may be pouring his floods into one heart, yet he that sitteth next to the favoured one may know nothing of it.

"In sacred silence of the mind
My heaven, and there my God I find."

Still waters run deep. Nothing more noisy than an empty drum. That silence is golden indeed in which the Holy Spirit meets with the souls of his saints. Not to raging waves of strife, but to peaceful streams of holy love does the Spirit of God conduct the chosen sheep. He is a dove, not an eagle; the dew, not the hurricane. Our Lord leads us beside these "still waters;" we could not go there of ourselves, we need his guidance, therefore it is said, "he leadeth me." He does not drive us. Moses drives us by the law, but Jesus leads us by his example, and the gentle drawing of his love.

Verse 3. "He restoreth my soul." When the soul grows sorrowful he revives it; when it is sinful he sanctifies it; when it is weak he strengthens it. "He" does it. His ministers could not do it if he did not. His Word would not avail by itself. "He restoreth my soul." Are any of us low in grace? Do we feel that our spirituality is at its lowest ebb? He who turns the ebb into the flood can soon restore our soul.

Pray to him, then, for the blessing—"Restore thou me, thou Shepherd of my soul!"

"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." The Christian delights to be obedient, but it is the obedience of love, to which he is constrained by the example of his Master. "He leadeth me." The Christian is not obedient to some commandments and neglectful of others; he does not pick and choose, but yields to all. Observe, that the plural is used—"the paths of righteousness." Whatever God may give us to do we would do it, led by his love. Some Christians overlook the blessing of sanctification, and yet to a thoroughly renewed heart this is one of the sweetest gifts of the covenant. If we could be saved from wrath, and yet remain unregenerate, impenitent sinners, we should not be saved as we desire, for we mainly and chiefly pant to be saved from sin and led in the way of holiness. All this is done out of pure free grace; "for his name's sake." It is to the honour of our great Shepherd that we should be a holy people, walking in the narrow way of righteousness. If we be so led and guided we must not fail to adore our heavenly Shepherd's care.

Verse 4. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." This unspeakably delightful verse has been sung on many a dying bed, and has helped to make the dark valley bright times out of mind. Every word in it has a wealth of meaning. "Yea, though I walk," as if the believer did not quicken his pace when he came to die, but still calmly walked with God. To walk indicates the steady advance of a soul which knows its road, knows its end, resolves to follow the path, feels quite safe, and is therefore perfectly calm and composed. The dying saint is not in a flurry, he does not run as though he were alarmed, nor stand still as though he would go no further, he is not confounded nor ashamed, and therefore keeps to his old pace. Observe that it is not walking in the valley, but through the valley. We go through the dark tunnel of death and emerge into the light of immortality. We do not die, we do but sleep to wake in glory. Death is not the house but the porch, not the goal but the passage to it. The dying article is called a valley. The storm breaks on the mountain, but the valley is the place of quietude, and thus full often the last days of the Christian are the most peaceful of his whole career; the mountain is bleak and bare, but the valley is rich with golden sheaves, and many a saint has reaped more joy and knowledge when he came to die than he ever knew while he lived. And, then, it is not "the valley of death," but "the valley of the shadow of death," for death in its substance has been removed, and only the shadow of it remains. Some one has said that when there is a shadow there must be light somewhere, and so there is. Death stands by the side of the highway in which we have to travel, and the light of heaven shining upon him throws a shadow across our path; let us then rejoice that there is a light beyond. Nobody is afraid of a shadow, for a shadow cannot stop a man's pathway even for a moment. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us. Let us not, therefore, be afraid. "I will fear no evil." He does not say there shall not be any evil; he had got beyond even that high assurance, and knew that Jesus had put all evil away; but "I will fear no evil;" as if even his fears, those shadows of evil, were gone for ever. The worst evils of life are those which do not exist except in our imagination. If we had no troubles but real troubles, we should not have a tenth part of our present sorrows. We feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, but the psalmist was cured of the disease of fearing. "I will fear no evil," not even the Evil One himself; I will not dread the last enemy, I will look upon him as a conquered foe, an enemy to be destroyed, "For thou art with me." This is the joy of the Christian! "Thou art with me." The little child out at sea in the storm is not frightened like all the other passengers on board the vessel, it sleeps in its mother's bosom; it is enough for it that its mother is with it; and it should be enough for the believer to know that Christ is with him. "Thou art with me; I have, in having thee, all that I can crave: I have perfect comfort and absolute security, for thou art with me." "Thy rod and thy staff," by which thou governest and rulest thy flock, the ensigns of thy sovereignty and of thy gracious

care—"they comfort me." I will believe that thou reignest still. The rod of Jesse shall still be over me as the sovereign succour of my soul.

Many persons profess to receive much comfort from the hope that they shall not die. Certainly there will be some who will be "alive and remain" at the coming of the Lord, but is there so very much of advantage in such an escape from death as to make it the object of Christian desire? A wise man might prefer of the two to die, for those who shall not die, but who "shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air," will be losers rather than gainers. They will lose that actual fellowship with Christ in the tomb which dying saints will have, and we are expressly told that they shall have no preference beyond those who are asleep. Let us be of Paul's mind when he said that "To die is gain," and think of "departing to be with Christ, which is far better." This twenty-third psalm is not worn out, and it is as sweet in a believer's ear now as it was in David's time, let novelty-hunters say what they will.

Verse 5. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." The good man has his enemies. He would not be like his Lord if he had not. If we were without enemies we might fear that we were not the friends of God, for the friendship of the world is enmity to God. Yet see the quietude of the godly man in spite of, and in the sight of, his enemies. How refreshing is his calm bravery! "Thou preparest a table before me." When a soldier is in the presence of his enemies, if he eats at all he snatches a hasty meal, and away he hastens to the fight. But observe: "Thou preparest a table," just as a servant does when she unfolds the damask cloth and displays the ornaments of the feast on an ordinary peaceful occasion. Nothing is hurried, there is no confusion, no disturbance, the enemy is at the door, and yet God prepares a table, and the Christian sits down and eats as if everything were in perfect peace. Oh! the peace which Jehovah gives to his people, even in the midst of the most trying circumstances!

"Let earth be all in arms abroad,
They dwell in perfect peace."

"Thou anointest my head with oil." May we live in the daily enjoyment of this blessing, receiving a fresh anointing for every day's duties. Every Christian is a priest, but he cannot execute the priestly office without unction, and hence we must go day by day to God the Holy Ghost, that we may have our heads anointed with oil. A priest without oil misses the chief qualification for his office, and the Christian priest lacks his chief fitness for service when he is devoid of new grace from on high. "My cup runneth over." He had not only enough, a cup full, but more than enough, a cup which overflowed. A poor man may say this as well as those in higher circumstances. "What, all this, and Jesus Christ too?" said a poor cottager as she broke a piece of bread and filled a glass with cold water. Whereas a man may be ever so wealthy, but if he be discontented his cup cannot run over; it is cracked and leaks. Content is the philosopher's stone which turns all it touches into gold; happy is he who has found it. Content is more than a kingdom, it is another word for happiness.

Verse 6. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." This is a fact as indisputable as it is encouraging, and therefore a heavenly verily, or "surely" is set as a seal upon it. This sentence may be read, "only goodness and mercy," for there shall be unmingled mercy in our history. These twin guardian angels will always be with me at my back and my beck. Just as when great princes go abroad they must not go unattended, so it is with the believer. Goodness and mercy follow him always—"all the days of his life"—the black days as well as the bright days, the days of fasting as well as the days of feasting, the dreary days of winter as well as the bright days of summer. Goodness supplies our needs, and mercy blots out our sins. "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord

for ever." "A servant abideth not in the house for ever, but the son abideth ever." While I am here I will be a child at home with my God; the whole world shall be his house to me; and when I ascend into the upper chamber, I shall not change my company, nor even change the house; I shall only go to dwell in the upper storey of the house of the Lord for ever.

May God grant us grace to dwell in the serene atmosphere of this most blessed Psalm!

Psalm 24

Verse 1. How very different is this from the ignorant Jewish notion of God which prevailed in our Saviour's day? The Jews said, "The holy land is God's, and the seed of Abraham are his only people;" but their great Monarch had long before instructed them,— "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." The whole round world is claimed for Jehovah, "and they that dwell therein" are declared to be his subjects. When we consider the bigotry of the Jewish people at the time of Christ, and how angry they were with our Lord for saying that many widows were in Israel, but unto none of them was the prophet sent, save only to the widow of Sarepta, and that there were many lepers in Israel, but none of them was healed except Naaman the Syrian,—when we recollect, too, how angry they were at the mention of Paul's being sent to the Gentiles, we are amazed that they should have remained in such blindness, and yet have sung this psalm, which shows so clearly that God is not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also. What a rebuke is this to those wiseacres who speak of the negro and other despised races as though they were not cared for by the God of heaven! If a man be but a man the Lord claims him, and who dares to brand him as a mere piece of merchandise! The meanest of men is a dweller in the world, and therefore belongs to Jehovah. Jesus Christ had made an end of the exclusiveness of nationalities. There is neither barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but we all are one in Christ Jesus.

Man lives upon "the earth," and parcels out its soil among his mimic kings and autocrats; but the earth is not man's. He is but a tenant at will, a leaseholder upon the most precarious tenure, liable to instantaneous ejection. The great Landowner and true Proprietor holds his court above the clouds, and laughs at the title-deeds of worms of the dust. The fee-simple is not with the lord of the manor nor the freeholder, but with the Creator. The "fulness" of the earth may mean its harvests, its wealth, its life, or its worship; in all these senses the Most High God is Possessor of all. The earth is full of God; he made it full and he keeps it full, notwithstanding all the demands which living creatures make upon its stores. The sea is full, despite all the clouds which rise from it; the air is full, notwithstanding all the lives which breathe it; the soil is full, though millions of plants derive their nourishment from it. Under man's tutored hand the world is coming to a greater fulness than ever, but it is all the Lord's; the field and the fruit, the earth and all earth's wonders are Jehovah's. We look also for a sublimer fulness when the true ideal of a world for God shall have been reached in millennial glories, and then most clearly the earth will be the Lord's and the fulness thereof. These words are now upon London's Royal Exchange, they shall one day be written in letters of light across the sky.

The term "world" indicates the habitable regions, wherein Jehovah is especially to be acknowledged as Sovereign. He who rules the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air should not be disobeyed by man, his noblest creature. Jehovah is the Universal King, all nations are beneath his sway: true Autocrat of all the nations, emperors and czars are but his slaves. Men are not their own, nor may they call their lips, their hearts, or their substance their own; they are Jehovah's rightful servants. This claim especially applies to us who are born from heaven. We do not belong to the world or to Satan, but by creation and redemption we are the peculiar portion of the Lord.

Paul uses this verse twice, to show that no food is unclean, and that nothing is really the property of false gods. All things are God's; no ban is on the face of nature, nothing is common or unclean. The

world is all God's world, and the food which is sold in the shambles is sanctified by being my Father's, and I need not scruple to eat thereof.

Verse 2. In the second verse we have the reason why the world belongs to God, namely, because he has created it, which is a title beyond all dispute. "For he hath founded it upon the seas." It is God who lifts up the earth from out of the sea, so that the dry land, which otherwise might in a moment be submerged, as in the days of Noah, is kept from the floods. The hungry jaws of ocean would devour the dry land if a constant fiat of Omnipotence did not protect it. "He hath established it upon the floods." The world is Jehovah's, because from generation to generation he preserves and upholds it, having settled its foundations. Providence and Creation are the two legal seals upon the title-deeds of the great Owner of all things. He who built the house and bears up its foundations has surely a first claim upon it. Let it be noted, however, upon what insecure foundations all terrestrial things are founded. Founded on the seas! Established on the floods! Blessed be God the Christian has another world to look forward to, and rests his hopes upon a more stable foundation than this poor world affords. They who trust in worldly things build upon the sea; but we have laid our hopes, by God's grace, upon the Rock of Ages; we are resting upon the promise of an immutable God, we are depending upon the constancy of a faithful Redeemer. Oh! ye worldlings, who have built your castles of confidence, your palaces of wealth, and your bowers of pleasure upon the seas, and established them upon the floods; how soon will your baseless fabrics melt, like foam upon the waters! Sand is treacherous enough, but what shall be said of the yet more unstable sea?

Verses 3-6. Here we have the true Israel described. The men who shall stand as courtiers in the palace of the living God are not distinguished by race, but by character; they are not Jews only, nor Gentiles only, nor any one branch of mankind peculiarly, but a people purified and made meet to dwell in the holy hill of the Lord.

Verse 3. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" It is uphill work for the creature to reach the Creator. Where is the mighty climber who can scale the towering heights? Nor is it height alone; it is glory too. Whose eye shall see the King in his beauty and dwell in his palace? In heaven he reigns most gloriously, who shall be permitted to enter into his royal presence? God has made all, but he will not save all; there is a chosen company who shall have the singular honour of dwelling with him in his high abode. These choice spirits desire to commune with God, and their wish shall be granted them. The solemn enquiry of the text is repeated in another form. Who shall be able to "stand" or continue there? He casteth away the wicked, who then can abide in his house? Who is he that can gaze upon the Holy One, and can abide in the blaze of his glory? Certainly none may venture to commune with God upon the footing of the law, but grace can make us meet to behold the vision of the divine presence. The question before us is one which all should ask for themselves, and none should be at ease till they have received an answer of peace. With careful self-examination let us enquire, "Lord, is it I."

Verse 4. "He that hath clean hands." Outward, practical holiness is a very precious mark of grace. To wash in water with Pilate is nothing, but to wash in innocency is all-important. It is to be feared that many professors have perverted the doctrine of justification by faith in such a way as to treat good works with contempt; if so, they will receive everlasting contempt at the last great day. It is vain to prate of inward experience unless the daily life is free from impurity, dishonesty, violence, and oppression. Those who draw near to God must have "clean hands." What monarch would have servants with filthy hands to wait at his table? They who were ceremonially unclean could not enter

into the Lord's house which was made with hands, much less shall the morally defiled be allowed to enjoy spiritual fellowship with a holy God. If our hands are now unclean, let us wash them in Jesu's precious blood, and so let us pray unto God, lifting up pure hands. But "clean hands" would not suffice, unless they were connected with "a pure heart." True religion is heart-work. We may wash the outside of the cup and the platter as long as we please; but if the inward parts be filthy, we are filthy altogether in the sight of God, for our hearts are more truly ourselves than our hands are. We may lose our hands and yet live, but we could not lose our heart and still live; the very life of our being lies in the inner nature, and hence the imperative need of purity within. There must be a work of grace in the core of the heart as well as in the palm of the hand, or our religion is a delusion. May God grant that our inward powers may be cleansed by the sanctifying Spirit, so that we may love holiness and abhor all sin. The pure in heart shall see God, all others are but blind bats; stone-blindness in the eyes arises from stone in the heart. Dirt in the heart throws dust in the eyes.

The soul must be delivered from delighting in the grovelling toys of earth; the man who is born for heaven "hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity." All men have their joys, by which their souls are lifted up; the worldling lifts up his soul in carnal delights, which are mere empty vanities; but the saint loves more substantial things; like Jehoshaphat, he is lifted up in the ways of the Lord. He who is content with the husks will be reckoned with the swine. If we suck our consolation from the breasts of the world, we prove ourselves to be its home-born children. Does the world satisfy thee? Then thou hast thy reward and thy portion in this life; make much of it, for thou shalt know no other joy.

"Nor sworn deceitfully." The saints are men of honour still. The Christian man's word is his only oath; but that is as good as twenty oaths of other men. False speaking will shut any man out of heaven, for a liar shall not enter into God's house, whatever may be his professions or doings. God will have nothing to do with liars, except to cast them into the lake of fire. Every liar is a child of the devil, and will be sent home to his father. A false declaration, a fraudulent statement, a cooked account, a slander, a lie—all these may suit the assembly of the ungodly, but are detested among true saints: how could they have fellowship with the God of truth, if they did not hate every false way?

Verse 5. It must not be supposed that the persons who are thus described by their inward and outward holiness are saved by the merits of their works; but their works are the evidences by which they are known. The present verse shows that in the saints grace reigns and grace alone. Such men wear the holy livery of the Great King because he has of his own free love clothed them therewith. The true saint wears the wedding garment, but he owns that the Lord of the feast provided it for him, without money and without price. "He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." So that the saints need salvation; they receive righteousness, and "the blessing" is a boon from God their Saviour. They do not ascend the hill of the Lord as givers but as receivers, and they do not wear their own merits, but a righteousness which they have received. Holy living ensures a blessing as its reward from the thrice Holy God, but it is itself a blessing of the New Covenant and a delightful fruit of the Spirit. God first gives us good works, and then rewards us for them. Grace is not obscured by God's demand for holiness, but is highly exalted as we see it decking the saint with jewels, and clothing him in fair white linen; all this sumptuous array being a free gift of mercy.

Verse 6. "This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob." These are the regeneration, these are in the line of grace; these are the legitimate seed. Yet they are only seekers; hence learn that true seekers are very dear in God's esteem, and are entered upon his register. Even seeking has a sanctifying influence; what a consecrating power must lie in finding and enjoying the Lord's face and favour! To desire communion with God is a purifying thing. Oh to hunger and thirst

more and more after a clear vision of the face of God; this will lead us to purge ourselves from all filthiness, and to walk with heavenly circumspection. He who longs to see his friend when he passes takes care to clear the mist from the window, lest by any means his friend should go by unobserved. Really awakened souls seek the Lord above everything, and as this is not the usual desire of mankind, they constitute a generation by themselves; a people despised of men but beloved of God. The expression "O Jacob" is a very difficult one, unless it be indeed true that the God of Jacob here condescendeth to be called Jacob, and takes upon himself the name of his chosen people. The preceding verses correct the inordinate boastings of those Jews who vaunted themselves as the favourites of heaven; they are told that their God is the God of all the earth, and that he is holy, and will admit none but holy ones into his presence. Let the mere professor as he reads these verses listen to the voice which saith, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."
"Selah." Lift up the harp and voice, for a nobler song is coming; a song of our Well-beloved.

Verse 7. These last verses reveal to us the great representative man, who answered to the full character laid down, and therefore by his own right ascended the holy hill of Zion. Our Lord Jesus Christ could ascend into the hill of the Lord because his hands were clean and his heart was pure, and if we by faith in him are conformed to his image we shall enter too. We have here a picture of our Lord's glorious ascent. We see him rising from amidst the little group upon Olivet, and as the cloud receives him, angels reverently escort him to the gates of heaven. The ancient gates of the eternal temple are personified and addressed in song by the attending cohorts of rejoicing spirits.

"Lo his triumphal chariot waits,
And angels chant the solemn lay.
'Lift up your heads, ye heavenly gates;
Ye everlasting doors, give way."

They are called upon "to lift up their heads," as though with all their glory they were not great enough for the Allglorious King. Let all things do their utmost to honour so great a Prince; let the highest heaven put on unusual loftiness in honour of "the King of Glory." He who, fresh from the cross and the tomb, now rides through the gates of the New Jerusalem is higher than the heavens; great and everlasting as they are, those gates of pearl are all unworthy of him before whom the heavens are not pure, and who chargeth his angels with folly. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates."

Verse 8. The watchers at the gate hearing the song look over the battlements and ask, "Who is this King of glory?" A question full of meaning and worthy of the meditations of eternity. Who is he in person, nature, character, office and work? What is his pedigree? What his rank and what his race? The answer given in a mighty wave of music is, "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." We know the might of Jesus by the battles which he has fought, the victories which he has won over sin, and death, and hell, and we clap our hands as we see him leading captivity captive in the majesty of his strength. Oh for a heart to sing his praises! Mighty hero, be thou crowned for ever King of kings and Lord of lords.

Verse 9. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." The words are repeated with a pleasing variation. There are times of deep earnest feeling when repetitions are not vain but full of force. Doors were often taken from their hinges when Easterns would show welcome to a guest, and some doors were drawn up and down like a portcullis,

and may possibly have protruded from the top; thus literally lifting up their heads. The picture is highly poetical, and shows how wide heaven's gate is set by the ascension of our Lord. Blessed be God, the gates have never been shut since. The opened gates of heaven invite the weakest believer to enter. Dear reader, it is possible that you are saying, "I shall never enter into the heaven of God, for I have neither clean hands nor a pure heart." Look then to Christ, who has already climbed the holy hill. He has entered as the forerunner of those who trust him. Follow in his footsteps, and repose upon his merit. He rides triumphantly into heaven, and you shall ride there too if you trust him. "But how can I get the character described?" say you. The Spirit of God will give you that. He will create in you a new heart and a right spirit. Faith in Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit, and has all virtues wrapped up in it. Faith stands by the fountain filled with blood, and as she washes therein, clean hands and a pure heart, a holy soul and a truthful tongue are given to her.

Verse 10. The closing note is inexpressibly grand. Jehovah of hosts, Lord of men and angels, Lord of the universe, Lord of the worlds, is the King of glory. All true glory is concentrated upon the true God, for all other glory is but a passing pageant, the painted pomp of an hour. The ascended Saviour is here declared to be the Head and Crown of the universe, the King of Glory. Our Immanuel is hymned in sublimest strains. Jesus of Nazareth is Jehovah Sabaoth.

Psalm 25

Verse 1. Unto thee, O Lord. See how the holy soul flies to its God like a dove to its cote. When the storm winds are out, the Lord's vessels put about and make for their well remembered harbour of refuge. What a mercy that the Lord will condescend to hear our cries in time of trouble, although we may have almost forgotten him in our hours of fancied prosperity. Unto thee, O Jehovah, do I lift up my soul. It is but a mockery to uplift the hands and the eyes unless we also bring our souls into our devotions. True prayer may be described as the soul rising from earth to have fellowship with heaven; it is taking a journey upon Jacob's ladder, leaving our cares and fears at the foot, and meeting with a covenant God at the top. Very often the soul cannot rise, she has lost her wings, and is heavy and earth bound; more like a burrowing mole than a soaring eagle. At such dull seasons we must not give over prayer, but must, by God's assistance, exert all our powers to lift up our hearts. Let faith be the lever and grace be the arm, and the dead lump will yet be stirred. But what a lift it has sometimes proved! With all our tugging and straining we have been utterly defeated, until the heavenly loadstone of our Saviour's love has displayed its omnipotent attractions, and then our hearts have gone up to our Beloved like mounting flames of fire.

Verse 2. O my God. This title is more dear than the name Jehovah, which is used in the first sentence. Already the sweet singer has drawn nearer to his heavenly helper, for he makes bold to grasp him with the hand of assured possession, calling him, my God. Oh the more than celestial music of that word—"My God!" It is to be observed that the psalmist does not deny expression to those gracious feelings with which God had favoured him; he does not fall into loathsome mock modesty, but finding in his soul a desire to seek the Lord he avows it; believing that he had a rightful interest in Jehovah he declares it, and knowing that he had confidence in his God he professes it; O my God, I trust in thee. Faith is the cable which binds our boat to the shore, and by pulling at it we draw ourselves to the land; faith unites us to God, and then draws us near to him. As long as the anchor of faith holds there is no fear in the worst tempest; if that should fail us there would be no hope left. We must see to it that our faith is sound and strong, for otherwise prayer cannot prevail with God. Woe to the warrior who throws away his shield; what defence can be found for him who finds no

defence in his God? Let me not be ashamed. Let not my disappointed hopes make me feel ashamed of my former testimonies of thy faithfulness. Many were on the watch for this. The best of men have their enemies, and should pray against them that they may not see their wicked desires accomplished. Let not mine enemies triumph over me. Suffer no wicked mouth to make blasphemous mirth out of my distresses by asking, "Where is thy God?" There is a great jealousy in believers for the honour of God, and they cannot endure that unbelievers should taunt them with the failure of their expectations from the God of their salvation. All other trusts will end in disappointment and eternal shame, but our confidence shall never be confounded.

Verse 3. Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed. Suffering enlarges the heart by creating the power to sympathize. If we pray eagerly for ourselves, we shall not long be able to forget our fellow sufferers. None pity the poor like those who have been or are still poor, none have such tenderness for the sick as those who have been long in ill health themselves. We ought to be grateful for occasional griefs if they preserve us from chronic hardheartedness; for of all afflictions, an unkind heart is the worst, it is a plague to its possessor, and a torment to those around him. Prayer when it is of the Holy Ghost's teaching is never selfish; the believer does not sue for monopolies for himself, but would have all in like case to partake of divine mercy with him. The prayer may be viewed as a promise; our Heavenly Father will never let his trustful children find him untrue or unkind. He will ever be mindful of his covenant. Let them be ashamed which transgress without cause. David had given his enemies no provocation; their hatred was wanton. Sinners have no justifiable reason or valid excuse for transgressing; they benefit no one, not even themselves by their sins; the law against which they transgress is not harsh or unjust; God is not a tyrannical ruler, providence is not a bondage: men sin because they will sin, not because it is either profitable or reasonable to do so. Hence shame is their fitting reward. May they blush with penitential shame now, or else they will not be able to escape the everlasting contempt and the bitter shame which is the portion of fools in the world to come.

Verse 4. Shew me thy ways, O Lord. Unsanctified natures clamour for their own way, but gracious spirits cry, "Not my will, but thine be done." We cannot at all times discern the path of duty, and at such times it is our wisdom to apply to the Lord himself. Frequently the dealings of God with us are mysterious, and then also we may appeal to him as his own interpreter, and in due time he will make all things plain. Moral, providential and mental forms of guidance are all precious gifts of a gracious God to a teachable people. The second petition, teach me thy paths, appears to mean more than the first, and may be illustrated by the case of a little child who should say to his father, "Father, first tell me which is the way, and then teach my little trembling feet to walk in it." What weak dependent creatures we are! How constantly should we cry to the Strong for strength!

Verse 5. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me. The same request as in the last verse. The little child having begun to walk, asks to be still led onward by its parent's helping hand, and to be further instructed in the alphabet of truth. Experimental teaching is the burden of this prayer. Lead me according to thy truth, and prove thyself faithful; lead me into truth that I may know its preciousness, lead me by the way of truth that I may manifest its spirit. David knew much, but he felt his ignorance and desired to be still in the Lord's school; four times over in these two verses he applies for a scholarship in the college of grace. It were well for many professors if instead of following their own devices, and cutting out new paths of thought for themselves, they would enquire for the good old ways of God's own truth, and beseech the Holy Ghost to give them sanctified understandings and teachable spirits. For thou art the God of my salvation. The Three One Jehovah is the Author and

Perfector of salvation to his people. Reader, is he the God of your salvation? Do you find in the Father's election, in the Son's atonement, and in the Spirit's quickening all the grounds of your eternal hopes? If so, you may use this as an argument for obtaining further blessings; if the Lord has ordained to save you, surely he will not refuse to instruct you in his ways. It is a happy thing when we can address the Lord with the confidence which David here manifests, it gives us great power in prayer, and comfort in trial. On thee do I wait all the day. Patience is the fair handmaid and daughter of faith; we cheerfully wait when we are certain that we shall not wait in vain. It is our duty and our privilege to wait upon the Lord in service, in worship, in expectancy, in trust all the days of our life. Our faith will be tried faith, and if it be of the true kind, it will bear continued trial without yielding. We shall not grow weary of waiting upon God if we remember how long and how graciously he once waited for us.

Verse 6. Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses. We are usually tempted in seasons of affliction to fear that our God has forgotten us, or forgotten his usual kindness towards us; hence the soul doth as it were put the Lord in remembrance, and beseech him to recollect those deeds of love which once he wrought towards it. There is a holy boldness which ventures thus to deal with the Most High, let us cultivate it; but there is also an unholy unbelief which suggests our fears, let us strive against it with all our might. What gems are those two expressions, "tender mercies and lovingkindnesses!" They are the virgin honey of language; for sweetness no words can excel them; but as for the gracious favours which are intended by them, language fails to describe them.

"When all thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I am lost
In wonder, love and praise."

If the Lord will only do unto us in the future as in the past, we shall be well content. We seek no change in the divine action, we only crave that the river of grace may never cease to flow. For they have been ever of old. A more correct translation would be "from eternity." David was a sound believer in the doctrine of God's eternal love. The Lord's lovingkindnesses are no novelties. When we plead with him to bestow them upon us, we can urge use and custom of the most ancient kind. In courts of law men make much of precedents, and we may plead them at the throne of grace. "Faith," saith Dickson, "must make use of experiences and read them over unto God, out of the register of a sanctified memory, as a recorder to him who cannot forget." With a unchangeable God it is a most effectual argument to remind him of his ancient mercies and his eternal love. By tracing all that we enjoy to the fountain head of everlasting love we shall greatly cheer our hearts, and those do us but sorry service who try to dissuade us from meditating upon election and its kindred topics.

Verse 7. Remember not the sins of my youth. Sin is the stumbling block. This is the thing to be removed. Lord, pass an act of oblivion for all my sins, and especially for the hot blooded wanton follies of my younger years. Those offences which we remember with repentance God forgets, but if we forget them, justice will bring them forth to punishment. The world winks at the sins of younger men, and yet they are none so little after all; the bones of our youthful feastings at Satan's table will stick painfully in our throats when we are old men. He who presumes upon his youth is poisoning his old age. How large a tear may wet this page as some of us reflect upon the past! Nor my transgressions. Another word for the same evils. Sincere penitents cannot get through their confessions at a gallop; they are constrained to use many bemoanings, for their swarming sins smite

them with so innumerable griefs. A painful sense of any one sin provokes the believer to repentance for the whole mass of his iniquities. Nothing but the fullest and clearest pardon will satisfy a thoroughly awakened conscience. David would have his sins not only forgiven, but forgotten. According to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O Lord. David and the dying thief breathe the same prayer, and doubtless they grounded it upon the same plea, viz., the free grace and unmerited goodness of Jehovah. We dare not ask to have our portion measured from the balances of justice, but we pray to be dealt with by the hand of mercy.

Verses 8-10. These three verses are a meditation upon the attributes and acts of the Lord. He who toils in the harvest field of prayer should occasionally pause awhile and refresh himself with a meal of meditation.

Verse 8. Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. Here the goodness and rectitude of the divine character are beheld in friendly union; he who would see them thus united in bonds of perfect amity must stand at the foot of the cross and view them blended in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. It is no less true than wonderful that through the atonement the justice of God pleads as strongly as his grace for the salvation of the sinners whom Jesus died to save. Moreover, as a good man naturally endeavours to make others like himself, so will the Lord our God in his compassion bring sinners into the way of holiness and conform them to his own image; thus the goodness of our God leads us to expect the reclaiming of sinful men. We may not conclude from God's goodness that he will save those sinners who continue to wander in their own ways, but we may be assured that he will renew transgressors' hearts and guide them into the way of holiness. Let those who desire to be delivered from sin take comfort from this. God himself will condescend to be the teacher of sinners. What a ragged school is this for God to teach in! God's teaching is practical; he teaches sinners not only the doctrine but the way.

Verse 9. The meek will he guide in judgment. Meek spirits are in high favour with the Father of the meek and lowly Jesus, for he sees in them the image of his only begotten Son. They know their need of guidance, and are willing to submit their own understandings to the divine will, and therefore the Lord condescends to be their guide. Humble spirits are in this verse endowed with a rich inheritance; let them be of good cheer. Trouble puts gentle spirits to their wit's ends, and drives them to act without discretion, but grace comes to the rescue, enlightens their minds to follow that which is just, and helps them to discern the way in which the Lord would have them to go. Proud of their own wisdom fools will not learn, and therefore miss their road to heaven, but lowly hearts sit at Jesu's feet, and find the gate of glory, for the meek will he teach his way. Blessed teacher! Favoured scholar! Divine lesson! My soul, be thou familiar with the whole.

Verse 10. This is a rule without exception. God is good to those that be good. Mercy and faithfulness shall abound towards those who through mercy are made faithful. Whatever outward appearances may threaten we should settle it steadfastly in our minds that while grace enables us to obey the Lord's will we need not fear that Providence will cause us any real loss. There shall be mercy in every unsavoury morsel, and faithfulness in every bitter drop; let not our hearts be troubled, but let us rest by faith in the immutable covenant of Jehovah, which is ordered in all things and sure. Yet this is not a general truth to be trampled upon by swine, it is a pearl for a child's neck. Gracious souls, by faith resting upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus, keep the covenant of the Lord, and, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, they walk in his testimonies; these will find all things working together for their good, but to the sinner there is no such promise. Keepers of the covenant shall be kept by the

covenant; those who follow the Lord's commandments shall find the Lord's mercy following them.

Verse 11. This sentence of prayer would seem out of place were it not that prayer is always in its place, whether in season or out of season. Meditation having refreshed the Psalmist, he falls to his weighty work again, and wrestles with God for the remission of his sin. For thy name's sake, O Lord. Here is a blessed, never failing plea. Not for our sakes or our merit's sake, but to glorify thy mercy, and to show forth the glory of thy divine attributes. Pardon mine iniquity. It is confessed, it is abhorred, it is consuming my heart with grief; Lord forgive it; let thine own lips pronounce my absolution. For it is great. It weighs so heavily upon me that I pray thee remove it. Its greatness is no difficulty with thee, for thou art a great God, but the misery which it causes to me is my argument with thee for speedy pardon. Lord, the patient is sore sick, therefore heal him. To pardon a great sinner will bring thee great glory, therefore for thy name's sake pardon me. Observe how this verse illustrates the logic of faith, which is clean contrary to that of a legal spirit; faith looks not for merit in the creature, but hath regard to the goodness of the Creator; and instead of being staggered by the demerits of sin it looks to the precious blood, and pleads all the more vigorously because of the urgency of the case.

Verse 12. What man is he that feareth the Lord? Let the question provoke self examination. Gospel privileges are not for every pretender. Art thou of the seed royal or no? Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. Those whose hearts are right shall not err for want of heavenly direction. Where God sanctifies the heart he enlightens the head. We all wish to choose our way; but what a mercy is it when the Lord directs that choice, and makes free will to be goodwill! If we make our will God's will, God will let us have our will. God does not violate our will, but leaves much to our choice; nevertheless, he instructs our wills, and so we choose that which is well pleasing in his sight. The will should be subject to law; there is a way which we should choose, but so ignorant are we that we need to be taught, and so wilful that none but God himself can teach us effectually.

Verse 13. He who fears God has nothing else to fear. His soul shall dwell at ease. He shall lodge in the chamber of content. One may sleep as soundly in the little bed in the corner as in the Great Bed of Ware; it is not abundance but content that gives true ease. Even here, having learned by grace both to abound and be empty, the believer dwells at ease; but how profound will be the ease of his soul for ever! There he will enjoy the otium cum dignitate; ease and glory shall go together. Like a warrior whose battles are over, or a husbandman whose barns are full, his soul shall take its ease, and be merry for ever. His seed shall inherit the earth. God remembers Isaac for the sake of Abraham, and Jacob for the sake of Isaac. Good men's sons have a goodly portion to begin the world with, but many of them, alas! turn a father's blessing into a curse. The promise is not broken because in some instances men wilfully refuse to receive it; moreover, it is in its spiritual meaning that it now holds good; our spiritual seed do inherit all that was meant by "the earth, "or Canaan; they receive the blessing of the new covenant. May the Lord make us the joyful parents of many spiritual children, and we shall have no fears about their maintenance, for the Lord will make each one of them princes in all the earth.

Verse 14. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. Some read it "the friendship:" it signifies familiar intercourse, confidential intimacy, and select fellowship. This is a great secret. Carnal minds cannot guess what is intended by it, and even believers cannot explain it in words, for it must be felt to be known. The higher spiritual life is necessarily a path which the eagle's eye hath not known, and which the lion's whelp has not travelled; neither natural wisdom nor strength can force a door into this inner chamber. Saints have the key of heaven's hieroglyphics; they can unriddle celestial enigmas.

They are initiated into the fellowship of the skies; they have heard words which it is not possible for them to repeat to their fellows. And he will shew them his covenant. Its antiquity, security, righteousness, fulness, graciousness and excellence, shall be revealed to their hearts and understandings, and above all, their own part in it shall be sealed to their souls by the witness of the Holy Spirit. The designs of love which the Lord has to his people in the covenant of grace, he has been pleased to show to believers in the Book of Inspiration, and by his Spirit he leads us into the mystery, even the hidden mystery of redemption. He who does not know the meaning of this verse, will never learn it from a commentary; let him look to the cross, for the secret lies there.

Verse 15. Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord. The writer claims to be fixed in his trust, and constant in his expectation; he looks in confidence, and waits in hope. We may add to this look of faith and hope the obedient look of service, the humble look of reverence, the admiring look of wonder, the studious look of meditation, and the tender look of affection. Happy are those whose eyes are never removed from their God. "The eye," says Solomon, "is never satisfied with seeing," but this sight is the most satisfying in the world. For he shall pluck my feet out of the net. Observe the conflicting condition in which a gracious soul may be placed, his eyes are in heaven and yet his feet are sometimes in a net; his nobler nature ceases not to behold the glories of God, while his baser parts are enduring the miseries of the world. A net is the common metaphor for temptation. The Lord often keeps his people from falling into it, and if they have fallen he rescues them. The word "pluck" is a rough word, and saints who have fallen into sin find that the means of their restoration are not always easy to the flesh; the Lord plucks at us sharply to let us feel that sin is an exceeding bitter thing. But what a mercy is here: Believer, be very grateful for it. The Lord will deliver us from the cunning devices of our cruel enemy, and even if through infirmity we have fallen into sin, he will not leave us to be utterly destroyed but will pluck us out of our dangerous state; though our feet are in the net, if our eyes are up unto God, mercy certainly will interpose.

Verse 16. His own eyes were fixed upon God, but he feared that the Lord had averted his face from him in anger. Oftentimes unbelief suggests that God has turned his back upon us. If we know that we turn to God we need not fear that he will turn from us, but may boldly cry, Turn thee unto me. The ground of quarrel is always in ourselves, and when that is removed there is nothing to prevent our full enjoyment of communion with God. Have mercy upon me. Saints still must stand upon the footing of mercy; notwithstanding all their experience they cannot get beyond the publican's prayer, "Have mercy upon me." For I am desolate and afflicted. He was lonely and bowed down. Jesus was in the days of his flesh in just such a condition; none could enter into the secret depths of his sorrows, he trod the winepress alone, and hence he is able to succour in the fullest sense those who tread the solitary path.

"Christ leads me through no darker rooms
Than he went through before; He that into God's kingdom comes,
Must enter by this door."

Verse 17. The troubles of my heart are enlarged. When trouble penetrates the heart it is trouble indeed. In the case before us, the heart was swollen with grief like a lake surcharged with water by enormous floods; this is used as an argument for deliverance, and it is a potent one. When the darkest hour of the night arrives we may expect the dawn; when the sea is at its lowest ebb the tide must surely turn; and when our troubles are enlarged to the greatest degree, then we may hopefully pray, O bring thou me out of my distresses.

Verse 18. Look upon mine affliction and my pain. Note the many trials of the saints; here we have no less than six words all descriptive of woe. "Desolate, and afflicted, troubles enlarged, distresses, affliction, and pain." But note yet more the submissive and believing spirit of a true saint; all he asks for is, "Lord, look upon my evil plight; "he does not dictate, or even express a complaint; a look from God will content him, and that being granted he asks no more. Even more noteworthy is the way in which the believer under affliction discovers the true source of all the mischief, and lays the axe at the root of it. Forgive all my sins, is the cry of a soul that is more sick of sin than of pain, and would sooner be forgiven than healed. Blessed is the man to whom sin is more unbearable than disease, he shall not be long before the Lord shall both forgive his iniquity and heal his diseases. Men are slow to see the intimate connection between sin and sorrow, a grace taught heart alone feels it.

Verse 19. Consider mine enemies. Watch them, weigh them, check them, defeat them. For they are many. They need the eyes of Argus to watch them, and the arms of Hercules to match them, but the Lord is more than sufficient to defeat them. The devils of hell and the evils of earth are all vanquished when the Lord makes bare his arm. They hate me with cruel hatred. It is the breath of the serpent's seed to hate; their progenitor was a hater, and they themselves must needs imitate him. No hate so cruel as that which is unreasonable and unjust. A man can forgive one who had injured him, but one whom he has injured he hates implacably. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, "is still our Master's word to us.

Verse 20. O keep my soul out of evil, and deliver me when I fall into it. This is another version of the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Let me not be ashamed. This is the one fear which like a ghost haunted the psalmist's mind. He trembled lest his faith should become the subject of ridicule through the extremity of his affliction. Noble hearts can brook anything but shame. David was of such a chivalrous spirit, that he could endure any torment rather than be put to dishonour. For I put my trust in thee. And therefore the name of God would be compromised if his servants were deserted; this the believing heart can by no means endure.

Verse 21. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me. What better practical safeguards can a man require? If we do not prosper with these as our guides, it is better for us to suffer adversity. Even the ungodly world admits that "honesty is the best policy." The heir of heaven makes assurance doubly sure, for apart from the rectitude of his public life, he enlists the guardian care of heaven in secret prayer: for I wait on thee. To pretend to wait on God without holiness of life is religious hypocrisy, and to trust to our own integrity without calling upon God is presumptuous atheism. Perhaps the integrity and uprightness referred to are those righteous attributes of God, which faith rests upon as a guarantee that the Lord will not forfeit his word.

Verse 22. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles. This is a very comprehensive prayer, including all the faithful and all their trials. Sorrow had taught the psalmist sympathy, and given him communion with the tried people of God; he therefore remembers them in his prayers. Israel, the tried, the wrestling, the conquering hero, fit representative of all the saints. Israel in Egypt, in the wilderness, in wars with Canaanites, in captivity, fit type of the church militant on earth. Jesus is the Redeemer from trouble as well as sin, he is a complete Redeemer, and from every evil he will rescue every saint. Redemption by blood is finished: O God, send us redemption by power. Amen and Amen.

Psalm 26

Verse 1. Judge me, O Jehovah. A solemn appeal to the just tribunal of the heart searching God, warranted by the circumstances of the writer, so far as regarded the particular offences with which he was wrongly charged. Worried and worn out by the injustice of men, the innocent spirit flies from its false accusers to the throne of Eternal Right. He had need have a clear case who dares to carry his suit into the King's Bench of heaven. Such an appeal as this is not to be rashly made on any occasion; and as to the whole of our walk and conversation, it should never be made at all, except as we are justified in Christ Jesus: a far more fitting prayer for a sinful mortal is the petition, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant." For I have walked in mine integrity. He held integrity as his principle, and walked in it as his practice. David had not used any traitorous or unrighteous means to gain the crown, or to keep it; he was conscious of having been guided by the noblest principles of honour in all his actions with regard to Saul and his family. What a comfort it is to have the approbation of one's own conscience! If there be peace within the soul, the blustering storms of slander which howl around us are of little consideration. When the little bird in my bosom sings a merry song, it is no matter to me if a thousand owls hoot at me from without. I have trusted also in the Lord. Faith is the root and sap of integrity. He who leans upon the Lord is sure to walk in righteousness. David knew that God's covenant had given him the crown, and therefore he took no indirect or unlawful means to secure it; he would not slay his enemy in the cave, nor suffer his men at arms to smite him when he slept unguarded on the plain. Faith will work hard for the Lord, and in the Lord's way, but she refuses so much as to lift a finger to fulfil the devices of unrighteous cunning. Rebecca acted out a great falsehood in order to fulfil the Lord's decree in favour of Jacob—this was unbelief; but Abraham left the Lord to fulfil his own purposes, and took the knife to slay his son—this was faith. Faith trusts God to accomplish his own decrees. Why should I steal when God has promised to supply my need? Why should I avenge myself when I know that the Lord has espoused my cause? Confidence in God is a most effectual security against sin. Therefore I shall not slide. Slippery as the way is, so that I walk like a man upon ice, yet faith keeps my heels from tripping, and will continue to do so. The doubtful ways of policy are sure sooner or later to give a fall to those who run therein, but the ways of honesty, though often rough, are always safe. We cannot trust in God if we walk crookedly; but straight paths and simple faith bring the pilgrim happily to his journey's end.

Verse 2. There are three modes of trial here challenged, which are said in the original to refer to trial by touch, trial by smell, and trial by fire. The psalmist was so clear from the charge laid against him, that he submitted himself unconditionally to any form of examination which the Lord might see fit to employ. Examine me, O Lord. Look me through and through; make a minute survey; put me to the question, cross examine my evidence. And prove me. Put me again to trial; and see if I would follow such wicked designs as my enemies impute to me. Try my reins and my heart. Assay me as metals are assayed in the furnace, and do this to my most secret parts, where my affections hold their court; see, O God, whether or no I love murder, and treason, and deceit. All this is a very bold appeal, and made by a man like David, who feared the Lord exceedingly, it manifests a most solemn and complete conviction of innocence. The expressions here used should teach us the thoroughness of the divine judgment, and the necessity of being in all things profoundly sincere, lest we be found wanting at the last. Our enemies are severe with us with the severity of spite, and this a brave man endures without fear; but God's severity is that of unswerving right. Who shall stand against such a trial? The sweet singer says "Who can stand before his cold?" and we may well enquire, "Who can stand before the heat of his justice?"

Verse 3. For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes. An object of memory and a ground of hope. A sense of mercy received sets a fair prospect before the faithful mind in its gloomiest condition, for it yields visions of mercies yet to come, visions not visionary but real. Dwell, dear reader, upon that celestial word lovingkindness. It has a heavenly savour. Is it not an unmatchable word, unexcelled, unrivalled? The goodness of the Lord to us should be before our eyes as a motive actuating our conduct; we are not under the bondage of the law, but we are under the sweet constraints of grace, which are far more mighty, although far more gentle. Men sin with the law before their eyes, but divine love, when clearly seen, sanctifies the conversation. If we were not so forgetful of the way of mercy in which God walks toward us, we should be more careful to walk in the ways of obedience toward him. And I have walked in thy truth. The psalmist was preserved from sin by his assurance of the truthfulness of God's promise, which truth he endeavoured to imitate as well as to believe. Observe from this verse that an experience of divine love will show itself in a practical following of divine truth; those who neglect either the doctrinal or practical parts of truth must not wonder if they lose the experimental enjoyment of it. Some talk of truth, it is better to walk in it. Some vow to do well in future, but their resolutions come to nothing; only the regenerate man can say "I have walked in thy truth."

Verses 4-5. So far from being himself an open offender against the laws of God, the psalmist had not even associated with the lovers of evil. He had kept aloof from the men of Belial. A man is known by his company, and if we have kept ourselves apart from the wicked, it will always be evidence in our favour should our character be impugned. He who was never in the parish is not likely to have stolen the corn. He who never went to sea is clearly not the man who scuttled the ship.

Verse 4. I have not sat with vain persons. True citizens have no dealings with traitors. David had no seat in the parliament of triflers. They were not his boon companions at feasts, nor his advisers in council, nor his associates in conversation. We must needs see, and speak, and trade, with men of the world, but we must on no account take our rest and solace in their empty society. Not only the profane, but the vain are to be shunned by us. All those who live for this life only are vain, chaffy, frothy men, quite unworthy of a Christian's friendship. Moreover as this vanity is often allied with falsehood, it is well to save ourselves altogether from this untoward generation, lest we should be led from bad to worse and from tolerating the vain should come to admire the wicked. Neither will I go in with dissemblers. Since I know that hypocritical piety is double iniquity, I will cease all acquaintance with pretenders. If I must need walk the same street, I will not enter the same door and spend my time in their society. The congregation of the hypocrites is not one with which we should cultivate communion; their ultimate rendezvous will be the lowest pit of hell, let us drop their acquaintance now! for we shall not desire it soon. They hang their beads around their necks and carry the devil in their hearts. This clause is in the future tense, to indicate that the writer felt no desire to begin an acquaintance with the characters whom up till then he had shunned. We must maintain the separated path with more and more circumspection as we see the great redemption day approaching. Those who would be transfigured with Jesus, must not be disfigured by conformity to the world. The resolution of the psalmist suggests, that even among professed followers of truth we must make distinctions, for as there are vain persons out of the church, so there are dissemblers in it and both are to be shunned with scrupulous decision.

Verse 5. I have hated the congregation of evil doers. A severe sentence, but not too severe. A man who does not hate evil terribly, does not love good heartily. Men, as men, we must always love, for they are our neighbours, and therefore to be loved as ourselves; but evil doers, as such, are traitors

to the Great King, and no loyal subject can love traitors. What God hates we must hate. The congregation or assembly of evil doers, signifies violent men in alliance and conclave for the overthrow of the innocent; such synagogues of Satan are to be held in abhorrence. What a sad reflection it is that there should be a congregation of evil doers as well as a congregation of the upright, a church of Satan as well as a church of God; a seed of the serpent as well as a seed of the woman; an old Babylon as well as a new Jerusalem: a great whore sitting upon many waters, to be judged in wrath, as well as a chaste bride of the Lamb to be crowned at his coming. And will not sit with the wicked. Saints have a seat at another table, and will never leave the King's dainties for the husks of the swine trough. Better to sit with the blind, and the halt, and the lame, at the table of mercy, than with the wicked in their feasts of ungodliness, yea, better to sit on Job's dunghill than on Pharaoh's throne. Let each reader see well to his company, for such as we keep in this world, we are likely to keep in the next.

Verse 6. I will wash mine hands in innocency. He would publicly avow himself to be altogether clear of the accusations laid against him, and if any fault in other matters could be truthfully alleged against him, he would for the future abstain from it. The washing of the hands is a significant action to set forth our having no connection with a deed, as we still say, "I wash my hands of the whole business." As to perfect innocence, David does not here claim it, but he avows his innocence of the crimes whereof he was slanderously accused; there is, however, a sense in which we may be washed in absolute innocency, for the atoning blood makes us clean every whit. We ought never to rest satisfied short of a full persuasion of our complete cleansing by Jesus' precious blood. So will I compass thine altar, O Lord. Priests unto God must take great care to be personally cleansed; the brazen laver was as needful as the golden altar; God's worship requires us to be holy in life. He who is unjust to man cannot be acceptably religious towards God. We must not bring our thank offerings with hands defiled with guilt. To love justice and purity is far more acceptable to God, than ten thousands of the fat of fed beasts. We see from this verse that holy minds delight in the worship of the Lord, and find their sweetest solace at his altar; and that it is their deepest concern never to enter upon any course of action which would unfit them for the most sacred communion with God. Our eye must be upon the altar which sanctifies both the giver and the gift, yet we must never draw from the atoning sacrifice an excuse for sin, but rather find in it a most convincing argument for holiness.

Verse 7. That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving. David was so far instructed that he does not mention the typical offering, but discerns the spiritual offering which was intended thereby, not the groans of bullocks, but songs of gratitude the spiritual worshipper presents. To sound abroad the worthy praises of the God of all grace should be the everyday business of a pardoned sinner. Let men slander us as they will, let us not defraud the Lord of his praises; let dogs bark, but let us like the moon shine on. And tell of all thy wondrous works. God's people should not be tongue tied. The wonders of divine grace are enough to make the tongue of the dumb sing. God's works of love are wondrous if we consider the unworthiness of their objects, the costliness of their method, and the glory of their result. And as men find great pleasure in discoursing upon things remarkable and astonishing, so the saints rejoice to tell of the great things which the Lord hath done for them.

Verse 8. Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house. Into the abodes of sin he would not enter, but the house of God he had long loved, and loved it still. We were sad children if we did not love our Father's dwelling place. Though we own no sacred buildings, yet the church of the living God is the house of God, and true Christians delight in her ordinances, services, and assemblies. O that all our days were Sabbaths! And the place where thine honour dwelleth. In his church where God is had in

honour at all times, where he reveals himself in the glory of his grace, and is proclaimed by his people as the Lord of all. We come not together as the Lord's people to honour the preacher, but to give glory to God; such an occupation is most pleasant to the saints of the Most High. What are those gatherings where God is not honoured, are they not an offence to his pure and holy eyes, and are they not a sad stumbling block to the people of God? It brings the scalding tear upon our cheek to hear sermons in which the honour of God is so far from being the preacher's object, that one might almost imagine that the preacher worshipped the dignity of manhood, and thought more of it than of the Infinite Majesty of God.

Verse 9. Gather not my soul with sinners. Lord, when, like fruit, I must be gathered, put me not in the same basket with the best of sinners, much less with the worst of them. The company of sinners is so distasteful to us here, that we cannot endure the thought of being bound up in the same bundle with them to all eternity. Our comfort is, that the Great Husbandman discerns the tares from the wheat, and will find a separate place for distinct characters. In the former verses we see that the psalmist kept himself clear of profane persons, and this is to be understood as a reason why he should not be thrust into their company at the last. Let us think of the doom of the wicked, and the prayer of the text will forcibly rise to our lips; meanwhile, as we see the rule of judgment by which like is gathered to its like, we who have passed from death unto life have nothing to fear. Nor my life with bloody men. Our soul sickens to hear them speak; their cruel dispatches, in which they treat the shooting of their fellow men as rare sport, are horrifying to us; Lord, let us not be shut up in the same prison with them; nay, the same paradise with such men would be a hell, if they remained as they are now.

Verse 10. In whose hands is mischief. They have both hands full of it, plotting it and carrying it out. And their right hand, with which they are most dexterous, is full of bribes; like thieves who would steal with impunity, they carry a sop for the dogs of justice. He who gives bribes is every way as guilty as the man who takes them, and in the matter of our parliamentary elections the rich villain who give the bribe is by far the worse. Bribery, in any form or shape, should be as detestable to a Christian as carrion to a dove, or garbage to a lamb. Let those whose dirty hands are fond of bribes remember that neither death nor the devil can be bribed to let them escape their well earned doom.

Verse 11. Here is the lover of godliness entering his personal protest against unrighteous gain. He is a Nonconformist, and is ready to stand alone in his Nonconformity. Like a live fish, he swims against the stream. Trusting in God, the psalmist resolves that the plain way of righteousness shall be his choice, and those who will, may prefer the tortuous paths of violence and deceit. Yet, he is by no means a boaster, or a self righteous vaunter of his own strength, for he cries for redemption and pleads for mercy. Our integrity is not absolute nor inherent, it is a work of grace in us, and is marred by human infirmity; we must, therefore, resort to the redeeming blood and to the throne of mercy, confessing that though we are saints among men, we must still bow as sinners before God.

Verse 12. The song began in the minor, but it has now reached the major key. Saints often sing themselves into happiness. The even place upon which our foot stands is the sure, covenant faithfulness, eternal promise and immutable oath of the Lord of Hosts; there is no fear of falling from this solid basis, or of its being removed from under us. Established in Christ Jesus, by being vitally united to him, we have nothing left to occupy our thoughts but the praises of our God. Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and when assembled, let us not be slow to contribute our portion of thanksgiving. Each saint is a witness to divine faithfulness, and should be ready with his testimony. As for the slanderers, let them howl outside the door while the children sing within.

Psalm 27

Verse 1. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Here is personal interest, "my light, ""my salvation; "the soul is assured of it, and therefore, declaring it boldly. "My light; "—into the soul at the new birth divine light is poured as the precursor of salvation; where there is not enough light to see our own darkness and to long for the Lord Jesus, there is no evidence of salvation. Salvation finds us in the dark, but it does not leave us there; it gives light to those who sit in the valley of the shadow of death. After conversion our God is our joy, comfort, guide, teacher, and in every sense our light; he is light within, light around, light reflected from us, and light to be revealed to us. Note, it is not said merely that the Lord gives light, but that he "is" light; nor that he gives salvation, but that he is salvation; he, then, who by faith has laid hold upon God has all covenant blessings in his possession. Every light is not the sun, but the sun is the father of all lights. This being made sure as a fact, the argument drawn from it is put in the form of a question, Whom shall I fear? A question which is its own answer. The powers of darkness are not to be feared, for the Lord, our light, destroys them; and the damnation of hell is not to be dreaded by us, for the Lord is our salvation. This is a very different challenge from that of boastful Goliath, for it is based upon a very different foundation; it rests not upon the conceited vigour of an arm of flesh, but upon the real power of the omnipotent I AM. The Lord is the strength of my life. Here is a third glowing epithet, to show that the writer's hope was fastened with a threefold cord which could not be broken. We may well accumulate terms of praise where the Lord lavishes deeds of grace. Our life derives all its strength from him who is the author of it; and if he deigns to make us strong we cannot be weakened by all the machinations of the adversary. Of whom shall I be afraid? The bold question looks into the future as well as the present. "If God be for us, "who can be against us, either now or in time to come?

Verse 2. This verse records a past deliverance, and is an instance of the way in which experience should be employed to reassure our faith in times of trial. Each word is instructive. When the wicked. It is a hopeful sign for us when the wicked hate us; if our foes were godly men it would be a sore sorrow, but as for the wicked their hatred is better than their love. Even mine enemies and my foes. There were many of them, they were of different sorts, but they were unanimous in mischief and hearty in hatred. Came upon me—advanced to the attack, leaping upon the victim like a lion upon its prey. To eat up my flesh, like cannibals they would make a full end of the man, tear him limb from limb, and make a feast for their malice. The enemies of our souls are not deficient in ferocity, they yield no quarter, and ought to have none in return. See in what danger David was; in the grip and grasp of numerous, powerful, and cruel enemies, and yet observe his perfect safety and their utter discomfiture! They stumbled and fell. God's breath blew them off their legs. There were stones in the way which they never reckoned upon, and over these they made an ignominious tumble. This was literally true in the case of our Lord in Gethsemane, when those who came to take him went backward and fell to the ground; and herein he was a prophetic representative of all wrestling believers who, rising from their knees shall, by the power of faith, throw their foes upon their faces.

Verse 3. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Before the actual conflict, while as yet the battle is untried, the warrior's heart, being held in suspense, is very liable to become fluttered. The encamping host often inspires greater dread than the same host in actual affray. Young tells us of some—"Who feel a thousand deaths in fearing one." Doubtless the shadow of anticipated trouble is, to timorous minds, a more prolific source of sorrow than the trouble itself, but faith puts a strengthening plaister to the back of courage, and throws out of the window the dregs of

the cup of trembling. Though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. When it actually comes to push of pike, faith's shield will ward off the blow; and if the first brush should be but the beginning of a war, yet faith's banners will wave in spite of the foe. Though battle should succeed battle, and one campaign should be followed by another, the believer will not be dismayed at the length of the conflict. Reader, this third verse is the comfortable and logical inference from the second, confidence is the child of experience. Have you been delivered out of great perils? then set up your ensign, wait at your watch fire, and let the enemy do his worst.

Verse 4. One thing. Divided aims tend to distraction, weakness, disappointment. The man of one book is eminent, the man of one pursuit is successful. Let all our affections be bound up in one affection, and that affection set upon heavenly things. Have I desired—what we cannot at once attain, it is well to desire. God judges us very much by the desire of our hearts. He who rides a lame horse is not blamed by his master for want of speed, if he makes all the haste he can, and would make more if he could; God takes the will for the deed with his children. Of the Lord. This is the right target for desires, this is the well into which to dip our buckets, this is the door to knock at, the bank to draw upon; desire of men, and lie upon the dunghill with Lazarus: desire of the Lord, and to be carried of angels into Abraham's bosom. Our desires of the Lord should be sanctified, humble, constant, submissive, fervent, and it is well if, as with the psalmist, they are all molten into one mass. Under David's painful circumstances we might have expected him to desire repose, safety, and a thousand other good things, but no, he has set his heart on the pearl, and leaves the rest. That will I seek after. Holy desires must lead to resolute action. The old proverb says, "Wishers and woulders are never good housekeepers, "and "wishing never fills a sack." Desires are seed which must be sown in the good soil of activity, or they will yield no harvest. We shall find our desires to be like clouds without rain, unless followed up by practical endeavours. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. For the sake of communion with the King, David longed to dwell always in the palace; so far from being wearied with the services of the Tabernacle, he longed to be constantly engaged in them, as his life long pleasure. He desired above all things to be one of the household of God, a home born child, living at home with his Father. This is our dearest wish, only we extend it to those days of our immortal life which have not yet dawned. We pine for our Father's house above, the home of our souls; if we may but dwell there for ever, we care but little for the goods or ills of this poor life. "Jerusalem the golden" is the one and only goal of our heart's longings. To behold the beauty of the Lord. An exercise both for earthly and heavenly worshippers. We must not enter the assemblies of the saints in order to see and be seen, or merely to hear the minister; we must repair to the gatherings of the righteous, intent upon the gracious object of learning more of the loving Father, more of the glorified Jesus, more of the mysterious Spirit, in order that we may the more lovingly admire, and the more reverently adore our glorious God. What a word is that, "the beauty of the Lord!" Think of it, dear reader! Better far—behold it by faith! What a sight will that be when every faithful follower of Jesus shall behold "the King in his beauty!" Oh, for that infinitely blessed vision! And to enquire in his temple. We should make our visits to the Lord's house enquirers' meetings. Not seeking sinners alone, but assured saints should be enquirers. We must enquire as to the will of God and how we may do it; as to our interest in the heavenly city, and how we may be more assured of it. We shall not need to make enquiries in heaven, for there we shall know even as we are known; but meanwhile we should sit at Jesus' feet, and awaken all our faculties to learn of him.

Verse 5. This verse gives an excellent reason for the psalmist's desire after communion with God, namely, that he was thus secured in the hour of peril. For in the time of trouble, that needy time, that time when others forsake me, he shall hide me in his pavilion: he shall give me the best of shelter in

the worst of danger. The royal pavilion was erected in the centre of the army, and around it all the mighty men kept guard at all hours; thus in that divine sovereignty which almighty power is sworn to maintain, the believer peacefully is hidden, hidden not by himself furtively, but by the king, who hospitably entertains him. In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me. Sacrifice aids sovereignty in screening the elect from harm. No one of old dared to enter the most holy place on pain of death; and if the Lord has hidden his people there, what foe shall venture to molest them? He shall set me up upon a rock. Immutability, eternity, and infinite power here come to the aid of sovereignty and sacrifice. How blessed is the standing of the man whom God himself sets on high above his foes, upon an impregnable rock which never can be stormed! Well may we desire to dwell with the Lord who so effectually protects his people.

Verse 6. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me. He is quite sure of it. Godly men of old prayed in faith, nothing wavering, and spoke of their answer to their prayers as a certainty. David was by faith so sure of a glorious victory over all those who beset him, that he arranged in his own heart what he would do when his foes lay all prostrate before him; that arrangement was such as gratitude suggested. Therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy. That place for which he longed in his conflict, should see his thankful joy in his triumphant return. He does not speak of jubilation to be offered in his palace, and feasting in his banqueting halls, but holy mirth he selects as most fitting for so divine a deliverance. I will sing. This is the most natural mode of expressing thankfulness. Yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord. The vow is confirmed by repetition, and explained by addition, which addition vows all the praise unto Jehovah. Let who will be silent, the believer when his prayer is heard, must and will make his praise to be heard also; and let who will sing unto the vanities of the world, the believer reserves his music for the Lord alone.

Verse 7. Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice. The pendulum of spirituality swings from prayer to praise. The voice which in the last verse was tuned to music is here turned to crying. As a good soldier, David knew how to handle his weapons, and found himself much at home with the weapon of "all prayer." Note his anxiety to be heard. Pharisees care not a fig for the Lord's hearing them, so long as they are heard of men, or charm their own pride with their sounding devotions; but with a genuine man, the Lord's ear is everything. The voice may be profitably used even in private prayer; for though it is unnecessary, it is often helpful, and aids in preventing distractions. Have mercy also upon me. Mercy is the hope of sinners and the refuge of saints. All acceptable petitioners dwell much upon this attribute. And answer me. We may expect answers to prayer, and should not be easy without them any more than we should be if we had written a letter to a friend upon important business, and had received no reply.

Verse 8. In this verse we are taught that if we would have the Lord hear our voice, we must be careful to respond to his voice. The true heart should echo the will of God as the rocks among the Alps repeat in sweetest music the notes of the peasant's horn. Observe, that the command was in the plural, to all the saints, Seek ye; but the man of God turned it into the singular by a personal application, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. The voice of the Lord is very effectual where all other voices fail. When thou saidst, then my heart, my inmost nature was moved to an obedient reply. Note the promptness of the response—no sooner said than done; as soon as God said "seek," the heart said, "I will seek." Oh, for more of this holy readiness! Would to God that we were more plastic to the divine hand, more sensitive of the touch of God's Spirit.

Verse 9. Hide not thy face far from me. The word "far" is not in the original, and is a very superfluous

addition of the translators, since even the least hiding of the Lord's face is a great affliction to a believer. The command to seek the Lord's face would be a painful one if the Lord, by withdrawing himself, rendered it impossible for the seeker to meet with him. A smile from the Lord is the greatest of comforts, his frown the worst of ills. Put not thy servant away in anger. Other servants had been put away when they proved unfaithful, as for instance, his predecessor Saul; and this made David, while conscious of many faults, most anxious that divine long suffering should continue him in favour. This is a most appropriate prayer for us under a similar sense of unworthiness. Thou hast been my help. How truly can we join in this declaration; for many years, in circumstances of varied trial, we have been upheld by our God, and must and will confess our obligation. "Ingratitude," it is said, "is natural to fallen man," but to spiritual men it is unnatural and detestable. Leave me not, neither forsake me. A prayer for the future, and an inference from the past. If the Lord had meant to leave us, why did he begin with us? Past help is but a waste of effort if the soul now be deserted. The first petition, "leave me not," may refer to temporary desertions, and the second word to the final withdrawal of grace, both are to be prayed against; and concerning the second, we have immutable promises to urge. O God of my salvation. A sweet title worthy of much meditation.

Verse 10. When my father and my mother forsake me. These dear relations will be the last to desert me, but if the milk of human kindness should dry up even from their breasts, there is a Father who never forgets. Some of the greatest of the saints have been cast out by their families, and persecuted for righteousness' sake. Then the Lord will take me up. Will espouse my cause, will uplift me from my woes, will carry me in his arms, will elevate me above my enemies, will at last receive me to his eternal dwelling place.

Verse 11. Teach me thy way, O Lord. He does not pray to be indulged with his own way, but to be informed as to the path in which the righteous Jehovah would have him walk. This prayer evinces an humble sense of personal ignorance, great teachableness of spirit, and cheerful obedience of heart. Lead me in a plain path. Help is here sought as well as direction; we not only need a map of the way, but a guide to assist us in the journey. A path is here desired which shall be open, honest, straightforward, in opposition to the way of cunning, which is intricate, tortuous, dangerous. Good men seldom succeed in fine speculations and doubtful courses; plain simplicity is the best spirit for an heir of heaven: let us leave shifty tricks and political expedencies to the citizens of the world—the New Jerusalem owns plain men for its citizens. Esau was a cunning hunter, Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. Because of mine enemies. These will catch us if they can, but the way of manifest, simple honesty is safe from their rage. It is wonderful to observe how honest simplicity baffles and outwits the craftiness of wickedness. Truth is wisdom. "Honesty is the best policy."

Verse 12. Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies; or I should be like a victim cast to the lions, to be rent in pieces and utterly devoured. God be thanked that our foes cannot have their way with us, or Smithfield would soon be on a blaze again. For false witnesses are risen up against me. Slander is an old fashioned weapon out of the armoury of hell, and is still in plentiful use; and no matter how holy a man may be, there will be some who will defame him. "Give a dog an ill name, and hang him;" but glory be to God, the Lord's people are not dogs, and their ill names do not injure them. And such as breathe out cruelty. It is their vital breath to hate the good; they cannot speak without cursing them; such was Paul before conversion. They who breathe out cruelty may well expect to be sent to breathe their native air in hell; let persecutors beware!

Verse 13. Faintness of heart is a common infirmity; even he who slew Goliath was subject to its

attacks. Faith puts its bottle of cordial to the lip of the soul, and so prevents fainting. Hope is heaven's balm for present sorrow. In this land of the dying, it is our blessedness to be looking and longing for our fair portion in the land of the living, whence the goodness of God has banished the wickedness of man, and where holy spirits charm with their society those persecuted saints who were vilified and despised among men. We must believe to see, not see to believe; we must wait the appointed time, and stay our soul's hunger with foretastes of the Lord's eternal goodness which shall soon be our feast and our song.

Verse 14. Wait on the Lord. Wait at his door with prayer; wait at his foot with humility; wait at his table with service; wait at his window with expectancy. Suitors often win nothing but the cold shoulder from earthly patrons after long and obsequious waiting; he speeds best whose patron is in the skies. Be of good courage. A soldier's motto. Be it mine. Courage we shall need, and for the exercise of it we have as much reason as necessity, if we are soldiers of King Jesus. And he shall strengthen thine heart. He can lay the plaister right upon the weak place. Let the heart be strengthened, and the whole machine of humanity is filled with power; a strong heart makes a strong arm. What strength is this which God himself gives to the heart? Read the "Book of Martyrs," and see its glorious deeds of prowess; go to God rather, and get such power thyself. Wait, I say, on the Lord. David, in the words "I say," sets his own private seal to the word which, as an inspired man, he had been moved to write. It is his testimony as well as the command of God, and indeed he who writes these scanty notes has himself found it so sweet, so reviving, so profitable to draw near to God, that on his own account he also feels bound to write, "Wait, I SAY, on the Lord."

Psalm 28

Verse 1. Unto thee will I cry, O Lord, my rock. A cry is the natural expression of sorrow, and is a suitable utterance when all other modes of appeal fail us; but the cry must be alone directed to the Lord, for to cry to man is to waste our entreaties upon the air. When we consider the readiness of the Lord to hear, and his ability to aid, we shall see good reason for directing all our appeals at once to the God of our salvation, and shall use language of firm resolve like that in the text, "I will cry." The immutable Jehovah is our rock, the immovable foundation of all our hopes and our refuge in time of trouble: we are fixed in our determination to flee to him as our stronghold in every hour of danger. It will be in vain to call to the rocks in the day of judgment, but our rock attends to our cries. Be not silent to me. Mere formalists may be content without answers to their prayers, but genuine suppliants cannot; they are not satisfied with the results of prayer itself in calming the mind and subduing the will—they must go further and obtain actual replies from heaven, or they cannot rest; and those replies they long to receive at once, if possible; they dread even a little of God's silence. God's voice is often so terrible that it shakes the wilderness; but his silence is equally full of awe to an eager suppliant. When God seems to close his ear, we must not therefore close our mouths, but rather cry with more earnestness; for when our note grows shrill with eagerness and grief, he will not long deny us a hearing. What a dreadful case should we be in if the Lord should become for ever silent to our prayers! This thought suggested itself to David, and he turned it into a plea, thus teaching us to argue and reason with God in our prayers. Lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit. Deprived of the God who answers prayer, we should be in a more pitiable plight than the dead in the grave, and should soon sink to the same level as the lost in hell. We must have answers to prayer: ours is an urgent case of dire necessity; surely the Lord will speak peace to our agitated minds, for he never can find it in his heart to permit his own elect to perish.

Verse 2. This is much to the same effect as the first verse, only that it refers to future as well as present pleadings. Hear me! Hear me! Hear the voice of my supplications! This is the burden of both verses. We cannot be put off with a refusal when we are in the spirit of prayer; we labour, use importunity, and agonize in supplications until a hearing is granted us. The word "supplications," in the plural, shows the number, continuance, and variety of a good man's prayers, while the expression "hear the voice," seems to hint that there is an inner meaning, or heart voice, about which spiritual men are far more concerned than for their outward and audible utterances. A silent prayer may have a louder voice than the cries of those priests who sought to awaken Baal with their shouts. When I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle: which holy place was the type of our Lord Jesus; and if we would gain acceptance, we must turn ourselves evermore to the blood besprinkled mercy seat of his atonement. Uplifted hands have ever been a form of devout posture, and are intended to signify a reaching upward towards God, a readiness, an eagerness to receive the blessing sought after. We stretch out empty hands, for we are beggars; we lift them up, for we seek heavenly supplies; we lift them towards the mercy seat of Jesus, for there our expectation dwells. O that whenever we use devout gestures, we may possess contrite hearts, and so speed well with God.

Verse 3. Draw me not away with the wicked. They shall be dragged off to hell like felons of old drawn on a hurdle to Tyburn, like logs drawn to the fire, like fagots to the oven. David fears lest he should be bound up in their bundle, drawn to their doom; and the fear is an appropriate one for every godly man. The best of the wicked are dangerous company in time, and would make terrible companions for eternity; we must avoid them in their pleasures, if we would not be confounded with them in their miseries. And with the workers of iniquity. These are overtly sinful, and their judgment will be sure; Lord, do not make us to drink of their cup. Activity is found with the wicked even if it be lacking to the righteous. Oh! to be "workers" for the Lord. Which speak peace to their neighbours, but mischief is in their hearts. They have learned the manners of the place to which they are going: the doom of liars is their portion for ever, and lying is their conversation on the road. Soft words, oily with pretended love, are the deceitful meshes of the infernal net in which Satan catches the precious life; many of his children are learned in his abominable craft, and fish with their father's nets, almost as cunningly as he himself could do it. It is a sure sign of baseness when the tongue and the heart do not ring to the same note. Deceitful men are more to be dreaded than wild beasts: it were better to be shut up in a pit with serpents than to be compelled to live with liars. He who cries "peace" too loudly, means to sell it if he can get his price. "Good wine need no bush:" if he were so very peaceful he would not need to say so; he means mischief, make sure of that.

Verse 4. When we view the wicked simply as such, and not as our fellow men, our indignation against sin leads us entirely to coincide with the acts of divine justice which punish evil, and to wish that justice might use her power to restrain by her terrors the cruel and unjust; but still the desires of the present verse, as our version renders it, are not readily made consistent with the spirit of the Christian dispensation, which seeks rather the reformation than the punishment of sinners. If we view the words before us as prophetic, or as in the future tense, declaring a fact, we are probably nearer to the true meaning than that given in our version. Ungodly reader, what will be your lot when the Lord deals with you according to your desert, and weighs out to you his wrath, not only in proportion to what you have actually done, but according to what you would have done if you could. Our endeavours are taken as facts; God takes the will for the deed, and punishes or rewards accordingly. Not in this life, but certainly in the next, God will repay his enemies to their faces, and give them the wages of their sins. Not according to their fawning words, but after the measure of their mischievous deeds, will the Lord mete out vengeance to them that know him not.

Verse 5. Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands. God works in creation—nature teems with proofs of his wisdom and goodness, yet purblind atheists refuse to see him: he works in providence, ruling and overruling, and his hand is very manifest in human history, yet the infidel will not discern him: he works in grace—remarkable conversions are still met with on all hands, yet the ungodly refuse to see the operations of the Lord. Where angels wonder, carnal men despise. God condescends to teach, and man refuses to learn. He shall destroy them: he will make them "behold, and wonder, and perish." If they would not see the hand of judgment upon others, they shall feel it upon themselves. Both soul and body shall be overwhelmed with utter destruction for ever and ever. And not build them up. God's cure is positive and negative; his sword has two edges, and cuts right and left. Their heritage of evil shall prevent the ungodly receiving any good; the ephah shall be too full of wrath to contain a grain of hope. They have become like old, rotten, decayed houses of timber, useless to the owner, and harbouring all manner of evil, and, therefore, the Great Builder will demolish them utterly. Incurable offenders may expect speedy destruction: they who will not mend, shall be thrown away as worthless. Let us be very attentive to all the lessons of God's word and work, lest being found disobedient to the divine will, we be made to suffer the divine wrath.

Verse 6. Blessed be the Lord. Saints are full of benedictions; they are a blessed people, and a blessing people; but they give their best blessings, the fat of their sacrifices, to their glorious Lord. Our Psalm was prayer up to this point, and now it turns to praise. They who pray well, will soon praise well: prayer and praise are the two lips of the soul; two bells to ring out sweet and acceptable music in the ears of God; two angels to climb Jacob's ladder: two altars smoking with incense; two of Solomon's lilies dropping sweet smelling myrrh; they are two young roes that are twins, feeding upon the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. Because he hath heard the voice of my supplications. Real praise is established upon sufficient and constraining reasons; it is not irrational emotion, but rises, like a pure spring, from the deeps of experience. Answered prayers should be acknowledged. Do we not often fail in this duty? Would it not greatly encourage others, and strengthen ourselves, if we faithfully recorded divine goodness, and made a point of extolling it with our tongue? God's mercy is not such an inconsiderable thing that we may safely venture to receive it without so much as thanks. We should shun ingratitude, and live daily in the heavenly atmosphere of thankful love.

Verse 7. Here is David's declaration and confession of faith, coupled with a testimony from his experience. The Lord is my strength. The Lord employs his power on our behalf, and moreover, infuses strength into us in our weakness. The psalmist, by an act of appropriating faith, takes the omnipotence of Jehovah to be his own. Dependence upon the invisible God gives great independence of spirit, inspiring us with confidence more than human. And my shield. Thus David found both sword and shield in his God. The Lord preserves his people from unnumbered ills; and the Christian warrior, sheltered behind his God, is far more safe than the hero when covered with his shield of brass or triple steel. My heart trusted in him, and I am helped. Heart work is sure work; heart trust is never disappointed. Faith must come before help, but help will never be long behindhand. Every day the believer may say, "I am helped, "for the divine assistance is vouchsafed us every moment, or we should go back unto perdition; when more manifest help is needed, we have but to put faith into exercise, and it will be given us. Therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him. The heart is mentioned twice to show the truth of his faith and his joy. Observe the adverb "greatly, "we need not be afraid of being too full of rejoicing at the remembrance of grace received. We serve a great God, let us greatly rejoice in him. A song is the soul's fittest method of

giving vent to its happiness, it were well if we were more like the singing lark, and less like the croaking raven. When the heart is glowing, the lips should not be silent. When God blesses us, we should bless him with all our heart.

Verse 8. The Lord is their strength. The heavenly experience of one believer is a pattern of the life of all. To all the militant church, without exception, Jehovah is the same as he was to his servant David, "the least of them shall be as David." They need the same aid and they shall have it, for they are loved with the same love, written in the same book of life, and one with the same anointed Head. And he is the saving strength of his anointed. Here behold king David as the type of our Lord Jesus, our covenant Head, our anointed Prince, through whom all blessings come to us. He has achieved full salvation for us, and we desire saving strength from him, and as we share in the unction which is so largely shed upon him, we expect to partake of his salvation. Glory be unto the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has magnified the power of his grace in his only begotten Son, whom he has anointed to be a Prince and a Saviour unto his people.

Verse 9. This is a prayer for the church militant, written in short words, but full of weighty meaning. We must pray for the whole church, and not for ourselves alone. Save thy people. Deliver them from their enemies, preserve them from their sins, succour them under their troubles, rescue them from their temptations, and ward off from them every ill. There is a plea hidden in the expression, "thy people:" for it may be safely concluded that God's interest in the church, as his own portion, will lead him to guard it from destruction. Bless thine inheritance. Grant positive blessings, peace, plenty, prosperity, happiness; make all thy dearly purchased and precious heritage to be comforted by thy Spirit. Revive, refresh, enlarge, and sanctify thy church. Feed them also. Be a shepherd to thy flock, let their bodily and spiritual wants be plentifully supplied. By thy word, and ordinances, direct, rule, sustain, and satisfy those who are the sheep of thy hand. And lift them up for ever. Carry them in thine arms on earth, and then lift them into thy bosom in heaven. Elevate their minds and thoughts, spiritualise their affections, make them heavenly, Christlike, and full of God. O Lord, answer this our petition, for Jesus' sake.

Psalm 29

Verse 1. Give, i.e., ascribe. Neither men nor angels can confer anything upon Jehovah, but they should recognise his glory and might, and ascribe it to him in their songs and in their hearts. Unto the Lord, and unto him alone, must honour be given. Natural causes, as men call them, are God in action, and we must not ascribe power to them, but to the infinite Invisible who is the true source of all. O ye mighty. Ye great ones of earth and of heaven, kings and angels, join in rendering worship to the blessed and only Potentate; ye lords among men need thus to be reminded, for ye often fail where humbler men are ardent; but fail no longer, bow your heads at once, and loyally do homage to the King of kings. How frequently do grandees and potentates think it beneath them to fear the Lord; but, when they have been led to extol Jehovah, their piety has been the greatest jewel in their crowns. Give unto the Lord glory and strength, both of which men are too apt to claim for themselves, although they are the exclusive prerogatives of the self-existent God. Let crowns and swords acknowledge their dependence upon God. Not to your arms, O kings, give ye the glory, nor look for strength to your hosts of warriors, for all your pomp is but as a fading flower, and your might is as a shadow which declineth. When shall the day arrive when kings and princes shall count it their delight to glorify their God? "All worship be to God only, "let this be emblazoned on every coat of arms.

Verse 2. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. A third time the admonition is given, for men are backward in glorifying God, and especially great men, who are often too much swollen with their own glory to spare time to give God his rightful praise, although nothing more is asked of them than is most just and right. Surely men should not need so much pressing to give what is due, especially when the payment is so pleasant. Unbelief and distrust, complaining and murmuring, rob God of his honour; in this respect, even the saints fail to give due glory to their King. Worship the Lord, bow before him with devout homage and sacred awe, and let your worship be such as he appoints. Of old, worship was cumbered with ceremonial, and men gathered around one dedicated building, whose solemn pomp was emblematic of the beauty of holiness; but now our worship is spiritual, and the architecture of the house and the garments of the worshippers are matters of no importance; the spiritual beauty of inward purity and outward holiness being far more precious in the eyes of our thrice holy God. O for grace ever to worship with holy motives and in a holy manner, as becometh saints! The call to worship in these two verses chimes in with the loud pealing thunder, which is the church bell of the universe ringing kings and angels, and all the sons of earth to their devotions.

Verse 3. The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. The thunder is not only poetically but instructively called "the voice of God," since it peals from on high; it surpasses all other sounds, it inspires awe, it is entirely independent of man, and has been used on some occasions as the grand accompaniment of God's speech to Adam's sons. There is a peculiar terror in a tempest at sea, when deep calleth unto deep, and the raging sea echoes to the angry sky. No sight more alarming than the flash of lightning around the mast of the ship; and no sound more calculated to inspire reverent awe than the roar of the storm. The children of heaven have often enjoyed the tumult with humble joy peculiar to the saints, and even those who know not God have been forced into unwilling reverence while the storm has lasted. The glory of God thundereth. Thunder is in truth no mere electric phenomenon, but is caused by the interposition of God himself. Even the old heathen spake of Jupiter Tonans; but our modern wise men will have us believe in laws and forces, and anything or nothing so they may be rid of God. Electricity of itself can do nothing, it must be called and sent upon its errand; and until the almighty Lord commissions it, its bolt of fire is inert and powerless. As well might a rock of granite, or a bar of iron fly in the midst of heaven, as the lightning go without being sent by the great First Cause. The Lord is upon many waters. Still the Psalmist's ear hears no voice but that of Jehovah, resounding from the multitudinous and dark waters of the upper ocean of clouds, and echoing from the innumerable billows of the storm tossed sea below. The waters above and beneath the firmament are astonished at the eternal voice. When the Holy Spirit makes the divine promise to be heard above the many waters of our soul's trouble, then is God as glorious in the spiritual world as in the universe of matter. Above us and beneath us all is the peace of God when he gives us quiet.

Verse 4. The voice of the Lord is powerful. An irresistible power attends the lightning of which the thunder is the report. In an instant, when the Lord wills it, the force of electricity produces amazing results. A writer upon this subject, speaks of these results as including a light of the intensity of the sun in his strength, a heat capable of fusing the most compact metals, a force in a moment paralysing the muscles of the most powerful animals; a power suspending the all pervading gravity of the earth, and an energy capable of decomposing and recomposing the closest affinities of the most intimate combinations. Well does Thompson speak of "the unconquerable lightning," for it is the chief of the ways of God in physical forces, and none can measure its power. As the voice of God in nature is so powerful, so is it in grace; the reader will do well to draw a parallel, and he will find much in the gospel which may be illustrated by the thunder of the Lord in the tempest. His voice, whether in nature or revelation, shakes both earth and heaven; see that ye refuse not him that speaketh. If his voice be

thus mighty, what must his hand be! beware lest ye provoke a blow. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The King of kings speaks like a king. As when a lion roareth, all the beasts of the forest are still, so is the earth hushed and mute while Jehovah thundereth marvellously.

"It is listening fear and dumb amazement all."

As for the written word of God, its majesty is apparent both in its style, its matter, and its power over the human mind; blessed be God, it is the majesty of mercy wielding a silver sceptre; of such majesty the word of our salvation is full to overflowing.

Verse 5. The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars.

"Black from the stroke above, the smouldering pine
Stands a sad shattered trunk."

Noble trees fall prostrate beneath the mysterious bolt, or stand in desolation as mementoes of its power. Lebanon itself is not secure, high as it stands, and ancient as are its venerable woods: Yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. The greatest and most venerable of trees or men, may not reckon upon immunity when the Lord is abroad in his wrath. The gospel of Jesus has a like dominion over the most inaccessible of mortals; and when the Lord sends the word, it breaks hearts far stouter than the cedars.

Verse 6. He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. Not only the trees, but the mountains themselves move as though they frisked and leaped like young bulls or antelopes. As our own poets would mention hills and valleys known to them, so the Psalmist hears the crash and roar among the ranges of Libanus, and depicts the tumult in graphic terms. Thus sings one of our own countrymen:—"Amid Carnavon's mountains rages loud
The repercussive roar: with mighty crash
Into the flashing deep, from the rude rocks
Of Penmaen Mawr, heaped hideous to the sky,
Tumble the smitten cliffs; and Snowdon's peak,
Dissolving, instant yields his wintry load.
Far seen, the heights of heathy Cheviot blaze,
And Thule bellows through her utmost isles."

The glorious gospel of the blessed God has more than equal power over the rocky obduracy and mountainous pride of man. The voice of our dying Lord rent the rocks and opened the graves: his living voice still works the like wonders. Glory be to his name, the hills of our sins leap into his grave, and are buried in the red sea of his blood, when the voice of his intercession is heard.

Verse 7. The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire. As when sparks fly from the anvil by blows of a ponderous hammer, so the lightning attends the thundering strokes of Jehovah. "At first heard solemn over the verge of heaven,
The tempest growls; but as it nearer comes,
And rolls its awful burden on the wind,
The lightnings flash a larger curve, and more

The noise astounds: till overhead a sheet
Of livid flame discloses wide; then shuts
And opens wider; shuts and opens still
Expansive, wrapping ether in a blaze."

The thunder seems to divide one flash from another, interposing its deepening roar between the flash which precedes it and the next. That the flashes are truly flames of fire is witnessed by their frequently falling upon houses, churches, etc., and wrapping them in a blaze. How easily could the Lord destroy his rebellious creatures with his hot thunderbolts! how gracious is the hand which spares such great offenders, when to crush them would be so easy! Flames of fire attend the voice of God in the gospel, illuminating and melting the hearts of men: by those he consumes our lusts and kindles in us a holy flame of ever aspiring love and holiness. Pentecost is a suggestive commentary upon this verse.

Verse 8. As the storm travelled, it burst over the desert. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. God courts not the applause of men—his grandest deeds are wrought where man's inquisitive glance is all unknown. Where no sound of man was heard, the voice of God was terribly distinct. The vast and silent plains trembled with affright. Silence did homage to the Almighty voice. Low lying plains must hear the voice of God as well as lofty mountains; the poor as well as the mighty must acknowledge the glory of the Lord. Solitary and barren places are to be gladdened by the gospel's heavenly sound. What a shaking and overturning power there is in the word of God! even the conservative desert quivers into progress when God decrees it.

Verse 9. The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve, those timid creatures, in deadly fear of the tempest, drop their burdens in an untimely manner. Perhaps a better reading is, "the oaks to tremble, "especially as this agrees with the next sentence, and discovereth the forests. The dense shades of the forest are lit up with the lurid glare of the lightning, and even the darkest recesses are for a moment laid bare.

"The gloomy woods
Start at the flash, and from their deep recesses
Wide flaming out, their trembling inmates shake."

Our first parents sought a refuge among the trees, but the voice of the Lord soon found them out, and made their hearts to tremble. There is no concealment from the fire glance of the Almighty—one flash of his angry eye turns midnight into noon. The gospel has a like revealing power in dark hearts, in a moment it lights up every dark recess of the heart's ungodliness, and bids the soul tremble before the Lord. In his temple doth everyone speak of his glory. Those who were worshipping in the temple, were led to speak of the greatness of Jehovah as they heard the repeated thunder claps. The whole world is also a temple for God, and when he rides abroad upon the wings of the wind, all things are vocal in his praise. We too, the redeemed of the Lord, who are living temples for his Spirit, as we see the wonders of his power in creation, and feel them in grace, unite to magnify his name. No tongue may be dumb in God's temple when his glory is the theme. The original appears to have the force of "every one crieth Glory, "as though all things were moved by a sense of God's majesty to shout in ecstasy, "Glory, glory." Here is a good precedent for our Methodist friends and for the Gogonians of the zealous Welsh.

Verse 10. The Lord sitteth upon the flood. Flood follows tempest, but Jehovah is ready for the emergency. No deluge can undermine the foundation of his throne. He is calm and unmoved, however much the deep may roar and be troubled: his government rules the most unstable and boisterous of created things. Far out on the wild waste of waters, Jehovah "plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm, "Yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever. Jesus has the government upon his shoulders eternally: our interests in the most stormy times are safe in his hands. Satan is not a king, but Jehovah Jesus is; therefore let us worship him, and rejoice evermore.

Verse 11. Power was displayed in the hurricane whose course this Psalm so grandly pictures; and now, in the cool calm after the storm, that power is promised to be the strength of the chosen. He who wings the unerring bolt, will give to his redeemed the wings of eagles; he who shakes the earth with his voice, will terrify the enemies of his saints, and give his children peace. Why are we weak when we have divine strength to flee to? Why are we troubled when the Lord's own peace is ours? Jesus the mighty God is our peace—what a blessing is this today! What a blessing it will be to us in that day of the Lord which will be in darkness and not light to the ungodly! Dear reader, is not this a noble Psalm to be sung in stormy weather? Can you sing amid the thunder? Will you be able to sing when the last thunders are let loose, and Jesus judges quick and dead? If you are a believer, the last verse is your heritage, and surely that will set you singing.

Psalm 30

Verse 1. I will extol thee. I will have high and honourable conceptions of thee, and give them utterance in my best music. Others may forget thee, murmur at thee, despise thee, blaspheme thee, but "I will extol thee, "for I have been favoured above all others. I will extol thy name, thy character, thine attributes, thy mercy to me, thy great forbearance to my people; but, especially will I speak well of thyself; "I will extol thee, "O Jehovah; this shall be my cheerful and constant employ. For thou hast lifted me up. Here is an antithesis, "I will exalt thee, for thou hast exalted me." I would render according to the benefits received. The Psalmist's praise was reasonable. He had a reason to give for the praise that was in his heart. He had been drawn up like a prisoner from a dungeon, like Joseph out of the pit, and therefore he loved his deliverer. Grace has uplifted us from the pit of hell, from the ditch of sin, from the Slough of Despond, from the bed of sickness, from the bondage of doubts and fears: have we no song to offer for all this? How high has our Lord lifted us? Lifted us up into the children's place, to be adopted into the family; lifted us up into union with Christ, "to sit together with him in heavenly places." Lift high the name of our God, for he has lifted us up above the stars. And hast not made my foes to rejoice over me. This was the judgment which David most feared out of the three evils; he said, let me fall into the hand of the Lord, and not into the hand of man. Terrible indeed were our lot if we were delivered over to the will of our enemies. Blessed be the Lord, we have been preserved from so dire a fate. The devil and all our spiritual enemies have not been permitted to rejoice over us; for we have been saved from the fowler's snare. Our evil companions, who prophesied that we should go back to our old sins, are disappointed. Those who watched for our halting, and would fain say, "Aha! Aha! So would we have it!" have watched in vain until now. O happy they whom the Lord keeps so consistent in character that the lynx eyes of the world can see no real fault in them. Is this our case? let us ascribe all the glory to him who has sustained us in our integrity.

Verse 2. O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. David sent up prayers for himself and for his people when visited with the pestilence. He went at once to head quarters, and not

roundabout to fallible means. God is the best physician, even for our bodily infirmities. We do very wickedly and foolishly when we forget God. It was a sin in Asa that he trusted to physicians and not to God. If we must have a physician, let it be so, but still let us go to our God first of all; and, above all, remember that there can be no power to heal in medicine of itself; the healing energy must flow from the divine hand. If our watch is out of order, we take it to the watchmaker; if our body or soul be in an evil plight, let us resort to him who created them, and has unfailing skill to put them in right condition. As for our spiritual diseases, nothing can heal these evils but the touch of the Lord Christ: if we do but touch the hem of his garment, we shall be made whole, while if we embrace all other physicians in our arms, they can do us no service. "O Lord my God." Observe the covenant name which faith uses—"my God." Thrice happy is he who can claim the Lord himself to be his portion. Note how David's faith ascends the scale; he sang "O Lord" in the first verse, but it is "O Lord my God," in the second. Heavenly heart music is an ascending thing, like the pillars of smoke which rose from the altar of incense. I cried unto thee. I could hardly pray, but I cried; I poured out my soul as a little child pours out its desires. I cried to my God: I knew to whom to cry; I did not cry to my friends, or to any arm of flesh. Hence the sure and satisfactory result—Thou hast healed me. I know it. I am sure of it. I have the evidence of spiritual health within me now: glory be to thy name! Every humble suppliant with God who seeks release from the disease of sin, shall speed as well as the Psalmists did, but those who will not so much as seek a cure, need not wonder if their wounds putrefy and their soul dies.

Verse 3. O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave. Mark, it is not "I hope so; "but it is, "Thou hast; thou hast; thou hast"—three times over. David is quite sure, beyond a doubt, that God has done great things for him, whereof he is exceeding glad. He had descended to the brink of the sepulchre, and yet was restored to tell of the forbearance of God; nor was this all, he owned that nothing but grace had kept him from the lowest hell, and this made him doubly thankful. To be spared from the grave is much; to be delivered from the pit is more; hence there is growing cause for praise, since both deliverances are alone traceable to the glorious right hand of the Lord, who is the only preserver of life, and the only Redeemer of our souls from hell.

Verse 4. Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his. "Join my song; assist me to express my gratitude." He felt that he could not praise God enough himself, and therefore he would enlist the hearts of others. Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his. David would not fill his choir with reprobates, but with sanctified persons, who could sing from their hearts. He calls to you, ye people of God, because ye are saints: and if sinners are wickedly silent, let your holiness constrain you to sing. You are his saints—chosen, blood bought, called, and set apart for God; sanctified on purpose that you should offer the daily sacrifice of praise. Abound ye in this heavenly duty. Sing unto the Lord. It is a pleasing exercise; it is a profitable engagement. Do not need to be stirred up so often to so pleasant a service. And give thanks. Let your songs be grateful songs, in which the Lord's mercies shall live again in joyful remembrance. The very remembrance of the past should tune our harps, even if present joys be lacking. At the remembrance of his holiness. Holiness is an attribute which inspires the deepest awe, and demands a reverent mind; but still give thanks at the remembrance of it. "Holy, holy, holy!" is the song of seraphim and cherubim; let us join it—not dolefully, as though we trembled at the holiness of God, but cheerfully, as humbly rejoicing in it.

Verse 5. For his anger endureth but a moment. David here alludes to those dispensations of God's providence which are the chastisement ordered in his paternal government towards his erring children, such as the plague which fell upon Jerusalem for David's sins; these are but short

judgments, and they are removed as soon as real penitence sues for pardon and presents the great and acceptable sacrifice. What a mercy is this, for if the Lord's wrath smoked for a long season, flesh would utterly fail before him. God puts up his rod with great readiness as soon as its work is done; he is slow to anger and swift to end it. If his temporary and fatherly anger be so severe that it has need be short, what must be the terror of eternal wrath exercised by the Judge towards his adversaries? In his favour is life. As soon as the Lord looked favourably upon David, the city lived, and the king's heart lived too. We die like withered flowers when the Lord frowns, but his sweet smile revives us as the dews refresh the field. His favour not only sweetens and cheers life, but it is life itself, the very essence of life. Who would know life, let him seek the favour of the Lord. Weeping may endure for a night; but nights are not for ever. Even in the dreary winter the day star lights his lamp. It seems fit that in our nights the dews of grief should fall. When the Bridegroom's absence makes it dark within, it is meet that the widowed soul should pine for a renewed sight of the Well beloved. But joy cometh in the morning. When the Sun of Righteousness comes, we wipe our eyes, and joy chases out intruding sorrow. Who would not be joyful that knows Jesus? The first beams of the morning brings us comfort when Jesus is the day dawn, and all believers know it to be so. Mourning only lasts to morning: when the night is gone the gloom shall vanish. This is adduced as a reason for saintly singing, and forcible reason it is; short nights and merry days call for the psaltery and harp.

Verse 6. In my prosperity. When all his foes were quiet, and his rebellious son dead and buried, then was the time of peril. Many a vessel founders in a calm. No temptation is so bad as tranquillity. I said, I shall never be moved. Ah! David, you said more than was wise to say, or even to think, for God has founded the world upon the floods, to show us what a poor, mutable, moveable, inconstant world it is. Unhappy he who builds upon it! He builds himself a dungeon for his hopes. Instead of conceiving that we shall never be moved, we ought to remember that we shall very soon be removed altogether. Nothing is abiding beneath the moon. Because I happen to be prosperous today, I must not fancy that I shall be in my high estate tomorrow. As in a wheel, the uppermost spokes descend to the bottom in due course, so it is with mortal conditions. There is a constant revolution: many who are in the dust today shall be highly elevated tomorrow; while those who are now aloft shall soon grind the earth. Prosperity had evidently turned the psalmist's head, or he would not have been so self confident. He stood by grace, and yet forgot himself, and so met with a fall. Reader, is there not much of the same proud stuff in all our hearts? let us beware lest the fumes of intoxicating success get into our brains and make fools of us also.

Verse 7. Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong. He ascribed his prosperity to the Lord's favour—so far good, it is well to own the hand of the Lord in all our stability and wealth. But observe that the good in a good man is not unmingled good, for this was alloyed with carnal security. His state he compares to a mountain, a molehill would have been nearer—we never think too little of ourselves. He boasted that his mountain stood strong, and yet he had before, in Psalm 29, spoken of Sirion and Lebanon as moving like young unicorns. Was David's state more firm than Lebanon? Ah, vain conceit, too common to us all! How soon the bubble bursts when God's people get conceit into their heads, and fancy that they are to enjoy immutability beneath the stars, and constancy upon this whirling orb. How touchingly and teachingly God corrected his servant's mistake: Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled. There was no need to come to blows, a hidden face was enough. This proves, first, that David was a genuine saint, for no hiding of God's face on earth would trouble a sinner; and, secondly, that the joy of the saint is dependent upon the presence of his Lord. No mountain, however firm, can yield us rest when our communion with God is broken, and his face is concealed. However, in such a case, it is well to be troubled. The next best thing to basking in the

light of God's countenance, is to be thoroughly unhappy when that bliss is denied us.

"Lord, let me weep for nought for sin!
And after none but thee!
And then I would—O that I might,
A constant weeper be!"

Verse 8. I cried to thee, O Lord. Prayer is the unfailing resource of God's people. If they are driven to their wit's end, they may still go to the mercyseat. When an earthquake makes our mountain tremble, the throne of grace still stands firm, and we may come to it. Let us never forget to pray, and let us never doubt the success of prayer. The hand which wounds can heal: let us turn to him who smites us, and he will be entreated of us. Prayer is better solace than Cain's building a city, or Saul's seeking for music. Mirth and carnal amusements are a sorry prescription for a mind distracted and despairing: prayer will succeed where all else fails.

Verse 9. In this verse we learn the form and method of David's prayer. It was an argument with God, an urging of reasons, a pleading of his cause. It was not a statement of doctrinal opinions, nor a narration of experience, much less a sly hit at other people under pretence of praying to God, although all these things and worse have been substituted for holy supplication at certain prayer meetings. He wrestled with the angel of the covenant with vehement pleadings, and therefore he prevailed. Head and heart, judgment and affections, memory and intellect were all at work to spread the case aright before the Lord of love. What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Wilt thou not lose a songster from thy choir, and one who loves to magnify thee? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth? Will there not be one witness the less to thy faithfulness and veracity? Spare, then, thy poor unworthy one for thine own name sake!

Verse 10. Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me. A short and comprehensive petition, available at all seasons, let us use it full often. It is the publican's prayer; be it ours. If God hears prayer, it is a great act of mercy; our petitions do not merit a reply. Lord, be thou my helper. Another compact, expressive, ever fitting prayer. It is suitable to hundreds of the cases of the Lord's people; it is well becoming in the minister when he is going to preach, to the sufferer upon the bed of pain, to the toiler in the field of service, to the believer under temptation, to the man of God under adversity; when God helps, difficulties vanish. He is the help of his people, a very present help in trouble. The two brief petitions of this verse are commended as ejaculations to believers full of business, denied to those longer seasons of devotion which are the rare privilege of those whose days are spent in retirement.

Verse 11. Observe the contrast, God takes away the mourning of his people; and what does he give them instead of it? Quiet and peace? Aye, and a great deal more than that. Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing. He makes their hearts to dance at the sound of his name. He takes off their sackcloth. That is good. What a delight to be rid of the habiliments of woe! But what then? He clothes us. And how? With some common dress? Nay, but with that royal vestment which is the array of glorified spirits in heaven. Thou hast girded me with gladness. This is better than to wear garments of silk or cloth of gold, bedight with embroidery and bespangled with gems. Many a poor man wears this heavenly apparel wrapped around his heart, though fustian and corduroy are his only outward garb; and such a man needs not envy the emperor in all his pomp. Glory be to thee, O God, if, by a sense of full forgiveness and present justification, thou hast enriched my spiritual nature, and filled me with all the fulness of God.

Verse 12. To the end—namely, with this view and intent—that my glory—that is, my tongue or my soul—may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. It would be a shameful crime, if, after receiving God's mercies, we should forget to praise him. God would not have our tongues lie idle while so many themes for gratitude are spread on every hand. He would have no dumb children in the house. They are all to sing in heaven, and therefore they should all sing on earth. Let us sing with the poet:

"I would begin the music here,
And so my soul should rise:
Oh for some heavenly notes to bear
My passions to the skies."
O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.
"I will praise him in life; I will praise him in death;
I will praise him as long as he lendeth me breath;
And say when the death dew lays cold on my brow,
If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, it is now."

Psalm 31

Verse 1. In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust. Nowhere else do I fly for shelter, let the tempest howl as it may. The psalmist has one refuge, and that the best one. He casts out the great sheet anchor of his faith in the time of storm. Let other things be doubtful, yet the fact that he relies on Jehovah, David lays down most positively; and he begins with it, lest by stress of trial he should afterwards forget it. This avowal of faith is the fulcrum by means of which he labours to uplift and remove his trouble; he dwells upon it as a comfort to himself and a plea with God. No mention is made of merit, but faith relies upon divine favour and faithfulness, and upon that alone. Let me never be ashamed. How can the Lord permit the man to be ultimately put to shame who depends alone upon him? This would not be dealing like a God of truth and grace. It would bring dishonour upon God himself if faith were not in the end rewarded. It will be an ill day indeed for religion when trust in God brings no consolation and no assistance. Deliver me in thy righteousness. Thou art not unjust to desert a trustful soul, or to break thy promises; thou wilt vindicate the righteousness of thy mysterious providence, and give me joyful deliverance. Faith dares to look even to the sword of justice for protection: while God is righteous, faith will not be left to be proved futile and fanatical. How sweetly the declaration of faith in this first verse sounds, if we read it at the foot of the cross, beholding the promise of the Father as yea and amen through the Son; viewing God with faith's eye as he stands revealed in Jesus crucified.

Verse 2. Bow down thine ear to me. Condescend to my low estate; listen to me attentively as one who would hear every word. Heaven with its transcendent glories of harmony might well engross the divine ear, but yet the Lord has an hourly regard to the weakest moanings of his poorest people. Deliver me speedily. We must not set times or seasons, yet in submission we may ask for swift as well as sure mercy. God's mercies are often enhanced in value by the timely haste which he uses in their bestowal; if they came late they might be too late—but he rides upon a cherub, and flies upon the wings of the wind when he intends the good of his beloved. Be thou my strong rock. Be my Engedi, my Adullam; my immutable, immovable, impregnable, sublime, resort. For an house of defence to save me, wherein I may dwell in safety, not merely running to thee for temporary shelter, but abiding in thee for eternal salvation. How very simply does the good man pray, and yet with what weight of meaning! he uses no ornamental flourishes, he is too deeply in earnest to be otherwise than

plain: it were well if all who engage in public prayer would observe the same rule.

Verse 3. For thou art my rock and my fortress. Here the tried soul avows yet again its full confidence in God. Faith's repetitions are not vain. The avowal of our reliance upon God in times of adversity is a principle method of glorifying him. Active service is good, but the passive confidence of faith is not one jot less esteemed in the sight of God. The words before us appear to embrace and fasten upon the Lord with a fiducial grip which is not to be relaxed. The two personal pronouns, like sure nails, lay hold upon the faithfulness of the Lord. O for grace to have our heart fixed in firm unstaggering belief in God! The figure of a rock and a fortress may be illustrated to us in these times by the vast fortress of Gibraltar, often besieged by our enemies, but never wrested from us: ancient strongholds, though far from impregnable by our modes of warfare, were equally important in those remoter ages—when in the mountain fastnesses, feeble bands felt themselves to be secure. Note the singular fact that David asked the Lord to be his rock Ps 31:2 because he was his rock; and learn from it that we may pray to enjoy in experience what we grasp by faith. Faith is the foundation of prayer. Therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me. The psalmist argues like a logician with his fors and therefore. Since I do sincerely trust thee, saith he, O my God, be my director. To lead and to guide are two things very like each other, but patient thought will detect different shades of meaning, especially as the last may mean provide for me. The double word indicates an urgent need—we require double direction, for we are fools, and the way is rough. Lead me as a soldier, guide me as a traveller! lead me as a babe, guide me as a man; lead me when thou art with me, but guide me even if thou be absent; lead me by thy hand, guide me by thy word. The argument used is one which is fetched from the armoury of free grace: not for my own sake, but for thy name's sake guide me. Our appeal is not to any fancied virtue in our own names, but to the glorious goodness and graciousness which shines resplendent in the character of Israel's God. It is not possible that the Lord should suffer his own honour to be tarnished, but this would certainly be the case if those who trusted him should perish. This was Moses' plea, "What wilt thou do unto thy great name?"

Verse 4. Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me. The enemies of David were cunning as well as mighty; if they could not conquer him by power, they would capture him by craft. Our own spiritual foes are of the same order—they are of the serpent's brood, and seek to ensnare us by their guile. The prayer before us supposes the possibility of the believer being caught like a bird; and, indeed, we are so foolish that this often happens. So deftly does the fowler do his work that simple ones are soon surrounded by it. The text asks that even out of the meshes of the net the captive one may be delivered; and this is a proper petition, and one which can be granted; from between the jaws of the lion and out of the belly of hell can eternal love rescue the saint. It may need a sharp pull to save a soul from the net of temptation, and a mighty pull to extricate a man from the snares of malicious cunning, but the Lord is equal to every emergency, and the most skilfully placed nets of the hunter shall never be able to hold his chosen ones. Woe unto those who are so clever at net laying: they who tempt others shall be destroyed themselves. Villains who lay traps in secret shall be punished in public. For thou art my strength. What an inexpressible sweetness is to be found in these few words! How joyfully may we enter upon labours, and how cheerfully may we endure sufferings when we can lay hold upon celestial power. Divine power will rend asunder all the toils of the foe, confound their politics and frustrate their knavish tricks; he is a happy man who has such matchless might engaged upon his side. Our own strength would be of little service when embarrassed in the nets of base cunning, but the Lord's strength is ever available; we have but to invoke it, and we shall find it near at hand. If by faith we are depending alone upon the strength of the strong God of Israel, we may use our holy reliance as a plea in supplication.

Verse 5. Into thine hand I commit my spirit. These living words of David were our Lord's dying words, and have been frequently used by holy men in their hour of departure. Be assured that they are good, choice, wise, and solemn words; we may use them now and in the last tremendous hour. Observe, the object of the good man's solicitude in life and death is not his body or his estate, but his spirit; this is his jewel, his secret treasure; if this be safe, all is well. See what he does with his pearl! He commits it to the hand of his God; it came from him, it is his own, he has aforesaid sustained it, he is able to keep it, and it is most fit that he should receive it. All things are safe in Jehovah's hands; what we entrust to the Lord will be secure, both now and in that day of days towards which we are hastening. Without reservation the good man yields himself to his heavenly Father's hand; it is enough for him to be there; it is peaceful living and glorious dying to repose in the care of heaven. At all times we should commit and continue to commit our all to Jesus' sacred care, then, though life may hang on a thread, and adversities may multiply as the sands of the sea, our soul shall dwell at ease, and delight itself in quiet resting places. Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. Redemption is a solid base for confidence. David had not known Calvary as we have done, but temporal redemption cheered him; and shall not eternal redemption yet more sweetly console us? Past deliverances are strong pleas for present assistance. What the Lord has done he will do again, for he changes not. He is a God of veracity, faithful to his promises, and gracious to his saints; he will not turn away from his people.

Verse 6. I have hated them that regard lying vanities. Those who will not lean upon the true arm of strength, are sure to make to themselves vain confidences. Man must have a god, and if he will not adore the only living and true God, he makes a fool of himself, and pays superstitious regard to a lie, and waits with anxious hope upon a base delusion. Those who did this were none of David's friends; he had a constant dislike to them: the verb includes the present as well as the past tense. He hated them for hating God; he would not endure the presence of idolaters; his heart was set against them for their stupidity and wickedness. He had no patience with their superstitious observances, and calls their idols vanities of emptiness, nothings of nonentity. Small courtesy is more than Romanists and Puseyists deserve for their fooleries. Men who make gods of their riches, their persons, their wits, or anything else, are to be shunned by those whose faith rests upon God in Christ Jesus; and so far from being envied, they are to be pitied as depending upon utter vanities. But I trust in the Lord. This might be very unfashionable, but the psalmist dared to be singular. Bad example should not make us less decided for the truth, but the rather in the midst of general defection we should grow the more bold. This adherence to his trust in Jehovah is the great plea employed all along: the troubled one flies into the arms of his God, and ventures everything upon the divine faithfulness.

Verse 7. I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy. For mercy past he is grateful, and for mercy future, which he believingly anticipates, he is joyful. In our most importunate intercessions, we must find breathing time to bless the Lord: praise is never a hindrance to prayer, but rather a lively refreshment therein. It is delightful at intervals to hear the notes of the high sounding cymbals when the dolorous sackbut rules the hour. Those two words, glad and rejoice, are an instructive reduplication, we need not stint ourselves in our holy triumph; this wine we may drink in bowls without fear of excess. For thou hast considered my trouble. Thou hast seen it, weighed it, directed it, fixed a bound to it, and in all ways made it a matter of tender consideration. A man's consideration means the full exercise of his mind; what must God's consideration be? Thou hast known my soul in adversities. God owns his saints when others are ashamed to acknowledge them; he never refuses to know his friends. He thinks not the worse of them for their rags and tatters. He does not misjudge them and cast them off

when their faces are lean with sickness, or their hearts heavy with despondency. Moreover, the Lord Jesus knows us in our pangs in a peculiar sense, by having a deep sympathy towards us in them all; when no others can enter into our griefs, from want of understanding them experimentally, Jesus dives into the lowest depths with us, comprehending the direst of our woes, because he has felt the same. Jesus is a physician who knows every case; nothing is new to him. When we are so bewildered as not to know our own state, he knows us altogether. He has known us and will know us: O for grace to know more of him! "Man, know thyself," is a good philosophic precept, but "Man, thou art known of God," is a superlative consolation. Adversities in the plural—"Many are the afflictions of the righteous."

Verse 8. And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy. To be shut up in one's hand is to be delivered over absolutely to his power; now, the believer is not in the hand of death or the devil, much less is he in the power of man. The enemy may get a temporary advantage over us, but we are like men in prison with the door open; God will not let us be shut up, he always provides a way of escape. Thou hast set my feet in a large room. Blessed be God for liberty: civil liberty is valuable, religious liberty is precious, spiritual liberty is priceless. In all troubles we may praise God if these are left. Many saints have had their greatest enlargements of soul when their affairs have been in the greatest straits. Their souls have been in a large room when their bodies have been lying in Bonner's coal hole, or in some other narrow dungeon. Grace has been equal to every emergency; and more than this, it has made the emergency an opportunity for displaying itself.

Verse 9. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble. Now, the man of God comes to a particular and minute description of his sorrowful case. He unbosoms his heart, lays bare his wounds, and expresses his inward desolation. This first sentence pithily comprehends all that follows, it is the text for his lamenting discourse. Misery moves mercy—no more reasoning is needed. "Have mercy" is the prayer; the argument is as prevalent as it is plain and personal, "I am in trouble." Mine eye is consumed with grief. Dim and sunken eyes are plain indicators of failing health. Tears draw their salt from our strength, and floods of them are very apt to consume the source from which they spring. God would have us tell him the symptoms of our disease, not for his information, but to show our sense of need. Yea, my soul and my belly (or body). Soul and body are so intimately united, that one cannot decline without the other feeling it. We, in these days, are not strangers to the double sinking which David describes; we have been faint with physical suffering, and distracted with mental distress: when two such seas meet, it is well for us that the Pilot at the helm is at home in the midst of the water floods, and makes storms to become the triumph of his art.

Verse 10. For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing. It had become his daily occupation to mourn; he spent all his days in the dungeon of distress. The sap and essence of his existence was being consumed, as a candle is wasted while it burns. His adversities were shortening his days, and digging for him an early grave. Grief is a sad market to spend all our wealth of life in, but a far more profitable trade may be driven there than in Vanity Fair; it is better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting. Black is good wear. The salt of tears is a healthy medicine. Better spend our years in sighing than in sinning. The two members of the sentence before us convey the same idea; but there are no idle words in Scripture, the reduplication is the fitting expression of fervency and importunity. My strength faileth because of mine iniquity. David sees to the bottom of his sorrow, and detects sin lurking there. It is profitable trouble which leads us to trouble ourselves about our iniquity. Was this the psalmist's foulest crime which now gnawed at his heart, and devoured his strength? Very probably it was so. Sinful morsels, though sweet in the mouth, turn out to be poison in

the bowels: if we wantonly give a portion of our strength to sin, it will by and by take the remainder from us. We lose both physical, mental, moral, and spiritual vigour by iniquity. And my bones are consumed. Weakness penetrated the innermost parts of his system, the firmest parts of his frame felt the general decrepitude. A man is in a piteous plight when he comes to this.

Verse 11. I was a reproach among all mine enemies. They were pleased to have something to throw at me; my mournful estate was music to them, because they maliciously interpreted it to be a judgment from heaven upon me. Reproach is little thought of by those who are not called to endure it, but he who passes under its lash knows how deep it wounds. The best of men may have the bitterest foes, and be subject to the most cruel taunts. But especially among my neighbours. Those who are nearest can stab the sharpest. We feel most the slights of those who should have shown us sympathy. Perhaps David's friends feared to be identified with his declining fortunes, and therefore turned against him in order to win the mercy if not the favour of his opponents. Self interest rules the most of men: ties the most sacred are soon snapped by its influence, and actions of the utmost meanness are perpetrated without scruple. And a fear to mine acquaintance. The more intimate before, the more distant did they become. Our Lord was denied by Peter, betrayed by Judas, and forsaken by all in the hour of his utmost need. All the herd turn against a wounded deer. The milk of human kindness curdles when a despised believer is the victim of slanderous accusations. They that did see me without fled from me. Afraid to be seen in the company of a man so thoroughly despised, those who once courted his society hastened from him as though he had been infected with the plague. How villainous a thing is slander which can thus make an eminent saint, once the admiration of his people, to become the general butt, the universal aversion of mankind! To what extremities of dishonour may innocence be reduced!

Verse 12. I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind. All David's youthful prowess was now gone from remembrance; he had been the saviour of his country, but his services were buried in oblivion. Men soon forget the deepest obligations; popularity is evanescent to the last degree: he who is in every one's mouth today may be forgotten by all tomorrow. A man had better be dead than be smothered in slander. Of the dead we say nothing but good, but in the psalmist's case they said nothing but evil. We must not look for the reward of philanthropy this side of heaven, for men pay their best servants but sorry wages, and turn them out of doors when no more is to be got out of them. I am like a broken vessel, a thing useless, done for, worthless, cast aside, forgotten. Sad condition for a king! Let us see herein the portrait of the King of kings in his humiliation, when he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.

Verse 13. For I have heard the slander of many. One slanderous viper is death to all comfort—what must be the venom of a whole brood? What the ear does not hear the heart does not rue; but in David's case the accusing voices were loud enough to break in upon his quiet—foul mouths had grown so bold, that they poured forth their falsehoods in the presence of their victim. Shimei was but one of a class, and his cry of "Go up, thou bloody man," was but the common speech of thousands of the sons of Belial. All Beelzebub's pack of hounds may be in full cry against a man, and yet he may be the Lord's anointed. Fear was on every side. He was encircled with fearful suggestions, threatenings, remembrances, and forebodings; no quarter was clear from incessant attack. While they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life. The ungodly act in concert in their onslaughts upon the excellent of the earth: it is to be wondered at that sinners should often be better agreed than saints, and generally set about their wicked work with much more care and foresight than the righteous exhibit in holy enterprises. Observe the cruelty of a good man's foes! they

will be content with nothing less than his blood—for this they plot and scheme. Better fall into the power of a lion than under the will of malicious persecutors, for the beast may spare its prey if it be fed to the full, but malice is unrelenting and cruel as a wolf. Of all fiends the most cruel is envy. How sorely was the psalmist bested when the poisoned arrows of a thousand bows were all aimed at his life! Yet in all this his faith did not fail him, nor did his God forsake him. Here is encouragement for us.

Verses 14-18. In this section of the Psalm he renews his prayers, urging the same pleas as at first: earnest wrestlers attempt over and over again the same means of gaining their point.

Verse 14. But I trusted in thee, O Lord. Notwithstanding all afflicting circumstances, David's faith maintained its hold, and was not turned aside from its object. What a blessed saving clause is this! So long as our faith, which is our shield, is safe, the battle may go hard, but its ultimate result is no matter of question; if that could be torn from us, we should be as surely slain as were Saul and Jonathan upon the high places of the field. I said, Thou art my God. He proclaimed aloud his determined allegiance to Jehovah. He was no fair weather believer, he could hold to his faith in a sharp frost, and wrap it about him as a garment fitted to keep out all the ills of time. He who can say what David did need not envy Cicero his eloquence: "Thou art my God," has more sweetness in it than any other utterance which human speech can frame. Note that this adhesive faith is here mentioned as an argument with God to honour his own promise by sending a speedy deliverance.

Verse 15. My times are in thy hand. The sovereign arbiter of destiny holds in his own power all the issues of our life; we are not waifs and strays upon the ocean of fate, but are steered by infinite wisdom towards our desired haven. Providence is a soft pillow for anxious heads, an anodyne for care, a grave for despair. Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. It is lawful to desire escape from persecution if it be the Lord's will; and when this may not be granted us in the form which we desire, sustaining grace will give us deliverance in another form, by enabling us to laugh to scorn all the fury of the foe.

Verse 16. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant. Give me the sunshine of heaven in my soul, and I will defy the tempests of earth. Permit me to enjoy a sense of thy favour, O Lord, and a consciousness that thou art pleased with my manner of life, and all men may frown and slander as they will. It is always enough for a servant if he pleases his master; others may be dissatisfied, but he is not their servant, they do not pay him his wages, and their opinions have no weight with him. Save me for thy mercies' sake. The good man knows no plea but mercy; whoever might urge legal pleas David never dreamed of it.

Verse 17. Let me not be ashamed, O Lord; for I have called upon thee. Put not my prayers to the blush! Do not fill profane mouths with jeers at my confidence in my God. Let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave. Cause them to their amazement to see my wrongs righted and their own pride horribly confounded. A milder spirit rules our prayers under the gentle reign of the Prince of Peace, and, therefore, we can only use such words as these in their prophetic sense, knowing as we do full well, that shame and the silence of death are the best portion that ungodly sinners can expect. That which they desired for despised believers shall come upon themselves by a decree of retributive justice, at which they cannot cavil—"As he loved mischief, so let it come upon him."

Verse 18. Let the lying lips be put to silence. A right good and Christian prayer; who but a bad man

would give liars more license than need be? May God silence them either by leading them to repentance, by putting them to thorough shame, or by placing them in positions where what they may say will stand for nothing. Which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous. The sin of slanderers lies partly in the matter of their speech; "they speak grievous things; "things cutting deep into the feelings of good men, and wounding them sorely in that tender place—their reputations. The sin is further enhanced by the manner of their speech; they speak proudly and contemptuously; they talk as if they themselves were the cream of society, and the righteous the mere scum of vulgarity. Proud thoughts of self are generally attended by debasing estimates of others. The more room we take up ourselves, the less we can afford our neighbours. What wickedness it is that unworthy characters should always be the loudest in railing at good men! They have no power to appreciate moral worth of which they are utterly destitute, and yet they have the effrontery to mount the judgment seat, and judge the men compared with whom they are as so much chaff. Holy indignation may well prompt us to desire anything which may rid the world of such unbearable impertinence and detestable arrogance.

Verses 19-22. Being full of faith, the psalmist gives glory to God for the mercy which he is assured will be his position.

Verse 19. Oh how great is thy goodness. Is it not singular to find such a joyful sentence in connection with so much sorrow? Truly the life of faith is a miracle. When faith led David to his God, she set him singing at once. He does not tell us how great was God's goodness, for he could not; there are no measures which can set forth the immeasurable goodness of Jehovah, who is goodness itself. Holy amazement uses interjections where adjectives utterly fail. Notes of exclamation suit us when words of explanation are of no avail. If we cannot measure we can marvel; and though we may not calculate with accuracy, we can adore with fervency. Which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee. The psalmist in contemplation divides goodness into two parts, that which is in store and that which is wrought out. The Lord has laid up in reserve for his people supplies beyond all count. In the treasury of the covenant, in the field of redemption, in the caskets of the promises, in the granaries of providence, the Lord has provided for all the needs which can possibly occur to his chosen. We ought often to consider the laid up goodness of God which has not yet been distributed to the chosen, but is already provided for them: if we are much in such contemplations, we shall be led to feel devout gratitude, such as glowed in the heart of David. Which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men. Heavenly mercy is not all hidden in the storehouse; in a thousand ways it has already revealed itself on behalf of those who are bold to avow their confidence in God; before their fellow men this goodness of the Lord has been displayed, that a faithless generation might stand rebuked. Overwhelming are the proofs of the Lord's favour to believers, history teems with amazing instances, and our own lives are full of prodigies of grace. We serve a good Master. Faith receives a large reward even now, but looks for her full inheritance in the future. Who would not desire to take his lot with the servants of a Master whose boundless love fills all holy minds with astonishment?

Verse 20. Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man. Pride is a barbed weapon: the proud man's contumely is iron which entereth into the soul; but those who trust in God, are safely housed in the Holy of holies, the innermost court, into which no man may dare intrude; here in the secret dwelling place of God the mind of the saint rests in peace, which the foot of pride cannot disturb. Dwellers at the foot of the cross of Christ grow callous to the sneers of the haughty. The wounds of Jesus distil a balsam which heals all the scars which the jagged weapons of contempt can inflict upon us; in fact, when armed with the same mind which was in Christ Jesus, the heart is

invulnerable to all the darts of pride. Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. Tongues are more to be dreaded than beasts of prey—and when they strive, it is as though a whole pack of wolves were let loose; but the believer is secure even in this peril, for the royal pavilion of the King of kings shall afford him quiet shelter and serene security. The secret tabernacle of sacrifice, and the royal pavilion of sovereignty afford a double security to the Lord's people in their worst distresses. Observe the immediate action of God, "Thou shalt hide, ""Thou shalt keep, "the Lord himself is personally present for the rescue of his afflicted.

Verse 21. Blessed be the Lord. When the Lord blesses us we cannot do less than bless him in return. For he hath shewed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city. Was this in Mahanaim, where the Lord gave him victory over the hosts of Absalom? Or did he refer to Rabbath of Ammon, where he gained signal triumphs? Or, best of all, was Jerusalem the strong city where he most experienced the astonishing kindness of his God? Gratitude is never short of subjects; her Ebenezers stand so close together as to wall up her path to heaven on both sides. Whether in cities or in hamlets our blessed Lord has revealed himself to us, we shall never forget the hallowed spots: the lonely mount of Hermon, or the village of Emmaus, or the rock of Patmos, or the wilderness of Horeb, are all alike renowned when God manifests himself to us in robes of love.

Verse 22. Confession of faults is always proper; and when we reflect upon the goodness of God, we ought to be reminded of our own errors and offences. For I said in my haste. We generally speak amiss when we are in a hurry. Hasty words are but for a moment on the tongue, but they often lie for years on the conscience. I am cut off from before thine eyes. This was an unworthy speech; but unbelief will have a corner in the heart of the firmest believer, and out of that corner it will vent many spiteful things against the Lord if the course of providence be not quite so smooth as nature might desire. No saint ever was, or ever could be, cut off from before the eyes of God, and yet no doubt many have thought so, and more than one has said so. For ever be such dark suspicions banished from our minds. Nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee. What a mercy that if we believe not, yet God abideth faithful, hearing prayer even when we are labouring under doubts which dishonour his name. If we consider the hindrances in the way of our prayers, and the poor way in which we present them, it is a wonder of wonders that they ever prevail with heaven.

Verse 23. O love the Lord, all ye his saints. A most affecting exhortation, showing clearly the deep love of the writer to his God: there is the more beauty in the expression, because it reveals love toward a smiting God, love which many waters could not quench. To bless him who gives is easy, but to cling to him who takes away is a work of grace. All the saints are benefited by the sanctified miseries of one, if they are led by earnest exhortations to love their Lord the better. If saints do not love the Lord, who will? Love is the universal debt of all the saved family: who would wish to be exonerated from its payment? Reasons for love are given, for believing love is not blind. For the Lord preserveth the faithful. They have to bide their time, but the recompense comes at last, and meanwhile all the cruel malice of their enemies cannot destroy them. And plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. This also is cause for gratitude: pride is so detestable in its acts that he who shall mete out to it its righteous due, deserves the love of all holy minds.

Verse 24. Be of good courage. Keep up your spirit, let no craven thoughts blanch your cheek. Fear weakens, courage strengthens. Victory waits upon the banners of the brave. And he shall strengthen your heart. Power from on high shall be given in the most effectual manner by administering force to

the fountain of vitality. So far from leaving us, the Lord will draw very near to us in our adversity, and put his own power into us. All ye that hope in the Lord. Every one of you, lift up your heads and sing for joy of heart. God is faithful, and does not fail even his little children who do but hope, wherefore then should we be afraid?

Psalm 32

Verse 1. Blessed. Like the sermon on the mount on the mount, this Psalm begins with beatitudes. This is the second Psalm of benediction. The first Psalm describes the result of holy blessedness, the thirty-second details the cause of it. The first pictures the tree in full growth, this depicts it in its first planting and watering. He who in the first Psalm is a reader of God's book, is here a suppliant at God's throne accepted and heard. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven. He is now blessed and ever shall be. Be he ever so poor, or sick, or sorrowful, he is blessed in very deed. Pardoning mercy is of all things in the world most to be prized, for it is the only and sure way to happiness. To hear from God's own Spirit the words, "absolvo te" is joy unspeakable. Blessedness is not in this case ascribed to the man who has been a diligent law keeper, for then it would never come to us, but rather to a lawbreaker, who by grace most rich and free has been forgiven. Self righteous Pharisees have no portion in this blessedness. Over the returning prodigal, the word of welcome is here pronounced, and the music and dancing begin. A full, instantaneous, irreversible pardon of transgression turns the poor sinner's hell into heaven, and makes the heir of wrath a partaker in blessing. The word rendered forgiven is in the original taken off or taken away, as a burden is lifted or a barrier removed. What a lift is here! It cost our Saviour a sweat of blood to bear our load, yea, it cost him his life to bear it quite away. Samson carried the gates of Gaza, but what was that to the weight which Jesus bore on our behalf? Whose sin is covered. Covered by God, as the ark was covered by the mercyseat, as Noah was covered from the flood, as the Egyptians were covered by the depths of the sea. What a cover must that be which hides away for ever from the sight of the all seeing God all the filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit! He who has once seen sin in its horrible deformity, will appreciate the happiness of seeing it no more for ever. Christ's atonement is the propitiation, the covering, the making an end of sin; where this is seen and trusted in, the soul knows itself to be now accepted in the Beloved, and therefore enjoys a conscious blessedness which is the antepast of heaven. It is clear from the text that a man may know that he is pardoned: where would be the blessedness of an unknown forgiveness? Clearly it is a matter of knowledge, for it is the ground of comfort.

Verse 2. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity. The word blessed is in the plural, oh, the blessednesses! the double joys, the bundles of happiness, the mountains of delight! Note the three words so often used to denote our disobedience: transgression, sin, and iniquity, are the three headed dog at the gates of hell, but our glorious Lord has silenced his barkings for ever against his own believing ones. The trinity of sin is overcome by the Trinity of heaven. Non imputation is of the very essence of pardon: the believer sins, but his sin is not reckoned, not accounted to him. Certain divines froth at the mouth with rage against imputed righteousness, be it ours to see our sin not imputed, and to us may there be as Paul words it, "Righteousness imputed without works." He is blessed indeed who has a substitute to stand for him to whose account all his debts may be set down. And in whose spirit there is no guile. He who is pardoned, has in every case been taught to deal honestly with himself, his sin, and his God. Forgiveness is no sham, and the peace which it brings is not caused by playing tricks with conscience. Self deception and hypocrisy bring no blessedness, they may drug the soul into hell with pleasant dreams, but into the heaven of true peace

they cannot conduct their victim. Free from guilt, free from guile. Those who are justified from fault are sanctified from falsehood. A liar is not a forgiven soul. Treachery, double dealing, chicanery, dissimulation, are lineaments of the devil's children, but he who is washed from sin is truthful, honest, simple, and childlike. There can be no blessedness to tricksters with their plans, and tricks, and shuffling, and pretending: they are too much afraid of discovery to be at ease; their house is built on the volcano's brink, and eternal destruction must be their portion. Observe the three words to describe sin, and the three words to represent pardon, weigh them well, and note their meaning. (See note at the end.)

Verses 3-5. David now gives us his own experience: no instructor is so efficient as one who testifies to what he has personally known and felt. He writes well who like the spider spins his matter out of his own bowels.

Verse 3. When I kept silence. When through neglect I failed to confess, or through despair dared not do so, my bones, those solid pillars of my frame, the stronger portions of my bodily constitution, waxed old, began to decay with weakness, for my grief was so intense as to sap my health and destroy my vital energy. What a killing thing is sin! It is a pestilent disease! A fire in the bones! While we smother our sin it rages within, and like a gathering wound swells horribly and torments terribly. Through my roaring all the day long. He was silent as to confession, but not as to sorrow. Horror at his great guilt, drove David to incessant laments, until his voice was no longer like the articulate speech of man, but so full of sighing and groaning, that it resembled to hoarse roaring of a wounded beast. None knows the pangs of conviction but those who have endured them. The rack, the wheel, the flaming fagot are ease compared with the Tophet which a guilty conscience kindles within the breast: better suffer all the diseases which flesh is heir to, than lie under the crushing sense of the wrath of almighty God. The Spanish inquisition with all its tortures was nothing to the inquest which conscience holds within the heart.

Verse 4. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me. God's finger can crush us—what must his hand be, and that pressing heavily and continuously! Under terrors of conscience, men have little rest by night, for the grim thoughts of the day dog them to their chambers and haunt their dreams, or else they lie awake in a cold sweat of dread. God's hand is very helpful when it uplifts, but it is awful when it presses down: better a world on the shoulder, like Atlas, than God's hand on the heart, like David. My moisture is turned into the drought of summer. The sap of his soul was dried, and the body through sympathy appeared to be bereft of its needful fluids. The oil was almost gone from the lamp of life, and the flame flickered as though it would soon expire. Unconfessed transgression, like a fierce poison, dried up the fountain of the man's strength and made him like a tree blasted by the lightning, or a plant withered by the scorching heat of a tropical sun. Alas! for a poor soul when it has learned its sin but forgets its Saviour, it goes hard with it indeed. Selah. It was time to change the tune, for the notes are very low in the scale, and with such hard usage, the strings of the harp are out of order: the next verse will surely be set to another key, or will rehearse a more joyful subject.

Verse 5. I acknowledged my sin unto thee. After long lingering, the broken heart bethought itself of what it ought to have done at the first, and laid bare its bosom before the Lord. The lancet must be let into the gathering ulcer before relief can be afforded. The least thing we can do, if we would be pardoned, is to acknowledge our fault; if we are too proud for this we double deserve punishment. And mine iniquity have I not hid. We must confess the guilt as well as the fact of sin. It is useless to conceal it, for it is well known to God; it is beneficial to us to own it, for a full confession softens and

humbles the heart. We must as far as possible unveil the secrets of the soul, dig up the hidden treasure of Achan, and by weight and measure bring out our sins. I said. This was his fixed resolution. I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord. Not to my fellow men or to the high priest, but unto Jehovah; even in those days of symbol the faithful looked to God alone for deliverance from sin's intolerable load, much more now, when types and shadows have vanished at the appearance of the dawn. When the soul determines to lay low and plead guilty, absolution is near at hand; hence we read, And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Not only was the sin itself pardoned, but the iniquity of it; the virus of its guilt was put away, and that at once, so soon as the acknowledgment was made. God's pardons are deep and thorough: the knife of mercy cuts at the roots of the ill weed of sin. Selah. Another pause is needed, for the matter is not such as may be hurried over.

"Pause, my soul, adore and wonder,
Ask, O why such love to me?
Grace has put me in the number
Of the Saviour's family.
Hallelujah!
Thanks, eternal thanks, to thee."

Verse 6. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found. If the psalmist means that on account of God's mercy others would become hopeful, his witness is true. Remarkable answers to prayer very much quicken the prayerfulness of other godly persons. Where one man finds a golden nugget others feel inclined to dig. The benefit of our experience to others should reconcile us to it. No doubt the case of David has led thousands to seek the Lord with hopeful courage who, without such an instance to cheer them, might have died in despair. Perhaps the psalmist meant for this favour or the like all godly souls would seek, and here, again, we can confirm his testimony, for all will draw near to God in the same manner as he did when godliness rules their heart. The mercy seat is the way to heaven for all who shall ever come there. There is, however, a set time for prayer, beyond which it will be unavailing; between the time of sin and the day of punishment mercy rules the hour, and God may be found, but when once the sentence has gone forth pleading will be useless, for the Lord will not be found by the condemned soul. O dear reader, slight not the accepted time, waste not the day of salvation. The godly pray while the Lord has promised to answer, the ungodly postpone their petitions till the Master of the house has risen up and shut to the door, and then their knocking is too late. What a blessing to be led to seek the Lord before the great devouring floods leap forth from their lairs, for then when they do appear we shall be safe. Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. The floods shall come, and the waves shall rage, and toss themselves like Atlantic billows; whirlpools and waterspouts shall be on every hand, but the praying man shall be at a safe distance, most surely secured from every ill. David was probably most familiar with those great land floods which fill up, with rushing torrents, the beds of rivers which at other times are almost dry: these overflowing waters often did great damage, and, as in the case of the Kishon, were sufficient to sweep away whole armies. From sudden and overwhelming disasters thus set forth in metaphor the true suppliant will certainly be held secure. He who is saved from sin has no need to fear anything else.

Verse 7. Thou art my hiding place. Terse, short sentences make up this verse, but they contain a world of meaning. Personal claims upon our God are the joy of spiritual life. To lay our hand upon the Lord with the clasp of a personal "my" is delight at its full. Observe that the same man who in the fourth verse was oppressed by the presence of God, here finds a shelter in him. See what honest

confession and full forgiveness will do! The gospel of substitution makes him to be our refuge who otherwise would have been our judge. Thou shalt preserve me from trouble. Trouble shall do me no real harm when the Lord is with me, rather it shall bring me much benefit, like the file which clears away the rust, but does not destroy the metal. Observe the three tenses, we have noticed the sorrowful past, the last sentence was a joyful present, this is a cheerful future. Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. What a golden sentence! The man is encircled in song, surrounded by dancing mercies, all of them proclaiming the triumphs of grace. There is no breach in the circle, it completely rings him round; on all sides he hears music. Before him hope sounds the cymbals, and behind him gratitude beats the timbrel. Right and left, above and beneath, the air resounds with joy, and all this for the very man who, a few weeks ago, was roaring all the day long. How great a change! What wonders grace has done and still can do! Selah. There was a need of a pause, for love so amazing needs to be pondered, and joy so great demands quiet contemplation, since language fails to express it.

Verse 8. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. Here the Lord is the speaker, and gives the psalmist an answer to his prayer. Our Saviour is our instructor. The Lord himself deigns to teach his children to walk in the way of integrity, his holy word and the monitions of the Holy Spirit are the directors of the believer's daily conversation. We are not pardoned that we may henceforth live after our own lusts, but that we may be educated in holiness and trained for perfection. A heavenly training is one of the covenant blessings which adoption seals to us: "All thy children shall be taught by the Lord." Practical teaching is the very best of instruction, and they are thrice happy who, although they never sat at the feet of Gamaliel, and are ignorant of Aristotle, and the ethics of the schools, have nevertheless learned to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. I will guide thee with mine eye. As servants take their cue from the master's eye, and a nod or a wink is all that they require, so should we obey the slightest hints of our Master, not needing thunderbolts to startle our incorrigible sluggishness, but being controlled by whispers and love touches. The Lord is the great overseer, whose eye in providence overlooks everything. It is well for us to be the sheep of his pasture, following the guidance of his wisdom.

Verse 9. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding. Understanding separates man from a brute—let us not act as if we were devoid of it. Men should take counsel and advice, and be ready to run where wisdom points them the way. Alas! we need to be cautioned against stupidity of heart, for we are very apt to fall into it. We who ought to be as the angels, readily become as the beasts. Whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. It is much to be deplored that we so often need to be severely chastened before we will obey. We ought to be as a feather in the wind, wafted readily in the breath of the Holy Spirit, but alas! we lie like motionless logs, and stir not with heaven itself in view. Those cutting bits of affliction show how hard mouthed we are, those bridles of infirmity manifest our headstrong and wilful manners. We should not be treated like mules if there was not so much of the ass about us. If we will be fractious, we must expect to be kept in with a tight rein. Oh, for grace to obey the Lord willingly, lest like the wilful servant, we are beaten with many stripes. Calvin renders the last words, "Lest they kick against thee," a version more probable and more natural, but the passage is confessedly obscure—not however, in its general sense.

Verse 10. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked. Like refractory horses and mules, they have many cuts and bruises. Here and hereafter the portion of the wicked is undesirable. Their joys are evanescent, their sorrows are multiplying and ripening. He who sows sin will reap sorrow in heavy

sheaves. Sorrows of conscience, of disappointment, of terror, are the sinner's sure heritage in time, and then for ever sorrows of remorse and despair. Let those who boast of present sinful joys, remember the shall be of the future and take warning. But he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Faith is here placed as the opposite of wickedness, since it is the source of virtue. Faith in God is the great charmer of life's cares, and he who possesses it, dwells in an atmosphere of grace, surrounded with the bodyguard of mercies. May it be given to us of the Lord at all times to believe in the mercy of God, even when we cannot see traces of its working, for to the believer, mercy is as all surrounding as omniscience, and every thought and act of God is perfumed with it. The wicked have a hive of wasps around them, many sorrows; but we have a swarm of bees storing honey for us.

Verse 11. Be glad. Happiness is not only our privilege, but our duty. Truly we serve a generous God, since he makes it a part of our obedience to be joyful. How sinful are our rebellious murmurings! How natural does it seem that a man blest with forgiveness should be glad! We read of one who died at the foot of the scaffold of overjoy at the receipt of his monarch's pardon; and shall we receive the free pardon of the King of kings, and yet pine in inexcusable sorrow? "In the Lord." Here is the directory by which gladness is preserved from levity. We are not to be glad in sin, or to find comfort in corn, and wine, and oil, but in our God is to be the garden of our soul's delight. That there is a God and such a God, and that he is ours, ours for ever, our Father and our reconciled Lord, is matter enough for a never ending psalm of rapturous joy. And rejoice, ye righteous, redouble your rejoicing, peal upon peal. Since God has clothed his choristers in the white garments of holiness, let them not restrain their joyful voices, but sing aloud and shout as those who find great spoil. And shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart. Our happiness should be demonstrative; chill penury of love often represses the noble flame of joy, and men whisper their praises decorously where a hearty outburst of song would be far more natural. It is to be feared that the church of the present day, through a craving for excessive propriety, is growing too artificial; so that enquirers' cries and believers' shouts would be silenced if they were heard in our assemblies. This may be better than boisterous fanaticism, but there is as much danger in the one direction as the other. For our part, we are touched to the heart by a little sacred excess, and when godly men in their joy over leap the narrow bounds of decorum, we do not, like Michal, Saul's daughter, eye them with a sneering heart. Note how the pardoned are represented as upright, righteous, and without guile; a man may have many faults and yet be saved, but a false heart is everywhere the damning mark. A man of twisting, shifty ways, of a crooked, crafty nature, is not saved, and in all probability never will be; for the ground which brings forth a harvest when grace is sown in it, may be weedy and waste, but our Lord tells us it is honest and good ground. Our observation has been that men of double tongues and tricky ways are the least likely of all men to be saved: certainly where grace comes it restores man's mind to its perpendicular, and delivers him from being doubled up with vice, twisted with craft, or bent with dishonesty. Reader, what a delightful Psalm! Have you, in perusing it, been able to claim a lot in the goodly land? If so, publish to others the way of salvation.

Psalm 33

Verse 1. Rejoice in the Lord. Joy is the soul of praise. To delight ourselves in God is most truly to extol him, even if we let no notes of song proceed from our lips. That God is, and that he is such a God, and our God, ours for ever and ever, should wake within us an unceasing and overflowing joy. To rejoice in temporal comforts is dangerous, to rejoice in self is foolish, to rejoice in sin is fatal, but to rejoice in God is heavenly. He who would have a double heaven must begin below to rejoice like

those above. O ye righteous. This is peculiarly your duty, your obligations are greater, and your spiritual nature more adapted to the work, be ye then first in the glad service. Even the righteous are not always glad, and have need to be stirred up to enjoy their privileges. For praise is comely for the upright. God has an eye to things which are becoming. When saints wear their choral robes, they look fair in the Lord's sight. A harp suits a blood washed hand. No jewel more ornamental to a holy face than sacred praise. Praise is not comely from unpardoned professional singers; it is like a jewel of gold in a swine's snout. Crooked hearts make crooked music, but the upright are the Lord's delight. Praise is the dress of saints in heaven, it is meet that they should fit it on below.

Verse 2. Praise the Lord with harp. Men need all the help they can get to stir them up to praise. This is the lesson to be gathered from the use of musical instruments under the old dispensation. Israel was at school, and used childish things to help her to learn; but in these days, when Jesus gives us spiritual manhood, we can make melody without strings and pipes. We who do not believe these things to be expedient in worship, lest they should mar its simplicity, do not affirm them to be unlawful, and if any George Herbert or Martin Luther can worship God better by the aid of well tuned instruments, who shall gainsay their right? We do not need them, they would hinder than help our praise, but if others are otherwise minded, are they not living in gospel liberty? Sing unto him. This is the sweetest and best of music. No instrument like the human voice. As a help to singing the instrument is alone to be tolerated, for keys and strings do not praise the Lord. With the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings. The Lord must have a full octave, for all notes are his, and all music belongs to him. Where several pieces of music are mentioned, we are taught to praise God with all the powers which we possess.

Verse 3. Sing unto him a new song. All songs of praise should be unto him. Singing for singing's sake is nothing worth; we must carry our tribute to the King, and not cast it to the winds. Do most worshippers mind this? Our faculties should be exercised when we are magnifying the Lord, so as not to run in an old groove without thought; we ought to make every hymn of praise a new song. To keep up the freshness of worship is a great thing, and in private it is indispensable. Let us not present old worn out praise, but put life, and soul, and heart, into every song, since we have new mercies every day, and see new beauties in the work and word of our Lord. Play skilfully. It is wretched to hear God praised in a slovenly manner. He deserves the best that we have. Every Christian should endeavour to sing according to the rules of the art, so that he may keep time and tune with the congregation. The sweetest tunes and the sweetest voices, with the sweetest words, are all too little for the Lord our God; let us not offer him limping rhymes, set to harsh tunes, and growled out by discordant voices. With a loud noise. Heartiness should be conspicuous in divine worship. Well bred whispers are disreputable here. It is not that the Lord cannot hear us, but that it is natural for great exultation to express itself in the loudest manner. Men shout at the sight of their kings: shall we offer no loud hosannahs to the Son of David?

Verse 4. For the word of the Lord is right. His ordinances both natural, moral, and spiritual, are right, and especially his incarnate Word, who is the Lord our righteousness. Whatever God has ordained must be good, and just, and excellent. There are no anomalies in God's universe, except what sin has made; his word of command made all things good. When we look at his word of promise, and remember its faithfulness, what reasons have we for joy and thankfulness! And all his works are done in truth. His work is the outflow of his word, and it is true to it. He neither doth nor saith anything ill; in deed and speech he agrees with himself and the purest truth. There is no lie in God's word, and no sham in his works; in creation, providence, and revelation, unalloyed truth abounds. To act truth as

well as to utter it is divine. Let not children of God ever yield their principles in practice any more than in heart. What a God we serve! The more we know of him, the more our better natures approve his surpassing excellence; even his afflicting works are according to his truthful word.

"Why should I complain of want of distress,
Afflictions or pain? he told me no less;
The heirs of salvation, I know from his word,
Through much tribulation must follow their Lord."

God writes with a pen that never blots, speaks with a tongue that never slips, acts with a hand which never fails. Bless his name.

Verse 5. He loveth righteousness and judgment. The theory and practice of right he intensely loves. He doth not only approve the true and the just, but his inmost soul delights therein. The character of God is a sea, every drop of which should become a wellhead of praise for his people. The righteousness of Jesus is peculiarly dear to the Father, and for its sake he takes pleasure in those to whom it is imputed. Sin, on the other hand, is infinitely abhorrent to the Lord, and woe unto those who die in it; if he sees no righteousness in them, he will deal righteously with them, and judgment stern and final will be the result. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. Come hither, astronomers, geologists, naturalists, botanists, chemists, miners, yea, all of you who study the works of God, for all your truthful stories confirm this declaration. From the midge in the sunbeam to leviathan in the ocean all creatures own the bounty of the Creator. Even the pathless desert blazes with some undiscovered mercy, and the caverns of ocean conceal the treasures of love. Earth might have been as full of terror as of grace, but instead thereof it teems and overflows with kindness. He who cannot see it, and yet lives in it as the fish lives in the water, deserves to die. If earth be full of mercy, what must heaven be where goodness concentrates its beams?

Verse 6. By the word of the Lord were the heavens made. The angelic heavens, the sidereal heavens, and the firmament or terrestrial heavens, were all made to start into existence by a word; what if we say by the Word, "For without him was not anything made that is made." It is interesting to note the mention of the Spirit in the next clause, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth; the breath is the same as is elsewhere rendered Spirit. Thus the three persons of the Godhead unite in creating all things. How easy for the Lord to make the most ponderous orbs, and the most glorious angels! A word, a breath could do it. It is as easy for God to create the universe as for a man to breathe, nay, far easier, for man breathes not independently, but borrows the breath in his nostrils from his Maker. It may be gathered from this verse that the constitution of all things is from the infinite wisdom, for his word may mean his appointment and determination. A wise and merciful Word has arranged, and a living Spirit sustains all the creation of Jehovah.

Verse 7. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap. The waters were once scattered like corn strewn upon a threshing floor: they are now collected in one spot as an heap. Who else could have gathered them into one channel but their great Lord, at whose bidding the waters fled away? The miracle of the Red Sea is repeated in nature day by day, for the sea which now invades the shore under the impulse of sun and moon, would soon devour the land if bounds were not maintained by the divine decree. He layeth up the depth in storehouses. The depths of the main are God's great cellars and storerooms for the tempestuous element. Vast reservoirs of water are secreted in the bowels of the earth, from which issue our springs and wells of water. What a merciful

provision for a pressing need? May not the text also refer to the clouds, and the magazines of hail, and snow, and rain, those treasures of merciful wealth for the fields of earth? These aqueous masses are not piled away as in lumber rooms, but in storehouses for future beneficial use. Abundant tenderness is seen in the foresight of our heavenly Joseph, whose granaries are already filled against earth's time of need. These stores might have been, as once they were, the ammunition of vengeance, they are now a part of the commissariat of mercy.

Verse 8. Let all the earth fear the Lord. Not only Jews, but Gentiles. The psalmist was not a man blinded by national prejudice, he did not desire to restrict the worship of Jehovah to the seed of Abraham. He looks for homage even to far off nations. If they are not well enough instructed to be able to praise, at least let them fear. There is an inferior kind of worship in the trembling which involuntarily admits the boundless power of the thundering God. A defiant blasphemer is out of place in a world covered with tokens of the divine power and Godhead: the whole earth cannot afford a spot congenial for the erection of a synagogue of Atheism, nor a man in whom it is becoming to profane the name of God. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. Let them forsake their idols, and reverently regard the only living God. What is here placed as a wish may also be read as a prophecy: the adoration of God will yet be universal.

Verse 9. For he spake, and it was done. Creation was the fruit of a word. Jehovah said, "Light be, and light was. The Lord's acts are sublime in their ease and instantaneousness. "What a word is this?" This was the wondering enquiry of old, and it may be ours to this day. He commanded, and it stood fast. Out of nothing creation stood forth, and was confirmed in existence. The same power which first uplifted, now makes the universe to abide; although we may not observe it, there is as great a display of sublime power in confirming as in creating. Happy is the man who has learned to lean his all upon the sure word of him who built the skies!

Verse 10. The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought. While his own will is done, he takes care to anticipate the wilfulness of his enemies. Before they come to action he vanquishes them in the council chamber; and when, well armed with craft, they march to the assault, he frustrates their knaveries, and makes their promising plots to end in nothing. Not only the folly of the heathen, but their wisdom too, shall yield to the power of the cross of Jesus: what a comfort is this to those who have to labour where sophistry, and philosophy, falsely so called, are set in opposition to the truth as it is in Jesus. He maketh the devices of the people of none effect. Their persecutions, slanders, falsehoods, are like puff balls flung against a granite wall—they produce no result at all; for the Lord overrules the evil, and brings good out of it. The cause of God is never in danger: infernal craft is outwitted by infinite wisdom, and Satanic malice held in check by boundless power.

Verse 11. The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever. He changes not his purpose, his decree is not frustrated, his designs are accomplished. God has a predestination according to the counsel of his will, and none of the devices of his foes can thwart his decree for a moment. Men's purposes are blown to and from like the thread of the gossamer or the down of the thistle, but the eternal purposes are firmer than the earth. The thoughts of his heart to all generations. Men come and go, sons follow their sires to the grave, but the undisturbed mind of God moves on in unbroken serenity, producing ordained results with unerring certainty. No man can expect his will or plan to be carried out from age to age; the wisdom of one period is the folly of another, but the Lord's wisdom is always wise, and his designs run on from century to century. His power to fulfil his purposes is by no means diminished by the lapse of years. He who was absolute over Pharaoh in Egypt is not one whit the less today the

King of kings and Lord of lords; still do his chariot wheels roll onward in imperial grandeur, none being for a moment able to resist his eternal will.

Verse 12. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. Israel was happy in the worship of the only true God. It was the blessedness of the chosen nation to have received a revelation from Jehovah. While others grovelled before their idols, the chosen people were elevated by a spiritual religion which introduced them to the invisible God, and led them to trust in him. All who confide in the Lord are blessed in the largest and deepest sense, and none can reverse the blessing. And the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance. Election is at the bottom of it all. The divine choice rules the day; none take Jehovah to be their God till he takes them to be his people. What an ennobling choice this is! We are selected to no mean estate, and for no ignoble purpose: we are made the peculiar domain and delight of the Lord our God. Being so blessed, let us rejoice in our portion, and show the world by our lives that we serve a glorious Master.

Verse 13. The Lord looketh from heaven. The Lord is represented as dwelling above and looking down below; seeing all things, but peculiarly observing and caring for those who trust in him. It is one of our choicest privileges to be always under our Father's eye, to be never out of sight of our best Friend. He beholdeth all the sons of men. All Adam's sons are as well watched as was Adam himself, their lone progenitor in the garden. Ranging from the frozen pole to the scorching equator, dwelling in hills and valleys, in huts and palaces, alike doth the divine eye regard all the members of the family of man.

Verse 14. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. Here the sentiment is repeated: it is worth repeating, and it needs repeating, for man is most prone to forget it. As great men sit at their windows and watch the crowd below, so doth the Lord; he gazes intently upon his responsible creatures, and forgets nothing of what he sees.

Verse 15. He fashioneth their hearts alike. By which is meant that all hearts are equally fashioned by the Lord, kings' hearts as well as the hearts of beggars. The text does not mean that all hearts are created originally alike by God, such a statement would scarcely be true, since there is the utmost variety in the constitutions and dispositions of men. All men equally owe the possession of life to the Creator, and have therefore no reason to boast themselves. What reason has the vessel to glorify itself in presence of the potter? He considereth all their words. Not in vain doth God see men's acts: he ponders and judges them. He reads the secret design in the outward behaviour, and resolves the apparent good into its real elements. This consideration foretokens a judgment when the results of the divine thoughts will be meted out in measures of happiness or woe. Consider thy ways, O man, for God considereth them!

Verse 16. There is no king saved by the multitude of an host. Mortal power is a fiction, and those who trust in it are dupes. Serried ranks of armed men have failed to maintain an empire, or even to save their monarch's life when a decree from the court of heaven has gone forth for the empire's overthrow. The all seeing God preserves the poorest of his people when they are alone and friendless, but ten thousand armed men cannot ensure safety to him whom God leaves to destruction. A mighty man is not delivered by much strength. So far from guarding others, the valiant veteran is not able to deliver himself. When his time comes to die, neither the force of his arms nor the speed of his legs can save him. The weakest believer dwells safely under the shadow of Jehovah's throne, while the most mighty sinner is in peril every hour. Why do we talk so much of our

armies and our heroes? the Lord alone has strength, and let him alone have praise.

Verse 17. An horse is a vain thing for safety. Military strength among the Orientals lay much in horses and scythed chariots, but the psalmist calls them a lie, a deceitful confidence. Surely the knight upon his gallant steed may be safe, either by valour or by flight? Not so, his horse shall bear him into danger or crush him with its fall. Neither shall he deliver any by his great strength. Thus the strongest defences are less than nothing when most needed. God only is to be trusted and adored. Sennacherib with all his calvary is not a match for one angel of the Lord, Pharaoh's horses and chariots found it vain to pursue the Lord's anointed, and so shall all the leaguered might of earth and hell find themselves utterly defeated when they rise against the Lord and his chosen.

Verse 18. Behold. For this is a greater wonder than hosts and horses, a surer confidence than chariots or shields. The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him. That eye of peculiar care is their glory and defence. None can take them at unawares, for the celestial watcher foresees the designs of their enemies, and provides against them. They who fear God need not fear anything else; let them fix their eye of faith on him, and his eye of love will always rest upon them. Upon them that hope in his mercy. This one would think to be a small evidence of grace, and yet it is a valid one. Humble hope shall have its share as well as courageous faith. Say, my soul, is not this an encouragement to thee? Dost thou not hope in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus? Then the Father's eye is as much upon thee as upon the elder born of the family. These gentle words, like soft bread, are meant for babes in grace, who need infant's food.

Verse 19. To deliver their soul from death. The Lord's hand goes with his eye; he sovereignly preserves those whom he graciously observes. Rescues and restorations hedge about the lives of the saints; death cannot touch them till the King signs his warrant and gives him leave, and even then his touch is not so much mortal as immortal; he doth not so much kill us as kill our mortality. And to keep them alive in famine. Gaunt famine knows its master. God has meal and oil for his Elijahs somewhere. "Verily thou shalt be fed" is a divine provision for the man of faith. The Preserver of men will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish. Power in human hands is outmatched by famine, but God is good at a pinch, and proves his bounty under the most straitened circumstances. Believer, wait upon thy God in temporals. His eye is upon thee, and his hand will not long delay.

Verse 20. Our soul waits for the Lord. Here the godly avow their reliance upon him whom the Psalm extols. To wait is a great lesson. To be quiet in expectation, patient in hope, single in confidence, is one of the bright attainments of a Christian. Our soul, our life, must hang upon God; we are not to trust him with a few gewgaws, but with all we have and are. He is our help and our shield. Our help in labour, our shield in danger. The Lord answereth all things to his people. He is their all in all. Note the three "ours" in the text. These holdfast words are precious. Personal possession makes the Christian man; all else is mere talk.

Verse 21. For our hearts shall rejoice in him. The duty commended and commanded in the first verse is here presented to the Lord. We, who trust, cannot but be of a glad heart, our inmost nature must triumph in our faithful God. Because we have trusted in his holy name. The root of faith in due time bears the flower of rejoicing. Doubts breed sorrow, confidence creates joy.

Verse 22. Here is a large and comprehensive prayer to close with. It is an appeal for mercy, which even joyful believers need; and it is sought for in a proportion which the Lord has sanctioned.

"According to your faith be it unto you, "is the Master's word, and he will not fall short of the scale which he has himself selected. Yet, Master, do more than this when hope is faint, and bless us far above what we ask or even think.

Psalm 34

Verse 1. I will bless the Lord at all times. He is resolved and fixed, I will; he is personally and for himself determined, let others so as they may; he is intelligent in head and inflamed in heart—he knows to whom the praise is due, and what is due, and for what and when. To Jehovah, and not to second causes our gratitude is to be rendered. The Lord hath by right a monopoly in his creatures praise. Even when a mercy may remind us of our sin with regard to it, as in this case David's deliverance from the Philistine monarch was sure to do, we are not to rob God of his meed of honour because our conscience justly awards a censure to our share in the transaction. Though the hook was rusty, yet God sent the fish, and we thank him for it. At all times, in every situation, under every circumstance, before, in and after trials, in bright days of glee, and dark nights of fear. He would never have done praising, because never satisfied that he had done enough; always feeling that he fell short of the Lord's deservings. Happy is he whose fingers are wedded to his harp. He who praises God for mercies shall never want a mercy for which to praise. To bless the Lord is never unseasonable. His praise shall continually be in my mouth, not in my heart merely, but in my mouth too. Our thankfulness is not to be a dumb thing; it should be one of the daughters of music. Our tongue is our glory, and it ought to reveal the glory of God. What a blessed mouthful is God's praise! How sweet, how purifying, how perfuming! If men's mouths were always thus filled, there would be no repining against God, or slander of neighbours. If we continually rolled this dainty morsel under our tongue, the bitterness of daily affliction would be swallowed up in joy. God deserves blessing with the heart, and extolling with the mouth—good thoughts in the closet, and good words in the world.

Verse 2. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord. Boasting is a very natural propensity, and if it were used as in this case, the more it were indulged the better. The exultation of this verse is no mere tongue bragging, "the soul" is in it, the boasting is meant and felt before it is expressed. What scope there is for holy boasting in Jehovah! His person, attributes, covenant, promises, works, and a thousand things besides, are all incomparable, unparalleled, matchless; we may cry them up as we please, but we shall never be convicted of vain and empty speech in so doing. Truly he who writes these words of comment has nothing of his own to boast of, but much to lament over, and yet none shall stop him of his boast in God so long as he lives. The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. They are usually grieved to hear boastings; they turn aside from vauntings and lofty speeches, but boasting in the Lord is quite another matter; by this the most lowly are consoled and encouraged. The confident expressions of tried believers are a rich solace to their brethren of less experience. We ought to talk of the Lord's goodness on purpose that others may be confirmed in their trust in a faithful God.

Verse 3. O magnify the Lord with me. Is this request addressed to the humble? If so it is most fitting. Who can make God great but those who feel themselves to be little? He bids them help him to make the Lord's fame greater among the sons of men. Jehovah is infinite, and therefore cannot really be made greater, but his name grows in manifested glory as he is made known to his creatures, and thus he is said to be magnified. It is well when the soul feels its own inability adequately to glorify the Lord, and therefore stirs up others to the gracious work; this is good both for the man himself and for his companions. No praise can excel that which lays us prostrate under a sense of our own

nothingness, while divine grace like some topless Alp rises before our eyes and sinks us lower and lower in holy awe. Let us exalt his name together. Social, congregated worship is the outgrowth of one of the natural instincts of the new life. In heaven it is enjoyed to the full, and earth is like heaven where it abounds.

Verse 4. I sought the Lord, and he heard me. It must have been in a very confused manner that David prayed, and there must have been much of self sufficiency in his prayer, or he would not have resorted to methods of such dubious morality as pretending to be mad and behaving as a lunatic; yet his poor limping prayer had an acceptance and brought him succour: the more reason for then celebrating the abounding mercy of the Lord. We may seek God even when we have sinned. If sin could blockade the mercyseat it would be all over with us, but the mercy is that there are gifts even for the rebellious, and an advocate for men who sin. And delivered me from all my fears. God makes a perfect work of it. He clears away both our fears and their causes, all of them without exception. Glory be to his name, prayer sweeps the field, slays all the enemies and even buries their bones. Note the egoism of this verse and of those preceding it; we need not blush to speak of ourselves when in so doing we honestly aim at glorifying God, and not at exalting ourselves. Some are foolishly squeamish upon this point, but they should remember that when modesty robs God it is most immodest.

Verse 5. They looked unto him, and were lightened. The psalmist avows that his case was not at all peculiar, it was matched in the lives of all the faithful; they too, each one of them on looking to their Lord were brightened up, their faces began to shine, their spirits were uplifted. What a means of blessing one look at the Lord may be! There is life, light, liberty, love, everything in fact, in a look at the crucified One. Never did a sore heart look in vain to the good Physician; never a dying soul turned its darkening eye to the brazen serpent to find its virtue gone. And their faces were not ashamed. Their faces were covered with joy but not with blushes. He who trusts in God has no need to be ashamed of his confidence, time and eternity will both justify his reliance.

Verse 6. This poor man cried. Here he returns to his own case. He was poor indeed, and so utterly friendless that his life was in great jeopardy; but he cried in his heart to the protector of his people and found relief. His prayer was a cry, for brevity and bitterness, for earnestness and simplicity, for artlessness and grief; it was a poor man's cry, but it was none the less powerful with heaven, for the Lord heard him, and to be heard of God is to be delivered; and so it is added that the Lord saved him out of all his troubles. At once and altogether David was clean rid of all his woes. The Lord sweeps our griefs away as men destroy a hive of hornets, or as the winds clear away the mists. Prayer can clear us of troubles as easily as the Lord made riddance of the frogs and flies of Egypt when Moses entreated him. This verse is the psalmist's own personal testimony: he being dead yet speaketh. Let the afflicted reader take heart and be of good courage.

Verse 7. The angel of the Lord. The covenant angel, the Lord Jesus, at the head of all the bands of heaven, surrounds with his army the dwellings of the saints. Like hosts entrenched so are the ministering spirits encamped around the Lord's chosen, to serve and succour, to defend and console them. Encampeth round about them that fear him. On every side the watch is kept by warriors of sleepless eyes, and the Captain of the host is one whose prowess none can resist. And delivereth them. We little know how many providential deliverances we owe to those unseen hands which are charged to bear us up lest we dash our foot against a stone.

Verse 8. O taste and see. Make a trial, an inward, experimental trial of the goodness of God. You cannot see except by tasting for yourself; but if you taste you shall see, for this, like Jonathan's honey, enlightens the eyes. That the Lord is good. You can only know this really and personally by experience. There is the banquet with its oxen and fatlings; its fat things full of marrow, and wine on the lees well refined; but their sweetness will be all unknown to you except you make the blessings of grace your own, by a living, inward, vital participation in them. Blessed is the man that trusteth in him. Faith is the soul's taste; they who test the Lord by their confidence always find him good, and they become themselves blessed. The second clause of the verse, is the argument in support of the exhortation contained in the first sentence.

Verse 9. O fear the Lord, ye his saints. Pay to him humble childlike reverence, walk in his laws, have respect to his will, tremble to offend him, hasten to serve him. Fear not the wrath of men, neither be tempted to sin through the virulence of their threats; fear God and fear nothing else. For there is no want to them that fear him. Jehovah will not allow his faithful servants to starve. He may not give luxuries, but the promise binds him to supply necessaries, and he will not run back from his word. Many whims and wishes may remain unfulfilled, but real wants the Lord will supply. The fear of the Lord or true piety is not only the duty of those who avow themselves to be saints, that is, persons set apart and consecrated for holy duties, but it is also their path of safety and comfort. Godliness hath the promise of the life which now is. If we were to die like dogs, and there were no hereafter, yet were it well for our own happiness' sake to fear the Lord. Men seek a patron and hope to prosper; he prospers surely who hath the Lord of Hosts to be his friend and defender.

Verse 10. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger. They are fierce, cunning, strong, in all the vigour of youth, and yet they sometimes howl in their ravenous hunger, and even so crafty, designing, and oppressing men, with all their sagacity and unscrupulousness, often come to want; yet simple minded believers, who dare not act as the greedy lions of earth, are fed with food convenient for them. To trust God is better policy than the craftiest politicians can teach or practice. But they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. No really good thing shall be denied to those whose first and main end in life is to seek the Lord. Men may call them fools, but the Lord will prove them wise. They shall win where the world's wiseacres lose their all, and God shall have the glory of it.

Verse 11. Come, ye children. Though a warrior and a king, the psalmist was not ashamed to teach children. Teachers of youth belong to the true peerage; their work is honourable, and their reward shall be glorious. Perhaps the boys and girls of Gath had made sport of David in his seeming madness, and if so, he here aims by teaching the rising race to undo the mischief which he had done aforetime. Children are the most hopeful persons to teach—wise men who wish to propagate their principles take care to win the ear of the young. Harken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. So far as they can be taught by word of mouth, or learned by the hearing of the ear, we are to communicate the faith and fear of God, inculcating upon the rising generation the principles and practices of piety. This verse may be the address of every Sabbath school teacher to his class, of every parent to his children. It is not without instruction in the art of teaching. We should be winning and attractive to the youngsters, bidding them "come," and not repelling them with harsh terms. We must get them away, apart from toys and sports, and try to occupy their minds with better pursuits; for we cannot well teach them while their minds are full of other things. We must drive at the main point always, and keep the fear of the Lord ever uppermost in our teachings, and in so doing we may discreetly cast our own personality into the scale by narrating our own experiences and convictions.

Verse 12. Life spent in happiness is the desire of all, and he who can give the young a receipt for leading a happy life deserves to be popular among them. Mere existence is not life; the art of living, truly, really, and joyfully living, it is not given to all men to know. To teach men how to live and how to die, is the aim of all useful religious instruction. The rewards of virtue are the baits with which the young are to be drawn to morality. While we teach piety to God we should also dwell much upon morality towards man.

Verse 13. Keep thy tongue from evil. Guard with careful diligence that dangerous member, the tongue, lest it utter evil, for that evil will recoil upon thee, and mar the enjoyment of thy life. Men cannot spit forth poison without feeling some of the venom burning their own flesh. And thy lips from speaking guile. Deceit must be very earnestly avoided by the man who desires happiness. A crafty schemer lives like a spy in the enemy's camp, in constant fear of exposure and execution. Clean and honest conversation, by keeping the conscience at ease, promotes happiness, but lying and wicked talk stuffs our pillow with thorns, and makes life a constant whirl of fear and shame. David had tried the tortuous policy, but he here denounces it, and begs others as they would live long and well to avoid with care the doubtful devices of guile.

Verse 14. Depart from evil. Go away from it. Not merely take your hands off, but yourself off. Live not near the pest house. Avoid the lion's lair, leave the viper's nest. Set a distance between yourself and temptation. And do good. Be practical, active, energetic, persevering in good. Positive virtue promotes negative virtue; he who does good is sure to avoid evil. Seek peace. Not merely prefer it, but with zeal and care endeavour to promote it. Peace with God, with thine own heart, with thy fellow man, search after this as the merchantman after a precious pearl. Nothing can more effectually promote our own happiness than peace; strife awakens passions which eat into the heart with corroding power. Anger is murder to one's own self, as well as to its objects. And pursue it. Hunt after it, chase it with eager desire. It may soon be lost, indeed, nothing is harder to retain, but do your best, and if enmity should arise let it be no fault of yours. Follow after peace when it shuns you; be resolved not to be of a contentious spirit. The peace which you thus promote will be returned into your own bosom, and be a perennial spring of comfort to you.

Verse 15. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous. He observes them with approval and tender consideration; they are so dear to him that he cannot take his eyes off them; he watches each one of them as carefully and intently as if there were only that one creature in the universe. His ears are open unto their cry. His eyes and ears are thus both turned by the Lord towards his saints; his whole mind is occupied about them: if slighted by all others they are not neglected by him. Their cry he hears at once, even as a mother is sure to hear her sick babe; the cry may be broken, plaintive, unhappy, feeble, unbelieving, yet the Father's quick ear catches each note of lament or appeal, and he is not slow to answer his children's voice.

Verse 16. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil. God is not indifferent to the deeds of sinners, but he sets his face against them, as we say, being determined that they shall have no countenance and support, but shall be thwarted and defeated. He is determinately resolved that the ungodly shall not prosper; he sets himself with all his might to overthrow them. To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. He will stamp out their fires, their honour shall be turned into shame, their names forgotten or accursed. Utter destruction shall be the lot of all the ungodly.

Verse 17. The righteous cry. Like Israel in Egypt, they cry out under the heavy yoke of oppression,

both of sin, temptation, care, and grief. And the Lord heareth; he is like the night watchman, who no sooner hears the alarm bell than he flies to relieve those who need him. And delivereth them out of all their troubles. No net of trouble can so hold us that the Lord cannot free us. Our afflictions may be numerous and complicated, but prayer can set us free from them all, for the Lord will show himself strong on our behalf.

Verse 18. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart. Near in friendship to accept and console. Broken hearts think God far away, when he is really most near them; their eyes are holden so that they see not their best friend. Indeed, he is with them, and in them, but they know it not. They run hither and thither, seeking peace in their own works, or in experiences, or in proposals and resolutions, whereas the Lord is nigh them, and the simple act of faith will reveal him. And saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. What a blessed token for good is a repentant, mourning heart! Just when the sinner condemns himself, the Lord graciously absolves him. If we chasten our own spirits the Lord will spare us. He never breaks with the rod of judgment those who are already sore with the rod of conviction. Salvation is linked with contrition.

Verse 19. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. Thus are they made like Jesus their covenant Head. Scripture does not flatter us like the story books with the idea that goodness will secure us from trouble; on the contrary, we are again and again warned to expect tribulation while we are in this body. Our afflictions come from all points of the compass, and are as many and as tormenting as the mosquitoes of the tropics. It is the earthly portion of the elect to find thorns and briars growing in their pathway, yea, to lie down among them, finding their rest broken and disturbed by sorrow. BUT, blessed but, how it takes the sting out of the previous sentence! But the Lord delivereth him out of them all. Through troops of ills Jehovah shall lead his redeemed scatheless and triumphant. There is an end to the believer's affliction, and a joyful end too. None of his trials can hurt so much as a hair of his head, neither can the furnace hold him for a moment after the Lord bids him come forth of it. Hard would be the lot of the righteous if this promise, like a bundle of camphire, were not bound up in it, but this sweetens all. The same Lord who sends the afflictions will also recall them when his design is accomplished, but he will never allow the fiercest of them to rend and devour his beloved.

Verse 20. He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken. David had come off with kicks and cuffs, but no broken bones. No substantial injury occurs to the saints. Eternity will heal all their wounds. Their real self is safe; they may have flesh wounds, but no part of the essential fabric of their being shall be broken. This verse may refer to frequent providential protections vouchsafed to the saints; but as good men have had broken limbs as well as others, it cannot absolutely be applied to bodily preservations; but must, it seems to me, be spiritually applied to great injuries of soul, which are for ever prevented by divine love. Not a bone of the mystical body of Christ shall be broken, even as his corporeal frame was preserved intact. Divine love watches over every believer as it did over Jesus; no fatal injury shall happen to us, we shall neither be halt or maimed in the kingdom, but shall be presented after life's trials are over without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, being preserved in Christ Jesus, and kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

Verse 21. Evil shall slay the wicked. Their adversaries shall be killing; they are not medicine, but poison. Ungodly men only need rope enough and they will hang themselves; their own iniquities shall be their punishment. Hell itself is but evil fully developed, torturing those in whom it dwells. Oh! happy they who have fled to Jesus to find refuge from their former sins, such, and such only will escape. And they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. They hated the best of company, and they shall

have none; they shall be forsaken, despoiled, wretched, despairing. God makes the viper poison itself. What desolation of heart do the damned feel, and how richly have they deserved it!

Verse 22. The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants—with price and with power, with blood and with water. All providential helps are a part of the redemption by power, hence the Lord is said still to redeem. All thus ransomed belong to him who bought them—this is the law of justice and the verdict of gratitude. Joyfully will we serve him who so graciously purchases us with his blood, and delivers us by his power. And none of them that trust in him shall be desolate. Faith is the mark of the ransomed, and wherever it is seen, though in the least and meanest of the saints, it ensures eternal salvation. Believer, thou shalt never be deserted, forsaken, given up to ruin. God, even thy God, is thy guardian and friend, and bliss is thine.

Psalm 35

Verse 1. "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me." Plead against those who plead against me; strive with my strivers; contend with my contenders. If they urge their suit in the law-court, Lord, meet them there, and beat them at their own weapons. Every saint of God shall have this privilege: the accuser of the brethren shall be met by the Advocate of the saints. "Fight against them that fight against me." If my adversaries try force as well as fraud, be a match for them; oppose thy strength to their strength. Jesus does this for all his beloved—for them he is both intercessor and champion; whatever aid they need they shall receive from him, and in whatever manner they are assaulted they shall be effectually defended. Let us not fail to leave our case into the Lord's hand. Vain is the help of man, but ever effectual is the interposition of heaven. What is here asked for as a boon, may be regarded as a promise, to all the saints; in judgment they shall have a divine advocate, in warfare a divine protection.

Verse 2. "Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help." In vivid metaphor the Lord is pictured as coming forth armed for battle, and interposing himself between his servant and his enemies. The greater and lesser protections of providence may be here intended by the two defensive weapons, find by the Lord's standing up is meant his active and zealous preservation of his servant in the perilous hour. This poetic imagery shows how the Psalmist realised the existence and power of God; and thought of him as a real and actual personage, truly working for his afflicted.

Verse 3. "Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me." Before the enemy comes to close quarters the Lord can push them off as with a long spear. To stave off trouble is no mean act of lovingkindness. As when some valiant warrior with his lance blocks up a defile, and keeps back a host until his weaker brethren have made good their escape, so does the Lord often hold the believer's foes at bay until the good man has taken breath, or clean fled from his foes. He often gives the foes of Zion some other work to do, and so gives rest to his church. What a glorious idea is this of Jehovah blocking the way of persecutors, holding them at the pike's end, and giving time for the hunted saint to elude their pursuit! "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." Besides holding off the enemy the Lord can also calm the mind of his servant by express assurance from his own mouth, that he is, and shall be, safe under the Almighty wing. An inward persuasion of security in God is of all things the most precious in the furnace of persecution. One word from the Lord quiets all our fears.

Verse 4. "Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul." There is nothing

malicious here, the slandered man simply craves for justice, and the petition is natural and justifiable. Guided by God's good spirit the Psalmist foretells the everlasting confusion of all the haters of the righteous. Shameful disappointment shall be the portion of the enemies of the gospel, nor would the most tender-hearted Christian have it otherwise: viewing sinners as men, we love them and seek their good, but regarding them as enemies of God, we cannot think of them with anything but detestation, and a loyal desire for the confusion of their devices. No loyal subject can wish well to rebels. Squeamish sentimentality may object to the strong language here used, but in their hearts all good men wish confusion to mischief-makers.

Verse 5. "Let them be as chaff before the wind." They were swift enough to attack, let them be as swift to flee. Let their own fears and the alarms of their consciences unman them so that the least breeze of trouble shall carry them hither and thither. Ungodly men are worthless in character, and light in their behaviour, being destitute of solidity and fixedness; it is but just that those who make themselves chaff should be treated as such. When this imprecation is fulfilled in graceless men, they will find it an awful thing to be for ever without rest, without peace of mind, or stay of soul, hurried from fear to fear, and from misery to misery. "And let the angel-of the Lord chase them." Fallen angels shall haunt them, good angels shall afflict them. To be pursued by avenging spirits will be the lot of those who delight in persecution. Observe the whole scene as the Psalmist sketches it: the furious foe is first held at bay, then turned back, then driven to headlong flight, and chased by fiery messengers from whom there is no escape, while his pathway becomes dark and dangerous, and his destruction overwhelming.

Verse 6. "Let their way be dark and slippery." What terrors are gathered here! No light, no foothold, and a fierce avenger at their heels! What a doom is appointed for the enemies of God! They may rage and rave today, but how altered will be their plight ere long! "And let the angel of the Lord persecute them." He will follow them hot-foot, as we say, never turning aside, but like a trusty pursuivant serving the writ of vengeance upon them, and arresting them in the name of unflinching justice. Woe, woe, woe, unto those who touch the people of God; their destruction is both swift and sure.

Verse 7. In this verse the Psalmist brings forward the gravamen of his charge against the servants of the devil. "For without cause"—without my having injured, assailed, or provoked them; out of their own spontaneous malice "have they hid for me their net in a pit," even as men hunt for their game with cunning and deception. Innocent persons have often been ruined by traps set for them, into which they have fallen as guilelessly as beasts which stumble into concealed pits, and are taken as in a net. It is no little thing to be able to feel that the enmity which assails us is undeserved—uncaused by any wilful offence on our part. Twice does David assert in one verse that his adversaries plotted against him "without cause." Net-making and pit-digging require time and labour, and both of these the wicked will expend cheerfully if they may but overthrow the people of God. Fair warfare belongs to honourable men, but the assailants of God's church prefer mean, ungenerous schemes, and so prove their nature and their origin. We must all of us be on our guard, for gins and pitfalls are still the favourite weapons of the powers of evil.

Verse 8. "Let destruction come, upon him at unawares." This tremendous imprecation is frequently fulfilled. God's judgments are often sudden and signal. Death enter the persecutor's house without pausing to knock at the door. The thunderbolt of judgment leaps from its hiding-place, and in one crash the wicked are broken for ever. "And let his net that he hath hid catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall." There is a *lex talionis* with God which often works most wonderfully. Men set

traps and catch their own fingers. They throw up stones, and they fall upon their own heads. How often Satan outwits himself, and burns his fingers with his own coals! This will doubtless be one of the aggravations of hell, that men will torment themselves with what were once the fond devices of their rebellious minds. They curse and are cursed; they kick the pricks and tear themselves; they pour forth floods of fire, and it burns them within and without.

Verse 9. "And my soul shall be joyful in the Lord." Thus rescued, David ascribes all the honour to the Judge of the right; to his own valorous arm he offers no sacrifice of boasting. He turns away from his adversaries to his God, and finds a deep unbroken joy in Jehovah, and in that joy his spirit revels. "It shall rejoice in his salvation." We do not triumph in the destruction of others, but in the salvation given to us of God. Prayer heard should always suggest praise. It were well if we were more demonstrative in our holy rejoicings. We rob God by suppressing grateful emotions.

Verse 10. As if the tongue were not enough to bless God with, David makes every limb vocal—"All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like unto thee?" His whole anatomy he would make resonant with gratitude. Those bones which were to have been broken by my enemies shall now praise God; every one of them shall bring its tribute, ascribing unrivalled excellence to Jehovah the Saviour of his people. Even if worn to skin and bone, yet my very skeleton shall magnify the Lord, "which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him." God is the champion, the true knight-errant of all oppressed ones. Where there is so much condescension, justice, kindness, power, and compassion, the loftiest songs should be rendered. Come, dear reader, have you not been delivered from sin, Satan, and death, and will not you bless the Redeemer? You were poor and weak, but in due time Christ sought you, and set you free. O magnify the Lord today, and speak well of his name.

Verse 11. "False witnesses did rise up." This is the old device of the ungodly, and we must not wonder if it be used against us as against our Master. To please Saul, there were always men to be found mean enough to impeach David. "they laid to my charge things that I knew not." He had not even a thought of sedition; he was loyal even to excess; yet they accused him of conspiring against the Lord's anointed. He was not only innocent, but ignorant of the fault alleged. It is well when our hands are so clean that no trace of dirt is upon them.

Verse 12. "They rewarded me evil for good." This is devilish; but men have learned the lesson well of the old Destroyer, and practise it most perfectly. "To the spoiling of my soul." They robbed him of comfort, and even would have taken his life had it not been for special rescues from the hand of God. The wicked would strip the righteous naked to their very soul: they know no pity. There are only such limits to human malice as God himself may see fit to place.

Verse 13. "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth." David had been a man of sympathy; he had mourned when Saul was in ill health, putting on the weeds of sorrow for him as though he were a near and dear friend. His heart went into mourning for his sick master. "I humbled my soul with fasting." He prayed for his enemy, and made the sick man's case his own, pleading and confessing as if his own personal sin had brought on the evil. This showed a noble spirit in David, and greatly aggravated the baseness of those who now so cruelly persecuted him. "And my prayer returned into mine own bosom." Prayer is never lost: if it bless not those for whom intercession is made, it shall bless the intercessors. Clouds do not always descend in showers upon the same spot from which the vapours ascended, but they come down somewhere; and even so do supplications in

some place or other yield their showers of mercy. If our dove find no rest for the sole of her foot among our enemies, it shall fly into our bosoms and bring an olive branch of peace in its mouth. How sharp is the contrast all through this Psalm between the righteous and his enemies! We must be earnest to keep the line of demarcation broad and clear.

Verse 14. "I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother:" I waited on him assiduously, comforted him affectionately, and sympathised with him deeply. This may refer to those days when David played on the harp, and chased away the evil spirit from Saul. "I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother. He bowed his head as mourners do. The strongest natural grief was such as he felt when they were in trouble. The mother usually wins the deepest love, and her loss is most keenly felt; such was David's grief. How few professors in these days have such bowels of compassion; and yet under the gospel there should be far more tender love than under the law. Had we more hearty love to manhood, and care for its innumerable ills, we might be far more useful; certainly we should be infinitely more Christ-like. "He prayeth best that loveth best."

Verse 15. "But in mine adversity they rejoiced." In my halting they were delighted. My lameness was sport to them. Danger was near, and they sang songs over my expected defeat. How glad are the wicked to see a good man limp! "Now," say they, "he will meet with his downfall." "And gathered themselves together," like kites and vultures around a dying sheep. They found a common joy in my ruin, and a recreation in my sorrow, and therefore met together to keep the feast. They laid their heads together to devise, and their tongues to deceive. "Yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me." Those who deserved horsewhipping, fellows the soles of whose feet were needing the bastinado, came together to plot, and held hole and corner meetings. Like curs around a sick lion, the mean wretches taunted and insulted one whose name had been their terror. The very cripples hobbled out to join the malicious crew. How unanimous are the powers of evil; how heartily do men serve the devil; and none decline his service because they are not endowed with great abilities! "I knew it not." It was all done behind my back. What a fluster the world may be in, and the cause of it all may not even know that he has given offence. "They did tear me, and ceased not." It is such dainty work to tear to pieces a good man's character, that when slanderers have their hand in they are loath to leave off. A pack of dogs tearing their prey is nothing compared with a set of malicious gossips mauling the reputation of a worthy man. That lovers of the gospel are not at this time rent and torn as in the old days of Mary, is to be attributed to the providence of God rather than to the gentleness of men.

Verse 16. "With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth." Like professional buffoons who grin around the banquet to make sport, so they made a business of jeering at the good man; not, however, out of mirth, but from violent, insatiable hatred. Like cake-scoffers, or men who will jeer for a bit of bread, these hireling miscreants persecuted David in order to get a bellyful for themselves from Saul's table: having moreover an inward grudge against the son of Jesse because he was a better man than themselves.

Very forcibly might our Lord have used the words of these verses! Let us not forget to see the Despised and Rejected of men here painted to the life. Calvary and the ribald crew around the cross seem brought before our eyes.

Verse 17. "Lord, how long wilt thou look on?" Why be a mere spectator? Why so neglectful of thy servant? Art thou indifferent? Carest thou not that we perish? We may thus reason with the Lord. He permits us this familiarity. There is a time for our salvation, but to our impatience it often seems to be

very slow in coming; yet wisdom has ordained the hour, and nothing shall delay it. "Rescue my soul from their destructions." From their many devices; their multiplied assaults, be pleased to set me free. "My darling," my lovely, only, precious soul, do thou rescue "from the lions." His enemies were fierce, cunning, and strong as young lions; God only could deliver him from their jaws, to God he therefore addresses himself.

Verse 18. "I will give thee thanks in the great congregation." Notable deliverances must be recorded, and their fame emblazoned. All the saints should be informed of the Lord's goodness. The theme is worthy of the largest assembly; the experience of a believer is a subject fit for an assembled universe to hear of. Most men publish their griefs, good men should proclaim their mercies. "I will praise thee among much people." Among friends and foes will I glorify the God of my salvation. Praise—personal praise, public praise, perpetual praise—should be the daily revenue of the King of heaven. Thus, for the second time, David's prayer ends in praise, as indeed all prayer should.

Verse 19. He earnestly prays that as they have no cause for their enmity, they may have no cause for triumph either in his folly, sin, or overthrow. "Neither let them wink with the eye that hale me without a cause." The winking of the eye was the low-bred sign of congratulation at the ruin of their victim, and it may also have been one of their scornful gestures as they gazed upon him whom they despised. To cause hatred is the mark of the wicked, to suffer it causelessly is the lot of the righteous. God is the natural Protector of all who are wronged, and he is the enemy of all oppressors.

Verse 20. "For they speak not peace." They love it not; how can they speak it? They are such troublers themselves that they cannot judge others to be peaceable. Out of the mouth comes what is in the heart. Riotous men charge others with sedition. "They devise deceitful mailers against them that are quiet in the land." David would fain have been an orderly citizen, but they laboured to make him a rebel. He could do nothing aright, all his dealings were misrepresented. This is an old trick of the enemy to brand good men with S.S on their cheeks, as sowers of sedition, though they have ever been a harmless race, like sheep among wolves. When mischief is meant, mischief is soon made. Unscrupulous partisans could even charge Jesus with seeking to overturn Caesar, much more will they thus accuse his household. At this very hour, those who stand up for the crown rights of King Jesus are called enemies of the church, favourers of Popery, friends of Atheists, levellers, red republicans, and it were hard to say what besides. Billingsgate and Babylon are in league.

Verse 21. "Yea, they opened their mouth wide against me." As if they would swallow him. Uttering great lies which needed wide mouths. They set no bounds to their infamous charges, but poured out wholesale abuse, trusting that if all did not stick, some of it would. "And said, Aha, aha, our eye hath seen it." Glad to find out a fault or a misfortune, or to swear they had seen evil where there was none. Malice has but one eye; it is blind to all virtue in its enemy. Eyes can generally see what hearts wish. A man with a mote in his eye sees a spot in the sun. How like a man is to an ass when he brays over another's misfortunes! how like to a devil when he laughs a hyaena-laugh over a good man's slips! Malice is folly, and when it holds a festival its tones and gestures far exceed all the freaks and mummeries of the Lord of misrule.

Verse 22. "This thou hast seen, O Lord." Here is comfort. Our heavenly Father knows all our sorrow. Omniscience is the saint's candle which never goes out. A father will not long endure to see his child abused. Shall not God avenge his own elect? "Keep not silence." Rebuke thine enemies and mine, O Lord. A word will do it. Clear my character, comfort my heart. "O Lord, be not far from me." Walk the

furnace with me. Stand in the pillory at my side. The sweet presence of God is the divine cordial of the persecuted; his painful absence would be their deepest misery.

Verse 23. "Stir up thyself." Be upon thy mettle. Prove that thou art no indifferent witness to all this infamy. "Awake to rail judgment." Take the sceptre and summon the great assize; vindicate justice, avenge oppression. Do not tarry as men do who sleep. "Even unto my cause, my God and my Lord." He claims a nearness to his God, he holds him with both hands; he leaves his case with the righteous Judge. He begs that the suit may be brought on, heard, tried, and verdict given. Well is it for a man when his conscience is so clear that he dares to make such an appeal.

Verse 24. The appeal is here repeated; the plaintiff feels that the joy of his accusers will be short-lived as soon as impartial justice rules. The oppressors' wrong, the proud man's contumely, the fool's grimace—all, all will cease when the righteous Lord sits down upon the judgment seat.

Verse 25. "Let them not say in their hearts, Ah, so would we have it: let them not say, We have swallowed him up." Disappoint them of their prey when their mouths are ready to swallow it. Saints are too dear a morsel for the powers of evil; God will not give his sheep over to the wolfish jaws of the persecutors. Just when they are tuning their pipes to celebrate their victory, they shall be made to laugh on the other side of their mouths. They are all too sure, and too boastful; they reckon without their host: little do they dream of the end which will be put to their scheming. Their bird shall be flown, and they themselves shall be in the trap. The prayer of this text is a promise. Even before the lips of the wicked can frame a speech of exultation, they shall be disappointed; their heart-speech shall be forestalled, their wishes frustrated, their knavish tricks exposed.

Verse 26. Here is the eternal result of all the laborious and crafty devices of the Lord's enemies. God will make little of them, though they "magnified themselves;" he will shame them for shaming his people, bring them to confusion for making confusion, pull off their fine apparel and give them a beggarly suit of dishonour, and turn all their rejoicing into weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Truly, the saints can afford to wait.

Verse 27. "Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favour my righteous cause." Even those who could not render him active aid, but in their hearts favoured him, David would have the Lord reward most abundantly. Men of tender heart set great store by the good wishes and prayers of the Lord's people. Jesus also prizes those whose hearts are with his cause. The day is coming when shouts of victory shall be raised by all who are on Christ's side, for the battle will turn, and the foes of truth shall be routed. "Yea, let them say continually, Let the Lord be magnified." He would have their gladness contributory to the divine glory; they are not to shout to David's praise, but for the honour of Jehovah. Such acclamations may fitly be continued throughout time and eternity. "Which hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant." They recognised David as the Lord's servant, and saw with pleasure the Lord's favour to him. We can have no nobler title than "servant of God," and no greater reward than for our Master to delight in our prosperity. What true prosperity may be we are not always best able to judge. We must leave that in Jesus' hand; he will not fail to rule all things for our highest good. "For by his saints it stands confessed. That what he does is always best."

Verse 28. Unceasing praise is here vowed to the just and gracious God. From morning till evening the grateful tongue would talk and sing, and glorify the Lord. O for such a resolve carried out by us all!

Psalm 36

Verse 1. The transgression of the wicked. His daring and wanton sin; his breaking the bounds of law and justice. Saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. Men's sins have a voice to godly ears. They are the outer index of an inner evil. It is clear that men who dare to sin constantly and presumptuously cannot respect the great Judge of all. Despite the professions of unrighteous men, when we see their unhallowed actions our heart is driven to the conclusion that they have no religion whatever. Unholiness is clear evidence of ungodliness. Wickedness is the fruit of an atheistic root. This may be made clear to the candid head by cogent reasoning, but it is clear already and intuitively to the pious heart. If God be everywhere, and I fear him, how can I dare to break his laws in his very presence? He must be a desperate traitor who will rebel in the monarch's own halls. Whatever theoretical opinions bad men may avow, they can only be classed with atheists, since they are such practically. Those eyes which have no fear of God before them now, shall have the terrors of hell before them for ever.

Verse 2. For. Here is the argument to prove the proposition laid down in the former verse. David here runs over the process of reasoning by which he had become convinced that wicked men have no proper idea of God or respect for him. God fearing men see their sins and bewail them, where the reverse is the case we may be sure there is no fear of God. He flattereth himself in his own eyes. He counts himself a fine fellow, worthy of great respect. He quiets his conscience, and so deceives his own judgment as to reckon himself a pattern of excellence; if not for morality, yet for having sense enough not to be enslaved by rules which are bonds to others. He is the free thinker, the man of strong mind, the hater of cant, the philosopher; and the servants of God are, in his esteem, mean spirited and narrow minded. Of all flatteries this is the most absurd and dangerous. Even the silliest bird will not set traps for itself; the most pettifogging attorney will not cheat himself. To smooth over one's own conduct to one's conscience (which is the meaning of the Hebrew) is to smooth one's own path to hell. The descent to eternal ruin is easy enough, without making a glissade of it, as self flatters do. Until his iniquity be found to be hateful. At length he is found out and detested, despite his self conceit. Rottenness smells sooner or later too strong to be concealed. There is a time when the leprosy cannot be hidden. At last the old house can no longer be propped up, and falls about the tenant's ears: so there is a limit to a man's self gratulation; he is found out amid general scorn, and can no longer keep up the farce which he played so well. If this happens not in this life, the hand of death will let light in upon the coveted character, and expose the sinner to shame and contempt. The self flattering process plainly proves the atheism of sinners, since the bare reflection that God sees them would render such self flatteries extremely difficult, if not impossible. Belief in God, like light reveals, and then our sin and evil are perceived; but wicked men are in the dark, for they cannot see what is so clearly within them and around them that it stares them in the face.

Verse 3. The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit. This pair of hell dogs generally hunt together, and what one does not catch the other will; if iniquity cannot win by oppression, deceit will gain by chicanery. When the heart is so corrupt as to flatter itself, the tongue follows suit. The open sepulchre of the throat reveals the foulness of the inner nature. God fearing men make a conscience of their words, and if they sin through infirmity they do not invent excuses, or go about to boast of their wickedness: but because wicked men think little of evil and artful speeches, we may be clear that God rules not in their souls. The original by declaring that the words of the wicked are falsehood and deceit is peculiarly strong; as if they were not only false in quality, but actual falseness itself. He hath

left off to be wise, and to do good. From the good way he has altogether gone aside. Men who fear God proceed from strength to strength in the right path, but godless men soon forsake what little good they once knew. How could men apostatise if they had respect unto the supreme Judge? Is it not because they grow more and more forgetful of God, that in due season they relinquish even that hypocritical reverence of him which in former days they maintained in order to flatter their souls?

Verse 4. He deviseth mischief upon his bed. His place of rest becomes the place for plotting. His bed is a hot bed for poisonous weeds. God fearing men meditate upon God and his service; but when men turn all their thoughts and inventive faculties towards evil, their godlessness is proved to a demonstration. He hath the devil for his bed fellow who lies abed and schemes how to sin. God is far from him. He setteth himself in a way that is not good. When he gets up he resolutely and persistently pursues the mischief which he planned. The worst of ways he prefers for his walking, for he has taught his heart to love filthiness, having accustomed himself to revel in it in imagination. He abhorreth not evil. So far from having a contempt and abhorrence for evil, he even rejoices in it, and patronises it. He never hates a wrong thing because it is wrong, but he meditates on it, defends it, and practises it. What a portrait of a graceless man these few verses afford us! His jauntiness of conscience, his licentiousness of speech, his intentness upon wrong doing, his deliberate and continued preference of iniquity, and withal his atheistic heart, are all photographed to the life. Lord, save us from being such.

Verses 5-9. From the baseness of the wicked the psalmist turns his contemplation to the glory of God. Contrasts are impressive.

Verse 5. Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens. Like the ethereal blue, it encompasses the whole earth, smiling upon universal nature, acting as a canopy for all the creatures of earth, surmounting the loftiest peaks of human provocations, and rising high above the mists of mortal transgression. Clear sky is evermore above, and mercy calmly smiles above the din and smoke of this poor world. Darkness and clouds are but of earth's lower atmospheres: the heavens are evermore serene, and bright with innumerable stars. Divine mercy abides in its vastness of expanse, and matchless patience, all unaltered by the rebellions of man. When we can measure the heavens, then shall we bound the mercy of the Lord. Towards his own servants especially, in the salvation of the Lord Jesus, he has displayed grace higher than the heaven of heavens, and wider than the universe. O that there atheist could but see this, how earnestly would he long to become a servant of Jehovah! Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Far, far above all comprehension is the truth and faithfulness of God. He never fails, nor forgets, nor falters, nor forfeits his word. Afflictions are like clouds, but the divine truthfulness is all around them. While we are under the cloud we are in the region of God's faithfulness; when we mount above it we shall not need such an assurance. To every word of threat, or promise, prophecy or covenant, the Lord has exactly adhered, for he is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent.

Verse 6. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains. Firm and unmoved, lofty and sublime. As winds and hurricanes shake not an Alp, so the righteousness of God is never in any degree affected by circumstances; he is always just. Who can bribe the Judge of all the earth, or who can, by threatening, compel him to pervert judgment? Not even to save his elect would the Lord suffer his righteousness to be set aside. No awe inspired by mountain scenery can equal that which fills the soul when it beholds the Son of God slain as a victim to vindicate the justice of the Inflexible Lawgiver. Right across the path of every unholy man who dreams of heaven stand the towering

Andes of divine righteousness, which no unregenerate sinner can ever climb. Among great mountains lie slumbering avalanches, and there the young lightnings try their callow wings until the storm rushes down again from the awful peaks; so against the great day of the Lord's wrath the Lord has laid up in the mountains of his righteousness dreadful ammunition of war with which to overwhelm his adversaries. Thy judgments are a great deep. God's dealings with men are not to be fathomed by every boaster who demands to see a why for every wherefore. The Lord is not to be questioned by us as to why this and why that. He has reasons, but he does not choose to submit them to our foolish consideration. Far and wide, terrible and irresistible like the ocean are the providential dispensations of God: at one time they appear as peaceful as the unrippled sea of glass; at another tossed with tempest and whirlwind, but evermore most glorious and full of mystery. Who shall discover the springs of the sea? He who shall do this may hope to comprehend the providence of the Eternal.

"Undiscovered sea!
Into thy dark, unknown, mysterious caves,
And secret haunts unfathomably deep,
Beneath all visible retired, none went
And came again to tell the wonders there."

Yet as the deep mirrors the sky, so the mercy of the Lord is to be seen reflected in all the arrangements of his government on earth, and over the profound depth the covenant rainbow casts its arch of comfort, for the Lord is faithful in all that he doeth. O Lord, thou preservest man and beast. All the myriads of creatures, rational and irrational, are fed by Jehovah's hand. The countless beasts, the innumerable birds, the inconceivable abundance of fishes, the all but infinite armies of insects, all owe their continuance of life to the unceasing outgoings of the divine power. What a view of God this presents to us! What a debased creature must he be who sees no trace of such a God, and feels no awe of him!

Verse 7. How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God. Here we enter into the Holy of Holies. Benevolence, and mercy, and justice, are everywhere, but the excellence of that mercy only those have known whose faith has lifted the veil and passed into the brighter presence of the Lord; these behold the excellency of the Lord's mercy. The word translated excellent may be rendered "precious; "no gem or pearl can ever equal in value a sense of the Lord's love. This is such a brilliant as angels wear. King's regalia are a beggarly collection of worthless pebbles when compared with the tender mercies of Jehovah. David could not estimate it, and therefore, after putting a note of admiration, he left our hearts and imagination, and, better still, our experience, to fill up the rest. He writes how excellent! because he cannot tell us the half of it. Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. The best of reasons for the best of courses. The figure is very beautiful. The Lord overshadows his people as a hen protects her brood, or as an eagle covers its young; and we as the little ones run under the blessed shelter and feel at rest. To cower down under the wings of God is so sweet. Although the enemy be far too strong for us, we have no fear, for we nestle under the Lord's wing. O that more of Adam's race knew the excellency of the heavenly shelter! It made Jesus weep to see how they refused it: our tears may well lament the same evil.

Verse 8. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house. Those who learn to put their trust in God shall be received into his house, and shall share in the provision laid up therein. The dwelling place of the Lord is not confined to any place, and hence reside where we may, we may regard our dwelling, if we be believers, as one room in the Lord's great house; and we shall, both in

providence and grace, find a soul contenting store supplied to us as the result of living by faith in nearness to the Lord. If we regard the assembly of the saints as being peculiarly the house of God, believers shall, indeed, find in sacred worship the richest spiritual food. Happy is the soul that can drink in the sumptuous dainties of the gospel—nothing can so completely fill the soul. And thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. As they have the fruits of Eden to feed on, so shall they have the river of Paradise to drink from. God's everlasting love bears to us a constant and ample comfort, of which grace makes us to drink by faith, and then our pleasure is of the richest kind. The Lord not only brings us to this river, but makes us drink: herein we see the condescension of divine love. Heaven will, in the fullest sense, fulfil these words; but they who trust in the Lord enjoy the antepast even here. The happiness given to the faithful is that of God himself; purified spirits joy with the same joy as the Lord himself. "That my joy may be in you, that your joy may be full."

Verse 9. For with thee is the fountain of life. This verse is made of simple words, but like the first chapter of John's Gospel, it is very deep. From the Lord, as from an independent self sufficient spring, all creature life proceeds, by him is sustained, through him alone can it be perfected. Life is in the creature, but the fountain of it is only in the Creator. Of spiritual life, this is true in the most emphatic sense; "it is the Spirit that quickeneth, ""and we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God." In thy light shall we see light. Light is the glory of life. Life in the dark is misery, and rather death than life. The Lord alone can give natural, intellectual, and spiritual life; he alone can make life bright and lustrous. In spiritual things the knowledge of God sheds a light on all other subjects. We need no candle to see the sun, we see it by its own radiance, and then see everything else by the same lustre. We never see Jesus by the light of self, but self in the light of Jesus. No inward intelligence of ours leads us to receive the Spirit's light, but the rather, it often helps to quench the sacred beam; purely and only by his own illumination, the Holy Ghost lights up the dark recesses of our heart's ungodliness. Vain are they who look to learning and human wit, one ray from the throne of God is better than the noonday splendour of created wisdom. Lord, give me the sun, and let those who will delight in the wax candles of superstition and the phosphorescence of corrupt philosophy. Faith derives both light and life from God, and hence she neither dies nor darkens.

Verse 10. O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee. We ask no more than a continuance of the past mercy. Lord, extend this grace of thine to all the days of all who have been taught to know thy faithful love, thy tenderness, thine immutability and omnipotence. As they have been taught of the Lord to know the Lord, so go on to instruct them and perfect them. This prayer is the heart of the believer asking precisely that which the heart of his God is prepared to grant. It is well when the petition is but the reflection of the promise. And thy righteousness to the upright in heart. As thou hast never failed the righteous, so abide thou in the same manner their defender and avenger. The worst thing to be feared by the man of God is to be forsaken of heaven, hence this prayer; but the fear is groundless, hence the peace which faith brings to us. Learn from this verse, that although a continuance of mercy is guaranteed in the covenant, we are yet to make it a matter of prayer. For this good thing will the Lord be enquired of.

Verse 11. Let not the foot of pride come against me. The general prayer is here turned into a particular and personal one for himself. Pride is the devil's sin. Good men may well be afraid of proud men, for the serpent's seed will never cease to bite the heel of the godly. Fain would proud scoffers spurn the saints or trample them under foot: against their malice prayer lifts up her voice. No foot shall come upon us, no hand shall prevail against us, while Jehovah is on our side. Let not the hand of the wicked remove me. Suffer me not to be driven about as a fugitive, nor torn from my place like

an uprooted tree. Violence with both hand and foot, with means fair and means foul, strove to overthrow the psalmist, but he resorts to his great Patron, and sings a song of triumph in anticipation of the defeat of his foes.

Verse 12. There are the workers of iniquity fallen. Faith sees them scattered on the plain. There! before our very eyes sin, death, and hell, lie prostrate. Behold the vanquished foes! They are cast down. Providence and grace have dashed them from their vantage ground. Jesus has already thrown all the foes of his people upon their faces, and in due time all sinners shall find it so. And shall not be able to rise. The defeat of the ungodly and of the powers of evil is final, total, irretrievable. Glory be to God, however high the powers of darkness may carry it at this present, the time hastens on when God shall defend the right, and give to evil such a fall as shall for ever crush the hopes of hell; while those who trust in the Lord shall eternally praise him and rejoice in his holy name.

Psalm 37

Verse 1. The Psalm opens with the first precept. It is alas! too common for believers in their hours of adversity to think themselves harshly dealt with when they see persons utterly destitute of religion and honesty, rejoicing in abundant prosperity. Much needed is the command, Fret not thyself because of evildoers. To fret is to worry, to have the heartburn, to fume, to become vexed. Nature is very apt to kindle a fire of jealousy when it sees lawbreakers riding on horses, and obedient subjects walking in the mire: it is a lesson learned only in the school of grace, when one comes to view the most paradoxical providences with the devout complacency of one who is sure that the Lord is righteous in all his acts. It seems hard to carnal judgments that the best meat should go to the dogs, while loving children pine for want of it. Neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. The same advice under another shape. When one is poor, despised, and in deep trial, our old Adam naturally becomes envious of the rich and great; and when we are conscious that we have been more righteous than they, the devil is sure to be at hand with blasphemous reasonings. Stormy weather may curdle even the cream of humanity. Evil men instead of being envied, are to be viewed with horror and aversion; yet their loaded tables, and gilded trappings, are too apt to fascinate our poor half opened eyes. Who envies the fat bullock the ribbons and garlands which decorate him as he is led to the shambles? Yet the case is a parallel one; for ungodly rich men are but as beasts fattened for the slaughter.

Verse 2. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass. The scythe of death is sharpening. Green grows the grass, but quick comes the scythe. The destruction of the ungodly will be speedy, sudden, sure, overwhelming, irretrievable. The grass cannot resist or escape the mower. And wither as the green herb. The beauty of the herb dries up at once in the heat of the sun, and so all the glory of the wicked shall disappear at the hour of death. Death kills the ungodly man like grass, and wrath withers him like hay; he dies, and his name rots. How complete an end is made of the man whose boasts had no end! Is it worth while to waste ourselves in fretting about the insect of an hour, an ephemeral which in the same day is born and dies? Within believers there is a living and incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever; why should they envy mere flesh, and the glory of it, which are but as grass, and the flower thereof?

Verse 3. Trust in the Lord. Here is the second precept, and one appropriate to the occasion. Faith cures fretting. Sight is cross-eyed, and views things only as they seem, hence her envy: faith has clearer optics to behold things as they really are, hence her peace. And do good. True faith is actively

obedient. Doing good is a fine remedy for fretting. There is a joy in holy activity which drives away the rust of discontent. So shalt thou dwell in the land. In "the land" which floweth with milk and honey; the Canaan of the covenant. Thou shalt not wander in the wilderness of murmuring, but abide in the promised land of content and rest. "We which have believed do enter into rest." Very much of our outward depends upon the inward: where there is heaven in the heart there will be heaven in the house. And verily thou shalt be fed, or shepherded. To integrity and faith necessities are guaranteed. The good shepherd will exercise his pastoral care over all believers. In truth they shall be fed, and fed on truth. The promise of God shall be their perpetual banquet; they shall neither lack in spirituals nor in temporals. Some read this as an exhortation, "Feed on truth; " certainly this is good cheer, and banishes for ever the hungry heart burnings of envy.

Verse 4. There is an ascent in this third precept. He who was first bidden not to fret, was then commanded actively to trust, and now is told with holy desire to delight in God. Delight thyself also in the Lord. Make Jehovah the joy and rejoicing of thy spirit. Bad men delight in carnal objects; do not envy them if they are allowed to take their fill in such vain idols; look thou to thy better delight, and fill thyself to the full with thy more sublime portion. In a certain sense imitate the wicked; they delight in their portion—take care to delight in yours, and so far from envying you will pity them. There is no room for fretting if we remember that God is ours, but there is every incentive to sacred enjoyment of the most elevated and ecstatic kind. Every name, attribute, word, or deed of Jehovah, should be delightful to us, and in meditating thereon our soul should be as glad as is the epicure who feeds delicately with a profound relish for his dainties. And he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. A pleasant duty is here rewarded with another pleasure. Men who delight in God desire or ask for nothing but what will please God; hence it is safe to give them carte blanche. Their will is subdued to God's will, and now they may have what they will. Our innermost desires are here meant, not our casual wishes; there are many things which nature might desire which grace would never permit us to ask for; these deep, prayerful, asking desires are those to which the promise is made.

Verse 5. Commit thy way unto the Lord. Roll the whole burden of life upon the Lord. Leave with Jehovah not thy present fretfulness merely, but all thy cares; in fact, submit the whole tenor of thy way to him. Cast away anxiety, resign thy will, submit thy judgment, leave all with the God of all. What a medicine is this for expelling envy! What a high attainment does this fourth precept indicate! How blessed must he be who lives every day in obedience to it! Trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. Our destiny shall be joyfully accomplished if we confidently entrust all to our Lord. We may serenely sing—

"Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
However dark it be;
O lead me by thine own right hand,
Choose out the path for me."

"Smooth let it be or rough,
It will be still the best;
Winding or straight, it matters not,
It leads me to thy rest."

"I dare not choose my lot,
I would not if I might;

But choose Thou for me, O my God,
So shall I walk aright."

"Take thou my cup, and it
With joy or sorrow fill;
As ever best to thee may seem,
Choose thou my good and ill."

The ploughman sows and harrows, and then leaves the harvest to God. What can he do else? He cannot cover the heavens with clouds, or command the rain, or bring forth the sun or create the dew. He does well to leave the whole matter with God; and so to all of us it is truest wisdom, having obediently trusted in God, to leave results in his hands, and expect a blessed issue.

Verse 6. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light. In the matter of personal reputation we may especially be content to be quiet, and leave our vindication with the Judge of all the earth. The more we fret in this case the worse for us. Our strength is to sit still. The Lord will clear the slandered. If we look to his honour, he will see to ours. It is wonderful how, when faith learns to endure calumny with composure, the filth does not defile her, but falls off like snowballs from a wall of granite. Even in the worst cases, where a good name is for awhile darkened, Providence will send a clearing like the dawning light, which shall increase until the man once censured shall be universally admired. And thy judgment as the noonday. No shade of reproach shall remain. The man shall be in his meridian of splendour. The darkness of his sorrow and his ill repute shall both flee away.

Verse 7. Rest in the Lord. This fifth is a most divine precept, and requires much grace to carry it out. To hush the spirit, to be silent before the Lord, to wait in holy patience the time for clearing up the difficulties of Providence—that is what every gracious heart should aim at. "Aaron held his peace:" "I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." A silent tongue in many cases not only shows a wise head, but a holy heart. And wait patiently for him. Time is nothing to him; let it be nothing to thee. God is worth waiting for. "He never is before his time, he never is too late." In a story we wait for the end to clear up the plot; we ought not to prejudge the great drama of life, but stay till the closing scene, and see to what a finish the whole arrives. Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. There is no good, but much evil, in worrying your heart about the present success of graceless plotters: be not enticed into premature judgments—they dishonour God, they weary yourself. Determine, let the wicked succeed as they may, that you will treat the matter with indifference, and never allow a question to be raised as to the righteousness and goodness of the Lord. What if wicked devices succeed and your own plans are defeated! there is more of the love of God in your defeats than in the successes of the wicked.

Verse 8. Cease from anger and forsake wrath. Especially anger against the arrangements of Providence, and jealousies of the temporary pleasures of those who are so soon to be banished from all comfort. Anger anywhere is madness, here it is aggravated insanity. Yet since anger will try to keep us company, we must resolutely forsake it. Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. By no reasonings and under no circumstances be led into such a course. Fretfulness lies upon the verge of great sin. Many who have indulged a murmuring disposition have at last come to sin, in order to gain their fancied rights. Beware of carping at others, study to be yourself found in the right way; and as you would dread outward sin, tremble at inward repining.

Verse 9. For evil doers shall be cut off. Their death shall be a penal judgment; not a gentle removal to a better state, but an execution in which the axe of justice will be used. But those that wait upon the Lord—those who in patient faith expect their portion in another life—they shall inherit the earth. Even in this life they have the most of real enjoyment, and in the ages to come theirs shall be the glory and the triumph. Passion, according to Bunyan's parable, has his good things first, and they are soon over; Patience has his good things last, and they last for ever.

Verse 10. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be. When bad men reach to greatness, the judgments of God frequently sweep them away; their riches melt, their power decays, their happiness turns to wretchedness; they themselves cease any longer to be numbered with the living. The shortness of life makes us see that the glitter of the wicked great is not true gold. O wherefore, tried believer, dost thou envy one who in a little while will lie lower than the dust? Yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. His house shall be empty, his chair of office vacant, his estate without an owner; he shall be utterly blotted out, perhaps cut off by his own debauchery, or brought to a deathbed of penury by his own extravagance. Gone like a passing cloud—forgotten as a dream—where are his boastings and hectorings, and where the pomp which made poor mortals think the sinner blest?

Verse 11. But the meek shall inherit the earth. Above all others they shall enjoy life. Even if they suffer, their consolations shall overtop their tribulations. By inheriting the land is meant obtaining covenant privileges and the salvation of God. Such as are truly humble shall take their lot with the rest of the heirs of grace, to whom all good things come by a sacred birthright. And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. Peace they love and peace they shall have. If they find not abundance of gold, abundance of peace will serve their turn far better. Others find joy in strife, and thence arises their misery in due time, but peace leads on to peace, and the more a man loves it the more shall it come to him. In the halcyon period of the latter days, when universal peace shall make glad the earth, the full prophetic meaning of words like these will be made plain.

Verses 12-15. Here is the portrait of a proud oppressor armed to the teeth.

Verse 12. The wicked plotteth against the just. Why can he not let the good man alone? Because there is enmity between the serpent's seed and the seed of the woman. Why not attack him fairly? Why plot and scheme? Because it is according to the serpent's nature to be very subtle. Plain sailing does not suit those who are on board of "The Apollyon." And gnashed upon him with his teeth. The wicked show by their gestures what they would do if they could; if they cannot gnaw they will gnash; if they may not bite they will at least bark. This is precisely what the graceless world did with "that just One," the Prince of Peace. Yet he took no vengeance upon them, but like a silent lamb received injuries in patience.

Verse 13. The Lord shall laugh at him. The godly man needs not trouble himself, but leave well deserved vengeance to be dealt out by the Lord, who will utterly deride the malice of the good man's enemies. Let the proud scorner gnash his teeth and foam at the mouth; he has one to deal with who will look down upon him and his ravings with serene contempt. For he seeth that his day is coming. The evil man does not see how close his destruction is upon his heels; he boasts of crushing others when the foot of justice is already uplifted to trample him as the mire of the streets. Sinners, in the hand of an angry God, and yet plotting against his children! Poor souls, thus to run upon the point of Jehovah's spear.

Verse 14. The wicked have drawn out the sword. They hold their weapon out of its sheath, and watch for a time to use it. And have bent their bow. One weapon is not enough, they carry another ready for action. They carry so strong a bow that they have trodden upon it to bend it—they will lose nothing for want of force or readiness. To cast down the poor and needy. These are their game, the objects of their accursed malice. These cowards attack not their equals, but seek out those excellent ones who, from the gentleness of their spirits and the poverty of their estates, are not able to defend themselves. Note how our meek and lowly Lord was beset by cruel foes, armed with all manner of weapons to slay him. And to slay such as be of upright conversation. Nothing short of the overthrow and death of the just will content the wicked. The sincere and straightforward are hated by the crafty schemers who delight in unrighteousness. See, then, the enemies of the godly doubly armed, and learn how true were our Lord's words, "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of this world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

Verse 15. Their sword shall enter into their own heart. Like Haman they shall be hanged upon the gallows built by themselves for Mordecai. Hundreds of times has this been the case. Saul, who sought to slay David, fell on his own sword; and the bow, his favourite weapon, the use of which he taught the children of Israel, was not able to deliver him on Gilboa. And their bows shall be broken. Their inventions of evil shall be rendered useless. Malice outwits itself. It drinks the poisoned cup which it mixed for another, and burns itself in the fire which it kindled for its neighbour. Why need we fret at the prosperity of the wicked when they are so industriously ruining themselves while they fancy they are injuring the saints? The next nine verses mainly describe the character and blessedness of the godly, and the light is brought out with a few black touches descriptive of the wicked and their doom.

Verse 16. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. This is a fine proverb. The little of one good man is contrasted with the riches of many wicked, and so the expression is rendered the more forcible. There is more happiness in the godly dinner of herbs than in the stalled ox of profane rioters. In the original there is an allusion to the noise of a multitude, as if to hint at the turmoil and hurly burly of riotous wealth, and to contrast it with the quiet of the humbler portion of the godly. We would sooner hunger with John than feast with Herod; better feed on scant fare with the prophets in Obadiah's cave than riot with the priests of Baal. A man's happiness consists not in the heaps of gold which he has in store. Content finds multum in parvo, while for a wicked heart the whole world is too little.

Verse 17. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken. Their power to do mischief shall be effectually taken away, for the arms which they lifted up against God shall be crushed even to the bone. God often makes implacable men incapable men. What is a more contemptible sight than toothless malice, armless malevolence! But the Lord upholdeth the righteous. Their cause and course shall be safe, for they are in good keeping. The sword of two edges smites the wicked and defends the just.

Verse 18. The Lord knoweth the days of the upright. His foreknowledge made him laugh at the proud, but in the case of the upright he sees a brighter future, and treats them as heirs of salvation. Ever is this our comfort, that all events are known to our God, and that nothing in our future can take him at unawares. No arrow can pierce us by accident, no danger smite us by stealth; neither in time nor eternity can any unforeseen ill occur to us. Futurity shall be but a continual development of the good things which the Lord has laid up in store for us. And their inheritance shall be for ever. Their

inheritance fades not away. It is entailed, so that none can deprive them of it, and preserved, so that none shall destroy it. Eternity is the peculiar attribute of the believer's portion: what they have on earth is safe enough, but what they shall have in heaven is theirs without end.

Verse 19. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time. Calamities will come, but deliverances will come also. As the righteous never reckoned upon immunity from trouble, they will not be disappointed when they are called to take their share of it, but the rather they will cast themselves anew upon their God, and prove again his faithfulness and love. God is not a friend in the sunshine only, he is a friend indeed and a friend in need. And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. Their barrel of meal and cruse of oil shall last out the day of distress, and if ravens do not bring them bread and meat, the supply of their needs shall come in some other way, for their bread shall be given them. Our Lord stayed himself upon this when he hungered in the wilderness, and by faith he repelled the tempter; we too may be enabled not to fret ourselves in any wise to do evil by the same consideration. If God's providence is our inheritance, we need not worry about the price of wheat. Mildew, and smut, and bent, are all in the Lord's hands. Unbelief cannot save a single ear from being blasted, but faith, if it do not preserve the crop, can do what is better, namely, preserve our joy in the Lord.

Verse 20. But the wicked shall perish. Whatever phantom light may mock their present, their future is black with dark, substantial night. Judgment has been given against them, they are but reserved for execution. Let them flaunt their scarlet and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day; the sword of Damocles is above their heads, and if their wits were a little more awake, their mirth would turn to misery. The enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs. As the sacrificial fat was all consumed upon the altar, so shall the ungodly utterly vanish from the place of their honour and pride. How can it be otherwise? If the stubble dares to contend with the flame, to what end can it hope to come? They shall consume. As dry wood, as heaps of leaves, as burning coals, they shall soon be gone, and gone altogether, for into smoke shall they consume away. Sic transit gloria mundi. A puff is the end of all their puffing. Their fuming ends in smoke. They made themselves fat, and perished in their own grease. Consumers of the good they tried to be, and consumed they shall be.

Verse 21. The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again. Partly because he will not, but mainly because he cannot. Want follows upon waste, and debt remains undischarged. Often are the wicked thus impoverished in this life. Their wanton extravagance brings them down to the usurer's door and to the bankrupt's suit. But the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth, Mercy has given to him, and therefore he gives in mercy. He is generous and prosperous. He is not a borrower, but a giver. So far as the good man can do it, he lends an ear to the requests of need, and instead of being impoverished by what he imparts, he grows richer, and is able to do more. He does not give to encourage idleness, but in real mercy, which supposes real need. The text suggests to us how much better it generally is to give than to lend. Generally, lending comes to giving in the end, and it is as well to anticipate the fact, and by a little liberality forestall the inevitable. If these two sentences describe the wicked and the righteous, the writer of these lines has reason to know that in and about the city of London the wicked are very numerous.

Verse 22. For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth. God's benediction is true wealth after all. True happiness, such as the covenant secures to all the chosen of heaven, lies wrapped up in the divine favour. And they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. His frown is death; nay, more, It is hell.

Verse 23. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. All his course of life is graciously ordained, and in lovingkindness all is fixed, settled, and maintained. No reckless fate, no fickle chance rules us; our every step is the subject of divine decree. He delighteth in his way. As parents are pleased with the tottering footsteps of their babes. All that concerns a saint is interesting to his heavenly Father. God loves to view the holy strivings of a soul pressing forward to the skies. In the trials and the joys of the faithful, Jesus has fellowship with them, and delights to be their sympathising companion.

Verse 24. Though he fall. Disasters and reverses may lay him low; he may, like Job, be stripped of everything; like Joseph, be put in prison; like Jonah, be cast into the deep. He shall not be utterly cast down. He shall not be altogether prostrate. He shall be brought on his knees, but not on his face; or, if laid prone for a moment, he shall be up again ere long. No saint shall fall finally or fatally. Sorrow may bring us to the earth, and death may bring us to the grave, but lower we cannot sink, and out of the lowest of all we shall arise to the highest of all. For the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. Condescendingly, with his own hand, God upholds his saints; he does not leave them to mere delegated agency, he affords personal assistance. Even in our falls the Lord gives a measure of sustaining. Where grace does not keep from going down, it shall save from keeping down. Job had double wealth at last, Joseph reigned over Egypt, Jonah was safely landed. It is not that the saints are strong, or wise, or meritorious, that therefore they rise after every fall, but because God is their helper, and therefore none can prevail against them.

Verse 25. This was David's observation, I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. It is not my observation just as it stands, for I have relieved the children of undoubtedly good men, who have appealed to me as common mendicants. But this does not cast a doubt upon the observation of David. He lived under a dispensation more outward, and more of this world than the present rule of personal faith. Never are the righteous forsaken; that is a rule without exception. Seldom indeed do their seed beg bread; and although it does occasionally occur, through dissipation, idleness, or some other causes on the part of their sons, yet doubtless it is so rare a thing that there are many alive who never saw it. Go into the union house and see how few are the children of godly parents; enter the gaol and see how much rarer still is the case. Poor minister's sons often become rich. I am not old, but I have seen families of the poor godly become rich, and have seen the Lord reward the faithfulness of the father in the success of the son, so that I have often thought that the best way to endow one's seed with wealth is to become poor for Christ's sake. In the Indian mission of the "Baptist Missionary Society, "this is abundantly illustrated.

Verse 26. He is ever merciful, and lendeth. The righteous are constantly under generous impulses; they do not prosper through parsimony, but through bounty. Like the bounteous giver of all good, of whom they are the beloved sons, they delight in doing good. How stingy covetous professors can hope for salvation is a marvel to those who read such verses as this in the Bible. And his seed is blessed. God pays back with interest in the next generation. Where the children of the righteous are not godly, there must be some reason for it in parental neglect, or some other guilty cause. The friend of the father is the friend of the family. The God of Abraham is the God of Isaac and of Jacob.

Verses 27-29. Here we have the seventh precept, which takes a negative and positive form, and is the quintessence of the entire Psalm

Verse 27. Depart from evil, and do good. We must not envy the doers of evil, but depart altogether from their spirit and example. As Lot left Sodom without casting a look behind, so must we leave sin. No truce or parley is to be held with sin, we must turn away from it without hesitation, and set ourselves practically to work in the opposite direction. He who neglects to do good will soon fall into evil. And dwell for evermore. Obtain an abiding and quiet inheritance. Short lived are the gains and pleasures of evil, but eternal are the rewards of grace.

Verse 28. For the Lord loveth judgment. The awarding of honour to whom honour is due is God's delight, especially when the upright man has been traduced by his fellow men. It must be a divine pleasure to right wrongs, and to defeat the machinations of the unjust. The great Arbiter of human destinies is sure to deal out righteous measure both to rich and poor, to good and evil, for such judgment is his delight. And forsaketh not his saints. This would not be right, and, therefore, shall never be done. God is as faithful to the objects of his love as he is just towards all mankind. They are preserved for ever. By covenant engagements their security is fixed, and by suretyship fulfilments that safety is accomplished; come what may, the saints are preserved in Christ Jesus, and because he lives, they shall live also. A king will not lose his jewels, nor will Jehovah lose his people. As the manna in the golden pot, which else had melted, was preserved in the ark of the covenant beneath the mercyseat, so shall the faithful be preserved in the covenant by the power of Jesus their propitiation. But the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. Like the house of Jeroboam and Ahab, of which not a dog was left. Honour and wealth ill gotten seldom reach the third generation; the curse grows ripe before many years have passed, and falls upon the evil house. Among the legacies of wicked men the surest entail is a judgment on their family.

Verse 29. The righteous shall inherit the land. As heirs with Jesus Christ, the Canaan above, which is the antitype of "the land, " shall be theirs with all covenant blessing. And dwell therein for ever. Tenures differ, but none can match the holding which believers have of heaven. Paradise is theirs for ever by inheritance, and they shall live for ever to enjoy it. Who would not be a saint on such terms? Who would fret concerning the fleeting treasures of the godless?

Verse 30. The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom. Where the whole Psalm is dedicated to a description of the different fates of the just and the wicked, it was meet to give a test by which they could be known. A man's tongue is no ill index of his character. The mouth betrays the heart. Good men, as a rule, speak that which is to edifying, sound speech, religious conversation, consistent with the divine illumination which they have received. Righteousness is wisdom in action, hence all good men are practically wise men, and well may the speech be wise. His tongue talketh of judgment. He advocates justice, gives an honest verdict on things and men, and he foretells that God's judgments will come upon the wicked, as in the former days. His talk is neither foolish nor ribald, neither vapid nor profane. Our conversation is of far more consequence than some men imagine.

Verse 31. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide. The best thing in the best place, producing the best results. Well might the man's talk be so admirable when his heart was so well stored. To love holiness, to have the motives and desires sanctified, to be in one's inmost nature obedient to the Lord—this is the surest method of making the whole run of our life efficient for its great ends, and even for securing the details of it, our steps from any serious mistake. To keep the even tenor of one's way, in such times as these, is given only to those whose hearts are sound towards God, who can, as in the text, call God their God. Policy slips and trips, it twists and tacks, and after all is worsted in the long run, but sincerity plods on its plain pathway and reaches the goal.

Verse 32. The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him. If it were not for the laws of the land, we should soon see a massacre of the righteous. Jesus was watched by his enemies, who were thirsting for his blood: his disciples must not look for favour where their Master found hatred and death.

Verse 33. The Lord will not leave him in his hand. God often appears to deliver his servants, and when he does not do so in this life as to their bodies, he gives their souls such joy and peace that they triumphantly rise beyond their tormentors' power. We may be in the enemy's hand for awhile, as Job was, but we cannot be left there. Nor condemn him when he is judged. Time shall reverse the verdict of haste, or else eternity shall clear away the condemnation of time. In due season just men will be justified. Temporary injustices are tolerated, in the order of Providence, for purposes most wise; but the bitter shall not always be called sweet, nor light for ever be traduced as darkness; the right shall appear in due season; the fictitious and pretentious shall be unmasked, and the real and true shall be revealed. If we have done faithfully, we may appeal from the petty sessions of society to the solemn assize of the great day.

Verse 34. Wait on the Lord. We have here the eighth precept, and it is a lofty eminence to attain to. Tarry the Lord's leisure. Wait in obedience as a servant, in hope as an heir, in expectation as a believer. This little word "wait" is easy to say, but hard to carry out, yet faith must do it. And keep his way. Continue in the narrow path; let no haste for riches or ease cause unholy action. Let your motto be, "On, on, on." Never flag, or dream of turning aside. "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." And he shall exalt thee to inherit the land. Thou shalt have all of earthly good which is really good, and of heavenly good there shall be no stint. Exaltation shall be the lot of the excellent. When the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. A sight how terrible and how instructive! What a rebuke for fretfulness! what an incentive to gratitude! My soul, be still, as you foresee the end, the awful end of the Lord's enemies.

Verse 35. A second time David turns to his diary, and this time in poetic imagery tells us of what he had observed. It were well if we too took notes of divine providences. I have seen the wicked in great power. The man was terrible to others, ruling with much authority, and carrying things with a high hand, a Caesar in might, a Croesus in wealth. And spreading himself like a green bay tree. Adding house to house and field to field, rising higher and higher in the state. He seemed to be ever verdant like a laurel, he grew as a tree in its own native soil, from which it had never been transplanted. No particular tree is here meant, a spreading beech or a wide expanding oak may serve us to realize the picture; it is a thing of earth, whose roots are in the clay; its honours are fading leaves; and though its shadow dwarfs the plants which are condemned to pine beneath it, yet it is itself a dying thing as the feller's axe shall prove. In the noble tree, which claims to be king of the forest, behold the grandeur of the ungodly today; wait awhile and wonder at the change, as the timber is carried away, and the very root torn from the ground.

Verse 36. Yet he passed away. Tree and man both gone, the son of man as surely as the child of the forest. What clean sweeps death makes! And, lo, he was not. To the surprise of all men the great man was gone, his estates sold, his business bankrupt, his house alienated, his name forgotten, and all in a few months. Yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Moved by curiosity, if we enquire for the ungodly, they have left no trace; like birds of ill omen none desire to remember them. Some of the humblest of the godly are immortalized, their names are imperishably fragrant in the church, while of

the ablest of infidels and blasphemers hardly their names are remembered beyond a few years. Men who were in everybody's mouths but yesterday are forgotten tomorrow, for only virtue is immortal.

Verse 37. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright. After having watched with surprise the downfall of the wicked, give your attention to the sincerely godly man, and observe the blessed contrast. Good men are men of mark, and are worth our study. Upright men are marvels of grace, and worth beholding. For the end of that man is peace. The man of peace has an end of peace. Peace without end comes in the end to the man of God. His way may be rough, but it leads home. With believers it may rain in the morning, thunder at midday, and pour in torrents in the afternoon, but it must clear up ere the sun goes down. War may last till our last hour, but then we shall hear the last of it.

Verse 38. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together. A common ruin awaits those who are joined in common rebellion. The end of the wicked shall be cut off. Their time shall be shortened, their happiness shall be ended, their hopes for ever blasted, their execution hastened on. Their present is shortened by their sins; they shall not live out half their days. They have no future worth having, while the righteous count their future as their true heritage.

Verse 39. But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord. Sound doctrine this. The very marrow of the gospel of free grace. By salvation is meant deliverance of every kind; not only the salvation which finally lands us in glory, but all the minor rescues of the way; these are all to be ascribed unto the Lord, and to him alone. Let him have glory from those to whom he grants salvation. He is their strength in the time of trouble. While trouble overthrows the wicked, it only drives the righteous to their strong Helper, who rejoices to uphold them.

Verse 40. And the Lord shall help them. In all future time Jehovah will stand up for his chosen. Our Great Ally will bring up his forces in the heat of the battle. He shall deliver them from the wicked. As he rescued Daniel from the lions, so will he preserve his beloved from their enemies; they need not therefore fret, nor be discouraged. And save them, because they trust in him. Faith shall ensure their safety of the elect. It is the mark of the sheep by which they shall be separated from the goats. Not their merit, but their believing, shall distinguish them. Who would not try the walk of faith? Whoever truly believes in God will be no longer fretful against the apparent irregularities of this present life, but will rest assured that what is mysterious is nevertheless just, and what seems hard, is, beyond a doubt, ordered in mercy. So the Psalm ends with a note which is the death knell of the unhallowed disquietude with which the Psalm commenced. Happy they who can thus sing themselves out of ill frames into gracious conditions.

Psalm 38

Verse 1. O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath. Rebuked I must be, for I am an erring child and thou a careful Father, but throw not too much anger into the tones of thy voice; deal gently although I have sinned grievously. The anger of others I can bear, but not thine. As thy love is most sweet to my heart, so thy displeasure is most cutting to my conscience. Neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Chasten me if thou wilt, it is a Father's prerogative, and to endure it obediently is a child's duty; but, O turn not the rod into a sword, smite not so as to kill. True, my sins might well inflame thee, but let thy mercy and longsuffering quench the glowing coals of thy wrath. O let me not be treated as an enemy or dealt with as a rebel. Bring to remembrance thy covenant, thy fatherhood, and my feebleness, and

spare the servant.

Verse 2. For thine arrows stick fast in me. By this he means both bodily and spiritual griefs, but we may suppose, especially the latter, for these are most piercing and stick the fastest. God's law applied by the Spirit to the conviction of the soul of sin, wounds deeply and rankles long; it is an arrow not lightly to be brushed out by careless mirthfulness, or to be extracted by the flattering hand of self righteousness. The Lord knows how to shoot so that his bolts not only strike but stick. He can make convictions sink into the innermost spirit like arrows driven in up to the head. It seems strange that the Lord should shoot at his own beloved ones, but in truth he shoots at their sins rather than them, and those who feel his sin killing shafts in this life, shall not be slain with his hot thunderbolts in the next world. And thy hand presseth me sore. The Lord had come to close dealings with him, and pressed him down with the weight of his hand, so that he had no rest or strength left. By these two expressions we are taught that conviction of sin is a piercing and a pressing thing, sharp and sore, smarting and crushing. Those who know by experience "the terrors of the Lord," will be best able to vouch for the accuracy of such descriptions; they are true to the life.

Verse 3. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger. Mental depression tells upon the bodily frame; it is enough to create and foster every disease, and is in itself the most painful of all diseases. Soul sickness tells upon the entire frame; it weakens the body, and then bodily weakness reacts upon the mind. One drop of divine anger sets the whole of our blood boiling with misery. Neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. Deeper still the malady penetrates, till the bones, the more solid parts of the system, are affected. No soundness and no rest are two sad deficiencies; yet these are both consciously gone from every awakened conscience until Jesus gives relief. God's anger is a fire that dries up the very marrow; it searches the secret parts of the belly. A man who has pain in his bones tosses to and fro in search of rest, but he finds none; he becomes worn out with agony, and in so many cases a sense of sin creates in the conscience a horrible unrest which cannot be exceeded in anguish except by hell itself.

Verse 4. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head. Like waves of the deep sea; like black mire in which a man utterly sinks. Above my hopes, my strength, my life itself, my sin rises in its terror. Unawakened sinners think their sins to be mere shallows, but when conscience is aroused they find out the depth of iniquity. As an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. It is well when sin is an intolerable load, and when the remembrance of our sins burdens us beyond endurance. This verse is the genuine cry of one who feels himself undone by his transgressions and as yet sees not the great sacrifice.

Verse 5. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. Apply this to the body, and it pictures a sad condition of disease; but read it of the soul, and it is to the life. Conscience lays on stripe after stripe till the swelling becomes a wound and suppurates, and the corruption within grows offensive. What a horrible creature man appears to be in his own consciousness when his depravity and vileness are fully opened up by the law of God, applied by the Holy Spirit! It is true there are diseases which are correctly described in this verse, when in the worst stage; but we prefer to receive the expressions as instructively figurative, since the words "because of my foolishness" point rather at a moral than a physical malady. Some of us know what it is to stink in our own nostrils, so as to loathe ourselves. Even the most filthy diseases cannot be so foul as sin. No ulcers, cancers, or putrifying sores, can match the unutterable vileness and pollution of iniquity. Our own perceptions have made us feel this. We write what we do know, and testify what we have seen; and even now we

shudder to think that so much of evil should lie festering deep within our nature.

Verse 6. I am troubled. I am wearied with distress, writhing with pain, in sore travail on account of sin revealed within me. I am bowed down greatly. I am brought very low, grievously weakened and frightfully depressed. Nothing so pulls a man down from all loftiness as a sense of sin and of divine wrath concerning it. I go mourning all the day long. The mourner's soul sorrow knew no intermission, even when he went about such business as he was able to attend, he went forth like a mourner who goes to the tomb, and his words and manners were like the lamentations of those who follow the corpse. The whole verse may be the more clearly understood if we picture the Oriental mourner, covered with sackcloth and ashes, bowed as in a heap, sitting amid squalor and dirt, performing contortions and writhings expressive of his grief; such is the awakened sinner, not in outward guise, but in very deed.

Verse 7. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease—a hot, dry, parching disorder, probably accompanied by loathsome ulcers. Spiritually, the fire burns within when the evil of the heart is laid bare. Note the emphatic words, the evil is loathsome, it is in the loins, its seat is deep and vital—the man is filled with it. Those who have passed through the time of conviction understand all this. And there is no soundness in my flesh. This he had said before, and thus the Holy Spirit brings humiliating truth again and again to our memories, tears away every ground of glorying, and makes us know that in us, that is, in our flesh, there dwelleth no good thing.

Verse 8. I am feeble. The original is "benumbed, "or frozen, such strange incongruities and contradictions meet in a distracted mind and a sick body—it appears to itself to be alternately parched with heat and pinched with cold. Like souls in the Popish fabled Purgatory, tossed from burning furnaces into thick ice, so tormented hearts rush from one extreme to the other, with equal torture in each. A heat of fear, a chill of horror, a flaming desire, a horrible insensibility—by these successive miseries a convinced sinner is brought to death's door. And sore broken. Crushed as in a mill, pounded as in a mortar. The body of the sick man appears to be all out of joint and smashed into a palpitating pulp, and the soul of the desponding is in an equally wretched case; as a victim crushed under the car of Juggernaut, such is a soul over whose conscience the wheels of divine wrath have forced their awful way. I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Deep and hoarse is the voice of sorrow, and often inarticulate and terrible. The heart learns groanings which cannot be uttered, and the voice fails to tone and tune itself to human speech. When our prayers appear to be rather animal than spiritual, they are none the less prevalent with the pitiful Father of mercy. He hears the murmur of the heart and the roaring of the soul because of sin, and in due time he comes to relieve his afflicted. The more closely the preceding portrait of an awakened soul is studied in the light of experience, the more will its striking accuracy appear. It cannot be a description of merely outward disorder, graphic as it might then be; it has a depth and pathos in it which only the soul's mysterious and awful agony can fully match.

Verse 9. Lord, all my desire is before thee. If unuttered, yet perceived. Blessed be God, he reads the longings of our hearts; nothing can be hidden from him; what we cannot tell to him he perfectly understands. The psalmist is conscious that he has not exaggerated, and therefore appeals to heaven for a confirmation of his words. The good Physician understands the symptoms of our disease and sees the hidden evil which they reveal, hence our case is safe in his hands. And my groaning is not hid from thee.

"He takes the meaning of our tears,
The language of our groans."

Sorrow and anguish hide themselves from the observation of man, but God spies them out. None more lonely than the broken hearted sinner, yet hath he the Lord for his companion.

Verse 10. My heart panteth. Here begins another tale of woe. He was so dreadfully pained by the unkindness of friends, that his heart was in a state of perpetual palpitation. Sharp and quick were the beatings of his heart; he was like a hunted roe, filled with distressing alarms, and ready to fly out of itself with fear. The soul seeks sympathy in sorrow, and if it finds none, its sorrowful heart throbs are incessant. My strength faileth me. What with disease and distraction, he was weakened and ready to expire. A sense of sin, and a clear perception that none can help us in our distress, are enough to bring a man to death's door, especially if there be none to speak a gentle word, and point the broken spirit to the beloved Physician. As for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me. Sweet light departed from his bodily eye, and consolation vanished from his soul. Those who were the very light of his eyes forsook him. Hope, the last lamp of night, was ready to go out. What a plight was the poor convict in! Yet here, we have some of us been; and here should we have perished had not infinite mercy interposed. Now, as we remember the lovingkindness of the Lord, we see how good it was for us to find our own strength fail us, since it drove us to the strong for strength; and how right it was that our light should all be quenched, that the Lord's light should be all in all to us.

Verse 11. My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore. Whatever affection they might pretend to, they kept out of his company, lest as a sinking vessel often draws down boats with it, they might be made to suffer through his calamities. It is very hard when those who should be the first to come to the rescue, are the first to desert us. In times of deep soul trouble, even the most affectionate friends cannot enter into the sufferer's case; let them be as anxious as they may, the sores of a tender conscience they cannot bind up. Oh, the loneliness of a soul passing under the convincing power of the Holy Ghost! And my kinsmen stand afar off. As the women and others of our Lord's acquaintances from afar gazed on his cross, so a soul wounded for sin sees all mankind as distant spectators, and in the whole crowd finds none to aid. Often relatives hinder seekers after Jesus, oftener still they look on with unconcern, seldom enough do they endeavour to lead the penitent to Jesus.

Verse 12. They also that seek after my life lay snares for me. Alas! for us when in addition to inward griefs, we are beset by outward temptations. David's foes endeavoured basely to ensnare him. If fair means would not overthrow him, foul should be tried. This snaring business is a vile one, the devil's own poachers alone condescend to it; but prayer to God will deliver us, for the craft of the entire college of tempters can be met and overcome by those who are led of the Spirit. They that seek my hurt speak mischievous things. Lies and slanders poured from them like water from the town pump. Their tongue was for ever going, and their heart for ever inventing lies. And imagine deceit all the day long. They were never done, their forge was going from morning to night. When they could not act they talked, and when they could not talk they imagined, and schemed, and plotted. Restless is the activity of malice. Bad men never have enough of evil. They compass sea and land to injure a saint; no labour is too severe, no cost too great if they may utterly destroy the innocent. Our comfort is, that our glorious Head knows the pertinacious malignity of our foes, and will in due season put an end to it, as he even now sets a bound about it.

Verse 13. But I, as a deaf man, heard not. Well and bravely was this done. A sacred indifference to the slanders of malevolence is true courage and wise policy. It is well to be as if we could not hear or see. Perhaps the psalmist means that this deafness on his part was unavoidable because he had no power to answer the taunts of the cruel, but felt much of the truth of their ungenerous accusations. And I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth. David was bravely silent, and herein was eminently typical of our Lord Jesus, whose marvellous silence before Pilate was far more eloquent than words. To abstain from self defence is often most difficult, and frequently most wise.

Verse 14. Thus I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs. He repeats the fact of his silence that we may note it, admire it, and imitate it. We have an advocate, and need not therefore plead our own cause. The Lord will rebuke our foes, for vengeance belongs to him; we may therefore wait patiently and find it our strength to sit still.

Verse 15. David committed himself to him that judgeth righteously, and so in patience was able to possess his soul. Hope in God's intervention, and belief in the power of prayer, are two most blessed stays to the soul in time of adversity. Turning right away from the creature to the sovereign Lord of all, and to him as our own covenant God, we shall find the richest solace in waiting upon him. Reputation like a fair pearl may be cast into the mire, but in due time when the Lord makes up his jewels, the godly character shall shine with unclouded splendour. Rest then, O slandered one, and let not thy soul be tossed to and fro with anxiety.

Verse 16. For I said, hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me. The good man was not insensible, he dreaded the sharp stings of taunting malice; he feared lest either by his conduct or his condition, he should give occasion to the wicked to triumph. This fear his earnest desires used as an argument in prayer as well as an incentive to prayer. When my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me. The least flaw in a saint is sure to be noticed; long before it comes to a fall the enemy begins to rail, the merest trip of the foot sets all the dogs of hell barking. How careful ought we to be, and how importunate in prayer for upholding grace! We do not wish, like blind Samson, to make sport for our enemies; let us then beware of the treacherous Delilah of sin, by whose means our eyes may soon be put out.

Verse 17. For I am ready to halt. Like one who limps, or a person with tottering footsteps, in danger of falling. How well this befits us all. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." How small a thing will lame a Christian, how insignificant a stumbling block may cause him to fall! This passage refers to a weakness caused by pain and sorrow; the sufferer was ready to give up in despair; he was so depressed in spirit that he stumbled at a straw. Some of us painfully know what it is to be like dry tinder for the sparks of sorrow; ready to halt, ready to mourn, and sigh and cry upon any occasion, and for any cause. And my sorrow is continually before me. He did not need to look out of window to find sorrow, he felt it within, and groaned under a body of sin which was an increasing plague to him. Deep conviction continues to irritate the conscience; it will not endure a patched up peace; but cries war to the knife till the enmity is slain. Until the Holy Ghost applies the precious blood of Jesus, a truly awakened sinner is covered with raw wounds which cannot be healed nor bound up, nor mollified with ointment.

Verse 18. For I will declare mine iniquity. The slander of his enemies he repudiates, but the accusations of his conscience he admits. Open confession is good for the soul. When sorrow leads to hearty and penitent acknowledgment of sin it is blessed sorrow, a thing to thank God for most

devoutly. I will be sorry for my sin. My confession will be salted with briny tears. It is well not so much to bewail our sorrows as to denounce the sins which lie at the root of them. To be sorry for sin is no atonement for it, but it is the right spirit in which to repair to Jesus, who is the reconciliation and the Saviour. A man is near to the end of his trouble when he comes to an end with his sins.

Verse 19. But mine enemies are lively, and they are strong. However weak and dying the righteous man may be, the evils which oppose him are sure to be lively enough. Neither the world, the flesh, nor the devil, are ever afflicted with debility or inertness; this trinity of evils labour with mighty unremitting energy to overthrow us. If the devil were sick, or our lusts feeble, or Madame Bubble infirm, we might slacken prayer; but with such lively and vigorous enemies we must not cease to cry mightily unto our God. And they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied. Here is another misery, that as we are no match for our enemies in strength, so also they outnumber us as a hundred to one. Wrong as the cause of evil is, it is a popular one. More and more the kingdom of darkness grows. Oh, misery of miseries, that we see the professed friends of Jesus forsaking him, and the enemies of his cross and his cause mustering in increasing bands!

Verse 20. They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries. Such would a wise man wish his enemies to be. Why should we seek to be beloved of such graceless souls? It is a fine plea against our enemies when we can without injustice declare them to be like the devil, whose nature it is to render evil for good. Because I follow the thing that good is. If men hate us for this reason we may rejoice to bear it: their wrath is the unconscious homage which vice renders to virtue. This verse is not inconsistent with the writer's previous confession; we may feel equally guilty before God, and yet be entirely innocent of any wrong to our fellow men. It is one sin to acknowledge the truth, quite another thing to submit to be belied. The Lord may smite me justly, and yet I may be able to say to my fellow man, "Why smitest thou me?"

Verse 21. Forsake me not, O Lord. Now is the time I need thee most. When sickness, slander, and sin, all beset a saint, he requires the especial aid of heaven, and he shall have it too. He is afraid of nothing while God is with him, and God is with him evermore. Be not far from me. Withhold not the light of thy near and dear love. Reveal thyself to me. Stand at my side. Let me feel that though friendless besides, I have a most gracious and all sufficient friend in thee.

Verse 22. Make haste to help me. Delay would prove destruction. The poor pleader was far gone and ready to expire, only speedy help would serve his turn. See how sorrow quickens the importunity of prayer! Here is one of the sweet results of affliction, it gives new life to our pleading, and drives us with eagerness to our God. O Lord my salvation. Not my Saviour only, but my salvation. He who has the Lord on his side has salvation in present possession. Faith foresees the blessed issue of all her pleas, and in this verse begins to ascribe to God the glory of the expected mercy. We shall not be left of the Lord. His grace will succour us most opportunely, and in heaven we shall see that we had not one trial too many, or one pang too severe. A sense of sin shall melt into the joy of salvation; grief shall lead on to gratitude, and gratitude to joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Psalm 39

Verse 1. I said. I steadily resolved and registered a determination. In his great perplexity his greatest fear was lest he should sin; and, therefore, he cast about for the most likely method for avoiding it, and he determined to be silent. It is right excellent when a man can strengthen himself in a good

course by the remembrance of a well and wisely formed resolve. "What I have written I have written, "or what I have spoken I will perform, may prove a good strengthener to a man in a fixed course of right. I will take heed to my ways. To avoid sin one had need be very circumspect, and keep one's actions as with a guard or garrison. Unguarded ways are generally unholy ones. Heedless is another word for graceless. In times of sickness or other trouble we must watch against the sins peculiar to such trials, especially against murmuring and repining. That I sin not with my tongue. Tongue sins are great sins; like sparks of fire ill words spread, and do great damage. If believers utter hard words of God in times of depression, the ungodly will take them up and use them as a justification for their sinful courses. If a man's own children rail at him, no wonder if his enemies' mouths are full of abuse. Our tongue always wants watching, for it is restive as an ill broken horse; but especially must we hold it in when the sharp cuts of the Lord's rod excite it to rebel. I will keep my mouth with a bridle, or more accurately, with a muzzle. The original does not so much mean a bridle to check the tongue as a muzzle to stop it altogether. David was not quite so wise as our translation would make him; if he had resolved to be very guarded in his speech, it would have been altogether commendable; but when he went so far as to condemn himself to entire silence, "even from good, "there must have been at least a little sullenness in his soul. In trying to avoid one fault, he fell into another. To use the tongue against God is a sin of commission, but not to use it at all involves an evident sin of omission. Commendable virtues may be followed so eagerly that we may fall into vices; to avoid Scylla we run into Charybdis. While the wicked is before me. This qualifies the silence, and almost screens it from criticism, for bad men are so sure to misuse even our holiest speech, that it is as well not to cast any of our pearls before such swine; but what if the psalmist meant, "I was silent while I had the prosperity of the wicked in my thoughts, "then we see the discontent and questioning of his mind, and the muzzled mouth indicates much that is not to be commended. Yet, if we blame we must also praise, for the highest wisdom suggests that when good men are bewildered with sceptical thoughts, they should not hasten to repeat them, but should fight out their inward battle upon its own battlefield. The firmest believers are exercised with unbelief, and it would be doing the devil's work with a vengeance if they were to publish abroad all their questionings and suspicions. If I have the fever myself, there is no reason why I should communicate it to my neighbours. If any on board the vessel of my soul are diseased, I will put my heart in quarantine, and allow none to go on shore in the boat of speech till I have a clean bill of health.

Verse 2. I was dumb with silence. He was as strictly speechless as if he had been tongueless—not a word escaped him. He was as silent as the dumb. I held my peace, even from good. Neither bad nor good escaped his lips. Perhaps he feared that if he began to talk at all, he would be sure to speak amiss, and, therefore, he totally abstained. It was an easy, safe, and effectual way of avoiding sin, if it did not involve a neglect of the duty which he owed to God to speak well of his name. Our divine Lord was silent before the wicked, but not altogether so, for before Pontius Pilate he witnessed a good confession, and asserted his kingdom. A sound course of action may be pushed to the extreme, and become a fault. And my sorrow was stirred. Inward grief was made to work and ferment by want of vent. The pent up floods are swollen and agitated. Utterance is the natural outlet for the heart's anguish, and silence is, therefore, both an aggravation of the evil and a barrier against its cure. In such a case the resolve to hold one's peace needs powerful backing, and even this is most likely to give way when grief rushes upon the soul. Before a flood gathering in force and foaming for outlet the strongest banks are likely to be swept away. Nature may do her best to silence the expression of discontent, but unless grace comes to her rescue, she will be sure to succumb.

Verse 3. My heart was hot within me. The friction of inward thoughts produced an intense mental

heat. The door of his heart was shut, and with the fire of sorrow burning within, the chamber of his soul soon grew unbearable with heat. Silence is an awful thing for a sufferer, it is the surest method to produce madness. Mourner, tell your sorrow; do it first and most fully to God, but even to pour it out before some wise and godly friend is far from being wasted breath. While I was musing the fire burned. As he thought upon the ease of the wicked and his own daily affliction, he could not unravel the mystery of providence, and therefore he became greatly agitated. While his heart was musing it was fusing, for the subject was confusing. It became harder every moment to be quiet; his volcanic soul was tossed with an inward ocean of fire, and heaved to and fro with a mental earthquake; and eruption was imminent, the burning lava must pour forth in a fiery stream. Then spake I with my tongue. The original is grandly laconic. I spake. The muzzled tongue burst all its bonds. The gag was hurled away. Misery, like murder, will out. You can silence praise, but anguish is clamorous. Resolve or no resolve, heed or no heed, sin or no sin, the impetuous torrent forced for itself a channel and swept away every restraint.

Verse 4. Lord. It is well that the vent of his soul was toward God and not towards man. Oh! if my swelling heart must speak, Lord let it speak with thee; even if there be too much of natural heat in what I say, thou wilt be more patient with me than man, and upon thy purity it can cast no stain; whereas if I speak to my fellows, they may harshly rebuke me or else learn evil from my petulance. Make me to know mine end. Did he mean the same as Elias in his agony, "Let me die, I am no better than my father"? Perhaps so. At any rate, he rashly and petulantly desired to know the end of his wretched life, that he might begin to reckon the days till death should put a finish to his woe. Impatience would pry between the folded leaves. As if there were no other comfort to be had, unbelief would fain hide itself in the grave and sleep itself into oblivion. David was neither the first nor the last who have spoken unadvisedly in prayer. Yet, there is a better meaning: the psalmist would know more of the shortness of life, that he might better bear its transient ills, and herein we may safely kneel with him, uttering the same petition. That there is no end to its misery is the hell of hell; that there is an end to life's sorrow is the hope of all who have a hope beyond the grave. God is the best teacher of the divine philosophy which looks for an expected end. They who see death through the Lord's glass, see a fair sight, which makes them forget the evil of life in foreseeing the end of life. And the measure of my days. David would fain be assured that his days would be soon over and his trials with them; he would be taught anew that life is measured out to us by wisdom, and is not a matter of chance. As the trader measures his cloth by inches, and ells, and yards, so with scrupulous accuracy is life measured out to man. That I may know how frail I am, or when I shall cease to be. Alas! poor human nature, dear as life is, man quarrels with God at such a rate that he would sooner cease to be than bear the Lord's appointment. Such pettishness in a saint! Let us wait till we are in a like position, and we shall do no better. The ship on the stocks wonders that the barque springs a leak, but when it has tried the high seas, it marvels that its timbers hold together in such storms. David's case is not recorded for our imitation, but for our learning.

Verse 5. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth. Upon consideration, the psalmist finds little room to bewail the length of life, but rather to bemoan its shortness. What changeable creatures we are! One moment we cry to be rid of existence, and the next instant beg to have it prolonged! A handbreadth is one of the shortest natural measures, being the breadth of four fingers; such is the brevity of life, by divine appointment; God hath made it so, fixing the period in wisdom. The behold calls us to attention; to some the thoughts of life's hastiness will bring the most acute pain, to others the most solemn earnestness. How well should those live who are to live so little! Is my earthly pilgrimage so brief? then let me watch every step of it, that in the little of time there may be much of

grace. And mine age is as nothing before thee. So short as not to amount to an entity. Think of eternity, and an angel is as a newborn babe, the world a fresh blown bubble, the sun a spark just fallen from the fire, and man a nullity. Before the Eternal, all the age of frail man is less than one ticking of a clock. Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity. This is the surest truth, that nothing about man is either sure or true. Take man at his best, he is but a man, and a man is a mere breath, unsubstantial as the wind. Man is settled, as the margin has it, and by divine decree it is settled that he shall not be settled. He is constant only in inconstancy. His vanity is his only verity; his best, of which he is vain, is but vain; and this is verily true of every man, that everything about him is every way fleeting. This is sad news for those whose treasures are beneath the moon; those whose glorying is in themselves may well hang the flag half mast; but those whose best estate is settled upon them in Christ Jesus in the land of unfading flowers, may rejoice that it is no vain thing in which they trust.

Verse 6. Surely every man walketh in a vain shew. Life is but a passing pageant. This alone is sure, that nothing is sure. All around us shadows mock us; we walk among them, and too many live for them as if the mocking images were substantial; acting their borrowed parts with zeal fit only to be spent on realities, and lost upon the phantoms of this passing scene. Worldly men walk like travellers in a mirage, deluded, duped, deceived, soon to be filled with disappointment and despair. Surely they are disquieted in vain. Men fret, and fume, and worry, and all for mere nothing. They are shadows pursuing shadows, while death pursues them. He who toils and contrives, and wearies himself for gold, for fame, for rank, even if he wins his desire, finds at the end of his labour lost; for like the treasure of the miser's dream, it all vanishes when the man awakes in the world of reality. Read well this text, and then listen to the clamour of the market, the hum of the exchange, the din of the city streets, and remember that all this noise (for so the word means), this breach of quiet, is made about unsubstantial, fleeting vanities. Broken rest, anxious fear, over worked brain, failing mind, lunacy, these are the steps in the process of disquieting with many, and all to be rich, or, in other words, to load one's self with the thick clay; clay, too, which a man must leave so soon. He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. He misses often the result of his ventures, for there are many slips between the cup and the lips. His wheat is sheaved, but an interloping robber bears it away—as often happens with the poor Eastern husbandman; or, the wheat is even stored, but the invader feasts thereon. Many work for others all unknown to them. Especially does this verse refer to those all gathering muckrakes, who in due time are succeeded by all scattering forks, which scatter riches as profusely as their sires gathered them parsimoniously. We know not our heirs, for our children die, and strangers fill the old ancestral halls; estates change hands, and entail, though riveted with a thousand bonds, yields to the corroding power of time. Men rise up early and sit up late to build a house, and then the stranger tramps along its passages, laughs in its chambers, and forgetful of its first builder, calls it all his own. Here is one of the evils under the sun for which no remedy can be prescribed.

Verse 7. And now, Lord, what wait I for? What is there in these phantoms to enchant me? Why should I linger where the prospect is so uninviting, and the present so trying? It were worse than vanity to linger in the abodes of sorrow to gain a heritage of emptiness. The psalmist, therefore, turns to his God, in disgust of all things else; he has thought on the world and all things in it, and is relieved by knowing that such vain things are all passing away; he has cut all cords which bound him to earth, and is ready to sound "Boot and saddle, up and away." My hope is in thee. The Lord is self existent and true, and therefore worthy of the confidence of men; he will live when all the creatures die, and his fulness will abide when all second causes are exhausted; to him, therefore, let us direct our

expectation, and on him let us rest our confidence. Away from sand to rock let all wise builders turn themselves, for if not today, yet surely ere long, a storm will rise before which nothing will be able to stand but that which has the lasting element of faith in God to cement it. David had but one hope, and that hope entered within the veil, hence he brought his vessel to safe anchorage, and after a little drifting all was peace.

Verse 8. Deliver me from all my transgressions. How fair a sign it is when the psalmist no longer harps upon his sorrows, but begs freedom from his sins! What is sorrow when compared with sin! Let but the poison of sin be gone from the cup, and we need not fear its gall, for the bitter will act medicinally. None can deliver a man from his transgression but the blessed One who is called Jesus, because he saves his people from their sins; and when he once works this great deliverance for a man from the cause, the consequences are sure to disappear too. The thorough cleansing desired is well worthy of note: to be saved from some transgressions would be of small benefit; total and perfect deliverance is needed. Make me not the reproach of the foolish. The wicked are the foolish here meant: such are always on the watch for the faults of saints, and at once make them the theme of ridicule. It is a wretched thing for a man to be suffered to make himself the butt of unholy scorn by apostasy from the right way. Alas, how many have thus exposed themselves to well deserved reproach! Sin and shame go together, and from both David would fain be preserved.

Verse 9. I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it. This had been far clearer if it had been rendered, "I am silenced, I will not open my mouth." Here we have a nobler silence, purged of all sullenness, and sweetened with submission. Nature failed to muzzle the mouth, but grace achieved the work in the worthiest manner. How like in appearance may two very different things appear! silence is ever silence, but it may be sinful in one case and saintly in another. What a reason for hushing every murmuring thought is the reflection, "because thou didst it."! It is his right to do as he wills, and he always wills to do that which is wisest and kindest; why should I then arraign his dealings? Nay, if it be indeed the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.

Verse 10. Remove thy stroke away from me. Silence from all repining did not prevent the voice of prayer, which must never cease. In all probability the Lord would grant the psalmist's petition, for he usually removes affliction when we are resigned to it; if we kiss the rod, our Father always burns it. When we are still, the rod is soon still. It is quite consistent with resignation to pray for the removal of a trial. David was fully acquiescent in the divine will, and yet found it in his heart to pray for deliverance; indeed, it was while he was rebellious that he was prayerless about his trial, and only when he became submissive did he plead for mercy. I am consumed by the blow of thine hand. Good pleas may be found in our weakness and distress. It is well to show our Father the bruises which his scourge has made, for peradventure his fatherly pity will bind his hands, and move him to comfort us in his bosom. It is not to consume us, but to consume our sins, that the Lord aims at in his chastisements.

Verse 11. When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity. God does not trifle with his rod; he uses it because of sin, and with a view to whip us from it; hence he means his strokes to be felt, and felt they are. Thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth. As the moth frets the substance of the fabric, mars all its beauty, and leaves it worn out and worthless, so do the chastisements of God discover to us our folly, weakness, and nothingness, and make us feel ourselves to be as worn out vestures, worthless and useless. Beauty must be a poor thing when a moth can consume it and a rebuke can mar it. All our desires and delights are wretched moth eaten things when the Lord visits

us in his anger. Surely every man is vanity. He is as Trapp wittily says "a curious picture of nothing." He is unsubstantial as his own breath, a vapour which appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away. Selah. Well may this truth bring us to a pause, like the dead body of Amasa, which, lying in the way, stopped the hosts of Joab.

Verse 12. Hear my prayer, O Lord. Drown not my pleadings with the sound of thy strokes. Thou hast heard the clamour of my sins, Lord; hear the laments of my prayers. And give ear unto my cry. Here is an advance in intensity: a cry is more vehement, pathetic, and impassioned, than a prayer. The main thing was to have the Lord's ear and heart. Hold not thy peace at my tears. This is a yet higher degree of importunate pleading. Who can withstand tears, which are the irresistible weapons of weakness? How often women, children, beggars, and sinners, have betaken themselves to tears as their last resort, and therewith have won the desire of their hearts!—"This shower, blown up by tempest of the soul, "falls not in vain. Tears speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues; they act as keys upon the wards of tender hearts, and mercy denies them nothing, if through them the weeper looks to richer drops, even to the blood of Jesus. When our sorrows pull up the sluices of our eyes, God will ere long interpose and turn our mourning into joy. Long may he be quiet as though he regarded not, but the hour of deliverance will come, and come like the morning when the dewdrops are plentiful. For I am a stranger with thee. Not to thee, but with thee. Like thee, my Lord, a stranger among the sons of men, an alien from my mother's children. God made the world, sustains it, and owns it, and yet men treat him as though he were a foreign intruder; and as they treat the Master, so do they deal with the servants. "It is no surprising thing that we should be unknown." These words may also mean, "I share the hospitality of God, "like a stranger entertained by a generous host. Israel was bidden to deal tenderly with the stranger, and the God of Israel has in much compassion treated us poor aliens with unbounded liberality. And a sojourner, as all my fathers were. They knew that this was not their rest; they passed through life in pilgrim guise, they used the world as travellers use an inn, and even so do I. Why should we dream of rest on earth when our fathers' sepulchres are before our eyes? If they had been immortal, their sons would have had an abiding city this side the tomb; but as the sires were mortal, so must their offspring pass away. All of our lineage, without exception, were passing pilgrims, and such are we. David uses the fleeting nature of our life as an argument for the Lord's mercy, and it is such a one as God will regard. We show pity to poor pilgrims, and so will the Lord.

Psalm 40

Verse 1. I waited patiently for the Lord. Patient waiting upon God was a special characteristic of our Lord Jesus. Impatience never lingered in his heart, much less escaped his lips. All through his agony in the garden, his trial of cruel mockings before Herod and Pilate, and his passion on the tree, he waited in omnipotence of patience. No glance of wrath, no word of murmuring, no deed of vengeance came from God's patient Lamb; he waited and waited on; was patient, and patient to perfection, far excelling all others who have according to their measure glorified God in the fires. Job on the dunghill does not equal Jesus on the cross. The Christ of God wears the imperial crown among the patient. Did the Only Begotten wait, and shall we be petulant and rebellious? And he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. Neither Jesus the head, nor any one of the members of his body, shall ever wait upon the Lord in vain. Mark the figure of inclining, as though the suppliant cried out of the lowest depression, and condescending love stooped to hear his feeble moans. What a marvel is it that our Lord Jesus should have to cry as we do, and wait as we do, and should receive the Father's help after the same process of faith and pleading as must be gone through by ourselves! The Saviour's

prayers among the midnight mountains and in Gethsemane expound this verse. The Son of David was brought very low, but he rose to victory; and here he teaches us how to conduct our conflicts so as to succeed after the same glorious pattern of triumph. Let us arm ourselves with the same mind; and panoplied in patience, armed with prayer, and girt with faith, let us maintain the Holy War.

Verse 2. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit. When our Lord bore in his own person the terrible curse which was due to sin, he was so cast down as to be like a prisoner in a deep, dark, fearful dungeon, amid whose horrible glooms the captive heard a noise as of rushing torrents, while overhead resounded the tramp of furious foes. Our Lord in his anguish was like a captive in the oubliettes, forgotten of all mankind, immured amid horror, darkness, and desolation. Yet the Lord Jehovah made him to ascend from all his abasement; he retraced his steps from that deep hell of anguish into which he had been cast as our substitute. He who thus delivered our surety in extremis, will not fail to liberate us from our far lighter griefs. Out of the miry clay. The sufferer was as one who cannot find a foothold, but slips and sinks. The figure indicates not only positive misery as in the former figure, but the absence of solid comfort by which sorrow might have been rendered supportable. Once give man a good foothold, and a burden is greatly lightened, but to be loaded and to be placed on slimy, slippery clay, is to be tried doubly. Reader, with humble gratitude, adore the dear Redeemer who, for thy sake, was deprived of all consolation while surrounded with every form of misery; remark his gratitude at being born up amid his arduous labours and sufferings, and if thou too hast experienced the divine help, be sure to join thy Lord in this song. And set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. The Redeemer's work is done. He reposes on the firm ground of his accomplished engagements; he can never suffer again; for ever does he reign in glory. What a comfort to know that Jesus our Lord and Saviour stands on a sure foundation in all that he is and does for us, and his goings forth in love are not liable to be cut short by failure in years to come, for God has fixed him firmly. He is for ever and eternally able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing that in the highest heavens he ever liveth to make intercession for them. Jesus is the true Joseph taken from the pit to be Lord of all. It is something more than a "sip of sweetness" to remember that if we are cast like our Lord into the lowest pit of shame and sorrow, we shall by faith rise to stand on the same elevated, sure, and everlasting rock of divine favour and faithfulness.

Verse 3. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God. At the passover, before his passion, our Lord sang one of the grand old Psalms of praise; but what is the music of his heart now, in the midst of his redeemed! What a song is that in which his glad heart for ever leads the chorus of the elect! Not Miriam's tabor nor Moses' triumphant hymn over Miriam's chivalry can for a moment rival that ever new and exulting song. Justice magnified and grace victorious; hell subdued and heaven glorified; death destroyed and immortality established; sin overthrown and righteousness resplendent; what a theme for a hymn in that day when our Lord drinketh the red wine new with us all in our heavenly Father's kingdom! Even on earth, and before his great passion, he foresaw the joy which was set before him, and was sustained by the prospect. Our God. The God of Jesus, the God of Israel, "my God and your God." How will we praise him, but ah! Jesus will be the chief player on our stringed instruments; he will lead the solemn hallelujah which shall go up from the sacramental host redeemed by blood. Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. A multitude that no man can number shall see the griefs and triumphs of Jesus, shall tremble because of their sinful rejection of him, and then through grace shall receive faith and become trusters in Jehovah. Here is our Lord's reward. Here is the assurance which makes preachers bold and workers persevering. Reader, are you one among the many? Note the way of salvation, a sight, a fear, a trust! Do you

know what these mean by possessing and practising them in your own soul? Trusting in the Lord is the evidence, nay, the essence of salvation. He who is a true believer is evidently redeemed from the dominion of sin and Satan.

Verse 4. Blessed. This is an exclamation similar to that of the first Psalm, "Oh, the happiness of the man." God's blessings are emphatic, "I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, "indeed and in very truth. Is that man that maketh the Lord his trust. Faith obtaineth promises. A simple single eyed confidence in God is the sure mark of blessedness. A man may be as poor as Lazarus, as hated as Mordecai, as sick as Hezekiah, as lonely as Elijah, but while his hand of faith can keep its hold on God, none of his outward afflictions can prevent his being numbered among the blessed; but the wealthiest and most prosperous man who has no faith is accursed, be he who he may. And respecteth not the proud. The proud expect all men to bow down and do them reverence, as if the worship of the golden calves were again set up in Israel; but believing men are too noble to honour mere money bags, or cringe before bombastic dignity. The righteous pay their respect to humble goodness, rather than to inflated self consequence. Our Lord Jesus was in this our bright example. No flattery of kings and great ones ever fell from his lips; he gave no honour to dishonourable men. The haughty were never his favourites. Nor such as turn aside to lies. Heresies and idolatries are lies, and so are avarice, worldliness, and pleasure seeking. Woe to those who follow such deceptions. Our Lord was ever both the truth and the lover of truth, and the father of lies had no part in him. We must never pay deference to apostates, time servers, and false teachers; they are an ill leaven, and the more we purge ourselves of them the better; they are blessed whom God preserves from all error in creed and practice. Judged by this verse, many apparently happy persons must be the reverse of blessed, for anything in the shape of a purse, a fine equipage, or a wealthy establishment, commands their reverence, whether the owner be a rake or a saint, an idiot or a philosopher. Verily, were the arch fiend of hell to start a carriage and pair, and live like a lord, he would have thousands who would court his acquaintance.

Verse 5. Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done. Creation, providence, and redemption, teem with wonders as the sea with life. Our special attention is called by this passage to the marvels which cluster around the cross and flash from it. The accomplished redemption achieves many ends, and compasses a variety of designs; the outgoings of the atonement are not to be reckoned up, the influences of the cross reach further than the beams of the sun. Wonders of grace beyond all enumeration take their rise from the cross; adoption, pardon, justification, and a long chain of godlike miracles of love proceed from it. Note that our Lord here speaks of the Lord as "my God." The man Christ Jesus claimed for himself and us a covenant relationship with Jehovah. Let our interest in our God be ever to us our peculiar treasure. And thy thoughts which are toward us. The divine thoughts march with the divine acts, for it is not according the God's wisdom to act without deliberation and counsel. All the divine thoughts are good and gracious towards his elect. God's thoughts of love are very many, very wonderful, very practical! Muse on them, dear reader; no sweeter subject ever occupied your mind. God's thoughts of you are many, let not yours be few in return. They cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee. Their sum is so great as to forbid alike analysis and numeration. Human minds fail to measure, or to arrange in order, the Lord's ways and thoughts; and it must always be so, for he hath said, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." No maze to lose oneself in like the labyrinth of love. How sweet to be outdone, overcome and overwhelmed by the astonishing grace of the Lord our God! If I would declare and speak of them, and surely this should be the occupation of my tongue at all seasonable opportunities, they are more than

can be numbered; far beyond all human arithmetic they are multiplied; thoughts from all eternity, thoughts of my fall, my restoration, my redemption, my conversion, my pardon, my upholding, my perfecting, my eternal reward; the list is too long for writing, and the value of the mercies too great for estimation. Yet, if we cannot show forth all the works of the Lord, let us not make this an excuse for silence; for our Lord, who is in this our best example, often spake of the tender thoughts of the great Father.

Verse 6. Here we enter upon one of the most wonderful passages in the whole of the Old Testament, a passage in which the incarnate Son of God is seen not through a glass darkly, but as it were face to face. Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire. In themselves considered, and for their own sakes, the Lord saw nothing satisfactory in the various offerings of the ceremonial law. Neither the victim pouring forth its blood, nor the fine flour rising in smoke from the altar, could yield content to Jehovah's mind; he cared not for the flesh of bulls or of goats, neither had he pleasure in corn and wine, and oil. Typically these offerings had their worth, but when Jesus, the Antitype, came into the world, they ceased to be of value, as candles are of no estimation when the sun has arisen. Mine ears hast thou opened. Our Lord was quick to hear and perform his Father's will; his ears were as if excavated down to his soul; they were not closed up like Isaac's wells, which the Philistines filled up, but clear passages down to the fountains of his soul. The prompt obedience of our Lord is here the first idea. There is, however, no reason whatever to reject the notion that the digging of the ear here intended may refer to the boring of the ear of the servant, who refused out of love to his master to take his liberty, at the year of jubilee; his perforated ear, the token of perpetual service, is a true picture of our blessed Lord's fidelity to his Father's business, and his love to his Father's children. Jesus irrevocably gave himself up to be the servant of servants for our sake and God's glory. The Septuagint, from which Paul quoted, has translated this passage, "A body hast thou prepared me:" how this reading arose it is not easy to imagine, but since apostolical authority has sanctioned the variation, we accept it as no mistake, but as an instance of various readings equally inspired. In any case, the passage represents the Only Begotten as coming into the world equipped for service; and in a real and material body, by actual life and death, putting aside all the shadows of the Mosaic law. Burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Two other forms of offerings are here mentioned; tokens of gratitude and sacrifices for sin as typically presented are set aside; neither the general nor the private offerings are any longer demanded. What need of mere emblems when the substance itself is present? We learn from this verse that Jehovah values far more the obedience of the heart than all the imposing performances of ritualistic worship; and that our expiation from sin comes not to us as the result of an elaborate ceremonial, but as the effect of our great Substitute's obedience to the will of Jehovah.

Verse 7. Then said I. That is to say, when it was clearly seen that man's misery could not be remedied by sacrifices and offerings. It being certain that the mere images of atonement, and the bare symbols of propitiation were of no avail, the Lord Jesus, in propria persona, intervened. O blessed "then said I." Lord, ever give us to hear and feed on such living words as these, so peculiarly and personally thine own. Lo, I come. Behold, O heavens, and thou earth, and ye places under the earth! Here is something worthy of your most intense gaze. Sit ye down and watch with earnestness, for the invisible God comes in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an infant the Infinite hangs at a virgin's breast! Immanuel did not send but come; he came in his own personality, in all that constituted his essential self he came forth from the ivory palaces to the abodes of misery; he came promptly at the destined hour; he came with sacred alacrity as one freely offering himself. In the volume of the book it is written of me. In the eternal decree it is thus recorded. The mystic roll of

predestination which providence gradually unfolds, contained within it, to the Saviour's knowledge, a written covenant, that in the fulness of time the divine I should descend to earth to accomplish a purpose which hecatombs of bullocks and rams could not achieve. What a privilege to find our names written in the book of life, and what an honour, since the name of Jesus heads the page! Our Lord had respect to his ancient covenant engagements, and herein he teaches us to be scrupulously just in keeping our word; have we so promised, it is so written in the book of remembrance? then let us never be defaulters.

Verse 8. I delight to do thy will, O my God. Our blessed Lord alone could completely do the will of God. The law is too broad for such poor creatures as we are to hope to fulfil it to the uttermost: but Jesus not only did the Father's will, but found a delight therein; from old eternity he had desired the work set before him; in his human life he was straitened till he reached the baptism of agony in which he magnified the law, and even in Gethsemane itself he chose the Father's will, and set aside his own. Herein is the essence of obedience, namely, in the soul's cheerful devotion to God: and our Lord's obedience, which is our righteousness, is in no measure lacking in this eminent quality. Notwithstanding his measureless griefs, our Lord found delight in his work, and for "the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame." Yea, thy law is within my heart. No outward, formal devotion was rendered by Christ; his heart was in his work, holiness was his element, the Father's will his meat and drink. We must each of us be like our Lord in this, or we shall lack the evidence of being his disciples. Where there is no heart work, no pleasure, no delight in God's law, there can be no acceptance. Let the devout reader adore the Saviour for the spontaneous and hearty manner in which he undertook the great work of our salvation.

Verse 9. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation. The purest morality and the highest holiness were preached by Jesus. Righteousness divine was his theme. Our Lord's whole life was a sermon, eloquent beyond compare, and it is heard each day by myriads. Moreover, he never shunned in his ministry to declare the whole counsel of God; God's great plan of righteousness he plainly set forth. He taught openly in the temple, and was not ashamed to be a faithful and a true witness. He was the great evangelist; the master of itinerant preachers; the head of the clan of open air missionaries. O servants of the Lord, hide not your lights, but reveal to others what your God has revealed to you; and especially by your lives testify for holiness, be champions for the right, both in word and deed. Lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. Never either from love of ease, of fear of men, did the Great Teacher's lips become closed. He was instant in season and out of season. The poor listened to him, and princes heard his rebuke; Publicans rejoiced at him, and Pharisees raged, but to them both he proclaimed the truth from heaven. It is well for a tried believer when he can appeal to God and call him to witness that he has not been ashamed to bear witness for him; for rest assured if we are not ashamed to confess our God, he will never be ashamed to own us. Yet what a wonder is here, that the Son of God should plead, just as we plead, and urge just such arguments as would befit the mouths of his diligent ministers! How truly is he "made like unto his brethren."

Verse 10. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart. On the contrary, "Never man spake like this man." God's divine plan of making men righteous was well known to him, and he plainly taught it. What was in our great Master's heart he poured forth in holy eloquence from his lips. The doctrine of righteousness by faith he spake with great simplicity of speech. Law and gospel equally found in him a clear expositor. I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation. Jehovah's fidelity to his promises and his grace in saving believers were declared by the Lord Jesus on many occasions, and are

blessedly blended in the gospel which he came to preach. God, faithful to his own character, law and threatenings, and yet saving sinners, is a peculiar revelation of the gospel. God faithful to the saved ones evermore is the joy of the followers of Christ Jesus. I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation. The tender as well as the stern attributes of God, our Lord Jesus fully unveiled. Concealment was far from the Great Apostle of our profession. Cowardice he never exhibited, hesitancy never weakened his language. He who as a child of twelve years spake in the temple among the doctors, and afterward preached to five thousand at Gennesaret, and to the vast crowds at Jerusalem on that great day, the last day of the feast, was always ready to proclaim the name of the Lord, and could never be charged with unholy silence. He could be dumb when so the prophecy demanded and patience suggested, but otherwise, preaching was his meat and his drink, and he kept back nothing which would be profitable to his disciples. This in the day of his trouble, according to this Psalm, he used as a plea for divine aid. He had been faithful to his God, and now begs the Lord to be faithful to him. Let every dumb professor, tongue tied by sinful shame, bethink himself how little he will be able to plead after this fashion in the day of his distress.

Verse 11. Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord. Alas! these were to be for awhile withheld from our Lord while on the accursed tree, but meanwhile in his great agony he seeks for gentle dealing; and the coming of the angel to strengthen him was a clear answer to his prayer. He had been blessed aforetime in the desert, and now at the entrance of the valley of the shadow of death, like a true, trustful, and experienced man, he utters a holy, plaintive desire for the tenderness of heaven. He had not withheld his testimony to God's truth, now in return he begs his Father not to withhold his compassion. This verse might more correctly be read as a declaration of his confidence that help would not be refused; but whether we view this utterance as the cry of prayer, or the avowal of faith, in either case it is instructive to us who take our suffering Lord for an example, and it proves to us how thoroughly he was made like unto his brethren. Let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me. He had preached both of these, and now he asks for an experience of them, that he might be kept in the evil day and rescued from his enemies and his afflictions. Nothing endears our Lord to us more than to hear him thus pleading with strong crying and tears to him who was able to save. O Lord Jesus, in our nights of wrestling we will remember thee.

Verse 12. For innumerable evils have compassed me about. On every side he was beset with evils; countless woes environed the great Substitute for our sins. Our sins were innumerable, and so were his griefs. There was no escape for us from our iniquities, and there was no escape for him from the woes which we deserved. From every quarter evils accumulated about the blessed One, although in his heart evil found no place. Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up. He had no sin, but sins were laid on him, and he took them as if they were his. "He was made sin for us." The transfer of sin to the Saviour was real, and produced in him as man the horror which forbade him to look into the face of God, bowing him down with crushing anguish and woe intolerable. O my soul, what would thy sins have done for thee eternally if the Friend of sinners had not condescended to take them all upon himself? Oh, blessed Scripture! "The Lord hath made to meet upon him the iniquity of us all." Oh, marvellous depth of love, which could lead the perfectly immaculate to stand in the sinner's place, and bear the horror of great trembling which sin must bring upon those conscious of it. They are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me. The pains of the divine penalty were beyond compute, and the Saviour's soul was so burdened with them, that he was sore amazed, and very heavy even unto a sweat of blood. His strength was gone, his spirits sank, he was in an agony.

Verse 13. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me: O Lord, make haste to help me. How touching! How humble! How plaintive! The words thrill us as we think that after this sort our Lord and Master prayed. His petition is not so much that the cup should pass away undrained, but that he should be sustained while drinking it, and set free from its power at the first fitting moment. He seeks deliverance and help; and he entreats that the help may not be slow in coming; this is after the manner of our pleadings. Is it not? Note, reader, how our Lord was heard in that he feared, for there was after Gethsemane a calm endurance which made the fight as glorious as the victory.

Verse 14. Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it. Whether we read this as a prayer or a prophecy it matters not, for the powers of sin, and death, and hell, may well be ashamed as they see the result of their malice for ever turned against themselves. It is to the infinite confusion of Satan that his attempts to destroy the Saviour destroyed himself; the diabolical conclave who plotted in council are now all alike put to shame, for the Lord Jesus has met them at all points, and turned all their wisdom into foolishness. Let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil. It is even so; the hosts of darkness are utterly put to the rout, and made a theme for holy derision for ever and ever. How did they gloat over the thought of crushing the seed of the woman! but the Crucified has conquered, the Nazarene has laughed them to scorn, the dying Son of Man has become the death of death and hell's destruction. For ever blessed be his name.

Verse 15. Let them be desolate, or amazed; even as Jesus was desolate in his agony, so let his enemies be in their despair when he defeats them. The desolation caused in the hearts of evil spirits and evil men by envy, malice, chagrin, disappointment, and despair, shall be a fit recompense for their cruelty to the Lord when he was in their hands. For a reward of their shame that say unto me, Aha, aha. Did the foul fiend insult over our Lord? Behold how shame is now his reward! Do wicked men today pour shame upon the name of the Redeemer? Their desolation shall avenge him of his adversaries! Jesus is the gentle Lamb to all who seek mercy through his blood; but let despisers beware, for he is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and "who shall rouse him up?" The Jewish rulers exulted and scornfully said, "Aha, aha; "but when the streets of Jerusalem ran like rivers deep with gore, "and the temple was utterly consumed, "then their house was left unto them desolate, and the blood of the last of the prophets, according to their own desire, came upon themselves and upon their children. O ungodly reader, if such a person glance over this page, beware of persecuting Christ and his people, for God will surely avenge his own elect. Your "ahas" will cost you dear. It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.

Verse 16. Let all those that seek thee, rejoice and be glad in thee. We have done with Ebal and turn to Gerizim. Here our Lord pronounces benedictions on his people. Note who the blessed objects of his petition are: not all men, but some men, "I pray for them, I pray not for the world." He pleads for seekers: the lowest in the kingdom, the babes of the family; those who have true desires, longing prayers, and consistent endeavours after God. Let seeking souls pluck up heart when they hear of this. What riches of grace, that in his bitterest hour Jesus should remember the lambs of the flock! And what does he entreat for them? it is that they may be doubly glad, intensely happy, emphatically joyful, for such the repetition of terms implies. Jesus would have all seekers made happy, by finding what they seek after, and by winning peace through his grief. As deep as were his sorrows, so high would he have their joys. He groaned that we might sing, and was covered with a bloody sweat that we might be anointed with the oil of gladness. Let such as love thy salvation say continually, The Lord be magnified. Another result of the Redeemer's passion is the promotion of the glory of God by those who gratefully delight in his salvation. Our Lord's desire should be our directory; we love with all our

hearts his great salvation, let us then, with all our tongues proclaim the glory of God which is resplendent therein. Never let his praises cease. As the heart is warm with gladness let it incite the tongue to perpetual praise. If we cannot do what we would for the spread of the kingdom, at least let us desire and pray for it. Be it ours to make God's glory the chief end of every breath and pulse. The suffering Redeemer regarded the consecration of his people to the service of heaven as a grand result of his atoning death; it is the joy which was set before him; that God is glorified as the reward of the Saviour's travail.

Verse 17. But I am poor and needy. The man of sorrows closes with another appeal, based upon his affliction and poverty. Yet the Lord thinketh upon me. Sweet was this solace to the holy heart of the great sufferer. The Lord's thoughts of us are a cheering subject of meditation, for they are ever kind and never cease. His disciples forsook him, and his friends forgot him, but Jesus knew that Jehovah never turned away his heart from him, and this upheld him in the hour of need. Thou art my help and my deliverer. His unmoved confidence stayed itself alone on God. O that all believers would imitate more fully their great Apostle and High Priest in his firm reliance upon God, even when afflictions abounded and the light was veiled. Make no tarrying, O my God. The peril was imminent, the need urgent, the suppliant could not endure delay, nor was he made to wait, for the angel came to strengthen, and the brave heart of Jesus rose up to meet the foe. Lord Jesus, grant that in all our adversities we may possess like precious faith, and be found like thee, more than conquerors.

Psalm 41

Verse 1. Blessed is he that considereth the poor. This is the third Psalm opening with a benediction, and there is a growth in it beyond the first two. To search the word of God comes first, pardoned sin is second, and now the forgiven sinner brings forth fruit unto God available for the good of others. The word used is as emphatic as in the former cases, and so is the blessing which follows it. The poor intended, are such as are poor in substance, weak in bodily strength, despised in repute, and desponding in spirit. These are mostly avoided and frequently scorned. The worldly proverb bequeaths the hindmost to one who has no mercy. The sick and the sorry are poor company, and the world deserts them as the Amalekite left his dying servant. Such as have been made partakers of divine grace receive a tenderer nature, and are not hardened against their own flesh and blood; they undertake the cause of the downtrodden, and turn their minds seriously to the promotion of their welfare. They do not toss them a penny and go on their way, but enquire into their sorrows, sift out their cause, study the best ways for their relief, and practically come to their rescue: such as these have the mark of the divine favour plainly upon them, and are as surely the sheep of the Lord's pasture as if they wore a brand upon their foreheads. They are not said to have considered the poor years ago, but they still do so. Stale benevolence, when boasted of, argues present churlishness. First and foremost, yea, far above all others put together in tender compassion for the needy is our Lord Jesus, who so remembered our low estate, that though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor. All his attributes were charged with the task of our uplifting. He weighed our case and came in the fulness of wisdom to execute the wonderful work of mercy by which we are redeemed from our destructions. Wretchedness excited his pity, misery moved his mercy, and thrice blessed is he both by his God and his saints for his attentive care and wise action towards us. He still considereth us; his mercy is always in the present tense, and so let our praises be.

The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The compassionate lover of the poor thought of others, and therefore God will think of him. God measures to us with our own bushel. Days of trouble come

even to the most generous, and they have made the wisest provision for rainy days who have lent shelter to others when times were better with them. The promise is not that the generous saint shall have no trouble, but that he shall be preserved in it, and in due time brought out of it. How true was this of our Lord! never trouble deeper nor triumph brighter than his, and glory be to his name, he secures the ultimate victory of all his blood bought ones. Would that they all were more like him in putting on bowels of compassion to the poor. Much blessedness they miss who stint their alms. The joy of doing good, the sweet reaction of another's happiness, the approving smile of heaven upon the heart, if not upon the estate; all these the niggardly soul knows nothing of. Selfishness bears in itself a curse, it is a cancer in the heart; while liberality is happiness, and maketh fat the bones. In dark days we cannot rest upon the supposed merit of alms giving, but still the music of memory brings with it no mean solace when it tells of widows and orphans whom we have succoured, and prisoners and sick folk to whom we have ministered.

Verse 2. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive. His noblest life shall be immortal, and even his mortal life shall be sacredly guarded by the power of Jehovah. Jesus lived on till his hour came, nor could the devices of crafty Herod take away his life till the destined hour had struck; and even then no man took his life from him, but he laid it down of himself, to take it again. Here is the portion of all those who are made like their Lord, they bless and they shall be blessed, they preserve and shall be preserved, they watch over the lives of others and they themselves shall be precious in the sight of the Lord. The miser like the hog is of no use till he is dead—then let him die; the righteous like the ox is of service during life—then let him live. And he shall be blessed upon the earth. Prosperity shall attend him. His cruse of oil shall not be dried up because he fed the poor prophet. He shall cut from his roll of cloth and find it longer at both ends.

"There was a man, and some did count him mad,
The more he gave away the more he had."

If temporal gains be not given him, spirituals shall be doubled to him. His little shall be blessed, bread and water shall be a feast to him. The liberal are and must be blessed even here; they have a present as well as a future portion. Our Lord's real blessedness of heart in the joy that was set before him is a subject worthy of earnest thought, especially as it is the picture of the blessing which all liberal saints may look for. And thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. He helped the distressed, and now he shall find a champion in his God. What would not the good man's enemies do to him if they had him at their disposal? Better be in a pit with vipers than to be at the mercy of persecutors. This sentence sets before us a sweet negative, and yet it were not easy to have seen how it could be true of our Lord Jesus, did we not know that although he was exempted from much of blessing, being made a curse for us, yet even he was not altogether nor for ever left of God, but in due time was exalted above all his enemies.

Verse 3. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing. The everlasting arms shall stay up his soul as friendly hands and downy pillows stay up the body of the sick. How tender and sympathising is this image; how near it brings our God to our infirmities and sicknesses! Whoever heard this of the old heathen Jove, or of the gods of India or China? This is language peculiar to the God of Israel; he it is who deigns to become nurse and attendant upon good men. If he smites with one hand he sustains with the other. Oh, it is blessed fainting when one falls upon the Lord's own bosom, and is borne up thereby! Grace is the best of restoratives; divine love is the noblest stimulant for a languishing patient; it makes the soul strong as a giant, even when the aching bones are

breaking through the skin. No physician like the Lord, no tonic like his promise, no wine like his love. Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness. What, doth the Lord turn bed maker to his sick children? Herein is love indeed. Who would not consider the poor if such be the promised reward? A bed soon grows hard when the body is weary with tossing to and fro upon it, but grace gives patience, and God's smile gives peace, and the bed is made soft because the man's heart is content; the pillows are downy because the head is peaceful. Note that the Lord will make all his bed, from head to foot. What considerate and indefatigable kindness! Our dear and ever blessed Lord Jesus, though in all respects an inheritor of this promise, for our sakes condescended to forego the blessing, and died on a cross and not upon a bed; yet, even there, he was after awhile upheld and cheered by the Lord his God, so that he died in triumph.

We must not imagine that the benediction pronounced in these three verses belongs to all who casually give money to the poor, or leave it in their wills, or contribute to societies. Such do well, or act from mere custom, as the case may be, but they are not here alluded to. The blessing is for those whose habit it is to love their neighbour as themselves, and who for Christ's sake feed the hungry and clothe the naked. To imagine a man to be a saint who does not consider the poor as he has ability, is to conceive the fruitless fig tree to be acceptable; there will be sharp dealing with many professors on this point in the day when the King cometh in his glory.

Verses 4-9. Here we have a controversy between the pleader and his God. He has been a tender friend to the poor, and yet in the hour of his need the promised assistance was not forthcoming. In our Lord's case there was a dark and dreary night in which such arguments were well befitting himself and his condition.

Verse 4. I said—said it in earnest prayer—Lord, be merciful unto me. Prove now thy gracious dealings with my soul in adversity, since thou didst aforetime give me grace to act liberally in my prosperity. No appeal is made to justice; the petitioner but hints at the promised reward, but goes straightforward to lay his plea at the feet of mercy. How low was our Redeemer brought when such petitions could come from his reverend mouth, when his lips like lilies dropped such sweet smelling but bitter myrrh! Heal my soul. My time of languishing is come, now do as thou hast said, and strengthen me, especially in my soul. We ought to be far more earnest for the soul's healing than for the body's ease. We hear much of the cure of souls, but we often forget to care about it. For I have sinned against thee. Here was the root of sorrow. Sin and suffering are inevitable companions. Observe that by the psalmist sin was felt to be mainly evil because directed against God. This is of the essence of true repentance. The immaculate Saviour could never have used such language as this unless there be here a reference to the sin which he took upon himself by imputation; and for our part we tremble to apply words so manifestly indicating personal rather than imputed sin. Applying the petition to David and other sinful believers, how strangely evangelical is the argument: heal me, not for I am innocent, but I have sinned. How contrary is this to all self righteous pleading! How consonant with grace! How inconsistent with merit! Even the fact that the confessing penitent had remembered the poor, is but obliquely urged, but a direct appeal is made to mercy on the ground of great sin. O trembling reader, here is a divinely revealed precedent for thee, be not slow to follow it.

Verse 5. Mine enemies speak evil of me. It was their nature to do and speak evil; it was not possible that the child of God could escape them. The viper fastened on Paul's hand: the better the man the more likely, and the more venomous the slander. Evil tongues are busy tongues, and never deal in truth. Jesus was traduced to the utmost, although no offence was in him. When shall he die, and his

name perish? They could not be content till he was away. The world is not wide enough for evil men to live in while the righteous remain, yea, the bodily presence of the saints may be gone, but their memory is an offence to their foes. It was never merry England, say they, since men took to Psalm singing. In the Master's case, they cried, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, it is not fit that he should live." If persecutors could have their way, the church should have but one neck, and that should be on the block. Thieves would fain blow out all candles. The lights of the world are not the delights of the world. Poor blind bats, they fly at the lamp, and try to dash it down; but the Lord liveth, and preserveth both the saints and their names.

Verse 6. And if he come to see me, he speaketh vanity. His visits of sympathy are visitations of mockery. When the fox calls on the sick lamb his words are soft, but he licks his lips in hope of the carcass. It is wretched work to have spies haunting one's bedchamber, calling in pretence of kindness, but with malice in their hearts. Hypocritical talk is always fulsome and sickening to honest men, but especially to the suffering saint. Our divine Lord had much of this from the false hearts that watched his words. His heart gathereth iniquity to itself. Like will to like. The bird makes its nest of feathers. Out of the sweetest flowers chemists can distil poison, and from the purest words and deeds malice can gather groundwork for calumnious report. It is perfectly marvellous how spite spins webs out of no materials whatever. It is no small trial to have base persons around you lying in wait for every word which they may pervert into evil. The Master whom we serve was constantly subject to this affliction. When he goeth abroad, he telleth it. He makes his lies, and then vends them in open market. He is no sooner out of the house than he outs with his lie, and this against a sick man whom he called to see as a friend—a sick man to whose incoherent and random speeches pity should be showed. Ah, black hearted wretch! A devil's cub indeed. How far abroad men will go to publish their slanders! They would fain placard the sky with their falsehoods. A little fault is made much of; a slip of the tongue is a libel, a mistake a crime, and if a word can bear two meanings the worse is always fathered upon it. Tell it in Gath, publish it in Askelon, that the daughters of the uncircumcised may triumph. It is base to strike a man when he is down, yet such is the meanness of mankind towards a Christian hero should he for awhile chance to be under a cloud.

Verse 7. All that hate me whisper together against me. The spy meets his comrades in conclave and sets them all a whispering. Why could they not speak out? Were they afraid of the sick warrior? Or were their designs so treacherous that they must needs be hatched in secrecy? Mark the unanimity of the wicked—all. How heartily the dogs unite to hunt the stag! Would God we were half as united in holy labour as persecutors in their malicious projects, and were half as wise as they are crafty, for their whispering was craft as well as cowardice, the conspiracy must not be known till all is ready. Against me do they devise my hurt. They lay their heads together, and scheme and plot. So did Ahithophel and the rest of Absalom's counsellors, so also did the chief priests and Pharisees. Evil men are good at devising; they are given to meditation, they are deep thinkers, but the mark they aim at is evermore the hurt of the faithful. Snakes in the grass are never there for a good end.

Verse 8. An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him. They whisper that some curse has fallen upon him, and is riveted to him. They insinuate that a foul secret stains his character, the ghost whereof haunts his house, and never can be laid. An air of mystery is cast around this doubly dark saying, as if to show how indistinct are the mutterings of malice. Even thus was our Lord accounted "smitten of God and afflicted." His enemies conceived that God had forsaken him, and delivered him for ever into their hands. And now that he lieth he shall rise up no more. His sickness they hoped was mortal, and this was fine news for them. No more would the good man's holiness chide their sin, they

would now be free from the check of his godliness. Like the friars around Wycliffe's bed, their prophesyings were more jubilant than accurate, but they were a sore scourge to the sick man. When the Lord smites his people with his rod of affliction for a small moment, their enemies expect to see them capitally executed, and prepare their jubilates to celebrate their funerals, but they are in too great a hurry, and have to alter their ditties and sing to another tune. Our Redeemer eminently foretokened this, for out of his lying in the grave he has gloriously risen. Vain the watch, the stone, the seal! Rising he pours confusion on his enemies.

Verse 9. Yea. Here is the climax of the sufferer's woe, and he places before it the emphatic affirmation, as if he thought that such villainy would scarcely be believed. Mine own familiar friend. "The man of my peace," so runs the original, with whom I had no differences, with whom I was in league, who had aforetime ministered to my peace and comfort. This was Ahithophel to David, and Iscariot with our Lord. Judas was an apostle, admitted to the privacy of the Great Teacher, hearing his secret thoughts, and, as it were, allowed to read his very heart. "Et tu Brute?" said the expiring Caesar. The kiss of the traitor wounded our Lord's heart as much as the nail wounded his hand. In whom I trusted. Judas was the treasurer of the apostolic college. Where we place great confidence an unkind act is the more severely felt. Which did eat of my bread. Not only as a guest but as a dependant, a pensioner at my board. Judas dipped in the same dish with his Lord, and hence the more accursed was his treachery in his selling his Master for a slave's price. Hath lifted up his heel against me. Not merely turned his back on me, but left me with a heavy kick such as a vicious horse might give. Hard is it to be spurned in our need by those who formerly fed at our table. It is noteworthy that the Redeemer applied only the last words of this verse to Judas, perhaps because, knowing his duplicity, he had never made a familiar friend of him in the fullest sense, and had not placed implicit trust in him. Infernal malice so planned it that every circumstance in Jesus' death should add wormwood to it; and the betrayal was one of the bitterest drops of gall. We are indeed, wretched when our quondam friend becomes our relentless foe, when confidence is betrayed, when all the rites of hospitality are perverted, and ingratitude is the only return for kindness; yet in so deplorable a case we may cast ourselves upon the faithfulness of God, who, having, delivered our Covenant Head, is in verity engaged to be the very present help of all for whom that covenant was made.

Verse 10. But thou, O Lord, be merciful unto me. How the hunted and affrighted soul turns to her God! How she seems to take breath with a "but, thou!" How she clings to the hope of mercy from God when every chance of pity from man is gone! And raise me up. Recover me from my sickness, give me to regain my position. Jesus was raised up from the grave; his descent was ended by an ascent. That I may requite them. This as it reads is a truly Old Testament sentence, and quite aside from the spirit of Christianity, yet we must remember that David was a person in magisterial office, and might without any personal revenge, desire to punish those who had insulted his authority and libelled his public character. Our great Apostle and High Priest had no personal animosities, but even he by his resurrection has requited the powers of evil, and avenged on death and hell all their base attacks upon his cause and person. Still the strained application of every sentence of this Psalm to Christ is not to our liking, and we prefer to call attention to the better spirit of the gospel beyond that of the old dispensation.

Verse 11. We are all cheered by tokens for good, and the psalmist felt it to be an auspicious omen, that after all his deep depression he was not utterly given over to his foe. By this I know that thou favourest me. Thou hast a special regard to me, I have the secret assurance of this in my heart, and,

therefore, thine outward dealings do not dismay me, for I know that thou lovest me in them all. Because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. What if the believer has no triumph over his foes, he must be glad that they do not triumph over him. If we have not all we would we should praise God for all we have. Much there is in us over which the ungodly might exult, and if God's mercy keeps the dog's mouths closed when they might be opened, we must give him our heartiest gratitude. What a wonder it is that when the devil enters the lists with a poor, erring, bedridden, deserted, slandered saint, and has a thousand evil tongues to aid him, yet he cannot win the day, but in the end slinks off without renown.

"The feeblest saint shall win the day
Though death and hell obstruct the way, "

Verse 12. And as for me, despite them all and in the sight of them all, thou upholdest me in mine integrity; thy power enables me to rise above the reach of slander by living in purity and righteousness. Our innocence and consistency are the result of the divine upholding. We are like those glasses without feet, which can only be upright while they are held in the hand; we fall, and spill, and spoil all, if left to ourselves. The Lord should be praised every day if we are preserved from gross sin. When others sin they show us what we should do but for grace. "He today and I tomorrow," was the exclamation of a holy man, whenever he saw another falling into sin. Our integrity is comparative as well as dependent, we must therefore be humbled while we are grateful. If we are clear of the faults alleged against us by our calumniators, we have nevertheless quite enough of actual blameworthiness to render it shameful for us to boast. And settest me before thy face for ever. He rejoiced that he lived under the divine surveillance; tended, cared for, and smiled upon by his Lord; and yet more, that it would be so world without end. To stand before an earthly monarch is considered to be a singular honour, but what must it be to be a perpetual courtier in the palace of the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible?

Verse 13. The Psalm ends with a doxology. Blessed be the Lord, i.e., let him be glorified. The blessing at the beginning from the mouth of God is returned from the mouth of his servant. We cannot add to the Lord's blessedness, but we can pour out our grateful wishes, and these he accepts, as we receive little presents of flowers from children who love us. Jehovah is the personal name of our God. God of Israel is his covenant title, and shows his special relation to his elect people. From everlasting and to everlasting. The strongest way of expressing endless duration. We die, but the glory of God goes on and on without pause. Amen and amen. So let it surely, firmly, and eternally be. Thus the people joined in the Psalm by a double shout of holy affirmation; let us unite in it with all our hearts. This last verse may serve for the prayer of the universal church in all ages, but none can sing it so sweetly as those who have experienced as David did the faithfulness of God in times of extremity.

Psalm 42

Verse 1. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after the, O God. As after a long drought the poor fainting hind longs for the streams, or rather as the hunted hart instinctively seeks after the river to lave its smoking flanks and to escape the dogs, even so my weary, persecuted soul pants after the Lord my God. Debarred from public worship, David was heartsick. Ease he did not seek, honour he did not covet, but the enjoyment of communion with God was an urgent need of his soul; he viewed it not merely as the sweetest of all luxuries, but as an absolute necessity, like water to a stag. Like the parched traveller in the wilderness, whose skin bottle is empty, and who

finds the wells dry, he must drink or die—he must have his God or faint. His soul, his very self, his deepest life, was insatiable for a sense of the divine presence. As the hart brays so his soul prays. Give him his God and he is as content as the poor deer which at length slakes its thirst and is perfectly happy; but deny him his Lord, and his heart heaves, his bosom palpitates, his whole frame is convulsed, like one who gasps for breath, or pants with long running. Dear reader, dost thou know what this is, by personally having felt the same? It is a sweet bitterness. The next best thing to living in the light of the Lord's love is to be unhappy till we have it, and to pant hourly after it—hourly, did I say? thirst is a perpetual appetite, and not to be forgotten, and even thus continual is the heart's longing after God. When it is as natural for us to long for God as for an animal to thirst, it is well with our souls, however painful our feelings. We may learn from this verse that the eagerness of our desires may be pleaded with God, and the more so, because there are special promises for the importunate and fervent.

Verse 2. My soul. All my nature, my inmost self. Thirsteth. Which is more than hungering; hunger you can palliate, but thirst is awful, insatiable, clamorous, deadly. O to have the most intense craving after the highest good! this is no questionable mark of grace. For God. Not merely for the temple and the ordinances, but for fellowship with God himself. None but spiritual men can sympathise with this thirst. For the living God. Because he lives, and gives to men the living water; therefore we, with greater eagerness, desire him. A dead God is a mere mockery; we loathe such a monstrous deity; but the ever living God, the perennial fountain of life and light and love, is our soul's desire. What are gold, honour, pleasure, but dead idols? May we never pant for these. When shall I come and appear before God? He who loves the Lord loves also the assemblies wherein his name is adored. Vain are all pretences to religion where the outward means of grace have no attraction. David was never so much at home as in the house of the Lord; he was not content with private worship; he did not forsake the place where saints assemble, as the manner of some is. See how pathetically he questions as to the prospect of his again uniting in the joyous gathering! How he repeats and reiterates his desire! After his God, his Elohim (his God to be worshipped, who had entered into covenant with him), he pined even as the drooping flowers for the dew, or the moaning turtle for her mate. It were well if all our resortings to public worship were viewed as appearances before God, it would then be a sure mark of grace to delight in them. Alas, how many appear before the minister, or their fellow men, and think that enough! "To see the face of God" is a nearer translation of the Hebrew; but the two ideas may be combined—he would see his God and be seen of him: this is worth thirsting after!

Verse 3. My tears have been my meat day and night. Salt meats, but healthful to the soul. When a man comes to tears, constant tears, plenteous tears, tears that fill his cup and trencher, he is in earnest indeed. As the big tears stand in the stag's eyes in her distress, so did the salt drops glitter in the eyes of David. His appetite was gone, his tears not only seasoned his meat, but became his only meat, he had no mind for other diet. Perhaps it was well for him that the heart could open the safety valves; there is a dry grief far more terrible than showery sorrows. His tears, since they were shed because God was blasphemed, were "honourable dew," "drops of holy water, such as Jehovah putteth into his bottle. While they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? Cruel taunts come naturally from coward minds. Surely they might have left the mourner alone; he could weep no more than he did—it was a supererogation of malice to pump more tears from a heart which already overflowed. Note how incessant was their jeer, and how artfully they framed it! It cut the good man to the bone to have the faithfulness of his God impugned. They had better have thrust needles into his eyes than have darted insinuations against his God. Shimei may here be alluded to who after this fashion mocked David as he fled from Absalom. He roundly asserted that David was a bloody man, and that

God was punishing him for supplanting Saul and his house; his wish was father to his thought. The wicked know that our worst misfortune would be to lose God's favour, hence their diabolical malice leads them to declare that such is the case. Glory be to God, they lie in their throats, for our God is in the heavens, aye, and in the furnace too, succouring his people.

Verse 4. When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me. When he harped upon his woes his heart melted into water and was poured out upon itself. God hidden, and foes raging, a pair of evils enough to bring down the stoutest heart! Yet why let reflections so gloomy engross us, since the result is of no value: merely to turn the soul on itself, to empty it from itself into itself is useless, how much better to pour out the heart before the Lord! The prisoner's tread wheel might sooner land him in the skies than mere inward questioning raise us nearer to consolation. For I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God. Painful reflections were awakened by the memory of past joys; he had mingled in the pious throng, their numbers had helped to give him exhilaration and to awaken holy delight, their company had been a charm to him as with them he ascended the hill of Zion. Gently proceeding with holy ease, in comely procession, with frequent strains of song, he and the people of Jehovah had marched in reverent ranks up to the shrine of sacrifice, the dear abode of peace and holiness. Far away from such goodly company the holy man pictures the sacred scene and dwells upon the details of the pious march. With the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday. The festive noise is in his ears, and the solemn dance before his eyes. Perhaps he alludes to the removal of the ark and to the glorious gatherings of the tribes on that grand national holy day and holiday. How changed his present place! For Zion, a wilderness; for the priests in white linen, soldiers in garments of war; for the song, the sneer of blasphemy; for the festivity, lamentation; for joy in the Lord, a mournful dirge over his absence.

Verse 5. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? As though he were two men, the psalmist talks to himself. His faith reasons with his fears, his hope argues with his sorrows. These present troubles, are they to last forever? The rejoicings of my foes, are they more than empty talk? My absence from the solemn feasts, is that a perpetual exile? Why this deep depression, this faithless fainting, this chicken hearted melancholy? As Trapp says, "David chides David out of the dumps; "and herein he is an example for all desponding ones. To search out the cause of our sorrow is often the best surgery for grief. Self ignorance is not bliss; in this case it is misery. The mist of ignorance magnifies the causes of our alarm; a clearer view will make monsters dwindle into trifles. Why art thou disquieted within me? Why is my quiet gone? If I cannot keep a public Sabbath, yet wherefore do I deny my soul her indoor Sabbath? Why am I agitated like a troubled sea, and why do my thoughts make a noise like a tumultuous multitude? The causes are not enough to justify such utter yielding to despondency. Up, my heart! What aileth thee? Play the man, and thy castings down shall turn to up liftings, and thy disquietudes to calm. Hope thou in God. If every evil be let loose from Pandora's box, yet is there hope at the bottom. This is the grace that swims, though the waves roar and be troubled. God is unchangeable, and therefore his grace is the ground for unshaken hope. If everything be dark, yet the day will come, and meanwhile hope carries stars in her eyes; her lamps are not dependent on oil from without, her light is fed by secret visitations of God, which sustain the spirit. For I shall yet praise him. Yet will my sighs give place to songs, my mournful ditties shall be exchanged for triumphal paeans. A loss of the present sense of God's love is not a loss of that love itself; the jewel is there, though it gleams not on our breast; hope knows her title good when she cannot read it clear; she expects the promised boon though present providence stands before her with empty hands. For I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. Salvations come from the propitious face of God, and he will yet lift up his countenance upon us. Note well that the main hope and chief desire of David rest in the

smile of God. His face is what he seeks and hopes to see, and this will recover his low spirits, this will put to scorn his laughing enemies, this will restore to him all the joys of those holy and happy days around which memory lingers. This is grand cheer. This verse, like the singing of Paul and Silas, looses chains and shakes prison walls. He who can use such heroic language in his gloomy hours will surely conquer. In the garden of hope grow the laurels for future victories, the roses of coming joy, the lilies of approaching peace.

Verse 6. O my God, my soul is cast down within me. Here the song begins again upon the bass. So sweet an ending deserves that for the sake of a second hopeful close the Psalm should even begin again. Perhaps the psalmist's dejection continued, the spasm of despondency returned; well, then, he will down with his harp again, and try again its power upon himself, as in his younger days, he saw its influence upon Saul when the evil spirit came upon him. With God the song begins a second time more nearly than at first. The singer was also a little more tranquil. Outward expression of desire was gone; there was no visible panting; the sorrow was not all restrained within doors. Within or upon himself he was cast down; and, verily, it may well be so, while our thoughts look more within than upward. If self were to furnish comfort, we should have but poor provender. There is no solid foundation for comfort in such fickle frames as our heart is subject to. It is well to tell the Lord how we feel, and the more plain the confession the better: David talks like a sick child to its mother, and we should learn to imitate him. Therefore will I remember thee. It is well to fly to our God. Here is terra firma. Blessed down casting which drives us to so sure a rock of refuge as thee, O Lord! From the hill Mizar. He recalls his seasons of choice communion by the river and among the hills, and especially that dearest hour upon the little hill, where love spake her sweetest language and revealed her nearest fellowship. It is great wisdom to store up in memory our choice occasions of converse with heaven; we may want them another day, when the Lord is slow in bringing back his banished ones, and our soul is aching with fear. "His love in times past" has been a precious cordial to many a fainting one; like soft breath it has fanned the smoking flax into a flame, and bound up the bruised reed. Oh, never to be forgotten valley of Achor, thou art a door of hope! Fair days, now gone, ye have left a light behind you which cheers our present gloom. Or does David mean that even where he was he would bethink him of his God; does he declare that, forgetful of time and place, he would count Jordan as sacred as Siloa, Hermon as holy as Zion, and even Mizar, that insignificant rising ground as glorious as the mountains which are round about Jerusalem! Oh! it is a heavenly heart which can sing

"To me remains nor place nor time;
my country is in every clime;
I can be calm and free from care
On any shore, since God is there."

"Could I be cast where thou art not,
That were indeed a dreadful lot,
But regions none remote I call,
Secure of finding God in all."

Verse 7. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts. Thy severe dealings with me seem to excite all creation to attack me; heaven, and earth, and hell, call to each other, stirring each other up in dreadful conspiracy against my peace. As in a waterspout, the deeps above and below clasp hands, so it seemed to David that heaven and earth united to create a tempest around him. His woes

were incessant and overwhelming. Billow followed billow, one sea echoed the roaring of another; bodily pain aroused mental fear, Satanic suggestions chimed in with mistrustful forebodings, outward tribulation thundered in awful harmony with inward anguish: his soul seemed drowned as in a universal deluge of trouble, over whose waves the providence of the Lord moved as a watery pillar, in dreadful majesty inspiring the utmost terror. As for the afflicted one he was like a lonely bark around which the fury of a storm is bursting, or a mariner floating on a mast, almost every moment submerged. All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. David thought that every trouble in the world had met in him, but he exaggerated, for all the breaking waves of Jehovah have passed over none but the Lord Jesus; there are griefs to which he makes his children strangers for his love's sake. Sorrow naturally states its case forcibly; the mercy is that the Lord after all hath not dealt with us according to our fears. Yet what a plight to be in! Atlantic rollers sweeping in ceaseless succession over one's head, waterspouts coming nearer and nearer, and all the ocean in uproar around the weary swimmer; most of the heirs of heaven can realise the description, for they have experienced the like. This is a deep experience unknown to babes in grace, but common enough to such as do business on great waters of affliction: to such it is some comfort to remember that the waves and billows are the Lord's, "thy waves and thy billows," says David, they are all sent, and directed by him, and achieve his designs, and the child of God knowing this, is the more resigned.

Verse 8. Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime. Come what may there shall be "a certain secret something" to sweeten all. Lovingkindness is a noble life belt in a rough sea. The day may darken into a strange and untimely midnight, but the love of God ordained of old to be the portion of the elect, shall be by sovereign decree meted out to them. No day shall ever dawn on an heir of grace and find him altogether forsaken of his Lord: the Lord reigneth, and as a sovereign he will with authority command mercy to be reserved for his chosen. And in the night. Both divisions of the day shall be illuminated with special love, and no stress of trial shall prevent it. Our God is God of the nights as well as the days; none shall find his Israel unprotected, be the hour what it may. His song shall be with me. Songs of praise for blessings received shall cheer the gloom of night. No music sweeter than this. The belief that we shall yet glorify the Lord for mercy given in extremity is a delightful stay to the soul. Affliction may put out our candle, but if it cannot silence our song we will soon light the candle again. And my prayer unto the God of my life. Prayer is yoked with praise. He who is the living God, is the God of our life, from him we derive it, with him in prayer and praise we spend it, to him we devote it, in him we shall perfect it. To be assured that our sighs and songs shall both have free access to our glorious Lord is to have reason for hope in the most deplorable condition.

Verse 9. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? Faith is allowed to enquire of her God the causes of his displeasure, and she is even permitted to expostulate with him and put him in mind of his promises, and ask why apparently they are not fulfilled. If the Lord be indeed our refuge, when we find no refuge, it is time to be raising the question, "Why is this?" Yet we must not let go our hold, the Lord must be my rock still; we must keep to him as our alone confidence, and never forego our interest in him. Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? He who condescends to be pleaded with by Abraham, his friend, allows us to put to him the question that we may search out the causes of his severity towards us. Surely he can have no pleasure in seeing the faces of his servants stained and squalid with their tears; he can find no content in the harshness with which their foes assail them. He can never take pleasure in the tyranny with which Satan vexes them. Why then does he leave them to be mocked by his enemies and theirs? How can the strong God, who is as firm and abiding as a rock, be also as hard and unmoved as a rock towards those who trust

in him? Such enquiries humbly pressed often afford relief to the soul. To know the reason for sorrow is in part to know how to escape it, or at least to endure it. Want of attentive consideration often makes adversity appear to be more mysterious and hopeless than it really is. It is a pitiable thing for any man to have a limb amputated, but when we know that the operation was needful to save life, we are glad to hear that it has been successfully performed; even thus as trial unfolds, the design of the Lord sending it becomes far more easy to bear.

Verse 10. As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me. Cruel mockeries cut deeper than the flesh, they reach the soul as though a rapier were introduced between the ribs to prick the heart. If reproaches kill not, yet they are killing, the pain caused is excruciating. The tongue cuts to the bone, and its wounds are hard to cure. While they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? This is the most unkind cut of all, reflecting as it does both upon the Lord's faithfulness and his servant's character. Such was the malice of David's foes, that having thought of the cruel question, they said it, said it daily, repeated it to him, and that for a length, of time; surely the continual yapping of these curs at his heel was enough to madden him, and perhaps would have done so had he not resorted to prayer and made the persecutions of his enemies a plea with his Lord.

Verse 11. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? In the rehearsal of his sorrow, he finds after all no sufficient ground for being disquieted. Looked in the face, his fears were not so overwhelming as they seemed when shrouded in obscurity. Hope thou in God. Let the anchor still keep its hold. God is faithful, God is love, therefore there is room and reason for hope. Who is the health of my countenance, and my God. This is the same hopeful expression as that contained in verse five, but the addition of and my God shows that the writer was growing in confidence, and was able defiantly to reply to the question, "Where is thy God?" Here, even here, he is, ready to deliver me. I am not ashamed to own him amid your sneers and taunts, for he will rescue me out of your hands. Thus faith closes the struggle, a victor in fact by anticipation, and in heart by firm reliance. The saddest countenance shall yet be made to shine, if there be a taking of God at his word and an expectation of his salvation.

"For yet I know I shall him praise
Who graciously to me,
The health is of my countenance,
Yea, mine own God is he."

Psalm 43

Verse 1. Judge me, O God. Others are unable to understand my motives, and unwilling to give me a just verdict. My heart is clear as to intent and therefore I bring my case before thee, content that thou wilt impartially weigh my character, and right my wrongs. If thou wilt judge, thy acceptance of my conduct will be enough for me; I can laugh at human misrepresentation if my conscience knows that thou art on my side; thou art the only one I care for; and besides, thy verdict will not sleep, but thou wilt see practical justice done to thy slandered servant. And plead my cause against an ungodly nation. One such advocate as the Lord will more than suffice to answer a nation of brawling accusers. When people are ungodly, no wonder that they are unjust; those who are not true to God himself cannot be expected to deal rightly with his people. Hating the King they will not love his subjects. Popular opinion weighs with many, but divine opinion is far more weighty with the gracious few. One good word from God outweighs ten thousand railing speeches of men. He bears a brazen shield

before him whose reliance in all things is upon his God; the arrows of calumny fall harmlessly from such a buckler. O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man. Deceit and injustice are boon companions: he who fawns will not fear to slander. From two such devils none can deliver us but God. His wisdom can outwit the craft of the vilest serpent, and his power can overmatch the most raging lion. Whether this was Doeg or Ahithophel is small matter, such double distilled villains are plentiful, and the only way of dealing with them is to refer the matter to the righteous Judge of all; if we try to fight them with their own weapons, we shall suffer more serious injury from ourselves than from them. O child of God, leave these thine enemies in better hands, remembering that vengeance belongeth not to thee, but to thy Lord. Turn to him in prayer, crying, "O deliver me, "and ere long you shall publish abroad the remembrance of his salvation.

Verse 2. For. Here is argument, which is the very sinew of prayer. If we reasoned more with the Lord we should have more victories in supplication. Thou art the God of my strength. All my strength belongs to thee—I will not, therefore, use it on my own behalf against my personal foes. All my strength comes from thee, I therefore seek help from thee, who art able to bestow it. All my strength is in thee, I leave therefore this task of combating my foes entirely in thy hands. Faith which leaves such things alone is wise faith. Note the assurance of David, thou art, not I hope and trust so, but I know it is so; we shall find confidence to be our consolation. Why dost thou cast me off? Why am I treated as if thou didst loathe me? Am I become an offence unto thee? There are many reasons why the Lord might cast us off, but no reason shall prevail to make him do so. He hath not cast off his people, though he for awhile treats them as cast offs. Learn from this question that it is well to enquire into dark providences, but we must enquire of God, not of our own fears. He who is the author of a mysterious trial can best expound it to us.

"Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain."

Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? Why do I wander hither and thither like a restless spirit? Why wear I the weeds of sorrow on my body, and the lines of grief on my face? Oppression makes a wise man mad; why, Lord, am I called to endure so much of it for so long a time? Here again is a useful question, addressed to the right quarter. The answer will often be because we are saints, and must be made like our Head, and because such sorrow is chastening to the spirit, and yieldeth comfortable fruit. We are not to cross question the Lord in peevishness, but we may ask of him in humility; God help us to observe the distinction so as not to sin through stress of sorrow.

Verse 3. O send out thy light and thy truth. The joy of thy presence and the faithfulness of thy heart; let both of these be manifest to me. Reveal my true character by thy light, and reward me according to thy truthful promise. As the sun darts forth his beams, so does the Lord send forth his favour and his faithfulness towards all his people; and as all nature rejoices in the sunshine, even so the saints triumph in the manifestation of the love and fidelity of their God, which, like the golden sunbeam, lights up even the darkest surroundings with delightful splendour. Let them lead me. Be these my stars to guide me to my rest. Be these my Alpine guides to conduct me over mountains and precipices to the abodes of grace. Let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. First in thy mercy bring me to thine earthly courts, and end my weary exile, and then in due time admit me to thy

celestial palace above. We seek not light to sin by, nor truth to be exalted by it, but that they may become our practical guides to the nearest communion with God: only such light and truth as are sent us from God will do this, common light is not strong enough to show the road to heaven, nor will mere moral or physical truths assist to the holy hill; but the light of the Holy Spirit, and the truth as it is in Jesus, these are elevating, sanctifying, perfecting; and hence their virtue in leading us to the glorious presence of God. It is beautiful to observe how David's longing to be away from the oppression of man always leads him to sigh more intensely for communion with God.

Verse 4. Then will I go unto the altar of God. If David might but be favoured with such a deliverance as would permit his return, it would not be his own house or heritage which would be his first resort, but to the altar of God his willing feet should conduct him. His whole heart would go as sacrifice to the altar, he himself counting it his greatest happiness to be permitted to lie as a burnt offering wholly dedicated to the Lord. With what exultation should believers draw near unto Christ, who is the antitype of the altar! clearer light should give greater intensity of desire. Unto God my exceeding joy. It was not the altar as such that the psalmist cared for, he was no believer in the heathenism of ritualism: his soul desired spiritual fellowship, fellowship with God himself in very deed. What are all the rites of worship unless the Lord be in them; what, indeed, but empty shells and dry husks? Note the holy rapture with which David regards his Lord! He is not his joy alone, but his exceeding joy; not the fountain of joy, the giver of joy, or the maintainer of joy, but that joy itself. The margin hath it, "The gladness of my joy," i.e., the soul, the essence, the very bowels of my joy. To draw near to God, who is such a joy to us, may well be the object of our hungering and thirsting. Yea, upon the harp will I praise thee. His best music for his best love. When God fills us with joy we ought ever to pour it out at his feet in praise, and all the skill and talent we have should be laid under contribution to increase the divine revenue of glory. O God, my God. How he dwells upon the name which he loves so well! He already harps on it as though his harp music had begun. What sweeter sounds can music know than these four words? To have God in possession, and to know it by faith, is the heart's heaven—a fulness of bliss lies therein.

Verse 5. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? If God be thine, why this dejection? If he uplifts thee, why art thou so near the ground? The dew of love is falling, O withering heart, revive. And why art thou disquieted within me? What cause is there to break the repose of thy heart? Wherefore indulge unreasonable sorrows, which benefit no one, fret thyself, and dishonour thy God? Why overburden thyself with forebodings? Hope in God, or wait for God. There is need of patience, but there is ground for hope. The Lord cannot but avenge his own elect. The heavenly Father will not stand by and see his children trampled on for ever; as surely as the sun is in the heavens, light must arise for the people of God, though for awhile they may walk in darkness. Why, then, should we not be encouraged, and lift up our head with comfortable hope? For I shall yet praise him. Times of complaint will soon end, and seasons of praise will begin. Come, my heart, look out of the window, borrow the telescopic glass, forecast a little, and sweeten thy chamber with sprigs of the sweet herb of hope. Who is the health of my countenance, and my God. My God will clear the furrows from my brow, and the tear marks from my cheek; therefore will I lift up my head and smile in the face of the storm. The Psalm has a blessed ending, such as we would fain imitate when death puts an end to our mortal existence.

Psalm 44

Verse 1. We have heard with our ears, O God. Thy mighty acts have been the subjects of common

conversation; not alone in books have we read thy famous deeds, but in the ordinary talk of the people we have heard of them. Among the godly Israelites the biography of their nation was preserved by oral tradition, with great diligence and accuracy. This mode of preserving and transmitting history has its disadvantages, but it certainly produces a more vivid impression on the mind than any other; to hear with the ears affects us more sensitively than to read with the eyes; we ought to note this, and seize every possible opportunity of telling abroad the gospel of our Lord Jesus viva voce, since this is the most telling mode of communication. The expression, "heard with our ears," may denote the pleasure with which they listened, the intensity of their interest, the personality of their hearing, and the lively remembrance they had of the romantic and soul stirring narrative. Too many have ears but hear not; happy are they who, having ears, have learned to hear. Our fathers have told us. They could not have had better informants. Schoolmasters are well enough, but godly fathers are, both by the order of nature and grace, the best instructors of their sons, nor can they delegate the sacred duty. It is to be feared that many children of professors could plead very little before God of what their fathers have told them. When fathers are tongue tied religiously with their offspring, need they wonder if their children's hearts remain sin tied? Just as in all free nations men delight to gather around the hearth, and tell the deeds of valour of their sires "in the brave days of old," so the people of God under the old dispensation made their families cheerful around the table, be rehearsing the wondrous doings of the Lord their God. Religious conversation need not be dull, and indeed it could not be if, as in this case, it dealt more with facts and less with opinions. What work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. They began with what their own eyes had witnessed, and then passed on to what were the traditions of their youth. Note that the main point of the history transmitted from father to son was the work of God; this is the core of history, and therefore no man can write history aright who is a stranger to the Lord's work. It is delightful to see the footprints of the Lord on the sea of changing events, to behold him riding on the whirlwind of war, pestilence, and famine, and above all to see his unchanging care for his chosen people. Those who are taught to see God in history have learned a good lesson from their fathers, and no son of believing parents should be left in ignorance of so holy an art. A nation tutored as Israel was in a history so marvellous as their own, always had an available argument in pleading with God for aid in trouble, since he who never changes gives in every deed of grace a pledge of mercy yet to come. The traditions of our past experience are powerful pleas for present help.

Verse 2. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand. The destruction of the Canaanites from the promised land is the work here brought to remembrance. A people numerous, warlike, gigantic and courageous, firmly established and strongly fortified, were driven out by a far feebler nation, because the Lord was against them in the fight. It is clear from Scripture that God sent a plague (so that the land ate up the inhabitants thereof), and also a visitation of hornets against the Canaanites, and by other means dispirited them, so that the easy victories of Joshua were but the results of God's having worked beforehand against the idolatrous nation. And plantedst them. The tribes of Israel were planted in the places formerly occupied by the heathen. Hivites and Jebusites were chased from their cities to make room for Ephraim and Judah. The Great Wonder worker tore up by the roots the oaks of Bashan, that he might plant instead thereof his own chosen "vineyard of red wine." How thou didst afflict the people. With judgments and plagues the condemned nations were harassed, by fire and sword they were hunted to the death, till they were all expelled, and the enemies of Israel were banished far away. And cast them out. This most probably refers to Israel and should be read, "caused them to increase." He who troubled his enemies smiled on his friends; he meted out vengeance to the ungodly nations, but he reserved of his mercy for the chosen tribes. How fair is mercy when she stands by the side of justice! Bright beams the star of grace amid the night of wrath!

It is a solemn thought that the greatness of divine love has its counterpart in the greatness of his indignation. The weight of mercy bestowed on Israel is balanced by the tremendous vengeance which swept the thousands of Amorites and Hittites down to hell with the edge of the sword. Hell is as deep as heaven is high, and the flame of Tophet is as everlasting as the blaze of the celestial glory. God's might, as shown in deeds both of mercy and justice, should be called to mind in troublous times as a stay to our fainting faith.

Verse 3. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword. Behold how the Lord alone was exalted in bringing his people to the land which floweth with milk and honey! He, in his distinguishing grace, had put a difference between Canaan and Israel, and therefore, by his own effectual power, he wrought for his chosen and against their adversaries. The tribes fought for their allotments, but their success was wholly due to the Lord who wrought with them. The warriors of Israel were not inactive, but their valour was secondary to that mysterious, divine working by which Jericho's walls fell down, and the hearts of the heathen failed them for fear. The efforts of all the men at arms were employed, but as these would have been futile without divine succour, all the honour is ascribed unto the Lord. The passage may be viewed as a beautiful parable of the work of salvation; men are not saved without prayer, repentance, etc., but none of those save a man, salvation is altogether of the Lord. Canaan was not conquered without the armies of Israel, but equally true is it that it was not conquered by them; the Lord was the conqueror, and the people were but instruments in his hands. Neither did their own arm save them. They could not ascribe their memorable victories to themselves; he who made sun and moon stand still for them was worthy of all their praise. A negative is put both upon their weapons and themselves as if to show us how ready men are to ascribe success to second causes. But thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance. The divine hand actively fought for them, the divine arm powerfully sustained them with more than human energy, and the divine smile inspired them with dauntless courage. Who could not win with such triple help, though earth, death, and hell should rise in war against him? What mattered the tallness of the sons of Anak, or the terror of their chariots of iron, they were as nothing when Jehovah arose for the avenging of Israel. Because thou hadst a favour unto them. Here is the fountain from whence every stream of mercy flows. The Lord's delight in his people, his peculiar affection, his distinguishing regard—this is the mainspring which moves every wheel of a gracious providence. Israel was a chosen nation, hence their victories and the scattering of their foes; believers are an elect people, hence their spiritual blessings and conquests. There was nothing in the people themselves to secure them success, the Lord's favour alone did it, and it is ever so in our case, our hope of final glory must not rest on anything in ourselves, but on the free and sovereign favour of the Lord of Hosts.

Verse 4. Thou art my King, O God. Knowing right well thy power and grace my heart is glad to own thee for her sovereign prince. Who among the mighty are so illustrious as thou art? To whom, then, should I yield my homage or turn for aid? God of my fathers in the olden time, thou art my soul's monarch and liege Lord. Command deliverances for Jacob. To whom should a people look but to their king? he it is who, by virtue of his office, fights their battles for them. In the case of our King, how easy it is for him to scatter all our foes! O Lord, the King of kings, with what ease canst thou rescue thy people; a word of thine can do it, give but the command and thy persecuted people shall be free. Jacob's long life was crowded with trials and deliverances, and his descendants are here called by his name, as if to typify the similarity of their experience to that of their great forefather. He who would win the blessings of Israel must share the sorrows of Jacob. This verse contains a personal declaration and an intercessory prayer; those can pray best who make most sure of their personal interest in God, and those who have the fullest assurance that the Lord is their God should be the

foremost to plead for the rest of the tried family of the faithful.

Verse 5. Through thee will we push down our enemies. The fight was very close, bows were of no avail, and swords failed to be of service, it came to daggers drawing, and hand to hand wrestling, pushing and tugging. Jacob's God was renewing in the seed of Jacob their father's wrestling. And how fared it with faith then? Could she stand foot to foot with her foe and hold her own? Yea, verily, she came forth victorious from the encounter, for she is great at a close push, and overthrows all her adversaries, the Lord being her helper.

Through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. The Lord's name served instead of weapons, and enabled those who used it to leap on their foes and crush them with jubilant valour. In union and communion with God, saints work wonders; if God be for us, who can be against us? Mark well that all the conquests of these believers are said to be "through thee, ""through thy name:" never let us forget this, lest going a warfare at our own charges, we fail most ignominiously. Let us not, however, fall into the equally dangerous sin of distrust, for the Lord can make the weakest of us equal to any emergency. Though today we are timid and defenceless as sheep, he can by his power make us strong as the firstling of his bullock, and cause us to push as with the horns of unicorns, until those who rose up against us shall be so crushed and battered as never to rise again. Those who of themselves can scarcely keep their feet, but like little babes totter and fall, are by divine assistance made to overthrow their foes, and set their feet upon their necks. Read Christian's fight with Apollyon, and see how

"The man so bravely played the man
He made the fiend to fly."

Verse 6. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. Thy people Israel, under thy guidance, shouldered out the heathen, and gained their land, not by skill of weapons or prowess of arms, but by thy power alone; therefore will we renounce for ever all reliance upon outward confidences, of which other men make such boast, and we will cast ourselves upon the omnipotence of our God. Bows having been newly introduced by king Saul, were regarded as very formidable weapons in the early history of Israel, but they are here laid aside together with the all conquering sword, in order that there may be room for faith in the living God. This verse, in the first person singular, may serve as the confession of faith of every believer renouncing his own righteousness and strength, and looking alone to the Lord Jesus. O for grace to stand to this self renunciation, for alas! our proud nature is all too apt to fix its trust on the puffed up and supposititious power of the creature. Arm of flesh, how dare I trust thee? How dare I bring upon myself the curse of those who rely upon man?

Verse 7. But thou hast saved us from our enemies. In ages past all our rescues have been due to thee, O God. Never hast thou failed us. Out of every danger thou has brought us. And hast put them to shame that hated us. With the back of thy saving hand thou hast given them a cuff which has made them hide their faces; thou hast defeated them in such a manner as to make them ashamed of themselves to be overthrown by such puny adversaries as they thought the Israelites to be. The double action of God in blessing his people and confounding his enemies is evermore to be observed; Pharaoh is drowned, while Israel passes through the sea; Amalek is smitten, while the tribes rejoice; the heathen are chased from their abodes, while the sons of Jacob rest beneath their vine and fig tree.

Verse 8. In God we boast all the day long. We have abundant reason for doing so while we recount his mighty acts. What blessed boasting is this! it is the only sort of boasting that is bearable. All other manna bred worms and stank except that which was laid up before the Lord, and all other boasting is loathsome save this glorying in the Lord, which is laudable and pleasing. And praise thy name for ever. Praise should be perpetual. If there were no new acts of love, yet ought the Lord to be praised for what he has done for his people. High let the song be lifted up as we bring to remembrance the eternal love which chose us, predestinated us to be sons, redeemed us with a price, and then enriched us with all the fulness of God. Selah. A pause comes in fitly here, when we are about to descend from the highest to the lowest key. No longer are we to hear Miriam's timbrel, but rather Rachel's weeping.

Verse 9. But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame. Here the patriot bard begins to contrast the past glories of the nation's history with its present sadness and distress; which he does not ascribe to the death of some human champion, or to the accidents of war, but solely and alone to the withdrawal of Israel's God. It seemed to the mourner that Jehovah had grown weary of his people and put them away in abhorrence, as men lay aside leprous garments, loathing the sight of them. To show his displeasure he had made his people to be ridiculed by the heathen, whose easy victories over their largest armies covered Israel with disgrace. Alas! for a church and people when the Lord in the active energy of his Spirit withdraws from them, they want no greater shame or sorrow. He will not cast away his people finally and totally, but many a church has been left to defeat and disgrace on account of sin, and therefore all churches should be exceedingly watchful lest the like should happen to themselves. Poverty and distress bring no shame on a people, but the Lord's absence takes from a church everything which can exalt and ennoble. And goest not forth with our armies. If the Lord be not the leader, of what avail are strong battalions? Vain are the combined efforts of the most zealous workers if God's arm be not revealed. May none of us in our churches have to mourn over the ministry, the Sabbath school, the missionary work, the visiting, the street preaching, left to be carried out without the divine aid. If our great ally will not go with us our defeat is inevitable.

Verse 10. Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy. The humiliating consciousness that the Lord has left them soon makes men cowards. Flight closes the fight of those who have not the Lord in the van. And they which hate us spoil for themselves. After defeat and retreat, comes spoliation. The poor, vanquished nation paid a terrible penalty for being overcome; plunder and murder desolated the conquered land, and the invaders loaded themselves with every precious thing which they could carry away. In spiritual experience we know what it is to be despoiled by our enemies; doubts and fears rob us of our comforts, and terrible forebodings spoil us of our hopes; and all because the Lord, for wise purposes, sees fit to leave us to ourselves. Alas! for the deserted soul; no calamity can equal the sorrow of being left of God, though it be but for a small moment.

Verse 11. Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat. As sheep are slaughtered for food, so were the people slain in flocks, with ease, and frequency. Not with dignity of sacrifice, but with the cruelty of the shambles, were they put to death. God appeared to give them up like sheep allotted to the butcher, to abandon them as the hireling abandons the flock to wolves. The complaint is bitterly eloquent. And hast scattered us among the heathen. Many were carried into captivity, far off from the public worship of the temple of God, to pine as exiles among idolaters. All this is ascribed to the Lord, as being allowed by him, and even appointed by his decree. It is well to trace the hand of God in our sorrows, for it is surely there.

Verse 12. Thou sellest thy people for nought. As men sell merchandise to any one who cares to have it, so the Lord seemed to hand over his people to any nation who might choose to make war upon them. Meanwhile no good result was perceptible from all the miseries of Israel; so far as the psalmist could discover, the Lord's name received no honour from the sorrows of his people; they were given away to their foes as if they were so little valued as not to be worth the ordinary price of slaves, and the Lord did not care to gain by them so long as they did but suffer. The woe expressed in this line is as vinegar mingled with gall: the expression is worthy of the weeping prophet. And dost not increase thy wealth by their price. If Jehovah had been glorified by all this wretchedness it could have been borne patiently, but it was the reverse; the Lord's name had, through the nation's calamities, been despised by the insulting heathen, who counted the overthrow of Israel to be the defeat of Jehovah himself. It always lightens a believer's trouble when he can see that God's great name will be honoured thereby, but it is a grievous aggravation of misery when we appear to be tortured in vain. For our comfort let us rest satisfied that in reality the Lord is glorified, and when no revenue of glory is manifestly rendered to him, he none the less accomplishes his own secret purposes, of which the grand result will be revealed in due time. We do not suffer for nought, nor are our griefs without result.

Verse 13. Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours. Scorn is always an intensely bitter ingredient in the cup of the oppressed. The taunts and jeers of the victors pain the vanquished almost as much as their swords and spears. It was a mystery indeed that God should suffer his royal nation, his peculiar people, to be taunted by all who dwelt near them. A scorn and a derision to them that are round about us. The down trodden people had become a common jest; "as base as Israel" cried the cruel tongue of the tyrant: so ordinary had the scorn become that the neighbouring nations, though perhaps equally oppressed, borrowed the language of the conquerors, and joined in the common mockery. To be a derision to both strong and weak, superiors, equals, and inferiors, is hard to bear. The tooth of scoffing bites to the bone. The psalmist sets forth the brutality of the enemy in many words, in order to move the pity of the Lord, to whose just anger he traced all the sorrows of his people: he used the very best of arguments, for the sufferings of his chosen touch the heart of God far more readily than any other reasonings. Blessed be his name, our great Advocate above knows how to avail himself of this powerful plea, and if we are at this hour enduring reproach for truth's sake, he will urge it before the eternal throne; and shall not God avenge his own elect? A father will not long endure to see his children despitefully entreated; he may put up with it for a little, but his love will speedily arouse his anger, and then it will fare ill with the persecutor and reviler.

Verse 14. Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people. The lamentation is here repeated. They had sunk so low that none did them reverence, but universally and publicly they were treated as infamous and despicable. Those who reviled others dragged in Israel's name by the way as a garnish to their insults, and if perchance they saw one of the seed of Jacob in the street they used lewd gestures to annoy him. Those whose heads were emptiest wagged them at the separated people. They were the common butts of every fool's arrow. Such has been the lot of the righteous in ages past, such is their portion in a measure now, such may be yet again their heritage in the worst sense. The world knows not its nobility, it has no eye for true excellence: it found a cross for the Master, and cannot be expected to award crowns to his disciples.

Verse 15. My confusion is continually before me. The poet makes himself the representative of his nation, and declares his own constant distress of soul. He is a man of ill blood who is unconcerned for the sorrows of the church of which he is a member, or the nation of which he is a citizen; the better

the heart the greater its sympathy. And the shame of my face hath covered me. One constant blush, like a crimson mantle, covered him both before God and man; he felt before God that the divine desertion was well deserved, and before man, that he and his people were despicable indeed now that heavenly help was gone. It is well for a nation when there still exist in it men who lay to heart its sin and shame. God will have pity on his chastened ones, and it is a pledge thereof when he sends us choice ministers, men of tenderness, who make the people's case their own.

Verse 16. For the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth. It seems that from mocking the people of God, the adversaries advanced to reviling God himself, they proceeded from persecution to the sin which is next of kin, namely blasphemy. By reason of the enemy and avenger. The enemy boasted of avenging the defeats of their forefathers; they took revenge for the ancient victories of Israel, by insulting over the now fallen people. Here was a sad plight for a nation to be placed in, but it was by no means a hopeless case, for the Lord who brought all this evil upon them could with equal ease release them from it. So long as Israel looked alone to her God, and not to her own arm, no foe could retain her beneath his foot; she must arise, for God was on her side.

Verse 17. All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee. Here the psalmist urges that Israel had not turned away from her allegiance to Jehovah. When in the midst of many griefs we can still cling to God in loving obedience, it must be well with us. True fidelity can endure rough usage. Those who follow God for what they get, will leave him when persecution is stirred up, but not so the sincere believer; he will not forget his God, even though the worst come to the worst. Neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. No idol was set up, the ordained worship was not relinquished, God was still nationally acknowledged, and therefore the psalmist is more earnest that the Lord should interpose. This and the succeeding verses are suitable for the lips of martyrs, indeed the entire psalm might be called the martyr's complaint. Not for sin but for righteousness did the saints suffer, not for falsehood but for truth, not for forsaking the Lord, but for following hard after him. Sufferings of such a sort may be very terrible, but they are exceedingly honourable, and the comforts of the Lord shall sustain those who are accounted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake.

Verse 18. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way. Heart and life were agreed, and both were true to the Lord's way. Neither within nor without had the godly sufferers offended; they were not absolutely perfect, but they were sincerely free from all wilful transgression. It was a healthy sign for the nation that her prophet poet could testify to her uprightness before God, both in heart and act; far oftener the case would have worn quite another colour, for the tribes were all too apt to set up other gods and forsake the rock of their salvation.

Verse 19. Though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons. Though utterly crushed and rendered desolate and driven as it were to associate with creatures such as jackals, owls, serpents, which haunt deserted ruins, yet Israel remained faithful. To be true to a smiting God, even when the blows lay our joys in ruinous heaps, is to be such as the Lord delighteth in. Better to be broken by God than from God. Better to be in the place of dragons than of deceivers. And covered us with the shadow of death. The language is very strong. The nation is described as completely enveloped in the dense darkness of despair and death, covered up as though confined in hopelessness. Yet the claim is made that they still remained mindful of their God, and a glorious plea it is. Better death than false of faith. Those who are true to God shall never find him false to them.

Verse 20. An appeal is now made to the omniscience of God; he is himself called in to bear witness

that Israel had not set up another God. If we have forgotten the name of our God. This would be the first step in apostasy; men first forget the true, and then adore the false. Or stretched out our hands to a strange god. Stretching out the hands was the symbol of adoration or of entreaty in prayer; this they had not offered to any of the idols of the heathens.

Verse 21. Shall not God search this out? Could such idolatry be concealed from him? Would he not with holy indignation have detected unfaithfulness to itself, even had it been hidden in the heart and unrevealed in the life? For he knoweth the secrets of the heart. He is acquainted with the inner workings of the mind, and therefore this could not have escaped him. Not the heart only which is secret, but the secrets of the heart, which are secrets of the most secret thing, are as open to God as a book to a reader. The reasoning is that the Lord himself knew the people to be sincerely his followers, and therefore was not visiting them for sin; hence, then, affliction evidently came from quite another cause.

Verse 22. Yea, i.e., assuredly, certainly, for thy sake, not for our offences, but for obeying thee; the trials of these suppliants came upon them because they were loyal to their God. Are we killed all the day long. Persecution never ceased to hound them to the death, they had no respite and found no door of escape; and all in God's behalf, because they would not forsake their covenant God and King. We are counted as sheep for the slaughter; as if we were only meant to be killed, and made on purpose to be victims; as if it were as easy and as innocent a thing to slay us as to slaughter sheep. In this and following verses we clearly hear the martyr's cry. From Piedmont and Smithfield, from St. Bartholomew's massacre and the dragoonades of Claverhouse, this appeal goes up to heaven, while the souls under the altar continue their solemn cry for vengeance. Not long shall the church plead in this fashion, her shame shall be recompensed, her triumph shall dawn.

Verse 23. Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord. God sleepeth not, but the psalmist puts it so, as if on no other theory he could explain the divine inaction. He would fain see the great Judge ending oppression and giving peace to the holy, therefore does he cry "Awake; "he cannot understand why the reign of tyranny and the oppression of virtue are permitted, and therefore he enquires "Why sleepest thou?" Arise. This is all thou needest to do, one move of thine will save us. Cast us not off for ever. Long enough hast thou deserted us; the terrible effects of thine absence are destroying us; end thou our calamities, and let thine anger be appeased. In persecuting times men are apt to cry, Where is the God of Israel? At the thought of what the saints have endured from their haughty enemies, we join our voices in the great martyr cry and sing with the bard of Paradise:

"Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even those who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep."

Verse 24. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression? Not petulantly, but piteously and inquiringly, we may question the Lord when his dealings are mysterious. We are permitted to order our case with arguments, and plead the right before the face of the august Majesty. Why, Lord, dost thou become oblivious of thy children's woes? This question is far more easily asked than answered; it is hard, indeed, in the midst of persecution to see the reason why we

are left to suffer so severely.

Verse 25. For our soul is bowed down to the dust. Our heart is low as low can be, as low as the dust beneath the soles of men's feet. When the heart sinks, the man is down indeed. Heart sorrow is the very heart of sorrow. Our belly cleaveth unto the earth. The man is prone upon the earth, and he is not only down, but fastened down on the earth and glued to it. It is misery, indeed, when the heart cannot escape from itself, is shut up in its own dejection, and bound with the cords of despondency. God's saints may be thus abject, they may be not only in the dust, but on the dunghill with Job and Lazarus, but their day cometh, and their tide will turn, and they shall have a brave summer after their bitter winter.

Verse 26. Arise for our help. A short, but sweet and comprehensive prayer, much to the point, clear, simple, urgent, as all prayers should be. And redeem us for thy mercies' sake. Here is the final plea. The favour is redemption, the plea is mercy; and this, too, in the case of faithful sufferers who had not forgotten their God. Mercy is always a safe plea, and never will any man find a better.

"Were I a martyr at the stake.
I would plead my Saviour's name,
Intreat a pardon for his sake,
And urge no other claim."

Here ends this memorable Psalm, but in heaven its power ends not, but brings down deliverance for the tried people of God.

Psalm 45

Verse 1. My heart. There is no writing like that dictated by the heart. Heartless hymns are insults to heaven. Is inditing a good matter. A good heart will only be content with good thoughts. Where the fountain is good good streams will flow forth. The learned tell us that the word may be read overflows, or as others, boils or bubbles up, denoting the warmth of the writer's love, the fulness of his heart, and the consequent richness and glow of his utterance, as though it were the ebullition of his inmost soul, when most full of affection. We have here no single cold expression; the writer is not one who frigidly studies the elegancies and proprieties of poetry, his stanzas are the natural outburst of his soul, comparable to the boiling jets of the geysers of Hecla. As the corn offered in sacrifice was parched in the pan, so is this tribute of love hot with sincere devotion. It is a sad thing when the heart is cold with a good matter, and worse when it is warm with a bad matter, but incomparably well when a warm heart and a good matter meet together. O that we may often offer to God an acceptable minchah, a sweet oblation fresh from the pan of hearts warmed with gratitude and admiration. I speak of the things which I have made touching the King. This song has "the King" for its only subject, and for the King's honour alone was it composed, well might its writer call it a good matter. The psalmist did not write carelessly; he calls his poem his works, or things which he had made. We are not to offer to the Lord that which costs us nothing. Good material deserves good workmanship. We should well digest in our heart's affections and our mind's meditations any discourse or poem in which we speak of one so great and glorious as our Royal Lord. As our version reads it, the psalmist wrote experimentally things which he had made his own, and personally tasted and handled concerning the King. My tongue is the pen of a ready writer, not so much for rapidity, for there the tongue always has the preference, but for exactness, elaboration, deliberation, and skilfulness of expression. Seldom are the

excited utterances of the mouth equal in real weight and accuracy to the verba scripta of a thoughtful accomplished penman; but here the writer, though filled with enthusiasm, speaks as correctly as a practised writer; his utterances therefore are no ephemeral sentences, but such as fall from men who sit down calmly to write for eternity. It is not always that the best of men are in such a key, and when they are they should not restrain the gush of their hallowed feelings. Such a condition of heart in a gifted mind creates that auspicious hour in which poetry pours forth her tuneful numbers to enrich the service of song in the house of the Lord.

Verse 2. Thou. As though the King himself had suddenly appeared before him, the psalmist lost in admiration of his person, turns from his preface to address his Lord. A loving heart has the power to realise its object. The eyes of a true heart see more than the eyes of the head. Moreover, Jesus reveals himself when we are pouring forth our affections towards him. It is usually the case that when we are ready Christ appears. If our heart is warm it is an index that the sun is shining, and when we enjoy his heat we shall soon behold his light. Thou art fairer than the children of men. In person, but especially in mind and character, the King of saints is peerless in beauty. The Hebrew word is doubled, "Beautiful, beautiful art thou." Jesus is so emphatically lovely that words must be doubled, strained, yea, exhausted before he can be described. Among the children of men many have through grace been lovely in character, yet they have each had a flaw; but in Jesus we behold every feature of a perfect character in harmonious proportion. He is lovely everywhere, and from every point of view, but never more so than when we view him in conjugal union with his church; then love gives a ravishing flush of glory to his loveliness. Grace is poured into thy lips. Beauty and eloquence make a man majestic when they are united; they both dwell in perfection in the all fair, all eloquent Lord Jesus. Grace of person and grace of speech reach their highest point in him. Grace has in the most copious manner been poured upon Christ, for it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell, and now grace is in superabundance, poured forth from his lips to cheer and enrich his people. The testimony, the promises, the invitations, the consolations of our King pour forth from him in such volumes of meaning that we cannot but contrast those cataracts of grace with the speech of Moses which did but drop as the rain, and distil as the dew. Whoever in personal communion with the Wellbeloved has listened to his voice will feel that "never man spake like this man." Well did the bride say of him, "his lips are like lilies dropping sweet smelling myrrh." One word from himself dissolved the heart of Saul of Tarsus, and turned him into an apostle, another word raised up John the Divine when fainting in the Isle of Patmos. Oftentimes a sentence from his lips has turned our own midnight into morning, our winter into spring. Therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Calvin reads it, Because God hath blessed thee for ever. Christ is blessed of God, blessed for ever, and this is to us one great reason for his beauty, and the source of the gracious words which proceed out of his lips. The rare endowments of the man Christ Jesus are given him of the Father, that by them his people may be blessed with all spiritual blessings in union with himself. But if we take our own translation, we read that the Father has blessed the Mediator as a reward for all his gracious labours; and right well does he deserve the recompense. Whom God blesses we should bless, and the more so because all his blessedness is communicated to us.

Verse 3. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh. Loving spirits jealous of the Redeemer's glory long to see him putting forth his power to vindicate his own most holy cause. Why should the sword of the Spirit lie still, like a weapon hung up in an armoury; it is sharp and strong, both for cutting and piercing: O that the divine power of Jesus were put forth to use against error. The words before us represent our great King as urged to arm himself for battle, by placing his sword where it is ready for use. Christ is the true champion of the church, others are but underlings who must borrow strength from him; the

single arm of Immanuel is the sole hope of the faithful. Our prayer should be that of this verse. There is at this moment an apparent suspension of our Lord's former power, we must by importunate prayer call him to the conflict, for like the Greeks without Achilles we are soon overcome by our enemies, and we are but dead men if Jesus be not in our midst. O most mighty. A title well deserved, and not given from empty courtesy like the serenities, excellencies and highnesses of our fellow mortals—titles, which are but sops for vain glory. Jesus is the truest of heroes. Hero worship in his case alone is commendable. He is mighty to save, mighty in love. With thy glory and thy majesty. Let thy sword both win thee renown and dominion, or as it may mean, gird on with thy sword thy robes which indicate thy royal splendour. Love delights to see the Beloved arrayed as becometh his excellency; she weeps as she sees him in the garments of humiliation, she rejoices to behold him in the vestments of his exaltation. Our precious Christ can never be made too much of. Heaven itself is but just good enough for him. All the pomp that angels and archangels, and thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers can pour at his feet is too little for him. Only his own essential glory is such as fully answers to the desire of his people, who can never enough extol him.

Verse 4. And in thy majesty ride prosperously. The hero monarch armed and apparelled is now entreated to ascend his triumphal car. Would to God that our Immanuel would come forth in the chariot of love to conquer our spiritual foes and seize by power the souls whom he has bought with blood. Because of truth and meekness and righteousness. These words may be rendered, ride forth upon truth and meekness and righteousness.—Three noble chargers to draw the war chariot of the gospel. In the sense of our translation it is a most potent argument to urge with our Lord that the cause of the true, the humble, and the good, calls for his advocacy. Truth will be ridiculed, meekness will be oppressed, and righteousness slain, unless the God, the Man in whom these precious things are incarnated, shall arise for their vindication. Our earnest petition ought ever to be that Jesus would lay his almighty arm to the work of grace lest the good cause languish and wickedness prevail. And thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Foreseeing the result of divine working, the psalmist prophesies that the uplifted arm of Messiah will reveal to the King's own eyes the terrible overthrow of his foes. Jesus needs no guide but his own right hand, no teacher but his own might; may he instruct us all in what he can perform, by achieving it speedily before our gladdened eyes.

Verse 5. Thine arrows. Our King is master of all weapons: he can strike those who are near and those afar off with equal force. Are sharp. Nothing that Jesus does is ill done, he uses no blunted shafts, no pointless darts. In the heart of the King's enemies. Our Captain aims at men's hearts rather than their heads, and he hits them too; point blank are his shots, and they enter deep into the vital part of man's nature. Whether for love or vengeance, Christ never misses aim, and when his arrows stick, they cause a smart not soon forgotten, a wound which only he can heal. Jesus' arrows of conviction are sharp in the quiver of his word, and sharp when on the bow of his ministers, but they are most known to be so when they find a way into careless hearts. They are his arrows, he made them, he shoots them. He makes them sharp, and he makes them enter the heart. May none of us ever fall under the darts of his judgment, for none kill so surely as they. Whereby the people fall under thee. On either side the slain of the Lord are many when Jesus leads on the war. Nations tremble and turn to him when he shoots abroad his truth. Under his power and presence, men are stricken down as though pricked in the heart. There is no standing against the Son of God when his bow of might is in his hands. Terrible will be that hour when his bow shall be made quite naked, and bolts of devouring fire shall be hurled upon his adversaries: then shall princes fall and nations perish.

Verse 6. Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. To whom can this be spoken but our Lord? The

psalmist cannot restrain his adoration. His enlightened eye sees in the royal Husband of the church, God, God to be adored, God reigning, God reigning everlastingly. Blessed sight! Blind are the eyes that cannot see God in Christ Jesus! We never appreciate the tender condescension of our King in becoming one flesh with his church, and placing her at his right hand, until we have fully rejoiced in his essential glory and deity. What a mercy for us that our Saviour is God, for who but a God could execute the work of salvation? What a glad thing it is that he reigns on a throne which will never pass away, for we need both sovereign grace and eternal love to secure our happiness. Could Jesus cease to reign we should cease to be blessed, and were he not God, and therefore eternal, this must be the case. No throne can endure for ever, but that on which God himself sitteth. The sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. He is the lawful monarch of all things that be. His rule is founded in right, its law is right, its result is right. Our King is no usurper and no oppressor. Even when he shall break his enemies with a rod of iron, he will do no man wrong; his vengeance and his grace are both in conformity with justice. Hence we trust him without suspicion; he cannot err; no affliction is too severe, for he sends it; no judgment too harsh, for he ordains it. O blessed hands of Jesus! the reigning power is safe with you. All the just rejoice in the government of the King who reigns in righteousness.

Verse 7. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness. Christ Jesus is not neutral in the great contest between right and wrong: as warmly as he loves the one he abhors the other. What qualifications for a sovereign! what grounds of confidence for a people! The whole of our Lord's life on earth proved the truth of these words; his death to put away sin and bring in the reign of righteousness, sealed the fact beyond all question; his providence by which he rules from his mediatorial throne, when rightly understood, reveals the same; and his final assize will proclaim it before all worlds. We should imitate him both in his love and hate; they are both needful to complete a righteous character. Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. Jesus as Mediator owned God as his God, to whom, being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient. On account of our Lord's perfect life he is now rewarded with superior joy. Others there are to whom grace has given a sacred fellowship with him, but by their universal consent and his own merit, he is prince among them, the gladdest of all because the cause of all their gladness. At Oriental feasts oil was poured on the heads of distinguished and very welcome guests; God himself anoints the man Christ Jesus, as he sits at the heavenly feasts, anoints him as a reward for his work, with higher and fuller joy than any else can know; thus is the Son of man honoured and rewarded for all his pains. Observe the indisputable testimony to Messiah's Deity in verse six, and to his manhood in the present verse. Of whom could this be written but of Jesus of Nazareth? Our Christ is our Elohim. Jesus is God with us.

Verse 8. All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. The divine anointing causes fragrance to distil from the robes of the Mighty Hero. He is delightful to every sense, to the eyes most fair, to the ear most gracious, to the spiritual nostril most sweet. The excellences of Jesus are all most precious, comparable to the rarest spices; they are most varied, and to be likened not to myrrh alone, but to all the perfumes blended in due proportion. The Father always finds a pleasure in him, in him he is well pleased; and all regenerated spirits rejoice in him, for he is made of God unto us, "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Note that not only is Jesus most sweet, but even his garments are so; everything that he has to do with is perfumed by his person. All his garments are thus fragrant; not some of them, but all; we delight as much in his purple of dominion as in the white of his priesthood, his mantle as our prophet is as dear to us as his seamless coat as our friend. All his dress is fragrant with all sweetness. To attempt to spiritualise each spice here mentioned would be

unprofitable, the evident sense is that all sweetnesses meet in Jesus, and are poured forth wherever he is present. Out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad. The abode of Jesus now is imperial in splendour, ivory and gold but faintly image his royal seat; there is he made glad in the presence of the Father, and in the company of his saints. Oh, to behold him with his perfumed garments on! The very smell of him from afar ravishes our spirit, what must it be to be on the other side of the pearl gate, within the palace of ivory, amid those halls of Zion, "conjubilant with song, "where is the throne of David, and the abiding presence of the Prince! To think of his gladness, to know that he is full of joy, gives gladness at this moment to our souls. We poor exiles can sing in our banishment since our King, our Wellbeloved, has come to his throne.

Verse 9. King's daughters were among thy honourable women. Our Lord's courts lack not for courtiers, and those the fairest and noblest. Virgin souls are maids of honour to the court, the true lilies of heaven. The lowly and pure in heart are esteemed by the Lord Jesus as his most familiar friends, their place in his palace is not among the menials but near the throne. The day will come when those who are "king's daughters" literally will count it their greatest honour to serve the church, and, meanwhile every believing sister is spiritually a King's daughter, a member of the royal family of heaven. Upon thy right hand, in the place of love, honour, and power, did stand the queen in gold of Ophir: the church shares her Lord's honour and happiness, he sets her in the place of dignity, he clothes her with the best of the best. Gold is the richest of metals, and Ophir gold the purest known. Jesus bestows nothing inferior or of secondary value upon his beloved church. In imparted and imputed righteousness the church is divinely arrayed. Happy those who are members of a church so honoured, so beloved; unhappy those who persecute the beloved people, for as a husband will not endure that his wife should be insulted or maltreated, so neither will the heavenly Husband; he will speedily avenge his own elect. Mark, then, the solemn pomp of the verses we have read. The King is seen with rapture, he girds himself as a warrior, robes himself as a monarch, mounts his chariot, darts his arrows, and conquers his foes. Then he ascends his throne with his sceptre in his hand, fills the palace hall with perfume brought from his secret chambers, his retinue stand around him, and, fairest of all, his bride is at his right hand, with daughters of subject princes as her attendants. Faith is no stranger to this sight, and every time she looks she adores, she loves, she rejoices, she expects.

Verse 10. Hearken, O daughter, and consider. Ever is this the great duty of the church. Faith cometh by hearing, and confirmation by consideration. No precept can be more worthy of the attention of those who are honoured to be espoused to Christ than that which follows. And incline thine ear. Lean forward so that no syllable may be unheard. The whole faculties of the mind should be bent upon receiving holy teaching. Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. To renounce the world is not easy, but it must be done by all who are affianced to the Great King, for a divided heart he cannot endure; it would be misery to the beloved one as well as dishonour to her Lord. Evil acquaintances, and even those who are but neutral, must be forsaken, they can confer no benefits, they must inflict injury. The house of our nativity is the house of sin—we were shapen in iniquity; the carnal mind is enmity against God, we must come forth of the house of fallen nature, for it is built in the City of Destruction. Not that natural ties are broken by grace, but ties of the sinful nature, bonds of graceless affinity. We have much to forget as well as to learn, and the unlearning is so difficult that only diligent hearing, and considering, and bending of the whole soul to it, can accomplish the work; and even these would be too feeble did not divine grace assist. Yet why should we remember the Egypt from which we came out? Are the leeks and the garlic, and the onions anything, when the iron bondage, and the slavish tasks, and the death dealing Pharaoh of hell are remembered? We part with folly for wisdom; with bubbles for eternal joys; with deceit for truth; with misery for bliss; with idols for

the living God. O that Christians were more mindful of the divine precept here recorded; but, alas! worldliness abounds; the church is defiled; and the glory of the Great King is veiled. Only when the whole church leads the separated life will the full splendour and power of Christianity shine forth upon the world.

Verse 11. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty. Wholehearted love is the duty and bliss of the marriage state in every case, but especially so in this lofty mystic marriage. The church must forsake all others and cleave to Jesus only, or she will not please him nor enjoy the full manifestation of his love. What less can he ask, what less may she dare propose than to be wholly his? Jesus sees a beauty in his church, a beauty which he delights in most when it is not marred by worldliness. He has always been most near and precious to his saints when they have cheerfully taken up his cross and followed him without the camp. His Spirit is grieved when they mingle themselves among the people and learn their ways. No great and lasting revival of religion can be granted us till the professed lovers of Jesus prove their affection by coming out from an ungodly world, being separated, and touching not the unclean thing. For he is thy Lord; and worship thou him. He has royal rights still; his condescending grace does not lessen but rather enforce his authority. Our Saviour is also our Ruler. The husband is the head of the wife; the love he bears her does not lessen but strengthen her obligation to obey. The church must reverence Jesus, and bow before him in prostrate adoration; his tender union with her gives her liberty, but not license; it frees her from all other burdens, but places his easy yoke upon her neck. Who would wish it to be otherwise? The service of God is heaven in heaven, and perfectly carried out it is heaven upon earth. Jesus, thou art he whom thy church praises in her unceasing songs, and adores in her perpetual service. Teach us to be wholly thine. Bear with us, and work by thy Spirit in us till thy will is done by us on earth as it is in heaven.

Verse 12. And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift. When the church abounds in holiness, she shall know no lack of homage from the surrounding people. Her glory shall then impress and attract the heathen around, till they also unite in doing honour to her Lord. The power of missions abroad lies at home: a holy church will be a powerful church. Nor shall there be lack of treasure in her coffers when grace is in her heart; the free gifts of a willing people shall enable the workers for God to carry on their sacred enterprise without stint. Commerce shall send in its revenue to endow, not with forced levies and imperial taxes, but with willing gifts the church of the Great King. Even the rich among the people shall intreat thy favour. Not by pandering to their follies, but by testifying against their sins, shall the wealthy be one to the faith of Jesus. They shall come not to favour the church but to beg for her favour. She shall not be the hireling of the great, but as a queen shall she dispense her favours to the suppliant throng of the rich among the people. We go about to beg for Christ like beggars for alms, and many who should know better will make compromises and become reticent of unpopular truth to please the great ones of the earth; not so will the true bride of Christ degrade herself, when her sanctification is more deep and more visible; then will the hearts of men grow liberal, and offerings from afar, abundant and continual, shall be presented at the throne of the Pacific Prince.

Verse 13. The king's daughter is all glorious within. Within her secret chambers her glory is great. Though unseen of men her Lord sees her, and commends her. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Or the passage may be understood as meaning within herself—her beauty is not outward only or mainly; the choicest of her charms are to be found in her heart, her secret character, her inward desires. Truth and wisdom in the hidden parts are what the Lord regards; mere skin deep beauty is nothing in his eyes. The church is of royal extraction, of imperial dignity, for she is a king's daughter;

and she has been purified and renewed in nature; for she is glorious within. Note the word all. The Bridegroom was said to have all his garments perfumed, and now the bride in all glorious within—entireness and completeness are great points. There is no mixture of ill savour in Jesus, nor shall there be alloy of unholiness in his people, his church shall be presented without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. Her clothing is of wrought gold. Best material and best workmanship. How laboriously did our Lord work out the precious material of his righteousness into a vesture for his people! no embroidery of golden threads can equal that masterpiece of holy art. Such clothing becomes on so honoured by relationship to the Great King. The Lord looks to it that nothing shall be wanting to the glory and beauty of his bride.

Verse 14. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework. The day comes when the celestial marriage shall be openly celebrated, and these words describe the nuptial procession wherein the queen is brought to her royal Husband attended by her handmaidens. In the latter-day glory, and in the consummation of all things, the glory of the bride, the Lamb's wife, shall be seen by all the universe with admiration. While she was within doors, and her saints hidden ones, the church was glorious; what will be her splendour when she shall appear in the likeness of her Lord in the day of his manifestation? The finest embroidery is but a faint image of the perfection of the church when sanctified by the Spirit. This verse tells us of the ultimate rest of the church—the King's own bosom; of the way she comes to it, she is brought by the power of sovereign grace; of the time when this is done—in the future, she shall be, it does not yet appear; of the state in which she shall come—clad in richest array, and attended by brightest spirits. The virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. Those who love and serve the church for her Lord's sake shall share in her bliss "in that day." In one sense they are a part of the church, but for the sake of the imagery they are represented as maids of honour; and, though the figure may seem incongruous, they are represented as brought to the King with the same loving familiarity as the bride, because the true servants of the church are of the church, and partake in all her happiness. Note that those who are admitted to everlasting communion with Christ, are pure in heart—virgins, pure in company—her companions, pure in walk—that follow her. Let none hope to be brought into heaven at last who are not purified now.

Verse 15. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought. Joy becomes a marriage feast. What joy will that be which will be seen at the feasts of paradise when all the redeemed shall be brought home! Gladness in the saints themselves, and rejoicing from the angels shall make the halls of the New Jerusalem ring again with shoutings. They shall enter into the King's palace. Their peaceful abodes shall be where Jesus the King reigns in state for ever. They shall not be shut out but shut in. Rights of free entrance into the holiest of all shall be accorded them. Brought by grace, they shall enter into glory. If there was joy in the bringing, what in the entering? What in the abiding? The glorified are not field labourers in the plains of heaven, but sons who dwell at home, princes of the blood, resident in the royal palace. Happy hour when we shall enjoy all this and forget the sorrows of time in the triumph of eternity.

Verse 16. Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children. The ancient saints who stood as fathers in the service of the Great King have all passed away; but a spiritual seed is found to fill their places. The veterans depart, but volunteers fill up the vacant places. The line of grace never becomes extinct. As long as time shall last, the true apostolical succession will be maintained. Whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth. Servants of Christ are kings. Where a man has preached successfully, and evangelised a tribe or nation, he gets to himself more than regal honours, and his name is like the

name of the great men that be upon the earth. Jesus is the king maker. Ambition of the noblest kind shall win her desire in the army of Christ; immortal crowns are distributed to his faithful soldiers. The whole earth shall yet be subdued for Christ, and honoured are they, who shall, through grace, have a share in the conquest—these shall reign with Christ at his coming.

Verse 17. I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations. Jehovah by the prophet's mouth promises to the Prince of Peace eternal fame as well as a continuous progeny. His name is his fame, his character, his person; these are dear to his people now—they never can forget them; and it shall be so as long as men exist. Names renowned in one generation have been unknown to the next era, but the laurels of Jesus shall ever be fresh, his renown ever new. God will see to this; his providence and his grace shall make it so. The fame of Messiah is not left to human guardianship; the Eternal guarantees it, and his promise never fails. All down the ages the memories of Gethsemane and Calvary shall glow with inextinguishable light; nor shall the lapse of time, the smoke of error, or the malice of hell be able to dim the glory of the Redeemer's fame. Therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever. They shall confess thee to be what thou art, and shall render to thee in perpetuity the homage due. Praise is due from every heart to him who loved us, and redeemed us by his blood; this praise will never be fully paid, but will be ever a standing and growing debt. His daily benefits enlarge our obligations, let them increase the number of our songs. Age to age reveals more of his love, let every year swell the volume of the music of earth and heaven, and let thunders of song roll up in full diapason to the throne of him that liveth, and was dead, and is alive for evermore, and hath the keys of hell and of death.

"Let him be crowned with majesty
Who bowed his head to death,
And be his honours sounded high
By all things that have breath."

Psalm 46

Verse 1. God is our refuge and strength. Not our armies, or our fortresses. Israel's boast is in Jehovah, the only living and true God. Others vaunt their impregnable castles, placed on inaccessible rocks, and secured with gates of iron, but God is a far better refuge from distress than all these: and when the time comes to carry the war into the enemy's territories, the Lord stands his people in better stead than all the valour of legions or the boasted strength of chariot and horse. Soldiers of the cross, remember this, and count yourselves safe, and make yourselves strong in God. Forget not the personal possessive word our; make sure each one of your portion in God, that you may say, "He is my refuge and strength." Neither forget the fact that God is our refuge just now, in the immediate present, as truly as when David penned the word. God alone is our all in all. All other refuges are refuges of lies, all other strength is weakness, for power belongeth unto God: but as God is all sufficient, our defence and might are equal to all emergencies. A very present help in trouble, or in distress he has so been found, he has been tried and proved by his people. He never withdraws himself from his afflicted. He is their help, truly, effectually, constantly; he is present or near them, close at their side and ready for their succour, and this is emphasized by the word very in our version, he is more present than friend or relative can be, yea, more nearly present than even the trouble itself. To all this comfortable truth is added the consideration that his assistance comes at the needed time. He is not as the swallows that leave us in the winter; he is a friend in need and a friend indeed. When it is very dark with us, let brave spirits say, "Come, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm."

"A fortress firm, and steadfast rock,
Is God in time of danger;
A shield and sword in every shock,
From foe well known or stranger."

Verse 2. Therefore. How fond the psalmist is of therefore! his poetry is no poetic rapture without reason, it is as logical as a mathematical demonstration. The next words are a necessary inference from these. Will not we fear. With God on our side, how irrational would fear be! Where he is all power is, and all love, why therefore should we quail? Though the earth be removed, though the basis of all visible things should be so convulsed as to be entirely changed. And though the mountains be carried into the middle of the sea; though the firmest of created objects should fall to headlong ruin, and be submerged in utter destruction. The two phrases set forth the most terrible commotions within the range of imagination, and include the overthrow of dynasties, the destruction of nations, the ruin of families, the persecutions of the church, the reign of heresy, and whatever else may at any time try the faith of believers. Let the worst come to the worst, the child of God should never give way to mistrust; since God remaineth faithful there can be no danger to his cause or people. When the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the heavens and the earth shall pass away in the last general conflagration, we shall serenely behold "the wreck of matter, and the crash of worlds," for even then our refuge shall preserve us from all evil, our strength shall prepare us for all good.

Verse 3. Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled. When all things are excited to fury, and reveal their utmost power to disturb, faith smiles serenely. She is not afraid of noise, nor even of real force, she knows that the Lord stilleth the raging of the sea, and holdeth the waves in the hollow of his hand. Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Alps and Andes may tremble, but faith rests on a firmer basis, and is not to be moved by swelling seas. Evil may ferment, wrath may boil, and pride may foam, but the brave heart of holy confidence trembles not. Great men who are like mountains may quake for fear in times of great calamity, but the man whose trust is in God needs never to be dismayed. Selah. In the midst of such a hurly burly the music may well come to a pause, both to give the singers breath, and ourselves time for meditation. We are in no hurry, but can sit us down and wait while earth dissolves, and mountains rock, and oceans roar. Ours is not the headlong rashness which passes for courage, we can calmly confront the danger, and meditate upon terror, dwelling on its separate items and united forces. The pause is not an exclamation of dismay, but merely a rest in music; we do not suspend our song in alarm, but tune our harps again with deliberation amidst the tumult of the storm. It were well if all of us could say, Selah, under tempestuous trials, but alas! too often we speak in our haste, lay our trembling hands bewildered among the strings, strike the lyre with a rude crash, and mar the melody of our life song.

Verse 4. There is a river. Divine grace like a smoothly flowing, fertilising, full, and never failing river, yields refreshment and consolation to believers. This is the river of the water of life, of which the church above as well as the church below partakes evermore. It is no boisterous ocean, but a placid stream, it is not stayed in its course by earthquakes or crumbling mountains, it follows its serene course without disturbance. Happy are they who know from their own experience that there is such a river of God. The streams whereof in their various influences, for they are many, shall make glad the city of God, by assuring the citizens that Zion's Lord will unfailingly supply all their needs. The streams are not transient like Cherith, nor muddy like the Nile, nor furious like Kishon, nor

treacherous like Job's deceitful brooks, neither are their waters "naught" like those of Jericho, they are clear, cool, fresh, abundant, and gladdening. The great fear of an Eastern city in time of war was lest the water supply should be cut off during a siege; if that were secured the city could hold out against attacks for an indefinite period. In this verse, Jerusalem, which represents the church of God, is described as well supplied with water, to set forth the fact that in seasons of trial all sufficient grace will be given to enable us to endure unto the end. The church is like a well ordered city, surrounded with mighty walls of truth and justice, garrisoned by omnipotence, fairly built and adorned by infinite wisdom: its burgesses the saints enjoy high privileges; they trade with far off lands, they live in the smile of the King; and as a great river is the very making and mainstay of a town, so is the broad river of everlasting love, and grace their joy and bliss. The church is peculiarly the City of God, of his designing, building, election, purchasing and indwelling. It is dedicated to his praise, and glorified by his presence. The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. This was the peculiar glory of Jerusalem, that the Lord within her walls had a place where he peculiarly revealed himself, and this is the choice privilege of the saints, concerning which we may cry with wonder, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" To be a temple for the Holy Ghost is the delightful portion of each saint, to be the living temple for the Lord our God is also the high honour of the church in her corporate capacity. Our God is here called by a worthy title, indicating his power, majesty, sublimity, and excellency; and it is worthy of note that under this character he dwells in the church. We have not a great God in nature, and a little God in grace; no, the church contains as clear and convincing a revelation of God as the works of nature, and even more amazing in the excellent glory which shines between the cherubim overshadowing that mercy seat which is the centre and gathering place of the people of the living God. To have the Most High dwelling within her members, is to make the church on earth like the church in heaven.

Verse 5. God is in the midst of her. His help is therefore sure and near. Is she besieged, then he is himself besieged within her, and we may be certain that he will break forth upon his adversaries. How near is the Lord to the distresses of his saints, since he sojourns in their midst! Let us take heed that we do not grieve him; let us have such respect to him as Moses had when he felt the sand of Horeb's desert to be holy, and put off his shoes from off his feet when the Lord spake from the burning bush. She shall not be moved. How can she be moved unless her enemies move her Lord also? His presence renders all hope of capturing and demolishing the city utterly ridiculous. The Lord is in the vessel, and she cannot, therefore, be wrecked. God shall help her. Within her he will furnish rich supplies, and outside her walls he will lay her foes in heaps like the armies of Sennacherib, when the angel went forth and smote them. And that right early. As soon as the first ray of light proclaims the coming day, at the turning of the morning God's right arm shall be outstretched for his people. The Lord is up betimes. We are slow to meet him, but he is never tardy in helping us. Impatience complains of divine delays, but in very deed the Lord is not slack concerning his promise. Man's haste is often folly, but God's apparent delays are ever wise; and when rightly viewed, are no delays at all. Today the bands of evil may environ the church of God, and threaten her with destruction; but ere long they shall pass away like the foam on the waters, and the noise of their tumult shall be silent in the grave. The darkest hour of the night is just before the turning of the morning; and then, even then, shall the Lord appear as the great ally of his church.

Verse 6. The heathen raged. The nations were in a furious uproar, they gathered against the city of the Lord like wolves ravenous for their prey; they foamed, and roared, and swelled like a tempestuous sea. The kingdoms were moved. A general confusion seized upon society; the fierce invaders convulsed their own dominions by draining the population to urge on the war, and they desolated

other territories by their devastating march to Jerusalem. Crowns fell from royal heads, ancient thrones rocked like trees driven of the tempest, powerful empires fell like pines uprooted by the blast: everything was in disorder, and dismay seized on all who knew not the Lord. He uttered his voice, the earth melted. With no other instrumentality than a word the Lord ruled the storm. He gave forth a voice and stout hearts were dissolved, proud armies were annihilated, conquering powers were enfeebled. At first the confusion appeared to be worse confounded, when the element of divine power came into view; the very earth seemed turned to wax, the most solid and substantial of human things melted like the fat of rams upon the altar; but anon peace followed, the rage of man subsided, hearts capable of repentance relented, and the implacable were silenced. How mighty is a word from God! How mighty the Incarnate Word. O that such a word would come from the excellent glory even now to melt all hearts in love to Jesus, and to end for ever all the persecutions, wars, and rebellions of men!

Verse 7. The Lord of hosts is with us. This is the reason for all Zion's security, and for the overthrow of her foes. The Lord rules the angels, the stars, the elements, and all the hosts of heaven; and the heaven of heavens are under his sway. The armies of men though they know it not are made to subserve his will. This Generalissimo of the forces of the land, and the Lord High Admiral of the seas, is on our side—our august ally; woe unto those who fight against him, for they shall fly like smoke before the wind when he gives the word to scatter them. The God of Jacob is our refuge, Immanuel is Jehovah of Hosts, and Jacob's God is our high place of defence. When this glad verse is sung to music worthy of such a jubilate, well may the singers pause and the players wait awhile to tune their instruments again; here, therefore, fitly stands that solemn, stately, peaceful note of rest, SELAH.

Verse 8. Come, behold the works of the Lord. The joyful citizens of Jerusalem are invited to go forth and view the remains of their enemies, that they may mark the prowess of Jehovah and the spoil which his right hand hath won for his people. It were well if we also carefully noted the providential dealings of our covenant God, and were quick to perceive his hand in the battles of his church. Whenever we read history it should be with this verse sounding in our ears. We should read the newspaper in the same spirit, to see how the Head of the Church rules the nations for his people's good, as Joseph governed Egypt for the sake of Israel. What desolations he hath made in the earth. The destroyers he destroys, the desolators he desolates. How forcible is the verse at this date! The ruined cities of Assyria, Babylon, Petra, Bashan, Canaan, are our instructors, and in tables of stone record the doings of the Lord. In every place where his cause and crown have been disregarded ruin has surely followed: sin has been a blight on nations, and left their palaces to lie in heaps. In the days of the writer of this Psalm, there had probably occurred some memorable interpositions of God against his Israel's foes; and as he saw their overthrow, he called on his fellow citizens to come forth and attentively consider the terrible things in righteousness which had been wrought on their behalf. Dismantled castles and ruined abbeys in our own land stand as memorials of the Lord's victories over oppression and superstition. May there soon be more of such desolations.

"Ye gloomy piles, ye tombs of living men,
Ye sepulchres of womanhood, or worse;
Ye refuges of lies, soon may ye fall,
And amid your ruins may the owl, and bat,
And dragon find congenial resting place."

Verse 9. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth. His voice quiets the tumult of war, and calls for the silence of peace. However remote and barbarous the tribe, he awes the people into rest.

He crushes the great powers till they cannot provoke strife again; he gives his people profound repose. He breaketh the bow, the sender of swift winged death he renders useless. And cutteth the spear in sunder—the lance of the mighty man he shivers. He burneth the chariot in the fire—the proud war chariot with its death dealing scythes he commits to the flames. All sorts of weapons he piles heaps on heaps, and utterly destroys them. So was it in Judea in the days of yore, so shall it be in all lands in eras yet to come. Blessed deed of the Prince of Peace! when shall it be literally performed? Already the spiritual foes of his people are despoiled of their power to destroy; but when shall the universal victory of peace be celebrated, and instruments of wholesale murder be consigned to ignominious destruction? How glorious will the ultimate victory of Jesus be in the day of his appearing, when every enemy shall lick the dust!

Verse 10. Be still, and know that I am God. Hold off your hands, ye enemies! Sit down and wait in patience, ye believers! Acknowledge that Jehovah is God, ye who feel the terrors of his wrath! Adore him, and him only, ye who partake in the protection of his grace. Since none can worthily proclaim his nature, let "expressive silence muse his praise." The boasts of the ungodly and the timorous forebodings of the saints should certainly be hushed by a sight of what the Lord has done in past ages. I will be exalted among the heathen. They forget God, they worship idols, but Jehovah will yet be honoured by them. Reader, the prospects of missions are bright, bright as the promises of God. Let no man's heart fail him; the solemn declarations of this verse must be fulfilled. I will be exalted in the earth, among all people, whatever may have been their wickedness or their degradation. Either by terror or love God will subdue all hearts to himself. The whole round earth shall yet reflect the light of his majesty. All the more because of the sin, and obstinacy, and pride of man shall God be glorified when grace reigns unto eternal life in all corners of the world.

Verse 11. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. It was meet to sing this twice over. It is a truth of which no believer wearies, it is a fact too often forgotten, it is a precious privilege which cannot be too often considered. Reader, is the Lord on thy side? Is Emmanuel, God with us, thy Redeemer? Is there a covenant between thee and God as between God and Jacob? If so, thrice happy art thou. Show thy joy in holy song, and in times of trouble play the man by still making music for thy God. SELAH. Here as before, lift up the heart. Rest in contemplation after praise. Still keep the soul in tune. It is easier to sing a hymn of praise than to continue in the spirit of praise, but let it be our aim to maintain the uprising devotion of our grateful hearts, and so end our song as if we intended it to be continued.

SELAH bids the music rest.
Pause in silence soft and blest;
SELAH bids uplift the strain,
Harps and voices tune again;
SELAH ends the vocal praise,
Still your hearts to God upraise.

Psalm 47

Verse 1. O clap your hands. The most natural and most enthusiastic tokens of exultation are to be used in view of the victories of the Lord, and his universal reign. Our joy in God may be demonstrative, and yet he will not censure it. All ye people. The joy is to extend to all nations; Israel may lead the van, but all the Gentiles are to follow in the march of triumph, for they have an equal

share in that kingdom where there is neither Greek nor Jew, but Christ is all and in all. Even now if they did but know it, it is the best hope of all nations that Jehovah ruleth over them. If they cannot all speak the same tongue, the symbolic language of the hands they can all use. All people will be ruled by the Lord in the latter days, and all will exult in that rule; were they wise they would submit to it now, and rejoice to do so; yea, they would clap their hands in rapture at the thought. Shout, let your voices keep tune with your hands. Unto God, let him have all the honours of the day, and let them be loud, joyous, universal, and undivided. With the voice of triumph, with happy sounds, consonant with such splendid victories, so great a King, so excellent a rule, and such happy subjects. Many are human languages, and yet the nations may triumph as with one voice. Faith's view of God's government is full of transport. The prospect of the universal reign of the Prince of Peace is enough to make the tongue of the dumb sing; what will the reality be? Well might the poet of the seasons bid mountains and valleys raise their joyous hymn—

"For the GREAT SHEPHERD reigns,
And his unsuffering kingdom yet will come."

Verse 2. For the Lord, or JEHOVAH, the self-existent and only God; Most high, most great in power, lofty in dominion, eminent in wisdom, elevated in glory. Is terrible, none can resist his power or stand before his vengeance; yet as these terrors are wielded on the behalf of his subjects, they are fit reasons for rejoicing. Omnipotence, which is terrible to crush, is almighty to protect. At a grand review of the troops of a great prince, all his loyal subjects are filled with triumph, because their liege lord is so able to defend his own, and so much dreaded by his foes. He is a great King over all the earth. Not over Judea only, but even to the utmost isles his reign extends. Our God is no local deity, no petty ruler of a tribe; in infinite majesty he rules the mightiest realm as absolute arbiter of destiny, sole monarch of all lands, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Not a hamlet or an islet is excluded from his dominion. How glorious will that era be when this is seen and known of all; when in the person of Jesus all flesh shall behold the glory of the Lord!

Verse 3. He, with whom is infinite power, shall subdue the people under us. The battle is not ours but the Lord's. He will take his own time, but he will certainly achieve victory for his church. Truth and righteousness shall through grace climb to the ascendant. We wage no doubtful warfare. Hearts the most rebellious, and wills the most stubborn, shall submit to all conquering grace. All the Lord's people, whether Jews or Gentiles, may clap their hands at this, for God's victory will be theirs; but surely apostles, prophets, ministers, and those who suffer and labour the most, may take the largest share in the joy. Idolatry, infidelity, superstition, we shall yet tread upon, as men tread down the stones of the street. And the nations under our feet. The church of God shall be the greatest of monarchies, her victory shall be signal and decisive. Christ shall take to himself his great power and reign, and all the tribes of men shall own at once his glory and the glory of his people in him. How changed will be the position of affairs in coming ages! The people of God have been under the feet of men in long and cruel persecutions, and in daily contempt; but God will reverse the position, and the best in character shall be first in honour.

Verse 4. While as yet we see not all things put under him, we are glad to put ourselves and our fortunes at his disposal. He shall choose our inheritance for us. We feel his reign to be so gracious that we even now ask to be in the fullest degree the subjects of it. We submit our will, our choice, our desire, wholly to him. Our heritage here and hereafter we leave to him, let him do with us as seemeth him good. The excellency of Jacob whom he loved. He gave his ancient people their portion, he will

give us ours, and we ask nothing better; this is the most spiritual and real manner of clapping our hands because of his sovereignty, namely, to leave all our affairs in his hands, for then our hands are empty of all care for self, and free to be used in his honour. He was the boast and glory of Israel, he is and shall be ours. He loved his people and became their greatest glory; he loves us, and he shall be our exceeding joy. As for the latter days, we ask nothing better than to stand in our appointed lot, for if we have but a portion in our Lord Jesus, it is enough for our largest desires. Our beauty, our boast, our best treasure, lies in having such a God to trust in, such a God to love us. Selah. Yes, pause, ye faithful songsters. Here is abundant room for holy meditation—

"Muse awhile, obedient thought,
Lo, the theme's with rapture fraught;
See thy King, whose realm extends
Even to earth's remotest ends.
Gladly shall the nations own
Him their God and Lord alone;
Clap their hands with holy mirth,
Hail him MONARCH OF THE EARTH.

Come, my soul, before him bow,
Gladdest of his subjects thou;
Leave thy portion to his choice,
In his sovereign will rejoice,
This thy purest, deepest bliss,
He is thine and thou art his."

Verse 5. God is gone up with a shout. Faith hears the people already shouting. The command of the first verse is here regarded as a fact. The fight is over, the conqueror ascends to his triumphant chariot, and rides up to the gates of the city which is made resplendent with the joy of his return. The words are fully applicable to the ascension of the Redeemer. We doubt not that angels and glorified spirits welcomed him with acclamations. He came not without song, shall we imagine that he returned in silence? The Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Jesus is Jehovah. The joyful strain of the trumpet betokens the splendour of his triumph. It was meet to welcome one returning from the wars with martial music. Fresh from Bozrah, with his garments all red from the winepress, he ascended, leading captivity captive, and well might the clarion ring out the tidings of Immanuel's victorious return.

Verse 6. Sing praises. What jubilation is here, when five times over the whole earth is called upon to sing to God! He is worthy, he is Creator, he is goodness itself. Sing praises, keep on with the glad work. Never let the music pause. He never ceases to be good, let us never cease to be grateful. Strange that we should need so much urging to attend to so heavenly an exercise. Sing praises unto our King. Let him have all our praise; no one ought to have even a particle of it. Jesus shall have it all. Let his sovereignty be the fount of gladness. It is a sublime attribute, but full of bliss to the faithful. Let our homage be paid not in groans but songs. He asks not slaves to grace his throne; he is no despot; singing is fit homage for a monarch so blessed and gracious. Let all hearts that own his sceptre sing and sing on for ever, for there is everlasting reason for thanksgiving while we dwell under the shadow of such a throne.

Verse 7. For God is the King of all the earth. The Jews of our Saviour's time resented this truth, but

had their hearts been right they would have rejoiced in it. They would have kept their God to themselves, and not even have allowed the Gentile dogs to eat the crumbs from under his table. Alas! how selfishness turns honey into wormwood. Jehovah is not the God of the Jews only, all the nations of the earth are, through the Messiah, yet to own him Lord. Meanwhile his providential throne governs all events beneath the sky. Sing praises with understanding. Sing a didactic Psalm. Sound doctrine praises God. Even under the economy of types and ceremonies, it is clear that the Lord had regard to the spirituality of worship, and would be praised thoughtfully, intelligently, and with deep appreciation of the reason for song. It is to be feared from the slovenly way in which some make a noise in singing, that they fancy any sound will do. On the other hand, from the great attention paid by some to the mere music, we feel sadly sure that the sense has no effect upon them. Is it not a sin to be tickling men's ears with sounds when we profess to be adoring the Lord? What has a sensuous delight in organs, anthems, etc., to do with devotion? Do not men mistake physical effects for spiritual impulses? Do they not often offer to God strains far more calculated for human amusement than for divine acceptance? An understanding enlightened of the Holy Spirit is then and then only fully capable of offering worthy praise.

Verse 8. Now at this moment, over the most debased idolaters, God holds a secret rule; here is work for faith. How we ought to long for the day when this truth shall be changed in its aspect, and the rule now unrecognised shall be delighted in! The great truth that God reigneth in providence is the guarantee that in a gracious gospel sense his promises shall be fulfilled, and his kingdom shall come. He sitteth upon the throne of his holiness. Unmoved he occupies an undisputed throne, whose decrees, acts, and commands are holiness itself. What other throne is like this? Never was it stained with injustice, or defiled with sin. Neither is he who sits upon it dismayed, or in a dilemma. He sits in serenity, for he knows his own power, and sees that his purposes will not miscarry. Here is reason enough for holy song.

Verse 9. The princes of the people are gathered together. The prophetic eye of the psalmist sees the willing subjects of the great King assembled to celebrate his glory. Not only the poor and the men of low estate are there, but nobles bow their willing necks to his sway. "All kings shall bow down before him." No people shall be unrepresented; their great men shall be good men, their royal ones regenerate ones. How august will be the parliament where the Lord Jesus shall open the court, and princes shall rise up to do him honour! Even the people of the God of Abraham. That same God, who was known only to here and there a patriarch like the father of the faithful, shall be adored by a seed as many as the stars of heaven. The covenant promise shall be fulfilled, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Shiloh shall come, and "to him shall the gathering of the people be." Babel's dispersion shall be obliterated by the gathering arm of the Great Shepherd King.

For the shields of the earth belong unto God. The insignia of pomp, the emblems of rank, the weapons of war, all must pay loyal homage to the King of all. Right honourables must honour Jesus, and majesties must own him to be far more majestic. Those who are earth's protectors, the shields of the commonwealth, derive their might from him, and are his. All principalities and powers must be subject unto Jehovah and his Christ, for He is greatly exalted. In nature, in power, in character, in glory, there is none to compare with him. Oh, glorious vision of a coming era! Make haste, ye wheels of time! Meanwhile, ye saints, "Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Verse 1. Great is the Lord. How great Jehovah is essentially none can conceive; but we can all see that he is great in the deliverance of his people, great in their esteem who are delivered, and great in the hearts of those enemies whom he scatters by their own fears. Instead of the mad cry of Ephesus, "Great is Diana, "we bear the reasonable, demonstrable, self evident testimony, "Great is Jehovah." There is none great in the church but the Lord. Jesus is "the great Shepherd, "he is "a Saviour, and a great one, "our great God and Saviour, our great High Priest; his Father has divided him a portion with the great, and his name shall be great unto the ends of the earth. And greatly to be praised. According to his nature should his worship be; it cannot be too constant, too laudatory, too earnest, too reverential, too sublime. In the city of our God. He is great there, and should be greatly praised there. If all the world beside renounced Jehovah's worship, the chosen people in his favoured city should continue to adore him, for in their midst and on their behalf his glorious power has been so manifestly revealed. In the church the Lord is to be extolled though all the nations rage against him. Jerusalem was the peculiar abode of the God of Israel, the seat of the theocratic government, and the centre of prescribed worship, and even thus is the church the place of divine manifestation. In the mountain of his holiness. Where his holy temple, his holy priests, and his holy sacrifices might continually be seen. Zion was a mount, and as it was the most renowned part of the city, it is mentioned as a synonym for the city itself. The church of God is a mount for elevation and for conspicuousness, and it should be adorned with holiness, her sons being partakers of the holiness of God. Only by holy men can the Lord be fittingly praised, and they should be incessantly occupied with his worship.

Verse 2. Beautiful for situation. Jerusalem was so naturally, she was styled the Queen of the East; the church is so spiritually, being placed near God's heart, within the mountain of his power, upon the hills of his faithfulness, in the centre of providential operations. The elevation of the church is her beauty. The more she is above the world the fairer she is. The joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion. Jerusalem was the world's star; whatever light lingered on earth was borrowed from the oracles preserved by Israel. An ardent Israelite would esteem the holy city as the eye of the nations, the most precious pearl of all lands. Certainly the church of God, though despised of men, is the true joy and hope of the world. On the sides of the north, the city of the great King. Either meaning that Jerusalem was in the northern extremity of Judah, or it may denote that part of the city that lay to the north of Mount Zion. It was the glory of Jerusalem to be God's city, the place of his regal dwelling, and it is the joy of the church that God is in her midst. The great God is the great King of the church, and for her sake he rules all the nations. The people among whom the Lord deigns to dwell are privileged above all others; the lines have fallen unto them in pleasant places, and they have a goodly heritage. We who dwell in Great Britain in the sides of the north, have this for our chief glory, that the Lord is known in our land, and the abode of his love is among us.

Verse 3. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. We worship no unknown God. We know him as our refuge in distress, we delight in him as such, and run to him in every time of need. We know nothing else as our refuge. Though we are made kings, and our houses are palaces, yet we have no confidence in ourselves, but trust in the Lord Protector, whose well known power is our bulwark.

Verse 4. The kings were assembled, they passed by together. They came and they went. No sooner together than scattered. They came one way and fled twenty ways. Boastful the gathering hosts with their royal leaders, despairing the fugitive bands with their astonished captains. They came like foam on the angry sea, like foam they melted away. This was so remarkable that the psalmist puts in a

note of exclamation, Lo! What! have they so suddenly fled! Even thus shall the haters of the church vanish from the field. Papists, Ritualists, Arians, Sceptics, they shall each have their day, and shall pass on to the limbo of forgetfulness.

Verse 5. They saw it, and so they marvelled. They came, they saw, but they did not conquer. There was no *veni, vidi, vici* for them. No sooner did they perceive that the Lord was in the Holy City, than they took to their heels. Before the Lord came to blows with them, they were faint hearted, and beat a retreat. They were troubled and hasted away. The troublers were troubled. Their haste in coming was nothing to their hurry in going. Panic seized them, horses were not fleet enough; they would have borrowed the wings of the wind. They fled ignominiously, like children in a fright. Glory be to God, it shall be even thus with the foes of his church; when the Lord cometh to our help, our enemies shall be as nothing. Could they foresee their ignominious defeat, they would not advance to the attack.

Verse 6. Fear took hold upon them there. They were in Giant Despair's grip. Where they hoped to triumph, there they quivered with dismay. They did not take the city, but fear took hold on them. And pain, as of a woman in travail. They were as much overcome as a woman whose fright causes premature delivery; or, as full of pain as a poor mother in her pangs—a strong expression, commonly employed by Orientals to set forth the extremity of anguish. When the Lord arises for the help of his church, the proudest of his foes shall be as trembling women, and their dismay shall be but the beginning of eternal defeat.

Verse 7. Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind. As easily as vessels are driven to shipwreck, dost thou overturn the most powerful adversaries; or it may mean the strength of some nations lies in their ships, whose wooden walls are soon broken; but our strength is in our God, and therefore, it fails not; or there may be another meaning, though thou art our defence, yet thou takest vengeance on our inventions, and while thou dost preserve us, yet our ships, our comforts, our earthly ambitions, are taken from us that we may look alone to thee. God is seen at sea, but he is equally present on land. Speculative heresies, pretending to bring us wealth from afar, are constantly assailing the church, but the breath of the Lord soon drives them to destruction. The church too often relies on the wisdom of men, and these human helps are soon shipwrecked; yet the church itself is safe beneath the care of her God and King.

Verse 8. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God. Our father's stories are reproduced before our very eyes. We heard the promise, and we have seen the fulfilment. The records of Zion, wonderful as they are, are proved to be truthful, because present facts are in perfect harmony therewith. Note how the Lord is first spoken of as Lord of hosts, a name of power and sovereignty, and then as our God, a name of covenant relation and condescension. No wonder that since the Lord bears both titles, we find him dealing with us after the precedents of his lovingkindness, and the faithfulness of his promises. God will establish it for ever. The true church can never be disestablished. That which kings establish can last for time only, that which God establishes endures to all eternity. Selah. Here is a fit place to pause, viewing the past with admiration, and the future with confidence.

Verse 9. We have thought. Holy men are thoughtful men; they do not suffer God's wonders to pass before their eyes and melt into forgetfulness, but they meditate deeply upon them. Of thy lovingkindness, O God. What a delightful subject! Devout minds never tire of so divine a theme. It is well to think of past lovingkindness in times of trial, and equally profitable to remember it in seasons

of prosperity. Grateful memories sweeten sorrows and sober joys. In the midst of thy temple. Fit place for so devout a meditation. Where God is most seen he is best loved. The assembled saints constitute a living temple, and our deepest musings when so gathered together should have regard to the lovingkindness of the Lord, exhibited in the varied experiences of each of the living stones. Memories of mercy should be associated with continuance of praise. Hard by the table of show bread commemorating his bounty, should stand the altar of incense denoting our praise.

Verse 10. According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth. Great fame is due to his great name. The glory of Jehovah's exploits overleaps the boundaries of earth; angels behold with wonder, and from every star delighted intelligences proclaim his fame beyond the ends of the earth. What if men are silent, yet the woods, and seas, and mountains, with all their countless tribes, and all the unseen spirits that walk them, are full of the divine praise. As in a shell we listen to the murmurs of the sea, so in the convolutions of creation we hear the praises of God. Thy right hand is full of righteousness. Thy sceptre and thy sword, thy government and thy vengeance, are altogether just. Thy hand is never empty, but full of energy, of bounty, and of equity. Neither saint nor sinner shall find the Lord to be an empty handed God; he will in both cases deal out righteousness to the full: to the one, through Jesus, he will be just to forgive, to the other just to condemn.

Verse 11. Let mount Zion rejoice. As the first of the cities of Judah, and the main object of the enemies' attack, let her lead the song. Let the daughters of Judah be glad, let the smaller towns join the chorus, for they join in the common victory. Let the women, who fare worst in the havoc of war, be among the gladdest of the glad, now that the spoilers have fled. All the church, and each individual member, should rejoice in the Lord, and magnify his name. Because of thy judgments. The righteous acts of the Lord are legitimate subjects for joyful praise. However it may appear on earth, yet in heaven the eternal ruin of the wicked will be the theme of adoring song. Re 19:1,3: "Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God. For true and righteous are his judgments; for he hath judged the great whore which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia, and her smoke rose up for ever and ever." Justice which to our poor optics now seems severe, will then be perceived to be perfectly consistent with God's name of love, and to be one of the brightest jewels of his crown.

Verse 12. Walk about Zion; often beat her bounds, even as Israel marched around Jericho. With leisurely and careful inspection survey her. And go round about her. Encircle her again and again with loving perambulations. We cannot too frequently or too deeply consider the origin, privileges, history, security, and glory of the church. Some subjects deserve but a passing thought; this is worthy of the most patient consideration. Tell the towers thereof. See if any of them have crumbled, or have been demolished. Is the church of God what she was in doctrine, in strength and in beauty? Her foes counted her towers in envy first, and then in terror, let us count them with sacred exultation. The city of Lucerne, encircled by its ancient walls, adorned with a succession of towers, is a visible illustration of this figure; and as we have gone around it, and paused at each picturesque tower, we have realised the loving lingering inspection which the metaphor implies.

Verse 13. Mark ye well her bulwarks. Consider most attentively how strong are her ramparts, how safely her inhabitants are entrenched behind successive lines of defence. The security of the people of God is not a doctrine to be kept in the background, it may be safely taught, and frequently pondered; only to base hearts will that glorious truth prove harmful; the sons of perdition make a stumbling stone even of the Lord Jesus himself, it is little wonder that they pervert the truth of God

concerning the final perseverance of the saints. We are not to turn away from inspecting Zion's ramparts, because idlers skulk behind them. Consider her palaces. Examine with care the fair dwellings of the city. Let the royal promises which afford quiet resting places for believers be attentively inspected. See how sound are the defences, and how fair are the pleasaunces of "that ancient citie, "of which you are citizens. A man should be best acquainted with his own home; and the church is our dear and blest abode. Would to God professors were more considerate of the condition of the church; so far from telling the towers, some of them scarcely know what or where they are; they are too busy counting their money, and considering their ledgers. Freehold and copyhold, and leasehold, men measure to an inch, but heaven hold and grace hold are too often taken at peradventure, and neglected in sheer heedlessness. That ye may tell it to the generation following. An excellent reason for studious observation. We have received and we must transmit. We must be students that we may be teachers. The debt we owe to the past we must endeavour to repay by handing down the truth to the future.

Verse 14. For this God is our God for ever and ever. A good reason for preserving a record of all that he has wrought. Israel will not change her God so as to wish to forget, nor will the Lord change so as to make the past mere history. He will be the covenant God of his people world without end. There is no other God, we wish for no other, we would have no other even if there were. There are some who are so ready to comfort the wicked, that for the sake of ending their punishment they weaken the force of language, and make for ever and ever mean but a time; nevertheless, despite their interpretations we exult in the hope of an eternity of bliss, and to us "everlasting, " and "for ever and ever" mean what they say. He will be our guide even unto death. Throughout life, and to our dying couch, he will graciously conduct us, and even after death he will lead us to the living fountains of waters. We look to him for resurrection and eternal life. This consolation is clearly derivable from what has gone before; hitherto our foes have been scattered, and our bulwarks have defied attack, for God has been in our midst, therefore all possible assaults in the future shall be equally futile.

"The church has all her foes defied
And laughed to scorn their rage;
Even thus for aye she shall abide
Secure from age to age."

Farewell, fear. Come hither, gratitude and faith, and sing right joyously.

Psalm 49

Verses 1-4. In these four verses the poet prophet calls universal humanity to listen to his didactic hymn.

Verse 1. Hear this, all ye people. All men are concerned in the subject, it is of them, and therefore to them that the psalmist would speak. It is not a topic which men delight to consider, and therefore he who would instruct them must press them to give ear. Where, as in this case, the theme claims to be wisdom and understanding, attention is very properly demanded; and when the style combines the sententiousness of the proverb with the sweetness of poesy, interest is readily excited. Give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world. "He that hath ears to hear let him hear." Men dwelling in all climes are equally concerned in the subject, for the laws of providence are the same in all lands. It is wise for each one to feel I am a man, and therefore everything which concerns mortals has a personal interest

to me. We must all appear before the judgment seat, and therefore we all should give earnest heed to holy admonition which may help us to prepare for that dread event. He who refuses to receive instruction by the ear, will not be able to escape receiving destruction by it when the Judge shall say, "Depart, ye cursed."

Verse 2. Both low and high, rich and poor, together. Sons of great men, and children of mean men, men of large estate, and ye who pine in poverty, ye are all bidden to hear the inspired minstrel as he touches his harp to a mournful but instructive lay. The low will be encouraged, the high will be warned, the rich will be sobered, the poor consoled, there will be a useful lesson for each if they are willing to learn it. Our preaching ought to have a voice for all classes, and all should have an ear for it. To suit our word to the rich alone is wicked sycophancy, and to aim only at pleasing the poor is to act the part of a demagogue. Truth may be so spoken as to command the ear of all, and wise men seek to learn that acceptable style. Rich and poor must soon meet together in the grave, they may well be content to meet together now. In the congregation of the dead all differences of rank will be obliterated, they ought not now to be obstructions to united instructions.

Verse 3. My mouth shall speak of wisdom. Inspired and therefore lifted beyond himself, the prophet is not praising his own attainments, but extolling the divine Spirit which spoke in him. He knew that the Spirit of truth and wisdom spoke through him. He who is not sure that his matter is good has no right to ask a hearing. And the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding. The same Spirit who made the ancient seers eloquent, also made them thoughtful. The help of the Holy Ghost was never meant to supersede the use of our own mental powers. The Holy Spirit does not make us speak as Balaam's ass, which merely uttered sounds, but never meditated; but he first leads us to consider and reflect, and then he gives us the tongue of fire to speak with power.

Verse 4. I will incline mine ear to a parable. He who would have others hear, begins by hearing himself. As the minstrel leans his ear to his harp, so must the preacher give his whole soul to his ministry. The truth came to the psalmist as a parable, and he endeavoured to unriddle it for popular use; he would not leave the truth in obscurity, but he listened to its voice till he so well understood it as to be able to interpret and translate it into the common language of the multitude. Still of necessity it would remain a problem, and a dark saying to the unenlightened many, but this would not be the songster's fault, for, saith he, I will open my dark saying upon the harp. The writer was no mystic, delighting in deep and cloudy things, yet he was not afraid of the most profound topics; he tried to open the treasures of darkness, and to uplift pearls from the deep. To win attention he cast his proverbial philosophy into the form of song, and tuned his harp to the solemn tone of his subject. Let us gather round the minstrel of the King of kings, and hear the Psalm which first was led by the chief musician, as the chorus of the sons of Korah lifted up their voices in the temple.

Verse 5. Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about? The man of God looks calmly forward to dark times when those evils which have dogged his heels shall gain a temporary advantage over him. Iniquitous men, here called in the abstract iniquity, lie in wait for the righteous, as serpents that aim at the heels of travellers: the iniquity of our heels is that evil which aims to trip us up or impede us. It was an old prophecy that the serpent should wound the heel of the woman's seed, and the enemy of our souls is diligent to fulfil that premonition. In some dreary part of our road it may be that evil will wax stronger and bolder, and gaining upon us will openly assail us; those who followed at our heels like a pack of wolves, may perhaps overtake us, and compass us about. What then? Shall we yield to cowardice? Shall we be a prey to their teeth?

God forbid. Nay, we will not even fear, for what are these foes? What indeed, but mortal men who shall perish and pass away? There can be no real ground of alarm to the faithful. Their enemies are too insignificant to be worthy of one thrill of fear. Doth not the Lord say to us, "I, even I, am he that comforteth thee; who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?" Scholars have given other renderings of this verse, but we prefer to keep to the authorised version when we can, and in this case we find in it precisely the same meaning which those would give to it who translate my heels, by the words "my supplanters."

Verse 6. What if the good man's foes be among the great ones of the earth! yet he need not fear them. They that trust in their wealth. Poor fools, to be content with such a rotten confidence. When we set our rock in contrast with theirs, it would be folly to be afraid of them. Even though they are loud in their brags, we can afford to smile. What if they glory and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches? yet while we glory in our God we are not dismayed by their proud threatenings. Great strength, position, and estate, make wicked men very lofty in their own esteem, and tyrannical towards others; but the heir of heaven is not overawed by their dignity, nor cowed by their haughtiness. He sees the small value of riches, and the helplessness of their owners in the hour of death, and therefore he is not so mean as to be afraid of an ephemera, a moth, a bubble.

Verse 7. None of them can by any means redeem his brother. With all their riches, the whole of them put together could not rescue a comrade from the chill grasp of death. They boast of what they will do with us, let them see to themselves. Let them weigh their gold in the scales of death, and see how much they can buy therewith from the worm and the grave. The poor are their equals in this respect; let them love their friend ever so dearly, they cannot give to God a ransom for him. A king's ransom would be of no avail, a Monte Rosa of rubies, an America of silver, a world of gold, a sun of diamonds, would all be utterly contemned. O ye boasters, think not to terrify us with your worthless wealth, go ye and intimidate death before ye threaten men in whom is immortality and life.

Verse 8. For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever. Too great is the price, the purchase is hopeless. For ever must the attempt to redeem a soul with money remain a failure. Death comes and wealth cannot bribe him; hell follows and no golden key can unlock its dungeon. Vain, then, are your threatenings, ye possessors of the yellow clay; your childish toys are despised by men who estimate the value of possessions by the shekel of the sanctuary.

Verse 9. No price could secure for any man that he should still live for ever, and not see corruption. Mad are men now after gold, what would they be if it could buy the elixir of immortality? Gold is lavished out of the bag to cheat the worm of the poor body by embalming it, or enshrining it in a coffin of lead, but it is a miserable business, a very burlesque and comedy. As for the soul, it is too subtle a thing to be detained when it hears the divine command to soar through tracks unknown. Never, therefore, will we fear those base nibblers at our heels, whose boasted treasure proves to be so powerless to save.

Verse 10. For he seeth that wise men die. Every one sees this. The proud persecuting rich man cannot help seeing it. He cannot shut his eyes to the fact that wiser men than he are dying, and that he also, with all his craft, must die. Likewise the fool and the brutish person perish. Folly has no immunity from death. Off goes the jester's cap, as well as the student's gown. Jollity cannot laugh off the dying hour; death who visits the university, does not spare the tavern. Thoughtlessness and brutishness meet their end as surely as much care and wasting study. In fact, while the truly wise, so

far as this world is concerned, die, the fool has a worse lot, for he perishes, is blotted out of remembrance, bewailed by none, remembered no more. And leave their wealth to others. Not a farthing can they carry with them. Whether heirs male of their own body, lawfully begotten, inherit their estates, or they remain unclaimed, it matters not, their hoardings are no longer theirs; friends may quarrel over their property, or strangers divide it as spoil, they cannot interfere. Ye boasters, hold ye your own, before ye dream of despoiling the sons of the living God. Keep shoes to your own feet in death's dark pilgrimage, ere ye seek to bite our heels.

Verse 11. Their inward thought is, their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations. He is very foolish who is more a fool in his inmost thought than he dare to be in his speech. Such rotten fruit, rotten at the core, are worldlings. Down deep in their hearts, though they dare not say so, they fancy that earthly goods are real and enduring. Foolish dreamers! The frequent dilapidation of their castles and manor houses should teach them better, but still they cherish the delusion. They cannot tell the mirage from the true streams of water; they fancy rainbows to be stable, and clouds to be the everlasting hills. They call their lands after their own names. Common enough is this practice. His grounds are made to bear the groundling's name, he might as well write it on the water. Men have even called countries by their own names, but what are they the better for the idle compliment, even if men perpetuate their nomenclature?

Verse 12. Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not. He is but a lodger for the hour, and does not stay a night: even when he dwells in marble halls his notice to quit is written out. Eminence is evermore in imminence of peril. The hero of the hour lasts but for an hour. Sceptres fall from the paralysed hands which once grasped them, and coronets slip away from skulls when the life is departed. He is like the beasts that perish. He is not like the sheep which are preserved of the Great Shepherd, but like the hunted beast which is doomed to die. He lives a brutish life and dies a brutish death. Wallowing in riches, surfeited with pleasure, he is fatted for the slaughter, and dies like the ox in the shambles. Alas! that so noble a creature should use his life so unworthily, and end it so disgracefully. So far as this world is concerned, wherein does the death of many men differ from the death of a dog? They go down—

"To the vile dust from whence they sprung,
Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung."

What room is there, then, for fear to the godly when such natural brute beasts assail them? Should they not in patience possess their souls? We make a break here, because this stanza appears to be the refrain of the song, and as such is repeated in Ps 49:20.

Verse 13. Their vain confidences are not casual aberrations from the path of wisdom, but their way, their usual and regular course; their whole life is regulated by such principles. Their life path is essential folly. They are fools ingrain. From first to last brutishness is their characteristic, grovelling stupidity the leading trait of their conduct. Yet their posterity approve their sayings. Those who follow them in descent follow them in folly, quote their worldly maxims, and accept their mad career as the most prudent mode of life. Why do they not see by their father's failure their father's folly? No, the race transmits its weakness. Grace is not hereditary, but sordid worldliness goes from generation to generation. The race of fools never dies out. No need of missionaries to teach men to be earthworms, they crawl naturally to the dust. Selah. Well may the minstrel pause, and bid us muse upon the deep seated madness of the sons of Adam. Take occasion, reader, to reflect upon thine own.

Verse 14. Like sheep they are laid in the grave. As dumb driven cattle, they are hurried to their doom, and are penned in within the gates of destruction. As sheep that go whither they are driven, and follow their leader without thought, so these men who have chosen to make this world their all, are urged on by their passions, till they find themselves at their journey's end, that end the depths of Hades. Or if we keep to our own translation, we have the idea of their dying peaceably, and being buried in quiet, only that they may wake up to be ashamed at the last great day. Death shall feed on them. Death like a grim shepherd leads them on, and conducts them to the place of their eternal pasturage, where all is barrenness and misery. The righteous are led by the Good Shepherd, but the ungodly have death for their shepherd, and he drives them onward to hell. As the power of death rules them in this world, for they have not passed from death unto life, so the terrors of death shall devour them in the world to come. As grim giants, in old stories, are said to feed on men whom they entice to their caves, so death, the monster, feeds on the flesh and blood of the mighty. The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning. The poor saints were once the tail, but at the day break they shall be the head. Sinners rule till night fall; their honours wither in the evening, and in the morning they find their position utterly reversed. The sweetest reflection to the upright is that "the morning" here intended begins an endless, changeless, day. What a vexation of spirit to the proud worldling, when the Judge of all the earth holds his morning session, to see the man whom he despised, exalted high in heaven, while he himself is cast away! And their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling. Whatever of glory the ungodly had shall disappear in the tomb. Form and comeliness shall vanish from them, the worm shall make sad havoc of all their beauty. Even their last dwelling place, the grave, shall not be able to protect the relics committed to it; their bodies shall dissolve, no trace shall remain of all their strong limbs and lofty heads, no vestige of remaining beauty shall be discoverable. The beauty of the righteous is not yet revealed, it waits its manifestations; but all the beauty the wicked will ever have is in full bloom in this life; it will wither, fade, decay, rot, and utterly pass away. Who, then, would envy or fear the proud sinner?

Verse 15. But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave. Forth from that temporary resting place we shall come in due time, quickened by divine energy. Like our risen Head we cannot be holden by the bands of the grave; redemption has emancipated us from the slavery of death. No redemption could man find in riches, but God has found it in the blood of his dear Son. Our Elder Brother has given to God a ransom, and we are the redeemed of the Lord: because of this redemption by price we shall assuredly be redeemed by power out of the hand of the last enemy. For he shall receive me. He shall take me out of the tomb, take me up to heaven. If it is not said of me as of Enoch, "He was not, for God took him, "yet shall I reach the same glorious state. My spirit God will receive, and my body shall sleep in Jesus till, being raised in his image, it shall also be received into glory. How infinitely superior is such a hope to anything which our oppressors can boast! Here is something which will bear meditation, and therefore again let us pause, at the bidding of the musician, who inserts a Selah.

Verse 16. In these last verses the psalmist becomes a preacher, and gives admonitory lessons which he has himself gathered from experience. Be not thou afraid when one is made rich. Let it not give thee any concern to see the godless prosper. Raise no questions as to divine justice; suffer no foreboding to cloud thy mind. Temporal prosperity is too small a matter to be worth fretting about; let the dogs have their bones, and the swine their draff. When the glory of his house is increased. Though the sinner and his family are in great esteem, and stand exceedingly high, never mind; all things will be righted in due time. Only those whose judgment is worthless will esteem men the more

because their lands are broader; those who are highly estimated for such unreasonable reasons will find their level ere long, when truth and righteousness come to the fore.

Verse 17. For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away. He has but a leasehold of his acres, and death ends his tenure. Through the river of death man must pass naked. Not a rag of all his raiment, not a coin of all his treasure, not a joy of all his honour, can the dying worldling carry with him. Why then fret ourselves about so fleeting a prosperity? His glory shall not descend after him. As he goes down, down, down for ever, none of his honours or possessions will follow him. Patents of nobility are invalid in the sepulchre. His worship, his honour, his lordship, and his grace, will alike find their titles ridiculous in the tomb. Hell knows no aristocracy. Your dainty and delicate sinners shall find that eternal burnings have no respect for their affectations and refinements.

Verse 18. Though while he lived he blessed his soul. He pronounced himself happy. He had his good things in this life. His chief end and aim were to bless himself. He was charmed with the adulation of flatterers. Men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself. The generality of men worship success, however it may be gained. The colour of the winning horse is no matter; it is the winner, and that is enough. "Take care of Number One," is the world's proverbial philosophy, and he who gives good heed to it is "a clever fellow, ""a fine man of business, ""a shrewd common sense tradesman, ""a man with his head put on the right way." Get money, and you will be "respectable, ""a substantial man, "and your house will be "an eminent firm in the city, "or "one of the best county families." To do good wins fame in heaven, but to do good to yourself is the prudent thing among men of the world. Yet not a whisper of worldly congratulation can follow the departing millionaire; they say he died worth a mint of money, but what charm has that fact to the dull cold ear of death? The banker rots as fast as the shoeblack, and the peer becomes as putrid as the pauper. Alas! poor wealth, thou art but the rainbow colouring of the bubble, the tint which yellows the morning mist, but adds not substance to it.

Verse 19. He shall go to the generation of his fathers. Where the former generations lie, the present shall also slumber. The sires beckon to their sons to come to the same land of forgetfulness. Mortal fathers beget not immortal children. As our ancestors have departed, so also must we. They shall never see light. To this upper region the dead worldling shall never return again to possess his estates, and enjoy his dignities. Among the dead he must lie in the thick darkness, where no joy or hope can come to him. Of all his treasures there remains not enough to furnish him one poor candle; the blaze of his glory is out for ever, and not a spark remains to cheer him. How then can we look with fear or envy upon a wretch doomed to such unhappiness?

Verse 20. The song ends with the refrain, Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish. Understanding differences men from animals, but if they will not follow the highest wisdom, and like beasts find their all in this life, then their end shall be as mean and dishonourable as that of beasts slain in the chase, or killed in the shambles. From the loftiest elevation of worldly honour to the uttermost depths of death is but a step. Saddest of all is the reflection, that though men are like beasts in all the degradation of perishing, yet not in the rest which animal perishing secures, for, alas! it is written, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." So ends the minstrel's lay. Comforting as the theme is to the righteous, it is full of warning to the worldly. Hear ye it, O ye rich and poor. Give ear to it, ye nations of the earth.

Psalm 50

Verse 1. The mighty God, even the Lord. El, Elohim, Jehovah, three glorious names for the God of Israel. To render the address the more impressive, these august titles are mentioned, just as in royal decrees the names and dignities of monarchs are placed in the forefront. Here the true God is described as Almighty, as the only and perfect object of adoration and as the self-existent One. Hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun until the going down thereof. The dominion of Jehovah extends over the whole earth, and therefore to all mankind is his decree directed. The east and the west are bidden to hear the God who makes his sun to rise on every quarter of the globe. Shall the summons of the great King be despised? Will we dare provoke him to anger by slighting his call?

Verse 2. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. The Lord is represented not only as speaking to the earth, but as coming forth to reveal the glory of his presence to an assembled universe. God of old dwelt in Zion among his chosen people, but here the beams of his splendour are described as shining forth upon all nations. The sun was spoken of in the first verse, but here is a far brighter sun. The majesty of God is most conspicuous among his own elect, but is not confined to them; the church is not a dark lantern, but a candlestick. God shines not only in Zion, but out of her. She is made perfect in beauty by his indwelling, and that beauty is seen by all observers when the Lord shines forth from her. Observe how with trumpet voice and flaming ensign the infinite Jehovah summons the heavens and the earth to hearken to his word.

Verse 3. Our God shall come. The psalmist speaks of himself and his brethren as standing in immediate anticipation of the appearing of the Lord upon the scene. "He comes, "they say, "our covenant God is coming; "they can hear his voice from afar, and perceive the splendour of his attending train. Even thus should we await the long-promised appearing of the Lord from heaven. And shall not keep silence. He comes to speak, to plead with his people, to accuse and judge the ungodly. He has been silent long in patience, but soon he will speak with power. What a moment of awe when the Omnipotent is expected to reveal himself! What will be the reverent joy and solemn expectation when the poetic scene of this Psalm becomes in the last great day an actual reality! A fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. Flame and hurricane are frequently described as the attendants of the divine appearance. "Our God is a consuming fire." "At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hailstones and coals of fire." Ps 18:12. "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly; yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind." "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God." 2Th 1:7-8. Fire is the emblem of justice in action, and the tempest is a token of his overwhelming power. Who will not listen in solemn silence when such is the tribunal from which the judge pleads with heaven and earth?

Verse 4. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth. Angels and men, the upper and the lower worlds, are called to witness the solemn scene. The whole creation shall stand in court to testify to the solemnity and the truth of the divine pleading. Both earth beneath and heaven above shall unite in condemning sin; the guilty shall have no appeal, though all are summoned that they may appeal if they dare. Both angels and men have seen the guilt of mankind and the goodness of the Lord, they shall therefore confess the justice of the divine utterance, and say "Amen" to the sentence of the supreme Judge. Alas, ye despisers! What will ye do and to whom will ye fly? That he may judge his people. Judgment begins at the house of God. The trial of the visible people of God will be a most awful ceremonial. He will thoroughly purge his floor. He will discern between his nominal and his real people, and that in open court, the whole universe looking on. My soul, when this actually takes

place, how will it fare with thee? Canst thou endure the day of his coming?

Verse 5. Gather my saints together unto me. Go, ye swift winged messengers, and separate the precious from the vile. Gather out the wheat of the heavenly garner. Let the long scattered, but elect people, known by my separating grace to be my sanctified ones, be now assembled in one place. All are not saints who seem to be so—a severance must be made; therefore let all who profess to be saints be gathered before my throne of judgment, and let them hear the word which will search and try the whole, that the false may be convicted and the true revealed. Those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice; this is the grand test, and yet some have dared to imitate it. The covenant was ratified by the slaying of victims, the cutting and dividing of offerings; this the righteous have done by accepting with true faith the great propitiatory sacrifice, and this the pretenders have done in merely outward form. Let them be gathered before the throne for trial and testing, and as many as have really ratified the covenant by faith in the Lord Jesus shall be attested before all worlds as the objects of distinguishing grace, while formalists shall learn that outward sacrifices are all in vain. Oh, solemn assize, how does my soul bow in awe at the prospect thereof!

Verse 6. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness. Celestial intelligences and the spirits of just men made perfect, shall magnify the infallible judgment of the divine tribunal. Now they doubtless wonder at the hypocrisy of men; then they shall equally marvel at the exactness of the severance between the true and the false. For God is judge himself. This is the reason for the correctness of the judgment. Priests of old, and churches of later times, were readily deceived, but not so the all discerning Lord. No deputy judge sits on the great white throne; the injured Lord of all himself weighs the evidence and allots the vengeance or reward. The scene in the Psalm is a grand poetical conception, but it is also an inspired prophecy of that day which shall burn as an oven, when the Lord shall discern between him that feareth and him that feareth him not. Selah. Here we may well pause in reverent prostration, in deep searching of heart, in humble prayer, and in awe struck expectation.

Verses 7-15. The address which follows is directed to the professed people of God. It is clearly, in the first place, meant for Israel; but is equally applicable to the visible church of God in every age. It declares the futility of external worship when spiritual faith is absent, and the mere outward ceremonial is rested in.

Verse 7. Hear, O my people, and I will speak. Because Jehovah speaks and they are avowedly his own people, they are bound to give earnest heed. "Let me speak," saith the great I AM. The heavens and earth are but listeners, the Lord is about both to testify and to judge. O Israel, and I will testify against thee. Their covenant name is mentioned to give point to the address; it was a double evil that the chosen nation should become so carnal, so unspiritual, so false, so heartless to their God. God himself, whose eyes sleep not, who is not misled by rumour, but sees for himself, enters on the scene as witness against his favoured nation. Alas! for us when God, even our fathers' God, testifies to the hypocrisy of the visible church. I am God, even thy God. He had taken them to be his peculiar people above all other nations, and they had in the most solemn manner avowed that he was their God. Hence the special reason for calling them to account. The law began with, "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt," and now the session of their judgment opens with the same reminder of their singular position, privilege, and responsibility. It is not only that Jehovah is God, but thy God, O Israel; this is that makes thee so amenable to his searching reproofs.

Verse 8. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been ever before me.

Though they had not failed in maintaining his outward worship, or even if they had, he was not about to call them to account for this: a more weighty matter was now under consideration. They thought the daily sacrifices and the abounding burnt offerings to be everything: he counted them nothing if the inner sacrifice of heart devotion had been neglected. What was greatest with them was least with God. It is even so today. Sacraments (so called) and sacred rites are their main concern with unconverted but religious men, but with the Most High the spiritual worship which they forget is the sole matter. Let the external be maintained by all means, according to the divine command, but if the secret and spiritual be not in them, they are a vain oblation, a dead ritual, and even an abomination before the Lord.

Verse 9. I will take no bullock out of thy house. Foolishly they dreamed that bullocks with horns and hoofs could please the Lord, when indeed he sought for hearts and souls. Impiously they fancied that Jehovah needed these supplies, and that if they fed his altar with their fat beasts, he would be content. What he intended for their instruction, they made their confidence. They remembered not that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Nor he goats out of thy folds. He mentions these lesser victims as if to rouse their common sense to see that the great Creator could find not satisfaction in mere animal offerings. If he needed these, he would not appeal to their scanty stalls and folds; in fact, he here refuses to take so much as one, if they brought them under the false and dishonouring view, that they were in themselves pleasing to him. This shows that the sacrifices of the law were symbolical of higher and spiritual things, and were not pleasing to God except under their typical aspect. The believing worshipper looking beyond the outward was accepted, the unspiritual who had no respect to their meaning was wasting his substance, and blaspheming the God of heaven.

Verse 10. For every beast of the forest is mine. How could they imagine that the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth, had need of beasts, when all the countless hordes that find shelter in a thousand forests and wildernesses belong to him? And the cattle upon a thousand hills. Not alone the wild beasts, but also the tamer creatures are all his own. Even if God cared for these things, he could supply himself. Their cattle were not, after all, their own, but were still the great Creator's property, why then should he be beholden to them. From Dan to Beersheba, from Nebaioth to Lebanon, there fed not a beast which was not marked with the name of the great Shepherd; why, then, should he crave oblations of Israel? What a slight is here put even upon sacrifices of divine appointment when wrongly viewed as in themselves pleasing to God! And all this to be so expressly stated under the law! How much more is this clear under the gospel, when it is so much more plainly revealed, that "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth"? Ye Ritualists, ye Sacramentarians, ye modern Pharisees, what say ye to this?

Verse 11. I know all the fowls of the mountain. All the winged creatures are under my inspection and near my hand; what then can be the value of your pairs of turtledoves, and your two young pigeons? The great Lord not only feeds all his creatures, but is well acquainted with each one; how wondrous is this knowledge! And the wild beasts of the fields are mine. The whole population moving over the plain belongs to me; why then should I seek you beeves and rams? In me all things live and move; how mad are you to suppose that I desire your living things! A spiritual God demands other life than that which is seen in animals; he looks for spiritual sacrifice; for the love, the trust, the praise, the life of your hearts.

Verse 12. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee. Strange conception, a hungry God! Yet if such an

absurd ideal could be truth, and if the Lord hungered for meat, he would not ask it of men. He could provide for himself out of his own possessions; he would not turn suppliant to his own creatures. Even under the grossest ideal of God, faith in outward ceremonies is ridiculous. Do men fancy that the Lord needs banners, and music, and incense, and fine linen? If he did, the stars would emblazon his standard, the winds and the waves become his orchestra, ten thousand times ten thousand flowers would breathe forth perfume, the snow should be his alb, the rainbow his girdle, the clouds of light his mantle. O fools and slow of heart, ye worship ye know not what! For the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. What can he need who is owner of all things and able to create as he wills? Thus overwhelmingly does the Lord pour forth his arguments upon formalists.

Verse 13. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Are you so infatuated as to think this? Is the great I AM subject to corporeal wants, and are they to be thus grossly satisfied? Heathens thought thus of their idols, but dare ye think thus of the God who made the heavens and the earth? Can ye have fallen so low as to think thus of me, O Israel? What vivid reasoning is here! How the fire flashes dart into the idiot faces of trusters in outward forms! Ye dupes of Rome, can ye read this and be unmoved? The expostulation is indignant; the questions utterly confound; the conclusion is inevitable; heart worship only can be acceptable with the true God. It is inconceivable that outward things can gratify him, except so far as through them our faith and love express themselves.

Verse 14. Offer unto God thanksgiving. No longer look at your sacrifices as in themselves gifts pleasing to me, but present them as the tributes of your gratitude; it is then that I will accept them, but not while your poor souls have no love and no thankfulness to offer me. The sacrifices, as considered in themselves, are contemned, but the internal emotions of love consequent upon a remembrance of divine goodness, are commended as the substance, meaning, and soul of sacrifice. Even when the legal ceremonials were not abolished, this was true, and when they came to an end, this truth was more than ever made manifest. Not for want of bullocks on the altar was Israel blamed, but for want of thankful adoration before the Lord. She excelled in the visible, but in the inward grace, which is the one thing needful, she sadly failed. Too many in these days are in the same condemnation. And pay thy vows unto the most High. Let the sacrifice be really presented to the God who seeth the heart, pay to him the love you promised, the service you covenanted to render, the loyalty of heart you have vowed to maintain. O for grace to do this! O that we may be graciously enabled to love God, and live up to our profession! To be, indeed, the servants of the Lord, the lovers of Jesus, this is our main concern. What avails our baptism, to what end our gatherings at the Lord's table, to what purpose our solemn assemblies, if we have not the fear of the Lord, and vital godliness reigning within our bosoms?

Verse 15. And call upon me in the day of trouble. Oh blessed verse! Is this then true sacrifice? Is it an offering to ask an alms of heaven? It is even so. The King himself so regards it. For herein is faith manifested, herein is love proved, for in the hour of peril we fly to those we love. It seems a small thing to pray to God when we are distressed, yet is it a more acceptable worship than the mere heartless presentation of bullocks and he goats. This is a voice from the throne, and how full of mercy it is! It is very tempestuous round about Jehovah, and yet what soft drops of mercy's rain drop from the bosom of the storm! Who would not offer such sacrifices? Troubled one, haste to present it now! Who shall say that Old Testament saints did not know the gospel? Its very spirit and essence breathes like frankincense all around this holy Psalm. I will deliver thee. The reality of thy sacrifice of prayer shall be seen in its answer. Whether the smoke of burning bulls be sweet to me or no, certainly thy humble prayer shall be, and I will prove it so by my gracious reply to thy supplication.

This promise is very large, and may refer both to temporal and eternal deliverances; faith can turn it every way, like the sword of the cherubim. And thou shalt glorify me. Thy prayer will honour me, and thy grateful perception of my answering mercy will also glorify me. The goats and bullocks would prove a failure, but the true sacrifice never could. The calves of the stall might be a vain oblation, but not the calves of sincere lips. Thus we see what is true ritual. Here we read inspired rubrics. Spiritual worship is the great, the essential matter; all else without it is rather provoking than pleasing to God. As helps to the soul, outward offerings were precious, but when men went not beyond them, even their hallowed things were profaned in the view of heaven.

Verses 16-21. Here the Lord turns to the manifestly wicked among his people; and such there were even in the highest places of his sanctuary. If moral formalists had been rebuked, how much more these immoral pretenders to fellowship with heaven? If the lack of heart spoiled the worship of the more decent and virtuous, how much more would violations of the law, committed with a high hand, corrupt the sacrifices of the wicked?

Verse 16. But unto the wicked God saith. To the breakers of the second table he now addresses himself; he had previously spoken to the neglectors of the first. What hast thou to do to declare my statutes? You violate openly my moral law, and yet are great sticklers for my ceremonial commands! What have you to do with them? What interest can you have in them? Do you dare to teach my law to others, and profane it yourselves? What impudence, what blasphemy is this! Even if you claim to be sons of Levi, what of that? Your wickedness disqualifies you, disinherits you, puts you out of the succession. It should silence you, and would if my people were as spiritual as I would have them, for they would refuse to hear you, and to pay you the portion of temporal things which is due to my true servants. You count up your holy days, you contend for rituals, you fight for externals, and yet the weightier matters of the law ye despise! Ye blind guides, ye strain out gnats and swallow camels; your hypocrisy is written on your foreheads and manifest to all. Or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth. Ye talk of being in covenant with me, and yet trample my holiness beneath you feet as swine trample upon pearls; think ye that I can brook this? Your mouths are full of lying and slander, and yet ye mouth my words as if they were fit morsels for such as you! How horrible and evil it is, that to this day we see men explaining doctrines who despise precepts! They make grace a coverlet for sin, and even judge themselves to be sound in the faith, while they are rotten in life. We need the grace of the doctrines as much as the doctrines of grace, and without it an apostle is but a Judas, and a fair spoken professor is an arrant enemy of the cross of Christ.

Verse 17. Seeing thou hatest instruction. Profane professors are often too wise to learn, too besotted with conceit to be taught of God. What a monstrosity that men should declare those statutes which with their hearts they do not know, and which in their lives they openly disavow! Woe unto the men who hate the instruction which they take upon themselves to give. And castest my words behind thee. Despising them, throwing them away as worthless, putting them out of sight as obnoxious. Many boasters of the law did this practically; and in these last days there are pickers and choosers of God's words who cannot endure the practical part of Scripture; they are disgusted at duty, they abhor responsibility, they disembowel texts of their plain meanings, they wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction. It is an ill sign when a man dares not look a Scripture in the face, and an evidence of brazen impudence when he tries to make it mean something less condemnatory of his sins, and endeavours to prove it to be less sweeping in its demands. How powerful is the argument that such men have no right to take the covenant of God into their mouths, seeing that its spirit does not regulate their lives!

Verse 18. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him. Moral honesty cannot be absent where true grace is present. Those who excuse others in trickery are guilty themselves; those who use others to do unjust actions for them are doubly so. If a man be ever so religious, if his own actions do not rebuke dishonesty, he is an accomplice with thieves. If we can acquiesce in anything which is not upright, we are not upright ourselves, and our religion is a lie. And hast been partaker with adulterers. One by one the moral precepts are thus broken by the sinners in Zion. Under the cloak of piety, unclean livers conceal themselves. We may do this by smiling at unchaste jests, listening to indelicate expressions, and conniving at licentious behaviour in our presence; and if we thus act, how dare we preach, or lead public prayer, or wear the Christian name? See how the Lord lays righteousness to the plummet. How plainly all this declares that without holiness no man shall see the Lord! No amount of ceremonial or theological accuracy can cover dishonesty and fornication: these filthy things must be either purged from us by the blood of Jesus, or they will kindle a fire in God's anger which will burn even to the lowest hell.

Verse 19. Thou givest thy mouth to evil. Sins against the ninth commandment are here mentioned. The man who surrenders himself to the habit of slander is a vile hypocrite if he associates himself with the people of God. A man's health is readily judged by his tongue. A foul mouth, a foul heart. Some slander almost as often as they breathe, and yet are great upholders of the church, and great sticklers for holiness. To what depths will not they go in evil, who delight in spreading it with their tongues? And thy tongue frameth deceit. This is a more deliberate sort of slander, where the man dexterously elaborates false witness, and concocts methods of defamation. There is an ingenuity of calumny in some men, and, alas! even in some who are thought to be followers of the Lord Jesus. They manufacture falsehoods, weave them in their loom, hammer them on their anvil, and then retail their wares in every company. Are these accepted with God? Though they bring their wealth to the altar, and speak eloquently of truth and of salvation, have they any favour with God? We should blaspheme the holy God if we were to think so. They are corrupt in his sight, a stench in his nostrils. He will cast all liars into hell. Let them preach, and pray, and sacrifice as they will; till they become truthful, the God of truth loathes them utterly.

Verse 20. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother. He sits down to it, makes it his meat, studies it, resolves upon it, becomes a master of defamation, occupies the chair of calumny. His nearest friend is not safe, his dearest relative escapes not. Thou slanderest thine own mother's son. He ought to love him best, but he has an ill word for him. The son of one's own mother was to the Oriental a very tender relation; but the wretched slanderer knows no claims of kindred. He stabs his brother in the dark, and aims a blow at him who came forth of the same womb; yet he wraps himself in the robe of hypocrisy, and dreams that he is a favourite of heaven, an accepted worshipper of the Lord. Are such monsters to be met with nowadays? Alas! they pollute our churches still, and are roots of bitterness, spots on our solemn feasts, wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. Perhaps some such may read these lines, but they will probably read them in vain; their eyes are too dim to see their own condition, their hearts are waxen gross, their ears are dull of hearing; they are given up to a strong delusion to believe a lie, that they may be damned.

Verse 21. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence. No swift judgment overthrew the sinner—longsuffering reigned; no thunder was heard in threatening, and no bolt of fire was hurled in execution. Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself. The inference drawn from the Lord's patience was infamous; the respited culprit thought his judge to be one of the same order

as himself. He offered sacrifice, and deemed it accepted; he continued in sin, and remained unpunished, and therefore he rudely said, "Why need believe these crazy prophets? God cares not how we live so long as we pay our tithes. Little does he consider how we get the plunder, so long as we bring a bullock to his altar." What will not men imagine of the Lord? At one time they liken the glory of Israel to a calf, and anon unto their brutish selves. But I will reprove thee. At last I will break silence and let them know my mind. And set them in order before thine eyes. I will marshall thy sins in battle array. I will make thee see them, I will put them down item by item, classified and arranged. Thou shalt know that if silent awhile, I was never blind or deaf. I will make thee perceive what thou hast tried to deny. I will leave the seat of mercy for the throne of judgment, and there I will let thee see how great the difference between thee and me.

Verse 22. Now or oh! it is a word of entreaty, for the Lord is loath even to let the most ungodly run on to destruction. Consider this; take these truths to heart, ye who trust in ceremonies and ye who live in vice, for both of you sin in that ye forget God. Bethink you how unaccepted you are, and turn unto the Lord. See how you have mocked the eternal, and repent of your iniquities. Lest I tear you in pieces, as the lion rends his prey, and there be none to deliver, no Saviour, no refuge, no hope. Ye reject the Mediator: beware, for ye will sorely need one in the day of wrath, and none will be near to plead for you. How terrible, how complete, how painful, how humiliating, will be the destruction of the wicked! God uses no soft words, or velvet metaphors, nor may his servants do so when they speak of the wrath to come. O reader, consider this.

Verse 23. Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me. Praise is the best sacrifice; true, hearty, gracious thanksgiving from a renewed mind. Not the lowing of bullocks bound to the altar, but the songs of redeemed men are the music which the ear of Jehovah delights in. Sacrifice your loving gratitude, and God is honoured thereby. And to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God. Holy living is a choice evidence of salvation. He who submits his whole way to divine guidance, and is careful to honour God in his life, brings an offering which the Lord accepts through his dear Son; and such a one shall be more and more instructed, and made experimentally to know the Lord's salvation. He needs salvation, for the best ordering of the life cannot save us, but that salvation he shall have. Not to ceremonies, not to unpurified lips, is the blessing promised, but to grateful hearts and holy lives. O Lord, give us to stand in the judgment with those who have worshipped thee aright and have seen thy salvation.

Psalm 51

Verse 1. Have mercy upon me, O God. He appeals at once to the mercy of God, even before he mentions his sin. The sight of mercy is good for eyes that are sore with penitential weeping. Pardon of sin must ever be an act of pure mercy, and therefore to that attribute the awakened sinner flies. "According to thy lovingkindness." Act, O Lord, like thyself; give mercy like thy mercy. Show mercy such as is congruous with thy grace.

"Great God, thy nature hath no bound:
So let thy pardoning love be found."

What a choice word is that of our English version, a rare compound of precious things: love and kindness sweetly blended in one—"lovingkindness." According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies. Let thy most loving compassions come to me, and make thou thy pardons such as these

would suggest. Reveal all thy gentlest attributes in my case, not only in their essence but in their abundance. Numberless have been thine acts of goodness, and vast is thy grace; let me be the object of thine infinite mercy, and repeat it all in me. Make my one case an epitome of all thy tender mercies. By every deed of grace to others I feel encouraged, and I pray thee let me add another and a yet greater one, in my own person, to the long list of thy compassions. Blot out my transgressions. My revolts, my excesses, are all recorded against me; but, Lord, erase the lines. Draw thy pen through the register. Obliterate the record, though now it seems engraven in the rock for ever; many strokes of thy mercy may be needed, to cut out the deep inscription, but then thou has a multitude of mercies, and therefore, I beseech thee, erase my sins.

Verse 2. Wash me thoroughly. It is not enough to blot out the sin; his person is defiled, and he fain would be purified. He would have God himself cleanse him, for none but he could do it effectually. The washing must be thorough, it must be repeated, therefore he cries, "Multiply to wash me." The dye is in itself immovable, and I, the sinner, have lain long in it, till the crimson is ingrained; but, Lord, wash, and wash, and wash again, till the last stain is gone, and not a trace of my defilement is left. The hypocrite is content if his garments be washed, but the true suppliant cries, "wash me." The careless soul is content with a nominal cleansing, but the truly awakened conscience desires a real and practical washing, and that of a most complete and efficient kind. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity. It is viewed as one great pollution, polluting the entire nature, and as all his own; as if nothing were so much his own as his sin. The one sin against Bathsheba, served to show the psalmist the whole mountain of his iniquity, of which that foul deed was but one falling stone. He desires to be rid of the whole mass of his filthiness, which though once so little observed, had then become a hideous and haunting terror to his mind. And cleanse me from my sin. This is a more general expression; as if the psalmist said, "Lord, if washing will not do, try some other process; if water avails not, let fire, let anything be tried, so that I may but be purified. Rid me of my sin by some means, by any means, by every means, only do purify me completely, and leave no guilt upon my soul." It is not the punishment he cries out against, but the sin. Many a murderer is more alarmed at the gallows than at the murder which brought him to it. The thief loves the plunder, though he fears the prison. Not so David: he is sick of sin as sin; his loudest outcries are against the evil of his transgression, and not against the painful consequences of it. When we deal seriously with our sin, God will deal gently with us. When we hate what the Lord hates, he will soon make an end of it, to our joy and peace.

Verse 3. For I acknowledge my transgressions. Here he sees the plurality and immense number of his sins, and makes open declaration of them. He seems to say, I make a full confession of them. Not that this is my plea in seeking forgiveness, but it is a clear evidence that I need mercy, and am utterly unable to look to any other quarter for help. My pleading guilty has barred me from any appeal against the sentence of justice: O Lord, I must cast myself on thy mercy, refuse me not, I pray thee. Thou hast made me willing to confess. O follow up this work of grace with a full and free remission! And my sin is ever before me. My sin as a whole is never out of my mind; it continually oppresses my spirit. I lay it before thee because it is ever before me: Lord, put it away both from thee and me. To an awakened conscience, pain on account of sin is not transient and occasional, but intense and permanent, and this is no sign of divine wrath, but rather a sure preface of abounding favour.

Verse 4. Against thee, thee only have I sinned. The virus of sin lies in its opposition to God: the psalmist's sense of sin towards others rather tended to increase the force of this feeling of sin against God. All his wrong doing centred, culminated, and came to a climax, at the foot of the divine throne. To injure our fellow men is sin, mainly because in so doing we violate the law of God. The penitent's

heart was so filled with a sense of the wrong done to the Lord himself, that all other confession was swallowed up in a broken hearted acknowledgment of offence against him. And done this evil in thy sight. To commit treason in the very court of the king and before his eye is impudence indeed: David felt that his sin was committed in all its filthiness while Jehovah himself looked on. None but a child of God cares for the eye of God, but where there is grace in the soul it reflects a fearful guilt upon every evil act, when we remember that the God whom we offend was present when the trespass was committed. That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. He could not present any argument against divine justice, if it proceeded at once to condemn him and punish him for his crime. His own confession, and the judge's own witness of the whole transaction, places the transgression beyond all question or debate; the iniquity was indisputably committed, and was unquestionably a foul wrong, and therefore the course of justice was clear and beyond all controversy.

Verse 5. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity. He is thunderstruck at the discovery of his inbred sin, and proceeds to set it forth. This was not intended to justify himself, but it rather meant to complete the confession. It is as if he said, not only have I sinned this once, but I am in my very nature a sinner. The fountain of my life is polluted as well as its streams. My birth tendencies are out of the square of equity; I naturally lean to forbidden things. Mine is a constitutional disease, rendering my very person obnoxious to thy wrath. And in sin did my mother conceive me. He goes back to the earliest moment of his being, not to traduce his mother, but to acknowledge the deep tap roots of his sin. It is a wicked wresting of Scripture to deny that original sin and natural depravity are here taught. Surely men who cavil at this doctrine have need to be taught of the Holy Spirit what be the first principles of the faith. David's mother was the Lord's handmaid, he was born in chaste wedlock, of a good father, and he was himself, "the man after God's own heart; "and yet his nature was as fallen as that of any other son of Adam, and there only needed the occasion for the manifesting of that sad fact. In our shaping we were put out of shape, and when we were conceived our nature conceived sin. Alas, for poor humanity! Those who will may cry it up, but he is most blessed who in his own soul has learned to lament his lost estate.

Verse 6. Behold. Here is the great matter for consideration. God desires not merely outward virtue, but inward purity, and the penitent's sense of sin is greatly deepened as with astonishment he discovers this truth, and how far he is from satisfying the divine demand. The second "Behold" is fitly set over against the first; how great the gulf which yawns between them! Thou desirest truth in the inward parts. Reality, sincerity, true holiness, heart fidelity, these are the demands of God. He cares not for the pretence of purity, he looks to the mind, heart, and soul. Always has the Holy One of Israel estimated men by their inner nature, and not by their outward professions; to him the inward is as visible as the outward, and he rightly judges that the essential character of an action lies in the motive of him who works it. And in the hidden parts thou shalt make me to know wisdom. The penitent feels that God is teaching him truth concerning his nature, which he had not before perceived. The love of the heart, the mystery of its fall, and the way of its purification—this hidden wisdom we must all attain; and it is a great blessing to be able to believe that the Lord will "make us to know it." No one can teach our innermost nature but the Lord, but he can instruct us to profit. The Holy Spirit can write the law on our heart, and that is the sum of practical wisdom. He can put the fear of the Lord within, and that is the beginning of wisdom. He can reveal Christ in us, and he is essential wisdom. Such poor, foolish, disarranged souls as ours, shall yet be ordered aright, and truth and wisdom shall reign within us.

Verse 7. Purge me with hyssop. Sprinkle the atoning blood upon me with the appointed means. Give me the reality which legal ceremonies symbolise. Nothing but blood can take away my blood stains, nothing but the strongest purification can avail to cleanse me. Let the sin offering purge my sin. Let him who was appointed to atone, execute his sacred office on me; for none can need it more than I. The passage may be read as the voice of faith as well as a prayer, and so it runs—"Thou wilt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." Foul as I am, there is such power in the divine propitiation, that my sin shall vanish quite away. Like the leper upon whom the priest has performed the cleansing rites, I shall again be admitted into the assembly of thy people and allowed to share in the privileges of the true Israel; while in thy sight also, through Jesus my Lord, I shall be accepted. Wash me. Let it not merely be in type that I am clean, but by a real spiritual purification, which shall remove the pollution of my nature. Let the sanctifying as well as the pardoning process be perfected in me. Save me from the evils which my sin has created and nourished in me. And I shall be whiter than snow. None but thyself can whiten me, but thou canst in grace outdo nature itself in its purest state. Snow soon gathers smoke and dust, it melts and disappears; thou canst give me an enduring purity. Though snow is white below as well as on the outer surface, thou canst work the like inward purity in me, and make me so clean that only an hyperbole can set forth my immaculate condition. Lord, do this; my faith believes thou wilt, and well she knows thou canst. Scarcely does Holy Scripture contain a verse more full of faith than this. Considering the nature of the sin, and the deep sense the psalmist had of it, it is a glorious faith to be able to see in the blood sufficient, nay, all sufficient merit entirely to purge it away. Considering also the deep natural inbred corruption which David saw and experienced within, it is a miracle of faith that he could rejoice in the hope of perfect purity in his inward parts. Yet, be it added, the faith is no more than the word warrants, than the blood of atonement encourages, than the promise of God deserves. O that some reader may take heart, even now while smarting under sin, to do the Lord the honour to rely thus confidently on the finished sacrifice of Calvary and the infinite mercy there revealed.

Verse 8. Make me to hear joy and gladness. He prays about his sorrow late in the Psalm; he began at once with his sin; he asks to hear pardon, and then to hear joy. He seeks comfort at the right time and from the right source. His ear has become heavy with sinning, and so he prays, "Make me to hear." No voice could revive his dead joys but that which quickeneth the dead. Pardon from God would give him double joy—"joy and gladness." No stinted bliss awaits the forgiven one; he shall not only have a double blooming joy, but he shall hear it; it shall sing with exultation. Some joy is felt but not heard, for it contends with fears; but the joy of pardon has a voice louder than the voice of sin. God's voice speaking peace is the sweetest music an ear can hear. That the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. He was like a poor wretch whose bones are crushed, crushed by no ordinary means, but by omnipotence itself. He groaned under no mere flesh wounds; his firmest and yet most tender powers were "broken in pieces all asunder; "his manhood had become a dislocated, mangled, quivering sensibility. Yet if he who crushed would cure, every wound would become a new mouth for song, every bone quivering before with agony would become equally sensible of intense delight. The figure is bold, and so is the supplicant. He is requesting a great thing; he seeks joy for a sinful heart, music for crushed bones. Preposterous prayer anywhere but at the throne of God! Preposterous there most of all but for the cross where Jehovah Jesus bore our sins in his own body on the tree. A penitent need not ask to be an hired servant, or settle down in despairing content with perpetual mourning; he may ask for gladness and he shall have it; for if when prodigals return the father is glad, and the neighbours and friends rejoice and are merry with music and dancing, what need can there be that the restored one himself should be wretched?

Verse 9. Hide thy face from my sins. Do not look at them; be at pains not to see them. They thrust themselves in the way; but, Lord, refuse to behold them, lest if thou consider them, thine anger burn, and I die. Blot out all mine iniquities. He repeats the prayer of the first verse with the enlargement of it by the word "all." All repetitions are not "vain repetitions." Souls in agony have no space to find variety of language: pain has to content itself with monotonous. David's face was ashamed with looking on his sin, and no diverting thoughts could remove it from his memory; but he prays the Lord to do with his sin what he himself cannot. If God hide not his face from our sin, he must hide it forever from us; and if he blot not out our sins, he must blot our names out of his book of life.

Verse 10. Create. What! has sin so destroyed us, that the Creator must be called in again? What ruin then doth evil work among mankind! Create in me. I, in my outward fabric, still exist; but I am empty, desert, void. Come, then, and let thy power be seen in a new creation within my old fallen self. Thou didst make a man in the world at first; Lord, make a new man in me! A clean heart. In the seventh verse he asked to be clean; now he seeks a heart suitable to that cleanliness; but he does not say, "Make my old heart clean;" he is too experienced in the hopelessness of the old nature. He would have the old man buried as a dead thing, and a new creation brought in to fill its place. None but God can create either a new heart or a new earth. Salvation is a marvellous display of supreme power; the work in us as much as that for us is wholly of Omnipotence. The affections must be rectified first, or all our nature will go amiss. The heart is the rudder of the soul, and till the Lord take it in hand we steer in a false and foul way. O Lord, thou who didst once make me, be pleased to new make me, and in my most secret parts renew me. Renew a right spirit within me. It was there once, Lord, put it there again. The law on my heart has become like an inscription hard to read: new write it, gracious Maker. Remove the evil as I have entreated thee; but, O replace it with good, lest into my swept, empty, and garnished heart, from which the devil has gone out for a while, seven other spirits more wicked than the first should enter and dwell. The two sentences make a complete prayer. Create what is not there at all; renew that which is there, but in a sadly feeble state.

Verse 11. Cast me not away from thy presence. Throw me not away as worthless; banish me not, like Cain, from thy face and favour. Permit me to sit among those who share thy love, though I only be suffered to keep the door. I deserve to be forever denied admission to thy courts; but, O good Lord, permit me still the privilege which is dear as life itself to me. Take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Withdraw not his comforts, counsels, assistances, quickenings, else I am indeed as a dead man. Do not leave me as thou didst Saul, when neither by Urim, nor by prophet, nor by dream, thou wouldst answer him. Thy Spirit is my wisdom, leave me not to my folly; he is my strength, O desert me not to my own weakness. Drive me not away from thee, neither do thou go away from me. Keep up the union between us, which is my only hope of salvation. It will be a great wonder if so pure a spirit deigns to stay in so base a heart as mine; but then, Lord, it is all wonder together, therefore do this, for thy mercy's sake, I earnestly entreat thee.

Verse 12. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation. Salvation he had known, and had known it as the Lord's own; he had also felt the joy which arises from being saved in the Lord, but he had lost it for a while, and therefore he longed for its restoration. None but God can give back this joy; he can do it; we may ask it; he will do it for his own glory and our benefit. This joy comes not first, but follows pardon and purity: in such order it is safe, in any other it is vain presumption or idiotic delirium. And uphold me with thy free Spirit. Conscious of weakness, mindful of having so lately fallen, he seeks to be kept on his feet by power superior to his own. That royal Spirit, whose holiness is true dignity, is able to make us walk as kings and priests, in all the uprightness of holiness; and he will do so if we

seek his gracious upholding. Such influences will not enslave but emancipate us; for holiness is liberty, and the Holy Spirit is a free Spirit. In the roughest and most treacherous ways we are safe with such a Keeper; in the best paths we stumble if left to ourselves. The praying for joy and upholding go well together; it is all over with joy if the foot is not kept; and, on the other hand, joy is a very upholding thing, and greatly aids holiness; meanwhile, the free, noble, royal Spirit is at the bottom of both.

Verse 13. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways. It was his fixed resolve to be a teacher of others; and assuredly none instruct others so well as those who have been experimentally taught of God themselves. Reclaimed poachers make the best gamekeepers. Huntingdon's degree of S.S., or Sinner Saved, is more needful for a soul winning evangelist than either M.A. or D.D. The pardoned sinner's matter will be good, for he has been taught in the school of experience, and his manner will be telling, for he will speak sympathetically, as one who has felt what he declares. The audience the psalmist would choose is memorable—he would instruct transgressors like himself; others might despise them, but, "a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind." If unworthy to edify saints, he would creep in along with the sinners, and humbly tell them of divine love. The mercy of God to one is an illustration of his usual procedure, so that our own case helps us to understand his "ways," or his general modes of action: perhaps, too, David under that term refers to the preceptive part of the word of God, which, having broken, and having suffered thereby, he felt that he could vindicate and urge upon the reverence of other offenders. And sinners shall be converted unto thee. My fall shall be the restoration of others. Thou wilt bless my pathetic testimony to the recovery of many who, like myself, have turned aside unto crooked ways. Doubtless this Psalm and the whole story of David, have produced for many ages the most salutary results in the conversion of transgressors, and so evil has been overruled for good.

Verse 14. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness. He had been the means of the death of Uriah, the Hittite, a faithful and attached follower, and he now confesses that fact. Besides, his sin of adultery was a capital offence, and he puts himself down as one worthy to die the death. Honest penitents do not fetch a compass and confess their sins in an elegant periphrasis, but they come to the point, call a spade a spade, and make a clean breast of all. What other course is rational in dealing with the Omniscient? O God, thou God of my salvation. He had not ventured to come so near before. It had been, O God, up till now, but here he cries, Thou God of my salvation. Faith grows by the exercise of prayer. He confesses sin more plainly in this verse than before, and yet he deals with God more confidently: growing upward and downward at the same time are perfectly consistent. None but the King can remit the death penalty, it is therefore a joy to faith that God is King, and that he is the author and finisher of our salvation. And my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. One would rather have expected him to say, I will sing of thy mercy; but David can see the divine way of justification, that righteousness of God which Paul afterwards spoke of by which the ungodly are justified, and he vows to sing, yea, and to sing lustily of that righteous way of mercy. After all, it is the righteousness of divine mercy which is its greatest wonder. Note how David would preach in the last verse, and now here he would sing. We can never do too much for the Lord to whom we owe more than all. If we could be preacher, precentor, doorkeeper, pew opener, foot washer, and all in one, all would be too little to show forth all our gratitude. A great sinner pardoned makes a great singer. Sin has a loud voice, and so should our thankfulness have. We shall not sing our own praises if we be saved, but our theme will be the Lord our righteousness, in whose merits we stand righteously accepted.

Verse 15. O Lord, open thou my lips. He is so afraid of himself that he commits his whole being to the divine care, and fears to speak till the Lord unstops his shame silenced mouth. How marvellously the Lord can open our lips, and what divine things can we poor simpletons pour forth under his inspiration! This prayer of a penitent is a golden petition for a preacher, Lord, I offer it for myself and my brethren. But it may stand in good stead any one whose shame for sin makes him stammer in his prayers, and when it is fully answered, the tongue of the dumb begins to sing. And my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. If God opens the mouth he is sure to have the fruit of it. According to the porter at the gate is the nature of that which comes out of a man's lips; when vanity, anger, falsehood, or lust unbar the door, the foulest villainies troop out; but if the Holy Spirit opens the wicket, then grace, mercy, peace, and all the graces come forth in tuneful dances, like the daughters of Israel when they met David returning with the Philistine's head.

Verse 16. For thou desirest not sacrifice. This was the subject of the last Psalm. The psalmist was so illuminated as to see far beyond the symbolic ritual; his eye of faith gazed with delight upon the actual atonement. Else would I give it. He would have been glad enough to present tens of thousands of victims if these would have met the case. Indeed, anything which the Lord prescribed he would cheerfully have rendered. We are ready to give up all we have if we may but be cleared of our sins; and when sin is pardoned our joyful gratitude is prepared for any sacrifice. Thou delightest not in burnt offering. He knew that no form of burnt sacrifice was a satisfactory propitiation. His deep soul need made him look from the type to the antitype, from the external rite to the inward grace.

Verse 17. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. All sacrifices are presented to thee in one, by the man whose broken heart presents the Saviour's merit to thee. When the heart mourns for sin, thou art better pleased than when the bullock bleeds beneath the axe. "A broken heart" is an expression implying deep sorrow, embittering the very life; it carries in it the idea of all but killing anguish in that region which is so vital as to be the very source of life. So excellent is a spirit humbled and mourning for sin, that it is not only a sacrifice, but it has a plurality of excellences, and is preeminently God's sacrifices. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. A heart crushed is a fragrant heart. Men condemn those who are contemptible in their own eyes, but the Lord seeth not as man seeth. He despises what men esteem, and values that which they despise. Never yet has God spurned a lowly, weeping penitent, and never will he while God is love, and while Jesus is called the man who receiveth sinners. Bulls and rams he desires not, but contrite hearts he seeks after; yea, but one of them is better to him than all the varied offerings of the old Jewish sanctuary.

Verse 18. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion. Let blessings according to thy wont be poured upon thy holy hill and chosen city. Zion was David's favourite spot, whereon he had hoped to erect a temple. The ruling passion is so strong on him, that when he has discharged his conscience he must have a word for Zion. He felt he had hindered the project of honouring the Lord there as he desired, but he prayed God still to let the place of his ark be glorious, and to establish his worship and his worshipping people. Build thou the walls of Jerusalem. This had been one of David's schemes, to wall in the holy city, and he desires to see it completed; but we believe he had a more spiritual meaning, and prayed for the prosperity of the Lord's cause and people. He had done mischief by his sin, and had, as it were, pulled down her walls; he, therefore, implores the Lord to undo the evil, and establish his church. God can make his cause to prosper, and in answer to prayer he will do so. Without his building we labour in vain; therefore are we the more instant and constant in prayer. There is surely no grace in us if we do not feel for the church of God, and take a lasting interest in its welfare.

Verse 19. In those days of joyful prosperity thy saints shall present in great abundance the richest and holiest thank offerings to thee, and thou shalt be pleased to accept them. A saved soul expects to see its prayers answered in a revived church, and then is assured that God will be greatly glorified. Though we bring no more sacrifices for sin, yet as priests unto God our solemn praises and votive gifts are thank offerings acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. We bring not the Lord our least things—our doves and pigeons; but we present him with our best possessions—our bullocks. We are glad that in this present time we are able to fulfil in person the declaration of this verse: we also, forecasting the future, wait for days of the divine presence, when the church of God, with unspeakable joy, shall offer gifts upon the altar of God, which will far eclipse anything beheld in these less enthusiastic days. Hasten it, O Lord.

Psalm 52

Verse 1. Why boasteth thyself in mischief, O mighty man? Doeg had small matter for boasting in having procured the slaughter of a band of defenceless priests. A mighty man indeed to kill men who never touched a sword! He ought to have been ashamed of his cowardice. He had no room for exultation! Honourable titles are but irony where the wearer is mean and cruel. If David alluded to Saul, he meant by these words pityingly to say, "How can one by nature fitted for nobler deeds, descend to so low a level as to find a theme for boasting in a slaughter so heartless and mischievous?" The goodness of God endureth continually. A beautiful contrast. The tyrant's fury cannot dry up the perennial stream of divine mercy. If priests be slain their Master lives. If Doeg for awhile triumphs the Lord will outlive him, and right the wrongs which he has done. This ought to modify the proud exultations of the wicked, for after all, while the Lord liveth, iniquity has little cause to exalt itself.

Verse 2. Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs. Thou speakest with an ulterior design. The information given was for Saul's assistance apparently, but in very deed in his heart the Edomite hated the priests of the God of Jacob. It is a mark of deep depravity, when the evil spoken is craftily intended to promote a yet greater evil. Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. David represents the false tongue as being effectual for mischief, like a razor which, unawares to the person operated on, is making him bald; so softly and deftly do Oriental barbers perform their work. Or he may mean that as with a razor a man's throat may be cut very speedily, under the pretence of shaving him, even thus keenly, basely, but effectually Doeg destroyed the band of the priests. Whetted by malice, and guided by craft, he did his cruel work with accursed thoroughness.

Verse 3. Thou lovest evil more than good. He loved not good at all. If both had been equally profitable and pleasant, he would have preferred evil. And lying rather than to speak righteousness. He was more at home at lying than at truth. He spake not the truth except by accident, but he delighted heartily in falsehood. SELAH. Let us pause and look at the proud blustering liar. Doeg is gone, but other dogs bark at the Lord's people. Saul's cattle master is buried, but the devil still has his drovers, who fain would hurry the saints like sheep to the slaughter.

Verse 4. Thou lovest. Thou hast a taste, a gusto for evil language. All devouring words. There are words that, like boa constrictors, swallow men whole, or like lions, rend men to pieces; these words evil minds are fond of. Their oratory is evermore furious and bloody. That which will most readily provoke the lowest passions they are sure to employ, and they think such pandering to the madness of the wicked to be eloquence of a high order. O thou deceitful tongue. Men can manage to say a

great many furious things, and yet cover all over with the pretext of justice. They claim that they are jealous for the right, but the truth is they are determined to put down truth and holiness, and craftily go about it under this transparent pretence.

Verse 5. God shall likewise destroy thee for ever. Fain would the persecutor destroy the church, and therefore God shall destroy him, pull down his house, pluck up his roots, and make an end of him. He shall take thee away. God shall extinguish his coal and sweep him away like the ashes of the hearth; he would have quenched the truth, and God shall quench him. And pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, like a plant torn from the place where it grew, or a captive dragged from his home. Ahimelech and his brother priests were cut off from their abode, and so should those be who compassed and contrived their murder. And root thee out of the land of the living. The persecutor shall be eradicated, stubbed up by the root, cut up root and branch. He sought the death of others and death shall fall upon him. He troubled the land of the living, and he shall be banished to that land where the wicked cease from troubling. Those who will not "let live" have no right to "live." God will turn the tables on malicious men, and mete to them a portion with their own measure. "SELAH." Pause again, and behold the divine justice proving itself more than a match for human sin.

Verse 6. The righteous—the object of the tyrant's hatred—shall outlive his enmity, and also shall see, before his own face, the end of the ungodly oppressor. God permits Mordecai to see Haman hanging on the gallows. David had brought to him the tokens of Saul's death on Gilboa. And fear. Holy awe shall sober the mind of the good man; he shall reverently adore the God of providence. And shall laugh at him. If not with righteous joy, yet with solemn contempt. Schemes so far reaching all baffled, plans so deep, so politic, all thwarted. Mephistopheles outwitted, the old serpent taken in his own subtlety. This is a good theme for that deep seated laughter which is more akin to solemnity than merriment.

Verse 7. Lo. Look ye here, and read the epitaph of a mighty man, who lorded it proudly during his little hour, and set his heel upon the necks of the Lord's chosen. This is the man that made not God his strength. Behold the man! The great vainglorious man. He found a fortress, but not in God; he gloried in his might, but not in the Almighty. Where is he now? How has it fared with him in the hour of his need? Behold his ruin, and be instructed. But trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. The substance he had gathered, and the mischiefs he had wrought, were his boast and glory. Wealth and wickedness are dreadful companions; when combined they make a monster. When the devil is master of money bags, he is a devil indeed. Beelzebub and Mammon together heat the furnace seven times hotter for the child of God, but in the end that shall work out their own destruction. Wherever we see today a man great in sin and substance, we shall do well to anticipate his end, and view this verse as the divine in memoriam.

Verse 8. But I, hunted and persecuted though I am, am like a green olive tree. I am not plucked up or destroyed, but am like a flourishing olive, which out of the rock draws oil, and amid the drought still lives and grows. In the house of God. He was one of the divine family, and could not be expelled from it; his place was near his God, and there was he safe and happy, despite all the machinations of his foes. He was bearing fruit, and would continue to do so when all his proud enemies were withered like branches lopped from the tree. I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever. Eternal mercy is my present confidence. David knew God's mercy to be eternal and perpetual, and in that he trusted. What a rock to build on! What a fortress to fly to!

Verse 9. I will praise thee for ever. Like thy mercy shall my thankfulness be. While others boast in their riches I will boast in my God; and when their glorying is silenced for ever in the tomb, my song shall continue to proclaim the lovingkindness of Jehovah. Because thou hast done it. Thou hast vindicated the righteous, and punished the wicked. God's memorable acts of providence, both to saints and sinners, deserve, and must have our gratitude. David views his prayer as already answered, the promise of God as already fulfilled, and therefore at once lifts up the sacred Psalm. And I will wait on thy name. God shall still be the psalmist's hope; he will not in future look elsewhere. He whose name has been so gloriously made known in truth and righteousness, is justly chosen as our expectation for years to come. For it is good before thy saints. Before or among the saints David intended to wait, feeling it to be good both for him and them to look to the Lord alone, and wait for the manifestation of his character in due season. Men must not too much fluster us; our strength is to sit still. Let the mighty ones boast, we will wait on the Lord; and if their haste brings them present honour, our patience will have its turn by and by, and bring us the honour which excelleth.

Psalm 53

Verse 1. The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. And this he does because he is a fool. Being a fool he speaks according to his nature; being a great fool he meddles with a great subject, and comes to a wild conclusion. The atheist is, morally as well as mentally, a fool, a fool in the heart as well as in the head; a fool in morals as well as in philosophy. With the denial of God as a starting point, we may well conclude that the fool's progress is a rapid, riotous, raving, ruinous one. He who begins at impiety is ready for anything.

No God, being interpreted, means no law, no order, no restraint to lust, no limit to passion. Who but a fool would be of this mind? What a Bedlam, or rather what an Aceldama, would the world become if such lawless principles came to be universal! He who heartily entertains an irreligious spirit, and follows it out to its legitimate issues is a son of Belial, dangerous to the commonwealth, irrational, and despicable. Every natural man is, more or less a denier of God. Practical atheism is the religion of the race.

Corrupt are they. They are rotten. It is idle to compliment them as sincere doubters, and amiable thinkers—they are putrid. There is too much dainty dealing nowadays with atheism; it is not a harmless error, it is an offensive, putrid sin, and righteous men should look upon it in that light. All men being more or less atheistic in spirit, are also in that degree corrupt; their heart is foul, their moral nature is decayed.

And have done abominable iniquity. Bad principles soon lead to bad lives. One does not find virtue promoted by the example of your Voltaires and Tom Paines. Those who talk so abominably as to deny their Maker will act abominably when it serves their turn. It is the abounding denial and forgetfulness of God among men which is the source of the unrighteousness and crime which we see around us. If all men are not outwardly vicious it is to be accounted for by the power of other and better principles, but left to itself the "No God" spirit so universal in mankind would produce nothing but the most loathsome actions.

There is none that doeth good. The one typical fool is reproduced in the whole race; without a single exception men have forgotten the right way. This accusation twice made in the Psalm, and repeated a third time by the inspired apostle Paul, is an indictment most solemn and sweeping, but he who

makes it cannot err, he knows what is in man; neither will he lay more to man's charge than he can prove.

Verse 2. God looked down from heaven upon the children of men. He did so in ages past, and he has continued his steadfast gaze from his all surveying observatory. To see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Had there been one understanding man, one true lover of his God, the divine eye would have discovered him. Those pure heathens and admirable savages that men talk so much of, do not appear to have been visible to the eye of Omniscience, the fact being that they live nowhere but in the realm of fiction. The Lord did not look for great grace, but only for sincerity and right desire, but these he found not. He saw all nations, and all men in all nations, and all hearts in all men, and all motions of all hearts, but he saw neither a clear head nor a clean heart among them all. Where God's eyes see no favourable sign we may rest assured there is none.

Verse 3. Every one of them is gone back. The whole mass of manhood, all of it, is gone back. In the fourteenth Psalm it was said to turn aside, which was bad enough, but here it is described as running in a diametrically opposite direction. The life of unregenerate manhood is in direct defiance of the law of God, not merely apart from it but opposed to it. They are altogether become filthy. The whole lump is soured with an evil leaven, fouled with an all pervading pollution, made rank with general putrefaction. Thus, in God's sight, our atheistic nature is not the pardoned thing that we think it to be. Errors as to God are not the mild diseases which some account them, they are abominable evils. Fair is the world to blind eyes, but to the all seeing Jehovah it is otherwise. There is none that doeth good, no, not one. How could there be, when the whole mass was leavened with so evil a leaven? This puts an end to the fictions of the innocent savage, the lone patriarch, "the Indian whose untutored mind, "etc. Pope's verse—

"Father of all, in every age;
In every clime adored,
By saint, by savage, or by sage,
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord, "

—evaporates in smoke. The fallen race of man, left to its own energy, has not produced a single lover of God or doer of holiness, nor will it ever do so. Grace must interpose, or not one specimen of humanity will be found to follow after the good and true. This is God's verdict after looking down upon the race. Who shall gainsay it?

Verse 4. Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge? They have no wisdom, certainly, but even so common a thing as knowledge might have restrained them. Can they not see that there is a God? that sin is an evil thing? that persecution recoils upon a man's own head? Are they such utter fools as not to know that they are their own enemies, and are ruining themselves? Who eat up my people as they eat bread. Do they not see that such food will be hard to digest, and will bring on them a horrible vomit when God deals with them in justice? Can they imagine that the Lord will allow them to devour his people with impunity? They must be insane indeed. They have not called upon God. They carry on their cruel enterprises against the saints, and use every means but that which is essential to success in every case, namely, the invocation of God. In this respect persecutors are rather more consistent than Pharisees who devoured widow's houses, and prayed too. The natural man, like Ishmael, loves not the spiritual seed, is very jealous of it, and would fain destroy it, because it is beloved of God; yet the natural man does not seek after the like favour from God. The carnal mind

envies those who obtain mercy, and yet it will not seek mercy itself. It plays the dog in the manger. Sinners will out of a malicious jealousy devour those who pray, but yet they will not pray themselves.

Verse 5. There were they in great fear, where no fear was. David sees the end of the ungodly, and the ultimate triumph of the spiritual seed. The rebellious march in fury against the gracious, but suddenly they are seized with a causeless panic. The once fearless boasters tremble like the leaves of the aspen, frightened at their own shadows. In this sentence and this verse, this Psalm differs much from the fourteenth. It is evidently expressive of a higher state of realisation in the poet, he emphasises the truth by stronger expressions. Without cause the wicked are alarmed. He who denies God is at bottom a coward, and in his infidelity he is like the boy in the churchyard who "whistles to keep his courage up." For God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee. When the wicked see the destruction of their fellows they may well quail. Mighty were the hosts which besieged Zion, but they were defeated, and their unburied carcasses proved the prowess of the God whose being they dared to deny. Thou hast put them to shame, because God hath despised them. God's people may well look with derision upon their enemies since they are the objects of divine contempt. They scoff at us, but we may with far greater reason laugh them to scorn, because the Lord our God considers them as less than nothing and vanity.

Verse 6. Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion. Would God the final battle were well over. When will the Lord avenge his own elect? When will the long oppression of the saints come to its close, and glory crown their heads? The word salvation is in the plural, to show its greatness. When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad. Inasmuch as the yoke has been heavy, and the bondage cruel, the liberty will be happy, and the triumph joyous. The second advent and the restoration of Israel are our hope and expectation. We have attempted to throw into rhyme the last two verses of this Psalm:

The foes of Zion quake for fright.
Where no fear was they quail;
For well they know that sword of might
Which cuts through coats of mail.

The Lord of old defiled their shields,
And all their spears he scorned;
Their bones lay scattered over the fields,
Unburied and unmourned.

Let Zion's foes be filled with shame;
Her sons are blessed of God;
Though scoffers now despise their name,
The Lord shall break the rod.

Oh! would our God to Zion turn,
God with salvation clad;
Then Judah's harps should music learn,
And Israel be glad.

Psalm 54

Verse 1. Save me, O God. Thou art my Saviour; all around me are my foes and their eager helpers. No shelter is permitted me. Every land rejects me and denies me rest. But thou, O God, wilt give me refuge, and deliver me from all my enemies. By thy name, by thy great and glorious nature. Employ all thine attributes for me. Let every one of the perfections which are blended in thy divine name work for me. Is not thine honour pledged for my defence? And judge me by thy strength. Render justice to me, for none else will or can. Thou canst give me efficient justice, and right my wrongs by thine omnipotence. We dare not appeal to God in a bad cause, but when we know that we can fearlessly carry our cause before his justice we may well commit it to his power.

Verse 2. Hear my prayer, O God. This has ever been the defence of saints. As long as God hath an open ear we cannot be shut up in trouble. All other weapons may be useless, but all prayer is evermore available. No enemy can spike this gun. Give ear to the words of my mouth. Vocal prayer helps the supplicant, and we keep our minds more fully awake when we can use our tongues as well as our hearts. But what is prayer if God hear not? It is all one whether we babble nonsense or plead arguments if our God grant us not a hearing. When his case had become dangerous, David could not afford to pray out of mere custom, he must succeed in his pleadings, or become the prey of his adversary.

Verse 3. For strangers are risen up against me. Those who had no cause for ill will had gone against him; persons to whom he could have given no offence, for they were strangers to him. They were aliens to his God also, and should these be allowed to worry and destroy him. A child may well complain to his father when strangers come in to molest him. What right have they to interfere? Let them leave off meddling and mind their own concerns. And oppressors seek after my soul. Saul, that persecuting tyrant, had stamped his own image on many more. Kings generally coin their own likeness. He led the way, and others followed seeking David's soul, his blood, his life, his very existence. Cruel and intense were they in their malice, they would utterly crush the good man; no half measure would content them. They have not set God before them. They had no more regard for right and justice than if they knew no God, or cared for none. Had they regarded God they would not have betrayed the innocent to be hunted down like a poor harmless stag. David felt that atheism lay at the bottom of the enmity which pursued him. Good men are hated for God's sake, and this is a good plea for them to urge in prayer. Selah. As if he said, "Enough of this, let us pause." He is out of breath with indignation. A sense of wrong bids him suspend the music awhile. It may also be observed, that more pauses would, as a rule, improve our devotions: we are usually too much in a hurry: a little more holy meditation would make our words more suitable and our emotions more fervent.

Verse 4. Behold, God is mine helper. He saw enemies everywhere, and now to his joy as he looks upon the band of his defenders he sees one whose aid is better than all the help of men; he is overwhelmed with joy at recognizing his divine champion, and cries, Behold. And is not this a theme for pious exultation in all time, that the great God protects us, his own people: what matters the number or violence of our foes when HE uplifts the shield of his omnipotence to guard us, and the sword of his power to aid us? Little care we for the defiance of the foe while we have the defence of God. The Lord is with them that uphold my soul. The reigning Lord, the great Adonai is in the camp of my defenders. Here was a greater champion than any of the three mighties, or than all the valiant men who chose David for their captain. The psalmist was very confident, he felt so thoroughly that his heart was on the Lord's side that he was sure God was on his side. He asked in the first verse for deliverance, and here he returns thanks for upholding: while we are seeking one mercy which we

have not, we must not be unmindful of another which we have. It is a great mercy to have some friends left us, but a greater mercy still to see the Lord among them, for like so many cyphers our friends stand for nothing till the Lord sets himself as a great unit in the front of them.

Verse 5. He shall reward evil unto mine enemies. They worked for evil, and they shall have their wages. It cannot be that malice should go unavenged. It were cruelty to the good to be lenient to their persecutors. It is appointed, and so it must ever be, that those who shoot upward the arrows of malice shall find them fall upon themselves. The recoil of their own gun has often killed oppressors. Cut them off in thy truth. Not in ferocious revenge is this spoken, but as an Amen to the sure sentence of the just Judge. Let the veracity of thy threatenings be placed beyond dispute, the decree is right and just, let it be fulfilled. It is not a private desire, but the solemn utterance of a military man, a grossly injured man, a public leader destined to be a monarch, and a man well trained in the school of Moses, whose law ordains eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.

Verse 6. I will freely sacrifice unto thee. Spontaneously will I bring my freewill offerings. So certain is he of deliverance that he offers a vow by anticipation. His overflowing gratitude would load the altars of God with victims cheerfully presented. The more we receive, the more we ought to render. The spontaneousness of our gifts is a great element in their acceptance; the Lord loveth a cheerful giver. I will praise thy name, O Lord. As if no amount of sacrifice could express his joyful feelings, he resolves to be much in vocal thanksgiving. The name which he invoked in prayer (Ps 54:1), he will now magnify in praise. Note how roundly he brings it out: O Jehovah. This is ever the grand name of the revealed God of Israel, a name which awakens the most sublime sentiments, and so nourishes the most acceptable praise. None can praise the Lord so well as those who have tried and proved the preciousness of his name in seasons of adversity. The psalmist adds, for it is good, and surely we may read this with a double nominative, God's name is good, and so is his praise. It is of great use to our souls to be much in praise; we are never so holy or so happy as when our adoration of God abounds. Praise is good in itself, good to us, and good to all around us. If David's enemies are described in Ps 54:3 as not setting God before them, he here declares that he is of a different mind from them, for he resolves to have the Lord in perpetual remembrance in his sacrifices and praises.

Verse 7. For he hath delivered me out of all trouble. Up to that time deliverance had come, and for that danger also he felt that rescue was near. David lived a life of dangers and hair breadth escapes, yet he was always safe. In the retrospect of his very many deliverances he feels that he must praise God, and looking upon the mercy which he sought as though it were already received, he sang this song over it—

"And a new song is in my mouth,
To long loved music set,
Glory to thee for all the grace
I have not tasted yet."

Out of all trouble our covenant God is pledged to bring us, and therefore even now let us uplift the note of triumph unto Jehovah, the faithful preserver of them that put their trust in him. Thus far have we proved his promise good; he changes not, and therefore in all the unknown future he will be equally our guardian and defence, "showing himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

And mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies. He knew that yet he should look on his haughty foes, gazing down on them in triumph as now they looked on him in contempt. He desired this as a matter of justice, and not of personal pique. His righteous soul exulted because he knew that unprovoked and gratuitous malice would meet with a righteous punishment. Could we keep out of our hearts all personal enmity as fully as the psalmist did in this Psalm, we might yet equally feel with him a sacred acquiescence and delight in that divine justice which will save the righteous and overthrow the malicious. In closing, let us trust that if we are as friendless as this man of God, we may resort in prayer as he did, exercise the like faith, and find ourselves ere long singing the same joyous hymn of praise.

Psalm 55

Verse 1. Give ear to my prayer, O God. The fact is so commonly before us, otherwise we should be surprised to observe how universally and constantly the saints resort to prayer in seasons of distress. From the Great Elder Brother down to the very least of the divine family, all of them delight in prayer. They run as naturally to the mercyseat in time of trouble as the little chickens to the hen in the hour of danger. But note well that it is never the bare act of prayer which satisfies the godly, they crave an audience with heaven, and an answer from the throne, and nothing less will content them. Hide not thyself from my supplication. Do not stop thine ear, or restrain thy hand. When a man saw his neighbour in distress, and deliberately passed him by, he was said to hide himself from him; and the psalmist begs that the Lord would not so treat him. In that dread hour when Jesus bore our sins upon the tree, his Father did hide himself, and this was the most dreadful part of all the Son of David's agony. Well may each of us deprecate such a calamity as that God should refuse to hear our cries.

Verse 2. Attend unto me, and hear me. This is the third time he prays the same prayer. He is in earnest, in deep and bitter earnest. If his God do not hear, he feels that all is over with him. He begs for his God to be a listener and an answerer. I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise. He gives a loose to his sorrows, permits his mind to rehearse her griefs, and to pour them out in such language as suggests itself at the time, whether it be coherent or not. What a comfort that we may be thus familiar with our God! We may not complain of him, but we may complain to him. Our rambling thoughts when we are distracted with grief we may bring before him, and that too in utterances rather to be called a noise than language. He will attend so carefully that he will understand us, and he will often fulfil desires which we ourselves could not have expressed in intelligible words. "Groanings that cannot be uttered," are often prayers which cannot be refused. Our Lord himself used strong crying and tears, and was heard in that he feared.

Verse 3. Because of the voice of the enemy. The enemy was vocal and voluble enough, and found a voice where his godly victim had nothing better than a "noise." Slander is seldom short of expression, it prates and prattles evermore. Neither David, nor our Lord, nor any of the saints were allowed to escape the attacks of venomous tongues, and this evil was in every case the cause of acute anguish. Because of the oppression of the wicked: the unjust pressed and oppressed the righteous; like an intolerable burden they crushed them down, and brought them to their knees before the Lord. This is a thrice told story, and to the end of time it will be true; he that is born after the flesh will persecute him that is born after the Spirit. The great seed of the woman suffered from a bruised heel. For they cast iniquity upon me, they black me with their soot bags, throw the dust of their lying over me, cast the vitriol of their calumny over me. They endeavour to trip me up, and if I do not fall they say I do. And in wrath they hate me. With a hearty ill will they detested the holy man. It was no sleeping

animosity, but a moral rancour which reigned in their bosoms. The reader needs not that we show how applicable this is to our Lord.

Verse 4. My heart is sore pained within me. His spirit writhed in agony, like a poor worm; he was mentally as much in pain as a woman in travail physically. His inmost soul was touched; and a wounded spirit who can bear? If this were written when David was attacked by his own favourite son, and ignominiously driven from his capital, he had reason enough for using these expressions. And the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Mortal fears seized him, he felt like one suddenly surrounded with the glooms of the shadow of death, upon whom the eternal night suddenly descends. Within and without he was afflicted, and his chief terror seemed to come from above, for he uses the expression, "Fallen upon me." He gave himself up for lost. He felt that he was as good as dead. The inmost centre of his nature was moved with dismay. Think of our Lord in the garden, with his "soul exceeding sorrowful even unto death," and you have a parallel to the griefs of the psalmist. Perchance, dear reader, if as yet thou hast not trodden this gloomy way, thou wilt do soon; then be sure to mark the footprints of thy Lord in this miry part of the road.

Verse 5. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me. Like house breakers these robbers were entering his soul. Like one who feels a fainting fit coming over him, so the oppressed suppliant was falling into a state of terror. His fear was so great as to make him tremble. He did not know what would happen next, or how soon the worst should come. The sly, mysterious whisperings of slander often cause a noble mind more fear than open antagonism; we can be brave against an open foe, but cowardly, plotting conspiracies bewilder and distract us. And horror hath overwhelmed me. He was as one enveloped in a darkness that might be felt. As Jonah went down into the sea, so did David appear to go down into deeps of horror. He was unmanned, confounded, brought into a hideous state of suspense and mortal apprehension.

Verse 6. And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. If he could not resist as an eagle, he would escape as a dove. Swiftly, and unobserved, on strong, untiring pinions would he fly away from the abodes of slander and wickedness. His love of peace made him sigh for an escape from the scene of strife.

"O for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,
Where rumour of oppression and deceit
Might never reach me more."

We are all too apt to utter this vain desire, for vain it is; no wings of doves or eagles could bear us away from the sorrows of a trembling heart. Inward grief knows nothing of place. Moreover, it is cowardly to shun the battle which God would have us fight. We had better face the danger, for we have no armour for our backs. He had need of a swifter conveyance than doves' pinions who would outfly slander; he may be at rest who does not fly, but commends his case to his God. Even the dove of old found no rest till she returned to her ark, and we amid all our sorrow may find rest in Jesus. We need not depart; all will be well if we trust in him.

Verse 7. Lo, then would I wander far off. Yet when David was far off, he sighed to be once more near Jerusalem; thus, in our ill estate we ever think the past to be better than the present. We shall be called to fly far enough away, and perchance we shall be loath to go; we need not indulge vain

notions of premature escape from earth.

And remain in the wilderness. He found it none such a dear abode when there, yet resolves now to make it his permanent abode. Had he been condemned to receive his wish he would ere long have felt like Selkirk, in the poet's verse—

"O solitude, where are the charms
That sages have found in thy face?
Better dwell in the midst of alarms
Than reign in this horrible place."

Our Lord, while free from all idle wishes, found much strength in solitude, and loved the mountain's brow at midnight, and the quiet shade of the olives of Gethsemane. It is better practically to use retirement than pathetically to sigh for it. Yet it is natural, when all men do us wrong, to wish to separate ourselves from their society; nature, however, must yield to grace, and we must endure the contradiction of sinners against ourselves, and not be weary and faint in our minds. Selah. After such a flight well may the mind rest. When we are going too fast, and giving way too freely to regrets, it is well to cry, "halt," and pause awhile, till more sober thoughts return.

Verse 8. I would hasten my escape. He tried to pause but could not, like a horse which when pulled up slips on a little because of the speed at which he was going. David declares that he would not waste a moment, or stay to bid adieu to his friends, but up and away at once, for fear he should be too late, and because he could bear the clamour of his foes no longer. From the windy storm and tempest. A storm was brewing, and, like a dove, he would outfly it and reach a calmer region. Swifter than the storm cloud would he fly, to avoid the deluge of rain, and the flash of the lightning. Alas! poor soul, no such wings are thine, as yet thou must tarry here and feel the tempest; but be of good cheer, thou shalt stretch thy wings ere long for a bolder flight, heaven shall receive thee, and there thy sorrows shall have a finis of felicity among the birds of paradise.

Verse 9. Destroy, O Lord. Put mine enemies to the rout. Let them be devoured by the sword, since they have unsheathed it against me. How could we expect the exiled monarch to offer any other prayer than this against the rebellious bands of Absalom, and the crafty devices of Ahithophel? Divide their tongues. Make another Babel in their debates and councils of war. Set them at cross purposes. Divide the pack that the hunted one may escape. The divisions of error are the hope of truth. For I have seen violence and strife in the city. The rabble and their leaders were plotting and planning, raging and contending against their king, running wild with a thousand mad projects: anarchy had fermented among them, and the king hoped that now it might come to pass that the very lawlessness which had exiled him would create weakness among his foes. Revolution devours its own children. They who are strong through violence, will sooner or later find that their strength is their death. Absalom and Ahithophel may raise the mob, but they cannot so easily rule it, nor so readily settle their own policy as to remain firm friends. The prayer of David was heard, the rebels were soon divided in their councils; Ahithophel went his way to be hanged with a rope, and Absalom to be hanged without one.

Verse 10. Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof. The city, the holy city had become a den of wickedness; conspirators met in the dark, and talked in little knots in the streets even in broad daylight. Meanwhile the country was being roused to revolt, and the traitors without threatened to

environ the city, and act in concert with the rebels within. No doubt there was a smothered fire of insurrection which Absalom kindled and fanned, which David perceived with alarm some time before he left Jerusalem; and when he quitted the city it broke out into an open flame. Mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it. Unhappy capital to be thus beset by foes, left by her monarch, and filled with all those elements of turbulence which breed evil and trouble. Unhappy king to be thus compelled to see the mischief which he could not avert laying waste the city which he loved so well. There was another King whose many tears watered the rebellious city, and who said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

Verse 11. Wickedness is in the midst thereof. The very heart of the city was base. In her places of authority crime went hand in hand with calamity. All the wilder and more wicked elements were uppermost; the canaille were commanders; the scum floated uppermost; justice was at a discount; the population was utterly demoralized; prosperity had vanished and order with it. Deceit and guile depart not from her streets. In all the places of concourse crafty tongues were busy persuading the people with cozening phrases. Crafty demagogues led the people by the nose. Their good king was defamed in all ways, and when they saw him go away, they fell to reviling the governors of their own choosing. The forum was the fortress of fraud, the congress was the convention of cunning. Alas, poor Jerusalem, to be thus the victim of sin and shame! Virtue reviled and vice regnant! Her solemn assemblies broken up, her priests fled, her king banished, and troops of reckless villains parading her streets, sunning themselves on her walls, and vomiting their blasphemies in her sacred shrines. Here was cause enough for the sorrow which so plaintively utters itself in these verses.

Verse 12. The reader will do well to observe how accurately the psalmist described his own Psalm when he said, "I mourn in my complaint, "or rather "give loose to my thoughts, "for he proceeds from one point of his sorrow to another, wandering on like one in a maze, making few pauses, and giving no distinct intimations that he is changing the subject. Now from the turbulent city his mind turns to the false hearted councillor. For is was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it. It was not an open foe, but a pretended friend; he went over to the other camp and tried to prove the reality of his treachery by calumniating his old friend. None are such real enemies as false friends. Reproaches from those who have been intimate with us, and trusted by us, cut us to the quick; and they are usually so well acquainted with our peculiar weaknesses that they know how to touch us where we are most sensitive, and to speak so as to do us most damage. The slanders of an avowed antagonist are seldom so mean and dastardly as those of a traitor, and the absence of the elements of ingratitude and treachery renders them less hard to bear. We can bear from Shimei what we cannot endure from Ahithophel. Neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him. We can find a hiding place from open foes, but who can escape from treachery? If our enemies proudly boast over us we nerve our souls for resistance, but when those who pretended to love us leer at us with contempt, whither shall we go? Our blessed Lord had to endure at its worst the deceit and faithlessness of a favoured disciple; let us not marvel when we are called to tread the road which is marked by his pierced feet.

Verse 13. But it was thou. He sees him. The poetic fury is upon him, he sees the traitor as though he stood before him in flesh and blood. He singles him out, he points his finger at him, he challenges him to his face. But thou. Et tu, Brute. And thou, Ahithophel, art thou here? Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man? A man mine equal. Treated by me as one of my own rank, never looked upon as an inferior, but as a trusted friend. My guide, a counsellor so sage that I trusted thine advice and found it prudent

to do so. And mine acquaintance, with whom I was on most intimate terms, who knew me even as I knew him by mutual disclosures of heart. No stranger occasionally conversed with, but a near and dear friend admitted to my secret fellowship. It was fiendish treason for such a one to prove false hearted. There was no excuse for such villainy. Judas stood very much in this relation to our Lord, he was treated as an equal, trusted as treasurer, and in that capacity often consulted with. He knew the place where the Master was wont to spend his solitude; in fact, he knew all the Master's movements, and yet he betrayed him to his remorseless adversaries. How justly might the Lord have pointed at him and said, But thou; but his gentler spirit warned the son of perdition in the mildest manner, and had not Iscariot been tenfold a child of hell he would have relinquished his detestable purpose.

Verse 14. We took sweet counsel together. It was not merely the counsel which men take together in public or upon common themes, their fellowship had been tender and confidential. The traitor had been treated lovingly, and trusted much. Solace, mutual and cheering, had grown out of their intimate communings. There were secrets between them of no common kind. Soul had been in converse with soul, at least on David's part. However feigned might have been the affection of the treacherous one, the betrayed friend had not dealt with him coldly, or guarded his utterance before him. Shame on the wretch who could belie such fellowship, and betray such confidence! And walked unto the house of God in company. Religion had rendered their intercourse sacred, they had mingled their worship, and communed on heavenly themes. If ever any bonds ought to be held inviolable, religious connections should be. There is a measure of impiety, of a detestable sort, in the deceit which debases the union of men who make profession of godliness. Shall the very altar of God be defiled with hypocrisy? Shall the gatherings of the temple be polluted by the presence of treachery? All this was true of Ahithophel, and in a measure of Judas. His union with the Lord was on the score of faith, they were joined in the holiest of enterprises, he had been sent on the most gracious of errands. His cooperation with Jesus to serve his own abominable ends stamped him as the firstborn of hell. Better had it been for him had he never been born. Let all deceitful professors be warned by his doom, for like Ahithophel he went to his own place by his own hand, and retains a horrible preeminence in the calendar of notorious crime. Here was one source of heart break for the Redeemer, and it is shared in by his followers. Of the serpent's brood some vipers still remain, who will sting the hand that cherished them, and sell for silver those who raised them to the position which rendered it possible for them to be so abominably treacherous.

Verse 15. Not thus would Jesus pray, but the rough soldier David so poured out the anguish of his spirit, under treachery and malice seldom equalled and altogether unprovoked. The soldier, as such, desires the overthrow of his foes, for this very end he fights; and viewed as a matter of law and justice, David was right in his wish; he was waging a just, defensive war against men utterly regardless of truth and justice. Read the words as a warrior's imprecation. Let death seize upon them. Traitors such as these deserve to die, there is no living with them, earth is polluted by their tread; if spies are shot, much more these sneaking villains. Let them go down quick into hell. While in the vigour of life into sheol let them sink, let them suddenly exchange the enjoyment of the quick or living for the sepulchre of the dead. There is, however, no need to read this verse as an imprecation, it is rather a confident expectation or prophecy: God would, he was sure, desolate them, and cast them out of the land of the living into the regions of the dead. For wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them. They are too bad to be spared, for their houses are dens of infamy, and their hearts fountains of mischief. They are a pest to the commonwealth, a moral plague, a spiritual pestilence, to be stamped out by the laws of men and the providence of God. Both Ahithophel and Judas soon ended their own lives; Absalom was hanged in the oak, and the rebels perished in the wood in great

numbers. There is justice in the universe, love itself demands it; pity to rebels against God, as such, is no virtue—we pray for them as creatures, we abhor them as enemies of God. We need in these days far more to guard against the disguised iniquity which sympathises with evil, and counts punishment to be cruelty, than against the harshness of a former age. We have steered so far from Scylla that Charybdis is absorbing us.

Verse 16. As for me, I will call upon God. The psalmist would not endeavour to meet the plots of his adversaries by counterplots, or imitate their incessant violence, but in direct opposition to their godless behaviour would continually resort to his God. Thus Jesus did, and it has been the wisdom of all believers to do the same. As this exemplifies the contrast of their character, so it will foretell the contrast of their end—the righteous shall ascend to their God, the wicked shall sink to ruin. And the Lord shall save me. Jehovah will fulfil my desire, and glorify himself in my deliverance. The psalmist is quite sure. He knows that he will pray, and is equally clear that he will be heard. The covenant name is the pledge of the covenant promise.

Verse 17. Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray. Often but none too often. Seasons of great need call for frequent seasons of devotion. The three periods chosen are most fitting; to begin, continue, and end the day with God is supreme wisdom. Where time has naturally set up a boundary, there let us set up an altar stone. The psalmist means that he will always pray; he will run a line of prayer right along the day, and track the sun with his petitions. Day and night he saw his enemies busy (Ps 55:10), and therefore he would meet their activity by continuous prayer. And cry aloud. He would give a tongue to his complaint; he would be very earnest in his pleas with heaven. Some cry aloud who never say a word. It is the bell of the heart that rings loudest in heaven. Some read it, "I will nurse and murmur; "deep heart thoughts should be attended with inarticulate but vehement utterances of grief. Blessed be God, moaning is translatable in heaven. A father's heart reads a child's heart. And he shall hear my voice. He is confident that he will prevail; he makes no question that he would be heard, he speaks as if already he were answered. When our window is opened towards heaven, the windows of heaven are open to us. Have but a pleading heart and God will have a plenteous hand.

Verse 18. He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me. The deliverance has come. Joab has routed the rebels. The Lord has justified the cause of his anointed. Faith sees as well as foresees; to her foresight is sight. He is not only safe but serene, delivered in peace—peace in his inmost soul. For there were many with me; many contending against me. Or it may be that he thankfully acknowledges that the Lord raised him up unexpected allies, fetched him succour when he most needed it, and made the friendless monarch once more the head of a great army. The Lord can soon change our condition, and he often does so when our prayers become fervent. The crisis of life is usually the secret place of wrestling. Jabbok makes Jacob a prevailing prince. He who stripped us of all friends to make us see himself in their absence, can give them back again in greater numbers that we may see him more joyfully in the fact of their presence.

Verse 19. God shall hear, and afflict them. They make a noise as well as I, and God will hear them. The voice of slander, malice, and pride, is not alone heard by those whom it grieves, it reaches to heaven, it penetrates the divine ear, it demands vengeance, and shall have it. God hears and delivers his people, he hears and destroys the wicked. Their cruel jests, their base falsehoods, their cowardly insults, their daring blasphemies are heard, and shall be repaid to them by the eternal judge. Even he that abideth of old. He sits in eternity, enthroned judge for evermore; all the prayers of saints and

profanities of sinners are before his judgment seat, and he will see that justice is done. Selah. The singer pauses, overwhelmed with awe in the presence of the everlasting God. Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God. His own reverential feeling causes him to remember the daring godlessness of the wicked; he feels that his trials have driven him to his God, and he declares that their uninterrupted prosperity was the cause of their living in such neglect of the Most High. It is a very manifest fact that long continued ease and pleasure are sure to produce the worst influences upon graceless men: though troubles do not convert them, yet the absence of them makes their corrupt nature more readily develop itself. Stagnant water becomes putrid. Summer heat breeds noxious insects. He who is without trouble is often without God. It is a forcible proof of human depravity that man turns the mercy of God into nutriment for sin: the Lord save us from this.

Verse 20. The psalmist cannot forget the traitor's conduct, and returns again to consider it. He hath put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him. He smites those to whom he had given the hand of friendship, he breaks the bonds of alliance, he is perfidious to those who dwell at ease because of his friendly profession. He hath broken his covenant. The most solemn league he has profaned, he is regardless of oaths and promises.

Verse 21. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter. He lauded and larded the man he hoped to devour. He buttered him with flattery and then battered him with malice. Beware of a man who has too much honey on his tongue; a trap is to be suspected where the bait is so tempting. Soft, smooth, oily words are most plentiful where truth and sincerity are most scarce. But war was in his heart. He brought forth butter in a lordly dish, but he had a tent pin ready for the temples of his guest. When heart and lip so widely differ, the man is a monster, and those whom he assails are afflicted indeed. His words were softer than oil. Nothing could be more unctuous and fluent, there were no objectionable syllables, no jars or discords, his words were as yielding as the best juice of the olive; yet were they drawn swords, rapiers unsheathed, weapons brandished for the fray. Ah! base wretch, to be cajoling your victim while intending to devour him! entrapping him as if he were but a beast of prey; surely, such art thou thyself.

Verse 22. Thy burden, or what thy God lays upon thee, lay thou it upon the Lord. His wisdom casts it on thee, it is thy wisdom to cast it on him. He cast thy lot for thee, cast thy lot on him. He gives thee thy portion of suffering, accept it with cheerful resignation, and then take it back to him by thine assured confidence. He shall sustain thee. Thy bread shall be given thee, thy waters shall be sure. Abundant nourishment shall fit thee to bear all thy labours and trials. As thy days so shall thy strength be. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. He may move like the boughs of a tree in the tempest, but he shall never be moved like a tree torn up by the roots. He stands firm who stands in God. Many would destroy the saints, but God has not suffered it, and never will. Like pillars, the godly stand immoveable, to the glory of the Great Architect.

Verse 23. For the ungodly a sure, terrible, and fatal overthrow is appointed. Climb as they may, the pit yawns for them, God himself will cause them to descend into it, and destruction there shall be their portion. Bloody and deceitful men, with double iniquity of cruelty and craft upon them, shall not live out half their days; they shall be cut off in their quarrels, or being disappointed in their artifices, vexation shall end them. They were in heart murderers of others, and they became in reality self murderers. Doubt not that virtue lengthens life, and that vice tends to shorten it. But I will trust in thee. A very wise, practical conclusion. We can have no better ground of confidence. The Lord is all, and more than all that faith can need as the foundation of peaceful dependence. Lord, increase our faith

evermore.

Psalm 56

Verse 1. Be merciful unto me, O God. In my deep distress my soul turns to thee, my God. Man has no mercy on me, therefore double thy mercy to me. If thy justice has let loose my enemies, let thy mercy shorten their chain. It is sweet to see how the tender dove like spirit of the psalmist flies to the most tender attribute for succour in the hour of peril. For man would swallow me up. He is but thy creature, a mere man, yet like a monster he is eager for blood, he pants, he gapes for me; he would not merely wound me, or feed on my substance, but he would fain swallow me altogether, and so make an end of me. The open mouths of sinners when they rage against us should open our mouths in prayer. We may plead the cruelty of men as a reason for the divine interposition—a father is soon aroused when his children are shamefully entreated. He fighting daily oppresses me. He gives me no interval—he fights daily. He is successful in his unrighteous war—he oppresses me, he crushes me, he presses me sore. David has his eye on the leader of his foes, and lays his complaint against him in the right place. If we may thus plead against man, much more against that great enemy of souls, the devil. We ask the Lord to forgive us our trespasses, which is another way of saying, "Be merciful to me, O God, "and then we may say, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." The more violent the attack of Satan the stronger our plea for deliverance.

Verse 2. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up. Their appetite for blood never fails them. With them there is no truce or armistice. They are many, but one mind animates them. Nothing I can do can make them relent. Unless they can quite devour me they will never be content. The ogres of nursery tales exist in reality in the enemies of the church, who would crush the bones of the godly, and make a mouthful of them if they could. For they be many that fight against me. Sinners are gregarious creatures. Persecutors hunt in packs. These wolves of the church seldom come down upon us singly. The number of our foes is a powerful plea for the interposition of the one Defender of the faithful, who is mightier than all their bands. These foes of the gracious are also keen eyed, and ever on the watch, hence the margin calls them "observers." O thou most High. Thus he invokes against the lofty ones of the earth the aid of one who is higher than the highest. Some translate the words differently, and think that the writer means that his foes assailed him from the high places in which pride and power had placed them. Saul, his great foe, attacked him from his throne with all the force which his high position placed at his disposal: our comfort in such a case is near to hand, for God will help us from a higher place than our proudest foes can occupy. The greatness of God as the Most High is a fertile source of consolation to weak saints oppressed by mighty enemies.

Verse 3. What time I am afraid. David was no braggart, he does not claim never to be afraid, and he was no brutish Stoic free from fear because of the lack of tenderness. David's intelligence deprived him of the stupid heedlessness of ignorance, he saw the imminence of his peril, and was afraid. We are men, and therefore liable to overthrow; we are feeble, and therefore unable to prevent it; we are sinful men, and therefore deserving it, and for all these reasons we are afraid. But the condition of the psalmist's mind was complex—he feared, but that fear did not fill the whole area of his mind, for he adds, I will trust in thee. It is possible, then, for fear and faith to occupy the mind at the same moment. We are strange beings, and our experience in the divine life is stranger still. We are often in a twilight, where light and darkness are both present, and it is hard to tell which predominates. It is a blessed fear which drives us to trust. Unregenerate fear drives from God, gracious fear drives to him. If I fear man I have only to trust God, and I have the best antidote. To trust when there is no cause for fear, is

but the name of faith, but to be reliant upon God when occasions for alarm are abundant and pressing, is the conquering faith of God's elect. Though the verse is in the form of a resolve, it became a fact in David's life, let us make it so in ours. Whether the fear arise from without or within, from past, present, or future, from temporals, or spirituals, from men or devils, let us maintain faith, and we shall soon recover courage.

Verse 4. In God I will praise his word. Faith brings forth praise. He who can trust will soon sing. God's promise, when fulfilled, is a noble subject for praise, and even before fulfilment it should be the theme of song. It is in or through God that we are able to praise. We praise as well as pray in the Spirit. Or we may read it—in extolling the Lord one of the main points for thanksgiving is his revealed will in the Scriptures, and the fidelity with which he keeps his word of promise. In God I have put my trust. Altogether and alone should we stay ourselves on God. What was a gracious resolve in the former verse, is here asserted as already done. I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. Faith exercised, fear is banished, and holy triumph ensues, so that the soul asks, "What can flesh do unto me?" What indeed? He can do me no real injury; all his malice shall be overruled for my good. Man is flesh, flesh is grass—Lord, in thy name I defy its utmost wrath. There were two verses of complaint, and here are two of confidence; it is well to weigh out a sufficient quantity of the sweet to counteract the sour.

Verse 5. Every day they wrest my words. This is a common mode of warfare among the ungodly. They put our language on the rack, they extort meanings from it which it cannot be made fairly to contain. Thus our Saviour's prophecy concerning the temple of his body, and countless accusations against his servants, were founded on wilful perversions. They who do this every day become great adepts in the art. A wolf can always find in a lamb's discourse a reason for eating him. Prayers are blasphemies if you choose to read them the wrong way upwards. All their thoughts are against me for evil. No mixture of good will tone down their malice. Whether they viewed him as a king, a psalmist, a man, a father, a warrior, a sufferer, it was all the same, they saw through coloured glass, and could not think a generous thought towards him. Even those actions of his which were an undoubted blessing to the commonwealth, they endeavoured to undervalue. Oh, foul spring, from which never a drop of pure water can come!

Verse 6. They gather themselves together. Firebrands burn the fiercer for being pushed together. They are afraid to meet the good man till their numbers place terrible odds against him. Come out, ye cowards, man to man, and fight the old hero! No, ye wait till ye are assembled like thieves in bands, and even then ye waylay the man. There is nothing brave about you. They hide themselves. In ambuscade they wait their opportunity. Men of malice are men of cowardice. He who dares not meet his man on the king's highway, writes himself down a villain. Constantly are the reputations of good men assailed with deep laid schemes, and diabolical plots, in which the anonymous enemies stab in the dark. They mark my steps, as hunters mark the trail of their game, and so track them. Malicious men are frequently very sharp sighted to detect the failings, or supposed failings, of the righteous. Spies and mouchards are not all in the pay of earthly governments, some of them will have wages to take in red hot coin from one who himself is more subtle than all the beasts of the field. When they wait for my soul. Nothing less than his life would content them, only his present and eternal ruin could altogether glut them. The good man is no fool, he sees that he has enemies, and that they are many and crafty; he sees also his own danger, and then he shows his wisdom by spreading the whole case before the Lord, and putting himself under divine protection.

Verse 7. Shall they escape by iniquity? Will such wickedness as this stand them in good stead? Can

it be that this conduct shall enable them to avoid the sentence of earthly punishment? They slander the good man to screen themselves—will this avail them? They have cunningly managed hitherto, but will there not be an end to their games? In thine anger cast down the people, O God. Trip them up in their tricks. Hurl them from the Tarpeian rock. A persecuted man finds a friend even in an angry God, how much more in the God of love! When men seek to cast us down, it is but natural and not at all unlawful to pray that they may be disabled from the accomplishment of their infamous designs. What God often does we may safely ask him to do.

Verse 8. Thou tellest my wanderings. Every step which the fugitive had taken when pursued by his enemies, was not only observed but thought worthy of counting and recording. We perhaps are so confused after a long course of trouble, that we hardly know where we have or where we have not been; but the omniscient and considerate Father of our spirits remembers all in detail; for he has counted them over as men count their gold, for even the trial of our faith is precious in his sight. Put thou my tears into thy bottle. His sorrows were so many that there would need a great wineskin to hold them all. There is no allusion to the little complimentary lachrymators for fashionable and fanciful Romans, it is a more robust metaphor by far; such floods of tears had David wept that a leathern bottle would scarce hold them. He trusts that the Lord will be so considerate of his tears as to store them up as men do the juice of the vine, and he hopes that the place of storage will be a special one—thy bottle, not a bottle. Are they not in thy book? Yes, they are recorded there, but let not only the record but the grief itself be present to thee. Look on my griefs as real things, for these move the heart more than a mere account, however exact. How condescending is the Lord! How exact his knowledge of us! How generous his estimation! How tender his regard!

Verse 9. When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back. So soon as I pray they shall fly. So surely as I cry they shall be put to the rout.

"So swift is prayer to reach the sky,
So kind is God to me."

The machinery of prayer is not always visible, but it is most efficient. God inclines us to pray, we cry in anguish of heart, he hears, he acts, the enemy is turned back. What irresistible artillery is this which wins the battle as soon as its report is heard! What a God is this who harkens to the cry of his children, and in a moment delivers them from the mightiest adversaries! This I know. This is one of the believer's certainties, his axioms, his infallible, indisputable verities. For God is for me. This, we know, and we know, therefore, that none can be against us who are worth a moment's fear. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Who will restrain prayer when it is so potent? Who will seek any other ally than God, who is instantly present so soon as we give the ordained signal, by which we testify both our need and our confidence?

Verse 10. In God will I praise his word. Now comes the thanksgiving. He is a wretch who, having obtained help, forgets to return a grateful acknowledgment. The least we can do is to praise him from whom we receive such distinguished favours. Does David here mean "by God's grace I will praise him"? If so, he shows us that all our emotions towards God must be in God, produced by him and presented as such. Or does he mean, "that which in God is most the object of my praise is his word, and the faithfulness with which he keeps it"? If so, we see how attached our hearts should be to the sure word of promise, and especially to him who is the WORD incarnate. The Lord is to be praised under every aspect, and in all his attributes and acts, but certain mercies peculiarly draw out our

admiration towards special portions of the great whole. That praise which is never special in its direction cannot be very thoughtful, and it is to be feared cannot be very acceptable. In the Lord will I praise his word. He delights to dwell on his praise, he therefore repeats his song. The change by which he brings in the glorious name of Jehovah is doubtless meant to indicate that under every aspect he delights in his God and in his word.

Verse 11. In God have I put my trust. This and the former verse are evidently the chorus of the Psalm. We cannot be too careful of our faith, or see too sedulously that it is grounded on the Lord alone. I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Faith has banished fear. He views his foes in their most forcible character, calling them not flesh, but indicating them as man, yet he dreads them not; though the whole race were his enemies he would not be afraid now that his trust is stayed on God. He is not afraid of what they threaten to do, for much of that they cannot do; and even what is in their power, what they can do, he defies with holy daring. He speaks for the future, "I will not," for he is sure that the security of the present will suffice for days to come.

Verse 12. Thy vows are upon me, O God. Vows made in his trouble he does not lightly forget, nor should we. We voluntarily made them, let us cheerfully keep them. All professed Christians are men under vows, but especially those who in hours of dire distress have rededicated themselves unto the Lord. I will render praises unto thee. With heart, and voice, and gift, we should cheerfully extol the God of our salvation. The practice of making solemn vows in times of trouble is to be commended, when it is followed by the far less common custom of fulfilling them when the trouble is over.

Verse 13. For thou hast delivered my soul from death. His enemies were defeated in their attempts upon his life, and therefore he vowed to devote his life to God. Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling? One mercy is a plea for another, for indeed it may happen that the second is the necessary complement of the first. It little boots that we live, if we are made to fall in character by the thrusts of our enemies. As lief not be, as live to be bereft of honour, and fallen prostrate before my enemies. That I may walk before God in the light of the living, enjoying the favour and presence of God, and finding the joy and brightness of life therein. Walking at liberty, in holy service, in sacred communion, in constant progress in holiness, enjoying the smile of heaven—this I seek after. Here is the loftiest reach of a good man's ambition, to dwell with God, to walk in righteousness before him, to rejoice in his presence, and in the light and glory which it yields. Thus in this short Psalm, we have climbed from the ravenous jaws of the enemy into the light of Jehovah's presence, a path which only faith can tread.

Psalm 57

Verse 1. Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me. Urgent need suggests the repetition of the cry, for thus intense urgency of desire is expressed. If 'he gives twice who gives quickly, 'so he who would receive quickly must ask twice. For mercy the psalmist pleads at first, and he feels he cannot improve upon his plea, and therefore returns to it. God is the God of mercy, and the Father of mercies, it is most fit therefore that in distress he should seek mercy from him in whom it dwells. For my soul trusteth in thee. Faith urges her suit right well. How can the Lord be unmerciful to a trustful soul? Our faith does not deserve mercy, but it always wins it from the sovereign grace of God when it is sincere, as in this case where the soul of the man believed. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge. Not in the cave alone would he hide, but in the cleft of the Rock of ages. As the little birds find ample shelter beneath the parental

wing, even so would the fugitive place himself beneath the secure protection of the divine power. The emblem is delightfully familiar and suggestive. May we all experimentally know its meaning. When we cannot see the sunshine of God's face, it is blessed to cower down beneath the shadow of his wings. Until these calamities be overpast. Evil will pass away, and the eternal wings will abide over us till then. Blessed be God, our calamities are matters of time, but our safety is a matter of eternity. When we are under the divine shadow, the passing over of trouble cannot harm us; the hawk flies across the sky, but this is no evil to the chicks when they are safely nestling beneath the hen.

Verse 2. I will cry. He is quite safe, but yet he prays, for faith is never dumb. We pray because we believe. We exercise by faith the spirit of adoption whereby we cry. He says not I do cry, or I have cried, but I will cry, and indeed, this resolution may stand with all of us until we pass through the gates of pearl; for while we are here below we shall still have need to cry. Unto God most high.—Prayers are for God only; the greatness and sublimity of his person and character suggest and encourage prayer; however high our enemies, our heavenly Friend is higher, for he is Most high, and he can readily send from the height of his power the succour which we need. Unto God that performeth all things for me. He has cogent reason for praying, for he sees God performing. The believer waits and God works. The Lord has undertaken for us, and he will not draw back, he will go through with his covenant engagements. Our translators have very properly inserted the words, "all things," for there is a blank in the Hebrew, as if it were a *carte blanche*, and you might write therein that the Lord would finish anything and everything which he has begun. Whatsoever the Lord takes in hand he will accomplish; hence past mercies are guarantees for the future, and admirable reasons for continuing to cry unto him.

Verse 3. He shall send from heaven. If there be no fit instruments on earth, heaven shall yield up its legions of angels for the succour of the saints. We may in times of great straits expect mercies of a remarkable kind; like the Israelites in the wilderness, we shall have our bread hot from heaven, new every morning; and for the overthrow of our enemies God shall open his celestial batteries, and put them to utter confusion. Wherever the battle is more fierce than ordinary, there shall come succours from headquarters, for the Commander in chief sees all. And save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. He will be in time, not only to rescue his servants from being swallowed up, but even from being reproached. Not only shall they escape the flames, but not even the smell of fire shall pass upon them. O dog of hell, I am not only delivered from thy bite, but even from thy bark. Our foes shall not have the power to sneer at us, their cruel jests and taunting gibes shall be ended by the message from heaven, which shall for ever save us. Selah. Such mercy may well make us pause to meditate and give thanks. Rest, singer, for God has given thee rest! God shall send forth his mercy and his truth. He asked for mercy, and truth came with it. Thus evermore doth God give us more than we ask or think. His attributes, like angels on the wing, are ever ready to come to the rescue of his chosen.

Verse 4. My soul is among lions. He was a very Daniel. Howled at, hunted, wounded, but not slain. His place was in itself one of extreme peril, and yet faith made him feel himself secure, so that he could lie down. The cave may have reminded him of a lion's den, and Saul and his band shouting and yelling in their disappointment at missing him, were the lions; yet beneath the divine shelter he finds himself safe. And I lie even among them that are set on fire. Perhaps Saul and his band kindled a fire in the cavern while they halted in it, and David was thus reminded of the fiercer fire of their hate which burned within their hearts. Like the bush in Horeb, the believer is often in the midst of flames, but never consumed. It is a mighty triumph of faith when we can lie down even among firebrands and find

rest, because God is our defence. Even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Malicious men carry a whole armoury in their mouths; they have not harmless mouths, whose teeth grind their own food as in a mill, but their jaws are as mischievous as if every tooth were a javelin or an arrow. They have no molars, all their teeth are canines, and their nature is canine, leonine, wolfish, devilish. As for that busy member the tongue, in the case of the malicious, it is a two edged, keen, cutting, killing sword. The tongue, which is here compared to a sword, has the adjective sharp added to it, which is not used in reference to the teeth, which are compared to spears, as if to show that if men were actually to tear us with their teeth, like wild beasts, they could not thereby wound us so severely as they can do with their tongues. No weapon is so terrible as a tongue sharpened on the devil's grindstone; yet even this we need not fear, for "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that riseth against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn."

Verse 5. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens. This is the chorus of the Psalm. Before he has quite concluded his prayer the good man interjects a verse of praise; and glorious praise too, seeing it comes from the lion's den and from amid the coals of fire. Higher than the heavens is the Most High, and so high ought our praises to rise. Above even the power of cherubim and seraphim to express it, the glory of God is revealed and is to be acknowledged by us. Let thy glory be above all the earth. As above, so below, let thy praises, O thou great Jehovah, be universally proclaimed. As the air surrounds all nature, so let thy praises gird the earth with a zone of song.

Verse 6. They have prepared a net for my steps. The enemies of the godly spare no pains, but go about their wicked work with the coolest deliberation. As for each sort of fish, or bird, or beast, a fitting net is needed, so do the ungodly suit their net to their victim's circumstances and character with a careful craftiness of malice. Whatever David might do, and whichever way he might turn, his enemies were ready to entrap him in some way or other. My soul is bowed down. He was held down like a bird in a trap; his enemies took care to leave him no chance of comfort. They have dug a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. He likens the design of his persecutors to pits, which were commonly dug by hunters to entrap their prey; these were made in the usual path of the victim, and in this case David says, before me, i.e., in my ordinary way. He rejoices because these devices had recoiled upon themselves. Saul hunted David, but David caught him more than once and might have slain him on the spot. Evil is a stream which one day flows back to its source. Selah. We may sit down at the pit's mouth and view with wonder the just retaliations of providence.

Verse 7. My heart is fixed. One would have thought he would have said, "My heart is fluttered;" but no, he is calm, firm, happy, resolute, established. When the central axle is secure, the whole wheel is right. If our great bower anchor holds, the ship cannot drive. O God, my heart is fixed. I am resolved to trust thee, to serve thee, and to praise thee. Twice does he declare this to the glory of God who thus comforts the souls of his servants. Reader, it is surely well with thee, if thy once roving heart is now firmly fixed upon God and the proclamation of his glory. I will sing and give praise. Vocally and instrumentally will I celebrate thy worship. With lip and with heart will I ascribe honour to thee. Satan shall not stop me, nor Saul, nor the Philistines, I will make Adullam ring with music, and all the caverns thereof echo with joyous song. Believer, make a firm decree that your soul in all seasons shall magnify the Lord.

"Sing, though sense and carnal reason
Fain would stop the joyful song:

Sing, and count it highest treason
For a saint to hold his tongue."

Verse 8. Awake up, my glory. Let the noblest powers of my nature bestir themselves: the intellect which conceives thought, the tongue which expresses it, and the inspired imagination which beautifies it—let all be on the alert now that the hour for praise has come. Awake, psaltery and harp. Let all the music with which I am familiar be well attuned for the hallowed service of praise. I myself will awake early. I will awake the dawn with my joyous notes. No sleepy verses and weary notes shall be heard from me; I will thoroughly arouse myself for this high employ. When we are at our best we fall short of the Lord's deserts, let us, therefore, make sure that what we bring him is our best, and, if marred with infirmity, at least let it not be deteriorated by indolence. Three times the psalmist calls upon himself to awake. Do we need so much arousing, and for such work? Then let us not spare it, for the engagement is too honourable, too needful to be left undone or ill done for want of arousing ourselves.

Verse 9. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people. Gentiles shall hear my praise. Here is an instance of the way in which the truly devout evangelic spirit overleaps the boundaries which bigotry sets up. The ordinary Jew would never wish the Gentile dogs to hear Jehovah's name, except to tremble at it; but this grace taught psalmist has a missionary spirit, and would spread the praise and fame of his God. I will sing unto thee among the nations. However far off they may be, I would make them hear of thee through my glad psalmody.

Verse 10. For thy mercy is great unto the heavens. Right up from man's lowliness to heaven's loftiness mercy reaches. Imagination fails to guess the height of heaven, and even thus the riches of mercy exceed our highest thoughts. The psalmist, as he sits at the cave's mouth and looks up to the firmament, rejoices that God's goodness is more vast and more sublime than even the vaulted skies. And thy truth unto the clouds. Upon the cloud he sets the seal of his truth, the rainbow, which ratifies his covenant; in the cloud he hides his rain and snow, which prove his truth by bringing to us seedtime and harvest, cold and heat. Creation is great, but the Creator greater far. Heaven cannot contain him; above clouds and stars his goodness far exceeds.

Verse 11. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens. A grand chorus. Take it up, ye angels and ye spirits made perfect, and join in it, ye sons of men below, as ye say, Let thy glory be above all the earth. The prophet in the previous verse spoke of mercy "unto the heavens," but here his song flies "above the heavens; "praise rises higher, and knows no bound

Psalm 58

Verse 1. Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? The enemies of David were a numerous and united band, and because they so unanimously condemned the persecuted one, they were apt to take it for granted that their verdict was a right one. "What everybody says must be true, "is a lying proverb based upon the presumption which comes of large combinations. Have we not all agreed to hound the man to the death, and who dare hint that so many great ones can be mistaken? Yet the persecuted one lays the axe at the root by requiring his judges to answer the question whether or not they were acting according to justice. It were well if men would sometimes pause, and candidly consider this. Some of those who surrounded Saul were rather passive than active persecutors; they held their tongues when the object of royal hate was slandered; in the original, this

first sentence appears to be addressed to them, and they are asked to justify their silence. Silence gives consent. He who refrains from defending the right is himself an accomplice in the wrong. Do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men? Ye too are only men though dressed in a little brief authority. Your office for men, and your relation to men both bind you to rectitude; but have ye remembered this? Have ye not put aside all truth when ye have condemned the godly, and united in seeking the overthrow of the innocent? Yet in doing this be not too sure of success, or ye are only the "sons of men," and there is a God who can and will reverse your verdicts.

Verse 2. Yea, in heart ye work wickedness. Down deep in your very souls ye hold a rehearsal of the injustice ye intend to practise, and when your opportunity arrives, ye wreak vengeance with a gusto; your hearts are in your wicked work, and your hands are therefore ready enough. Those very men who sat as judges, and pretended to so much indignation at the faults imputed to their victim, were in their hearts perpetrating all manner of evil. Ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth. They were deliberate sinners, cold, calculating villains. As righteous judges ponder the law, balance the evidence, and weigh the case, so the malicious dispense injustice with malice aforethought in cold blood. Note in this verse that the men described sinned with heart and hand; privately in their heart, publicly in the earth; they worked and they weighed—they were active, and yet deliberate. See what a generation saints have to deal with! Such were the foes of our Lord, a generation of vipers, an evil and adulterous generation; they sought to kill him because he was righteousness itself, yet they masked their hatred to his goodness by charging him with sin.

Verse 3. The wicked are estranged from the womb. It is small wonder that some men persecute the righteous seed of the woman, since all of them are of the serpent's brood, and enmity is set between them. No sooner born than alienated from God—what a condition to be found in! Do we so early leave the right track? Do we at the same moment begin to be men and commence to be sinners? They go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Every observer may see how very soon infants act lies. Before they can speak they practise little deceptive arts. This is especially the case in those who grow up to be adept in slander, they begin their evil trade early, and there is no marvel that they become adept in it. He who starts early in the morning will go far before night. To be untruthful is one of the surest proofs of a fallen state, and since falsehood is universal, so also is human depravity.

Verse 4. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent. Is man also a poisonous reptile? Yes, and his venom is even as that of a serpent. The viper has but death for the body in his fangs; but unregenerate man carries poison under his tongue, destructive to the nobler nature. They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear. While speaking of serpents the psalmist remembers that many of them have been conquered by the charmer's art, but men such as he had to deal with no art could tame or restrain; therefore, he likens them to a serpent less susceptible than others to the charmer's music, and says that they refused to hear reason, even as the adder shuts her ear to those incantations which fascinate other reptiles. Man, in his natural corruption, appears to have all the ill points of a serpent without its excellences. O sin, what hast thou done!

Verse 5. Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely. Ungodly men are not to be won to right by arguments the most logical, or appeals the most pathetic. Try all your arts, ye preachers of the word! Lay yourselves out to meet the prejudices and tastes of sinners, and ye shall yet have to cry, "Who hath believed our report?" It is not in your music, but in the sinner's ear that the cause of failure lies, and it is only the power of God that can remove it.

"You can call spirits from the vast deep,
But will they come when you do call for them?"

No, we call and call, and call in vain, till the arm of the Lord is revealed. This is at once the sinner's guilt and danger. He ought to hear but will not, and because he will not hear, he cannot escape the damnation of hell.

Verse 6. Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth. If they have no capacity for good, at least deprive them of their ability for evil. Treat them as the snake charmers do their serpents, extract their fangs, break their teeth. The Lord can do this, and he will. He will not suffer the malice of the wicked to triumph, he will deal them such a blow as shall disable them from mischief. Break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord. As if one brute creature had not enough of evil in it to complete the emblem of ungodly nature, another specimen of *ferae naturae* is fetched in. For fierce cruelty the wicked are likened to young lions, monsters in the prime of their vigour, and the fury of their lustiness; and it is asked that their grinders may be smashed in, broken off, or dashed out, that the creatures may henceforth be harmless. One can well understand how the banished son of Jesse, while poisoned by the venomous slander of his foes, and worried by their cruel power, should appeal to heaven for a speedy and complete riddance from his enemies.

Verse 7. Let them melt away as waters which run continually. Like mountain torrents dried up by the summer heats let them disappear; or like running streams whose waters are swiftly gone, so let them pass away; or like water spilt which none can find again, so let them vanish out of existence. Begone, ye foul streams, the sooner ye are forgotten the better for the universe. When he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces. When the Lord goes forth to war, let his judgments so tell upon these persecutors that they may be utterly cut in pieces as a mark shattered by many shafts. Or perhaps the meaning is, when the ungodly man marches to the conflict, let his arrows and his bow drop into fragments, the string cut, the bow snapped, the arrows headless, the points blunted; so that the boastful warrior may not have wherewithal to hurt the object of his enmity. In either sense the prayer of the Psalm has often become fact, and will be again fulfilled as often as need arises.

Verse 8. As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away. As the snail makes its own way by its slime, and so dissolves as it goes, or as its shell is often found empty, as though the inhabitant had melted away, so shall the malicious eat out their own strength while they proceed upon their malevolent designs, and shall themselves disappear. To destroy himself by envy and chagrin is the portion of the ill disposed. Like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun. Solemn is this curse, but how surely does it fall on many graceless wretches! They are as if they had never been. Their character is shapeless, hideous, revolting. They are fitter to be hidden away in an unknown grave than to be reckoned among men. Their life comes never to ripeness, their aims are abortive, their only achievement is to have brought misery to others, and horror to themselves. Such men as Herod, Judas, Alva, Bonner, had it not been better for them if they had never been born? Better for the mothers who bore them? Better for the lands they cursed? Better for the earth in which their putrid carcasses are hidden from the sun? Every unregenerate man is an abortion. He misses the true form of God made manhood; he corrupts in the darkness of sin; he never sees or shall see the light of God in purity, in heaven.

Verse 9. Before your pots can feel the thorns. So sudden is the overthrow of the wicked, so great a failure is their life, that they never see joy. Their pot is put upon the hook to prepare a feast of joy, and

the fuel is placed beneath, but before the thorns are lit, before any heat can be brought to bear upon the pot, yea, even as soon as the fuel has touched the cooking vessel, a storm comes and sweeps all away; the pot is overturned, the fuel is scattered far and wide. Perhaps the figure may suppose the thorns, which are the fuel, to be kindled, and then the flame is so rapid that before any heat can be produced the fire is out, the meat remains raw, the man is disappointed, his work is altogether a failure. He shall take them away as with a whirlwind. Cook, fire, pot, meat and all, disappear at once, whirled away to destruction. Both living, and in his wrath. In the very midst of the man's life, and in the fury of his rage against the righteous, the persecutor is overwhelmed with a tornado, his designs are baffled, his contrivances defeated, and himself destroyed. The passage is difficult, but this is probably its meaning, and a very terrible one it is. The malicious wretch puts on his great seething pot, he gathers his fuel, he means to play the cannibal with the godly; but he reckons without his host, or rather without the Lord of hosts, and the unexpected tempest removes all trace of him, and his fire, and his feast, and that in a moment.

Verse 10. The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance. He will have no hand in meting out, neither will he rejoice in the spirit of revenge, but his righteous soul shall acquiesce in the judgments of God, and he shall rejoice to see justice triumphant. There is nothing in Scripture of that sympathy with God's enemies which modern traitors are so fond of parading as the finest species of benevolence. We shall at the last say, "Amen, "to the condemnation of the wicked, and feel no disposition to question the ways of God with the impenitent. Remember how John, the loving disciple, puts it. "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever." He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. He shall triumph over them, they shall be so utterly vanquished that their overthrow shall be final and fatal, and his deliverance complete and crowning. The damnation of sinners shall not mar the happiness of saints.

Verse 11. So that a man shall say. Every man however ignorant shall be compelled to say, Verily, in very deed, assuredly, there is a reward for the righteous. If nothing else be true this is. The godly are not after all forsaken and given over to their enemies; the wicked are not to have the best of it, truth and goodness are recompensed in the long run. Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth. All men shall be forced by the sight of the final judgment to see that there is a God, and that he is the righteous ruler of the universe. Two things will come out clearly after all—there is a God and there is a reward for the righteous. Time will remove doubts, solve difficulties, and reveal secrets; meanwhile faith's foreseeing eye discerns the truth even now, and is glad thereat.

Psalm 59

Verse 1. Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God. They were all round the house with the warrant of authority, and a force equal to the carrying of it out. He was to be taken dead or alive, well or ill, and carried to the slaughter. No prowess could avail him to break the cordon of armed men, neither could any eloquence stay the hand of his bloody persecutor. He was taken like a bird in a net, and no friend was near to set him free. Unlike the famous starling, he did not cry, "I cannot get out," but his faith uttered quite another note. Unbelief would have suggested that prayer was a waste of breath, but not so thought the good man, for he makes it his sole resort. He cries for deliverance and leaves ways and means with his God. Defend me from them that rise up against me. Saul was a king, and

therefore sat in high places, and used all his authority to crush David; the persecuted one therefore beseeches the Lord to set him on high also, only in another sense. He asks to be lifted up, as into a lofty tower, beyond the reach of his adversary. Note how he sets the title, My God, over against the word, mine enemies. This is the right method of effectually catching and quenching the fiery darts of the enemy upon the shield of faith. God is our God, and therefore deliverance and defence are ours.

Verse 2. Deliver me from the workers of iniquity. Saul was treating him very unjustly, and besides that was pursuing a tyrannical and unrighteous course towards others, therefore David the more vehemently appeals against him. Evil men were in the ascendant at court, and were the ready tools of the tyrant, against these also he prays. Bad men in a bad cause may be pleaded against without question. When a habitation is beset by thieves, the good man of the house rings the alarm bell; and in these verses we may hear it ring out loudly, "deliver me, ""defend me, ""deliver me, ""save me." Saul had more cause to fear than David had, for the invincible weapon of prayer was being used against him, and heaven was being aroused to give him battle. And save me from bloody men. As David remembers how often Saul had sought to assassinate him, he knows what he has to expect from that quarter and from the king's creatures and minions who were watching for him. David represents his enemy in his true colours before God; the bloodthirstiness of the foe is a fit reason for the interposition of the righteous God, for the Lord abhors all those who delight in blood.

Verse 3. For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul. They were in ambuscade for the good man's life. He knew their design and cried to God to be rescued from it. Like wild beasts they crouched, and waited to make the fatal spring; but their victim used effectual means to baffle them, for he laid the matter before the Lord. While the enemy lies waiting in the posture of a beast, we wait before God in the posture of prayer, for God waits to be gracious to us and terrible towards our foes. The mighty are gathered against me. None of them were absent from the muster when a saint was to be murdered. They were too fond of such sport to be away. The men at arms who ought to have been fighting their country's battles, are instead thereof hunting a quiet citizen; the gigantic monarch is spending all his strength to slay a faithful follower. Not for my transgression, not for my sin, O Lord. He appeals to Jehovah that he had done no ill. His only fault was, that he was too valiant and too gracious, and was, besides, the chosen of the Lord, therefore the envious king could not rest till he had washed his hands in the blood of his too popular rival. We shall always find it to be a great thing to be innocent; if it does not carry our cause before an earthly tribunal, it will ever prove the best of arguments in the court of conscience, and a standing consolation when we are under persecution. Note the repetition of his declaration of integrity. David is sure of his innocence. He dares repeat the plea.

Verse 4. They run and prepare themselves without my fault. They are all alive and active, they are swift to shed blood. They prepare and use their best tactics; they besiege me in my house, and lay their ambuscades as for some notable enemy. They come up fully armed to the attack, and assail me with all the vigour and skill of a host about to storm a castle; and all for no cause, but out of gratuitous malice. So quick are they to obey their cruel master, that they never stay to consider whether their errand is a good one or not; they run at once, and buckle on their harness as they run. To be thus gratuitously attacked is a great grief. To a brave man the danger causes little distress of mind compared with the injustice to which he is subjected. It was a cruel and crying shame that such a hero as David should be hounded down as if he were a monster, and beset in his house like a wild beast in its den. Awake to help me, and behold. When others go to sleep, keep thou watch, O God. Put forth thy might. Arouse thee from thy inaction. Only look at thy servant's sad condition and thy hand will be sure to deliver me. We see how thorough was the psalmist's faith in the mercy of his

Lord, for he is satisfied that if the Lord do but look on his case it will move his active compassion.

Verse 5. Thou, thyself, work for me personally, for the case needs thine interposition. Therefore, because I am unjustly assailed, and cannot help myself. O Lord, ever living, God of Hosts, able to rescue me; the God of Israel, pledged by covenant to redeem thine oppressed servant; awake to visit all the heathen, arouse thy holy mind, bestow thy sacred energies, punish the heathen among thine Israel, the false hearted who say they are Jews and are not, but do lie. And when thou art about the business, let all the nations of thine enemies, and all the heathenish people at home and abroad know that thou art upon circuit, judging and punishing. It is the mark of a thoughtful prayer that the titles which are in it applied to God are appropriate, and are, as it were, congruous to the matter, and fitted to add force to the argument. Shall Jehovah endure to see his people oppressed? Shall the God of hosts permit his enemies to exult over his servant? Shall the faithful God of a chosen people leave his chosen to perish? The name of God is, even in a literal sense, a fortress and high tower for all his people. What a forceful petition is contained in the words, "awake to visit"! Actively punish, in wisdom judge, with force chastise. Be not merciful to any wicked transgressors. Be merciful to them as men, but not as transgressors; if they continue hardened in their sin, do not wink at their oppression. To wink at sin in transgressors will be to leave the righteous under their power, therefore do not pass by their offences but deal out the due reward. The psalmist feels that the overthrow of oppression which was so needful for himself must be equally desirable for multitudes of the godly placed in like positions, and therefore he prays for the whole company of the faithful, and against the entire confraternity of traitors. Selah. With such a subject before us we may well pause. Who would not sit still and consider, when vengeance is being meted out to all the enemies of God? How wrong is that state of mind which hates to hear of the punishment of the wicked!

Verse 6. They return at evening. Like wild beasts that roam at night, they come forth to do mischief. If foiled in the light, they seek the more congenial darkness in which to accomplish their designs. They mean to break into the house in the dead of night. They make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. Howling with hunger for their prey, they sneak round and round the walls, prowling with stealthy footstep, and barking in unamiable concert. David compares his foes to Eastern dogs, unowned, loathsome, degraded, lean, and hungry, and he represents them as howling with disappointment, because they cannot find the food they seek. Saul's watchmen and the cruel king himself must have raved and raged fiercely when they found the image and the pillow of goat's hair in the bed instead of David. Vain were their watchings, the victim had been delivered, and that by the daughter of the man who desired his blood. Go, ye dogs, to your kennels and gnaw your bones, for this good man is not meat for your jaws.

Verse 7. Behold they belch out with their mouth. The noisy creatures are so remarkable in their way, that attention is called to them with a behold. Ecce homines, might we not say, Ecce canes! Their malicious speech gushes from them as from a bubbling fountain. The wicked are voluble in slander; their vocabulary of abuse is copious, and as detestable as it is abundant. What torrents of wrathful imprecation will they pour on the godly! They need no prompters, their feelings force for themselves their own vent, and fashion their own expressions. Swords are in their lips. They speak daggers. Their words pierce like rapiers, and cleave like cutlasses. As the cushion of a lions's paw conceals his claw, so their soft ruby lips contain bloody words. For who, say they, doth hear? They are free from all restraint, they fear no God in heaven, and the government on earth is with them. When men have none to call them to account, there is no accounting for what they will do. He who neither fears God nor regards man sets out on errands of oppression with gusto, and uses language concerning it of the

most atrociously cruel sort. David must have been in a singular plight when he could hear the foul talk and hideous braggings of Saul's black guards around the house. After the style in which a Cavalier would have cursed a Puritan, or Claverhouse a Coventanter, the Saulites swore at the upstarts whom the king's majesty had sent them to arrest. David called them dogs, and no doubt a pretty pack they were, a cursed cursing company of curs. When they said, "Who doth hear?" God was listening, and this David knew, and therefore took courage.

Verse 8. But thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them. He speaks to God, as to one who is close at hand. He points to the liars in wait and speaks to God about them. They are laughing at me, and longing for my destruction, but thou hast the laugh of them seeing thou hast determined to send them away without their victim, and made fools of by Michal. The greatest, cleverest, and most malicious of the enemies of the church are only objects of ridicule to the Lord; their attempts are utterly futile, they need give no concern to our faith. Thou shalt have all the heathen in derision. As if David had said—What are these fellows who lie in ambush! And what is the king their master, if God be on my side? If not only these but all the heathen nations were besetting the house, yet Jehovah would readily enough disappoint them and deliver them. In the end of all things it will be seen how utterly contemptible and despicable are all the enemies of the cause and kingdom of God. He is a brave man who sees this today when the enemy is in great power, and while the church is often as one shut up and besieged in his house.

Verse 9. Because of his strength will I wait upon thee. Is my persecutor strong? Then, my God, for this very reason I will turn myself to thee, and leave my matters in thy hand. It is a wise thing to find in the greatness of our difficulties a reason for casting ourselves on the Lord.

"And when it seems no chance nor change
From grief can set me free,
Hope finds its strength in helplessness,
And, patient, waits on thee."

For God is my defence, my high place, my fortress, the place of my resort in the time of my danger. If the foe be too strong for me to cope with him, I will retreat into my castle, where he cannot reach me.

Verse 10. The God of my mercy shall prevent me. God who is the giver and fountain of all the undeserved goodness I have received, will go before me and lead my way as I march onward. He will meet me in my time of need. Not alone shall I have to confront my foes, but he whose goodness I have long tried and proved will gently clear my way, and be my faithful protector. How frequently have we met with preventing mercy—the supply prepared before the need occurred, the refuge built before the danger arose. Far ahead into the future the foreseeing grace of heaven has projected itself, and forestalled every difficulty. God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies. Observe that the words, my desire, are not in the original. From the Hebrew we are taught that David expected to see his enemies without fear. God will enable his servant to gaze steadily upon the foe without trepidation; he shall be calm, and self possessed, in the hour of peril; and ere long he shall look down on the same foes discomfited, overthrown, destroyed. When Jehovah leads the way victory follows at his heels. See God, and you need not fear to see your enemies. Thus the hunted David, besieged in his own house by traitors, looks only to God, and exults over his enemies.

Verse 11. Slay them not, lest my people forget. It argues great faith on David's part, that even while

his house was surrounded by his enemies he is yet so fully sure of their overthrow, and so completely realises it in his own mind, that he puts in a detailed petition that they may not be too soon or too fully exterminated. God's victory over the craft and cruelty of the wicked is so easy and so glorious that it seems a pity to end the conflict too soon. To sweep away the plotters all at once were to end the great drama of retribution too abruptly. Nay, let the righteous be buffeted a little longer, and let the boasting oppressor puff and brag through his little hour, it will help to keep Israel in mind of the Lord's justice, and make the brave party who side with God's champion accustomed to divine interpositions. It were a pity for good men to be without detractors, seeing that virtue shines the brighter for the foil of slander. Enemies help to keep the Lord's servants awake. A lively, vexatious devil is less to be dreaded than a sleepy, forgetful spirit which is given to slumber. Scatter them by thy power. Blow them to and fro, like chaff in the wind. Let the enemy live as a vagabond race. Make Cains of them. Let them be living monuments of divine power, advertisements of heaven's truth. To the fullest extent let divine justice be illustrated in them. And bring them down. Like rotten fruit from a tree. From the seats of power which they disgrace, and the positions of influence which they pollute, let them be hurled into humiliation. This was a righteous wish, and if it be untempered by the gentleness of Jesus, we must remember that it is a soldier's prayer, and the wish of one who was smarting under injustice and malice of no ordinary kind. O Lord, our shield. David felt himself to be the representative of the religious party in Israel, and therefore he says, our shield, speaking in the name of all those who make Jehovah their defence. We are in good company when we hide beneath the buckler of the Eternal; meanwhile he who is the shield of his people is the scatterer of their enemies.

Verse 12. For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride. Such dreadful language of atheism and insolence deserves a fit return. As they hope to take their victims, so let them be taken themselves, entangled in their own net, arrested in the midst of their boastful security. Sins of the lips are real sins, and punishable sins. Men must not think because their hatred gets no further than railing and blasphemy that therefore they shall be excused. He who takes the will for the deed, will take the word for the deed and deal with men accordingly. Wretches who are persecutors in talk, burners and stabbers with the tongue, shall have a reckoning for their would be transgressions. Pride though it show not itself in clothes, but only in speech, is a sin; and persecuting pride, though it pile no faggots at Smithfield, but only revile with its lips, shall have to answer for it among the unholy crew of inquisitors. And for cursing and lying which they speak. Sins, like hounds, often hunt in couples. He who is not ashamed to curse before God, will be sure to lie unto men. Every swearer is a liar. Persecution leads on to perjury. They lie and swear to it. They curse and give a lying reason for their hate. This shall not go unnoticed of the Lord, but shall bring down its recompense. How often has it happened that while haughty speeches have been fresh in the mouths of the wicked they have been overtaken by avenging providence, and made to see their mischief recoil upon themselves!

Verse 13. Consume them in wrath. As if he had changed his mind and would have them brought to a speedy end, or if spared would have them exist as ruins, he cries, consume them, and he redoubles his cry, consume them; nay, he gives a triple note, that they may not be. Revilers of God whose mouths pour forth such filth as David was on this occasion obliged to hear, are not to be tolerated by a holy soul; indignation must flame forth, and cry to God against them. When men curse the age and the place in which they live, common humanity leads the righteous to desire that they may be removed. If they could be reformed it would be infinitely better; but if they cannot, if they must and will continue to be like mad dogs in a city, then let them cease to be. Who can desire to see such a generation perpetuated? And let them know; i.e., let all the nations know, that God ruleth in Jacob

unto the ends of the earth. He whose government is universal fixes his headquarters among his chosen people, and there in special he punishes sin. So David would have all men see. Let even the most remote nations know that the great moral Governor has power to destroy ungodliness, and does not wink at iniquity in any, at any time, or in any place. When sin is manifestly punished it is a valuable lesson to all mankind. The overthrow of a Napoleon is a homily for all monarchs, the death of a Tom Paine a warning to all infidels, the siege of Paris a sermon to all cities. Selah. Good cause there is for this rest, when a theme so wide and important is introduced. Solemn subjects ought not to be hurried over; nor should the condition of the heart while contemplating themes so high be a matter of indifference. Reader, bethink thee. Sit thou awhile and consider the ways of God with men.

Verse 14. Here verse six is repeated, as if the songster defied his foes and revelled in the thought of their futile search, their malice, their disappointment, their rage, their defeated vigilance, their wasted energy. He laughs to think that all the city would know how they were deceived, and all Israel would ring with the story of the image and the goats' hair in the bed. Nothing was more a subject of Oriental merriment than a case in which the crafty are deceived, and nothing more makes a man the object of derision than to be outwitted by a woman, as in this instance Saul and his base minions were by Michal. The warrior poet hears in fancy the howl of rage in the council of his foes when they found their victim clean escaped from their hands.

Verse 16. Let them wander up and down for meat. Like dogs that have missed the expected carcass, let them go up and down dissatisfied, snapping at one another, and too disappointed to be quiet and take the matter easily. And grudge if they be not satisfied. Let them act like those who cannot believe that they have lost their prey: like a herd of Oriental dogs, unhoused, unkennelled, let them prowl about seeking a prey which they shall never find. Thus the menial followers of Saul paraded the city in vain hope of satisfying their malice and their master. "Surely, "say they, "we shall have him yet. We cannot endure to miss him. Perhaps he is in yonder corner, or concealed in such a hiding place. We must have him. We grudge him his life. Our lust for his blood is hot, nor can we be persuaded but that we shall light upon him." See the restlessness of wicked men; this will increase as their enmity to God increases, and in hell it will be their infinite torment. What is the state of the lost, but the condition of an ambitious camp of rebels, who have espoused a hopeless cause, and will not give it up, but are impelled by their raging passions to rave on against the cause of God, of truth, and of his people.

Verse 16. But I will sing of thy power. The wicked howl, but I sing and will sing. Their power is weakness, but thine is omnipotence; I see them vanquished and thy power victorious, and for ever and ever will I sing of thee. Yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning. When those lovers of darkness find their game is up, and their midnight howlings die away, then will I lift up my voice on high and praise the lovingkindness of God without fear of being disturbed. What a blessed morning will soon break for the righteous, and what a song will be theirs! Sons of the morning, ye may sigh tonight, but joy will come on the wings of the rising sun. Tune your harps even now, for the signal to commence the eternal music will soon be given; the morning cometh and your sun shall go no more down for ever. For thou hast been my defence. The song is for God alone, and it is one which none can sing but those who have experienced the lovingkindness of their God. Looking back upon a past all full of mercy, the saints will bless the Lord with their whole hearts, and triumph in him as the high place of their security. And refuge in the day of my trouble. The greater our present trials the louder will our future songs be, and the more intense our joyful gratitude. Had we no day of trouble, where were our season of retrospective thanksgiving? David's besetment by Saul's bloodhounds creates an opportunity for divine interposition and so for triumphant praise.

Verse 17. Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing. What transport is here! What a monopolising of all his emotions for the one object of praising God! Strength has been overcome by strength; not by the hero's own prowess, but by the might of God alone. See how the singer girds himself with the almightiness of God, and calls it all his own by faith. Sweet is the music of experience, but it is all for God; there is not even a stray note for man, for self, or for human helpers. For God is my defence, and the God of my mercy. With full assurance he claims possession of the Infinite as his protection and security. He sees God in all, and all his own. Mercy rises before him, undisturbed and manifold, for he feels he is undeserving, and security is with him, undisturbed and impregnable, for he knows that he is safe in divine keeping. Oh, choice song! My soul would sing it now in defiance of all the dogs of hell. Away, away, ye adversaries of my soul, the God of my mercy will keep ye all at bay—

"Nor shall the infernal lion rend
Whom he designs to keep."

Psalm 60

Verse 1. Before the days of Saul, Israel had been brought very low; during his government it had suffered from internal strife, and his reign was closed by an overwhelming disaster at Gibeon. David found himself the possessor of a tottering throne, troubled with the double evil of factions at home, and invasion from abroad. He traced at once the evil to its true source, and began at the fountainhead. His were the politics of piety, which after all are the wisest and most profound. He knew that the displeasure of the Lord had brought calamity upon the nation, and to the removal of that displeasure he set himself by earnest prayer. O God, thou hast cast us off. Thou hast treated us as foul and offensive things, to be put away; as mean and beggarly persons, to be shunned with contempt; as useless dead boughs, to be torn away from the tree, which they disfigure. To be cast off by God is the worst calamity that can befall a man or a people; but the worst form of it is when the person is not aware of it and is indifferent to it. When the divine desertion causes mourning and repentance, it will be but partial and temporary. When a cast off soul sighs for its God it is indeed not cast off at all. Thou has scattered us. David clearly sees the fruits of the divine anger, he traces the flight of Israel's warriors, the breaking of her power, the division in her body politic, to the hand of God. Whoever might be the secondary agent of these disasters, he beholds the Lord's hand as the prime moving cause, and pleads with the Lord concerning the matter. Israel was like a city with a breach made in its wall, because her God was wroth with her. These first two verses, with their depressing confession, must be regarded as greatly enhancing the power of the faith which in the after verses rejoices in better days, through the Lord's gracious return unto his people.

Thou hast been displeased. This is the secret of our miseries. Had we pleased thee, thou wouldst have pleased us; but as we have walked contrary to thee, thou hast walked contrary to us. O turn thyself to us again. Forgive the sin and smile once more. Turn us to thee, turn thou to us. Aforetime thy face was towards thy people, be pleased to look on us again with thy favour and grace. Some read it, "Thou wilt turn to us again," and it makes but slight difference which way we take it, for a true hearted prayer brings a blessing so soon that it is no presumption to consider it already obtained. There was more need for God to turn to his people than for Judah's troops to be brave, or Joab and the commanders wise. God with us is better than strong battalions; God displeased is more terrible than all the Edomites that ever marched into the valley of salt, or all the devils that ever opposed the church. If the Lord turn to us, what care we for Aramnaharaim or Aramzobah, or death, or hell? but if

he withdraw his presence we tremble at the fall of a leaf.

Verse 2. Thou hast made the earth to tremble. Things were as unsettled as though the solid earth had been made to quake; nothing was stable; the priests had been murdered by Saul, the worst men had been put in office, the military power had been broken by the Philistines, and the civil authority had grown despicable through insurrections and intestine contests. Thou hast broken it. As the earth cracks, and opens itself in rifts during violent earthquakes, so was the kingdom rent with strife and calamity. Heal the breaches thereof. As a house in time of earthquake is shaken, and the walls begin to crack, and gape with threatening fissures, so was it with the kingdom. For it shaketh. It tottered to a fall; if not soon propped up and repaired it would come down in complete ruin. So far gone was Israel, that only God's interposition could preserve it from utter destruction. How often have we seen churches in this condition, and how suitable is the prayer before us, in which the extremity of the need is used as an argument for help. The like may be said of our personal religion, it is sometimes so tried, that like a house shaken by earthquake it is ready to come down with a crash, and none but the Lord himself can repair its breaches, and save us from utter destruction.

Verse 3. Thou hast showed thy people hard things. Hardships had been heaped upon them, and the psalmist traces these rigorous providences to their fountainhead. Nothing had happened by chance, but all had come by divine design and with a purpose, yet for all that things had gone hard with Israel. The psalmist claims that they were still the Lord's own people, though in the first verse he had said, "thou hast cast us off." The language of complaint is usually confused, and faith in time of trouble ere long contradicts the desponding statements of the flesh. Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment. Our afflictions have made us like men drunken with some potent and bitter wine; we are in amazement, confusion, delirium; our steps reel, and we stagger as those about to fall. The great physician gives his patients potent potions to purge out their abounding and deep seated diseases. Astonishing evils bring with them astonishing results. The grapes of the vineyard of sin produce a wine which fills the most hardened with anguish when justice compels them to quaff the cup. There is a fire water of anguish of soul which even to the righteous makes a cup of trembling, which causes them to be exceeding sorrowful almost unto death. When grief becomes so habitual as to be our drink, and to take the place of our joys, becoming our only wine, then are we in an evil case indeed.

Verse 4. Here the strain takes a turn. The Lord has called back to himself his servants, and commissioned them for his service, presenting them with a standard to be used in his wars. Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee. Their afflictions had led them to exhibit holy fear, and then being fitted for the Lord's favour, he gave them an ensign, which would be both a rallying point for their hosts, a proof that he had sent them to fight, and a guarantee of victory. The bravest men are usually intrusted with the banner, and it is certain that those who fear God must have less fear of man than any others. The Lord has given us the standard of the gospel, let us live to uphold it, and if needful die to defend it. Our right to contend for God, and our reason for expecting success, are found in the fact that the faith has been once committed to the saints, and that by the Lord himself. That it may be displayed because of the truth. Banners are for the breeze, the sun, the battle. Israel might well come forth boldly, for a sacred standard was borne aloft before them. To publish the gospel is a sacred duty, to be ashamed of it a deadly sin. The truth of God was involved in the triumph of David's armies, he had promised them victory; and so in the proclamation of the gospel we need feel no hesitancy, for as surely as God is true he will give success to his own word. For the truth's sake, and because the true God is on our side, let us in these modern days of warfare emulate

the warriors of Israel, and unfurl our banners to the breeze with confident joy. Dark signs of present or coming ill must not dishearten us; if the Lord had meant to destroy us he would not have given us the gospel; the very fact that he has revealed himself in Christ Jesus involves the certainty of victory. Magna est veritas et praevalabit.

Hard things thou hast upon us laid,
And made us drink most bitter wine;
But still thy banner we have displayed,
And borne aloft thy truth divine.
Our courage fails not, though the night
No earthly lamp avails to break,
For thou wilt soon arise in might,
And of our captors captives make.

Selah. There is so much in the fact of a banner being given to the hosts of Israel, so much of hope, of duty, of comfort, that a pause is fitly introduced. The sense justifies it, and the more joyful strain of the music necessitates it.

Verse 5. That thy beloved may be delivered. David was the Lord's beloved, his name signifies "dear, or beloved," and there was in Israel a remnant according to the election of grace, who were the beloved of the Lord; for their sakes the Lord wrought great marvels, and he had an eye to them in all his mighty acts. God's beloved are the inner seed, for whose sake he preserves the entire nation, which acts as a husk to the vital part. This is the main design of providence, That thy beloved may be delivered; if it were not for their sakes he would neither give a banner nor send victory to it. Save with thy right hand, and hear me. Save at once, before the prayer is over; the case is desperate unless there be immediate salvation. Tarry not, O Lord, till I have done pleading: save first and hear afterwards. The salvation must be a right royal and eminent one, such as only the omnipotent hand of God linked with his dexterous wisdom can achieve. Urgent distress puts men upon pressing and bold petitions such as this. We may by faith ask for and expect that our extremity will be God's opportunity; special and memorable deliverances will be wrought out when dire calamities appear to be imminent. Here is one suppliant for many, even as in the case of our Lord's intercession for his saints. He, the Lord's David, pleads for the rest of the beloved, beloved and accepted in him the Chief Beloved; he seeks salvation as though it were for himself, but his eye is ever upon all those who are one with him in the Father's love. When divine interposition is necessary for the rescue of the elect it must occur, for the first and greatest necessity of providence is the honour of God, and the salvation of his chosen. This is fixed fate, the centre of the immutable decree, the inmost thought of the unchangeable Jehovah.

Verse 6. God hath spoken in his holiness. Faith is never happier than when it can fall back upon the promise of God. She sets this over against all discouraging circumstances; let outward providences say what they will, the voice of a faithful God drowns every sound of tear. God had promised Israel victory, and David the kingdom; the holiness of God secured the fulfilment of his own covenant, and therefore the king spake confidently. The goodly land had been secured to the tribes by the promise made to Abraham, and that divine grant was an abundantly sufficient warrant for the belief that Israel's arms would be successful in battle. Believer make good use of this, and banish doubts while promises remain. I will rejoice, or "I will triumph." Faith regards the promise not as fiction but fact, and therefore drinks in joy from it, and grasps victory by it. "God hath spoken; I will rejoice:" here is a fit

motto for every soldier of the cross.

I will divide Shechem. As a victor David would allot the conquered territory to those to whom God had given it by lot. Shechem was an important portion of the country, which as yet had not yielded to his government; but he saw that by Jehovah's help it would be, and indeed was all his own. Faith divides the spoil, she is sure of what God has promised, and enters at once into possession. And mete out the valley of Succoth. As the east so the west of Jordan should be allotted to the proper persons. Enemies should be expelled, and the landmarks of peaceful ownership set up. Where Jacob had pitched his tent, there his rightful heirs should till the soil. When God has spoken, his divine shall, our I will, becomes no idle boast, but the fit echo of the Lord's decree. Believer, up and take possession of covenant mercies. Divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. Let not Canaanitish doubts and legalisms keep thee out of the inheritance of grace. Live up to thy privileges, take the good which God provides thee.

Verse 7. Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine. He claims the whole land on account of the promise. Two other great divisions of the country he mentions, evidently delighting to survey the goodly land which the Lord had given him. All things are ours, whether things present or things to come; no mean portion belongs to the believer, and let him not think meanly of it. No enemy shall withhold from true faith what God has given her, for grace makes her mighty to wrest it from the foe. Life is mine, death is mine, for Christ is mine. Ephraim also is the strength of mine head. All the military power of the valiant tribe was at the command of David, and he praises God for it. God will bow to the accomplishment of his purposes all the valour of men; the church may cry, "the prowess of armies is mine," God will overrule all their achievements for the progress of his cause. Judah is my lawgiver. There the civil power was concentrated: the king being of that tribe sent forth his laws out of her midst. We know no lawgiver, but the King who came out of Judah. To all the claims of Rome, Or Oxford, or the councils of men, we pay no attention; we are free from all other ecclesiastical rule, but that of Christ: but we yield joyful obedience to him: Judah is my lawgiver. Amid distractions it is a great thing to have good and sound legislation, it was a balm for Israel's wounds, it is our joy in the Church of Christ.

Verse 8. Having looked at home with satisfaction, the hero king now looks abroad with exultation. Moab, so injurious to me in former years, is my washpot. The basin into which the water falls when it is poured from an ewer upon my feet. A mere pot to hold the dirty water after my feet have been washed in it. Once she defiled Israel, according to the counsel of Balaam, the son of Beor; but she shall no longer be able to perpetrate such baseness; she shall be a washpot for those whom she sought to pollute. The wicked as we see in them the evil, the fruit, and the punishment of sin, shall help on the purification of the saints. This is contrary to their will, and to the nature of things, but faith finds honey in the lion, and a washpot in filthy Moab. David treats his foes as but insignificant and inconsiderable; a whole nation he counts but as a footbath for his kingdom. Over Edom will I cast out my shoe. As a man when bathing throws his shoes on one side, so would he obtain his dominion over haughty Esau's descendants as easily as a man casts a shoe. Perhaps he would throw his shoe as nowadays men throw their glove, as a challenge to them to dare dispute his sway. He did not need draw a sword to smite his now crippled and utterly despondent adversary, for if he dared revolt he would only need to throw his slipper at him, and he would tremble. Easily are we victors when Omnipotence leads the way. The day shall come when the church shall with equal ease subdue China and Ethiopia to the sceptre of the Son of David. Every believer also may by faith triumph over all difficulties, and reign with him who hath made us kings and priests. "They overcame through the

blood of the Lamb, "shall yet be said of all who rest in the power of Jesus.

Philistia, triumph thou because of me. Be so subdued as to rejoice in my victories over my other foes. Or does he mean, I who smote thy champion have at length so subdued thee that thou shalt never be able to rejoice over Israel again; but if thou must needs triumph it must be with me, and not against me; or rather is it a taunting defiance, a piece of irony? O proud Philistia, where are thy vaunts? Where now thy haughty looks, and promised conquests? Thus dare we defy the last enemy, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" So utterly hopeless is the cause of hell when the Lord comes forth to the battle, that even the weakest daughter of Zion may shake her head at the enemy, and laugh him to scorn. O the glorifying of faith! There is not a grain of vain glory in it, but yet her holy boastings none can hinder. When the Lord speaks the promise, we will not be slow to rejoice and glory in it.

Verse 9. As yet the interior fortresses of Edom had not been subdued. Their invading bands had been slain in the valley of salt, and David intended to push his conquests even to Petra the city of the rock, deemed to be impregnable. Who will bring me into the strong city? It was all but inaccessible, and hence the question of David. When we have achieved great success it must be a stimulus to greater efforts, but it must not become a reason for self confidence. We must look to the strong for strength as much at the close of a campaign as at its beginning. Who will lead me into Edom? High up among the stars stood the city of stone, but God could lead his servant up to it. No heights of grace are too elevated for us, the Lord being our leader, but we must beware of high things attempted in self reliance. EXCELSIOR is well enough as a cry, but we must look to the highest of all for guidance. Joab could not bring David into Edom. The veterans of the valley of salt could not force the passage, yet was it to be attempted, and David looked to the Lord for help. Heathen nations are yet to be subdued. The city of the seven hills must yet hear the gospel. Who will give the church the power to accomplish this? The answer is not far to seek.

Verse 10. Wilt not thou, O God, which hadst cast us off? Yes, the chastising God is our only hope. He loves us still. For a small moment doth he forsake, but with great mercy does he gather his people. Strong to smite, he is also strong to save. He who proved to us our need of him by showing us what poor creatures we are without him, will now reveal the glory of his help by conducting great enterprises to a noble issue. And thou, O God, which didst not go out with our armies? The self same God art thou, and to thee faith cleaves. Though thou slay us, we will trust in thee, and look for thy merciful help.

Verse 11. Give us help from trouble. Help us to overcome the disasters of civil strife and foreign invasion; save us from further incursions from without and division within. Do thou, O Lord, work this deliverance, for vain is the help of man. We have painfully learned the utter impotence of armies, kings, and nations without thine help. Our banners trailed in the mire have proven our weakness without thee, but yonder standard borne aloft before us shall witness to our valour now that thou hast come to our rescue. How sweetly will this verse suit the tried people of God as a frequent ejaculation. We know how true it is.

Verse 12. Through God we shall do valiantly. From God all power proceeds, and all we do well is done by divine operation; but still we, as soldiers of the great king, are to fight, and to fight valiantly too. Divine working is not an argument for human inaction, but rather is it the best excitement for courageous effort. Helped in the past, we shall also be helped in the future, and being assured of this

we resolve to play the man. For he it is that shall tread down our enemies. From him shall the might proceed, to him shall the honour be given. Like straw on the threshing floor beneath the feet of the oxen shall we tread upon our abject foes, but it shall rather be his foot which presses them down than ours; his hand shall go out against them so as to put them down and keep them in subjection. In the case of Christians there is much encouragement for a resolve similar to that of the first clause. We shall do valiantly, we will not be ashamed of our colours, afraid of our foes, or fearful of our cause. The Lord is with us, omnipotence sustains us, and we will not hesitate, we dare not be cowards. O that our King, the true David, were come to claim the earth, for the kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the governor among the nations.

Psalm 61

Verse 1. Hear my cry, O God. He was in terrible earnest; he shouted, he lifted up his voice on high. He is not however content with the expression of his need: to give his sorrows vent is not enough for him, he wants actual audience of heaven, and manifold succour as the result. Pharisees may rest in their prayers; true believers are eager for an answer to them: ritualists may be satisfied when they have, "said or sung" their litanies and collects, but living children of God will never rest till their supplications have entered the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth. Attend unto my prayer. Give it thy consideration, and such an answer as thy wisdom sees fit. When it comes to crying with us, we need not doubt but that it will come to attending with God. Our heavenly Father is not hardened against the cries of his own children. What a consoling thought it is that the Lord at all times hears his people's cries, and is never forgetful of their prayers; whatever else fails to move him, praying breath is never spent in vain!

Verse 2. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee. He was banished from the spot which was the centre of his delight, and at the same time his mind was in a depressed and melancholy condition; both actually and figuratively he was an outcast, yet he does not therefore restrain prayer, but rather finds therein a reason for the louder and more importunate cries. To be absent from the place of divine worship was a sore sorrow to saints in the olden times; they looked upon the tabernacle as the centre of the world, and they counted themselves to be at the fag end of the universe when they could no longer resort to the sacred shrine; their heart was heavy as in a strange land when they were banished from its solemnities. Yet even they knew right well that no place is unsuitable for prayer. There may be an end of the earth, but there must not be an end to devotion. On creation's verge we may call upon God, for even there he is within call. No spot is too dreary, no condition too deplorable; whether it be the world's end or life's end, prayer is equally available. To pray in some circumstances needs resolve, and the psalmist here expresses it,

I will cry. It was a wise resolution, for had he ceased to pray he would have become the victim of despair; there is an end to a man when he makes an end to prayer. Observe that David never dreamed of seeking any other God; he did not imagine the dominion of Jehovah to be local: he was at the end of the promised land, but he knew himself to be still in the territory of the Great King; to him only does he address his petitions. When my heart is overwhelmed:—when the huge waves of trouble wash over me, and I am completely submerged, not only as to my head, but also my heart. It is hard to pray when the very heart is drowning, yet gracious men plead best at such times. Tribulation brings us to God, and brings God to us. Faith's greatest triumphs are achieved in her heaviest trials. It is all over with me, affliction is all over me; it encompasses me as a cloud, it swallows me up like a sea, it shuts me in with thick darkness, yet God is near, near enough to hear

my voice, and I will call him. Is not this brave talk? Mark how our psalmist tells the Lord, as if he knew he were hearing him, that he intended to call upon him: our prayer by reason of our distress may be like to a call upon a far off friend, but our inmost faith has its quiet heart whispers to the Lord as to one who is assuredly our very present help. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. I see thee to be my refuge, sure and strong; but alas! I am confused, and cannot find thee; I am weak, and cannot climb thee. Thou art so steadfast, guide me; thou art so high, uplift me. There is a mint of meaning in this brief prayer. Along the iron bound coast of our northern shores, lives are lost because the rocks are inaccessible to the shipwrecked mariner. A clergyman of one of the coast villages has with immense labour cut steps up from the beach to a large chamber, which he has excavated in the chalk cliffs; here many mariners have been saved; they have climbed the rock, which had else been too high for them, and they have escaped. We have heard of late, however, that the steps have been worn away by the storms, and that poor sailors have perished miserably within sight of the refuge which they could not reach, for it was too high for them: it is therefore proposed to drive in iron stanchions, and to hang up chain ladders that shipwrecked mariners may reach the chambers in the rock. The illustration is self interpreting. Our experience leads us to understand this verse right well, for the time was with us when we were in such amazement of soul be reason of sin, that although we knew the Lord Jesus to be a sure salvation for sinners, yet we could not come at him, by reason of our many doubts and forebodings. A Saviour would have been of no use to us if the Holy Spirit had not gently led us to him, and enabled us to rest upon him. To this day we often feel that we not only want a rock, but to be led to it. With this in view we treat very leniently the half unbelieving prayers of awakened souls; for in their bewildered state we cannot expect from them all at once a fully believing cry. A seeking soul should at once believe in Jesus, but it is legitimate for a man to ask to be led to Jesus; the Holy Spirit is able to effect such a leading, and he can do it even though the heart be on the borders of despair. How infinitely higher that we are is the salvation of God. We are low and grovelling, but it towers like some tall cliff far above us. This is its glory, and is our delight when we have once climbed into the rock, and claimed an interest in it; but while we are as yet trembling seekers, the glory and sublimity of salvation appal us, and we feel that we are too unworthy ever to be partakers of it; hence we are led to cry for grace upon grace, and to see how dependent we are for everything, not only for the Saviour, but for the power to believe on him.

Verse 3. For thou hast been a shelter for me. Observe how the psalmist rings the changes on, Thou hast, and I will, —Ps 61:3-6. Experience is the nurse of faith. From the past we gather arguments for present confidence. Many and many a time had the persecutions of Saul and the perils of battle imperilled David's life, and only by miracle had he escaped, yet was he still alive and unhurt; this he remembers, and he is full of hope. And a strong tower from the enemy. As in a fort impregnable, David had dwelt, because surrounded by omnipotence. Sweet is it beyond expression to remember the lovingkindnesses of the Lord in our former days, for he is unchangeable, and therefore will continue to guard us from all evil.

Verse 4. I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever. Let me once get back to thy courts, and nothing shall again expel me from them: even now in my banishment my heart is there; and ever will I continue to worship thee in spirit wherever my lot may be cast. Perhaps by the word tabernacle is here meant the dwelling place of God; and if so, the sense is, I will dwell with the Lord, enjoying his sacred hospitality, and sure protection.

"There would I find a settled rest,
While others go and come;

No more a stranger or a guest,
But like a child at home."

He who communes with God is always at home. The divine omnipresence surrounds such a one consciously; his faith sees all around him the palace of the King, in which he walks with exulting security and overflowing delight. Happy are the indoor servants who go not out from his presence. Hewers of wood and drawers of water in the tents of Jehovah are more to be envied than the princes who riot in the pavilions of kings. The best of all is that our residence with God is not for a limited period of time, but for ages; yea, for ages of ages, for time and for eternity: this is our highest and most heavenly privilege, I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever. I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Often does our sweet singer use this figure; and far better is it to repeat one apt and instructive image, than for the sake of novelty to ransack creation for poor, strained metaphors. The chicks beneath the hen how safe, how comfortable, how happy! How warm the parent's bosom! How soft the cherishing feathers! Divine condescension allows us to appropriate the picture to ourselves, and how blessedly instructive and consoling it is! O for more trust; it cannot be too implicit: such a covert invites us to the most unbroken repose. SELAH. Rest we well may when we reach this point. Even the harp may be eloquently silent when deep, profound calm completely fills the bosom, and sorrow has sobbed itself into a peaceful slumber.

Verse 5. For thou, O God, hast heard my vows. Proofs of divine faithfulness are to be had in remembrance, and to be mentioned to the Lord's honour. The prayer of Ps 61:1 is certain of an answer because of the experience of Ps 61:5, since we deal with an immutable God. Vows may rightly be joined with prayers when they are lawful, well considered, and truly for God's glory. It is great mercy on God's part to take any notice of the vows and promises of such faithless and deceitful creatures as we are. What we promise him is his due already, and yet he deigns to accept our vows as if we were not so much his servants as his free suitors who could give or withhold at pleasure. Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name. We are made heirs, joint heirs with all the saints, partakers of the same portion. With this we ought to be delighted. If we suffer, it is the heritage of the saints; if we are persecuted, are in poverty, or in temptation, all this is contained in the title deeds of the heritage of the chosen. Those we are to sup with we may well be content to dine with. We have the same inheritance as the Firstborn himself; what better is conceivable? Saints are described as fearing the name of God; they are reverent worshippers; they stand in awe of the Lord's authority; they are afraid of offending him, they feel their own nothingness in the sight of the Infinite One. To share with such men, to be treated by God with the same favour as he metes out to them, is matter for endless thanksgiving. All the privileges of all the saints are also the privileges of each one.

Verse 6. Thou wilt prolong the king's life; or, better, "days to the days of the King thou wilt add." Death threatened, but God preserved his beloved. David, considering his many perils, enjoyed a long and prosperous reign. And his years as many generations. He lived to see generation after generation personally; in his descendants he lived as king through a very long period; his dynasty continued for many generations; and in Christ Jesus, his seed and son, spiritually David reigns on evermore. Thus he who began at the foot of the rock, half drowned, and almost dead, is here led to the summit, and sings as a priest abiding in the tabernacle, a king ruling with God for ever, and a prophet foretelling good things to come. (Ps 61:7.) See the uplifting power of faith and prayer. None so low but they may yet be set on high.

Verse 7. He shall abide before God for ever. Though this is true of David in a modified sense, we

prefer to view the Lord Jesus as here intended as the lineal descendant of David, and the representative of his royal race. Jesus is enthroned before God to eternity; here is our safety, dignity, and delight. We reign in him; in him we are made to sit together in the heavens. David's personal claim to sit enthroned for ever is but a foreshadowing of the revealed privilege of all true believers. O prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him. As men cry, "Long live the king," so we hail with acclamation our enthroned Immanuel, and cry, "Let mercy and truth preserve him." Eternal love and immutable faithfulness are the bodyguards of Jesus' throne, and they are both the providers and the preservers of all those who in him are made kings and priests unto God. We cannot keep ourselves, and nothing short of divine mercy and truth can do it; but these both can and will, nor shall the least of the people of God be suffered to perish.

Verse 8. So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever. Because my prayer is answered, my song shall be perpetual; because Jesus for ever sits at thy right hand, it shall be acceptable; because I am preserved in him, it shall be grateful. David had given vocal utterance to his prayer by a cry; he will now give expression to his praise by a song: there should be a parallel between our supplications and our thanksgivings. We ought not to leap in prayer, and limp in praise. The vow to celebrate the divine name for ever is no hyperbolical piece of extravagance, but such as grace and glory shall enable us to carry out to the letter. That I may daily perform my vows. To God who adds days to our days we will devote all our days. We vowed perpetual praise, and we desire to render it without intermission. We would worship God de die in diem, going right on as the days roll on. We ask no vacation from this heavenly vocation; we would make no pause in this sacred service. God daily performs his promises, let us daily perform our vows: he keeps his covenant, let us not forget ours. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth, even for evermore.

Psalm 62

Verse 1. Truly, or verily, or only. The last is probably the most prominent sense here. That faith alone is true which rests on God alone, that confidence which relies but partly on the Lord is vain confidence. If we Anglicized the word by our word verily, as some do, we should have here a striking reminder of our blessed Lord's frequent use of that adverb. My soul waiteth upon God. My inmost self draws near in reverent obedience to God. I am no hypocrite or mere posture maker. To wait upon God, and for God, is the habitual position of faith; to wait on him truly is sincerity; to wait on him only is spiritual chastity. The original is, "only to God is my soul silence." The presence of God alone could awe his heart into quietude, submission, rest, and acquiescence; but when that was felt, not a rebellious word or thought broke the peaceful silence. The proverb that speech is silver but silence is gold, is more than true in this case. No eloquence in the world is half so full of meaning as the patient silence of a child of God. It is an eminent work of grace to bring down the will and subdue the affections to such a degree, that the whole mind lies before the Lord like the sea beneath the wind, ready to be moved by every breath of his mouth, but free from all inward and self caused emotion, as also from all power to be moved by anything other than the divine will. We should be wax to the Lord, but adamant to every other force. From him cometh my salvation. The good man will, therefore, in patience possess his soul till deliverance comes: faith can hear the footsteps of coming salvation, because she has learned to be silent. Our salvation in no measure or degree comes to us from any inferior source; let us, therefore, look alone to the true fountain, and avoid the detestable crime of ascribing to the creature what belongs alone to the Creator. If to wait on God be worship, to wait on the creature is idolatry; if to wait on God alone be true faith, to associate an arm of the flesh with him is audacious unbelief.

Verse 2. He only is my rock and my salvation. Sometimes a metaphor may be more full of meaning and more suggestive than literal speech: hence the use of the figure of a rock, the very mention of which would awaken grateful memories in the psalmists's mind. David had often lain concealed in rocky caverns, and here he compares his God to such a secure refuge; and, indeed, declares him to be his only real protection, all-sufficient in himself and never failing. At the same time, as if to show us that what he wrote was not mere poetic sentiment but blessed reality, the literal word salvation follows the figurative expression: that our God is our refuge is no fiction, nothing in the world is more a matter of fact. He is my defence, my height, my lofty rampart, my high fort. Here we have another and bolder image; the tried believer not only abides in God as in a cavernous rock; but dwells in him as a warrior in some bravely defiant tower or lordly castle. I shall not be greatly moved. His personal weakness might cause him to be somewhat moved; but his faith would come in to prevent any very great disturbance; not much would he be tossed about. Moved, as one says, "but not removed." Moved like a ship at anchor which swings with the tide, but is not swept away by the tempest. When a man knows assuredly that the Lord is his salvation, he cannot be very much cast down: it would need more than all the devils in hell greatly to alarm a heart which knows God to be its salvation.

Verse 3. How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? It is always best to begin with God, and then we may confront our enemies. Make all sure with heaven, then may you grapple with earth and hell. David expostulates with his insensate foes; he marvels at their dogged perseverance in malice, after so many failures and with certain defeat before them. He tells them that their design was an imaginary one, which they never could accomplish however deeply they might plot. It is a marvel that men will readily enough continue in vain and sinful courses, and yet to persevere in grace is so great a difficulty as to be an impossibility, were it not for divine assistance. The persistency of those who oppose the people of God is so strange that we may well expostulate with them and say, "How long will ye thus display your malice?" A hint is given in the text as to the cowardliness of so many pressing upon one man; but none are less likely to act a fair and manly part than those who are opposed to God's people for righteousness' sake. Satan could not enter into combat with Job in fair duel, but must needs call in the Sabeans and Chaldeans, and even then must borrow the lightning and the wind before his first attack was complete. If there were any shame in him, or in his children, they would be ashamed of the dastardly manner in which they have waged war against the seed of the woman. Ten thousand to one has not seemed to them too mean an advantage; there is not a drop of chivalrous blood in all their veins. Ye shall be slain all of you. Your edged tools will cut your own fingers. Those who take the sword shall perish with the sword. However many or fierce the bands of the wicked may be, they shall not escape the just retribution of heaven; rigorously shall the great Lawgiver exact blood from men of blood, and award death to those who seek the death of others.

As a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence. Boastful persecutors bulge and swell with pride, but they are only as a bulging wall ready to fall in a heap; they lean forward to seize their prey, but it is only as a tottering fence inclines to the earth upon which it will soon lie at length. They expect men to bow to them, and quake for fear in their presence; but men made bold by faith see nothing in them to honour, and very, very much to despise. It is never well on our part to think highly of ungodly persons; whatever their position, they are near their destruction, they totter to their fall; it will be our wisdom to keep our distance, for no one is advantaged by being near a falling wall; if it does not crush with its weight, it may stifle with its dust. The passage is thought to be more correctly rendered as follows:—"How long will ye press on one man, that ye may crush him in a body, like a toppling wall, a

sinking fence?" (So Dr. Kay, of Calcutta, translates it.) We have, however, kept to our own version as yielding a good and profitable meaning. Both senses may blend in our meditations; for if David's enemies battered him as though they could throw him down like a bulging wall, he, on the other hand, foresaw that they themselves would by retributive justice be overthrown like an old crumbling, leaning, yielding fence.

Verse 4. They only consult to cast him down from his excellency. The excellencies of the righteous are obnoxious to the wicked, and the main object of their fury. The elevation which God gives to the godly in Providence, or in dispute, is also the envy of the baser sort, and they labour to pull them down to their own level. Observe the concentration of malice upon our point only, as here set in contrast with the sole reliance of the gracious one upon his Lord. If the wicked could but ruin the work of grace in us, they would be content; to crush our character, to overturn our influence, is the object of their consultation. They delight in lies; hence they hate the truth and the truthful, and by falsehood endeavour to compass their overthrow. To lie is base enough, but to delight in it is one of the blackest marks of infamy. They bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Flattery has ever been a favourite weapon with the enemies of good men; they can curse bitterly enough when it serves their turn; meanwhile, since it answers their purpose, they mask their wrath, and with smooth words pretend to bless those whom they would willingly tear in pieces. It was fortunate for David that he was well practised in silence, for to cozening deceivers there is no other safe reply. Selah. Here pause, and consider with astonishment the futile rancour of unholy men, and the perfect security of such as rest themselves upon the Lord.

Verse 5. My soul, wait thou only upon God. When we have already practised a virtue, it is yet needful that we bind ourselves to a continuance in it. The soul is apt to be dragged away from its anchorage, or is readily tempted to add a second confidence to the one sole and sure ground of reliance; we must, therefore, stir ourselves up to maintain the holy position which we were at first able to assume. Be still silent, O my soul! submit thyself completely, trust immovably, wait patiently. Let none of thy enemies' imaginings, consultings, flatteries, or maledictions cause thee to break the King's peace. Be like the sheep before her shearers, and like thy Lord, conquer by the passive resistance of victorious patience: thou canst only achieve this as thou shalt be inwardly persuaded of God's presence, and as you wait solely and alone on him. Unmingled faith is undismayed. Faith with a single eye sees herself secure, but if her eye be darkened by two confidences, she is blind and useless. For my expectation is from him. We expect from God because we believe in him. Expectation is the child of prayer and faith, and is owned of the Lord as an acceptable grace. We should desire nothing but what would be right for God to give, then our expectation would be all from God; and concerning truly good things we should not look to second causes, but to the Lord alone, and so again our expectation would be all from him. The vain expectations of worldly men come not; they promise but there is no performance; our expectations are on the way, and in due season will arrive to satisfy our hopes. Happy is the man who feels that all he has, all he wants, and all he expects are to be found in his God.

Verse 6. He only is my rock and my salvation. Alone, and without other help, God is the foundation and completion of my safety. We cannot too often hear the toll of that great bell only; let it ring the death knell of all carnal reliances, and lead us to cast ourselves on the bare arm of God. He is my defence. Not my defender only, but my actual protection. I am secure, because he is faithful. I shall not be moved—not even in the least degree. See how his confidence grows. In the second verse an adverb qualified his quiet; here, however, it is absolute; he altogether defies the rage of his adversaries, he will not stir an inch, nor be made to fear even in the smallest degree. A living faith

grows; experience develops the spiritual muscles of the saint, and gives a manly force which our religious childhood has not yet reached.

Verse 7. In God is my salvation and my glory. Wherein should we glory but in him who saves us? Our honour may well be left with him who secures our souls. To find all in God, and to glory that it is so, is one of the sure marks of an enlightened soul. The rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. He multiplies titles, for he would render much honour to the Lord, whom he had tried, and proved to be a faithful God under so many aspects. Ignorance needs but few words, but when experience brings a wealth of knowledge, we need varied expressions to serve as coffers for our treasure. God who is our rock when we flee for shelter, is also our strong rock when we stand firm and defy the foe; he is to be praised under both characters. Observe how the psalmist brands his own initials upon every name which he rejoicingly gives to his God—my expectation, my rock, my salvation, my glory, my strength, my refuge; he is not content to know that the Lord is all these things; he acts faith towards him, and lays claim to him under every character. What are the mines of Peru or Golconda to me if I have no inheritance in them? It is the word my which puts the honey into the comb. If our experience has not yet enabled us to realise the Lord under any of these consoling titles, we must seek grace that we may yet be partakers of their sweetness. The bees in some way or other penetrate the flowers and collect their juices; it must be hard for them to enter the closed cups and mouthless bags of some of the favourites of the garden, yet the honey gatherers find or make a passage; and in this they are our instructors, for into each delightful name, character, and office of our covenant God our persevering faith must find an entrance, and from each it must draw delight.

Verse 8. Trust in him at all times. Faith is an abiding duty, a perpetual privilege. We should trust when we can see, as well as when we are utterly in the dark. Adversity is a fit season for faith; but prosperity is not less so. God at all times deserves our confidence. We at all times need to place our confidence in him. A day without trust in God is a day of wrath, even if it be a day of mirth. Lean ever, ye saints, on him, on whom the world leans. Ye people, pour out your heart before him. Ye to whom his love is revealed, reveal yourselves to him. His heart is set on you, lay bare your hearts to him. Turn the vessel of your soul upside down in his secret presence, and let your inmost thoughts, desires, sorrows, and sins be poured out like water. Hide nothing from him, for you can hide nothing. To the Lord unburden your soul; let him be your only father confessor, for he only can absolve you when he has heard your confession. To keep our griefs to ourselves is to hoard up wretchedness. The stream will swell and rage if you dam it up: give it a clear course, and it leaps along and creates no alarm. Sympathy we need, and if we unload our hearts at Jesus' feet, we shall obtain a sympathy as practical as it is sincere, as consolatory as it is ennobling. The writer in the Westminster Assembly's Annotations well observes that it is the tendency of our wicked nature to bite on the bridle, and hide our grief in sullenness; but the gracious soul will overcome this propensity, and utter its sorrow before the Lord. God is a refuge for us. Whatever he may be to others, his own people have a peculiar heritage in him; for us he is undoubtedly a refuge: here then is the best of reasons for resorting to him whenever sorrows weigh upon our bosoms. Prayer is peculiarly the duty of those to whom the Lord has specially revealed himself as their defence. SELAH. Precious pause! Timely silence! Sheep may well lie down when such pasture is before them.

Verse 9. Surely men of low degree are vanity. Here the word is only again; men of low degree are only vanity, nothing more. They are many and enthusiastic, but they are not to be depended on; they are mobile as the waves of the sea, ready to be driven to and fro by any and every wind; they cry "Hosanna" today, and "Crucify him" tomorrow. The instability of popular applause is a proverb; as well

build a house with smoke as find comfort in the adulation of the multitude. As the first son of Adam was called Abel or vanity, so here we are taught that all the sons of Adam are Abels: it were well if they were all so in character as well as in name; but alas! in this respect, too many of them are Cains. And men of high degree are a lie. That is worse. We gain little by putting our trust in the aristocracy, they are not one whit better than the democracy: nay, they are even worse, for we expect something from them, but get nothing. May we not trust the elite? Surely reliance may be placed in the educated, the chivalrous, the intelligent? For this reason are they a lie; because they promise so much, and in the end, when relied upon, yield nothing but disappointment. How wretched is that poor man who puts his trust in princes. The more we rely upon God, the more shall we perceive the utter hollowness of every other confidence. To be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity. Take a true estimate of them; judge them neither by quantity nor by appearance, but by weight, and they will no longer deceive you. Calmly deliberate, quietly ponder, and your verdict will be that which inspiration here records. Vainer than vanity itself are all human confidences: the great and the mean, alike, are unworthy of our trust. A feather has some weight in the scale, vanity has none, and creature confidence has less than that: yet such is the universal infatuation, that mankind prefer an arm of flesh to the power of the invisible but almighty Creator; and even God's own children are too apt to be bitten with this madness.

Verse 10. Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery. Wealth ill gotten is the trust only of fools, for the deadly pest lies in it; it is full of canker, it reeks with God's curse. To tread down the poor and silence their cries for justice, is the delight of many a braggart bully, who in his arrogance imagines that he may defy both God and man; but he is warned in these words, and it will be well for him if he takes the warning, for the Judge of all the earth will surely visit upon men the oppression of the innocent, and the robbery of the poor: both of these may be effected legally in the courts of man, but no twistings of the law, no tricks and evasions will avail with the Court of Heaven. If riches increase, set not your heart upon them. If they grow in an honest, providential manner, as the result of industry or commercial success, do not make much account of the circumstance; be not unduly elated, do not fix your love upon your money bags. To bow an immortal spirit to the constant contemplation of fading possessions is extreme folly. Shall those who call the Lord their glory, glory in yellow earth? Shall the image and superscription of Caesar deprive them of communion with him who is the image of the invisible God? As we must not rest in men, so neither must we repose in money. Gain and fame are only so much foam of the sea. All the wealth and honour the whole world can afford would be too slender a thread to bear up the happiness of an immortal soul.

Verse 11. God hath spoken once. So immutable is God that he need not speak twice, as though he had changed; so infallible, that one utterance suffices, for he cannot err; so omnipotent, that his solitary word achieves all his designs. We speak often and say nothing; God speaks once and utters eternal verities. All our speaking may yet end in sound; but he speaks, and it is done; he commands, and it stands fast. Twice have I heard this. Our meditative soul should hear the echo of God's voice again and again. What he speaks once in revelation, we should be always hearing. Creation and providence are evermore echoing the voice of God; "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." We have two ears, that we may hear attentively, and the spiritual have inner ears with which they hear indeed. He hears twice in the best sense who hears with his heart as well as his ears. That power belongeth unto God. He is the source of it, and in him it actually abides. This one voice of God we ought always to hear, so as to be preserved from putting our trust in creatures in whom there can be no power, since all power is in God. What reason for faith is here! It can never be unwise to rest upon the almighty arm. Out of all troubles he can release us, under all burdens sustain us, while men must

fail us at the last, and may deceive us even now. May our souls hear the thunder of Jehovah's voice as he claims all power, and henceforth may we wait only upon God!

Verse 12. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy. This tender attribute sweetens the grand thought of his power: the divine strength will not crush us, but will be used for our good. God is so full of mercy that it belongs to him, as if all the mercy in the universe came from God, and still was claimed by him as his possession. His mercy, like his power, endureth for ever, and is ever present in him, ready to be revealed, For thou renderest to every man according to his work. This looks rather like justice than mercy; but if we understand it to mean that God graciously rewards the poor, imperfect works of his people, we see in it a clear display of mercy. May it not also mean that according to the work he allots us is the strength which he renders to us? he is not a hard master; he does not bid us make bricks without straw, but he metes out to us strength equal to our day. In either meaning we have power and mercy blended, and have a double reason for waiting only upon God. Man neither helps us nor rewards us; God will do both. In him power and grace are eternally resident; our faith should therefore patiently hope and quietly wait, for we shall surely see the salvation of God. Deo soli gloria. All glory be to God only.

Psalm 63

Verse 1. O God, thou art my God; or, O God, thou art my Mighty One. The last Psalm left the echo of power ringing in the ear, and it is here remembered. Strong affiance bids the fugitive poet confess his allegiance to the only living God; and firm faith enables him to claim him as his own. He has no doubts about his possession of his God; and why should other believers have any? The straightforward, clear language of this opening sentence would be far more becoming in Christians than the timorous and doubtful expressions so usual among professors. How sweet is such language! Is there any other word comparable to it for delights? Meus Deus. Can angels say more? Early will I seek thee. Possession breeds desire. Full assurance is no hindrance to diligence, but is the mainspring of it. How can I seek another man's God? but it is with ardent desire that I seek after him whom I know to be my own. Observe the eagerness implied in the time mentioned; he will not wait for noon or the cool eventide; he is up at cockcrowing to meet his God. Communion with God is so sweet that the chill of the morning is forgotten, and the luxury of the couch is despised. The morning is the time for dew and freshness, and the psalmist consecrates it to prayer and devout fellowship. The best of men have been betimes on their knees. The word early has not only the sense of early in the morning, but that of eagerness, immediateness. He who truly longs for God longs for him now. Holy desires are among the most powerful influences that stir our inner nature; hence the next sentence,

My soul thirsteth for thee. Thirst is an insatiable longing after that which is one of the most essential supports of life; there is no reasoning with it, no forgetting it, no despising it, no overcoming it by stoical indifference. Thirst will be heard; the whole man must yield to its power; even thus is it with that divine desire which the grace of God creates in regenerate men; only God himself can satisfy the craving of a soul really aroused by the Holy Spirit. My flesh longeth for thee; by the two words soul and flesh, he denotes the whole of his being. The flesh, in the New Testament sense of it, never longs after the Lord, but rather it lusteth against the spirit; David only refers to that sympathy which is sometimes created in our bodily frame by vehement emotions of the soul. Our corporeal nature usually tugs in the other direction, but the spirit when ardent can compel it to throw in what power it has upon the other side. When the wilderness caused David weariness, discomfort, and thirst, his flesh cried out in unison with the desire of his soul. In a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. A

weary place and a weary heart make the presence of God the more desirable: if there be nothing below and nothing within to cheer, it is a thousand mercies that we may look up and find all we need. How frequently have believers traversed in their experience this dry and thirsty land, where spiritual joys are things forgotten! and how truly can they testify that the only true necessity of that country is the near presence of their God! The absence of outward comforts can be borne with serenity when we walk with God; and the most lavish multiplication of them avails not when he withdraws. Only after God, therefore, let us pant. Let all desires be gathered into one. Seeking first the kingdom of God—all else shall be added unto us.

Verse 2. To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. He longed not so much to see the sanctuary as to see his God; he looked through the veil of ceremonies to the invisible One. Often had his heart been gladdened by communion with God in the outward ordinances, and for this great blessing he sighs again; as well he might, for it is the weightiest of all earth's sorrows for a Christian man to lose the conscious presence of his covenant God. He remembers and mentions the two attributes which had most impressed themselves upon his mind when he had been rapt in adoration in the holy place; upon these his mind had dwelt in the preceding Psalm, and the savour of that contemplation is evidently upon his heart when in the wilderness: these he desires to behold again in the place of his banishment. It is a precious thought that the divine power and glory are not confined in their manifestation to any places or localities; they are to be heard above the roaring of the sea, seen amid the glare of the tempest, felt in the forest and the prairie, and enjoyed wherever there is a heart that longs and thirsts to behold them. Our misery is that we thirst so little for these sublime things, and so much for the mocking trifles of time and sense. We are in very truth always in a weary land, for this is not our rest; and it is marvellous that believers do not more continuously thirst after their portion far beyond the river where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; but shall see the face of their God, and his name shall be in their foreheads. David did not thirst for water or any earthly thing, but only for spiritual manifestations. The sight of God was enough for him, but nothing short of that would content him. How great a friend is he, the very sight of whom is consolation. Oh, my soul, imitate the psalmist, and let all thy desires ascend towards the highest good; longing here to see God, and having no higher joy even for eternity.

Verse 3. Because thy lovingkindness is better than life. A reason for that which went before, as well as for that which follows. Life is dear, but God's love is dearer. To dwell with God is better than life at its best; life at ease, in a palace, in health, in honour, in wealth, in pleasure; yea, a thousand lives are not equal to the eternal life which abides in Jehovah's smile. In him we truly live, and move, and have our being; the withdrawal of the light of his countenance is as the shadow of death to us: hence we cannot but long after the Lord's gracious appearing. Life is to many men a doubtful good: lovingkindness is an unquestioned boon: life is but transient, mercy is everlasting: life is shared in by the lowest animals, but the lovingkindness of the Lord is the peculiar portion of the chosen. My lips shall praise thee. Openly, so that thy glory shall be made known, I will tell of thy goodness. Even when our heart is rather desiring than enjoying we should still continue to magnify the Most High, for his love is truly precious; even if we do not personally, for the time being, happen to be rejoicing in it. We ought not to make our praises of God to depend upon our own personal reception of benefits; this would be mere selfishness; even publicans and sinners have a good word for those whose hands are enriching them with gifts; it is the true believer only who will bless the Lord when he takes away his gifts or hides his face.

Verse 4. Thus will I bless thee while I live. As I now bless thee so will I ever do; or rather, so as thou

shalt reveal thy lovingkindness to me, I will in return continue to extol thee. While we live we will love. If we see no cause to rejoice in our estate, we shall always have reason for rejoicing in the Lord. If none others bless God, yet his people will; his very nature, as being the infinitely good God, is a sufficient argument for our praising him as long as we exist. I will lift up my hands in thy name. For worship the hands were uplifted, as also in joy, in thanksgiving, in labour, in confidence; in all these senses we would lift up our hands in Jehovah's name alone. No hands need hang down when God draws near in love. The name of Jesus has often made lame men leap as a hart, and it has made sad men clap their hands for joy.

Verse 5. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness. Though unable to feast on the sacrifice at thine altar, my soul shall even here be filled with spiritual joys, and shall possess a complete, a double contentment. There is in the love of God a richness, a sumptuousness, a fulness of soul filling joy, comparable to the richest food with which the body can be nourished. The Hebrews were more fond of fat than we are, and their highest idea of festive provision is embodied in the two words, marrow and fatness: a soul hopeful in God and full of his favour is thus represented as feeding upon the best of the best, the dainties of a royal banquet. And my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips. More joy, more praise. When the mouth is full of mercy, it should also be full of thanksgiving. When God gives us the marrow of his love, we must present to him the marrow of our hearts. Vocal praise should be rendered to God as well as mental adoration; others see our mercies, let them also hear our thanks.

Verse 6. When I remember thee upon my bed. Lying awake, the good man betook himself to meditation, and then began to sing. He had a feast in the night, and a song in the night. He turned his bedchamber into an oratory, he consecrated his pillow, his praise anticipated the place of which it is written, "There is no night there." Perhaps the wilderness helped to keep him awake, and if so, all the ages are debtors to it for this delightful hymn. If day's cares tempt us to forget God, it is well that night's quiet should lead us to remember him. We see best in the dark if we there see God best. And meditate on thee in the night watches. Keeping up sacred worship in my heart as the priests and Levites celebrated it in the sanctuary. Perhaps David had formerly united with those "who by night stand in the house of the Lord," and now as he could not be with them in person, he remembers the hours as they pass, and unites with the choristers in spirit, blessing Jehovah as they did. It may be, moreover, that the king heard the voices of the sentries as they relieved guard, and each time he returned with renewed solemnity to his meditations upon his God. Night is congenial, in its silence and darkness, to a soul which would forget the world, and rise into a higher sphere. Absorption in the most hallowed of all themes makes watches, which else would be weary, glide away all too rapidly; it causes the lonely and hard couch to yield the most delightful repose—repose more restful than even sleep itself. We read of beds of ivory, but beds of piety are better far. Some revel in the night, but they are not a tithe so happy as those who meditate in God.

Verse 7. Because thou hast been my help. Meditation had refreshed his memory and recalled to him his past deliverances. It were well if we oftener read our own diaries, especially noting the hand of the Lord in helping us in suffering, want, labour, or dilemma. This is the grand use of memory, to furnish us with proofs of the Lord's faithfulness, and lead us onward to a growing confidence in him. Therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. The very shade of God is sweet to a believer. Under the eagle wings of Jehovah we hide from all fear, and we do this naturally and at once, because we have aforetime tried and proved both his love and his power. We are not only safe, but happy in God: we rejoice as well as repose.

Verse 8. My soul followeth hard after thee, or is glued to thee. We follow close at the Lord's heels, because we are one with him. Who shall divide us from his love? If we cannot walk with him with equal footsteps, we will at least follow after with all the strength he lends us, earnestly panting to reach him and abide in his fellowship. When professors follow hard after the world, they will fall into the ditch; but none are ever too eager after communion with the Lord. Thy right hand upholdeth me. Else he would not have followed the Lord with constancy, or even have longed after him. The divine power, which has so often been dwelt upon in this and the preceding Psalms, is here mentioned as the source of man's attachment to God. How strong are we when the Lord works in us by his own right hand, and how utterly helpless if he withhold his aid!

Verse 9. As David earnestly sought for God, so there were men of another order who as eagerly sought after his blood; of these he speaks: But those that seek my soul, to destroy it. At his life they aimed, at his honour, his best welfare; and this they would not merely injure but utterly ruin. The devil is a destroyer, and all his seed are greedy to do the same mischief; and as he has ruined himself by his crafty devices, so also shall they. Destroyers shall be destroyed. Those who hunt souls shall be themselves the victims. Shall go into the lower parts of the earth. Into the pits which they digged for others they shall fall themselves. The slayers shall be slain, and the grave shall cover them. The hell which they in their curse invoked for others shall shut its mouth upon them. Every blow aimed against the godly will recoil on the persecutor; he who smites a believer drives a nail in his own coffin.

Verse 10. They shall fall by the sword. So David's enemies did. They that take the sword shall perish with the sword; bloody men shall feel their own life gushing forth from them, when their evil day shall at last come, and they shall be given up to feel in their own persons the horrors of death. They shall be a portion for foxes. Too mean to be fit food for the lions, the foxes shall sniff around their corpses, and the jackals shall hold carnival over their carcasses. Unburied and unhonoured they shall be meat for the dogs of war. Frequently have malicious men met with a fate so dire as to be evidently the award of retributive justice. Although the great assize is reserved for another world, yet even here, at the common sessions of providence, justice often bares her avenging sword in the eyes of all the people.

Verse 11. But the king shall rejoice in God. Usurpers shall fade, but he shall flourish; and his prosperity shall be publicly acknowledged as the gift of God. The Lord's anointed shall not fail to offer his joyful thanksgiving: his well established throne shall own the superior lordship of the King of kings; his rejoicing shall be alone in God. When his subjects sing, "Io triumphe," he will bid them chant, "Te Deum." Every one that sweareth by him shall glory. His faithful followers shall have occasion for triumph; they shall never need to blush for the oath of their allegiance. Or, "swearing by him," may signify adherence to God, and worship paid to him. The heathen swore by their gods, and the Israelite called Jehovah to witness to his asseveration; those, therefore, who owned the Lord as their God should have reason to glory when he proved himself the defender of the king's righteous cause, and the destroyer of traitors. But the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped. And the sooner the better. If shame will not do it, nor fear, nor reason, then let them be stopped with the sexton's shovelful of earth; for a liar is a human devil, he is the curse of men, and accursed of God, who has comprehensively said, "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." See the difference between the mouth that praises God, and the mouth that forges lies: the first shall never be stopped, but shall sing on for ever; the second shall be made speechless at the bar of God. O Lord, we seek thee and thy truth; deliver us from all malice and slander, and reveal to us thine own

self, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Psalm 64

Verse 1. Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer. It often helps devotion if we are able to use the voice and speak audibly; but even mental prayer has a voice with God which he will hear. We do not read that Moses had spoken with his lips at the Red Sea, and yet the Lord said to him, "Why criest thou unto me?" Prayers which are unheard on earth may be among the best heard in heaven. It is our duty to note how constantly David turns to prayer; it is his battle axe and weapon of war; he uses it under every pressure, whether of inward sin or outward wrath, foreign invasion or domestic rebellion. We shall act wisely if we make prayer to God our first and best trusted resource in every hour of need. Preserve my life from fear of the enemy. From harm and dread of harm protect me; or it may be read as an expression of his assurance that it would be so; "from fear of the foe thou wilt preserve me." With all our sacrifices of prayer we should offer the salt of faith.

Verse 2. Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked. From their hidden snares hide me. Circumvent their counsel; let their secrets be met by thy secret providence, their counsels of malice by thy counsels of love. From the insurrection of the workers of iniquity. When their secret counsels break forth into clamorous tumults, be thou still my preserver. When they think evil, let thy divine thoughts defeat them; and when they do evil, let thy powerful justice overthrow them: in both cases, let me be out of reach of their cruel hand, and even out of sight of their evil eye. It is a good thing to conquer malicious foes, but a better thing still to be screened from all conflict with them, by being hidden from the strife. The Lord knows how to give his people peace, and when he wills to make quiet, he is more than a match for all disturbers, and can defeat alike their deep laid plots and their overt hostilities.

Verse 3. Who whet their tongue like a sword. Slander has ever been the master weapon of the good man's enemies, and great is the care of the malicious to use it effectively. As warriors grind their swords, to give them an edge which will cut deep and wound desperately, so do the unscrupulous invent falsehoods which shall be calculated to inflict pain, to stab the reputation, to kill the honour of the righteous. What is there which an evil tongue will not say? What misery will it not labour to inflict? And bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words. Far off they dart their calumnies, as archers shoot their poisoned arrows. They studiously and with force prepare their speech as bent bows, and then with cool, deliberate aim, they let fly the shaft which they have dipped in bitterness. To sting, to inflict anguish, to destroy, is their one design. Insult, sarcasm, taunting defiance, nicknaming, all these were practised among Orientals as a kind of art; and if in these Western regions, with more refined manners, we are less addicted to the use of rough abuse, it is yet to be feared that the less apparent venom of the tongue inflicts none the less poignant pain. However, in all cases, let us fly to the Lord for help. David had but the one resource of prayer against the twofold weapons of the wicked, for defence against sword or arrow he used the one defence of faith in God.

Verse 4. That they may shoot in secret at the perfect. They lie in ambush, with bows ready bent to aim a coward's shaft at the upright man. Sincere and upright conduct will not secure us from the assaults of slander. The devil shot at our Lord himself, and we may rest assured he has a fiery dart in reserve for us; He was absolutely perfect, we are only so in a relative sense, hence in us there is fuel for fiery darts to kindle on. Observe the meanness of malicious men; they will not accept fair combat, they shun the open field, and skulk in the bushes, lying in ambush against those who are not so

acquainted with deceit as to suspect their treachery, and are so manly to imitate their despicable modes of warfare. Suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not. To secrecy they add suddenness. They give their unsuspecting victim no chance of defending himself; they pounce on him like a wild beast leaping on its prey. They lay their plans so warily that they fear no detection. We have seen in daily life the arrow of calumny wounding its victim sorely; and yet we have not been able to discover the quarter from which the weapon was shot, nor to detect the hand which forged the arrowhead, or tinged it with the poison. Is it possible for justice to invent a punishment sufficiently severe to meet the case of the dastard who defiles my good name, and remains himself in concealment? An open liar is an angel compared with this demon. Vipers and cobras are harmless and amiable creatures compared with such a reptile. The devil himself might blush at being the father of so base an offspring.

Verse 5. They encourage themselves in an evil matter. Good men are frequently discouraged, and not infrequently discourage one another, but the children of darkness are wise in their generation and keep their spirits up, and each one has a cheering word to say to his fellow villain. Anything by which they can strengthen each other's hands in their one common design they resort to; their hearts are thoroughly in their black work. They commune of laying snares privily. Laying their heads together they count and recount their various devices, so as to come at some new and masterly device. They know the benefit of cooperation, and are not sparing in it; they pour their experience into one common fund, they teach each other fresh methods. They say, Who shall see them? So sedulously do they mask their attacks, that they defy discovery; their pitfalls are too well hidden, and themselves too carefully concealed to be found out. So they think, but they forget the all seeing eye, and the all discovering hand, which are ever hard by them. Great plots are usually laid bare. As in the Gunpowder Plot, there is usually a breakdown somewhere or other; among the conspirators themselves truth finds an ally, or the stones of the field cry out against them. Let no Christian be in bondage through fear of deep laid Jesuitical schemes, for surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor divination against Israel; the toils of the net are broken, the arrows of the bow are snapped, the devices of the wicked are foiled. Therefore, fear not, ye tremblers; for the Lord is at your right hand, and ye shall not be hurt of the enemy.

Verse 6. They search out iniquities. Diligently they consider, invent, devise, and seek for wicked plans to wreak their malice. These are no common villains, but explorers in iniquity, inventors and concoctors of evil. Sad indeed it is that to ruin a good man the evil disposed will often show as much avidity as if they were searching after treasure. The Inquisition could display instruments of torture, revealing as much skill as the machinery of our modern exhibitions. The deep places of history, manifesting most the skill of the human mind, are those in which revenge has arranged diplomacy, and used intrigue to compass its diabolical purposes. They accomplish a diligent search. Their design is perfected, consummated, and brought into working order. They cry "Eureka; "they have sought and found the sure method of vengeance. Exquisite are the refinements of malice! hell's craft furnishes inspiration to the artistes who fashion deceit. Earth and the places under it are ransacked for the material of war, and profound skill turns all to account. Both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep. No superficial wit is theirs; but sagacity, sharpened by practice and keen hatred. Wicked men have frequently the craft to hasten slowly, to please in order to ruin, to flatter that ere long they may devour, to bow the knee that they may ultimately crush beneath their foot. He who deals with the serpent's seed has good need of the wisdom which is from above: the generation of vipers twist and turn, wind and wiggle, yet evermore they are set upon their purpose, and go the nearest way to it when they wander round about. Alas! how dangerous is the believer's condition, and

how readily may he be overcome if left to himself. This is the complaint of reason and the moan of unbelief. When faith comes in, we see that even in all this the saints are still secure, for they are all in the hands of God.

Verse 7. But God shall shoot at them with an arrow. They shot, and shall be shot. A greater archer than they are shall take sure aim at their hearts. One of his arrows shall be enough, for he never misses his aim. The Lord turns the tables on his adversaries, and defeats them at their own weapons. Suddenly shall they be wounded. They were looking to surprise the saint, but, lo! they are taken at unawares themselves; they desired to inflict deadly wounds, and are smitten themselves with wounds which none can heal. While they were bending their bows, the great Lord had prepared his bow already, and he let slip the shaft when least they looked for such an unsparing messenger of justice. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." The righteous need not learn the arts of self defence or of attack, their avenging is in better hands than their own.

Verse 9. And all men shall fear. They shall be filled with awe by the just judgments of God, as the Canaanites were by the overthrow of Pharaoh at the Red Sea. Those who might have been bold in sin shall be made to tremble and to stand in awe of the righteous Judge. And shall declare the work of God. It shall become the subject of general conversation. So strange, so pointed, so terrible shall be the Lord's overthrow of the malicious, that it shall be spoken of in all companies. They sinned secretly, but their punishment shall be wrought before the face of the sun. For they shall wisely consider of his doing. The judgments of God are frequently so clear and manifest that men cannot misread them, and if they have any thought at all, they must extract the true teaching from them. Some of the divine judgments are a great deep, but in the case of malicious persecutors the matter is plain enough, and the most illiterate can understand.

Verse 10. The righteous shall be glad in the Lord. Admiring his justice and fully acquiescing in its displays, they shall also rejoice at the rescue of injured innocence yet, their joy shall not be selfish or sensual, but altogether in reference to the Lord. And shall trust in him. Their observation of providence shall increase their faith; since he who fulfils his threatenings will not forget his promises. And all the upright in heart shall glory. The victory of the oppressed shall be the victory of all upright men; the whole host of the elect shall rejoice in the triumph of virtue. While strangers fear, the children are glad in view of their Father's power and justice. That which alarms the evil, cheers the good. Lord God of mercy, grant to us to be preserved from all our enemies, and saved in thy Son with an everlasting salvation.

Psalm 65

Verse 1. Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion. Though Babylon adores Antichrist, Zion remains faithful to her King; to him, and to him only, she brings her perpetual oblation of worship. Those who have seen in Zion the blood of sprinkling, and know themselves to belong to the church of the firstborn, can never think of her without presenting humble praise to Zion's God; his mercies are too numerous and precious to be forgotten. The praises of the saints wait for a signal from the divine Lord, and when he shows his face they burst forth at once. Like a company of musicians gathered to welcome and honour a prince, who wait till he makes his appearance, so do we reserve our best praises till the Lord reveals himself in the assembly of his saints; and, indeed, till he shall descend from heaven in the day of his appearing. Praise also waits like a servant or courtier in the royal halls—gratitude is humble and obedient. Praise attends the Lord's pleasure, and continues to bless

him, whether he shows tokens of present favour or no; she is not soon wearied, but all through the night she sings on in sure hope that the morning cometh. We shall continue to wait on, tuning our harps, amid the tears of earth; but O what harmonies will those be which we will pour forth, when the home bringing is come, and the King shall appear in his glory. The passage may be rendered "praise is silent for thee; "it is calm, peaceful, and ready to adore thee in quietness. Or, it may mean, our praise is but silence compared with thy deservings, O God. Or, in solemn silence we worship thee, because our praise cannot be uttered; accept, therefore, our silence as praise. Or, we are so engrossed in thy praise, that to all other things we are dumb; we have no tongue for anything but thee. Perhaps the poet best expressed the thought of the psalmist when he said—

"A sacred reverence checks our songs,
And praise sits silent on our tongues."

Certainly, when the soul is most filled with adoring awe, she is least content with her own expressions, and feels most deeply how inadequate are all mortal songs to proclaim the divine goodness. A church, bowed in silent adoration by a profound sense of divine mercy, would certainly offer more real praise than the sweetest voices aided by pipes and strings; yet, vocal music is not to be neglected, for this sacred hymn was meant to be sung. It is well before singing to have the soul placed in a waiting attitude, and to be humbly conscious that our best praise is but silence compared with Jehovah's glory. And unto thee shall the vow be performed. Perhaps a special vow made during a season of drought and political danger. Nations and churches must be honest and prompt in redeeming their promises to the Lord, who cannot be mocked with impunity. So, too, must individuals. We are not to forget our vows, or to redeem them to be seen of men—unto God alone must they be performed, with a single eye to his acceptance. Believers are all under covenant, which they made at conversion, and have renewed upon being baptised, joining the church, and coming to the table, and some of them are under special pledges which they entered into under peculiar circumstances; these are to be piously and punctually fulfilled. We ought to be very deliberate in promising, and very punctilious in performing. A vow unkept will burn the conscience like a hot iron. Vows of service, of donation, of praise, or whatever they may be, are no trifles; and in the day of grateful praise they should, without fail, be fulfilled to the utmost of our power.

Verse 2. O thou that hearest prayer. This is thy name, thy nature, thy glory. God not only has heard, but is now hearing prayer, and always must hear prayer, since he is an immutable being and never changes in his attributes. What a delightful title for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Every right and sincere prayer is as surely heard as it is offered. Here the psalmist brings in the personal pronoun thou, and we beg the reader to notice how often "thou, ""thee, "and "thy, "occur in this hymn; David evidently believed in a personal God, and did not adore a mere idea or abstraction. Unto thee shall all flesh come. This shall encourage men of all nations to become suppliants to the one and only God, who proves his Deity by answering those who seek his face. Flesh they are, and therefore weak; frail and sinful, they need to pray; and thou art such a God as they need, for thou art touched with compassion, and dost condescend to hear the cries of poor flesh and blood. Many come to thee now in humble faith, and are filled with good, but more shall be drawn to thee by the attractiveness of thy love, and at length the whole earth shall bow at thy feet. To come to God is the life of true religion; we come weeping in conversion, hoping in supplication, rejoicing in praise, and delighting in service. False gods must in due time lose their deluded votaries, for man when enlightened will not be longer be fooled; but each one who tries the true God is encouraged by his own success to persuade others also, and so the kingdom of God comes to men, and men come to it.

Verse 3. Iniquities prevail against me. Others accuse and slander me, and in addition to my own sins rise up and would beset me to my confusion, were it not for the remembrance of the atonement which covers every one of my iniquities. Our sins would, but for grace, prevail against us in the court of divine justice, in the court of conscience, and in the battle of life. Unhappy is the man who despises these enemies, and worse still is he who counts them his friends! He is best instructed who knows their deadly power, and flees for refuge to him who pardons iniquity. As for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away. Thou dost cover them all, for thou hast provided a covering propitiation, a mercysheet which wholly covers thy law. Note the word our, the faith of the one penitent who speaks for himself in the first clause, here embraces all the faithful in Zion; and he is so persuaded of the largeness of forgiving love that he leads all the saints to sing of the blessing. What a comfort that iniquities that prevail against us, do not prevail against God. They would keep us away from God, but he sweeps them away from before himself and us; they are too strong for us, but not for our Redeemer, who is mighty, yea, and almighty to save. It is worthy of note that as the priest washed in the laver before he sacrificed, so David leads us to obtain purification from sin before we enter upon the service of song. When we have washed our robes and made them white in his blood, then shall we acceptably sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

Verse 4. Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee. After cleansing comes benediction, and truly this is a very rich one. It comprehends both election, effectual calling, access, acceptance, and sonship. First, we are chosen of God, according to the good pleasure of his will, and this alone is blessedness. Then, since we cannot and will not come to God of ourselves, he works graciously in us, and attracts us powerfully; he subdues our unwillingness, and removes our inability by the almighty workings of his transforming grace. This also is no slight blessedness. Furthermore, we, by his divine drawings, are made nigh by the blood of his Son, and brought near by his spirit, into intimate fellowship; so that we have access with boldness, and are no longer as those who are afar off by wicked works: here also is unrivalled blessedness. To crown all, we do not come nigh in peril of dire destruction, as Nadab and Abihu did, but we approach as chosen and accepted ones, to become dwellers in the divine household: this is heaped up blessedness, vast beyond conception. But dwelling in the house we are treated as sons, for the servant abideth not in the house for ever, but the son abideth ever. Behold what manner of love and blessedness the Father has bestowed upon us that we may dwell in his house, and go no more out for ever. Happy men who dwell at home with God. May both writer and reader be such men. That he may dwell in thy courts. Acceptance leads to abiding: God does not make a temporary choice, or give and take; his gifts and calling are without repentance. He who is once admitted to God's courts shall inhabit them for ever; he shall be

"No more a stranger or a guest,
But like a child at home."

Permanence gives preciousness. Terminating blessings are but half blessings. To dwell in the courts of the Great King is to be ennobled; to dwell there for ever is to be emparadised: yet such is the portion of every man whom God has chosen and caused to approach unto him, though once his iniquities prevailed against him.

Verse 5. By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation. God's memorial is that he hears prayer, and his glory is that he answers it in a manner fitted to inspire awe

in the hearts of his people. The saints, in the commencement of the Psalm, offered praise in reverential silence; and now, in the like awe stricken spirit, they receive answers to their prayers. The direct allusion here is, no doubt, to the Lord's overthrow of the enemies of his people in ways calculated to strike terror into all beholders; his judgments in their severe righteousness were calculated to excite fear both among friends and foes. Who would not fear a God whose blows are so crushing? We do not always know what we are asking for when we pray; when the answer comes, the veritable answer, it is possible that we may be terrified by it. We seek sanctification, and trial will be the reply: we ask for more faith, and more affliction is the result: we pray for the spread of the gospel, and persecution scatters us. Nevertheless, it is good to ask on, for nothing which the Lord grants in his love can do us any harm. Terrible things will turn out to be blessed things after all, where they come in answer to prayer. See in this verse how righteousness and salvation are united, the terrible things with the gracious answers. Where but in Jesus could they be blended? The God who saves may answer our prayers in a way which puts unbelief into a flutter; but when faith spies the Saviour, she remembers that "things are not what they seem," and she is of good courage. He who is terrible is also our refuge from terror when we see him in the Well beloved.

Who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth. The dwellers in the far off isles trust in God; those most remote from Zion yet confide in the ever living Jehovah. Even those who dwell in countries, frozen or torrid, where nature puts on her varied terrors, and those who see dread wonders on the deep, yet fly from the terrors of God and place their confidence in the God of terrors. His arm is strong to smite, but also strong to save. And of them that are afar off upon the sea. Both elements have their elect band of believers. If the land gave Moses elders, the sea gave Jesus apostles. Noah, when all was ocean, was as calm with God as Abraham in his tent. All men are equally dependent upon God: the seafaring man is usually most conscious of this, but in reality he is not more so than the husbandman, nor the husbandman than anyone else. There is no room for self confidence on land or sea, since God is the only true confidence of men on earth or ocean. Faith is a plant of universal growth, it is a tree of life on shore and a plant of renown at sea; and, blessed be God, those who exercise faith in him anywhere shall find that he is swift and strong to answer their prayers. A remembrance of this should quicken our devotions when we approach unto the Lord our God.

Verse 6. Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains. He, as it were, fixed them in their sockets, and preserved them from falling by earthquake or storm. The firmest owe their stability to him. Philosophers of the forget God school are too much engrossed with their laws of upheaval to think of the Upheaver. Their theories of volcanic action and glacier action, etc., etc., are frequently used as bolts and bars to shut the Lord out of his own world. Our poet is of another mind, and sees God's hand settling Alps and Andes on their bases, and therefore he sings in his praise. Let me for ever be just such an unphilosophical simpleton as David was, for he was nearer akin to Solomon than any of our modern theorists. Being girded with power. The Lord is so himself, and he therefore casts a girdle of strength around the hills, and there they stand, braced, belted, and bulwarked with his might. The poetry is such as would naturally suggest itself to one familiar with mountain scenery; power everywhere meets you, sublimity, massive grandeur, and stupendous force are all around you; and God is there, the author and source of all. Let us learn that we poor puny ones, if we wish for true establishment, must go to the strong for strength. Without him, the everlasting hills would crumble; how much more shall all our plans, projects, and labours come to decay. Repose, O believer, where the mountains find their bases—viz., in the undiminished might of the Lord God.

Verse 7. Which stilleth the noise of the seas. His soft breath smooths the sea into a glass, and the

mountainous waves into ripples. God does this. Calms are of the God of peace; it needs not that we look for a hurricane when it is said that he cometh. He walked of old in the garden in the cool of the day; he is resting even now, for his great seventh day is not yet over, and he is always "the Lord and giver of peace." Let mariners magnify the God who rules the waves. The noise of their waves. Each separate brawler amid the riot of the storm is quieted by the divine voice. And the tumult of the people. Nations are as difficult to rule as the sea itself, they are as fitful, treacherous, restless, and furious; they will not brook the bridle nor be restrained by laws. Canute had not a more perilous seat by the rising billows than many a king and emperor has had when the multitude have been set on mischief, and have grown weary of their lords. God alone is King of nations. The sea obeys him, and the yet more tumultuous nations are kept in check by him. Human society owes its preservation to the continued power of God: evil passions would secure its instant dissolution; envy, ambition, and cruelty would create anarchy tomorrow if God did not prevent; whereof we have had clear proof in the various French revolutions. Glory be unto God who maintains the fabric of social order, and checks the wicked, who would fain overthrow all things. The child of God is seasons of trouble should fly at once to him who stills the seas: nothing is too hard for him.

Verse 8. They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid of thy tokens. Signs of God's presence are not few, nor confined to any one region. Zembla sees them as well as Zion, and Terra del Fuego as surely as the Terra Sacra. These tokens are sometimes terrible phenomena in nature—such as earthquakes, pestilence, tornado, or storm; and when these are seen, even the most barbarous people tremble before God. At other times they are dread works of providence—such as the overthrow of Sodom, and the destruction of Pharaoh. The rumour of these judgments travels to earth's utmost verge, and impresses all people with a fear and trembling at such a just and holy God. We bless God that we are not afraid but rejoice at his tokens; with solemn awe we are glad when we behold his mighty acts. We fear, but not with slavish fear. Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice. East and west are made happy by God's favour to the dwellers therein. Our rising hours are bright with hope, and our evening moments mellow with thanksgiving. Whether the sun go forth or come in we bless God and rejoice in the gates of the day. When the fair morning blushes with the rosy dawn we rejoice; and when the calm evening smiles restfully we rejoice still. We do not believe that the dew weeps the death of the day; we only see jewels bequeathed by the departing day for its successor to gather up from the earth. Faith, when she sees God, rounds the day with joy. She cannot fast, because the bridegroom is with her. Night and day are alike to her, for the same God made them and blessed them. She would have no rejoicing if God did not make her glad; but, blessed be his name, he never ceases to make joy for those who find their joy in him.

Verse 9. Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it. God's visits leave a blessing behind; this is more than can be said of every visitor. When the Lord goes on visitations of mercy, he has abundance of necessary things for all his needy creatures. He is represented here as going round the earth, as a gardener surveys his garden, and as giving water to every plant that requires it, and that not in small quantities, but until the earth is drenched and soaked with a rich supply of refreshment. O Lord, in this manner visit thy church, and my poor, parched, and withering piety. Make thy grace to overflow towards my graces; water me, for no plant of thy garden needs it more.

"My stock lies dead and no increase
Doth my dull husbandry improve;
O let thy graces without cease
Drop from above."

Thou greatly enrichest it. Millions of money could not so much enrich mankind as the showers do. The soil is made rich by the rain, and then yields its riches to man; but God is the first giver of all. How truly rich are those who are enriched with grace; this is great riches. With the river of God, which is full of water. The brooks of earth are soon dried up, and all human resources, being finite, are liable to failure; but God's provision for the supply of rain is inexhaustible; there is no bottom or shore to his river. The deluge poured from the clouds of yesterday may be succeeded by another tomorrow, and yet the waters above the firmament shall not fail. How true this is in the realm of grace; there the river of God is full of water, and "of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace." The ancients in their fables spake of Pactolus, which flowed over sands of gold; but this river of God, which flows above and from which the rain is poured, is far more enriching; for, after all, the wealth of men lies mainly in the harvest of their fields, without which even gold would be of no value whatever.

Thou preparest them corn. Corn is specially set apart to be the food of man. In its various species it is a divine provision for the nutriment of our race, and is truly called the staff of life. We hear in commerce of "prepared corn flour," but God prepared it long before man touched it. As surely as the manna was prepared of God for the tribes, so certainly is corn made and sent by God for our daily use. What is the difference whether we gather wheat ears or manna, and what matters it if the first come upward to us, and the second downward? God is as much present beneath as above; it is as great a marvel that food should rise out of the dust, as that it should fall from the skies. When thou hast so provided for it. When all is prepared to produce corn, the Lord puts the finishing stroke, and the grain is forthcoming; not even, when all the material is prepared, will the wheat be perfected without the continuous and perfecting operation of the Most High. Blessed be the Great Householder; he does not suffer the harvest to fail, he supplies the teeming myriads of earth with bread enough from year to year. Even thus does he vouchsafe heavenly food to his redeemed ones: "He hath given meat unto them that fear him; he is ever mindful of his covenant."

Verse 10. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof. Ridge and furrow are drenched. The ridges beaten down and settled, and the furrows made to stand like gutters flooded to the full. Thou makest it soft with showers. The drought turned the clods into iron, but the plenteous showers dissolve and loosen the soil. Thou blessest the springing thereof. Vegetation enlivened by the moisture leaps into vigour, the seed germinates and sends forth its green shoot, and the smell is that as of a field which the Lord has blessed. All this may furnish us with a figure of the operations of the Holy Spirit in beating down high thoughts, filling our lowly desires, softening the soul, and causing every holy thing to increase and spread.

Verse 11. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness. The harvest is the plainest display of the divine bounty, and the crown of the year. The Lord himself conducts the coronation, and sets the golden coronal upon the brow of the year. Or we may understand the expression to mean that God's love encircles the year as with a crown; each month has its gems, each day its pearl. Unceasing kindness girdles all time with a belt of love. The providence of God in its visitations makes a complete circuit, and surrounds the year. And thy paths drop fatness. The footsteps of God, when he visits the land with rain, create fertility. It was said of the Tartar hordes, that grass grew no more where their horses' feet had trodden; so, on the contrary, it may be said that the march of Jehovah, the Fertiliser, may be traced by the abundance which he creates. For spiritual harvests we must look to him, for he alone can give "times of refreshing" and feasts of Pentecost.

Verse 12. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness. Not alone where man is found do the showers descend, but away in the lone places, where only wild animals have their haunt, there the bountiful Lord makes the refreshing rain to drop. Ten thousand oases smile while the Lord of mercy passes by. The birds of the air, the wild goats, and the fleet stags rejoice as they drink from the pools, new filled from heaven. The most lonely and solitary souls God will visit in love. And the little hills rejoice on every side. On all hands the eminences are girt with gladness. Soon they languish under the effects of drought, but after a season of rain they laugh again with verdure.

Verse 13. The pastures are clothed with flocks. The clothing of man first clothes the fields. Pastures appear to be quite covered with numerous flocks when the grass is abundant. The valleys also are covered over with corn. The arable as well as the pasture land is rendered fruitful. God's clouds, like ravens, bring us both bread and flesh. Grazing flocks and waving crops are equally the gifts of the Preserver of men, and for both praise should be rendered. Sheep shearing and harvest should both be holiness unto the Lord. They shout for joy. The bounty of God makes the earth vocal with his praise, and in opened ears it lifts up a joyous shout. The cattle low out the divine praises, and the rustling ears of grain sing a soft sweet melody unto the Lord.

"Ye forests bend, ye harvests wave to him;
Breathe your still song into the reaper's heart,
As home he goes beneath the joyous moon.
Bleat out afresh, ye hills; ye mossy rocks
Retain the sound; the broad responsive low
Ye valleys raise; for the GREAT SHEPHERD reigns,
And his unsuffering kingdom yet will come."

They also sing. The voice of nature is articulate to God; it is not only a shout, but a song. Well ordered are the sounds of animate creation as they combine with the equally well tuned ripple of the waters, and sighings of the wind. Nature has no discords. Her airs are melodious, her chorus is full of harmony. All, all is for the Lord; the world is a hymn to the Eternal, blessed is he who, hearing, joins in it, and makes one singer in the mighty chorus.

Psalm 66

Verse 1. Make a joyful noise unto God. "In Zion, "where the more instructed saints were accustomed to profound meditation, the song was silent unto God, and was accepted of him; but in the great popular assemblies a joyful noise was more appropriate and natural, and it would be equally acceptable. If praise is to be wide spread, it must be vocal; exulting sounds stir the soul and cause a sacred contagion of thanksgiving. Composers of tunes for the congregation should see to it that their airs are cheerful; we need not so much noise, as joyful noise. God is to be praised with the voice, and the heart should go therewith in holy exultation. All praise from all nations should be rendered unto the Lord. Happy the day when no shouts shall be presented to Juggernaut or Boodh, but all the earth shall adore the Creator thereof. All ye lands. Ye heathen nations, ye who have not known Jehovah hitherto, with one consent let the whole earth rejoice before God. The languages of the lands are many, but their praises should be one, addressed to one only God.

Verse 2. Sing forth the honour of his name. The noise is to be modulated with tune and time, and fashioned into singing, for we adore the God of order and harmony. The honour of God should be our

subject, and to honour him our object when we sing. To give glory to God is but to restore to him his own. It is our glory to be able to give God glory; and all our true glory should be ascribed unto God, for it is his glory. "All worship be to God only," should be the motto of all true believers. The name, nature, and person of God are worthy of the highest honour. Make his praise glorious. Let not his praise be mean and grovelling: let it arise with grandeur and solemnity before him. The pomp of the ancient festivals is not to be imitated by us, under this dispensation of the Spirit, but we are to throw so much of heart and holy reverence into all our worship that it shall be the best we can render. Heart worship and spiritual joy render praise more glorious than vestments, incense, and music could do.

Verse 3. Say unto God. Turn all your praises to him. Devotion, unless it be resolutely directed to the Lord, is no better than whistling to the wind. How terrible art thou in thy works. The mind is usually first arrested by those attributes which cause fear and trembling; and, even when the heart has come to love God, and rest in him, there is an increase of worship when the soul is awed by an extraordinary display of the more dreadful of the divine characteristics. Looking upon the convulsions which have shaken continents, the hurricanes which have devastated nations, the plagues which have desolated cities, and other great and amazing displays of divine working, men may well say: How terrible art thou in thy works. Till we see God in Christ, the terrible predominates in all our apprehensions of him. Through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee; but, as the Hebrew clearly intimates, it will be a forced and false submission. Power brings a man to his knee, but love alone wins his heart. Pharaoh said he would let Israel go, but he lied unto God; he submitted in word but not in deed. Tens of thousands, both in earth and hell, are rendering this constrained homage to the Almighty; they only submit because they cannot do otherwise; it is not their loyalty, but his power, which keeps them subjects of his boundless dominion.

Verse 4. All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee. All men must even now prostrate themselves before thee, but a time will come when they shall do this cheerfully; to the worship of fear shall be added the singing of love. What a change shall have taken place when singing shall displace sighing, and music shall thrust out misery! They shall sing to thy name. The nature and works of God will be the theme of earth's universal song, and he himself shall be the object of the joyful adoration of our emancipated race. Acceptable worship not only praises God as the mysterious Lord, but it is rendered fragrant by some measure of knowledge of his name or character. God would not be worshipped as an unknown God, nor have it said of his people, "Ye worship ye know not what." May the knowledge of the Lord soon cover the earth, that so the universality of intelligent worship may be possible: such a consummation was evidently expected by the writer of this Psalm; and, indeed, throughout all Old Testament writings, there are intimations of the future general spread of the worship of God. It was an instance of wilful ignorance and bigotry when the Jews raged against the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. Perverted Judaism may be exclusive, but the religion of Moses, and David, and Isaiah was not so. Selah. A little pause for holy expectation is well inserted after so great a prophecy, and the uplifting of the heart is also a seasonable direction. No meditation can be more joyous than that excited by the prospect of a world reconciled to its Creator.

Verse 5. Come and see the works of God. Such glorious events, as the cleaving of the Red Sea and the overthrow of Pharaoh, are standing wonders, and throughout all time a voice sounds forth concerning them—"Come and see." Even till the close of all things, the marvellous works of God at the Red Sea will be the subject of meditation and praise; for, standing on the sea of glass mingled with fire, the triumphal armies of heaven sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. It has always been the favourite subject of the inspired bards, and their choice was most

natural. He is terrible in his doing toward the children of men. For the defence of his church and the overthrow of her foes he deals terrific blows, and strikes the mighty with fear. O thou enemy, wherefore dost thou vaunt thyself? Speak no more so exceeding proudly, but remember the plagues which bowed the will of Pharaoh, the drowning of Egypt's chariots in the Red Sea, the overthrow of Og and Sihon, the scattering of the Canaanites before the tribes. This same God still liveth, and is to be worshipped with trembling reverence.

Verse 6. He turned the sea into dry land. It was no slight miracle to divide a pathway through such a sea, and to make it fit for the traffic of a whole nation. He who did this can do anything, and must be God, the worthy object of adoration. The Christian's inference is that no obstacle in his journey heavenward need hinder him, for the sea could not hinder Israel, and even death itself shall be as life; the sea shall be dry land when God's presence is felt. They went through the flood on foot. Through the river the tribes passed dry shod, Jordan was afraid because of them.

"What ailed thee, O thou mighty sea?
Why rolled thy waves in dread?
What bade thy tide, O Jordan, flee
And bare its deepest bed?"

"O earth, before the Lord, the God
Of Jacob, tremble still;
Who makes the waste a watered sod,
The flint a gushing rill."

There did we rejoice in him. We participate this day in that ancient joy. The scene is so vividly before us that it seems as if we were there personally, singing unto the Lord because he hath triumphed gloriously. Faith casts herself bodily into the past joys of the saints, and realises them for herself in much the same fashion in which she projects herself into the bliss of the future, and becomes the substance of things hoped for. It is to be remarked that Israel's joy was in her God, and there let ours be. It is not so much what he has done, as what he is, that should excite in us a sacred rejoicing. "He is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him."

Verse 7. He ruleth by his power for ever. He has not deceased, nor abdicated, nor suffered defeat. The prowess displayed at the Red Sea is undiminished: the divine dominion endures throughout eternity. His eyes behold the nations. Even as he looked out of the cloud upon the Egyptians and discomfited them, so does he spy out his enemies, and mark their conspiracies. His hand rules and his eye observes, his hand has not waxed weak, nor his eye dim. As so many grasshoppers he sees the people and tribes, at one glance he takes in all their ways. He oversees all and overlooks none. Let not the rebellious exalt themselves. The proudest have no cause to be proud. Could they see themselves as God sees them they would shrivel into nothing. Where rebellion reaches to a great head, and hopes most confidently for success, it is a sufficient reason for abating our fears, that the Omnipotent ruler is also an Omniscient observer. O proud rebels, remember that the Lord aims his arrows at the high soaring eagles and brings them down from their nest among the stars. "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree." After a survey of the Red Sea and Jordan, rebels, if they were in their senses, would have no more stomach for the fight, but would humble themselves at the Conqueror's feet. Selah. Pause again, and take time to bow low before the throne of the Eternal.

Verse 8. O bless our God, ye people. Ye chosen seed, peculiarly beloved, it is yours to bless your covenant God as other nations cannot. Ye should lead the strain, for he is peculiarly your God. First visited by his love, ye should be foremost in his praise. And make the voice of his praise to be heard. Whoever else may sing with bated breath, do you be sure to give full tongue and volume to the song. Compel unwilling ears to hear the praises of your covenant God. Make rocks, and hills, and earth, and sea, and heaven itself to echo with your joyful shouts.

Verse 9. Which holdeth our soul in life. At any time the preservation of life, and especially the soul's life, is a great reason for gratitude but much more when we are called to undergo extreme trials, which of themselves would crush our being. Blessed be God, who, having put our souls into possession of life, has been pleased to preserve that heaven given life from the destroying power of the enemy. And suffereth not our feet to be moved. This is another and precious boon. If God has enabled us not only to keep our life, but our position, we are bound to give him double praise. Living and standing is the saint's condition through divine grace. Immortal and immoveable are those whom God preserves. Satan is put to shame, for instead of being able to slay the saints, as he hoped, he is not even able to trip them up. God is able to make the weakest to stand fast, and he will do so.

Verse 10. For thou, O God, hast proved us. He proved his Israel with sore trials. David had his temptations. All the saints must go to the proving house; God had one Son without sin, but he never had a son without trial. Why ought we to complain if we are subjected to the rule which is common to all the family, and from which so much benefit has flowed to them? The Lord himself proves us, who then shall raise a question as to the wisdom and the love which are displayed in the operation? The day may come when, as in this case, we shall make hymns out of our griefs, and sing all the more sweetly because our mouths have been purified with bitter draughts. Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Searching and repeated, severe and thorough, has been the test; the same result has followed us as in the case of precious metal, for the dross and tin have been consumed, and the pure ore has been discovered. Since trial is sanctified to so desirable an end, ought we not to submit to it with abounding resignation.

Verse 11. Thou broughtest us into the net. The people of God in the olden time were often enclosed by the power of their enemies, like fishes or birds entangled in a net; there seemed no way of escape for them. The only comfort was that God himself had brought them there, but even this was not readily available, since they knew that he had led them there in anger as a punishment for their transgressions; Israel in Egypt was much like a bird in the fowler's net. Thou laidest affliction upon our loins. They were pressed even to anguish by their burdens and pains. Not on their backs alone was the load, but their loins were pressed and squeezed with the straits and weights of adversity. God's people and affliction are intimate companions. As in Egypt every Israelite was a burden bearer, so is every believer while he is in this foreign land. As Israel cried to God by reason of their sore bondage, so also do the saints. We too often forget that God lays our afflictions upon us; if we remembered this fact, we should more patiently submit to the pressure which now pains us. The time will come when, for every ounce of present burden, we shall receive a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Verse 12. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads. They stormed, and hectorred, and treated us like the mire of the street. Riding the high horse, in their arrogance, they, who were in themselves mean men, treated the Lord's people as if they were the meanest of mankind. They even turned their captives into beasts of burden, and rode upon their heads, as some read the Hebrew. Nothing is too

bad for the servants of God when they fall into the hands of proud persecutors. We went through fire and through water. Trials many and varied were endured by Israel in Egypt, and are still the portion of the saints. The fires of the brick kiln and the waters of the Nile did their worst to destroy the chosen race; hard labour and child murder were both tried by the tyrant, but Israel went through both ordeals unharmed, and even thus the church of God has outlived, and will outlive, all the artifices and cruelties of man. Fire and water are pitiless and devouring, but a divine fiat stays their fury, and forbids these or any other agents from utterly destroying the chosen seed. Many an heir of heaven has had a dire experience of tribulation; the fire through which he has passed has been more terrible than that which chars the bones, for it has fed upon the marrow of his spirit, and burned into the core of his heart; while the waterfloods of affliction have been even more to be feared than the remorseless sea, for they have gone in even unto the soul, and carried the inner nature down into deeps horrible, and not to be imagined without trembling. Yet each saint has been more than conqueror hitherto, and, as it has been, so it shall be. The fire is not kindled which can burn the woman's seed, neither does the dragon know how to vomit a flood which shall suffice to drown it. But thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place. A blessed issue to a mournful story. Canaan was indeed a broad and royal domain for the once enslaved tribes: God, who took them into Egypt, also brought them into the land which flowed with milk and honey, and Egypt was in his purposes en route to Canaan. The way to heaven is via tribulation.

"The path of sorrow and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

How wealthy is the place of every believer, and how doubly does he feel it to be so in contrast with his former slavery: what songs shall suffice to set forth our joy and gratitude for such a glorious deliverance and such a bountiful heritage. More awaits us. The depth of our griefs bears no proportion to the height of our bliss. For our shame we have double, and more than double. Like Joseph we shall rise from the prison to the palace, like Mordecai we shall escape the gallows prepared by malignity, and ride the white horse and wear the royal robe appointed by benignity. Instead of the net, liberty; instead of a burden on the loins, a crown on our heads; instead of men riding over us, we shall rule over the nations: fire shall no more try us, for we shall stand in glory on the sea of glass mingled with fire; and water shall not harm us, for there shall be no more sea. O the splendour of this brilliant conclusion to a gloomy history. Glory be unto him who saw in the apparent evil the true way to the real good. With patience we will endure the present gloom, for the morning cometh. Over the hills faith sees the daybreak, in whose light we shall enter into the wealthy place.

Verse 13. I will. The child of God is so sensible of his own personal indebtedness to grace, that he feels that he must utter a song of his own. He joins in the common thanksgiving, but since the best public form must fail to meet each individual case, he makes sure that the special mercies received by him shall not be forgotten, for he records them with his own pen, and sings of them with his own lips. I will go into thy house with burnt offerings; the usual sacrifices of godly men. Even the thankful heart dares not come to God without a victim of grateful praise; of this as well as of every other form of worship, we may say, "the blood is the life thereof." Reader, never attempt to come before God without Jesus, the divinely promised, given, and accepted burnt offering. I will pay thee my vows. He would not appear before the Lord empty, but at the same time he would not boast of what he offered, seeing it was all due on account of former vows. After all, our largest gifts are but payments; when we have given all, we must confess, "O Lord, of thine own have we given unto thee." We should be slow in making vows, but prompt in discharging them. When we are released from trouble, and can once

more go up to the house of the Lord, we should take immediate occasion to fulfil our promises. How can we hope for help another time, if we prove faithless to covenants voluntarily entered upon in hours of need.

Verse 15. I will offer unto thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings. The good man will give his best things to God. No starveling goat upon the hills will he present at the altar, but the well fed bullocks of the luxuriant pastures shall ascend in smoke from the sacred fire. He who is miserly with God is a wretch indeed. Few devise liberal things, but those few find a rich reward in so doing. With the incense of rams. The smoke of burning rams should also rise from the altar; he would offer the strength and prime of his flocks as well as his herds. Of all we have we should give the Lord his portion, and that should be the choicest we can select. It was no waste to burn the fat upon Jehovah's altar, nor to pour the precious ointment upon Jesus' head; neither are large gifts and bountiful offerings to the church of God any diminution to a man's estate: such money is put to good interest and placed where it cannot be stolen by thieves nor corroded by rust. I will offer bullocks with goats. A perfect sacrifice, completing the circle of offerings, should show forth the intense love of his heart. We should magnify the Lord with the great and the little. None of his ordinances should be disregarded; we must not omit either the bullocks or the goats. In these three verses we have gratitude in action, not content with words, but proving its own sincerity by deeds of obedient sacrifice. Selah. It is most fit that we should suspend the song while the smoke of the victims ascends the heavens; let the burnt offerings stand for praises while we meditate upon the infinitely greater sacrifice of Calvary.

Verse 16. Come and hear. Before, they were bidden to come and see. Hearing is faith's seeing. Mercy comes to us by way of ear gate. "Hear, and your soul shall live." They saw how terrible God was, but they heard how gracious he was. All ye that fear God. These are a fit audience when a good man is about to relate his experience; and it is well to select our hearers when inward soul matters are our theme. It is forbidden us to throw pearls before swine. We do not want to furnish wanton minds with subjects for their comedies, and therefore it is wise to speak of personal spiritual matters where they can be understood, and not where they will be burlesqued. All God fearing men may hear us, but far hence ye profane. And I will declare what he hath done for my soul. I will count and recount the mercies of God to me, to my soul, my best part, my most real self. Testimonies ought to be borne by all experienced Christians, in order that the younger and feebler sort may be encouraged by the recital to put their trust in the Lord. To declare man's doings is needless; they are too trivial, and, besides, there are trumpeters enough of man's trumpety deeds; but to declare the gracious acts of God is instructive, consoling, inspiriting, and beneficial in many respects. Let each man speak for himself, for a personal witness is the surest and most forcible; second hand experience is like "cauld kale het again; "it lacks the flavour of first hand interest. Let no mock modesty restrain the grateful believer from speaking of himself, or rather of God's dealings to himself, for it is justly due to God; neither let him shun the individual use of the first person, which is most correct in detailing the Lord's ways of love. We must not be egotists, but we must be egotists when we bear witness for the Lord.

Verse 17. I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. It is well when prayer and praise go together, like the horses in Pharaoh's chariot. Some cry who do not sing, and some sing who do not cry: both together are best. Since the Lord's answers so frequently follow close at the heels of our petitions, and even overtake them, it becomes us to let our grateful praises keep pace with our humble prayers. Observe that the psalmist did both cry and speak; the Lord has cast the dumb devil out of his children, and those of them who are least fluent with their tongues are often the most eloquent with their hearts.

Verse 18. If I regard iniquity in my heart. If, having seen it to be there, I continue to gaze upon it without aversion; if I cherish it, have a side glance of love toward it, excuse it, and palliate it; The Lord will not hear me. How can he? Can I desire him to connive at my sin, and accept me while I wilfully cling to any evil way? Nothing hinders prayer like iniquity harboured in the breast; as with Cain, so with us, sin lieth at the door, and blocks the passage. If thou listen to the devil, God will not listen to thee. If you refuse to hear God's commands, he will surely refuse to hear thy prayers. An imperfect petition God will hear for Christ's sake, but not one which is wilfully miswritten by a traitor's hand. For God to accept our devotions, while we are delighting in sin, would be to make himself the God of hypocrites, which is a fitter name for Satan than for the Holy One of Israel.

Verse 19. But verily God hath heard me. Sure sign this that the petitioner was no secret lover of sin. The answer to his prayer was a fresh assurance that his heart was sincere before the Lord. See how sure the psalmist is that he has been heard; it is with him no hope, surmise, or fancy, but he seals it with a verily. Facts are blessed things when they reveal both God's heart as loving, and our own heart as sincere. He hath attended to the voice of my prayer. He gave his mind to consider my cries, interpreted them, accepted them, and replied to them; and therein proved his grace and also my uprightness of heart. Love of sin is a plague spot, a condemning mark, a killing sign, but those prayers, which evidently live and prevail with God, most clearly arise from a heart which is free from dalliance with evil. Let the reader see to it, that his inmost soul be rid of all alliance with iniquity, all toleration of secret lust, or hidden wrong.

Verse 20. Blessed be God. Be his name honoured and loved. Which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me. He has neither withdrawn his love nor my liberty to pray. He has neither cast out my prayer nor me. His mercy and my cries still meet each other. The psalm ends on its key note. Praise all through is its spirit and design. Lord enable us to enter into it. Amen.

Psalm 67

Verse 1. God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us. This is a fit refrain to the benediction of the High Priest in the name of the Lord, as recorded in Nu 6:24-25. "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." It begins at the beginning with a cry for mercy. Forgiveness of sin is always the first link in the chain of mercies experienced by us. Mercy is a foundation attribute in our salvation. The best saints and the worst sinners may unite in this petition. It is addressed to the God of mercy, by those who feel their need of mercy, and it implies the death of all legal hopes or claims of merit. Next, the church begs for a blessing; bless us—a very comprehensive and far reaching prayer. When we bless God we do but little, for our blessings are but words, but when God blesses he enriches us indeed, for his blessings are gifts and deeds. But his blessing alone is not all his people crave, they desire a personal consciousness of his favour, and pray for a smile from his face. These three petitions include all that we need here or hereafter. This verse may be regarded as the prayer of Israel, and spiritually of the Christian church. The largest charity is shown in this Psalm, but it begins at home. The whole church, each church, and each little company, may rightly pray, bless us. It would, however, be very wrong to let our charity end where it begins, as some do; our love must make long marches, and our prayers must have a wide sweep, we must embrace the whole world in our intercessions. Selah. Lift up the heart, lift up the voice. A higher key, a sweeter note is called for.

Verse 2. That thy way may be known upon earth. As showers which first fall upon the hills afterwards run down in streams into the valleys, so the blessing of the Most High comes upon the world through the church. We are blessed for the sake of others as well as ourselves. God deals in a way of mercy with his saints, and then they make that way known far and wide, and the Lord's name is made famous in the earth. Ignorance of God is the great enemy of mankind, and the testimonies of the saints, experimental and grateful, overcome this deadly foe. God has set a way and method of dealing out mercy to men, and it is the duty and privilege of a revived church to make that way to be everywhere known. Thy saving health among all nations, or, thy salvation. One likes the old words, "saving health," yet as they are not the words of the Spirit but only of our translators, they must be given up: the word is salvation, and nothing else. This all nations need, but many of them do not know it, desire it, or seek it; our prayer and labour should be, that the knowledge of salvation may become as universal as the light of the sun. Despite the gloomy notions of some, we cling to the belief that the kingdom of Christ will embrace the whole habitable globe, and that all flesh shall see the salvation of God: for this glorious consummation we agonize in prayer.

Verse 3. Let the people praise thee, O God. Cause them to own thy goodness and thank thee with all their hearts; let nations do this, and do it continually, being instructed in thy gracious way. Let all the people praise thee. May every man bring his music, every citizen his canticle, every peasant his praise, every prince his psalm. All are under obligations to thee, to thank thee will benefit all, and praise from all will greatly glorify thee; therefore, O Lord, give all men the grace to adore thy grace, the goodness to see thy goodness. What is here expressed as a prayer in our translation, may be read as a prophecy, if we follow the original Hebrew.

Verse 4. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy, or, they shall joy and triumph. When men know God's way and see his salvation, it brings to their hearts much happiness. Nothing creates gladness so speedily, surely, and abidingly as the salvation of God. Nations never will be glad till they follow the leadership of the great Shepherd; they may shift their modes of government from monarchies to republics, and from republics to communes, but they will retain their wretchedness till they bow before the Lord of all. What a sweet word is that to sing for joy! Some sing for form, others for show, some as a duty, others as an amusement, but to sing from the heart, because overflowing joy must find a vent, this is to sing indeed. Whole nations will do this when Jesus reigns over them in the power of his grace. We have heard hundreds and even thousands sing in chorus, but what will it be to hear whole nations lifting up their voices, as the noise of many waters and like great thunders. When shall the age of song begin? When shall groans and murmurs be exchanged for holy hymns and joyful melodies?

For thou shalt judge the people righteously. Wrong on the part of governors is a fruitful source of national woe, but where the Lord rules, rectitude is supreme. He doeth ill to none. His laws are righteousness itself. He rights all wrongs and releases all who are oppressed. Justice on the throne is a fit cause for national exultation. And govern the nations upon earth. He will lead them as a shepherd his flock, and through his grace they shall willingly follow, then will there be peace, plenty, and prosperity. It is a great condescension on God's part to become the Shepherd of nations, and to govern them for their good: it is a fearful crime when a people, who know the salvation of God, apostatize and say to the Lord, "Depart from us." There is some cause for trembling lest our nation should fall into this condemnation; may God forbid. Selah. Before repeating the chorus, the note is again elevated, that full force may be given to the burst of song and the accompaniment of harps.

"Strings and voices, hands and hearts,
In the concert bear your parts;
All that breathe, your Lord adore,
Praise him, Praise him, evermore!"

Verse 5. These words are no vain repetition, but are a chorus worthy to be sung again and again. The great theme of the psalm is the participation of the Gentiles in the worship of Jehovah; the psalmist is full of it, he hardly knows how to contain or express his joy.

Verse 6. Then shall the earth yield her increase. Sin first laid a curse on the soil, and grace alone can remove it. Under tyrannical governments lands become unproductive; even the land which flowed with milk and honey is almost a wilderness under Turkish rule; but, when the principles of true religion shall have elevated mankind, and the dominion of Jesus shall be universally acknowledged, the science of tillage shall be perfected, men shall be encouraged to labour, industry shall banish penury, and the soil shall be restored to more than its highest condition of fertility. We read that the Lord turneth "a fruitful land into barrenness, "for the wickedness of them that dwell therein, and observation confirms the truth of the divine threatening; but even under the law it was promised, "The Lord shall make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land for good." There is certainly an intimate relation between moral and physical evil, and between spiritual and physical good. Alexander notes that the Hebrew is in the past tense, and he concludes that it is ungrammatical to render it in the future; but to us it seems that the prophet bard, hearing the nations praise the Lord, speaks of the bounteous harvest as already given in consequence. On the supposition that all the people praise Jehovah, the earth has yielded her increase. The future in the English appears to be the clearest rendering of the Hebrew. And God, even our own God, shall bless us. He will make earth's increase to be a real blessing. Men shall see in his gifts the hand of that same God whom Israel of old adored, and Israel, especially, shall rejoice in the blessing, and exult in her own God. We never love God aright till we know him to be ours, and the more we love him the more we long to be fully assured that he is ours. What dearer name can we give to him than "mine own God." The spouse in the song has no sweeter canticle than "my beloved is mine and I am his." Every believing Jew must feel a holy joy at the thought that the nations shall be blessed by Abraham's God; but every Gentile believer also rejoices that the whole world shall yet worship the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is our Father and our God.

Verse 7. God shall bless us. The prayer of the first verse is the song of the last. We have the same phrase twice, and truly the Lord's blessing is manifold; he blesses and blesses and blesses again. How many are his beatitudes! How choice his benedictions! They are the peculiar heritage of his chosen. He is the Saviour of all men, but specially of them that believe. In this verse we find a song for all future time. God shall bless us is our assured confidence; he may smite us, or strip us, or even slay us, but he must bless us. He cannot turn away from doing good to his elect. And all the ends of the earth shall fear him. The far off shall fear. The ends of the earth shall end their idolatry, and adore their God. All tribes, without exception, shall feel a sacred awe of the God of Israel. Ignorance shall be removed, insolence subdued, injustice banished, idolatry abhorred, and the Lord's love, light, life, and liberty, shall be over all, the Lord himself being King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen, and Amen.

Psalm 68

Verse 1. Let God arise. In some such words Moses spake when the cloud moved onward, and the

ark was carried forward. The ark would have been a poor leader if the Lord had not been present with the symbol. Before we move, we should always desire to see the Lord lead the way. The words suppose the Lord to have been passive for awhile, suffering his enemies to rage, but restraining his power. Israel beseeches him to "arise, "as elsewhere to "awake, ""gird on his sword, "and other similar expressions. We, also, may thus importunately cry unto the Lord, that he would be pleased to make bare his arm, and plead his own cause. Let his enemies be scattered. Our glorious Captain of the vanguard clears the way readily, however many may seek to obstruct it; he has but to arise, and they flee, he has easily over thrown his foes in days of yore, and will do so all through the ages to come. Sin, death, and hell know the terror of his arm; their ranks are broken at his approach. Our enemies are his enemies, and in this is our confidence of victory. Let them also that hate him flee before him. To hate the infinitely good God is infamous, and the worst punishment is not too severe. Hatred of God is impotent. His proudest foes can do him no injury. Alarmed beyond measure, they shall flee before it comes to blows. Long before the army of Israel can come into the fray, the haters of God shall flee before HIM who is the champion of his chosen. He comes, he sees, he conquers. How fitting a prayer is this for the commencement of a revival! How it suggests the true mode of conducting one:—the Lord leads the way, his people follow, the enemies flee.

Verse 2. As smoke is driven away. Easily the wind chases the smoke, completely it removes it, no trace is left; so, Lord, do thou to the foes of thy people. They fume in pride, they darken the sky with their malice, they mount higher and higher in arrogance, they defile wherever they prevail. Lord, let thy breath, thy Spirit, thy Providence, make them to vanish for ever from the march of thy people. Philosophic scepticism is as flimsy and as foul as smoke; may the Lord deliver his Church from the reek of it. As wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. Wax is hard when by itself, but put it to the fire, how soft it is. Wicked men are haughty till they come into contact with the Lord, and then they faint for fear; their hearts melt like wax when they feel the power of his anger. Wax, also, burns and passes away; the taper is utterly consumed by the flame: so shall all the boastful power of the opposers of the gospel be as a thing of nought. Rome, like the candles on her altars, shall dissolve, and with equal certainty shall infidelity disappear. Israel saw, in the ark, God on the mercyseat—power in connection with propitiation—and they rejoiced in the omnipotence of such a manifestation; this is even more clearly the confidence of the New Testament church, for we see Jesus, the appointed atonement, clothed with glory and majesty, and before his advance all opposition melts like snow in the sun; the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. When he comes by his Holy Spirit, conquest is the result; but when he arises in person, his foes shall utterly perish.

Verse 3. But let the righteous be glad. The presence of God on the throne of grace is an overflowing source of delight to the godly; and let them not fail to drink of the streams which are meant to make them glad. Let them rejoice before God. The courtiers of the happy God should wear the garments of gladness, for in his presence is fulness of joy. That presence, which is the dread and death of the wicked, is the desire and delight of the saints. Yea, let them exceedingly rejoice. Let them dance with all their might, as David did, for very joy. No bounds should be set to joy in the Lord. "Again, I say, rejoice," says the apostle, as if he would have us add joy to joy without measure or pause. When God is seen to shine propitious from above the mercyseat in the person of our Immanuel, our hearts must needs leap within us with exultation, if we are indeed among those made righteous in his righteousness, and sanctified by his Spirit. Move on, O army of the living God, with shouts of abounding triumph, for Jesus leads the van.

Verse 4. Sing unto God, sing praises to his name. To time and tune, with order and care, celebrate the character and deeds of God, the God of his people. Do it again and again; and let the praise, with resolution of heart, be all directed to him. Sing not for ostentation, but devotion; not to be heard of men, but of the Lord himself. Sing not to the congregation, but "unto God," Extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH. Remember his most great, incomprehensible, and awful name; reflect upon his self existence and absolute dominion, rise to the highest pitch of joyful reverence in adoring him. Heaven beholds him riding on the clouds in storm, and earth has seen him marching over its plains with majesty. The Hebrew seems to be: "Cast up a highway for him who marches through the wilderness, "in allusion to the wanderings of the tribes in the desert. The marches of God were in the waste howling wilderness. His eternal power and Godhead were there displayed in his feeding, ruling, and protecting the vast hosts which he had brought out of Egypt. The ark brought all this to remembrance, and suggested it as a theme for song. The name JAH is an abbreviation of the name Jehovah; it is not a diminution of that name, but an intensified word, containing in it the essence of the longer, august title. It only occurs here in our version of Scripture, except in connection with other words such as Hallelujah. And rejoice before him. In the presence of him who marched so gloriously at the head of the elect nation, it is most fitting that all his people should display a holy delight. We ought to avoid dulness in our worship. Our songs should be weighty with solemnity, but not heavy with sadness. Angels are nearer the throne than we, but their deepest awe is consonant with the purest bliss; our sense of divine greatness must not minister terror but gladness to our souls; we should rejoice before him. It should be our wish and prayer, that in this wilderness world, a highway may be prepared for the God of grace. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God, "is the cry of gospel heralds, and we must all zealously aim at obedience thereto; for where the God of the mercyseat comes, blessings innumerable are given to the sons of men.

Verse 5. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. In the wilderness the people were like an orphan nation, but God was more than a father to them. As the generation which came out of Egypt gradually died away, there were many widows and fatherless ones in the camp, but they suffered no want or wrong, for the righteous laws and the just administrators whom God had appointed, looked well to the interests of the needy. The tabernacle was the Palace of Justice; the ark was the seat of the great King. This was a great cause for joy to Israel, that they were ruled by the ONE who would not suffer the poor and needy to be oppressed. To this day and for ever, God is, and will be, the peculiar guardian of the defenceless. He is the President of Orphanages, the Protector of Widows. He is so glorious that he rides on the heavens, but so compassionate that he remembers the poor of the earth. How zealously ought his church to cherish those who are here marked out as Jehovah's especial charge. Does he not here in effect say, "Feed my lambs"? Blessed duty, it shall be our privilege to make this one of our life's dearest objects. The reader is warned against misquoting this verse; it is generally altered into "the husband of the widow, "but Scripture had better be left as God gave it.

Verse 6. God setteth the solitary in families. The people had been sundered and scattered over Egypt; family ties had been disregarded, and affections crushed; but when the people escaped from Pharaoh they came together again, and all the fond associations of household life were restored. This was a great joy. He bringeth out those which are bound with chains. The most oppressed in Egypt were chained and imprisoned, but the divine Emancipator brought them all forth into perfect liberty. He who did this of old continues his gracious work. The solitary heart, convinced of sin and made to pine alone, is admitted into the family of the Firstborn; the fettered spirit is set free, and its prison

broken down, when sin is forgiven; and for all this, God is to be greatly extolled, for he hath done it, and magnified the glory of his grace. But the rebellious dwell in a dry land. If any find the rule of Jehovah to be irksome, it is because their rebellious spirits kick against his power. Israel did not find the desert dry, for the smitten rock gave forth its streams; but even in Canaan itself men were consumed with famine, because they cast off their allegiance to their covenant God. Even where God is revealed on the mercyseat, some men persist in rebellion, and such need not wonder if they find no peace, no comfort, no joy, even where all these abound. Justice is the rule of the Lord's kingdom, and hence there is no provision for the unjust to indulge their evil lustings: a perfect earth, and even heaven itself, would be a dry land to those who can only drink of the waters of sin. Of the most soul satisfying of sacred ordinances these witless rebels cry, "what a weariness it is!" and, under the most soul sustaining ministry, they complain of "the foolishness of preaching." When a man has a rebellious heart, he must of necessity find all around him a dry land.

Verse 7. O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people. What a sweetly suitable association, "thou" and "thy people; "—thou before, and thy people following! The Lord went before, and, therefore, whether the Red Sea or burning sand lay in the way, it mattered not; the pillar of cloud and fire always led them by a right way. When thou didst march through the wilderness. He was the Commander in chief of Israel, from whom they received all orders, and the march was therefore his march. "His stately step the region drear beheld." We may speak, if we will, of the "wanderings of the children of Israel, "but we must not think them purposeless strayings, they were in reality a well arranged and well considered march. SELAH. This seems an odd place for a musical pause or direction, but it is better to break a sentence than spoil praise. The sense is about to be superlatively grand, and, therefore, the selah intimates the fact to the players and singers, that they may with suitable solemnity perform their parts. It is never untimely to remind a congregation that the worship of God should be thoughtfully and heartily presented.

Verse 8. The earth shook. Beneath the sublime tread the solid ground trembled. The heavens also dropped at the presence of God, as if they bowed before their God, the clouds descended, and "a few dark shower drops stole abroad." Even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God. Moses tell us, in Exodus 19, that "the whole mountain quaked greatly." That hill, so lone and high, bowed before the manifested God. The God of Israel. The one only living and true God, whom Israel worshipped, and who had chosen that nation to be his own above all the nations of the earth. The passage is so sublime, that it would be difficult to find its equal. May the reader's heart adore the God before whom the unconscious earth and sky act as if they recognised their Maker and were moved with a tremor of reverence.

Verse 9. Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain. The march of God was not signaled solely by displays of terror, for goodness and bounty were also made conspicuous. Such rain as never fell before dropped on the desert sand, bread from heaven and winged fowl fell all around the host; good gifts were poured upon them, rivers leaped forth from rocks. The earth shook with fear, and in reply, the Lord, as from a cornucopia, shook out blessings upon it; so the original may be rendered. Whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary. As at the end of each stage, when they halted, weary with the march, they found such showers of good things awaiting them that they were speedily refreshed. Their foot did not swell all those forty years. When they were exhausted, God was not. When they were weary, He was not. They were his chosen heritage, and, therefore, although for their good he allowed them to be weary, yet he watchfully tended them and tenderly considered their distresses. In like manner, to this day, the elect of God in this wilderness state are

apt to become tired and faint, but their ever loving Jehovah comes in with timely succours, cheers the faint, strengthens the weak, and refreshes the hungry; so that once again, when the silver trumpets sound, the church militant advances with bold and firm step towards "the rest which remaineth." By this faithfulness, the faith of God's people is confirmed, and their hearts established; if fatigue and want made them waver, the timely supply of grace stays them again upon the eternal foundations.

Verse 10. Thy congregation hath dwelt therein. In the wilderness itself, enclosed as in a wall of fire, thy chosen church has found a home; or, rather, girdled by the shower of free grace which fell all around the camp, thy flock has rested. The congregation of the faithful find the Lord to be their "dwelling place in all generations." Where there were no dwellings of men, God was the dwelling of his people. Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor. Within the guarded circle there was plenty for all; all were poor in themselves, yet there were no beggars in all the camp, for celestial fare was to be had for the gathering. We, too, still dwell within the circling protection of the Most High, and find goodness made ready for us: although poor and needy by nature, we are enriched by grace; divine preparations in the decree, the covenant, the atonement, providence, and the Spirit's work, have made ready for us a fulness of the blessing of the Lord. Happy people, though in the wilderness, for all things are ours, in possessing the favour and presence of our God.

Verse 11. In the next verse we do not sing of marching, but of battle and victory. The Lord gave the word. The enemy was near, and the silver trumpet from the tabernacle door was God's mouth to warn the camp: then was there hurrying to and fro, and a general telling of the news; great was the company of those that published it. The women ran from tent to tent and roused their lords to battle. Ready as they always were to chant the victory, they were equally swift to publish the fact that the battle note had been sounded. The ten thousand maids of Israel, like good handmaids of the Lord, aroused the sleepers, called in the wanderers, and bade the valiant men to hasten to the fray. O for the like zeal in the church of today, that, when the gospel is published, both men and women may eagerly spread the glad tidings of great joy.

Verse 12. Kings of armies did flee apace. The lords of hosts fled before the Lord of Hosts. No sooner did the ark advance than the enemy turned his back: even the princely leaders stayed not, but took to flight. The rout was complete, the retreat hurried and disorderly;—they "did flee, did flee; "helter skelter, pell mell, as we say.

"Where are the kings of mighty hosts?
Fled far away, fled far and wide.
Their triumph and their trophied boasts
The damsels in their bowers divide."

And she that tarried at home divided the spoil. The women who had published the war cry shared the booty. The feeblest in Israel had a portion of the prey. Gallant warriors cast their spoils at the feet of the women and bade them array themselves in splendour, taking each one "a prey of divers colours, of divers colours of needlework on both sides." When the Lord gives success to his gospel, the very best of his saints are made glad and feel themselves partakers in the blessing.

Verse 13. Though ye have lien among the pots. Does he mean that the women at home, who had been meanly clad as they performed their household work, would be so gorgeously arrayed in the spoil, that they would be like doves of silver wing and golden plumage? Or, would he say that Israel,

which had been begrimed in the brick kilns of Egypt, should come forth lustrous and happy in triumph and liberty? Or, did the song signify that the ark should be brought from its poor abode with Obededom into a fairer dwelling place? It is a hard passage, a nut for the learned to crack. If we knew all that was known when this ancient hymn was composed, the allusion would no doubt strike us as being beautifully appropriate, but as we do not, we will let it rest among the unriddled things. Alexander reads it, "When ye shall lie down between the borders, ye shall be like the wings, "etc., which he considers to mean, "when settled in peace, the land shall enjoy prosperity; "but this version does not seem to us any more clear than our authorized one. Of making many conjectures there is no end; but the sense seems to be, that from the lowest condition the Lord would lift up his people into joy, liberty, wealth, and beauty. Their enemies may have called them squatters among the pots—in allusion to their Egyptian slavery; they may have jested at them as scullions of Pharaoh's kitchen; but the Lord would avenge them and give them beauty for blackness, glory for grime. Yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. The dove's wing flashed light like silver, and anon gleams with the radiance of "the pale, pure gold." The lovely, changeable colours of the dove might well image the mild, lustrous beauty of the nation, when arrayed in white holiday attire, bedecked with their gems, jewels, and ornaments of gold. God's saints have been in worse places than among the pots, but now they soar aloft into the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Verse 14. When the almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Salmon. The victory was due to the Almighty arm alone; he scattered the haughty ones who came against his people, and he did it as easily as snow is driven from the bleak sides of Salmon. The word white appears to be imported into the text, and by leaving it out the sense is easy. A traveller informed the writer that on a raw and gusty day, he saw the side of what he supposed to be Mount Salmon suddenly swept bare by a gust of wind, so that the snow was driven hither and thither into the air like the down of thistles, or the spray of the sea: thus did the Omnipotent one scatter all the potentates that defied Israel. If our authorized version must stand, the conjectures that the bleached bones of the enemy, or the royal mantles cast away in flight, whitened the battle field, appear to be rather too far fetched for sacred poetry. Another opinion is, that Salmon was covered with dark forests, and appeared black, but presented quite another aspect when the snow covered it, and that by this noteworthy change from sombre shade to gleaming whiteness, the poet sets forth the change from war to peace. Whatever may be the precise meaning, it was intended to pourtray the glory and completeness of the divine triumph over the greatest foes. In this let all believers rejoice.

Verse 15. Here the priests on the summit of the chosen hill begin to extol the Lord for his choice of Zion as his dwelling place. The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan, or more accurately, "a hill of God is Bashan," that is to say, Bashan is an eminent mountain, far exceeding Zion in height. According to the Hebrew custom, every great or remarkable thing is thus designated. Where we talk of the Devil's Dyke, the Devil's Ditch, the Devil's Punch Bowl, etc., the more commendable idiom of the Hebrews speaks of the hill of God, the trees of the Lord, the river of God, etc. An high hill as the hill of Bashan, or rather, "a mount of peaks is Bashan." It does not appear that Zion is compared with Bashan, but contrasted with it. Zion certainly was not a high hill comparatively; and it is here conceded that Bashan is a greater mount, but not so glorious, for the Lord in choosing Zion had exalted it above the loftier hills. The loftiness of nature is made as nothing before the Lord. He chooses as pleases him, and, according to the counsel of his own will, he selects Zion, and passes by the proud, uplifted peaks of Bashan; thus doth he make the base things of this world, and things that are despised, to become monuments of his grace and sovereignty.

Verse 16. Why leap ye, ye high hills? Why are ye moved to envy? Envy as ye may, the Lord's choice is fixed. Lift up yourselves, and even leap from your seats, ye cannot reach the sublimity which Jehovah's presence has bestowed on the little hill of Moriah. This is the hill which God desireth to dwell in. Elohim makes Zion his abode, yea, Jehovah resides there. Yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever. Spiritually the Lord abides eternally in Zion, his chosen church, and it was Zion's glory to be typical thereof. What were Carmel and Sirion, with all their height, compared to Zion, the joy of the whole earth! God's election is a patent of nobility. They are choice men whom God has chosen, and that place is superlatively honoured which he honours with his presence.

Verse 17. The chariots of God are twenty thousand. Other countries, which in the former verse were symbolically referred to as "high hills," gloried in their chariots of war; but Zion, though far more lowly, was stronger than they, for the omnipotence of God was to her as two myriads of chariots. The Lord of Hosts could summon more forces into the field than all the petty lords who boasted in their armies; his horses of fire and chariots of fire would be more than a match for their fiery steeds and flashing cars. The original is grandly expressive: "the war chariots of Elohim are myriads, a thousand thousands." The marginal reading of our Bibles, even many thousands, is far more correct than the rendering, even thousands of angels. It is not easy to see where our venerable translators found these "angels," for they are not in the text; however, as it is a blessing to entertain them unawares, we are glad to meet with them in English, even though the Hebrew knows them not; and the more so because it cannot be doubted that they constitute a right noble squadron of the myriad hosts of God. We read in De 33:2, of the Lord's coming "with ten thousands of saints," or holy ones, and in Heb 12:22, we find upon mount Zion "an innumerable company of angels," so that our worthy translators putting the texts together, inferred the angels, and the clause is so truthfully explanatory, that we have no fault to find with it. The Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place, or, "it is a Sinai in holiness." God is in Zion as the Commander in chief of his countless hosts, and where he is, there is holiness. The throne of grace on Zion is as holy as the throne of justice on Sinai. The displays of his glory may not be so terrible under the new covenant as under the old; but they are even more marvellous if seen by the spiritual eye. Sinai has no excellency of glory beyond Zion; but the rather it pales its light of law before the noontide splendours of Zion's grace and truth. How joyful was it to a pious Hebrew to know that God was as truly with his people in the tabernacle and temple as amid the terrors of the Mount of Horeb; but it is even more heart cheering to us to be assured that the Lord abides in his church, and has chosen it to be his rest for ever. May we be zealous for the maintenance of holiness in the spiritual house which God condescends to occupy; let a sense of his presence consume, as with flames of fire, every false way. The presence of God is the strength of the church; all power is ours when God is ours. Twenty thousand chariots shall bear the gospel to the ends of the earth; and myriads of agencies shall work for its success. Providence is on our side, and it "has servants everywhere." There is no room for a shade of doubt or discouragement, but every reason for exultation and confidence.

Verse 18. Thou hast ascended on high. The ark was conducted to the summit of Zion; God himself took possession of the high places of the earth, being extolled and very high. The antitype of the ark, the Lord Jesus, has ascended into the heavens with signal marks of triumph. To do battle with our enemies, the Lord descended and left his throne; but now the fight is finished, he returns to his glory; high above all things is he now exalted. Thou hast led captivity captive. A multitude of the sons of men are the willing captives of Messiah's power. As great conquerors of old led whole nations into captivity, so Jesus leads forth from the territory of his foe a vast company as the trophies of his mighty grace. From the gracious character of his reign it comes to pass that to be led into captivity by

him is for our captivity to cease, or to be itself led captive; a glorious result indeed. The Lord Jesus destroys his foes with their own weapons: he puts death to death, entombs the grave, and leads captivity captive. Thou hast received gifts for men, or, received gifts among men: they have paid thee tribute, O mighty Conqueror, and shall in every age continue to do so willingly, delighting in thy reign. Paul's rendering is the gospel one: Jesus has "received gifts for men, "of which he makes plentiful distribution, enriching his church with the priceless fruits of his ascension, such as apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, and all their varied endowments. In him, the man who received gifts for man, we are endowed with priceless treasures, and moved with gratitude, we return gifts to him, yea, we give him ourselves, our all. Yea, for the rebellious also: these gifts the rebels are permitted to share in; subdued by love, they are indulged with the benefits peculiar to the chosen. The original runs, "even the rebellious, "or, "even from the rebellious, "of which the sense is that rebels become captives to the Lord's power, and tributaries to his throne.

"Great King of grace my heart subdue,
I would be led in triumph too;
As willing captive to my Lord,
To own the conquests of his word."

That the Lord God might dwell among them. In the conquered territory, Jah Elohim would dwell as Lord of all, blessing with his condescending nearness those who were once his foes. When Canaan was conquered, and the fort of Zion carried by storm, then was there found a resting place for the ark of God; and so when the weapons of victorious grace have overcome the hearts of men, the Lord God, in all the glory of his name, makes them to be his living temples. Moreover, the ascension of Jesus is the reason for the descent of the Lord God, the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus dwells with God, God dwells with men. Christ on high is the reason for the Spirit below. It was expedient that the Redeemer should rise, that the Comforter should come down.

Verse 19. Blessed be the Lord. At the mention of the presence of God among men the singers utter an earnest acclamation suggested by reverential love, and return blessings to him who so plentifully blesses his people. Who daily loadeth us with benefits. Our version contains a great and precious truth, though probably not the doctrine intended here. God's benefits are not few nor light, they are loads; neither are they intermittent, but they come "daily; "nor are they confined to one or two favourites, for all Israel can say, he loadeth us with benefits. Delitzsch reads it, "He daily bears our burden; "and Alexander, "Whoever lays a load upon us, the Mighty God is our salvation." If he himself burdens us with sorrow, he gives strength sufficient to sustain it; and if others endeavour to oppress us, there is no cause for fear, for the Lord will come to the rescue of his people. Happy nation, to be subdued by a King whose yoke is easy, and who secures his people from all fear of foreign burdens which their foes might try to force upon them.

Even the God of our salvation. A name most full of glory to him, and consolation to us. No matter how strong the enemy, we shall be delivered out of his hands; for God himself, as King, undertakes to save his people from all harm. What a glorious stanza this is! It is dark only because of its excessive light. A world of meaning is condensed into a few words. His yoke is easy, and his burden is light, therefore blessed be the Saviour's name for evermore. All hail! thou thrice blessed Prince of Peace! All thy saved ones adore thee, and call thee blessed. Selah. Well may the strings need tuning, they have borne an unparalleled strain in this mighty song. Higher and yet higher, ye men of music, lift up the strain. Dance before the ark, ye maidens of Israel; bring forth the timbrel, and sing unto the Lord

who hath triumphed gloriously.

Verse 20. He that is our God is the God of salvation. The Almighty who has entered into covenant with us is the source of our safety, and the author of our deliverances. As surely as he is our God he will save us. To be his is to be safe. And unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. He has ways and means of rescuing his children from death: when they are at their wit's end, and see no way of escape, he can find a door of deliverance for them. The gates of the grave none can open but himself, we shall only pass into them at his bidding; while on the heavenward side he has set open the doors for all his people, and they shall enjoy triumphant issues from death. Jesus, our God, will save his people from their sins, and from all else besides, whether in life or death.

Verse 21. But God shall wound the head of his enemies. The Preserver is also the Destroyer. He smites his foes on the crown of their pride. The seed of the woman crushes the serpent's head. There is no defence against the Lord, he can in a moment smite with utter destruction the lofty crests of his haughty foes. And the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses. He may glory in his outward appearance, and make his hair his pride, as Absalom did; but the Lord's sword shall find him out, and pour out his soul. Headstrong sinners will find that providence overcomes them despite their strong heads. They who go on in sin will find judgments come on them; and the adornment of their pride may be made the instrument of their doom. He covers the head of his servants, but he crushes the head of his foes. At the second coming of the Lord Jesus, his enemies will find his judgments to be beyond conception terrible.

Verse 22. This verse, by the insertion of the words, my people, is made to bear the meaning which the translators thought best; but, if their interpolated word is omitted, we probably get nearer to the sense. The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring again from the depths of the sea. Though his foes should endeavour to escape, they should not be able. Amos describes the Lord as saying, "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them." As there is no resisting Israel's God, so is there no escape from him, neither the heights of Bashan nor the depths of the great sea can shelter from his eye of detection, and his hand of justice. The powers of evil may flee to the utmost ends of the earth, but the Lord will arrest them, and lead them back in chains to adorn his triumph.

Verse 23. That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies. Vengeance shall be awarded to the oppressed people, and that most complete and terrible. And the tongue of thy dogs in the same. So overwhelming should be the defeat of the foe that dogs should lick their blood. Here "the stern joy which warriors feel" expresses itself in language most natural to the oriental ear. To us, except in a spiritual sense, the verse sounds harshly; but read it with an inner sense, and we also desire the utter and crushing defeat of all evil, and that wrong and sin may be the objects of profound contempt. Terrible is the God of Israel when he cometh forth as a man of war, and dreadful is even the Christ of God when he bares his arm to smite his enemies. Contemplate Revelation 19 and note the following:—"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called The Word of God... And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls

that fly in the midst of heaven, come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit upon them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh."

Verse 24. They have seen thy goings, O God. In the song the marchings of the Lord had been described; friends and foes had seen his goings forth with the ark and his people. We suppose that the procession was now climbing the hill, and entering the enclosure where the tabernacle of the ark was pitched; it was suitable at this moment to declare with song that the tribes had seen the glorious progress of the Lord as he led forth his people. Even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary. The splendid procession of the ark, which symbolised the throne of the great King, was before the eyes of men and angels as it ascended to the holy place; and the psalmist points to it with exultation before he proceeds to describe it. All nature and providence are, as it were, a procession attending the great Lord, in his visitations of this lower globe. Winter and summer, sun and moon, storm and calm, and all the varied glories of nature swell the pomp of the King of kings, of whose dominion there is no end.

Verse 25. The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after. This was the order of the march, and God is to be worshipped evermore with due decorum. First the singers, and lastly the musicians, for the song must lead the music, and not the music drown the singing. In the midst of the vocal and instrumental band, or all around them, were the maidens: among them were the damsels playing with timbrels. Some have imagined that this order indicates the superiority of vocal to instrumental music: but we need not go so far for arguments, when the simplicity and spirituality of the gospel already teach us that truth. The procession depicted in this sublime song was one of joy, and every means was taken to express the delight of the nation in the Lord their God.

Verse 26. Bless ye God in the congregations. Let the assembled company magnify the God whose ark they followed. United praise is like the mingled perfume which Aaron made, it should all be presented unto God. He blesses us; let him be blessed. Even the Lord, from the fountain of Israel. A parallel passage to that in Deborah's song: "They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord." The seat of the ark would be the fountain of refreshing for all the tribes, and there they were to celebrate his praises. "Drink," says the old inscription, "drink, weary traveller; drink and pray." We may alter one word, and read it, drink and praise. If the Lord overflows with grace, we should overflow with gratitude. Ezekiel saw an ever growing stream flow from under the altar, and issue out from under the threshold of the sanctuary, and wherever it flowed it gave life: let as many as have quaffed this life giving stream glorify "the fountain of Israel."

Verse 27. There is little Benjamin with their ruler. The tribe was small, having been greatly reduced in numbers, but it had the honour of including Zion within its territory. "And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders." Little Benjamin had been Jacob's darling, and now the tribe is

made to march first in the procession, and to dwell nearest to the holy place. The princes of Judah and their council. Judah was a large and powerful tribe, not with one governor, like Benjamin, but with many princes "and their company, "for so the margin has it. "From thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel, "and the tribe was a quarry of stones wherewith to build up the nations: some such truth is hinted at in the Hebrew. The princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali. Israel was there, as well as Judah; there was no schism among the people. The north sent a representative contingent as well as the south, and so the long procession set forth the hearty loyalty of all the tribes to their Lord and King. O happy day, when all believers shall be one around the ark of the Lord; striving for nothing but the glory of the God of grace. The prophet now puts into the mouth of the assembly a song, foretelling the future conquests of Jehovah.

Verse 28. Thy God hath commanded thy strength. His decree had ordained the nation strong, and his arm had made them so. As a commander in chief, the Lord made the valiant men pass in battle array, and bade them be strong in the day of conflict. This is a very rich though brief sentence, and, whether applied to an individual believer, or to the whole church, it is full of consolation. Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us. As all power comes from God at first, so its continual maintenance is also of him. We who have life should pray to have it more "abundantly; "if we have strength we should seek to be still more established. We expect God to bless his own work. He has never left any work unfinished yet, and he never will. "When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly; "and now, being reconciled to God, we may look to him to perfect that which concerneth us, since he never forsakes the work of his own hands.

Verse 29. Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee. The palace of God, which towered above Jerusalem, is prophesied as becoming a wonder to all lands, and when it grew from the tabernacle of David to the temple of Solomon, it was so. So splendid was that edifice that the queen of far off Sheba came with her gifts; and many neighbouring princes, overawed by the wealth and power therein displayed, came with tribute to Israel's God. The church of God, when truly spiritual, wins for her God the homage of the nations. In the latter day glory this truth shall be far more literally and largely verified.

Verse 30. Rebuke the company of spearmen; or, the beasts of the reeds, as the margin more correctly renders it. Speak to Egypt, let its growing power and jealousy be kept in order, by a word from thee. Israel remembers her old enemy, already plotting the mischief, which would break out under Jeroboam, and begs for a rebuking word from her Omnipotent Friend. Antichrist also, that great red dragon, needs the effectual word of the Lord to rebuke its insolence. The multitude of the bulls, the stronger foes; the proud, headstrong, rampant, fat, and roaring bulls, which sought to gore the chosen nation,—these also need the Lord's rebuke, and they shall have it too. All Egypt's sacred bulls could not avail against a "thus saith Jehovah." Popish bulls, and imperial edicts have dashed against the Lord's church, but they have not prevailed against her, and they never shall. With the calves of the people. The poorer and baser sort are equally set on mischief, but the divine voice can control them; multitudes are as nothing to the Lord when he goes forth in power; whether bulls or calves, they are but cattle for the shambles when Omnipotence displays itself. The gospel, like the ark, has nothing to fear from great or small; it is a stone upon which every one that stumbleth shall be broken.

Till every one submit himself with pieces of silver. The Lord is asked to subdue the enemies of Israel, till they rendered tribute in silver ingots. Blessed is that rebuke, which does not break but bend; for subjection to the Lord of hosts is liberty, and tribute to him enriches him that pays it. The taxation of

sin is infinitely more exacting than the tribute of religion. The little finger of lust is heavier than the loins of the law. Pieces of silver given to God are replaced with pieces of gold. Scatter thou the people that delight in war. So that, notwithstanding the strong expression of Ps 68:23, God's people were peace men, and only desired the crushing of oppressive nations, that war might not occur again. Let the battles of peace be as fierce as they will; heap coals of fire on the heads of enemies, and slay their enmity thereby. That "they who take the sword should perish by the sword," is a just regulation for the establishment of quiet in the earth. What peace can there be, while blood thirsty tyrants and their myrmidons are so many? Devoutly may we offer this prayer, and with equal devotion, we may bless God that it is sure to be answered, for "he breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder, he burneth the chariot in the fire."

Verse 31. Princes shall come out of Egypt. Old foes shall be new friends. Solomon shall find a spouse in Pharaoh's house. Christ shall gather a people from the realm of sin. Great sinners shall yield themselves to the sceptre of grace, and great men shall become good men, by coming to God. Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God. Cush shall hasten to present peace offerings. Sheba's queen shall come from the far south. Candace's chamberlain shall ask of Him who was led as a lamb to the slaughter. Abyssinia shall yet be converted, and Africa become the willing seeker after grace, eagerly desiring and embracing the Christ of God. Poor Ethiopia, thy hands have been long manacled and hardened by cruel toil, but millions of thy sons have in their bondage found the liberty with which Christ made men free; and so thy cross, like the cross of Simon of Cyrene, has been Christ's cross, and God has been thy salvation. Hasten, O Lord, this day, when both the civilization and the barbarism of the earth shall adore thee, Egypt and Ethiopia blending with glad accord in thy worship! Here is the confidence of thy saints, even thy promise; hasten it in thine own time, good Lord.

Verse 32. Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth. Glorious shall that song be in which whole empires join. Happy are men that God is one who is consistently the object of joyous worship, for not such are the demons of the heathen. So sweet a thing is song that it ought to be all the Lord's; a secular concert seems almost a sacrilege, a licentious song is treason. O sing praises unto the Lord. Again and again is God to be magnified; we have too much sinning against God, but cannot have too much singing to God. Selah. Well may we rest now that our contemplations have reached the millennial glory. What heart will refuse to be lifted up by such a prospect!

Verse 33. To him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old. Before, he was described in his earthly manifestations, as marching through the desert; now, in his celestial glory, as riding in the heavens of the primeval ages. Long ere this heaven and earth were made, the loftier abodes of the Deity stood fast; before men or angels were created, the splendours of the Great King were as great as now, and his triumphs as glorious. Our knowledge reaches but to a small fragment of the life of God, whose "goings forth were of old, even from everlasting." Well might the Jewish church hymn the eternal God, and well may we join therewith the adoration of the Great Firstborn:

"Ere sin was born, or Satan fell,
He led the host of morning stars.
Thy generation who can tell?
Or count the number of thy years?"

Lo, he doth send out his voice, and that a mighty voice. Was there a thunderclap just then heard in

heaven? Or, did the poet's mind flash backward to the time when from the heaven of heavens the voice of Jehovah broke the long silence and said, "Light be, "and light was. To this hour, the voice of God is power. This gospel, which utters and reveals his word, is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. Our voices are fitly called to praise him whose voice spoke us into being, and gives us the effectual grace which secures our well being.

Verse 34. Ascribe ye strength unto God. When even his voice rends the rocks and uproots the cedars, what cannot his hand do? His finger shakes the earth; who can conceive the power of his arm? Let us never by our doubts or our daring defiances appear to deny power unto God; on the contrary, by yielding to him and trusting in him, let our hearts acknowledge his might. When we are reconciled to God, his omnipotence is an attribute of which we sing with delight. His excellency is over Israel. The favoured nation is protracted by his majesty; his greatness is to them goodness, his glory is their defence. And his strength is in the clouds. He does not confine his power to the sons of men, but makes it like a canopy to cover the skies. Rain, snow, hail, and tempest are his artillery; he rules all nature with awe inspiring majesty. Nothing is so high as to be above him, or too low to be beneath him; praise him, then, in the highest.

Verse 35. O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places. You inspire awe and fear. Thy saints obey with fear and trembling, and thine enemies flee in dismay. From thy threefold courts, and especially from the holy of holies, thy majesty flashes forth and makes the sons of men prostrate themselves in awe. The God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. In this thou, who art Israel's God by covenant, art terrible to thy foes by making thy people strong, so that one shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight. All the power of Israel's warriors is derived from the Lord, the fountain of all might. He is strong, and makes strong: blessed are they who draw from his resources, they shall renew their strength. While the self sufficient faint, the All sufficient shall sustain the feeblest believer, Blessed be God. A short but sweet conclusion. Let our souls say Amen to it, and yet again, Amen.

Psalm 69

Verse 1. Save me, O God. "He saved others, himself he cannot save." With strong cries and tears he offered up prayers and supplications unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared (Heb 5:7). Thus David had prayed, and here his Son and Lord utters the same cry. This is the second Psalm which begins with a "Save me, O God, "and the former (Psalm 54) is but a short summary of this more lengthened complaint. It is remarkable that such a scene of woe should be presented to us immediately after the jubilant ascension hymn of the last Psalm, but this only shows how interwoven are the glories and the sorrows of our ever blessed Redeemer. The head which now is crowned with glory is the same which wore the thorns; he to whom we pray, "Save us, O God, "is the selfsame person who cried, "Save me, O God." For the waters are come in unto my soul. Sorrows, deep, abounding, deadly, had penetrated his inner nature. Bodily anguish is not his first complaint; he begins not with the gall which embittered his lips, but with the mighty griefs which broke into his heart. All the sea outside a vessel is less to be feared than that which finds its way into the hold. A wounded spirit who can bear. Our Lord in this verse is seen before us as a Jonah, crying, "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul." He was doing business for us on the great waters, at his Father's command; the stormy wind was lifting up the waves thereof, and he went down to the depths till his soul was melted because of trouble. In all this he has sympathy with us, and is able to succour us when we, like Peter, beginning to sink, cry to him, "Lord, save, or we perish."

Verse 2. I sink in deep mire. In water one might swim, but in mud and mire all struggling is hopeless; the mire sucks down its victim. Where there is no standing. Everything gave way under the Sufferer; he could not get foothold for support—this is a worse fate than drowning. Here our Lord pictures the close, clinging nature of his heart's woes. "He began to be sorrowful, and very heavy." Sin is as mire for its filthiness, and the holy soul of the Saviour must have loathed even that connection with it which was necessary for its expiation. His pure and sensitive nature seemed to sink in it, for it was not his element, he was not like us born and acclimated to this great dismal swamp. Here our Redeemer became another Jeremiah, of whom it is recorded (Jer 38:6) that his enemies cast him into a dungeon wherein "was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire." Let our hearts feel the emotions, both of contrition and gratitude, as we see in this simile the deep humiliation of our Lord. I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. The sorrow gathers even greater force; he is as one cast into the sea, the waters go over his head. His sorrows were first within, then around, and now above him. Our Lord was no fainthearted sentimentalist; his were real woes, and though he bore them heroically, yet were they terrible even to him. His sufferings were unlike all others in degree, the waters were such as soaked into the soul; the mire was the mire of the abyss itself, and the floods were deep and overflowing. To us the promise is, "the rivers shall not overflow thee," but no such word of consolation was vouchsafed to him. My soul, thy Well beloved endured all this for thee. Many waters could not quench his love, neither could the floods drown it; and, because of this, thou hast the rich benefit of that covenant assurance, "as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." He stemmed the torrent of almighty wrath, that we might for ever rest in Jehovah's love.

Verse 3. I am weary of my crying. Not of it, but by it, with it. He had prayed till he sweat great drops of blood, and well might physical weariness intervene. My throat is dried, parched, and inflamed. Long pleading with awful fervour had scorched his throat as with flames of fire. Few, very few, of his saints follow their Lord in prayer so far as this. We are, it is to be feared, more likely to be hoarse with talking frivolities to men than by pleading with God; yet our sinful nature demands more prayer than his perfect humanity might seem to need. His prayers should shame us into fervour. Our Lord's supplications were salted with fire, they were hot with agony; and hence they weakened his system, and made him "a weary man and full of woes." Mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. He wanted in his direst distress nothing more than his God; that would be all in all to him. Many of us know what watching and waiting mean; and we know something of the failing eye when hope is long deferred: but in all this Jesus bears the palm; no eyes ever failed as his did or for so deep a cause. No painter can ever depict those eyes; their pencils fail in every feature of his all but fair but all marred countenance, but most of all do they come short when they venture to portray those eyes which were fountains of tears. He knew both how to pray and to watch, and he would have us learn the like. There are times when we should pray till the throat is dry, and watch till the eyes grow dim. Only thus can we have fellowship with him in his sufferings. What! can we not watch with him one hour? Does the flesh shrink back? O cruel flesh to be so tender of thyself, and so ungenerous to thy Lord!

Verse 4. They that hate me. Surprising sin that men should hate the altogether lovely one, truly is it added, without a cause, for reason there was none for this senseless enmity. He neither blasphemed God, nor injured man. As Samuel said: "Whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed?" Even so might Jesus enquire. Besides, he had not only done us no evil, but he had bestowed countless and priceless benefits. Well might he demand, "For which of these works do ye stone me?" Yet from his cradle to his cross, beginning with

Herod and not ending with Judas, he had foes without number; and he justly said, they are more than the hairs of mine head. Both the civilians and the military, laics and clerics, doctors and drunkards, princes and people, set themselves against the Lord's anointed. "This is the heir, let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours," was the unanimous resolve of all the keepers of the Jewish vineyard; while the Gentiles outside the walls of the garden furnished the instruments for his murder, and actually did the deed. The hosts of earth and hell, banded together, made up vast legions of antagonists, none of whom had any just ground for hating him.

They that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty. It was bad that they were many, but worse that they were mighty. All the ecclesiastical and military powers of his country were arrayed against him. The might of the Sanhedrin, the mob, and the Roman legions were combined in one for his utter destruction: "Away with such a fellow from this earth; it is not fit that he should live," was the shout of his ferocious foes. David's adversaries were on the throne when he was hiding in caverns, and our Lord's enemies were the great ones of the earth; while he, of whom the world was not worthy, was reproached of men and despised of the people. Then I restored that which I took not away. Though innocent, he was treated as guilty. Though David had no share in plots against Saul, yet he was held accountable for them. In reference to our Lord, it may be truly said that he restores what he took not away; for he gives back to the injured honour of God a recompense, and to man his lost happiness, though the insult of the one and the fall of the other were neither of them, in any sense, his doings. Usually, when the ruler sins the people suffer, but here the proverb is reversed—the sheep go astray, and their wanderings are laid at the Shepherd's door.

Verse 5. O God, thou knowest my foolishness. David might well say this, but not David's Lord; unless it be understood as an appeal to God as to his freedom from the folly which men imputed to him when they said he was mad. That which was foolishness to men was superlative wisdom before God. How often might we use these words in their natural sense, and if we were not such fools as to be blind to our own folly, this confession would be frequently on our lips. When we feel that we have been foolish we are not, therefore, to cease from prayer, but rather to be more eager and fervent in it. Fools had good need consult with the infinitely wise. And my sins are not hid from thee. They cannot be hid with any fig leaves of mine; only the covering which thou wilt bring me can conceal their nakedness and mine. It ought to render confession easy, when we are assured that all is known already. That prayer which has no confession in it may please a Pharisee's pride, but will never bring down justification. They who have never seen their sins in the light of God's omniscience are quite unable to appeal to that omniscience in proof of their piety. He who can say, Thou knowest my foolishness, is the only man who can add, "But thou knowest that I love thee."

Verse 6. Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake. If he were deserted, others who were walking in the same path of faith would be discouraged and disappointed. Unbelievers are ready enough to catch at anything which may turn humble faith into ridicule, therefore, O God of all the armies of Israel, let not my case cause the enemy to blaspheme—such is the spirit of this verse. Our blessed Lord ever had a tender concern for his people, and would not have his own oppression of spirit become a source of discouragement to them. Let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel. He appealed to the Lord of hosts by his power to help him, and now to the God of Israel by his covenant faithfulness to come to the rescue. If the captain of the host fail, how will it fare with the rank and file? If David flee, what will his followers do? If the king of believers shall find his faith unrewarded, how will the feeble ones hold on their way? Our Lord's behaviour during his sharpest agonies is no cause of shame to us; he wept, for he was man,

but he murmured not, for he was sinless man; he cried, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" for he was human, but he added, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt," for his humanity was without taint of rebellion. In the depths of tribulation no repining word escaped him, for there was no repining in his heart. The Lord of martyrs witnessed a good confession. He was strengthened in the hour of peril, and came off more than a conqueror, as we also shall do, if we hold fast our confidence even to the end.

Verse 7. Because for thy sake I have borne reproach. Because he undertook to do the Father's will, and teach his truth, the people were angry; because he declared himself to be the Son of God, the priesthood raved. They could find no real fault in him, but were forced to hatch up a lying accusation before they could commence their sham trial of him. The bottom of the quarrel was, that God was with him, and he with God, while the Scribes and Pharisees sought only their own honour. Reproach is at all times very cutting to a man of integrity, and it must have come with acute force upon one of so unsullied a character as our Lord; yet see, how he turns to his God, and finds his consolation in the fact that he is enduring all for his Father's sake. The like comfort belongs to all misrepresented and persecuted saints. Shame hath covered my face. Men condemned to die frequently had their faces covered as they were dragged away from the judge's seat, as was the case with the wicked Haman in Es 7:8: after this fashion they first covered our Lord with a veil of opprobrious accusation, and then hurried him away to be crucified. Moreover, they passed him through the trial of cruel mockings, besmeared his face with spittle, and covered it with bruises, so that Pilate's "Ecce Homo" called the world's attention to an unexampled spectacle of woe and shame. The stripping on the cross must also have suffused the Redeemer's face with a modest blush, as he hung there exposed to the cruel gaze of a ribald multitude. Ah, blessed Lord, it was our shame which thou wast made to bear! Nothing more deserves to be reproached and despised than sin, and lo, when thou wast made sin for us thou wast called to endure abuse and scorn. Blessed be thy name it is over now, but we owe thee more than heart can conceive for thine amazing stoop of love.

Verse 8. I am become a stranger unto my brethren. The Jews his brethren in race rejected him, his family his brethren by blood were offended at him, his disciples his brethren in spirit forsook him and fled; one of them sold him, and another denied him with oaths and cursings. Alas, my Lord, what pangs must have smitten thy loving heart to be thus forsaken by those who should have loved thee, defended thee, and, if need be, died for thee. And an alien unto my mother's children. These were the nearest of relatives, the children of a father with many wives felt the tie of consanguinity but loosely, but children of the same mother owned the band of love; yet our Lord found his nearest and dearest ones ashamed to own him. As David's brethren envied him, and spake evil of him, so our Lord's relatives by birth were jealous of him, and his best beloved followers in the hour of his agony were afraid to be known as having any connection with him. These were sharp arrows of the mighty in the soul of Jesus, the most tender of friends. May none of us ever act as if we were strangers to him; never may we treat him as if he were an alien to us: rather let us resolve to be crucified with him, and may grace turn the resolve into fact.

Verse 9. For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. His burning ardour, like the flame of a candle, fed on his strength and consumed it. His heart, like a sharp sword, cut through the scabbard. Some men are eaten up with lechery, others with covetousness, and a third class with pride, but the master passion with our great leader was the glory of God, jealousy for his name, and love to the divine family. Zeal for God is so little understood by men of the world, that it always draws down opposition upon those who are inspired with it; they are sure to be accused of sinister motives, or of hypocrisy,

or of being out of their senses. When zeal eats us up, ungodly men seek to eat us up too, and this was preeminently the case with our Lord, because his holy jealousy was preeminent. With more than a seraph's fire he glowed, and consumed himself with his fervour. And the reproaches of them that reproached thee have fallen upon me. Those who habitually blaspheme God now curse me instead. I have become the butt for arrows intended for the Lord himself. Thus the Great Mediator was, in this respect, a substitute for God as well as for man, he bore the reproaches aimed at the one, as well as the sins committed by the other.

Verse 10. When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach. Having resolved to hate him, everything he did was made a fresh reason for reviling. If he ate and drank as others, he was a man gluttonous and a winebibber; if he wept himself away and wore himself out with fasting, then he had a devil and was mad. Nothing is more cruel than prejudice, its eye colours all with the medium through which it looks, and its tongue rails at all indiscriminately. Our Saviour wept much in secret for our sins, and no doubt his private soul chastening on our behalf were very frequent. Lone mountains and desert places saw repeated agonies, which, if they could disclose them, would astonish us indeed. The emaciation which these exercises wrought in our Lord made him appear nearly fifty years old when he was but little over thirty; this which was to his honour was used as a matter of reproach against him.

Verse 11. I made sackcloth also my garment. This David did literally, but we have no reason to believe that Jesus did. In a spiritual sense he, as one filled with grief, was always a sackcloth wearer. And I became a proverb to them. He was ridiculed as "the man of sorrows," quoted as "the acquaintance of grief." He might have said, "here I and sorrow sit." This which should have won him pity only earned him new and more general scorn. To interweave one's name into a mocking proverb is the highest stretch of malice, and to insult one's acts of devotion is to add profanity to cruelty.

Verse 12. They that sit in the gate speak against me. The ordinary gossips who meet at the city gates for idle talk make me their theme, the business men who there resort for trade forget their merchandise to slander me, and even the beggars who wait at men's doors for alms contribute their share of insult to the heap of infamy. And I was the song of the drunkard. The ungodly know no merrier jest than that in which the name of the holy is traduced. The flavour of slander is piquant, and gives a relish to the revellers' wine. The character of the man of Nazareth was so far above the appreciation of the men of strength to mingle strong drink, it was so much out of their way and above their thoughts, that it is no wonder it seemed to them ridiculous, and therefore well adapted to create laughter over their cups. The saints are ever choice subjects for satire. Butler's Hudibras owed more of its popularity to its irreligious banter than to any intrinsic cleverness. To this day the tavern makes rare fun of the tabernacle, and the ale bench is the seat of the scorner. What a wonder of condescension is here that he who is the adoration of angels should stoop to be the song of drunkards! What amazing sin that he whom seraphs worship with veiled faces should be a scornful proverb among the most abandoned of men.

"The byword of the passing throng,
The ruler's scoff, the drunkard's song."

Verse 13. But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord. He turned to Jehovah in prayer as being the most natural thing for the godly to do in their distress. To whom should a child turn but to his father. He did not answer them; like a sheep before her shearers he was dumb to them, but he opened his

mouth unto the Lord his God, for he would hear and deliver. In an acceptable time. It was a time of rejection with man, but of acceptance with God. Sin ruled on earth, but grace reigned in heaven. There is to each of us an accepted time, and woe to us if we suffer it to glide away unimproved. God's time must be our time, or it will come to pass that, when time closes, we shall look in vain for space for repentance. Our Lord's prayers were well timed, and always met with acceptance.

O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me. Even the perfect one makes his appeal to the rich mercy of God, much more should we. To misery no attribute is more sweet than mercy, and when sorrows multiply, the multitude of mercy is much prized. When enemies are more than the hairs of our head, they are yet to be numbered, but God's mercies are altogether innumerable, and let it never be forgotten that every one of them is an available and powerful argument in the hand of faith. In the truth of thy salvation. "Jehovah's faithfulness is a further mighty plea." His salvation is no fiction, no mockery, no changeable thing, therefore he is asked to manifest it, and make all men see his fidelity to his promise. Our Lord teaches us here the sacred art of wrestling in prayer, and ordering our cause with arguments; and he also indicates to us that the nature of God is the great treasury of strong reasons, which shall be to us most prevalent in supplication.

Verse 14. Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink. He turns into prayer the very words of his complaint; and it is well, if, when we complain, we neither feel nor say anything which we should fear to utter before the Lord as a prayer. We are allowed to ask for deliverance from trouble as well as for support under it; both petitions are here combined. How strange it seems to hear such language from the Lord of glory. Let me be delivered from them that hate, me, and out of the deep waters. Both from his foes, and the griefs which they caused him, he seeks a rescue. God can help us in all ways, and we may, therefore, put up a variety of requests without fear of exceeding our liberty to ask, or his ability to answer.

Verse 15. Let not the waterflood overflow me. He continues to recapitulate the terms of his lament. He is willing to bear suffering, but entreats grace that it may not get the victory over him. He was heard in that he feared. Neither let the deep swallow me up. As Jonah came forth again, so let me also arise from the abyss of woe; here also our Lord was heard, and so shall we be. Death itself must disgorge us. Let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. When a great stone was rolled over the well, or pit, used as a dungeon, the prisoner was altogether enclosed, and forgotten like one on the oubliettes of the Bastille; this is an apt picture of the state of a man buried alive in grief and left without remedy; against this the great sufferer pleaded and was heard. He was baptised in agony but not drowned in it; the grave enclosed him, but before she could close her mouth he had burst his prison. It is said that truth lies in a well, but it is assuredly an open well, for it walks abroad in power; and so our great Substitute in the pit of woe and death was yet the Conqueror of death and hell. How appropriately may many of us use this prayer. We deserve to be swept away as with a flood, to be drowned in our sins, to be shut up in hell; let us, then, plead the merits of our Saviour, lest these things happen unto us.

Verse 16. Hear me, O Lord. Do not refuse thy suppliant Son. It is to the covenant God, the ever living Jehovah, that he appeals with strong crying. For thy lovingkindness is good. By the greatness of thy love have pity upon thine afflicted. It is always a stay to the soul to dwell upon the preeminence and excellence of the Lord's mercy. It has furnished sad souls much good cheer to take to pieces that grand old Saxon word, which is here used in our version, lovingkindness. Its composition is of two most sweet and fragrant things, fitted to inspire strength into the fainting, and make desolate hearts

sing for joy. Turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies. If the Lord do but turn the eye of pity, and the hand of power, the mourner's spirit revives. It is the gall of bitterness to be without the comfortable smile of God; in our Lord's case his grief culminated in "Lama Sabachthani, "and his bitterest cry was that in which he mourned an absent God. Observe how he dwells anew upon divine tenderness, and touches again that note of abundance, "The multitude of thy compassions."

Verse 17. And hide not thy face from thy servant. A good servant desires the light of his master's countenance; that servus servorum, who was also rex regium, could not bear to lose the presence of his God. The more he loved his Father, the more severely he felt the hiding of his face. For I am in trouble. Stay thy rough wind in the day of thine east wind; do not add sorrow upon sorrow. If ever a man needs the comforting presence of God it is when he is in distress; and, being in distress, it is a reason to be pleaded with a merciful God why he should not desert us. We may pray that our flight be not in the winter, and that God will not add spiritual desertion to all our other tribulations. Hear me speedily. The case was urgent, delay was dangerous, nay deadly. Our Lord was the perfection of patience, yet he cried urgently for speedy mercy; and therein he gives us liberty to do the same, so long as we add, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

Verse 18. Draw nigh unto my soul. The near approach of God is all the sufferer needs; one smile of heaven will still the rage of hell. And redeem it. It shall be redemption to me if thou wilt appear to comfort me. This is a deeply spiritual prayer, and one very suitable for a deserted soul. It is in renewed communion that we shall find redemption realized. Deliver me because of mine enemies, lest they should, in their vaunting, blaspheme thy name, and boast that thou art not able to rescue those who put their trust in thee. Jesus, in condescending to use such supplications, fulfils the request of his disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray." Here we have a sad recapitulation of sorrows, with more especial reference to the persons concerned in their infliction.

Verse 19. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour. It is no novelty or secret, it has been long continued; thou, O God, hast seen it; and for thee to see the innocent suffer is an assurance of help. Here are three words piled up to express the Redeemer's keen sense of the contempt poured upon him; and his assurance that every form of malicious despite was observed of the Lord. Mine adversaries are all before thee. The whole lewd and loud company is now present to thine eye: Judas and his treachery; Herod and his cunning; Caiaphas and his counsel; Pilate and his vacillation; Jews, priests, people, rulers, all, thou seest and wilt judge.

Verse 20. Reproach hath broken my heart. There is no hammer like it. Our Lord died of a broken heart, and reproach had done the deed. Intense mental suffering arises from slander; and in the case of the sensitive nature of the immaculate Son of Man, it sufficed to lacerate the heart till it broke. "Then burst his mighty heart." And I am full of heaviness. Calumny and insult bowed him to the dust; he was sick at heart. The heaviness of our Lord in the garden is expressed by many and forcible words in the four gospels, and each term goes to show that the agony was beyond measure great; he was filled with misery, like a vessel which is full to the brim. And I looked for some to take pity, but there was none. "Deserted in his utmost need by those his former bounty fed." Not one to say him a kindly word, or drop a sympathetic tear. Amongst ten thousand foes there was not one who was touched by the spectacle of his misery; not one with a heart capable of humane feeling towards him. And for comforters, but I found none. His dearest ones had sought their own safety, and left their Lord alone. A sick man needs comforters, and a persecuted man needs sympathy; but our blessed Surety found neither on that dark and doleful night when the powers of darkness had their hour. A spirit like

that of our Lord feels acutely desertion by beloved and trusted friends, and yearns for real sympathy. This may be seen in the story of Gethsemane:—

"Backwards and forwards thrice he ran.
As if he sought some help from man;
Or wished, at least, they would condole—
It was all they could—his tortured soul."

"What ever he sought for, there was none;
Our Captain fought the field alone.
Soon as the chief to battle led,
That moment every soldier fled."

Verse 21. They gave me also gall for my meat. This was the sole refreshment cruelty had prepared for him. Others find pleasure in their food, but his taste was made to be an additional path of pain to him. And in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. A criminal's draught was offered to our innocent Lord, a bitter portion to our dying Master. Sorry entertainment had earth for her King and Saviour. How often have our sins filled the gall cup for our Redeemer? While we blame the Jews, let us not excuse ourselves. From this point David and our Lord for awhile part company, if we accept the rendering of our version. The severe spirit of the law breathes out imprecations, while the tender heart of Jesus offers prayers for his murderers. The whole of these verses, however, may be viewed as predictions, and then they certainly refer to our Lord, for we find portions of them quoted in that manner by the apostle in Ro 11:9-10, and by Christ himself in Mt 23:38.

Verse 22. Let their table become a snare before them. There they laid snares, and there they shall find them. From their feasts they would afford nothing but wormwood for their innocent victim, and now their banquets shall be their ruin. It is very easy for the daily provisions of mercy to become temptations to sin. As birds and beasts are taken in a trap by means of baits for the appetite, so are men snared full often by their meats and drinks. Those who despise the upper springs of grace, shall find the nether springs of worldly comfort prove their poison. The table is used, however, not alone for feeding, but for conversations, transacting business, counsel, amusement, and religious observance: to those who are the enemies of the Lord Jesus that table may, in all these respects, become a snare. This first plague is terrible, and the second is like unto it. And that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. This, if we follow the original closely, and the version of Paul in the Romans, is a repetition of the former phrase; but we shall not err if we say that, to the rejecters of Christ, even those things which are calculated to work their spiritual and eternal good, become occasions for yet greater sin. They reject Christ, and are condemned for not believing on him; they stumble on this stone, and are broken by it. Wretched are those men, who not only have a curse upon their common blessings, but also on the spiritual opportunities of salvation.

"Whom oils and balsams kill, what salve can cure?"
This second plague even exceeds the first.

Verse 23. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not. They shall wander in a darkness that may be felt. They have loved darkness rather than light, and in darkness they shall abide. Judicial blindness fell upon Israel after our Lord's death and their persecution of his apostles; they were blinded by the light which they would not accept. Eyes which see no beauty in the Lord Jesus, but flash wrath upon

him, may well grow yet more dim, till death spiritual leads to death eternal. And make their loins continually to shake. Their conscience shall be so ill at ease that they shall continually quiver with fear; their backs shall bend to the earth (so some read it) with grovelling avarice, and their strength shall be utterly paralysed, so that they cannot walk firmly, but shall totter at every step. See the terrifying, degrading, and enfeebling influence of unbelief. See also the retaliation of justice: those who will not see shall not see; those who would not walk in uprightness shall be unable to do so.

Verse 24. Pour out thine indignation upon them. What can be too severe a penalty for those who reject the incarnate God, and refuse to obey the commands of his mercy? They deserve to be flooded with wrath, and they shall be; for upon all who rebel against the Saviour, Christ the Lord, "the wrath is come to the uttermost." 1Th 2:16. God's indignation is no trifle; the anger of a holy, just, omnipotent, and infinite Being, is above all things to be dreaded; even a drop of it consumes, but to have it poured upon us is inconceivably dreadful. O God, who knoweth the power of thine anger? And let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Grasping them, arresting them, abiding on them. If they flee, let it overtake and seize them; let it lay them by the heels in the condemned cell, so that they cannot escape from execution. It shall indeed be so with all the finally impenitent, and it ought to be so. God is not to be insulted with impunity, and his Son, our ever gracious Saviour, the best gift of infinite love, is not to be scorned and scoffed at for nothing. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, but what shall be the "sorer punishment" reserved for those who have trodden under foot the Son of God?

Verse 25. Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents. This may signify that their posterity shall be cut off, and the abode which they occupy shall be left a ruin; or, as our Lord quoted it, it refers to the temple, which was left by its divine occupant and became a desolation. What occurs on a large scale to families and nations is often fulfilled in individuals, as was conspicuously the case with Judas, to whom Peter referred this prophecy, Ac 1:20, "For it is written in the book of Psalms, let this habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein." The fierce proclamation of Nebuchadnezzar, "that every people, nation, and language, that speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill, "is but an anticipation of that dread hour when the enemies of the Lord shall be broken in pieces, and perish out of the land.

Verse 26. For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten. They are cruel where they should be pitiful. When a stroke comes to any in the providence of God, their friends gather around them and condole, but these wretches hunt the wounded and vex the sick. Their merciless hearts invent fresh blows for him who is "smitten of God and afflicted." And they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. They lay bare his wounds with their rough tongues. They lampoon the mourner, satirise his sorrows, and deride his woes. They pointed to the Saviour's wounds, they looked and stared upon him, and then they uttered shameful accusations against him. After this fashion the world still treats the members of Christ. "Report, "say they, "and we will report it." If a godly man be a little down in estate, how glad they are to push him over altogether, and, meanwhile, to talk everywhere against him. God takes note of this, and will visit it upon the enemies of his children; he may allow them to act as a rod to his saints, but he will yet avenge his own elect. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem, and for Zion, with a great jealousy; and I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction."

Verse 27. Add iniquity unto their iniquity. Unbelievers will add sin to sin, and so, punishment to

punishment. This is the severest imprecation, or prophecy, of all. For men to be let alone to fill up the measure of their iniquity, is most equitable, but yet most awful. And let them not come into thy righteousness. If they refuse it, and resist thy gospel, let them shut themselves out of it.

"He that will not when he may,
When he would he shall have nay."

Those who choose evil shall have their choice. Men who hate divine mercy shall not have it forced upon them, but (unless sovereign grace interpose) shall be left to themselves to aggravate their guilt, and ensure their doom.

Verse 28. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living. Though in their conceit they wrote themselves among the people of God, and induced others to regard them under that character, they shall be unmasked and their names removed from the register. Enrolled with honour, they shall be erased with shame. Death shall obliterate all recollection of them; they shall be held no longer in esteem, even by those who paid them homage. Judas first, and Pilate, and Herod, and Caiaphas, all in due time, were speedily wiped out of existence; their names only remain as bywords, but among the honoured men who live after their departure they are not recorded. And not be written with the righteous. This clause is parallel with the former, and shows that the inner meaning of being blotted out from the book of life is to have it made evident that the name was never written there at all. Man in his imperfect copy of God's book of life will have to make many emendations, both of insertion and erasure; but, as before the Lord, the record is for ever fixed and unalterable. Beware, O man, of despising Christ and his people, lest thy soul should never partake in the righteousness of God, without which men are condemned already. Imprecations, prophecies, and complaints are ended, and prayer of a milder sort begins, intermingled with bursts of thankful song, and encouraging foresight of coming good.

Verse 29. But I am poor and sorrowful. The psalmist was afflicted very much, but his faith was in God. The poor in spirit and mourners are both blessed under the gospel, so that here is a double reason for the Lord to smile on his suppliant. No man was ever poorer or more sorrowful than Jesus of Nazareth, yet his cry out of the depths was heard, and he was uplifted to the highest glory. Let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high. How fully has this been answered in our great Master's case, for he not only escaped his foes personally, but he has become the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him, and this continues to glorify him more and more. O ye poor and sorrowful ones, lift up your heads, for as with your Lord so shall it be with you. You are trodden down today as the mire of the streets, but you shall ride upon the high places of the earth ere long; and even now ye are raised up together, and made to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.

Verse 30. I will praise the name of God with a song. He who sang after the passover, sings yet more joyously after the resurrection and ascension. He is, in very truth, "the sweet singer of Israel." He leads the eternal melodies, and all his saints join in chorus. And will magnify him with thanksgiving. How sure was our Redeemer of ultimate victory, since he vows a song even while yet in the furnace. In us, also, faith foresees the happy issue of all affliction, and makes us even now begin the music of gratitude which shall go on for ever increasing in volume, world without end. What clear shining after the rain we have in this and succeeding verses. The darkness is past, and the glory light shines forth as the sun. All the honour is rendered unto him to whom all the prayer was presented; he alone could deliver and did deliver, and, therefore, to him only be the praise.

Verse 31. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs. No sacrifice is so acceptable to God, who is a Spirit, as that which is spiritual. He accepted bullocks under a dim and symbolical dispensation; but in such offerings, in themselves considered, he had no pleasure. "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" Here he puts dishonour upon mere outward offerings by speaking of the horns and hoofs, the offal of the victim. The opus operatum, which our ritualists think so much of, the Lord puffs at. The horning and hoofing are nothing to him, though to Jewish ritualists these were great points, and matters for critical examination; our modern rabbis are just as precise as to the mingling of water with their wine, the baking of their wafers, the cut of their vestments, and the performance of genuflections towards the right quarter of the compass. O fools, and slow of heart to perceive all that the Lord has declared. "Offer unto God thanksgiving" is the everlasting rubric of the true directory of worship. The depths of grief into which the suppliant had been plunged gave him all the richer an experience of divine power and grace in his salvation, and so qualified him to sing more sweetly "the song of loves." Such music is ever most acceptable to the infinite Jehovah.

Verse 32. The humble shall see this and be glad. Grateful hearts are ever on the look out for recruits, and the rejoicing psalmist discerns with joy the fact, that other oppressed and lowly men observing the Lord's dealings with his servants are encouraged to look for a like issue to their own tribulations. The standing consolation of the godly is the experience of their Lord, for as he is so are we also in this world; yea, moreover, his triumph has secured ours, and therefore, we may on the most solid grounds rejoice in him. This gave our great leader satisfaction as he foresaw the comforts which would flow to us from his conflict and conquest. And your heart shall live that seek God. A similar assurance is given in Psalm 22, which is near akin to this. It would have been useless to seek if Jesus' victories had not cleared the way, and opened a door of hope; but, since the Breaker has gone up before us, and the King at the head of us, our hope is a living one, our faith is living, our love is living, and our renewed nature is full of a vitality which challenges the cold hand of death to damp it.

Verse 33. For the Lord heareth the poor. The examples of David and David's Lord, and tens of thousands of the saints, all go to prove this. Monarchs of the nations are deaf to the poor, but the Sovereign of the Universe has a quick ear for the needy. None can be brought lower than was the Nazarene, but see how highly he is exalted: descend into what depths we may, the prayer hearing God can bring us up again. And despiseth not his prisoners. Poor men have their liberty, but these are bound; however, they are God's prisoners, and, therefore, prisoners of hope. The captive in the dungeon is the lowest and least esteemed of men, but the Lord seeth not as man seeth; he visited those who are bound with chains, and proclaims a jail delivery for his afflicted. God despises no man, and no prayer that is honest and sincere. Distinctions of rank are nothing with him; the poor have the gospel preached to them, and the prisoners are loosed by his grace. Let all poor and needy ones hasten to seek his face, and to yield him their love.

Verse 34. Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein. The doxology of a glowing heart. The writer had fathomed the deeps, and had ascended to the heights; and, therefore, calls on the whole range of creation to bless the Lord. Our Well Beloved here excites us all to grateful adoration: who among us will hold back? God's love to Christ argues good to all forms of life; the exaltation of the Head brings good to the members, and to all in the least connected with him. Inasmuch as the creation itself also is by Christ's work to be delivered from bondage, let all that have life and motion magnify the Lord. Glory be unto thee, O Lord, for the sure and all including

pledge of our Surety's triumph; we see in this the exaltation of all thy poor and sorrowful ones, and our heart is glad.

Verse 35. For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah. Poor, fallen Israel shall have a portion in the mercy of the Lord; but, above all, the church, so dear to the heart of her glorious bridegroom, shall be revived and strengthened. Ancient saints so dearly loved Zion, that even in their distresses they did not forget her; with the first gleam of light which visited them, they fell to pleading for the faithful: see notable instances of this which have passed under our eye already. Ps 5:11 14:7 22:23 51:18. To us, in these modern times, it is the subject of cheering hope that better days are coming for the chosen people of God, and for this we would ever pray. O Zion, whatever other memories fade away, we cannot forget thee. That they may dwell there, and have it in possession. Whatever captivities may occur, or desolations be caused, the land of Canaan belongs to Israel by a covenant of salt, and they will surely repossess it; and this shall be a sign unto us, that through the atonement of the Christ of God, all the poor in spirit shall enjoy the mercies promised in the covenant of grace. The sure mercies of David shall be the heritage of all the seed.

Verse 36. The seed also of his servants shall inherit it. Under this image, which, however, we dare not regard as a mere simile, but as having in itself a literal significance, we have set forth to us the enrichment of the saints, consequent upon the sorrow of their Lord. The termination of this Psalm strongly recalls in us that of the twenty-second. The seed lie near the Saviour's heart, and their enjoyment of all promised good is the great concern of his disinterested soul. Because they are his Father's servants, therefore he rejoices in their welfare. And they that love his name shall dwell therein. He has an eye to the Father's glory, for it is to his praise that those who love him should attain, and for ever enjoy, the utmost happiness. Thus a Psalm, which began in the deep waters, ends in the city which hath foundations. How gracious is the change. Hallelujah.

Psalm 70

(The Reader is referred for full Exposition and Notes to Ps 40:13-17, in "Treasury of David," Vol. 2, pp 267-268.)

Verse 1. This is the second Psalm which is a repetition of another, the former being Psalm 53, which was a rehearsal of Psalm 14. The present differs from the Fortieth Psalm at the outset, for that begins with, "Be pleased, "and this, in our version, more urgently with, Make haste; or, as in the Hebrew, with an abrupt and broken cry, O God, to deliver me; O Lord, to help me hasten. It is not forbidden us, in hours of dire distress, to ask for speed on God's part in his coming to rescue us. The only other difference between this and verse 13 of Psalm 40, is the putting of Elohim in the beginning of the verse for Jehovah, but why this is done we know not; perhaps, the guesses of the critics are correct, but perhaps they are not. As we have the words of this Psalm twice in the letter, let them be doubly with us in spirit. It is most meet that we should day by day cry to God for deliverance and help; our frailty and our many dangers render this a perpetual necessity.

Verse 2. Here the words, "together, "and, "to destroy it, "which occur in Psalm 40, are omitted: a man in haste uses no more words than are actually necessary. His enemies desired to put his faith to shame, and he eagerly entreats that they may be disappointed, and themselves covered with confusion. It shall certainly be so; if not sooner, yet at that dread day when the wicked shall awake to shame and everlasting contempt. Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul: let

them be turned backward, and put to confusion, that desire my hurt: turned back and driven back are merely the variations of the translators. When men labour to turn others back from the right road, it is God's retaliation to drive them back from the point they are aiming at.

Verse 3. Let them be turned back. This is a milder term than that used in Psalm 40, where he cries, "let them be desolate." Had growing years matured and mellowed the psalmist's spirit? To be "turned back," however, may come to the same thing as to be "desolate;" disappointed malice is the nearest akin to desolation that can well be conceived. For a reward of their shame that say, Aha, aha. They thought to shame the godly, but it was their shame, and shall be their shame for ever. How fond men are of taunts, and if they are meaningless ahas, more like animal cries than human words, it matters nothing, so long as they are a vent for scorn and sting the victim. Rest assured, the enemies of Christ and his people shall have wages for their work; they shall be paid in their own coin; they loved scoffing, and they shall be filled with it—yea, they shall become a proverb and a byword for ever.

Verse 4. Anger against enemies must not make us forget our friends, for it is better to preserve a single citizen of Zion, than to kill a thousand enemies. Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee. All true worshippers, though as yet in the humble ranks of seekers, shall have cause for joy. Even though the seeking commence in darkness, it shall bring light with it. And let such as love thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified. Those who have tasted divine grace, and are, therefore, wedded to it, are a somewhat more advanced race, and these shall not only feel joy, but shall with holy constancy and perseverance tell abroad their joy, and call upon men to glorify God. The doxology, "Let the Lord's name be magnified," is infinitely more manly and ennobling than the dog's bark of "Aha, aha."

Verse 5. But I am poor and needy. Just the same plea as in the preceding Psalm, Ps 69:29: it seems to be a favourite argument with tried saints; evidently our poverty is our wealth, even as our weakness is our strength. May we learn well this riddle. Make haste unto me, O God. This is written instead of "yet the Lord thinketh upon me," in Psalm 40: and there is a reason for the change, since the key note of the Psalm frequently dictates its close. Psalm 40 sings of God's thoughts, and, therefore, ends therewith; but the peculiar note of Psalm 70 is "Make haste," and, therefore, so it concludes. Thou art my help and my deliverer. My help in trouble, my deliverer out of it. O Lord, make no tarrying. Here is the name of "Jehovah" instead of "my God." We are warranted in using all the various names of God, for each has its own beauty and majesty, and we must reverence each by its holy use as well as by abstaining from taking it in vain. I have presumed to close this recapitulatory exposition with an original hymn, suggested by the watchword of this Psalm, "MAKE HASTE."

Make haste, O God, my soul to bless!
My help and my deliverer thou;
Make haste, for I am in deep distress,
My case is urgent; help me now.
Make haste, O God! make haste to save!
For time is short, and death is nigh;
Make haste ere yet I am in my grave,
And with the lost forever lie.

Make haste, for I am poor and low;
And Satan mocks my prayers and tears;

O God, in mercy be not slow,
But snatch me from my horrid fears.
Make haste, O God, and hear my cries;
Then with the souls who seek thy face,
And those who thy salvation prize,
I will magnify thy matchless grace.

Psalm 71

Verse 2. Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape. Be true, O God, to thy word. It is a righteous thing in thee to keep the promises which thou hast made unto thy servants. I have trusted thee, and thou wilt not be unrighteous to forget my faith. I am taken as in a net, but do thou liberate me from the malice of my persecutors. Incline thine ear unto me, and save me. Stoop to my feebleness, and hear my faint whispers; be gracious to my infirmities, and smile upon me: I ask salvation; listen thou to my petitions, and save me. Like one wounded and left for dead by mine enemies, I need that thou bend over me and bind up my wounds. These mercies are asked on the plea of faith, and they cannot, therefore, be denied.

Verse 3. Be thou my strong habitation. Permit me to enter into thee, and be as much at home as a man in his own house, and then suffer me to remain in thee as my settled abode. Whereas foes molest me, I need a dwelling framed and bulwarked, to sustain a siege and resist the attacks of armies; let, then, thine omnipotence secure me, and be as a fortress unto me. Here we see a weak man, but he is in a strong habitation; his security rests upon the tower in which he hides, and is not placed in jeopardy through his personal feebleness. Whereunto I may continually resort. Fast shut is this castle against all adversaries, its gates they cannot burst open; the drawbridge is up, the portcullis is down, the bars are fast in their places; but, there is a secret door, by which friends of the great Lord can enter at all hours of the day or night, as often as ever they please. There is never an hour when it is unlawful to pray. Mercy's gates stand wide open, and shall do so, till, at the last, the Master of the house has risen up and shut to the door. Believers find their God to be their habitation, strong and accessible, and this is for them a sufficient remedy for all the ills of their mortal life.

Thou hast given commandment to save me. Nature is charged to be tender with God's servants; Providence is ordered to work their good, and the forces of the invisible world are ordained as their guardians. David charged all his troops to spare the young man Absalom, but yet he fell. God's commandment is of far higher virtue, for it compels obedience, and secures its end. Destruction cannot destroy us, famine cannot starve us; but we laugh at both, while God's mandate shields us. No stones of the field can throw us down, while angels bear us up in their hands; neither can the beasts of the field devour us, while David's God delivers us from their ferocity, or Daniel's God puts them in awe of us. For thou art my rock and my fortress. In God we have all the security which nature which furnishes the rock, and art which builds the fortress, could supply; he is the complete preserver of his people. Immutability may be set forth by the rock, and omnipotence by the fortress. Happy is he who can use the personal pronoun "my"—not only once, but as many times as the many aspects of the Lord may render desirable. Is he a strong habitation? I will call him "my strong habitation," and he shall be my rock, my fortress, my God (Ps 71:4), my hope, my trust (Ps 71:5), my praise (Ps 71:6). All mine shall be his, all his shall be mine. This was the reason why the psalmist was persuaded that God had commanded his salvation, namely, because he had enabled his to exercise a calm and appropriating faith.

Verse 4. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked. God is on the same side with us, and those who are our enemies are also his, for they are wicked; therefore will the Lord surely rescue his own confederates, and he will not suffer the evil to triumph over the just. He who addresses such a prayer as this to heaven, does more injury to his enemies than if he had turned a battery of Armstrongs upon them. Out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. Being wicked to God, they become unrighteous towards men, and cruel in their persecutions of the godly. Two hands are here mentioned: they grasp and they crush; they strike and they would slay if God did not prevent; had they as many hands as Briarcus, the finger of God would more than match them.

Verse 5. For thou art my hope, O Lord God. God who gives us grace to hope in him, will assuredly fulfil our hope, and, therefore, we may plead it in prayer. His name is "Jehovah, the hope of Israel" (Jer 17:13); and, as he cannot be a false or failing hope, we may expect to see our confidence justified. Thou art my trust from my youth. David had proved his faith by notable exploits when he was a youth and ruddy; it was to him a cheering recollection, and he felt persuaded that the God of his youth would not forsake him in his age. They are highly favoured who can like David, Samuel, Josiah, Timothy, and others say, "Thou art my trust from my youth."

Verse 6. By thee have I been holden up from the womb. Before he was able to understand the power which preserved him, he was sustained by it. God knows us before we know anything. The elect of old lay in the bosom of God before they were laid on their mothers' bosoms; and when their infantile weakness had no feet strong enough to carry it, the Lord upheld it. We do well to reflect upon divine goodness to us in childhood, for it is full of food for gratitude. Thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels. Even before conscious life, the care of God is over his chosen. Birth is a mystery of mercy, and God is with both mother and babe. If marriages are registered in heaven, we may be sure that births are also. Holy women do well to bless God for his mercy to them in nature's perilous hour; but every one who is born of woman has equal cause for thankfulness. She, whose life is preserved, should render thanks, and so should he whose life is given. My praise shall be continually of thee. Where goodness has been unceasingly received, praise should unceasingly be offered. God is the circle where praise should begin, continue, and endlessly revolve, since in him we live, and move, and have our being.

Verse 7. I am as a wonder unto many. "To thousand eyes a mark and gaze am I." The saints are men wondered at; often their dark side is gloomy even to amazement, while their bright side is glorious even to astonishment. The believer is a riddle, an enigma puzzling the unspiritual; he is a monster warring with those delights of the flesh, which are the all in all of other men; he is a prodigy, unaccountable to the judgments of ungodly men; a wonder gazed at, feared, and, by and by, contemptuously derided. Few understand us, many are surprised at us. But thou art my strong refuge. Here is the answer to our riddle. If we are strong, it is in God; if we are safe, our refuge shelters us; if we are calm, our soul hath found her stay in God. When faith is understood, and the grounds of her confidence seen, the believer is no longer a wonder; but the marvel is that so much unbelief remains among the sons of men.

Verse 8. Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day. What a blessed mouthful! A man never grows nauseated though the flavour of it be all day in his mouth. God's bread is always in our mouths, so should his praise be. He fills us with good; let us be also filled with gratitude. This would leave no room for murmuring or backbiting; therefore, may we well join with holy

David in this sacred wish.

Verse 9. Cast me not off in the time of old age. David was not tired of his Master, and his only fear was lest his Master should be tired of him. The Amalekite in the Bible history left his Egyptian servant to famish when he grew old and sick, but not so the Lord of saints; even to hoar hairs he bears and carries us. Alas for us, if we were abandoned by our God, as many a courtier has been by his prince! Old age robs us of personal beauty, and deprives us of strength for active service; but it does not lower us in the love and favour of God. An ungrateful country leaves its worn out defenders to starve upon a scanty pittance, but the pensioners of heaven are satisfied with good things. Forsake me not when my strength faileth. Bear with me, and endure my infirmities. To be forsaken of God is the worst of all conceivable ills, and if the believer can be but clear of that grievous fear, he is happy: no saintly heart need be under any apprehension upon this point.

Verse 10. For mine enemies speak against me. Dogs howl over a dying lion. When David's arm was able to chastise his foes, they were yet impudent enough to slander him, and he fears that now they will take fresh license in the hour of his weakness. The text most properly means that his enemies had said that God would forsake him; and, therefore, he is the more earnest that the Lord's faithful dealings may give them the lie. And they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together. The psalmist had enemies, and these were most malicious; seeking his utter destruction, they were very persevering, and staid long upon the watch; to this they added cunning, for they lay in ambush to surprise him, and take him at a disadvantage; and all this they did with the utmost unanimity and deliberation, neither spoiling their design by want of prudence, nor marring its accomplishment by a lack of unity. The Lord our God is our only and all sufficient resort from every form of persecution.

Verse 11. Saying, God hath forsaken him. O bitter taunt! There is no worse arrow in all the quivers of hell. Our Lord felt this barbed shaft, and it is no marvel if his disciples feel the same. Were this exclamation the truth, it were indeed an ill day for us; but, glory be to God, it is a barefaced lie. Persecute and take him. Let loose the dogs of persecution upon him, seize him, worry him, for there is none to deliver him. Down with him, for he has no friends. It is safe to insult him, for none will come to his rescue. O cowardly boasts of a braggart foe, how do ye wound the soul of the believer: and only when his faith cries to his Lord is he able to endure your cruelty.

Verse 12. O God, be not far from me. Nearness to God is our conscious security. A child in the dark is comforted by grasping its father's hand. O my God, make haste for my help. To call God ours, as having entered into covenant with us, is a mighty plea in prayer, and a great stay to our faith. The cry of "make haste" has occurred many times in this portion of the Psalms, and it was evoked by the sore pressure of affliction. Sharp sorrows soon put an end to procrastinating prayers.

Verse 13. Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul. It will be all this to them to see thy servant preserved; their envy and malice, when disappointed, will fill them with life consuming bitterness. The defeat of their plans shall nonplus them, they shall be confounded as they enquire the reason for their overthrow; the men they seek to destroy seem so weak, and their cause so contemptible, that they will be filled with amazement as they see them not only survive all opposition, but even surmount it. How confounded must Pharaoh have been when Israel multiplied, despite his endeavours to exterminate the race; and how consumed with rage must the Scribes and Pharisees have become when they saw the gospel spreading from land to land by the very means which they used for its destruction. Let them be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek my

hurt. He would have their shame made visible to all eyes, by their wearing it in their blushes as a mantle. They would have made a laughing stock of the believer, if his God had forsaken him; therefore, let unbelief and atheism be made a public scoffing in their persons.

Verse 14. The holy faith of the persecuted saint comes to the front in these three verses. But I will hope continually. When I cannot rejoice in what I have, I will look forward to what shall be mine, and will still rejoice. Hope will live on a bare common, and sing on a branch laden down with snow. No date and no place are unsuitable for hope. Hell alone excepted, hope is a dweller in all regions. We may always hope, for we always have grounds for it: we will always hope, for it is a never failing consolation. And will yet praise thee more and more. He was not slack in thanksgiving; in fact, no man was ever more diligent in it; yet he was not content with all his former praises, but vowed to become more and more a grateful worshipper. When good things are both continual and progressive with us, we are on the right tack. We ought to be misers in going good, and our motto should be "more and more." While we do not disdain to "rest and be thankful," we cannot settle down into resting in our thankfulness. "Superior" cries the eagle, as he mounts towards the sun: higher and yet higher is also our aim, as we soar aloft in duty and devotion. It is our continual hope that we shall be able more and more to magnify the Lord.

Verse 15. My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day. We are to bear testimony as experience enables us, and not withhold from others that which we have tasted and handled. The faithfulness of God in saving us, in delivering us out of the hand of our enemies, and in fulfilling his promises, is to be everywhere proclaimed by those who have proved it in their own history. How gloriously conspicuous is righteousness in the divine plan of redemption! It should be the theme of constant discourse. The devil rages against the substitutionary sacrifice, and errorists of every form make this the main point of their attack; be it ours, therefore, to love the doctrine, and to spread its glad tidings on every side, and at all times. Mouths are never so usefully employed as in recounting the righteousness of God revealed in the salvation of believers in Jesus. The preacher who should be confined to this one theme would never need seek another: it is the medulla theologae, the very pith and marrow of revealed truth. Has our reader been silent upon this choice subject? Let us, then, press him to tell abroad what he enjoys within: he does not well who keeps such glad tidings to himself. For I know not the numbers thereof. He knew the sweetness of it, the sureness, the glory, and the truth of it; but as to the full reckoning of its plenitude, variety, and sufficiency, he felt he could not reach to the height of the great argument. Lord, where I cannot count I will believe, and when a truth surpasses numeration I will take to admiration. When David spoke of his enemies, he said they were more in number than the hairs of his head; he had, therefore, some idea of their number, and found a figure suitable to set it out; but, in the case of the Lord's covenant mercies, he declares, "I know not the number," and does not venture upon any sort of comparison. To creatures belong number and limit, to God and his grace there is neither. We may, therefore, continue to tell out his great salvation all day long, for the theme is utterly inexhaustible.

Verse 16. I will go in the strength of the Lord God. Our translators give us a good sense, but not the sense in this place, which is on this wise, "I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord Jehovah." He would enter into those deeds by admiring study, and then, wherever he went, he would continue to rehearse them. He should ever be a welcome guest who can tell us of the mighty acts of the Lord, and help us to put our trust in him. The authorised version may be used by us as a resolve in all our exertions and endeavours. In our own strength we must fail; but, when we hear the voice which saith, "Go in this thy might," we may advance without fear. Though hell itself were in the way, the believer

would pursue the path of duty, crying: I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only. Man's righteousness is not fit to be mentioned—filthy rags are best hidden; neither is there any righteousness under heaven, or in heaven, comparable to the divine. As God himself fills all space, and is, therefore, the only God, leaving no room for another, so God's righteousness, in Christ Jesus, fills the believer's soul, and he counts all other things but dross and dung "that he may win Christ, and be found in him, not having his own righteousness which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith." What would be the use of speaking upon any other righteousness to a dying man? and all are dying men. Let those who will cry up man's natural innocence, the dignity of the race, the purity of philosophers, the loveliness of untutored savages, the power of sacraments, and the infallibility of pontiffs; this is the true believer's immovable resolve: "I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only." For ever dedicated to thee, my Lord, be this poor, unworthy tongue, whose glory it shall be to glorify thee.

Verse 17. O God, thou hast taught me from my youth. It was comfortable to the psalmist to remember that from his earliest days he had been the Lord's disciple. None are too young to be taught of God, and they make the most proficient scholars who begin betimes. And hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. He had learned to tell what he knew, he was a pupil teacher; he continued still learning and declaring, and did not renounce his first master; this, also, was his comfort, but it is one which those who have been seduced from the school of the gospel, into the various colleges of philosophy and scepticism, will not be able to enjoy. A sacred conservatism is much needed in these days, when men are giving up old lights for new. We mean both to learn and to teach the wonders of redeeming love, till we can discover something nobler or more soul satisfying; for this reason we hope that our gray heads will be found in the same road as we have trodden, even from our beardless youth.

Verse 18. Now also when I am old and grey headed, O God, forsake me not. There is something touching in the sight of hair whitened with the snows of many a winter: the old and faithful soldier receives consideration from his king, the venerable servant is beloved by his master. When our infirmities multiply, we may, with confidence, expect enlarged privileges in the world of grace, to make up for our narrowing range in the field of nature. Nothing shall make God forsake those who have not forsaken him. Our fear is lest he should do so; but his promise kisses that fear into silence. Until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation. He desired to continue his testimony and complete it; he had respect to the young men and little children about him, and knowing the vast importance of training them in the fear of God, he longed to make them all acquainted with the power of God to support his people, that they also might be led to walk by faith. He had leaned on the almighty arm, and could speak experimentally of its all sufficiency, and longed to do so ere life came to a close. And thy power to every one that is to come. He would leave a record for unborn ages to read. He thought the Lord's power to be so worthy of praise, that he would make the ages ring with it till time should be no more. For this cause believers live, and they should take care to labour zealously for the accomplishment of this their most proper and necessary work. Blessed are they who begin in youth to proclaim the name of the Lord, and cease not until their last hour brings their last word for their divine Master.

Verse 19. Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high. Very sublime, unsearchable, exalted, and glorious is the holy character of God, and his way of making men righteous. His plan of righteousness uplifts men from the gates of hell to the mansions of heaven. It is a high doctrine gospel, gives a high experience, leads to high practice, and ends in high felicity. Who hast done great things. The exploits

of others are mere child's play compared with thine, and are not worthy to be mentioned in the same age. Creation, providence, redemption, are all unique, and nothing can compare with them. O God, who is like unto thee. As thy works are so transcendent, so art thou. Thou art without compeer, or even second, and such are thy works, and such, especially, thy plan of justifying sinners by the righteousness which thou hast provided. Adoration is a fit frame of mind for the believer. When he draws near to God, he enters into a region where everything is surpassingly sublime; miracles of love abound on every hand, and marvels of mingled justice and grace. A traveller among the high Alps often feels overwhelmed with awe, amid their amazing sublimities; much more is this the case when we survey the heights and depths of the mercy and holiness of the Lord. O God, who is like unto thee.

Verse 20. Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again. Here is faith's inference from the infinite greatness of the Lord. He has been strong to smite; he will be also strong to save. He has shown me many heavy and severe trials, and he will also show me many and precious mercies. He has almost killed me, he will speedily revive me; and though I have been almost dead and buried, he will give me a resurrection, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth. However low the Lord may permit us to sink, he will fix a limit to the descent, and in due time will bring us up again. Even when we are laid low in the tomb, the mercy is that we can go no lower, but shall retrace our steps and mount to better lands; and all this, because the Lord is ever mighty to save. A little God would fail us, but not Jehovah the Omnipotent. It is safe to lean on him, since he bears up the pillars both of heaven and earth.

Verse 21. Thou shalt increase my greatness. As a king, David grew in influence and power. God did great things for him, and by him, and this is all the greatness believers want. May we have faith in God, such as these words evince. And comfort me on every side. As we were surrounded with afflictions, so shall we be environed with consolations. From above, and from all around, light shall come to dispel our former gloom; the change shall be great, indeed, when the Lord returns to comfort us. Here is the final vow of praise.

Verse 22. I will also praise thee with the psaltery. Love so amazing calls for sweetest praise. David would give his best music, both vocal and instrumental, to the Best of Masters. His harp should not be silent, nor his voice. Even thy truth, O my God. This is ever a most enchanting attribute—viz., the truth or faithfulness of our covenant God. On this we rest, and from it we draw streams of richest consolation. His promises are sure, his love unalterable, his veracity indisputable. What saint will not praise him as he remembers this? Unto thee will I sing with the harp, O thou Holy One of Israel. Here is a new name, and, as it were, a new song. The Holy One of Israel is at once a lofty and an endearing name, full of teaching. Let us resolve, by all means within our power, to honour him. Here is the final vow of praise.

Verse 23. My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee. It shall be no weariness to me to praise thee. It shall be a delightful recreation, a solace, a joy. The essence of song lies in the holy joy of the singer. And my soul, which thou hast redeemed. Soul singing is the soul of singing. Till men are redeemed, they are like instruments out of tune; but when once the precious blood has set them at liberty, then are they fitted to magnify the Lord who bought them. Our being bought with a price is a more than sufficient reason for our dedicating ourselves to the earnest worship of God our Saviour. Here is the final vow of praise.

Verse 24. My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long. I will talk to myself, and to thee, my God, and to my fellow men: my theme shall be thy way of justifying sinners, the glorious display of thy righteousness and grace in thy dear Son; and this most fresh and never to be exhausted subject shall be ever with me, from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same. Others talk of their beloveds, and they shall be made to hear of mine. I will become an incessant talker, while this matter lies on my heart, for in all company this subject will be in season. For they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt. As in many other Psalms, the concluding stanzas speak of that as an accomplished fact, which was only requested in former verses. Faith believes that she has her request, and she has it. She is the substance of things hoped for—a substance so real and tangible, that it sets the glad soul singing. Already sin, Satan, and the world are vanquished, and the victory is ours.

"Sin, Satan, Death appear
To harass and appal:
Yet since the gracious Lord is near,
Backward they go, and fall."
"We meet them face to face,
Through Jesus' conquest blest;
March in the triumph of his grace,
Right onward to our rest."

Psalm 72

Verse 1. Give the king thy judgments, O God. The right to reign was transmitted by descent from David to Solomon, but not by that means alone: Israel was a theocracy, and the kings were but the viceroys of the greater King; hence the prayer that the new king might be enthroned by divine right, and then endowed with divine wisdom. Our glorious King in Zion hath all judgment committed unto him. He rules in the name of God over all lands. He is king "Dei Gratia" as well as by right of inheritance. And thy righteousness unto the king's son. Solomon was both king and king's son; so also is our Lord. He has power and authority in himself, and also royal dignity given of his Father. He is the righteous king; in a word, he is "the Lord our righteousness." We are waiting till he shall be manifested among men as the ever righteous Judge. May the Lord hasten on his own time the long looked for day. Now wars and fightings are even in Israel itself, but soon the dispensation will change, and David, the type of Jesus warring with our enemies, shall be displaced by Solomon the prince of peace.

Verse 2. He shall judge thy people with righteousness. Clothed with divine authority, he shall use it on the behalf of the favoured nation, for whom he shall show himself strong, that they be not misjudged, slandered, or in any way treated maliciously. His sentence shall put their accusers to silence, and award the saints their true position as the accepted of the Lord. What a consolation to feel that none can suffer wrong in Christ's kingdom: he sits upon the great white throne, unspotted by a single deed of injustice, or even mistake of judgment: reputations are safe enough with him. And thy poor with judgment. True wisdom is manifest in all the decisions of Zion's King. We do not always understand his doings, but they are always right. Partiality has been too often shown to rich and great men, but the King of the last and best of monarchies deals out even handed justice, to the delight of the poor and despised. Here we have the poor mentioned side by side with the king. The sovereignty of God is a delightful theme to the poor in spirit; they love to see the Lord exalted, and have no quarrel with him

for exercising the prerogatives of his crown. It is the fictitious wealth which labours to conceal real poverty, which makes men cavil at the reigning Lord, but a deep sense of spiritual need prepares the heart loyally to worship the Redeemer King. On the other hand, the King has a special delight in the humbled hearts of his contrite ones, and exercises all his power and wisdom on their behalf, even as Joseph in Egypt ruled for the welfare of his brethren.

Verse 3. The mountains shall bring peace to the people. Thence, aforetime, rushed the robber bands which infested the country; but now the forts there erected are the guardians of the land, and the watchmen publish far and near the tidings that no foe is to be seen. Where Jesus is there is peace, lasting, deep, eternal. Even those things which were once our dread, lose all terror when Jesus is owned as monarch of the heart: death itself, that dark mountain, loses all its gloom. Trials and afflictions, when the Lord is with us, bring us an increase rather than a diminution of peace. And the little hills, by righteousness. Seeing that the rule of the monarch was just, every little hill seemed clothed with peace. Injustice has made Palestine a desert; if the Turk and Bedouin were gone, the land would smile again; for even in the most literal sense, justice is the fertilizer of lands, and men are diligent to plough and raise harvests when they have the prospect of eating the fruit of their labours. In a spiritual sense, peace is given to the heart by the righteousness of Christ; and all the powers and passions of the soul are filled with a holy calm, when the way of salvation, by a divine righteousness, is revealed. Then do we go forth with joy, and are led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills break forth before us into singing.

Verse 4. He shall judge the poor of the people. He will do them justice, yea, and blessed be his name, more than justice, for he will delight to do them good. He shall save the children of the needy. Poor, helpless things, they were packhorses for others, and paupers themselves, but their King would be their protector. Happy are God's poor and needy ones; they are safe under the wing of the Prince of Peace, for he will save them from all their enemies. And shall break in pieces the oppressor. He is strong to smite the foes of his people. Oppressors have been great breakers, but their time of retribution shall come, and they shall be broken themselves. Sin, Satan, and all our enemies must be crushed by the iron rod of King Jesus. We have, therefore, no cause to fear; but abundant reason to sing—

"All hail the power of Jesus' name!
Let angels prostrate fall,
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown him lord of all."

It is much better to be poor than to be an oppressor; for both the needy and their children find an advocate in the heavenly Solomon, who aims all his blows at haughty ones, and rests not till they are utterly destroyed.

Verse 5. They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure. And well they may. Such righteousness wins the cheerful homage of the poor and the godly, and strikes dismay into the souls of unrighteous oppressors; so that all through the lands, both good and bad are filled with awe. Where Jesus reigns in power men must render obeisance of some sort. His kingdom, moreover, is no house of cards, or dynasty of days; it is as lasting as the lights of heaven; days and nights will cease before he abdicates his throne. Neither sun nor moon as yet manifest any failure in their radiance, nor are there any signs of decrepitude in the kingdom of Jesus; on the contrary, it is but in its youth, and

is evidently the coming power, the rising sun. Would to God that fresh vigour were imparted to all its citizens to push at once the conquests of Immanuel to the uttermost ends of the earth. Throughout all generations shall the throne of the Redeemer stand. Humanity shall not wear out the religion of the Incarnate God. No infidelity shall wither it away, nor superstition smother it; it shall rise immortal from what seemed its grave; as the true phoenix, it shall revive from its ashes! As long as there are men on earth Christ shall have a throne among them. Instead of the fathers shall be the children. Each generation shall have a regeneration in its midst, let Pope and Devil do what they may. Even at this hour we have before us the tokens of his eternal power; since he ascended to his throne, eighteen hundred years ago, his dominion has not been overturned, though the mightiest of empires have gone like visions of the night. We see on the shore of time the wrecks of the Caesars, the relics of the Moguls, and the last remnants of the Ottomans. Charlemagne, Maximilian, Napoleon, how they flit like shadows before us! They were and are not; but Jesus for ever is. As for the houses of Hohenzollern, Guelph, or Hapsburg, they have their hour; but the Son of David has all hours and ages as his own.

Verse 6. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass. Blessings upon his gentle sway! Those great conquerors who have been the scourges of mankind have fallen like the fiery hail of Sodom, transforming fruitful lands into deserts; but he with mild, benignant influence softly refreshes the weary and wounded among men, and makes them spring up into newness of life. Pastures mown with the scythe, or shorn by the teeth of cattle, present, as it were, so many bleeding stems of grass, but when the rain falls it is balm to all these wounds, and it renews the verdure and beauty of the field; fit image of the visits and benedictions of "the consolation of Israel." My soul, how well it is for thee to be brought low, and to be even as the meadows eaten bare and trodden down by cattle, for then to thee shall the Lord have respect; he shall remember thy misery, and with his own most precious love restore thee to more than thy former glory. Welcome Jesus, thou true Bien-aime, the Well beloved, thou art far more than Titus ever was—the Delight of Mankind. As showers that water the earth. Each crystal drop of rain tells of heavenly mercy, which forgets not the parched plains: Jesus is all grace, all that he does is love, and his presence among men is joy. We need to preach him more, for no shower can so refresh the nations. Philosophic preaching mocks men as with a dust shower, but the gospel meets the case of fallen humanity, and happiness flourishes beneath its genial power. Come down, O Lord, upon my soul, and my heart shall blossom with thy praise:—

"He shall come down as still and light
As scattered drops on genial field;
And in his time who loves the right,
Freely shall bloom, sweet peace her harvest yield."

Verse 7. In his days shall the righteous flourish. Beneath the deadly Upas of unrighteous rule no honest principles can be developed, and good men can scarcely live; but where truth and uprightness are on the throne, the best of men prosper most. A righteous king is the patron and producer of righteous subjects. None flourish under Nero but those who are monsters like himself: like will to like; and under the gentle Jesus the godly find a happy shelter. And abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. Where Jesus reigns he is known as the true Melchizedek, king both of righteousness and peace. Peace based upon right is sure to be lasting, but no other will be. Many a so called Holy Alliance has come to the ground ere many moons have filled their horns, because craft formed the league, perjury established it, and oppression was the design of it; but when Jesus shall proclaim the great Truce of God, he will ordain perpetual peace, and men shall learn war no more. The peace

which Jesus brings is not superficial or short lived; it is abundant in its depth and duration. Let all hearts and voices welcome the King of nations; Jesus the Good, the Great, the Just, the Ever blessed.

Verse 8. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea. Wide spread shall be the rule of Messiah; only the Land's End shall end his territory: to the Ultima Thule shall his sceptre be extended. From Pacific to Atlantic, and from Atlantic to Pacific, he shall be Lord, and the oceans which surround each pole shall be beneath his sway. All other power shall be subordinate to his; no rival nor antagonist shall he know. Men speak of the Emperor of all the Russias, but Jesus shall be Ruler of all mankind. And from the river unto the ends of the earth. Start where you will, by any river you choose, and Messiah's kingdom shall reach on to the utmost bounds of the round world. As Solomon's realm embraced all the land of promise, and left no unconquered margin; so shall the Son of David rule all lands given him in the better covenant, and leave no nation to pine beneath the tyranny of the prince of darkness. We are encouraged by such a passage as this to look for the Saviour's universal reign; whether before or after his personal advent we leave for the discussion of others. In this Psalm, at least, we see a personal monarch, and he is the central figure, the focus of all the glory; not his servant, but himself do we see possessing the dominion and dispensing the government. Personal pronouns referring to our great King are constantly occurring in this Psalm; he has dominion kings fall down before him, and serve him; for he delivers, he spares, he saves, he lives, and daily is he praised.

Verse 9. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him. Unconquered by arms, they shall be subdued by love. Wild and lawless as they have been, they shall gladly wear his easy yoke; then shall their deserts be made glad, yea, they shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. And his enemies shall lick the dust. If they will not be his friends, they shall be utterly broken and humbled. Dust shall be the serpent's meat; the seed of the serpent shall be filled therewith. Homage among Orientals is often rendered in the most abject manner, and truly no sign is too humiliating to denote the utter discomfiture and subjugation of Messiah's foes. Tongues which rail at the Redeemer deserve to lick the dust. Those who will not joyfully bow to such a prince richly merit to be hurled down and laid prostrate; the dust is too good for them, since they trampled on the blood of Christ.

Verse 10. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents. Trade shall be made subservient to the purposes of mediatorial rule; merchant princes, both far and near, shall joyfully contribute of their wealth to his throne. Seafaring places are good centres from which to spread the gospel; and seafaring men often make earnest heralds of the cross. Tarshish of old was so far away, that to the eastern mind it was lost in its remoteness, and seemed to be upon the verge of the universe; even so far as imagination itself can travel, shall the Son of David rule; across the blue sea shall his sceptre be stretched; the white cliffs of Britain already own him, the gems of the Southern Sea glitter for him, even Iceland's heart is warm with his love. Madagascar leaps to receive him; and if there be isles of the equatorial seas whose spices have as yet not been presented to him, even there shall he receive a revenue of glory. He has made many an islet to become a Holy Isle, and hence, a true Formosa. The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Agriculture and pasturage shall contribute their share. Foreign princes from inland regions, as yet unexplored, shall own the all embracing monarchy of the King of kings; they shall be prompt to pay their reverential tribute. Religious offerings shall they bring, for their King is their God. Then shall Arabia Felix be happy indeed, and the Fortunate Isles be more than fortunate. Observe, that true religion leads to generous giving; we are not taxed in Christ's dominions, but we are delighted to offer freely to him. It will be a great day when kings will do this: the poor widow has long ago been before them, it is time that they

followed; their subjects would be sure to imitate the royal example. This free will offering is all Christ and his church desire; they want no forced levies and distrains, let all men give of their own free will, kings as well as commoners; alas! the rule has been for kings to give their subjects' property to the church, and a wretched church has received this robbery for a burnt offering; it shall not be thus when Jesus more openly assumes the throne.

Verse 11. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him. Personally shall they pay their reverence, however mighty they may be. No matter how high their state, how ancient their dynasty, or far off their realms, they shall willingly accept him as their Imperial Lord. All nations shall serve him. The people shall be as obedient as the governors. The extent of the mediatorial rule is set forth by the two far reaching alls, all kings, and all nations: we see not as yet all things put under him, but since we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour in heaven, we are altogether without doubt as to his universal monarchy on earth. It is not to be imagined that an Alexander or a Caesar shall have wider sway than the Son of God. "Every knee shall bow to him, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Hasten it, O Lord, in thine own time.

Verse 12. For he shall deliver the needy. Here is an excellent reason for man's submission to the Lord Christ; it is not because they dread his overwhelming power, but because they are won over by his just and condescending rule. Who would not fear so good a Prince, who makes the needy his peculiar care, and pledges himself to be their deliverer in times of need? When he crieth. He permits them to be so needy as to be driven to cry bitterly for help, but then he hears them, and comes to their aid. A child's cry touches a father's heart, and our King is the Father of his people. If we can do no more than cry it will bring omnipotence to our aid. A cry is the native language of a spiritually needy soul; it has done with fine phrases and long orations, and it takes to sobs and moans; and so, indeed, it grasps the most potent of all weapons, for heaven always yields to such artillery. The poor also, and him that hath no helper. The proverb says, "God helps those that help themselves; "but it is yet more true that Jesus helps those who cannot help themselves, nor find help in others. All helpless ones are under the especial care of Zion's compassionate King; let them hasten to put themselves in fellowship with him. Let them look to him, for he is looking for them.

Verse 13. He shall spare the poor and needy. His pity shall be manifested to them; he will not allow their trials to overwhelm them; his rod of correction shall fall lightly; he will be sparing of his rebukes, and not sparing in his consolations. And shall save the souls of the needy. His is the dominion of souls, a spiritual and not a worldly empire; and the needy, that is to say, the consciously unworthy and weak, shall find that he will give them his salvation. Jesus calls not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He does not attempt the superfluous work of aiding proud Pharisees to air their vanity; but he is careful of poor Publicans whose eyes dare not look up to heaven by reason of their sense of sin. We ought to be anxious to be among these needy ones whom the Great King so highly favours.

Verse 14. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence. These two things are the weapons with which the poor are assailed: both law and no law are employed to fleece them. The fox and the lion are combined against Christ's lambs, but the Shepherd will defeat them, and rescue the defenceless from their teeth. A soul hunted by the temptations of Satanic craft, and the insinuations of diabolical malice, will do well to fly to the throne of Jesus for shelter. And precious shall their blood be in his sight. He will not throw away his subjects in needless wars as tyrants have done, but will take every means for preserving the humblest of them. Conquerors have reckoned thousands of lives as small items; they have reddened fields with gore, as if blood were water, and flesh but manure for

harvests; but Jesus, though he gave his own blood, is very chary of the blood of his servants, and if they must die for him as martyrs, he loves their memory, and counts their lives as his precious things.

Verse 15. And he shall live. Vive le Roi! O King! live for ever! He was slain, but is risen and ever liveth. And to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba. These are coronation gifts of the richest kind, cheerfully presented at his throne. How gladly would we give him all that we have and are, and count the tribute far too small. We may rejoice that Christ's cause will not stand still for want of funds; the silver and the gold are his, and if they are not to be found at home, far off lands shall hasten to make up the deficit. Would to God we had more faith and more generosity. Prayer also shall be made for him continually. May all blessings be upon his head; all his people desire that his cause may prosper, therefore do they hourly cry, "Thy kingdom come." Prayer for Jesus is a very sweet idea, and one which should be for evermore lovingly carried out; for the church is Christ's body, and the truth is his sceptre; therefore we pray for him when we plead for these. The verse may, however, be read as "through him, "for it is by Christ as our Mediator that prayer enters heaven and prevails. "Continue in prayer" is the standing precept of Messiah's reign, and it implies that the Lord will continue to bless. And daily shall he be praised. As he will perpetually show himself to be worthy of honour, so shall he be incessantly praised:—

"For him shall constant prayer be made,
And praises throng to crown his head;
His name, like sweet perfume, shall rise
With every morning's sacrifice."

Verse 16. There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains. From small beginnings great results shall spring. A mere handful in a place naturally ungenial shall produce a matchless harvest. What a blessing that there is a handful; "except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah:" but now the faithful are a living seed, and shall multiply in the land. The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon. The harvest shall be so great that the wind shall rustle through it, and sound like the cedars upon Lebanon:—

"Like Lebanon, by soft winds fanned,
Rustles the golden harvest far and wide."

God's church is no mean thing; its beginnings are small, but its increase is of the most astonishing kind. As Lebanon is conspicuous and celebrated, so shall the church be. And they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. Another figure. Christ's subjects shall be as plentiful as blades of grass, and shall as suddenly appear as eastern verdure after a heavy shower. We need not fear for the cause of truth in the land; it is in good hands, where the pleasure of the Lord is sure to prosper. "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." When shall these words, which open up such a vista of delight, be fulfilled in the midst of the earth?

Verse 17. His name shall endure for ever. In its saving power, as the rallying point of believers, and as renowned and glorified, his name shall remain for ever the same. His name shall be continued as long as the sun. While time is measured out by days, Jesus shall be glorious among men. And men shall be blessed in him. There shall be cause for all this honour, for he shall really and truly be a benefactor to the race. He himself shall be earth's greatest blessing; when men wish to bless others

they shall bless in his name. All nations shall call him blessed. The grateful nations shall echo his benedictions, and wish him happy who has made them happy. Not only shall some glorify the Lord, but all; no land shall remain in heathenism; all nations shall delight to do him honour.

Verses 18-19. As Quesnel well observes, these verses explain themselves. They call rather for profound gratitude, and emotion of heart, than for an exercise of the understanding; they are rather to be used for adoration than for exposition. It is, and ever will be, the acme of our desires, and the climax of our prayers, to behold Jesus exalted King of kings and Lord of lords. He has done great wonders such as none else can match, leaving all others so far behind, that he remains the sole and only wonder worker; but equal marvels yet remain, for which we look with joyful expectation. He is the Blessed God, and his name shall be blessed; his name is glorious, and that glory shall fill the whole earth. For so bright a consummation our heart yearns daily, and we cry Amen, and Amen.

Verse 20. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended. What more could he ask? He has climbed the summit of the mount of God; he desires nothing more. With this upon his lip, he is content to die. He strips himself of his own royalty and becomes only the "son of Jesse," thrice happy to subside into nothing before the crowned Messiah. Before his believing eye the reign of Jesus, like the sun, filled all around with light, and the holy soul of the man after God's own heart exulted in it, and sung his "Nunc dimittis:" "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!" We, too, will cease from all petitioning if it be granted to us to see the day of the Lord. Our blissful spirits will then have nothing further to do but for ever to praise the Lord our God.

Psalm 73

Verse 1. Truly, or, more correctly, only, God is good to Israel. He is only good, nothing else but good to his own covenanted ones. He cannot act unjustly, or unkindly to them; his goodness to them is beyond dispute, and without mixture. Even to such as are of a clean heart. These are the true Israel, not the ceremonially clean but the really so; those who are clean in the inward parts, pure in the vital mainspring of action. To such he is, and must be, goodness itself. The writer does not doubt this, but lays it down as his firm conviction. It is well to make sure of what we do know, for this will be good anchor hold for us when we are molested by those mysterious storms which arise from things which we do not understand. Whatever may or may not be the truth about mysterious and inscrutable things, there are certainties somewhere; experience has placed some tangible facts within our grasp; let us, then, cling to these, and they will prevent our being carried away by those hurricanes of infidelity which still come from the wilderness, and, like whirlwinds, smite the four corners of our house and threaten to overthrow it. O my God, however perplexed I may be, let me never think ill of thee. If I cannot understand thee, let me never cease to believe in thee. It must be so, it cannot be otherwise, thou art good to those whom thou hast made good; and where thou hast renewed the heart thou wilt not leave it to its enemies.

Verse 2. Here begins the narrative of a great soul battle, a spiritual Marathon, a hard and well fought field, in which the half defeated became in the end wholly victorious. But as for me. He contrasts himself with his God who is ever good; he owns his personal want of good, and then also compares himself with the clean in heart, and goes on to confess his defilement. The Lord is good to his saints, but as for me, am I one of them? Can I expect to share his grace? Yes, I do share it; but I have acted an unworthy part, very unlike one who is truly pure in heart. My feet were almost gone. Errors of heart and head soon affect the conduct. There is an intimate connection between the heart and the feet.

Asaph could barely stand, his uprightness was going, his knees were bowing like a falling wall. When men doubt the righteousness of God, their own integrity begins to waver. My steps had well nigh slipped. Asaph could make no progress in the good road, his feet ran away from under him like those of a man on a sheet of ice. He was weakened for all practical action, and in great danger of actual sin, and so of a disgraceful fall. How ought we to watch the inner man, since it has so forcible an effect upon the outward character. The confession in this case is, as it should be, very plain and explicit.

Verse 3. For I was envious at the foolish. "The foolish" is the generic title of all the wicked: they are beyond all others fools, and he must be a fool who envies fools. Some read it, "the proud:" and, indeed, these, by their ostentation, invite envy, and many a mind which is out of gear spiritually, becomes infected with that wasting disease. It is a pitiful thing that an heir of heaven should have to confess "I was envious," but worse still that he should have to put it, "I was envious at the foolish." Yet this acknowledgment is, we fear, due from most of us. When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. His eye was fixed too much on one thing; he saw their present, and forgot their future, saw their outward display, and overlooked their soul's discomfort. Who envies the bullock his fat when he recollects the shambles? Yet some poor afflicted saint has been sorely tempted to grudge the ungodly sinner his temporary plenty. All things considered, Dives had more cause to envy Lazarus than Lazarus to be envious of Dives.

Verse 4. For there are no bands in their death. This is mentioned as the chief wonder, for we usually expect that in the solemn article of death, a difference will appear, and the wicked will become evidently in trouble. The notion is still prevalent that a quiet death means a happy hereafter. The psalmist had observed that the very reverse is true. Careless persons become case hardened, and continue presumptuously secure, even to the last. Some are startled at the approach of judgment, but many more have received a strong delusion to believe a lie. What with the surgeon's drugs and their own infidelity, or false peace, they glide into eternity without a struggle. We have seen godly men bound with doubts, and fettered with anxieties, which have arisen from their holy jealousy; but the godless know nothing of such bands: they care neither for God nor devil. Their strength is firm. What care they for death? Frequently they are brazen and insolent, and can vent defiant blasphemies even on their last couch. This may occasion sorrow and surprise among saints, but certainly should not suggest envy, for, in this case, the most terrible inward conflict is infinitely to be preferred to the profoundest calm which insolent presumption can create. Let the righteous die as they may, let my last end be like theirs.

Verse 5. They are not in trouble as other men. The prosperous wicked escape the killing toils which afflict the mass of mankind; their bread comes to them without care, their wine without stint. They have no need to enquire, "Whence shall we get bread for our children, or raiment for our little ones?" Ordinary domestic and personal troubles do not appear to molest them. Neither are they plagued like other men. Fierce trials do not arise to assail them: they smart not under the divine rod. While many saints are both poor and afflicted, the prosperous sinner is neither. He is worse than other men, and yet he is better off; he ploughs least, and yet has the most fodder. He deserves the hottest hell, and yet has the warmest nest. All this is clear to the eyes of faith, which unriddles the riddle; but to the bleared eye of sense it seems an enigma indeed. They are to have nothing hereafter, let them have what they can here; they, after all, only possess what is of secondary value, and their possessing it is meant to teach us to set little store by transient things. If earthly good were of much value, the Lord would not give so large a measure of it to those who have least of his love.

Verse 6. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain. They are as great in their own esteem as if they were aldermen of the New Jerusalem; they want no other ornament than their own pomposity. No jeweller could sufficiently adorn them; they wear their own pride as a better ornament than a gold chain. Violence covereth them as a garment. In their boastful arrogance they array themselves; they wear the livery of the devil, and are fond of it. As soon as you see them, you perceive that room must be made for them, for, regardless of the feelings and rights of others, they intend to have their way, and achieve their own ends. They brag and bully, bluster and browbeat, as if they had taken out license to ride roughshod over all mankind.

Verse 7. Their eyes stand out with fatness. In cases of obesity the eyes usually appear to be enclosed in fat, but sometimes they protrude; in either case the countenance is changed, loses its human form, and is assimilated to that of fatted swine. The face is here the index of the man: the man has more than suffices him; he is gluttoned and surfeited with wealth, and yet is one of the wicked whom God abhorreth. They have more than heart could wish. Their wishes are gratified, and more; their very greediness is exceeded; they call for water, and the world gives them milk; they ask for hundreds, and thousands are lavished at their feet. The heart is beyond measure gluttonous, and yet in the case of certain ungodly millionaires, who have rivalled Sardanapalus both in lust and luxury, it has seemed as if their wishes were exceeded, and their meat surpassed their appetite.

Verse 8. They are corrupt. They rot above ground; their heart and life are depraved. And speak wickedly concerning oppression. The reek of the sepulchre rises through their mouths; the nature of the soul is revealed in the speech. They choose oppression as their subject, and they not only defend it, but advocate it, glory in it, and would fain make it the general rule among all nations. "Who are the poor? What are they made for? What, indeed, but to toil and slave that men of education and good family may enjoy themselves? Out on the knaves for prating about their rights! A set of wily demagogues are stirring them up, because they get a living by agitation. Work them like horses, and feed them like dogs; and if they dare complain, send them to the prison or let them die in the workhouse." There is still too much of this wicked talk abroad, and, although the working classes have their faults, and many of them very grave and serious ones too, yet there is a race of men who habitually speak of them as if they were an inferior order of animals. God forgive the wretches who thus talk. They speak loftily. Their high heads, like tall chimneys, vomit black smoke. Big talk streams from them, their language is colossal, their magniloquence ridiculous. They are Sir Oracle in every case, they speak as from the judges' bench, and expect all the world to stand in awe of them.

Verse 9. They set their mouth against the heavens. Against God himself they aim their blasphemies. One would think, to hear them, that they were demigods themselves, and held their heads above the clouds, for they speak down upon other men as from a sublime elevation peculiar to themselves. Yet they might let God alone, for their pride will make them enemies enough without their defying him. And their tongue walketh through the earth. Leisurely and habitually they traverse the whole world to find victims for their slander and abuse. Their tongue prowls in every corner far and near, and spares none. They affect to be universal censors, and are in truth perpetual vagrants. Like the serpent, they go nowhere without leaving their slime behind them; if there were another Eden to be found, its innocence and beauty would not preserve it from their filthy trail. They themselves are, beyond measure, worthy of all honour, and all the rest of mankind, except a few of their parasites, are knaves, fools, hypocrites, or worse. When these men's tongues are out for a walk, they are unhappy who meet them, for they push all travellers into the kennel: it is impossible altogether to avoid them,

for in both hemispheres they take their perambulations, both on land and sea they make their voyages. The city is not free from them, and the village swarms with them. They waylay men in the king's highway, but they are able to hunt across country, too. Their whip has a long lash, and reaches both high and low.

Verse 10. Therefore his people return hither. God's people are driven to fly to his throne for shelter; the doggish tongues fetch home the sheep to the Shepherd. The saints come again, and again, to their Lord, laden with complaints on account of the persecutions which they endure from these proud and graceless men. And waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. Though beloved of God, they have to drain the bitter cup; their sorrows are as full as the wicked man's prosperity. It grieves them greatly to see the enemies of God so high, and themselves so low, yet the Lord does not alter his dispensations, but continues still to chasten his children, and indulge his foes. The medicine cup is not for rebels, but for those whom Jehovah Rophi loves.

Verse 11. And they say, How doth God know? Thus dare the ungodly speak. They flatter themselves that their oppressions and persecutions are unobserved of heaven. If there be a God, is he not too much occupied with other matters to know what is going on upon this world? So they console themselves if judgments be threatened. Boasting of their own knowledge, they yet dare to ask, Is there knowledge in the Most High? Well were they called foolish. A God, and not know? This is a solecism in language, a madness of thought. Such, however, is the acted insanity of the graceless theists of this age; theists in name, because avowed infidelity is disreputable, but atheists in practice beyond all question. I could not bring my mind to accept the rendering of many expositors by which this verse is referred to tried and perplexed saints. I am unable to conceive that such language could flow from their lips, even under the most depressing perplexities.

Verse 12. Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world. Look! See! Consider! Here is the standing enigma! The crux of Providence! The stumblingblock of faith! Here are the unjust rewarded and indulged, and that not for a day or an hour, but in perpetuity. From their youth up these men, who deserve perdition, revel in prosperity. They deserve to be hung in chains, and chains are hung about their necks; they are worthy to be chased from the world, and yet the world becomes all their own. Poor purblind sense cries, Behold this! Wonder, and be amazed, and make this square with providential justice, if you can. They increase in riches; or, strength. Both wealth and health are their dowry. No bad debts and bankruptcies weigh them down, but robbery and usury pile up their substance. Money runs to money, gold pieces fly in flocks; the rich grow richer, the proud grow prouder. Lord, how is this? Thy poor servants, who become yet poorer, and groan under their burdens, are made to wonder at thy mysterious ways.

Verse 13. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain. Poor Asaph! he questions the value of holiness when its wages are paid in the coin of affliction. With no effect has he been sincere; no advantage has come to him through his purity, for the filthy hearted are exalted and fed on the fat of the land. Thus foolishly will the wisest of men argue, when faith is napping. Asaph was a seer, but he could not see when reason left him in the dark; even seers must have the sunlight of revealed truth to see by, or they grope like the blind. In the presence of temporal circumstances, the pure in heart may seem to have cleansed themselves altogether in vain, but we must not judge after the sight of the eyes. And washed my hands in innocency. Asaph had been as careful of his hands as of his heart; he had guarded his outer as well as his inner life, and it was a bitter thought that all of this was useless, and left him in even a worse condition than foul handed, black hearted worldlings. Surely the horrible

character of the conclusion must have helped to render it untenable; it could not be so while God was God. It smelt too strong of a lie to be tolerated long in the good man's soul; hence, in a verse or two, we see his mind turning in another direction.

Verse 14. For all the day long have I been plagued. He was smitten from the moment he woke to the time he went to bed. His griefs were not only continued, but renewed with every opening day. And chastened every morning. This was a vivid contrast to the lot of the ungodly. There were crowns for the reprobates and crosses for the elect. Strange that the saints should sigh and the sinners sing. Rest was given to the disturbers, and yet peace was denied to the peace makers. The downcast seer was in a muse and a maze. The affairs of mankind appeared to him to be in a fearful tangle; how could it be permitted by a just ruler that things should be so turned upside down, and the whole course of justice dislocated.

Verse 15. If I say, I will speak thus. It is not always wise to speak one's thoughts; if they remain within, they will only injure ourselves; but once uttered, their mischief may be great. From such a man as the psalmist, the utterance which his discontent suggested would have been a heavy blow and deep discouragement to the whole brotherhood. He dared not, therefore, come to such a resolution, but paused, and would not decide to declare his feelings. It was well, for in his case second thoughts were by far the best. I should offend against the generation of thy children. I should scandalise them, grieve them, and perhaps cause them to offend also. We ought to look at the consequences of our speech to all others, and especially to the church of God. Woe unto the man by whom offence cometh! Rash, undigested, ill considered speech, is responsible for much of the heart burning and trouble in the churches. Would to God that, like Asaph, men would bridle their tongues. Where we have any suspicion of being wrong, it is better to be silent; it can do no harm to be quiet, and it may do serious damage to spread abroad our hastily formed opinions. To grieve the children of God by appearing to act perfidiously and betray the truth, is a sin so heinous, that if the consciences of heresy mongers were not seared as with a hot iron, they would not be so glib as they are to publish abroad their novelties. Expressions which convey the impression that the Lord acts unjustly or unkindly, especially if they fall from the lips of men of known character and experience, are as dangerous as firebrands among stubble; they are used for blasphemous purposes by the ill disposed; and the timid and trembling are sure to be cast down thereby, and to find reason for yet deeper distress of soul.

Verse 16. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me. The thought of scandalising the family of God he could not bear, and yet his inward thoughts seethed and fermented, and caused an intolerable anguish within. To speak might have relieved one sorrow, but, as it would have created another, he forbore so dangerous a remedy; yet this did not remove the first pangs, which grew even worse and worse, and threatened utterly to overwhelm him. A smothered grief is hard to endure. The triumph of conscience which compels us to keep the wolf hidden beneath our own garments, does not forbid its gnawing at our vitals. Suppressed fire in the bones rages more fiercely than if it could gain a vent at the mouth. Those who know Asaph's dilemma will pity him as none others can.

Verse 17. Until I went into the sanctuary of God. His mind entered the eternity where God dwells as in a holy place, he left the things of sense for the things invisible, his heart gazed within the veil, he stood where the thrice holy God stands. Thus he shifted his point of view, and apparent disorder resolved itself into harmony. The motions of the planets appear most discordant from this world which is itself a planet; they appear as "progressive, retrograde, and standing still; "but could we fix our

observatory in the sun, which is the centre of the system, we should perceive all the planets moving in perfect circle around the head of the great solar family. Then understood I their end. He had seen too little to be able to judge; a wider view changed his judgment; he saw with his mind's enlightened eye the future of the wicked, and his soul was in debate no longer as to the happiness of their condition. No envy gnaws now at his heart, but a holy horror both of their impending doom, and of their present guilt, fills his soul. He recoils from being dealt with in the same manner as the proud sinners, whom just now he regarded with admiration.

Verse 18. The Psalmist's sorrow had culminated, not in the fact that the ungodly prospered, but that God had arranged it so: had it happened by mere chance, he would have wondered, but could not have complained; but how the arranger of all things could so dispense his temporal favours, was the vexatious question. Here, to meet the case, he sees that the divine hand purposely placed these men in prosperous and eminent circumstances, not with the intent to bless them but the very reverse. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places. Their position was dangerous, and, therefore, God did not set his friends there but his foes alone. He chose, in infinite love, a rougher but safer standing for his own beloved. Thou castedst them down into destruction. The same hand which led them up to their Tarpeian rock, hurled them down from it. They were but elevated by judicial arrangement for the fuller execution of their doom. Eternal punishment will be all the more terrible in contrast with the former prosperity of those who are ripening for it. Taken as a whole, the case of the ungodly is horrible throughout; and their worldly joy instead of diminishing the horror, actually renders the effect the more awful, even as the vivid lightning amid the storm does not brighten but intensify the thick darkness which lowers around. The ascent to the fatal gallows of Haman was an essential ingredient in the terror of the sentence—"hang him thereon." If the wicked had not been raised so high they could not have fallen so low.

Verse 19. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! This is an exclamation of godly wonder at the suddenness and completeness of the sinners' overthrow. Headlong is their fall; without warning, without escape, without hope of future restoration! Despite their golden chains, and goodly apparel, death stays not for manners but hurries them away; and stern justice unbribed by their wealth hurls them into destruction. They are utterly consumed with terrors. They have neither root nor branch left. They cease to exist among the sons of men, and, in the other world, there is nothing left of their former glory. Like blasted trees, consumed by the lightning, they are monuments of vengeance; like the ruins of Babylon they reveal, in the greatness of their desolation, the judgments of the Lord against all those who unduly exalt themselves. The momentary glory of the graceless is in a moment effaced, their loftiness is in an instant consumed.

Verse 20. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. They owe their existence and prosperity to the forbearance of God, which the psalmist compares to a sleep; but as a dream vanishes so soon as a man awakes, so the instant the Lord begins to exercise his justice and call men before him, the pomp and prosperity of proud transgressors shall melt away. When God awakes to judgment, they who despise him shall be despised; they are already "such stuff as dreams are made of," but then the baseless fabric shall not leave a wreck behind. Let them flaunt the little hour, poor unsubstantial sons of dreams; they will soon be gone; when the day breaketh, and the Lord awake as a mighty man out of his sleep, they will vanish away. Who cares for the wealth of dreamland? Who indeed but fools? Lord, leave us not to the madness which covets unsubstantial wealth, and ever teach us thine own true wisdom.

Verse 21. The holy poet here reviews his inward struggle and awards himself censure for his folly. His pain had been intense; he says, Thus my heart was grieved. It was a deep seated sorrow, and one which penetrated his inmost being. Alexander reads it, "My heart is soured." His spirit had become embittered; he had judged in a harsh, crabbed, surly manner. He had become atrabilious, full of black bile, melancholy, and choleric; he had poisoned his own life at the fountain head, and made all its streams to be bitter as gall. And I was pricked in my reins. He was as full of pain as a man afflicted with renal disease; he had pierced himself through with many sorrows; his hard thoughts were like so many calculi in his kidneys; he was utterly wretched and woebegone, and all through his own reflections. O miserable philosophy, which stretches the mind on the rack, and breaks it on the wheel! O blessed faith, which drives away the inquisitors, and sets the captives free!

Verse 22. So foolish was I. He, though a saint of God, had acted as if he had been one of the fools whom God abhorreth. Had he not even envied them?—and what is that but to aspire to be like them? The wisest of men have enough folly in them to ruin them unless grace prevents. And ignorant. He had acted as if he knew nothing, had babbled like an idiot, had uttered the very drivel of a witless loon. He did not know how sufficiently to express his sense of his own fatuity. I was as a beast before thee. Even in God's presence he had been brutish, and worse than a beast. As the grass eating ox has but this present life, and can only estimate things thereby, and by the sensual pleasure which they afford, even so had the psalmist judged happiness by this mortal life, by outward appearances, and by fleshly enjoyments. Thus he had, for the time, renounced the dignity of an immortal spirit, and, like a mere animal, judged after the sight of the eyes. We should be very loath to call an inspired man a beast, and yet, penitence made him call himself so; nay, he uses the plural, by way of emphasis, and as if he were worse than any one beast. It was but an evidence of his true wisdom that he was so deeply conscious of his own folly. We see how bitterly good men bewail mental wanderings; they make no excuses for themselves, but set their sins in the pillory, and cast the vilest reproaches upon them. O for grace to detest the very appearance of evil!

Verse 23. Nevertheless I am continually with thee. He does not give up his faith, though he confesses his folly. Sin may distress us, and yet we may be in communion with God. It is sin beloved and delighted in which separates us from the Lord, but when we bewail it heartily, the Lord will not withdraw from us. What a contrast is here in this and the former verse! He is as a beast, and yet continually with God. Our double nature, as it always causes conflict, so is it a continuous paradox: the flesh allies us with the brutes, and the spirit affiliates us to God. Thou hast holden me by my right hand. With love dost thou embrace me, with honour ennoble me, with power uphold me. He had almost fallen, and yet was always upheld. He was a riddle to himself, as he had been a wonder unto many. This verse contains the two precious mercies of communion and upholding, and as they were both given to one who confessed himself a fool, we also may hope to enjoy them.

Verse 24. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel. I have done with choosing my own way, and trying to pick a path amid the jungle of reason. He yielded not only the point in debate, but all intentions of debating, and he puts his hand into that of the great Father, asking to be led, and agreeing to follow. Our former mistakes are a blessing, when they drive us to this. The end of our own wisdom is the beginning of our being wise. With Him is counsel, and when we come to him, we are sure to be led aright. And afterward. "Afterward!" Blessed word. We can cheerfully put up with the present, when we foresee the future. What is around us just now is of small consequence, compared with afterward. Receive me to glory. Take me up into thy splendour of joy. Thy guidance shall conduct me to this matchless terminus. Glory shall I have, and thou thyself wilt admit me into it. As Enoch was not, for

God took him, so all the saints are taken up—received up into glory.

Verse 25. Whom have I in heaven but thee? Thus, then, he turns away from the glitter which fascinated him to the true gold which was his real treasure. He felt that his God was better to him than all the wealth, health, honour, and peace, which he had so much envied in the worldling; yea, He was not only better than all on earth, but more excellent than all in heaven. He bade all things else go, that he might be filled with his God. And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. No longer should his wishes ramble, no other object should tempt them to stray; henceforth, the Ever living One should be his all in all.

Verse 26. My flesh and my heart faileth. They had failed him already, and he had almost fallen; they would fail him in the hour of death, and, if he relied upon them, they would fail him at once. But God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. His God would not fail him, either as protection or a joy. His heart would be kept up by divine love, and filled eternally with divine glory. After having been driven far out to sea, Asaph casts anchor in the old port. We shall do well to follow his example. There is nothing desirable save God; let us, then, desire only him. All other things must pass away; let our hearts abide in him, who alone abideth for ever.

Verse 27. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish. We must be near God to live; to be far off by wicked works is death. Thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. If we pretend to be the Lord's servants, we must remember that he is a jealous God, and requires spiritual chastity from all his people. Offences against conjugal vows are very offensive, and all sins against God have the same element in them, and they are visited with the direst punishments. Mere heathens, who are far from God, perish in due season; but those who, being his professed people, act unfaithfully to their profession, shall come under active condemnation, and be crushed beneath his wrath. We read examples of this in Israel's history; may we never create fresh instances in our own persons.

Verse 28. But it is good for me to draw near to God. Had he done so at first he would not have been immersed in such affliction; when he did so he escaped from his dilemma, and if he continued to do so he would not fall into the same evil again. The greater our nearness to God, the less we are affected by the attractions and distractions of earth. Access into the most holy place is a great privilege, and a cure for a multitude of ills. It is good for all saints, it is good for me in particular; it is always good, and always will be good for me to approach the greatest good, the source of all good, even God himself. I have put my trust in the Lord God. He dwells upon the glorious name of the Lord Jehovah, and avows it as the basis of his faith. Faith is wisdom; it is the key of enigmas, the clue of mazes, and the pole star of pathless seas. Trust and you will know. That I may declare all thy works. He who believes shall understand, and so be able to teach. Asaph hesitated to utter his evil surmisings, but he has no diffidence in publishing abroad a good matter. God's ways are the more admired the more they are known. He who is ready to believe the goodness of God shall always see fresh goodness to believe in, and he who is willing to declare the works of God shall never be silent for lack of wonders to declare.

Psalm 74

Verse 1. O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? To cast us off at all were hard, but when thou dost for so long a time desert thy people it is an evil beyond all endurance—the very chief of woes and abyss of misery. It is our wisdom when under chastisement to enquire, "Show me wherefore thou

contendest with me?" and if the affliction be a protracted one, we should more eagerly enquire the purport of it. Sin is usually at the bottom of all the hiding of the Lord's face; let us ask the Lord to reveal the special form of it to us, that we may repent of it, overcome it, and henceforth forsake it. When a church is in a forsaken condition it must not sit still in apathy, but turn to the hand which smiteth it, and humbly enquire the reason why. At the same time, the enquiry of the text is a faulty one, for it implies two mistakes. There are two questions, which only admit of negative replies. "Hath God cast away his people?" (Ro 11:1); and the other, "Will the Lord cast off for ever?" (Ps 77:7). God is never weary of his people so as to abhor them, and even when his anger is turned against them, it is but for a small moment, and with a view to their eternal good. Grief in its distraction asks strange questions and surmises impossible terrors. It is a wonder of grace that the Lord has not long ago put us away as men lay aside cast off garments, but he hateth putting away, and will still be patient with his chosen. Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? They are thine, they are the objects of thy care, they are poor, silly, and defenceless things: pity them, forgive them, and come to their rescue. They are but sheep, do not continue to be wroth with them. It is a terrible thing when the anger of God smokes, but it is an infinite mercy that it does not break into a devouring flame. It is meet to pray the Lord to remove every sign of his wrath, for it is to those who are truly the Lord's sheep a most painful thing to be the objects of his displeasure. To vex the Holy Spirit is no mean sin, and yet how frequently are we guilty of it; hence it is no marvel that we are often under a cloud.

Verse 2. Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old. What a mighty plea is redemption. O God, canst thou see the blood mark on thine own sheep, and yet allow grievous wolves to devour them? The church is no new purchase of the Lord; from before the world's foundation the chosen were regarded as redeemed by the Lamb slain; shall ancient love die out, and the eternal purpose become frustrate? The Lord would have his people remember the paschal Lamb, the bloodstained lintel, and the overthrow of Egypt; and will he forget all this himself? Let us put him in remembrance, let us plead together. Can he desert his blood bought and forsake his redeemed? Can election fail and eternal love cease to glow? Impossible. The woes of Calvary, and the covenant of which they are the seal, are the security of the saints.

The rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed. So sweet a plea deserved to be repeated and enlarged upon. The Lord's portion is his people—will he lose his inheritance? His church is his kingdom, over which he stretches the rod of sovereignty; will he allow his possessions to be torn from him? God's property in us is a fact full of comfort: his value of us, his dominion over us, his connection with us are all so many lights to cheer our darkness. No man will willingly lose his inheritance, and no prince will relinquish his dominions; therefore we believe that the King of kings will hold his own, and maintain his rights against all comers.

This mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt. The Lord's having made Zion the especial centre of his worship, and place of his manifestation, is yet another plea for the preservation of Jerusalem. Shall the sacred temple of Jehovah be desecrated by heathen, and the throne of the Great King be defiled by his enemies? Has the Spirit of God dwelt in our hearts, and will he leave them to become a haunt for the devil? Has he sanctified us by his indwelling, and will he, after all, vacate the throne? God forbid. It may be well to note that this Psalm was evidently written with a view to the temple upon Zion, and not to the tabernacle which was there in David's time, and was a mere tent; but the destructions here bewailed were exercised upon the carved work of a substantial structure. Those who had seen the glory of God in Solomon's peerless temple might well mourn in bitterness, when the Lord allowed his enemies to make an utter ruin of that matchless edifice.

Verse 3. Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations. The ruin made had already long been an eyesore to the suppliant, and there seemed no hope of restoration. Havoc lorded it not only for a day or a year, but with perpetual power. This is another argument with God. Would Jehovah sit still and see his own land made a wilderness, his own palace a desolation? Until he should arise, and draw near, the desolation would remain; only his presence could cure the evil, therefore is he entreated to hasten with uplifted feet for the deliverance of his people. Even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. Every stone in the ruined temple appealed to the Lord; on all sides were the marks of impious spoilers, the holiest places bore evidence of their malicious wickedness; would the Lord for ever permit this? Would he not hasten to overthrow the foe who defied him to his face, and profaned the throne of his glory? Faith finds pleas in the worst circumstances, she uses even the fallen stones of her desolate palaces, and assails with them the gates of heaven, casting them forth with the great engine of prayer.

Verse 4. Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations. Where thy people sang like angels, these barbarians roar like beasts. When thy saints come together for worship, these cruel men attack them with all the fury of lions. They have no respect for the most solemn gatherings, but intrude themselves and their blasphemies into our most hallowed meetings. How often in times of persecution or prevalent heresy has the church learned the meaning of such language. May the Lord spare us such misery. When hypocrites abound in the church, and pollute her worship, the case is parallel to that before us; Lord save us from so severe a trial. They set up their ensigns for signs. Idolatrous emblems used in war were set up over God's altar, as an insulting token of victory, and of contempt for the vanquished and their God. Papists, Arians, and the modern school of Neologians, have, in their day, set up their ensigns for signs. Superstition, unbelief, and carnal wisdom have endeavoured to usurp the place of Christ crucified, to the grief of the church of God. The enemies without do us small damage, but those within the church cause her serious harm; by supplanting the truth and placing error in its stead, they deceive the people, and lead multitudes to destruction. As a Jew felt a holy horror when he saw an idolatrous emblem set up in the holy place, even so do we when in a Protestant church we see the fooleries of Rome, and when from pulpits, once occupied by men of God, we hear philosophy and vain deceit.

Verse 5. A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. Once men were renowned for felling the cedars and preparing them for building the temple, but now the axe finds other work, and men are as proud of destroying as their fathers were of erecting. Thus in the olden times our sires dealt sturdy blows against the forests of error, and laboured hard to lay the axe at the root of the trees; but, alas! their sons appear to be quite as diligent to destroy the truth and to overthrow all that their fathers built up. O for the good old times again! O for an hour of Luther's hatchet, or Calvin's mighty axe!

Verse 6. But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers. The invaders were as industrious to destroy as the ancient builders had been to construct. Such fair carving it was barbarous to hew in pieces, but the Vandals had no mercy and broke down all, with any weapon which came to hand. In these days men are using axes and sledgehammers against the gospel and the church. Glorious truths, far more exquisite than the goodliest carving, are cavilled over and smashed by the blows of modern criticism. Truths which have upheld the afflicted and cheered the dying are smitten by pretentious Goths, who would be accounted learned, but know not the first principals of the truth. With sharp ridicule, and heavy blows of sophistry, they break the faith of some:

and would, if it were possible, destroy the confidence of the elect themselves. Assyrians, Babylonians, and Romans are but types of spiritual foes who labour to crush the truth and the people of God.

Verse 7. They have cast fire into thy sanctuary. Axes and hammers were not sufficient for the purpose of the destroyers, they must needs try fire. Malice knows no bounds. Those who hate God are never sparing of the most cruel weapons. To this day the enmity of the human heart is quite as great as ever; and, if providence did not restrain, the saints would still be as fuel for the flames. They have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground. They made a heap of the temple, and left not one stone upon another. When the Lord left Mount Zion, and the Roman gained entrance, the military fury led the soldiers to burn out and root up the memorial of the famous House of the Lord. Could the powers of darkness have their way, a like fate would befall the church of Christ. "Rase it, "say they, "rase it even to the foundation thereof." Defilement to the church is destruction; her foes would defile her till nothing of her purity, and consequently of her real self, remained. Yet, even if they could wreak their will upon the cause of Christ, they are not able to destroy it, it would survive their blows and fires; the Lord would hold them still like dogs on a leash, and in the end frustrate all their designs.

Verse 8. They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together. It was no idle wish, their cruelty was sincere, deep seated, a matter of their inmost heart. Extirpation was the desire of Haman, and the aim of many another tyrant; not a remnant of the people of God would have been left if oppressors could have had their way. Pharaoh's policy to stamp out the nation has been a precedent for others, yet the Jews survive, and will: the bush though burning has not been consumed. Even thus the church of Christ has gone through baptism of blood and fire, but it is all the brighter for them. They have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land. Here is no allusion to places called synagogues, but to assemblies; and as no assemblies for worship here held in but one place, the ruin of the temple was the destruction of all the holy gatherings, and so in effect all the meeting places were destroyed. One object of persecutors has always been to put an end to all conventicles, as they have called them. Keep them from meeting and you will scatter them, so have the enemy said; but, glory be to God, saints are independent of walls, and have met on the hill side, by the moss, or in the catacombs, or in a boat at sea. Yet has the attempt been almost successful, and the hunt so hot, that the faithful have wandered in solitude, and their solemn congregations have been, under such circumstances, few and far between. What sighs and cries have in such times gone up to the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth. How happy are we that we can meet for worship in any place we choose, and none dare molest us.

Verse 9. We see not our signs. Alas, poor Israel! No Urim and Thummim blazed on the High Priest's bosom, and no Shechaniah shone from between the cherubim. The smoke of sacrifice and cloud of incense no more arose from the holy hill; solemn feasts were suspended, and even circumcision, the covenant sign, was forbidden by the tyrant. We, too, as believers, know what it is to lose our evidences and grope in darkness; and too often do our churches also miss the tokens of the Redeemer's presence, and their lamps remain untrimmed. Sad complaint of a people under a cloud! There is no more any prophet. Prophecy was suspended. No inspiring psalm or consoling promise fell from bard or seer. It is ill with the people of God when the voice of the preacher of the gospel fails, and a famine of the word of life falls on the people. God sent ministers are as needful to the saints as their daily bread, and it is a great sorrow when a congregation is destitute of a faithful pastor. It is to be feared, that with all the ministers now existing, there is yet a dearth of men whose hearts and

tongues are touched with the celestial fire. Neither is there any among us that knoweth how long. If someone could foretell an end, the evil might be borne with a degree of patience, but when none can see a termination, or foretell an escape, the misery has a hopeless appearance, and is overwhelming. Blessed be God, he has not left his church in these days to be so deplorably destitute of cheering words; let us pray that he never may. Contempt of the word is very common, and may well provoke the Lord to withdraw it from us; may his long suffering endure the strain, and his mercy afford us still the word of life.

Verse 10. O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Though we know not how long yet thou dost. The times and seasons are with thee. When God is reproached, there is hope for us, for it may be he will hearken and avenge his dishonoured name. Wickedness has great license allowed it, and justice lingers on the road; God has his reasons for delay, and his seasons for action, and in the end it shall be seen that he is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness. Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? He will do so for ever, unless thou dost give him his quietus. Wilt thou never defend thyself, and stop slanderous tongues? Wilt thou always endure the jeers of the profane? Is there to be no end to all this sacrilege and cursing? Yes, it shall all be ended, but not by and by. There is a time for the sinner to rage, and a time in which patience bears with him; yet it is but a time, and then, ah, then!

Verse 11. Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? Wherefore this inaction, this indifference for thine own honour and thy people's safety? How bold is the suppliant! Does he err? Nay, verily, we who are so chill, and distant, and listless in prayer are the erring ones. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and he who learns the art shall surely prevail with God by its means. It is fit that we should enquire why the work of grace goes on so slowly, and the enemy has so much power over men: the inquiry may suggest practical reflections of unbounded value.

"Why dost thou from the conflict stay?
Why do thy chariot wheels delay?
Lift up thyself, heaven's kingdom shake,
Arm of the Lord, awake, awake."

Pluck it out of thy bosom. A bold simile, but dying men must venture for their lives. When God seems to fold his arms we must not fold ours, but rather renew our entreaties that he would again put his hand to the work. O for more agony in prayer among professing Christians, then should we see miracles of grace. We have here before us a model of pleading, a very rapture of prayer. It is humble, but very bold, eager, fervent, and effectual. The heart of God is always moved by such entreaties. When we bring forth out strong reasons, then will he bring forth his choice mercies.

Verses 12-23. Having spread the sad case before the Lord, the pleader now urges another series of arguments for divine help. He reasons from the Lord's former wonders of grace, and his deeds of power, imploring a repetition of the same divine works.

Verse 12. For God is my King of old. How consoling is this avowal! Israel in holy loyalty acknowledges her King, and claims to have been his possession from of old, and thence she derives a plea for defence and deliverance. If the Lord be indeed the sole monarch of our bosoms, he will in his love put forth his strength on our behalf; if from eternity he has claimed us as his own, he will preserve us from the insulting foe. Working salvation in the midst of the earth. From the most remote

period of Israel's history the Lord had worked out for her many salvations; especially at the Red Sea, the very heart of the world was astonished by his wonders of deliverance. Now, every believer may plead at this day the ancient deeds of the Lord, the work of Calvary, the overthrow of sin, death, and hell. He who wrought out our salvation of old will not, cannot desert us now. Each past miracle of grace assures us that he who has begun to deliver will continue to redeem us from all evil. His deeds of old were public and wrought in the teeth of his foes, they were no delusions or make believes; and, therefore, in all our perils we look for true and manifest assistance, and we shall surely receive it.

Verse 21. O let not the oppressed return ashamed. Though broken and crushed they come to thee with confidence; suffer them not to be disappointed, for then they will be ashamed of their hope. Let the poor and needy praise thy name. By thy speedy answer to their cries make their hearts glad, and they will render to thee their gladdest songs. It is not the way of the Lord to allow any of those who trust in him to be put to shame; for his word is, "He shall call upon me, and I will deliver him, and he shall glorify me."

Verse 22. Arise, O God, plead thine own cause. Answer thou the taunts of the profane by arguments which shall annihilate both the blasphemy and the blasphemer. God's judgments are awful replies to the defiance of his foes. When he makes empires crumble, and smites persecutors to the heart, his cause is pleaded by himself as none other could have advocated it. O that the Lord himself would come into the battle field. Long has the fight been trembling in the balance; one glance of his eyes, one word from his lip, and the banners of victory shall be borne on the breeze. Remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. The Lord is begged to remember that he is himself reproached, and that by a mere man—that man a fool, and he is also reminded that these foul reproaches are incessant and repeated with every revolving day. It is bravely done when faith can pluck pleas out of the dragon's mouth and out of the blasphemies of fools find arguments with God.

Verse 23. Forget not the voice of thine enemies. Great warrior let the enemy's taunt provoke thee to the fray. They challenge thee; accept thou the gage of battle, and smite them with thy terrible hand. If the cries of thy children are too feeble to be heard, be pleased to note the loud voices of thy foes and silence their profanities for ever. The tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually. The ungodly clamour against thee and thy people, their blasphemies are loud and incessant, they defy thee, even thee, and because thou repliest not they laugh thee to scorn. They go from bad to worse, from worse to worst; their fury swells like the thunders of an advancing tempest. What will it come too? What infamy will next be hurled at thee and thine? O God, wilt thou for ever bear this? Hast thou no regard for thine honour, no respect for thy glory? Much of this Psalm has passed over our mind while beholding the idolatries of Rome, (the author visited Rome in November and December, 1871, while this portion of the Treasury of David was in progress) and remembering her bloody persecution of the saints. O Lord, how long shall it be ere thou wilt ease thyself of those profane wretches, the priests, and cast the harlot of Babylon into the ditch of corruption? May the church never cease to plead with thee till judgment shall be executed, and the Lord avenged upon Antichrist.

Psalm 75

Verse 1. Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks. Not to ourselves, for we were helpless, but to Elohim who heard our cry, and replied to the taunt of our foes. Never let us neglect thanksgiving, or we may fear that another time our prayers will remain unanswered. As the smiling flowers gratefully reflect in

their lovely colours the various constituents of the solar ray, so should gratitude spring up in our hearts after the smiles of God's providence. Unto thee do we give thanks. We should praise God again and again. Stinted gratitude is ingratitude. For infinite goodness there should be measureless thanks. Faith promises redoubled praise for greatly needed and signal deliverances. For that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare. God is at hand to answer and do wonders—adore we then the present Deity. We sing not of a hidden God, who sleeps and leaves the church to her fate, but of one who ever in our darkest days is most near, a very present help in trouble. "Near is his name." Baal is on a journey, but Jehovah dwells in his church. Glory be unto the Lord, whose perpetual deeds of grace and majesty are the sure tokens of his being with us always, even unto the ends of the world.

Verse 2. When I shall receive the congregation I will judge uprightly. This is generally believed to be the voice of God, who will, when he accepts his people, mount his judgment seat and avenge their cause in righteousness. It is rendered by some, "I will take a set time;" and by others, "I will seize the moment."

"God never is before his time,
He is never too late."

He determines the period of interposition, and when that arrives swift are his blows and sure are his deliverances. God sends no delegated judge, but sits himself upon the throne. O Lord, let thy set time come for grace. Tarry no longer, but for the truth and the throne of Jesus be thou speedily at work. Let the appointed assize come, O Jesus, and sit thou on thy throne to judge the world in equity.

Verse 3. The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved. When anarchy is abroad, and tyrants are in power, everything is unloosed, dissolution threatens all things, the solid mountains of government melt as wax; but even then the Lord upholds and sustains the right. I bear up the pillars of it. Hence, there is no real cause for fear. While the pillars stand, and stand they must for God upholds them, the house will brave out the storm. In the day of the Lord's appearing a general melting will take place, but in that day our covenant God will be the sure support of our confidence.

"How can I sink with such a prop
As my eternal God,
Who bears the earth's huge pillars up,
And spreads the heavens abroad."

Selah. Here may the music pause while the sublime vision passes before our view; a world dissolved and an immutable God uplifting all his people above the terrible commotion.

Verse 4. I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly. The Lord bids the boasters boast not, and commands the mad oppressors to stay their folly. How calm is he, how quiet are his words, yet how divine the rebuke. If the wicked were not insane, they would even now hear in their consciences the still small voice bidding them cease from evil, and forbear their pride. And to the wicked, Lift not up the horn. He bids the ungodly stay their haughtiness. The horn was the emblem of boastful power; only the foolish, like wild and savage beasts, will lift it high; but they assail heaven itself with it, as if they would gore the Almighty himself. In dignified majesty he rebukes the inane glories of the wicked, who beyond measure exalt themselves in the day of their fancied power.

Verse 5. Lift not up your horn on high. For their abounding pride there is a double rebuke. A word from God soon abases the lofty. Would to God that all proud men would obey the word here given them; for, if they do not, he will take effectual means to secure obedience, and then woe will come upon them, such as shall break their horns and roll their glory in the mire for ever. Speak not with a stiff neck. Impudence before God is madness. The outstretched neck of insolent pride is sure to provoke his axe. Those who carry their heads high shall find that they will be lifted yet higher, as Haman was upon the gallows which he had prepared for the righteous man. Silence, thou silly boaster! Silence! or God will answer thee. Who art thou, thou worm, that thou shouldst arrogantly object against thy Maker's laws and cavil at his truth? Be hushed, thou vainglorious prater, or vengeance shall silence thee to thine eternal confusion.

Verse 6. For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. There is a God, and a providence, and things happen not by chance. Though deliverance be hopeless from all points of the compass, yet God can work it for his people; and though judgment come neither from the rising or the setting of the sun, nor from the wilderness of mountains, yet come it will, for the Lord reigneth. Men forget that all things are ordained in heaven; they see but the human force, and the carnal passion, but the unseen Lord is more real far than these. He is at work behind and within the cloud. The foolish dream that he is not, but he is near even now, and on the way to bring in his hand that cup of spiced wine of vengeance, one draught of which shall stagger all his foes.

Verse 7. But God is the judge. Even now he is actually judging. His seat is not vacant; his authority is not abdicated; the Lord reigneth evermore. He putteth down one, and setteth up another. Empires rise and fall at his bidding. A dungeon here, and there a throne, his will assigns. Assyria yields to Babylon, and Babylon to the Medes. Kings are but puppets in his hand; they serve his purpose when they rise and when they fall. A certain author has issued a work called "Historic Ninepins," (Timbs), a fit name of scorn for all the great ones of the earth. God only is; all power belongs to him; all else is shadow, coming and going, unsubstantial, misty, dream like.

Verse 8. For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup. The punishment of the wicked is prepared, God himself holds it in readiness; he has collected and concocted woes most dread, and in the chalice of his wrath he holds it. They scoffed his feast of love; they shall be dragged to his table of justice, and made to drink their due deserts. And the wine is red. The retribution is terrible, it is blood for blood, foaming vengeance for foaming malice. The very colour of divine wrath is terrible; what must the taste be? It is full of mixture. Spices of anger, justice, and incensed mercy are there. Their misdeeds, their blasphemies, their persecutions have strengthened the liquor as with potent drugs;

"Mingled, strong, and mantling high;
Behold the wrath divine."

Ten thousand woes are burning in the depths of that fiery cup, which to the brim is filled with indignation. And he poureth out of the same. The full cup must be quaffed, the wicked cannot refuse the terrible draught, for God himself pours it out for them and into them. Vain are their cries and entreaties. They could once defy him, but that hour is over, and the time to requite them if fully come. But the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them. Even to the bitter end must wrath proceed. They must drink on and on for ever, even to the bottom where lie the lees of deep damnation; these they must suck up, and still must they drain the cup. Oh the anguish

and the heart break of the day of wrath! Mark well, it is for all the wicked; all hell for all the ungodly; the dregs for the dregs; bitters for the bitter; wrath for the heirs of wrath. Righteousness is conspicuous, but over all terror spreads a tenfold night, cheerless, without a star. Oh happy they who drink the cup of godly sorrow, and the cup of salvation: these, though now despised, will then be envied by the very men who trod them under foot.

Verse 9. But I will declare for ever. Thus will the saints occupy themselves with rehearsing Jehovah's praises, while their foes are drunken with the wine of wrath. They shall chant while the others roar in anguish, and justly so, for the former Psalm informed us that such had been the case on earth,—“thine enemies roar in the sanctuary, ”—the place where the chosen praised the Lord. I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. The covenant God, who delivered Jacob from a thousand afflictions, our soul shall magnify. He has kept his covenant which he made with the patriarch, and has redeemed his seed, therefore will we spread abroad his fame world without end.

Verse 10. All the horns of the wicked also will I cut off. Power and liberty being restored to Israel, she begins again to execute justice, by abasing the godless who had gloried in the reign of oppression. Their power and pomp are to be smitten down. Men wore horns in those days as a part of their state, and these, both literally and figuratively, were to be lopped off; for since God abhors the proud, his church will not tolerate them any longer. But the horns of the righteous shall be exalted. In a rightly ordered society, good men are counted great men, virtue confers true rank, and grace is more esteemed than gold. Being saved from unrighteous domination, the chief among the chosen people here promises to rectify the errors which had crept into the commonwealth, and after the example of the Lord himself, to abase the haughty and elevate the humble. This memorable ode may be sung in times of great depression, when prayer has performed her errand at the mercyseat, and when faith is watching for speedy deliverance. It is a song of the second advent, CONCERNING THE NEARNESS OF THE JUDGE WITH THE CUP OF WRATH.

Psalm 76

Verse 1. In Judah is God known. If unknown in all the world beside, he has so revealed himself to his people by his deeds of grace, that he is no unknown God to them. His name is great in Israel. To be known, in the Lord's case, is to be honoured: those who know his name admire the greatness of it. Although Judah and Israel were unhappily divided politically, yet the godly of both nations were agreed concerning Jehovah their God; and truly whatever schisms may mar the visible church, the saints always “appear as one” in magnifying the Lord their God. Dark is the outer world, but within the favoured circle Jehovah is revealed, and is the adoration of all who behold him. The world knows him not, and therefore blasphemes him, but his church is full of ardour to proclaim his fame unto the ends of the earth.

Verse 2. In Salem also is his tabernacle. In the peaceful city he dwells, and the peace is perpetuated, because there his sacred tent is pitched. The church of God is the place where the Lord abides and he is to her the Lord and giver of peace. And his dwelling place in Zion. Upon the chosen hill was the palace of Israel's Lord. It is the glory of the church that the Redeemer inhabits her by his Holy Spirit. Vain are the assaults of the enemy, for they attack not us alone, but the Lord himself. Immanuel, God with us, finds a home among his people, who then shall work us ill?

Verse 3. There brake he the arrows of the bow. Without leaving his tranquil abode, he sent forth his

word and snapped the arrows of his enemies before they could shoot them. The idea is sublime, and marks the ease, completeness, and rapidity of the divine action. The shield, and the sword, and the battle. Every weapon, offensive and defensive, the Lord dashed in pieces; death bearing bolts and life preserving armour were alike of no avail when the Breaker sent forth his word of power. In the spiritual conflicts of this and every age, the like will be seen; no weapon that is formed against the church shall prosper, and every tongue that rises against her in judgment, she shall condemn. Selah. It is meet that we should dwell on so soul stirring a theme, and give the Lord our grateful adoration,—hence a pause is inserted.

Verse 4. Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey. Far more is Jehovah to be extolled than all the invading powers which sought to oppress his people, though they were for power and greatness comparable to mountains. Assyria had pillaged the nations till it had become rich with mountains of spoil, this was talked of among men as glory, but the psalmist despised such renown, and declares that the Lord was far more illustrious. What are the honours of war but brags of murder? What the fame of conquerors but the reek of manslaughter? But the Lord is glorious in holiness, and his terrible deeds are done in justice for the defence of the weak and the deliverance of the enslaved. Mere power may be glorious, but it is not excellent: when we behold the mighty acts of the Lord, we see a perfect blending of the two qualities.

Verse 5. The stouthearted are spoiled. They came to spoil, and lo! they are spoiled themselves. Their stout hearts are cold in death, the angel of the pestilence has dried up their life blood, their very heart is taken from them. They have slept their sleep. Their last sleep—the sleep of death. And none of the men of might have found their hands. Their arms are palsied, they cannot lift a finger, for the rigour of death has stiffened them. What a scene was that when Sennacherib's host was utterly destroyed in one night. The hands which were furious to pull down Jerusalem, could not even be raised from the sod, the most valiant warriors were as weak as the palsied cripples at the temple gate, yea, their eyes they could not open, a deep sleep sealed their vision in everlasting darkness. O God, how terrible art thou! Thus shalt thou fight for us, and in the hour of peril overthrow the enemies of thy gospel. Therefore in thee will we trust and not be afraid.

Verse 6. At thy rebuke. A word accomplished all, there was no need of a single blow. O God of Jacob. God of thy wrestling people, who again like their father supplant their enemy; God of the covenant and the promise, thou hast in this gracious character fought for thine elect nation. Both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep. They will neither neigh nor rattle again; still are the trampings of the horses and the crash of the cars; the calvary no more creates its din. The Israelites always had a special fear of horses and scythed chariots; and, therefore, the sudden stillness of the entire force of the enemy in this department is made the theme of special rejoicing. The horses were stretched on the ground, and the chariots stood still, as if the whole camp had fallen asleep. Thus can the Lord send a judicial sleep over the enemies of the church, a premonition of the second death, and this he can do when they are in the zenith of power; and, as they imagine, in the very act of blotting out the remembrance of his people. The world's Rabshakahs can write terrible letters, but the Lord answers not with pen and ink, but with rebukes, which bear death in every syllable.

Verse 7. Thou, even thou, art to be feared. Not Sennacherib, nor Nisroch his god, but Jehovah alone, who with a silent rebuke had withered all the monarch's host.

"Fear him, ye saints, and then ye shall

Have nothing else to fear."

The fear of man is a snare, but the fear of God is a great virtue, and has great power for good over the human mind. God is to be feared profoundly, continually, and alone. Let all worship be to him only. And who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry? Who indeed? The angels fell when their rebellion provoked his justice; Adam lost his place in Paradise in the same manner; Pharaoh and other proud monarchs passed away at his frown; neither is there in earth or hell any who can abide the terror of his wrath. How blest are they who are sheltered in the atonement of Jesus, and hence have no cause to fear the righteous anger of the Judge of all the earth.

Verse 8. Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven. So complete an overthrow was evidently a judgment from heaven; those who saw it not, yet heard the report of it, and said, "This is the finger of God." Man will not hear God's voice if he can help it, but God takes care to cause it to be heard. The echoes of that judgment executed on the haughty Assyrian are heard still, and will ring on down all the ages, to the praise of divine justice. The earth feared and was still. All nations trembled at the tidings, and sat in humbled awe. Repose followed the former turmoils of war, when the oppressor's power was broken, and God was revered for having given quiet to the peoples. How readily can Jehovah command an audience! It may be that in the latter days he will, by some such miracles of power in the realms of grace, constrain all earth's inhabitants to attend to the gospel, and submit to the reign of his all glorious Son. So be it, good Lord.

Verse 9. When God arose to judgment. Men were hushed when he ascended the judgment seat and actively carried out the decrees of justice. When God is still the people are in tumult; when he arises they are still as a stone. To save all the meek of the earth. The Ruler of men has a special eye towards the poor and despised; he makes it his first point to right all their wrongs. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." They have little enough of it now, but their avenger is strong and he will surely save them. He who saves his people is the same God who overthrows their enemies; he is as omnipotent to save as to destroy. Glory be unto his name. Selah. Here pause, and let devout contemplation adore the God of Jacob.

Verse 10. Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee. It shall not only be overcome but rendered subservient to thy glory. Man with his breath of threatening is but blowing the trumpet of the Lord's eternal fame. Furious winds often drive vessels the more swiftly into port. The devil blows the fire and melts the iron, and then the Lord fashions it for his own purposes. Let men and devils rage as they may, they cannot do otherwise than subserve the divine purposes. The remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain. Malice is tethered and cannot break its bounds. The fire which cannot be utilised shall be damped. Some read it "thou shalt gird, "as if the Lord girded on the wrath of man as a sword to be used for his own designs, and certainly men of the world are often a sword in the hand of God, to scourge others. The verse clearly teaches that even the most rampant evil is under the control of the Lord, and will in the end be overruled for his praise.

Verse 11. Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God. Well may we do so in memory of such mercies and judgments. To vow or not is a matter of choice, but to discharge our vows is our bounden duty. He who would defraud God, his own God, is a wretch indeed. He keeps his promises, let not his people fail in theirs. He is their faithful God and deserves to have a faithful people. Let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared. Let surrounding nations submit to the only living God, let his own people with alacrity present their offerings, and let his priests and Levites be leaders

in the sacred sacrifice. He who deserves to be praised as our God does, should not have mere verbal homage, but substantial tribute. Dread Sovereign, behold I give myself to thee.

Verse 12. He shall cut off the spirit of princes. Their courage, skill, and life are in his hands, and he can remove them as a gardener cuts off a slip from a plant. None are great in his hand. Caesars and Napoleons fall under his power as the boughs of the tree beneath the woodman's axe. He is terrible to the kings of the earth. While they are terrible to others, he is terrible to them. If they oppose themselves to his people, he will make short work of them; they shall perish before the terror of his arm, "for the Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name." Rejoice before him all ye who adore the God of Jacob.

Psalm 77

Verse 1. I cried unto God with my voice. This Psalm has much sadness in it, but we may be sure it will end well, for it begins with prayer, and prayer never has an ill issue. Asaph did not run to man but to the Lord, and to him he went, not with studied, stately, stilted words, but with a cry, the natural, unaffected, unfeigned expression of pain. He used his voice also, for though vocal utterance is not necessary to the life of prayer, it often seems forced upon us by the energy of our desires. Sometimes the soul feels compelled to use the voice, for thus it finds a freer vent for its agony. It is a comfort to hear the alarm bell ringing when the house is invaded by thieves. Even unto God with my voice. He returned to his pleading. If once sufficed not, he cried again. He needed an answer, he expected one, he was eager to have it soon, therefore he cried again and again, and with his voice too, for the sound helped his earnestness. And he gave ear unto me. Importunity prevailed. The gate opened to the steady knock. It shall be so with us in our hour of trial, the God of grace will hear us in due season.

Verse 2. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord. All day long his distress drove him to his God, so that when night came he continued still in the same search. God had hidden his face from his servant, therefore the first care of the troubled saint was to seek his Lord again. This was going to the root of the matter and removing the main impediment first. Diseases and tribulations are easily enough endured when God is found of us, but without him they crush us to the earth. My sore ran in the night, and ceased not. As by day so by night his trouble was on him and his prayer continued. Some of us know what it is, both physically and spiritually, to be compelled to use these words: no respite has been afforded us by the silence of the night, our bed has been a rack to us, our body has been in torment, and our spirit in anguish. It appears that this sentence is wrongly translated, and should be, "my hand was stretched out all night," this shows that his prayer ceased not, but with uplifted hand he continued to seek succour of his God. My soul refused to be comforted. He refused some comforts as too weak for his case, others as untrue, others as unhallowed; but chiefly because of distraction, he declined even those grounds of consolation which ought to have been effectual with him. As a sick man turns away even from the most nourishing food, so did he. It is impossible to comfort those who refuse to be comforted. You may bring them to the waters of the promise, but who shall make them drink if they will not do so? Many a daughter of despondency has pushed aside the cup of gladness, and many a son of sorrow has hugged his chains. There are times when we are suspicious of good news, and are not to be persuaded into peace, though the happy truth should be as plain before us as the King's highway.

Verse 3. I remembered God, and was troubled. He who is the wellspring of delight to faith becomes

an object of dread to the psalmist's distracted heart. The justice, holiness, power, and truth of God have all a dark side, and indeed all the attributed may be made to look black upon us if our eye be evil; even the brightness of divine love blinds us, and fills us with a horrible suspicion that we have neither part nor lot in it. He is wretched indeed whose memories of the Ever Blessed prove distressing to him; yet the best of men know the depth of this abyss. I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. He mused and mused but only sank the deeper. His inward disquietudes did not fall asleep as soon as they were expressed, but rather they returned upon him, and leaped over him like raging billows of an angry sea. It was not his body alone which smarted, but his noblest nature writhed in pain, his life itself seemed crushed into the earth. It is in such a case that death is coveted as a relief, for life becomes an intolerable burden. With no spirit left in us to sustain our infirmity, our case becomes forlorn; like man in a tangle of briars who is stripped of his clothes, every hook of the thorns becomes a lancet, and we bleed with ten thousand wounds. Alas, my God, the writer of this exposition well knows what thy servant Asaph meant, for his soul is familiar with the way of grief. Deep glens and lonely caves of soul depressions, my spirit knows full well your awful glooms! Selah. Let the song go softly; this is no merry dance for the swift feet of the daughters of music, pause ye awhile, and let sorrow take breath between her sighs.

Verse 4. Thou holdest mine eyes waking. The fears which thy strokes excite in me forbid my eyelids to fall, my eyes continue to watch as sentinels forbidden to rest. Sleep is a great comforter, but it forsakes the sorrowful, and then their sorrow deepens and eats into the soul. If God holds the eyes waking, what anodyne shall give us rest? How much we owe to him who giveth his beloved sleep! I am so troubled that I cannot speak. Great griefs are dumb. Deep streams brawl not among the pebbles like the shallow brooklets which live on passing showers. Words fail the man whose heart fails him. He had cried to God but he could not speak to man, what a mercy it is that if we can do the first, we need not despair though the second should be quite out of our power. Sleepless and speechless Asaph was reduced to great extremities, and yet he rallied, and even so shall we.

Verse 5. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. If no good was in the present, memory ransacked the past to find consolation. She fain would borrow a light from the altars of yesterday to light the gloom of today. It is our duty to search for comfort, and not in sullen indolence yield to despair; in quiet contemplation topics may occur to us which will prove the means of raising our spirits, and there is scarcely any theme more likely to prove consolatory than that which deals with the days of yore, the years of the olden time, when the Lord's faithfulness was tried and proven by hosts of his people. Yet it seems that even this consideration created depression rather than delight in the good man's soul, for he contrasted his own mournful condition with all that was bright in the venerable experiences of ancient saints, and so complained the more. Ah, sad calamity of a jaundiced mind, to see nothing as it should be seen, but everything as through a veil of mist.

Verse 6. I call to remembrance my song in the night. At other times his spirit had a song for the darkest hour, but now he could only recall the strain as a departed memory. Where is the harp which once thrilled sympathetically to the touch of those joyful fingers? My tongue, hast thou forgotten to praise? Hast thou no skill except in mournful ditties? Ah me, how sadly fallen am I! How lamentable that I, who like the nightingale could charm the night, am now fit comrade for the hooting owl. I commune with mine own heart. He did not cease from introspection, for he was resolved to find the bottom of his sorrow, and trace it to its fountain head. He made sure work of it by talking not with his mind only, but with his inmost heart; it was heart work with him. He was no idler, no melancholy trifler; he was up and at it, resolutely resolved that he would not tamely die of despair, but would fight for his

hope to the last moment of life. And my spirit made diligent search. He ransacked his experience, his memory, his intellect, his whole nature, his entire self, either to find comfort or to discover the reason why it was denied him. That man will not die by the hand of the enemy who has enough force of soul remaining to struggle in this fashion.

Verse 7. Wilt the Lord cast off forever? This was one of the matters he enquired into. He painfully knew that the Lord might leave his people for a season, but his fear was that the time might be prolonged and have no close; eagerly, therefore, he asked, will the Lord utterly and finally reject those who are his own, and suffer them to be the objects of his contemptuous reprobation, his everlasting cast offs? This he was persuaded could not be. No instance in the years of ancient times led him to fear that such could be the case. And will he be favourable no more? Favourable he had been; would that goodwill never again show itself? Was the sun set never to rise again? Would spring never follow the long and dreary winter? The questions are suggested by fear, but they are also the cure for fear. It is a blessed thing to have grace enough to look such questions in the face, for their answer is self evident and eminently fitted to cheer the heart.

Verse 8. Is his mercy clean gone for ever? If he has no love for his elect, has he not still his mercy left? Has that dried up? Has he no pity for the sorrowful? Doth his promise fail for evermore? His word is pledged to those who plead with him; is that become of none effect? Shall it be said that from one generation to another the Lord's word has fallen to the ground; whereas aforetime he kept his covenant to all generations of them that fear him? It is a wise thing thus to put unbelief through the catechism. Each one of the questions is a dart aimed at the very heart of despair. Thus have we also in our days of darkness done battle for life itself.

Verse 9. Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Has El, the Mighty One, become great in everything but grace? Does he know how to afflict, but not how to uphold? Can he forget anything? Above all, can he forget to exercise that attribute which lies nearest to his essence, for he is love? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Are the pipes of goodness choked up so that love can no more flow through them? Do the bowels of Jehovah no longer yearn towards his own beloved children? Thus with cord after cord unbelief is smitten and driven out of the soul; it raises questions and we will meet it with questions: it makes us think and act ridiculously, and we will heap scorn upon it. The argument of this passage assumes very much the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*. Strip it naked, and mistrust is a monstrous piece of folly. Selah. Here rest awhile, for the battle of questions needs a lull.

Verse 10. And I said, This is my infirmity. He has won the day, he talks reasonably now, and surveys the field with a cooler mind. He confesses that unbelief is an infirmity, a weakness, a folly, a sin. He may also be understood to mean, "this is my appointed sorrow, "I will bear it without complaint. When we perceive that our affliction is meted out by the Lord, and is the ordained portion of our cup, we become reconciled to it, and no longer rebel against the inevitable. Why should we not be content if it be the Lord's will? What he arranges it is not for us to cavil at. But I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. Here a good deal is supplied by our translators, and they make the sense to be that the psalmist would console himself by remembering the goodness of God to himself and others of his people in times gone by: but the original seems to consist only of the words, "the years of the right hand of the most High, "and to express the idea that his long continued affliction, reaching through several years, was allotted to him by the Sovereign Lord of all. It is well when a consideration of the divine goodness and greatness silences all complaining, and creates a childlike acquiescence.

Verse 11. I will remember the works of the Lord. Fly back my soul, away from present turmoil, to the grandeurs of history, the sublime deeds of Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts; for he is the same and is ready even now to defend his servants as in days of yore. Surely I will remember thy wonders of old. Whatever else may glide into oblivion, the marvellous works of the Lord in the ancient days must not be suffered to be forgotten. Memory is a fit handmaid for faith. When faith has its seven years of famine, memory like Joseph in Egypt opens her granaries.

Verse 12. I will meditate also of all thy work. Sweet work to enter into Jehovah's work of grace, and there to lie down and ruminate, every thought being absorbed in the one precious subject. And talk of thy doings. It is well that the overflow of the mouth should indicate the good matter which fills the heart. Meditation makes rich talking; it is to be lamented that so much of the conversation of professors is utterly barren, because they take no time for contemplation. A meditative man should be a talker, otherwise he is a mental miser, a mill which grinds corn only for the miller. The subject of our meditation should be choice, and then our task will be edifying; if we meditate on folly and affect to speak wisdom, our double mindedness will soon be known unto all men. Holy talk following upon meditation has a consoling power in it for ourselves as well as for those who listen, hence its value in the connection in which we find it in this passage.

Verse 13. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary, or in holiness. In the holy place we understand our God, and rest assured that all his ways are just and right. When we cannot trace his way, because it is "in the sea," it is a rich consolation that we can trust it, for it is in holiness. We must have fellowship with holiness if we would understand "the ways of God to man." He who would be wise must worship. The pure in heart shall see God, and pure worship is the way to the philosophy of providence. Who is so great a God as our God? In him the good and the great are blended. He surpasses in both. None can for a moment be compared with the mighty One of Israel.

Verse 14. Thou art the God that doest wonders. Thou alone art Almighty. The false gods are surrounded with the pretence of wonders, but you really work them. It is thy peculiar prerogative to work marvels; it is no new or strange thing with thee, it is according to thy wont and use. Herein is renewed reason for holy confidence. It would be a great wonder if we did not trust the wonder working God. Thou hast declared thy strength among the people. Not only Israel, but Egypt, Bashan, Edom, Philistia, and all the nations have seen Jehovah's power. It was no secret in the olden time and to this day it is published abroad. God's providence and grace are both full of displays of his power; he is in the latter peculiarly conspicuous as "mighty to save." Who will not be strong in faith when there is so strong an arm to lean upon? Shall our trust be doubtful when his power is beyond all question? My soul see to it that these considerations banish thy mistrusts.

Verse 15. Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. All Israel, the two tribes of Joseph as well as those which sprang from the other sons of Jacob, were brought out of Egypt by a display of divine power, which is here ascribed not to the hand but to the arm of the Lord, because it was the fulness of his might. Ancient believers were in the constant habit of referring to the wonders of the Red Sea, and we also can unite with them, taking care to add the song of the Lamb to that of Moses, the servant of God. The comfort derivable from such a meditation is obvious and abundant, for he who brought up his people from the house of bondage will continue to redeem and deliver till we come into the promised rest. Selah. Here we have another pause preparatory to a final burst of song.

Verse 16. The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid. As if conscious of its Maker's presence, the sea was ready to flee from before his face. The conception is highly poetical, the psalmist has the scene before his mind's eye, and describes it gloriously. The water saw its God, but man refuses to discern him; it was afraid, but proud sinners are rebellious and fear not the Lord. The depths also were troubled. To their heart the floods were made afraid. Quiet caves of the sea, far down in the abyss, were moved with fear; and the lowest channels were left bare, as the water rushed away from its place, in terror of the God of Israel.

Verse 17. The clouds poured out water. Obedient to the Lord, the lower region of the atmosphere yielded its aid to overthrow the Egyptian host. The cloudy chariots of heaven hurried forward to discharge their floods. The skies sent out a sound. From the loftier aerial regions thundered the dread artillery of the Lord of Hosts. Peal on peal the skies sounded over the heads of the routed enemies, confusing their minds and adding to their horror. Thine arrows also went abroad. Lightnings flew like bolts from the bow of God. Swiftly, hither and thither, went the red tongues of flame, on helm and shield they gleamed; anon with blue bale fires revealing the innermost caverns of the hungry sea which waited to swallow up the pride of Mizraim. Behold, how all the creatures wait upon their God, and show themselves strong to overthrow his enemies.

Verse 18. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven, or in the whirlwind. Rushing on with terrific swiftness and bearing all before it, the storm was as a chariot driven furiously, and a voice was heard (even thy voice, O Lord!) out of the fiery car, even as when a mighty man in battle urges forward his charger, and shouts to it aloud. All heaven resounded with the voice of the Lord. The lightnings lightened the world. The entire globe shone in the blaze of Jehovah's lightnings. No need for other light amid the battle of that terrible night, every wave gleamed in the fire flashes, and the shore was lit up with the blaze. How pale were men's faces in that hour, when all around the fire leaped from sea to shore, from crag to hill, from mountain to star, till the whole universe was illuminated in honour of Jehovah's triumph. The earth trembled and shook. It quaked and quaked again. Sympathetic with the sea, the solid shore forgot its quiescence and heaved in dread. How dreadful art thou, O God, when thou comest forth in thy majesty to humble thine arrogant adversaries.

Verse 19. Thy way is in the sea. Far down in secret channels of the deep is thy roadway; when thou wilt thou canst make a sea a highway for thy glorious march. And thy path in the great waters. There, where the billows surge and swell, thou still dost walk; Lord of each crested wave. And thy footsteps are not known. None can follow thy tracks by foot or eye. Thou art alone in thy glory, and thy ways are hidden from mortal ken. Thy purposes thou wilt accomplish, but the means are often concealed, yea, they need no concealing, they are in themselves too vast and mysterious for human understanding. Glory be to thee, O Jehovah.

Verse 20. Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. What a transition from tempest to peace, from wrath to love. Quietly as a flock Israel was guided on, by human agency which veiled the excessive glory of the divine presence. The smiter of Egypt was the shepherd of Israel. He drove his foes before him, but went before his people. Heaven and earth fought on his side against the sons of Ham, but they were equally subservient to the interests of the sons of Jacob. Therefore, with devout joy and full of consolation, we close this Psalm; the song of one who forgot how to speak and yet learned to sing far more sweetly than his fellows.

Verse 1. Give ear, O my people, to my law. The inspired bard calls on his countrymen to give heed to his patriotic teaching. We naturally expect God's chosen nation to be first in hearkening to his voice. When God gives his truth a tongue, and sends forth his messengers trained to declare his word with power, it is the least we can do to give them our ears and the earnest obedience of our hearts. Shall God speak, and his children refuse to hear? His teaching has the force of law, let us yield both ear and heart to it. Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. Give earnest attention, bow your stiff necks, lean forward to catch every syllable. We are at this day, as readers of the sacred records, bound to study them deeply, exploring their meaning, and labouring to practice their teaching. As the officer of an army commences his drill by calling for "Attention," even so every trained soldier of Christ is called upon to give ear to his words. Men lend their ears to music, how much more then should they listen to the harmonies of the gospel; they sit enthralled in the presence of an orator, how much rather should they yield to the eloquence of heaven.

Verse 2. I will open my mouth in a parable. Analogies are not only to be imagined, but are intended by God to be traced between the story of Israel and the lives of believers. Israel was ordained to be a type; the tribes and their marchings are living allegories traced by the hand of an all wise providence. Unspiritual persons may sneer about fancies and mysticisms, but Paul spake well when he said "which things are an allegory," and Asaph in the present case spake to the point when he called his narrative "a parable." That such was his meaning is clear from the quotation, "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." Mt 13:34-35. I will utter dark sayings of old;—enigmas of antiquity, riddles of yore. The mind of the poet prophet was so full of ancient lore that he poured it forth in a copious stream of song, while beneath the gushing flood lay pearls and gems of spiritual truth, capable of enriching those who could dive into the depths and bring them up. The letter of this song is precious, but the inner sense is beyond all price. Whereas the first verse called for attention, the second justifies the demand by hinting that the outer sense conceals an inner and hidden meaning, which only the thoughtful will be able to perceive.

Verse 3. Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. Tradition was of the utmost service to the people of God in the olden time, before the more sure word of prophecy had become complete and generally accessible. The receipt of truth from the lips of others laid the instructed believer under solemn obligation to pass on the truth to the next generation. Truth, endeared to us by its fond associations with godly parents and venerable friends, deserves of us our best exertions to preserve and propagate it. Our fathers told us, we hear them, and we know personally what they taught; it remains for us in our turn to hand it on. Blessed be God we have now the less mutable testimony of written revelation, but this by no means lessens our obligation to instruct our children in divine truth by word of mouth: rather, with such a gracious help, we ought to teach them far more fully the things of God. Dr. Doddridge owed much to the Dutch tiles and his mother's explanations of the Bible narratives. The more of parental teaching the better; ministers and Sabbath school teachers were never meant to be substitutes for mother's tears and father's prayers.

Verse 4. We will not hide them from their children. Our negligent silence shall not deprive our own and our father's offspring of the precious truth of God, it would be shameful indeed if we did so. Shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord. We will look forward to future generations, and endeavour to provide for their godly education. It is the duty of the church of God to maintain, in

fullest vigour, every agency intended for the religious education of the young; to them we must look for the church of the future, and as we sow towards them so shall we reap. Children are to be taught to magnify the Lord; they ought to be well informed as to his wonderful doings in ages past, and should be made to know his strength and his wonderful works that he hath done. The best education is education in the best things. The first lesson for a child should be concerning his mother's God. Teach him what you will, if he learn not the fear of the Lord, he will perish for lack of knowledge. Grammar is poor food for the soul if it be not flavoured with grace. Every satchel should have a Bible in it. The world may teach secular knowledge alone, it is all she has a heart to know, but the church must not deal so with her offspring; she should look well to every Timothy, and see to it that from a child he knows the Holy Scriptures. Around the fireside fathers should repeat not only the Bible records, but the deeds of the martyrs and reformers, and moreover the dealings of the Lord with themselves both in providence and grace. We dare not follow the vain and vicious traditions of the apostate church of Rome, neither would we compare the fallible record of the best human memories with the infallible written word, yet would we fain see oral tradition practised by every Christian in his family, and children taught cheerfully by word of mouth by their own mothers and fathers, as well as by the printed pages of what they too often regard as dull, dry task books. What happy hours and pleasant evenings have children had at their parents knees as they have listened to some "sweet story of old." Reader, if you have children, mind you do not fail in this duty.

Verse 5. For he established a testimony in Jacob. The favoured nation existed for the very purpose of maintaining God's truth in the midst of surrounding idolatry. Theirs were the oracles, they were the conservators and guardians of the truth. And appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children. The testimony for the true God was to be transmitted from generation to generation by the careful instruction of succeeding families. We have the command for this oral transmission very frequently given in the Pentateuch, and it may suffice to quote one instance from De 6:7: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Reader, if you are a parent, have you conscientiously discharged this duty?

Verse 6. That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born. As far on as our brief life allows us to arrange, we must industriously provide for the godly nurture of youth. The narratives, commands, and doctrines of the word of God are not worn out; they are calculated to exert an influence as long as our race shall exist. Who should arise and declare them to their children. The one object aimed at is transmission; the testimony is only given that it may be passed on to succeeding generations.

Verse 7. That they might set their hope in God. Faith cometh by hearing. Those who know the name of the Lord will set their hope in him, and that they may be led to do so is the main end of all spiritual teaching. And not forget the works of God. Grace cures bad memories; those who soon forget the merciful works of the Lord have need of teaching; they require to learn the divine art of holy memory. But keep his commandments. Those who forget God's works are sure to fail in their own. He who does not keep God's love in memory is not likely to remember his law. The design of teaching is practical; holiness towards God is the end we aim at, and not the filling of the head with speculative notions.

Verse 8. And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation. There was room for

improvement. Fathers stubborn in their own way, and rebellious against God's way, are sorry examples for their children; and it is earnestly desired that better instruction may bring forth a better race. It is common in some regions for men to count their family custom as the very best rule; but disobedience is not to be excused because it is hereditary. The leprosy was none the less loathsome because it had been long in the family. If our fathers were rebellious we must be better than they were, or else we shall perish as they did. A generation that set not their heart aright. They had no decision for righteousness and truth. In them there was no preparedness, or willingness of heart, to entertain the Saviour; neither judgments, nor mercies could bind their affections to their God; they were fickle as the winds, and changeful as the waves. And whose spirit was not steadfast with God. The tribes in the wilderness were constant only in their inconstancy; there was no depending upon them. It was, indeed, needful that their descendants should be warned, so that they might not blindly imitate them. How blessed it would be if each age improved upon its predecessor; but, alas! it is to be feared that decline is more general than progress, and too often the heirs of true saints are far more rebellious than even their fathers were in their unregeneracy. May the reading of this patriotic and divine song move many to labour after the elevation of themselves and their posterity.

Verse 9. The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. Well equipped and furnished with the best weapons of the times, the leading tribe failed in faith and courage and retreated before the foe. There were several particular instances of this, but probably the psalmist refers to the general failure of Ephraim to lead the tribes to the conquest of Canaan. How often have we also, although supplied with every gracious weapon, failed to wage successful war against our sins, we have marched onward gallantly enough till the testing hour has come, and then "in the day of battle "we have proved false to good resolutions and holy obligations. How altogether vain is unregenerate man! Array him in the best that nature and grace can supply, he still remains a helpless coward in the holy war, so long as he lacks a loyal faith in his God.

Verse 10. They kept not the covenant of God. Vows and promises were broken, idols were set up, and the living God was forsaken. They were brought out of Egypt in order to be a people separated unto the Lord, but they fell into the sins of other nations, and did not maintain a pure testimony for the one only true God. And refused to walk in his law. They gave way to fornication, and idolatry, and other violations of the decalogue, and were often in a state of rebellion against the benign theocracy under which they lived. They had pledged themselves at Sinai to keep the law, and then they wilfully disobeyed it, and so became covenant breakers.

Verse 11. And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them. Had they remembered them they would have been filled with gratitude and inspired with holy awe: but the memory of God's mercies to them was as soon effaced as if written upon water. Scarcely could one generation retain the sense of the divine presence in miraculous power, the succeeding race needed a renewal of the extraordinary manifestations, and even then was not satisfied without many displays thereof. Ere we condemn them, let us repent of our own wicked forgetfulness, and confess the many occasions upon which we also have been unmindful of past favours.

Verse 12. Egypt, here called the field of Zoan, was the scene of marvellous things which were done in open day in the sight of Israel. These were extraordinary, upon a vast scale, astounding, indisputable, and such as ought to have rendered it impossible for an Israelite to be disloyal to Jehovah, Israel's God.

Verse 13. He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through. A double wonder, for when the waters were divided the bottom of the sea would naturally be in a very unfit state for the passage of so vast a host as that of Israel; it would in fact have been impassable, had not the Lord made the road for his people. Who else has ever led a nation through a sea? Yet the Lord has done this full often for his saints in providential deliverances, making a highway for them where nothing short of an almighty arm could have done so. And he made the waters to stand as an heap. He forbade a drop to fall upon his chosen, they felt no spray from the crystal walls on either hand. Fire will descend and water stand upright at the bidding of the Lord of all. The nature of creatures is not their own intrinsically, but is retained or altered at the will of him who first created them. The Lord can cause those evils which threaten to overwhelm us to suspend their ordinary actions, and become innocuous to us.

Verse 14. In the daytime also he led them with a cloud. HE did it all. He alone. He brought them into the wilderness, and he led them through it; it is not the Lord's manner to begin a work, and then cease from it while it is incomplete. The cloud both led and shadowed the tribes. It was by day a vast sun screen, rendering the fierce heat of the sun and the glare of the desert sand bearable. And all the night with a light of fire. So constant was the care of the Great Shepherd that all night and every night the token of his presence was with his people. That cloud which was a shade by day was as a sun by night. Even thus the grace which cools and calms our joys, soothes and solaces our sorrows. What a mercy to have a light of fire with us amid the lonely horrors of the wilderness of affliction. Our God has been all this to us, and shall we prove unfaithful to him? We have felt him to be both shade and light, according as our changing circumstances have required.

"He hath been our joy in woe,
Cheered our heart when it was low,
And, with warnings softly sad,
Calmed our heart when it was glad."

May this frequently renewed experience knit our hearts to him in firmest bonds.

Verse 15. He clave the rocks in the wilderness. Moses was the instrument, but the Lord did it all. Twice he made the flint a gushing rill. What can he not do? And gave them drink as out of the great depths,—as though it gushed from earth's innermost reservoirs. The streams were so fresh, so copious, so constant, that they seemed to well up from the earth's primeval fountains, and to leap at once from "the deep which coucheth beneath." Here was a divine supply for Israel's urgent need, and such an one as ought to have held them for ever in unwavering fidelity to their wonder working God.

Verse 16. The supply of water was as plenteous in quantity as it was miraculous in origin. Torrents, not driblets came from the rocks. Streams followed the camp; the supply was not for an hour or a day. This was a marvel of goodness. If we contemplate the abounding of divine grace we shall be lost in admiration. Mighty rivers of love have flowed for us in the wilderness. Alas, great God! our return has not been commensurate therewith, but far otherwise.

Verse 17. And they sinned yet more against him. Outdoing their former sins, going into greater deeps of evil: the more they had the more loudly they clamoured for more, and murmured because they had not every luxury that pampered appetites could desire. It was bad enough to mistrust their God for necessaries, but to revolt against him in a greedy rage for superfluities was far worse. Ever is it the

nature of the disease of sin to proceed from bad to worse; men never weary of sinning, but rather increase their speed in the race of iniquity. In the case before us the goodness of God was abused into a reason for greater sin. Had not the Lord been so good they would not have been so bad. If he had wrought fewer miracles before, they would not have been so inexcusable in their unbelief, so wanton in their idolatry. By provoking the most High in the wilderness. Although they were in a position of obvious dependence upon God for everything, being in a desert where the soil could yield them no support, yet they were graceless enough to provoke their benefactor. At one time they provoked his jealousy by their hankering after false gods, anon they excited his wrath by their challenges of his power, their slanders against his love, their rebellions against his will. He was all bounty of love, and they all superfluity of naughtiness. They were favoured above all nations, and yet none were more ill favoured. For them the heavens dropped manna, and they returned murmurs; the rocks gave them rivers, and they replied with floods of wickedness. Herein, as in a mirror, we see ourselves. Israel in the wilderness acted out, as in a drama, all the story of man's conduct towards his God.

Verse 18. And they tempted God in their heart. He was not tempted, for he cannot be tempted by any, but they acted in a manner calculated to tempt him, and it always just to charge that upon men which is the obvious tendency of their conduct. Christ cannot die again, and yet many crucify him afresh, because such would be the legitimate result of their behaviour if its effects were not prevented by other forces. The sinners in the wilderness would have had the Lord change his wise proceedings to humour their whims, hence they are said to tempt him. By asking meat for their lust. Would they have God become purveyor for their greediness? Was there nothing for it but that he must give them whatever their diseased appetites might crave? The sin began in their hearts, but it soon reached their tongues. What they at first silently wished for, they soon loudly demanded with menaces, insinuations, and upbraidings.

Verse 19. From this verse we learn that unbelief of God is a slander against him. Yea, they spake against God. But how? The answer is, They said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? To question the ability of one who is manifestly Almighty, is to speak against him. These people were base enough to say that although their God had given them bread and water, yet he could not properly order or furnish a table. He could give them coarse food, but could not prepare a feast properly arranged, so they were ungrateful enough to declare. As if the manna was a mere makeshift, and the flowing rock stream a temporary expedient, they ask to have a regularly furnished table, such as they had been accustomed to in Egypt. Alas, how have we also quarrelled with our mercies, and querulously pined for some imaginary good, counting our actual enjoyments to be nothing because they did not happen to be exactly conformed to our foolish fancies. They who will not be content will speak against providence even when it daily loadeth them with benefits.

Verse 20. Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed. They admit what he had done, and yet, with superabundant folly and insolence, demand further proofs of his omnipotence. Can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people? As if the manna were nothing, as if animal food alone was true nourishment for men. If they had argued, "can he not give flesh?" the argument would have been reasonable, but they ran into insanity; when, having seen many marvels of omnipotence, they dared to insinuate that other things were beyond the divine power. Yet, in this also, we have imitated their senseless conduct. Each new difficulty has excited fresh incredulity. We are still fools and slow of heart to believe our God, and this is a fault to be bemoaned with deepest penitence. For this cause the Lord is often wroth with us and chastens us

sorely; for unbelief has in it a degree of provocation of the highest kind.

Verse 21. Therefore the Lord heard this, and was wroth. He was not indifferent to what they said. He dwelt among them in the holy place, and, therefore, they insulted him to his face. He did not hear a report of it, but the language itself came into his ears. So a fire was kindled against Jacob. The fire of his anger which was also attended with literal burnings. And anger also came up against Israel. Whether he viewed them in the lower or higher light, as Jacob or as Israel, he was angry with them: even as mere men they ought to have believed him; and as chosen tribes, their wicked unbelief was without excuse. The Lord doeth well to be angry at so ungrateful, gratuitous and dastardly an insult as the questioning of his power.

Verse 22. Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation. This is the master sin, the crying sin. Like Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, it sins and makes Israel to sin; it is in itself evil and the parent of evils. It was this sin which shut Israel out of Canaan, and it shuts myriads out of heaven. God is ready to save, combining power with willingness, but rebellious man will not trust his Saviour, and therefore is condemned already. In the text it appears as if all Israel's other sins were as nothing compared with this; this is the peculiar spot which the Lord points at, the special provocation which angered him. From this let every unbeliever learn to tremble more at his unbelief than at anything else. If he be no fornicator, or thief, or liar, let him reflect that it is quite enough to condemn him that he trusts not in God's salvation.

Verse 23. Though he had commanded the clouds from above. Such a marvel ought to have rendered unbelief impossible: when clouds become granaries, seeing should be believing, and doubts should dissolve. And opened the doors of heaven. The great storehouse doors were set wide open, and the corn of heaven poured out in heaps. Those who would not believe in such a case were hardened indeed; and yet our own position is very similar, for the Lord has wrought for us great deliverances, quite as memorable and undeniable, and yet suspicions and forebodings haunt us. He might have shut the gates of hell upon us, instead of which he has opened the doors of heaven; shall we not both believe in him and magnify him for this?

Verse 24. And had rained down manna upon them to eat. There was so much of it, the skies poured with food, the clouds burst with provender. It was fit food, proper not for looking at but for eating; they could eat it as they gathered it. Mysterious though it was, so that they called it manna, or "what is it?" yet it was eminently adapted for human nourishment; and it was both abundant and adapted, so also was it available! They had not far to fetch it, it was nigh them, and they had only to gather it up. O Lord Jesus, thou blessed manna of heaven, how all this agrees with Thee! We will even now feed on Thee as our spiritual meat, and will pray Thee to chase away all wicked unbelief from us. Our fathers ate manna and doubted; we feed upon Thee and are filled with assurance. And had given them of the corn of heaven. It was all a gift without money and without price. Food which dropped from above, and was of the best quality, so as to be called heavenly corn, was freely granted them. The manna was round, like a coriander seed, and hence was rightly called corn; it did not rise from the earth, but descended from the clouds, and hence the words of the verse are literally accurate. The point to be noted is that this wonder of wonders left the beholders, and the feasters, as prone as ever to mistrust their Lord.

Verse 25. Man did eat angel's food. The delicacies of kings were outdone, for the dainties of angels were supplied. Bread of the mighty ones fell on feeble man. Those who are lower than the angels

fared as well. It was not for the priests, or the princes, that the manna fell; but for all the nation, for every man, woman, and child in the camp: and there was sufficient for them all, for he sent them meat to the full. God's banquets are never stinted; he gives the best diet, and plenty of it. Gospel provisions deserve every praise that we can heap upon them; they are free, full, and preeminent; they are of God's preparing, sending, and bestowing. He is well fed whom God feeds; heaven's meat is nourishing and plentiful. If we have ever fed upon Jesus we have tasted better than angel's food; for

"Never did angels taste above
Redeeming grace and dying love."

It will be our wisdom to eat to the full of it, for God has so sent it that we are not straitened in him, but in our own bowels. Happy pilgrims who in the desert have their meat sent from the Lord's own palace above; let them eat abundantly of the celestial banquet, and magnify the all sufficient grace which supplies all their needs, according to His riches in glory, by Christ Jesus.

Verse 26. He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven. He is Lord Paramount, above the prince of the power of the air: storms arise and tempests blow at his command. Winds sleep till God arouses them, and then, like Samuel, each one answers, "Here am I, for thou didst call me." And by his power he brought in the south wind. Either these winds followed each other, and so blew the birds in the desired direction, or else they combined to form a south east wind; in either case they fulfilled the design of the Lord, and illustrated his supreme and universal power. If one wind will not serve, another shall; and if need be, they shall both blow at once. We speak of fickle winds, but their obedience to their Lord is such that they deserve a better word. If we ourselves were half as obedient as the winds, we should be far superior to what we are now.

Verse 27. He rained flesh also upon them as dust. First he rained bread and then flesh, when he might have rained fire and brimstone. The words indicate the speed, and the abundance of the descending quails. And feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea; there was no counting them. By a remarkable providence, if not by miracle, enormous numbers of migratory birds were caused to alight around the tents of the tribes. It was, however, a doubtful blessing, as easily acquired and super abounding riches generally are. The Lord save us from meat which is seasoned with divine wrath.

Verse 28. And he let it fall in the midst of their camp. They had no journey to make; they had clamoured for flesh, and it almost flew into their mouths, round about their habitations. This made them glad for the moment, but they knew not that mercies can be sent in anger, else they had trembled at sight of the good things which they had lusted after.

Verse 29. So they did eat, and were well filled. They greedily devoured the birds, even to repletion. The Lord shewed them that he could "provide flesh for his people, "even enough and to spare. He also shewed them that when lust wins its desire it is disappointed, and by the way of satiety arrive at distaste. First the food satiates, then it nauseates. For he gave them their own desire. They were filled with their own ways. The flesh meat was unhealthy for them, but as they cried for it they had it, and a curse with it. O my God, deny me my most urgent prayers sooner than answer them in displeasure. Better hunger and thirst after righteousness than to be well filled with sin's dainties.

Verses 30-31. They were not estranged from their lust. Lust grows upon that which it feeds on. If sick of too much flesh, yet men grow not weary of lust, they change the object, and go on lusting still.

When one sin is proved to be a bitterness, men do not desist, but pursue another iniquity. If, like Jehu, they turn from Baal, they fall to worshipping the calves of Bethel. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, before they could digest their coveted meat, it turned to their destruction. The wrath of God came upon them before they could swallow their first meal of flesh. Short was the pleasure, sudden was the doom. The festival ended in a funeral. And slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel. Perhaps these were the ringleaders in the lusting; they are first in the punishment. God's justice has no respect of persons, the strong and the valiant fall as well as the weak and the mean. What they ate on earth they digested in hell, as many have done since. How soon they died, though they felt not the edge of the sword! How terrible was the havoc, though not amid the din of battle! My soul, see here the danger of gratified passions; they are the janitors of hell. When the Lord's people hunger God loves them; Lazarus is his beloved, though he pines upon crumbs; but when he fattens the wicked he abhors them; Dives is hated of heaven when he fares sumptuously every day. We must never dare to judge men's happiness by their tables, the heart is the place to look at. The poorest starveling believer is more to be envied than the most full fleshed of the favourites of the world. Better be God's dog than the devil's darling.

Verse 32. For all this they sinned still. Judgments moved them no more than mercies. They defied the wrath of God. Though death was in the cup of their iniquity, yet they would not put it away, but continued to quaff it as if it were a healthful potion. How truly might these words be applied to ungodly men who have been often afflicted, laid upon a sick bed, broken in spirit, and impoverished in estate, and yet have persevered in their evil ways, unmoved by terrors, unswayed by threatenings. And believed not for his wondrous works. Their unbelief was chronic and incurable. Miracles both of mercy and judgment were unavailing. They might be made to wonder, but they could not be taught to believe. Continuance in sin and in unbelief go together. Had they believed they would not have sinned, had they not have been blinded by sin they would have believed. There is a reflex action between faith and character. How can the lover of sin believe? How, on the other hand, can the unbeliever cease from sin? God's ways with us in providence are in themselves both convincing and converting, but unrenewed nature refuses to be either convicted or converted by them.

Verse 33. Therefore their days did he consume in vanity. Apart from faith life is vanity. To wander up and down in the wilderness was a vain thing indeed, when unbelief had shut them out of the promised land. It was meet that those who would not live to answer the divine purpose by believing and obeying their God should be made to live to no purpose, and to die before their time, unsatisfied, unblessed. Those who wasted their days in sin had little cause to wonder when the Lord cut short their lives, and swore that they should never enter the rest which they had despised. And their years in trouble. Weary marches were their trouble, and to come to no resting place was their vanity. Innumerable graves were left all along the track of Israel, and if any ask, "Who slew all these?" the answer must be, "They could not enter in because of unbelief." Doubtless much of the vexation and failure of many lives results from their being sapped by unbelief, and honeycombed by evil passions. None live so fruitlessly and so wretchedly as those who allow sense and sight to override faith, and their reason and appetite to domineer over their fear of God. Our days go fast enough according to the ordinary lapse of time, but the Lord can make them rust away at a bitterer rate, till we feel as if sorrow actually ate out the heart of our life, and like a canker devoured our existence. Such was the punishment of rebellious Israel, the Lord grant it may not be ours.

Verse 34. When he slew them, then they sought him. Like whipped curs, they licked their Master's feet. They obeyed only so long as they felt the whip about their loins. Hard are the hearts which only

death can move. While thousands died around them, the people of Israel became suddenly religious, and repaired to the tabernacle door, like sheep who run in a mass while the black dog drives them, but scatter and wander when the shepherd whistles him off. And they returned and enquired early after God. They could not be too zealous, they were in hot haste to prove their loyalty to their divine King. "The devil was sick and the devil a monk would be." Who would not be pious while the plague is abroad? Doors, which were never so sanctified before, put on the white cross then. Even reprobates send for the minister when they lie a dying. Thus sinners pay involuntary homage to the power of right and the supremacy of God, but their hypocritical homage is of small value in the sight of the Great Judge.

Verse 35. And they remember that God was their rock. Sharp strokes awoke their sleepy memories. Reflection followed infliction. They were led to see that all their dependence must be placed upon their God; for he alone had been their shelter, their foundation, their fountain of supply, and their unchangeable friend. What could have made them forget this? Was it that their stomachs were so full of flesh that they had no space for ruminating upon spiritual things? And the high God their redeemer. They had forgotten this also. The high hand and outstretched arm which redeemed them out of bondage had both faded from their mental vision. Alas, poor man, how readily dost thou forget thy God! Shame on thee, ungrateful worm, to have no sense of favours a few days after they have been received. Will nothing make thee keep in memory the mercy of thy God except the utter withdrawal of it?

Verse 36. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth. Bad were they at their best. False on their knees, liars in their prayers. Mouth worship must be very detestable to God when dissociated from the heart: other kings love flattery, but the King of kings abhors it. Since the sharpest afflictions only extort from carnal men a feigned submission to God, there is proof positive that the heart is desperately set on mischief, and that sin is ingrained in our very nature. If you beat a tiger with many stripes you cannot turn him into a sheep. The devil cannot be whipped out of human nature, though another devil, namely, hypocrisy may be whipped into it. Piety produced by the damps of sorrow and the heats of terror is of mushroom growth; it is rapid in its springing up—"they enquired early after God"—but it is a mere unsubstantial fungus of unabiding excitement. And they lied unto him with their tongues. Their godly speech was cant, their praise mere wind, their prayer a fraud. Their skin deep repentance was a film too thin to conceal the deadly wound of sin. This teaches us to place small reliance upon professions of repentance made by dying men, or upon such even when the basis is evidently slavish fear, and nothing more. Any thief will whine out repentance if he thinks the judge will thereby be moved to let him go scot free.

Verse 37. For their heart was not right with him. There was no depth in their repentance, it was not heart work. They were fickle as a weathercock, every wind turned them, their mind was not settled upon God. Neither were they steadfast in his covenant. Their promises were no sooner made than broken, as if only made in mockery. Good resolutions called at their hearts as men do at inns; they tarried awhile, and then took their leave. They were hot today for holiness, but cold towards it tomorrow. Variable as the hues of the dolphin, they changed from reverence to rebellion, from thankfulness to murmuring. One day they gave their gold to build a tabernacle for Jehovah, and the next they plucked off their earrings to make a golden calf. Surely the heart is a chameleon. Proteus had not so many changes. As in the age we both burn and freeze, so do inconstant natures in their religion.

Verse 38. But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not. Though they were full of flattery, he was full of mercy, and for this cause he had pity on them. Not because of their pitiful and hypocritical pretensions to penitence, but because of his own real compassion for them he overlooked their provocations. Yea, many a time turned he his anger away. When he had grown angry with them he withdrew his displeasure. Even unto seventy times seven did he forgive their offences. He was slow, very slow, to anger. The sword was uplifted and flashed in midair, but it was sheathed again, and the nation yet lived. Though not mentioned in the text, we know from the history that a mediator interposed, the man Moses stood in the gap; even so at this hour the Lord Jesus pleads for sinners, and averts the divine wrath. Many a barren tree is left standing because the dresser of the vineyard cries, "let it alone this year also." And did not stir up all his wrath. Had he done so they must have perished in a moment. When his wrath is kindled but a little men are burned up as chaff; but were he to let loose his indignation, the solid earth itself would melt, and hell would engulf every rebel. Who knoweth the power of thine anger, O Lord? We see the fulness of God's compassion, but we never see all his wrath.

Verse 39. For he remembered that they were but flesh. They were forgetful of God, but he was mindful of them. He knew that they were made of earthy, frail, corruptible material, and therefore he dealt leniently with them. Though in this he saw no excuse for their sin, yet he constrained it into a reason for mercy; the Lord is ever ready to discover some plea or other upon which he may have compassion. A wind that passeth away, and cometh not again. Man is but a breath, gone never to return. Spirit and wind are in this alike, so far as our humanity is concerned; they pass and cannot be recalled. What a nothing is our life. How gracious on the Lord's part to make man's insignificance an argument for staying his wrath.

Verse 40. How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness. Times enough did they rebel: they were as constant in provocation as he was in his patience. In our own case, who can count his errors? In what book could all our perverse rebellions be recorded? The wilderness was a place of manifest dependence, where the tribes were helpless without divine supplies, yet they wounded the hand which fed them while it was in the act of feeding them. Is there no likeness between us and them? Does it bring no tears into our eyes, while as in a glass, we see our own selves? And grieve him in the desert. Their provocations had an effect; God was not insensible to them, he is said to have been grieved. His holiness could not find pleasure in their sin, his justice in their unjust treatment, or his truth in their falsehood. What must it be to grieve the Lord of love! Yet we also have vexed the Holy Spirit, and he would long ago have withdrawn himself from us, were it not that he is God and not man. We are in the desert where we need our God, let us not make it a wilderness of sin by grieving him.

Verses 41. Yea, they turned back. Their hearts sighed for Egypt and its fleshpots. They turned to their old ways again and again, after they had been scourged out of them. Full of twists and turns, they never kept the straight path. And tempted God. As far as in them lay they tempted him. His ways were good, and they in desiring to have them altered tempted God. Before they would believe in him they demanded signs, defying the Lord to do this and that, and acting as if he could be cajoled into being the minion of their lusts. What blasphemy was this! Yet let us not tempt Christ lest we also be destroyed by the destroyer. And limited the Holy One of Israel. Doubted his power and so limited him, dictated to his wisdom and so did the same. To chalk out a path for God is arrogant impiety. The Holy One must do right, the covenant God of Israel must be true, it is profanity itself to say unto him thou shalt do this or that, or otherwise I will not worship thee. Not thus is the Eternal God to be led by a string by his impotent creature. He is the Lord and he will do as seemeth him good.

Verse 42. They remembered not his hand. Yet it must have been difficult to forget it. Such displays of divine power as those which smote Egypt with astonishment, it must have needed some more than usual effort to blot it from the tablets of memory. It is probably meant that they practically, rather than actually, forgot. He who forgets the natural returns of gratitude, may justly be charged with not remembering the obligation. Nor the days when he delivered them from the enemy. The day itself was erased from their calendar, so far as any due result from it or return for it. Strange is the faculty of memory in its oblivion as well as its records. Sin perverts man's powers, makes them forceful only in wrong directions, and practically dead for righteous ends.

Verse 43. How he had wrought his signs in Egypt. The plagues were ensigns of Jehovah's presence and proofs of his hatred of idols; these instructive acts of power were wrought in the open view of all, as signals are set up to be observed by those far and near. And his wonders in the field of Zoan. In the whole land were miracles wrought, not in cities alone, but in the broad territory, in the most select and ancient regions of the proud nation. This the Israelites ought not to have forgotten, for they were the favoured people for whom these memorable deeds were wrought.

Verse 44. And had turned their rivers into blood. The waters had been made the means of the destruction of Israel's newborn infants, and now they do as it were betray the crime—they blush for it, they avenge it on the murderers. The Nile was the vitality of Egypt, its true life blood, but at God's command it became a flowing curse; every drop of it was a horror, poison to drink, and terror to gaze on. How soon might the Almighty One do this with the Thames or the Seine. Sometimes he has allowed men, who were his rod, to make rivers crimson with gore, and this is a severe judgment; but the event now before us was more mysterious, more general, more complete, and must, therefore, have been a plague of the first magnitude. And their floods, that they could not drink. Lesser streams partook in the curse, reservoirs and canals felt the evil; God does nothing by halves. All Egypt boasted of the sweet waters of their river, but they were made to loathe it more than they had ever loved it. Our mercies may soon become our miseries if the Lord shall deal with us in wrath.

Verse 45. He sent diverse sorts of flies among them, which devoured them. Small creatures become great tormentors. When they swarm they can sting a man till they threaten to eat him up. In this case, various orders of insects fought under the same banner; lice and beetles, gnats and hornets, wasps and gadflies dashed forward in fierce battalions, and worried the sinners of Egypt without mercy. The tiniest plagues are the greatest. What sword or spear could fight with these innumerable bands? Vain were the monarch's armour and robes of majesty, the little cannibals were no more lenient towards royal flesh than any other; it had the same blood in it, and the same sin upon it. How great is that God who thus by the minute can crush the magnificent. And frogs, which destroyed them. These creatures swarmed everywhere when they were alive, until the people felt ready to die at the sight; and when the reptiles died, the heaps of their bodies made the land to stink so foully, that a pestilence was imminent. Thus not only did earth and air send forth armies of horrible life, but the water also added its legions of loathsomeness. It seemed as if the Nile was first made nauseous and then caused to leave its bed altogether, crawling and leaping in the form of frogs. Those who contend with the Almighty, little know what arrows are in his quiver; surprising sin shall be visited with surprising punishment.

Verse 46. He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust. Different sorts of devourers ate up every green herb and tree. What one would not eat another did. What they

expected from the natural fertility of the soil, and what they looked for from their own toil, they saw devoured before their eyes by an insatiable multitude against whose depredation no defense could be found. Observe in the text that the Lord did it all—"he sent, " "he gave, ""he destroyed, ""he gave up, "etc.; whatever the second agent may be, the direct hand of the Lord is in every national visitation.

Verse 47. He destroyed their vines with hail. No more shall thy butler press the clusters into thy cup, O Pharaoh! The young fruit bearing shoots were broken off, the vintage failed. And their sycamore trees with frost. Frost was not usual, but Jehovah regards no laws of nature when men regard not his moral laws. The sycamore fig was perhaps more the fruit of the many than was the vine, therefore this judgment was meant to smite the poor, while the former fell most heavily upon the rich. Mark how the heavens obey their Lord and yield their stores of hail, and note how the fickle weather is equally subservient to the divine will.

Verse 48. He gave up their cattle also to the hail. What hail it must have been to have force enough to batter down bullocks and other great beasts. God usually protects animals from such destruction, but here he withdraws his safeguards and gave them up: may the Lord never give us up. Some read, "shut up, "and the idea of being abandoned to destructive influences is then before us in another shape. And their flocks to hot thunderbolts. Fire was mingled with the hail, the fire ran along upon the ground, it smote the smaller cattle. What a storm must that have been: its effects were terrible enough upon plants, but to see the poor dumb creatures stricken must have been heartbreaking. Adamantine was that heart which quailed not under such plagues as these, harder than adamant those hearts which in after years forgot all that the Lord had done, and broke off from their allegiance to him.

Verse 49. He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble. His last arrow was the sharpest. He reserved the strong wine of his indignation to the last. Note how the psalmist piles up the words, and well he might; for blow followed blow, each one more staggering than its predecessor, and then the crushing stroke was reserved for the end. By sending evil angels among them. Messengers of evil entered their houses at midnight, and smote the dearest objects of their love. The angels were evil to them, though good enough in themselves; those who to the heirs of salvation are ministers of grace, are to the heirs of wrath executioners of judgment. When God sends angels, they are sure to come, and if he bids them slay they will not spare. See how sin sets all the powers of heaven in array against man; he has no friend left in the universe when God is his enemy.

Verse 50. He made a way to his anger, coming to the point with them by slow degrees; assailing their outworks first by destroying their property, and then coming in upon their persons as through an open breach in the walls. He broke down all the comforts of their life, and then advanced against their life itself. Nothing could stand in his way; he cleared a space in which to do execution upon his adversaries. He spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence. In their soul was the origin of the sin, and he followed it to its source and smote it there. A fierce disease filled the land with countless funerals; Jehovah dealt out myriads of blows, and multitudes of spirits failed before him.

Verse 51. And smote all the firstborn in Egypt. No exceptions were made, the monarch bewailed his heir as did the menial at the mill. They smote the Lord's firstborn, even Israel, and he smites theirs. The chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham. Swinging his scythe over the field, death topped off the highest flowers. The tents of Ham knew each one its own peculiar sorrow, and were made to

sympathise with the sorrows which had been ruthlessly inflicted upon the habitations of Israel. Thus curses come home to roost. Oppressors are repaid in their own coin, without the discount of a penny.

Verse 52. But made his own people to go forth like sheep. The contrast is striking, and ought never to have been forgotten by the people. The wolves were slain in heaps, the sheep were carefully gathered, and triumphantly delivered. The tables were turned, and the poor serfs became the honoured people, while their oppressors were humbled before them. Israel went out in a compact body like a flock; they were defenceless in themselves as sheep, but they were safe under their Great Shepherd; they left Egypt as easily as a flock leaves one pasture for another. And guided them in the wilderness like a flock. Knowing nothing of the way by their own understanding or experience, they were, nevertheless, rightly directed, for the All wise God knew every spot of the wilderness. To the sea, through the sea, and from the sea, the Lord led his chosen; while their former taskmasters were too cowed in spirit, and broken in power, to dare to molest them.

Verse 53. And he led them on safely, so that they feared not. After the first little alarm, natural enough when they found themselves pursued by their old taskmasters, they plucked up courage and ventured forth boldly into the sea, and afterwards into the desert where no man dwelt. But the sea overwhelmed their enemies. They were gone, gone for ever, never to disturb the fugitives again. That tremendous blow effectually defended the tribes for forty years from any further attempt to drive them back. Egypt found the stone too heavy and was glad to let it alone. Let the Lord be praised who thus effectually freed his elect nation. What a grand narrative have we been considering. Well might the mightiest master of sacred song select "Israel in Egypt" as a choice theme for his genius; and well may every believing mind linger over every item of the amazing transaction. The marvel is that the favoured nation should live as if unmindful of it all, and yet such is human nature. Alas, poor man! Rather, alas, base heart! We now, after a pause, follow again the chain of events, the narration of which had been interrupted by a retrospect, and we find Israel entering into the promised land, there to repeat her follies and enlarge her crimes.

Verse 54. And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary. He conducted them to the frontier of the Holy Land, where he intended the tabernacle to become the permanent symbol of his abode among his people. He did not leave them halfway upon their journey to their heritage; his power and wisdom preserved the nation till the palm trees of Jericho were within sight on the other side of the river. Even to this mountain, which his right hand had purchased. Nor did he leave them then, but still conducted them till they were in the region round about Zion, which was to be the central seat of his worship. This the Lord had purchased in type of old by the sacrifice of Isaac, fit symbol of the greater sacrifice which was in due season to be presented there: that mountain was also redeemed by power, when the Lord's right hand enabled his valiant men to smite the Jebusites, and take the sacred hill from the insulting Canaanite. Thus shall the elect of God enjoy the sure protection of the Lord of hosts, even to the border land of death, and through the river, up to the hill of the Lord in glory. The purchased people shall safely reach the purchased inheritance.

Verse 55. He cast out the heathen also before them, or "he drove out the nations." Not only were armies routed, but whole peoples displaced. The iniquity of the Canaanites was full; their vices made them rot above ground; therefore, the land ate up its inhabitants, the hornets vexed them, the pestilence destroyed them, and the sword of the tribes completed the execution to which the justice of long provoked heaven had at length appointed them. The Lord was the true conqueror of Canaan; he cast out the nations as men cast out filth from their habitations, he uprooted them as noxious weeds

are extirpated by the husbandman. And divided them an inheritance by line. He divided the land of the nations among the tribes by lot and measure, assigning Hivite, Perizzite, and Jebusite territory to Simeon, Judah, or Ephraim, as the case might be. Among those condemned nations were not only giants in stature, but also giants in crime: those monsters of iniquity had too long defiled the earth; it was time that they should no more indulge the unnatural crimes for which they were infamous; they were, therefore, doomed to forfeit life and lands by the hands of the tribes of Israel. The distribution of the forfeited country was made by divine appointment; it was no scramble, but a judicial appointment of lands which had fallen to the crown by the attainder of the former holders. And made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents. The favoured people entered upon a furnished house: they found the larder supplied, for they fed upon the old corn of the land, and the dwellings were already builded in which they could dwell. Thus does another race often enter into the lot of a former people, and it is sad indeed when the change which judgment decrees does not turn out to be much for the better, because the incomers inherit the evils as well as the goods of the ejected. Such a case of judicial visitation ought to have had a salutary influence upon the tribes; but, alas, they were incorrigible, and would not learn even from examples so near at home and so terribly suggestive.

Verse 56. Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God. Change of condition had not altered their manners. They left their nomadic habits, but not their tendencies to wander from their God. Though every divine promise had been fulfilled to the letter, and the land flowing with milk and honey was actually their own, yet they tried the Lord again with unbelief, and provoked him with other sins. He is not only high and glorious, but most High, yea, the most High, the only being who deserves to be so highly had in honour; yet, instead of honouring him, Israel grieved him with rebellion. And kept not his testimonies. They were true to nothing but hereditary treachery; steadfast in nothing but in falsehood. They knew his truth and forgot it, his will and disobeyed it, his grace and perverted it to an occasion for greater transgression. Reader, dost thou need a looking glass? See here is one which suits the present expositor well; does it not also reflect thine image?

Verse 57. But turned back. Turned over the old leaf, repeated the same offences, started aside like an ill made bow, were false and faithless to their best promises. And dealt unfaithfully like their fathers, proving themselves legitimate by manifesting the treachery of their sires. They were a new generation, but not a new nation—another race yet not another. Evil propensities are transmitted; the birth follows the progenitor; the wild ass breeds wild asses; the children of the raven fly to the carrion. Human nature does not improve, the new editions contain all the errata of the first, and sometimes fresh errors are imported. They were turned aside like a deceitful bow, which not only fails to send the arrow towards the mark in a direct line, but springs back to the archer's hurt, and perhaps sends the shaft among his friends to their serious jeopardy. Israel boasted of the bow as the national weapon, they sang the song of the bow, and hence a deceitful bow is made to be the type and symbol of their own unsteadfastness; God can make men's glory the very ensign of their shame, he draws a bar sinister across the escutcheon of traitors.

Verse 58. For they provoked him to anger with their high places. This was their first error—will worship, or the worship of God, otherwise than according to his command. Many think lightly of this, but it was no mean sin; and its tendencies to further offence are very powerful. The Lord would have his holy place remain as the only spot for sacrifice; and Israel, in wilful rebellion, (no doubt glossed over by the plea of great devotion,) determined to have many altars upon many hills. If they might have but one God, they insisted upon it that they would not be restricted to one sacred place of sacrifice. How much of the worship of the present day is neither more nor less than sheer will

worship! Nobody dare plead a divine appointment for a title of the offices, festivals, ceremonies, and observances of certain churches. Doubtless God, so far from being honoured by worship which he has not commanded, is greatly angered at it. And moved him to jealousy with their graven images. This was but one more step; they manufactured symbols of the invisible God, for they lusted after something tangible and visible to which they could shew reverence. This also is the crying sin of modern times. Do we not hear and see superstition abounding? Images, pictures, crucifixes, and a host of visible things are had in religious honour, and worst of all men now a days worship what they eat, and call that a God which passes into their belly, and thence into baser places still. Surely the Lord is very patient, or he would visit the earth for this worst and basest of idolatry. He is a jealous God, and abhors to see himself dishonoured by any form of representation which can come from man's hands.

Verse 59. When God heard this, he was wroth. The mere report of it filled him with indignation; he could not bear it, he was incensed to the uttermost, and most justly so. And greatly abhorred Israel. He cast his idolatrous people from his favour, and left them to themselves, and their own devices. How could he have fellowship with idols? What concord hath Christ with Belial? Sin is in itself so offensive that it makes the sinner offensive too. Idols of any sort are highly abhorrent to God, and we must see to it that we keep ourselves from them through divine grace, for rest assured idolatry is not consistent with true grace in the heart. If Dagon sit aloft in any soul, the ark of God is not there. Where the Lord dwells no image of jealousy will be tolerated. A visible church will soon become a visible curse if idols be set up in it, and then the pruning knife will remove it as a dead branch from the vine. Note that God did not utterly cast away his people Israel even when he greatly abhorred them, for he returned in mercy to them, so the subsequent verses tell us: so now the seed of Abraham, though for awhile under a heavy cloud, will be gathered yet again, for the covenant of salt shall not be broken. As for the spiritual seed, the Lord hath not despised nor abhorred them; they are his peculiar treasure and lie for ever near his heart.

Verse 60. So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men. His glory would no more reveal itself there, he left Shiloh to become a complete ruin. At the door of that tent shameless sin had been perpetrated, and all around it idols had been adored, and therefore the glory departed and Ichabod was sounded as a word of dread concerning Shiloh and the tribe of Ephraim. Thus may the candlestick be removed though the candle is not quenched. Erring churches become apostate, but a true church still remains; if Shiloh be profaned Zion is consecrated. Yet is it ever a solemn caution to all the assemblies of the saints, admonishing them to walk humbly with their God, when we read such words as those of the prophet Jeremiah in his seventh chapter, "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these. Go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel." Let us take heed, lest as the ark never returned to Shiloh after its capture by the Philistines, so the gospel may be taken from us in judgment, never to be restored to the same church again.

Verse 61. And delivered his strength into captivity. The ark was captured by the Philistines in battle, only because the Lord for the punishment of Israel chose to deliver it into their hands, otherwise they could have had no power at all against it. The token of the divine presence is here poetically called "his strength; ", and, indeed, the presence of the Lord is his strength among his people. It was a black day when the mercyseat was removed, when the cherubim took flight, and Israel's palladium was carried away. And his glory into the enemy's hand. The ark was the place for the revealed glory of

God, and his enemies exulted greatly when they bore it away into their own cities. Nothing could more clearly have shown the divine displeasure. It seemed to say that Jehovah would sooner dwell among his avowed adversaries than among so false a people as Israel; he would sooner bear the insults of Philistia than the treacheries of Ephraim. This was a fearful downfall for the favoured nation, and it was followed by dire judgments of most appalling nature. When God is gone all is gone. No calamity can equal the withdrawal of the divine presence from a people. O Israel, how art thou brought low! Who shall help thee now that thy God has left thee!

Verse 62. He gave his people over also unto the sword. They fell in battle because they were no longer aided by the divine strength. Sharp was the sword, but sharper still the cause of its being unsheathed. And was wroth with his inheritance. They were his still, and twice in this verse they are called so; yet his regard for them did not prevent his chastening them, even with a rod of steel. Where the love is most fervent, the jealousy is most cruel. Sin cannot be tolerated in those who are a people near unto God.

Verse 63. The fire consumed their young men. As fire slew Nadab and Abihu literally, so the fire of divine wrath fell on the sons of Eli, who defiled the sanctuary of the Lord, and the like fire, in the form of war, consumed the flower of the people. And their maidens were not given to marriage. No nuptial hymn were sung, the bride lacked her bridegroom, the edge of the sword had cut the bands of their espousals, and left unmarried those who else had been extolled in hymns and congratulations. Thus Israel was brought very low, she could not find husbands for her maids, and therefore her state was not replenished; no young children clustered around parental knees. The nation had failed in its solemn task of instructing the young in the fear of Jehovah, and it was a fitting judgment that the very production of a posterity should be endangered.

Verse 64. Their priests fell by the sword. Hophni and Phineas were slain; they were among the chief in sin, and, therefore, they perished with the rest. Priesthood is no shelter for transgressors; the jewelled breastplate cannot turn aside the arrows of judgment. And their widows made no lamentation. Their private griefs were swallowed up in the greater national agony, because the ark of God was taken. As the maidens had no heart for the marriage song, so the widows had no spirit, even to utter the funeral wail. The dead were buried too often and too hurriedly to allow of the usual rites of lamentation. This was the lowest depth; from this point things will take a gracious turn.

Verse 65. The Lord awaked as one out of sleep. Justly inactive, he had suffered the enemy to triumph, his ark to be captured, and his people to be slain; but now he arouses himself, his heart is full of pity for his chosen, and anger against the insulting foe. Woe to thee, O Philistia, now thou shalt feel the weight of his right hand! Waking and putting forth strength like a man who has taken a refreshing draught, the Lord is said to be, like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. Strong and full of energy the Lord dashed upon his foes, and made them stagger beneath his blows. His ark from city to city went as an avenger rather than as a trophy, and in every place the false gods fell helplessly before it.

Verse 66. He smote his enemies in the hinder parts. The emerods rendered them ridiculous, and their numerous defeats made them yet more so. They fled but were overtaken and wounded in the back to their eternal disgrace. He put them to a perpetual reproach. Orientals are not very refined, and we can well believe that the haemorrhoids were the subject of many a taunt against the Philistines, as also were their frequent defeats by Israel until at last they were crushed under, never to exist again as

a distinct nation.

Verse 67. Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph. God had honoured Ephraim, for to that tribe belonged Joshua the great conqueror, and Gideon the great judge, and within its borders was Shiloh the place of the ark and the sanctuary; but now the Lord would change all this and set up other rulers. He would no longer leave matters to the leadership of Ephraim, since that tribe had been tried and found wanting. And chose not the tribe of Ephraim. Sin had been found in them, folly and instability, and therefore they were set aside as unfit to lead.

Verse 68. But chose the tribe of Judah. To give the nation another trial this tribe was elected to supremacy. This was according to Jacob's dying prophecy. Our Lord sprang out of Judah, and he it is whom his brethren shall praise. The Mount Zion which he loved. The tabernacle and ark were removed to Zion during the reign of David; no honour was left to the wayward Ephraimites. Hard by this mountain the Father of the Faithful had offered up his only son, and there in future days the great gatherings of his chosen seed would be, and therefore Zion is said to be lovely unto God.

Verse 69. And he built his sanctuary like high palaces. The tabernacle was placed on high, literally and spiritually it was a mountain of beauty. True religion was exalted in the land. For sanctity it was a temple, for majesty it was a palace. Like the earth which he hath established for ever. Stability was well as stateliness were seen in the temple, and so also in the church of God. The prophets saw both in vision.

Verse 70. He chose David also his servant. It was an election of a sovereignly gracious kind, and it operated practically by making the chosen man a willing servant of the Lord. He was not chosen because he was a servant, but in order that he might be so. David always esteemed it to be a high honour that he was both elect of God, and a servant of God. And took him from the sheepfolds. A shepherd of sheep he had been, and this was a fit school for a shepherd of men. Lowliness of occupation will debar no man from such honours as the Lord's election confers, the Lord seeth not as man seeth. He delights to bless those who are of low estate.

Verse 71. From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. Exercising the care and art of those who watch for the young lambs, David followed the ewes in their wanderings; the tenderness and patience thus acquired would tend to the development of characteristics most becoming in a king. To the man thus prepared, the office and dignity which God had appointed for him, came in due season, and he was enabled worthily to wear them. It is wonderful how often divine wisdom so arranges the early and obscure portion of a choice life, so as to make it a preparatory school for a more active and noble future.

Verse 72. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart. David was upright before God, and never swerved in heart from the obedient worship of Jehovah. Whatever faults he had, he was unfeignedly sincere in his allegiance to Israel's superior king; he shepherded for God with honest heart. And guided them by the skilfulness of his hands. He was a sagacious ruler, and the psalmist magnifies the Lord for having appointed him. Under David, the Jewish kingdom rose to an honourable position among the nations, and exercised an influence over its neighbours. In closing the Psalm which has described the varying conditions of the chosen nation, we are glad to end so peacefully; with all noise of tumult or of sinful rites hushed into silence. After a long voyage over a stormy sea, the ark of the Jewish state rested on its Ararat, beneath a wise and gentle reign, to be wafted no

more hither and thither by floods and gales. The psalmist had all along intended to make this his last stanza, and we too may be content to finish all our songs of love with the reign of the Lord's anointed. Only we may eagerly enquire, when will it come? When shall we end these desert roamings, these rebellions, and chastenings, and enter into the rest of a settled kingdom, with the Lord Jesus reigning as "the Prince of the house of David?" Thus have we ended this lengthy parable, may we in our life parable have less of sin, and as much of grace as are displayed in Israel's history, and may we close it under the safe guidance of "that great Shepherd of the sheep." AMEN.

Psalm 79

Verse 1. O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance. It is the cry of amazement at sacrilegious intrusion; as if the poet were struck with horror. The stranger pollutes thine hallowed courts with his tread. All Canaan is thy land, but thy foes have ravaged it. "Thy holy temple have they defiled." Into the inmost sanctuary they have profanely forced their way, and there behaved themselves arrogantly. Thus, the holy land, the holy house, and the holy city, were all polluted by the uncircumcised. It is an awful thing when wicked men are found in the church and numbered with her ministry. Then are the tares sown with the wheat, and the poisoned gourds cast into the pot. "They have laid Jerusalem on heaps." After devouring and defiling, they have come to destroying, and have done their work with a cruel completeness. Jerusalem, the beloved city, the joy of the nation, the abode of her God, was totally wrecked. Alas! alas! for Israel! It is sad to see the foe in our own house, but worse to meet him in the house of God; they strike hardest who smite at our religion. The psalmist piles up the agony; he was a suppliant, and he knew how to bring out the strong points of his case. We ought to order our case before the Lord with as much care as if our success depended on our pleading. Men in earthly courts use all their powers to obtain their ends, and so also should we state our case with earnestness, and bring forth our strong arguments.

Verse 2. "The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth." The enemy cared not to bury the dead, and there was not a sufficient number of Israel left alive to perform the funeral rites; therefore, the precious relics of the departed were left to be devoured of vultures and torn by wolves. Beasts on which man could not feed fed on him. The flesh of creation's Lord became meat for carrion crows and hungry dogs. Dire are the calamities of war, yet have they happened to God's saints and servants. This might well move the heart of the poet, and he did well to appeal to the heart of God by reciting the grievous evil. Such might have been the lamentation of an early Christian as he thought of the amphitheatre and all its deeds of blood. Note in the two verses how the plea is made to turn upon God's property in the temple and the people:—we read "thine inheritance, ""thy temple, ""thy servants, "and "thy saints." Surely the Lord will defend his own, and will not suffer rampant adversaries to despoil them.

Verse 3. "Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem." The invaders slew men as if their blood was of no more value than so much water; they poured it forth as lavishly as when the floods deluge the plains. The city of holy peace became a field of blood. "And there was none to bury them." The few who survived were afraid to engage in the task. This was a serious trial and grievous horror to the Jews, who evinced much care concerning their burials. Has it come to this, that there are none to bury the dead of thy family, O Lord? Can none be found to grant a shovelful of earth with which to cover up the poor bodies of thy murdered saints? What woe is here! How glad should we be that we live in so quiet an age, when the blast of the trumpet is no more heard in our streets.

Verse 4. "We are become a reproach to our neighbours." Those who have escaped the common foe make a mockery of us, they fling our disasters into our face, and ask us, "Where is your God?" Pity should be shown to the afflicted, but in too many cases it is not so, for a hard logic argues that those who suffer more than ordinary calamities must have been extraordinary sinners. Neighbours especially are often the reverse of neighbourly; the nearer they dwell the less they sympathize. It is most pitiable it should be so. "A scorn and a derision to them that are round about us." To find mirth in others' miseries, and to exult over the ills of others, is worthy only of the devil and of those whose father he is. Thus the case is stated before the Lord, and it is a very deplorable one. Asaph was an excellent advocate, for he gave a telling description of calamities which were under his own eyes, and in which he sympathized, but we have a mightier Intercessor above, who never ceases to urge our suit before the eternal throne.

Verse 5. "How long, Lord?" Will there be no end to these chastisements? They are most sharp and overwhelming; wilt thou much longer continue them? "Wilt thou be angry for ever?" Is thy mercy gone so that thou wilt for ever smite? "Shall thy jealousy burn like fire?" There was great cause for the Lord to be jealous, since idols had been set up, and Israel had gone aside from his worship, but the psalmist begs the Lord not to consume his people utterly as with fire, but to abate their woes.

Verse 6. "Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee." If thou must smite look further afield; spare thy children and strike thy foes. There are lands where thou art in no measure acknowledged; be pleased to visit these first with thy judgments, and let thine erring Israel have a respite. "And upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name." Hear us the prayerful, and avenge thyself upon the prayerless. Sometimes providence appears to deal much more severely with the righteous than with the wicked, and this verse is a bold appeal founded upon such an appearance. It in effect says—Lord, if thou must empty out the vials of thy wrath, begin with those who have no measure of regard for thee, but are openly up in arms against thee; and be pleased to spare thy people, who are thine notwithstanding all their sins.

Verse 7. "For they have devoured Jacob." The oppressor would quite eat up the saints if he could. If these lions do not swallow us, it is because the Lord has sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths. "And laid waste his dwelling place," or his pasture. The invader left no food for man or beast, but devoured all as the locust. The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

Verse 8. "O remember not against us former iniquities." Sins accumulate against nations. Generations lay up stores of transgressions to be visited upon their successors; hence this urgent prayer. In Josiah's days the most earnest repentance was not able to avert the doom which former long years of idolatry had sealed against Judah. Every man has reason to ask for an act of oblivion for his past sins, and every nation should make this a continual prayer. "Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low." Hasten to our rescue, for our nation is hurrying down to destruction; our numbers are diminished and our condition is deplorable. Observe how penitent sorrow seizes upon the sweeter attributes, and draws her piteous from the "tender mercies" of God; see, too, how she pleads her own distress, and not her goodness, as a motive for the display of mercy. Let souls who are brought very low find an argument in their abject condition. What can so powerfully appeal to pity as dire affliction? The quaint prayer-book version is touchingly expressive: "O remember not our old sins, but have mercy upon us, and that soon; for we are come to great misery." This supplication befits a sinner's life. We have known seasons when this would have been as good a prayer for our burdened heart as any that human mind could compose.

Verse 9. "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name." This is masterly pleading. No argument has such force as this. God's glory was tarnished in the eyes of the heathen by the defeat of his people, and the profanation of his temple; therefore, his distressed servants implore his aid, that his great name may no more be the scorn of blaspheming enemies. "And deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake." Sin,—the root of the evil—is seen and confessed; pardon of sin is sought as well as removal of chastisement, and both are asked not as matters of right, but as gifts of grace. God's name is a second time brought into the pleading. Believers will find it their wisdom to use very frequently this noble plea: it is the great gun of the battle, the mightiest weapon in the armoury of prayer.

Verse 10. "Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God?" Why should those impious mouths be filled with food so sweet to them, but so bitter to us? When the afflictions of God's people become the derision of sinners, and cause them to ridicule religion, we have good ground for expostulation with the Lord. "Let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed." Justice is desired that God may be vindicated and feared. It is but meet that those who taunted the people of God because they smarted under the Lord's rod, should be made themselves also to smart by the same hand. If any complain of the spirit of this imprecation, we think they do so needlessly; for it is the common feeling of every patriot to desire to see his country's wrongs redressed, and of every Christian to wish a noble vengeance for the church by the overthrow of error. The destruction of Antichrist is the recompense of the blood of the martyrs, and by no means is it to be deprecated; far rather is it one of the most glorious hopes of the latter days.

Verse 11. "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee." When thy people cannot sing, and dare not shout aloud, then let their silent sigh ascend into thine ear, and secure for them deliverance. These words are suitable for the afflicted in a great variety of conditions; men of experience will know how to adapt them to their own position and to use them in reference to others. "According to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die." Faith grows while it prays; the appeal to the Lord's tender mercy is here supplemented by another addressed to the divine power, and the petitioner rises from a request for those who are brought low, to a prayer for those who are on the verge of death, set apart as victims for the slaughter. How consoling is it to desponding believers to reflect that God can preserve even those who bear the sentence of death in themselves. Men and devils may consign us to perdition, while sickness drags us to the grave, and sorrow sinks us in the dust; but, there is One who can keep our soul alive, ay, and bring it up again from the depths of despair. A lamb shall live between the lion's jaws if the Lord wills it. Even in the charnel, life shall vanquish death if God be near.

Verse 12. "And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord." They denied thine existence, mocked thy power, insulted thy worship, and destroyed thy house; up, therefore, O Lord, and make them feel to the full that thou art not to be mocked with impunity. Pour into their laps good store of shame because they dared insult the God of Israel. Recompense them fully, till they have received the perfect number of punishments. It will be so. The wish of the text will become matter of fact. The Lord will avenge his own elect though he bear long with them.

Verse 13. "So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks far ever; we will shew

forth thy praise to all generations." The gratitude of the church is lasting as well as deep. On her tablets are memorials of great deliverances, and, as long as she shall exist, her sons will rehearse them with delight. We have a history which will survive all other records, and it is bright in every line with the glory of the Lord. From the direst calamities God's glory springs, and the dark days of his people become the prelude to unusual displays of the Lord's love and power.

Psalm 80

Verse 1. "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel." Hear thou the bleatings of thy suffering flock. The name is full of tenderness, and hence is selected by the troubled psalmist: broken hearts delight in names of grace. Good old Jacob delighted to think of God as the Shepherd of Israel, and this verse may refer to his dying expression: "From thence is the Shepherd, the stone of Israel." We may be quite sure that he who deigns to be a shepherd to his people will not turn a deaf ear to their complaints. "Thou that ledest Joseph like a flock." The people are called here by the name of that renowned son who became a second father to the tribes, and kept them alive in Egypt; possibly they were known to the Egyptians under the name of "the family of Joseph," and if so, it seems most natural to call them by that name in this place. The term may, however, refer to the ten tribes of which Manasseh was the acknowledged head. The Lord had of old in the wilderness led, guided, shepherded all the tribes; and, therefore, the appeal is made to him. The Lord's doings in the past are strong grounds for appeal and expectation as to the present and the future. "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth." The Lord's especial presence was revealed upon the mercyseat between the cherubim, and in all our pleadings we should come to the Lord by this way: only upon the mercyseat will God reveal his grace, and only there can we hope to commune with him. Let us ever plead the name of Jesus, who is our true mercyseat, to whom we may come boldly, and through whom we may look for a display of the glory of the Lord on our behalf. Our greatest dread is the withdrawal of the Lord's presence, and our brightest hope is the prospect of his return. In the darkest times of Israel, the light of her Shepherd's countenance is all she needs.

Verse 2. "Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us." It is wise to mention the names of the Lord's people in prayer, for they are precious to him. Jesus bears the names of his people on his breastplate. Just as the mention of the names of his children has power with a father, so it is with the Lord. The three names were near of kin; Ephraim and Manasseh represent Joseph, and it was meet that Benjamin, the other son of the beloved Rachel, should be mentioned in the same breath: these three tribes were wont to march together in the wilderness, following immediately behind the ark. The prayer is that the God of Israel would be mighty on behalf of his people, chasing away their foes, and saving his people. O that in these days the Lord may be pleased to remember every part of his church, and make all her tribes to see his salvation. We would not mention our own denomination only, but lift up prayer for all the sections of the one church.

Verse 3. "Turn us again, O God." It is not so much said, "turn our captivity," but "turn us." All will come right if we are right. The best turn is not that of circumstances but of character. When the Lord turns his people he will soon turn their condition. It needs the Lord himself to do this, for conversion is as divine a work as creation; and those who have been once turned unto God, if they at any time backslide, as much need the Lord to turn them again as to turn them at the first. The word may be read, "restore us; verily, it is a choice mercy that "he restoreth my soul." "And cause thy face to shine." Be favourable to us, smile upon us. This was the high priest's blessing upon Israel: what the

Lord has already given us by our High Priest and Mediator we may right confidently ask of him. "And we shall be saved." All that is wanted for salvation is the Lord's favour. One glance of his gracious eye would transform Tophet into Paradise. No matter how fierce the foe, or dire the captivity, the shining face of God ensures both victory and liberty. This verse is a very useful prayer. Since we too often turn aside, let us often with our lips and heart cry, "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved."

Verse 4. "O Lord God of Hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?" How long shall the smoke of thy wrath drown the smoking incense of our prayers? Prayer would fain enter thy holy place, but thy wrath battles with it, and prevents its entrance. That God should be angry with us when sinning seems natural enough, but that he should be angry even with our prayers is a bitter grief. With many a pang may the pleader ask, "How long?" Commander of all the hosts of thy creatures, able to save thy saints in their extremity, shall they for ever cry to thee in vain?

Verse 5. "Thou feedest them with the bread of tears." Their meat is seasoned with brine distilled from weeping eyes. Their meals, which were once such pleasant seasons of social merriment, are now like funeral feasts to which each man contributes his bitter morsel. Thy people ate bread of wheat before, but now they receive from thine own hand no better diet than bread of tears. "And givest them tears to drink in great measure." Tears are both their food and their drink, and that without stint. They swallow tierces of tears, and swim in gulfs of grief, and all this by God's own appointment; not because their enemies have them in their power by force of arms, but because their God refuses to interpose. Tear bread is even more the fruit of the curse than to eat bread in the sweat of one's face, but it shall by divine love be turned into a greater blessing by ministering to our spiritual health.

Verse 6. "Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours." Always jealous and malicious, Edom and Moab exulted over Israel's troubles, and then fell to disputing about their share of the spoil. A neighbour's jeer is ever most cutting, especially if a man has been superior to them, and claimed to possess more grace. None are unneighbourly as envious neighbours. "And our enemies laugh among themselves." They find mirth in our misery, comedy in our tragedy, salt for their wit in the brine of our tears, amusement in our amazement. It is devilish to sport with another's griefs; but it is the constant habit of the world which lieth in the wicked one to make merry with the saints' tribulations; the seed of the serpent follow their progenitor and rejoice in evil.

Verse 7. "Turn us again, O God of hosts." The prayer rises in the form of its address to God. He is here the God of Hosts. The more we approach the Lord in prayer and contemplation the higher will our ideas of him become.

Verse 8. "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt." There it was in unfriendly soil: the waters of the Nile watered it not, but were as death to its shoots, while the inhabitants of the land despised it and trampled it down. Glorious was the right hand of the Lord when with power and great wonders he removed his pleasant plant in the teeth of those who sought its destruction. "Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it." Seven nations were digged out to make space for the vine of the Lord; the old trees, which long had engrossed the soil, were torn up root and branch; oaks of Bashan, and palm trees of Jericho were displaced for the chosen vine. It was securely placed in its appointed position with divine prudence and wisdom. Small in appearance, very dependent, exceeding weak, and apt to trail on the ground, yet the vine of Israel was chosen of the Lord, because he knew that by incessant care, and abounding skill, he could make of it a goodly fruit bearing plant.

Verse 9. "Thou preparedst room before it." The weeds, brambles, and huge stones were cleared; the Amorites, and their brethren in iniquity, were made to quit the scene, their forces were routed, their kings slain, their cities captured, and Canaan became like a plot of land, made ready for a vineyard. "And didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land." Israel became settled and established as a vine well rooted, and then it began to flourish and to spread to every side. This analogy might be applied to the experience of every believer in Jesus. The Lord has planted us, we are growing downward, "rooting roots," and by his grace we are also advancing in manifest enlargement. The same is true of the church in a yet closer degree, for at this moment through the goodwill of the dresser of the vineyard her branches spread far and wide.

Verse 10. "The hills were covered with the shadow of it." Israel dwelt up the mountains' summits, cultivating every foot of soil. The nation multiplied and became so great that other lands felt its influence, or were shadowed by it. "And the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars." The nation itself was so great that even its tribes were powerful and worthy to take rank among the mighty. A more correct rendering describes the cedars as covered with the vine, and we know that in many lands vines climb the trees, and cover them. What a vine must that be which ascends the cedars of God, and even overtops them! It is a noble picture of the prosperity of the Israelitish people in their best days. In Solomon's time the little land of Israel occupied a high place among the nations. There have been times when the church of God also has been eminently conspicuous, and her power has been felt far and near.

Verse 11. "She sent out her boughs unto the sea." Along the Mediterranean and, perhaps, across its waters, Israel's power was felt. "And her branches unto the river." On her Eastern side she pushed her commerce even to the Euphrates. Those were brave days for Israel, and would have continued, had not sin cut them short. When the church pleases the Lord, her influence becomes immense, far beyond the proportion which her numbers or her power would lead us to expect; but, alas! when the Lord leaves her she becomes as worthless, useless, and despised as an untended vine, which is of all plants the most valueless.

Verse 12. "Why hast thou then broken down her hedges?" Thou hast withdrawn protection from her after caring for her with all this care; wherefore is this, O Lord? A vine unprotected is exposed to every form of injury; none regard it, all prey upon it: such was Israel when given over to her enemies; such has the church full often been. "So that all they which pass by the way do pluck her." Her cruel neighbours have a pluck at her, and marauding bands, like roaming beasts, must needs pick at her. With God no enemy can harm us, without him none are so weak as to be unable to do us damage.

Verse 13. The boar out of the wood doth waste it. Such creatures are famous for rending and devouring vines. Babylon, like a beast from the marshes of the Euphrates, came up and wasted Judah and Israel. Fierce peoples, comparable to wild swine of the forest, warred with the Jewish nation, until it was gored and torn like a vine destroyed by greedy hogs. And the wild beast of the field doth devour it. First one foe and then another wreaked vengeance on the nation, neither did God interpose to chase them away. Ruin followed ruin; the fox devoured the young shoots which had been saved from the damage wrought by the boar. Alas, poor land. How low wast thou brought! An oak or cedar might have been crushed by such ravages, but how canst thou endure it, O weak and tender vine? See what evils follow in the train of sin, and how terrible a thing it is for a people to be forsaken of their God.

Verse 14. Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts. Turn thyself to us as well as us to thee. Thou hast gone from us because of our sins, come back to us, for we sigh and cry after thee. Or, if it be too much to ask thee to come then do at least give us some consideration and cast an eye upon our griefs. Look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine. Do not close thine eyes; it is thy vine, do not utterly turn away from it as though it were quite gone from thy mind. Great Husbandman, at least note the mischief which the beasts have done, for then it may be thy heart will pity, and thy hand will be outstretched to deliver.

Verse 15. And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted. Shall all thy care be lost? Thou has done so much, wilt thou lose thy labour? With thy power and wisdom thou didst great things for thy people, wilt thou now utterly give them up, and suffer thine enemies to exult in the evil which they delight in? And the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. A prayer for the leader whom the Lord had raised up, or for the Messiah whom they expected. Though the vine had been left, yet one branch had been regarded of the Lord, as if to furnish a scion for another vine; therefore, is the prayer made in this form. Let us pray the Lord, if he will not in the first place look upon his church, to look upon the Lord Jesus, and then behold her in mercy for his sake. This is the true art of prayer, to put Christ forward and cry, "Him and then the sinner see, Look through Jesus' wounds on me."

Verse 16. It is burned with fire. In broken utterances the sorrowful singer utters his distress. The vineyard was like a forest which has been set on fire; the choice vines were charred and dead. It is cut down. The cruel axe had hacked after its murderous fashion, the branches were lopped, the trunk was wounded, desolation reigned supreme. They perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. God's rebuke was to Israel what fire and axe would be to a vine. His favour is life, and his wrath is as messengers of death. One angry glance from Jehovah's eye is sufficient to lay all the vineyards of Ephraim desolate. O Lord, look not thus upon our churches. Rebuke us, but not in anger.

Verse 17. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand. Let thy power rest on thy true Benjamin, son of thy right hand; give a commission to some chosen man by whom thou wilt deliver. Honour him, save us, and glorify thyself. There is no doubt here an outlook to the Messiah, for whom believing Jews had learned to look as the Saviour in time of trouble. Upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. Send forth thy power with him whom thou shalt strengthen to accomplish thy purposes of grace. It pleases God to work for the sons of men by sons of men. "By man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead." Nations rise or fall largely through the instrumentality of individuals: by a Napoleon the kingdoms are scourged, and by a Wellington nations are saved from the tyrant. It is by the man Christ Jesus that fallen Israel is yet to rise, and indeed through him, who deigns to call himself the Son of Man, the world is to be delivered from the dominion of Satan and the curse of sin. O Lord, fulfil thy promise to the man of thy right hand, who participates in thy glory, and give him to see the pleasure of the Lord prospering in his hand.

Verse 18. So will not we go back from thee. Under the leadership of one whom God had chosen the nation would be kept faithful, grace would work gratitude, and so cement them to their allegiance. It is in Christ that we abide faithful; because he lives we live also. There is no hope of our perseverance apart from him. Quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. If the Lord gives life out of death, his praise is sure to follow. The Lord Jesus is such a leader, that in him is life, and the life is the light of men. He is our life. When he visits our souls anew we shall be revived, and our praise shall ascend unto the name of the Triune God.

Verse 19. Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts. Here we have another advance in the title and the incommunicable name of Jehovah, the I AM is introduced. Faith's day grows brighter as the hours roll on; and her prayers grow more full and mighty. Cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. Even we who were so destroyed. No extremity is too great for the power of God. He is able to save at the last point, and that too by simply turning his smiling face upon his afflicted. Men can do little with their arm, but God can do all things with a glance. Oh, to live for ever in the light of Jehovah's countenance.

Psalm 81

Verse 1. Sing, in tune and measure, so that the public praise may be in harmony; sing with joyful notes, and sounds melodious. Aloud. For the heartiest praise is due to our good Lord. His acts of love to us speak more loudly than any of our words of gratitude can do. No dulness should ever stupefy our psalmody, or half heartedness cause us to limp along. Sing aloud, ye debtors to sovereign grace, your hearts are profoundly grateful: let your voices express your thankfulness. Unto God our strength. The Lord was the strength of his people in delivering them out of Egypt with a high hand, and also in sustaining them in the wilderness, placing them in Canaan, preserving them from their foes, and giving them victory. To whom do men give honour but to those upon whom they rely, therefore let us sing aloud unto our God, who is our strength and our song. Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. The God of the nation, the God of their father Jacob, was extolled in happy music by the Israelitish people; let no Christian be silent, or slack in praise, for this God is our God. It is to be regretted that the niceties of modern singing frighten our congregations from joining lustily in the hymns. For our part we delight in full bursts of praise, and had rather discover the ruggedness of a want of musical training than miss the heartiness of universal congregational song. The gentility which lisps the tune in well bred whispers, or leaves the singing altogether to the choir, is very like a mockery of worship. The gods of Greece and Rome may be worshipped well enough with classical music, but Jehovah can only be adored with the heart, and that music is the best for his service which gives the heart most play.

Verse 2. Take a psalm. Select a sacred song, and then raise it with your hearty voices. And bring hither the timbrel. Beat on your tambourines, ye damsels, let the sound be loud and inspiring. "Sound the trumpets, beat the drums." God is not to be served with misery but with mirthful music, sound ye then the loud timbrel, as of old ye smote it by "Egypt's dark sea." The pleasant harp with the psaltery. The timbrel for sound, must be joined by the harp for sweetness, and this by other stringed instruments for variety. Let the full compass of music be holiness unto the Lord.

Verse 3. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon. Announce the sacred month, the beginning of months, when the Lord brought his people out of the house of bondage. Clear and shrill let the summons be which calls all Israel to adore the Redeeming Lord. In the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. Obedience is to direct our worship, not whim and sentiment: God's appointment gives a solemnity to rites and times which no ceremonial pomp or hierarchical ordinance could confer. The Jews not only observed the ordained month, but that part of the month which had been divinely set apart. The Lord's people in the olden time welcomed the times appointed for worship; let us feel the same exultation, and never speak of the Sabbath as though it could be other than "a delight" and "honourable." Those who plead this passage will keep such feasts as the Lord appoints, but not those which Rome or Canterbury may ordain.

Verse 4. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob. It was a precept binding upon all the tribes that a sacred season should be set apart to commemorate the Lord's mercy; and truly it was but the Lord's due, he had a right and a claim to such special homage. When it can be proved that the observance of Christmas, Whitsuntide, and other Popish festivals was ever instituted by a divine statute, we also will attend to them, but not till then. It is as much our duty to reject the traditions of men, as to observe the ordinances of the Lord. We ask concerning every rite and rubric, "Is this a law of the God of Jacob?" and if it be not clearly so, it is of no authority with us, who walk in Christian liberty.

Verse 5. This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony. The nation is called Joseph, because in Egypt it would probably be known and spoken of as Joseph's family, and indeed Joseph was the foster father of the people. The passover, which is probably here alluded to, was to be a standing memorial of the redemption from Egypt; and everything about it was intended to testify to all ages, and all peoples, the glory of the Lord in the deliverance of his chosen nation. When he went out through the land of Egypt. Much of Egypt was traversed by the tribes in their exodus march, and in every place the feast which they had kept during the night of Egypt's visitation would be a testimony for the Lord, who had also himself in the midnight slaughter gone forth through the land of Egypt. The once afflicted Israelites marched over the land of bondage as victors who trample down the slain.

Where I heard a language that I understood not. Surely the connection requires that we accept these words as the language of the Lord. It would be doing great violence to language if the "I" here should be referred to one person, and the "I" in the next verse to another. But how can it be imagined that the Lord should speak of a language which he understood not, seeing he knows all things, and no form of speech is incomprehensible to him? The reply is, that the Lord here speaks as the God of Israel identifying himself with his own chosen nation, and calling that an unknown tongue to himself which was unknown to them. He had never been adored by psalm or prayer in the tongue of Egypt; the Hebrew was the speech known in his sacred house, and the Egyptian was outlandish and foreign there. In strictest truth, and not merely in figure, might the Lord thus speak, since the wicked customs and idolatrous rites of Egypt were disapproved of by him, and in that sense were unknown. Of the wicked, Jesus shall say, "I never knew you; "and probably in the same sense this expression should be understood, for it may be correctly rendered, "a speech I knew not I am hearing." It was among the griefs of Israel that their taskmasters spake an unknown tongue, and they were thus continually reminded that they were strangers in a strange land. The Lord had pity upon them, and emancipated them, and hence it was their bounden duty to maintain inviolate the memorial of the divine goodness. It is no small mercy to be brought out from an ungodly world and separated unto the Lord.

Verse 6. I removed his shoulder from the burden. Israel was the drudge and slave of Egypt, but God gave him liberty. It was by God alone that the nation was set free. Other peoples owe their liberties to their own efforts and courage, but Israel received its Magna Charta as a free gift of divine power. Truly may the Lord say of everyone of his freed men, I removed his shoulder from the burden. His hands were delivered from the pots. He was no longer compelled to carry earth, and mould it, and bake it; the earth basket was no more imposed upon the people, nor the tale of bricks exacted, for they came out into the open country where none could exact upon them. How typical all this is of the believer's deliverance from legal bondage, when, through faith, the burden of sin glides into the Saviour's sepulchre, and the servile labours of self righteousness come to an end for ever.

Verse 7. Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee. God heard his people's cries in Egypt, and at the Red Sea: this ought to have bound them to him. Since God does not forsake us in our need, we ought never to forsake him at any time. When our hearts wander from God, our answered prayers cry "shame" upon us. I answered thee in the secret place of thunder. Out of the cloud the Lord sent forth tempest upon the foes of his chosen. That cloud was his secret pavilion, within it he hung up his weapons of war, his javelins of lightning his trumpet of thunder; forth from that pavilion he came and overthrew the foe that his own elect might be secure. I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. They had proved him and found him faithful, he afterwards proved them in return. Precious things are tested, therefore Israel's loyalty to her King was put to trial, and, alas, it failed lamentably. The God who was adored one day for his goodness was reviled the next, when the people for a moment felt the pangs of hunger and thirst. The story of Israel is only our own history in another shape. God has heard us, delivered us, liberated us, and too often our unbelief makes the wretched return of mistrust, murmuring, and rebellion. Great is our sin; great is the mercy of our God: let us reflect upon both, and pause a while. Selah. Hurried reading is of little benefit; to sit down a while and meditate is very profitable.

Verse 8. Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee. What? Are the people so insensible as to be deaf to their God? So it would seem, for he earnestly asks a hearing. Are we not also at times quite as careless and immovable? O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me. There is much in this "if." How low have they fallen who will not hearken unto God himself! The deaf adder is not more grovelling. We are not fond of being upbraided, we had rather avoid sharp and cutting truths; and, though the Lord himself rebuke us, we fly from his gentle reproofs.

Verse 9. There shall no strange god be in thee. No alien god is to be tolerated in Israel's tents. Neither shalt thou worship any strange god. Where false gods are, their worship is sure to follow. Man is so desperate an idolater that the image is always a strong temptation: while the nests are there the birds will be eager to return. No other god had done anything for the Jews, and therefore they had no reason for paying homage to any other. To us the same argument will apply. We owe all to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: the world, the flesh, the devil, none of these have been of any service to us; they are aliens, foreigners, enemies, and it is not for us to bow down before them. "Little children keep yourselves from idols," is our Lord's voice to us, and by the power of his Spirit we would cast out every false god from our hearts.

Verse 10. I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Thus did Jehovah usually introduce himself to his people. The great deliverance out of Egypt was that claim upon his people's allegiance which he most usually pleaded. If ever people were morally bound to their God, certainly Israel was a thousand times pledged unto Jehovah, by his marvellous deeds on their behalf in connection with the Exodus. Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. Because he had brought them out of Egypt he could do great things for them. He had proved his power and his good will; it remained only for his people to believe in him and ask large things of him. If their expectations were enlarged to the utmost degree, they could not exceed the bounty of the Lord. Little birds in the nest open their mouths widely enough, and perhaps the parent birds fail to fill them, but it will never be so with our God. His treasures of grace are inexhaustible,

"Deep as our helpless miseries are,
And boundless as our sins."

The Lord began with his chosen nation upon a great scale, doing great wonders for them, and offering them vast returns for their faith and love, if they would but be faithful to him. Sad, indeed, was the result of this grand experiment.

Verse 11. But my people would not hearken to my voice. His warnings were rejected, his promises forgotten, his precepts disregarded. Though the divine voice proposed nothing but good to them, and that upon an unparalleled scale of liberality, yet they turned aside. And Israel would none of me. They would not consent to his proposals, they walked in direct opposition to his commands, they hankered after the ox god of Egypt, and their hearts were bewitched by the idols of the nations round about. The same spirit of apostasy is in all our hearts, and if we have not altogether turned aside from the Lord, it is only grace which has prevented us.

Verse 12. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust. No punishment is more just or more severe than this. If men will not be checked, but madly take the bit between their teeth and refuse obedience, who shall wonder if the reins are thrown upon their necks, and they are let alone to work out their own destruction. It were better to be given up to lions than to our hearts' lusts. And they walked in their own counsels. There was no doubt as to what course they would take, for man is everywhere wilful and loves his own way,—that way being at all times in direct opposition to God's way. Men deserted of restraining grace, sin with deliberation; they consult, and debate, and consider, and then elect evil rather than good, with malice aforethought and in cool blood. It is a remarkable obduracy of rebellion when men not only run into sin through passion, but calmly "walk in their own counsels" of iniquity.

Verse 13. O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! The condescending love of God expresses itself in painful regrets for Israel's sin and punishment. Such were the laments of Jesus over Jerusalem. Certain doctrinalists find a stumbling stone in such passages, and set themselves to explain them away, but to men in sympathy with the divine nature the words and the emotions are plain enough. A God of mercy cannot see men heaping up sorrow for themselves through their sins without feeling his compassion excited toward them.

Verse 14. I should soon have subdued their enemies. As he did in Egypt overthrow Pharaoh, so would he have baffled every enemy. And turned my hand against their adversaries. He would have smitten them once, and then have dealt them a return blow with the back of his hand. See what we lose by sin. Our enemies find the sharpest weapons against us in the armoury of our transgressions. They could never overthrow us if we did not first overthrow ourselves. Sin strips a man of his armour, and leaves him naked to his enemies. Our doubts and fears would long ago have been slain if we had been more faithful to our God. Ten thousand evils which afflict us now would have been driven far from us if we had been more jealous of holiness in our walk and conversation. We ought to consider not only what sin takes from our present stock, but what it prevents our gaining: reflections will soon show us that sin always costs us dear. If we depart from God, our inward corruptions are sure to make a rebellion. Satan will assail us, the world will worry us, doubts will annoy us, and all through our own fault. Solomon's departure from God raised up enemies against him, and it will be so with us, but if our ways please the Lord he will make even our enemies to be at peace with us.

Verse 15. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto him. Though the submission would have been false and flattering, yet the enemies of Israel would have been so humiliated that they would have hastened to make terms with the favoured tribes. Our enemies become abashed and cowardly when we, with resolution, walk carefully with the Lord. It is in God's

power to keep the fiercest in check, and he will do so if we have a filial fear, a pious awe of him. But their time should have endured for ever. The people would have been firmly established, and their prosperity would have been stable. Nothing confirms a state or a church like holiness. If we be firm in obedience we shall be firm in happiness. Righteousness establishes, sin ruins.

Verse 16. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat. Famine would have been an unknown word, they would have been fed on the best of the best food, and have had abundance of it as their every day diet. And with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee. Luxuries as well as necessaries would be forthcoming, the very rocks of the land would yield abundant and sweet supplies; the bees would store the clefts of the rocks with luscious honey, and so turn the most sterile part of the land to good account. The Lord can do great things for an obedient people. When his people walk in the light of his countenance, and maintain unsullied holiness, the joy and consolation which he yields them are beyond conception. To them the joys of heaven have begun even upon earth. They can sing in the ways of the Lord. The spring of the eternal summer has commenced with them; they are already blest, and they look for brighter things. This shows us by contrast how sad a thing it is for a child of God to sell himself into captivity to sin, and bring his soul into a state of famine by following after another god. O Lord, for ever bind us to thyself alone, and keep us faithful unto the end.

Psalm 82

Verse 1. God standeth in the congregation of the mighty. He is the overlooker, who, from his own point of view, sees all that is done by the great ones of the earth. When they sit in state he stands over them, ready to deal with them if they pervert judgment. Judges shall be judged, and to justices justice shall be meted out. Our village squires and country magistrates would do well to remember this. Some of them had need go to school to Asaph till they have mastered this psalm. Their harsh decisions and strange judgments are made in the presence of him who will surely visit them for every unseemly act, for he has no respect unto the person of any, and is the champion of the poor and needy. A higher authority will criticise the decision of petty sessions, and even the judgments of our most impartial judges will be revised by the High Court of heaven. He judgeth among the gods. They are gods to other men, but he is GOD to them. He lends them his name, and this is their authority for acting as judges, but they must take care that they do not misuse the power entrusted to them, for the Judge of judges is in session among them. Our puisne judges are but puny judges, and their brethren who administer common law will one day be tried by the common law. This great truth is, upon the whole, well regarded among us in these times, but it was not so in the earlier days of English history, when Jeffries, and such as he, were an insult to the name of justice. Oriental judges, even now, are frequently, if not generally, amenable to bribes, and in past ages it was very hard to find a ruler who had any notion of justice apart from his own arbitrary will. Such plain teaching as this psalm contains was needful indeed, and he was a bold good man who, in such courtly phrases, delivered his own soul.

Verse 2. How long will ye judge unjustly and accept the persons of the wicked? It is indirectly stated that the magistrates had been unjust and corrupt. They not only excused the wicked, but even decided in their favour against the righteous. A little of this is too much, a short time too long. Some suitors could get their claims settled at once, and in their own favour, while others were wearing out their lives by waiting for an audience, or were robbed by legal process because their opponents had the judge's ear: how long were such things to be perpetuated? Would they never remember the Great

Judge, and renounce their wickedness? This verse is so grandly stern that one is tempted to say, "Surely an Elijah is here." Selah. This gives the offenders pause for consideration and confession.

Verse 3. Defend the poor and fatherless. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Look not to the interests of the wealthy whose hands proffer you bribes, but protect the rights of the needy, and especially uphold the claims of orphans whose property too often becomes a prey. Do not hunt down the peasant for gathering a few sticks, and allow the gentlemanly swindler to break through the meshes of the law. Do justice to the afflicted and needy. Even they can claim from you as judge no more than justice; your pity for their circumstances must not make you hold the scales unfairly: but if you give them no more than justice, at least be sure that you give them that to the full. Suffer not the afflicted to be further afflicted by enduring injustice, and let not the needy long stand in need of an equitable hearing.

Verse 4. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked. Break the nets of the man catchers, the legal toils, the bonds, the securities, with which cunning men capture and continue to hold in bondage the poor and the embarrassed. It is a brave thing when a judge can liberate a victim like a fly from the spider's web, and a horrible case when magistrate and plunderer are in league. Law has too often been an instrument for vengeance in the hand of unscrupulous men, an instrument as deadly as poison or the dagger. It is for the judge to prevent such villainy.

Verse 5. They know not, neither will they understand. A wretched plight for a nation to be in when its justices know no justice, and its judges are devoid of judgment. Neither to know his duty nor to wish to know it is rather the mark of an incorrigible criminal than of a magistrate, yet such a stigma was justly set upon the rulers of Israel. They walk on in darkness. They are as reckless as they are ignorant. Being both ignorant and wicked they yet dare to pursue a path in which knowledge and righteousness are essential: they go on without hesitation, forgetful of the responsibilities in which they are involved, and the punishment which they are incurring. All the foundations of the earth are out of course. When the dispensers of law have dispensed with justice, settlements are unsettled, society is unhinged, the whole fabric of the nation is shaken. When injustice is committed in due course of law the world is indeed out of course. When "Justices' justice" becomes a byword it is time that justice dealt with justices. Surely it would be well that certain of "the great unpaid" should be paid off, when day after day their judgments show that they have no judgment. When peasants may be horsewhipped by farmers with impunity, and a pretty bird is thought more precious than poor men, the foundations of the earth are indeed sinking like rotten piles unable to bear up the structures built upon them. Thank God we have, as an almost invariable rule, incorruptible judges; may it always be so. Even our lesser magistrates are, in general, most worthy men; for which we ought to be grateful to God evermore.

Verse 6. I have said, ye are gods. The greatest honour was thus put upon them; they were delegated gods, clothed for a while with a little of that authority by which the Lord judges among the sons of men. And all of you are children of the Most High. This was their ex-officio character, not their moral or spiritual relationship. There must be some government among men, and as angels are not sent to dispense it, God allows men to rule over men, and endorses their office, so far at least that the prostitution of it becomes an insult to his own prerogatives. Magistrates would have no right to condemn the guilty if God had not sanctioned the establishment of government, the administration of law, and the execution of sentences. Here the Spirit speaks most honourably of these offices, even when it censures the officers; and thereby teaches us to render honour to whom honour is due,

honour to the office even if we award censure to the officer bearer.

Verse 7. But ye shall die like men. What sarcasm it seems! Great as the office made the men, they were still but men, and must die. To every judge this verse is a memento mori! He must leave the bench to stand at the bar, and on the way must put off the ermine to put on the shroud. And fall like one of the princes. Who were usually the first to die: for battle, sedition, and luxury, made greater havoc among the great than among any others. Even as princes have often been cut off by sudden and violent deaths, so should the judges be who forget to do justice. Men usually respect the office of a judge, and do not conspire to slay him, as they do to kill princes and kings; but injustice withdraws this protection, and puts the unjust magistrate in personal danger. How quickly death unrobes the great. What a leveller he is. He is no advocate for liberty, but in promoting equality and fraternity he is a masterly democrat. Great men die as common men do. As their blood is the same, so the stroke which lets out their life produces the same pains and throes. No places are too high for death's arrows: he brings down his birds from the tallest trees. It is time that all men considered this.

Verse 8. Arise, O God, and judge the earth. Come thou Judge of all mankind, put the bad judges to thy bar and end their corruption and baseness. Here is the world's true hope of rescue from the fangs of tyranny. For thou shalt inherit all nations. The time will come when all races of men shall own their God, and accept him as their king. There is one who is "King by right divine," and he is even now on his way. The last days shall see him enthroned, and all unrighteous potentates broken like potter's vessels by his potent sceptre. The second advent is still earth's brightest hope. Come quickly, even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Psalm 83

Verse 1. Keep not thou silence, O God. Man is clamorous, be not thou speechless. He rails and reviles, wilt not thou reply? On word of thine can deliver thy people; therefore, O Lord, break thy quiet and let thy voice be heard. Hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. Here the appeal is to EL., the Mighty One. He is entreated to act and speak, because his nation suffers and is in great jeopardy. How entirely the psalmist looks to God; he asks not for "a leader bold and brave," or for any form of human force, but casts his burden upon the Lord, being well assured that his eternal power and Godhead could meet every difficulty of the case.

Verse 2. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult. They are by no means sparing of their words, they are like a hungry pack of dogs, all giving tongue at once. So sure are they of devouring thy people that they already shout over the feast. And they that hate thee have lifted up the head. Confident of conquest, they carry themselves proudly and exalt themselves as if their anticipated victories were already obtained. These enemies of Israel were also God's enemies, and are here described as such by way of adding intensity to the argument of the intercession. The adversaries of the church are usually a noisy and a boastful crew. Their pride is a brass which always sounds, a cymbal which is ever tinkling.

Verse 3. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people. Whatever we may do, our enemies use their wits and lay their heads together; in united conclave they discourse upon the demands and plans of the campaign, using much treachery and serpentine cunning in arranging their schemes. Malice is cold blooded enough to plot with deliberation; and pride, though it be never wise, is often allied with craft. And consulted against thy hidden ones. Hidden away from all harm are the Lord's

chosen; their enemies think not so, but hope to smite them; they might as well attempt to destroy the angels before the throne of God.

Verse 4. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation. Easier said than done. Yet it shows how thorough going are the foes of the church. Theirs was the policy of extermination. They laid the axe at the root of the matter. Rome has always loved this method of warfare, and hence she has gloated over the massacre of Bartholomew, and the murders of the Inquisition. That the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. They would blot them out of history as well as out of existence. Evil is intolerant of good. If Israel would let Edom alone yet Edom cannot be quiet, but seeks like its ancestor to kill the chosen of the Lord. Men would be glad to cast the church out of the world because it rebukes them, and is thus a standing menace to their sinful peace.

Verse 5. For they have consulted together with one consent. They are hearty and unanimous in their designs. They seem to have but one heart, and that a fierce one, against the chosen people and their God. They are confederate against thee. At the Lord himself they aim through the sides of his saints. They make a covenant, and ratify it with blood, resolutely banding themselves together to war with the Mighty God.

Verse 6. The tabernacles of Edom. Nearest of kin, yet first in enmity. Their sire despised the birthright, and they despise the possessors of it. Leaving their rock built mansions for the tents of war, the Edomites invaded the land of Israel. And the Ishmaelites. A persecuting spirit ran in their blood, they perpetuated the old grudge between the child of the bondwoman and the son of the freewoman. Of Moab. Born of incest, but yet a near kinsman, the feud of Moab against Israel was very bitter. Little could righteous Lot have dreamed that his unhallowed seed would be such unrelenting enemies of his uncle Abraham's posterity. And the Hagarenes—perhaps descendants of Hagar by a second husband. Whoever they may have been, they cast their power into the wrong scale, and with all their might sought the ruin of Israel. Children of Hagar, and all others who dwell around Mount Sinai, which is in Arabia, are of the seed which gendereth to bondage, and hence they hate the seed according to promise.

Verse 7. Gebal was probably a near neighbour of Edom, though there was a Gebal in the region of Tyre and Sidon. And Ammon, and Amalek. Two other hereditary foes of Israel, fierce and remorseless as ravaging wolves. In the roll of infamy let these names remain detestably immortalised. How thick they stand. Their name is legion, for they are many. Alas, poor Israel, how art thou to stand against such a Bloody League? Nor is this all. Here comes another tribe of ancient foemen, the Philistines; who once blinded Samson, and captured the ark of the Lord; and here are old allies become new enemies; the builders of the temple conspiring to pull it down, even the inhabitants of Tyre. These last were mercenaries who cared not at whose bidding they drew sword, so long as they carved something for their own advantage. True religion has had its quarrel with merchants and craftsmen, and because it has interfered with their gains, they have conspired against it.

Verse 8. Assur is also joined with them. It was then a rising power, anxious for growth, and it thus early distinguished itself for evil. What a motley group they were; a league against Israel is always attractive, and gathers whole nations within its bonds. Herod and Pilate are friends, if Jesus is to be crucified. Romanism and Ritualism make common cause against the gospel. They have holpen the children of Lot. All these have come to the aid of Moab and Ammon, which two nations were among the fiercest in the conspiracy. There were ten to one against Israel, and yet she overcame all her

enemies. Her name is not blotted out; but many, nay, most of her adversaries are now a name only, their power and their excellence are alike gone. Selah. There was good reason for a pause when the nation was in such jeopardy: and yet it needs faith to make a pause, for unbelief is always in a hurry.

Verse 9. Do unto them as unto the Midianites. Faith delights to light upon precedents, and quote them before the Lord; in the present instance, Asaph found a very appropriate one, for the nations in both cases were very much the same, and the plight of the Israelites very similar. Yet Midian perished, and the psalmist trusted that Israel's present foes would meet with the like overthrow from the hand of the Lord. As to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison. The hosts were swept away by the suddenly swollen torrent, and utterly perished; which was a second instance of divine vengeance upon confederated enemies of Israel. When God wills it, a brook can be as deadly as a sea. Kishon was as terrible to Jabin as was the Red Sea to Pharaoh. How easily can the Lord smite the enemies of his people. God of Gideon and of Barak, wilt thou not again avenge thine heritage of their bloodthirsty foes?

Verse 10. Which perished at Endor. There was the centre of the carnage, where the heaps of the slain lay thickest. They became as dung for the earth, manuring it with man; making the earth, like Saturn, feed on its own children. War is cruel, but in this case its avengements were most just,—those who would not give Israel a place above ground are themselves denied a hiding place under the ground; they counted God's people to be as dung, and they became dung themselves. Asaph would have the same fate befell other enemies of Israel; and his prayer was a prophecy, for so it happened to them.

Verse 11. Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb. Smite the great ones as well as the common ruck. Suffer not the ringleaders to escape. As Oreb fell at the rock and Zeeb at the winepress, so do thou mete out vengeance to Zion's foes wherever thou mayest overtake them. They boastfully compare themselves to ravens and wolves; let them receive the fate which is due to such wild beasts. Yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunnua. These were captured and slain by Gideon, despite their claiming to have been anointed to the kingdom. Zebah became a sacrifice, and Zalmunna was sent to those shadowy images from which his name is derived. The psalmist seeing these four culprits hanging in history upon a lofty gallows, earnestly asks that others of a like character may, for truth and righteousness' sake, share their fate.

Verse 12. Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession. Viewing the temple, and also the dwellings of the tribes, as all belonging to God, these greedy plunderers determined to push out the inhabitants, slay them, and become themselves landlords and tenants of the whole. These were large words and dark designs, but God could bring them all to nothing. It is in vain for men to say "Let us take, "if God does not give. He who robs God's house will find that he has a property reeking with a curse; it will plague him and his seed for ever. "Will a man rob God?" Let him try it, and he will find it hot and heavy work.

Verse 13. O my God, make them like a wheel; like a rolling thing which cannot rest, but is made to move with every breath. Let them have no quiet. May their minds eternally revolve and never come to peace. Blow them away like thistle down, as the stubble before the wind. Scatter them, chase them, drive them to destruction. Every patriot prays thus against the enemies of his country, he would be no better than a traitor if he did not.

Verse 14. As the fire burneth a wood. Long years have strewn the ground with deep deposits of leaves; these being dried in the sun are very apt to take fire, and when they do so the burning is terrific. The underwood and the ferns blaze, the bushes crackle, the great trees kindle and to their very tops are wrapped in fire, while the ground is all red as a furnace. In this way, O Lord, mete out destruction to thy foes, and bring all of them to an end. The flame setteth the mountains on fire. Up the hill sides the hanging woods glow like a great sacrifice, and the forests on the mountain's crown smoke towards heaven. Even thus, O Lord, do thou conspicuously and terribly overthrow the enemies of thine Israel.

Verse 15. So persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm. The Lord will follow up his enemies, alarm them, and chase them till they are put to a hopeless rout. He did this, according to the prayer of the present Psalm, for his servant Jehoshaphat; and in like manner will he come to the rescue of any or all of his chosen.

Verse 16. Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O Lord. Shame has often weaned men from their idols, and set them upon seeking the Lord. If this was not the happy result, in the present instance, with the Lord's enemies, yet it would be so with his people who were so prone to err. They would be humbled by his mercy, and ashamed of themselves because of his grace; and then they would with sincerity return to the earnest worship of Jehovah their God, who had delivered them.

Verse 17. Where no good result followed, and the men remained as fierce and obstinate as ever, justice was invoked to carry out the capital sentence. Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish. What else could be done with them? It was better that they perished than that Israel should be rooted up. What a terrible doom it will be to the enemies of God to be "confounded, and troubled for ever, "to see all their schemes and hopes defeated, and their bodies and souls full of anguish without end: from such a shameful perishing may our souls be delivered.

Verse 18. That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth. Hearing of the Lord's marvellous deeds in defeating such a numerous confederacy, the very heathen would be compelled to acknowledge the greatness of Jehovah. We read in 2Ch 20:30, that the fear of God was on all the neighbouring kingdoms when they heard that Jehovah fought against the enemies of Israel. Jehovah is essentially the Most High. He who is self existent is infinitely above all creatures, all the earth is but his footstool. The godless race of man disregards this, and yet at times the wonderful works of the Lord compel the most unwilling to adore his majesty. Thus has this soul stirring lyric risen from the words of complaint to those of adoration; let us in our worship always seek to do the same. National trouble called out the nation's poet laureate, and well did he discourse at once of her sorrows, and prayers, and hopes. Sacred literature thus owes much to sorrow and distress. How enriching is the hand of adversity! The following attempt to verify the Psalm, and tune it to gospel purposes, is submitted with great diffidence.

O God, be thou no longer still,
Thy foes are leagued against thy law;
Make bare thine arm on Zion's hill,
Great Captain of our Holy War.

As Amalek and Ishmael

Had war for ever with thy seed,
So all the hosts of Rome and hell
Against the Son their armies led.

Though they are agreed in nought beside,
Against thy truth they all unite;
They rave against the Crucified,
And hate the gospel's growing might.

By Kishon's brook all Jabin's band
At thy rebuke were swept away;
O Lord, display thy mighty hand,
A single stroke shall win the day.

Come, rushing wind, the stubble chase!
Come, sacred fire, the forests burn!
Come, Lord, with all thy conquering grace,
Rebellious hearts to Jesus turn!

That men may know at once that thou,
Jehovah, lovest truth right well;
And that thy church shall never bow
Before the boastful gates of hell.

Psalm 84

"How amiable," or, How lovely! He does not tell us how lovely they were, because he could not. His expressions show us that his feelings were inexpressible. Lovely to the memory, to the mind, to the heart, to the eye, to the whole soul, are the assemblies of the saints. Earth contains no sight so refreshing to us as the gathering of believers for worship. Those are sorry saints who see nothing amiable in the services of the Lord's house. "Are thy tabernacles." The tabernacle had been pitched in several places, and, moreover, was divided into several courts and portions; hence, probably, the plural number is here used. It was all and altogether lovely to David. Outer court, or inner court, he loved every portion of it. Every cord and curtain was dear to him. Even when at a distance, he rejoiced to remember the sacred tent where Jehovah revealed himself, and he cried out with exultation while he pictured in fond imagination its sacred services, and solemn rites, as he had seen them in bygone times. Because they are thy tabernacles, "O Lord of hosts," therefore are they so dear to thy people. Thy pavilion is the centre of the camp, around which all thy creatures gather, and towards which their eyes are turned, as armies look to the tent of the king. Thou rulest all the companies of creatures with such goodness, that all their hosts rejoice in thy dwelling-place, and the bands of thy saints especially hail thee with Joyful loyalty as Jehovah of hosts.

Verse 2. My soul longeth, it pines, and faints to meet with the saints in the Lord's house. The desire was deep and insatiable—the very soul of the man was yearning for his God. Yea, even fainteth; as though it could not long hold out, but was exhausted with delay. He had a holy lovesickness upon him, and was wasted with an inward consumption because he was debarred the worship of the Lord in the appointed place. For the courts of the Lord. To stand once again in those areas which were

dedicated to holy adoration was the soul longing of the psalmist. True subjects love the courts of their king. My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. It was God himself that he pined for, the only living and true God. His whole nature entered into his longing. Even the clay cold flesh grew warm through the intense action of his fervent spirit. Seldom, indeed, does the flesh incline in the right direction, but in the matter of Sabbath services our weary body sometimes comes to the assistance of our longing heart, for it desires the physical rest as much as the soul desires the spiritual repose. The psalmist declared that he could not remain silent in his desires, but began to cry out for God and his house; he wept, he sighed, he pleaded for the privilege. Some need to be whipped to church, while here is David crying for it. He needed no clatter of bells from the belfry to ring him in, he carried his bell in his own bosom: holy appetite is a better call to worship than a full chime.

Verse 3. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house. He envied the sparrows which lived around the house of God, and picked up the stray crumbs in the courts thereof; he only wished that he, too, could frequent the solemn assemblies and bear away a little of the heavenly food. And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young. He envied also the swallows whose nests were built under the eaves of the priest's houses, who there found a place for their young, as well as for themselves. We rejoice not only in our personal religious opportunities, but in the great blessing of taking our children with us to the sanctuary. The church of God is a house for us and a nest for our little ones. Even thine altars, O Lord of hosts. To the very altars these free birds drew near, none could restrain them nor would have wished to do so, and David wished to come and go as freely as they did. Mark how he repeats the blessed name of Jehovah of Hosts; he found in it a sweetness which helped him to bear his inward hunger. Probably David himself was with the host, and, therefore, he dwelt with emphasis upon the title which taught him that the Lord was in the tented field as well as within the holy curtains. My King and my God. Here he utters his loyalty from afar. If he may not tread the courts, yet he loves the King. If an exile, he is not a rebel. When we cannot occupy a seat in God's house, he shall have a seat in our memories and a throne in our hearts. The double "my" is very precious; he lays hold upon his God with both his hands, as one resolved not to let him go till the favour requested be at length accorded.

Verse 4. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house. Those he esteems to be highly favoured who are constantly engaged in divine worship—the canons residentiary, yea, the pew openers, the menials who sweep and dust. To come and go is refreshing, but to abide in the place of prayer must be heaven below. To be the guests of God, enjoying the hospitalities of heaven, set apart for holy work, screened from a noisy world, and familiar with sacred things—why this is surely the choicest heritage a son of man can possess. They will be still praising thee. So near to God, their very life must be adoration. Surely their hearts and tongues never cease from magnifying the Lord. We fear David here drew rather a picture of what should be than of what is; for those occupied daily with the offices needful for public worship are not always among the most devout; on the contrary, "the nearer the church the further from God." Yet in a spiritual sense this is most true, for those children of God who in spirit abide even in his house, are also ever full of the praises of God. Communion is the mother of adoration. They fail to praise the Lord who wander far from him, but those who dwell in him are always magnifying him.

"Selah." In such an occupation as this we might be content to remain for ever. It is worth while to pause and meditate upon the prospect of dwelling with God and praising him throughout eternity.

Verse 5. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee. Having spoken of the blessedness of those who reside in the house of God, he now speaks of those who are favoured to visit it at appointed

seasons, going upon pilgrimage with their devout brethren: he is not, however, indiscriminate in his eulogy, but speaks only of those who heartily attend to the sacred festivals. The blessedness of sacred worship belongs not to half hearted, listless worshippers, but to those who throw all their energies into it. Neither prayer, nor praise, nor the hearing of the word will be pleasant or profitable to persons who have left their hearts behind them. A company of pilgrims who had left their hearts at home would be no better than a caravan of carcasses, quite unfit to blend with living saints in adoring the living God. In whose heart are the ways of them, or far better, in whose heart are thy ways. Those who love the ways of God are blessed. When we have God's ways in our hearts, and our heart in his ways, we are what and where we should be, and hence we shall enjoy the divine approval.

Verse 6. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well. Traversing joyfully the road to the great assembly, the happy pilgrims found refreshment even in the dreariest part of the road. As around a well men meet and converse cheerfully, being refreshed after their journey, so even in the vale of tears, or any other dreary glen, the pilgrims to the skies find sweet solace in brotherly communion and in anticipation of the general assembly above, with its joys unspeakable. Probably there is here a local allusion, which will never now be deciphered, but the general meaning is clear enough. There are joys of pilgrimage which make men forget the discomforts of the road. "The rain also filleth the pools." God gives to his people the supplies they need while traversing the roads which he points out for them. Where there were no natural supplies from below, the pilgrims found an abundant compensation in waters from above, and so also shall all the sacramental host of God's elect. Ways, which otherwise would have been deserted from want of accommodation, were made into highways abundantly furnished for the travellers' wants, because the great annual pilgrimages led in that direction; even so, Christian converse and the joy of united worship makes many duties easy and delightful which else had been difficult and painful.

Verse 7. They go from strength to strength. So far from being wearied they gather strength as they proceed. Each individual becomes happier, each company becomes more numerous, each holy song more sweet and full. We grow as we advance if heaven be our goal. If we spend our strength in God's ways we shall find it increase. Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God. This was the end of the pilgrim's march, the centre where all met, the delight of all hearts. Not merely to be in the assembly, but to appear before God was the object of each devout Israelite. Would to God it were the sincere desire of all who in these days mingle in our religious gatherings. Unless we realise the presence of God we have done nothing; the mere gathering together is nothing worth.

Verse 8. O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer. Give me to go up to thy house, or if I may not do so, yet let my cry be heard. Thou listenest to the united supplications of thy saints, but do not shut out my solitary petition, unworthy though I be. Give ear, O God of Jacob. Though Jehovah of hosts, thou art also the covenant God of solitary pleaders like Jacob; regard thou, then, my plaintive supplication. I wrestle here alone with thee, while the company of thy people have gone on before me to happier scenes, and I beseech thee bless me; for I am resolved to hold thee till thou speak the word of grace into my soul. The repetition of the request for an answer to his prayer denotes his eagerness for a blessing. What a mercy it is that if we cannot gather with the saints, we can still speak to their Master. Selah. A pause was needed after a cry so vehement, a prayer so earnest.

Verse 9. Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. Here we have the nation's prayer for David; and the believer's prayer for the Son of David. Let but the Lord look upon our Lord Jesus, and we shall be shielded from all harm; let him behold the face of his Anointed, and

we shall be able to behold his face with joy. We also are anointed by the Lord's grace, and our desire is that he will look upon us with an eye of love in Christ Jesus. Our best prayers when we are in the best place are for our glorious King, and for the enjoyment of his Father's smile.

Verse 10. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. Of course the psalmist means a thousand days spent elsewhere. Under the most favourable circumstances in which earth's pleasures can be enjoyed, they are not comparable by so much as one in a thousand to the delights of the service of God. To feel his love, to rejoice in the person of the anointed Saviour, to survey the promises and feel the power of the Holy Ghost in applying precious truth to the soul, is a joy which worldlings cannot understand, but which true believers are ravished with. Even a glimpse at the love of God is better than ages spent in the pleasures of sense. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. The lowest station in connection with the Lord's house is better than the highest position among the godless. Only to wait at his threshold and peep within, so as to see Jesus, is bliss. To bear burdens and open doors for the Lord is more honour than to reign among the wicked. Every man has his choice, and this is ours. God's worst is better than the devil's best. God's doorstep is a happier rest than downy couches within the pavilions of royal sinners, though we might lie there for a lifetime of luxury. Note how he calls the tabernacle the house of my God; there's where the sweetness lies: if Jehovah be our God, his house, his altars, his doorstep, all become precious to us. We know by experience that where Jesus is within, the outside of the house is better than the noblest chambers where the Son of God is not to be found.

Verse 11. For the Lord God is a sun and shield. Pilgrims need both as the weather may be, for the cold would smite them were it not for the sun, and foes are apt to waylay the sacred caravan, and would haply destroy it if it were without a shield. Heavenly pilgrims are not left uncomforted or unprotected. The pilgrim nation found both sun and shield in that fiery cloudy pillar which was the symbol of Jehovah's presence, and the Christian still finds both light and shelter in the Lord his God. A sun for happy days and a shield for dangerous ones. A sun above, a shield around. A light to show the way and a shield to ward off its perils. Blessed are they who journey with such a convoy; the sunny and shady side of life are alike happy to them. The Lord will give grace and glory. Both in due time, both as needed, both to the full, both with absolute certainty. The Lord has both grace and glory in infinite abundance; Jesus is the fulness of both, and, as his chosen people, we shall receive both as a free gift from the God of our salvation. What more can the Lord give, or we receive, or desire. No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. Grace makes us walk uprightly and this secures every covenant blessing to us. What a wide promise! Some apparent good may be withheld, but no real good, no, not one. "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." God has all good, there is no good apart from him, and there is no good which he either needs to keep back or will on any account refuse us, if we are but ready to receive it. We must be upright and neither lean to this or that form of evil: and this uprightness must be practical,—we must walk in truth and holiness, then shall we be heirs of all things, and as we come of age all things shall be in our actual possession; and meanwhile, according to our capacity for receiving shall be the measure of the divine bestowal. This is true, not of a favoured few, but of all the saints for evermore.

Verse 12. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee. Here is the key of the Psalm. The worship is that of faith, and the blessedness is peculiar to believers. No formal worshipper can enter into this secret. A man must know the Lord by the life of real faith, or he can have no true rejoicing in the Lord's worship, his house, his Son, or his ways. Dear reader, how fares it with thy soul?

Psalm 85

Verse 1. LORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land. The self-existent, all-sufficient JEHOVAH is addressed: by that name he revealed himself to Moses when his people were in bondage, by that name he is here pleaded with. It is wise to dwell upon that view of the divine character which arouses the sweetest memories of his love. Sweeter still is that dear name of "Our Father," with which Christians have learned to commence their prayers. The psalmist speaks of Canaan as the Lord's land, for he chose it for his people, conveyed it to them by covenant, conquered it by his power, and dwelt in it in mercy; it was meet therefore that he should smile upon a land so peculiarly his own. It is most wise to plead the Lord's union of interest with ourselves, to lash our little boat as it were close to his great barque, and experience a sacred community in the tossings of the storm. It is our land that is devastated, but O Jehovah, it is also thy land. The psalmist dwells upon the Lord's favour to the chosen land, which he had shewed in a thousand ways. God's past doings are prophetic of what he will do; hence the encouraging argument—"Thou hast been favourable unto thy land," therefore deal graciously with it again. Many a time had foes been baffled, pestilence stayed, famine averted, and deliverance vouchsafed, because of the Lord's favour; that same favourable regard is therefore again invoked. With an immutable God this is powerful reasoning; it is because he changes not that we are not consumed, and know we never shall be if he has once been favourable to us. From this example of prayer let us learn how to order our cause before God. It is clear that Israel was not in exile, or the prayer before us would not have referred to the land but to the nation. Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. When down-trodden and oppressed through their sins, the Ever-merciful One had looked upon them, changed their sad condition, chased away the invaders, and given to his people rest: this he had done not once, nor twice, but times without number. Many a time have we also been brought into soul-captivity by our backslidings, but we have not been left therein; the God who brought Jacob back from Padanaram to his father's house, has restored us to the enjoyment of holy fellowship;—will he not do the like again? Let us appeal to him with Jacob-like wrestlings, beseeching him to be favourable, or sovereignly gracious to us notwithstanding all our provocations of his love. Let declining churches remember their former history, and with holy confidence plead with the Lord to turn their captivity yet again.

Verse 2. Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people. Often and often had he done this, pausing to pardon even when his sword was bared to punish. Who is a pardoning God like thee, O Jehovah? Who is so slow to anger, so ready to forgive? Every believer in Jesus enjoys the blessing of pardoned sin, and he should regard this priceless boon as the pledge of all other needful mercies. He should plead it with God—"Lord, hast thou pardoned me, and wilt thou let me perish for lack of grace, or fall into mine enemies' hands for want of help. Thou wilt not thus leave thy work unfinished." Thou hast covered all their sin. All of it, every spot, and wrinkle, the veil of love has covered all. Sin has been divinely put out of sight. Hiding it beneath the propitiatory, covering it with the sea of the atonement, blotting it out, making it to cease to be, the Lord has put it so completely away that even his omniscient eye sees it no more. What a miracle is this! To cover up the sun would be easy work compared with the covering up of sin. Not without a covering atonement is sin removed, but by means of the great sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, it is most effectually put away by one act, for ever. What a covering does his blood afford!

Verse 3. Thou hast taken away all thy wrath. Having removed the sin, the anger is removed also. How often did the long-suffering of God take away from Israel the punishments which had been justly laid upon them! How often also has the Lord's chastising hand been removed from us when our

waywardness called for heavier strokes! Thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger. Even when judgments had been most severe, the Lord had in mercy stayed his hand. In mid volley he had restrained his thunder. When ready to destroy, he had averted his face from his purpose of judgment and allowed mercy to interpose. The book of Judges is full of illustrations of this, and the psalmist does well to quote them while he interceded. Is not our experience equally studded with instances in which judgment has been stayed and tenderness has ruled? What a difference between the fierce anger which is feared and deprecated here, and the speaking of peace which is foretold in verse 8. There are many changes in Christian experience, and therefore we must not despair when we are undergoing the drearier portion of the spiritual life, for soon, very soon, it may be transformed into gladness.

"The Lord can clear the darkest skies,
Can give us day for night.
Make drops of sacred sorrow rise
To rivers of delight."

Verse 4. Turn us, O God of our salvation. This was the main business. Could the erring tribes be rendered penitent all would be well. It is not that God needs turning from his anger so much as that we need turning from our sin; here is the hinge of the whole matter. Our trials frequently arise out of our sins, they will not go till the sins go. We need to be turned from our sins, but only God can turn us: God the Saviour must put his hand to the work: it is indeed a main part of our salvation. Conversion is the dawn of salvation. To turn a heart to God is as difficult as to make the world revolve upon its axis. Yet when a man learns to pray for conversion there is hope for him, he who turns to prayer is beginning to turn from sin. It is a very blessed sight to see a whole people turn unto their God; may the Lord so send forth his converting grace on our land that we may live to see the people flocking to the loving worship of God as the doves to their cotes. And cause thine anger toward us to cease. Make an end of it. Let it no longer burn. When sinners cease to rebel, the Lord ceases to be angry with them; when they return to him he returns to them; yea, he is first in the reconciliation, and turns them when otherwise they would never turn of themselves. May all those who are now enduring the hidings of Jehovah's face seek with deep earnestness to be turned anew unto the Lord, for so shall all their despondencies come to an end. Thus the sweet singer asks for his nation priceless blessings, and quotes the best of arguments. Because the God of Israel has been so rich in favour in bygone years, therefore he is entreated to reform and restore his backsliding nation.

Verse 5. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? See how the psalmist makes bold to plead. We are in time as yet and not in eternity, and does not time come to an end, and therefore thy wrath! Wilt thou be angry always as if it were eternity? Is there no boundary to thine indignation? Will thy wrath never have done? And if for ever angry, yet wilt thou be angry with us, thy favoured people, the seed of Abraham, thy friend? That our enemies should be always wroth is natural, but wilt thou, our God, be always incensed against us? Every word is an argument. Men in distress never waste words. Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Shall sons suffer for their father's faults, and punishment become an entailed inheritance? O merciful God, hast thou a mind to spin out thine anger, and make it as long as the ages? Cease thou, as thou hast ceased aforetime, and let grace reign as it has done in days of yore. When we are under spiritual desertion we may beg in the like manner that the days of tribulation may be shortened, lest our spirit should utterly fail beneath the trial.

Verse 6. Wilt thou not revive us again? Hope here grows almost confident. She feels sure that the

Lord will return in all his power to save. We are dead or dying, faint and feeble, God alone can revive us, he has in other times refreshed his people, he is still the same, he will repeat his love. Will he not? Why should he not? We appeal to him—Wilt thou not? That thy people may rejoice in thee. Thou lovest to see thy children happy with that best of happiness which centres in thyself, therefore revive us, for revival will bring us the utmost joy. The words before us teach us that gratitude has an eye to the giver, even beyond the gift—thy people may rejoice in thee. Those who were revived would rejoice not only in the new life but in the Lord who was the author of it. Joy in the Lord is the ripest fruit of grace, all revivals and renewals lead up to it. By our possession of it we may estimate our spiritual condition, it is a sure gauge of inward prosperity. A genuine revival without joy in the Lord is as impossible as spring without flowers, or daydawn without light. If, either in our own souls or in the hearts of others, we see declension, it becomes us to be much in the use of this prayer, and if on the other hand we are enjoying visitations of the Spirit and bedewings of grace, let us abound in holy joy and make it our constant delight to joy in God.

Verse 7. Shew us thy mercy, O LORD. Reveal it to our poor half blinded eyes. We cannot see it or believe it by reason of our long woes, but thou canst make it plain to us. Others have beheld it, Lord shew it to us. We have seen thine anger, Lord let us see thy mercy. Thy prophets have told us of it, but O Lord, do thou thyself display it in this our hour of need. And grant us thy salvation. This includes deliverance from the sin as well as the chastisement, it reaches from the depth of their misery to the height of divine love. God's salvation is perfect in kind, comprehensive in extent, and eminent in degree; grant us this, O Lord, and we have all. Having offered earnest intercession for the afflicted but penitent nation, the sacred poet in the true spirit of faith awaits a response from the sacred oracle. He pauses in joyful confidence, and then in ecstatic triumph he give utterance to his hopes in the richest form of song.

Verse 8. I will hear what God the LORD will speak. When we believe that God hears us, it is but natural that we should be eager to hear him. Only from him can come the word which can speak peace to troubled spirits; the voices of men are feeble in such a case, a plaister far too narrow for the sore; but God's voice is power, he speaks and it is done, and hence when we hear him our distress is ended. Happy is the suppliant who has grace to lie patiently at the Lord's door, and wait until his love shall act according to its old wont and chase all sorrow far away. For he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints. Even though for a while his voice is stern with merited rebuke, he will not always chide, the Great Father will reassume his natural tone of gentleness and pity. The speaking of peace is the peculiar prerogative of the Lord Jehovah, and deep, lasting, ay, eternal, is the peace he thus creates. Yet not to all does the divine word bring peace, but only to his own people, whom he means to make saints, and those whom he has already made so. But let them not turn again to folly. For if they do so, his rod will fall upon them again, and their peace will be invaded. Those who would enjoy communion with God must be jealous of themselves, and avoid all that would grieve the Holy Spirit; not only the grosser sins, but even the follies of life must be guarded against by those who are favoured with the delights of conscious fellowship. We serve a jealous God, and must needs therefore be incessantly vigilant against evil. Backsliders should study this verse with the utmost care, it will console them and yet warn them, draw the back to their allegiance, and at the same time inspire them with a wholesome fear of going further astray. To turn again to folly is worse than being foolish for once; it argues wilfulness and obstinacy, and it involves the soul in sevenfold sin. There is no fool like the man who will be a fool cost him what it may.

Verse 9. Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him. Faith knows that a saving God is always near

at hand, but only (for such is the true rendering) to those who fear the Lord, and worship him with holy awe. In the gospel dispensation this truth is conspicuously illustrated. If to seeking sinners salvation is nigh, it is assuredly very nigh to those who have once enjoyed it, and have lost its present enjoyment by their folly; they have but to turn unto the Lord and they shall enjoy it again. We have not to go about by a long round of personal mortifications or spiritual preparations, we may come to the Lord, through Jesus Christ, just as we did at the first, and he will again receive us into his loving embrace. Whether it be a nation under adversity, or a single individual under chastisement, the sweet truth before us is rich with encouragement to repentance, and renewed holiness. That glory may dwell in our land. The object of the return of grace will be a permanent establishment of a better state of things, so that gloriously devout worship shall be rendered to God continuously, and a glorious measure of prosperity shall be enjoyed in consequence. Israel was glorious whenever she was faithful—her dishonour always followed her disloyalty; believers also live glorious lives when they walk obediently, and they only lose the true glory of their religion when they fall from their steadfastness. In these two verses we have, beneath the veil of the letter, an intimation of the coming of THE WORD OF GOD to the nations in times of deep apostacy and trouble, when faithful hearts would be looking and longing for the promise which had so long tarried. By his coming salvation is brought near, and glory, even the glory of the presence of the Lord, tabernacles among men. Of this the succeeding verses speak without obscurity.

Verse 10. Mercy and truth are met together. In answer to prayer, the exulting psalmist sees the attributes of God confederating to bless the once afflicted nation. Mercy comes hand in hand with Truth to fulfil the faithful promise of their gracious God; the people recognise at once the grace and the veracity of Jehovah, he is to them neither a tyrant nor a deceiver. Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. The Lord whose just severity inflicted the smart, now in pity sends peace to bind up the wound. The people being now made willing to forsake their sins, and to follow after righteousness, find peace granted to them at once. "The war drum throbbed no longer, and the battle flags were furled;" for idolatry was forsaken, and Jehovah was adored. This appears to be the immediate and primary meaning of these verses; but the inner sense is Christ Jesus, the reconciling Word. In him, the attributes of God unite in glad unanimity in the salvation of guilty men, they meet and embrace in such a manner as else were inconceivable either to our just fears or to our enlightened hopes. God is as true as if he had fulfilled every letter of his threatenings, as righteous as if he had never spoken peace to a sinner's conscience; his love in undiminished splendour shines forth, but no other of his ever blessed characteristics is eclipsed thereby. It is the custom of modern thinkers(?) to make sport of this representation of the result of our Lord's substitutionary atonement; but had they ever been themselves made to feel the weight of sin upon a spiritually awakened conscience, they would cease from their vain ridicule. Their doctrine of atonement has well been described by Dr. Duncan as the admission "that the Lord Jesus Christ did something or other, which somehow or other, was in some way or other connected with man's salvation." This is their substitute for substitution. Our facts are infinitely superior to their dreams, and yet they sneer. It is but natural that natural men should do so. We cannot expect animals to set much store by the discoveries of science, neither can we hope to see unspiritual men rightly estimate the solution of spiritual problems—they are far above and out of their sight. Meanwhile it remains for those who rejoice in the great reconciliation to continue both to wonder and adore.

Verse 11. Truth shall spring out of the earth. Promises which lie unfulfilled, like buried seeds, shall spring up and yield harvests of joy; and men renewed by grace shall learn to be true to one another and their God, and abhor the falsehood which they loved before. And righteousness shall look down

from heaven, as if it threw up the windows and leaned out to gaze upon a penitent people, whom it could not have looked upon before without an indignation which would have been fatal to them. This is a delicious scene. Earth yielding flowers of truth, and heaven shining with stars of holiness; the spheres echoing to each other, or being mirrors of each other's beauties. "Earth carpeted with truth and canopied with righteousness, "shall be a nether heaven. When God looks down in grace, man sends his heart upward in obedience. The person of our adorable Lord Jesus Christ explains this verse most sweetly. In Him truth is found in our humanity, and his deity brings divine righteousness among us. His Spirit's work even now creates a hallowed harmony between his church below, and the sovereign righteousness above; and in the latter day, earth shall be universally adorned with every precious virtue, and heaven shall hold intimate intercourse with it. There is a world of meaning in these verses, only needing meditation to draw it out. Reader, "the well is deep, "but if thou hast the Spirit, it cannot be said, that "thou hast nothing to draw with."

Verse 12. Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good. Being himself pure goodness, he will readily return from his wrath, and deal out good things to his repenting people. Our evil brings evil upon us, but when we are brought back to follow that which is good, the Lord abundantly enriches us with good things. Material good will always be bestowed where it can be enjoyed in consistency with spiritual good. And our land shall yield her increase. The curse of barrenness will fly with the curse of sin. When the people yielded what was due to God, the soil would recompense their husbandry. See at this day what sin has done for Palestine, making her gardens a wilderness; her wastes are the scars of her iniquities: nothing but repentance and divine forgiveness will reclaim her desolations. The whole world also shall be bright with the same blessing in the days yet to come,—

"Freed from the curse, the grateful garden gives
Its fruit in goodly revenue. Nor frost,
Nor blight, nor mildew fall, nor cankerworm,
Nor caterpillar, mar one ripening hope.
The clouds drop fatness. The very elements
Are subject to the prayerful will of those
Whose pleasure is in unison with God's."

Verse 13. Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps. God's march of right will leave a track wherein his people will joyfully follow. He who smote in justice will also bless in justice, and in both will make his righteousness manifest, so as to affect the hearts and lives of all his people. Such are the blessings of our Lord's first advent, and such shall be yet more conspicuously the result of his second coming. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

Psalm 86

Verse 1. Bow down thine ear, O Lord, hear me. In condescension to my littleness, and in pity to my weakness, "bow down thine ear, O Lord." When our prayers are lowly by reason of our humility, or feeble by reason of our sickness, or without wing by reason of our despondency, the Lord will bow down to them, the infinitely exalted Jehovah will have respect unto them. Faith, when she has the loftiest name of God on her tongue, and calls him Jehovah, yet dares to ask from him the most tender and condescending acts of love. Great as he is he loves his children to be bold with him. For I am poor and needy—doubly a son of poverty, because, first, poor and without supply for my needs, and next needy, and so full of wants, though unable to supply them. Our distress is a forcible reason for

our being heard by the Lord God, merciful, and gracious, for misery is ever the master argument with mercy. Such reasoning as this would never be adopted by a proud man, and when we hear it repeated in the public congregation by those great ones of the earth who count the peasantry to be little better than the earth they tread upon, it sounds like a mockery of the Most High. Of all despicable sinners those are the worst who use the language of spiritual poverty while they think themselves to be rich and increased in goods.

Verse 2. Preserve my soul. Let my life be safe from my enemies, and my spiritual nature be secure from their temptations. He feels himself unsafe except he be covered by the divine protection. For I am holy. I am set apart for holy uses, therefore do not let thine enemies commit a sacrilege by injuring or defiling me: I am clear of the crimes laid to my charge, and in that sense innocent; therefore, I beseech thee, do not allow me to suffer from unjust charges: and I am inoffensive, meek, and gentle towards others, therefore deal mercifully with me as I have dealt with my fellow men. Any of these renderings may explain the text, perhaps all together will expound it best. It is not self righteous in good men to plead their innocence as a reason for escaping from the results of sins wrongfully ascribed to them; penitents do not bedaub themselves with mire for the love of it, or make themselves out to be worse than they are out of compliment to heaven. No, the humblest saint is not a fool, and he is as well aware of the matters wherein he is clear as of those wherein he must cry "peccavi." To plead guilty to offences we have never committed is as great a lie as the denial of our real faults. O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee. Lest any man should suppose that David trusted in his own holiness he immediately declared his trust in the Lord, and begged to be saved as one who was not holy in the sense of being perfect, but was even yet in need of the very clements of salvation. How sweet is that title, "my God", when joined to the other, "thy servant"; and how sweet is the hope that on this ground we shall be saved; seeing that our God is not like the Amalekitish master who left his poor sick servant to perish. Note how David's poor I am (or rather the I repeated without the am) appeals to the great I AM with that sacred boldness engendered by the necessity which breaks through stone walls, aided by the faith which removes mountains.

Verse 3. Be merciful unto me, O Lord. The best of men need mercy, and appeal to mercy, yea to nothing else but mercy; they need it for themselves, and crave it eagerly of their God as a personal requisite. For I cry unto thee daily. Is there not a promise that importunity shall prevail? May we not, then, plead our importunity as an argument with God? He who prays every day, and all the day, for so the word may mean, may rest assured that the Lord will hear him in the day of his need. If we cried sometimes to man, or other false confidences, we might expect to be referred to them in the hour of our calamity, but if in all former times we have looked to the Lord alone, we may be sure that he will not desert us now. See how David pleaded, first that he was poor and needy, next that he was the Lord's set apart one, then that he was God's servant and had learned to trust in the Lord, and lastly that he had been taught to pray daily; surely these are such holy pleadings as any tried believer may employ when wrestling with a prayer hearing God, and with such weapons the most trembling suppliant may hope to win the day.

Verse 4. Rejoice the soul of thy servant. Make my heart glad, O my Maker, for I count it my honour to call myself again and again thy servant, and I reckon thy favour to be all the wages I could desire. I look for all my happiness in thee only, and therefore unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. As the heliotrope looks to the sun for its smile, so turn I my heart to thee. Thou art as the brazen serpent to my sick nature, and I lift up my soul's eye to thee that I may live. I know that the nearer I am to thee the greater is my joy, therefore be pleased to draw me nearer while I am labouring to draw near. It is

not easy to lift a soul at all; it needs a strong shoulder at the wheel when a heart sticks in the miry clay of despondency: it is less easy to lift a soul up to the Lord, for the height is great as well as the weight oppressive; but the Lord will take the will for the deed, and come in with a hand of almighty grace to raise his poor servant out of the earth and up to heaven.

Verse 5. For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive. Good at giving and forgiving; supplying us with his good, and removing our evil. Here was the great reason why the Psalmist looked to the Lord alone for his joy, because every joy creating attribute is to be found in perfection in Jehovah alone. Some men who would be considered good are so self exultingly indignant at the injuries done them by others, that they cannot forgive; but we may rest assured that the better a being is, the more willing he is to forgive, and the best and highest of all is ever ready to blot out the transgressions of his creatures. And plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee. God does not dispense his mercy from a slender store which perchance may be so impoverished as to give out altogether, but out of a cornucopiae he pours forth the infinite riches of his mercy: his goodness flows forth in abounding streams towards those who pray and in adoring worship make mention of his name. David seems to have stood in the cleft of the rock with Moses, and to have heard the name of the Lord proclaimed even as the great lawgiver did, for in two places in this psalm he almost quotes verbatim the passage in Ex 34:6—"The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."

Verse 6. Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer. Even the glory which his spirit had beheld did not withdraw him from his prayer, but rather urged him to be more fervent in it; hence he implores the Lord to hear his requests. Attend to the voice of my supplications. Here are repetitions, but not vain repetitions. When a child cries it repeats the same note, but it is equally in earnest every time, and so was it with the suppliant here. Note the expression, "the voice of my supplications", as if they were not all voice but were partly made up of inarticulate noise, yet amid much that was superfluous there really was a distinct voice, an inner meaning, a living sense which was the heart's intention. This he would have the Lord sift out from the chaff, and hear amid the mingled din. May our prayers never be voiceless; may the soul's intent always give them a live core of meaning.

Verse 7. In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me. A pious resolve backed by a judicious reason. It is useless to cry to those who cannot or will not hear; once convince men that prayer has no effect upon God, and they will have no more of it. In these busy days and especially in troublous times, men cannot afford to waste time in entreaties which must be unavailing. Our experience confirms us in the belief that Jehovah the living God really does aid those who call upon him, and therefore we pray and mean to pray, not because we are so fascinated by prayer that for its own sake we would continue in it if it proved to be mere folly and superstition, as vain philosophers assert; but because we really, indeed, and of a truth, find it to be a practical and effectual means of obtaining help from God in the hour of need. There can be no reason for praying if there be no expectation of the Lord's answering. Who would make a conscience of pleading with the winds, or find a solace in supplicating the waves? The mercy seat is a mockery if there be no hearing nor answering. David, as the following verses show, believed the Lord to be a living and potent God, and indeed to be "God alone", and it was on that account that he resolved in every hour of trouble to call upon him.

Verse 8. Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord. There are gods by delegated office, such as kings and magistrates, but they are as nothing in the presence of Jehovah; there are also

gods by the nomination of superstition, but these are vanity itself, and cannot be compared with the living and true God. Even if the heathen idols were gods, none of them in power or even in character, could be likened unto the self-existent, all-creating God of Israel. If every imaginary deity could start into actual existence, and become really divine, yet would we choose Jehovah to be our God, and reject all others. Neither are there any works like unto thy works. What have the false gods ever made or unmade? What miracles have they wrought? When did they divide a sea, or march through a wilderness scattering bread from the skies? O Jehovah, in thy person and in thy works, thou art as far above all gods as the heavens are above the nethermost abyss.

Verse 9. All nations whom thou hast made, and these include all mankind, since they all come of the first Adam—thy creature, and their lives are all distinct creations of thine omnipotence. All these shall come with penitent hearts, in thine own way, to thine own self, and worship before thee, O Lord. Because thou art thus above all gods, the people who have been so long deceived shall at last discover thy greatness, and shall render thee the worship which is thy due: thou hast created them all, and unto thee shall they all yield homage. This was David's reason for resorting to the Lord in trouble, for he felt that one day all men would acknowledge the Lord to be the only God. It makes us content to be in the minority today, when we are sure that the majority will be with us tomorrow, ay, and that the truth will one day be carried unanimously and heartily. David was not a believer in the theory that the world will grow worse and worse, and that the dispensation will wind up with general darkness, and idolatry. Earth's sun is to go down amid tenfold night if some of our prophetic brethren are to be believed. Not so do we expect, but we look for day when the dwellers in all lands shall learn righteousness, shall trust in the Saviour, shall worship thee alone, O God, and shall glorify thy name. The modern notion has greatly damped the zeal of the church for missions, and the sooner it is shown to be unscriptural the better for the cause of God. It neither consorts with prophecy, honours God, nor inspires the church with ardour. Far hence be it driven.

Verse 10. For thou art great. He had before said, "thou art good"; it is a grand thing when greatness and goodness are united; it is only in the Divine Being that either of them exists absolutely, and essentially. Happy is it for us that they both exist in the Lord to an equal degree. To be great and not good might lead to tyranny in the King, and for him to be good and not great might involve countless calamities upon his subjects from foreign foes, so that either alternative would be terrible; let the two be blended, and we have a monarch in whom the nation may rest and rejoice. And doest wondrous things. Being good, he is said to be ready to forgive: being great, he works wonders: we may blend the two, for there is no wonder so wonderful as the pardon of our transgressions. All that God does or makes has wonder in it; he breathes, and the wind is mystery; he speaks, and the thunder astounds us; even the commonest daisy is a marvel, and a pebble enshrines wisdom. Only to fools is anything which God has made uninteresting: the world is a world of wonders. Note that the verb doest is in the present, the Lord is doing wondrous things, they are transpiring before our eyes. Where are they? Look upon the bursting buds of spring or the maturing fruits of autumn, gaze on the sky or skim the sea, mark the results of providence and the victories of grace, everywhere at all times the great Thaumaturge stretches forth his rod of power.

Thou art God alone. Alone wast thou God before thy creatures were; alone in godhead still art thou now that thou hast given life to throngs of beings; alone for ever shalt thou be, for none can ever rival thee. True religion makes no compromises, it does not admit Baal or Dagon to be a god; it is exclusive and monopolizing, claiming for Jehovah nothing less than all. The vaunted liberality of certain professors of modern thought is not to be cultivated by believers in the truth. "Philosophic

breadth" aims at building a Pantheon, and piles a Pandemonium; it is not for us to be helpers in such an evil work. Benevolently intolerant, we would, for the good of mankind, as well as for the glory of God, undeceive mankind as to the value of their compromises,—they are mere treason to truth. Our God is not to be worshipped as one among many good and true beings, but as God alone; and his gospel is not to be preached as one of several saving systems, but as the one sole way of salvation. Lies can face each other beneath one common dome; but in the temple of truth the worship is one and indivisible.

Verse 11. Teach me thy way, O LORD. Instruct me thus at all times, let me live in thy school; but teach me now especially since I am in trouble and perplexity. Be pleased to shew me the way which thy wisdom and mercy have prepared for my escape; behold I lay aside all wilfulness, and only desire to be informed as to thy holy and gracious mind. Not my way give me, but thy way teach me, I would follow thee and not be wilful. I will walk in thy truth. When taught I will practise what I know, truth shall not be a mere doctrine or sentiment to me, but a matter of daily life. The true servant of God regulates his walk by his master's will, and hence he never walks deceitfully, for God's way is ever truth. Providence has a way for us, and it is our wisdom to keep in it. We must not be as the bullock which needs to be driven and urged forward because it likes not the road, but be as men who voluntarily go where their trusted friend and helper appoints their path. Unite my heart to fear thy name. Having taught me one way, give me one heart to walk therein, for too often I feel a heart and a heart, two natures contending, two principles struggling for sovereignty. Our minds are apt to be divided between a variety of objects, like trickling streamlets which waste their force in a hundred runnels; our great desire should be to have all our life floods poured into one channel and to have that channel directed towards the Lord alone. A man of divided heart is weak, the man of one object is the man. God who created the bands of our nature can draw them together, tighten, strengthen, and fasten them, and so braced and inwardly knit by his uniting grace, we shall be powerful for good, but not otherwise. To fear God is both the beginning, the growth, and the maturity of wisdom, therefore should we be undividedly given up to it, heart, and soul.

Verse 12. I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart. When my heart is one, I will give thee all of it. Praise should never be rendered with less than all our heart, and soul, and strength, or it will be both unreal and unacceptable. This is the second time in the psalm that David calls the Lord "my God", the first time he was in an agony of prayer (Ps 86:2), and now he is in an ecstasy of praise. If anything can make a man pray and praise, it is the knowledge into that the Lord is his God. And I will glorify thy name for evermore, eternity gratitude will prolong its praise. God has never done blessing us, let us never have done blessing him. As he ever gives us grace, let us ever render to him the glory of it.

Verse 13. For great is thy mercy toward me. Personal experience is ever the master singer. Whatever thou art to others, to me thy mercy is most notable. The psalmist claims to sing among the loudest, because his debt to divine mercy is among the greatest. And thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell. From the direst death and the deepest dishonour David had been kept by God, for his enemies would have done more than send him to hell had they been able. His sense of sin also made him feel as if the most overwhelming destruction would have been his portion had not grace prevented, therefore does he speak of deliverance from the nethermost abode of lost spirits. There are some alive now who can use this language unfeignedly, and he who pens these lines most humbly confesses that he is one. Left to myself to indulge my passions, to rush onward with my natural vehemence, and defy the Lord with recklessness of levity, what a candidate for the lowest

abyss should I have made myself by this time. For me, there was but one alternative, great mercy, or the lowest hell. With my whole heart do I sing, "Great is thy mercy towards me, and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell." The psalmist here again touches a bold and joyful note, but soon he exchanges it for the mournful string.

Verse 14. O God, the proud are risen against me. They could not let God's poor servant alone, his walk with God was as smoke to their eyes, and therefore they determined to destroy him. None hate good men so fiercely as do the high minded and domineering. And the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul. Unitedly oppressors sought the good man's life; they hunted in packs, with keen scent, and eager foot. In persecuting times many a saint has used these words in reference to Papal bishops and inquisitors. And have not set thee before them. They would not have molested the servant if they had cared one whit for the master. Those who fear not God are not afraid to commit violent and cruel acts. An atheist is a misanthrope. Irreligion is akin to inhumanity.

Verse 15. But thou, O Lord. What a contrast! We get away from the hectorings and blusterings of proud but puny men to the glory and goodness of the Lord. We turn from the boisterous foam of chafing waves to the sea of glass mingled with fire, calm and serene. "Art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth." A truly glorious doxology, in which there is not one redundant word. As we have before observed, it is mainly transcribed from Ex 34:6. Here is compassion for the weak and sorrowing, grace for the undeserving, longsuffering for the provoking, mercy for the guilty, and truth for the tried. God's love assumes many forms, and is lovely in them all. Into whatsoever state we may be cast, there is a peculiar hue in the light of love which will harmonize with our condition; love is one and yet sevenfold, its white ray contains the chromatic scale. Are we sorrowful? We find the Lord full of compassion. Are we contending with temptation? His grace comes to our aid. Do we err? He is patient with us. Have we sinned? He is plenteous in mercy. Are we resting on his promise? He will fulfil it with abundant truth.

Verse 16. O turn unto me. As though the face of God had been before averted in anger, the suppliant pleads for a return of conscious favour. One turn of God's face will turn all our darkness into day. And have mercy upon me, that is all he asks, for he is lowly in heart; that is all he wants, for mercy answereth all a sinner's needs. Give thy strength unto thy servant. Gird me with it that I may serve thee, guard me with it that I may not be overcome. When the Lord gives us his own strength we are sufficient for all emergencies, and have no cause to fear any adversaries. And save the son of thine handmaid. He meant that he was a home born servant of God. As the sons of slaves were their master's property by their birth, so he gloried in being the son of a woman who herself belonged to the Lord. What others might think a degrading illustration he uses with delight, to show how intensely he loved the Lord's service; and also as a reason why the Lord should interpose to rescue him, seeing that he was no newly purchased servant, but had been in the house from his very birth.

Verse 17. Shew to me a token for good. Let me be assured of thy mercy by being delivered out of trouble.

That they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed.
"Some token of thy favour show,
Some sign which all my foes may see;
And filled with blank confusion know,
My comfort and my help in thee."

What bodes good to me shall make them quail and blush. Disappointed and defeated, the foes of the good man would feel ashamed of what they had designed. "Because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me." God doth nothing by halves, those whom he helps he also consoles, and so makes them not merely safe but joyful. This makes the foes of the righteous exceedingly displeased, but it brings to the Lord double honour. Lord, deal thou thus with us evermore, so will we glorify thee, world without end. Amen.

Psalm 87

Verse 1. His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Psalm begins abruptly, the poet's heart was full, and it gained vent on a sudden.

"God's foundation stands forever
On the holy mountain towers;
Sion's gates Jehovah favours
More than Jacob's thousand bowers."

Sudden passion is evil, but bursts of holy joy are most precious. God has chosen to found his earthly temple upon the mountains; he might have selected other spots, but it was his pleasure to have his chosen abode upon Zion. His election made the mountains holy, they were by his determination ordained and set apart for the Lord's use. The foundation of the church, which is the mystical Jerusalem, is laid in the eternal, immutable, and invincible decrees of Jehovah. He wills that the church shall be, he settles all arrangements for her calling, salvation, maintenance and perfection, and all his attributes, like the mountains round about Jerusalem, lend their strength for her support. Not on the sand of carnal policy, nor in the morass of human kingdoms, has the Lord founded his church, but on his own power and godhead, which are pledged for the establishment of his beloved church, which is to him the chief of all his works. What a theme for meditation is the founding of the church of God in the ancient covenant engagements of eternity; the abrupt character of this first verse indicates long consideration on the part of the writer, leading up to his bursting forth in wonder and adoration. Well might such a theme cause his heart to glow. Rome stands on her seven hills and has never lacked a poet's tongue to sing her glories, but more glorious far art thou, O Zion, among the eternal mountains of God: while pen can write or mouth can speak, thy praises shall never lie buried in inglorious silence.

Verse 2. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. The gates are put for the city itself. The love of God is greatest to his own elect nation, descended from his servant Jacob, yet the central seat of his worship is dearer still; no other supposable comparison could have so fully displayed the favour which Jehovah bore to Jerusalem,—he loves Jacob best and Zion better than the best. At this hour the mystical teaching of these words is plain, God delights in the prayers and praises of Christian families and individuals, but he has a special eye to the assemblies of the faithful, and he has a special delight in their devotions in their church capacity. The great festivals, when the crowds surrounded the temple gates, were fair in the Lord's eyes, and even such is the general assembly and church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven. This should lead each separate believer to identify himself with the church of God; where the Lord reveals his love the most, there should each believer most delight to be found. Our own dwellings are very dear to us, but we must not prefer them to the assemblies of the saints; we must say of the church—

"Here my best friends, my kindred dwell:
Here God, my Saviour reigns."

Verse 3. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. This is true of Jerusalem. Her history, which is the story of the nation of which she is the capital, is full of glorious incidents, and her use and end as the abode of the true God, and of his worship, was preeminently glorious. Glorious things were taught in the streets, and seen in her temples. Glorious things were foretold of her, and she was the type of the most glorious things of all. This is yet more true of the church: she is founded in grace, but her pinnacles glow with glory. Men may glory in her without being braggarts, she has a lustre about her brow which none can rival. Whatever glorious things the saints may say of the church in their eulogies, they cannot exceed what prophets have foretold, what angels have sung, or what God himself has declared. Happy are the tongues which learn to occupy themselves with so excellent a subject, may they be found around our fire sides, in our market places, and in all the spots where men most congregate. Never let thy praises cease, O thou bride of Christ, thou fairest among women, thou in whom the Lord himself hath placed his delight, calling thee by that pearl of names, Hephzibah,—"for my delight is in her." Since the Lord has chosen thee, and deigns to dwell in thee, O thou city of beauty, none can rival thee, thou art the eye of the world, the pearl, the queen of all the cities of the universe; the true "eternal city", the metropolitan, the mother of us all. The years to come shall unveil thy beauties to the astonished eyes of all peoples, and the day of thy splendour shall come to its sevenfold noon. Selah. With the prospect before him of a world converted, and the most implacable foes transformed into friends, it was meet that the Psalmist should pause. How could he sing the glories of new born Tyre and Ethiopia, received with open arms into union with Zion, until he had taken breath and prepared both voice and heart for so divine a song.

Verse 4. I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me. This shall be a glorious subject to speak of concerning Zion, that her old foes are new born and have become her friends, worshipping in the temple of her God. Rahab or Egypt which oppressed Israel shall become a sister nation, and Babylon in which the tribes endured their second great captivity, shall become a fellow worshipper; then shall there be mention made in familiar talk of the old enmities forgotten and the new friendships formed. Some consider that these are the words of God himself, and should be rendered "I will mention Rahab and Babylon as knowing me": but we feel content with our common version, and attribute the words to the Psalmist himself, who anticipates the conversion of the two great rival nations and speaks of it with exultation. Behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia. These also are to bow before the Lord. Philistia shall renounce her ancient hate, Tyre shall not be swallowed up by thoughts of her commerce, and distant Ethiopia shall not be too far off to receive the salvation of the Lord. This man was born there. The word man is inserted by the translators to the marring of the sense, which is clear enough when the superfluous word is dropped,—"Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this was born there"—i.e., this nation has been born into Zion, regenerated into the church of God. Of the new births of nations we will make mention, for it is at once a great blessing and a great wonder. It is a glorious thing indeed when whole nations are born unto God.

"Mark ye well Philistia's legions,
Lo, to seek the Lord they came;
And within the sacred regions
Tyre and Cush have found a home."

Many understand the sense of these verses to be that all men are proud of their native country, and so also is the citizen of Zion, so that while of one it is said, "he was born in Egypt" and of another, "he came from Ethiopia", it would be equally to the honour of others that they were home born sons of the city of God. The passage is not so clear that any one should become dogmatical as to its meaning, but we prefer the interpretation given above.

Verse 5. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her. Not as nations only, but one by one, as individuals, the citizens of the New Jerusalem shall be counted, and their names publicly declared. Man by man will the Lord reckon them, for they are each one precious in his sight; the individual shall not be lost in the mass, but each one shall be of high account. What a patent of nobility is it, for a man to have it certified that he was born in Zion; the twice born are a royal priesthood, the true aristocracy, the imperial race of men. The original, by using the noblest word for man, intimates that many remarkable men will be born in the church, and indeed every man who is renewed in the image of Christ is an eminent personage, while there are some, who, even to the dim eyes of the world, shine forth with a lustre of character which cannot but be admitted to be unusual and admirable. The church has illustrious names of prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, reformers, missionaries and the like, which bear comparison with the grandest names honoured by the world, nay, in many respects far excel them. Zion has no reason to be ashamed of her sons, nor her sons of her. "Wisdom is justified of her children." And the highest himself shall establish her—the only establishment worth having. When the numbers of the faithful are increased by the new birth, the Lord proves himself to be the builder of the church. The Lord alone deserves to wear the title of Defender of the Faith; he is the sole and sufficient Patron and Protector of the true church. There is no fear for the Lord's heritage, his own arm is sufficient to maintain his rights. The Highest is higher than all those who are against us, and the good old cause shall triumph over all.

Verse 6. The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. At the great census which the Lord himself shall take, he will number the nations without exception and make an exact registry of them, whether they were by their natural descent Babylonians or Tyrians, or other far off heathen. May it be our happy lot to be numbered with the Lord's chosen both in life and death, in the church roll below, and in the church roll above. Jehovah's census of his chosen will differ much from ours; he will count many whom we should have disowned, and he will leave out many whom we should have reckoned. His registration is infallible. Let us pray then for that adoption and regeneration which will secure us a place among the heaven born. It was thought to be a great honour to have one's name written in the golden book of the Republic of Venice, kings and princes paid dearly for the honour, but the book of life confers far rarer dignity upon all whose names are recorded therein.

Verse 7. In vision the Psalmist sees the citizens of Zion rejoicing at some sacred festival, and marching in triumphant procession with vocal and instrumental music:—As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there. Where God is there must be joy, and where the church is increased by numerous conversions the joy becomes exuberant and finds out ways of displaying itself. Singers and dancers, Psalmists and pipers, united their efforts and made a joyful procession to the temple, inspired not by Bacchus, or by the Castalian fount, but by draughts from the sacred source of all good, of which they each one sing All my springs are in thee. Did the poet mean that henceforth he would find all his joys in Zion, or that to the Lord he would look for all inspiration, comfort, strength, joy, life and everything. The last is the truest doctrine. Churches have not such all sufficiency within them that we can afford to look to them for all, but the Lord who founded the church

is the eternal source of all our supplies, and looking to him we shall never flag or fail. How truly does all our experience lead us to look to the Lord by faith, and say "all my fresh springs are in thee." The springs of my faith and all my graces; the springs of my life and all my pleasures; the springs of my activity and all its right doings; the springs of my hope, and all its heavenly anticipations, all lie in thee, my Lord. Without thy Spirit I should be as a dry well, a mocking cistern, destitute of power to bless myself or others. O Lord, I am assured that I belong to the regenerate whose life is in thee, for I feel that I cannot live without thee; therefore, with all thy joyful people will I sing thy praises.

"With joy shall sing the choral train,
The minstrels breathe the answering strain:
'O Zion, Zion fair, I see
The fountains of my bliss in thee."

Psalm 88

Verse 1. O Lord God of my salvation. This is a hopeful title by which to address the Lord, and it has about it the only ray of comfortable light which shines throughout the Psalm. The writer has salvation, he is sure of that, and God is the sole author of it. While a man can see God as his Saviour, it is not altogether midnight with him. While the living God can be spoken of as the life of our salvation, our hope will not quite expire. It is one of the characteristics of true faith that she turns to Jehovah, the saving God, when all other confidences have proved liars unto her. I have cried day and night before thee. His distress had not blown out the sparks of his prayer, but thickened them into a greater ardency, till they burned perpetually like a furnace at full blast. His prayer was personal—whoever had not prayed, he had done so; it was intensely earnest, so that it was correctly described as a cry, such as children utter to move the pity of their parents; and it was unceasing, neither the business of the day nor the weariness of the night had silenced it: surely such entreaties could not be in vain. Perhaps, if Heman's pain had not been incessant his supplications might have been intermittent; it is a good thing that sickness will not let us rest if we spend our restlessness in prayer. Day and night are both suitable to prayer; it is no work of darkness, therefore let us go with Daniel and pray when men can see us, yet, since supplication needs no light, let us accompany Jacob and wrestle at Jabbok till the day breaketh. Evil is transformed to good when it drives us to prayer. One expression of the text is worthy of special note; "before thee" is a remarkable intimation that the Psalmist's cries had an aim and a direction towards the Lord, and were not the mere clamours of nature, but the groanings of a gracious heart towards Jehovah, the God of salvation. Of what use are arrows shot into the air? The archer's business is to look well at the mark he drives at. Prayers must be directed to heaven with earnest care. So thought Heman—his cries were all meant for the heart of his God. He had no eye to onlookers as Pharisees have, but all his prayers were before his God.

Verse 2. Let my prayer come before thee. Admit it to an audience; let it speak with thee. Though it be my prayer, and therefore very imperfect, yet deny it not thy gracious consideration. Incline thine ear unto my cry. It is not music save to the ear of mercy, yet be not vexed with its discord, though it be but a cry, for it is the most natural expression of my soul's anguish. When my heart speaks, let thine ear hear. There may be obstacles which impede the upward flight of our prayers—let us entreat the Lord to remove them; and as there may also be offences which prevent the Lord from giving favourable regard to our requests—let us implore him to put these out of the way. He who has prayed day and night cannot bear to lose all his labour. Only those who are indifferent in prayer will be indifferent about the issue of prayer.

Verse 3. For my soul is full of troubles. I am satiated and nauseated with them. Like a vessel full to the brim with vinegar, my heart is filled up with adversity till it can hold no more. He had his house full and his hands full of sorrow; but, worse than that, he had his heart full of it. Trouble in the soul is the soul of trouble. A little soul trouble is pitiful; what must it be to be sated with it? And how much worse still to have your prayers return empty when your soul remains full of grief. And my life draweth nigh unto the grave. He felt as if he must die, indeed he thought himself half dead already. All his life was going, his spiritual life declined, his mental life decayed, his bodily life flickered; he was nearer dead than alive. Some of us can enter into this experience, for many a time have we traversed this valley of death shade, aye and dwelt in it by the month together. Really to die and be with Christ will be a gala day's enjoyment compared with our misery when a worse than physical death has cast its dreadful shadow over us. Death would be welcomed as a relief by those whose depressed spirits make their existence a living death. Are good men ever permitted to suffer thus? Indeed they are; and some of them are even all their life time subject to bondage. O Lord, Be pleased to set free thy prisoners of hope! Let, none of thy mourners imagine that a strange thing has happened unto him, but rather rejoice as he sees the footprints of brethren who have trodden this desert before.

Verse 4. I am counted with them that go down into the pit. My weakness is so great that both by myself and others I am considered as good as dead. If those about me have not ordered my coffin they have at least conversed about my sepulchre, discussed my estate, and reckoned their share of it. Many a man has been buried before he was dead, and the only mourning over him has been because he refused to fulfil the greedy expectations of his hypocritical relatives by going down to the pit at once. It has come to this with some afflicted believers, that their hungry heirs think they have lived too long. I am as a mat, that hath no strength. I have but the name to live; my constitution is broken up; I can scarce crawl about my sick room, my mind is even weaker than my body, and my faith weakest of all. The sons and daughters of sorrow will need but little explanation of these sentences, they are to such tried ones as household words.

Verse 5. Free among the dead. Unbound from all that links a man with life, familiar with death's door, a freeman of the city of the sepulchre, I seem no more one of earth's drudges, but begin to anticipate the rest of the tomb. It is a sad case when our only hope lies in the direction of death, our only liberty of spirit amid the congenial horrors of corruption. Like the slain that lie in the grave, whom you remember no more. He felt as if he were as utterly forgotten as those whose carcasses are left to rot on the battle field. As when a soldier, mortally wounded, bleeds unheeded amid the heaps of slain, and remains to his last expiring groan unpitied and unsuccoured, so did Heman sigh out his soul in loneliest sorrow, feeling as if even God himself had quite forgotten him. How low the spirits of good and brave men will sometimes sink. Under the influence of certain disorders everything will wear a sombre aspect, and the heart will dive into the profoundest deeps of misery. It is all very well for those who are in robust health and full of spirits to blame those whose lives are sicklied over with the pale cast of melancholy, but the evil is as real as a gaping wound, and all the more hard to bear because it lies so much in the region of the soul that to the inexperienced it appears to be a mere matter of fancy and diseased imagination. Reader, never ridicule the nervous and hypochondriacal, their pain is real; though much of the evil lies in the imagination, it is not imaginary. And they are cut off from thy hand. Poor Heman felt as if God himself had put him away, smitten him and laid him among the corpses of those executed by divine justice. He mourned that the hand of the Lord had gone out against him, and that lie was divided from the great author of his life. This is the essence of wormwood. Man's blows are trifles, but God's smitings are terrible to a gracious heart. To feel utterly forsaken of the

Lord and cast away as though hopelessly corrupt is the very climax of heart desolation.

Verse 6. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. What a collection of forcible metaphors, each one expressive of the utmost grief. Heman compared his forlorn condition to an imprisonment in a subterranean dungeon, to confinement in the realms of the dead, and to a plunge into the abyss. None of the similes are strained. The mind can descend far lower than the body, for it there are bottomless pits. The flesh can bear only a certain number of wounds and no more, but the soul can bleed in ten thousand ways, and die over and over again each hour. It is grievous to the good man to see the Lord whom he loves laying him in the sepulchre of despondency; piling nightshade upon him, putting out all his candles, and heaping over him solid masses of sorrow; evil from so good a hand seems evil indeed, and yet if faith could but be allowed to speak she would remind the depressed spirit that it is better to fall into the hand of the Lord than into the hands of man, and moreover she would tell the despondent heart that God never placed a Joseph in a pit without drawing him up again to fill a throne; that he never caused a horror of great darkness to fall upon an Abraham without revealing his covenant to him; and never cast even a Jonah into the deeps without preparing the means to land him safely on dry land. Alas, when under deep depression the mind forgets all this, and is only conscious of its unutterable misery; the man sees the lion but not the honey in its carcass, he feels the thorns but he cannot smell the roses which adorn them. He who now feebly expounds these words knows within himself more than he would care or dare to tell of the abysses of inward anguish. He has sailed round the Cape of Storms, and has drifted along by the dreary headlands of despair. He has groaned out with one of old—"My bones are pierced in me in the night season; and my sinews take no rest. I go morning without the sun. Terrors are turned upon me, they pursue my soul as the wind." Those who know this bitterness by experience will sympathise, but from others it would be idle to expect pity, nor would their pity be worth the having if it could be obtained. It is an unspeakable consolation that our Lord Jesus knows this experience, right well, having, with the exception of the sin of it, felt it all and more than all in Gethsemane when he was exceeding sorrowful even unto death.

Verse 7. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me. Dreadful plight this, the worst in which a man can be found. Wrath is heavy in itself; God's wrath is crushing beyond conception, and when that presses hard the soul is oppressed indeed. The wrath of God is the very hell of hell, and when it weighs upon the conscience a man feels a torment such as only that of damned spirits can exceed. Joy or peace, or even numbness of indifference, there can be none to one who is loaded with this most tremendous of burdens. And thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves, or all thy breakers. He pictures God's wrath as breaking over him like those waves of the sea which swell, and rage, and dash with fury upon the shore. How could his frail barque hope to survive those cruel breakers, white like the hungry teeth of death. Seas of affliction seemed to rush in upon him with all the force of omnipotence; he felt himself to be oppressed and afflicted like Israel in Egypt, when they cried by reason of their afflictions. It appeared impossible for him to suffer more, he had exhausted the methods of adversity and endured all its waves. So have we imagined, and yet it is not really quite so bad. The worst case might be worse, there are alleviations to every woe; God has other and more terrible waves which, if he chose to let them forth, would sweep us into the infernal abyss, whence hope has long since been banished. Selah. There was need to rest. Above the breakers the swimmer lifts his head and looks around him, breathing for a moment, until the next wave comes. Even lamentation must have its pauses. Nights are broken up into watches, and even so mourning has its intervals. Such sorrowful music is a great strain both on voices and instruments, and it is well to give the singers the relief of silence for a while.

Verse 8. Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me. If ever we need friends it is in the dreary hour of despondency and the weary time of bodily sickness; therefore does the sufferer complain because divine providence had removed his friends. Perhaps his disease was infectious or defiling, so that he was legally separated from his fellow men, perhaps their fears kept them away from his plague stricken house, or else his good name had become so injured that they naturally avoided him. Lost friends require but small excuse for turning their backs on the afflicted. The swallows offer no apology for leaving us to winter by ourselves. Yet it is a piercing pain which arises from the desertion of dear associates; it is a wound which festers and refuses to be healed. Thou hast made me an abomination unto them. They turned from him as though he had become loathsome and contaminating, and this because of something which the Lord had done to him; therefore, he brings his complaint to the prime mover in his trouble. He who is still flattered by the companions of his pleasure can little guess the wretchedness which will be his portion should he become poor, or slanderously accused, for then one by one the parasites of his prosperity will go their way and leave him to his fate, not without cutting remarks on their part to increase his misery. Men have not so much power to bless by friendship as to curse by treachery. Earth's poisons are more deadly than her medicines are healing. The mass of men who gather around a man and flatter him are like tame leopards; when they lick his hand it is well for him to remember that with equal gusto they would drink his blood. "Cursed is he that trusteth in man." I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. He was a prisoner in his room, and felt like a leper in the lazaretto, or a condemned criminal in his cell. His mind, too, was bound as with fetters of iron; he felt no liberty of hope, he could take no flights of joy. When God shuts friends out, and shuts us in to pine away alone, it is no wonder if we water our couch with tears.

Verse 9. Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction. He wept his eyes out. He exhausted the lachrymal glands, he wore away the sight itself. Tears in showers are a blessing, and work our good; but in floods they become destructive and injurious. Lord, I have called daily upon thee. His tears wetted his prayers, but did not damp then fervour. He prayed still, though no answer came to dry his eyes. Nothing can make a true believer cease praying; it is a part of his nature, and pray he must. I have stretched out my hands unto thee. He used the appropriate posture of a supplicant, of his own accord; men need no posture maker, or master of the ceremonies, when they are eagerly pleading for mercy, nature suggests to them attitudes both natural and correct. As a little child stretches out its hands to its mother while it cries, so did this afflicted child of God. He prayed all over, his eyes wept, his voice cried, his hands were outstretched, and his heart broke. This was prayer indeed.

Verse 10. Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? Wherefore then suffer me to die? While I live thou canst in me display the glories of thy grace, but when I have passed into the unknown land, how canst thou illustrate in me thy love? If I perish thou wilt lose a worshipper who both revered, and in his own experience illustrated, the wonders of thy character and acts. This is good pleading, and therefore he repeats it. Shall the dead arise and praise thee? He is thinking only of the present, and not of the last great day, and he urges that the Lord would have one the less to praise him among the sons of men. Shades take no part in the quires of the Sabbath, ghosts sing no joyous Psalms, sepulchres and vaults send forth no notes of thanksgiving. True the souls of departed saints render glory to God, but the dejected Psalmist's thoughts do not mount to heaven but survey the gloomy grave: he stays on this side of eternity, where in the grave he sees no wonders and hears no songs. Selah. At the mouth of the tomb he sits down to meditate, and then returns to his theme.

Verse 11. Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Thy tender goodness—who shall testify

concerning it in that cold abode where the worm and corruption hold their riot? The living may indite "meditations among the Tombs", but the dead know nothing, and therefore can declare nothing. Or thy faithfulness in destruction? If the Lord suffered his servant to die before the divine promise was fulfilled, it would be quite impossible for his faithfulness to be proclaimed. The poet is dealing with this life only, and looking at the matter from the point of view afforded by time and the present race of men; if a believer were deserted and permitted to die in despair, there could come no voice from his grave to inform mankind that the Lord had rectified his wrongs and relieved him of his trials, no songs would leap up from the cold sod to hymn the truth and goodness of the Lord; but as far as men are concerned, a voice which loved to magnify the grace of God would be silenced, and a loving witness for the Lord removed from the sphere of testimony.

Verse 12. Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? If not here permitted to prove their goodness of Jehovah, how could the singer do so in the land of darkness and death shade? Could his tongue, when turned into a clod, alarm the dull cold ear of death? Is not a living dog better than a dead lion, and a living believer of more value to the cause of God on earth than all the departed put together? And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? What shall be told concerning thee in the regions of oblivion? Where memory and love are lost, and men are alike unknowing and unknown, forgetful and forgotten, what witness to the divine holiness can be borne? The whole argument amounts to this—if the believer dies unblessed, how will God's honour be preserved? Who will bear witness to his truth and righteousness?

Verse 13. But unto thee have I cried, O LORD; I have continued to pray for help to thee, O Jehovah, the living God, even though thou hast so long delayed to answer. A true born child of God may be known by his continuing to cry; a hypocrite is great at a spurt, but the genuine believer holds on till he wins his suit. And in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee. He meant to plead on yet, and to increase his earnestness. He intended to be up betimes, to anticipate the day light, and begin to pray before the sun was up. If the Lord is pleased to delay, he has a right to do as he wills, but we must not therefore become tardy in supplication. If we count the Lord slack concerning his promise we must only be the more eager to outrun him, lest sinful sloth on our part should hinder the blessing.

"Let prayer and holy hymn
Perfume the morning air; Before the world with smoke is dim
Bestir thy soul to prayer."

"While flowers are wet with dew
Lament thy sins with tears,
And ere the sun shines forth anew
Tell to thy Lord thy fears."

Verse 14. LORD, why castest thou off my soul? Hast thou not aforesaid chosen me, wilt thou now reject me? Shall thine elect ones become thy reprobates? Dost thou, like changeable men, give a writing of divorcement to those whom thy love has espoused? Can thy beloveds become thy cast offs? Why hidest thou thy face from me? Wilt thou not so much as look upon me? Canst thou not afford me a solitary smile? Why this severity to one who has in brighter days basked in the light of thy favour? We may put these questions to the Lord, nay, we ought to do so. It is not undue familiarity, but holy boldness. It may help us to remove the evil which provokes the Lord to jealousy, if we seriously beg him to shew us wherefore he contends with us. He cannot act towards us in other than a right and gracious manner, therefore for every stroke of his rod there is a sufficient reason in the

judgment of his loving heart; let us try to learn that reason and profit by it.

Verse 15. I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up. His affliction had now lasted so long that he could hardly remember when it commenced; it seemed to him as if he had been at death's door ever since he was a child. This was no doubt an exaggeration of a depressed spirit, and yet perhaps Heman may have been born under the cypress, and have been all his days afflicted with some chronic disease or bodily infirmity; there are holy men and women whose lives are a long apprenticeship to patience, and these deserve both our sympathy and our reverence,—our reverence we have ventured to say, for since the Saviour became the acquaintance of grief, sorrow has become honourable in believers' eyes. A life long sickness may by divine grace prove to be a life long blessing. Better suffer from childhood to old age than to be let alone to find pleasure in sin. While I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. Long use had not blunted the edge of sorrow, God's terrors had not lost their terror; rather had they become more overwhelming and had driven the man to despair. He was unable to collect his thoughts, he was so tossed about that he could not judge and weigh his own condition in a calm and rational manner. Sickness alone will thus distract the mind; and when a sense of divine anger is added thereto, it is not to be wondered at if reason finds it hard to hold the reins. How near akin to madness soul depression sometimes may be, it is not our province to decide; but we speak what we do know when we say that a feather weight might be sufficient to turn the scale at times. Thank God O ye tempted ones who yet retain your reason! Thank him that the devil himself cannot add that feather while the Lord stands by to adjust all things. Even though we have grazed upon the rock of utter distraction, we bless the infinitely gracious Steersman that the vessel is seaworthy yet, and answers to her helm: tempest tossed from the hour of her launch even to this hour, yet she mounts the waves and defies the hurricane.

Verse 16. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me. What an expression, "fierce wrath", and it is a man of God who feels it! Do we seek an explanation? It seemed so to him, but "tidings are not what they seem." No punitive anger ever falls upon the saved one, for Jesus shields him from it all; but a father's anger may fall upon his dearest child, none the less but all the more, because he loves it. Since Jesus bore my guilt as my substitute, my Judge cannot punish me, but my Father can and will correct me. In this sense the Father may even manifest "fierce wrath" to his erring child, and under a sense of it that dear broken down one may be laid in the dust and covered with wretchedness, and yet for all that he may be accepted and beloved of the Lord all the while. Heman represents God's wrath as breaking over him as waves over a wreck. Thy terrors have cut me off. They have made me a marked man, they have made me feel like a leper separated from the congregation of thy people, and they have caused others to look upon me as no better than dead. Blessed be God this is the sufferer's idea and not the very truth, for the Lord will neither cast off nor cut off his people, but will visit his mourners with choice refreshments.

Verse 17. They came round about me daily like water. My troubles, and thy chastisement poured in upon me, penetrating everywhere, and drowning all. Such is the permeating and pervading power of spiritual distress, there is no shutting it out; it soaks into the soul like the dew into Gideon's fleece; it sucks the spirit down as the quicksand swallows the ship; it overwhelms it as the deluge submerged the green earth. They compassed me about together. Grievings hemmed him in. He was like the deer in the hunt, when the dogs are all around and at his throat. Poor soul! and yet he was a man greatly beloved of heaven!

Verse 18. Lover and friend: hast thou put far from me. Even when they are near me bodily, they are

so unable to swim with me in such deep waters, that they stand like men far away on the shore while I am buffeted with the billows; but, alas, they shun me, the dearest lover of all is afraid of such a distracted one, and those who took counsel with me avoid me now! The Lord Jesus knew the meaning of this in all its wormwood and gall when in his passion. In dreadful loneliness he trod the wine press, and all his garments were distained with the red blood of those sour grapes. Lonely sorrow falls to the lot of not a few; let them not repine, but enter herein into close communion with that dearest lover and friend who is never far from his tried ones. And mine acquaintance into darkness, or better still, my acquaintance is darkness. I am familiar only with sadness, all else has vanished. I am a child crying alone in the dark. Will the heavenly Father leave his child there? Here he breaks off, and anything more from us would only spoil the abruptness of the unexpected FINIS.

(We have not attempted to interpret this Psalm concerning our Lord, but we fully believe that where the members are, the Head is to be seen preeminently. To have given a double exposition under each verse would have been difficult and confusing; we have therefore left the Messianic references to be pointed out in the Notes, where, if God the Holy Ghost be pleased to illustrate the page, we have gathered up more than enough to lead each devout reader to behold Jesus, the man of sorrows and the acquaintance of grief.)

Psalm 89

Verse 1. I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever. A devout resolve, and very commendable when a man is exercised with great trouble on account of an apparent departure of the Lord from his covenant and promise. Whatever we may observe abroad or experience in our own persons, we ought still to praise God for his mercies, since they most certainly remain the same, whether we can perceive them or not. Sense sings but now and then, but faith is an eternal songster. Whether others sing or not, believers must never give over; in them should be constancy of praise, since God's love to them cannot by any possibility have changed, however providence may seem to frown. We are not only to believe the Lord's goodness, but to rejoice in it evermore; it is the source of all our joy, and as it cannot be dried up, so the stream ought never to fail to flow, or cease to flash in sparkling crystal of song. We have not one, but many mercies to rejoice in, and should therefore multiply the expressions of our thankfulness. It is Jehovah who deigns to deal out to us our daily benefits, and he is the all sufficient and immutable God; therefore our rejoicing in him must never suffer diminution. By no means let his exchequer of glory be deprived of the continual revenue which we owe to it. Even time itself must not bound our praises—they must leap into eternity; he blesses us with eternal mercies—let us sing unto him forever.

With my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. The utterances of the present will instruct future generations. What Ethan sung is now a text book for Christians, and will be so as long as this dispensation shall last. We ought to have an eye to posterity in all that we write, for we are the schoolmasters of succeeding ages. Ethan first spoke with his mouth that which he recorded with his pen—a worthy example of using both means of communication; the mouth has a warmer manner than the pen, but the pen's speech lives longest, and is heard farther and wider. While reading this Psalm, such in the freshness of the style, that one seems to hear it gushing from the poet's mouth; he makes the letters live and talk, or, rather, sing to us. Note, that in this second sentence he speaks of faithfulness, which is the mercy of God's mercies—the brightest jewel in the crown of goodness. The grace of an unfaithful God would be a poor subject for music, but unchangeable love and immutable promises demand everlasting songs. In times of trouble it is the divine faithfulness which the soul

hangs upon; this is the bower anchor of the soul, its hold fast, and its stay. Because God is, and ever will be, faithful, we have a theme for song which will not be out of date for future generations; it will never be worn out, never be disproved, never be unnecessary, never be an idle subject, valueless to mankind. It will also be always desirable to make it known, for men are too apt to forget it, or to doubt it, when hard times press upon them. We cannot too much multiply testimonies to the Lord's faithful mercy—if our own generation should not need them others will: sceptics are so ready to repeat old doubts and invent new ones that believers should be equally prompt to bring forth evidences both old and new. Whoever may neglect this duty, those who are highly favoured, as Ethan was, should not be backward.

Verse 2. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever. His heart was persuaded of it, and he had affirmed it as an indisputable truth. He was certain that upon a sure foundation the Lord intended to pile up a glorious palace of goodness—a house of refuge for all people, wherein the Son of David should for ever be glorified as the dispenser of heavenly grace. Thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. This divine edifice, he felt assured, would tower into the skies, and would be turreted with divine faithfulness even as its foundations were laid in eternal love. God's faithfulness is no thing of earth, for here nothing is firm, and all things savour of the changes of the moon and the fickleness of the sea: heaven is the birthplace of truth, and there it dwells in eternal vigour. As the blue arch above us remains unimpaired by age, so does the Lord's truth; as in the firmament he hangs his covenant bow, so in the upper heavens the faithfulness of God is enthroned in immutable glory. This Ethan said, and this we may say; come what will, mercy and faithfulness are built up by "the Eternal Builder", and his own nature is the guarantee for their perpetuity. This is to be called to mind whenever the church is in trouble, or our own spirits bowed down with grief.

Verse 3. I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant. This was the ground of the Psalmist's confidence in God's mercy and truth, for he knew that the Lord had made a covenant of grace with David and his seed, and confirmed it by an oath. Here he quotes the very words of God, which were revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, and are a condensation of the original covenant in 2Sa 7:1-29. Well might he write in the former verse, "I have said", when he knew that Jehovah had said, "I have sworn." David was the Lord's elect, and with him a covenant was made, which ran along in the line of his seed until it received a final and never ending fulfilment in "the Son of David." David's house must be royal: as long as there was a sceptre in Judah, David's seed must be the only rightful dynasty; the great "King of the Jews" died with that title above his head in the three current languages of the then known world, and at this day he is owned as king by men of every tongue. The oath sworn to David has not been broken, though the temporal crown is no longer worn, for in the covenant itself his kingdom was spoken of as enduring for ever. In Christ Jesus there is a covenant established with all the Lord's chosen, and they are by grace led to be the Lord's servants, and then are ordained kings and priests by Christ Jesus. How sweet it is to see the Lord, not only making a covenant, but owning to it in after days, and bearing witness to his own oath; this ought to be solid ground for faith, and Ethan, the Ezrahite, evidently thought it so. Let the reader and writer both pause over such glorious lines, and sing of the mercies of the Lord, who thus avows the bonds of the covenant, and, in so doing, gives a renewed pledge of his faithfulness to it. "I have", says the Lord, and yet again "I have", as though he himself was nothing loath to dwell upon the theme. We also would lovingly linger over the ipsissima verba of the covenant made with David, reading them carefully and with joy. There are thus recorded in 2Sa 7:12-16: "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shall sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the

throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." After reading this, let us remember that the Lord has said to us by his servant Isaiah, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

Verse 4. Thy seed will I establish for ever. David must always have a seed, and truly in Jesus this is fulfilled beyond his hopes. What a seed David has in the multitude which have sprung from him who was both his Son and his Lord. The Son of David is the Great Progenitor, the second Adam, the Everlasting Father, he sees his seed, and in them beholds of the travail of his soul. And build up thy throne to all generations. David's dynasty never decays, but on the contrary, is evermore consolidated by the great Architect of heaven and earth. Jesus is a king as well as a progenitor and his throne is ever being built up—his kingdom comes—his power extends. Thus runs the covenant; and when the church declines, it is ours to plead it before the ever faithful God, as the Psalmist does in the latter verses of this sacred song. Christ must reign, but why is his name blasphemed and his gospel so despised? The more gracious Christians are, the more will they be moved to jealousy by the sad estate of the Redeemer's cause, and the more will they argue the case with the great Covenant maker, crying day and night before him, "Thy kingdom come." Selah. It would not be meet to hurry on. Rest, O reader, at the bidding of this Selah, and let each syllable of the covenant ring in thine ears; and then lift up the heart and proceed with the sacred poet to tell forth the praises of the Lord.

Verse 5. And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Lord. Looking down upon what God had done, and was about to do, in connection with his covenant of grace, all heaven would be filled with adoring wonder. The sun and moon, which had been made tokens of the covenant, would praise God for such an extraordinary display of mercy, and the angels and redeemed spirits would sing, "as it were, a new song." Thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints. By which is probably intended the holy ones on earth. So that the "whole family in heaven and earth" would join in the praise. Earth and heaven are one in admiring and adoring the covenant God. Saints above see most clearly into the heights and depths of divine love, therefore they praise its wonders; and saints below, being conscious of their many sins and multiplied provocations of the Lord, admire his faithfulness. The heavens broke forth with music at the wonders of mercy contained in the glad tidings concerning Bethlehem, and the saints who came together in the temple magnified the faithfulness of God at the birth of the Son of David. Since that auspicious day, the general assembly on high and the sacred congregation below have not ceased to sing unto Jehovah, the Lord that keepeth covenant with his elect.

Verse 6. For who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord—therefore all heaven worships him, seeing none can equal him. Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord?—therefore the assemblies of the saints on earth adore him, seeing none can rival him. Until we can find one equally worthy to be praised, we will give unto the Lord alone all the homage of our praise. Neither among the sons of the morning nor the sons of the mighty can any peer be found for Jehovah, yea none that can be mentioned in the same day; therefore he is rightly praised. Since the Lord Jesus, both as God and as man, is far above all creatures, he also is to be devoutly worshipped. How full of poetic fire is this verse! How bold is the challenge! How triumphant the holy boasting! The sweet singer dwells upon the name of Jehovah with evident exultation; to him the God of Israel is

God indeed and God alone. He closely follows the language long before rehearsed by Miriam, when she sang, "Who is like unto thee, O Jehovah, among the gods? Who is like thee?" His thoughts are evidently flying back to the days of Moses and the marvels of the Red Sea, when God was gloriously known by his incommunicable name; there is a ring of timbrels in the double question, and a sound as of the twinkling feet of rejoicing maidens. Have we no poets now? Is there not a man among us who can compose hymns flaming with this spirit? O, Spirit of the living God, be thou the inspirer of some master minds among us!

Verse 7. God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints. The holiest tremble in the presence of the thrice Holy One: their familiarity is seasoned with the profoundest awe. Perfect love casts out the fear which hath torment, and works in lieu thereof that other fear which is akin to joy unutterable. How reverent should our worship be! Where angels veil their faces, men should surely bow in lowliest fashion. Sin is akin to presumptuous boldness, but holiness is sister to holy fear. "And to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." The nearer they are the more they adore. If mere creatures are struck with awe, the courtiers and favourites of heaven must be yet more reverent in the presence of the Great King. God's children are those who most earnestly pray "hallowed be thy name." Irreverence is rebellion. Thoughts of the covenant of grace tend to create a deeper awe of God, they draw us closer to him, and the more his glories are seen by us in that nearer access, the more humbly we prostrate ourselves before his Majesty.

Verse 8. O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? Or Jehovah, God of Hosts, who is like thee, Mighty Jah. Alexander remarks, that the infinite superiority of God to men and angels is here expressed, or rather indicated, by an accumulation of descriptive titles. Here we have the name which displays his self existence, the title which denotes his dominion over all his creatures, and an adjective which sets forth the power with which he exercises his sovereignty. Yet this great and terrible God has entered into covenant with men! Who would not reverence him with deepest love? Or to thy faithfulness round about thee. He dwells in faithfulness; it is said to be the girdle of the loins of his only begotten Son, who is the express image of his person. None in all creation is faithful as he is; even his angels might prove faithless if he left them to themselves, but he cannot "lie unto David", or forget to keep his oath. Men often fail in truth because their power is limited, and then they find it easier to break their word than to keep it; but the strong Jehovah is equal to all his engagements, and will assuredly keep them. Unrivalled might and unparalleled truth are wedded in the character of Jehovah. Blessed be his name that it is so.

Verse 9. Thou rulest the raging of the sea. Always, even in the hour of ocean's maddest fury, the Lord controls it. At the Red Sea the foaming billows saw their God and stood upright in awe. When the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them. None else can do this; to attempt it would be madness, but the Lord's "hush" silences the boisterous storm. So did the Lord's Anointed calm the storms of Galilee, for he is Lord of all; so also does the great Ruler of Providence evermore govern the fickle wills of men, and quiet the tumults of the people. As a mother stills her babe to sleep, so the Lord calms the fury of the sea, the anger of men, the tempest of adversity, the despair of the soul, and the rage of hell. "The Lord sitteth upon the floods; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever", and in all his ruling and over ruling he has respect unto his covenant; therefore, although our house be not so with God as our hearts would wish, yet we will rejoice in his covenant ordered in all things and sure, and delight in him as all our salvation and all our desire.

Verse 10. Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces as one that is slain. Egypt was crushed like a corpse

beneath the chariot wheels of the destroyer: its pomp and glory were broken like the limbs of the dead in battle. Egypt was Israel's ancient foe, and its overthrow wits a theme to which devout minds constantly reverted, as to a subject fit for their most exulting songs. We, too, have seen our Rahab broken, our sins overthrown, and we cannot but unite in the ascription of praise unto the Lord. Thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm. Thy strength has strewn thy foes dead upon the plain, or compelled them to flee hither and thither in dismay. Jehovah has overthrown his enemies with his own right arm, unaided and alone. Proud Rahab, swelling in her fury like the sea, was utterly broken and scattered before the Lord of Hosts.

Verse 11. The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine. All things are alike God's—rebellious earth as well as adoring heaven. Let us not despair of the kingdom of truth; the Lord has not abdicated the throne of earth or handed it over to the sway of Satan. As for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them. The habitable and cultivated earth, with all its produce, owns the Lord to be both its Creator and Sustainer, builder and upholder.

Verse 12. The north and the south thou hast created them. North and south, opposite poles, agree in this—that Jehovah fashioned them. Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name, that is to say, east and west are equally formed by thee, and therefore give thee praise. Turn to all points of the compass, and behold the Lord is there. The regions of snow and the gardens of the sun are his dominions: both the land of the dawning and the home of the setting sun rejoice to own his sway. Tabor was on the west of Jordan and Hermon on the east, and it seems natural to consider these two mountains as representatives of the east and west. Keble paraphrases the passage thus:

"Both Heman moist, and Tabor lone,
They wait on thee with glad acclaim."

Verse 13. Thou hast a mighty arm, omnipotence is thine in smiting or uplifting; strong is thy hand, thy power to create and grasp is beyond conception great; and high is thy right hand—thy skill is incomparable, thy favour ennobling, thy working glorious. The power of God so impressed the Psalmist that in many ways he repeated the same thought: and indeed the truth of God's omnipotence is so full of refreshment to gracious hearts that it cannot be too much dwelt upon, especially when viewed in connection with his mercy and truth, as in the following verse.

Verse 14. Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne. They are the basis of the divine government, the sphere within which his sovereignty moves. God as a sovereign is never unjust or unwise. He is too holy to be unrighteous, too wise to be mistaken; this is constant matter for joy to the upright in heart. Mercy and truth shall go before thy face. They are the harbingers and heralds of the Lord; he calls these to the front to deal with guilty and changeful man; he makes them, in the person of the Lord Jesus, to be his ambassadors, and so poor, guilty man is enabled to endure the presence of his righteous Lord. If mercy had not paved the way, the coming of God to any man must have been swift destruction. Thus has the poet sung the glories of the covenant God. It was meet that before he poured forth his lament he should record his praise, lest his sorrow should seem to have withered his faith. Before we argue our case before the Lord it is most becoming to acknowledge that we know him to be supremely great and good, whatever may be the appearance of his providence; this is such a course as every wise man will take who desires to have an answer of peace in the day of trouble.

Verse 15. Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound. It is a blessed God of whom the Psalmist

has been singing, and therefore they are a blessed people who partake of his bounty, and know how to exult in his favour. Praise is a peculiarly joyful sound, and blessed are those who are familiar with its strains. The covenant promises have also a sound beyond measure precious, and they are highly favoured who understand their meaning and recognise their own personal interest in them. There may also be a reference here to the blowing of trumpets and other glad noises which attended the worship of Jehovah, who, unlike the gods of the heathen was not adored by the shrieks of wretched victims, or the yells and outcries of terror stricken crowds, but by the joyful shouts of his happy people. They shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. For them it is joy enough that Jehovah is favourable to them; all day long this contents them and enables them with rigour to pursue their pilgrimage. Only a covenant God could look with favour upon men, and those who have known him in that relationship learn to rejoice in him, yea, to walk with him in fellowship, and to continue in communion with him. If we give God our ear and hear the joyful sound, he will shew us his face and make us glad. While the sun shines, men walk without stumbling as to their feet, and when the Lord smiles on us we live without grief as to our souls.

Verse 16. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day. And good cause they have for so doing, for to the soul which, in Christ Jesus, has entered into covenant with God, every attribute is a fountain of delight. There is no hour in the day, and no day in our life, in which we may not rejoice in the name, person, and character of the Lord. We need no other reason for rejoicing. As philosophers could make merry without music, so can we rejoice without carnal comforts; the Lord All sufficient is an all sufficient source of joy. And in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. By the Lord's righteous dealings the saints are uplifted in due time, however great may have been the oppression and the depression from which they may have suffered. In the righteousness which the covenant supplies, which is entirely of the Lord, believers are set on high in a secure and blessed position, so that they are full of sacred happiness. If God were unjust, or if he regarded us as being without righteousness, we must be filled with misery, but as neither of these things are so, we are exalted indeed, and would extol the name of the Lord.

Verse 17. For thou art the glory of their strength. Surely in the Lord Jehovah have we both righteousness and strength. He is our beauty and glory when we are strong in him, as well as our comfort and sustenance when we tremble because of conscious weakness in ourselves. No man whom the Lord makes strong may dare to glory in himself, he must ascribe all honour to the Lord alone; we have neither strength nor beauty apart from him. And in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. By the use of the word our the Psalmist identifies himself with the blessed people, and this indicates how much sweeter it is to sing in the first person than concerning others. May we have grace to claim a place among those in covenant with God, in Christ Jesus, for then a sense of divine favour will make us also bold and joyous. A creature full of strength and courage lifts up its horn, and so also does a believer become potent, valiant, and daring. The horn was an eastern ornament, worn by men and women, or at least is so at this day, and by the uplifting of this the wearer showed himself to be in good spirits, and in a confident frame of mind: we wear no such outward vanities, but our inward soul is adorned and made bravely triumphant when the favour of God is felt by us. Worldly men need outward prosperity to make them lift up their heads, but the saints find more than enough encouragement in the secret love of God.

Verse 18. For the Lord is our defence. Whoever else may defend us, he is our ultimate Defender and Shield. And the Holy one of Israel is our king. He who protects should govern, our defender should be acknowledged as our king. Kings are called the shields of nations, and the God of Israel is both our

Ruler and our Defence. Another sense may be that Israel's defender and king was of the Lord, belonging to him and sent by him; even the protectors of the land being themselves protected by the Lord. The title "the Holy One of Israel" is peculiarly delightful to the renewed heart. God is one, we worship none beside. He is holiness itself, the only being who can be called "the Holy One", and in his perfection of character we see the most excellent reason for our faith. He who is holy cannot break his promises, or act unjustly concerning his oath and covenant. Moreover, he is the Holy One of Israel, being specially the God of his own elect, ours by peculiar ties, ours for ever and ever. Who among the saints will not rejoice in the God of election? Are they not indeed a people greatly blessed who can call this God their God for ever and ever?

Verse 19. Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one. The Psalmist returns to a consideration of the covenant made with David. The holy one here meant may be either David or Nathan the prophet, but most probably the latter, for it was to him that the word of the Lord came by night. 2Sa 7:4-5. God condescends to employ his gracious ministers to be the means of communication between himself and his favoured ones,—even to King David the covenant was revealed by Nathan the prophet; thus the Lord puts honour upon his ministers. I have laid help upon one that is mighty. The Lord had made David a mighty man of valour, and now he covenants to make him the helper and defender of the Jewish state. In a far fuller sense the Lord Jesus is essentially and immeasurably mighty, and on him the salvation of his people rests by divine appointment, while his success is secured by divine strength being engaged to be with him. Let us lay our faith where God has laid our help. I have exalted one chosen out of the people. David was God's elect, elect out of the people, as one of themselves, and elect to the highest position in the state. In his extraction, election, and exaltation, he was an eminent type of the Lord Jesus, who is the man of the people, the chosen of God, and the king of his church. Whom God exalts let us exalt. Woe unto those who despise him, they are guilty of contempt of court before the Lord of Hosts, as well as of rejecting the Son of God.

Verse 20. I have found David my servant. David was discovered by the Lord among the sheepfolds and recognised as a man of gracious spirit, full of faith and courage, and therefore fit to be leader in Israel. With my holy oil have I anointed him. By the hand of Samuel, David was anointed to be king long before he ascended the throne. The verse must also be expounded of the Prince Emmanuel; he became the servant of the Lord for our sakes, the Father having found for us in his person a mighty deliverer, therefore upon him rested the Spirit without measure, to qualify him for all the offices of love to which he was set apart. We have not a Saviour self appointed and unqualified, but one sent of God and divinely endowed for his work. Our Saviour Jesus is also the Lord's Christ, or anointed. The oil with which he is anointed is God's own oil, and holy oil; he is divinely endowed with the Spirit of holiness.

Verse 21. With whom my hand shall be established, or, "with whom my hand shall ever be present." The almightiness of God abides permanently with Jesus in his work as Redeemer and Ruler of his people. Mine arm also shall strengthen him. The fulness of divine power shall attend him. This covenant promise ought to be urged in prayer before the Lord, for the great lack of the church at this time is power. We have everything except the divine energy, and we must never rest content until we see it in full operation among us. Jesus must be among us, and then there will be no lack of force in any of our church agencies.

Verse 22. The enemy shall not exact upon him; he shall not be vexed and persecuted as a helpless debtor by an extortionate creditor. Nor the son of wickedness afflict him. Graceless men shall no

longer make his life a burden. David had in his earlier history been hunted by Saul like a partridge on the mountains, and though he had striven in all things to act justly towards Saul, because he was the Lord's anointed, yet Saul was never content with his displays of loyalty, but persecuted him relentlessly. The covenant, therefore, engaged that his life of hardship and oppression should come to an end for ever; it did so in David's own person, and more remarkably still in the life of Solomon his son. Who does not in all this see a type of the Lord Jesus, who though he was once seized for our debts, and also evil entreated by the ungodly, is now so exalted that he can never be exacted upon any more, neither can the fiercest of his enemies vex him again. No Judas can now betray him to death, no Pilate can deliver him to be crucified. Satan cannot tempt him, and our sins cannot burden him.

Verse 23. And I will beat down his foes before his face—crushing them and their plans. God himself thus fights the battles of his Son, and effectually overturns his foes. And plague them that hate him, or smite his haters. May none of us learn the terror of this threatening, which is surely being fulfilled upon all those unbelievers who have rejected the Son of God, and died in the hardness of their hearts. The prophecy is also having another fulfilment in the overthrow of systems of error, and the vexation caused to their promoters. There is no such plague to bad men as the prosperity of the cause of Jesus.

Verse 24. But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him. These were the two attributes of which the Psalmist began to sing in Ps 89:1, doubtless because he saw them to be most prominent in the covenant which he was about to plead with God. To David and his seed, God was gracious and faithful, and though through their sin the literal kingdom lost all its glory and the dynasty became obscure, yet the line remained unbroken and more than all its former glory was restored by the enthronisation of Him who is Prince of the kings of the earth, with whom the Lord's mercy and faithfulness remain for ever. All who are in Jesus should rejoice, for they shall prove in their own experience the faithful mercy of the Lord. And in my name shall his horn be exalted. Gloriously does the Lord Jesus lift up his head, raised to the highest place of honour by the mandate of the Father. David and Solomon in their dignity were but faint types of the Lord Jesus, who is far above all principalities and powers. The fullest exaltation of the horn of Jesus is yet to come in that millennial period which is hastening on.

Verse 25. I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. He shall reach far beyond the little rivers which stand for boundaries in Palestine; he shall by his power embrace all lands from sea to sea. He shall have his hand in the ocean and his right hand in earth's mightiest streams. As monarchs hold in their hands a globe to set forth their dominion over the earth, he shall grasp the far more unconquerable sea, and be Lord of all. This power is to be given him of the Lord, and is to be abiding; so we understand the words "I will set." The verse has in it a voice of good cheer concerning sailors, and all dwellers on the waters; the hand of Jesus is over them, and as he found his first apostles by the sea, so we trust he still finds earnest disciples there.

Verse 27. Also I will make him my firstborn. Among the kings the seed of David were to be most favoured and indulged with most love and paternal regard from God: but in Jesus we see this in the highest degree verified, for he has preeminence in all things, inasmuch as by inheritance he has a more glorious name than any other, and is higher than the kings of the earth. Who can rival heaven's Firstborn? The double portion and the government belong to him. Kings are honoured when they honour him, and those who honour him are kings! In the millennial glory it shall be seen what the

covenant stores up for the once despised Son of David, but even now faith sees him exalted as King of kings and Lord of lords. Lo, we bow before thee, thou Heir of all things! Our sheaves do obeisance to thy sheaf. All thy mother's children call thee blessed. Thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise. Jesus is no servant of princes, nor would he have his bride, the church, degrade herself by bowing before kings and eating the bread of a pensioner at their hands. He and his kingdom are higher than the kings of the earth. Let the great ones of the earth be wise and submit to him, for he is Lord, and he is the governor among the nations.

Verse 28. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore. The kings of David's line needed mercy, and mercy prevented their house from utterly perishing until the Son of Mary came. He needs no mercy for himself, but he is a representative man, and the mercy of God is required for those who are in him: for such mercy is kept for ever. And my covenant shall stand fast with him. With Jesus the covenant is ratified both by blood of sacrifice and by oath of God, it cannot be cancelled or altered, but is an eternal verity, resting upon the veracity of one who cannot lie. What exultation fills our hearts as we see that the covenant of grace is sure to all the seed, because it stands fast with him with whom we are indissolubly united.

Verse 29. His seed also will I make to endure for ever. David's seed lives on in the person of the Lord Jesus, and the seed of Jesus in the persons of believers. Saints are a race that neither death nor life can kill. Rome and its priests, with their inquisition and other infernal cruelties, have laboured to exterminate the covenant seed, but "vain is their rage, their efforts vain." As long as God lives, his people must live. And his throne, as the days of heaven. Jesus reigns on, and will reign till the skies shall fall, yea, and when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, his throne shall stand. What a blessed covenant is this! Some commentators talk of conditions, but we fail to see any; the promises are as absolute as they can possibly be, and if any conditions as to the conduct of the favoured individuals can be conceived, they are disposed of in the succeeding verses.

Verse 30. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments. It was possible, terribly possible, that David's posterity might wander from the Lord; indeed they did so, but what then? Was the mercy of God to pass away from David's seed?—far from it. So, too, the seed of the Son of David are apt to start aside, but are they therefore cast away? Not a single word gives liberty for such an idea, but the very reverse. Expositors in their fear of Calvinistic doctrine shake off the fear of adding to the word of God, or else they would not have spent their time in talking about "the conditions" of this absolutely unconditional covenant.

Verse 31. If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments. The dreadful "if" is suggested again, and the sad case is stated in other forms. But if it should be so, what then? Death and rejection? Ah, no; Blessed be God, No! If their sin be negative or positive, if it be forsaking or profanation; if either judgments or commandments or both be violated, yet there is not a word as to final destruction, but the very reverse. Legalism will import its ifs, but the Lord slays the ifs as fast as they rise. Eternal shalls and wills make glorious havoc among the ifs and buts.

Verse 32. Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod. Not with the sword, not with death and destruction; but still with a smarting, tingling, painful rod. Saints must smart if they sin: God will see to that. He hates sin too much not to visit it, and he loves his saints too well not to chasten them. God never plays with his rod, he lays it well home to his children, he visits them with it in their houses,

bodies, and hearts, and makes them know that he is grieved with their ways. He smites home and chastens their iniquity with stripes, which are either many or few in proportion as the heart is properly affected by them. The rod is a covenant blessing, and is meant to be used. As sin is so frequent, the rod never rests long together; in God's family the rod is not spared, or the children would be spoiled.

Verse 33. Nevertheless. And a glorious nevertheless too! Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him. O glorious fear killing sentence! This crowns the covenant with exceeding glory. Mercy may seem to depart from the Lord's chosen, but it shall never altogether do so. Jesus still enjoys the divine favour, and we are in him, and therefore under the most trying circumstances the Lord's lovingkindness to each one of his chosen will endure the strain. If the covenant could be made void by our sins it would have been void long ere this; and if renewed its tenure would not be worth an hour's purchase if it had remained dependent upon us. God may leave his people, and they may thereby suffer much and fall very low, but utterly and altogether he never can remove his love from them; for that would be to cast a reflection upon his own truth, and this he will never allow, for he adds, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. Man fails in all points, but God in none. To be faithful is one of the eternal characteristics of God, in which he always places a great part of his glory: his truth is one of his peculiar treasures and crown jewels, and he will never endure that it should be tarnished in any degree. This passage sweetly assures us that the heirs of glory shall not be utterly cast off. Let those deny the safety of the saints who choose to do so, we have not so learned Christ. We believe in the gospel rod, but not in the penal sword for the adopted sons.

Verse 34. My covenant will I not break. It is his own covenant. He devised it, drew up the draft of it, and voluntarily entered into it: he therefore thinks much of it. It is not a man's covenant, but the Lord claims it as his own. It is an evil thing among men for one to be a "covenant breaker", and such an opprobrious epithet shall never be applicable to the Most High. Nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Alterations and afterthoughts belong to short sighted beings who meet with unexpected events which operate upon them to change their minds, but the Lord who sees everything from the beginning has no such reason for shifting his ground. He is besides immutable in his nature and designs, and cannot change in heart, and therefore not in promise. A word once given is sacred; once let a promise pass our lips and honesty forbids that we should recall it,—unless indeed the thing promised be impossible, or wicked, neither of which can happen with the promises of God. How consoling it is to see the Lord thus resolute. He, in the words before us, virtually reasserts his covenant and rehearses his engagements. This he does at such length, and with such reiteration, that it is evident he takes pleasure in that most ancient and solemn contract. If it were conceivable that he had repented of it, he would not be found dwelling upon it, and repeating it with renewed emphasis.

Verse 35. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. Because he could swear by no greater he swore by himself, and by that peculiar attribute which is his highest glory, being the subject of threefold adoration by all the hosts of heaven. God here pledges the crown of his kingdom, the excellent beauty of his person, the essence of his nature. He does as good as say that if he ceases to be true to his covenant he will have forfeited his holy character. What more can he say? In what stronger language can he express his unalterable adherence to the truth of his promise? An oath is the end of all strife; it ought to be the end of all doubt on our part. We cannot imagine that God could lie, yet he puts it so—that if the covenant were not kept by him, he would regard it as a lie. Here is ground for strong confidence; may our faith be of such a nature as these assurances will warrant.

Verse 36. His seed shall endure for ever. David's line in the person of Jesus is an endless one, and the race of Jesus, as represented in successive generations of believers, shows no sign of failure. No power, human or Satanic, can break the Christian succession; as saints die others shall rise up to fill their places, so that till the last day, the day of doom, Jesus shall have a seed to serve him. And his throne as the sun before me. In our Lord Jesus the dynasty of David remains upon the throne. Jesus has never abdicated, nor gone into banishment. He reigns, and must reign so long as the sun continues to shine upon the earth. A seed and a throne are the two great promises of the covenant, and they are as important to us as to our Lord Jesus himself; for we are the seed who must endure for ever, and we are protected and ennobled by that King whose royalties are to last for ever.

Verse 37. It shall be established for ever as the moon. The kingdom may wax and wane to mortal eyes, but it shall still abide as long as the moon walks in her silver beauty. And as a faithful witness in heavens. The most stable part of the universe is selected as a type of Messiah's kingdom, and both sun and moon are made to be symbols of its long endurance. Whatever else there is in the sky which faithfully witnesses to the unbending course of nature is also called upon to be a sign of the Lord's truth. When heaven and earth witness, and the Lord himself swears, there remains no excuse for doubting, and faith joyfully reposes in confident expectation.

Verse 38. But thou hast cast off and abhorred. The Lord had promised not to cast off the seed of David, and yet it looked as if he had done so, and that too in the most angry manner, as if he loathed the person of the king. God's actions may appear to us to be the reverse of his promises, and then our best course is to come before him in prayer and put the matter before him just as it strikes our apprehension. We are allowed to do this, for this holy and inspired man did so unrebuked, but we must do it humbly and in faith. Thou hast been wroth with thine anointed. He deserved the wrath, doubtless, but the Psalmist's point is, that this appeared to him to conflict with the gracious covenant. He puts the matter plainly, and makes bold with the Lord, and the Lord loves to have his servants so do; it shows that they believe his engagements to be matters of fact.

Verse 39. Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant. The dispensations of providence looked as if there had been a disannulling of the sacred compact, though indeed it was not so. Thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground. The king had been subject to such sorrow and shame that his diadem had been as it were taken from his head, dashed on the earth, and rolled in the mire. He was a theocratic monarch, and the Lord, who gave him his crown, took it from him and treated it with contempt,—at least so it seemed. In these sad days also we may utter the same complaint, for Jesus is not acknowledged in many of the churches, and usurpers have profaned his crown. When we hear of kings and queens set up as "heads of the church", and a priest styled "The Vicar of Christ", while parliaments and courts take upon themselves to legislate for the church of God, we may bitterly lament that things should come to so wretched a pass. Few are there who will acknowledge the crown rights of King Jesus, the very subject is considered to be out of date. O Lord how long!

Verse 40. Thou hast broken down all his hedges. He was no longer sheltered from the slanderous assaults of contemptuous tongues; the awe which should guard the royal name had ceased to separate him from his fellows. The "divinity which doth hedge a king" had departed. Hitherto, the royal family had been like a vine within an enclosure, but the wall was now laid low, and the vine was unprotected. It is sorrowfully true that in many places the enclosures of the church have been destroyed, the line of demarcation between the church and the world has almost vanished, and godless men fill the sacred offices. Alas, O Lord God, shall it be always so? Shall thy true vine be

deserted by thee, thou great Husbandman? Set up the boundaries again, and keep thy church as a vineyard reserved for thyself. Thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin. The forts of the land were in the possession of the enemy and were dismantled, the defences of the kingdom were overthrown. Thus has it happened that precious truths, which were the bulwarks of the church, have been assailed by heresy, and the citadels of sound doctrine have been abandoned to the foe. O God, how canst thou suffer this? As the God of truth, wilt thou not arise and tread down falsehood?

Verse 41. All that pass by the way spoil him. Idle passers by, who have nothing else to do, must needs have a pluck at this vine, and they do it without difficulty, since the hedges are gone. Woe is the day when every petty reasoner has an argument against religion, and men in their cups are fluent with objections against the gospel of Jesus. Although Jesus on the cross is nothing to them, and they pass him by without inquiring into what he has done for them, yet they can loiter as long as you will, if there be but the hope of driving another nail into his hands and helping to crucify the Lord afresh. They will not touch him with the finger of faith, but they pluck at him with the hand of malice. He is a reproach to his neighbours. David's successors had unneighbourly neighbours, who were a reproach to good fellowship, because they were so ready to reproach their neighbour. The Jews were much taunted by the surrounding Gentiles when at any time they fell into trouble. At this time the people of God, who follow the Lord fully, are subject to a thousand reproaches, and some of them of the most bitter kind. These reproaches are really the reproach of Christ, and, at bottom, are meant for him. Shall it always be so? Shall he, who deserves to be universally adored, be subject to general scorn? Where, then, O God, is thy faithfulness to thy covenant?

Verse 42. Thou hast set up the right hand of thy adversaries. Thou hast done it, thou, who hast sworn to give him help and victory, thou hast, instead thereof, sided with his enemies, and lent them thy strength, so that they have gained the supremacy. Thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice. They are boasting over him, and are glorying in his defeat, and this is done by thyself. O God,—how is this? Where is the covenant? Hast thou forgotten thine own pledges and promises?

Verse 43. Also turned the edge of his sword. When he goes to war he is as unsuccessful as though his sword refused to cut, and gave way like a sword of lead. His weapons fail him. And hast not made him to stand in the battle. His heart fails him as well as his sword—he wavers, he falls. This has happened even to naturally brave men—a terrible dread has unmanned them. At this present the church has few swords of true Jerusalem metal; her sons are pliable, her ministers yield to pressure. We need men whose edge cannot be turned, firm for truth, keen against error, sharp towards sin, cutting their way into men's hearts. Courage and decision are more needed now than ever, for charity towards heresy is the fashionable vice, and indifference to all truth, under the name of liberal mindedness, is the crowning virtue of the age. The Lord send us men of the school of Elias, or, at least, of Luther and Knox.

Verse 44. Thou hast made his glory to cease. The brightness of his reign and the prosperity of his house are gone, his fame is tarnished, his honour disgraced. And cast his throne down to the ground. He has lost his power to govern at home or to conquer abroad. This happened to kings of David's line, and, more grievous to tell, it is happening in these days to the visible kingdom of the Lord Jesus. Where are the glories of Pentecost? Where is the majesty of the Reformation? Where does his kingdom come among the sons of men? Woe is unto us, for the glory has departed, and the gospel throne of Jesus is hidden from our eyes!

Verse 45. The days of his youth hast thou shortened. The time of the king's energy was brief, he grew feeble before his time. Thou hast covered him with shame. Shame was heaped upon him because of his premature decay and his failure in arms. This was very grievous to the writer of this Psalm, who was evidently a most loyal adherent of the house of David. In this our day we have to bemoan the lack of vigour in religion—the heroic days of Christianity are over, her raven locks are sprinkled with untimely grey. Is this according to the covenant? Can this be as the Lord has promised? Let us plead with the righteous Judge of all the earth, and beseech him to fulfil his word wherein he has promised that those who wait upon him shall renew their strength. Selah. The interceding poet takes breath amid his lament, and then turns from describing the sorrows of the kingdom to pleading with the Lord.

Verse 46. How long, Lord? The appeal is to Jehovah, and the argument is the length of the affliction endured. Chastisement with a rod is not a lengthened matter, therefore he appeals to God to cut short the time of tribulation. Wilt thou hide thyself for ever? Hast thou not promised to appear for thy servant—wilt thou then for ever forsake him? Shall thy wrath burn like fire? Shall it go on and on evermore till it utterly consume its object? Be pleased to set a bound! How far wilt thou go? Wilt thou burn up the throne which thou hast sworn to perpetuate? Even thus we would entreat the Lord to remember the cause of Christ in these days. Can he be so angry with his church as to leave her much longer? How far will he suffer things to go? Shall truth die out, and saints exist no more? How long will he leave matters to take their course? Surely he must interpose soon, for, if he do not, true religion will be utterly consumed, as it were, with fire.

Verse 47. Remember how short my time is. If so brief, do not make it altogether bitter. If thine anger burn on it will outlast this mortal life, and then there will be no time for thy mercy to restore me. Some expositors ascribe these words, and all the preceding verses, to the state of the Lord Jesus in the days of his humiliation, and this gives an instructive meaning; but we prefer to continue our reference all through to the church, which is the seed of the Lord Jesus, even as the succeeding kings were the seed of David. We, having transgressed, are made to feel the rod, but we pray the Lord not to continue his stripes lest our whole life be passed in misery. Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? If the Lord do not shine upon his work we live for nothing—we count it no longer life if his cause does not prosper. We live if the King lives, but not else. Everything is vanity if religion be vanity. If the kingdom of heaven should fail, everything is a failure. Creation is a blot, providence an error, and our own existence a bell, if the faithfulness of God can fail and his covenant of grace can be dissolved. If the gospel system can be disproved, nothing remains for us or any other of the sons of men, which can render existence worth the having.

Verse 48. What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? All must die. None of our race can answer to the question here propounded except in the negative; there is none that can claim to elude the arrows of death. Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Neither by strength, wisdom, nor virtue can any man escape the common doom, for to the dust return we must. Since then we must all die, do not make this life all wretchedness, by smiting us so long, O Lord. Thy Son our covenant Head died, and so also shall we; let us not be so deserted of thee in this brief span that we shall be quite unable to testify to thy faithfulness: make us not feel that we have lived in vain. Thus the brevity of life and the certainty of death are turned into pleas with the Most High. Selah. Here we rest again, and proceed to further pleadings.

Verse 49. Lord, where are thy former loving kindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth? Here he comes to grand pleading, hand to hand work with the covenant angel. We may remind the

Lord of his first deeds of love, his former love to his church, his former favour to ourselves. Then may we plead his oath, and beg him to remember that he has sworn to bless his chosen: and we may wrestle hard also, by urging upon him his own character, and laying hold upon his inviolable truth. When things look black we may bring forth our strong reasons, and debate the case with our condescending God, who has himself said, "Come now, and let us reason together."

Verse 50. Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants. By reason of their great troubles they were made a mock of by ungodly men, and hence the Lord's pity is entreated. Will a father stand by and see his children insulted? The Psalmist entreats the Lord to compassionate the wretchedness brought upon his servants by the taunts of their adversaries, who jested at them on account of their sufferings. How I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people. The Psalmist himself laid the scorn of the great and the proud to heart. He felt as if all the reproaches which vexed his nation were centred in himself, and therefore in sacred sympathy with the people he poured out his heart. We ought to weep with those that weep; reproach brought upon the saints and their cause ought to burden us: if we can hear Christ blasphemed, and see his servants insulted, and remain unmoved, we have not the true Israelite's spirit. Our grief at the griefs of the Lord's people may be pleaded in prayer, and it will be acceptable argument. There is one interpretation of this verse which must not be passed over; the original is, Remember my bearing in my bosom all the many nations; and this may be understood as a pleading of the church that the Lord would remember her because she was yet to be the mother of many nations, according to the prophecy of Ps 77:1-20. She was as it were ready to give birth to nations, but how could they be born if she herself died in the meanwhile? The church is the hope of the world; should she expire, the nations would never come to the birth of regeneration, but must abide in death.

Verse 51. Wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O Lord. Here is another forcible point; the scoffers are the Lord's enemies as well as ours, and their reproach falls upon him as well as upon us; therefore we cry for the Lord's interposition. When Jehovah's own name is in the quarrel, surely he will arise. Wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed. Tracking him and finding occasion to blaspheme at every turn; not only watching his words and actions, but even his harmless steps. Neither Christ nor his church can please the world, whichever way we turn scoffers will rail. Does this verse refer to the oft repeated sarcasm—"Where is the promise of his coming?" Is the reproach aimed at the delays of the Messiah, those long expected footfalls which as yet are unheard? O Lord, how long shall this threadbare taunt continue? How long? How long?

"Come, for creation groans
Impatient of thy stay,
Worn out with these long years of ill,
These ages of delay."
"Come, in thy glorious might,
Come with the iron rod,
Scattering thy foes before thy face,
Most Mighty Son of God."

Verse 52. Blessed be the Lord for evermore. He ends where he began; he has sailed round the world and reached port again. Let us bless God before we pray, and while we pray, and when we have done praying, for he always deserves it of us. If we cannot understand him, we will not distrust him. When his ways are beyond our judgment we will not be so foolish as to judge; yet we shall do so if we

consider his dealings to be unkind or unfaithful. He is, he must be, he shall be, for ever, our blessed God. Amen, and Amen. All our hearts say so. So be it, Lord, we wish it over and over again. Be thou blessed evermore.

Psalm 90

Verse 1. Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. We must consider the whole Psalm as written for the tribes in the desert, and then we shall see the primary meaning of each verse. Moses, in effect, says—wanderers though we be in the howling wilderness, yet we find a home in thee, even as our forefathers did when they came out of Ur of the Chaldees and dwelt in tents among the Canaanites. To the saints the Lord Jehovah, the self-existent God, stands instead of mansion and roof-tree; he shelters, comforts, protects, preserves, and cherishes all his own. Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the saints dwell in their God, and have always done so in all ages. Not in the tabernacle or the temple do we dwell, but in God himself; and this we have always done since there was a church in the world. We have not shifted our abode. Kings' palaces have vanished beneath the crumbling hand of time—they have been burned with fire and buried beneath mountains of ruins, but the imperial race of heaven has never lost its regal habitation. Go to the Palatine and see how the Caesars are forgotten of the halls which echoed to their despotic mandates, and resounded with the plaudits of the nations over which they ruled, and then look upward and see in the ever-living Jehovah the divine home of the faithful, untouched by so much as the finger of decay. Where dwelt our fathers a hundred generations since, there dwell we still. It is of New Testament saints that the Holy Ghost has said, "He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in God and God in him!" It was a divine mouth which said, "Abide in me", and then added, "he that abideth in me and I in him the same bringeth forth much fruit." It is most sweet to speak with the Lord as Moses did, saying, "Lord, thou art our dwelling place", and it is wise to draw from the Lord's eternal condescension reasons for expecting present and future mercies, as the Psalmist did in the next Psalm wherein he describes the safety of those who dwell in God.

Verse 2. Before the mountains were brought forth. Before those elder giants had struggled forth from nature's womb, as her dread firstborn, the Lord was glorious and self-sufficient. Mountains to him, though hoar with the snows of ages, are but new-born babes, young things whose birth was but yesterday, mere novelties of an hour. Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world. Here too the allusion is to a birth. Earth was born but the other day, and her solid land was delivered from the flood but a short while ago. Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God, or, "thou art, O God." God was, when nothing else was. He was God when the earth was not a world but a chaos, when mountains were not upheaved, and the generation of the heavens and the earth had not commenced. In this Eternal One there is a safe abode for the successive generations of men. If God himself were of yesterday, he would not be a suitable refuge for mortal men; if he could change and cease to be God he would be but an uncertain dwelling place for his people. The eternal existence of God is here mentioned to set forth, by contrast, the brevity of human life.

Verse 3. Thou turnest man to destruction, or "to dust." Man's body is resolved into its elements, and is as though it had been crushed and ground to powder. And sayest, Return, ye children of men, i.e., return even to the dust out of which ye were taken. The frailty of man is thus forcibly set forth; God creates him out of the dust, and back to dust he goes at the word of his Creator. God resolves and man dissolves. A word creates and a word destroys. Observe how the action of God is recognised; man is not said to die because of the decree of faith, or the action of inevitable law, but the Lord is

made the agent of all, his hand turns and his voice speaks; without these we should not die, no power on earth or hell could kill us.

"An angel's arm cannot save me from the grave,
Myriads of angels cannot confine me there."

Verse 4. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past. A thousand years! This is a long stretch of time. How much may be crowded into it,—the rise and fall of empires, the glory and obliteration of dynasties, the beginning and the end of elaborate systems of human philosophy, and countless events, all important to household and individual, which elude the pens of historians. Yet this period, which might even be called the limit of modern history, and is in human language almost identical with an indefinite length of time, is to the Lord as nothing, even as time already gone. A moment yet to come is longer than "yesterday when it is past", for that no longer exists at all, yet such is a chiliad to the eternal. In comparison with eternity, the most lengthened reaches of time are mere points, there is in fact, no possible comparison between them. And as a watch in the night, a time which is no sooner come than gone. There is scarce time enough in a thousand years for the angels to change watches; when their millennium of service is almost over it seems as though the watch were newly set. We are dreaming through the long night of time, but God is ever keeping watch, and a thousand years are as nothing to him. A host of days and nights must be combined to make up a thousand years to us, but to God, that space of time does not make up a whole night, but only a brief portion of it. If a thousand years be to God as a single night watch, what must be the life time of the Eternal!

Verse 5. Thou carriest them away as with a flood. As when a torrent rushes down the river bed and bears all before it, so does the Lord bear away by death the succeeding generations of men. As the hurricane sweeps the clouds from the sky, so time removes the children of men. They are as a sleep. Before God men must appear as unreal as the dreams of the night, the phantoms of sleep. Not only are our plans and devices like a sleep, but we ourselves are such. "We are such stuff as dreams are made of." In the morning they are like grass which groweth up. As grass is green in the morning and hay at night, so men are changed from health to corruption in a few hours. We are not cedars, or oaks, but only poor grass, which is vigorous in the spring, but lasts not a summer through. What is there upon earth more frail than we!

Verse 6. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up. Blooming with abounding beauty till the meadows are all besprent with gems, the grass has a golden hour, even as man in his youth has a heyday of flowery glory. In the evening it is cut down, and withereth. The scythe ends the blossoming of the field flowers, and the dews at flight weep their fall. Here is the history of the grass—sown, grown, blown, mown, gone; and the history of man is not much more. Natural decay would put an end both to us and the grass in due time; few, however, are left to experience the full result of age, for death comes with his scythe, and removes our life in the midst of its verdure. How great a change in how short a time! The morning saw the blooming, and the evening sees the withering.

Verse 7. This mortality is not accidental, neither was it inevitable in the original of our nature, but sin has provoked the Lord to anger, and therefore thus we die. For we are consumed by thine anger. This is the scythe which mows and the scorching heat which withers. This was specially the case in reference to the people in the wilderness, whose lives were cut short by justice on account of their waywardness; they failed, not by a natural decline, but through the blast of the well deserved

judgments of God. It must have been a very mournful sight to Moses to see the whole nation melt away during the forty years of their pilgrimage, till none remained of all that came out of Egypt. As God's favour is life, so his anger is death; as well might grass grow in an oven as men flourish when the Lord is wroth with them. "And by thy wrath are we troubled", or terror stricken. A sense of divine anger confounded them, so that they lived as men who knew that they were doomed. This is true of us in a measure, but not altogether, for now that immortality and life are brought to light by the gospel, death has changed its aspect, and, to believers in Jesus, it is no more a judicial execution. Anger and wrath are the sting of death, and in these believers have no share; love and mercy now conduct us to glory by the way of the tomb. It is not seemly to read these words at a Christian's funeral without words of explanation, and a distinct endeavour to shew how little they belong to believers in Jesus, and how far we are privileged beyond those with whom he was not well pleased, "whose carcasses fell in the wilderness." To apply an ode, written by the leader of the legal dispensation under circumstances of peculiar judgment, in reference to a people under penal censure, to those who fall asleep in Jesus, seems to be the height of blundering. We may learn much from it, but we ought not to misapply it by taking to ourselves, as the beloved of the Lord, that which was chiefly true of those to whom God had sworn in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest. When, however, a soul is under conviction of sin, the language of this Psalm is highly appropriate to his case, and will naturally suggest itself to the distracted mind. No fire consumes like God's anger, and no anguish so troubles the heart as his wrath. Blessed be that dear substitute,

"Who bore that we might never
His Father's righteous ire."

Verse 8. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee. Hence these tears! Sin seen by God must work death; it is only by the covering blood of atonement that life comes to any of us. When God was overthrowing the tribes in the wilderness he had their iniquities before him, and therefore dealt with them in severity. He could not have their iniquities before him and not smite them. Our secret sins in the sight of thy countenance. There are no secrets before God; he unearths man's hidden things, and exposes them to the light. There can be no more powerful luminary than the face of God, yet, in that strong light, the Lord set the hidden sins of Israel. Sunlight can never be compared with the light of him who made the sun, of whom it is written, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." If by his countenance is here meant his love and favour, it is not possible for the heinousness of sin to be more clearly manifested than when it is seen to involve ingratitude to one so infinitely good and kind. Rebellion in the light of justice is black, but in the light of love it is devilish. How can we grieve so good a God? The children of Israel had been brought out of Egypt with a high hand, fed in the wilderness with a liberal hand, and guided with a tender hand, and their sins were peculiarly atrocious. We, too, having been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, and saved by abounding grace, will be verily guilty if we forsake the Lord. What manner of persons ought we to be? How ought we to pray for cleansing from secret faults? It is to us a wellspring of delights to remember that our sins, as believers are now cast behind the Lord's back, and shall never be brought to light again: therefore we live, because, the guilt being removed, the death penalty is removed also.

Verse 9. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath. Justice shortened the days of rebellious Israel; each halting place became a graveyard; they marked their march by the tombs they left behind them. Because of the penal sentence their days were dried up, and their lives wasted away. We spend our years as a tale that is told. Yea, not their days only, but their years flew by them like a thought, swift as a meditation, rapid and idle as a gossip's story. Sin had cast a shadow over all

things, and made the lives of the dying wanderers to be both vain and brief. The first sentence is not intended for believers to quote, as though it applied to themselves, for our days are all passed amid the lovingkindness of the Lord, even as David says in the Ps 23:6 "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Neither is the life of the gracious man unsubstantial as a story teller's tale; he lives in Jesus, he has the divine Spirit within him, and to him "life is real, life is earnest"—the simile only holds good if we consider that a holy life is rich in interest, full of wonders, chequered with many changes, yet as easily ordered by providence as the improvisatore arranges the details of the story with which he beguiles the hour. Our lives are illustrations of heavenly goodness, parables of divine wisdom, poems of sacred thought, and records of infinite love; happy are we whose lives are such tales.

Verse 10. The days of our years are threescore years and ten. Moses himself lived longer than this, but his was the exception not the rule: in his day life had come to be very much the same in duration as it is with us. This is brevity itself compared with the men of the elder time; it is nothing when contrasted with eternity. Yet is life long enough for virtue and piety, and all too long for vice and blasphemy. Moses here in the original writes in a disconnected manner, as if he would set forth the utter insignificance of man's hurried existence. His words may be rendered, "The days of our years! In them seventy years": as much as to say, "The days of our years? What about them? Are they worth mentioning? The account is utterly insignificant, their full tale is but seventy." And if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow. The unusual strength which overleaps the bound of threescore and ten only lands the aged man in a region where life is a weariness and a woe. The strength of old age, its very prime and pride, are but labour and sorrow; what must its weakness be? What panting for breath! What toiling to move! What a failing of the senses! What a crushing sense of weakness! The evil days are come and the years wherein a man cries, "I have no pleasure in them." The grasshopper has become a burden and desire faileth. Such is old age. Yet mellowed by hallowed experience, and solaced by immortal hopes, the latter days of aged Christians are not so much to be pitied as envied. The sun is setting and the heat of the day is over, but sweet is the calm and cool of the eventide: and the fair day melts away, not into a dark and dreary night, but into a glorious, unclouded, eternal day. The mortal fades to make room for the immortal; the old man falls asleep to wake up in the region of perennial youth. For it is soon cut off, and we fly away. The cable is broken and the vessel sails upon the sea of eternity; the chain is snapped and the eagle mounts to its native air above the clouds. Moses mourned for men as he thus sung: and well he might, as all his comrades fell at his side. His words are more nearly rendered, "He drives us fast and we fly away; "as the quails were blown along by the strong west wind, so are men hurried before the tempests of death. To us, however, as believers, the winds are favourable; they bear us as the gales bear the swallows away from the wintry realms, to lands

"Where everlasting spring abides
And never withering flowers."

Who wishes it to be otherwise? Wherefore should we linger here? What has this poor world to offer us that we should tarry on its shores? Away, away! This is not our rest. Heavenward, Ho! Let the Lord's winds drive fast if so he ordains, for they waft us the more swiftly to himself, and our own dear country.

Verse 11. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Moses saw men dying all around him: he lived among funerals, and was overwhelmed at the terrible results of the divine displeasure. He felt that

none could measure the might of the Lord's wrath. Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. Good men dread that wrath beyond conception, but they never ascribe too much terror to it: bad men are dreadfully convulsed when they awake to a sense of it, but their horror is not greater than it had need be, for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. Holy Scripture when it depicts God's wrath against sin never uses an hyperbole; it would be impossible to exaggerate it. Whatever feelings of pious awe and holy trembling may move the tender heart, it is never too much moved; apart from other considerations the great truth of the divine anger, when most powerfully felt, never impresses the mind with a solemnity in excess of the legitimate result of such a contemplation. What the power of God's anger is in hell, and what it would be on earth, were it not in mercy restrained, no man living can rightly conceive. Modern thinkers rail at Milton and Dante, Bunyan and Baxter, for their terrible imagery; but the truth is that no vision of poet, or denunciation of holy seer, can ever reach to the dread height of this great argument, much less go beyond it. The wrath to come has its horrors rather diminished than enhanced in description by the dark lines of human fancy; it baffles words, it leaves imagination far behind. Beware ye that forget God lest he tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver. God is terrible out of his holy places. Remember Sodom and Gomorrah! Remember Korah and his company! Mark well the graves of lust in the wilderness! Nay, rather bethink ye of the place where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched. Who is able to stand against this justly angry God? Who will dare to rush upon the bosses of his buckler, or tempt the edge of his sword? Be it ours to submit ourselves as dying sinners to this eternal God, who can, even at this moment, command us to the dust, and thence to hell.

Verse 12. So teach us to number our days. Instruct us to set store by time, mourning for that time past wherein we have wrought the will of the flesh, using diligently the time present, which is the accepted hour and the day of salvation, and reckoning the time which lieth in the future to be too uncertain to allow us safely to delay any gracious work or prayer. Numeration is a child's exercise in arithmetic, but in order to number their days aright the best of men need the Lord's teaching. We are more anxious to count the stars than our days, and yet the latter is by far more practical. That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Men are led by reflections upon the brevity of time to give their earnest attention to eternal things; they become humble as they look into the grave which is so soon to be their bed, their passions cool in the presence of mortality, and they yield themselves up to the dictates of unerring wisdom; but this is only the case when the Lord himself is the teacher; he alone can teach to real and lasting profit. Thus Moses prayed that the dispensations of justice might be sanctified in mercy. "The law is our school master to bring us to Christ", when the Lord himself speaks by the law. It is most meet that the heart which will so soon cease to beat should while it moves be regulated by wisdom's hand. A short life should be wisely spent. We have not enough time at our disposal to justify us in mispending a single quarter of an hour. Neither are we sure of enough life to justify us in procrastinating for a moment. If we were wise in heart we should see this, but mere head wisdom will not guide us aright.

Verse 13. Return, O LORD, how long? Come in mercy, to us again. Do not leave us to perish. Suffer not our lives to be both brief and bitter. Thou hast said to us, "Return, ye children of men", and now we humbly cry to thee, "Return, thou preserver of men." Thy presence alone can reconcile us to this transient existence; turn thou unto us. As sin drives God from us, so repentance cries to the Lord to return to us. When men are under chastisement they are allowed to expostulate, and ask "how long?" Our faith in these times is not too great boldness with God, but too much backwardness in pleading with him. And let it repent thee concerning thy servants. Thus Moses acknowledges the Israelites to be God's servants still. They had rebelled, but they had not utterly forsaken the Lord; they owned their

obligations to obey his will, and pleaded them as a reason for pity. Will not a man spare his own servants? Though God smote Israel, yet they were his people, and he had never disowned them, therefore is he entreated to deal favourably with them. If they might not see the promised land, yet he is begged to cheer them on the road with his mercy, and to turn his frown into a smile. The prayer is like others which came from the meek lawgiver when he boldly pleaded with God for the nation; it is Moses like. He here speaks with the Lord as a man speaketh with his friend.

Verse 14. O satisfy us early with thy mercy. Since they must die, and die so soon, the psalmist pleads for speedy mercy upon himself and his brethren. Good men know how to turn the darkest trials into arguments at the throne of grace. He who has but the heart to pray need never be without pleas in prayer. The only satisfying food for the Lord's people is the favour of God; this Moses earnestly seeks for, and as the manna fell in the morning he beseeches the Lord to send at once his satisfying favour, that all through the little day of life they might be filled therewith. Are we so soon to die? Then, Lord, do not starve us while we live. Satisfy us at once, we pray thee. Our day is short and the night hastens on, O give us in the early morning of our days to be satisfied with thy favour, that all through our little day we may be happy. That we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Being filled with divine love, their brief life on earth would become a joyful festival, and would continue so as long as it lasted. When the Lord refreshes us with his presence, our joy is such that no man can take it from us. Apprehensions of speedy death are not able to distress those who enjoy the present favour of God; though they know that the night cometh they see nothing to fear in it, but continue to live while they live, triumphing in the present favour of God and leaving the future in his loving hands. Since the whole generation which came out of Egypt had been doomed to die in the wilderness, they would naturally feel despondent, and therefore their great leader seeks for them that blessing which, beyond all others, consoles the heart, namely, the presence and favour of the Lord.

Verse 15. Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. None can gladden the heart as thou canst, O Lord, therefore as thou hast made us sad be pleased to make us glad. Fill the other scale. Proportion thy dispensations. Give us the lamb, since thou has sent us the bitter herbs. Make our days as long as our nights. The prayer is original, childlike, and full of meaning; it is moreover based upon a great principle in providential goodness, by which the Lord puts the good over against the evil in due measure. Great trial enables us to bear great joy, and may be regarded as the herald of extraordinary grace. God's dealings are according to scale; small lives are small throughout; and great histories are great both in sorrow and happiness. Where there are high hills there are also deep valleys. As God provides the sea for leviathan, so does he find a pool for the minnow; in the sea all things are in fit proportion for the mighty monster, while in the little brook all things befit the tiny fish. If we have fierce afflictions we may look for overflowing delights, and our faith may boldly ask for them. God who is great in justice when he chastens will not be little in mercy when he blesses, he will be great all through: let us appeal to him with unstaggering faith.

Verse 16. Let thy work appear unto thy servants. See how he dwells upon that word servants. It is as far as the law can go, and Moses goes to the full length permitted him henceforth Jesus calls us not servants but friends, and if we are wise we shall make full use of our wider liberty. Moses asks for displays of divine power and providence conspicuously wrought, that all the people might be cheered thereby. They could find no solace in their own faulty works, but in the work of God they would find comfort. And thy glory unto their children. While their sons were growing up around them, they desired to see some outshinings of the promised glory gleaming upon them. Their Sons were to

inherit the land which had been given them by covenant, and therefore they sought on their behalf some tokens of the coming good, some morning dawns of the approaching noonday. How eagerly do good men plead for their children. They can bear very much personal affliction if they may but be sure that their children will know the glory of God, and thereby be led to serve him. We are content with the work if our children may but see the glory which will result from it: we sow joyfully if they may reap.

Verse 17. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. Even upon us who must not see thy glory in the land of Canaan; it shall suffice us if in our characters the holiness of God is reflected, and if over all our camp the lovely excellences of our God shall cast a sacred beauty. Sanctification should be the daily object of our petitions. And establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it. Let what we do be done in truth, and last when we are in the grave; may the work of the present generation minister permanently to the building tip of the nation. Good men are anxious not to work in vain. They know that without the Lord they can do nothing, and therefore they cry to him for help in the work, for acceptance of their efforts, and for the establishment of their designs. The church as a whole earnestly desires that the hand of the Lord may so work with the hand of his people, that a substantial, yea, an eternal edifice to the praise and glory of God may be the result. We come and go, but the Lord's work abides. We are content to die so long as Jesus lives and his kingdom grows. Since the Lord abides for ever the same, we trust our work in his hands, and feel that since it is far more his work than ours he will secure it immortality. When we have withered like grass our holy service, like gold, silver, and precious stones, will survive the fire.

Psalm 91

Verse 1. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High. The blessings here promised are not for all believers, but for those who live in close fellowship with God. Every child of God looks towards the inner sanctuary and the mercyseat, yet all do not dwell in the most holy place; they run to it at times, and enjoy occasional approaches, but they do not habitually reside in the mysterious presence. Those who through rich grace obtain unusual and continuous communion with God, so as to abide in Christ and Christ in them, become possessors of rare and special benefits, which are missed by those who follow afar off, and grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Into the secret place those only come who know the love of God in Christ Jesus, and those only dwell there to whom to live is Christ. To them the veil is rent, the mercyseat is revealed, the covering cherubs are manifest, and the awful glory of the Most High is apparent: these, like Simeon, have the Holy Ghost upon them, and like Anna they depart not from the temple; they are the courtiers of the Great King, the valiant men who keep watch around the bed of Solomon, the virgin souls who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. Elect out of the elect, they have "attained unto the first three", and shall walk with their Lord in white, for they are worthy. Sitting down in the august presence chamber where shines the mystic light of the Shekinah, they know what it is to be raised up together, and to be made to sit together with Christ in the heavenlies, and of them it is truly said that their conversation is in heaven. Special grace like theirs brings with it special immunity. Outer court worshippers little know what belongs to the inner sanctuary, or surely they would press on until the place of nearness and divine familiarity became theirs. Those who are the Lord's constant guests shall find that he will never suffer any to be injured within his gates; he has eaten the covenant salt with them, and is pledged for their protection. Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. The Omnipotent Lord will shield all those who dwell with him, they shall remain under his care as guests under the protection of their host. In the most holy place the wings of the cherubim were the most conspicuous objects, and they probably suggested to

the psalmist the expression here employed. Those who commune with God are safe with Him, no evil can reach them, for the outstretched wings of his power and love cover them from all harm. This protection is constant—they abide under it, and it is all sufficient, for it is the shadow of the Almighty, whose omnipotence will surely screen them from all attack. No shelter can be imagined at all comparable to the protection of Jehovah's own shadow. The Almighty himself is where his shadow is, and hence those who dwell in his secret place are shielded by himself. What a shade in the day of noxious heat! What a refuge in the hour of deadly storm! Communion with God is safety. The more closely we cling to our Almighty Father the more confident may we be.

Verse 2. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress. To take up a general truth and make it our own by personal faith is the highest wisdom. It is but poor comfort to say `the Lord is a refuge, 'but to say he is my refuge, is the essence of consolation. Those who believe should also speak—"I will say", for such bold avowals honour God and lead others to seek the same confidence. Men are apt enough to proclaim their doubts, and even to boast of them, indeed there is a party nowadays of the most audacious pretenders to culture and thought, who glory in casting suspicion upon every thing: hence it becomes the duty of all true believers to speak out and testify with calm courage to their own well grounded reliance upon their God. Let others say what they will, be it ours to say of the Lord, "he is our refuge." But what we say we must prove by our actions, we must fly to the Lord for shelter, and not to an arm of flesh. The bird flies away to the thicket, and the fox hastens to its hole, every creature uses its refuge in the hour of danger, and even so in all peril or fear of peril let us flee unto Jehovah, the Eternal Protector of his own. Let us, when we are secure in the Lord, rejoice that our position is unassailable, for he is our fortress as well as our refuge. No moat, portcullis, drawbridge, wall, battlement and donjon, could make us so secure as we are when the attributes of the Lord of Hosts environ us around. Behold this day the Lord is to us instead of walls and bulwarks! Our ramparts defy the leagured hosts of hell. Foes in flesh, and foes in ghostly guise are alike balked of their prey when the Lord of Hosts stands between us and their fury, and all other evil forces are turned aside. Walls cannot keep out the pestilence, but the Lord can.

As if it were not enough to call the Lord his refuge and fortress, he adds, My God! in him will I trust. Now he can say no more; "my God" means all, and more than all, that heart can conceive by way of security. It was most meet that he should say "in him will I trust", since to deny faith to such a one were wilful wickedness and wanton insult. He who dwells in an impregnable fortress, naturally trusts in it; and shall not he who dwells in God feel himself well at ease, and repose his soul in safety? O that we more fully carried out the psalmist's resolve! We have trusted in God, let us trust him still. He has never failed us, why then should we suspect him? To trust in man is natural to fallen nature, to trust in God should be as natural to regenerated nature. Where there is every reason and warrant for faith, we ought to place our confidence without hesitancy or wavering. Dear reader, pray for grace to say, "In him will I trust."

Verse 3. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler. Assuredly no subtle plot shall succeed against one who has the eyes of God watching for his defence, We are foolish and weak as poor little birds, and are very apt to be lured to our destruction by cunning foes, but if we dwell near to God, he will see to it that the most skilful deceiver shall not entrap us.

"Satan the fowler who betrays
Unguarded souls a thousand ways,"

shall be foiled in the case of the man whose high and honourable condition consists in residence within the holy place of the Most High.

And from the noisome pestilence. He who is a Spirit can protect us from evil spirits, he who is mysterious can rescue us from mysterious dangers, he who is immortal can redeem us from mortal sickness. There is a deadly pestilence of error, we are safe from that if we dwell in communion with the God of truth; there is a fatal pestilence of sin, we shall not be infected by it if we abide with the thrice Holy One; there is also a pestilence of disease, and even from that calamity our faith shall win immunity if it be of that high order which abides in God, walks on in calm serenity, and ventures all things for duty's sake. Faith by cheering the heart keeps it free from the fear which, in times of pestilence, kills more than the plague itself. It will not in all cases ward off disease and death, but where the man is such as the first verse describes, it will assuredly render him immortal where others die; if all the saints are not so sheltered it is because they have not all such a close abiding with God, and consequently not such confidence in the promise. Such special faith is not given to all, for there are diversities in the measure of faith. It is not of all believers that the psalmist sings, but only of those who dwell in the secret place of the Most High. Too many among us are weak in faith, and in fact place more reliance in a phial or a globule than in the Lord and giver of life, and if we die of pestilence as others die it is because we acted like others, and did not in patience possess our souls. The great mercy is that in such a case our deaths are blessed, and it is well with us, for we are for ever with the Lord. Pestilence to the saints shall not be noisome but the messenger of heaven.

Verse 4. He shall cover thee with thy feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust. A wonderful expression! Had it been invented by an uninspired man it would have verged upon blasphemy, for who should dare to apply such words to the Infinite Jehovah? But as he himself authorised, yea, dictated the language, we have here a transcendent condescension, such as it becomes us to admire and adore. Doth the Lord speak of his feathers, as though he likened himself to a bird? Who will not see herein a matchless love, a divine tenderness, which should both woo and win our confidence? Even as a hen covereth her chickens so doth the Lord protect the souls which dwell in him; let us cower down beneath him for comfort and for safety. Hawks in the sky and snares in the field are equally harmless when we nestle so near the Lord. His truth—his true promise, and his faithfulness to his promise, shall be thy shield and buckler. Double armour has he who relies upon the Lord. He bears a shield and wears an all surrounding coat of mail—such is the force of the word "buckler." To quench fiery darts the truth is a most effectual shield, and to blunt all swords it is an equally effectual coat of mail. Let us go forth to battle thus harnessed for the war, and we shall be safe in the thickest of the fight. It has been so, and so shall it be till we reach the land of peace, and there among the "helmed cherubim and sworded seraphim," we will wear no other ornament, his truth shall still be our shield and buckler.

Verse 5. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night. Such frail creatures are we that both by night and by day we are in danger, and so sinful are we that in either season we may be readily carried away by fear; the promise before us secures the favourite of heaven both from danger and from the fear of it. Night is the congenial hour of horrors, when alarms walk abroad like beasts of prey, or ghouls from among the tombs; our fears turn the sweet season of repose into one of dread, and though angels are abroad and fill our chambers, we dream of demons and dire visitants from hell. Blessed is that communion with God which renders us impervious to midnight frights, and horrors born of darkness. Not to be afraid is in itself an unspeakable blessing, since for every suffering which we endure from real injury we are tormented by a thousand griefs which arise from fear only. The

shadow of the Almighty removes all gloom from the shadow of night: once covered by the divine wing, we care not what winged terrors may fly abroad in the earth. Nor for the arrow that flieth by day. Cunning foes lie in ambuscade, and aim the deadly shaft at our hearts, but we do not fear them, and have no cause to do so. That arrow is not made which can destroy the righteous, for the Lord hath said, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." In times of great danger those who have made the Lord their refuge, and therefore have refused to use the carnal weapon, have been singularly preserved; the annals of the Quakers bear good evidence to this; yet probably the main thought is, that from the cowardly attacks of crafty malice those who walk by faith shall be protected, from cunning heresies they shall be preserved, and in sudden temptations they shall be secured from harm. Day has its perils as well as night, arrows more deadly than those poisoned by the Indian are flying noiselessly through the air, and we shall be their victims unless we find both shield and buckler in our God. O believer, dwell under the shadow of the Lord, and none of the archers shall destroy thee, they may shoot at thee and wound thee grievously, but thy bow shall abide in strength. When Satan's quiver shall be empty thou shalt remain uninjured by his craft and cruelty, yea, his broken darts shall be to thee as trophies of the truth and power of the Lord thy God.

Verse 6. Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness. It is shrouded in mystery as to its cause and cure, it marches on, unseen of men, slaying with hidden weapons, like an enemy stabbing in the dark, yet those who dwell in God are not afraid of it. Nothing is more alarming than the assassin's plot, for he may at any moment steal in upon a man, and lay him low at a stroke; and such is the plague in the days of its power, none can promise themselves freedom from it for an hour in any place in the infected city; it enters a house men know not how, and its very breath is mortal; yet those choice souls who dwell in God shall live above fear in the most plague stricken places—they shall not be afraid of the "plagues which in the darkness walk." Nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. Famine may starve, or bloody war devour, earthquake may overturn and tempest may smite, but amid all, the man who has sought the mercy seat and is sheltered beneath the wings which overshadow it, shall abide in perfect peace. Days of horror and nights of terror are for other men, his days and nights are alike spent with God, and therefore pass away in sacred quiet. His peace is not a thing of times and seasons, it does not rise and set with the sun, nor does it depend upon the healthiness of the atmosphere or the security of the country. Upon the child of the Lord's own heart pestilence has no destroying power, and calamity no wasting influence: pestilence walks in darkness, but he dwells in light; destruction wastes at noonday, but upon him another sun has risen whose beams bring restoration. Remember that the voice which saith "thou shalt not fear" is that of God himself, who hereby pledges his word for the safety of those who abide under his shadow, nay, not for their safety only, but for their serenity. So far shall they be from being injured that they shall not even be made to fear the ills which are around them, since the Lord protects them.

"He, his shadowy plumes outspread.
With his wing shall fence thy head;
And his truth around thee wield,
Strong as targe or bossy shield!
Naught shall strike thee with dismay,
Fear by night, nor shaft by day."

Verse 7. A thousand shall fall at thy side and ten thousand at thy right hand. So terribly may the plague rage among men that the bills of mortality may become very heavy and continue to grow ten times heavier still, yet shall such as this Psalm speaks of survive the scythe of death. It shall not

come nigh thee. It shall be so near as to be at thy side, and yet not nigh enough to touch thee; like a fire it shall burn all around, yet shall not the smell of it pass upon thee. How true is this of the plague of moral evil, of heresy, and of backsliding. Whole nations are infected, yet the man who communes with God is not affected by the contagion; he holds the truth when falsehood is all the fashion. Professors all around him are plague smitten, the church is wasted, the very life of religion decays, but in the same place and time, in fellowship with God, the believer renews his youth, and his soul knows no sickness. In a measure this also is true of physical evil; the Lord still puts a difference between Israel and Egypt in the day of his plagues. Sennacherib's army is blasted, but Jerusalem is in health.

"Our God his chosen people saves
Amongst the dead, amidst the graves."

Verse 8. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. The sight shall reveal both the justice and the mercy of God; in them that perish the severity of God will be manifest, and in the believer's escape the richness of divine goodness will be apparent. Joshua and Caleb verified this promise. The Puritan preachers during the plague of London must have been much impressed with this verse as they came out of their hiding places to proclaim mercy and judgment to the dissolute age which was so sorely visited with the pest. The sight of God's judgments softens the heart, excites a solemn awe, creates gratitude, and so stirs up the deepest kind of adoration. It is such a sight as none of us would wish to see, and yet if we did see it we might thus be lifted up to the very noblest style of manhood. Let us but watch providence, and we shall find ourselves living in a school where examples of the ultimate reward of sin are very plentiful. One case may not be judged alone lest we misjudge, but instances of divine visitation will be plentiful in the memory of any attentive observer of men and things; from all these put together we may fairly draw conclusions, and unless we shut our eyes to that which is self evident, we shall soon perceive that there is after all a moral ruler over the sons of men, who sooner or later rewards the ungodly with due punishment.

Verses 9-10. Before expounding these verses I cannot refrain from recording a personal incident illustrating their power to soothe the heart, when they are applied by the Holy Spirit. In the year 1854, when I had scarcely been in London twelve months, the neighbourhood in which I laboured was visited by Asiatic cholera, and my congregation suffered from its inroads. Family after family summoned me to the bedside of the smitten, and almost every day I was called to visit the grave. I gave myself up with youthful ardour to the visitation of the sick, and was sent for from all corners of the district by persons of all ranks and religions. I became weary in body and sick at heart. My friends seemed falling one by one, and I felt or fancied that I was sickening like those around me. A little more work and weeping would have laid me low among the rest; I felt that my burden was heavier than I could bear, and I was ready to sink under it. As God would have it, I was returning mournfully home from a funeral, when my curiosity led me to read a paper which was wafered up in a shoemaker's window in the Dover Road. It did not look like a trade announcement, nor was it, for it bore in a good bold handwriting these words:

Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. The effect upon my heart was immediate. Faith appropriated the passage as her own. I felt secure, refreshed, girt with immortality. I went on with my visitation of the dying in a calm and peaceful spirit; I felt no fear of evil, and I suffered no harm. The providence which moved the tradesman to place those verses in his window I gratefully

acknowledge, and in the remembrance of its marvellous power I adore the Lord my God. The psalmist in these verses assures the man who dwells in God that he shall be secure. Though faith claims no merit of its own, yet the Lord rewards it wherever he sees it. He who makes God his refuge shall find him a refuge; he who dwells in God shall find his dwelling protected. We must make the Lord our habitation by choosing him for our trust and rest, and then we shall receive immunity from harm; no evil shall touch us personally, and no stroke of judgment shall assail our household. The dwelling here intended by the original was only a tent, yet the frail covering would prove to be a sufficient shelter from harm of all sorts. It matters little whether our abode be a gypsy's hut or a monarch's palace if the soul has made the Most High its habitation. Get into God and you dwell in all good, and ill is banished far away. It is not because we are perfect or highly esteemed among men that we can hope for shelter in the day of evil, but because our refuge is the Eternal God, and our faith has learned to hide beneath his sheltering wing.

"For this no ill thy cause shall daunt,
No scourge thy tabernacle haunt."

It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord; the most crushing calamities can only shorten his journey and hasten him to his reward. Ill to him is no ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honour, death is his gain. No evil in the strict sense of the word can happen to him, for everything is overruled for good. Happy is he who is in such a case. He is secure where others are in peril, he lives where others die.

Verse 11. For he shall give his angels charge over thee. Not one guardian angel, as some fondly dream, but all the angels are here alluded to. They are the bodyguard of the princes of the blood imperial of heaven, and they have received commission from their Lord and ours to watch carefully over all the interests of the faithful. When men have a charge they become doubly careful, and therefore the angels are represented as bidden by God himself to see to it that the elect are secured. It is down in the marching orders of the hosts of heaven that they take special note of the people who dwell in God. It is not to be wondered at that the servants are bidden to be careful of the comfort of their Master's guests; and we may be quite sure that when they are specially charged by the Lord himself they will carefully discharge the duty imposed upon them. To keep thee in all thy ways. To be a bodyguard, a garrison to the body, soul, and spirit of the saint. The limit of this protection "in all thy ways" is yet no limit to the heart which is right with God. It is not the way of the believer to go out of his way. He keeps in the way, and then the angels keep him. The protection here promised is exceeding broad as to place, for it refers to all our ways, and what do we wish for more? How angels thus keep us we cannot tell. Whether they repel demons, counteract spiritual plots, or even ward off the more subtle physical forces of disease, we do not know. Perhaps we shall one day stand amazed at the multiplied services which the unseen bands have rendered to us.

Verse 12. They, that is the angels, God's own angels, shall cheerfully become our servants. They shall bear thee up in their hands; as nurses carry little children, with careful love, so shall those glorious spirits bear up each individual believer. Lest thou dash thy foot against a stone; even minor ills they ward off. It is most desirable that we should not stumble, but as the way is rough, it is most gracious on the Lord's part to send his servants to bear us up above the loose pebbles. If we cannot have the way smoothed it answers every purpose if we have angels to bear us up in their hands. Since the greatest ills may arise out of little accidents, it shows the wisdom of the Lord that from the smaller evils we are protected.

Verse 13. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder. Over force and fraud shalt thou march victoriously; bold opponents and treacherous adversaries shall alike be trodden down. When our shoes are iron and brass lions and adders are easily enough crushed beneath our heel. The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. The strongest foe in power, and the most mysterious in cunning, shall be conquered by the man of God. Not only from stones in the way, but from serpents also, shall we be safe. To men who dwell in God the most evil forces become harmless, they wear a charmed life, and defy the deadliest ills. Their feet come into contact with the worst of foes, even Satan himself nibbles at their heel, but in Christ Jesus they have the assured hope of bruising Satan under their feet shortly. The people of God are the real "George and the dragon," "the true lion kings and serpent tamers. Their dominion over the powers of darkness makes them cry, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy word."

Verse 14. Here we have the Lord himself speaking of his own chosen one. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him. Not because he deserves to be thus kept, but because with all his imperfections he does love his God; therefore not the angels of God only, but the God of angels himself will come to his rescue in all perilous times, and will effectually deliver him. When the heart is enamoured of the Lord, all taken up with him, and intensely attached to him, the Lord will recognise the sacred flame, and preserve the man who bears it in his bosom. It is love,—love set upon God, which is the distinguishing mark of those whom the Lord secures from ill. I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. The man has known the attributes of God so as to trust in him, and then by experience has arrived at a yet deeper knowledge, this shall be regarded by the Lord as a pledge of his grace, and he will set the owner of it above danger or fear, where he shall dwell in peace and joy. None abide in intimate fellowship with God unless they possess a warm affection towards God, and an intelligent trust in him; these gifts of grace are precious in Jehovah's eyes, and wherever he sees them he smiles upon them. How elevated is the standing which the Lord gives to the believer. We ought to covet it right earnestly. If we climb on high it may be dangerous, but if God sets us there it is glorious.

Verse 15. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him. He will have need to pray, he will be led to pray aright and the answer shall surely come. Saints are first called of God and then they call upon God; such calls as theirs always obtain answers. Not without prayer will the blessing come to the most favoured, but by means of prayer they shall receive all good things. I will be with him in trouble, or "I am with him in trouble." Heirs of heaven are conscious of a special divine presence in times of severe trial. God is always near in sympathy and in power to help his tried ones. I will deliver him, and honour him. The man honours God, and God honours him. Believers are not delivered or preserved in a way which lowers them, and makes them feel themselves degraded; far from it, the Lord's salvation bestows honour upon those it delivers. God first gives us conquering grace, and then rewards us for it.

Verse 16. With long life will I satisfy him. The man described in this Psalm fills out the measure of his days, and whether he dies young or old he is quite satisfied with life, and is content to leave it. He shall rise from life's banquet as a man who has had enough, and would not have more even if he could. And shew him my salvation. The full sight of divine grace shall be his closing vision. He shall look from Amana and Lebanon. Not with destruction before him black as night, but with salvation bright as noonday smiling upon him he shall enter into his rest.

Psalm 92

Verse 1. It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, or JEHOVAH. It is good ethically, for it is the Lord's right; it is good emotionally, for it is pleasant to the heart; it is good practically, for it leads others to render the same homage. When duty and pleasure combine, who will be backward? To give thanks to God is but a small return for the great benefits wherewith he daily loadeth us; yet as he by his Spirit calls it a good thing we must not despise it, or neglect it. We thank men when they oblige us, how much more ought we to bless the Lord when he benefits us. Devout praise is always good, it is never out of season, never superfluous, but it is especially suitable to the Sabbath; a Sabbath without thanksgiving is a Sabbath profaned. And to sing praises unto thy name, O most High. It is good to give thanks in the form of vocal song. Nature itself teaches us thus to express our gratitude to God; do not the birds sing, and the brooks warble as they flow? To give his gratitude a tongue is wise in man. Silent worship is sweet, but vocal worship is sweeter. To deny the tongue the privilege of uttering the praises of God involves an unnatural strain upon the most commendable prompting of our renewed manhood, and it is a problem to us how the members of the Society of Friends can deprive themselves of so noble, so natural, so inspiring a part of sacred worship. Good as they are, they miss one good thing when they decline to sing praises unto the name of the Lord. Our personal experience has confirmed us in the belief that it is good to sing unto the Lord; we have often felt like Luther when he said, "Come, let us sing a psalm, and drive away the devil."

Verse 2. To shew forth thy loving kindness in the morning. The day should begin with praise: no hour is too early for holy song. Loving kindness is a most appropriate theme for those dewy hours when morn is sowing all the earth with orient pearl. Eagerly and promptly should we magnify the Lord; we leave unpleasant tasks as long as we can, but our hearts are so engrossed with the adoration of God that we would rise betimes to attend to it. There is a peculiar freshness and charm about early morning praises; the day is loveliest when it first opens its eyelids, and God himself seems then to make distribution of the day's manna, which tastes most sweetly if gathered ere the sun is hot. It seems most meet that if our hearts and harps have been silent through the shades of night we should be eager again to take our place among the chosen choir who ceaselessly hymn the Eternal One. And thy faithfulness every night. No hour is too late for praise, the end of the day must not be the end of gratitude. When nature seems in silent contemplation to adore its Maker, it ill becomes the children of God to refrain their thanksgiving. Evening is the time for retrospect, memory is busy with the experience of the day, hence the appropriate theme for song is the divine faithfulness, of which another day has furnished fresh evidences. When darkness has settled down over all things, "a shade immense", then there comes over wise men a congenial, meditative spirit, and it is most fitting that they should take an expanded view of the truth and goodness of Jehovah—

"This sacred shade and solitude, what is it?
It is the felt presence of the Deity."

"Every night, "clouded or clear, moonlit or dark, calm or tempestuous, is alike suitable for a song upon the faithfulness of God, since in all seasons, and under all circumstances, it abides the same, and is the mainstay of the believer's consolation. Shame on us that we are so backward in magnifying the Lord, who in the daytime scatters bounteous love, and in the night season walks his rounds of watching care.

Verse 3. Upon an instrument of ten strings; with the fullest range of music, uttering before God with

the full compass of melody the richest emotions of his soul. And upon the psaltery; thus giving variety to praise: the Psalmist felt that every sweet-sounding instrument should be consecrated to God. George Herbert and Martin Luther aided their private devotions by instrumental music; and whatever may have been the differences of opinion in the Christian church, as to the performance of instrumental music in public, we have met with no objection to its personal and private use. Upon the harp with a solemn sound, or upon meditation with a harp; as much as to say, my meditative soul is, after all, the best instrument, and the harp's dulcet tones comes in to aid my thoughts. It is blessed work when hand and tongue work together in the heavenly occupation of praise.

"Strings and voices, hands and hearts,
In the concert bear your parts:
All that breathe, your God adore,
Praise him, praise him, evermore."

It is, however, much to be feared that attention to the mere mechanism of music, noting keys and strings, bars and crotchets, has carried many away from the spiritual harmony which is the soul and essence of praise. Fine music without devotion is but a splendid garment upon a corpse.

Verse 4. For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work. It was natural for the psalmist to sing, because he was glad, and to sing unto the Lord, because his gladness was caused by a contemplation of the divine work. If we consider either creation or providence, we shall find overflowing reasons for joy; but when we come to review the work of redemption, gladness knows no bounds, but feels that she must praise the Lord with all her might. There are times when in the contemplation of redeeming love we feel that if we did not sing we must die; silence would be as horrible to us as if we were gagged by inquisitors, or stifled by murderers. I will triumph in the works of thy hands. I cannot help it, I must and I will rejoice in the Lord, even as one who has won the victory and has divided great spoil. In the first sentence of this verse he expresses the unity of God's work, and in the second the variety of his works; in both there is reason for gladness and triumph. When God reveals his work to a man, and performs a work in his soul, he makes his heart glad most effectually, and then the natural consequence is continual praise.

Verse 5. O Lord, how great are thy works! He is lost in wonder. He utters an exclamation of amazement. How vast! How stupendous are the doings of Jehovah! Great for number, extent, and glory and design are all the creations of the Infinite One. And thy thoughts are very deep. The Lord's plans are as marvellous as his acts; his designs are as profound as his doings are vast. Creation is immeasurable, and the wisdom displayed in it unsearchable. Some men think but cannot work, and others are mere drudges working without thought; in the Eternal the conception and the execution go together. Providence is inexhaustible, and the divine decrees which originate it are inscrutable. Redemption is grand beyond conception, and the thoughts of love which planned it are infinite. Man is superficial, God is inscrutable; man is shallow, God is deep. Dive as we may we shall never fathom the mysterious plan, or exhaust the boundless wisdom of the all comprehending mind of the Lord. We stand by the fathomless sea of divine wisdom, and exclaim with holy awe, "O the depth!"

Verse 6. A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this. In this and the following verses the effect of the psalm is heightened by contrast; the shadows are thrown in to bring out the lights more prominently. What a stoop from the preceding verse; from the saint to the brute, from the worshipper to the boor, from the psalmist to the fool! Yet, alas, the character described here is no

uncommon one. The boorish or boarish man, for such is almost the very Hebrew word, sees nothing in nature; and if it be pointed out to him, his foolish mind will not comprehend it. He may be a philosopher, and yet be such a brutish being that he will not own the existence of a Maker for the ten thousand matchless creations around him, which wear, even upon their surface, the evidences of profound design. The unbelieving heart, let it boast as it will, does not know; and with all its parade of intellect, it does not understand. A man must either be a saint or a brute, he has no other choice; his type must be the adoring seraph, or the ungrateful swine. So far from paying respect to great thinkers who will not own the glory or being of God, we ought to regard them as comparable to the beasts which perish, only vastly lower than mere brutes, because their degrading condition is of their own choosing. O God, how sorrowful a thing it is that men whom thou hast so largely gifted, and made in thine own image, should so brutify themselves that they will neither see nor understand what thou hast made so clear. Well might an eccentric writer say, "God made man a little lower than the angels at first, and he has been trying to get lower ever since."

Verse 7. When the wicked spring as the grass, in abundance, and apparent strength, hastening on their progress like verdant plants, which come to perfection in a day, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; flowering in their prime and pride, their pomp and their prosperity; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever. They grow to die, they blossom to be blasted. They flower for a short space to wither without end. Greatness and glory are to them but the prelude of their overthrow. Little does their opposition matter, the Lord reigns on as if they had never blasphemed him; as a mountain abides the same though the meadows at its feet bloom or wither, even so the Most High is unaffected by the fleeting mortals who dare oppose him; they shall soon vanish for ever from among the living. But as for the wicked—how can our minds endure the contemplation of their doom "for ever." Destruction "for ever" is a portion far too terrible for the mind to realise. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the full terror of the wrath to come!

Verse 8. But thou, Lord, art most high for evermore. This is the middle verse of the Psalm, and the great fact which this Sabbath song is meant to illustrate. God is at once the highest and most enduring of all beings. Others rise to fall, but he is the Most High to eternity. Glory be to his name! How great a God we worship! Who would not fear thee, O thou High Eternal One! The ungodly are destroyed for ever, and God is most high for ever; evil is cast down, and the Holy One reigns supreme eternally.

Verse 9. For, lo, thine enemies, O Lord. It is a wonder full of instruction and warning, observe it, O ye sons of men; for, lo, thine enemies shall perish; they shall cease from among men, they shall be known no more. In that the thing is spoken twice it is confirmed by the Lord, it shall surely be, and that speedily. All the workers of iniquity shall be scattered; their forces shall be dispersed, their hopes broken, and themselves driven hither and thither like chaff before the tempest. They shall scatter like timid sheep pursued by the lion, they will not have the courage to remain in arms, nor the unity to abide in confederacy. The grass cannot resist the scythe, but falls in withering ranks, even so are the ungodly cut down and swept away in process of time, while the Lord whom they despised sits unmoved upon the throne of his infinite dominion. Terrible as this fact is, no true hearted heart would wish to have it otherwise. Treason against the great Monarch of the universe ought not to go unpunished; such wanton wickedness richly merits the severest doom.

Verse 10. But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn. The believer rejoices that he shall not be suffered to perish, but shall be strengthened and enabled to triumph over his enemies, by the

divine aid. The unicorn may have been some gigantic ox or buffalo now unknown, and perhaps extinct—among the ancients it was the favourite symbol of unconquerable power; the psalmist adopts it as his emblem. Faith takes delight in foreseeing the mercy of the Lord, and sings of what he will do as well as of what he has done. I shall be anointed with fresh oil. Strengthening shall be attended with refreshment and honour. As guests were anointed at feasts with perfumed unguents, so shall the saints be cheered and delighted by fresh outpourings of divine grace; and for this reason they shall not pass away like the wicked. Observe the contrast between the happiness of the brutish people and the joy of the righteous: the brutish men grow with a sort of vegetable vigour of their own, but the righteous are dealt with by the Lord himself, and all the good which they receive comes directly from his own right hand, and so is doubly precious in their esteem. The psalmist speaks in the first person, and it should be a matter of prayer with the reader that he may be enabled to do the same.

Verse 11. Mine eye also shall see MY DESIRE on mine enemies. The words, "my desire", inserted by the translators, had far better have been left out. He does not say what he should see concerning his enemies, he leaves that blank, and we have no right to fill in the vacant space with words which look vindictive. He would see that which would be for God's glory, and that which would be eminently right and just. And mine ears shall hear MY DESIRE of the wicked that rise up against me. Here, again, the words "my desire" are not inspired, and are a needless and perhaps a false interpolation. The good man is quite silent as to what he expected to hear; he knew that what he should hear would vindicate his faith in his God, and he was content to leave his cruel foes in God's hands, without an expression concerning his own desire one way or the other. It is always best to leave Scripture as we find it. The broken sense of inspiration is better let alone than pieced out with additions of a translator's own invention; it is like repairing pure gold with tinsel, or a mosaic of gems with painted wood. The holy psalmist had seen the beginning of the ungodly, and expected to see their end; he felt sure that God would right all wrongs, and clear his Providence from the charge of favouring the unjust; this confidence he here expresses, and sits down contentedly to wait the issues of the future.

Verse 12. The song now contrasts the condition of the righteous with that of the graceless. The wicked "spring as the grass", but The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, whose growth may not be so rapid, but whose endurance for centuries is in fine contrast with the transitory verdure of the meadow. When we see a noble palm standing erect, sending all its strength upward in one bold column, and growing amid the dearth and drought of the desert, we have a fine picture of the godly man, who in his uprightness aims alone at the glory of God; and, independent of outward circumstances, is made by divine grace to live and thrive where all things else perish. The text tells us not only what the righteous is, but what he shall be; come what may, the good man shall flourish, and flourish after the noblest manner. He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. This is another noble and long lived tree. "As the days of a tree are the days of my people", saith the Lord. On the summit of the mountain, unsheltered from the blast, the cedar waves its mighty branches in perpetual verdure, and so the truly godly man under all adversities retains the joy of his soul, and continues to make progress in the divine life. Grass, which makes hay for oxen, is a good enough emblem of the unregenerate; but cedars, which build the temple of the Lord, are none too excellent to set forth the heirs of heaven.

Verse 13. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. In the courtyards of Oriental houses trees were planted, and being thoroughly screened, they would be likely to bring forth their fruit to perfection in trying seasons; even so, those who by grace are brought into communion with the Lord, shall be likened to trees planted in the Lord's house, and shall find it

good to their souls. No heart has so much joy as that which abides in the Lord Jesus. Fellowship with the stem begets fertility in the branches. If a man abide in Christ he brings forth much fruit. Those professors who are rooted to the world do not flourish; those who send forth their roots into the marshes of frivolous pleasure cannot be in a vigorous condition; but those who dwell in habitual fellowship with God shall become men of full growth, rich in grace, happy in experience, mighty in influence, honoured and honourable. Much depends upon the soil in which a tree is planted; everything, in our case, depends upon our abiding in the Lord Jesus, and deriving all our supplies from him. If we ever really grow in the courts of the Lord's house we must be planted there, for no tree grows in God's garden self sown; once planted of the Lord, we shall never be rooted up, but in his courts we shall take root downward, and bring forth fruit upward to his glory for ever.

Verse 14. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age. Nature decays but grace thrives. Fruit, as far as nature is concerned, belongs to days of vigour; but in the garden of grace, when plants are weak in themselves, they become strong in the Lord, and abound in fruit acceptable with God. Happy they who can sing this Sabbath Psalm, enjoying the rest which breathes through every verse of it; no fear as to the future can distress them, for their evil days, when the strong man faileth, are the subject of a gracious promise, and therefore they await them with quiet expectancy. Aged believers possess a ripe experience, and by their mellow tempers and sweet testimonies they feed many. Even if bedridden, they bear the fruit of patience; if poor and obscure, their lowly and contented spirit becomes the admiration of those who know how to appreciate modest worth. Grace does not leave the saint when the keepers of the house do tremble; the promise is still sure though the eyes can no longer read it; the bread of heaven is fed upon when the grinders fail; and the voice of the Spirit in the soul is still melodious when the daughters of music are brought low. Blessed be the Lord for this! Because even to hoar hairs he is the I AM, who made his people, he therefore bears and carries them. They shall be fat and flourishing. They do not drag out a wretched, starveling existence, but are like trees full of sap, which bear luxuriant foliage. God does not pinch his poor servants, and diminish their consolations when their infirmities grow upon them; rather does he see to it that they shall renew their strength, for their mouths shall be satisfied with his own good things. Such an one as Paul the aged would not ask our pity, but invite our sympathetic gratitude; however feeble his outward man may be, his inner man is so renewed day by day that we may well envy his perennial peace.

Verse 15. This mercy to the aged proves the faithfulness of their God, and leads them to shew that the Lord is upright, by their cheerful testimony to his ceaseless goodness. We do not serve a Master who will run back from his promise. Whoever else may defraud us, he never will. Every aged Christian is a letter of commendation to the immutable fidelity of Jehovah. He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him. Here is the psalmist's own seal and sign manual; still was he building upon his God, and still was the Lord a firm foundation for his trust. For shelter, for defence, for indwelling, for foundation, God is our rock; hitherto he has been to us all that he said he would be, and we may be doubly sure that he will abide the same even unto the end. He has tried us, but he has never allowed us to be tempted above what we are able to bear: he has delayed our reward, but he has never been unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labour of love. He is a friend without fault, a helper without fail. Whatever he may do with us, he is always in the right; his dispensations have no flaw in them, no, not the most minute. He is true and righteous altogether, and so we weave the end of the psalm with its beginning, and make a coronet of it, for the head of our Beloved. It is a good thing to sing praises unto the Lord, for "he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."

Verse 1. The LORD reigneth, or Jehovah reigns. Whatever opposition may arise, his throne is unmoved; he has reigned, does reign, and will reign for ever and ever. Whatever turmoil and rebellion there may be beneath the clouds, the eternal King sits above all in supreme serenity; and everywhere he is really Master, let his foes rage as they may. All things are ordered according to his eternal purposes, and his will is done. In the verse before us it would seem as if the Lord had for a while appeared to vacate the throne, but on a sudden he puts on his regal apparel and ascends his lofty seat, while his happy people proclaim him with new joy, shouting "The Lord reigneth." What can give greater joy to a loyal subject than a sight of the king in his beauty? Let us repeat the proclamation, "the Lord reigneth, " whispering it in the ears of the desponding, and publishing it in the face of the foe. He is clothed with majesty. Not with emblems of majesty, but with majesty itself: everything which surrounds him is majestic. His is not the semblance but the reality of sovereignty. In nature, providence, and salvation the Lord is infinite in majesty. Happy are the people among whom the Lord appears in all the glory of his grace, conquering their enemies, and subduing all things unto himself; then indeed is he seen to be clothed with majesty.

The LORD is clothed with strength. His garments of glory are not his only array, he wears strength also as his girdle. He is always strong, but sometimes he displays his power in a special manner, and may therefore be said to be clothed with it; just as he is always majestic essentially, but yet there are seasons when he reveals his glory, and so wears his majesty, or shows himself in it. May the Lord appear in his church, in our day in manifest majesty and might, saving sinners, slaying errors, and honouring his own name. O for a day of the Son of man, in which the King Immortal and Almighty shall stand upon his glorious high throne, to be feared in the great congregation, and admired by all them that believe. Wherewith he hath girded himself. As men gird up their loins for running or working, so the Lord appears in the eyes of his people to be preparing for action, girt with his omnipotence. Strength always dwells in the Lord Jehovah, but he hides his power full often, until, in answer to his children's cries, he puts on strength, assumes the throne, and defends his own. It should be a constant theme for prayer, that in our day the reign of the Lord may be conspicuous, and his power displayed in his church and on her behalf. "Thy kingdom come" should be our daily prayer: that the Lord Jesus does actually reign should be our daily praise.

The world also is established, that it cannot be moved. Because Jehovah reigns terrestrial things for a while are stable. We could not be sure of anything if we were not sure that he has dominion. When he withdraws his manifest presence from among men all things are out of order; blasphemers rave, persecutors rage, the profane grow bold, and the licentious increase in wantonness; but when the divine power and glory are again manifested order is restored, and the poor distracted world is at peace again. Society would be the football of the basest of mankind if God did not establish it, and even the globe itself would fly through space, like thistle down across the common, if the Lord did not hold it in its appointed orbit. That there is any stability, either in the world or in the church, is the Lord's doings, and he is to be adored for it. Atheism is the mother of anarchy; the reigning power of God exhibited in true religion is the only security for the human commonwealth. A belief in God is the foundation and cornerstone of a well ordered state.

Verse 2. Thy throne is established of old. Though thou mayest just now appear in more conspicuous sovereignty, yet thine is no upstart sovereignty: in the most ancient times thy dominion was secure, yea, before time was thy throne was set up. We often hear of ancient dynasties, but what are they when compared with the Lord? Are they not as the bubble on the breaker, born an instant ago and

gone as soon as seen? Thou art from everlasting. The Lord himself is eternal. Let the believer rejoice that the government under which he dwells has an immortal ruler at its head, has existed from all eternity and will flourish when all created things shall have for ever passed away. Vain are the rebellions of mortals, the kingdom of God is not shaken.

Verse 3. The floods have lifted up, O LORD. Men have raged like angry waves of the sea, but vain has been their tumult. Observe that the psalmist turns to the Lord when he sees the billows foam, and hears the breakers roar; he does not waste his breath by talking to the waves, or to violent men; but like Hezekiah he spreads the blasphemies of the wicked before the Lord. The floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. These repetitions are needed for the sake both of the poetry and the music, but they also suggest the frequency and the violence of wicked assaults upon the government of God, and the repeated defeats which they sustain. Sometimes men are furious in words—they lift up their voice, and at other times they rise to acts of violence—they lift up their waves; but the Lord has control over them in either case. The ungodly are all foam and fury, noise and bluster, during their little hour, and then the tide turns or the storm is hushed, and we hear no more of them; while the kingdom of the Eternal abides in the grandeur of its power.

Verse 4. The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters. The utmost of their power is to him but a sound and he can readily master it, therefore he calls it a noise by way of contempt. When men combine to overthrow the kingdom of Jesus, plot secretly, and by and by rage openly, the Lord thinks no more of it than of so much noise upon the sea beach. Jehovah, the self-existent and omnipotent, cares not for the opposition of dying men, however many or mighty they may be.

"Loud the stormy billows spoke,
Loud the billows raised their cry;
Fierce the stormy billows broke,
Sounding to the echoing sky.
Strong the breakers tossing high,
Stronger is Jehovah's might.
True thy words; and sanctity
Well becomes thy temple bright."

Yea, than the mighty waves of the sea. When the storm raises Atlantic billows, and drives them on with terrific force, the Lord is still able to restrain them, and so also when impious men are haughty and full of rage the Lord is able to subdue them and overrule their malice. Kings or mobs, emperors or savages, all are in the Lord's hands, and he can forbid their touching a hair of the heads of his saints.

Verse 5. Thy testimonies are very sure. As in providence the throne of God is fixed beyond all risk, so in revelation his truth is beyond all question. Other teachings are uncertain, but the revelations of heaven are infallible. As the rocks remain unmoved amid the tumult of the sea, so does divine truth resist all the currents of man's opinion and the storms of human controversy; they are not only sure, but very sure. Glory be to God, we have not been deluded by a cunningly devised fable: our faith is grounded upon the eternal truth of the Most High. Holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever. Truth changes not in its doctrines, which are very sure, nor holiness in its precepts, which are incorruptible. The teaching and the character of God are both unaltered. God has not admitted evil to dwell with him, he will not tolerate it in his house, he is eternally its enemy, and is for ever the sworn

friend of holiness. The church must remain unchanged, and for ever be holiness unto the Lord; yea, her King will preserve her undefiled by the intruder's foot. Sacred unto the Lord is the church of Jesus Christ, and so shall she be kept evermore. "Jehovah reigns," is the first word and the main doctrine of the psalm, and holiness is the final result; a due esteem for the great King will lead us to adopt a behaviour becoming his royal presence. Divine sovereignty both confirms the promises as sure testimonies, and enforces the precepts as seemly and becoming in the presence of so great a Lord. The whole psalm is most impressive, and is calculated to comfort the distressed, confirm the timorous, and assist the devout. O thou who art so great and gracious a King, reign over us for ever! We do not desire to question or restrain thy power, such is thy character that we rejoice to see thee exercise the rights of an absolute monarch. All power is in thine hands, and we rejoice to have it so. Hosanna! Hosanna!

Psalm 94

Verse 1. O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself: or, God of retribution, Jehovah, God of retribution, shine forth! A very natural prayer when innocence is trampled down, and wickedness exalted on high. If the execution of justice be a right thing,—and who can deny the fact?—then it must be a very proper thing to desire it; not out of private revenge, in which case a man would hardly dare to appeal to God, but out of sympathy with right, and pity for those who are made wrongfully to suffer, Who can see a nation enslaved, or even an individual downtrodden, without crying to the Lord to arise and vindicate the righteous cause? The toleration of injustice is here attributed to the Lord's being hidden, and it is implied that the bare sight of him will suffice to alarm the tyrants into ceasing their oppressions. God has but to show himself, and the good cause wins the day. He comes, he sees, he conquers! Truly in these evil days we need a manifest display of his power, for the ancient enemies of God and man are again struggling for the mastery, and if they gain it, woe unto the saints of God.

Verse 2. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth. Ascend thy judgment seat and be acknowledged as the ruler of men: and, moreover, raise thyself as men do who are about to strike with all their might; for the abounding sin of mankind requires a heavy blow from thy hand. Render a reward to the proud, give them measure for measure, a fair retaliation, blow for blow. The proud look down upon the gracious poor and strike them from above, as a giant might hurl down blows upon his adversary; after the same manner, O Lord, lift up thyself, and "return a recompense upon the proud," and let them know that thou art far more above them than they can be above the meanest of their fellow men. The psalmist thus invokes the retribution of justice in plain speech, and his request is precisely that which patient innocence puts up in silence, when her looks of anguish appeal to heaven.

Verse 3. LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? Shall wrong for ever rule? Are slavery, robbery, tyranny, never to cease? Since there is certainly a just God in heaven, armed with almighty power, surely there must be sooner or later an end to the ascendancy of evil, innocence must one day find a defender. This "how long?" of the text is the bitter complaint of all the righteous in all ages, and expresses wonder caused by that great enigma of providence, the existence and predominance of evil. The sound "how long?" is very akin to howling, as if it were one of the saddest of all the utterances in which misery bemoans itself. Many a time has this bitter complaint been heard in the dungeons of the Inquisition, at the whipping posts of slavery, and in the prisons of oppression. In due time God will publish his reply, but the full end is not yet.

Verse 4. How long shall they utter and speak hard things? The ungodly are not content with deeds of injustice, but they add hard speeches, boasting, threatening, and insulting over the saints. Will the Lord for ever endure this? Will he leave his own children much longer to be the prey of their enemies? Will not the insolent speeches of his adversaries and theirs at last provoke his justice to interfere? Words often wound more than swords, they are as hard to the heart as stones to the flesh; and these are poured forth by the ungodly in redundance, for such is the force of the word translated utter; and they use them so commonly that they become their common speech (they utter and speak them)—will this always be endured? And all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?—they even soliloquise and talk to themselves, and of themselves, in arrogance of Spirit, as if they were doing some good deed when they crush the poor and needy, and spit their spite on gracious men. It is the nature of workers of iniquity to boast, just as it is a characteristic of good men to be humble—will their boasts always be suffered by the great Judge, whose ear hears all that they say? Long, very long, have they had the platform to themselves, and loud, very loud, have been their blasphemies of God, and their railings at his saints—will not the day soon come when the threatened heritage of shame and everlasting contempt shall be meted out to them? Thus the oppressed plead with their Lord, and shall not God avenge his own elect? Will he not speak out of heaven to the enemy and say, "Why persecutest thou me"?

Verse 5. They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, grinding them with oppression, crushing them with contempt. Yet the men they break in pieces are God's own people, and they are persecuted because they are so; this is a strong plea for the divine interposition. And afflict thine heritage, causing them sorrowful humiliation and deep depression of heart. The term, "thine heritage," marks out the election of the saints, God's peculiar interest and delight in them, his covenant relation, of long standing, to them and their fathers; this also is a storehouse of arguments with their faithful God. Will he not defend his own? Will a man lose his inheritance, or permit it to be contemptuously despoiled? Those who are ground down, and trampled on, are not strangers, but the choice and chosen ones of the Lord; how long will he leave them to be a prey to cruel foes

Verse 6. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. They deal most arrogantly with those who are the most evident objects of compassion. The law of God especially commends these poor ones to the kindness of good men, and it is peculiar wickedness which singles them out to be the victims not only of fraud but of murder. Must not such inhuman conduct as this provoke the Lord? Shall the tears of widows, the groans of strangers, and the blood of orphans be poured forth in vain? As surely as there is a God in heaven, he will visit those who perpetrate such crimes; though he bear long with them, he will yet take vengeance, and that speedily.

Verse 7. Yet they say, the Lord shall not see. This was the reason of their arrogance, and the climax of their wickedness: they were blindly wicked because they dreamed of a blind God. When men believe that the eyes of God are dim, there is no reason to wonder that they give full license to their brutal passions. The persons mentioned above not only cherished an infidel unbelief, but dared to avow it, uttering the monstrous doctrine that God is too far away to take notice of the actions of men. Neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Abominable blasphemy and transparent falsehood. If God has actually become his people's God, and proved his care for them by a thousand acts of grace, how dare the ungodly assert that he will not notice the wrongs done to them? There is no limit to the proud man's profanity, reason itself cannot restrain him; he has broken through the bounds of common sense. Jacob's God heard him at the brook Jabbok; Jacob's God led him and kept him all his life long, and said concerning him and his family, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets

no harm; "and yet these brutish ones profess to believe that he neither sees nor regards the injuries wrought upon the elect people! Surely in such unbelievers is fulfilled the saying of the wise, that those whom the Lord means to destroy he leaves to the madness of their corrupt hearts.

Verse 8. Understand, ye brutish among the people. They said that God did not note, and now, using the same word in the original, the psalmist calls on the wicked to note, and have regard to the truth. He designates them as boors, boarish, swinish men, and well was the term deserved; and he bids them understand or consider, if they can. They thought themselves to be wise, and indeed the only men of wit in the world, but he calls them "boars among the people": wicked men are fools, and the more they know, the more foolish they become. "No fool like a learned fool" is a true proverb. When a man has done with God, he has done with his manhood, and has fallen to the level of the ox and the ass, yea, beneath them, for "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib." Instead of being humbled in the presence of scientific infidels, we ought to pity them; they affect to look clown upon us, but we have far more cause to look down upon them. And ye fools, when will ye be wise? Is it not high time? Ye know the ways of folly, what profit have ye in them? Have ye no relics of reason left? no shreds of sense? If as yet there lingers in your minds a gleam of intelligence, hearken to argument, and consider the questions now about to be proposed to you.

Verse 9. He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He fashioned that marvellous organ, and fixed it in the most convenient place near to the brain, and is he deaf himself? Is he capable of such design and invention, and yet can he not discern what is done in the world which he made? He made you hear, can he not himself hear? Unanswerable question! It overwhelms the sceptic, and covers him with confusion. He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He gives us vision; is it conceivable that he has no sight himself? With skilful hand he fashioned the optic nerve, and the eyeball, and all its curious mechanism, and it surpasses all conception that he can himself be unable to observe the doings of his creatures. If there be a God, he must be a personal intelligent being, and no limit can be set to his knowledge.

Verse 10. He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? He reproveth whole nations, can he not reprove individuals? All history shows that he visits national sin with national judgment, and can he not deal with single persons? The question which follows is equally full of force, and is asked with a degree of warmth which checks the speaker, and causes the inquiry to remain incomplete. It begins, He that teacheth man knowledge, and then it comes to a pause, which the translators have supplied with the words, shall not he know? but no such words are in the original, where the sentence comes to an abrupt end, as if the inference were too natural to need to be stated, and the writer had lost patience with the brutish men with whom he had argued. The earnest believer often feels as if he could say, "Go to, you are not worth arguing with! If you were reasonable men, these things would be too obvious to need to be stated in your hearing. I forbear." Man's knowledge comes from God. Science in its first principles was taught to our progenitor Adam, and all after advances have been due to divine aid; does not the author and revealer of all knowledge himself know?

Verse 11. Whether men admit or deny that God knows, one thing is here declared, namely, that The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity. Not their words alone are heard, and their works seen, but he reads the secret motions of their minds, for men themselves are not hard to be discerned of him, before his glance they themselves are but vanity. It is in the Lord's esteem no great matter to know the thoughts of such transparent pieces of vanity as mankind are, he sums them up in a moment as poor vain things. This is the sense of the original, but that given in the authorised

version is also true—the thoughts, the best part, the most spiritual portion of man's nature, even these are vanity itself, and nothing better. Poor man! And yet such a creature as this boasts, plays at monarch, tyrannises over his fellow worms, and defies his God! Madness is mingled with human vanity, like smoke with the fog, to make it fouler but not more substantial than it would have been alone. How foolish are those who think that God does not know their actions, when the truth is that their vain thoughts are all perceived by him! How absurd to make nothing of God when in fact we ourselves are as nothing in his sight.

Verse 12. Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD. The psalmist's mind is growing quiet. He no longer complains to God or argues with men, but tunes his harp to softer melodies, for his faith perceives that with the most afflicted believer all is well. Though he may not feel blessed while smarting under the rod of chastisement, yet blessed he is; he is precious in God's sight, or the Lord would not take the trouble to correct him, and right happy will the results of his correction be. The psalmist calls the chastened one a "man" in the best sense, using the Hebrew word which implies strength. He is a man, indeed, who is under the teaching and training of the Lord. And teachest him out of thy law. The book and the rod, the law and the chastening, go together, and are made doubly useful by being found in connection. Affliction without the word is a furnace for the metal, but there is no flux to aid the purifying: the word of God supplies that need, and makes the fiery trial effectual. After all, the blessing of God belongs far rather to those who suffer under the divine hand than to those who make others suffer: better far to lie and cry out as a "man" under the hand of our heavenly Father, than to roar and rave as a brute, and to bring down upon one's self a death blow from the destroyer of evil. The afflicted believer is under tuition, he is in training for something higher and better, and all that he meets with is working out his highest good, therefore is he a blessed man, however much his outward circumstances may argue the reverse.

Verse 13. That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked. The chastening hand and instructive book are sanctified to us, so that we learn to rest in the Lord. We see that his end is our everlasting benefit, and therefore abide quiet under all trying providences and bitter persecutions, waiting our time. The Mighty Hunter is preparing the pit for the brutish ones; they are prowling about at this time, and tearing the sheep, but they will soon be captured and destroyed, therefore the people of the Lord learn to rest in days of adversity, and tarry the leisure of their God. Wicked men may not yet be ripe for punishment, nor punishment ready for them: hell is a prepared place for a prepared people; as days of grace ripen saints for glory, so days of wantonness help sinners to rot into the corruption of eternal destruction.

Verse 14. For the LORD will not cast off his people. He may cast them down, but he never can cast them off. During fierce persecutions the saints have been apt to think that the Lord had left his own sheep, and given them over to the wolf; but it has never been so, nor shall it ever be, for the Lord will not withdraw his love, neither will he forsake his inheritance. For a time he may leave his own with the design of benefiting them thereby, yet never can he utterly desert them.

"He may chasten and correct,
But he never can neglect;
May in faithfulness reprove,
But he never can cease to love."

Verse 15. But judgment shall return unto righteousness. The great Judge will come, the reign of

righteousness will commence, the course of affairs will yet be turned into the right channel, and then all the godly will rejoice. The chariot of right will be drawn in triumph through our streets, and all the upright in heart shall follow it, as in happy procession. A delightful hope is here expressed in poetic imagery of much beauty. The government of the world has been for a while in the hands of those who have used it for the basest and most vicious ends; but the cry of prayer will bring back righteousness to the throne, and then every upright heart will have its portion of joy.

Verse 16. Notwithstanding the psalmist's persuasion that all would be well eventually, he could not at the time perceive any one who would stand side by side with him in opposing evil; no champion of the right was forthcoming, the faithful failed from among men. This also is a bitter trial, and a sore evil under the sun; yet it has its purpose, for it drives the heart still more completely to the Lord, compelling it to rest alone in him. If we could find friends elsewhere, it may be our God would not be so dear to us; but when, after calling upon heaven and earth to help, we meet with no succour but such as comes from the eternal arm, we are led to prize our God, and rest upon him with undivided trust. Never is the soul safer or more at rest than when, all other helpers failing, she leans upon the Lord alone. The verse before us is an appropriate cry, now that the church sees error invading her on all sides, while faithful ministers are few, and fewer still are bold enough to "stand up" and defy the enemies of truth. Where are our Luthers and our Calvins? A false charity has enfeebled the most of the valiant men of Israel. Our John Knox would be worth a mint at this hour, but where is he? Our grand consolation is that the God of Knox and Luther is yet with us, and in due time will call out his chosen champions.

Verse 17. Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. Without Jehovah's help, the psalmist declares that he should have died outright, and gone into the silent land, where no more testimonies can be borne for the living God. Or he may mean that he would not have had a word to speak against his enemies, but would have been wrapped in speechless shame. Blessed be God, we are not left to that condition yet, for the Almighty Lord is still the helper of all those who look to him. Our inmost soul is bowed down when we see the victories of the Lord's enemies—we cannot brook it, we cover our mouths in confusion; but he will yet arise and avenge his own cause, therefore have we hope.

Verse 18. When I said, My foot slippeth—is slipping even now: I perceived my danger, and cried out in horror, and then, at the very moment of my extremity, came the needed help, thy mercy, O LORD, held me up. Often enough is this the case, we feel our weakness, and see our danger, and in fear and trembling we cry out. At such times nothing can help us but mercy; we can make no appeal to any fancied merit, for we feel that it is our inbred sin which makes our feet so ready to fail us; our joy is that mercy endureth for ever, and is always at hand to pluck us out of the danger, and hold us up, where else we should fall to our destruction. Ten thousand times has this verse been true in relation to some of us, and especially to the writer of this comment. The danger was imminent, it was upon us, we were going; the peril was apparent, we saw it, and were aghast at the sight; our own heart was failing, and we concluded that it was all over with us; but then came the almighty interposition: we did not fail, we were held up by an unseen hand, the devices of the enemy were frustrated, and we sang for joy. O faithful Keeper of our souls, be thou extolled for ever and ever. We will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continually be in our mouths.

Verse 19. In the multitude of my thoughts within me. When I am tossed to and fro with various reasonings, distractions, questions, and forebodings, I will fly to my true rest, for thy comforts delight

my soul. From my sinful thoughts, my vain thoughts, my sorrowful thoughts, my griefs, my cares, my conflicts, I will hasten to the Lord; he has divine comforts, and these will not only console but actually delight me. How sweet are the comforts of the Spirit! Who can muse upon eternal love, immutable purposes, covenant promises, finished redemption, the risen Saviour, his union with his people, the coming glory, and such like themes, without feeling his heart leaping with joy? The little world within is, like the great world without full of confusion and strife; but when Jesus enters it, and whispers "Peace be unto you, "there is a calm, yea, a rapture of bliss. Let us turn away from the mournful contemplation of the oppression of man and the present predominance of the wicked, to that sanctuary of pure rest which is found in the God of all comfort. Good will to us, and to give us some evidence and assurance of his love and favour towards us; these are his comforts. "Delight." This is a transcendent expression, which the Holy Ghost in the pen of the prophet David comes up unto. It had been a great matter to have said, they satisfy my soul, or, they quiet me, no more but so, that is the highest pitch which a perplexed spirit can wish to itself. Those which are in great pain, they would be glad if they might have but ease, they cannot aspire so high as pleasure and delight, this is more than can be expected by them; but see here now the notable efficacy of these Divine comforts; they do not only pacify the mind, but they joy it; they do not only satisfy it, but ravish it; they not only quiet, but delight it. Thy comforts delight my soul. That is, not only take away the present grief, but likewise put in the room and place of it most unspeakable comfort and consolation; as the sun does not only dispel darkness, but likewise brings in a glorious light in the stead of it.

Verse 20. Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee? Such thrones there are, and they plead a right divine, but their claim is groundless, a fraud upon mankind and a blasphemy of heaven. God enters into no alliance with unjust authority, he gives no sanction to unrighteous legislation. Which frameth mischief by a law? They legalise robbery and violence, and then plead that it is the law of the land; and so indeed it may be, but it is a wickedness for all that. With great care men prepare enactments intended to put down all protests, so as to render wrong-doing a permanent institution, but one element is necessary to true Conservatism, viz., righteousness; and lacking that, all their arrangements of the holders of power must come to an end, and all their decrees must in process of time be wiped out of the statute book. Nothing can last for ever but impartial right. No injustice can be permanent, for God will not set his seal upon it, nor have any fellowship with it, and therefore down it must come, and happy shall be the day which sees it fall.

Verse 21. They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, so many are there of them that they crowd their assemblies, and carry their hard measures with enthusiasm; they are the popular party, and are eager to put down the saints. In counsel, and in action, they are unanimous; their one resolve is to hold their own tyrannical position, and put down the godly party. And condemn the innocent blood. They are great at slander and false accusation, nor do they stick at murder; no crime is too great for them, if only they can trample on the servants of the Lord. This description is historically true in reference to persecuting times; it has been fulfilled in England, and may be again if Popery is to advance in future time at the same rate as in the past few years. The dominant sect has the law on its side, and blasts that it is the national church; but the law which establishes and endows one religion rather than another is radically an injustice. God has no fellowship with it, and therefore the synagogue of Ritualism will yet be a stench in the nostrils of all sane men. What evil times are in store for us it is not for us to prophesy; it is ours to leave the matter in the hands of him who cannot be in fellowship with an oppressive system, and will not always endure to be insulted to his face by Popish idols, and their priests.

Verse 22. Let the wicked gather as they may, the psalmist is not afraid, but sweetly sings, The Lord is my defence, and my God is the rock of my refuge. Firm as a rock is Jehovah's love, and there do we betake ourselves for shelter. In him, even in him alone, we find safety, let the world rage as it may; we ask not aid from man, but are content to flee into the bosom of omnipotence.

Verse 23. The natural result of oppression is the destruction of the despot; his own iniquities crush him ere long. Providence arranges retaliations as remarkable as they are just. High crimes in the end bring on heavy judgments, to sweep away evil men from off the face of the earth; yea, God himself interposes in a special manner, and cuts short the career of tyrants while they are in the very midst of their crimes. Wicked men are often arrested by the pursuivants of divine justice red handed, with the evidences of their guilt upon them. He shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness. While the stolen bread is in their mouths wrath slays them, while the ill gotten wedge of gold is yet in their tent judgment overtakes them. God himself conspicuously visits them, and reveals his own power in their overthrow, yea, the Lord our God shall cut them off. Here, then, the matter ends; faith reads the present in the light of the future, and ends her song without a trembling note.

Psalm 95

Verse 1. O come, let us sing unto the LORD. Other nations sing unto their gods, let us sing unto Jehovah. We love him, we admire him, we reverence him, let us express our feelings with the choicest sounds, using our noblest faculty for its noblest end. It is well thus to urge others to magnify the Lord, but we must be careful to set a worthy example ourselves, so that we may be able not only to cry "Come", but also to add "let us sing", because we are singing ourselves. It is to be feared that very much even of religious singing is not unto the Lord but unto the ear of the congregation: above all things we must in our service of song take care that all we offer is with the heart's sincerest and most fervent intent directed toward the Lord himself. Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. With holy enthusiasm let us sing, making a sound which shall indicate our earnestness; with abounding joy let us lift up our voices, actuated by that happy and peaceful spirit which trustful love is sure to foster. As the children of Israel sang for joy when the smitten rock poured forth its cooling streams, so let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. The author of this song had in his mind's eye the rock, the tabernacle, the Red Sea, and the mountains of Sinai, and he alludes to them all in this first part of his hymn. God is our abiding, immutable, and mighty rock, and in him we find deliverance and safety, therefore it becomes us to praise him with heart and with voice from day to day; and especially should we delight to do this when we assemble as his people for public worship.

"Come let us to the Lord sing out
With trumpet voice and choral shout."

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Verse 2. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving. Here is probably a reference to the peculiar presence of God in the Holy of Holies above the mercy seat, and also to the glory which shone forth out of the cloud which rested above the tabernacle. Everywhere God is present, but there is a peculiar presence of grace and glory into which men should never come without the profoundest reverence. We may make bold to come before the immediate presence of the Lord—for the voice of the Holy Ghost in this psalm invites us, and when we do draw near to him we should remember his great goodness to us and cheerfully confess it. Our worship should have reference to the past as well as to the future; if we do not bless the Lord for what we have already received, how can we reasonably look for more. We are permitted to bring our petitions, and therefore we are in honour bound to bring our thanksgivings. And make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. We should shout as exultingly as those do who triumph in war, and as solemnly as those whose utterance is a psalm. It is not always easy to unite enthusiasm with reverence, and it is a frequent fault to destroy one of these qualities while straining after the other. The perfection of singing is that which unites joy with gravity, exultation with humility, fervency with sobriety. The invitation given in the first verse (Ps 95:1) is thus repeated in the second (Ps 95:2) with the addition of directions, which indicate more fully the intent of the writer. One can imagine David in earnest tones persuading his people to go up with him to the worship of Jehovah with sound of harp and hymn, and holy delight. The happiness of his exhortation is noteworthy, the noise is to be joyful; this quality he insists upon twice. It is to be feared that this is too much overlooked in ordinary services, people are so impressed with the idea that they ought to be serious that they put on the aspect of misery, and quite forget that joy is as much a characteristic of true worship as solemnity itself.

Verse 3. For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. No doubt the surrounding nations imagined Jehovah to be a merely local deity, the god of a small nation, and therefore one of the inferior deities; the psalmist utterly repudiates such an idea. Idolaters tolerated gods many and lords many, giving to each a certain measure of respect; the monotheism of the Jews was not content with this concession, it rightly claimed for Jehovah the chief place, and the supreme power. He is great, for he is all in all; he is a great King above all other powers and dignitaries, whether angels or princes, for they owe their existence to him; as for the idol gods, they are not worthy to be mentioned. This verse and the following supply some of the reasons for worship, drawn from the being, greatness, and sovereign dominion of the Lord.

Verse 4. In his hand are the deep places of the earth. He is the God of the valleys and the hills, the caverns, and the peaks. Far down where the miners sink their shafts, deeper yet where lie the secret oceans by which springs are fed, and deepest of all in the unknown abyss where rage and flame the huge central fires of earth, there Jehovah's power is felt, and all things are under the dominion of his hand. As princes hold the mimic globe in their hands, so does the Lord in very deed hold the earth. When Israel drank of the crystal fount which welled up from the great deep, below the smitten rock, the people knew that in the Lord's hands were the deep places of the earth. The strength of the hills is his also. When Sinai was altogether on a smoke the tribes learned that Jehovah was God of the hills as well as of the valleys. Everywhere and at all times is this true; the Lord rules upon the high places of the earth in lonely majesty. The vast foundations, the gigantic spurs, the incalculable masses, the

untrodden heights of the mountains are all the Lord's. These are his fastnesses and treasure houses, where he stores the tempest and the rain; whence also he pours the ice torrents and looses the avalanches. The granite peaks and adamantine aiguilles are his, and his the precipices and the beetling crags. Strength is the main thought which strikes the mind when gazing on those vast ramparts of cliff which front the raging sea, or peer into the azure sky, piercing the clouds, but it is to the devout mind the strength of God; hints of Omnipotence are given by those stern rocks which brave the fury of the elements, and like walls of brass defy the assaults of nature in her wildest rage.

Verse 5. The sea is his. This was seen to be true at the Red Sea when the waters saw their God, and obediently stood aside to open a pathway for his people. It was not Edom's sea though it was red, nor Egypt's sea though it washed her shores. The Lord on high reigned supreme over the flood, as King far ever and ever. So is it with the broad ocean, whether known as Atlantic or Pacific, Mediterranean or Arctic; no man can map it out and say "It is mine"; the illimitable acreage of waters knows no other lord but God alone. Jehovah rules the waves. Far down in vast abysses, where no eye of man has gazed, or foot of diver has descended, he is sole proprietor; every rolling billow and foaming wave owns him for monarch; Neptune is but a phantom, the Lord is God of ocean. And he made it. Hence his right and sovereignty. He scooped the unfathomed channel and poured forth the overflowing flood; seas were not fashioned by chance, nor their shores marked out by the imaginary finger of fate; God made the main, and every creek, and bay, and current, and far sounding tide owns the great Maker's hand. All hail, Creator and Controller of the sea, let those who fly in the swift ships across the wonder realm of waters worship thee alone! And his hands formed the dry land. Whether fertile field or sandy waste, he made all that men called terra firma, lifting it from the floods and fencing it from the overflowing waters. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." He bade the isles upraise their heads, he levelled the vast plains, upreared the table lands, cast up the undulating hills, and piled the massive Alps. As the potter moulds his clay, so did Jehovah with his hands fashion the habitable parts of the earth. Come ye, then, who dwell on this fair world, and worship him who is conspicuous wherever ye tread! Count it all as the floor of a temple where the footprints of the present Deity are visible before your eyes if ye do but care to see. The argument is overpowering if the heart be right; the command to adore is alike the inference of reason and the impulse of faith.

Verse 6. Here the exhortation to worship is renewed and backed with a motive which, to Israel of old and to Christians now, is especially powerful; for both the Israel after the flesh and the Israel of faith may be described as the people of his pasture, and by both he is called "our God." O come, let us worship and bow down. The adoration is to be humble. The "joyful noise" is to be accompanied with lowliest reverence. We are to worship in such style that the bowing down shall indicate that we count ourselves to be as nothing in the presence of the all glorious Lord. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker. As suppliants must we come; joyful, but not presumptuous; familiar as children before a father, yet reverential as creatures before their maker. Posture is not everything, yet is it something; prayer is heard when knees cannot bend, but it is seemly that an adoring heart should show its awe by prostrating the body, and bending the knee.

Verse 7. For he is our God. Here is the master reason for worship. Jehovah has entered into covenant with us, and from all the world beside has chosen us to be his own elect. If others refuse him homage, we at least will render it cheerfully. He is ours, and our God; ours, therefore will we love him; our God, therefore will we worship him. Happy is that man who can sincerely believe that this sentence is true in reference to himself. And we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. As he belongs to us, so do we belong to him. "My Beloved is mine, and I am his." And we are

his as the people whom he daily feeds and protects. Our pastures are not ours, but his; we draw all our supplies from his stores. We are his, even as sheep belong to the shepherd, and his hand is our rule, our guidance, our government, our succour, our source of supply. Israel was led through the desert, and we are led through this life by "that great Shepherd of the sheep." The hand which cleft the sea and brought water from the rock is still with us, working equal wonders. Can we refuse to "worship and bow down" when we clearly see that "this God is our God for ever and ever, and will be our guide, even unto death"? But what is this warning which follows? Alas, it was sorrowfully needed by the Lord's ancient people, and is not one whit the less required by ourselves. The favoured nation grew deaf to their Lord's command, and proved not to be truly his sheep, of whom it is written, "My sheep hear my voice": will this turn out to be our character also? God forbid. To day if ye will hear his voice. Dreadful "if." Many would not hear, they put off the claims of love, and provoked their God." Today, "in the hour of grace, in the day of mercy, we are tried as to whether we have an ear for the voice of our Creator. Nothing is said of tomorrow, "he limiteth a certain day, "he presses for immediate attention, for our own sakes he asks instantaneous obedience. Shall we yield it? The Holy Ghost saith "Today, "will we grieve him by delay?

Verse 8. Harden not your heart. If ye will hear, learn to fear also. The sea and the land obey him, do not prove more obstinate than they!

"Yield to his love who round you now
The bands of a man would east."

We cannot soften our hearts, but we can harden them, and the consequences will be fatal. Today is too good a day to be profaned by the hardening of our hearts against our own mercies. While mercy reigns let not obduracy rebel. "As in the provocations, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness" (or, "like Meribah, like the day of Massah in the wilderness"). Be not wilfully, wantonly, repeatedly, obstinately rebellious. Let the example of that unhappy generation serve as a beacon to you; do not repeat the offences which have already more than enough provoked the Lord. God remembers men's sins, and the more memorably so when they are committed by a favoured people, against frequent warnings, in defiance of terrible judgments, and in the midst of superlative mercies; such sins write their record in marble. Reader, this verse is for you, for you even if you can say, "He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture." Do not seek to turn aside the edge of the warning; thou hast good need of it, give good heed to it.

Verse 9. When your fathers tempted me. As far as they could do so they tempted God to change his usual way, and to do their sinful bidding, and though he cannot be tempted of evil, and will never yield to wicked requests, yet their intent was the same, and their guilt was none the less. God's way is perfect, and when we would have him alter it to please us, we are guilty of tempting him; and the fact that we do so in vain, while it magnifies the Lord's holiness, by no means excuses our guilt. We are in most danger of tilling sin in times of need, for then it is that we are apt to fall into unbelief, and to demand a change in those arrangements of providence which are the transcript of perfect holiness and infinite wisdom. Not to acquiesce in the will of God is virtually to tempt him to alter his plans to suit our imperfect views of how the universe should be governed. Proved me. They put the Lord to needless tests, demanding new miracles, fresh interpositions, and renewed tokens of his presence. Do not we also peevishly require frequent signs of the Lord's love other than those which every hour supplies? Are we not prone to demand specialities, with the alternative secretly offered in our hearts, that if they do not come at our bidding we will disbelieve? True, the Lord is very condescending, and

frequently grants us marvellous evidences of his power, but we ought not to require them. Steady faith is due to one who is so constantly kind. After so many proofs of his love, we are ungrateful to wish to prove him again, unless it be in those ways of his own appointing, in which he has said, "Prove me now." If we were for ever testing the love of our wife or husband, and remained unconvinced after years of faithfulness, we should wear out the utmost human patience. Friendship only flourishes in the atmosphere of confidence, suspicion is deadly to it: shall the Lord God, true and immutable, be day after day suspected by his own people? Will not this provoke him to anger? And saw my work. They tested him again and again, through out forty years, though each time his work was conclusive evidence of his faithfulness. Nothing could convince them for long.

"They saw his wonders wrought,
And then his praise they sung;
But soon his works of power forgot,
And murmured with their tongue."

"Now they believe his word,
While rocks with rivers flow;
Now with their lusts provoke the Lord,
And he reduced them low."

Fickleness is bound up in the heart of man, unbelief is our besetting sin; we must for ever be seeing, or we waver in our believing. This is no mean offence, and will bring with it no small punishment.

Verse 10. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation. The impression upon the divine mind is most vivid; he sees them before him now, and calls them "this generation." He does not leave his prophets to upbraid the sin, but himself utters the complaint and declares that he was grieved, nauseated, and disgusted. It is no small thing which can grieve our long suffering God to the extent which the Hebrew word here indicates, and if we reflect a moment we shall see the abundant provocation given; for no one who values his veracity can endure to be suspected, mistrusted, and belied, when there is no ground for it, but on the contrary the most overwhelming reason for confidence. To such base treatment was the tender Shepherd of Israel exposed, not for a day or a month, but for forty years at a stretch, and that not by here and there an unbeliever, but by a whole nation, in which only two men were found so thoroughly believing as to be exempted from the doom which at last was pronounced upon all the rest. Which shall we most wonder at, the cruel insolence of man, or the tender patience of the Lord? Which shall leave the deepest impression on our minds, the sin or the punishment? unbelief, or the barring of the gates of Jehovah's rest against the unbelievers? And said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways. Their heart was obstinately and constantly at fault; it was not their head which erred, but their very heart was perverse: love, which appealed to their affections, could not convert them. The heart is the main spring of the man, and if it be not in order, the entire nature is thrown out of gear. If sin were only skin deep, it might be a slight matter; but since it has defiled the soul, the case is bad indeed. Taught as they were by Jehovah himself in lessons illustrated by miracles, which came to them daily in the manual from heaven, and the water from the flinty rock, they ought to have learned something, and it was a foul shame that they remained obstinately ignorant, and would not know the ways of God. Wanderers in body, they were also wanderers in heart, and the plain providential goodness of their God remained to their blinded minds as great a maze as those twisting paths by which he led them through the wilderness. Are we better than they? Are we not quite as apt to misinterpret the dealings

of the Lord? Have we suffered and enjoyed so many things in vain? With many it is even so. Forty years of providential wisdom, yea, and even a longer period of experience, have failed to teach them serenity of assurance, and firmness of reliance. There is ground for much searching of heart concerning this. Many treat unbelief as a minor fault, they even regard it rather as an infirmity than a crime, but the Lord thinketh not so. Faith is Jehovah's due, especially from those who claim to be the people of his pasture, and yet more emphatically from those whose long life has been crowded with evidences of his goodness: unbelief insults one of the dearest attributes of Deity, it does so needlessly and without the slightest ground and in defiance of all sufficient arguments, weighty with the eloquence of love. Let us in reading this psalm examine ourselves, and lay these things to heart.

Verse 11. Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest. There can be no rest to an unbelieving heart. If manna and miracles could not satisfy Israel, neither would they have been content with the land which flowed with milk and honey. Canaan was to be the typical resting place of God, where his ark should abide, and the ordinances of religion should be established; the Lord had for forty years borne with the ill manners of the generation which came out of Egypt, and it was but right that he should resolve to have no more of them. Was it not enough that they had revolted all along that marvellous wilderness march? Should they be allowed to make new Messahs and Meribahs in the Promised Land itself? Jehovah would not have it so. He not only said but swore that into his rest they should not come, and that oath excluded every one of them; their carcasses fell in the wilderness. Solemn warning this to all who leave the way of faith for paths of petulant murmuring and mistrust. The rebels of old could not enter in because of unbelief, "let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should even seem to come short of it." One blessed inference from this psalm must not be forgotten. It is clear that there is a rest of God, and that some must enter into it: but "they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief, there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." The unbelievers could not enter, but "we which have believed do enter into rest." Let us enjoy it, and praise the Lord for it for ever. Ours is the true Sabbatic rest, it is ours to rest from our own works as God did from his. While we do so, let us "come into his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms."

Psalm 96

Verse 1. O sing unto the Lord a new song. New joys are filling the hearts of men, for the glad tidings of blessing to all people are proclaimed, therefore let them sing a new song. Angels inaugurated the new dispensation with new songs, and shall not we take up the strain? The song is for Jehovah alone, the hymns which chanted the praises of Jupiter and Neptune, Vishnoo and Siva are hushed for ever; Bacchanalian shouts are silenced, lascivious sonnets are no more. Unto the one only God all music is to be dedicated. Mourning is over, and the time of singing of hearts has come. No dismal rites are celebrated, no bloody sacrifices of human beings are presented, no cutting with knives, and outcries of lamentation are presented by deluded votaries. Joy is in the ascendant, and singing has become the universal expression of love, the fitting voice of reverent adoration. Men are made new creatures, and their song is new also. The names of Baalim are no more on their lips, the wanton music of Ashtaroth ceaseth; the foolish ditty and the cruel war song are alike forgotten; the song is holy, heavenly, pure, and pleasant. The psalmist speaks as if he would lead the strain and be the chief musician, he invites, he incites, he persuades to sacred worship, and cries with all his heart, "O sing unto Jehovah a new song." Sing unto the Lord, all the earth.—National jealousies are dead; a Jew invites the Gentiles to adore, and joins with them, so that all the earth may lift up one common psalm as with one heart and voice unto Jehovah, who hath visited it with his salvation. No corner of

the world is to be discordant, no race of heathen to be dumb. All the earth Jehovah made, and all the earth must sing to him. As the sun shines on all lands, so are all lands to delight in the light of the Sun of Righteousness. E Pluribus Unum, out of many one song shall come forth. The multitudinous languages of the sons of Adam, who were scattered at Babel, will blend in the same song when the people are gathered at Zion. Nor men alone, but the earth itself is to praise its Maker. Made subject to vanity for a while by a sad necessity, the creation itself also is to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God, so that sea and forest, field and flood, are to be joyful before the Lord. Is this a dream? then let us dream again. Blessed are the eyes which shall see the kingdom, and the ears which shall hear its songs. Hasten thine advent, good Lord! Yea, send forth speedily the rod of thy strength out of Zion, that the nations may bow before the Lord and his Anointed.

Verse 2. Sing unto the Lord, bless his name. Thrice is the name of the Lord repeated, and not without meaning. Is it not unto the Three One Lord that the enlightened nations will sing? Unitarianism is the religion of units; it is too cold to warm the world to worship; the sacred fire of adoration only burns with vehement flame where the Trinity is believed in and beloved. In other ways beside singing, the blessed Lord is to be blessed. His name, his fame, his character, his revealed word and will are to be delighted in, and remembered with perpetual thanksgiving. We may well bless him who so divinely blesses us. At the very mention of his name it is meet to say, "Let him be blessed for ever." Shew forth his salvation from day to day. The gospel is the clearest revelation of himself, salvation, outshines creation and providence; therefore let our praises overflow in that direction. Let us proclaim the glad tidings, and do so continually, never ceasing the blissful testimony. It is ever new, ever suitable, ever sure, ever perfect; therefore let us show it forth continually until he come, both by words and deeds, by songs and sermons, by sacred Baptism and by the Holy Supper, by books and by speech, by Sabbath services and weekday worship. Each day brings us deeper experience of our saving God, each day shows us anew how deeply men need his salvation, each day reveals the power of the gospel, each day the Spirit strives with the sons of men; therefore, never pausing, be it ours to tell out the glorious message of free grace. Let those do this who know for themselves what his salvation means; they can bear witness that there is salvation in none other, and that in him salvation to the uttermost is to be found. Let them show it forth till the echo flies around the spacious earth, and all the armies of the sky unite to magnify the God who hath displayed his saving health among all people.

Verse 3. Declare his glory among the heathen. His salvation is his glory, the word of the gospel glorifies him; and this should be published far and wide, till the remotest nations of the earth have known it. England has spent much blood and treasure to keep up her own prestige among barbarians; when will she be equally anxious to maintain the honour of her religion, the glory of her Lord? It is to be feared that too often the name of the Lord Jesus has been dishonoured among the heathen by the vices and cruelties of those who call themselves Christians; may this fact excite true believers to greater diligence in causing the gospel to be proclaimed as with a trumpet in all quarters of the habitable globe. His wonders among all people. The gospel is a mass of wonders, its history is full of wonders, and it is in itself far more marvellous than miracles themselves. In the person of his Son the Lord has displayed wonders of love, wisdom, grace, and power. All glory be unto his name; who can refuse to tell out the story of redeeming grace and dying love? All the nations need to hear of God's marvellous works; and a really living, self denying church would solemnly resolve that right speedily they fill shall hear thereof. The tribes which are dying out are not to be excluded from gospel teaching any more than the great growing families which, like the fat kine of Pharaoh, are eating up

other races: Red Indians as well as Anglo Saxons are to hear of the wonders of redeeming love. None are too degraded, none too cultured, none too savage, and none too refined.

Verse 4. For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised. He is no petty deity, presiding, as the heathen imagined their gods to do, over some one nation, or one department of nature. Jehovah is great in power and dominion, great in mind and act; nothing mean or narrow can be found in him or his acts, in all things he is infinite. Praise should be proportionate to its object, therefore let it be infinite when rendered unto the Lord. We cannot praise him too much, too often, too zealously, too carefully, too joyfully. He deserves that nothing in his worship should be little, but all the honour rendered unto him should be given in largeness of heart, with the utmost zeal for his glory. He is to be feared above all gods. Other gods have been worshipped at great cost, and with much fervour, by their blinded rotaries, but Jehovah should be adored with far greater reverence. Even if the graven images had been gods they could not have borne comparison for an instant with the God of Israel, and therefore his worship, should be far more zealous than any which has been rendered to them. He is to be feared, for there is cause to fear. Dread of other gods is mere superstition, awe of the Lord is pure religion. Holy fear is the beginning of the graces, and yet it is the accompaniment of their highest range. Fear of God is the blush upon the face of holiness enhancing its beauty.

Verse 5. For all the gods of the nations are idols. Mere images of wood and stone, vanities, nothings. But the Lord made the heavens. The reality of his Godhead is proved by his works, and foremost among these the psalmist mentions that matchless piece of architecture which casts its arch over every man's head, whose lamps are the light of all mankind, whose rains and dew fall upon the fields of every people, and whence the Lord in voice of thunder is heard speaking to every creature. The idol gods have no existence, but our God is the author of all existences; they are mere earthly vanities, while he is not only heavenly, but made the heavens. This is mentioned as an argument for Jehovah's universal praise. Who can be worshipped but he? Since none can rival him, let him be adored alone.

Verse 6. Honour and majesty are before him. Men can but mimic these things; their pompous pageants are but the pretence of greatness. Honour and majesty are with him and with him alone. In the presence of Jehovah real glory and sovereignty abide, as constant attendants. Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. In him are combined all that is mighty and lovely, powerful and resplendent. We have seen rugged strength devoid of beauty, we have also seen elegance without strength; the union of the two is greatly to be admired. Do we desire to see the "sublime and beautiful" at one glance? Then we must look to the eternal throne. In the Chronicles we read strength and gladness; and the two renderings do not disagree in sense, for in the highest degree in this instance it is true that "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever." Not in outward show or parade of costly robes does the glory of God consist; such things are tricks of state with which the ignorant are dazzled; holiness, justice, wisdom, grace, these are the splendours of Jehovah's courts, these the jewels and the gold, the regalia, and the pomp of the courts of heaven.

Verse 7. The first six verses commenced with an exhortation to sing, three times repeated, with the name of the Lord thrice mentioned; here we meet with the expression, Give unto the Lord, used in the same triple manner. This is after the manner of those poets whose flaming sonnets have best won the ear of, the people, they reiterate choice words till they penetrate the soul and fire the heart. The invocation of the sweet singer is still addressed to all mankind, to whom he speaks as, Ye kindreds of the people. Divided into tribes and families, we are called in our courses and order to appear before

him and ascribe to him all honour. "All worship be to God only," is the motto of one of our City companies, and it may well be the motto of all the families upon earth. Family worship is peculiarly pleasing unto him who is the God of all the families of Israel. Give unto the LORD glory and strength, that is to say, recognise the glory and power of Jehovah, and ascribe them unto him in your solemn hymns. Who is glorious but the Lord? Who is strong, save our God? Ye great nations who count yourselves both famous and mighty, cease your boastings! Ye monarchs, who are styled imperial and puissant, humble yourselves in the dust before the only Potentate. Glory and strength are nowhere to be found, save with the Lord, all others possess but the semblance thereof. Well did Massillon declare, "God alone is great."

Verse 8. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name. But who can do that to the full? Can all the nations of the earth put together discharge the mighty debt? All conceivable honour is due to our Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, and Redeemer, and however much of zealous homage we may offer to him, we cannot give him more than his due. If we cannot bring in the full revenue which he justly claims, at least let us not fail from want of honest endeavour. Bring an offering, and come into his courts. Come with an unbloody sacrifice; atonement for sin having been made, it only remains to bring thank offerings, and let not these be forgotten. To him who gives us all, we ought gladly to give our grateful tithe. When assembling for public worship we should make a point of bringing with us a contribution to his cause, according to that ancient word, "None of you shall appear before me empty." The time will come when from all ranks and nations the Lord will receive gifts when they gather together for his worship. O long expected day begin!

Verse 9. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. This is the only beauty which he cares for in our public services, and it is one for which no other can compensate. Beauty of architecture and apparel he does not regard; moral and spiritual beauty is that in which his soul delighteth. Worship must not be rendered to God in a slovenly, sinful, superficial manner; we must be reverent, sincere, earnest, and pure in heart both in our prayers and praises. Purity is the white linen of the Lord's choristers, righteousness is the comely garment of his priests, holiness is the royal apparel of his servants. Fear before him, all the earth. "Tremble" is the word in the original, and it expresses the profoundest awe, just as the word "worship" does, which would be more accurately translated by "bow down." Even the bodily frame would be moved to trembling and prostration if men were thoroughly conscious of the power and glory of Jehovah. Men of the world ridiculed "the Quakers" for trembling when under the power of the Holy Spirit; had they been able to discern the majesty of the Eternal they would have quaked also. There is a sacred trembling which is quite consistent with joy, the heart may even quiver with an awful excess of delight. The sight of the King in his beauty caused no alarm to John in Patmos, and yet it made him fall at his feet as dead. Oh, to behold him and worship him with prostrate awe and sacred fear!

Verse 10. Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth. This is the gladdest news which can be carried to them,—the Lord Jehovah, in the person of his Son has assumed the throne, and taken to himself his great power. Tell this out among the heathen, and let the heathen themselves, being converted, repeat the same rejoicing. The dominion of Jehovah Jesus is not irksome, his rule is fraught with untold blessings, his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. The world also shall be established that it shall not be moved. Society is safe where God is king, no revolutions shall convulse his empire, no invasions shall disturb his kingdom. A settled government is essential to national prosperity, the reign of the god of truth and righteousness will promote this to the highest degree. Sin has shaken the world, the reign of Jesus will set it fast again upon sure foundations. He

shall judge the people righteously. This is the best method for establishing society on a secure basis, and this is the greatest source of joy to oppressed nations. Iniquity makes the dynasties of tyrants fall, equity causes the throne of Jesus to stand. He will impartially rule over Jew and Gentile, prince and peasant, and this will bring happiness to those who are now the victims of the despot's arbitrary will.

Verse 11. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad. Above and below let the joy be manifested. Let the angels who have stood in amaze at the wickedness of men, now rejoice over their repentance and restoration to favour, and let men themselves express their pleasure in seeing their true prince set upon his throne. The book of creation has two covers, and on each of these let the glory of the Lord be emblazoned in letters of joy. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof Let it be no more a troubled sea, wailing over shipwrecked mariners, and rehearsing the griefs of widows and orphans, but let it adopt a cheerful note, and rejoice in the kingdom of the Lord. Let it thunder out the name of the Lord when its tides are at its full, and let all its teeming life express the utmost joy because the Lord reigneth even in the depth of the sea. In common with the rest of the creation, the sea has groaned and travailed until now; is not the time close at hand in which its hollow murmur shall be exchanged for an outburst of joy? Will not every billow soon flash forth the praises of him who once trod the sea?

"Waft, waft, ye winds, his story!
And you ye waters, roll,
Till, like a sea of glory,
It spreads from pole to pole."

Verse 12. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein. Let the cultivated plains praise the Lord. Peace enables their owners to plough and sow and reap, without fear of the rapine of invaders, and therefore in glad notes they applaud him whose empire is peace. Both men, and creatures that graze the plain, and the crops themselves are represented as swelling the praises of Jehovah, and the figure is both bold and warranted, for the day shall come when every inhabited rood of ground shall yield its song, and every farmstead shall contain a church. Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice. He does not say, let them rejoice, but they shall do so. The faith of the psalmist turns itself from the expression of desire to the fully assured prediction of the event. Groves have in old times stood shuddering at the horrid orgies which have been performed within their shade, the time shall come when they shall sing for joy because of the holy worship, the sounds of which they shall hear. The bush is the stronghold of savage men and robbers, but it shall be sanctified to retirement and devotion. Perhaps the psalmist was thinking of the birds; so Keble must have supposed, for he versifies the passage thus—

"Field exults and meadow fair,
With each bud and blossom there,
In the lonely woodlands now
Chants aloud each rusting bough."

Verse 13. Before the LORD: for he cometh. Even now he is near, his advent should, therefore, be the cause of immediate rejoicing: already are we in his presence, let us worship him with delight. For he cometh to judge the earth, to rule it with discretion; not to tax it, and control it by force, as kings often do, but to preside as magistrates do whose business it is to see justice carried out between man and man. All the world will be under the jurisdiction of this great Judge, and before his bar all will be

summoned to appear. At this moment he is on the road, and the hour of his coming draweth nigh. His great assize is proclaimed. Hear ye not the trumpets? His foot is on the threshold. He shall judge the world with righteousness. His essential rectitude will determine all causes and cases, there will be no bribery and corruption there, neither can error or failure be found in his decisions. And the people with his truth, or rather "the nations in faithfulness." Honesty, veracity, integrity, will rule upon his judgment seat. No nation shall be favoured there, and none be made to suffer through prejudice. The black man shall be tried by the same law as his white master, the aboriginal shall have justice executed for him against his civilised exterminator, the crushed and hunted Bushman shall have space to appeal against the Boer who slaughtered his tribe, and the South Sea Islander shall gain attention to his piteous complaint against the treacherous wretch who kidnapped him from his home. There shall be true judgment given without fear or favour. In all this let the nations be glad, and the universe rejoice. In closing, let us ourselves join in the song. Since the whole universe is to be clothed with smiles, shall not we be glad? As John Howe observes, "Shall we not partake in this common dutiful joy, and fall into concert with the adoring loyal chorus? Will we cut ourselves off from this happy obsequious throng? And what should put a pleasant face and aspect upon the whole world, shall it only leave our faces covered with clouds, and a mournful sadness?"

Psalm 97

Verse 1. The Lord reigneth. This is the watchword of the psalm—Jehovah reigns. It is also the essence of the gospel proclamation, and the foundation of the gospel kingdom. Jesus has come, and all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth, therefore men are bidden to yield him their obedient faith. Saints draw comfort from these words, and only rebels cavil at them. Let the earth rejoice, for there is cause for joy. Other reigns have produced injustice, oppression, bloodshed, terror; the reign of the infinitely gracious Jehovah is the hope of mankind, and when they all yield to it the race will have its paradise restored. The very globe itself may well be glad that its Maker and liege Lord has come to his own, and the whole race of man may also be glad, since to every willing subject Jesus brings untold blessings. Let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. To the ancient Israelites all places beyond the seas were isles, and the phrase is equivalent to all lands which are reached by ships. It is remarkable, however, that upon actual islands some of the greatest victories of the Cross have been achieved. Our own favoured land is a case in point, and not less so the islands of Polynesia and the kingdom of Madagascar. Islands are very numerous; may they all become Holy Islands, and Isles of Saints, then will they all be Fortunate Islands, and true Formosas. Many a land owes its peace to the sea; if it had not been isolated it would have been desolated, and therefore the inhabitants should praise the Lord who has moated them about, and given them a defence more available than bars of brass. Jesus deserves to be Lord of the Isles, and to have his praises sounded along every sea beaten shore. Amen, so let it be.

Verse 2. Clouds and darkness are round about him. So the Lord revealed himself at Sinai, so must he ever surround his essential Deity when he shows himself to the sons of men, or his excessive glory would destroy them. Every revelation of God must also be an obvelation; there must be a veiling of his infinite splendour if anything is to be seen by finite beings. It is often thus with the Lord in providence; when working out designs of unmingled love he conceals the purpose of his grace that it may be the more clearly discovered at the end. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." Around the history of his church dark clouds of persecution hover, and an awful gloom at times settles down, still the Lord is there; and though men for a while see not the bright light in the clouds, it bursts forth in due season to the confusion of the adversaries of the gospel. This passage should teach us the

impertinence of attempting to pry into the essence of the Godhead, the vanity of all endeavours to understand the mystery of the Trinity in Unity, the arrogance of arraigning the Most High before the bar of human reason, the folly of dictating to the Eternal One the manner in which he should proceed. Wisdom veils her face and adores the mercy which conceals the divine purpose; folly rushes in and perishes, blinded first, and by and by consumed by the blaze of glory. Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. There he abides, he never departs from strict justice and right: his throne is fixed upon the rock of eternal holiness. Righteousness is His immutable attribute, and judgment marks his every act. What though we cannot see or understand what he doeth, yet we are sure that he will do no wrong to us or any of his creatures. Is not this enough to make us rejoice in him and adore him? Divine sovereignty is never tyrannical. Jehovah is an autocrat, but not a despot. Absolute power is safe in the hands of him who cannot err, or act unrighteously. When the roll of the decrees, and the books of the divine providence shall be opened, no eye shall there discern one word that should be blotted out, one syllable of error, one line of injustice, one letter of unholiness. Of none but the Lord of all can this be said.

Verse 3. A fire goeth before him. Like an advance guard clearing the way. So was it at Sinai, so must it be: the very Being of God is power, consuming all opposition; omnipotence is a devouring flame which burneth up his enemies round about. God is longsuffering, but when he comes forth to judgment he will make short work with the unrighteous, they will be as chaff before the flame. Reading this verse in reference to the coming of Jesus, and the descent of the Spirit, we are reminded of the tongues of fire, and of the power which attended the gospel, so that all opposition was speedily overcome. Even now where the gospel is preached in faith, and in the power of the Spirit, it burns its own way, irresistibly destroying falsehood, superstition, unbelief, sin, indifference, and hardness of heart. In it the Lord reigneth, and because of it let the earth rejoice.

Verse 4. His lightnings enlightened the world. In times of tempest the whole of nature is lighted up with a lurid glare, even the light of the sun itself seems dim compared with the blaze of lightning. If such are the common lights of nature what must be the glories of the Godhead itself? When God draws aside the curtain for a moment how astonished are the nations, the light compels them to cover their eyes and bow their heads in solemn awe. Jesus in the gospel lights up the earth with such a blaze of truth and grace as was never seen or even imagined before. In apostolic times the word flashed from one end of the heavens to the other, no part of the civilised globe was left unilluminated. The earth saw, and trembled. In God's presence the solid earth quakes, astonished by his glory it is convulsed with fear. To the advent of our Lord and the setting up of his kingdom among men these words are also most applicable; nothing ever caused such a shaking and commotion as the proclamation of the gospel, nothing was more majestic than its course, it turned the world upside down, levelled the mountains, and filled up the valleys. Jesus came, he saw, he conquered. When the Holy Ghost rested upon his servants their course was like that of a mighty storm, the truth flashed with the force and speed of a thunderbolt, and philosophers and priests, princes and people were utterly confounded, and altogether powerless to withstand it. It shall be so again. Faith even now sets the world on fire and rocks the nations to and fro.

Verse 5. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD. Inanimate nature knows its Creator, and worships him in its own fashion. States and kingdoms which stand out upon the world like mountains are utterly dissolved when he decrees their end. Systems as ancient and firmly rooted as the hills pass away when he does but look upon them. In the Pentecostal era, and its subsequent age, this was seen on all hands, heathenism yielded at the glance of Jehovah Jesus, and the

tyrannies based upon it dissolved like melted wax. At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. His dominion is universal, and his power is everywhere felt. Men cannot move the hills, with difficulty do they climb them, with incredible toil do they pierce their way through their fastnesses, but it is not so with the Lord, his presence makes a clear pathway, obstacles disappear, a highway is made, and that not by his hand as though it cost him pains, but by his mere presence, for power goes forth from him with a word or a glance. O for the presence of the Lord after this sort with his church at this hour! It is our one and only need. With it the mountains of difficulty would flee away, and all obstacles would disappear. O that thou wouldest rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, O Lord. In the little world of our nature the presence of Jesus in reigning power is as a fire to consume our lusts and melt our souls to obedience. Sometimes we doubt the presence of the Lord within, for he is concealed with clouds, but we are again assured that he is within us when his light shines in and fills us with holy fear, while at the same time the warmth of grace softens us to penitence, resignation and obedience, even as wax becomes soft in the presence of fire.

Verse 6. The heavens declare his righteousness. It is as conspicuous as if written across the skies, both the celestial and the terrestrial globes shine in its light. It is the manner of the inspired poets to picture the whole creation as in sympathy with the glory of God, and indeed it is not mere poetry, for a great truth underlies it, the whole creation has been made to groan through man's sin, and it is yet to share in the joy of his restoration. And all the people see his glory. The glorious gospel became so well known and widely promulgated, that it seemed to be proclaimed by every star, and published by the very skies themselves, therefore all races of men became acquainted with it, and were made to see the exceeding glory of the grace of God which is resplendent therein. May it come to pass ere long that, by a revival of the old missionary ardour, the glad tidings may yet be carried to every tribe of Adam's race, and once again all flesh may see the glory of Jehovah. It must be so, therefore let us rejoice before the Lord.

Verse 7. Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols. They shall be so; shame shall cover their faces, they shall blush to think of their former besotted boastings. When a man gravely worships what has been engraved by a man's hand, and puts his trust in a mere nothing and nonentity, he is indeed brutish, and when he is converted from such absurdity, he may well be ashamed. A man who worships an image is but the image of a man, his senses must have left him. He who boasts of an idol makes an idle boast. Worship him, all ye gods. Bow down yourselves, ye fancied gods. Let Jove do homage to Jehovah, let Thor lay down his hammer at the foot of the cross, and Juggernaut remove his blood stained car out of the road of Immanuel. If the false gods are thus bidden to worship the coming Lord, how much more shall they adore him who are godlike creatures in heaven, even the angelic spirits? Paul quotes this passage as the voice of God to angels when he sent his Son into the world. All powers are bound to recognise the chief power; since they derive their only rightful authority from the Lord, they should be careful to acknowledge his superiority at all times by the most reverent adoration.

Verse 8. Zion heard, and was glad. While the heathen are confounded the people of God are made to triumph, for they love to see their God exalted. The day shall come when the literal Zion, so long forsaken, shall joy in the common salvation. It did so at the first when the apostles dwelt at Jerusalem, and the good days will come back again. And the daughters of Judah rejoiced. Each individual believer is glad when he sees false systems broken up and idol gods broken down; the judgments of the Lord afford unalloyed delight to those who worship the true God in spirit and in truth. In the first ages of Christianity the believing Israel rejoiced to see Christ's kingdom victorious among

the heathen, and even yet, though for a while turning aside, the daughters of Judah will sympathise in the wide spread reign of Jehovah their God, through the gospel of his dear Son. As the women of Judah went forth to meet David in the dance, singing his victory over the Philistine, so shall they chant the triumphs of David's son and Lord.

Verse 9. For thou, Lord, art high above all the earth. And therefore do we rejoice to see the idols abolished and to see all mankind bending at thy throne. There is but one God, there cannot be another, and he is and ever must be over all. Thou art exalted far above all gods. As much as ALL is exalted above nothing, and perfection above folly. Jehovah is not alone high over Judea, but over all the earth, nor is he exalted over men only, but over everything that can be called god: the days are on their way when all men shall discern this truth, and shall render unto the Lord the glory which is due alone to him.

Verse 10. Ye that love the Lord, hate evil. For He hates it, his fire consumes it, his lightnings blast it, his presence shakes it out of its place, and his glory confounds all the lovers of it. We cannot love God without hating that which he hates. We are not only to avoid evil, and to refuse to countenance it, but we must be in arms against it, and bear towards it a hearty indignation. He preserveth the souls of his saints. Therefore they need not be afraid of proclaiming war with the party which favours sin. The saints are the safe ones: they have been saved and shall be saved. God keeps those who keep his law. Those who love the Lord shall see his love manifested to them in their preservation from their enemies, and as they keep far from evil so shall evil be kept far from them. He delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked. It is not consistent with the glory of his name to give over to the power of his foes those whom his grace has made his friends. He may leave the bodies of his persecuted saints in the hand of the wicked, but not their souls, these are very dear to him, and he preserves them safe in his bosom. This foretells for the church a season of battling with the powers of darkness, but the Lord will preserve it and bring it forth to the light.

Verse 11. Light is sown for the righteous. All along their pathway it is strewn. Their night is almost over, their day is coming, the morning already advancing with rosy steps is sowing the earth with orient pearls. The full harvest of delight is not yet ours, but it is sown for us; it is springing, it will yet appear in fulness. This is only for those who are light before the Lord in his own righteousness, for all others the blackness of darkness is reserved. And gladness for the upright in heart. Gladness is not only for one righteous man in the singular, but for the whole company of the upright, even as the apostle, after speaking of the crown of life laid up for himself, immediately amended his speech by adding, "and not for me only, but also for all them that love his appearing." The upright ought to be glad, they have cause to be glad, yea and they shall be glad. Those who are right hearted shall also be glad hearted. Right leads to light. In the furrows of integrity lie the seeds of happiness, which shall develop into a harvest of bliss. God has lightning for sinners and light for saints. The gospel of Jesus, wherever it goes, sows the whole earth with joy for believers, for these are the men who are righteous before the Lord.

Verse 12. Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous. The psalmist had bidden the earth rejoice, and here he turns to the excellent of the earth and bids them lead the song. If all others fail to praise the Lord, the godly must not. To them God is peculiarly revealed, by them he should be specially adored. And give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness—which is the harmony of all his attributes, the superlative wholeness of his character. This is a terror to the wicked, and a cause of thankfulness to the gracious. To remember that Jehovah is holy is becoming in those who dwell in his courts, to give

thanks in consequence of that remembrance is the sure index of their fitness to abide in his presence. In reference to the triumphs of the gospel, this text teaches us to rejoice greatly in its purifying effect; it is the death of sin and the life of virtue. An unholy gospel is no gospel. The holiness of the religion of Jesus is its glory, it is that which makes it glad tidings, since while man is left in his sins no bliss can be his portion. Salvation from sin is the priceless gift of our thrice holy God, therefore let us magnify him for ever and ever. He will fill the world with holiness, and so with happiness, therefore let us glory in his holy name, world without end. Amen.

Psalm 98

Verse 1. O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things. We had a new song before (Ps 96:1-13) because the Lord was coming, but now we have another new song because he has come, and seen and conquered. Jesus, our King, has lived a marvellous life, died a marvellous death, risen by a marvellous resurrection, and ascended marvellously into heaven. By his divine power he has sent forth the Holy Spirit doing marvels, and by that sacred energy his disciples have also wrought marvellous things and astonished all the earth. Idols have fallen, superstitions have withered, systems of error have fled, and empires of cruelty have perished. For all this he deserves the highest praise. His acts have proved his Deity, Jesus is Jehovah, and therefore we sing unto him as the LORD. His right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory; not by the aid of others, but by his own unweaponed hand his marvellous conquests have been achieved. Sin, death, and hell fell beneath his solitary prowess, and the idols and the errors of mankind have been overthrown and smitten by his hand alone. The victories of Jesus among men are all the more wonderful because they are accomplished by means to all appearance most inadequate; they are due not to physical but to moral power—the energy of goodness, justice, truth; in a word, to the power of his holy arm. His holy influence has been the sole cause of success. Jesus never stoops to use policy, or brute force; his unsullied perfections secure to him a real and lasting victory over all the powers of evil, and that victory will lie gained as dexterously and easily as when a warrior strikes his adversary with his right hand and stretches him prone upon the earth. Glory be unto the Conqueror, let new songs be chanted to his praise. Stirred by contemplating his triumphs, our pen could not forbear to praise him in the following hymn:

Forth to the battle rides our King;
He climbs his conquering car;
He fits his arrows to the string,
And smites his foes afar.

Convictions pierce the stoutest hearts,
They bleed, they faint, they die;
Slain by Immanuel's well aligned darts,
In helpless heaps they lie.

Behold, he bares his two edged sword,
And deals almighty blows,
His all revealing, killing word
Mixed with joint and marrow goes.

Anon arrayed in robes of grace

He rides the trampled plain,
With pity beaming from his face,
And mercy in his train.

Mighty to save he now appears,
Mighty to raise the dead,
Mighty to stanch the bleeding wound,
And lift the fallen head.

Victor alike in love and arms,
Myriads before him bend:
Such are the Conqueror's matchless charms.
Each foe becomes his friend.

They crown him on the battle field
Of all the nations King;
With trumpets and with cornets loud
They make the welkin ring.

The salvation which Jesus has accomplished is wrought out with wonderful wisdom, hence it is ascribed to his right hand; it meets the requirements of justice, hence we read of his holy arm; it is his own unaided work, hence all the glory is ascribed to him; and it is marvellous beyond degree, hence it deserves a new song.

Verse 2. The LORD hath made known his salvation, —by the coming of Jesus and by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, by whose power the gospel was preached among the Gentiles. The Lord is to be praised not only for effecting human salvation, but also for making it known, for man would never have discovered it for himself; nay, not so much as one single soul would ever have found out for himself the way of mercy through a Mediator; in every case it is a divine revelation to the mind and heart. In God's own light his light is seen. He must reveal his Son in us, or we shall be unable to discern him. His righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. This word "righteousness" is the favourite word of the apostle of the Gentiles; he loves to dwell on the Lord's method of making man righteous, and vindicating divine justice by the atoning blood. What songs ought we to render who belong to a once heathen race, for that blessed gospel which is the power of God unto salvation, "for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." This is no close secret; it is clearly taught in Scripture, and has been plainly preached among the nations. What was hidden in the types is "openly shewed" in the gospel.

Verse 3. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel. To them Jesus came in the flesh, and to them was the gospel first preached; and though they counted themselves unworthy of eternal life, yet the covenant was not broken, for the true Israel were called into fellowship and still remain so. The mercy which endureth for ever, and the fidelity which cannot forget a promise, secure to the chosen seed the salvation long ago guaranteed by the covenant of grace. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Not to Abraham's seed alone after the flesh, but to the elect among all nations, has grace been given; therefore, let the whole church of God sing unto him a new song. It was no small blessing, or little miracle, that throughout all lands the gospel should be published in so short a time, with such singular success and such abiding results.

Pentecost deserves a new song as well as the Passion and the Resurrection; let our hearts exult as we remember it. Our God, our own for ever blessed God, has been honoured by those who once bowed down before dumb idols; his salvation has not only been heard of but seen among all people, it has been experienced as well as explained; his Son is the actual Redeemer of a multitude out of all nations. In these three verses we are taught how to praise the Lord.

Verse 4. Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth. Every tongue must applaud, and that with the rigour which joy of heart alone can arouse to action. As men shout when they welcome a king, so must we. Loud hosannas, full of happiness, must be lifted up. If ever men shout for joy it should be when the Lord comes among them in the proclamation of his gospel reign. John Wesley said to his people, "Sing lustily, and with a good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the songs of Satan." Make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise; or Burst forth, and sing, and play. Let every form of exultation be used, every kind of music pressed into the service till the accumulated praise causes the skies to echo the joyful tumult. There is no fear of our being too hearty in magnifying the God of our salvation, only we must take care the song comes from the heart, otherwise the music is nothing but a noise in his ears, whether it be caused by human throats, or organ pipes, or far resounding trumpets. Loud let our hearts ring out the honours of our conquering Saviour; with all our might let us extol the Lord who has vanquished all our enemies, and led our captivity captive: He will do this best who is most in love with Jesus:

"I have found the pearl of greatest price,
My heart doth sing for joy;
And sing I must, a Christ I have.
Oh, what a Christ have I!"

Verse 5. Sing unto the LORD with the harp. Skill in music should not be desecrated to the world's evil mirth, it should aid the private devotions of the saint, and then, like George Herbert, he will sing,

"My God, my God,
My music shall find thee,
And every string
Shall have his attribute to sing."

Martin Luther was thus wont to praise the Lord, whom he loved so well. God's praises should be performed in the best possible manner, but their sweetness mainly lies in spiritual qualities. The concords of faith and repentance, the harmonies of obedience and love are true music in the ear of the Most High, and better please him than "heaving bellows taught to blow, "though managed by the noblest master of human minstrelsy. With the harp. A very sweet instrument of music, and capable of great expression. The repetition of the word is highly poetical, and shows that the daintiest expressions of poetry are none too rich for the praise of God. His worship should be plain, but not uncouth, if we can compass elegancies of expression there are occasions upon which they will be most appropriate; God, who accepts the unlettered ditty of a ploughman, does not reject the smooth verse of a Cowper, or the sublime strains of a Milton. All repetitions are not vain repetitions, in sacred song there should be graceful repeats, they render the sense emphatic, and help to fire the soul; even preachers do not amiss when they dwell on a word and sound it out again and again, till dull ears feel its emphasis.

And the voice of a Psalm, or with a musical voice, as distinguished from common speech. Our voice has in it many modulations; there is the voice of conversation, the voice of complaint, the voice of pleading, the voice of command, and there ought to be with each of us the voice of a Psalm. Man's voice is at its best when it sings the best words in the best spirit to the best of Beings. Love and war must not monopolise the lyric muse; the love of God and the conquests of Immanuel should win to themselves man's sweetest strains. Do we sing enough unto the Lord? May not the birds of the air rebuke our sullen and ungrateful silence? in their brave struggles to achieve their country's independence, and were the repeated expression of their thanksgivings. The Lord of Psalmists and the Son of David, by the words of a Psalm proved himself to be higher than David; and sang Psalms with his apostles on the night before he suffered, when he instituted the holy supper of his love. With Psalms Paul and Silas praised God in the prison at midnight when their feet were made fast in the stocks, and sang so loud that the prisoners heard them. And after his own example the apostle exhorts the Christians at Ephesus and Colossae to teach and admonish one another with Psalms anti hymns and spiritual songs. Jerome tells us that in his day the Psalms were to be heard in the fields and vineyards of Palestine, and that they fell sweetly on the ear, mingling with the songs of birds, and the scent of flowers in spring. The ploughman as he guided his plough chanted the hallelujah, and the reaper, the vine dresser, and the shepherd sang the songs of David. "These," he says, "are our love songs, these the instruments of our agriculture." Sidonius Apollinaris makes his boatmen, as they urge their heavily laden barge up stream, sing Psalms, till the river banks echo again with the hallelujah, and beautifully applies the custom, in a figure, to the voyage of the Christian life. J.J.S. Perowne.

Verse 5. The voice of a Psalm. In D'Israeli's "Curiosities of Literature" there is a very curious piece upon Psalm singing, in which he mentions the spread of the singing of Psalms in France, which was first started among the Romanists by the version of Clement Marot, the favoured bard of Francis the First. In Marot's dedication occur the following lines:

"Thrice happy they, who may behold,
And listen in that age of gold!
As by the plough the labourer strays,
And carman 'mid the public ways,
And tradesman in his shop shall swell
Their voice in Psalm or canticle,
Singing to solace toil; again
From woods shall come a sweeter strain!

Shepherd and shepherdess shall vie
In many a tender Psalmody;
And the Creator's name prolong,
As rock and stream return their song!
Begin then, ladies fair! begin
The age renew'd that knows no sin!
And with light heart, that wants no wing,
Sing! from this holy songbook, sing!"

The singing of these Psalms became so popular that D'Israeli suggests that "it first conveyed to the

sullen fancy of the austere Calvin the project" of introducing the singing of Psalms into his Genevan discipline. "This infectious frenzy of Psalm singing, "as Warton almost blasphemously describes it, rapidly propagated itself through Germany as well as France, and passed over to England. D'Israeli says, with a sneer, that in the time of the Commonwealth, "Psalms were now sung at Lord Mayor's dinners and city feasts; soldiers sang them on their march and at parade; and few houses which had windows fronting the streets, but had their evening Psalms." We can only add, would to God it were so again. C.H.S.

Verses 5-6. These were, literally, the instruments most in use among the Jews, and a spiritual signification has been attached to each instrument. They seem to me to represent the cardinal virtues, the harp implying prudence; the psaltery, justice; the trumpet, fortitude; and the cornet, temperance. Bellarmine.

Verses 5-6. It is evident that the Psalmist here expresses the vehement and ardent affection which the faithful ought to have in praising God, when he enjoins musical instruments to be employed for this purpose. He would have nothing omitted by believers which tends to animate the minds and feelings of men in singing God's praises. The name of God, no doubt, can, properly speaking, be celebrated only by the articulate voice; but it is not without reason that David adds to this those aids by which believers were wont to stimulate themselves the more to this exercise; especially considering that he was speaking to God's ancient people. There is a distinction, however, to be observed here, that we may not indiscriminately consider as applicable to ourselves everything which was formerly enjoined upon the Jews. I have no doubt that playing upon cymbals, touching the harp and the viol, and all that kind of music which is so frequently mentioned in the Psalms, was a part of the education; that is to say, the puerile instruction of the law: I speak of the stated service of the temple. For even now, if believers choose to cheer themselves with musical instruments, they should, I think, make it their object not to dissever their cheerfulness from the praises of God. But when they frequent their sacred assemblies, musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostle is far more pleasing to him. Paul allows us to bless God in the public assembly of the saints only in a known tongue, 1Co 14:16. The voice of man, although not understood by the generality, assuredly excels all inanimate instruments of music; and yet we see what Paul determines concerning speaking in an unknown tongue. What shall we then say of chanting, which fills the ears with nothing but an empty sound? Does any one object that music is very useful for awakening the minds of men and moving their hearts?, I own it; but we should always take care that no corruption creep in, which might both defile the pure worship of God and involve men in superstition. Moreover, since the Holy Spirit expressly warns us of this danger by the mouth of Paul, to proceed beyond what we are there warranted by him, is not only, I must say, unadvised zeal, but wicked and perverse obstinacy. John Calvin.

Verses 5-6. The song and the stringed instruments belonged to the Levites, and the trumpets to the priests alone. Kitto says the trumpets did not join in the concert, but were sounded during certain regulated pauses in the vocal and instrumental music. The harps and voices made the sweetness, while the trumpets and horns added the strength; melody and energy should combine in the worship of God. C.H.S.

Verse 6. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise. God's worship should be heartily loud. The far resounding trump and horn well symbolise the power which should be put forth in praise.

Before the LORD, the King. On coronation days, and when beloved monarchs ride abroad, the people shout and the trumpets sound till the walls ring again. Shall men be more enthusiastic for their earthly princes than for the divine King? Is there no loyalty left among the subjects of the blessed and only Potentate? King Jehovah is his name; and there is none like it, have we no joyful noise for him? Let but the reigning power of Jesus be felt in the soul and we shall cast aside that chill mutter, drowned by the pealing organ, which is now so commonly the substitute for earnest congregational singing.

Say, if your hearts are tuned to sing,
Is there a subject greater?
Harmony all its strains may bring,
But Jesus' name is sweeter.
Who of his love doth once partake,
He evermore rejoices;
Melody in our hearts we make,
Melody with our voices.

Verse 7. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Even its thunders will not be too grand for such a theme. Handel, in some of his sublime choruses, would have been glad of its aid to express his lofty conceptions, and assuredly the inspired psalmist did well to call in such infinite uproar. The sea is his, let it praise its Maker. Within and upon its bosom it bears a wealth of goodness, why should it be denied a place in the orchestra of nature? Its deep bass will excellently suit the mystery of the divine glory. The world, and they that dwell therein. The land should be in harmony with the ocean. Its mountains and plains, cities and villages, should prolong the voice of jubilee which welcomes the Lord of all. Nothing can be more sublime than this verse; the muses of Parnassus cannot rival the muse of Zion, the Castalian fount never sparkled like that "fount of every blessing" to which sacred bands are wont to ascribe their inspiration. Yet no song is equal to the majesty of the theme when Jehovah, the King, is to be extolled.

Verse 8. Let the floods clap their hands. The rolling rivers, the tidal estuaries, the roaring cataracts, are here summoned to pay their homage, and to clap their hands, as men do when they greet their sovereigns with acclamation. Let the hills be joyful together, or in concert with the floods. Silent as are the mighty mountains, let them forget themselves, and burst forth into a sublime uproariousness of mirth, such as the poet described when he wrote those vivid lines—

"Far along,
From peak to peak, the rattling crags among,
Leaps the live thunder! Not from one lone cloud,
But every mountain now hath found a tongue,
And Jura answers, through her misty shroud,
Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud."

Verse 9. Before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth. Stiller music such as made the stars

twinkle with their soft kind eyes suited his first coming at Bethlehem, but his second advent calls for trumpets, for he is a judge; and for all earth's acclamations, for he has put on his royal splendour. The rule of Christ is the joy of nature. All things bless his throne, yea, and the very coming of it. As the dawn sets the earth weeping for joy at the rising of the sun, till the dewdrops stand in her eyes, so should the approach of Jesus' universal reign make all creation glad. With righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity. This is the joy of it. No tyrant and no weakling is he, to oppress the good or to indulge the vain, his law is good, his action right, his government the embodiment of justice. If ever there was a thing to rejoice in upon this poor, travailing earth, it is the coming of such a deliverer, the ascension to the universal throne of such a governor. All hail, Jesus! all hail! Our soul faints with delight at the sound of thins approaching chariots, and can only cry, "Come quickly. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!" Keble's version of the last four verses is so truly beautiful that we cannot deny our readers the luxury of perusing it:

"Ring out, with horn and trumpet ring,
In shouts before the Lord the King:
Let ocean with his fulness swing
In restless unison:"

"Earth's round and all the dwellers there,
The mighty floods the burden bear,
And clap the hand: in choral air,
Join every mountain lone."

"Tell out before the Lord, that he
Is come, the Judge of earth to be,
To judge the world in equity,
Do right to realm and throne."

Psalm 99

Verse 1. The Lord reigneth. One of the most joyous utterances which ever leaped from mortal lip. The overthrow of the reign of evil and the setting up of Jehovah's kingdom of goodness, justice, and truth, is worthy to be hymned again and again, as we have it here for the third time in the psalms. Let the people tremble. Let the chosen people feel a solemn yet joyful awe, which shall thrill their whole manhood. Saints quiver with devout emotion, and sinners quiver with terror when the rule of Jehovah is fully perceived and felt. It is not a light or trifling matter, it is a truth which, above all others, should stir the depths of our nature. He sitteth between the cherubims. In grandeur of sublime glory, yet in nearness of mediatorial condescension, Jehovah revealed himself above the mercyseat, whereon stood the likeness of those flaming ones who gaze upon his glory, and for ever cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts." The Lord reigning on that throne of grace which is sprinkled with atoning blood, and veiled with the covering wings of mediatorial love, is above all other revelations wonderful, and fitted to excite emotion among all mankind, hence it is added, Let the earth be moved. Not merely "the people," but the whole earth should feel a movement of adoring awe when it is known that on the mercyseat God sits as universal monarch. The pomp of heaven surrounds him, and is symbolised by the outstretched wings of waiting cherubs; let not the earth be less moved to adoration, rather let all her tribes bow before his infinite majesty, yea, let the solid earth itself with reverent tremor acknowledge his presence.

Verse 2. The Lord is great in Zion. Of old the temple's sacred hill was the centre of the worship of the great King, and the place where his grandeur was most clearly beheld: his church is now his favoured palace, where his greatness is displayed, acknowledged, and adored. He there unveils his attributes and commands the lowliest homage; the ignorant forget him, the wicked despise him, the atheistical oppose him, but among his own chosen he is great beyond comparison. He is great in the esteem of the gracious, great in his acts of mercy, and really great in himself: great in mercy, power, wisdom, justice, and glory. And he is high above all the people; towering above their highest thoughts and loftiest conceptions. The highest are not high to him, yet, blessed be his name, the lowliest are not despised by him. In such a God we rejoice, his greatness and loftiness are exceedingly delightful in our esteem; the more he is honoured and exalted in the hearts of men, the more exultant are his people. If Israel delighted in Saul because he was head and shoulders above the people, how much more should we exult in our God and King, Who is as high above us as the heavens are above the earth.

Verse 3. Let them praise thy great and terrible name: let all the dwellers in Zion and all the nations upon the earth praise the Lord, or "acknowledge thankfully" the goodness of his divine nature, albeit that there is so much in it which must inspire their awe. Under the most terrible aspect the Lord is still to be praised. Many profess to admire the milder beams of the sun of righteousness, but burn with rebellion against its more flaming radiance: so it ought not to be: we are bound to praise a terrible, God and worship him who casts the wicked down to hell. Did not Israel praise him "who overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea, for his mercy endureth for ever." The terrible Avenger is to be praised, as well as the loving Redeemer. Against this the sympathy of man's evil heart with sin rebels; it cries out for an effeminate God in whom pity has strangled justice. The well-instructed servants of Jehovah praise him in all the aspects of his character, whether terrible or tender. Grace streaming from the mercy-seat can alone work in us this admirable frame of mind. For it is holy, or He is holy. In him is no flaw or fault, excess or deficiency, error or iniquity. He is wholly excellent, and is therefore called holy. In his words, thoughts, acts, and revelations as well as in himself, he is perfection itself. O come let us worship and bow down before him.

Verse 4. The king's strength also loveth judgment. God is the king, the mercy-seat is his throne, and the sceptre which he sways is holy like himself. His power never exerts itself tyrannically; he is a sovereign, and he is absolute in his government, but his might delights in right, his force is used for just purposes only. Men in these days are continually arranging the Lord's government, and setting up to judge whether he does right or not; but saintly men in the olden time were of another mind, they were sure that what the Lord did was just, and instead of calling him to account they humbly submitted themselves to his will, rejoicing in the firm persuasion that with his whole omnipotence God was pledged to promote righteousness, and work justice among all his creatures. Thou dost establish equity. Not a court of equity merely, but equity itself thou dost set up, and that not for a time or upon an occasion, but as an established institution, stable as thy throne. Not even for the sake of mercy does the Lord remove or injure the equity of his moral government: both in providence and in grace he is careful to conserve the immaculate purity of his justice. Most kingdoms have an establishment of some kind, and generally it is inequitable; here we have an establishment which is equity itself. The Lord our God demolishes every system of injustice, and right alone is made to stand. Thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob. Justice is not merely established, but executed in God's kingdom; the laws are carried out, the executive is as righteous as the legislative. Herein let all the oppressed, yea, and all who love that which is right, find large occasion for praise. Other nations

under their despots were the victims and the perpetrators of grievous wrong, but when the tribes were faithful to the Lord they enjoyed an upright government within their own borders, and acted with integrity towards their neighbours. That kingcraft which delights in cunning, favouritism, and brute force is as opposite to the divine Kingship as darkness to light. The palace of Jehovah is no robber's fortress nor despot's castle, built on dungeons, with stones carved by slaves, and cemented with the blood of toiling serfs. The annals of most human governments have been written in the tears of the downtrodden, and the curses of the oppressed: the chronicles of the Lord's kingdom are of another sort, truth shines in each line, goodness in every syllable, and justice in every letter. Glory be to the name of the King, whose gentle glory beams from between the cherubic wings.

Verse 5. Exalt ye the LORD our God. If no others adore him, let his own people render to him the most ardent worship. Infinite condescension makes him stoop to be called our God, and truth and faithfulness bind him to maintain that covenant relationship; and surely we, to whom by grace he so lovingly gives himself, should exalt him with all our hearts. He shines upon us from under the veiling wings of cherubim, and above the seat of mercy, therefore let us come and worship at his footstool. When he reveals himself in Christ Jesus, as our reconciled God, who allows us to approach even to his throne, it becomes us to unite earnestness and humility, joy and adoration, and, while we exalt him, prostrate ourselves in the dust before him. Do we need to be thus excited to worship? How much ought we to blush for such backwardness! It ought to be our daily delight to magnify so good and great a God. For he is holy. A second time the note rings out, and as the ark, which was the divine footstool, has just been mentioned, the voice seems to sound forth from the cherubim where the Lord sitteth, who continually do cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy. Lord God of Sabaoth!" Holiness is the harmony of all the virtues. The Lord has not one glorious attribute alone, or in excess, but all glories are in him as a whole; this is the crown of his honour and the honour of his crown. His power is not his choicest jewel, nor his sovereignty, but his holiness. In this all comprehensive moral excellence he would have his creatures take delight, and when they do so their delight is evidence that their hearts have been renewed, and they themselves have been made partakers of his holiness. The gods of the heathen were, according to their own votaries, lustful, cruel, and brutish; their only claim to reverence lay in their supposed potency over human destinies: who would not far rather adore Jehovah, whose character is unsullied purity, unswerving justice, unbending truth, unbounded love, in a word, perfect holiness?

Verse 6. Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name. Though not ordained to the typical priesthood, Moses was a true priest, even as Melchizedek had been before him. God has ever had a priesthood beside and above that of the law. The three holy men here mentioned all stood in his courts, and saw his holiness, each one after his own order. Moses saw the Lord in flaming fire revealing each perfect law, Aaron full often watched the sacred fire devour the sin-offering, and Samuel witnessed the judgment of the Lord on Eli's house, because of the error of his way. These each one stood in the gap when the wrath of God broke forth, because his holiness had been insulted; and acting as intercessors, they screened the nation from the great and terrible God, who otherwise would in a dreadful manner have executed judgment in Jacob. Let these men, or such as these, lead us in our worship, and let us approach the Lord at the mercy-seat as they did, for he is as accessible to us as to them. They made it their life's business to call upon him in prayer, and by so doing brought down innumerable blessings upon themselves and others. Does not the Lord call us also to come up into the mount with Moses, and to enter the most holy place with Aaron? Do we not hear him call us by our name as he did Samuel? And do we not answer, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth"? They called upon the Lord, and he answered them. Not in vain were

their prayers; but being a holy God he was true to his promises, and hearkened to them from off the mercy-seat. Here is reason for praise, for answers to the petitions of some are proofs of God's readiness to hear others. These three men asked large things, they pleaded for a whole nation, and they stayed great plagues and turned away fiery wrath; who would not exercise himself in adoring so great and merciful a God? If he were unholy he would be false to his word and refuse his people's cries; this, then, is recorded for our joy and for his glory, that holy men of old were not suffered to pray in vain.

Verse 7. He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar. We have had mention of the ark and the shekinah, and now of the fiery cloudy pillar, which was another visible token of the presence of God in the midst of Israel. Responses came to Moses and Aaron out of that glorious overshadowing cloud, and though Samuel saw it not, yet to him also came the mystic voice which was wont to thunder forth from that divine canopy. Men have had converse with God, let men therefore speak to God in return. He has told us things to come, let us in return confess the sins which are past; he has revealed his mind to us, let us then pour out our hearts before him. They kept his testimonies. When others turned aside they were faithful; in their hearts they laid up his word, and in their lives they obeyed it. When he spake to them they observed his will, and therefore when they spake to him he yielded to their desires. This keeping of the divine testimonies is a virtue all too rare in these our days; men run after their own views and opinions, and make light of the truth of God; hence it is that they fail in prayer, and scoffers have even dared to say that prayer avails not at all. May the good Lord bring back his people to reverence his word, and then will he also have respect unto the voice of their cry. And the ordinance that he gave them. His practical precept they observed as well as his doctrinal instruction. Ordinances are not to be trifled with, or testimonies will also be despised; and the converse is also true, a light estimate of inspired dogma is sure to end in neglect of moral virtues. To Moses, Aaron, and Samuel special and personal charges were committed, and they were all true to their trust, for they stood in awe of the Lord, their God, and worshipped him with their whole souls. They were very different men, and had each one a work to do peculiar to himself, yet because each was a man of prayer they were all preserved in their integrity, fulfilled their office, and blessed their generation. Lord, teach us like Moses to hold up our hands in prayer and conquer Amalek, like Aaron to wave the censer between the living and the dead till the plague is stayed, and like Samuel to say to a guilty people, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; "if thou wilt make us mighty with thee in prayer, we shall also be kept faithful before thee in the service which thou hast laid upon us.

Verse 8. Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God. A sweet title and a cheering fact. Our covenant God in a very special manner heard his three servants when they pleaded for the people. Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions. He forgave the sinners, but he slew their sins. Some apply this verse to Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, and remind us that each of these fell into a fault and received chastisement. Of Samuel they assert that, for having set up his sons as his successors, he was compelled to submit to the anointing of Saul as king, which was a great grief to him: this is to our mind a very doubtful statement, and leads us to abandon the interpretation altogether. We believe that the passage refers to the nation which was spared through the intercession of these three holy men, but yet was severely chastened for its transgressions. In answer to the cry of Moses the tribes lived on, but the then existing generation could not enter Canaan: Aaron's golden calf was broken, though the fire of the Lord did not consume the people; and Israel smarted under the harsh government of Saul, though at Samuel's request its murmurings against the theocratic rule of their fathers' God was not visited with pestilence or famine. So to forgive

sin as at the same time to express abhorrence of it, is the peculiar glory of God, and is best seen in the atonement of our Lord Jesus. Reader, are you a believer? Then your sin is forgiven you; but so surely as you are a child of God the rod of paternal discipline will be laid upon you if your walk be not close with God. "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities."

Verse 9. Exalt the LORD our God. A second time the delightful title of Jehovah our God is used, and it is quickly followed by a third. The Psalm is Trinitarian in its whole structure. In each of his sacred persons the Lord is the God of his people; the Father is ours, the Son is ours, and the Holy Spirit is ours: let us exalt him with all our ransomed powers. And worship at his holy hill. Where he appoints his temple let us resort. No spot of ground is now fenced about as peculiarly holy, or to be regarded as more sacred than another; yet his visible church is his chosen hill, and there would we be found, numbered with his people, and unite with them in worship. For the LORD our God is holy. Again this devout description is repeated, and made the climax of the song. Oh for hearts made pure within, so that we may rightly perceive and worthily praise the infinite perfection of the Triune Lord.

Psalm 100

Verse 1. Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. This is a repetition of Ps 98:4. The original word signifies a glad shout, such as loyal subjects give when their king appears among them. Our happy God should be worshipped by a happy people; a cheerful spirit is in keeping with his nature, his acts, and the gratitude which we should cherish for his mercies. In every land Jehovah's goodness is seen, therefore in every land should be be praised. Nearer will the world be in its proper condition till with one unanimous shout it adores the only God. O ye nations, how long will ye blindly reject him? Your golden age will never arrive till ye with all your hearts revere him.

Verse 2. Serve the LORD with gladness. "Glad homage pay with awful mirth." He is our Lord, and therefore he is to be served; he is our gracious Lord, and therefore to be served with joy. The invitation to worship here given is not a melancholy one, as though adoration were a funeral solemnity, but a cheery gladsome exhortation, as though we were bidden to a marriage feast. Come before his presence with singing. We ought in worship to realise the presence of God, and by an effort of the mind to approach him. This is an act which must to every rightly instructed heart be one of great solemnity, but at the same time it must not be performed in the servility of fear, and therefore we come before him, not with weepings and wailings, but with Psalms and hymns. Singing, as it is a joyful, and at the same time a devout, exercise, should be a constant form of approach to God. The measured, harmonious, hearty utterance of praise by a congregation of really devout persons is not merely decorous but delightful, and is a fit anticipation of the worship of heaven, where praise has absorbed prayer, and become the sole mode of adoration. How a certain society of brethren can find it in their hearts to forbid singing in public worship is a riddle which we cannot solve. We feel inclined to say with Dr. Watts

"Let those refuse to sing
Who never knew our God;
But favourites of the heavenly king
Must speak his praise abroad."

Verse 3. Know ye that the Lord, he is God. Our worship must be intelligent. We ought to know whom

we worship and why. "Man, know thyself," is a wise aphorism, yet to know our God is truer wisdom; and it is very questionable whether a man can know himself until he knows his God. Jehovah is God in the fullest, most absolute, and most exclusive sense, he is God alone; to know him in that character and prove our knowledge by obedience, trust, submission, zeal, and love is an attainment which only grace can bestow. Only those who practically recognise his Godhead are at all likely to offer acceptable praise. It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves. Shall not the creature reverence its maker? Some men live as if they made themselves; they call themselves "self-made men," and they adore their supposed creators; but Christians recognise the origin of their being and their well-being, and take no honour to themselves either for being, or for being what they are. Neither in our first or second creation dare we put so much as a finger upon the glory, for it is the sole right and property of the Almighty. To disclaim honour for ourselves is as necessary a part of true reverence as to ascribe glory to the Lord. "Non nobis, domine!" will for ever remain the true believer's confession. Of late philosophy has laboured hard to prove that all things have been developed from atoms, or have, in other words, made themselves: if this theory shall ever find believers, there will certainly remain no reason for accusing the superstitious of credulity, for the amount of credence necessary to accept this dogma of scepticism is a thousandfold greater than that which is required even by an absurd belief in winking Madonnas, and smiling Bambinos. For our part, we find it far more easy to believe that the Lord made us than that we were developed by a long chain of natural selections from floating atoms which fashioned themselves. We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. It is our honour to have been chosen from all the world besides to be his own people, and our privilege to be therefore guided by his wisdom, tended by his care, and fed by his bounty. Sheep gather around their shepherd and look up to him; in the same manner let us gather around the great Shepherd of mankind. The avowal of our relation to God is in itself praise; when we recount his goodness we are rendering to him the best adoration; our songs require none of the inventions of fictions, the bare facts are enough; the simple narration of the mercies of the Lord is more astonishing than the productions of imagination. That we are the sheep of his pasture is a plain truth, and at the same time the very essence of poetry.

Verse 4. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving. To the occurrence of the word thanksgiving in this place the Psalm probably owes its title. In all our public service the rendering of thanks must abound; it is like the incense of the temple, which filled the whole house with smoke. Expiatory sacrifices are ended, but those of gratitude will never be out of date. So long as we are receivers of mercy we must be givers of thanks. Mercy permits us to enter his gates; let us praise that mercy. What better subject for our thoughts in God's own house than the Lord of the house. And into his courts with praise. Into whatever court of the Lord you may enter, let your admission be the subject of praise: thanks be to God, the innermost court is now open to believers, and we enter into that which is within the veil; it is incumbent upon us that we acknowledge the high privilege by our songs. Be thankful unto him. Let the praise be in your heart as well as on your tongue, and let it all be for him to whom it all belongs. And bless his name. He blessed you, bless him in return; bless his name, his character, his person. Whatever he does, be sure that you bless him for it; bless him when he takes away as well as when he gives; bless him as long as you live, under all circumstances; bless him in all his attributes, from whatever point of view you consider him.

Verse 5. For the Lord is good. This sums up his character and contains a mass of reasons for praise. He is good, gracious, kind, bountiful, loving; yea, God is love. He who does not praise the good is not good himself. The kind of praise inculcated in the Psalm, viz., that of joy and gladness, is most fitly urged upon us by an argument from the goodness of God. His mercy is everlasting. God is not mere

justice, stern and cold; he has bowels of compassion, and wills not the sinner's death. Towards his own people mercy is still more conspicuously displayed; it has been theirs from all eternity, and shall be theirs world without end. Everlasting mercy is a glorious theme for sacred song. And his truth endureth to all generations. No fickle being is he, promising and forgetting. He has entered into covenant with his people, and he will never revoke it, nor alter the thing that has gone out of his lips. As our fathers found him faithful, so will our sons, and their seed for ever. A changeable God would be a terror to the righteous, they would have no sure anchorage, and amid a changing world they would be driven to and fro in perpetual fear of shipwreck. It were well if the truth of divine faithfulness were more fully remembered by some theologians; it would overturn their belief in the final fall of believers, and teach them a more consolatory system. Our heart leaps for joy as we bow before One who has never broken his word or changed his purpose.

"As well might he his being quit
As break his promise or forget."

Resting on his sure word, we feel that joy which is here commanded, and in the strength of it we come into his presence even now, and speak good of his name.

Psalm 101

Verse 1. I will sing of mercy and judgment. He would extol both the love and the severity, the sweets and the bitters, which the Lord had mingled in his experience; he would admire the justice and the goodness of the Lord. Such a song would fitly lead up to godly resolutions as to his own conduct, for that which we admire in our superiors we naturally endeavour to imitate. Mercy and judgment would temper the administration of David, because he had adoringly perceived them in the dispensations of his God. Everything in God's dealings with us may fittingly become the theme of song, and we have not viewed it aright until we feel we can sing about it. We ought as much to bless the Lord for the judgment with which he chastens our sin, as for the mercy with which he forgives it; there is as much love in the blows of his hand as in the kisses of his mouth. Upon a retrospect of their lives instructed saints scarcely know which to be most grateful for—the comforts which have, or the afflictions which have purged them. Unto thee, O LORD, will I sing. Jehovah shall have all our praise. The secondary agents of either the mercy or the judgment must hold a very subordinate place in our memory, and the Lord alone must be hymned by our heart. Our soul's sole worship must be the lauding of the Lord. The psalmist forsakes the minor key, which was soon to rule him in the one hundred and second psalm, and resolves that, come what may, he will sing, and sing to the Lord too, whatever others might do.

Verse 2. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. To be holy is to be wise; a perfect way is a wise way. David's resolve was excellent, but his practice did not fully tally with it. Alas! he was not always wise or perfect, but it was well that it was in his heart. A king had need be both sage and pure, and, if he be not so in intent, when he comes to the throne, his after conduct will be a sad example to his people. He who does not even resolve to do well is likely to do very ill. Householders, employers, and especially ministers, should pray for both wisdom and holiness, for they will need them both. O when wilt thou come unto me?—an ejaculation, but not an interruption. He feels the need not merely of divine help, but also of the divine presence, that so he may be instructed, and sanctified, and made fit for the discharge of his high vocation. David longed for a more special and effectual visitation from the Lord before he began his reign. If God be with us we shall neither err in judgment nor transgress

in character; his presence brings us both wisdom and holiness; away from God we are away from safety. Good men are so sensible of infirmity that they cry for help from God, so full of prayer that they cry at all seasons, so intense in their desires that they cry with sighs and groanings which cannot be uttered, saying, "O when wilt thou come unto me?" I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. Piety must begin at home. Our first duties are those within our own abode. We must have a perfect heart at home, or we cannot keep a perfect way abroad. Notice that these words are a part of a song, and that there is no music like the harmony of a gracious life, no psalm so sweet as the daily practice of holiness. Reader, how fares it with your family? Do you sing in the choir and sin in the chamber Are you a saint abroad and a devil at home? For shame! What we are at home, that we are indeed. He cannot be a good king whose palace is the haunt of vice, nor he a true saint whose habitation is a scene of strife, nor he a faithful minister whose household dreads his appearance at the fireside.

Verse 3. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes. I will neither delight in it, aim at it or endure it. If I have wickedness brought before me by others I will turn away from it, I will not gaze upon it with pleasure. The psalmist is very sweeping in his resolve, he declines the least, the most reputable, the most customary form of evil—no wicked thing; not only shall it not dwell in his heart, but not even before his eyes, for what fascinates the eye is very apt to gain admission into the heart, even as Eve's apple first pleased her sight and then prevailed over her mind and hand. I hate the work of them that turn aside. He was warmly against it; he did not view it with indifference, but with utter scorn and abhorrence. Hatred of sin is a good sentinel for the door of virtue. There are persons in courts who walk in a very crooked way, leaving the high road of integrity; and these, by short cuts, and twists, and turns, are often supposed to accomplish work for their masters which simple honest hearts are not competent to undertake; but David would not employ such, he would pay no secret service money, he loathed the practices of men who deviate from righteousness. He was of the same mind as the dying statesman who said, "Corruption wins not more than honesty." It is greatly to be deplored that in after years he did not keep himself clear in this matter in every case, though, in the main he did; but what would he have been if he had not commenced with this resolve, but had followed the usual crooked Policy of Oriental princes? How much do we all need divine keeping! We are no more perfect than David, nay, we fall far short of him in many things; and, like him, we shall find need to write a psalm of penitence very soon after our psalm of good resolution. It shall not cleave to me. I will disown their ways, I will not imitate their policy: like dirt it may fall upon me, but I will wash it off, and never rest till I am rid of it. Sin, like pitch, is very apt to stick. In the course of our family history crooked things will turn up, for we are all imperfect, and some of those around us are far from being what they should be; it must, therefore, be one great object of our care to disentangle ourselves, to keep clear of transgression, and of all that comes of it: this cannot be done unless the Lord both comes to us, and abides with us evermore.

Verse 4. A froward heart shall depart from me. He refers both to himself and to those round about him; he would neither be crooked in heart himself, nor employ persons of evil character in his house; if he found such in his court he would chase them away. He who begins with his own heart begins at the fountain head, and is not likely to tolerate evil companions. We cannot turn out of our family all whose hearts are evil, but we can keep them out of our confidence, and let them see that we do not approve of their ways. I will not know a wicked person. He shall not be my intimate, my bosom friend. I must know him as a man or I could not discern his character, but if I know him to be wicked, I will not know him any further, and with his evil I will have no communion. "To know" in Scripture means more than mere perception, it includes fellowship, and in that sense it is here used. Princes must disown those who disown righteousness; if they know the wicked they will soon be known as wicked

themselves.

Verse 5. Whose privily slandereth his neighbor, him will I cut off. He had known so bitterly the miseries caused by slanderers that he intended to deal severely with such vipers when he came into power, not to revenge his own ills, but to prevent others from suffering as he had done. To give one's neighbour a stab in the dark is one of the most atrocious of crimes, and cannot be too heartily reprobated, yet such as are guilty of it often find patronage in high places, and are considered to be men of penetration, trusty ones who have a keen eye, and take care to keep their lords well posted up. King David would lop the goodly tree of his state of all such superfluous boughs, Him that hath an high look and a proud heart him will not I suffer. Proud, domineering, supercilious gentlemen, who look down upon the poor as though they were so many worms crawling in the earth beneath their feet, the psalmist could not bear. The sight of them made him suffer, and therefore he would not suffer them. Great men often affect aristocratic airs and haughty manners, David therefore resolved that none should be great in his palace but those who had more grace and more sense than to indulge in such abominable vanity, Proud men are generally hard, and therefore very unfit for office; persons of high looks provoke enmity and discontent, and the fewer of such eople about a court the better for the stability of a throne. If all slanderers were now cut off, and all the proud banished, it is to be feared that the next census would declare a very sensible diminution of the population.

Verse 6. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me. He would seek them out, engage their services, take care of them, and promote them to honour: this is a noble occupation for a king, and one which will repay him infinitely better than listening to the soft nothings of flatterers. It would be greatly for the profit of us all if we chose our servants rather by their piety than by their cleverness; he who gets a faithful servant gets a treasure, and he ought to do anything sooner than part with him. Those who are not faithful to God will not be likely to be faithful to men; if we are faithful ourselves, we shall not care to have those about us who cannot speak the truth or fulfill their promises; we shall not be satisfied until all the members of our family are upright in character. He that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. What I wish myself to be, that I desire my servant to be. Employers are to a great degree responsible for their servants, and it is customary to blame a master if he retains in his service persons of notorious character; therefore, lest we become partakers of other men's sins, we shall do well to decline the services of bad characters. A good master does well to choose a good servant; he may take a prodigal into his house for the sinner's good, but if he consults his own he will look in another quarter. Wicked nurses have great influence for evil over the minds of little children, and ungodly servants often injure the morals of the older members of the family, and therefore great care should be exercised that godly servants should be employed as far as possible. Even irreligious men have the sense to perceive the value of Christian servants, and surely their own Christian brethren ought not to have a lower appreciation of them.

Verse 7. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house. He had power to choose his courtiers, and he meant to exercise it. Deceit among most orientals is reckoned to be a virtue, and is only censured when it is not sufficiently cunning, and therefore comes to be found out; it was therefore all the more remarkable that David should have so determinedly set his face against it. He could not tell what a deceitful man might be doing, what plots he might be contriving, what mischief he might be brewing, and therefore he resolved that he would at any rate keep him out of his house, that his palace might not become a den of villainy. Cheats in the market are bad enough, but deceivers at our own table we cannot bear. He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight. He would not have a liar within sight or hearing; lie loathed the mention of him. Grace makes men truthful, and

creates in them an utter horror of everything approaching to falsehood. If David would not have a liar in his sight, much less will the Lord; neither he that loves nor he who makes a lie shall be admitted into heaven. Liars are obnoxious enough on earth; the saints shall not be worried with them in another world.

Verse 8. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land. At the very outset of his government he would promptly deal out justice to the worthless, he would leave them no rest, but make them leave their wickedness or feel the lash of the law. The righteous magistrate "beareth not the sword in vain." To favour sin is to discourage virtue; undue leniency to the bad is unkindness to the good. When our Lord comes in judgment, this verse will be fulfilled on a large scale; till then he sinks the judge in the Saviour, and bids men leave their sins and find pardon. Under the gospel we also are bidden to suffer long, and to be kind, even to the unthankful and the evil; but the office of the magistrate is of another kind, and he must have a sterner eye to justice than would be proper in private persons. Is he not to be a terror to evil doers? That I may cut off all the wicked doers from the city of the Lord. Jerusalem was to be a holy city, and the psalmist meant to be doubly careful in purging it from ungodly men. Judgment must begin at the house of God. Jesus reserves his scourge of small cords for sinners inside the temple. How pure ought the church to be, and how diligently should all those who hold office therein labour to keep out and chase out men of unclean lives. Honourable offices involve serious responsibilities; to trifle with them will bring our own souls into guilt, and injure beyond calculation the souls of others. Lord, come to us, that we, in our several positions in life, may walk before thee with perfect hearts.

Verse 8. That I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the LORD. As the kingdom of David was only a faint image of the kingdom of Christ, we ought to set Christ before our view; who, although he may bear with many hypocrites, yet as he will be the judge of the world, will at length call them all to account, and separate the sheep from the goats. And if it seems to us that he tarries too long, we should think of that morning which will suddenly dawn, that all filthiness being purged away, true purity may shine forth.—John Calvin.

Verse 8. Early. From some incidental notices of Scripture (2Sa 15:2 Ps 101:8 Je 21:12), it has been inferred that judges ordinarily held their sessions in the morning. In a climate like that of Palestine, such a custom would be natural and convenient. It is doubtful, however, whether this passage expresses anything more than the promptness and zeal which a righteous judge exercises in the discharge of his duty.—E.P. Barrows, in "Biblical Geography and Antiquities".

Verse 8. The holy vow "to destroy all the wicked of the lands": and to "cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord, "must begin at our own hearts as his sanctuary, the temple of the Holy Ghost.—Alfred Edersheim.

Psalm 102

Verse 1. Hear my prayer, O LORD. Or O JEHOVAH. Sincere supplicants are not content with praying for praying's sake, they desire really to reach the ear and heart of the great God. It is a great relief in time of distress to acquaint others with our trouble, we are eased by their hearing our lamentation, but it is the sweetest solace of all to have God himself as a sympathizing listener to our plaint. That he is such is no dream or fiction, but an assured fact. It would be the direst of all our woes if we could be indisputably convinced that with God there is neither hearing nor answering; he who

could argue us into so dreary a belief would do us no better service than if he had read us our death-warrants. Better die than be denied the mercy-seat. As well be atheists at once as believe in an unhearing, unfeeling God. And let my cry come unto thee. When sorrow rises to such a height that words become too weak a medium of expression, and prayer is intensified into a cry, then the heart is even more urgent to have audience with the Lord. If our cries do not enter within the veil, and reach to the living God, we may as well cease from prayer at once, for it is idle to cry to the winds; but, blessed be God, the philosophy which suggests such a hideous idea is disproved by the facts of every day experience, since thousands of the saints can declare, "Verily, God hath heard us."

Verse 2. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble. Do not seem as if thou didst not see me, or wouldst not own me. Smile now at any rate. Reserve thy frowns for other times when I can bear them better, if, indeed, I can ever bear them; but now in my heavy distress, favour me with looks of compassion. Incline thine ear unto me. Bow thy greatness to my weakness. If because of sin thy face is turned away, at least let me have a side view of thee, lend me thine ear if I may not see thine eye. Turn thyself to me again if, my sin has turned thee away, give to thine ear an inclination to my prayers. In the day when I call answer me speedily. Because the case is urgent, and my soul little able to wait. We may ask to have answers to prayer as soon as possible, but we may not complain of the Lord if he should think it more wise to delay. We have permission to request and to use importunity, but no right to dictate or to be petulant. If it be important that the deliverance should arrive at once, we are quite right in making an early time a point of our entreaty, for God is as willing to grant us a favour now as to-morrow, and he is not slack concerning his promise. It is a proverb concerning favours from human hands, that "he gives twice who gives quickly," because a gift is enhanced in value by arriving in a time of urgent necessity; and we may be sure that our heavenly Patron will grant us the best gifts in the best manner, granting us grace to help in time of need. When answers come upon the heels of our prayers they are all the more striking, more consoling, and more encouraging. In these two verses the psalmist has gathered up a variety of expressions all to the same effect; in them all he entreats an audience and answer of the Lord, and the whole may be regarded as a sort of preface to the prayer which follows.

Verse 3. For my days are consumed like smoke. My grief has made life unsubstantial to me, I seem to be but a puff of vapour which has nothing in it, and is soon dissipated. The metaphor is very admirably chosen, for, to the unhappy, life seems not merely to be frail, but to be surrounded by so much that is darkening, defiling, blinding, and depressing, that, sitting down in despair, they compare themselves to men wandering in a dense fog, and themselves so dried up thereby that they are little better than pillars of smoke. When our days have neither light of joy nor fire of energy in them, but become as a smoking flax which dies out ignobly in darkness, then have we cause enough to appeal to the Lord that he would not utterly quench us. And my bones are burned as an hearth. He became as dry as the hearth on which a wood fire has burned out, or as spent ashes in which scarcely a trace of fire can be found. His soul was ready to be blown away as smoke, and his body seemed likely to remain as the bare hearth when the last comforting ember is quenched. How often has our piety appeared to us to be in this condition! We have had to question its reality, and fear that it never was anything more than a smoke; we have had the most convincing evidence of its weakness, for we could not derive even the smallest comfort from it, any more than a chilled traveller can derive from the cold hearth on which a fire had burned long ago. Soul-trouble experienced in our own heart will help us to interpret the language here employed; and church-troubles may help us also, if unhappily we have been called to endure them. The psalmist was moved to grief by a view of national calamities, and these so wrought upon his patriotic soul that he was wasted with anxiety, his spirits

were dried up, and his very life was ready to expire. There is hope for any country which owns such a son; no nation can die while true hearts are ready to die for it.

Verse 4. My heart is smitten, like a plant parched by the fierce heat of a tropical sun, and withered like grass, which dries up when once the scythe has laid it low. The psalmist's heart was as a wilted, withered flower, a burned up mass of what once was verdure. His energy, beauty, freshness, and joy, were utterly gone, through the wasting influence of his anguish. So that I forget to eat my bread, or "because I forget to eat my bread." Grief often destroys the appetite, and the neglect of food tends further to injure the constitution and create a yet deeper sinking of spirit. As the smitten flower no longer drinks in the dew, or draws up nutriment from the soil, so a heart parched with intense grief often refuses consolation for itself and nourishment for the bodily frame, and descends at a doubly rapid rate into weakness, despondency, and dismay. The case here described is by no means rare, we have frequently met with individuals so disordered by sorrow that their memory has failed them even upon such pressing matters as their meals, and we must confess that we have passed through the same condition ourselves. One sharp pang has filled the soul, monopolized the mind, and driven everything else into the background, so that such common matters as eating and drinking have been utterly despised, and the appointed hours of refreshment have gone by unheeded, leaving no manifest faintness of body, but an increased weariness of heart.

Verse 5. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. He became emaciated with sorrow. He had groaned himself down to a living skeleton, and so in his bodily appearance was the more like the smoke-dried, withered, burnt-up things to which he had previously compared himself. It will be a very long time before the distresses of the church of God make some Christians shrivel into anatomies, but this good man was so moved with sympathy for Zion's ills that he was wasted down to skin and bone.

Verse 6. I am like a pelican of the wilderness, a mournful and even hideous object, the very image of desolation. I am like an owl of the desert; loving solitude, moping among ruins, hooting discordantly. The Psalmist likens himself to two birds which were commonly used as emblems of gloom and wretchedness; on other occasions he had been as the eagle, but the griefs of his people had pulled him down, the brightness was gone from his eye, and the beauty from his person; he seemed to himself to be as a melancholy bird sitting among the fallen palaces and prostrate temples of his native land. Should not we also lament when the ways of Zion mourn and her strength languishes? Were there more of this holy sorrow we should soon see the Lord returning to build up his church. It is ill for men to be playing the peacock with worldly pride when the ills of the times should make them as mournful as the pelican; and it is a terrible thing to see men flocking like vultures to devour the prey of a decaying church, when they ought rather to be lamenting among her ruins like the owl.

Verse 7. I watch, and am like a sparrow alone upon the house top: I keep a solitary vigil as the lone sentry of my nation; my fellows are too selfish, too careless to care for the beloved land, and so like a bird which sits alone on the housetop, I keep up a sad watch over my country. The Psalmist compared himself to a bird,—a bird when it has lost its mate or its young, or is for some other reason made to mope alone in a solitary place. Probably he did not refer to the cheerful sparrow of our own land, but if he did, the illustration would not be out of place, for the sparrow is happy in company, and if it were alone, the sole one of its species in the neighbourhood, there can be little doubt that it would become very miserable, and sit and pine away. He who has felt himself to be so weak and inconsiderable as to have no more power over his times than a sparrow over a city, has also, when

bowed down with despondency concerning the evils of the age, sat himself down in utter wretchedness to lament the ills which he could not heal. Christians of an earnest, watchful kind often find themselves among those who have no sympathy with them; even in the church they look in vain for kindred spirits; then do they persevere in their prayers and labours, but feel themselves to be as lonely as the poor bird which looks from the ridge of the roof, and meets with no friendly greeting from any of its kind.

Verse 8. Mine enemies reproach me all the day. Their rage was unrelenting and unceasing, and vented itself in taunts and insults, the Psalmist's patriotism and his griefs were both made the subjects of their sport. Pointing to the sad estate of his people they would ask him, "Where is your God?" and exult over him because their false gods were in the ascendant. Reproach cuts like a razor, and when it is continued from hour to hour, and repeated all the day and every day, it makes life itself undesirable. And they that are mad against me are sworn against me. They were so furious that they bound themselves by oath to destroy him, and used his name as their usual execration, a word to curse by, the synonym of abhorrence and contempt. What with inward sorrows and outward persecutions he was in as ill a plight as may well be conceived.

Verse 9. For I have eaten ashes like bread. He had so frequently cast ashes upon his head in token of mourning, that they had mixed with his ordinary food, and grated between his teeth when he ate his daily bread. One while he forgot to eat, and then the fit changed, and he ate with such a hunger that even ashes were devoured. Grief has strange moods and tenses. And mingled my drink with weeping. His drink became as nauseous as his meat, for copious showers of tears had made it brackish. This is a telling description of all-saturating, all-embittering sadness,—and this was the portion of one of the best of men, and that for no fault of his own, but because of his love to the Lord's people. If we, too, are called to mourn, let us not be amazed by the fiery trial as though some strange thing had happened unto us. Both in meat and drink we have sinned; it is not therefore wonderful if in both we are made to mourn.

Verse 10. Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up and cast me down. A sense of the divine wrath which had been manifested in the overthrow of the chosen nation and their sad captivity led the Psalmist into the greatest distress. He felt like a sere leaf caught up by a hurricane and carried right away, or the spray of the sea which is dashed upwards that it may be scattered and dissolved. Our translation gives the idea of a vessel uplifted in order that it may be dashed to the earth with all the greater violence and the more completely broken in pieces; or to change the figure, it reminds us of a wrestler whom his opponent catches up that he may give him a more desperate fall. The first interpretation which we have given is, however, more fully in accordance with the original, and sets forth the utter helplessness which the writer felt, and the sense of overpowering terror which bore him along in a rush of tumultuous grief which he could not withstand.

Verse 11. My days are like a shadow that declineth. His days were but a shadow at best, but now they seem to be like a shadow which was passing away. A shadow is unsubstantial enough, how feeble a thing must a declining shadow be? No expression could more forcibly set forth his extreme feebleness. And I am withered like grass. He was like grass, blasted by a parching wind, or cut down with a scythe, and then left to be dried up by the burning heat of the sun. There are times when through depression of spirit a man feels as if all life were gone from him, and existence had become merely a breathing death. Heart-break has a marvellously withering influence over our entire system;

our flesh at its best is but as grass, and when it is wounded with sharp sorrows, its beauty fades, and it becomes a shrivelled, dried, uncomely thing.

Verse 12. Now the writer's mind is turned away from his personal and relative troubles to the true source of all consolation, namely, the Lord himself, and his gracious purposes towards his own people. But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever. I perish, but thou wilt not, my nation has become almost extinct, but thou art altogether unchanged. The original has the word "sit, "—"thou, Jehovah, to eternity shalt sit:" that is to say, thou reignest on, thy throne is still secure even when thy chosen city lies in ruins, and thy peculiar people are carried into captivity. The sovereignty of God in all things is an unfailing ground for consolation; he rules and reigns whatever happens, and therefore all is well.

Firm as his throne his promise stands,
And he can well secure,
What I have committed to his hands.
Till the decisive hour.

And thy remembrance unto all generations. Men will forget me, but as for thee, O God, the constant tokens of thy presence will keep the race of man in mind of thee from age to age. What God is now he always will be, that which our forefathers told us of the Lord we find to be true at this present time, and what our experience enables us to record will be confirmed by our children and their children's children. All things else are vanishing like smoke, and withering like grass, but over all the one eternal, immutable light shines on, and will shine on when all these shadows have declined into nothingness.

Verse 13. Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion. He firmly believed and boldly prophesied that apparent inaction on God's part would turn to effective working. Others might remain sluggish in the matter, but the Lord would most surely bestir himself. Zion had been chosen of old, highly favoured, gloriously inhabited, and wondrously preserved, and therefore by the memory of her past mercies it was certain that mercy would again be showed to her. God will not always leave his church in a low condition; he may for a while hide himself from her in chastisement, to make her see her nakedness and poverty apart from himself, but in love he must return to her, and stand up in her defence, to work her welfare. For the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. Divine decree has appointed a season for blessing the church, and when that period has arrived, blessed she shall be. There was an appointed time for the Jews in Babylon, and when the weeks were fulfilled, no bolts nor bars could longer imprison the ransomed of the Lord. When the time came for the walls to rise stone by stone, no Tobiah or Sanballat could stay the work, for the Lord himself had arisen, and who can restrain the hand of the Almighty? When God's own time is come, neither Rome, nor the devil, nor persecutors, nor atheists, can prevent the kingdom of Christ from extending its bounds. It is God's work to do it;—he must "arise"; he will do it, but he has his own appointed season; and meanwhile we must, with holy anxiety and believing expectation, wait upon him.

Verse 14. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. They delight in her so greatly that even her rubbish is dear to them. It was a good omen for Jerusalem when the captives began to feel a home-sickness, and began to sigh after her. We may expect the modern Jews to be restored to their own land when the love of their country begins to sway them, and casts out the love of gain. To the church of God no token can be more full of hope than to see the members thereof deeply interested in all that concerns her; no prosperity is likely to rest upon a church when

carelessness about ordinances, enterprises, and services is manifest; but when even the least and lowest matter connected with the Lord's work is carefully attended to, we may be sure that the set time to favour Zion is come. The poorest church member, the most grievous backslider, the most ignorant convert, should be precious in our sight, because forming a part, although possibly a very feeble part, of the new Jerusalem. If we do not care about the prosperity of the church to which we belong, need we wonder if the blessing of the Lord is withheld?

Verse 15. So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD. Mercy within the church is soon perceived by those without. When a candle is lit in the house, it shines through the window. When Zion rejoices in her God, the heathen bend to reverence his name, for they hear of the wonders of his power, and are impressed thereby. And all the kings of the earth thy glory. The restoration of Jerusalem was a marvel among the princes who heard of it, and its ultimate resurrection in days yet to come will be one of the prodigies of history. A church quickened by divine power is so striking an object in current history that it cannot escape notice, rulers cannot ignore it, it affects the Legislature, and forces from the great ones of the earth a recognition of the divine working. Oh that we might see in our days such a revival of religion that our senators and princes might be compelled to pay homage to the Lord, and own his glorious grace. This cannot be till the saints are better edified, and more fully builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Internal prosperity is the true source of the church's external influence.

Verse 16. When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. As kings display their skill and power and wealth in the erection of their capitals, so would the Lord reveal the splendour of his attributes in the restoration of Zion, and so will he now glorify himself in the edification of his church. Never is the Lord more honourable in the eyes of his saints than when he prospers the church. To add converts to her, to train these for holy service, to instruct, illuminate, and sanctify the brotherhood, to bind all together in the bonds of Christian love, and to fill the whole body with the energy of the Holy Spirit—this is to build up Zion. Other builders do but puff her up, and their wood, hay, and stubble come to an end almost as rapidly as it was heaped together; but what the Lord builds is surely and well done, and redounds to his glory. Truly, when we see the church in a low state, and mark the folly, helplessness, and indifference of those who profess to be her builders; and, on the other hand, the energy, craft, and influence of those opposed to her, we are fully prepared to own that it will be a glorious work of omnipotent grace should she ever rise to her pristine grandeur and purity.

Verse 17. He will regard the prayer of the destitute. Only the poorest of the people were left to sigh and cry among the ruins of the beloved city; as for the rest, they were strangers in a strange land, and far away from the holy place, yet the prayers of the captives and the forlorn offscourings of the land would be heard of the Lord, who does not hear men because of the amount of money they possess, or the breadth of the acres which they call their own, but in mercy listens most readily to the cry of the greatest need. And not despise their prayer. When great kings are building their palaces it is not reasonable to expect them to turn aside and listen to every beggar who pleads with them, yet when the Lord builds up Zion, and appears in his robes of glory, he makes a point of listening to every petition of the poor and needy. He will not treat their pleas with contempt; he will incline his ear to hear, his heart to consider, and his hand to help. What comfort is here for those who account themselves to be utterly destitute; their abject want is here met with a most condescending promise. It is worth while to be destitute to be thus assured of the divine regard.

Verse 18. This shall be written for the generation to come. A note shall be made of it, for there will be destitute ones in future generations,—“the poor shall never cease out of the land, ”—and it will make glad their eyes to read the story of the Lord's mercy to the needy in former times. Registers of divine kindness ought to be made and preserved; we write down in history the calamities of nations,—wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are recorded; how much rather than should we set up memorials of the Lord's lovingkindness! Those who have in their own souls endured spiritual destitution, and have been delivered out of it, cannot forget it; they are bound to tell others of it, and especially to instruct their children in the goodness of the Lord. And the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD. The Psalmist here intends to say that the rebuilding of Jerusalem would be a fact in history for which the Lord would be praised from age to age. Revivals of religion not only cause great joy to those who are immediately concerned in them, but they give encouragement and delight to the people of God long after, and are indeed perpetual incentives to adoration throughout the church of God. This verse teaches us that we ought to have an eye to posterity, and especially should we endeavour to perpetuate the memory of God's love to his church and to his poor people, so that young people as they grow up may know that the Lord God of their fathers is good and full of compassion. Sad as the Psalmist was when he wrote the dreary portions of this complaint, he was not so absorbed in his own sorrow, or so distracted by the national calamity, as to forget the claims of coming generations; this, indeed, is a clear proof that he was not without hope for his people, for he who is making arrangements for the good of a future generation has not yet despaired of his nation. The praise of God should be the great object of all that we do, and to secure him a revenue of glory both from the present and the future is the noblest aim of intelligent beings.

Verses 19-20. For he hath looked down from the heights of his sanctuary, or “leaned from the high place of his holiness,” from heaven did the LORD behold the earth, looking out like a watcher from his tower. What was the object of this leaning from the battlements of heaven? Why this intent gaze upon the race of men? The answer is full of astounding mercy; the Lord does not look upon mankind to note their grandees, and observe the doings of their nobles, but to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death. Now the groans of those in prison so far from being musical are very horrible to hear, yet God bends to hear them: those who are bound for death are usually ill company, yet Jehovah deigns to stoop from his greatness to relieve their extreme distress and break their chains. This he does by providential rescues, by restoring health to the dying, and by finding food for the famishing; and spiritually this deed of grace is accomplished by sovereign grace, which delivers us by pardon from the sentence of sin, and by the sweetness of the promise from the deadly despair which a sense of sin had created within us. Well may those of us praise the Lord who were once the children of death, but are now brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The Jews in captivity were in Haman's time appointed to death, but their God found a way of escape for them, and they joyfully kept the feast of Purim in memorial thereof; let fill souls that have been set free from the crafty malice of the old dragon with even greater gratitude magnify the Lord of infinite compassion.

Verse 21. To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem. Great mercy displayed to those greatly in need of it, is the plainest method of revealing the attributes of the Most High. Actions speak more loudly than words; deeds of grace are a revelation even more impressive than the most tender promises. Jerusalem restored, the church re-edified, desponding souls encouraged, and all other manifestations of Jehovah's power to bless, are so many manifestoes and proclamations put up upon the walls of Zion to publish the character and glory of the great God. Every day's experience should be to us a new gazette of love, a court circular from heaven, a daily despatch

from the headquarters of grace. We are bound to inform our fellow Christians of all this, making them helpers in our praise, as they hear of the goodness which we have experienced. While God's mercies speak so eloquently, we ought not to be dumb. To communicate to others what God has done for us personally and for the church at large is so evidently our duty, that we ought not to need urging to fulfil it. God has ever an eye to the glory of his grace in all that he does, and we ought not wilfully to defraud him of the revenue of his praise.

Verse 22. When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord. The great work of restoring ruined Zion is to be spoken of in those golden ages when the heathen nations shall be converted unto God; even those glorious times will not be able to despise that grand event, which, like the passage of Israel through the Red Sea, will never be eclipsed and never cease to awaken the enthusiasm of the chosen people. Happy will the day be when all nations shall unite in the sole worship of Jehovah, then shall the histories of the olden times be read with adoring wonder, and the hand of the Lord shall be seen as having ever rested upon the sacramental host of his elect: then shall shouts of exulting praise ascend to heaven in honour of him who loosed the captives, delivered the condemned, raised up the desolations of ages, and made out of stones and rubbish a temple for his worship.

Verse 23. He weakened my strength in the way. Here the Psalmist comes down again to the mournful string, and pours forth his personal complaint. His sorrow had cast down his spirit, and even caused weakness in his bodily frame, so that he was like a pilgrim who limped along the road, and was ready to lie down and die. He shortened my days. Though he had bright hopes for Jerusalem, he feared that he should have departed this life long before those visions had become realities; he felt that he was pining away and would be a shortlived man. Perhaps this may be our lot, and it will materially help us to be content with it, if we are persuaded that the grandest of all interests is safe, and the good old cause secure in the hands of the Lord.

Verse 24. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days. He betook himself to prayer. What better remedy is there for heart-sickness and depression? We may lawfully ask for recovery from sickness and may hope to be heard. Good men should not dread death, but they are not forbidden to love life: for many reasons the man who has the best hope of heaven may nevertheless think it desirable to continue here a little longer, for the sake of his family, his work, the church of God, and even the glory of God itself. Some read the passage, "Take me not up, "let me not ascend like disappearing smoke, do not whirl me away like Elijah in a chariot of fire, for as yet I have only seen half my days, and that a sorrowful half; give me to live till the blustering morning shall have softened into a bright afternoon of happier existence. Thy years are throughout all generations. Thou livest, Lord; let me live also. A fulness of existence is with thee, let me partake therein. Note the contrast between himself pining and ready to expire, and his God living on in the fulness of strength for ever and ever; this contrast is full of consolatory power to the man whose heart is stayed upon the Lord. Blessed be his name, he faileth not, and, therefore, our hope shall not fail us, neither will we despair for ourselves or for his church.

Verse 25. Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth. Creation is no new work with God, and therefore to "create Jerusalem a praise in the earth" will not be difficult to him. Long ere the holy city was laid in ruins the Lord made a world out of nothing, and it will be no labour to him to raise the walls from their heaps and replace the stones in their courses. We can neither continue our own existence nor give being to others; but the Lord not only is, but he is the Maker of all things that are; hence,

when our affairs are at the very lowest ebb we are not at all despairing, because the Almighty and Eternal Lord can yet restore us. And the heavens are the work of thine hands. Thou canst therefore not merely lay the foundations of Zion, but complete its roof, even as thou hast arched in the world with its ceiling of blue; the loftiest stories of thine earthly palace shall be piled on high without difficulty when thou dost undertake the building thereof, since thou art architect of the stars, and the spheres in which they move. When a great labour is to be performed it is eminently reassuring to contemplate the power of him who has undertaken to accomplish it; and when our own strength is exhausted it is supremely cheering to see the unfailing energy which is still engaged on our behalf.

Verse 26. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure. The power which made them shall dissolve them, even as the city of thy love was destroyed at thy command; yet neither the ruined city nor the ruined earth can make a change in thee, reverse thy purpose, or diminish thy glory. Thou standest when all things fall. Yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. Time impairs all things, the fashion becomes obsolete and passes away. The visible creation, which is like the garment of the invisible God, is waxing old and wearing out, and our great King is not so poor that he must always wear the same robes; he will ere long fold up the worlds and put them aside as worn out vestures, and he will array himself in new attire, making a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. How readily will all this be done. "Thou shalt change them and they shall be changed; "as in the creation so in the restoration, omnipotence shall work its way without hindrance.

Verse 27. But thou art the same, or, "thou art he." As a man remains the same when he has changed his clothing, so is the Lord evermore the unchanging One, though his works in creation may be changed, and the operations of his providence may vary. When heaven and earth shall flee away from the dread presence of the great Judge, he will be unaltered by the terrible confusion, and the world in conflagration will effect no change in him; even so, the Psalmist remembered that when Israel was vanquished, her capital destroyed, and her temple levelled with the ground, her God remained the same self-existent, all-sufficient being, and would restore his people, even as he will restore the heavens and the earth, bestowing at the same time a new glory never known before. The doctrine of the immutability of God should be more considered than it is, for the neglect of it tinges the theology of many religious teachers, and makes them utter many things of which they would have seen the absurdity long ago if they had remembered the divine declaration, "I am God, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." And thy years shall have no end. God lives on, no decay can happen to him, or destruction overtake him. What a joy is this! We may lose our dearest earthly friends, but not our heavenly Friend. Men's days are often suddenly cut short, and at the longest they are but few, but the years of the right hand of the Most High cannot be counted, for they have neither first nor last, beginning nor end. O my soul, rejoice thou in the Lord always, since he is always the same.

Verse 28. The children of thy servants shall continue. The Psalmist had early in the psalm looked forward to a future generation, and here he speaks with confidence that such a race would arise and be preserved and blessed of God. Some read it as a prayer, "let the sons of thy servants abide." Any way, it is full of good cheer to us; we may plead for the Lord's favour to our seed, and we may expect that the cause of God and truth will revive in future generations. Let us hope that those who are to succeed us will not be so stubborn, unbelieving and erring as we have been. If the church has been minished and brought low by the lukewarmness of the present race, let us entreat the Lord to raise up a better order of men, whose zeal and obedience shall win and hold a long prosperity. May our own

dear ones be among the better generation who shall continue in the Lord's ways, obedient to the end. And their seed shall be established before thee. God does not neglect the children of his servants. It is the rule that Abraham's Isaac should be the Lord's, that Isaac's Jacob should be beloved of the Most High, and that Jacob's Joseph should find favour in the sight of God. Grace is not hereditary, yet God loves to be served by the same family time out of mind, even as many great landowners feel a pleasure in having the same families as tenants upon their estates from generation to generation. Here is Zion's hope, her sons will build her up, her offspring will restore her former glories. We may, therefore, not only for our own sakes, but also out of love to the church of God, daily pray that our sons and daughters may be saved, and kept by divine grace even unto the end,—established before the Lord. We have thus passed through the cloud, and in the next psalm we shall bask in the sunshine. Such is the chequered experience of the believer. Paul in the seventh of Romans cries and groans, and then in the eighth rejoices and leaps for joy; and so, from the moaning of the hundred and second psalm, we now advance to the songs and dancing of the hundred and third, blessing the Lord that, "though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning."

Psalm 103

Verse 1. Bless the Lord O my soul. Soul music is the very soul of music. The Psalmist strikes the best keynote when he begins with stirring up his inmost self to magnify the Lord. He soliloquizes, holds self-communion and exhorts himself, as though he felt that dulness would all too soon steal over his faculties, as, indeed, it will over us all, unless we are diligently on the watch. Jehovah is worthy to be praised by us in that highest style of adoration which is intended by the term bless—"All thy works praise thee, O God, but thy saints shall bless thee." Our very life and essential self should be engrossed with this delightful service, and each one of us should arouse his own heart to the engagement. Let others forbear if they can: "Bless the Lord, O MY soul." Let others murmur, but do thou bless. Let others bless themselves and their idols, but do thou bless the LORD. Let others use only their tongues, but as for me I will cry, "Bless the Lord, O my soul." And all that is within me, bless his holy name. Many are our faculties, emotions, and capacities, but God has given them all to us, and they ought all to join in chorus to his praise. Half-hearted, ill-conceived, unintelligent praises are not such as we should render to our loving Lord. If the law of justice demanded all our heart and soul and mind for the Creator, much more may the law of gratitude put in a comprehensive claim for the homage of our whole being to the God of grace. It is instructive to note how the Psalmist dwells upon the holy name of God, as if his holiness were dearest to him; or, perhaps, because the holiness or wholeness of God was to his mind the grandest motive for rendering to him the homage of his nature in its wholeness. Babies may praise the divine goodness, but fathers in grace magnify his holiness. By the name we understand the revealed character of God, and assuredly those songs which are suggested, not by our fallible reasoning and imperfect observation, but by unerring inspiration, should more than any others arouse all our consecrated powers.

Verse 2. Bless the LORD, O my soul. He is in real earnest, and again calls upon himself to arise. Had he been very sleepy before? Or was he now doubly sensible of the importance, the imperative necessity of adoration? Certainly, he uses no vain repetitions, for the Holy Spirit guides his pen; and thus he shews us that we have need, again and again, to bestir ourselves when we are about to worship God, for it would be shameful to offer him anything less than the utmost our souls can render. These first verses are a tuning of the harp, a screwing up of the loosened strings that not a note may fail in the sacred harmony. And forget not all his benefits. Not so much as one of the divine dealings

should be forgotten, they are all really beneficial to us, all worthy of himself, and all subjects for praise. Memory is very treacherous about the best things; by a strange perversity, engendered by the fall, it treasures up the refuse of the past and permits priceless treasures to lie neglected, it is tenacious of grievances and holds benefits all too loosely. It needs spurring to its duty, though that duty ought to be its delight. Observe that he calls all that is within him to remember all the Lord's benefits. For our task our energies should be suitably called out. God's all cannot be praised with less than our all. Reader, have we not cause enough at this time to bless him who blesses us? Come, let us read our diaries and see if there be not choice favours recorded there for which we have rendered no grateful return. Remember how the Persian king, when he could not sleep, read the chronicles of the empire, and discovered that one who had saved his life had never been rewarded. How quickly did he do him honour! The Lord has saved us with a great salvation, shall we render no recompense? The name of ingrate is one of the most shameful that a man can wear; surely we cannot be content to run the risk of such a brand. Let us awake then, and with intense enthusiasm bless Jehovah.

Verse 3. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities. Here David begins his list of blessings received, which he rehearses as themes and arguments for praise. He selects a few of the choicest pearls from the casket of divine love, threads them on the string of memory, and hangs them about the neck of gratitude. Pardoned sin is, in our experience, one of the choicest boons of grace, one of the earliest gifts of mercy,—in fact, the needful preparation for enjoying all that follows it. Till iniquity is forgiven, healing, redemption, and satisfaction are unknown blessings. Forgiveness is first in the order of our spiritual experience, and in some respects first in value. The pardon granted is a present one—forgiveth; it is continual, for he still forgiveth; it is divine, for God gives it; it is far reaching, for it removes all our sins; it takes in omissions as well as commissions, for both these are in-equities; and it is most effectual, for it is as real as the healing, and the rest of the mercies with which it is placed. Who healeth all thy diseases. When the cause is gone, namely, iniquity, the effect ceases. Sicknesses of body and soul came into the world by sin, and as sin is eradicated, diseases bodily, mental, and spiritual will vanish, till "the inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick." Many-sided is the character of our heavenly Father, for, having forgiven as a judge, he then cures as a physician. He is all things to us, as our needs call for him, and our infirmities do but reveal him in new characters.

"In him is only good,
In me is only ill,
My ill but draws his goodness forth,
And me he loveth still."

God gives efficacy to medicine for the body, and his grace sanctifies the soul. Spiritually we are daily under his care, and he visits us, as the surgeon does his patient; healing still (for that is the exact word) each malady as it arises. No disease of our soul baffles his skill, he goes on healing all, and he will do so till the last trace of taint has gone from our nature. The two alls of this verse are further reasons for all that is within us praising the Lord. The two blessings of this verse the Psalmist was personally enjoying, he sang not of others but of himself, or rather of his Lord, who was daily forgiving and healing him. He must have known that it was so, or he could not have sung of it. He had no doubt about it, he felt in his soul that it was so, and, therefore, he bade his pardoned and restored soul bless the Lord with all its might.

Verse 4. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction. By purchase and by power the Lord redeems us from the spiritual death into which we had fallen, and from the eternal death which would have been

its consequence. Had not the death penalty of sin been removed, our forgiveness and healing would have been incomplete portions of salvation, fragments only, and but of small value, but the removal of the guilt and power of sin is fitly attended by the reversal of the sentence of death which had been passed upon us. Glory be to our great Substitute, who delivered us from going down into the pit, by giving himself to be our ransom. Redemption will ever constitute one of the sweetest notes in the believer's grateful song. Who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies. Our Lord does nothing by halves, he will not stay his hand till he has gone to the uttermost with his people. Cleansing, healing, redemption, are not enough, he must needs make them kings and crown them, and the crown must be far more precious than if it were made of corruptible things, such as silver and gold; it is studded with gems of grace and lined with the velvet of lovingkindness; it is decked with the jewels of mercy, but made soft for the head to wear by a lining of tenderness. Who is like unto thee, O Lord! God himself crowns the princes of his family, for their best things come from him directly and distinctly; they do not earn the crown, for it is of mercy not of merit; they feel their own unworthiness of it, therefore he deals with tenderness; but he is resolved to bless them, and, therefore, he is ever crowning them, always surrounding their brows with coronets of mercy and compassion. He always crowns the edifice which he commences, and where he gives pardon he gives acceptance too. "Since thou wast precious in my sight thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." Our sin deprived us of all our honours, a bill of attainder was issued against us as traitors; but he who removed the sentence of death by redeeming us from destruction, restores to us more than all our former honours by crowning us anew. Shall God crown us and shall not we crown him? Up, my soul, and cast thy crown at his feet, and in lowliest reverence worship him, who has so greatly exalted thee, as to lift thee from the dunghill and set thee among princes.

Verse 5. Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, or rather "filling with good thy soul." No man is ever filled to satisfaction but a believer, and only God himself can satisfy even him. Many a worldling is satiated, but not one is satisfied. God satisfies the very soul of man, his noblest part, his ornament and glory; and of consequence he satisfies his mouth, however hungry and craving it might otherwise be. Soul-satisfaction loudly calls for soul-praise, and when the mouth is filled with good it is bound to speak good of him who filled it. Our good Lord bestows really good things, not vain toys and idle pleasures; and these he is always giving, so that from moment to moment he is satisfying our soul with good: shall we not be still praising him? If we never cease to bless him till he ceases to bless us, our employment will be eternal. So that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. Renewal of strength, amounting to a grant of a new lease of life, was granted to the Psalmist; he was so restored to his former self that he grew young again, and looked as vigorous as an eagle, whose eye can gaze upon the sun, and whose wing can mount above the storm. Our version refers to the annual moulting of the eagle, after which it looks fresh and young; but the original does not appear to allude to any such fact of natural history, but simply to describe the diseased one as so healed and strengthened, that he became as full of energy as the bird which is strongest of the feathered race, most fearless, most majestic, and most soaring. He who sat moping with the owl in the last Psalm, here flies on high with the eagle: the Lord works marvellous changes in us, and we learn by such experiences to bless his holy name. To grow from a sparrow to an eagle, and leave the wilderness of the pelican to mount among the stars is enough to make any man cry, "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Thus, is the endless chain of grace complete. Sins forgiven, its power subdued, and its penalty averted, then we are honoured, supplied, and our very nature renovated, till we are as new-born children in the household of God. O Lord we must bless thee, and we will; as thou dost withhold nothing from us so we would not keep back from thy praise one solitary power of our nature, but with all our heart, and soul, and strength praise thy holy name.

Verse 6. The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are of oppressed. Our own personal obligations must not absorb our song; we must also magnify the Lord for his goodness to others. He does not leave the poor and needy to perish at the hands of their enemies, but interposes on their behalf, for he is the executor of the poor and the executioner of the cruel. When his people were in Egypt he heard their groanings and brought them forth, but he overthrew Pharaoh in the Red Sea. Man's injustice shall receive retribution at the hand of God. Mercy to his saints demands vengeance on their persecutors, and he will repay it. No blood of martyrs shall be shed in vain; no groans of confessors in prison shall be left without inquisition being made concerning them. All wrongs shall be righted, all the oppressed shall be avenged. Justice may at times leave the courts of man, but it abides upon the tribunal of God. For this every right-minded person will bless God. Were he careless of his creature's good, did he neglect the administration of justice, did he suffer high-handed oppressors finally to escape, we should have greater reason for trembling than rejoicing; it is not so, however, for our God is a God of justice, and by him actions are weighed; he will mete out his portion to the proud and make the tyrant bite the dust,—yea, often he visits the haughty persecutor even in this life, so that "the Lord is known by the judgments which he executeth."

Verse 7. He made known his ways unto Moses. Moses was made to see the manner in which the Lord deals with men; he saw this at each of the three periods of his life, in the court, in retirement, and at the head of the tribes of Israel. To him the Lord gave specially clear manifestations of his dispensations and modes of ruling among mankind, granting to him to see more of God than had before been seen by mortal man, while he commaned with him upon the mount. His acts unto the children of Israel. They saw less than Moses, for they beheld the deeds of God without understanding his method therein, yet this was much, very much, and might have been more if they had not been so perverse; the stint was not in the revelation, but in the hardness of their hearts. It is a great act of sovereign grace and condescending love when the Lord reveals himself to any people, and they ought to appreciate the distinguished favour shown to them. We, as believers in Jesus, know the Lord's ways of covenant grace, and we have by experience been made to see his acts of mercy towards us; how heartily ought we to praise our divine teacher, the Holy Spirit, who has made these things known to us, for had it not been for him we should have continued in darkness unto this day, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world?" Why hast thou made us "of the election who have obtained it" while the rest are blinded? Observe how prominent is the personality of God in all this gracious teaching—"He made known." He did not leave Moses to discover truth for himself, but became his instructor. What should we ever know if he did not make it known? God alone can reveal himself. If Moses needed the Lord to make him know, how much more do we who are so much inferior to the great law-giver?

Verse 8. The Lord is merciful and gracious. Those with whom he deals are sinners. However much he favours them they are guilty and need mercy at his hands, nor is he slow to compassionate their lost estate, or reluctant by his grace to lift them out of it. Mercy pardons sin, grace bestows favour: in both the Lord abounds. This is that way of his which he made known to Moses (Ex 34:6), and in that way he will abide as long as the age of grace shall last, and men are yet in this life. He who "executeth righteousness and judgment, " yet delighteth in mercy. Slow to anger. He can be angry, and can deal out righteous indignation upon the guilty, but it is his strange work; he lingers long, with loving pauses, tarrying by the way to give space for repentance and opportunity for accepting his mercy. Thus deals he with the greatest sinners, and with his own children much more so: towards them his anger is shortlived and never reaches into eternity, and when it is shown in fatherly

chastisements he does not afflict willingly, and soon pities their sorrows. From this we should learn to be ourselves slow to anger; if the Lord is longsuffering under our great provocations how much more ought we to endure the errors of our brethren! And plenteous in mercy. Rich in it, quick in it, overflowing with it; and so had he need to be or we should soon be consumed. He is God, and not man, or our sins would soon drown his love; yet above the mountains of our sins the floods of his mercy rise.

"Plenteous grace with thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin;
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within."

All the world tastes of his sparing mercy, those who hear the gospel partake of his inviting mercy, the saints live by his saving mercy, are preserved by his upholding mercy, are cheered by his consoling mercy, and will enter heaven through his infinite and everlasting mercy. Let grace abounding be our hourly song in the house of our pilgrimage. Let those who feel that they live upon it glorify the plenteous fountain from which it so spontaneously flows.

Verse 9. He will not always chide. He will sometimes, for he cannot endure that his people should harbour sin in their hearts, but not for ever will he chasten them; as soon as they turn to him and forsake their evil ways he will end the quarrel. He might find constant cause for striving with us, for we have always something in us which is contrary to his holy mind, but he refrains himself lest our spirits should fail before him. It will be profitable for any one of us who may be at this time out of conscious fellowship with the Lord, to inquire at his hands the reason for his anger, saying, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me?" For he is easily entreated of, and soon ceaseth from his wrath. When his children turn from their sins he soon turns from his chidings. Neither will he keep his anger for ever. He bears no grudges. The Lord would not have his people harbour resentments, and in his own course of action he sets them a grand example. When the Lord has chastened his child he has done with his anger: he is not punishing as a judge, else might his wrath burn on, but he is acting as a father, and, therefore, after a few blows he ends the matter, and presses his beloved one to his bosom as if nothing had happened; or if the offence lies too deep in the offender's nature to be thus overcome, he continues to correct, but he never ceases to love, and he does not suffer his anger with his people to pass into the next world, but receives his erring child into his glory.

Verse 10. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. Else had Israel perished outright, and we also had long ago been consigned to the lowest hell. We ought to praise the Lord for what he has not done as well as for what he has wrought for us; even the negative side deserves our adoring gratitude. Up to this moment, at our very worst estate, we have never suffered as we deserved to suffer; our daily lot has not been apportioned upon the rule of what we merited, but on the far different measure of undeserved kindness. Shall we not bless the Lord? Every power of our being might have been rent with anguish, instead of which we are all in the enjoyment of comparative happiness, and many of us are exceedingly favoured with inward joy; let then every faculty, yea, all that is within us, bless his holy name.

Verse 11. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. Boundless in extent towards his chosen is the mercy of the Lord; it is no more to be measured than the height of heaven or the heaven of heavens. "Like the height of the heavens" is the original

language, which implies other points of comparison besides extent, and suggests sublimity, grandeur, and glory. As the lofty heavens canopy the earth, water it with dews and rains, enlighten it with sun, moon, and stars, and look down upon it with unceasing watchfulness, even so the Lord's mercy from above covers all his chosen, enriches them, embraces them, and stands for ever as their dwellingplace. The idea of our version is a very noble one, for who shall tell how exceeding great is the height of heaven? Who can reach the first of the fixed stars, and who can measure the utmost bounds of the starry universe? Yet so great is his mercy! Oh, that great little word so! All this mercy is for "them that fear him; "there must be a humble, hearty reverence of his authority, or we cannot taste of his grace. Godly fear is one of the first products of the divine life in us, it is the beginning of wisdom, yet it fully ensures to its possessor all the benefits of divine mercy, and is, indeed, here and elsewhere, employed to set forth the whole of true religion. Many a true child of God is full of filial fear, and yet at the same time stands trembling as to his acceptance with God; this trembling is groundless, but it is infinitely to be preferred to that baseborn presumption, which incites men to boast of their adoption and consequent security, when all the while they are in the gall of bitterness. Those who are presuming upon the infinite extent of divine mercy, should here be led to consider that although it is wide as the horizon and high as the stars, yet it is only meant for them that fear the Lord, and as for obstinate rebels, they shall have justice without mercy measured out to them.

Verse 12. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. O glorious verse, no word even upon the inspired page can excel it! Sin is removed from us by a miracle of love! What a load to move, and yet is it removed so far that the distance is incalculable. Fly as far as the wing of imagination can bear you, and if you journey through space eastward, you are further from the west at every beat of your wing. If sin be removed so far, then we may be sure that the scent, the trace, the very memory of it must be entirely gone. If this be the distance of its removal, there is no shade of fear of its ever being brought back again; even Satan himself could not achieve such a task. Our sins are gone, Jesus has borne them away. Far as the place of sunrise is removed from yonder west, where the sun sinks when his day's journey is done, so far were our sins carried by our scapegoat nineteen centuries ago, and now if they be sought for, they shall not be found, yea, they shall not be, saith the Lord. Come, my soul, awaken thyself thoroughly and glorify the Lord for this richest of blessings. Hallelujah. The Lord alone could remove sin at all, and he has done it in a godlike fashion, making a final sweep of all our transgressions.

Verse 13. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. To those who truly reverence his holy name, the Lord is a father and acts as such. These he pities, for in the very best of men the Lord sees much to pity, and when they are at their best state they still need his compassion. This should check every propensity to pride, though at the same time it should yield us the richest comfort. Fathers feel for their children, especially when they are in pain, they would like to suffer in their stead, their sighs and groans cut them to the quick: thus sensitive towards us is our heavenly Father. We do not adore a god of stone, but the living God, who is tenderness itself. He is at this moment compassionating us, for the word is in the present tense; his pity never fails to flow, and we never cease to need it.

Verse 14. For he knoweth our frame. He knows how we are made, for he made us. Our make and build, our constitution and temperament, our prevailing infirmity and most besetting temptation he well perceives, for he searches our inmost nature. He remembereth that we are dust. Made of dust, dust still, and ready to return to dust. We have sometimes heard of "the Iron Duke, " and of iron constitutions, but the words are soon belied, for the Iron Duke is dissolved, and other men of like

rigour are following to the grave, where "dust to dust" is an appropriate requiem. We too often forget that we are dust, and try our minds and bodies unduly by excessive mental and bodily exertion, we are also too little mindful of the infirmities of others, and impose upon them burdens grievous to be borne; but our heavenly Father never overloads us, and never fails to give us strength equal to our day, because he always takes our frailty into account when he is apportioning to us our lot. Blessed be his holy name for this gentleness towards his frail creatures.

Verse 15. As for man, his days are as grass. He lives on the grass, and lives like the grass. Corn is but educated grass, and man, who feeds on it, partakes of its nature. The grass lives, grows, flowers, falls beneath the scythe, dries up, and is removed from the field: read this sentence over again, and you will find it the history of man. If he lives out his little day, he is cut down at last, and it is far more likely that he will wither before he comes to maturity, or be plucked away on a sudden, long before he has fulfilled his time. As a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. He has a beauty and a comeliness even as the meadows have when they are yellow with the king-cups, but, alas, how short-lived! No sooner come than gone, a flash of loveliness and no more! Man is not even like a flower in the conservatory or in the sheltered garden border, he grows best according to nature, as the field-flower does, and like the unprotected beautifier of the pasture, he runs a thousand risks of coming to a speedy end. A large congregation, in many-coloured attire, always reminds us of a meadow bright with many hues; and the comparison becomes sadly true when we reflect, that as the grass and its goodness soon pass away, even so will those we gaze upon, and all their visible beauty. Thus, too, must it be with all that comes of the flesh, even its greatest excellencies and natural virtues, for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, "and therefore is but as grass which withers if but a breath of wind assails it. Happy are they who, born from above, have in them an incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever.

Verse 16. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone. Only a little wind is needed, not even a scythe is demanded, a breath can do it, for the flower is so frail.

"If one sharp wind sweep over the field,
It withers in an hour."

How small a portion of deleterious gas suffices to create a deadly fever, which no art of man can stay. No need of sword or bullet, a puff of foul air is deadlier far, and fails not to lay low the healthiest and most stalwart son of man. And the place thereof shall know it no more. The flower blooms no more. It may have a successor, but as for itself its leaves are scattered, and its perfume will never again sweeten the evening air. Man also dies and is gone, gone from his old haunts, his dear home, and his daily labours, never to return. As far as this world is concerned, he is as though he never had been; the sun rises, the moon increases or wanes, summer and winter run their round, the rivers flow, and all things continue in their courses as though they missed him not, so little a figure does he make in the affairs of nature. Perhaps a friend will note that he is gone, and say,

"One morn. I missed him on the accustomed hill,
Along the heath, and near his favourite tree;
Another came, nor yet beside the rill,
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he."

But when the "dirges due" are silent, beyond a mound of earth, and perhaps a crumbling stone, how

small will be the memorial of our existence upon this busy scene! True there are more enduring memories, and an existence of another kind coeval with eternity, but these belong, not to our flesh, which is but grass, but to a higher life, in which we rise to close fellowship with the Eternal.

Verse 17. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him. Blessed but! How vast the contrast between the fading flower and the everlasting God! How wonderful that his mercy should link our frailty with his eternity, and make us everlasting too! From old eternity the Lord viewed his people as objects of mercy, and as such chose them to become partakers of his grace; the doctrine of eternal election is most delightful to those who have light to see it and love wherewith to accept it. It is a theme for deepest thought and highest joy. The "to everlasting" is equally precious. Jehovah changes not, he has mercy without end as well as without beginning. Never will those who fear him find that either their sins or their needs have exhausted the great deep of his grace. The main question is, "Do we fear him?" If we are lifting up to heaven the eye of filial fear, the gaze of paternal love is never removed from us, and it never will be, world without end. And his righteousness unto children's children. Mercy to those with whom the Lord makes a covenant is guaranteed by righteousness; it is because he is just that he never revokes a promise, or fails to fulfil it. Our believing sons and their seed for ever will find the word of the Lord the same: to them will he display his grace and bless them even as he has blessed us. Let us sing, then, for posterity. The past commands our praise and the future invites it. For our descendants let us sing as well as pray. If Abraham rejoiced concerning his seed, so also may the godly, for "instead of the fathers shall be the children, "and as the last Psalm told us in its concluding verse, "the children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee."

Verse 18. Children of the righteous are not, however, promised the Lord's mercy without stipulation, and this verse completes the statement of the last by adding: To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. The parents must be obedient and the children too. We are here bidden to abide by the covenant, and those who run off to any other confidence than the finished work of Jesus are not among those who obey this precept; those with whom the covenant is really made stand firm to it, and having begun in the Spirit, they do not seek to be made perfect in the flesh. The truly godly keep the Lord's commands carefully—they "remember"; they observe them practically—"to do them": moreover they do not pick and choose, but remember "his commandments" as such, without exalting one above another as their own pleasure or convenience may dictate. May our offspring be a thoughtful, careful, observant race, eager to know the will of the Lord, and prompt to follow it fully, then will his mercy enrich and honour them from generation to generation. This verse also suggests praise, for who would wish the Lord to smile on those who will not regard his ways? That were to encourage vice. From the manner in which some men unguardedly preach the covenant, one might infer that God would bless a certain set of men however they might live, and however they might neglect his laws. But the word teaches not so. The covenant is not legal, but it is holy. It is all of grace from first to last, yet it is no panderer to sin; on the contrary, one of its greatest promises is, "I will put my laws in their hearts and in their minds will I write them"; its general aim is the sanctifying of a people unto God, zealous for good works, and all its gifts and operations work in that direction. Faith keeps the covenant by looking alone to Jesus, while at the same time by earnest obedience it remembers the Lord's commandments to do them.

Verse 19. The LORD has prepared his throne in the heavens. Here is a grand burst of song produced by a view of the boundless power, and glorious sovereignty of Jehovah. His throne is fixed, for that is the word; it is established, settled, immovable.

"He sits on no precarious throne,
Nor borrows leave to be."

About his government there is no alarm, no disorder, no perturbation, no hurrying to and fro in expedients, no surprises to be met or unexpected catastrophes to be warded off;—all is prepared and fixed, and he himself has prepared and fixed it. He is no delegated sovereign for whom a throne is set up by another; he is an autocrat, and his dominion arises from himself and is sustained by his own innate power. This matchless sovereignty is the pledge of our security, the pillar upon which our confidence may safely lean. And his kingdom ruleth over all. Over the whole universe he stretches his sceptre. He now reigns universally, he always has done so, and he always will. To us the world may seem rent with anarchy, but he brings order out of confusion. The warring elements are marching beneath his banner when they most wildly rush onward in furious tempest. Great and small, intelligent and material, willing and unwilling, fierce or gentle,—all, all are under his sway. His is the only universal monarchy, he is the blessed and only Potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords. A clear view of his ever active, and everywhere supreme providence, is one of the most delightful of spiritual gifts; he who has it cannot do otherwise than bless the Lord with all his soul. Thus has the sweet singer hymned the varied attributes of the Lord as seen in nature, grace, and providence, and now he gathers up all his energies for one final outburst of adoration, in which he would have all unite, since all are subjects of the Great King.

Verse 20. Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength. Finding his work of praise growing upon his hands, he calls upon "the firstborn sons of light" to speak the praises of the Lord, as well they may, for as Milton says, they best can tell. Dwelling nearer to that prepared throne than we as yet have leave to climb, they see in nearer vision the glory which we would adore. To them is given an exceeding might of intellect, and voice, and force which they delight to use in sacred services for him; let them now turn all their strength into that solemn song which we would send up to the third heaven. To him who gave angelic strength let all angelic strength be given. They are his angels, and therefore they are not loath to ring out his praises. That do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. We are bidden to do these commandments, and alas we fail; let those unfallen spirits, whose bliss it is never to have transgressed, give to the Lord the glory of their holiness. They hearken for yet more commands, obeying as much by reverent listening as by energetic action, and in this they teach us how the heavenly will should evermore be done; yet even for this surpassing excellence let them take no praise, but render all to him who has made and kept them what they are. O that we could hear them chant the high praises of God, as did the shepherds on that greatest of all birth nights—

"When such music sweet
Their hearts and ears did greet
As never was by mortal finger struck;
Divinely-warbled voice
Answering the stringed noise,
As well their souls in blissful rapture took:
The air, such pleasure loth to lose,
With thousand echoes still prolongs each heavenly close."

Our glad heart anticipates the hour when we shall hear them "harping in loud and solemn guise," and

all to the sole praise of God.

Verse 21. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; to whatever race of creatures ye may belong, for ye are all his troops, and he is the Generallissimo of all your armies. The fowl of the air and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea, should all unite in praising their Creator, after the best of their ability. Ye ministers of his that do his pleasure; in whatever way ye serve him, bless him as ye serve. The Psalmist would have every servant in the Lord's palace unite with him, and all at once sing out the praises of the Lord. We have attached a new sense to the word "ministers" in these latter days, and so narrowed it down to those who serve in word and doctrine. Yet no true minister would wish to alter it, for we are above all men bound to be the Lord's servants, and we would, beyond all other ministering intelligences or forces, desire to bless the glorious Lord.

Verse 22. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion. Here is a trinity of blessing for the thrice blessed God, and each one of the three blessings is an enlargement upon that which went before. This is the most comprehensive of all, for what can be a wider call than to all in all places? See how finite man can awaken unbounded praise! Man is but little, yet, placing his hands upon the keys of the great organ of the universe, he wakes it to thunders of adoration! Redeemed man is the voice of nature, the priest in the temple of creation, the precentor in the worship of the universe. O that all the Lord's works on earth were delivered from the vanity to which they were made subject, and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God: the time is hastening on and will most surely come; then will all the Lord's works bless him indeed. The immutable promise is ripening, the sure mercy is on its way. Hasten, ye winged hours! Bless the Lord, O my soul. He closes on his key-note. He cannot be content to call on others without taking his own part; nor because others sing more loudly and perfectly, will he be content to be set aside. O my soul, come home to thyself and to thy God, and let the little world within thee keep time and tune to the spheres which are ringing out Jehovah's praise. O infinitely blessed Lord, favour us with this highest blessing of being for ever and ever wholly engrossed in blessing Thee.

Psalm 104

Verse 1. Bless the LORD, O my soul. This psalm begins and ends like the Hundred and Third, and it could not do better: when the model is perfect it deserves to exist in duplicate. True praise begins at home. It is idle to stir up others to praise if we are ungratefully silent ourselves. We should call upon our inmost hearts to awake and bestir themselves, for we are apt to be sluggish, and if we are so when called upon to bless God, we shall have great cause to be ashamed. When we magnify the Lord, let us do it heartily: our best is far beneath his worthiness, let us not dishonour him by rendering to him half hearted worship. O LORD my God, thou art very great. This ascription has in it a remarkable blending of the boldness of faith, and the awe of holy fear: for the psalmist calls the infinite Jehovah "my God, "and at the same time, prostrate in amazement at the divine greatness, he cries out in utter astonishment, "Thou art very great." God was great on Sinai, yet the opening words of his law were, "I am the Lord thy God;" his greatness is no reason why faith should not put in her claim, and call him all her own. The declaration of Jehovah's greatness here given would have been very much in place at the end of the psalm, for it is a natural inference and deduction from a survey of the universe: its position at the very commencement of the poem is an indication that the whole psalm was well considered and digested in the mind before it was actually put into words; only on this supposition can we account for the emotion preceding the contemplation. Observe also, that the wonder expressed does not refer to the creation and its greatness, but to Jehovah himself. It is not

"the universe is very great!" but "THOU art very great." Many stay at the creature, and so become idolatrous in spirit; to pass onward to the Creator himself is true wisdom.

Thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Thou thyself art not to be seen, but thy works, which may be called thy garments, are full of beauties and marvels which redound to thine honour. Garments both conceal and reveal a man, and so do the creatures of God. The Lord is seen in his works as worthy of honour for his skill, his goodness, and his power, and as claiming majesty, for he has fashioned all things in sovereignty, doing as he wills, and asking no man's permit. He must be blind indeed who does not see that nature is the work of a king. These are solemn strokes of God's severer mind, terrible touches of his sterner attributes, broad lines of inscrutable mystery, and deep shadings of overwhelming power, and these make creation's picture a problem never to be solved, except by admitting that he who drew it giveth no account of his matters, but ruleth all things according to the good pleasure of his will. His majesty is, however, always so displayed as to reflect honour upon his whole character; he does as he wills, but he wills only that which is thrice holy, like himself. The very robes of the unseen Spirit teach us this, and it is ours to recognize it with humble adoration.

Verse 2. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: wrapping the light about him as a monarch puts on his robe. The conception is sublime: but it makes us feel how altogether inconceivable the personal glory of the Lord must be; if light itself is but his garment and veil, what must be the blazing splendour of his own essential being! We are lost in astonishment, and dare not pry into the mystery lest we be blinded by its insufferable glory. Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain—within which he might dwell. Light was created on the first day and the firmament upon the second, so that they fitly follow each other in this verse. Oriental princes put on their glorious apparel and then sit in state within curtains, and the Lord is spoken of under that image: but how far above all comprehension the figure must be lifted, since the robe is essential light, to which suns and moons owe their brightness, and the curtain is the azure sky studded with stars for gems. This is a substantial argument for the truth with which the psalmist commenced his song, "O Lord my God, thou art very great."

Verse 3. Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the water's. His lofty halls are framed with the waters which are above the firmament. The upper rooms of God's great house, the secret stories far above our ken, the palatial chambers wherein he resides, are based upon the floods which form the upper ocean. To the unsubstantial he lends stability; he needs no joists and rafters, for his palace is sustained by his own power. We are not to interpret literally where the language is poetical, it would be simple absurdity to do so. Who maketh the clouds his chariot. When he comes forth from his secret pavilion it is thus he makes his royal progress. "It is chariot of wrath deep thunder clouds form, "and his chariot of mercy drops plenty as it traverses the celestial road. Who walketh or rather goes upon the wings of the wind. With the clouds for a car, and the winds for winged steeds, the Great King hastens on his movements whether for mercy or for judgment. Thus we have the idea of a king still further elaborated—his lofty palace, his chariot, and his coursers are before us; but what a palace must we imagine, whose beams are of crystal, and whose base is consolidated vapour! What a stately car is that which is fashioned out of the flying clouds, whose gorgeous colours Solomon in all his glory could not rival; and what a Godlike progress is that in which spirit wings and breath of winds bear up the moving throne. "O Lord, my God, thou art very great!"

Verse 4. Who maketh his angels spirits; or wiends, for the word means either. Angels are pure spirits, though they are permitted to assume a visible form when God desires us to see them. God is a spirit,

and he is waited upon by spirits in his royal courts. Angels are like winds for mystery, force, and invisibility, and no doubt the winds themselves are often the angels or messengers of God. God who makes his angels to be as winds, can also make winds to be his angels, and they are constantly so in the economy of nature. His ministers a flaming fire. Here, too, we may choose which we will of two meanings: God's ministers or servants he makes to be as swift, potent, and terrible as fire, and on the other hand he makes fire, that devouring element, to be his minister flaming forth upon his errands. That the passage refers to angels is clear from Heb 1:7; and it was most proper to mention them here in connection with light and the heavens, and immediately after the robes and paltree of the Great King. Should not the retinue of the Lord of Hosts be mentioned as well as his chariot? It would have been a flaw in the description of the universe had the angels not been alluded to, and this is the most appropriate place for their introduction. When we think of the extraordinary powers entrusted to angelic beings, and the mysterious glory of the seraphim and the four living creatures, we are led to reflect upon the glory of the Master whom they serve, and again we cry out with the psalmist, "O Lord, my God, thou art very great."

Verse 5. Who laid the foundations of the earth. Thus the commencement of creation is described, in almost the very words employed by the Lord himself in Job 38:4. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened, and who laid the corner stone thereof?" And the words are found in the same connection too, for the Lord proceeds to say, "When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy." That it should not be removed forever. The language is, of course, poetical, but the fact is none the less wonderful: the earth is so placed in space that it remains as stable as if it were a fixture. The several motions of our planet are carried on so noiselessly and evenly that, as far as we are concerned, all things are as permanent and peaceful as if the old notion of its resting upon pillars were literally true. With what delicacy has the great Artificer poised our globe! What power must there be in that hand which has caused so vast a body to know its orbit, and to move so smoothly in it! What engineer can save every part of his machinery from an occasional jar, jerk, or friction? yet to our great world in its complicated motions no such thing has ever occurred. "O Lord, my God, thou art very great."

Verse 6. Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment. The new born earth was wrapped in aqueous swaddling bands. In the first ages, ere man appeared, the proud waters ruled the whole earth. The waters stood above the mountains, no dry land was visible, vapour as from a steaming cauldron covered all. Geologists inform us of this as a discovery, but the Holy Spirit had revealed the fact long before. The passage before us shows us the Creator commencing his work, and laying the foundation for future order and beauty: to think of this reverently will fill us with adoration; to conceive of it grossly and carnally would be highly blasphemous.

Verse 7. At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away. When the waters and vapours covered all, the Lord had but to speak and they disappeared at once. As though they had been intelligent agents the waves hurried to their appointed deeps and left the land to itself; then the mountains lifted their heads, the high lands rose from the main, and at length continents and islands, slopes and plains were left to form the habitable earth. The voice of the Lord effected this great marvel. Is not his word equal to every emergency? potent enough to work the greatest miracle? By that same word shall the waterfloods of trouble be restrained, and the raging billows of sin be rebuked: the day cometh when at the thunder of Jehovah's voice all the proud waters of evil shall utterly haste away. "O Lord, my God, thou art very great."

Verse 8. The vanquished waters are henceforth obedient. They go up by the mountains, climbing in the form of clouds even to the summits of the Alps. They go down by the valleys unto the place which thou hast founded for them: they are as willing to descend in rain, and brooks, and torrents as they were eager to ascend in mists. The loyalty of the mighty waters to the laws of their God is most notable; the fierce flood, the boisterous rapid; the tremendous torrent, are only forms of that gentle dew which trembles on the tiny blade of grass, and in those ruder shapes they are equally obedient to the laws which their Maker has impressed upon them. Not so much as a solitary particle of spray ever breaks rank, or violates the command of the Lord of sea and land, neither do the awful cataracts and terrific floods revolt from his sway. It is very beautiful among the mountains to see the divine system of water supply—the rising of the fleecy vapours, the distillation of the pure fluid, the glee with which the newborn element leaps down the crags to reach the rivers, and the strong eagerness with which the rivers seek the ocean, their appointed place.

Verse 9. Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth. That bound has once been passed, but it shall never be so again. The deluge was caused by the suspension of the divine mandate which held the floods in check: they knew their old supremacy, and hastened to reassert it, but now the covenant promise for ever prevents a return of that carnival of waters, that revolt of the waves: ought we not rather to call it that impetuous rush of the indignant floods to avenge the injured honour of their King, whom men had offended? Jehovah's word bounds the ocean, using only a narrow belt of sand to confine it to its own limits: that apparently feeble restraint answers every purpose, for the sea is obedient as a little child to the bidding of its Maker. Destruction lies asleep in the bed of the ocean, and though our sins might well arouse it, yet are its bands made strong by covenant mercy, so that it cannot break loose again upon the guilty sons of men.

Verse 10. He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. This is a beautiful part of the Lord's arrangement of the subject waters: they find vents through which they leap into liberty where their presence will be beneficial in the highest degree. Depressions exist in the sides of the mountains, and down these the water brooks are made to flow, often taking their rise at bubbling fountains which issue from the bowels of the earth. It is God who sends these springs even as a gardener makes the water courses, and turns the current with his foot. When the waters are confined in the abyss the Lord sets their bound, and when they sport at liberty he sends them forth.

Verse 11. They give drink to every beast of the field. Who else would water them if the Lord did not? They are his cattle, and therefore he leads them forth to watering. Not one of them is forgotten of him. The wild asses quench their thirst. The good Lord gives them enough and to spare. They know their Master's crib. Though bit or bridle of man they will not brook, and man denounces them as unteachable, they learn of the Lord, and know better far than man where flows the cooling crystal of which they must drink or die. They are only asses, and wild, yet our heavenly Father careth for them. Will he not also care for us? We see here, also, that nothing is made in vain; though no human lip is moistened by the brooklet in the lone valley, yet are there other creatures which need refreshment, and these slake their thirst at the stream. Is this nothing? Must everything exist for man, or else be wasted? What but our pride and selfishness could have suggested such a notion? It is not true that flowers which blush unseen by human eye are wasting their sweetness, for the bee finds them out, and other winged wanderers live on their luscious juices. Man is but one creature of the many whom the heavenly Father feedeth and watereth.

Verse 12. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. How refreshing are these words! What happy memories they arouse of splashing waterfalls and entangled boughs, where the merry din of the falling and rushing water forms a sort of solid background of music, and the sweet tuneful notes of the birds are the brighter and more flashing lights in the harmony. Pretty birdies, sing on! What better can ye do, and who can do it better? When we too drink of the river of God, and eat of the fruit of the tree of life, it well becomes us to "sing among the branches." Where ye dwell ye sing; and shall not we rejoice in the Lord, who has been our dwelling place in all generations. As ye fly from bough to bough, ye warble forth your notes, and so will we as we flit through time into eternity. It is not meet that birds of Paradise should be outdone by birds of earth.

Verse 13. He watereth the hills from his chambers. As the mountains are too high to be watered by rivers and brooks, the Lord himself refreshes them from those waters above the firmament which the poet had in a former verse described as the upper chambers of heaven. Clouds are detained among the mountain crags, and deluge the hill sides with fertilizing rain. Where man cannot reach the Lord can, whom none else can water with grace he can, and where all stores of refreshment fail he can supply all that is needed from his own halls. The earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. The result of the divine working is fulness everywhere, the soil is saturated with rain, the seed germinates, the beasts drink, and the birds sing—nothing is left without supplies. So, too, is it in the new creation, he giveth more grace, he fills his people with good, and makes them all confess, "of his fulness have all we received and grace for grace."

Verse 14. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man. Grass grows as well as herbs, for cattle must be fed as well as men. God appoints to the lowliest creature its portion and takes care that it has it: Divine power is as truly and as worthily put forth in the feeding of beasts as in the nurturing of man; watch but a blade of grass with a devout eye and you may see God at work within it. The herb is for man, and he must till the soil, or it will not be produced, yet it is God that causeth it to grow in the garden, even the same God who made the grass to grow in the unenclosed pastures of the wilderness. Man forgets this and talks of his produce, but in very truth without God he would plough and sow in vain. The Lord causeth each green blade to spring and each ear to ripen; do but watch with opened eye and you shall see the Lord walking through the cornfields. That he may bring forth food out of the earth. Both grass for cattle and corn for man are food brought forth out of the earth and they are signs that it was God's design that the very dust beneath our feet, which seems better adapted to bury us than to sustain us, should actually be transformed into the staff of life. The more we think of this the more wonderful it will appear. How great is that God who from among the sepulchres finds the support of life, and out of the ground which was cursed brings forth the blessings of corn and wine and oil.

Verse 15. And wine that maketh glad the heart of man. By the aid of genial showers the earth produces not merely necessaries but luxuries, that which furnishes a feast as well as that which makes a meal. O that man were wise enough to know how to use this gladdening product of the vine; but, alas, he full often turns it to ill account, and debases himself therewith. Of this he must himself bear the blame; he deserves to be miserable who turns even blessings into curses. And oil to make his face to shine. The easterns use oil more than we do, and probably are wiser in this respect than we are: they delight in anointing with perfumed oils, and regard the shining of the face as a choice emblem of joy. God is to be praised for all the products of the soil, not one of which could come to us were it not that he causeth it to grow. And bread which strengtheneth man's heart. Men have more

courage after they are fed: many a depressed spirit has been comforted by a good substantial meal. We ought to bless God for strength of heart as well as force of limb, since if we possess them they are both the bounties of his kindness.

Verse 16. The watering of the hills not only produces the grass and the cultivated herbs, but also the nobler species of vegetation, which come not within the range of human culture:

"Their veins with genial moisture fed,
Jehovah's forests lift the head:
Nor other than his fostering hand
Thy cedars, Lebanon, demand."

The trees of the Lord—the greatest, noblest, and most royal of trees; those too which are unowned of man, and untouched by his hand. Are full of sap, or are full, well supplied, richly watered, so that they become, as the cedars, full of resin, flowing with life, and verdant all the year round. The cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted. They grow where none ever thought of planting them, where for ages they were unobserved, and where at this moment they are too gigantic for man to prune them. What would our psalmist have said to some of the trees in the Yosemite valley? Truly these are worthy to be called the trees of the Lord, for towering stature and enormous girth. Thus is the care of God seen to be effectual and all sufficient. If trees uncared for by man are yet so full of sap, we may rest assured that the people of God who by faith live upon the Lord alone shall be equally well sustained. Planted by grace, and owing all to our heavenly Father's care, we may defy the hurricane, and laugh at the fear of drought, for none that trust in him shall ever be left unwatered.

Verse 17. Where the birds make their nests: as for the stork, the fir trees are her house. So far from being in need, these trees of God afford shelter to others, birds small and great make their nests in the branches. Thus what they receive from the great Lord they endeavour to return to his weaker creatures. How one thing fits into another in this fair creation, each link drawing on its fellow: the rains water the fir trees, and the fir trees become the happy home of birds; thus do the thunder clouds build the sparrow's house, and the descending rain sustains the basis of the stork's nest. Observe, also, how everything has its use—the boughs furnish a home for the birds; and every living thing has its accommodation—the stork finds a house in the pines. Her nest is called a house, because this bird exhibits domestic virtues and maternal love which make her young to be comparable to a family. No doubt this ancient writer had seen storks' nests in fir trees; they appear usually to build on houses and ruins, but there is also evidence that where there are forests they are content with pine trees. Has the reader ever walked through a forest of great trees and felt the awe which strikes the heart in nature's sublime cathedral? Then he will remember to have felt that each bird was holy, since it dwelt amid such sacred solitude. Those who cannot see or hear of God except in Gothic edifices, amid the swell of organs, and the voices of a surpliced choir, will not be able to enter into the feeling which makes the simple, unsophisticated soul hear "the voice of the Lord God walking among the trees."

Verse 18. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies. All places teem with life. We call our cities populous, but are not the forests and the high hills more densely peopled with life? We speak of uninhabitable places, but where are they? The chamois leaps from crag to crag, and the rabbit burrows beneath the soil. For one creature the loftiness of the hills, and for another the hollowness of the rocks, serves as a protection:

"Far over the crags the wild goats roam,
The rocks supply the coney's home."

Thus all the earth is full of happy life, every place has its appropriate inhabitant, nothing is empty and void and waste. See how goats, and storks, and conies, and sparrows, each contribute a verse to the psalm of nature; have we not also our canticles to sing unto the Lord? Little though we may be in the scale of importance, yet let us fill our sphere, and so honour the Lord who made us with a purpose.

Verse 19. The appointed rule of the great lights is now the theme for praise. The moon is mentioned first, because in the Jewish day the night leads the way. He appointed the moon for seasons. By the waxing and waning of the moon the year is divided into months, and weeks, and by this means the exact dates of the holy days were arranged. Thus the lamp of night is made to be of service to man, and in fixing the period of religious assemblies (as it did among the Jews) it enters into connection with his noblest being. Never let us regard the moon's motions as the inevitable result of inanimate impersonal law, but as the appointment of our God. The sun knoweth his going down. In finely poetic imagery the sun is represented as knowing when to retire from sight, and sink below the horizon. He never loiters on his way, or pauses as if undecided when to descend; his appointed hour for going down, although it is constantly varying, he always keeps to a second. We need to be aroused in the morning, but he arises punctually, and though some require to watch the clock to know the hour of rest, he, without a timepiece to consult, hides himself in the western sky the instant the set time has come. For all this man should praise the Lord of the sun and moon, who has made these great lights to be our chronometers, and thus keeps our world in order, and suffers no confusion to distract us.

Verse 20. Thou, makest darkness, and it is night. Drawing down the blinds for us, he prepares our bedchamber that we may sleep. Were there no darkness we should sigh for it, since we should find repose so much more difficult, if the weary day were never calmed into night. Let us see God's hand in the veiling of the sun, and never fear either natural or providential darkness, since both are of the Lord's own making. Wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. Then is the lion's day, his time to hunt his food. Why should not the wild beast have his hour as well as man? He has a service to perform, should he not also have his food? Darkness is fitter for beasts than man; and those men are most brutish who love darkness rather than light. When the darkness of ignorance broods over a nation, then all sorts of superstitions, cruelties, and vices abound; the gospel, like the sunrising, soon clears the world of the open ravages of these monsters, and they seek more congenial abodes. We see here the value of true light, for we may depend upon it where there is night there will also be wild beasts to kill and to devour.

Verse 21. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God. This is the poetic interpretation of a roar. To whom do the lions roar? Certainly not to their prey, for the terrible sound tends to alarm their victims, and drive them away. They after their own fashion express their desires for food, and the expression of desire is a kind of prayer. Out of this fact comes the devout thought of the wild beast's appealing to its Maker for food. But neither with lions nor men will the seeking of prayer suffice, there must be practical seeking too, and the lions are well aware of it. What they have in their own language asked for they go forth to seek; being in this thing far wiser than many men who offer formal prayers not half so earnest as those of the young lions, and then neglect the means in the use of which the object of their petitions might be gained. The lions roar and seek; too many are liars before God, and roar but never seek. How comforting is the thought that the Spirit translates the voice of a lion, and finds it to be a seeking of meat from God! May we not hope that our poor broken cries

and groans, which in our sorrow we have called "the voice of our roaring" Ps 12:10, will be understood by him, and interpreted in our favour. Evidently he considers the meaning rather than the music of the utterance and puts the best construction upon it.

Verse 22. The sun ariseth. Every evening has its morning to make the day. Were it not that we have seen the sun rise so often we should think it the greatest of miracles, and the most amazing of blessings. They gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens. Thus they are out of man's way, and he seldom encounters them unless he desires to do so. The forest's warriors retire to their quarters when the morning's drum is heard, finding in the recesses of their dens a darkness suitable for their slumbers; there they lay them down and digest their food, for God has allotted even to them their portion of rest and enjoyment. There was one who in this respect was poorer than lions and foxes, for he had not where to lay his head: all were provided for except their incarnate Provider. Blessed Lord, thou hast stooped beneath the conditions of the brutes to lift up worse than brutish men!

It is very striking how the Lord controls the fiercest of animals far more readily than the shepherd manages his sheep. At nightfall they separate and go forth each one upon the merciful errand of ending the miseries of the sickly and decrepit among grass eating animals. The younger of these animals being swift of foot easily escape them and are benefited by the exercise, and for the most part only those are overtaken and killed to whom life would have been protracted agony. So far lions are messengers of mercy, and are as much sent of God as the sporting dog is sent by man on his errands. But these mighty hunters must not always be abroad, they must be sent back to their lairs when man comes upon the scene. Who shall gather these ferocious creatures and shut them in? Who shall chain them down and make them harmless? The sun suffices to do it. He is the true lion tamer. They gather themselves together as though they were so many sheep, and in their own retreats they keep themselves prisoners till returning darkness gives them another leave to range. By simply majestic means the divine purposes are accomplished. In like manner even the devils are subject unto our Lord Jesus, and by the simple spread of the light of the gospel these roaring demons are chased out of the world. No need for miracles or displays of physical power, the Sun of Righteousness arises, and the devil and the false gods, and superstitions and errors of men, all seek their hiding places in the dark places of the earth among the moles and the bats.

Verse 23. Man goeth forth. It is his turn now, and the sunrise has made things ready for him. His warm couch he forsakes and the comforts of home, to find his daily food; this work is good for him, both keeping him out of mischief, and exercising his faculties. Unto his work and to his labour until the evening. He goes not forth to sport but to work, not to loiter but to labour; at least, this is the lot of the best part of mankind. We are made for work and ought to work, and should never grumble that so it is appointed. The hours of labour, however, ought not to be too long. If labour lasts out the average daylight it is certainly all that any man ought to expect of another, and yet there are poor creatures so badly paid that in twelve hours they cannot earn bread enough to keep them from hunger. Shame on those who dare so impose upon helpless women and children. Night work should also be avoided as much as possible. There are twelve hours in which a man ought to work: the night is meant for rest and sleep.

Night, then as well as day has its voice of praise. It is more soft and hushed, but it is none the less true. The moon lights up a solemn silence of worship among the fir trees, through which the night wind softly breathes its "songs without words." Every now and then a sound is heard, which, however

simple by day, sounds among the shadows startling and weird like, as if the presence of the unknown had filled the heart with trembling, and made the influence of the Infinite to be realized. Imagination awakens herself; unbelief finds the silence and the solemnity uncongenial, faith looks up to the skies above her and sees heavenly things all the more clearly in the absence of the sunlight, and adoration bows itself before the Great Invisible! There are spirits that keep the night watches, and the spell of their presence has been felt by many a wanderer in the solitudes of nature: God also himself is abroad all night long, and the glory which concealeth is often felt to be even greater than that which reveals. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Verse 24. O Lord, how manifold are thy works. They are not only many for number but manifold for variety. Mineral, vegetable, animal—what: a range of works is suggested by these three names! No two even of the same class are exactly alike, and the classes are more numerous than science can number. Works in the heavens above and in the earth beneath, and in the waters under the earth, works which abide the ages, works which come to perfection and pass away in a year, works which with all their beauty do not outlive a day, works within works, and works within these—who can number one of a thousand? God is the great worker, and ordainer of variety. It is ours to study his works, for they are great, and sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. The kingdom of grace contains as manifold and as great works as that of nature, but the chosen of the Lord alone discern them. In wisdom hast thou made them all, or wrought them all. They are all his works, wrought by his own power, and they all display his wisdom. It was wise to make their—none could be spared; every link is essential to the chain of nature—wild beasts as much as men, poisons as truly as odoriferous herbs. They are wisely made—each one fits its place, fills it, and is happy in so doing. As a whole, the "all" of creation is a wise achievement, and however it may be chequered with mysteries, and clouded with terrors, it all works together for good, and as one complete harmonious piece of workmanship it answers the great Worker's end. The earth is full of thy riches. It is not a poor house, but a palace; not a hungry ruin, but a well filled store house. The Creator has not set his creatures down in a dwelling place where the table is bare, and the buttery empty, he has filled the earth with food; and not with bare necessaries only, but with riches—dainties, luxuries, beauties, treasures. In the bowels of the earth are hidden mines of wealth, and on her surface are teeming harvests of plenty. All these riches are the Lord's; we ought to call them not "the wealth of nations," but "thy riches" O Lord! Not in one clime alone are these riches of God to be found, but in all lands—even the Arctic ocean has its precious things which men endure much hardness to win, and the burning sun of the equator ripens a produce which flavours the food of all mankind. If his house below is so full of riches what must his house above be, where

"The very streets are paved with gold
Exceeding clear and fine"?

Verse 25. So is this great and wide sea. He gives an instance of the immense number and variety of Jehovah's works by pointing to the sea. "Look, "saith he, "at yonder ocean, stretching itself on both hands and embracing so many lands, it too swarms with animal life, and in its deeps lie treasures beyond all counting. The heathen made the sea a different province from the land, and gave the command thereof to Neptune, but we know of a surety that Jehovah rules the waves." Wherein, are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts; read moving things and animals small and great, and you have the true sense. The number of minute forms of animal life is indeed beyond all reckoning: when a single phosphorescent wave may bear millions of infusoria, and around a fragment of rock armies of microscopic beings may gather, we renounce all idea of applying arithmetic to such

a case. The sea in many regions appears to be all alive, as if every drop were a world. Nor are these tiny creatures the only tenants of the sea, for it contains gigantic mammals which exceed in bulk those which range the land, and a vast host of huge fishes which wander among the waves, and hide in the caverns of the sea as the tiger lurks in the jungle, or the lion roams the plain. Truly, O Lord, thou makest the sea to be as rich in the works of thy hands as the land itself.

Verse 26. There go the ships. So that ocean is not altogether deserted of mankind. It is the highway of nations, and unites, rather than divides, distant lands. There is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein. The huge whale turns the sea into his recreation ground, and disports himself as God designed that he should do. The thought of this amazing creature caused the psalmist to adore the mighty Creator who created him, formed him for his place and made him happy in it. Our ancient maps generally depict a ship and whale upon the sea, and so show that it is most natural, as well as poetical, to connect them both with the mention of the ocean.

Verse 27. These wait all upon thee. They come around thee as fowls around the farmer's door at the time for feeding, and look up with expectation. Men or marmots, eagles or emmets, whales or minnows, they alike rely upon thy care. That thou mayest give them meat in due season; that is to say, when they need it and when it is ready for them. God has a time for all things, and does not feed his creatures by fits and starts; he gives them daily bread, and a quantity proportioned to their needs. This is all that any of us should expect; if even the brute creatures are content with a sufficiency we ought not to be more greedy than they.

Verse 28. That thou givest them they gather. God gives it, but they must gather it, and they are glad that he does so, for otherwise their gathering would be in vain. We often forget that animals and birds in their free life have to work to obtain food even as we do; and yet it is true with them as with us that our heavenly Father feeds all. When we see the chickens picking up the corn which the housewife scatters from her lap we have an apt illustration of the manner in which the Lord supplies the needs of all living things—he gives and they gather. Thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Here is divine liberality with its open hand filling needy creatures till they want no more: and here is divine omnipotence feeding a world by simply opening its hand. What should we do if that hand were closed? There would be no need to strike a blow, the mere closing of it would produce death by famine. Let us praise the open handed Lord, whose providence and grace satisfy our mouths with good things.

Verse 29. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled. So dependent are all living things upon God's smile, that a frown fills them with terror, as though convulsed with anguish. This is so in the natural world, and certainly not less so in the spiritual: saints when the Lord hides his face are in terrible perplexity. Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. The breath appears to be a trifling matter, and the air an impalpable substance of but small importance, yet, once withdrawn, the body loses all vitality, and crumbles back to the earth from which it was originally taken. All animals come under this law, and even the dwellers in the sea are not exempt from it. Thus dependent is all nature upon the will of the Eternal. Note here that death is caused by the act of God, "thou takest away their breath"; we are immortal till he bids us die, and so are even the little sparrows, who fall not to the ground without our Father.

Verse 30. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth. The loss of their breath destroys them, and by Jehovah's breath a new race is created. The works of the

Lord are majestically simple, and are performed with royal ease—a breath creates, and its withdrawal destroys. If we read the word spirit as we have it in our version, it is also instructive, for we see the Divine Spirit going forth to create life in nature even as we see him in the realms of grace. At the flood the world was stripped of almost all life, yet how soon the power of God refilled the desolate places! In winter the earth falls into a sleep which makes her appear worn and old, but how readily does the Lord awaken her with the voice of spring, and make her put on anew the beauty of her youth. Thou, Lord, doest all things, and let glory be unto thy name.

Verse 31. The glory of the LORD shall endure forever. His works may pass away, but not his glory. Were it only for what he has already done, the Lord deserves to be praised without ceasing. His personal being and character ensure that he would be glorious even were all the creatures dead. The LORD shall rejoice in his works. He did so at the first, when he rested on the seventh day, and saw that everything was very good; he does so still in a measure where beauty and purity in nature still survive the Fall, and he will do so yet more fully when the earth is renovated, and the trail of the serpent is cleansed from the globe. This verse is written in the most glowing manner. The poet finds his heart gladdened by beholding the works of the Lord, and he feels that the Creator himself must have felt unspeakable delight in exercising so much wisdom, goodness, and power.

Verse 32. He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth. The Lord who has graciously displayed his power in acts and works of goodness might, if he had seen fit, have overwhelmed us with the terrors of destruction, for even at a glance of his eye the solid earth rocks with fear. He toucheth the hills, and they smoke. Sinai was altogether on a smoke when the Lord descended upon it. It was but a touch, but it sufficed to make the mountain dissolve in flame. Even our God is a consuming fire. Woe unto those who shall provoke him to frown upon them, they shall perish at the touch of his hand. If sinners were not altogether insensible a glance of the Lord's eye would make them tremble, and the touches of his hand in affliction would set their hearts on fire with repentance. "Of reason all things show some sign, " except man's unfeeling heart.

Verse 33. I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live, or, literally, in my lives. Here and hereafter the psalmist would continue to praise the Lord, for the theme is an endless one, and remains for ever fresh and new. The birds sang God's praises before men were created, but redeemed men will sing his glories when the birds are no more. Jehovah, who ever lives and makes us to live shall be for ever exalted, and extolled in the songs of redeemed men. I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. A resolve both happy for himself and glorifying to the Lord. Note the sweet title—my God. We never sing so well as when we know that we have an interest in the good things of which we sing, and a relationship to the God whom we praise.

Verse 34. My meditation of him shall be sweet. Sweet both to him and to me. I shall be delighted thus to survey his works and think of his person, and he will graciously accept my notes of praise. Meditation is the soul of religion. It is the tree of life in the midst of the garden of piety, and very refreshing is its fruit to the soul which feeds thereon. And as it is good towards man, so is it towards God. As the fat of the sacrifice was the Lord's portion, so are our best meditations due to the Most High and are most acceptable to him. We ought, therefore, both for our own good and for the Lord's honour to be much occupied with meditation, and that meditation should chiefly dwell upon the Lord himself: it should be "meditation of him." For want of it much communion is lost and much happiness is missed. I will be glad in the Lord. To the meditative mind every thought of God is full of joy. Each one of the divine attributes is a well spring of delight now that in Christ Jesus we are reconciled unto

God.

Verse 35. Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. They are the only blot upon creation.

"Every prospect pleases.

And only man is vile."

In holy indignation the psalmist would fain rid the world of beings so base as not to love their gracious Creator, so blind as to rebel against their Benefactor. He does but ask for that which just men look forward to as the end of history: for the day is eminently to be desired when in all God's kingdom there shall not remain a single traitor or rebel. The Christian way of putting it will be to ask that grace may turn sinners into saints, and win the wicked to the ways of truth. Bless thou the LORD, O my soul. Here is the end of the matter—whatever sinners may do, do thou, my soul, stand to thy colours, and be true to thy calling. Their silence must not silence thee, but rather provoke thee to redoubled praise to make up for their failures. Nor canst thou alone accomplish the work; others must come to thy help. O ye saints, Praise ye the LORD. Let your hearts cry HALLELUJAH,—for that is the word in the Hebrew. Heavenly word! Let it close the Psalm: for what more remains to be said or written? HALLELUJAH. Praise ye the Lord.

Psalm 105

Verse 1. O give thanks unto the Lord. Jehovah is the author of all our benefits, therefore let him have all our gratitude. Call upon his name, or call him by his name; proclaim his titles and fill the world with his renown. Make known his deeds among the people, or among the nations. Let the heathen hear of our God, that they may forsake their idols and learn to worship him. The removal of the ark was a fit occasion for proclaiming aloud the glories of the Great King, and for publishing to all mankind the greatness of his doings, for it had a history in connection with the nations which it was well for them to remember with reverence. The rest of the psalm is a sermon, of which these first verses constitute the text.

Verse 2. Sing unto him. Bring your best thoughts and express them in the best language to the sweetest sounds. Take care that your singing is "unto him," and not merely for the sake of the music or to delight the ears of others. Singing is so delightful an exercise that it is a pity so much or it should be wasted upon trifles or worse than trifles. O ye who can emulate the nightingale, and almost rival the angels, we do most earnestly pray that your hearts may be renewed that so your floods of melody may be poured out at your Maker's and Redeemer's feet. Talk ye of all his wondrous works. Men love to speak of marvels, and others are generally glad to hear of surprising things; surely the believer in the living God has before him the most amazing series of wonders ever heard of or imagined, his themes are inexhaustible and they are such as should hold men spellbound. We ought to have more of this "talk": no one would be blamed as a Mr. Talkative if this were his constant theme. Talk ye, all of you: you all know something by experience of the marvellous loving kindness of the Lord—"talk ye." In this way, by all dwelling on this blessed subject, "all" his wondrous works will be published. One cannot do it, nor ten thousand times ten thousand, but if all speak to the Lord's honour, they will at least come nearer to accomplishing the deed. We ought to have a wide range when conversing upon the Lord's doings, and should not shut our eyes to any part of them. Talk ye of his wondrous works in creation and in grace, in judgment and in mercy, in providential interpositions and in spiritual

comforting; leave out none, or it will be to your damage. Obedience to this verse will give every sanctified tongue some work to do: the trained musicians can sing, and the commoner voices can talk, and in both ways the Lord will receive a measure of the thanks due to him, and his deeds will be made known among the people.

Verse 3. Glory ye in his holy name. Make it a matter of joy that you have such a God. His character and attributes are such as will never make you blush to call him your God. Idolaters may well be ashamed of the actions attributed to their fancied deities, their names are foul with lust and red with blood, but Jehovah is wholly glorious; every deed of his will bear the strictest scrutiny; his name is holy, his character is holy, his law is holy, his government is holy, his influence is holy. In all this we may make our boast, nor can any deny our right to do so. Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. If they have not yet found him so fully as they desire, yet even to be allowed and enabled to seek after such a God is cause for gladness, To worship the Lord and seek his kingdom and righteousness is the sure way to happiness, mad indeed there is no other. True seekers throw their hearts into the engagement, hence their hearts receive joy; according to the text they have a permit to rejoice and they have the promise that they shall do so. How happy all these sentences are! Where can men's ears be when they talk of the gloom of psalm singing? What worldly songs are fuller of real mirth? One hears the sound of the timbrel and the harp in every verse. Even seekers find bliss in the name of the Lord Jesus, but as for the finders, we may say with the poet,

"And those who find thee find a bliss,
Nor tongue nor pen Call show:
The love of Jesus what it is,
None but his loved ones know."

Verse 4. Seek the Loan and his strength. Put yourselves under his protection. Regard him not as a puny God, but look unto his omnipotence, and seek to know the power of his grace. We all need strength; let us look to the strong One for it. We need infinite power to bear us safely to our eternal resting place, let us look to the Almighty Jehovah for it. Seek his face evermore. Seek, seek, seek, we have the word three times, and though the words differ in the Hebrew, the sense is the same. It must be a blessed thing to seek, or we should not be thus stirred up to do so. To seek his face is to desire his presence, his smile, his favour consciously enjoyed. First we seek him, then his strength and then his face; from the personal reverence, we pass on to the imparted power, and then to the conscious favour. This seeking must never cease—the more we know the more we must seek to know. Finding him, we must "our minds inflame to seek him more and more." He seeks spiritual worshippers, and spiritual worshippers seek him; they are therefore sure to meet face to face ere long.

Verse 5. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done. Memory is never better employed than upon such topics. Alas, we are far more ready to recollect foolish and evil things than to retain in our minds the glorious deeds of Jehovah. If we would keep these in remembrance our faith would be stronger, our gratitude warmer, our devotion more fervent, and our love more intense. Shame upon us that we should let slip what it would seem impossible to forget. We ought to need no exhortation to remember such wonders, especially as he has wrought them all on the behalf of his people. His wonders, and the judgments of his mouth—these also should be had in memory. The judgments of his mouth are as memorable as the marvels of his band. God had but to speak and the enemies of his people were sorely afflicted; his threats were not mere words, but smote his adversaries terribly. As the Word of God is the salvation of his saints, so is it the destruction of the ungodly: out of his

mouth goeth a two edged sword with which he will slay the wicked.

Verse 6. O ye seed of Abraham his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen. Should all the world forget, ye are bound to remember. Your father Abraham saw his wonders and judgments upon Sodom, and upon the kings who came from far, and Jacob also saw the Lord's marvellous works in visiting the nations with famine, yet providing for his chosen a choice inheritance in a goodly land; therefore let the children praise their father's God. The Israelites were the Lord's elect nation, and they were bound to imitate their progenitor, who was the Lord's faithful servant and walked before him in holy faith: the seed of Abraham should not be unbelieving, nor should the children of so true a servant become rebels. As we read this pointed appeal to the chosen seed we should recognise the special claims which the Lord has upon ourselves, since we too have been favoured above all others. Election is not a couch for ease, but an argument for sevenfold diligence. If God has set his choice upon us, let us aim to be choice men.

Verse 7. He is the Lord our God. Blessed be his name. Jehovah condescends to be our God. This sentence contains a greater wealth of meaning than all the eloquence of orators can compass, and there is more joy in it than in all the sonnets of them that make merry. His judgments are in all the earth, or in all the land, for the whole of the country was instructed by his law, ruled by his statutes, and protected by his authority. What a joy it is that our God is never absent from us, he is never nonresident, never an absentee ruler, his judgments are in all the places in which we dwell. If the second clause of this verse refers to the whole world, it is very beautiful to see the speciality of Israel's election united with the universality of Jehovah's reign. Not alone to the one nation did the Lord reveal himself, but his glory flashed around the globe. It is wonderful that the Jewish people should have become so exclusive, and have so utterly lost the missionary spirit, for their sacred literature is full of the broad and generous sympathies which are so consistent with the worship of "the God of the whole earth." Nor is it less painful to observe that among a certain class of believers in God's election of grace there lingers a hard exclusive spirit, fatal to compassion and zeal. It would be well for these also to remember that their Redeemer is "the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe."

Verse 8. He hath remembered his covenant for ever. Here is the basis of all his dealings with his people: he had entered into covenant with them in their father Abraham, and to this covenant he remained faithful. The exhortation to remember (Ps 105:5) receives great force from the fact that God has remembered. If the Lord has his promise in memory surely we ought not to forget the wonderful manner in which he keeps it. To us it should be matter for deepest joy that never in any instance has the Lord been unmindful of his covenant engagements, nor will he be so world without end. O that we were as mindful of them as he is. The word which he commanded to a thousand generations. This is only an amplification of the former statement, and serves to set before us the immutable fidelity of the Lord during the changing generations of men. His judgments are threatened upon the third and fourth generations of them that hate him, but his love runs on for ever, even to "a thousand generations." His promise is here said to be commanded, or vested with all the authority of a law. It is a proclamation from a sovereign, the firman of an Emperor whose laws shall stand fast in every jot and tittle though heaven and earth shall pass away. Therefore let us give thanks unto the Lord and talk of all his wondrous works, so wonderful for their faithfulness and truth.

Verse 9. Which covenant he made with Abraham. When the victims were divided and the burning lamp passed between the pieces (Gen. 15.) then the Lord made, or ratified, the covenant with the

patriarch. This was a solemn deed, performed not without blood, and the cutting in pieces of the sacrifice; it points us to the greater covenant which in Christ Jesus is signed, sealed, and ratified, that it may stand fast for ever and ever. And his oath unto Isaac. Isaac did not in vision see the solemn making of the covenant, but the Lord renewed unto him his oath (Ge 26:2-5). This was enough for him, and must have established his faith in the Most High. We have the privilege of seeing in our Lord Jesus both the sacrificial seal, and the eternal oath of God, by which every promise of the covenant is made yea and amen to all the chosen seed.

Verse 10. And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law. Jacob in his wondrous dream (Ge 28:10-15) received a pledge that the Lord's mode of procedure with him would be in accordance with covenant relations: for said Jehovah, "I will not leave thee till I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Thus, if we may so speak with all reverence, the covenant became a law unto the Lord himself by which he bound himself to act. O matchless condescension, that the most free and sovereign Lord should put himself under covenant bonds to his chosen, and make a law for himself, though he is above all law. And to Israel for an everlasting covenant. When he changed Jacob's name he did not change his covenant, but it is written, "he blessed him there" (Ge 32:29), and it was with the old blessing, according to the unchangeable word of abiding grace.

Verse 11. Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance. This repetition of the great covenant promise is recorded in Ge 35:9-12 in connection with the change of Jacob's name, and very soon after that slaughter of the Shechemites, which had put the patriarch into such great alarm and caused him to use language almost identical with that of the next verse. When they were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it. Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me, and I shall be destroyed, and my house." Thus the fears of the man of God declared themselves, and they were reasonable if we look only at the circumstances in which he was placed, but they are soon seen to be groundless when we remember that the covenant promise, which guaranteed the possession of the land, necessarily implied the preservation of the race to whom the promise was made. We often fear where no fear is. The blessings promised to the seed of Abraham were not dependent upon the number of his descendants, or their position in this world. The covenant was made with one man, and consequently the number could never be less, and that one man was not the owner of a foot of soil in all the land, save only a cave in which to bury his dead, and therefore his seed could not have less inheritance than he. The smallness of a church, and the poverty of its members, are no barriers to the divine blessing, if it be sought earnestly by pleading the promise. Were not the apostles few, and the disciples feeble, when the good work began? Neither because we are strangers and foreigners here below, as our fathers were, are we in any the more danger: we are like sheep in the midst of wolves, but the wolves cannot hurt us, for our shepherd is near.

Verse 12. When they were but a few men in number. *bpom ytm*. Literally, "homines numeri", men of number; so few as easily to be numbered: in opposition to what their posterity afterwards were, as the sand of the sea, without number. Samuel Chandler.

Verse 13. When they went from one nation, to another, from one Kingdom to another people. Migrating as the patriarchs did from the region of one tribe to the country of another they were singularly preserved. The little wandering family might have been cut off root and branch had not a special mandate been issued from the throne for their protection. It was not the gentleness of their

neighbours which screened them; they were hedged about by the mysterious guardianship of heaven. Whether in Egypt, or in Philistia, or in Canaan, the heirs of the promises, dwelling in their tents, were always secure.

Verse 14. He suffered no man to do them wrong. Men cannot wrong us unless he suffers them to do so; the greatest of them must wait his permission before they can place a finger upon us. The wicked would devour us if they could, but they cannot even cheat us of a farthing without divine sufferance. Yea, he reproved kings for their sakes. Pharaoh and Abimelech must both be made to respect the singular strangers who had come to sojourn in their land; the greatest kings are very second rate persons with God in comparison with his chosen servants.

Verse 15. Saying, touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm. Abraham and his seed were in the midst of the world a generation of priests anointed to present sacrifice unto the most High God; since to them the oracles were committed, they were also the prophets of mankind; and they were kings too—a royal priesthood; hence they had received a threefold anointing. Their holy office surrounded them with a sacredness which rendered it sacrilege to molest them. The Lord was pleased to impress the wild tribes of Canaan with a respectful awe of the pious strangers who had come to abide with them, so that they came not near them to do them ill. The words here mentioned may not have been actually spoken, but the impression of awe which fell upon the nations is thus poetically described. God will not have those touched who have been set apart unto himself He calls them his own, saying, "Mine anointed" he declares that he has "anointed" them to be prophets, priests, and kings unto himself, and yet again he claims them as his prophets—"Do my prophets no harm." All through the many years in which the three great fathers dwelt in Canaan no man was able to injure them; they were not able to defend themselves by force of arms; but the eternal God was their refuge. Even so at this present time the remnant according to the election of grace cannot be destroyed, nay, nor so much as touched, without the divine consent. Against the church of Christ the gates of hell cannot prevail. In all this we see reasons for giving thanks unto the Lord, and proclaiming his name according to the exhortation of the first verse of the Psalm. Here ends the portion which was sung at the moving of the ark: its fitness to be used for such a purpose is very manifest, for the ark was the symbol both of the covenant and of that mystic dwelling of God with Israel which was at once her glory and her defence. None could touch the Lord's peculiar ones, for the Lord was among them, flaming forth in majesty between the cherubims. The presence of God having remained with his chosen ones while they sojourned in Canaan, it did not desert them when they were called to go down into Egypt. They did not go there of their own choice, but under divine direction, and hence the Lord prepared their way and prospered them until he saw fit to conduct them again to the land of promise.

Verse 16. Moreover he called for a famine upon the land. He had only to call for it as a man calls for his servant, and it came at once. How grateful ought we to be that he does not often call in that terrible servant of his, so meagre and gaunt, and grim, so pitiless to the women and the children, so bitter to the strong men, who utterly fail before it. He brake the whole staff of bread. Man's feeble life cannot stand without its staff—if bread fail him he fails. As a cripple with a broken staff falls to the ground, so does man when bread no longer sustains him. To God it is as easy to make a famine as to break a stall He could make that famine universal, too, so that all countries should be in like case: then would the race of man fall indeed, and its staff would be broken for ever. There is this sweet comfort in the matter, that the Lord has wise ends to serve even by famine: he meant his people to go down into Egypt, and the scarcity of food was his method of leading them there, for "they heard that

there was corn in Egypt."

Verse 17. He sent a man before them, even Joseph. He was the advance guard and pioneer for the whole clan. His brethren sold him, but God sent him. Where the hand of the wicked is visible God's hand may be invisibly at work, overruling their malice. No one was more of a man, or more fit to lead the van than Joseph: an interpreter of dreams was wanted, and his brethren had said of him, "Behold, this dreamer cometh." Who was sold for a servant, or rather for a slave. Joseph's journey into Egypt was not so costly as Jonah's voyage when he paid his own fare: his free passage was provided by the Midianites, who also secured his introduction to a great officer of state by handing him over as a Slave. His way to a position in which he could feed his family lay through the pit, the slaver's caravan, the slave market and the prison, and who shall deny but what it was the right way, the surest way, the wisest way, and perhaps the shortest way. Yet assuredly it seemed not so. Were we to send a man on such an errand we should furnish him with money—Joseph goes as a pauper; we should clothe him with authority—Joseph goes as a slave; we should leave him at full liberty—Joseph is a bondman: yet money would have been of little use when corn was so dear, authority would have been irritating rather than influential with Pharaoh, and freedom might not have thrown Joseph into connection with Pharaoh's captain and his other servants, and so the knowledge of his skill in interpretation might not have reached the monarch's ear. God way is the way. Our Lord's path to his mediatorial throne ran by the cross of Calvary; our road to glory runs by the rivers of grief.

Verse 18. Whose feet they hurt with fetters. From this we learn a little more of Joseph's sufferings than we find in the book of Genesis: inspiration had not ceased, and David was as accurate an historian as Moses, for the same Spirit guided his pen. He was laid in iron, or "into iron came his soul." The prayer book version, "the iron entered into his soul," is ungrammatical, but probably expresses much the same truth. His fetters hurt his mind as well as his body, and well did Jacob say, "The archers shot at him, and sorely grieved him." Under the cruelly false accusation, which he could not disprove, his mind was, as it were, belted and bolted around with iron, and had not the Lord been with him he might have sunk under his sufferings. In all this, and a thousand things besides, he was an admirable type of him who in the highest sense is "the Shepherd, the stone of Israel." The iron fetters were preparing him to wear chains of gold, and making his feet ready to stand on high places. It is even so with all the Lord's afflicted ones, they too shall one day step from their prisons to their thrones.

Verse 19. Until the time that his word came. God has his times, and his children must wait till his "until" is fulfilled. Joseph was tried as in a furnace, until the Lord's assaying work was fully accomplished. The word of the chief butler was nothing, he had to wait until God's word came, and meanwhile the word of the Lord tried him. He believed the promise, but his faith was sorely exercised. A delayed blessing tests men, and proves their metal, whether their faith is of that precious kind which can endure the fire. Of many a choice promise we may say with Daniel "the thing was true, but the time appointed was long." If the vision tarry it is good to wait for it with patience. There is a trying word and a delivering word, and we must bear the one till the other comes to us. How meekly Joseph endured his afflictions, and with what fortitude he looked forward to the clearing of his slandered character we may readily imagine: it will be better still if under similar trials we are able to imitate him, and come forth from the furnace as thoroughly purified as he was, and as well prepared to bear the yet harder ordeal of honour and power.

Verse 20. The king sent and loosed him. He was thrust into the roundhouse by an officer, but he was

released by the monarch himself. Even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. The tide had turned, so that Egypt's haughty potentate gave him a call from the prison to the palace. He had interpreted the dreams of captives, himself a captive; he must now interpret for a ruler and become a ruler himself. When God means to enlarge his prisoners, kings become his turnkeys.

Verse 21. He made him lord of his house. Reserving no power, but saying "only in the throne will I be greater than thou." The servitor of slaves becomes lord over nobles. How soon the Lord lifteth his chosen from the dunghill to set them among princes. And ruler of all his substance. He empowered him to manage the storing of the seven plenteous harvests, and to dispense the provisions in the coming days of scarcity. All the treasures of Egypt were under his lock and key, yea, the granaries of the world were sealed or opened at his bidding. Thus was he in the best conceivable position for preserving alive the house of Israel with whom the covenant was made. As our Lord was himself secured in Egypt from Herod's enmity, so, ages before, the redeemed race found an equally available shelter, in the hour of need. God has always a refuge for his saints, and if the whole earth could not afford them sanctuary, the Lord himself would be their dwelling place, and take them up to lie in his own bosom. We are always sure to be fed if all the world should starve. It is delightful to think of our greater Joseph ruling the nations for the good of his own household, and it becomes us to abide in quiet confidence in every political disaster, since Jesus is on the throne of providence, King of kings and Lord of lords, and will be so till this dispensation ends.

Verse 22. To bind his princes at his pleasure. He who was bound obtains authority to bind. He is no longer kept in prison, but keeps all the prisons, and casts into them the greatest nobles when justice demands it. And teach his senators wisdom. The heads of the various peoples, the elders of the nations, learned from him the science of government, the art of providing for the people. Joseph was a great instructor in political economy, and we doubt not that he mingled with it the purest morals, the most upright jurisprudence, and something of that divine wisdom without which the most able senators remain in darkness. The king's authority made him absolute both in the executive and in the legislative courts, and the Lord instructed him to use his power with discretion. What responsibilities and honours loaded the man who had been rejected by his brothers, and sold for twenty pieces of silver! What glories crown the head of that greater one who was "separated from his brethren."

Verse 23. Israel also came into Egypt. The aged patriarch came, and with him that increasing company which bore his name. He was hard to bring there. Perhaps nothing short of the hope of seeing Joseph could have drawn him to take so long a journey from the tombs of his forefathers; but the divine will was accomplished and the church of God was removed into an enemy's country, where for a while it was nourished. And Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. Shem the blessed came to lodge awhile with Ham the accursed: the dove was in the vulture's nest. God so willed it for a time, and therefore it was safe and right: still it was only a sojourn, not a settlement. The fairest Goshen in Egypt was not the covenant blessing, neither did the Lord mean his people to think it so; even so to us "earth is our lodge" but only our lodge, for heaven is our home. When we are best housed we ought still to remember that here we have no continuing city. It were ill news for us if we were doomed to reside in Egypt for ever, for all its riches are not worthy to be compared with the reproach of Christ. Thus the song rehearsed the removals of the Lord's people, and was a most fit accompaniment to the bearing up of the ark, as the priest carried it into the city of David, where the Lord had appointed it a resting place.

Verse 24. And he increased his people greatly. In Goshen they seem to have increased rapidly from

the first, and this excited the fears of the Egypt, inns, so that they tried to retard their increase by oppression, but the Lord continued to bless them, And made them stronger than their enemies. Both in physical strength and in numbers they threatened to become the more powerful race. Nor was this growth of the nation impeded by tyrannical measures, but the very reverse took place, thus giving an early instance of what has since become a proverb in the church—"the more they oppressed them the more they multiplied." It is idle to contend either with God or his people.

Verse 25. He turned their hearts to hate his people. It was his goodness to Israel which called forth the ill will of the Egyptian court, and so far the Lord caused it, and moreover he made use of this feeling to lead on to the discomfort of his people, and so to their readiness to leave the land to which they had evidently become greatly attached. Thus far but no further did the Lord turn the hearts of the Egyptians. God cannot in any sense be the author of sin so far as to be morally responsible for its existence, but it often happens through the evil which is inherent in human nature that the acts of the Lord arouse the ill feelings of ungodly men. Is the sun to be blamed because while it softens wax it hardens clay? Is the orb of day to be accused of creating the foul exhalations which are drawn by its warmth from the pestilential marsh? The sun causes the reek of the dunghill only in a certain sense had it been a bed of flowers his beams would have called forth fragrance. The evil is in men, and the honour of turning it to good and useful purposes is with the Lord. Hatred is often allied with cunning, and so in the case of the Egyptians, they began to deal subtilly with his servants. They treated them in a fraudulent manner, they reduced them to bondage by their exactions, they secretly concerted the destruction of their male children, and at length openly ordained that cruel measure, and all with the view of checking their increase, lest in time of war they should side with invaders in order to obtain their liberty. Surely the depths of Satanic policy were here reached, but vain was the cunning of man against the chosen seed.

Verse 26. He sent Moses his servant; and Aaron whom he had chosen. When the oppression was at the worst, Moses came. For the second time we have here the expression, "he sent"; he who sent Joseph sent also Moses and his eloquent brother. The Lord had the men in readiness and all he had to do was to commission them and thrust them forward. They were two, for mutual comfort and strength, even as the apostles and the seventy in our Lord's day were sent forth two and two. The men differed, and so the one became the supplement of the other, and together they were able to accomplish far more than if they had been exactly alike: the main point was that they were both sent, and hence both clothed with divine might.

Verse 27. They showed his signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham. The miracles which were wrought by Moses were the Lord's, not his own: signs, as being the marks of Jehovah's presence hence they are here called "his" and power. The plagues were "words of his signs" (see margin), that is to say, they were speaking marvels, which testified more plainly than words to the omnipotence of Jehovah, to his determination to be obeyed, to his anger at the obstinacy of Pharaoh. Never were discourses more plain, pointed, personal, or powerful, and yet it took ten of them to accomplish the end designed. In the preaching of the gospel there are words, and signs, and wonders and these leave men without excuse for their impenitence; to have the kingdom of God come nigh unto them, and yet to remain rebellious is the unhappy sin of obstinate spirits. Those are wonders of sin who see wonders of grace, and yet are unaffected by them: bad as he was, Pharaoh had not this guilt, for the prodigies which lie beheld were marvels of judgment and not of mercy.

Verse 28. He sent darkness, and made it dark. It was no natural or common darkness to be

accounted for by the blinding dust of the simoon, it was beyond all precedent and out of the range of ordinary events. It was a horrible palpable obscurity which men felt clinging about them as though it were a robe of death. It was a thick darkness, a total darkness, a darkness which lasted three days, a darkness in which no one dared to stir. What a condition to be in! This plague is first mentioned, thought it is not first in order, because it fitly describes all the period of the plagues: the land was in the darkness of sorrow, and in the darkness of sin all the time. If we shudder as we think of that long and terrible gloom, let us reflect upon the gross darkness which still covers heathen lands as the result of sin, for it is one of the chief plagues which iniquity creates for itself. May the day soon come when the people which sit in darkness shall see a great light. And they rebelled not against his word. Moses and Aaron did as they were bidden, and during the darkness the Egyptians were so cowed that even when it cleared away they were anxious for Israel to be gone, and had it not been for the pride of Pharaoh they would have rejoiced to speed them on their journey there and then. God can force men to obey, and even make the stoutest hearts eager to pay respect to his will, for fear his plagues should be multiplied. Possibly, however, the sentence before us neither refers to Moses nor the Egyptians, but to the plagues which came at the Lord's bidding. The darkness, the hail, the frogs, the murrain, were all so many obedient servants of the great Lord of all.

Verse 29. He turned their waters into blood, and slew their fish. So that the plague was not a mere colouring of the water with red earth, as some suppose, but the river was offensive and fatal to the fish. The beloved Nile and other streams were all equally tainted and ensanguined. Their commonest mercy became their greatest curse. Water is one of the greatest blessings, and the more plentiful it is the better, but blood is a hideous sight to look upon, and to see rivers and pools of it is frightful indeed. Fish in Egypt furnished a large part of the food supply, and it was no small affliction to see them floating dead and white upon a stream of crimson. The hand of the Lord thus smote them where all classes of the people would become aware of it and suffer from it.

Verse 30. Their land brought forth frogs in abundance. If fish could not live frogs might, yea, they multiplied both on land and in the water till they swarmed beyond all count. In the chambers of their kings. They penetrated the choicest rooms of the palace, and were found upon the couches of state. The Lord called for them and they marched forth. Obnoxious and even loathsome their multitudes became, but there was no resisting them; they seemed to spring out of the ground, the very land brought them forth. Their universal presence must have inspired horror and disgust which would cause sickness and make life a burden; their swarming even in the king's own chambers was a rebuke to his face, which his pride must have felt. Kings are no more than other men with God, nay less than others when they are first in rebellion; if the frogs had abounded elsewhere, but had been kept out of his select apartments, the monarch would have cared little, for he was a heartless being, but God took care that there should be a special horde of the invaders for the palace; they were more than ordinarily abundant in the chambers of their kings.

Verse 31. He spake. See the power of the divine word. He had only to say it and it was done: and there came divers sorts of flies. Insects of various annoying kinds came up in infinite hordes, a mixture of biting, stinging, buzzing gnats, mosquitos, flies, beetles, and other vermin such as make men's flesh their prey, the place of deposit for their eggs, and the seat of peculiar torments. And lice in all their coasts. These unutterably loathsome forms of life were as the dust of the ground, and covered their persons, their garments, and all they ate. Nothing is too small to master man when God commands it to assail him. The sons of Ham had despised the Israelites and now they were made to loathe themselves. The meanest beggars were more approachable than the proud Egyptians; they

were reduced to the meanest condition of filthiness, and the most painful state of irritation. What armies the Lord can send forth when once his right arm is bared for war! And what scorn he pours on proud nations when he fights them, not with angels, but with lice! Pharaoh had little left to be proud of when his own person was invaded by filthy parasites. It was a slap in the face which ought to have humbled his heart, but, alas, man, when he is altogether polluted, still maintains his self conceit, and when he is the most disgusting object in the universe he still vaunts himself. Surely pride is moral madness.

Verse 32. He gave them hail for rain. They seldom had rain, but now the showers assumed the form of heavy, destructive hail storms, and being accompanied with a hurricane and thunderstorm, they were overwhelming, terrible, and destructive. And flaming fire in their land. The lightning was peculiarly vivid, and seemed to run along upon the ground, or fall in fiery flakes. Thus all the fruit of the trees and the harvests of the fields were either broken to pieces or burned on the spot, and universal fear bowed the hearts of men to the dust. No phenomena are more appalling to the most of mankind than those which attend a thunderstorm; even the most audacious blasphemers quail when the dread artillery of heaven opens fire upon the earth.

Verse 33. He smote their vines also and their fig trees. So that all hope of gathering their best fruits was gone, and the trees were injured for future bearing. All the crops were destroyed, and these are mentioned as being the more prominent forms of their produce, used by them both at festivals and in common meals. And brake the trees of their coasts. From end to end of Egypt the trees were battered and broken by the terrible hailstorm. God is in earnest when he deals with proud spirits, he will either end them or mend them.

Verse 34. He spoke, and the locusts came, and caterpillars, and that without number. One word from the Captain and the armies leap forward. The expression is very striking, and sets forth the immediate result of the divine word. The caterpillar is called the licker, because it seems to lick up every green thing as in a moment. Perhaps the caterpillar here meant is still the locust in another form. That locusts swarm in countless armies is a fact of ordinary observation, and the case would be worse on this occasion. We have ourselves ridden for miles through armies of locusts, and we have seen with our own eyes how completely they devour every green thing. The description is not strained when we read, "And did eat up all the herbs in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground." Nothing escapes these ravenous creatures, they even climb the trees to reach any remnant of foliage which may survive. Commissioned as these were by God, we may be sure they would do their work thoroughly, and leave behind them nothing but a desolate wilderness.

Verse 35. Did eat up all the herbs. The locusts had devoured every green herb and every blade of grass; and had it not been for the reeds, on which our cattle entirely subsisted while we skirted the banks of the river, the journey must have been discontinued, at least in the line that had been proposed. The larvae, as generally is the case in this class of nature, are much more voracious than the perfect insect; nothing that is green seems to come amiss to them. The traces of their route over the country are very obvious for many weeks after they have passed it, the surface appearing as if swept by a broom, or as if a harrow had been drawn over it. John Barrow, 1764-1849.

Verse 36. Are smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength. Now came the master blow. The Lord spoke before, but now he smites; before he only smote vines, but now he strikes men themselves. The glory of the household dies in a single night, the prime and pick of the

nation are cut off, the flower of the troops, the heirs of the rich, and the hopes of the poor all die at midnight. Now the target was struck in the centre, there was no confronting this plague. Pharaoh feels it as much as the woman slave at the mill: he had smitten Israel, the Lord's firstborn, and the Lord repaid him to his face. What a cry went up throughout the land of Egypt when every house wailed its firstborn at the dead of night! O Jehovah, thou didst triumph in that hour, and with an outstretched arm didst thou deliver thy people.

Verse 37. He brought them forth also with silver and gold. This they asked of the Egyptians, perhaps even demanded, and well they might, for they had been robbed and spoiled for many a day, and it was not meet that they should go forth empty handed. Glad were the Egyptians to hand over their jewels to propitiate a people who had such a terrible friend above; they needed no undue pressure, they feared them too much to deny them their requests. The Israelites were compelled to leave their houses and lands behind them, and it was but justice that they should be able to turn these into portable property. And there was not one feeble person among their tribes—a great marvel indeed. The number of their army was very great and yet there was not one in hospital, not one carried in an ambulance, or limping in the rear. Poverty and oppression had not enfeebled them. JEHOVAH ROPHI had healed them; they carried none of the diseases of Egypt with them, and felt none of the exhaustion which sore bondage produces. When God calls his people to a long journey he fits them for it; in the pilgrimage of life our strength shall be equal to our day. See the contrast between Egypt and Israel—in Egypt one dead in every house, and among the Israelites not one so much as limping.

Verse 38. Egypt was glad when they departed, which would not have been the case had the gold and silver been borrowed by the Israelites, for men do not carry their goods into a far country. The awe of God like to see borrowers lad to nay them to be was on Egypt, and they feared his people and were glad to pay them to be gone. What a change from the time when the sons of Jacob were the drudges of the land, the offscouring of all things, the brick makers whose toil was only requited by the lash or the stick. Now they were revered as prophets and priests; for the fear of them fell upon them, the people proceeded even to a superstitious terror them. Thus with cheers and good wishes their former taskmasters sent them on their way: Pharaoh was foiled and the chosen people were once more on the move, journeying to the place which the Lord had given to them by a covenant of salt. "O give thanks unto Jehovah; call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people."

Verse 39. He spread a cloud for a covering. Never people were so favoured. What would not travellers in the desert now give for such a canopy? The sun could not scorch them with its burning ray; their whole camp was screened like a king in his pavilion. Nothing seemed to be too good for God to give his chosen nation, their comfort was studied in every way. And fire to give light in the night. While cities were swathed in darkness, their town of tents enjoyed a light which modern art with all its appliances cannot equal. God himself was their sun and shield, their glory and their defence. Could they be unbelieving while so graciously shaded, or rebellious while they walked at midnight in such a light? Alas, the tale of their sin is as extraordinary as this story of His love; but this Psalm selects the happier theme and dwells only upon covenant love and faithfulness. O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good. We, too, have found the Lord all this to us, for he has been our sun and shield, and has preserved us alike from the perils of joys and the evils of grief;

"He hath been my joy in woe,
Cheered my heart when it was low;
And with warnings softly sad

Calmed my heart when it was glad."

So has the promise been fulfilled to us, "the sun shall not hurt thee by day, nor the moon by night."

Verse 40. The people asked. But how badly, how wickedly! And yet his grace forgave the sin of their murmuring and heard its meaning: or perhaps we may consider that while the multitude murmured there were a few, who were really gracious people, who prayed, and therefore the blessing came. He brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. He gave them what they asked amiss as well as what was good for them, mingling judgment with goodness, for their discipline. The quails were more a curse than a blessing in the end, because of their greed and lust, but in themselves they were a peculiar indulgence, and favour: it was their own fault, that the dainty meat brought death with it. As for the manna it was unmingled good to them, and really satisfied them, which the quails never did. It was bread from heaven, and the bread of heaven, sent by heaven; it was a pity that they were not led to look up to heaven whence it came, and fear and love the God who out of heaven rained it upon them. Thus they were housed beneath the Lord's canopy and fed with food from his own table; never people were so lodged and boarded. O house of Israel, praise ye the Lord.

Verse 41. He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out. With Moses' rod and his own word he cleft the rock in the desert, and forth leaped abundant floods for their drinking where they had feared to die of thirst. From most unlikely sources the all sufficient God can supply his people's needs; hard rocks become springing fountains at the Lord's command. They ran in the dry places like a river: so that those at a distance from the rock could stoop down and refresh themselves, and the stream flowed on, so that in future journeyings they were supplied. The desert sand would naturally swallow up the streams, and yet it did not so, the refreshing river ran "in the dry places." We know that the rock set forth our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom there flows a fountain of living waters which shall never be exhausted till the last pilgrim has crossed the Jordan and entered Canaan.

Verse 42. For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant. Here is the secret reason for all this grace. The covenant and he for whose sake it was made are ever on the heart of the Most High. He remembered his people because he remembered his covenant. He could not violate that gracious compact for it was sacred to him,— "his holy promise." A holy God must keep his promise holy. In our case the Lord's eye is upon his beloved Son, and his engagements with him. On our behalf, and this is the source and well ahead of those innumerable favours which enrich us in all our wanderings through this life's wilderness.

Verse 43. And he brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness. Up from the wilderness he led them, rejoicing over them himself and making them rejoice too. They were his people, his chosen, and hence in them he rejoiced, and upon them he showered his favours, that they might rejoice in him as their God, and their portion.

Verse 44. And gave them the lands of the heathen. He drove out the Canaanites and allotted the lands to the tribes. They were called on to fight, but the Lord wrought so wonderfully that the conquest was not effected by their bow or spear—the Lord gave them the land. And they inherited the labour of the people, they dwelt in houses which they had not built, and gathered fruit from vines and olives which they had not planted. They were not settled in a desert which needed to be reclaimed, but in a land fertile to a proverb, and cultivated carefully by its inhabitants. Like Adam, they were placed in a garden. This entrance into the goodly land was fitly celebrated when the ark was being

moved to Zion.

Verse 45. That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. This was the practical design of it all. The chosen nation was to be the conservator of truth, the exemplar of morality, the pattern of devotion: everything was so ordered as to place them in advantageous circumstances for fulfilling this trust. Theirs was a high calling and a glorious election. It involved great responsibilities, but it was in itself a distinguished blessing, and one for which the nation was bound to give thanks. Most justly then did the music close with the jubilant but solemn shout of HALLELUJAH. Praise ye the Lord. If this history did not make Israel praise God, what would?

Psalm 106

Verse 1. Praise ye the Lord. Hallelujah. Praise ye Jah. This song is for the assembled people, and they are all exhorted to join in praise to Jehovah. It is not meet for a few to praise and the rest to be silent; but all should join. If David were present in churches where quartets and choirs carry on all the singing, he would turn to the congregation and say, "Praise ye the Lord." Our meditation dwells upon human sin; but on all occasions and in all occupations it is seasonable and profitable to praise the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good. To us needy creatures the goodness of God is the first attribute which excites praise, and that praise takes the form of gratitude. We praise the Lord truly when we give him thanks for what we have received from his goodness. Let us never be slow to return unto the Lord our praise; to thank him is the least we can do—let us not neglect it. For his mercy endureth for ever. Goodness towards sinners assumes the form of mercy, mercy should therefore be a leading note in our song. Since man ceases not to be sinful, it is a great blessing that Jehovah ceases not to be merciful. From age to age the Lord deals graciously with his church, and to every individual in it he is constant and faithful in his grace, even for evermore. In a short space we have here two arguments for praise, "for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever," and these two arguments are themselves praises. The very best language of adoration is that which adoringly in the plainest words sets forth the simple truth with regard to our great Lord. No rhetorical flourishes or poetical hyperboles are needed, the bare facts are sublime poetry, and the narration of them with reverence is the essence of adoration. This first verse is the text of all that which follows; we are now to see how from generation to generation the mercy of God endured to his chosen people.

Verse 2. Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? What tongue of men or angels can duly describe the great displays of divine power? They are unutterable. Even those who saw them could not fully tell them. Who can shew forth all his praise? To declare his works is the same thing as to praise him, for his own doings are his best commendation. We cannot say one tenth so much for him as his own character and acts have already done? Those who praise the Lord have an infinite subject, a subject which will not be exhausted throughout eternity by the most enlarged intellects, nay, nor by the whole multitude of the redeemed, though no man can number them. The questions of this verse never can be answered; their challenge can never be accepted, except in that humble measure which can be reached by a holy life and a grateful heart.

Verse 3. Since the Lord is so good and so worthy to be praised, it must be for our happiness to obey him. Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times. Multiplied are the blessings which must descend upon the whole company of the keepers of the way of justice, and especially upon that one rare man who at all times follows that which is right. Holiness is happiness. The way of right is the way of peace. Yet men leave this road, and prefer the paths of the destroyer.

Hence the story which follows is in sad contrast with the happiness here depicted, because the way of Israel was not that of judgment and righteousness, but that of folly and iniquity. The Psalmist, while contemplating the perfections of God, was impressed with the feeling that the servants of such a being must be happy, and when he looked around and saw how the tribes of old prospered when they obeyed, and suffered when they sinned, he was still more fully assured of the truth of his conclusion. O could we but be free of sin we should be rid of sorrow! We would not only be just, but "keep judgment"; we would not be content with occasionally acting rightly, but would "do justice at all times."

Verse 4. Remember me, O Lord, with the favour which thou bearest unto thy people. Insignificant as I am, do not forget me. Think of me with kindness, even as thou thinkest of thine own elect. I cannot ask more, nor would I seek less. Treat me as the least of thy saints are treated and I am content. It should be enough for us if we fare as the rest of the family. If even Balaam desired no more than to die the death of the righteous, we may be well content both to live as they live, and die as they die. This feeling would prevent our wishing to escape trial, persecution, and chastisement; these have fallen to the lot of saints, and why should we escape them

"Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease?
While others fought to will the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas."

At the same time we pray to have their sweets as well as their bitters. If the Lord smiled upon their souls we cannot rest unless he smiles upon us also. We would dwell where they dwell, rejoice as they rejoice, sorrow as they sorrow, and in all things be for ever one with them in the favour of the Lord. The sentence before us is a sweet prayer, at once humble and aspiring, submissive and expansive; it might be used by a dying thief or a living apostle; let us use it now. O visit me with thy salvation. Bring it home to me. Come to my house and to my heart, and give me the salvation which thou hast prepared, and art alone able to bestow. We sometimes hear of a man's dying by the visitation of God, but here is one who knows that he can only live by the visitation of God. Jesus said of Zacchaeus, "This day is salvation come to this house, "and that was the case because he himself had come there. There is no salvation apart from the Lord, and he must visit us with it or we shall never obtain it. We are too sick to visit our Great Physician, and therefore he visits us. O that our great Bishop would hold a visitation of all the churches, and bestow his benediction upon all his flock. Sometimes the second prayer of this verse seems to be too great for us, for we feel that we are not worthy that the Lord should come under our roof. Visit me, Lord? Can it be? Dare I ask for it? And yet I must, for thou alone canst: bring me salvation: therefore, Lord, I entreat thee come unto me, and abide with me for ever.

Verse 5. That I may see the good of thy chosen. His desire for the divine favour was excited by the hope that he might participate in all the good things which flow to the people of God through their election. The Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, according as he has chosen us in him, and in these precious gifts we desire to share through the saving visitation of the Lord. No other good do we wish to see, perceive, and apprehend, but that which is the peculiar treasure of the saints. That I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation. The psalmist, having sought his portion in the good of the chosen, now also begs to be a partaker in their joy for of all the nations under heaven the Lord's true people are the happiest. That I may glory with thine inheritance. He

would have a part and lot in their honour as well as their joy. He was willing to find glory where saints find it, namely, in being reproached for truth's sake. To serve the Lord and endure shame for his sake is the glory of the saints below: Lord, let me rejoice to bear my part therein. To be with God above, for ever blessed in Christ Jesus, is the glory of saints above: O Lord, be pleased to allot me a place there also. These introductory thanksgivings and supplications, though they occur first in the psalm, are doubtless the result of the contemplations which succeed them, and may be viewed not only as the preface, but also as the moral of the whole sacred song.

Verse 6. We have sinned with our fathers. Here begins a long and particular confession. Confession of sin is the readiest way to secure an answer to the prayer of verse 4; God visits with his salvation the soul which acknowledges its need of a Saviour. Men may be said to have sinned with their fathers when they imitate them, when they follow the same objects, and make their own lives to be mere continuations of the follies of their sires. Moreover, Israel was but one nation in all time, and the confession which follows sets forth the national rather than the personal sin of the Lord's people. They enjoyed national privileges, and therefore they shared in national guilt. We have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Thus is the confession repeated three times, in token of the sincerity and heartiness of it. Sins of omission, commission, and rebellion we ought to acknowledge under distinct heads, that we may show a due sense of the number and heinousness of our offences.

Verse 7. Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt. The Israelites saw the miraculous plagues and ignorantly wondered at them: their design of love, their deep moral and spiritual lessons, and their revelation of the divine power and justice they were unable to perceive. A long sojourn among idolaters had blunted the perceptions of the chosen family, and cruel slavery had ground them down into mental sluggishness. Alas, how many of God's wonders are not understood, or misunderstood by us still. We fear the sons are no great improvement upon the sires. We inherit from our fathers much sin and little wisdom; they could only leave us what they themselves possessed. We see from this verse that a want of understanding is no excuse for sin, but is itself one count in the indictment against Israel. They remembered not the multitude of thy mercies. The sin of the understanding leads on to the sin of the memory. What is not understood will soon be forgotten. Men feel little interest in preserving husks; if they know nothing of the inner kernel they will take no care of the shells. It was an aggravation of Israel's sin that when God's mercies were so numerous they yet were able to forget them all. Surely some out of such a multitude of benefits ought to have remained engraven upon their hearts; but if grace does not give us understanding, nature will soon cast out the memory of God's great goodness. But provoked him at the sea, even; at the Red sea. To fall out at starting was a bad sign. Those who did not begin well can hardly be expected to end well. Israel is not quite out of Egypt, and yet she begins to provoke the Lord by doubting his power to deliver, and questioning his faithfulness to his promise. The sea was only called Red, but their sins were scarlet in reality; it was known as the "sea of weeds," but far worse weeds grew in their hearts.

Verse 8. Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known. When he could find no other reason for his mercy he found it in his own glory, and seized the opportunity to display his power. If Israel does not deserve to be saved, yet Pharaoh's pride needs to be crushed, and therefore Israel shall be delivered. The Lord very jealously guards his own name and honour. It shall never be said of him that he cannot or will not save his people, or that he cannot abate the haughtiness of his defiant foes. This respect unto his own honour ever leads him to deeds of mercy, and hence we may well rejoice that he is a jealous God.

Verse 9. He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up. A word did it. The sea heard his voice and obeyed. How many rebukes of God are lost upon us! Are we not more unmanageable than the ocean? God did, as it were, chide the sea, and say, "Wherefore dost thou stop the way of my people? Their path to Canaan lies through thy channel, how dare you hinder them?" The sea perceived its Master and his seed royal, and made way at once. So he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness. As if it had been the dry floor of the desert the tribes passed over the bottom of the gulf; nor was their passage venturesome, for HE bade them go; nor dangerous, for He led them. We also have under divine protection passed through many trials and afflictions, and with the Lord as our guide we have experienced no fear and endured no perils. We have been led through the deeps as through the wilderness.

Verse 10. And he saved them from the hand of them that hated them. Pharaoh was drowned, and the power of Egypt so crippled that throughout the forty years' wanderings of Israel they were never threatened by their old masters. And redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. This was a redemption by power, and one of the most instructive types of the redemption of the Lord's people from sin and hell by the power which worketh in them.

Verse 11. And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. The Lord does nothing by halves. What he begins he carries through to the end. This, again, made Israel's sin the greater, because they saw the thoroughness of the divine justice, and the perfection of the divine faithfulness. In the covering of their enemies we have a type of the pardon of our sins; they are sunk as in the sea, never to rise again; and, blessed be the Lord, there is "not one of them left."—Not one sin of thought, or word, or deed, the blood of Jesus has covered all. "I will cast their iniquities into the depths of the sea."

Verse 12. Then believed they his words. That is to say, they believed the promise when they saw it fulfilled, but not till then. This is mentioned, not to their credit, but to their shame. Those who do not believe the Lord's word till they see it performed are not believers at all. Who would not believe when the fact stares them in the face? The Egyptians would have done as much as this. They sang his praise. How could they do otherwise? Their song was very excellent, and is the type of the song of heaven; but sweet as it was, it was quite as short, and when it was ended they fell to murmuring. "They sang his praise, "but "they soon forgot his works." Between Israel singing and Israel sinning there was scarce a step. Their song was good while it lasted, but it was no sooner begun than over.

Verse 13. They soon forgot his works. They seemed in a hurry to get the Lord's mercies out of their memories; they hastened to be ungrateful. They waited not for his counsel, neither waiting for the word of command or promise; eager to have their own way, and prone to trust in themselves. This is a common fault in the Lord's family to this day; we are long in learning to wait for the Lord, and upon the Lord. With him is counsel and strength, but we are vain enough to look for these to ourselves, and therefore we grievously err.

Verse 14. But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness. Though they would not wait God's will, they are hot to have their own. When the most suitable and pleasant food was found them in abundance, it did not please them long, but they grew dainty and sniffed at angel's food, and must needs have flesh to eat, which was unhealthy diet for that warm climate, and for their easy life. This desire of theirs they dwelt upon till it became a mania with them, and, like a wild horse, carried away its rider. For a meal of meat they were ready to curse their God and renounce the land which floweth with milk and honey.

What a wonder that the Lord did not take them at their word! It is plain that they vexed him greatly, And tempted God in the desert. In the place where they were absolutely dependent upon him and were everyday fed by his direct provision, they had the presumption to provoke their God. They would have him change the plans of his wisdom, supply their sensual appetites, and work miracles to meet their wicked unbelief: these things the Lord would not do, but they went as far as they could in trying to induce him to do so. They failed not in their wicked attempt because of any goodness in themselves, but because God "cannot be tempted, "—temptation has no power over him, he yields not to man's threats or promises.

Verse 15. And he gave them their request. Prayer may be answered in anger and denied in love. That God gives a man his desire is no proof that he is the object of divine favour, everything depends upon what that desire is. But sent leanness into their soul. Ah, that "but!" It embittered all. The meat was poison to them when it came without a blessing; whatever it might do in fattening the body, it was poor stuff when it made the soul lean. If we must know scantiness, may God grant it may not be scantiness of soul: yet this is a common attendant upon worldly prosperity. When wealth grows with many a man his worldly estate is fatter, but his soul's state is leaner. To gain silver and lose gold is a poor increase; but to win for the body and lose for the soul is far worse. How earnestly might Israel have unprayed her prayers had she known what would come with their answer! The prayers of lust will have to be wept over. We fret and fume till we have our desire, and then we have to fret still note because the attainment of it ends in bitter disappointment.

Verse 16. They envied Moses also in the camp. Though to him as the Lord's chosen instrument they owed everything, they grudged him the authority which it was needful that he should exercise for their good. Some were more openly rebellious than others, and became leaders of the mutiny, but a spirit of dissatisfaction was general, and therefore the whole nation is charged with it. Who can hope to escape envy when the meekest of men was subject to it? How unreasonable was this envy, for Moses was the one man in all the camp who laboured hardest and had most to bear. They should have sympathised with him; to envy him was ridiculous. And Aaron the saint of the Lord. By divine choice Aaron was set apart to be holiness unto the Lord, and instead of thanking God that he had favoured them with a high priest by whose intercession their prayers would be presented, they cavilled at the divine election, and quarrelled with the man who was to offer sacrifice for them. Thus neither church nor state was ordered aright for them; they would snatch from Moses his sceptre, and from Aaron his mitre. It is the mark of bad men that they are envious of the good, and spiteful against their best benefactors.

Verse 17. The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. Korah is not mentioned, for mercy was extended to his household, though he himself perished. The earth could no longer bear up under the weight of these rebels and ingrates: God's patience was exhausted when they began to assail his servants, for his children are very dear to him, and he that toucheth them touches the apple of his eye. Moses had opened the sea for their deliverance, and now that they provoke him, the earth opens for their destruction. It was time that the nakedness of their sins was covered, and that the earth should open her mouth to devour those who opened their mouths against the Lord and his servants.

Verse 18. And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked. The Levites who were with Korah perished by fire, which was a most fitting death for those who intruded into the priesthood, and so offered strange fire. God has more than one arrow in his quiver, the fire can

consume those whom the earthquake spares. These terrible things in righteousness are mentioned here to show the obstinacy of the people in continuing to rebel against the Lord. Terrors were as much lost upon them as mercies had been; they could neither be drawn nor driven.

Verse 19. They made a calf in Horeb. In the very place where they had solemnly pledged themselves to obey the Lord they broke the second, if not the first, of his commandments, and set up the Egyptian symbol of the ox, and bowed before it. The ox image is here sarcastically called "a calf"; idols are worthy of no respect, scorn is never more legitimately used than when it is poured upon all attempts to set forth the Invisible God. The Israelites were foolish indeed when they thought they saw the slightest divine glory in a bull, nay, in the mere image of a bull. To believe that the image of a bull could be the image of God must need great credulity. And worshipped the molten image. Before it they paid divine honours, and said, "These be thy gods, O Israel." This was sheer madness. After the same fashion the Ritualists must needs set up their symbols and multiply them exceedingly. Spiritual worship they seem unable to apprehend; their worship is sensuous to the highest degree, and appeals to eye, and ear, and nose. O the folly of men to block up their own way to acceptable worship, and to make the path of spiritual religion, which is hard to our nature, harder still through the stumblingblocks which they cast into it. We have heard the richness of Popish paraphernalia much extolled, but an idolatrous image when made of gold is not one jot the less abominable than it would have been had it been made of dross and dung: the beauty of art cannot conceal the deformity of sin. We are told also of the suggestiveness of their symbols, but what of that, when God forbids the use of them? Vain also is it to plead that such worship is hearty. So much the worse. Heartiness in forbidden actions is only an increase of transgression.

Verse 20. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass. They said that they only meant to worship the one God under a fitting and suggestive similitude by which his great power would be set forth to the multitude; they pleaded the great Catholic revival which followed upon this return to a more ornate ceremonial, for the people thronged around Aaron, and danced before the calf with all their might. But in very deed they had given up the true God, whom it had been their glory to adore, and had set up a rival to him, not a representation of him; for how should he be likened to a bullock? The psalmist is very contemptuous, and justly so: irreverence towards idols is an indirect reverence to God. False gods, attempts to represent the true God, and indeed, all material things which are worshipped, are so much filth upon the face of the earth, whether they be crosses, crucifixes, virgins, wafers, relics, or even the Pope himself. We are by far too mealy mouthed about these infamous abominations: God abhors them, and so should we. To renounce the glory of spiritual worship for outward pomp and show is the height of folly, and deserves to be treated as such.

Verse 21. They forgot God their saviour. Remembering the calf involved forgetting God. He had commanded them to make no image, and in daring to disobey they forgot his commands. Moreover, it is clear that they must altogether have forgotten the nature and character of Jehovah, or they could never have likened him to a grass eating animal. Some men hope to keep their sins and their God too—the fact being that he who sins is already so far departed from the Lord that he has actually forgotten him. Which had done great things in Egypt. God in Egypt had overcome all the idols, and yet they so far forgot him as to liken him to them. Could an ox work miracles? Could a golden calf cast plagues upon Israel's enemies? They were brutish to set up such a wretched mockery of deity, after having seen what the true God could really achieve. "Wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea". They saw several ranges of miracles, the Lord did not stint them as to the evidences of his eternal power and godhead, and yet they could not rest content with worshipping

him in his own appointed way, but must needs have a Directory of their own invention, an elaborate ritual after the old Egyptian fashion, and a manifest object of worship to assist them in adoring Jehovah. This was enough to provoke the Lord, and it did so; how much he is angered every day in our own land no tongue can tell.

Verse 23. Therefore he said that he would destroy them. The threatening of destruction came at last. For the first wilderness sin he chastened them, sending leanness into their soul; for the second he weeded out the offenders, the flame burned up the wicked; for the third he threatened to destroy them; for the fourth he lifted up his hand and almost came to blows (Ps 106:26); for the fifth he actually smote them, "and the plague brake in among them"; and so the punishment increased with their perseverance in sin. This is worth noting, and it should serve as a warning to the man who goeth on in his iniquities. God tries words before he comes to blows, "he said that he would destroy them": but his words are not to be trifled with, for he means them, and has power to make them good. Had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach. Like a bold warrior who defends the wall when there is an opening for the adversary and destruction is rushing in upon the city, Moses stopped the way of avenging justice with his prayers. Moses had great power with God. He was an eminent type of our Lord, who is called, as Moses here is styled, "mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth." As the Elect Redeemer interposed between the Lord and a sinful world, so did Moses stand between the Lord and his offending people. The story as told by Moses himself is full of interest and instruction, and tends greatly to magnify the goodness of the Lord, who thus suffered himself to be turned from the fierceness of his anger. With disinterested affection, and generous renunciation of privileges offered to himself and his family, the great Lawgiver interceded with the Lord to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them. Behold the power of a righteous man's intercession. Mighty as was the sin of Israel to provoke vengeance, prayer was mightier in turning it away. How diligently ought we to plead with the Lord for this guilty world, and especially for his own backsliding people! Who would not employ an agency so powerful for an end so gracious! The Lord still harkens to the voice of a man, shall not our voices be often exercised in supplicating for a guilty people? Verse 24. Yea, they despised the pleasant land. They spoke lightly of it, though it was the joy of all lands: they did not think it worth the trouble of seeking and conquering; they even spoke of Egypt, the land of their iron bondage, as though they preferred it to Canaan, the land which floweth with milk and honey. It is an ill sign with a Christian when he begins to think lightly of heaven and heavenly things; it indicates a perverted mind, and it is, moreover, a high offence to the Lord to despise that which he esteems so highly that he in infinite love reserves it for his own chosen. To prefer earthly things to heavenly blessings is to prefer Egypt to Canaan, the house of bondage to the land of promise. They believed not his word. This is the root sin. If we do not believe the Lord's word, we shall think lightly of his promised gifts. "They could not enter in because of unbelief"—this was the key which turned the lock against them. When pilgrims to the Celestial City begin to doubt the Lord of the way, they soon come to think little of the rest at the journey's end, and this is the surest way to make them bad travellers. Israel's unbelief demanded spies to see the land; the report of those spies was of a mingled character, and so a fresh crop of unbelief sprang up, with consequences most deplorable.

Verse 25. But murmured in their tents. From unbelief to murmuring is a short and natural step; they even fell to weeping when they had the best ground for rejoicing. Murmuring is a great sin and not a mere weakness; it contains within itself unbelief, pride, rebellion, and a whole host of sins. It is a home sin, and is generally practised by complainers "in their tents," but it is just as evil there as in the streets, and will be quite as grievous to the Lord. And hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord. Making a din with their own voices, they refused attention to their best Friend. Murmurers are bad

hearers.

Verse 26. Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness. He swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest; he commenced his work of judgment upon them, and they began to die. Only let God lift his hand against a man and his day has come; he falls terribly whom Jehovah overthrows. To overthrow their seed also among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands. Foreseeing that their descendants would reproduce their sins, he solemnly declared that he would give them over to captivity and the sword. Those whose carcasses fell in the wilderness were, in a sense, exiles from the land of promise, and, being surrounded by many hostile tribes, they were virtually in a foreign land: to die far off from their father's inheritance was a just and weighty doom, which their rebellions had richly deserved. Our own loss of fellowship with God, and the divisions in our churches, doubtless often come to us as punishments for the sins out of which they grow. If we will not honour the Lord we cannot expect him to honour us. Our captains shall soon become captives, and our princes shall be prisoners if we forget the Lord and despise his mercies. Our singing shall be turned into sighing, and our mirth into misery if we walk contrary to the mind of the Lord.

Verse 28. They joined themselves also unto Baalpeor. Ritualism led on to the adoration of false gods. If we choose a false way of worship we shall, ere long, choose to worship a false god. This abomination of the Moabites was an idol in whose worship women gave up their bodies to the most shameless lust. Think of the people of a holy God coming down to this. And ate the sacrifices of the dead. In the orgies with which the Baalites celebrated their detestable worship Israel joined, partaking even in their sacrifices as earnest inner court worshippers, though the gods were but dead idols. Perhaps they assisted in necromantic rites which were intended to open a correspondence with departed spirits, thus endeavouring to break the seal of God's providence, and burst into the secret chambers which God has shut up. Those who are weary of seeking the living God have often shown a hankering after dark sciences, and have sought after fellowship with demons and spirits. To what strong delusions those are often given up who cast off the fear of God! This remark is as much needed now as in days gone by.

Verse 29. Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them. Open licentiousness and avowed idolatry were too gross to be winked at. This time the offences clamoured for judgment, and the judgment came at once. Twenty-four thousand persons fell before a sudden and deadly disease which threatened to run through the whole camp. Their new sins brought on them a disease new to their tribes. When men invent sins God will not be slow to invent punishments. Their vices were a moral pest, and they were visited with a bodily pest: so the Lord meets like with its like.

Verse 30. Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed. God has his champions left in the worst times, and they will stand up when the time comes for them to come forth to battle. This righteous indignation moved him to a quick execution of two open offenders. His honest spirit could not endure that lewdness should be publicly practised at a time when a fast had been proclaimed. Such daring defiance of God and of all law he could not brook, and so with his sharp javelin he transfixed the two guilty ones in the very act. It was a holy passion which inflamed him, and no enmity to either of the persons whom he slew. The circumstances were so remarkable and the sin so flagrant that it would have involved great sin in a public man to have stood still and seen God thus defied, and Israel thus polluted. Phinehas was not of this mind, he was no trimmer, or

palliator of sin, his heart was sound in God's statutes, and his whole nature was ablaze with zeal for God's glory, and therefore, though a priest, and therefore not obliged to be an executioner, he undertook the unwelcome task, and though both transgressors were of princely stock he had no respect of persons, but dealt justice upon them as if they had been the lowest of the people. This brave and decided deed was so acceptable to God as a proof that there were some sincere souls in Israel that the deadly visitation went no further. Two deaths had sufficed to save the lives of the multitude.

Verse 31. And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore. Down to the moment when this psalm was penned the house of Phinehas was honoured in Israel. His faith had performed a valorous deed, and his righteousness was testified of the Lord, and honoured by the continuance of his family in the priesthood. He was impelled by motives that what would otherwise have been a deed of blood was justified in the sight of God; nay, more, was made the evidence that Phinehas was righteous. No personal ambition, or private revenge, or selfish passion, or even fanatical bigotry, inspired the man of God, but zeal for God, indignation at open filthiness, and true patriotism urged him on. Once again we have cause to note the mercy of God that even when his warrant was out, and actual execution was proceeding, he stayed his hand at the suit of one man: finding, as it were, an apology for his grace when justice seemed to demand immediate vengeance.

Verse 32. They angered him also at the waters of strife. Will they never have done? The scene changes, but the sin continues. Aforetime they had mutinied about water when prayer would soon have turned the desert into a standing pool, but now they do it again after their former experience of the divine goodness. This made the sin a double, yea a sevenfold offence, and caused the anger of the Lord to be the more intense. So that it went in with Moses for their sakes. Moses was at last wearied out, and began to grow angry with them and utterly hopeless of their ever improving; can we wonder at it, for he was man and not God? After forty years bearing with them the meek man's temper gave way, and he called them rebels, and showed unhallowed anger; and therefore he was not permitted to enter the land which he desired to inherit. Truly, he had a sight of the goodly country from the top of Pisgah, but entrance was denied him, and thus it went ill with him. It was their sin which angered him, but he had to bear the consequences; however clear it may be that others are more guilty than ourselves, we should always remember that this will not screen us, but every man must bear his own burden.

Verse 33. Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips. Which seems a small sin compared with that of others, but then it was the sin of Moses, the Lord's chosen servant, who had seen and known so much of the Lord, and therefore it could not be passed by. He did not speak blasphemously, or falsely, but only hastily and without care; but this is a serious fault in a lawgiver, and especially in one who speaks for God. This passage is to our mind one of the most terrible in the Bible. Truly we serve a jealous God. Yet he is not a hard master, or austere; we must not think so, but we must then rather be jealous of ourselves, and watch that we live the more carefully, and speak the more advisedly, because we serve such a Lord. We ought also to be very careful how we treat the ministers of the gospel, lest by provoking their spirit we should drive them into any unseemly behaviour which should bring upon them the chastisement of the Lord. Little do a murmuring, quarrelsome people dream of the perils in which they involve their pastors by their untoward behaviour.

Verse 34. They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them. They

were commissioned to act as executioners upon races condemned for their unnatural crimes, and through sloth, cowardice, or Sinful complacency they sheathed the sword too soon, very much to their own danger and disquietude. It is a great evil with professors that they are not zealous for the total destruction of all sin within and without. We make alliances of peace where we ought to proclaim war to the knife; we plead our constitutional temperament, our previous habits, the necessity of our circumstances, or some other evil excuse as an apology for being content with a very partial sanctification, if indeed it be sanctification at all. We are slow also to rebuke sin in others, and are ready to spare respectable sins, which like Agag walk with mincing steps. The measure of our destruction of sin is not to be our inclination, or the habit of others, but the Lord's command. We have no warrant for dealing leniently with any sin, be it what it may.

Verse 35. But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. It was not the wilderness which caused Israel's sins; they were just as disobedient when settled in the land of promise. They found evil company, and delighted in it. Those whom they should have destroyed they made their friends. Having enough faults of their own, they were yet ready to go to school to the filthy Canaanites, and educate themselves still more in the arts of iniquity. It was certain that they could learn no good from men whom the Lord had condemned to utter destruction. Few would wish to go to the condemned cell for learning, yet Israel sat at the feet of accursed Canaan, and rose up proficient in every abomination. This, too, is a grievous but common error among professors: they court worldly company and copy worldly fashions, and yet it is their calling to bear witness against these things. None can tell what evil has come of the folly of worldly conformity.

Verse 36. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. They were fascinated by the charms of idolatry, though it brings misery upon its votaries. A man cannot serve sin without being ensnared by it. It is like birdlime, and to touch it is to be taken by it. Samson laid his head in the Philistine woman's lap, but ere long he woke up shorn of his strength. Dalliance with sin is fatal to spiritual liberty.

Verse 37. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils. This was being snared indeed; they were spell bound by the cruel superstition, and were carried so far as even to become murderers of their own children, in honour of the most detestable deities, which were rather devils than gods. "And shed innocent blood." The poor little ones whom they put to death in sacrifice had not been partakers of their sin, and God looked with the utmost indignation upon the murder of the innocent. "Even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan." Who knows how far evil will go? It drove men to be unnatural as well as ungodly. Had they but thought for a moment, they must have seen that a deity who could be pleased with the blood of babes spilt by their own sires could not be a deity at all, but must be a demon, worthy to be detested and not adored. How could they prefer such service to that of Jehovah? Did he tear their babes from their bosoms and smile at their death throes? Men will sooner wear the iron yoke of Satan than carry the pleasant burden of the Lord; does not this prove to a demonstration the deep depravity of their hearts? If man be not totally depraved, what worse would he do if he were? Does not this verse describe the ne plus ultra of iniquity? And the land was polluted with blood. The promised land, the holy land, which was the glory of all lands, for God was there, was defiled with the reeking gore of innocent babes, and by the blood red hands of their parents, who slew them in order to pay homage to devils. Alas! alas! What vexation was this to the spirit of the Lord.

Verse 39. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.

Not only the land but the inhabitants of it were polluted. They broke the marriage bond between them and the Lord, and fell into spiritual adultery. The language is strong, but the offence could not be fitly described in less forcible words. As a husband is deeply dishonoured and sorely wounded should his wife become unchaste and run riot with many paramours in his own house, so was the Lord incensed at his people for setting up gods many and lords many in his own land. They made and invented new gods, and then worshipped what they had made. What a folly! Their novel deities were loathsome monsters and cruel demons, and yet they paid them homage. What wickedness! And to commit this folly and wickedness they cast off the true God, whose miracles they had seen, and whose people they were. This was provocation of the severest sort.

Verses 40. Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, in so much that he abhorred his own inheritance. Not that even then he broke his covenant or utterly cast off his offending people, but he felt the deepest indignation, and even looked upon them with abhorrence. The feeling described is like to that of a husband who still loves his guilty wife, and yet when he thinks of her lewdness feels his whole nature rising in righteous anger at her, so that the very sight of her afflicts his soul. How far the divine wrath can burn against those whom he yet loves in his heart it were hard to say, but certainly Israel pushed the experiment to the extreme. And he gave them into the hand of the heathen. This was the manifestation of his abhorrence. He gave them a taste of the result of sin; they spared the heathen, mixed with them and imitated them, and soon they had to smart from them, for hordes of invaders were let loose upon them to spoil them at their pleasure. Men make rods for their own backs. Their own inventions become their punishments. And they that hated them ruled over them. And who could wonder? Sin never creates true love. They joined the heathen in their wickedness, and they did not win their hearts, but rather provoked their contempt. If we mix with men of the world they will soon become our masters and our tyrants, and we cannot want worse.

Verse 42. Their enemies also oppressed them. This was according to their nature; an Israelite always fares ill at the hands of the heathen. Leniency to Canaan turned out to be cruelty to themselves. And they were brought into subjection under their hand. They were bowed down by laborious bondage, and made to lie low under tyranny. In their God they had found a kind master, but in those with whom they had perversely sought fellowship they found despots of the most barbarous sort. He who leaves his God leaves happiness for misery. God can make our enemies to be rods in his hands to flog us back to our best Friend.

Verse 43. Many times did he deliver them. By reading the book of Judges we shall see how truthful is this sentence: again and again their foes were routed, and they were set free again, only to return with rigour to their former evil ways. But they provoked him with their counsel. With deliberation they agreed to transgress anew; self will was their counsellor, and they followed it to their own destruction. And were brought low for their iniquity. Worse and worse were the evils brought upon them, lower and lower they fell in sin, and consequently in sorrow. In dens and caves of the earth they hid themselves; they were deprived of all warlike weapons, and were utterly despised by their conquerors; they were rather a race of serfs than of free men until the Lord in mercy raised them up again. Could we but fully know the horrors of the wars which desolated Palestine, and the ravages which caused famine and starvation, we should shudder at the sins which were thus rebuked. Deeply engrained in their nature must the sin of idolatry have been, or they would not have returned to it with such persistence in the teeth of such penalties; we need not marvel at this, there is a still greater wonder, man prefers sin and hell to heaven and God. The lesson to ourselves, as God's people, is to walk humbly and carefully before the Lord and above all to keep ourselves from idols. Woe unto

those who become partakers of Rome's idolatries, for they will be joined with her in her plagues. May grace be given to us to keep the separated path, and remain undefiled with the fornication of the scarlet harlot of Babylon.

Verse 44. Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry. Notwithstanding all these provoking rebellions and detestable enormities the Lord still heard their prayer and pitied them. This is very wonderful, very godlike. One would have thought that the Lord would have shut out their prayer, seeing they had shut their ears against his admonitions; but no, he had a father's heart, and a sight of their sorrows touched his soul, the sound of their cries overcame his heart, and he looked upon them with compassion. His fiercest wrath towards his own people is only a temporary flame, but his love burns on for ever like the light of his own immortality.

Verse 45. And he remembered for them his covenant. The covenant is the sure foundation of mercy, and when the whole fabric of outward grace manifested in the saints lies in ruins this is the fundamental basis of love which is never moved, and upon it the Lord proceeds to build again a new structure of grace. Covenant mercy is sure as the throne of God. And repented according to the multitude of his mercies. He did not carry out the destruction which he had commenced. Speaking after the manner of men he changed his mind, and did not leave them to their enemies to be utterly cut off, because he saw that his covenant would in such a case have been broken. The Lord is so full of grace that he has not only mercy but mercies, yea a multitude of them, and these he treasure up in the covenant and treasure up good for the erring sons of men.

Verse 46. He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives. Having the hearts of all men in his hands he produced compassion even in heathen bosoms. Even as he found Joseph friends in Egypt, so did he raise up sympathizers for his captive servants. In our very worst condition our God has ways and means for allaying the severity of our sorrows: he can find us helpers among those who have been our oppressors, and he will do so if we be indeed his people.

Verse 47. This is the closing prayer, arranged by prophecy for those who would in future time be captives, and suitable for all who before David's days had been driven from home by the tyranny of the various scatterings by famine and distress which had happened in the iron age of the judges. Save us, O Lord our God. The mention of the covenant encouraged the afflicted to call the Lord their God, and this enabled them with greater boldness to entreat him to interpose on their behalf and rescue them. And gather us from among the Heathen. Weary now of the ungodly and their ways, they long to be brought into their own separated country, where they might again enjoy the means of grace, enter into holy fellowship with their brethren, escape from contaminating examples, and be free to wait upon the Lord. How often do true believers now a days long to be removed from ungodly households, where their souls are vexed with the conversation of the wicked. To give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise. Weaned from idols, they desire to make mention of Jehovah's name alone, and to ascribe their mercies to his ever abiding faithfulness and love. The Lord had often saved them for his holy name's sake, and therefore they feel that when again restored they would render all their gratitude to that saving name, yea, it should be their glory to praise Jehovah and none else.

Verse 48. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting. Has not his mercy endured for ever, and should not his praise be of like duration? Jehovah, the God of Israel, has blessed his people, should they not also bless him? And let all the people say, Amen. They have all

seen spared by his grace, let them all join in the adoration with loud unanimous voice. What a thunder of praise would thus be caused! Yet should a nation thus magnify him, yea, should all the nations past and present unite in the solemn acclaim, it would fall far short of his deserts. O for the happy day when all flesh shall see the glory of God, and all shall aloud proclaim his praise.

Praise ye the LORD, or "Hallelujah."

Reader, praise thou the Lord, as he who writes this feeble exposition now does with his whole heart.

"Now blest, for ever blest, be He,

The same throughout eternity,

Our Israel's God adored!

Let all the people join the lay,

And loudly, 'Hallelujah', say,

'Praise ye the living Lord!'"

Psalm 107

Verse 1. O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good. It is all we can give him, and the least we can give; therefore let us diligently render to him our thanksgiving. The psalmist is in earnest in the exhortation, hence the use of the interjection "O", to intensity his words: let us be at all times thoroughly fervent in the praises of the Lord, both with our lips and with our lives, by thanksgiving and thanks living. JEHOVAH, for that is the name here used, is not to be worshipped with groans and cries, but with thanks, for he is good; and these thanks should be heartily rendered, for his is no common goodness: he is good by nature, and essence, and proven to be good in all the acts of his eternity. Compared with him there is none good, no, not one: but he is essentially, perpetually, superlatively, infinitely good. We are the perpetual partakers of his goodness, and therefore ought above all his creatures to magnify his name. Our praise should be increased by the fact that the divine goodness is not a transient thing, but in the attribute of mercy abides for ever the same, for his mercy endureth for ever. The word endureth has been properly supplied by the translators, but yet it somewhat restricts the sense, which will be better seen if we read it, "for his mercy forever." That mercy had no beginning, and shall never know an end. Our sin required that goodness should display itself to us in the form of mercy, and it has done so, and will do so evermore; let us not be slack in praising the goodness which thus adapts itself to our fallen nature.

Verse 2. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so. Whatever others may think or say, the redeemed have overwhelming reasons for declaring the goodness of the Lord. Theirs is a peculiar redemption, and for it they ought to render peculiar praise. The Redeemer is so glorious, the ransom price so immense, and the redemption so complete, that they are under sevenfold obligations to give thanks unto the Lord, and to exhort others to do so. Let them not only feel so but say so; let them both sing and bid their fellows sing. Whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy. Snatched by superior power away from fierce oppressions, they are bound above all men to adore the Lord, their Liberator. Theirs is a divine redemption, "he hath redeemed" them, and no one else has done it. His own unaided arm has wrought out their deliverance. Should not emancipated slaves be grateful to the hand which set them free? What gratitude can suffice for a deliverance from the power of sin, death, and hell? In heaven itself there is no sweeter hymn than that whose burden is, "Thou hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood."

Verse 3. And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and

from the south. Gathering follows upon redeeming. The captives of old were restored to their own land from every quarter of the earth, and even from beyond the sea; for the word translated south is really the sea. No matter what divides, the Lord will gather his own into one body, and first on earth by "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism", and then in heaven by one common bliss they shall be known to be the one people of the One God. What a glorious Shepherd must, he be who thus collects the blood bought flock from the remotest regions, guides them through countless perils, and at last makes them to lie down in the green pastures of Paradise. Some have wandered one way and some another they have all left Immanuel's land and strayed as far as they could, and great are the grace and power by which they are all collected into one flock by the Lord Jesus. With one heart and voice let the redeemed praise the Lord who gathers them into one.

Verse 4. They wandered in the wilderness. They wandered, for the track was lost, no vestige of a road remained; worse still, they wandered in a wilderness, where all around was burning sand. They were lost in the worst possible place, even as the sinner is who is lost in sin; they wandered up and down in vain searches and researches as a sinner does when he is awakened and sees his lost estate; but it ended in nothing, for they still continued in the wilderness, though they had hoped to escape from it. In a solitary way. No dwelling of man was near, and no other company of travellers passed within hail. Solitude is a great intensifier of misery. The loneliness of a desert has a most depressing influence upon the man who is lost in the boundless waste. The traveller's way in the wilderness is a waste way, and when he leaves even that poor, barren trail, to get utterly beyond the path of man, he is in a wretched plight indeed. A soul without sympathy is on the borders of hell: a solitary way is the way of despair. They found no city to dwell in. How could they? There was none. Israel in the wilderness abode under canvas, and enjoyed none of the comforts of settled life; wanderers in the Sahara find no town or village. Men when under distress of soul find nothing to rest upon, no comfort and no peace; their efforts after salvation are many, weary, and disappointing, and the dread solitude of their hearts fills them with dire distress.

Verse 5. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. The spirits sink when the bodily frame becomes exhausted by long privations. Who can keep his courage up when he is ready to fall to the ground at every step through utter exhaustion? The supply of food is all eaten, the water is spent in the bottles, and there are neither fields nor streams in the desert, the heart therefore sinks in dire despair. Such is the condition of an awakened conscience before it knows the Lord Jesus; it is full of unsatisfied cravings, painful needs, and heavy fears. It is utterly spent and without strength, and there is nothing in the whole creation which can minister to its refreshment.

Verse 6. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble. Not till they were in extremities did they pray, but the mercy is that they prayed then, and prayed in the right manner, with a cry, and to the right person, even to the Lord. Nothing else remained for them to do; they could not help themselves, or find help in others, and therefore they cried to God. Supplications which are forced out of us by stern necessity are none the less acceptable with God; but, indeed, they have all the more prevalence, since they are evidently sincere, and make a powerful appeal to the divine pity. Some men will never pray till they are half starved, and for their best interests it is far better for them to be empty and faint than to be full and stouthearted. If hunger brings us to our knees it is more useful to us than feasting; if thirst drives us to the fountain it is better than the deepest draughts of worldly joys; and if fainting leads to crying it is better than the strength of the mighty, And he delivered them out of their distresses. Deliverance follows prayer most surely. The cry must have been very feeble, for they were faint, and their faith was as weak as their cry; but yet they were heard, and heard at once. A little

delay would have been their death: but there was none, for the Lord was ready to save them. The Lord delights to come in when no one else can be of the slightest avail. The case was hopeless till Jehovah interposed, and then all was changed immediately; the people were shut up, straitened, and almost pressed to death, but enlargement came to them at once when they began to remember their God, and look to him in prayer. Those deserve to die of hunger who will not so much as ask for bread, and he who being lost in a desert will not beg the aid of a guide cannot be pitied even if he perish in the wilds and feed the vultures with his flesh.

Verse 7. And he led them forth by the right way. There are many wrong ways, but only one right one, and into this none can lead us but God himself. When the Lord is leader the way is sure to be right; we never need question that. Forth from the pathless mazes of the desert he conducted the lost ones; he found the way, made the way, and enabled them to walk along it, faint and hungry as they were. That they might go to a city of habitation. The end was worthy of the way: he did not lead them from one desert to another, but he gave the wanderers an abode, the weary ones a place of rest. They found no city to dwell in, but he found one readily enough. What we can do and what God can do are two very different things. What a difference it made to them to leave their solitude for a city, their trackless path for well frequented streets, and their faintness of heart for the refreshment of a home! Far greater are the changes which divine love works in the condition of sinners when God answers their prayers and brings them to Jesus. Shall not the Lord be magnified for such special mercies? Can we who have enjoyed them sit down in ungrateful silence?

Verse 8. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness. Men are not mentioned here in the original, but the word is fitly supplied by the translators; the psalmist would have all things in existence magnify Jehovah's name. Surely men will do this without being exhorted to it when the deliverance is fresh in their memories. They must be horrible ingrates who will not honour such a deliverer for so happy a rescue from the most cruel death. It is well that the redeemed should be stirred up to bless the Lord again and again, for preserved life deserves life long thankfulness. Even those who have not encountered the like peril, and obtained the like deliverance, should bless the Lord in sympathy with their fellows, sharing their joy. And for his wonderful works to the children of men. These favours are bestowed upon our race, upon children of the family to which we belong, and therefore we ought to join in the praise. The children of men are so insignificant, so feeble, and so undeserving, that it is a great wonder that the Lord should do anything for them; but he is not content with doing little works, he puts forth his wisdom, power, and love to perform marvels on the behalf of those who seek him. In the life of each one of the redeemed there is a world of wonders, and therefore from each there should resound a world of praises. As to the marvels of grace which the Lord has wrought for his church as a whole there is no estimating them, they are as high above our thoughts as the heavens are high above the earth. When shall the day dawn when the favoured race of man shall be as devoted to the praise of God as they are distinguished by the favour of God?

Verse 9. For he satisfieth the longing soul. This is the summary of the lost traveller's experience. He who in a natural sense has been rescued from perishing in a howling wilderness ought to bless the Lord who brings him again to eat bread among men. The spiritual sense is, however, the more rich in instruction. The Lord sets us longing and then completely satisfies us. That longing leads us into solitude, separation, thirst, faintness and self despair, and all these conduct us to prayer, faith, divine guidance, satisfying of the soul's thirst, and rest: the good hand of the Lord is to be seen in the whole process and in the divine result. And filleth the hungry soul with goodness. As for thirst he gives satisfaction, so for hunger he supplies filling. In both cases the need is more than met, there is an

abundance in the supply which is well worthy of notice: the Lord does nothing in a niggardly fashion; satisfying and filling are his peculiar modes of treating his guests; none who come under the Lord's providing ever complain of short commons. Nor does he fill the hungry with common fare, but with goodness itself. It is not so much good, as the essence of goodness which he bestows on needy suppliants. Shall man be thus royally supplied and return no praise for the largeness of love? It must not be so. We will even now give thanks with all the redeemed church, and pray for the time when the whole earth shall be filled with his glory.

Verse 10. Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. The cell is dark of itself, and the fear of execution casts a still denser gloom over the prison. Such is the cruelty of man to man that tens of thousands have been made to linger in places only fit to be tombs; unhealthy, suffocating, filthy sepulchres, where they have sickened and died of broken hearts. Meanwhile the dread of sudden death has been the most hideous part of the punishment; the prisoners have felt as if the chill shade of death himself froze them to the very marrow. The state of a soul under conviction of sin is forcibly symbolized by such a condition; persons in that state cannot see the promises which would yield them comfort, they sit still in the inactivity of despair, they fear the approach of judgment, and are thereby as much distressed as if they were at death's door. Being bound in affliction and iron. Many prisoners have been thus doubly fettered in heart and hand; or the text may mean that affliction becomes as an iron band to them, or that the iron chains caused them great affliction. None know these things but those who have felt them; we should prize our liberty more if we knew by actual experience what manacles and fetters mean. In a spiritual sense affliction frequently attends conviction of sin, and then the double grief causes a double bondage. In such cases the iron enters into the soul, the poor captives cannot stir because of their bonds, cannot rise to hope because of their grief, and have no power because of their despair. Misery is the companion of all those who are shut up and cannot come forth. O ye who are made free by Christ Jesus, remember those who are in bonds.

Verse 11. Because they rebelled against the words of God. This was the general cause of bondage among the ancient people of God, they were given over to their adversaries because they were not loyal to the Lord. God's words are not to be trifled with, and those who venture on such rebellion will bring themselves into bondage. And contemned the counsel of the Most High. They thought that they knew better than the Judge of all the earth, and therefore they left his ways and walked in their own. When men do not follow the divine counsel they give the most practical proof of their contempt for it. Those who will not be bound by God's law will, ere long, be bound by the fetters of judgment. There is too much contemning of the divine counsel, even among Christians, and hence so few of them know the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free.

Verse 12. Therefore he brought down their heart with labour. In eastern prisons men are frequently made to labour like beasts of the field. As they have no liberty, so they have no rest. This soon subdues the stoutest heart, and makes the proud boaster sing another tune. Trouble and hard toil are enough to tame a lion. God has methods of abating the loftiness of rebellious looks; the cell and the mill make even giants tremble. They fell down, and there was none to help. Stumbling on in the dark beneath their weary task, they at last fell prone upon the ground, but no one came to pity them or to lift them up. Their fall might be fatal for aught that any man cared about them; their misery was unseen, or, if observed, no one could interfere between them and their tyrant masters. In such a wretched plight the rebellious Israelite became more lowly in mind, and thought more tenderly of his God and of his offences against him. When a soul finds all its efforts at self salvation prove abortive,

and feels that it is now utterly without strength, then the Lord is at work hiding pride from man and preparing the afflicted one to receive his mercy. The spiritual case which is here figuratively described is desperate, and therefore affords the finer field for the divine interposition; some of us remember well how brightly mercy shone in our prison, and what music the fetters made when they fell off from our hands. Nothing but the Lord's love could have delivered us; without it we must have utterly perished.

Verse 13. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble. Not a prayer till then. While there was any to help below they would not look above. No cries till their hearts were brought down and their hopes were all dead—then they cried, but not before. So many a man offers what he calls prayer when he is in good case and thinks well of himself, but in very deed the only real cry to God is that which is forced out of him by a sense of utter helplessness and misery. We pray best when we are fallen on our faces in painful helplessness. And he saved them out of their distresses. Speedily and willingly he sent relief. They were long before they cried, but he was not long before he saved. They had applied everywhere else before they came to him, but when they did address themselves to him, they were welcome at once. He who saved men in the open wilderness can also save in the close prison: bolts and bars cannot shut him out, nor long shut in his redeemed ones.

Verse 14. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death. The Lord in providence fetches out prisoners from their cells and bids them breathe the sweet fresh air again, and then he takes off their fetters, and gives liberty to their aching limbs. So also he frees men from care and trouble, and especially from the misery and slavery of sin. This he does with his own hand, for in the experience of all the saints it is certified that there is no jail delivery unless by the Judge himself. And brake their bands in sunder. Set them free by force, so liberating them that they could not be chained again, for he had broken the manacles to pieces. The Lord's deliverances are of the most complete and triumphant kind, he neither leaves the soul in darkness nor in bonds, nor does he permit the powers of evil again to enthrall the liberated captive. What he does is done for ever. Glory be to his name.

Verse 15. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men. The sight of such goodness makes a right minded man long to see the Lord duly honoured for his amazing mercy. When dungeon doors fly open, and chains are snapped, who can refuse to adore the glorious goodness of the Lord? It makes the heart sick to think of such gracious mercies remaining unsung: we cannot but plead with men to remember their obligations and extol the Lord their God.

Verse 16. For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of Zion in sunder. This verse belongs to that which precedes it, and Sums up the mercy experienced by captives. The Lord breaks the strongest gates and bars when the time comes to set free his prisoners: and spiritually the Lord Jesus has broken the most powerful of spiritual bonds and made us free indeed. Brass and iron are as tow before the flame of Jesus' love. The gates of hell shall not prevail against us, neither shall the bars of the grave detain us. Those of us who have experienced his redeeming power must and will praise the Lord for the wonders of his grace displayed on our behalf.

Verse 17. Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Many sicknesses are the direct result of foolish acts. Thoughtless and lustful men by drunkenness, gluttony, and the indulgence of their passions fill their bodies with diseases of the worst kind. Sin is at the bottom of all sorrow, but some sorrows are the immediate results of wickedness: men by a course of

transgression afflict themselves and are fools for their pains. Worse still, even when they are in affliction they are fools still; and if they were brayed in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet would not their folly depart from them. From one transgression they go on to many iniquities, and while under the rod they add sin to sin. Alas, even the Lord's own people sometimes play the fool in this sad manner.

Verse 18. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat. Appetite departs from men when they are sick: the best of food is nauseous to them, their stomach turns against it. And they draw near unto the gates of death. From want of food, and from the destructive power of their malady, they slide gradually down till they lie at the door of the grave; neither does the skill of the physician suffice to stay their downward progress. As they cannot eat there is no support given to the system, and as the disease rages their little strength is spent in pain and misery. Thus it is with souls afflicted with a sense of sin, they cannot find comfort in the choicest promises, but turn away with loathing even from the gospel, so that they gradually decay into the grave of despair. The mercy is that though near the gates of death they are not yet inside the sepulchre.

Verse 19. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble. They join the praying legion at last. Saul also is among the prophets. The fool lays aside his motley in prospect of the shroud, and betakes himself to his knees. What a cure for the soul sickness of body is often made to be by the Lord's grace! And he saveth them out of their distresses. Prayer is as effectual on a sick bed as in the wilderness or in prison; it may be tried in all places and circumstances with certain result. We may pray about our bodily pains and weaknesses, and we may look for answers too. When we have no appetite for meat we may have an appetite for prayer. He who cannot feed on the word of God may yet turn to God himself and find mercy.

Verse 20. He sent his word and healed them. Man is not healed by medicine alone, but by the word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God is man restored from going down to the grave. A word will do it, a word has done it thousands of times. And delivered them from their destructions. They escape though dangers had surrounded them, dangers many and deadly. The word of the Lord has a great delivering power; he has but to speak and the armies of death flee in an instant. Sin sick souls should remember the power of the Word, and be much in hearing it and meditating upon it. Spiritually considered, these verses describe a sin sick soul: foolish but yet aroused to a sense of guilt, it refuses comfort from any and every quarter, and a lethargy of despair utterly paralyses it. To its own apprehension nothing remains but utter destruction in many forms: the gates of death stand open before it, and it is, in its own apprehension, hurried in that direction. Then is the soul driven to cry in the bitterness of its grief unto the Lord, and Christ, the eternal Word, comes with healing power in the direst extremity, saving to the uttermost.

Verse 21. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men. It is marvellous that men can be restored from sickness and yet refuse to bless the Lord. It would seem impossible that they should forget such great mercy, for we should expect to see both themselves and the friends to whom they are restored uniting in a lifelong act of thanksgiving. Yet when ten are healed it is seldom that more than one returns to give glory to God. Alas, where are the nine? When a spiritual cure is wrought by the great Physician, praise is one of the surest signs of renewed health. A mind rescued from the disease of sin and the weary pains of conviction, must and will adore Jehovah Rophi, the healing God: yet it were well if there were a thousand times as much even of this.

Verse 22. And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving. In such a case let there be gifts and oblations as well as words. Let the good Physician have his fee of gratitude. Let life become a sacrifice to him who has prolonged it, let the deed of self denying gratitude be repeated again and again: there must be many cheerful sacrifices to celebrate the marvellous boon. And declare his works with rejoicing. Such things are worth telling, for the personal declaration honours God, relieves ourselves, comforts others, and puts all men in possession of facts concerning the divine goodness which they will not be able to ignore.

Verse 23. They that go down to the sea in ships. Navigation was so little practised among the Israelites that mariners were invested with a high mystery, and their craft was looked upon as one of singular daring degree of and peril. Tales of the sea thrilled all hearts with awe, and he who had been to Ophir or to Tarshish and had returned alive was looked upon as a man of renown, an ancient mariner to be listened to with reverent attention. Voyages were looked on as descending to an abyss, "going down to the sea in ships"; whereas now our bolder and more accustomed sailors talk of the "high seas." That do business in great waters. If they had not had business to do, they would never have ventured on the ocean, for we never read in the Scriptures of any man taking his pleasure on the sea: so averse was the Israelitish mind to seafaring, that we do not hear of even Solomon himself keeping a pleasure boat. The Mediterranean was "the great sea" to David and his countrymen, and they viewed those who had business upon it with no small degree of admiration.

Verse 24. These see the works of the LORD. Beyond the dwellers on the land they see the Lord's greatest works, or at least such as stayers at home judge to be so when they hear the report thereof. Instead of the ocean proving to be a watery wilderness, it is full of God's creatures, and if we were to attempt to escape from his presence by flying to the uttermost parts of it, we should only rush into Jehovah's arms, and find ourselves in the very centre of his workshop. And his wonders in the deep. They see wonders in it and on it. It is in itself a wonder and it swarms with wonders. Seamen, because they have fewer objects around them, are more observant of those they have than landsmen are, and hence they are said to see the wonders in the deep. At the same time, the ocean really does contain many of the more striking of God's creatures, and it is the scene of many of the more tremendous of the physical phenomena by which the power and more majesty of the Lord are revealed among men. The chief wonders alluded to by the Psalmist are a sudden storm and the calm which follows it. All believers have not the same deep experience; but for wise ends, that they may do business for him, the Lord sends some of his saints to the sea of soul trouble, and there they see, as others do not, the wonders of divine grace. Sailing over the deeps of inward depravity, the waste waters of poverty, the billows of persecution, and the rough waves of temptation, they need God above all others, and they find him.

Verse 25. For he commandeth: his word is enough for anything, he has but to will it and the tempest rages. And raiseth the stormy wiled. It seemed to he asleep before, but it knows its Master's bidding, and is up at once in all its fury. Which lifteth up the waves thereof. The glassy surface of the sea is broken, and myriads of white heads appear and rage and toss themselves to and fro as the wind blows upon them. Whereas they were lying down in quiet before, the waves rise in their might and leap towards the sky as soon as the howling of the wind awakens them. Thus it needs but a word from God and the soul is in troubled waters, tossed to and fro with a thousand afflictions. Doubts, fears, terrors, anxieties lift their heads like so many angry waves, when once the Lord allows the storm winds to beat upon us.

Verse 26. They mount up to the heaven. Borne aloft on the crest of the wave, the sailors and their vessels appear to climb the skies, but it is only for a moment, for very soon in the trough of the sea they go down again to the depths. As if their vessel were but a sea bird, the mariners are tossed "up and down, up and down, from the base of the wave to the billow's crown." Their soul is melted because of trouble. Weary, wet, dispirited, hopeless of escape, their heart is turned to water, and they seem to have no manhood left. Those who have been on the spiritual deep in one of the great storms which occasionally agitate the soul know what this verse means. In these spiritual cyclones presumption alternates with despair, indifference with agony! No heart is left for anything, courage is gone, hope is almost dead. Such an experience is as real as the tossing of a literal tempest and far more painful. Some of us have weathered many such an internal hurricane, and have indeed seen the Lord's wondrous works.

Verse 27. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man. The violent motion of the vessel prevents their keeping their legs, and their fears drive them out of all power to use their brains, and therefore they look like intoxicated men. And are at their wit's end. What more can they do? They have used every expedient known to navigation, but the ship is so strained and beaten about that they know not how to keep her afloat. Here too the spiritual mariner's log agrees with that of the sailor on the sea. We have staggered frightfully! We could stand to nothing and hold by nothing. We knew not what to do, and could have done nothing if we had known it. We were as men distracted, and felt as if destruction itself would be better than our horrible state of suspense. As for wit and wisdom, they were clean washed out of us, we felt ourselves to be at a nonplus altogether.

Verse 28. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble. Though at their wit's end, they had wit enough to pray; their heart was melted, and it ran out in cries for help. This was well and ended well, for it is written, And he brought them out of their distresses. Prayer is good in a storm. We may pray staggering and reeling, and pray when we are at our wit's end. God will hear us amid the thunder and answer us out of the storm. He brought their distresses upon the mariners, and therefore they did well to turn to him for the removal of them; nor did they look in vain.

Verse 29. He maketh the storm a calm. He reveals his power in the sudden and marvellous transformations which occur at his bidding. He commanded the storm and now he ordains a calm: God is in all natural phenomena, and we do well to recognise his working. So that the waves thereof are still. They bow in silence at his feet. Where huge billows leaped aloft there is scarce a ripple to be seen. When God makes peace it is peace indeed, the peace of God which passeth all understanding. He can in an instant change the condition of a man's mind, so that it shall seem an absolute miracle to him that he has passed so suddenly from hurricane to calm. O that the Lord would thus work in the reader, should his heart be storm beaten with outward troubles or inward fears. Lord, say the word and peace will come at once.

Verse 30. Then are they glad because they be quiet. No one can appreciate this verse unless he has been in a storm at sea. No music can be sweeter than the rattling of the chain as the shipmen let down the anchor; and no place seems more desirable than the little cove, or the wide bay, in which the ship rests in peace. So he bringeth them unto their desired haven. The rougher the voyage the more the mariners long for port, and heaven becomes more and more "a desired haven", as our trials multiply. By storms and by favourable breezes, though tempest and fair weather, the great Pilot and Ruler of the sea brings mariners to port, and his people to heaven. HE must have the glory of the

successful voyage of time, and when we are moored in the river of life above we shall take care that his praises are not forgotten. We should long ago have been wrecked if it had not been for his preserving hand, and our only hope of outliving the storms of the future is based upon his wisdom, faithfulness and power. Our heavenly haven shall ring with shouts of grateful joy when once we reach its blessed shore.

Verse 31. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Let the sea sound forth Jehovah's praises because of his delivering grace. As the sailor touches the shore let him lift the solemn hymn to heaven, and let others who see him rescued from the jaws of death unite in his thanksgiving.

Verse 32. Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people. Thanks for such mercies should be given in public in the place where men congregate for worship. And praise him in the assembly of the elders. The praise should be presented with great solemnity in the presence of men of years, experience, and influence. High and weighty service should be rendered for great and distinguished favours, and therefore let the sacrifice be presented with due decorum and with grave seriousness. Often when men hear of a narrow escape from shipwreck they pass over the matter with a careless remark about good luck, but it should never be thus jested with. When a heart has been in great spiritual storms and has at last found peace, there will follow as a duty and a privilege the acknowledgment of the Lord's mercy before his people, and it is well that this should be done in the presence of those who hold office in the church, and who from their riper years are better able to appreciate the testimony.

Verse 33. He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground. When the Lord deals with rebellious men he can soon deprive them of those blessings of which they feel most assured: their rivers and perennial springs they look upon as certain never to be taken from them, but the Lord at a word can deprive them even of these. In hot climates after long droughts streams of water utterly fail, and even springs cease to flow, and this also has happened in other parts of the world when great convulsions of the earth's surface have occurred. In providence this physical catastrophe finds its counterpart when business ceases to yield profit and sources of wealth are made to fail; as also when health and strength are taken away, when friendly aids are withdrawn, and comfortable associations are broken up. So, too, in soul matters, the most prosperous ministries may become dry, the most delightful meditations cease to benefit us, and the most fruitful religious exercises grow void of the refreshment of grace which they formerly yielded. Since

"It is God who lifts our comforts high,
Or sinks them in the grave",

it behooves us to walk before him with reverential gratitude, and so to live that it may not become imperative upon him to afflict us.

Verse 34. A fruitful land into barrenness. This has been done in many instances, and notably in the case of the psalmist's own country, which was once the glory of all lands and is now almost a desert. For the wickedness of them that dwell therein. Sin is at the bottom of sorrow. It first made the ground sterile in father Adam's day, and it continues to have a blighting effect upon all that it touches. If we have not the salt of holiness we shall soon receive the salt of barrenness, for the text in the Hebrew is—"a fruitful land into saltness." If we will not yield the Lord a harvest of obedience he may forbid the

soil to yield us a harvest of bread, and what then? If we turn good into evil can we wonder if the Lord pays us in kind, and returns our baseness into our own bosoms? Many a barren church owes its present sad estate to its inconsistent behaviour, and many a barren Christian has come into this mournful condition by a careless, unsanctified walk before the Lord. Let not saints who are now useful run the risk of enduring the loss of their mercies, but let them be watchful that all things may go well with them.

Verse 35. He turneth the wilderness into a standing water. With another turn of his hand he more than restores that which in judgment he took away. He does his work of mercy on a royal scale, for a deep lake is seen where before there was only a sandy waste. It is not by natural laws, working by some innate force, that this wonder is wrought, but by himself—HE TURNETH. And dry ground into watersprings. Continuance, abundance, and perpetual freshness are all implied in watersprings, and these are created where all was dry. This wonder of mercy is the precise reversal of the deed of judgment, and wrought by the selfsame hand. Even thus in the church, and in each individual saint, the mercy of the Lord soon works wonderful changes where restoring and renewing grace begin their benign work. O that we might see this verse fulfilled in all around us, and within our own hearts: then would these words serve us for an exclamation of grateful astonishment, and a song of well deserved praise.

Verse 36. And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, where none could dwell before. They will appreciate the change and prize his grace; as the barrenness of the land caused their hunger so will its fertility banish it for ever, and they will settle down a happy and thankful people to bless God for every handful of corn which the land yields to them. None are so ready to return a revenue of praise to God for great mercies as those who have known the lack of them. Hungry souls make sweet music when the Lord fills them with his gracious gifts. Are we hungry? Or are we satisfied with the husks of this poor, swinish world? That they may prepare a city for habitation. When the earth is watered and men cultivate it, cities spring up and teem with inhabitants; when grace abounds where sin formerly reigned, hearts find peace and dwell in God's love as in a strong city. The church is built up where once all was a waste when the Lord causes the broad rivers and streams of gospel grace to flow forth.

Verse 37. And sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase. Men work when God works. His blessing encourages the sower, cheers the planter, and rewards the labourer. Not only necessities but luxuries are enjoyed, wine as well as corn, when the heavens are caused to yield the needed rain to fill the watercourses. Divine visitations bring great spiritual riches, foster varied works of faith and labours of love, and cause every good fruit to abound to our comfort and to God's praise. When God sends the blessing it does not supersede, but encourages and develops human exertion. Paul plants, Apollos waters, and God gives the increase.

Verse 38. He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease. God's blessing is everything. It not only makes men happy, but it makes men themselves, by causing men to be multiplied upon the earth. When the Lord made the first pair he blessed them and said "be fruitful and multiply", and here he restores the primeval blessing. Observe that beasts as well as men fare well when God favours his people: they share with men in the goodness or severity of divine providence. Plagues and pests are warded off from the flock and the herd when the Lord means well towards a people; but when chastisement is intended, the flocks and herds rot from off the face of the earth. O that nations in the day of their prosperity would but own the gracious hand of

God, for it is to his blessing that they owe their all.

Verse 39. Again they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow. As they change in character, so do their circumstances alter. Under the old dispensation, this was very clearly to be observed; Israel's ups and downs were the direct consequences of her sins and repentance. Trials are of various kinds; here we have three words for affliction, and there are numbers more: God has many rods and we have many smarts; and all because we have many sins. Nations and churches soon diminish in number when they are diminished in grace. If we are low in love to God, it is small wonder that he brings us low in other respects. God can reverse the order of our prosperity, and give us a diminuendo where we had a crescendo; therefore let us walk before him with great tenderness of spirit, conscious of our dependence upon his smile.

Verses 40-41. In these two verses we see how the Lord at will turns the wheel of providence. Paying no respect to man's imaginary grandeur, he puts princes down and makes them wander in banishment as they had made their captives wander when they drove them from land to land: at the same time, having ever a tender regard for the poor and needy, the Lord delivers the distressed and sets them in a position of comfort and happiness. This is to be seen upon the roll of history again and again, and in spiritual experience we remark its counterpart: the self sufficient are made to despise themselves and search in vain for help in the wilderness of their nature, while poor convicted souls are added to the Lord's family and dwell in safety as the sheep of his fold.

Verse 42. The righteous shall see it, and rejoice. Divine providence causes joy to God's true people; they see the hand of the Lord in all things, and delight to study the ways of his justice and of his grace. And all iniquity shall stop her mouth. What can she say? God's providence is often so conclusive in its arguments of fact, that there is no replying or questioning. It is not long that the impudence of ungodliness can be quiet, but when God's judgments are abroad it is driven to hold its tongue.

Verse 43. Those who notice providence shall never be long without a providence notice. It is wise to observe what the Lord doth, for he is wonderful in counsel; has given us eyes to see with, and it is foolish to close them when there is most to observe; but we must observe wisely, otherwise we may soon confuse ourselves and others with hasty reflections upon the dealings of the Lord. In a thousand ways the lovingkindness of the Lord is shown, and if we will prudently watch, we shall come to a better understanding of it. To understand the delightful attribute of lovingkindness is an attainment as pleasant it is profitable: those who are proficient scholars in this art will be among sweetest singers to the glory of Jehovah.

Psalm 108

These five verses are found in Ps 57:7-11 almost verbatim: the only important alteration being the use of the great name of JEHOVAH in Ps 108:3 instead of Adonai in Ps 57:9. This the English reader will only be able to perceive by the use of capitals in the present Psalm and not in Ps 57:7-11. There are other inconsiderable alterations, but the chief point of difference probably lies in the position of the verses. In Ps 57:7-11 these notes of praise follow prayer and grow out of it; but in this case the psalmist begins at once to sing and give praise, and afterwards prays to God in a remarkably confident manner, so that he seems rather to seize the blessing than to entreat for it. Sometimes we

must climb to praise by the ladder of prayer, and at other times we must bless God for the past in order to be able in faith to plead for the present and the future. By the aid of God's Spirit we can both pray ourselves up to praise, or praise the Lord till we get into a fit frame for prayer. In Ps 57:7-11 these words are a song in the cave of Adullam, and are the result of faith which is beginning its battles amid domestic enemies of the most malicious kind; but here they express the continued resolve and praise of a man who has already weathered many a campaign, has overcome all home conflicts, and is looking forward to conquests far and wide. The passage served as a fine close for one psalm, and it makes an equally noteworthy opening for another. We cannot too often with fixed heart resolve to magnify the Lord; nor need we ever hesitate to use the same words in drawing near to God, for the Lord who cannot endure vain repetitions is equally weary of vain variations. Some expressions are so admirable that they ought to be used again; who would throw away a cup because he drank from it before? God should be served with the best words, and when we have them they are surely good enough to be used twice. To use the same words continually and never utter a new song would show great slothfulness, and would lead to dead formalism, but we need not regard novelty of language as at all essential to devotion, nor strain after it as an urgent necessity. It may be that our heavenly Father would here teach us that if we are unable to find a great variety of suitable expressions in devotion, we need not in the slightest degree distress ourselves, but may either pray or praise, "using the same words."

Verse 1. O God, my heart is fixed. Though I have many wars to disturb me, and many cares to toss me to and fro, yet I am settled in one mind and cannot be driven from it. My heart has taken hold and abides in one resolve. Thy grace has overcome the fickleness of nature, and I am now in a resolute and determined frame of mind. I will sing and give praise. Both with voice and music will I extol thee—"I will sing and play", as some read it. Even though I have to shout in the battle I will also sing in my soul, and if my fingers must needs be engaged with the bow, yet shall they also touch the ten stringed instrument and show forth thy praise. Even with my glory—with my intellect, my tongue, my poetic faculty, my musical skill, or whatever else causes me to be renowned, and confers honour upon me. It is my glory to be able to speak and not to be a dumb animal, therefore my voice shall show forth thy praise; it is my glory to know God and not to be a heathen, and therefore my instructed intellect shall adore thee; it is my glory to be a saint and no more a rebel, therefore the grace I have received shall bless thee; it is my glory to be immortal and not a mere brute which perisheth, therefore my inmost life shall celebrate thy majesty. When he says I will, he supposes that there might be some temptation to refrain, but this he puts on one side, and with fixed heart prepares himself for the joyful engagement. He who sings with a fixed heart is likely to sing on, and all the while to sing well.

Verse 2. Awake, psaltery and harp. As if he could not be content with voice alone, but must use the well tuned strings, and communicate to them something of his own liveliness. Strings are wonderful things when some men play upon them, they seem to become sympathetic and incorporated with the minstrel as if his very soul were imparted to them and thrilled through them. Only when a thoroughly enraptured soul speaks in the instrument can music be acceptable with God: as mere musical sound the Lord can have no pleasure therein, he is only pleased with the thought and feeling which are thus expressed. When a man has musical gift, he should regard it as too lovely a power to be enlisted in the cause of sin. Well did Charles Wesley say:—

"If well I know the tuneful art
To captivate a human heart,

The glory, Lord, be thine.
A servant of thy blessed will,
I here devote my utmost skill
To sound the praise divine."

"Thine own musician, Lord, inspire,
And let my consecrated lyre
Repeat the Psalmist's part.
His Son and Thine reveal in me,
And fill with sacred melody
The fibres of my heart."

I myself will awake early. I will call up the dawn. The best and brightest hours of the day shall find me heartily aroused to bless my God. Some singers had need to awake, for they sing in drawling tones, as if they were half asleep; the tune drags wearily along, there is no feeling or sentiment in the singing, but the listener hears only a dull mechanical sound, as if the choir ground out the notes from a worn out barrel organ. Oh, choristers, wake up, for this is not a work for dreamers, but such as requires your best powers in their liveliest condition. In all worship this should be the personal resolve of each worshipper: "I myself will awake."

Verse 3. I will praise thee, O LORD, among the people. Whoever may come to hear me, devout or profane, believer or heathen, civilized or barbarian, I shall not cease my music. David seemed inspired to foresee that his Psalms would be sung in every land, from Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand. His heart was large, he would have the whole race of man listen to his joy in God, and lo, he has his desire, for his psalmody is cosmopolitan; no poet is so universally known as he. He had but one theme, he sang Jehovah and none beside, and his work being thus made of gold, silver, and precious stones, has endured the fiery ordeal of time, and was never more prized than at this day. Happy man, to have thus made his choice to be the Lord's musician, he retains his office as the Poet Laureate of the kingdom of heaven, and shall retain it till the crack of doom. And I will sing praises unto thee among the nations. This is written, not only to complete the parallelism of the verse, but to reaffirm his fixed resolve. He would march to battle praising Jehovah, and when he had conquered he would make the captured cities ring with Jehovah's praises. He would carry his religion with him wherever he pushed his conquests, and the vanquished should not hear the praises of David, but the glories of the Lord of Hosts. Would to God that wherever professing Christians travel they would carry the praises of the Lord with them! It is to be feared that some leave their religion when they leave their homes. Nations and peoples would soon know the gospel of Jesus if every Christian traveller were as intensely devout as the Psalmist. Alas, it is to be feared that the Lord's name is profaned rather than honoured among the heathen by many who are named by the name of Christ.

Verse 4. For thy mercy is great above the heavens, and therefore there must be no limit of time, or place, or people, when that mercy is to be extolled. As the heavens over arch the whole earth, and from above mercy pours down upon men, so shalt thou be praised everywhere beneath the sky. Mercy is greater than the mountains, though they pierce the clouds; earth cannot hold it all, it is so vast, so boundless, so exceeding high that the heavens themselves are over topped thereby. And thy truth teacheth unto the clouds. As far as we can see we behold thy truth and faithfulness, and there is much beyond which lies shrouded in cloud, but we are sure that it is all mercy, though it be far above

and out of our sight. Therefore shall the song be lifted high and the psalm shall peal forth without stint of far resounding music. Here is ample space for the loudest chorus, and a subject which deserves thunders of praise.

Verse 5. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth. Let thy praise be according to the greatness of thy mercy. Ah, if we were to measure our devotion thus, with what ardour should we sing! The whole earth with its overhanging dome would seem too scant an orchestra, and all the faculties of all mankind too little for the hallelujah. Angels would be called in to aid us, and surely they would come. They will come in that day when the whole earth shall be filled with the praises of Jehovah. We long for the time when God shall be universally worshipped, and his glory in the gospel shall be everywhere made known. This is a truly missionary prayer. David had none of the exclusiveness of the modern Jew, or the narrow heartedness of some nominal Christians. For God's sake, that his glory might be everywhere revealed, he longed to see heaven and earth full of the divine praise. Amen, so let it be. Now prayer follows upon praise, and derives strength of faith and holy boldness therefrom. It is frequently best to begin worship with a hymn, and then to bring forth our vials full of odours after the harps have commenced their sweeter sounds.

Verse 6. That thy beloved may be delivered: save with thy right hand, and answer me. Let my prayer avail for all the beloved ones. Sometimes a nation seems to hang upon the petitions of one man. With what ardour should such an one pour out his soul! David does so here. It is easy praying for the Lord's beloved, for we feel sure of a favourable answer, since the Lord's heart is already set upon doing them good: yet it is solemn work to plead when we feel that the condition of a whole beloved nation depends upon what the Lord means to do with us whom he has placed in a representative position. "Answer me, that thy many beloved ones may be delivered": it is an urgent prayer. David felt that the case demanded the right hand of God,—his wisest, speediest, and most efficient interposition, and he feels sure of obtaining it for himself, since his cause involved the safety of the chosen people. Will the Lord fail to use his right hand of power on behalf of those whom he has set at his right hand of favour? Shall not the beloved be delivered by him who loves them? When our suit is not a selfish one, but is bound up with the cause of God, we may be very bold about it.

Verse 7. God hath spoken in his holiness. Aforetime the Lord had made large promises to David, and these his holiness had guaranteed. The divine attributes were pledged to give the son of Jesse great blessings; there was no fear that the covenant God would run back from his plighted word. I will rejoice. If God has spoken we may well be glad: the very fact of a divine revelation is a joy. If the Lord had meant to destroy us he would not have spoken to us as he has done. But what God has spoken is a still further reason for gladness, for he has declared "the sure mercies of David", and promised to establish his seed upon his throne, and to subdue all his enemies. David greatly rejoiced after the Lord had spoken to him by the mouth of Nathan. He sat before the Lord in a wonder of joy. See 1Ch 17:1-27, and note that in the next chapter David began to act vigorously against his enemies, even as in this Psalm he vows to do. I will divide Shechem. Home conquests come first. Foes must be dislodged from Israel's territory, and lands properly settled and managed. And mete out the valley of Succoth. On the other side Jordan as well as on this the land must be put in order, and secured against all wandering marauders. Some rejoicing leads to inaction, but not that which is grounded upon a lively faith in the promise of God. See how David prays, as if he had the blessing already, and could share it among his men: this comes of having sung so heartily unto the Lord his helper. See how he resolves on action, like a man whose prayers are only a part of his life, and vital portions of his action.

Verse 8. Gilead is mine. Thankful hearts dwell upon the gifts which the Lord has given them, and think it no task to mention them one by one. Manasseh is mine. I have it already, and it is to me the token and assurance that the rest of the promised heritage will also come into my possession in due time. If we gratefully acknowledge what we have we shall be in better heart for obtaining that which as yet we have not received. He who gives us Gilead and Manasseh will not fail to put the rest of the promised territory into our hands. Ephraim also is the strength of mine head. This tribe furnished David with more than twenty thousand "mighty men of valour, famous throughout the house of their fathers": the faithful loyalty of this band was, no doubt, a proof that the rest of the tribe were with him, and so he regarded them as the helmet of the state, the guard of his royal crown. Judah is my lawgiver. There had he seated the government and chief courts of justice. No other tribe could lawfully govern but Judah: till Shiloh came the divine decree fixed the legal power in that state. To us also there is no lawgiver but our Lord who sprang out of Judah; and whenever Rome, or Canterbury, or any other power shall attempt to set up laws and ordinances for the church, we have but one reply—"Judah is my lawgiver." Thus the royal psalmist rejoiced because his own land had been cleansed of intruders, and a regular government had been set up, and guarded by an ample force, and in all this he found encouragement to plead for victory over his foreign foes. Even thus do we plead with the Lord that as in one land and another Christ's holy gospel has been set up and maintained, so also in other lands the power of his sceptre of grace may be owned till the whole earth shall bow before him, and the Edom of Antichrist shall be crushed beneath his feet.

Verse 9. Moab is my washpot. This nation had shown no friendly spirit to the Israelites, but had continually viewed them as a detested rival, therefore they were to be subdued and made subject to David's throne. He claims by faith the victory, and regards his powerful enemy with contempt. Nor was he disappointed, for "the Moabites became David's servants and brought him gifts" (2Sa 8:2). As men wash their feet after a long journey, and so are revived, so vanquished difficulties serve to refresh us: we use Moab for a washpot. Over Edom will I cast out my shoe. It shall be as the floor upon which the bather throws his sandals, it shall lie beneath his foot, subject to his will and altogether his own. Edom was proud, but David throws his slipper at it; its capital was high, but he casts his sandal over it; it was strong, but he hurls his shoe at it as the gage of battle. He had not entered yet into its rock built fortresses, but since the Lord was with him he felt sure that he would do so. Under the leadership of the Almighty, he felt so secure of conquering even fierce Edom itself that he looks upon it as a mere slave, over which he could exult with impunity. We ought never to fear those who are defending the wrong side, for since God is not with them their wisdom is folly, their strength is weakness, and their glory is their shame. We think too much of God's foes and talk of them with too much respect. Who is this pope of Rome? His Holiness? Call him not so, but call him His Blasphemy! His Profanity! His Impudence! What are he and his cardinals, and his legates, but the image and incarnation of Antichrist, to be in due time cast with the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire? Over Philistia will I triumph. David had done so in his youth, and he is all the more sure of doing it again. We read that "David smote the Philistines and subdued them" (2Sa 8:1), even as he hath smitten Edom and filled it with his garrisons. The enemies with whom we battled in our youth are yet alive, and we shall have more brushes with them before we die, but, blessed be God, we are by no means dismayed at the prospect, for we expect to triumph over them even more easily than aforetime.

Thy right hand shall thy people aid;
Thy faithful promise makes us strong;

We will Philistia's land invade.
And over Edom chant the song.
Through thee we shall most valiant prove,
And tread the foe beneath our feet;
Through thee our faith shall hills remove,
And small as chaff the mountains beat.

Verse 10. Faith leads on to strong desire for the realization of the promise, and hence the practical question, Who will bring me into the strong city? who will lead me into Edom? The difficulty is plainly perceived. Petra is strong and hard to enter: the Psalmist warrior knows that he cannot enter the city by his own power, and he therefore asks who is to help him. He asks of the right person, even of his Lord, who has all men at his beck, and can say to this man, "show my servant the road", and he will show it, or to this band, "cut your way into the rock city", and they will assuredly do it. Of Edom it is written by Obadiah", The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord." David looked for his conquest to Jehovah's infinite power and he looked not in vain.

Verse 11. Wilt not thou, O God, who hast cast us off? This is grand faith which can trust the Lord even when he seems to have cast us off. Some can barely trust him when he pampers them, and yet David relied upon him when Israel seemed under a cloud and the Lord had hidden his face. O for more of this real and living faith. The casting off will not last long when faith so gloriously keeps her hold. None but the elect of God who have obtained "like precious faith" can sing—

"Now thou arrayest thine awful face
In angry frowns, without a smile;
We, through the cloud, believe thy grace,
Secure of thy compassion still."

And wilt not thou, O God, go forth with our hosts? Canst thou for ever forsake thine own and leave thy people to be overthrown by thine enemies? The sweet singer is sure that Edom shall be captured, because he cannot and will not believe that God will refrain from going forth with the armies of his chosen people. When we ask ourselves, "Who will be the means of our obtaining a promised blessing?" we need not be discouraged if we perceive no secondary agent, for we may then fall back upon the great Promiser himself, and believe that he himself will perform his word unto us. If no one else will lead us into Edom, the Lord himself will do it, if he has promised it. Or if there must be visible instruments he will use our hosts, feeble as they are. We need not that any new agency should be created, God can strengthen our present hosts and enable them to do all that is needed; all that is wanted even for the conquest of a world is that the Lord go forth with such forces as we already have. He can bring us into the strong city even by such weak weapons as we wield today.

Verse 12. Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. This prayer has often fallen from the lips of men who have been bitterly disappointed by their fellows, and it has also been poured out unto the Lord in the presence of some gigantic labour in which mortal power is evidently of no avail. Edom cannot be entered by any human power, yet from its fastnesses the robber bands come rushing down; therefore, O Lord, do thou interpose and give thy people deliverance. Help divine is expected

because help human is of no avail. We ought to pray with all the more confidence in God when our confidence in man is altogether gone. When the help of man is vain, we shall not find it vain to seek the help of God.

Verse 13. God's help shall inspire us to help ourselves. Faith is neither a coward nor a sluggard: she knows that God is with her, and therefore she does valiantly; she knows that he will tread down her enemies, and therefore she arises to tread them down in his name. Where praise and prayer have preceded the battle, we may expect to see heroic deeds and decisive victories. Through God is our secret support; from that source we draw all our courage, wisdom, and strength. We shall do valiantly. This is the public outflow from that secret source: our inward and spiritual faith proves itself by outward and valorous deeds. He shall tread down our enemies. They shall fall before him, and as they lie prostrate he shall march over them, and all the hosts of his people with him. This is a prophecy. It was fulfilled to David, but it remains true to the Son of David and all who are on his side. The Church shall yet arouse herself to praise her God with all her heart, and then with songs and hosannas she will advance to the great battle; her foes shall be overthrown and utterly crushed by the power of her God, and the Lord's glory shall be above all the earth. Send it in our time, we beseech thee, O Lord.

Psalm 109

Verse 1. Hold not thy peace. Mine enemies speak, be thou pleased to speak too. Break thy solemn silence, and silence those who slander me. It is the cry of a man whose confidence in God is deep, and whose communion with him is very close and bold. Note, that he only asks the Lord to speak: a word from God is all a believer needs. O God of my praise. Thou whom my whole soul praises, be pleased to protect my honour and guard my praise. "My heart is fixed", said he in the former psalm, "I will sing and give praise", and now he appeals to the God whom he had praised. If we take care of God's honour he will take care of ours. We may look to him as the guardian of our character if we truly seek his glory. If we live to God's praise, he will in the long run give us praise among men.

Verse 2. For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me. Wicked men must needs say wicked things, and these we have reason to dread; but in addition they utter false and deceitful things, and these are worst of all. There is no knowing what may come out of mouths which are at once lewd and lying. The misery caused to a good man by slanderous reports no heart can imagine but that which is wounded by them: in all Satan's armoury there are no worse weapons than deceitful tongues. To have a reputation, over which we have watched with daily care, suddenly bespattered with the foulest aspersions, is painful beyond description; but when wicked and deceitful men get their mouths fully opened we can hardly expect to escape any more than others. They have spoken against me with a lying tongue. Lying tongues cannot lie still. Bad tongues are not content to vilify bad men, but choose the most gracious of saints to be the objects of their attacks. Here is reason enough for prayer. The heart sinks when assailed with slander, for we know not what may be said next, what friend may be alienated, what evil may be threatened, or what misery may be caused to us and others. The air is full of rumours, and shadows impalpable flit around; the mind is confused with dread of unseen foes, and invisible arrows. What ill can be worse than to be assailed with slander,

"Whose edge is sharper than the sword, whose tongue
Out venoms all the worms of Nile"?

Verse 3. They compassed me about also with words of hatred. Turn which way he would they hedged him in with falsehood, misrepresentation, accusation, and scorn. Whispers, sneers, insinuations, satires, and open charges filled his ear with a perpetual buzz, and all for no reason, but sheer hate. Each word was as full of venom as an egg is full of meat: they could not speak without showing their teeth. And fought against me without a cause. He had not provoked the quarrel or contributed to it, yet in a thousand ways they laboured to "corrode his comfort, and destroy his ease." All this tended to make the suppliant feel the more acutely the wrongs which were done to him.

Verse 4. For my love they are my adversaries. They hate me because I love them. One of our poets says of the Lord Jesus—"Found guilty of excess of love." Surely it was his only fault. Our Lord might have used all the language of this complaint most emphatically—they hated him without a cause and returned him hatred for love. What a smart this is to the soul, to be hated in proportion to the gratitude which it deserved, hated by those it loved, and hated because of its love. This was a cruel case, and the sensitive mind of the psalmist writhed under it. But give myself unto prayer. He did nothing else but pray. He became prayer as they became malice. This was his answer to his enemies, he appealed from men and their injustice to the Judge of all the earth, who must do right. True bravery alone can teach a man to leave his traducers unanswered, and carry the case unto the Lord.

"Men cannot help but reverence the courage that walketh amid calumnies unanswering."

"He standeth as a gallant chief unheeding shot or shell."

Verse 5. And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love. Evil for good is devil like. This is Satan's line of action, and his children upon earth follow it greedily; it is cruel, and wounds to the quick. The revenge which pays a man back in his own coin has a kind of natural justice in it; but what shall be said of that baseness which returns to goodness the very opposite of what it has a right to expect? Our Lord endured such base treatment all his days, and, alas, in his members, endures it still. Thus we see the harmless and innocent man upon his knees pouring out his lamentation: we are now to observe him rising from the mercy seat, inspired with prophetic energy, and pouring forth upon his foes the forewarning of their doom. We shall hear him speak like a judge clothed with stern severity, or like the angel of doom robed in vengeance, or as the naked sword of justice when she bares her arm for execution. It is not for himself that he speaks so much as for all the slandered and the down trodden, of whom he feels himself to be the representative and mouthpiece. He asks for justice, and as his soul is stung with cruel wrongs he asks with solemn deliberation, making no stint in his demands. To pity malice would be malice to mankind; to screen the crafty seekers of human blood would be cruelty to the oppressed. Nay, love, and truth, and pity lift their wounds to heaven, and implore vengeance on the enemies of the innocent and oppressed; those who render goodness itself a crime, and make innocence a motive for hate, deserve to find no mercy from the great Preserver of men. Vengeance is the prerogative of God, and as it would be a boundless calamity if evil were for ever to go unpunished, so it is an unspeakable blessing that the Lord will recompense the wicked and cruel man, and there are times and seasons when a good man ought to pray for that blessing. When the Judge of all threatens to punish tyrannical cruelty and false hearted treachery, virtue gives her assent and consent. Amen, so let it be, saith every just man in his inmost soul.

Verse 6. Set thou a wicked man over him. What worse punishment could a man have? The proud man cannot endure the proud, nor the oppressor brook the rule of another like himself. The righteous

in their patience find the rule of the wicked a sore bondage; but those who are full of resentful passions, and haughty aspirations, are slaves indeed when men of their own class have the whip hand of them. For Herod to be ruled by another Herod would be wretchedness enough, and yet what retribution could be more just? What unrighteous man can complain if he finds himself governed by one of like character? What can the wicked expect but that their rulers should be like themselves? Who does not admire the justice of God when he sees fierce Romans ruled by Tiberius and Nero, and Red Republicans governed by Marat and Robespierre? And let Satan stand at his right hand. Should not like come to like? Should not the father of lies stand near his children? Who is a better right hand friend for an adversary of the righteous than the great adversary himself? The curse is an awful one, but it is most natural that it should come to pass: those who serve Satan may expect to have his company, his assistance, his temptations, and at last his doom.

Verse 7. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned. He judged and condemned others in the vilest manner, he suffered not the innocent to escape; and it would be a great shame if in his time of trial, being really guilty, he should be allowed to go free. Who would wish Judge Jeffries to be acquitted if he were tried for perverting justice? Who would desire Nero or Caligula to be cleared if set at the bar for cruelty? When Shylock goes into court, who wishes him to win his suit? And let his prayer become sin. It is sin already, let it be so treated. To the injured it must seem terrible that the black hearted villain should nevertheless pretend to pray, and very naturally do they beg that he may not be heard, but that his pleadings may be regarded as an addition to his guilt. He has devoured the widow's house, and yet he prays. He has put Naboth to death by false accusation and taken possession of his vineyard, and then he presents prayers to the Almighty. He has given up villages to slaughter, and his hands are red with the blood of babes and maidens, and then he pays his vows unto Allah! He must surely be accursed himself who does not wish that such abominable prayers may be loathed of heaven and written down as new sins. He who makes it a sin for others to pray will find his own praying become sin. When he at last sees his need of mercy, mercy herself shall resent his appeal as an insult. "Because that he remembered not to show mercy", he shall himself be forgotten by the God of grace, and his bitter cries for deliverance shall be regarded as mockeries of heaven.

Verse 8. Let his days be few. Who would desire a persecuting tyrant to live long? As well might we wish length of days to a mad dog. If he will do nothing but mischief the shortening of his life will be the lengthening of the world's tranquillity. "Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days",—this is bare justice to them, and great mercy to the poor and needy. And let another take his office. Perhaps a better man may come, at any rate it is time a change were tried. So used were the Jews to look upon these verses as the doom of traitors, of cruel and deceitful mind, that Peter saw at once in the speedy death of Judas a fulfilment of this sentence, and a reason for the appointment of a successor who should take his place of oversight. A bad man does not make an office bad: another may use with benefit that which he perverted to ill uses.

Verse 9. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. This would inevitably be the case when the man died, but the psalmist uses the words in an emphatic sense, he would have his widow "a widow indeed", and his children so friendless as to be orphaned in the bitterest sense. He sees the result of the bad man's decease, and includes it in the punishment. The tyrant's sword makes many children fatherless, and who can lament when his barbarities come home to his own family, and they too, weep and lament. Pity is due to all orphans and widows as such, but a father's atrocious actions may dry up the springs of pity. Who mourns that Pharaoh's children lost their father, or that Sennacherib's wife became a widow? As Agag's sword had made women childless none wept when

Samuel's weapon made his mother childless among women. If Herod had been slain when he had just murdered the innocents at Bethlehem no man would have lamented it even though Herod's wife would have become a widow. These awful maledictions are not for common men to use, but for judges, such as David was, to pronounce over the enemies of God and man. A judge may sentence a man to death whatever the consequences may be to the criminal's family, and in this there will be no feeling of private revenge, but simply the doing of justice because evil must be punished. We are aware that this may not appear to justify the full force of these expressions, but it should never be forgotten that the case supposed is a very execrable one, and the character of the culprit is beyond measure loathsome and not to be met by any common abhorrence. Those who regard a sort of effeminate benevolence to all creatures alike as the acme of virtue are very much in favour with this degenerate age; these look for the salvation of the damned, and even pray for the restoration of the devil. It is very possible that if they were less in sympathy with evil, and more in harmony with the thoughts of God, they would be of a far sterner and also of a far better mind. To us it seems better to agree with God's curses than with the devil's blessings; and when at any time our heart kicks against the terrors of the Lord we take it as a proof of our need of greater humbling, and confess our sin before our God.

Verse 10. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg. May they have neither house nor home, settlement nor substance; and while they thus wander and beg may it ever be on their memory that their father's house lies in ruins,—let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. It has often been so: a race of tyrants has become a generation of beggars. Misused power and abused wealth have earned the family name universal detestation, and secured to the family character an entail of baseness. Justice herself would award no such doom except upon the supposition that the sin descended with the blood; but supreme providence which in the end is pure justice has written many a page of history in which the imprecation of this verse has been literally verified. We confess that as we read some of these verses we have need of all our faith and reverence to accept them as the voice of inspiration; but the exercise is good for the soul, for it educates our sense of ignorance, and tests our teachability. Yes, Divine Spirit, we can and do believe that even these dread words from which we shrink have a meaning consistent with the attributes of the Judge of all the earth, though his name is LOVE. How this may be we shall know hereafter.

Verse 11. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath. A doom indeed. Those who have once fallen into the hands of the usurer can tell you what this means: it were better to be a fly in the web of a spider. In the most subtle, worrying, and sweeping manner the extortioner takes away, piece by piece, his victim's estate, till not a fraction remains to form a pittance for old age. Baiting his trap, watching it carefully, and dexterously driving his victim into it, the extortioner by legal means performs unlawful deeds, catches his bird, strips him of every feather, and cares not if he die of starvation. He robs with law to protect him, and steals with the magistrate at his back: to fall into his clutches is worse than to be beset by professed thieves. And let the strangers spoil his labour,—so that his kindred may have none of it. What with hard creditors and pilfering strangers the estate must soon vanish! Extortion drawing one way, and spoliation the other, a known moneylender and an unknown robber both at work, the man's substance would soon disappear, and rightly so, for it was gathered by shameless means. This too has been frequently seen. Wealth amassed by oppression has seldom lasted to the third generation: it was gathered by wrong and by wrong it is scattered, and who would decree that it should be otherwise? Certainly those who suffer beneath high handed fraud will not wish to stay the retribution of the Almighty, nor would those who see the poor robbed and trampled on desire to alter the divine arrangements by which such evils are recompensed even in this life.

Verse 12. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him. He had no mercy, but on the contrary, he crushed down all who appealed to him. Loath to smite him with his own weapon, stern justice can do no otherwise, she lifts her scales and sees that this, too, must be in the sentence. Neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children. We are staggered to find the children included in the father's sentence, and yet as a matter of fact children do suffer for their father's sins, and, as long as the affairs of this life are ordered as they are, it must be so. So involved are the interests of the race, that it is quite impossible in all respects to view the father and the child apart. No man among us could desire to see the fatherless suffer for their deceased father's fault, yet so it happens, and there is no injustice in the fact. They share the parent's ill gotten gain or rank, and their aggrandizement is a part of the object at which he aimed in the perpetration of his crimes; to allow them to prosper would be an encouragement and reward of his iniquity; therefore, for these and other reasons, a man perishes not alone in his iniquity. The ban is on his race. If the man were innocent this would be a crime; if he were but commonly guilty it would be excessive retribution; but when the offence reeks before high heaven in unutterable abomination, it is little marvel that men devote the man's whole house to perpetual infamy, and that so it happeneth.

Verse 13. Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Both from existence and from memory let them pass away till none shall know that such a vile brood ever existed. Who wishes to see the family of Domitian or Julian continued upon earth? Who would mourn if the race of Tom Paine or of Voltaire should come to an utter end? It would be undesirable that the sons of the utterly villainous and bloodthirsty should rise to honour, and if they did they would only revive the memory of their father's sins.

Verse 14. This verse is, perhaps, the most terrible of all, but yet as a matter of fact children do procure punishment upon their parents' sins, and are often themselves the means of such punishment. A bad son brings to mind his father's bad points of character; people say, "Ah, he is like the old man. He takes after his father." A mother's sins also will be sure to be called to mind if her daughter becomes grossly wicked. "Ah", they will say, "there is little wonder, when you consider what her mother was." These are matters of everyday occurrence. We cannot, however, pretend to explain the righteousness of this malediction, though we fully believe in it. We leave it till our heavenly Father is pleased to give us further instruction. Yet, as a man's faults are often learned from his parents, it is not unjust that his consequent crimes should recoil upon him.

Verse 15. Again, he wishes that his father's sins may follow up the transgressor and assist to fill the measure of his own iniquities, so that for the whole accumulated load the family may be smitten with utter extinction. A king might justly wish for such an end to fall upon an incorrigible brood of rebels; and of persecutors, continuing in the same mind, the saints might well pray for their extinction; but the passage is dark; and we must leave it so. It must be right or it would not be here, but how we cannot see. Why should we expect to understand all things? Perhaps it is more for our benefit to exercise humility, and reverently worship God over a hard text, than it would be to comprehend all mysteries.

Verse 16. Because that he remembered not to shew mercy. Because he had no memory to show mercy the Judge of all will have a strong memory of his sins. So little mercy had he ever shown that he had forgotten how to do it, he was without common humanity, devoid of compassion, and therefore only worthy to be dealt with after the bare rule of justice. But persecuted the poor and needy man. He looked on poor men as a nuisance upon the earth, he ground their faces, oppressed them in

their wages, and treated them as the mire of the streets. Should he not be punished, and in his turn laid low? All who know him are indignant at his brutalities, and will glory to see him overthrown. That he might even slay the broken in heart. He had malice in his heart towards one who was already sufficiently sorrowful, whom it was a superfluity of malignity to attack. Yet no grief excited sympathy in him, no poverty ever moved him to relent. No, he would kill the heart broken and rob their orphans of their patrimony. To him groans were music, and tears were wine, and drops of blood precious rubies. Would any man spare such a monster? Will it not be serving the ends of humanity if we wish him gone, gone to the throne of God to receive his reward? If he will turn and repent, well: but if not, such a up as tree ought to be felled and cast into the fire. As men kill mad dogs if they can, and justly too, so may we lawfully wish that cruel oppressors of the poor were removed from their place and office, and, as an example to others, made to smart for their barbarities.

Verse 17. As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him. Deep down in every man's soul the justice of the lex talionis is established. Retaliation, not for private revenge, but as a measure of public justice, is demanded by the psalmist and deserved by the crime. Surely the malicious man cannot complain if he is judged by his own rule, and has his corn measured with his own bushel. Let him have what he loved. They are his own chickens, and they ought to come home to roost. He made the bed, let him lie on it himself. As he brewed, so let him drink. So all men say as a matter of justice, and though the higher law of love overrides all personal anger, yet as against the base characters here described even Christian love would not wish to see the sentence mitigated. As he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. He felt no joy in any man's good, nor would he lift a hand to do another a service, rather did he frown and fret when another prospered or mirth was heard under his window; what, then, can we wish him? Blessing was wasted on him, he hated those who gently sought to lead him to a better mind; even the blessings of providence he received with murmurs and repinings, he wished for famine to raise the price of his corn, and for war to increase his trade. Evil was good to him, and good he counted evil. If he could have blasted every field of corn in the world he would have done so if he could have turned a penny by it, or if he could thereby have injured the good man whom he hated from his very soul. What can we wish for him? He hunts after evil, he hates good; he lays himself out to ruin the godly whom God has blessed, he is the devil's friend, and as fiendish as his patron; should things go well with such a being? Shall we "wish him good luck in the name of the Lord?" To invoke blessings on such a man would be to participate in his wickedness, therefore let blessing be far from him, so long as he continues what he now is.

Verses 18-19. He was so openly in the habit of wishing ill to others that he seemed to wear robes of cursing, therefore let it be as his raiment girded and belted about him, yea, let it enter as water into his bowels, and search the very marrow of his bones like a penetrating oil. It is but common justice that he should receive a return for his malice, and receive it in kind, too.

Verse 20. This is the summing up of the entire imprecation, and fixes it upon the persons who had so maliciously assailed the inoffensive man of God. David was a man of gentle mould, and remarkably free from the spirit of revenge, and therefore we may here conceive him to be speaking as a judge or as a representative man, in whose person great principles needed to be vindicated and great injuries redressed. Thousands of God's people are perplexed with this psalm, and we fear we have contributed very little towards their enlightenment, and perhaps the notes we have gathered from others, since they display such a variety of view, may only increase the difficulty. What then? Is it not good for us sometimes to be made to feel that we are not yet able to understand all the word and mind of God? A thorough bewilderment, so long as it does not stagger our faith, may be useful to us

by confounding our pride, arousing our faculties, and leading us to cry, "What I know not teach thou me."

Verse 21. But do thou for me, O God the Lord, for thy name's sake. How eagerly he turns from his enemies to his God! He sets the great THOU in opposition to all his adversaries, and you see at once that his heart is at rest. The words are very indistinct and though our version may not precisely translate them, yet it in a remarkable manner hits upon the sense and upon the obscurity which hangs over it. "Do thou for me"—what shall he do? Why, do whatever he thinks fit. He leaves himself in the Lord's hands, dictating nothing, but quite content so long as his God will but undertake for him. His plea is not his own merit, but the name. The saints have always felt this to be their most mighty plea. God himself has performed his grandest deeds of grace for the honour of his name, and his people know that this is the most potent argument with him. What the Lord himself has guarded with sacred jealousy we should reverence with our whole hearts and rely upon without distrust. "Because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me." Not because I am good, but because thy mercy is good: see how the saints fetch their pleadings in prayer from the Lord himself. God's mercy is the star to which the Lord's people turn their eye when they are tossed with tempest and not comforted, for the peculiar bounty and goodness of that mercy have a charm for weary hearts. When man has no mercy we shall still find it in God. When man would devour we may look to God to deliver. His name and his mercy are two firm grounds for hope, and happy are those who know how to rest upon them.

Verse 22. For I am poor and needy. When he does plead anything about himself he urges not his riches or his merits, but his poverty and his necessities: this is gospel supplication, such as only the Spirit of God can indite upon the heart. This lowliness does not comport with the supposed vengeful spirit of the preceding verses: there must therefore be some interpretation of them which would make them suitable in the lips of a lowly minded man of God. And my heart is wounded within me. The Lord has always a tender regard to broken hearted ones, and such the psalmist had become: the undeserved cruelty, the baseness, the slander of his remorseless enemies had pierced him to the soul, and this sad condition he pleads as a reason for speedy help. It is time for a friend to step in when the adversary cuts so deep. The case has become desperate without divine aid; now, therefore, is the Lord's time.

Verse 23. I am gone like the shadow when it declineth. I am a mere shadow, a shadow at the vanishing point, when it stretches far, but is almost lost in the universal gloom of evening which settles over all, and so obliterates the shadows cast by the setting sun. Lord, there is next to nothing left of me, wilt thou not come in before I am quite gone? I am tossed up and down as the locust, which is the sport of the winds, and must go up or down as the breeze carries it. The psalmist felt as powerless in his distress as a poor insect, which a child may toss up and down at its pleasure. He entreats the divine pity, because he had been brought to this forlorn and feeble condition by the long persecution which his tender heart had endured. Slander and malice are apt to produce nervous disorders and to lead on to pining diseases. Those who use these poisoned arrows are not always aware of the consequences; they scatter fire brands and death and say it is sport.

Verse 24. My knees are weak through fasting; either religious fasting, to which he resorted in the dire extremity of his grief, or else through loss of appetite occasioned by distress of mind. Who can eat when every morsel is soured by envy? This is the advantage of the slanderer, that he feels nothing himself, while his sensitive victim can scarcely eat a morsel of bread because of his sensitiveness. However, the good God knoweth all this, and will succour his afflicted. The Lord who bids us confirm

the feeble knees will assuredly do it himself. "And my flesh faileth of fatness." He was wasted to a skeleton, and as his body was emaciated, so was his soul bereft of comfort: he was pining away, and all the while his enemies saw it and laughed at his distress. How pathetically he states his case; this is one of the truest forms of prayer, the setting forth of our sorrow before the Lord. Weak knees are strong with God, and failing flesh has great power in pleading.

Verse 25. I became also a reproach unto them. They made him the theme of ridicule, the butt of their ribald jests: his emaciation by fasting made him a tempting subject for their caricatures and lampoons. When they looked upon me they shook their heads. Words were not a sufficient expression of their scorn, they resorted to gestures which were meant both to show their derision and to irritate his mind. Though these things break no bones, yet they do worse, for they break and bruise far tenderer parts of us. Many a man who could have answered a malicious speech, and so have relieved his mind, has felt keenly a sneer, a putting out of the tongue, or some other sign of contempt. Those, too, who are exhausted by such fasting and wasting, as the last verse describes (Ps 109:31) are generally in a state of morbid sensibility, and therefore feel more acutely the unkindness of others. What they would smile at during happier seasons becomes intolerable when they are in a highly nervous condition.

Verse 26. Help me, O LORD my God. Laying hold of Jehovah by the appropriating word my, he implores his aid both to help him to bear his heavy load and to enable him to rise superior to it. He has described his own weakness, and the strength and fury of his foes, and by these two arguments he urges his appeal with double force. This is a very rich, short, and suitable prayer for believers in any situation of peril, difficulty, or sorrow. O save me according to thy mercy. As thy mercy is, so let thy salvation be. The measure is a great one, for the mercy of God is without bound. When man has no mercy it is comforting to fall back upon God's mercy. Justice to the wicked is often mercy to the righteous, and because God is merciful he will save his people by overthrowing their adversaries.

Verse 27. That they may know that this is thy hand. Dolts as they are, let the mercy shown to me be so conspicuous that they shall be forced to see the Lord's agency in it. Ungodly men will not see God's hand in anything if they can help it, and when they see good men delivered into their power they become more confirmed than ever in their atheism; but all in good time God will arise and so effectually punish their malice and rescue the object of their spite that they will be compelled to say like the Egyptian magicians, "this is the finger of God." That thou, LORD, hast done it. There will be no mistaking the author of so thorough a vindication, so complete a turning of the tables.

Verse 28. Let them curse, but bless thou, or, they will curse and thou wilt bless. Their cursing will then be of such little consequence that it will not matter a straw. One blessing from the Lord will take the poison out of ten thousand curses of men. When they arise, let them be ashamed. They lift up themselves to deal out another blow, to utter another falsehood, and to watch for its injurious effects upon their victim, but they see their own defeat and are filled with shame. But let thy servant rejoice. Not merely as a man protected and rescued, but as God's servant in whom his master's goodness and glory are displayed when he is saved from his foes. It ought to be our greatest joy that the Lord is honoured in our experience; the mercy itself ought not so much to rejoice us as the glory which is thereby brought to him who so graciously bestows it.

Verse 29. Let mine adversaries be clothed with shame. It is a prophecy as well as a wish, and may be read both in the indicative and the imperative. Where sin is the underclothing, shame will soon be the

outer vesture. He who would clothe good men with contempt shall himself be clothed with dishonour. And let them cover themselves with their own confusion, as with a mantle. Let their confusion be broad enough to wrap them all over from head to foot, let them bind it about them and hide themselves in it, as being utterly afraid to be seen. Now they walk abroad unblushingly and reveal their own wickedness, acting as if they either had nothing to conceal or did not care whether it was seen or no; but they will be of another mind when the great Judge deals with them, then will they entreat mountains to hide them and hills to fall upon them, that they may not be seen: but all in vain, they must be dragged to the bar with no other covering but their own confusion.

Verse 30. I will greatly praise the LORD with my mouth. Enthusiastically, abundantly, and loudly will he extol the righteous Lord, who redeemed him from all evil; and that not only in his own chamber or among his own family, but in the most public manner. Yea, I will praise him among the multitude. Remarkable and public providence demand public recognition, for otherwise men of the world will judge us to be ungrateful. We do not praise God to be heard of men, but as a natural sense of justice leads every one to expect to hear a befriended person speak well of his benefactor, we therefore have regard to such natural and just expectations, and endeavour to make our praises as public as the benefit we have received. The singer in the present case is the man whose heart was wounded within him because he was the laughing stock of remorseless enemies; yet now he praises, praises greatly, praises aloud, praises in the teeth of all gainsayers, and praises with a right joyous spirit. Never let us despair, yea, never let us cease to praise.

Verse 31. For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor. God will not be absent when his people are on their trial; he will hold a brief for them and stand in court as their advocate, prepared to plead on their behalf. How different is this from the doom of the ungodly who has Satan at his right hand (Ps 109:6). To save him from those that condemn his soul. The court only met as a matter of form, the malicious had made up their minds to the verdict, they judged him guilty, for their hate condemned him, yea, they pronounced sentence of damnation upon the very soul of their victim: but what mattered it? The great King was in court, and their sentence was turned against themselves. Nothing can more sweetly sustain the heart of a slandered believer than the firm conviction that God is near to all who are wronged, and is sure to work out their salvation. O Lord, save us from the severe trial of slander: deal in thy righteousness with all those who spitefully assail the characters of holy men, and cause all who are smarting under calumny and reproach to come forth unsullied from the affliction, even as did thine only begotten Son. Amen.

Psalm 110

Verse 2. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion. It is in and through the church that for the present the power of the Messiah is known. Jehovah has given to Jesus all authority in the midst of his people, whom he rules with his royal sceptre, and this power goes forth with divine energy from the church for the ingathering of the elect, and the subduing of all evil. We have need to pray for the sending out of the rod of divine strength. It was by his rod that Moses smote the Egyptians, and wrought wonders for Israel, and even so whenever the Lord Jesus sends forth the rod of his strength, our spiritual enemies are overcome. There may be an allusion here to Aaron's rod which budded and so proved his power; this was laid up in the ark, but our Lord's rod is sent forth to subdue his foes. This promise began to be fulfilled at Pentecost, and it continues even to this day, and shall yet have a grander fulfilment. O God of eternal might, let the strength of our Lord Jesus be more clearly seen, and let the nations see it as coming forth out of the midst of thy feeble people,

even from Zion, the place of thine abode. Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies as he does whenever his mighty sceptre of grace is stretched forth to renew and save them. Moses' rod brought water out of the flinty rock, and the gospel of Jesus soon causes repentance to flow in rivers from the once hardened heart of man. Or the text may mean that though the church is situated in the midst of a hostile world, yet it exerts a great influence, it continues to manifest an inward majesty, and is after all the ruling power among the nations because the shout of a king is in her midst. Jesus, however hated by men, is still the King of kings. His rule is over even the most unwilling, so as to overrule their fiercest opposition to the advancement of his cause. Jesus, it appears from this text, is not inactive during his session at Jehovah's right hand, but in his own way proves the abiding nature of his kingdom both in Zion and from Zion, both among his friends and his foes. We look for the clearer manifestation of his almighty power in the latter days; but even in these waiting times we rejoice that to the Lord all power is given in heaven and in earth.

Verse 3. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. In consequence of the sending forth of the rod of strength, namely, the power of the gospel, out of Zion, converts will come forward in great numbers to enlist under the banner of the Priest King. Given to him of old, they are his people, and when his power is revealed, these hasten with cheerfulness to own his sway, appearing at the gospel call as it were spontaneously, even as the dew comes forth in the morning. This metaphor is further enlarged upon, for as the dew has a sparkling beauty, so these willing armies of converts have a holy excellence and charm about them; and as the dew is the lively emblem of freshness, so are these converts full of vivacity and youthful vigour, and the church is refreshed by them and made to flourish exceedingly. Let but the gospel be preached with divine unction, and the chosen of the Lord respond to it like troops in the day of the mustering of armies; they come arrayed by grace in shining uniforms of holiness, and for number, freshness, beauty, and purity, they are as the dewdrops which come mysteriously from the tooming's womb. Some refer this passage to the resurrection, but even if it be so, the work of grace in regeneration is equally well described by it, for it is a spiritual resurrection. Even as the holy dead rise gladly into the lovely image of their Lord, so do quickened souls put on the glorious righteousness of Christ, and stand forth to behold their Lord and serve him. How truly beautiful is holiness! God himself admires it. How wonderful also is the eternal youth of the mystical body of Christ! As the dew is new every morning, so is there a constant succession of converts to give to the church perpetual juvenility. Her young men have a dew from the Lord upon them, and arouse in her armies an undying enthusiasm for him whose "locks are bushy and black as a raven" with unfailing youth. Since Jesus ever lives, so shall his church ever flourish. As his strength never faileth, so shall the vigour of his true people be renewed day by day. As he is a Priest King, so are his people all priests and kings, and the beauties of holiness are their priestly dress, their garments for glory and for beauty; of these priests unto God there shall be an unbroken succession. The realization of this day of power during the time of the Lord's tarrying is that which we should constantly pray for; and we may legitimately expect it since he ever sits in the seat of honour and power, and puts forth his strength, according to his own word, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

Verse 4. We have now reached the heart of the psalm, which is also the very centre and soul of our faith. Our Lord Jesus is a Priest King by the ancient oath of Jehovah: "he glorified not himself to be made an high priest, "but was ordained there unto from of old, and was called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek. It must be a solemn and a sure matter which leads the Eternal to swear, and with him an oath fixes and settles the decree for ever; but in this case, as if to make

assurance a thousand times sure, it is added, " and will not repent." It is done, and done for ever and ever; Jesus is sworn in to be the priest of his people, and he must abide so even to the end, because his commission is sealed by the unchanging oath of the immutable Jehovah. If his priesthood could be revoked, and his authority removed, it would be the end of all hope and life for the people whom he loves; but this sure rock is the basis of our security—the oath of God establishes our glorious Lord both in his priesthood and in his throne. It is the Lord who has constituted him a priest for ever, he has done it by oath, that oath is without repentance, is taking effect now, and will stand throughout all ages: hence our security in him is placed beyond all question.

The declaration runs in the present tense as being the only time with the Lord, and comprehending all other times. "Thou art, "i.e., thou wast and art and art to come, in all ages a priestly King. The order of Melchizedek's priesthood was the most ancient and primitive, the most free from ritual and ceremony, the most natural and simple, and at the same time the most honourable. That ancient patriarch was the father of his people, and at the same time ruled and taught them; he swayed both the sceptre and the censer, reigned in righteousness, and offered sacrifice before the Lord. There has never arisen another like to him since his days, for whenever the kings of Judah attempted to seize the sacerdotal office they were driven back to their confusion: God would have no king priest save his son.

Melchizedek's office was exceptional none preceded or succeeded him; he comes upon the page of history mysteriously; no pedigree is given, no date of birth, or mention of death; he blesses Abraham, receives tithe and vanishes from the scene amid honours which show that he was greater than the founder of the chosen nation. He is seen but once, and that once suffices. Aaron and his seed came and went; their imperfect sacrifice continued for many generations, because it had no finality in it, and could never make the comers thereunto perfect. Our Lord Jesus, like Melchizedek, stands forth before us as a priest of divine ordaining; not made a priest by fleshly birth, as the sons of Aaron: he mentions neither father, mother, nor descent, as his right to the sacred office; he stands upon his personal merits, by himself alone; as no man came before him in his work, so none can follow after; his order begins and ends in his own person, and in himself it is eternal, "having neither beginning of days nor end of years The King Priest has been here and left his blessing upon the believing, and now he sits in glory in his complete character, stoning for us by the merit of his blood, and exercising all power on our behalf."

"O may we ever hear thy voice
In mercy to us speak,
And in our Priest we will rejoice,
Thou great Melchizedek."

The last verses of this psalm we understand to refer to the future victories of the Priest King. He shall not forever sit in waiting posture, but shall come into the fight to end the weary war by his own victorious presence. He will lead the final charge in person; his own right hand and his holy arm shall get unto him the victory.

Verse 5. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. Now that he has come into the field of action, the infinite Jehovah comes with him as the strength of his right hand. Eternal power attends the coming of the Lord, and earthly power dies before it as though smitten through with a sword. In the last days all the kingdoms of the earth shall be overcome by the kingdom of heaven, and those who dare oppose shall meet with swift and overwhelming ruin. What are kings when they dare oppose the Son of God? A single stroke shall suffice for their destruction. When the

angel of the Lord smote Herod there was no need of a second blow; he was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost. Concerning the last days, we read of the Faithful and True, who shall ride upon a white horse, and in righteousness judge and make war: "Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

Verse 6. He shall judge among the heathen, or, among the nations. All nations shall feel his power, and either yield to it joyfully or be crushed before it. He shall fill the places with the dead bodies. In the terrible battles of his gospel all opponents shall fall till the field of fight is heaped high with the slain. This need not be understood literally, but as a poetical description of the overthrow of all rebellious powers and the defeat of all unholy principles. Yet should kings oppose the Lord with weapons of war, the result would be their overwhelming defeat and the entire destruction of their forces. Read in connection with this prophecy the passage which begins at the seventeenth verse of Re 19:1 and runs on to the end of the chapter. Terrible things in righteousness will be seen ere the history of this world comes to an end. He shall wound the heads over many countries. He will strike at the greatest powers which resist him, and wound not merely common men, but those who rule and reign. If the nations will not have Christ for their Head, they shall find their political heads to be powerless to protect them. Or the passage may be read, "he has smitten the head over the wide earth." The monarch of the greatest nation shall not be able to escape the sword of the Lord; nor shall that dread spiritual prince who rules over the children of disobedience be able to escape without a deadly wound. Pope and priest must fall, with Mahomet and other deceivers who are now heads of the people. Jesus must reign and they must perish.

Verse 7. He shall drink of the brook in the way. So swiftly shall he march to conquest that he shall not stay for refreshment, but drink as he hastens on. Like Gideon's men that lapped, he shall throw his heart into the fray and cut it short in righteousness, because a short work will the Lord make in the earth. "Therefore shall he lift up the head." His own head shall be lifted high in victory, and his people, in him, shall be upraised also. When he passed this way before, he was burdened and had stern work laid upon him; but in his second advent he will win an easy victory; aforesaid he was the man of sorrows, but when he comes a second time his head will be lifted in triumph. Let his saints rejoice with him. "Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." In the latter days we look for terrible conflicts and for a final victory. Long has Jesus borne with our rebellious race, but at length he will rise to end the warfare of longsuffering, by the blows of justice. God has fought with men's sins for their good, but he will not always by his Spirit strive with men; he will cease from that struggle of long suffering love, and begin another which shall soon end in the final destruction of his adversaries. O King priest, we who are, in a minor degree, king priests too, are full of gladness because thou reignest even now, and wilt come ere long to vindicate thy cause and establish thine empire for ever. Even so, come quickly. Amen.

Psalm 111

Verse 1. Praise ye the LORD, or, Hallelujah! All ye his saints unite in adoring Jehovah, who worketh so gloriously. Do it now, do it always: do it heartily, do it unanimously, do it eternally. Even if others refuse, take care that ye have always a song for your God. Put away all doubt, question, murmuring, and rebellion, and give yourselves up to the praising of Jehovah, both with your lips and in your lives. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart. The sweet singer commences the song, for his heart is all on flame: whether others will follow him or not, he will at once begin and long continue. What we

preach we should practise. The best way to enforce an exhortation is to set an example; but we must let that example be of the best kind, or we may lead others to do the work in a limping manner. David brought nothing less than his whole heart to the duty; all his love went out towards God, and all his zeal, his skill, and his ardour went with it. Jehovah the one and undivided God cannot be acceptably praised with a divided heart, neither should we attempt so to dishonour him; for our whole heart is little enough for his glory, and there can be no reason why it should not all be lifted up in his praise. All his works are praiseworthy, and therefore all our nature should adore him. In the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation;—whether with few or with many he would pour forth his whole heart and soul in praise, and whether the company was made up of select spirits or of the general mass of the people he would continue in the same exercise. For the choicest society there can be no better engagement than praise, and for the general assembly nothing can be more fitting. For the church and for the congregation, for the family or the community, for the private chamber of pious friendship, or the great hall of popular meeting, the praise of the Lord is suitable; and at the very least the true heart should sing hallelujah in any and every place. Why should we fear the presence of men? The best of men will join us in our song, and if the common sort, will not do so, our example will be a needed rebuke to them. In any case let us praise God, whether the hearers be a little band of saints or a mixed multitude. Come, dear reader, he who pens this comment is in his heart magnifying the Lord: will you not pause for a moment and join in the delightful exercise?

Verse 2. The works of the LORD are great. In design, in size, in number, in excellence, all the works of the Lord are great. Even the little things of God are great. In some point of view or other each one of the productions of his power, or the deeds of his wisdom, will appear to be great to the wise in heart. Sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. Those who love their Maker delight in his handiwork, they perceive that there is more in them than appears upon the surface, and therefore they bend their minds to study and understand them. The devout naturalist ransacks nature, the earnest student of history pries into hidden facts and dark stories, and the man of God digs into the mines of Scripture, and hoards up each grain of its golden truth. God's works are worthy of our researches, they yield us instruction and pleasure wonderfully blended, and they grow upon, appearing to be far greater, after investigation than before. Men's works are noble from a distance; God's works are great when sought out. Delitzsch reads the passage, "Worthy of being sought after in all their purposes," and this also is a grand truth, for the end and design which God hath in all that he makes or does is equally admirable with the work itself. The hidden wisdom of God is the most marvellous part of his works, and hence those who do not look below the surface miss the best part of what he would teach us. Because the works are great they cannot be seen all at once, but must be looked into with care, and this seeking out is of essential service to us by educating our faculties, and strengthening our spiritual eye gradually to bear the light of the divine glory. It is well for us that all things cannot be seen at a glance, for the search into their mysteries is as useful to us as the knowledge which we thereby attain. The history of the Lord's dealings with his people is especially a fit subject for the meditation of reverent minds who find therein a sweet solace, and a never failing source of delight.

Verse 3. His work is honourable and glorious. His one special work, the salvation of his people, is here mentioned as distinguished from his many other works. This reflects honour and glory upon him. It is deservedly the theme of the highest praise, and compels those who understand it and experience it to ascribe all honour and glory unto the Lord. Its conception, its sure foundations, its gracious purpose, its wise arrangements, its gift of Jesus as Redeemer, its application of redemption by the Holy Ghost in regeneration and sanctification, and all else which make up the one glorious whole, all

redound to the infinite honour of Him who contrived and carried out so astounding a method of salvation. No other work can be compared with it: it honours both the Saviour and the saved, and while it brings glory to God it also brings us to glory. There is none like the God of Jeshurun, and there is no salvation like that which he has wrought for his people. And his righteousness endureth for ever. In the work of grace righteousness is not forgotten, nor deprived of its glory; rather, it is honoured in the eyes of the intelligent universe. The bearing of guilt by our great Substitute proved that not even to effect the purposes of his grace would the Lord forget his righteousness; no future strain upon his justice can ever be equal to that which it has already sustained in the bruising of his dear Son; it must henceforth assuredly endure for ever. Moreover, the righteousness of God in the whole plan can never now be suspected of failure, for all that it requires is already performed, its demands are satisfied by the double deed of our Lord in enduring the vengeance due, and in rendering perfect obedience to the law. Caprice does not enter into the government of the Lord, the rectitude of it is and must for ever be beyond all question. In no single deed of God can unrighteousness be found, nor shall there ever be: this is the very glory of his work, and even its adversaries cannot gainsay it. Let believers, therefore, praise him evermore, and never blush to speak of that work which is so honourable and glorious.

Verse 4. He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered. He meant them to remain in the recollection of his people, and they do so: partly because they are in themselves memorable, and because also he has taken care to record them by the pen of inspiration, and has written them upon the hearts of his people by his Holy Spirit. By the ordinances of the Mosaic law, the coming out of Egypt, the sojourn in the wilderness, and other memorabilia of Israel's history were constantly brought before the minds of the people, and their children were by such means instructed in the wonders which God had wrought in old time. Deeds such as God has wrought are not to be admired for an hour and then forgotten, they are meant to be perpetual signs and instructive tokens to all coming generations; and especially are they designed to confirm the faith of his people in the divine love, and to make them know that the Lord is gracious and full of compassion. They need not fear to trust his grace for the future, for they remember it in the past. Grace is as conspicuous as righteousness in the great work of God, yea, a fulness of tender love is seen in all that he has done. He treats his people with great consideration for their weakness and infirmity; having the same pity for them as a father hath towards his children. Should we not praise him for this? A silver thread of lovingkindness runs through the entire fabric of God's work of salvation and providence, and never once is it left out in the whole piece. Let the memories of his saints bear witness to this fact with grateful joy.

Verse 5. He hath given meat unto them that fear him. Or spoil, as some read it, for the Lord's people both in coming out of Egypt and at other times have been enriched from their enemies. Not only in the wilderness with manna, but everywhere else by his providence he has supplied the necessities of his believing people. Somewhere or other they have had food convenient for them, and that in times of great scarcity. As for spiritual meat, that has been plentifully furnished them in Christ Jesus; they have been fed with the finest of the wheat, and made to feast on royal dainties. His word is as nourishing to the soul as bread to the body, and there is such an abundance of it that no heir of heaven shall ever be famished. Truly the fear of the Lord is wisdom, since it secures to a man the supply of all that he needs for soul and body. He will ever be mindful of his covenant. He could not let his people lack meat because he was in covenant with them, and they can never want in the future, for he will continue to act upon the terms of that covenant. No promise of the Lord shall fall to the ground, nor will any part of the great compact of eternal love be revoked or allowed to sink into oblivion. The covenant of grace is the plan of the great work which the Lord works out for his people,

and it will never be departed from: the Lord has set his hand and seal to it, his glory and honour are involved in it, yea, his very name hangs upon it, and he will not even in the least jot or tittle cease to be mindful of it. Of this the feeding of his people is the pledge: he would not so continually supply their needs if he meant after all to destroy them. Upon this most blessed earnest let us settle our minds; let us rest in the faithfulness of the Lord, and praise him with all our hearts every time that we eat bread or feed upon his word.

Verse 6. He hath shewed his people the power of his works. They have seen what he is able to do and what force he is prepared to put forth on their behalf. This power Israel saw in physical works, and we in spiritual wonders, for we behold the matchless energy of the Holy Ghost and feel it in our own souls. In times of dire distress the Lord has put forth such energy of grace that we have been astonished at his power; and this was part of his intent in bringing us into such conditions that he might reveal to us the arm of his strength. Could we ever have known it so well if we had not been in pressing need of his help? We may well turn this verse into a prayer and ask to see more and more the power of the Lord at work among us in these latter days. O Lord, let us now see how mightily thou canst work in the saving of sinners and in preserving and delivering thine own people. That he may give them the heritage of the heathen. He put forth all his power to drive out the Canaanites and bring in his people. Even thus may it please his infinite wisdom to give to his church the heathen for her inheritance in the name of Jesus. Nothing but great power can effect this, but it will surely be accomplished in due season.

Verse 7. The works of his hands are verity and judgment. Truth and justice are conspicuous in all that Jehovah does. Nothing like artifice or crooked policy can ever be seen in his proceedings; he acts faithfully and righteously towards his people, and with justice and impartiality to all mankind. This also should lead us to praise him, since it is of the utmost advantage to us to live under a sovereign whose laws, decrees, acts, and deeds are the essence of truth and justice. All his commandments are sure. All that he has appointed or decreed shall surely stand, and his precepts which he has proclaimed shall be found worthy of our obedience, for surely they are founded in justice and are meant for our lasting good. He is no fickle despot, commanding one thing one day and another another, but his commands remain absolutely unaltered, their necessity equally unquestionable, their excellence permanently proven, and their reward eternally secure. Take the word commandments to relate either to his decrees or his precepts, and we have in each case an important sense; but it seems more in accordance with the connection to take the first sense and consider the words to refer to the ordinances, appointments, or decrees of the great King.

Whatever the mighty Lord decrees,
Shall stand for ever sure.
The settled purpose of his heart
To ages shall endure.

Verse 8. They stand fast for ever and ever. That is to say, his purposes, commands, and courses of action. The Lord is not swayed by transient motives, or moved by the circumstances of the hour; immutable principles rule in the courts of Jehovah, and he pursues his eternal purposes without the shadow of a turning. Our works are too often as wood, hay, and stubble, but his doings are as gold, silver, and precious stones. We take up a purpose for a while and then exchange it for another, but he is of one mind, and none can turn him: he acts in eternity and for eternity, and hence what he works abides for ever. Much of this lasting character arises out of the fact which is next mentioned,

namely, that they are done in truth and uprightness. Nothing stands but that which is upright. Falsehood soon vanishes, for it is a mere show, but truth has salt in it which preserves it from decay. God always acts according to the glorious principles of truth and integrity, and hence there is no need of alteration or revocation; his works will endure till the end of time.

Verse 9. He sent redemption unto his people. When they were in Egypt he sent not only a deliverer, but an actual deliverance; not only a redeemer, but complete redemption. He has done the like spiritually for all his people, having first by blood purchased them out of the hand of the enemy, and then by power rescued them from the bondage of their sins. Redemption we can sing of as an accomplished act: it has been wrought for us, sent to us, and enjoyed by us, and we are in very deed the Lord's redeemed. He hath commanded his covenant for ever. His divine decree has made the covenant of his grace a settled and eternal institution: redemption by blood proves that the covenant cannot be altered, for it ratifies and establishes it beyond all recall. This, too, is reason for the loudest praise. Redemption is a fit theme for the heartiest music, and when it is seen to be connected with gracious engagements from which the Lord's truth cannot swerve, it becomes a subject fitted to arouse the soul to an ecstasy of gratitude. Redemption and the covenant are enough to make the tongue of the dumb sing. Holy and reverend is his name. Well may he say this. The whole name or character of God is worthy of profoundest awe, for it is perfect and complete, whole or holy. It ought not to be spoken without solemn thought, and never heard without profound homage. His name is to be trembled at, it is something terrible; even those who know him best rejoice with trembling before him. How good men can endure to be called "reverend" we know not. Being unable to discover any reason why our fellow men should reverence us, we half suspect that in other men there is not very much which can entitle them to be called reverend, very reverend, right reverend, and so on. It may seem a trifling matter, but for that very reason we would urge that the foolish custom should be allowed to fall into disuse.

Verse 10. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. It is its first principle, but it is also its head and chief attainment. The word "beginning" in Scripture sometimes means the chief; and true religion is at once the first element of wisdom, and its chief fruit. To know God so as to walk aright before him is the greatest of all the applied sciences. Holy reverence of God leads us to praise him, and this is the point which the psalm drives at, for it is a wise act on the part of a creature towards his Creator. A good understanding have all they that do his commandments. Obedience to God proves that our judgment is sound. Why should he not be obeyed? Does not reason itself claim obedience for the Lord of all? Only a man void of understanding will ever justify rebellion against the holy God. Practical godliness is the test of wisdom. Men may know and be very orthodox, they may talk and be very eloquent, they may speculate and be very profound; but the best proof of their intelligence must be found in their actually doing the will of the Lord. The former part of the psalm taught us the doctrine of God's nature and character, by describing his works: the second part supplies the practical lesson by drawing the inference that to worship and obey him is the dictate of true wisdom. We joyfully own that it is so. His praise endureth for ever. The praises of God will never cease, because his works will always excite adoration, and it will always be the wisdom of men to extol their glorious Lord. Some regard this sentence as referring to those who fear the Lord—their praise shall endure for ever: and, indeed, it is true that those who lead obedient lives shall obtain honour of the Lord, and commendations which will abide for ever. A word of approbation from the mouth of God will be a mede of honour which will outshine all the decorations which kings and emperors can bestow. Lord, help us to study thy works, and henceforth to breathe out hallelujahs as long as we live.

Psalm 112

Verse 1. Praise ye the LORD. This exhortation is never given too often; the Lord always deserves praise, we ought always to render it, we are frequently forgetful of it, and it is always well to be stirred up to it. The exhortation is addressed to all thoughtful persons who observe the way and manner of life of men that fear the Lord. If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, the Lord should have all the glory of it, for we are his workmanship. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord. According to the last verse of Psalm 111, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; this man, therefore, has begun to be wise, and wisdom has brought him present happiness, and secured him eternal felicity. Jehovah is so great that he is to be feared and had in reverence of all them that are round about him, and he is at the same time so infinitely good that the fear is sweetened into filial love, and becomes a delightful emotion, by no means engendering bondage. There is a slavish fear which is accursed; but that godly fear which leads to delight in the service of God is infinitely blessed. Jehovah is to be praised both for inspiring men with godly fear and for the blessedness which they enjoy in consequence thereof. We ought to bless God for blessing any man, and especially for setting the seal of his approbation upon the godly. His favour towards the God fearing displays his character and encourages gracious feelings in others, therefore let him be praised. That delighteth greatly in his commandments. The man not only studies the divine precepts and endeavours to observe them, but rejoices to do so: holiness is his happiness, devotion is his delight, truth is his treasure. He rejoices in the precepts of godliness, yea, and delights greatly in them. We have known hypocrites rejoice in the doctrines, but never in the commandments. Ungodly men may in some measure obey the commandments out of fear, but only a gracious man will observe them with delight. Cheerful obedience is the only acceptable obedience; he who obeys reluctantly is disobedient at heart, but he who takes pleasure in the command is truly loyal. If through divine grace we find ourselves described in these two sentences, let us give all the praise to God, for he hath wrought all our works in us, and the dispositions out of which they spring. Let self righteous men praise themselves, but he who has been made righteous by grace renders all the praise to the Lord.

Verse 2. His seed shall be mighty upon earth, that is to say, successive generations of God fearing men shall be strong and influential in society, and in the latter days they shall have dominion. The true seed of the righteous are those who follow them in their virtues, even as believers are the seed of Abraham, because they imitate his faith; and these are the real heroes of their era, the truly great men among the sons of Adam; their lives are sublime, and their power upon their age is far greater than at first sight appears. If the promise must be regarded as alluding to natural seed, it must be understood as a general statement rather than a promise made to every individual, for the children of the godly are not all prosperous, nor all famous. Nevertheless, he who fears God, and leads a holy life, is, as a rule, doing the best he can for the future advancement of his house; no inheritance is equal to that of an unblemished name, no legacy can excel the benediction of a saint; and, taking matters for all in all, the children of the righteous man commence life with greater advantages than others, and are more likely to succeed in it, in the best and highest sense. The generation of the upright shall be blessed. The race of sincere, devout, righteous men, is kept up from age to age, and ever abides under the blessing of God. The godly may be persecuted, but they shall not be forsaken; the curses of men cannot deprive them of the blessing of God, for the words of Balaam are true, "He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it." Their children also are under the special care of heaven, and as a rule it shall be found that they inherit the divine blessing. Honesty and integrity are better cornerstones for an honourable house than mere cunning and avarice, or even talent and push. To fear God and to walk uprightly is a higher nobility than blood or birth can bestow.

Verse 3. Wealth and riches shall be in his house. Understood literally this is rather a promise of the old covenant than of the new, for many of the best of the people of God are very poor; yet it has been found true that uprightness is the road to success, and, all other things being equal, the honest man is the rising man. Many are kept poor through knavery and profligacy; but godliness hath the promise of the life that now is. If we understand the passage spiritually it is abundantly true. What wealth can equal that of the love of God? What riches can rival a contented heart? It matters nothing that the roof is thatched, and the floor is of cold stone: the heart which is cheered with the favour of heaven is "rich to all the intents of bliss." And his righteousness endureth for ever. Often when gold comes in the gospel goes out; but it is not so with the blessed man. Prosperity does not destroy the holiness of his life, or the humility of his heart. His character stands the test of examination, overcomes the temptations of wealth, survives the assaults of slander, outlives the afflictions of time, and endures the trial of the last great day. The righteousness of a true saint endureth for ever, because it springs from the same root as the righteousness of God, and is, indeed, the reflection of it. So long as the Lord abideth righteous he will maintain by his grace the righteousness of his people. They shall hold on their way, and wax stronger and stronger. There is also another righteousness which belongs to the Lord's chosen, which is sure to endure for ever, namely, the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus, which is called "everlasting righteousness," "belonging as it does to the Son of God himself, who is "the Lord our righteousness."

Verse 4. Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness. He does not lean to injustice in order to ease himself, but like a pillar stands erect, and he shall be found so standing when the ungodly, who are as a bowing wall and a tottering fence, shall lie in ruins. He will have his days of darkness, he may be sick and sorry, poor and pining, as well as others; his former riches may take to themselves wings and fly away, while even his righteousness may be cruelly suspected; thus the clouds may lower around him, but his gloom shall not last for ever, the Lord will bring him light in due season, for as surely as a good man's sun goes down it shall rise again. If the darkness be caused by depression of spirit, the Holy Ghost will comfort him; if by pecuniary loss or personal bereavement, the presence of Christ shall be his solace; and if by the cruelty and malignity of men, the sympathy of his Lord shall be his support. It is as ordinary for the righteous to be comforted as for the day to dawn. Wait for the light and it will surely come; for even if our heavenly Father should in our last hours put us to bed in the dark, we shall find it morning when we awake. He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. This is spoken of God in the fourth verse of the hundred and eleventh Psalm, and now the same words are used of his servant: thus we are taught that when God makes a man upright, he makes him like himself. We are at best but humble copies of the great original; still we are copies, and because we are so we praise the Lord, who hath created us anew in Christ Jesus. The upright man is "gracious," that is, full of kindness to all around him; he is not sour and churlish, but he is courteous to friends, kind to the needy, forgiving to the erring, and earnest for the good of all. He is also "full of compassion"; that is to say, he tenderly feels for others, pities them, and as far as he can assists them in their time of trouble. He does not need to be driven to benevolence, he is brimful of humanity; it is his joy to sympathize with the sorrowing. He is also said to be "righteous": in all his transactions with his fellow men he obeys the dictates of right, and none can say that he goes beyond or defrauds his neighbour. His justice is, however, tempered with compassion, and seasoned with graciousness. Such men are to be found in our churches, and they are by no means so rare as the censorious imagine; but at the same time they are far scarcer than the breadth of profession might lead us to hope. Lord, make us all to possess these admirable qualities.

Verse 5. A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth. Having passed beyond stern integrity into open handed benevolence he looks kindly upon all around him, and finding himself in circumstances which enable him to spare a little of his wealth he lends judiciously where a loan will be of permanent service. Providence has made him able to lend, and grace makes him willing to lend. He is not a borrower, for God has lifted him above that necessity; neither is he a hoarder, for his new nature saves him from that temptation; but he wisely uses the talents committed to him. He will guide his affairs with discretion. Those who neglect their worldly business must not plead religion as an excuse, for when a man is truly upright he exercises great care in managing his accounts, in order that he may remain so. It is sometimes hard to distinguish between indiscretion and dishonesty; carelessness in business may become almost as great an evil to others as actual knavery; a good man should not only be upright, but he should be so discreet that no one may have the slightest reason to suspect him of being otherwise. When the righteous man lends he exercises prudence, not risking his all, for fear he should not be able to lend again, and not lending so very little that the loan is of no service. He drives his affairs, and does not allow them to drive him; his accounts are straight and clear, his plans are wisely laid, and his modes of operation carefully selected. He is prudent, thrifty, economical, sensible, judicious, discreet. Men call him a fool for his religion, but they do not find him so when they come to deal with him. "The beginning of wisdom" has made him wise, the guidance of heaven has taught him to guide his affairs, and with half an eye one can see that he is a man of sound sense. Such persons greatly commend godliness. Alas, some professedly good men act as if they had taken leave of their senses; this is not religion, but stupidity. True religion is sanctified common sense. Attention to the things of heaven does not necessitate the neglect of the affairs of earth; on the contrary, he who has learned how to transact business with God ought to be best able to do business with men. The children of this world often are in their generation wiser than the children of light, but there is no reason why this proverb should continue to be true.

Verse 6. Surely he shall not be moved for ever. God has rooted and established him so that neither men nor devils shall sweep him from his place. His prosperity shall be permanent, and not like that of the gambler and the cheat, whose gains are evanescent: his reputation shall be bright and lustrous from year to year, for it is not a mere pretence; his home shall be permanent, and he shall not need to wander from place to place as a bird that wanders from her nest; and even his memory shall be abiding, for a good man is not soon forgotten, and the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. They are of a most ancient family, and not mushrooms of an hour, and their grand old stock shall be found flourishing when all the proud houses of ungodly men shall have faded into nothing. The righteous are worth remembering, their actions are of the kind which record themselves, and God himself takes charge of their memorials. None of us likes the idea of being forgotten, and yet the only way to avoid it is to be righteous before God.

Verse 7. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings. He shall have no dread that evil tidings will come, and he shall not be alarmed when they do come. Rumours and reports he despises; prophecies of evil, vented by fanatical mouths, he ridicules; actual and verified information of loss and distress he bears with equanimity, resigning everything into the hands of God. His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. He is neither fickle nor cowardly; when he is undecided as to his course he is still fixed in heart: he may change his plan, but not the purpose of his soul. His heart being fixed in solid reliance upon God, a change in his circumstances but slightly affects him; faith has made him firm and steadfast, and therefore if the worst should come to the worst, he would remain quiet and patient, waiting for the salvation of God.

Verse 8. His heart is established. His love to God is deep and true, his confidence in God is firm and unmoved; his courage has a firm foundation, and is supported by Omnipotence. He has become settled by experience, and confirmed by years. He is not a rolling stone, but a pillar in the house of the Lord. He shall not be afraid. He is ready to face any adversary—a holy heart gives a brave face. Until he see his desire upon his enemies. All through the conflict, even till he seizes the victory, he is devoid of fear. When the battle wavers, and the result seems doubtful, he nevertheless believes in God, and is a stranger to dismay. Grace makes him desire his enemies' good: though nature leads him to wish to see justice done to his cause, he does not desire for those who injure him anything by way of private revenge.

Verse 9. He hath dispersed, he hath given, to the poor. What he received, he distributed; and distributed to those who most needed it. He was God's reservoir, and forth from his abundance flowed streams of liberality to supply the needy. If this be one of the marks of a man who feareth the Lord, there are some who are strangely destitute of it. They are great at gathering, but very slow at dispersing; they enjoy the blessedness of receiving, but seldom taste the greater joy of giving. "It is more blessed to give than to receive"—perhaps they think that the blessing of receiving is enough for them. His righteousness endureth for ever. His liberality has salted his righteousness, proved its reality, and secured its perpetuity. This is the second time that we have this remarkable sentence applied to the godly man, and it must be understood as resulting from the enduring mercy of the Lord. The character of a righteous man is not spasmodic, he is not generous by fits and starts, nor upright in a few points only; his life is the result of principle, his actions flow from settled, sure, and fixed convictions, and therefore his integrity is maintained when others fail. He is not turned about by companions, nor affected by the customs of society; he is resolute, determined, and immovable. His horn shall be exalted with honour. God shall honour him, the universe of holy beings shall honour him, and even the wicked shall feel an unconscious reverence of him. Let it be observed, in summing up the qualities of the God fearing man, that he is described not merely as righteous, but as one bearing the character to which Paul refers in the memorable verse, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." Kindness, benevolence, and generosity, are essential to the perfect character; to be strictly just is not enough, for God is love, and we must love our neighbour as ourselves: to give every one his due is not sufficient, we must act upon those same principles of grace which reign in the heart of God. The promises of establishment and prosperity are not to churlish Nabals, nor to niggard Labans, but to bountiful souls who have proved their fitness to be stewards of the Lord by the right way in which they use their substance.

Verse 10. The tenth and last verse sets forth very forcibly the contrast between the righteous and the ungodly, thus making the blessedness of the godly appear all the more remarkable. Usually we see Ebal and Gerizim, the blessing and the curse, set the one over against the other, to invest both with the greater solemnity. The wicked shall see it, and be grieved. The ungodly shall first see the example of the saints to their own condemnation, and shall at last behold the happiness of the godly and to the increase of their eternal misery. The child of wrath shall be obliged to witness the blessedness of the righteous, though the sight shall make him gnaw his own heart. He shall fret and fume, lament and wax angry, but he shall not be able to prevent it, for God's blessing is sure and effectual. He shall gnash with his teeth. Being very wrathful, and exceedingly envious, he would fain grind the righteous between his teeth; but as he cannot do that, he grinds his teeth against each other.

And melt away. The heat of his passion shall melt him like wax, and the sun of God's providence shall

dissolve him like snow, and at the last the fire of divine vengeance shall consume him as the fat of rams. How horrible must that life be which like the snail melts as it proceeds, leaving a slimy trail behind. Those who are grieved at goodness deserve to be worn away by such an abominable sorrow. The desire of the wicked shall perish. He shall not achieve his purpose, he shall die a disappointed man. By wickedness he hoped to accomplish his purpose—that very wickedness shall be his defeat. While the righteous shall endure for ever, and their memory shall be always green; the ungodly man and his name shall rot from off the face of the earth. He desired to be the founder of a family, and to be remembered as some great one: he shall pass away and his name shall die with him. How wide is the gulf which separates the righteous from the wicked, and how different are the portions which the Lord deals out to them. O for grace to be blessed of the Lord! This will make us praise him with our whole heart.

Psalm 113

Verse 1. Praise ye the LORD, or Hallelujah, praise to JAH Jehovah. Praise is an essential offering at all the solemn feasts of the people of God. Prayer is the myrrh, and praise is the frankincense, and both of these must be presented unto the Lord. How can we pray for mercy for the future if we do not bless God for his love in the past? The Lord hath wrought all good things for us, let us therefore adore him. All other praise is to be excluded, the entire devotion of the soul must be poured out unto Jehovah only. Praise, O ye servants of the LORD. Ye above all men, for ye are bound to do so by your calling and profession. If God's own servants do not praise him, who will? Ye are a people near unto him, and should be heartiest in your loving gratitude. While they were slaves of Pharaoh, the Israelites uttered groans and sighs by reason of their hard bondage; but now that they had become servants of the Lord, they were to express themselves in songs of joy. His service is perfect freedom, and those who fully enter into it discover in that service a thousand reasons for adoration. They are sure to praise God best who serve him best; indeed, service is praise. Praise the name of the LORD: extol his revealed character, magnify every sacred attribute, exult in all his doings, and reverence the very name by which he is called. The name of Jehovah is thrice used in this verse, and may by us who understand the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity be regarded as a thinly veiled allusion to that holy mystery. Let Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all be praised as the one, only, living, and true God. The close following of the words, "Hallelujah, Hallelu, Hallelu," must have had a fine effect in the public services. Dr. Edersheim describes the temple service as responsive, and says, "Every first line of a Psalm was repeated by the people, while to each of the others they responded by a Hallelu Jah or Praise ye the Lord"thus—

The Levites began: Hallelujah (Praise ye the Lord).

The people repeated: Hallelu Jah.

The Levites: Praise (Hallelu), O ye servants of Jehovah.

The people responded: Hallelu Jah.

The Levites: Praise (Hallelu) the name of Jehovah.

The people responded: Hallelu Jah.

These were not vain repetitions, for the theme is one which we ought to dwell upon; it should be deeply impressed upon the soul, and perseveringly kept prominent in the life.

Verse 2. Blessed be the name of the LORD. While praising him aloud, the people were also to bless him in the silence of their hearts, wishing glory to his name, success to his cause, and triumph to his

truth. By mentioning the name, the Psalmist would teach us to bless each of the attributes of the Most High, which are as it were the letters of his name; not quarrelling with his justice or his severity, nor servilely dreading his power, but accepting him as we find him revealed in the inspired word and by his own acts, and loving him and praising him as such. We must not give the Lord a new name nor invent a new nature, for that would be the setting up of a false god. Every time we think of the God of Scripture we should bless him, and his august name should never be pronounced without joyful reverence. From this time forth. If we have never praised him before, let us begin now. As the Passover stood at the beginning of the year it was well to commence the new year with blessing him who wrought deliverance for his people. Every solemn feast had its own happy associations, and might be regarded as a fresh starting place for adoration. Are there not reasons why the reader should make the present day the opening of a year of praise? When the Lord says, "From this time will I bless you," we ought to reply, "Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth." And for evermore: eternally. The Psalmist could not have intended that the divine praise should cease at a future date however remote. "For evermore" in reference to the praise of God must signify endless duration: are we wrong in believing that it bears the same meaning when it refers to gloomier themes? Can our hearts ever cease to praise the name of the Lord? Can we imagine a period in which the praises of Israel shall no more surround the throne of the Divine Majesty? Impossible. For ever, and more than "for ever," if more can be, let him be magnified.

Verse 3. From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD'S name is to be praised. From early morn till eve the ceaseless hymn should rise unto Jehovah's throne, and from east to west over the whole round earth pure worship should be rendered unto his glory. So ought it to be; and blessed be God, we are not without faith that so it shall be. We trust that ere the world's dread evening comes, the glorious name of the Lord will be proclaimed among all nations, and all people shall call him blessed. At the first proclamation of the gospel the name of the Lord was glorious throughout the whole earth; shall it not be much more so ere the end shall be? At any rate, this is the desire of our souls. Meanwhile, let us endeavour to sanctify every day with praise to God. At early dawn let us emulate the opening flowers and the singing birds,

"Chanting every day their lauds,
While the grove their song applauds;
Wake for shame my sluggish heart,
Wake and gladly sing thy part."

It is a marvel of mercy that the sun should rise on the rebellious sons of men, and prepare for the undeserving fruitful seasons and days of pleasantness; let us for this prodigy of goodness praise the Lord of all. From hour to hour let us renew the strain, for each moment brings its mercy; and when the sun sinks to his rest, let us not cease our music, but lift up the vesper hymn—

"Father of heaven and earth!
I bless thee for the night,
The soft still night!
The holy pause of care and mirth,
Of sound and light.
Now far in glade and dell,
Flower cup, and bud, and bell
Have shut around the sleeping woodlark's nest,

The bee's long murmuring toils are done,
And I, the over wearied one,
Bless thee, O God, O Father of the oppressed!
With my last waking thought."

Verse 4. The Lord is high above all nations. Though the Gentiles knew him not, yet was Jehovah their ruler: their false gods were no gods, and their kings were puppets in his hands. The Lord is high above all the learning, judgment, and imagination of heathen sages, and far beyond the pomp and might of the monarchs of the nations. Like the great arch of the firmament, the presence of the Lord spans all the lands where dwell the varied tribes of men, for his providence is universal: this may well excite our confidence and praise. And his glory above the heavens: higher than the loftiest part of creation; the clouds are the dust of his feet, and sun, moon, and stars twinkle far below his throne. Even the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. His glory cannot be set forth by the whole visible universe, nor even by the solemn pomp of angelic armies; it is above all conception and imagination, for he is God—infinite. Let us above all adore him who is above all.

Verse 5. Who is like unto the LORD our God? The challenge will never be answered. None can be compared with him for an instant; Israel's God is without parallel; our own God in covenant stands alone, and none can be likened unto him. Even those whom he has made like himself in some respects are not like him in godhead, for his divine attributes are many of them incommunicable and inimitable. None of the metaphors and figures by which the Lord is set forth in the Scriptures can give us a complete idea of him; his full resemblance is borne by nothing in earth or in heaven. Only in Jesus is the Godhead seen, but he unhesitatingly declared "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Who dwelleth on high. In the height of his abode none can be like him. His throne, his whole character, his person, his being, everything about him, is lofty, and infinitely majestic, so that none can be likened unto him. His serene mind abides in the most elevated condition, he is never dishonoured, nor does he stoop from the pure holiness and absolute perfection of his character. His saints are said to dwell on high, and in this they are the reflection of his glory; but as for himself, the height of his dwelling place surpasses thought, and he rises far above the most exalted of his glorified people.

"Eternal Power! whose high abode
Becomes the grandeur of a God:
Infinite lengths beyond the bounds
Where stars revolve their little rounds."

"The lowest step around thy seat
Rises too high for Gabriel's feet;
In vain the tall archangel tries
To reach thine height with wondering eyes."

"Lord, what shall earth and ashes do?
We would adore our Maker too;
From sin and dust to thee we cry,
The Great, the Holy, and the High!"

Verse 6. Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth! He dwells so

far on high that even to observe heavenly things he must humble himself. He must stoop to view the skies, and bow to see what angels do. What, then, must be his condescension, seeing that he observes the humblest of his servants upon earth, and makes them sing for joy like Mary when she said, "Thou hast regarded the low estate of thine handmaiden." How wonderful are those words of Isaiah, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Heathen philosophers could not believe that the great God was observant of the small events of human history; they pictured him as abiding in serene indifference to all the wants and woes of his creatures. "Our Rock is not as their rock"; we have a God who is high above all gods, and yet who is our Father, knowing what we have need of before we ask him; our Shepherd, who supplies our needs; our Guardian, who counts the hairs of our heads; our tender and considerate Friend, who sympathizes in all our griefs. Truly the name of our condescending God should be praised wherever it is known.

Verse 7. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust. This is an instance of his gracious stoop of love: he frequently lifts the lowest of mankind out of their poverty and degradation and places them in positions of power and honour. His good Spirit is continually visiting the down trodden, giving beauty for ashes to those who are cast down, and elevating the hearts of his mourners till they shout for joy. These up liftings of grace are here ascribed directly to the divine hand, and truly those who have experienced them will not doubt the fact that it is the Lord alone who brings his people up from the dust of sorrow and death. When no hand but his can help he interposes, and the work is done. It is worth while to be cast down to be so divinely raised from the dust. And lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, whereon they lay like worthless refuse, cast off and cast out, left as they thought to rot into destruction, and to be everlastingly forgotten. How great a stoop from the height of his throne to a dunghill! How wonderful that power which occupies itself in lifting up beggars, all befouled with the filthiness in which they lay! For he lifts them out of the dunghill, not disdaining to search them out from amidst the base things of the earth that he may by their means bring to nought the great ones, and pour contempt upon all human glorying. What a dunghill was that upon which we lay by nature! What a mass of corruption is our original estate! What a heap of loathsomeness we have accumulated by our sinful lives! What reeking abominations surround us in the society of our fellow men! We could never have risen out of all this by our own efforts, it was a sepulchre in which we saw corruption, and were as dead men. Almighty were the arms which lifted us, which are still lifting us, and will lift us into the perfection of heaven itself. Praise ye the Lord.

Verse 8. That he may set him with princes. The Lord does nothing by halves: when he raises men from the dust he is not content till he places them among the peers of his kingdom. We are made kings and priests unto God, and we shall reign for ever and ever. Instead of poverty, he gives us the wealth of princes; and instead of dishonour, he gives us a more exalted rank than that of the great ones of the earth. Even with the princes of his people. All his people are princes, and so the text teaches us that God places needy souls whom he favours among the princes of princes. He often enables those who have been most despairing to rise to the greatest heights of spirituality and gracious attainment, for those who once were last shall be first. Paul, though less than the least of all saints was, nevertheless, made to be not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles; and in our own times, Bunyan, the blaspheming tinker, was raised into another John, whose dream almost rivals the visions of the Apocalypse.

"Wonders of grace to God belong,

Repeat his mercies in your song."

Such verses as these should give great encouragement to those who are lowest in their own esteem. The Lord poureth contempt upon princes; but as for those who are in the dust and on the dunghill, he looks upon them with compassion, acts towards them in grace, and in their case displays the riches of his glory by Christ Jesus. Those who have experienced such amazing favour should sing continual hallelujahs to the God of their salvation.

Verse 9. He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. The strong desire of the easterns to have children caused the birth of offspring to be hailed as the choicest of favours, while barrenness was regarded as a curse; hence this verse is placed last as if to crown the whole, and to serve as a climax to the story of God's mercy. The glorious Lord displays his condescending grace in regarding those who are despised on account of their barrenness, whether it be of body or of soul. Sarah, Rachel, the wife of Manoaah, Hannah, Elizabeth, and others were all instances of the miraculous power of God in literally fulfilling the statement of the psalmist. Women were not supposed to have a house till they had children; but in certain cases where childless women pined in secret the Lord visited them in mercy, and made them not only to have a house, but to keep it. The Gentile church is a spiritual example upon a large scale of the gift of fruitfulness after long years of hopeless barrenness; and the Jewish church in the latter days will be another amazing display of the same quickening power: long forsaken for her spiritual adultery, Israel shall be forgiven, and restored, and joyously shall she keep that house which now is left unto her desolate. Nor is this all, each believer in the Lord Jesus must at times have mourned his lamentable barrenness; he has appeared to be a dry tree yielding no fruit to the Lord, and yet when visited by the Holy Ghost, he has found himself suddenly to be like Aaron's rod, which budded, and blossomed, and brought forth almonds. Or ever we have been aware, our barren heart has kept house, and entertained the Saviour, our graces have been multiplied as if many children had come to us at a single birth, and we have exceedingly rejoiced before the Lord. Then have we marvelled greatly at the Lord who dwelleth on high, that he has deigned to visit such poor worthless things. Like Mary, we have lifted up our Magnificat, and like Hannah, we have said, "There is none holy as the Lord; for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God." Praise ye the LORD. The music concludes upon its key note. The Psalm is a circle, ending where it began, praising the Lord from its first syllable to its last. May our life psalm partake of the same character, and never know a break or a conclusion. In an endless circle let us bless the Lord, whose mercies never cease. Let us praise him in youth, and all along our years of strength; and when we bow in the ripeness of abundant age, let us still praise the Lord, who doth not cast off his old servants. Let us not only praise God ourselves, but exhort others to do it; and if we meet with any of the needy who have been enriched, and with the barren who have been made fruitful, let us join with them in extolling the name of him whose mercy endureth for ever. Having been ourselves lifted from spiritual beggary and barrenness, let us never forget our former estate or the grace which has visited us, but world without end let us praise the Lord. Hallelujah.

Psalm 114

Verse 1. When Israel went out of Egypt. The song begins with a burst, as if the poetic fury could not be restrained, but overleaped all bounds. The soul elevated and filled with a sense of divine glory cannot wait to fashion a preface, but springs at once into the middle of its theme. Israel emphatically came out of Egypt, out of the population among whom they had been scattered, from under the yoke of bondage, and from under the personal grasp of the king who had made the people into national

slaves. Israel came out with a high hand and a stretched out arm, defying all the power of the empire, and making the whole of Egypt to travail with sore anguish, as the chosen nation was as it were born out of its midst. The house of Jacob from a people of strange language. They had gone down into Egypt as a single family—"the house of Jacob"; and, though they had multiplied greatly, they were still so united, and were so fully regarded by God as a single unit, that they are rightly spoken of as the house of Jacob. They were as one man in their willingness to leave Goshen; numerous as they were, not a single individual stayed behind. Unanimity is a pleasing token of the divine presence, and one of its sweetest fruits. One of their inconveniences in Egypt was the difference of languages, which was very great. The Israelites appear to have regarded the Egyptians as stammerers and babblers, since they could not understand them, and they very naturally considered the Egyptians to be barbarians, as they would no doubt often beat them because they did not comprehend their orders. The language of foreign taskmasters is never musical in an exile's ear. How sweet it is to a Christian who has been compelled to hear the filthy conversation of the wicked, when at last he is brought out from their midst to dwell among his own people!

Verse 2. Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. The pronoun "his" comes in where we should have looked for the name of God; but the poet is so full of thought concerning the Lord that he forgets to mention his name, like the spouse in the Song, who begins, "Let him kiss me," or Magdalene when she cried, "Tell me where thou hast laid him." From the mention of Judah and Israel certain critics have inferred that this Psalm must have been written after the division of the two kingdoms; but this is only another instance of the extremely slender basis upon which an hypothesis is often built up. Before the formation of the two kingdoms David had said, "Go number Israel and Judah, "and this was common parlance, for Uriah the Hittite said, "The ark, and Israel and Judah abide in tents"; so that nothing can be inferred from the use of the two names. No division into two kingdoms can have been intended here, for the poet is speaking of the coming out of Egypt when the people were so united that he has just before called them "the house of Jacob." It would be quite as fair to prove from the first verse that the Psalm was written when the people were in union as to prove from the second that its authorship dates from their separation. Judah was the tribe which led the way in the wilderness march, and it was foreseen in prophecy to be the royal tribe, hence its poetical mention in this place. The meaning of the passage is that the whole people at the coming out of Egypt were separated unto the Lord to be a peculiar people, a nation of priests whose motto should be, "Holiness unto the Lord." Judah was the Lord's "holy thing, "set apart for his special use. The nation was peculiarly Jehovah's dominion, for it was governed by a theocracy in which God alone was King. It was his domain in a sense in which the rest of the world was outside his kingdom. These were the young days of Israel, the time of her espousals, when she went after the Lord into the wilderness, her God leading the way with signs and miracles. The whole people were the shrine of Deity, and their camp was one great temple. What a change there must have been for the godly amongst them from the idolatries and blasphemies of the Egyptians to the holy worship and righteous rule of the great King in Jeshurun. They lived in a world of wonders, where God was seen in the wondrous bread they ate and in the water they drank, as well as in the solemn worship of his holy place. When the Lord is manifestly present in a church, and his gracious rule obediently owned, what a golden age has come, and what honourable privileges his people enjoy! May it be so among us.

Verse 4. The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs. At the coming of the Lord to Mount Sinai, the hills moved; either leaping for joy in the presence of their Creator like young lambs; or, if you will, springing from their places in affright at the terrible majesty of Jehovah, and flying like a flock of sheep when alarmed. Men fear the mountains, but the mountains tremble before the Lord.

Sheep and lambs move lightly in the meadows; but the hills, which we are wont to call eternal, were as readily made to move as the most active creatures. Rams in their strength, and lambs in their play, are not more stirred than were the solid hills when Jehovah marched by. Nothing is immovable but God himself: the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but the covenant of his grace abideth fast for ever and ever. Even thus do mountains of sin and hills of trouble move when the Lord comes forth to lead his people to their eternal Canaan. Let us never fear, but rather let our faith say unto this mountain, "Be thou removed hence and cast into the sea, "and it shall be done.

Verse 5. What ailed thee, O thou sea? Wert thou terribly afraid? Did thy strength fail thee? Did thy very heart dry up? What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? Thou wert neighbour to the power of Pharaoh, but thou didst never fear his hosts; stormy wind could never prevail against thee so as to divide thee in twain; but when the way of the Lord was in thy great waters thou was seized with affright, and thou becomest a fugitive from before him. Thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? What ailed thee, O quick descending river? Thy fountains had not dried up, neither had a chasm opened to engulf thee! The near approach of Israel and her God sufficed to make thee retrace thy steps. What aileth all our enemies that they fly when the Lord is on our side? What aileth hell itself that it is utterly routed when Jesus lifts up a standard against it? "Fear took hold upon them there, "for fear of HIM the stoutest hearted did quake, and became as dead men.

Verse 6. Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs? What ailed ye, that ye were thus moved? There is but one reply: the majesty of God made you to leap. A gracious mind will chide human nature for its strange insensibility, when the sea and the river, the mountains and the hills, are all sensitive to the presence of God. Man is endowed with reason and intelligence, and yet he sees unmoved that which the material creation beholds with fear. God has come nearer to us than ever he did to Sinai, or to Jordan, for he has assumed our nature, and yet the mass of mankind are neither driven back from their sins, nor moved in the paths of obedience.

Verse 7. Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob. Or "from before the Lord, the Adonai, the Master and King." Very fitly does the Psalm call upon all nature again to feel a holy awe because its Ruler is still in its midst.

"Quake when Jehovah walks abroad,
Quake earth, at sight of Israel's God."

Let the believer feel that God is near, and he will serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Awe is not cast out by faith, but the rather it becomes deeper and more profound. The Lord is most revered where he is most loved.

Verse 8. Which turned the rock into a standing water, causing a mere or lake to stand at its foot, making the wilderness a pool: so abundant was the supply of water from the rock that it remained like water in a reservoir. The flint into a fountain of waters, which flowed freely in streams, following the tribes in their devious marches. Behold what God can do! It seemed impossible that the flinty rock should become a fountain; but he speaks, and it is done. Not only do mountains move, but rocks yield rivers when the God of Israel wills that it should be so.

"From stone and solid rock he brings
The spreading lake, the gushing springs."

"O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together, " for he it is and he alone who doeth such wonders as these. He supplies our temporal needs from sources of the most unlikely kind, and never suffers the stream of his liberality to fail. As for our spiritual necessities they are all met by the water and the blood which gushed of old from the riven rock, Christ Jesus: therefore let us extol the Lord our God. Our deliverance from under the yoke of sin is strikingly typified in the going up of Israel from Egypt, and so also was the victory of our Lord over the powers of death and hell. The Exodus should therefore be earnestly remembered by Christian hearts. Did not Moses on the mount of transfiguration speak to our Lord of "the exodus" which he should shortly accomplish at Jerusalem; and is it not written of the hosts above that they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and of the Lamb? Do we not ourselves expect another coming of the Lord, when before his face heaven and earth shall flee away and there shall be no more sea? We join then with the singers around the Passover table and make their Hallel ours, for we too have been led out of bondage and guided like a flock through a desert land, wherein the Lord supplies our wants with heavenly manna and water from the Rock of ages. Praise ye the Lord.

Psalm 115

Verse 1. It will be well to remember that this psalm was sung at the Passover, and therefore it bears relationship to the deliverance from Egypt. The burden of it, seems to be a prayer that the living God, who had been so glorious at the Red Sea and at the Jordan, should again for his own name's sake display the wonders of his power. Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory. The people undoubtedly wished for relief from the contemptuous insults of idolaters, but their main desire was that Jehovah himself should no longer be the object of heathen insults. The saddest part of all their trouble was that their God was no longer feared and dreaded by their adversaries. When Israel marched into Canaan, a terror was upon all the people round about, because of Jehovah, the mighty God; but this dread the nations had shaken off since there had been of late no remarkable display of miraculous power. Therefore Israel cried unto her God that he would again make bare his arm as in the day when he cut Rahab and wounded the dragon. The prayer is evidently tintured with a consciousness of unworthiness; because of their past unfaithfulness they hardly dared to appeal to the covenant, and to ask blessings for themselves, but they fell back upon the honour of the Lord their God—an old style of argument which their great lawgiver, Moses, had used with such effect when he pleaded, "Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people." Joshua also used the like argument when he said, "What wilt thou do unto thy great name?" In such manner also let us pray when no other plea is available because of our sense of sin; for the Lord is always jealous of his honour, and will work for his name's sake when no other motive will move him.

The repetition of the words, Not unto us, would seem to indicate a very serious desire to renounce any glory which they might at any time have proudly appropriated to themselves, and it also sets forth the vehemence of their wish that God would at any cost to them magnify his own name. They loathed the idea of seeking their own glory, and rejected the thought with the utmost detestation; again and again disclaiming any self glorifying motive in their supplication. For thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. These attributes seemed most in jeopardy. How could the heathen think Jehovah to be a merciful God if he gave his people over to the hands of their enemies? How could they believe him to be faithful and true if, after all his solemn covenant engagements, he utterly rejected his chosen

nation? God is very jealous of the two glorious attributes of grace and truth, and the plea that these may not be dishonoured has great weight with him. In these times, when the first victories of the gospel are only remembered as histories of a dim and distant past, sceptics are apt to boast that the gospel has lost its youthful strength, and they even presume to cast a slur upon the name of God himself. We may therefore rightly entreat the divine interposition that the apparent blot may be removed from his escutcheon, and that his own word may shine forth gloriously as in the days of old. We may not desire the triumph of our opinions, for our own sakes, or for the honour of a sect, but we may confidently pray for the triumph of truth, that God himself may be honoured.

Verse 2. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? Or, more literally, "Where, pray, is their God?" Why should the nations be allowed with a sneer of contempt to question the existence, and mercy, and faithfulness of Jehovah? They are always ready to blaspheme; we may well pray that they may not derive a reason for so doing from the course of providence, or the decline of the church. When they see the godly down trodden while they themselves live at ease, and act the part of persecutors, they are very apt to speak as if they had triumphed over God himself, or as if he had altogether left the field of action and deserted his saints. When the prayers and tears of the godly seem to be unregarded, and their miseries are rather increased than assuaged, then do the wicked multiply their taunts and jeers, and even argue that their own wretched irreligion is better than the faith of Christians, because for the present their condition is so much preferable to that of the afflicted saints. And, truly, this is the very sting of the trials of God's chosen when they see the veracity of the Lord questioned, and the name of God profaned because of their sufferings. If they could hope that some good result would come out of all this they would endure it with patience; but as they are unable to perceive any desirable result consequent thereon, they enquire with holy anxiety. "Wherefore should the heathen be permitted to speak thus?" It is a question to which it would be hard to reply, and yet no doubt there is an answer. Sometimes the nations are permitted thus to blaspheme, in order that they may fill up the measure of their iniquity, and in order that the subsequent interposition of God may be rendered the more illustrious in contrast with their profane boastings. Do they say, "Where is now their God?" They shall know by and by, for it is written, "Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries"; they shall know it also when the righteous shall "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Do they say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" That coming shall be speedy and terrible to them. In our own case, by our own lukewarmness and the neglect of faithful gospel preaching, we have permitted the uprising and spread of modern doubt, and we are bound to confess it with deep sorrow of soul; yet we may not therefore lose heart, but may still plead with God to save his own truth and grace from the contempt of men of the world. Our honour and the honour of the church are small matters, but the glory of God is the jewel of the universe, of which all else is but the setting; and we may come to the Lord and plead his jealousy for his name, being well assured that he will not suffer that name to be dishonoured. Wherefore should the pretended wise men of the period be permitted to say that they doubt the personality of God? Wherefore should they say that answers to prayer are pious delusions, and that the resurrection and the deity of our Lord Jesus are moot points? Wherefore should they be permitted to speak disparagingly of atonement by blood and by price, and reject utterly the doctrine of the wrath of God against sin, even that wrath which burneth for ever and ever? They speak exceeding proudly, and only God can stop their arrogant blusterings: let us by extraordinary intercession prevail upon him to interpose, by giving to his gospel such a triumphant vindication as shall utterly silence the perverse opposition of ungodly men.

Verse 3. But our God is in the heavens—where he should be; above the reach of mortal sneers, over hearing all the vain jangling of men, but looking down with silent scorn upon the makers of the babel.

Supreme above all opposing powers, the Lord reigneth upon a throne high and lifted up. Incomprehensible in essence, he rises above the loftiest thought of the wise; absolute in will and infinite in power, he is superior to the limitations which belong to earth and time. This God is our God, and we are not ashamed to own him, albeit he may not work miracles at the beck and call of every vain glorious boaster who may choose to challenge him. Once they bade his Son come down from the cross and they would believe in him, now they would have God overstep the ordinary bounds of his providence and come down from heaven to convince them: but other matters occupy his august mind besides the convincement of those who wilfully shut their eyes to the superabundant evidences of his divine power and Godhead, which are all around them. If our God be neither seen nor heard, and is not to be worshipped under any outward symbol, yet is he none the less real and true, for he is where his adversaries can never be—in the heavens, whence he stretches forth his sceptre, and rules with boundless power. He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Up till this moment his decrees have been fulfilled, and his eternal purposes accomplished; he has not been asleep, nor oblivious of the affairs of men; he has worked, and he has worked effectually, none have been able to thwart, nor even so much as to hinder him. "Whatsoever he hath pleased": however distasteful to his enemies, the Lord has accomplished all his good pleasure without difficulty; even when his adversaries raved and raged against him they have been compelled to carry out his designs against their will. Even proud Pharaoh, when most defiant of the Lord was but as clay upon the potter's wheel, and the Lord's end and design in him were fully answered. We may well endure the jeering question, "Where is now their God?" while we are perfectly sure that his providence is undisturbed, his throne unshaken, and his purposes unchanged. What he hath done he will yet do, his counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure, and at the end of the great drama of human history, the omnipotence of God and his immutability and faithfulness will be more than vindicated to the eternal confusion of his adversaries.

Verse 4. Their idols are silver and gold, mere dead inert matter; at the best only made of precious metal, but that metal quite as powerless as the commonest wood or clay. The value of the idol shows the folly of the maker in wasting his substance, but certainly does not increase the power of the image, since there is no more life in silver and gold than in brass or iron. The work of men's hands. Inasmuch as the maker is always greater than the thing that he has made, these idols are less to be honoured than the artificers, who fashioned them. How irrational that men should adore that which is less than themselves! How strange that a man should think that he can make a god! Can madness go further? Our God is a spirit, and his hands made the heavens and the earth: well may we worship him, and we need not be disturbed at the sneering question of those who are so insane as to refuse to adore the living God, and yet bow their knees before images of their own carving. We may make an application of all this to the times in which we are now living. The god of modern thought is the creation of the thinker himself, evolved out of his own consciousness, or fashioned according to his own notion of what a god should be. Now, it is evident that such a being is no God. It is impossible that there should be a God at all except the God of revelation. A god who can be fashioned by our own thoughts is no more a God than the image manufactured or produced by our own hands. The true God must of necessity be his own revealer. It is clearly impossible that a being who can be excogitated and comprehended by the reason of man should be the infinite and incomprehensible God. Their idols are blinded reason and diseased thought, the product of men's muddled brains, and they will come to nought.

Verse 5. They have mouths, but they speak not. The idols cannot utter even the faintest sound, they cannot communicate with their worshippers, they can neither promise nor threaten, command nor

console, explain the past nor prophesy the future. If they had no mouths they might not be expected to speak, but having mouths and speaking not, they are mere dumb idols, and not worthy to be compared with the Lord God who thundered at Sinai, who in old time spake by his servants the prophets, and whose voice even now breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. Eyes have they, but they see not. They cannot tell who their worshippers may be or what they offer. Certain idols have had jewels in their eyes more precious than a king's ransom, but they were as blind as the rest of the fraternity. A god who has eyes, and cannot see, is a blind deity; and blindness is a calamity, and not an attribute of godhead. He must be very blind who worships a blind god: we pity a blind man, it is strange to worship a blind image.

Verse 6. They have ears, but they hear not. The Psalmist might have pointed to the monstrous ears with which some heathen deities are disfigured,—truly they have ears; but no prayer of their rotaries, though shouted by a million voices, can ever be heard by them. How can gold and silver hear, and how can a rational being address petitions to one who cannot even hear his words? Noses have they, but they smell not. The Psalmist seems to heap together these sentences with something of the grim sardonic spirit of Elijah when he said, "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." In sacred scorn he mocks at those who burn sweet spices, and fill their temples with clouds of smoke, all offered to an image whose nose cannot perceive the perfume. He seems to point his finger to every part of the countenance of the image, and thus pours contempt upon the noblest part of the idol, if any part of such a thing can be noble even in the least degree.

Verse 7. They have hands, but they handle not. Looking lower down upon the images, the Psalmist says, "They have hands, but they handle not, "they cannot receive that which is handed to them, they cannot grasp the sceptre of power or the sword of vengeance, they can neither distribute benefits nor dispense judgments, and the most trifling act they are utterly unable to perform. An infant's hand excels them in power. Feet have they, but they walk not. They must be lifted into their places or they would never reach their shrines; they must be fastened in their shrines or they would fall; they must be carried or they could never move; they cannot come to the rescue of their friends, nor escape the iconoclasm of their foes. The meanest insect has more power of locomotion than the greatest heathen god. Neither speak they through their throats. They cannot even reach so far as the guttural noise of the lowest order of beasts; neither a grunt, nor a growl, nor a groan, nor so much as a mutter, can come from them. Their priests asserted that the images of the gods upon special occasions uttered hollow sounds, but it was a mere pretence, or a crafty artifice: images of gold or silver are incapable of living sounds. Thus has the Psalmist surveyed the idol from head to foot, looked in its face, and sounded its throat, and he writes it down as utterly contemptible.

Verse 8. They that make them are like unto them. Those who make such things for worship are as stupid, senseless, and irrational as the figures they construct. So far as any spiritual life, thought, and judgment are concerned, they are rather the images of men than rational beings. The censure is by no means too severe. Who has not found the words leaping to his lips when he has seen the idols of the Romans? So is every one that trusteth in them. Those who have sunk so low as to be capable of confiding in idols have reached the extreme of folly, and are worthy of as much contempt as their detestable deities. Luther's hard speeches were well deserved by the Papists; they must be mere dolts to worship the rotten relics which are the objects of their veneration. The god of modern thought exceedingly resembles the deities described in this Psalm. Pantheism is wondrously akin to Polytheism, and yet differs very little from Atheism. The god manufactured by our great thinkers is a

mere abstraction: he has no eternal purposes, he does not interpose on the behalf of his people, he cares but very little as to how much man sins, for he has given to the initiated "a larger hope" by which the most incorrigible are to be restored. He is what the last set of critics chooses to make him, he has said what they choose to say, and he will do what they please to prescribe. Let this creed and its devotees alone, and they will work out their own refutation, for as now their god is fashioned like themselves, they will by degrees fashion themselves like their god; and when the principles of justice, law, and order shall have all been effectually sapped we may possibly witness in some form of socialism, similar to that which is so sadly spreading in Germany, a repetition of the evils which have in former ages befallen nations which have refused the living God, and set up gods of their own.

Verse 9. O Israel, trust thou in the LORD. Whatever others do, let the elect of heaven keep fast to the God who chose them. Jehovah is the God of Jacob, let his children prove their loyalty to their God by their confidence in him. Whatever our trouble may be, and however fierce the blasphemous language of our enemies, let us not fear nor falter, but confidently rest in him who is able to vindicate his own honour, and protect his own servants. He is their help and their shield. He is the friend of his servants, both actively and passively, giving them both aid in labour and defence in danger. In the use of the pronoun "their," the Psalmist may have spoken to himself, in a sort of soliloquy: he had given the exhortation, "trust in Jehovah," and then he whispers to himself, "They may well do so, for he is at all times the strength and security of his servants."

Verse 10. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD. You who are nearest to him, trust him most; your very calling is connected with his truth and is meant to declare his glory, therefore never entertain a doubt concerning him, but lead the way in holy confidence. The priests were the leaders, teachers, and exemplars of the people, and therefore above all others they should place an unreserved reliance upon Israel's God. The Psalmist is glad to add that they did so, for he says, He is their help and their shield. It is good to exhort those to faith who have faith: "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; ...that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." We may stir up pure minds by way of remembrance, and exhort men to trust in the Lord because we know that they are trusting already.

Verse 11. The next verse is of the same tenor—Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD, whether belonging to Israel, or to the house of Aaron, or not, all those who reverence Jehovah are permitted and commanded to confide in him. He is their help and their shield. He does aid and protect all those who worship him in filial fear, to whatever nation they may belong. No doubt these repeated exhortations were rendered necessary by the trying condition in which the children of Israel were found: the sneers of the adversary would assail all the people, they would most bitterly be felt by the priests and ministers, and those who were secret proselytes would groan in secret under the contempt forced upon their religion and their God. All this would be very staggering to faith, and therefore they were bidden again and again and again to trust in Jehovah. This must have been a very pleasant song to households in Babylon, or far away in Persia, when they met together in the night to eat the Paschal supper in a land which knew them not, where they wept as they remembered Zion. We seem to hear them repeating the threefold word, "Trust in Jehovah," men and women and little children singing out their scorn of the dominant idolatry, and declaring their adherence to the one God of Israel. In the same manner in this day of blasphemy and rebuke it becomes us all to abound in testimonies to the truth of God. The sceptic is loud in his unbelief, let us be equally open in the avowal of our faith.

Verse 12. The Lord hath been mindful of us, or "Jehovah hath remembered us." His past mercies prove that we are on his heart, and though for the present he may afflict us, yet he does not forget us. We have not to put him in remembrance as though he found it hard to recollect his children, but he hath remembered us and therefore he will in future deal well with us. He will bless us. The word "us" is supplied by the translators, and is superfluous, the passage should run, He will bless; he will bless the house of Israel he will bless the house of Aaron. The repetition of the word "bless" adds great effect to the passage. The Lord has many blessings, each one worthy to be remembered, he blesses and blesses and blesses again. Where he has once bestowed his favour he continues it; his blessing delights to visit the same house very often and to abide where it has once lodged. Blessing does not impoverish the Lord: he has multiplied his mercies in the past, and he will pour them forth thick and threefold in the future. He will have a general blessing for all who fear him, a peculiar blessing for the whole house of Israel, and a double blessing for the sons of Aaron. It is his nature to bless, it is his prerogative to bless, it is his glory to bless, it is his delight to bless; he has promised to bless, and therefore be sure of this, that he will bless and bless and bless without ceasing.

Verse 13. He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great. So long as a man fears the Lord it matters nothing whether he be prince or peasant, patriarch or pauper, God will assuredly bless him. He supplies the want of every living thing, from the leviathan of the sea to the insect upon a leaf, and he will suffer none of the godly to be forgotten, however small their abilities, or mean their position. This is a sweet cordial for those who are little in faith, and own themselves to be mere babes in the family of grace. There is the same blessing for the least saint as for the greatest; yea, if anything, the "small" shall be first; for as the necessity is the more pressing, the supply shall be the more speedy.

Verse 14. The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your children. Just as in Egypt he multiplied the people exceedingly, so will he increase the number of his saints upon the earth; not only shall the faithful be blessed with converts, and so with a spiritual seed; but those who are their spiritual children shall become fruitful also, and thus the multitude of the elect shall be accomplished; God shall increase the people, and shall increase the joy. Even to the end of the ages the race of true believers shall be continued, and shall increasingly multiply in number and in power. The first blessing upon mankind was, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth"; and it is this blessing which God now pronounces upon them that fear him. Despite the idols of philosophy and sacramentarianism, the truth shall gather its disciples, and fill the land with its defenders.

Verse 15. Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth. This is another form of the blessing of Melchizedek: "Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth"; and upon us through our great Melchizedek this same benediction rests. It is an omnipotent blessing, conveying to us all that an Almighty God can do, whether in heaven or on earth. This fulness is infinite, and the consolation which it brings is unailing: he that made heaven and earth can give us all things while we dwell below, and bring us safely to his palace above. Happy are the people upon whom such a blessing rests; their portion is infinitely above that of those whose only hope lies in a piece of gilded wood, or an image of sculptured stone.

Verse 16. The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's. There he specially reigns, and manifests his greatness and his glory: but the earth hath he given to the children of men. He hath left the world during the present dispensation in a great measure under the power and will of men, so that things are not here below in the same perfect order as the things which are above. It is true the Lord rules

over all things by his providence, but yet he allows and permits men to break his laws and persecute his people for the time being, and to set up their dumb idols in opposition to him. The free agency which he gave to his creatures necessitated that in some degree he should restrain his power and suffer the children of men to follow their own devices; yet nevertheless, since he has not vacated heaven, he is still master of earth, and can at any time gather up all the reins into his own hands. Perhaps, however, the passage is meant to have another meaning, viz., that God will increase his people, because he has given the earth to them, and intends that they shall fill it. Man was constituted originally God's vicegerent over the world, and though as yet we see not all things put under him, we see Jesus exalted on high, and in him the children of men shall receive a loftier dominion even on earth than as yet they have known. "The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace": and our Lord Jesus shall reign amongst his ancients gloriously. All this will reflect the exceeding glory of him who reveals himself personally in heaven, and in the mystical body of Christ below. The earth belongs to the sons of God, and we are bound to subdue it for our Lord Jesus, for he must reign. The Lord hath given him the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.

Verse 17. The dead praise not the LORD—So far as this world is concerned. They cannot unite in the Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with which the church delights to adore her Lord. The preacher cannot magnify the Lord from his coffin, nor the Christian worker further manifest the power of divine grace by daily activity while he lies in the grave. Neither any that go down into silence. The tomb sends forth no voice; from mouldering bones and flesh consuming worms there arises no sound of gospel ministry nor of gracious song. One by one the singers in the consecrated choir of saints steal away from us, and we miss their music. Thank God, they have gone above to swell the harmonies of the skies, but as far as we are concerned, we have need to sing all the more earnestly because so many songsters have left our choirs.

Verse 18. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. We who are still living will take care that the praises of God shall not fail among the sons of men. Our afflictions and depressions of spirit shall not cause us to suspend our praises; neither shall old age, and increasing infirmities damp the celestial fires, nay, nor shall even death itself cause us to cease from the delightful occupation. The spiritually dead cannot praise God, but the life within us constrains us to do so. The ungodly may abide in silence, but we will lift up our voices to the praise of Jehovah. Even though for a time he may work no miracle, and we may see no peculiar interposition of his power, yet on the strength of what he has done in ages past we will continue to laud his name "until the day break, and the shadows flee away, "when he shall once more shine forth as the sun to gladden the faces of his children. The present time is auspicious for commencing a life of praise, since today he bids us hear his voice of mercy. "From this time forth" is the suggestion of wisdom, for this duty ought not to be delayed; and it is the dictate of gratitude, for there are pressing reasons for prompt thankfulness. Once begin praising God and we have entered upon an endless service. Even eternity cannot exhaust the reasons why God should be glorified. Praise the Lord, or Hallelujah. Though the dead cannot, and the wicked will not, and the careless do not praise God, yet we will shout "Hallelujah" for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 116

Verse 1. I love the LORD. A blessed declaration: every believer ought to be able to declare without the slightest hesitation, "I love the Lord." It was required under the law, but was never produced in the

heart of man except by the grace of God, and upon gospel principles. It is a great thing to say "I love the Lord"; for the sweetest of all graces and the surest of all evidences of salvation is love. It is great goodness on the part of God that he condescends to be loved by such poor creatures as we are, and it is a sure proof that he has been at work in our heart when we can say, "Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." Because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. The Psalmist not only knows that he loves God, but he knows why he does so. When love can justify itself with a reason, it is deep, strong, and abiding. They say that love is blind; but when we love God our affection has its eyes open and can sustain itself with the most rigid logic. We have reason, superabundant reason, for loving the Lord; and so because in this case principle and passion, reason and emotion go together, they make up an admirable state of mind. David's reason for his love was the love of God in hearing his prayers. The Psalmist had used his "voice" in prayer, and the habit of doing so is exceedingly helpful to devotion. If we can pray aloud without being overheard it is well to do so. Sometimes, however, when the Psalmist had lifted up his voice, his utterance had been so broken and painful that he scarcely dared to call it prayer; words failed him, he could only produce a groaning sound, but the Lord heard his moaning voice. At other times his prayers were more regular and better formed: these he calls "supplications." David had praised as best he could, and when one form of devotion failed him he tried another. He had gone to the Lord again and again, hence he uses the plural and says "my supplications," "but as often as he had gone, so often had he been welcome. Jehovah had heard, that is to say, accepted, and answered both his broken cries and his more composed and orderly supplications; hence he loved God with all his heart. Answered prayers are silken bonds which bind our hearts to God. When a man's prayers are answered, love is the natural result. According to Alexander, both verbs may be translated in the present, and the text may run thus, "I love because Jehovah hears my voice, my supplications." This also is true in the case of every pleading believer. Continual love flows out of daily answers to prayer.

Verse 2. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me:—bowing down from his grandeur to attend to my prayer; the figure seems to be that of a tender physician or loving friend leaning over a sick man whose voice is faint and scarcely audible, so as to catch every accent and whisper. When our prayer is very feeble, so that we ourselves can scarcely hear it, and question whether we do pray or not, yet God bows a listening ear, and regards our supplications. Therefore will I call upon him as long as I live, or "in my days." Throughout all the days of my life I will address my prayer to God alone, and to him I will unceasingly pray. It is always wise to go where we are welcome and are well treated. The word "call" may imply praise as well as prayer: calling upon the name of the Lord is an expressive name for adoration of all kinds. When prayer is heard in our feebleness, and answered in the strength and greatness of God, we are strengthened in the habit of prayer, and confirmed in the resolve to make ceaseless intercession. We should not thank a beggar who informed us that because we had granted his request he would never cease to beg of us, and yet doubtless it is acceptable to God that his petitioners should form the resolution to continue in prayer: this shows the greatness of his goodness, and the abundance of his patience. In all days let us pray and praise the Ancient of days. He promises that as our days our strength shall be; let us resolve that as our days our devotion shall be.

Verse 3. The Psalmist now goes on to describe his condition at the time when he prayed unto God. The sorrows of death compassed me. As hunters surround a stag with dogs and men, so that no way of escape is left, so was David enclosed in a ring of deadly griefs. The bands of sorrow, weakness, and terror with which death is accustomed to bind men ere he drags them away to their long captivity were all around him. Nor were these things around him in a distant circle, they had come close home,

for he adds, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me. Horrors such as those which torment the lost seized me, grasped me, found me out, searched me through and through, and held me a prisoner. He means by the pains of hell those pangs which belong to death, those terrors which are connected with the grave; these were so closely upon him that they fixed their teeth in him as hounds seize their prey. I found trouble and sorrow—trouble was around me, and sorrow within me. His griefs were double, and as he searched into them they increased. A man rejoices when he finds a hid treasure; but what must be the anguish of a man who finds, where he least expected it, a vein of trouble and sorrow? The Psalmist was sought for by trouble and it found him out, and when he himself became a seeker he found no relief, but double distress.

Verse 4. Then I called upon the name of the LORD. Prayer is never out of season, he prayed then, when things were at their worst. When the good man could not run to God, he called to him. In his extremity his faith came to the front: it was useless to call on man, and it may have seemed almost as useless to appeal to the Lord; but yet he did with his whole soul invoke all the attributes which make up the sacred name of Jehovah, and thus he proved the truth of his confidence. We can some of us remember certain very special times of trial of which we can now say, "then called I upon the name of the Lord." The Psalmist appealed to the Lord's mercy, truth, power, and faithfulness, and this was his prayer,—O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. This form of petition is short, comprehensive, to the point, humble, and earnest. It were well if all our prayers were moulded upon this model; perhaps they would be if we were in similar circumstances to those of the Psalmist, for real trouble produces real prayer. Here we have no multiplicity of words, and no fine arrangement of sentences; everything is simple and natural; there is not a redundant syllable, and yet there is not one lacking.

Verse 5. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous. In hearing prayer the grace and righteousness of Jehovah are both conspicuous. It is a great favour to hear a sinner's prayer, and yet since the Lord has promised to do so, he is not unrighteous to forget his promise and disregard the cries of his people. The combination of grace and righteousness in the dealings of God with his servants can only be explained by remembering the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. At the cross we see how gracious is the Lord and righteous. Yea, our God is merciful, or compassionate, tender, pitiful, full of mercy. We who have accepted him as ours have no doubt as to his mercy, for he would never have been our God if he had not been merciful. See how the attribute of righteousness seems to stand between two guards of love:—gracious, righteous, merciful. The sword of justice is scabarded in a jewelled sheath of grace.

Verse 6. The LORD preserveth the simple. Those who have a great deal of wit may take care of themselves. Those who have no worldly craft and subtlety and guile, but simply trust in God, and do the right, may depend upon it that God's care shall be over them. The worldly wise with all their prudence shall be taken in their own craftiness, but those who walk in their integrity with single minded truthfulness before God shall be protected against the wiles of their enemies, and enabled to outlive their foes. Though the saints are like sheep in the midst of wolves, and comparatively defenceless, yet there are more sheep in the world than wolves, and it is highly probable that the sheep will feed in safety when not a single wolf is left upon the face of the earth: even so the meek shall inherit the earth when the wicked shall be no more. I was brought low, and he helped me,—simple though I was, the Lord did not pass me by. Though reduced in circumstances, slandered in character, depressed in spirit, and sick in body, the Lord helped me. There are many ways in which the child of God may be brought low, but the help of God is as various as the need of his people: he supplies our necessities when impoverished, restores our character when maligned, raises up friends

for us when deserted, comforts us when desponding, and heals our diseases when we are sick. There are thousands in the church of God at this time who can each one of them say for himself, "I was brought low, and he helped me." Whenever this can be said it should be said to the praise of the glory of his grace, and for the comforting of others who may pass through the like ordeal. Note how David after stating the general doctrine that the Lord preserveth the simple, proves and illustrates it from his own personal experience. The habit of taking home a general truth and testing the power of it in our own case is an exceedingly blessed one; it is the way in which the testimony of Christ is confirmed in us, and so we become witnesses unto the Lord our God.

Verse 7. Return, unto thy rest, O my soul. He calls the rest still his own, and feels full liberty to return to it. What a mercy it is that even if our soul has left its rest for a while we can tell it—"it is thy rest still." The Psalmist had evidently been somewhat disturbed in mind, his troubles had ruffled his spirit but now with a sense of answered prayer upon him he quiets his soul. He had rested before, for he knew the blessed repose of faith, and therefore he returns to the God who had been the refuge of his soul in former days. Even as a bird flies to its nest, so does his soul fly to his God. Whenever a child of God even for a moment loses his peace of mind, he should be concerned to find it again, not by seeking it in the world or in his own experience, but in the Lord alone. When the believer prays, and the Lord inclines his ear, the road to the old rest is before him, let him not be slow to follow it. For the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee. Thou hast served a good God, and built upon a sure foundation; go not about to find any other rest, but come back to him who in former days hath condescended to enrich thee by his love. What a text is this! and what an exposition of it is furnished by the biography of every believing man and woman! The Lord hath dealt bountifully with us, for he hath given us his Son, and in him he hath given us all things: he hath sent us his Spirit, and by him he conveys to us all spiritual blessings. God dealeth with us like a God; he lays his fulness open to us, and of that fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. We have sat at no niggard's table, we have been clothed by no penurious hand, we have been equipped by no grudging provider; let us come back to him who has treated us with such exceeding kindness. More arguments follow.

Verse 8. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. The triune God has given us a trinity of deliverances: our life has been spared from the grave, our heart has been uplifted from its griefs, and our course in life has been preserved from dishonour. We ought not to be satisfied unless we are conscious of all three of these deliverance. If our soul has been saved from death, why do we weep? What cause for sorrow remains? Whence those tears? And if our tears have been wiped away, can we endure to fall again into sin? Let us not rest unless with steady feet we pursue the path of the upright, escaping every snare and shunning every stumblingblock. Salvation, joy, and holiness must go together, and they are all provided for us in the covenant of grace. Death is vanquished, tears are dried, and fears are banished when the Lord is near. Thus has the Psalmist explained the reasons of his resolution to call upon God as long as he lived, and none can question but that he had come to a most justifiable resolve. When from so great a depth he had been uplifted by so special an interposition of God, he was undoubtedly bound to be for ever the hearty worshipper of Jehovah, to whom he owed so much. Do we not all feel the force of the reasoning, and will we not carry out the conclusion? May God the Holy Spirit help us so to pray without ceasing and in everything to give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us.

Verse 9. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. This is the Psalmist's second resolution, to live as in the sight of God in the midst of the sons of men. By a man's walk is understood his way of

life: some men live only as in the sight of their fellow men, having regard to human judgment and opinion; but the truly gracious man considers the presence of God, and acts under the influence of his all observing eye. "Thou God seest me" is a far better influence than "My master sees me." The life of faith, hope, holy fear, and true holiness is produced by a sense of living and walking before the Lord, and he who has been favoured with divine deliverances in answer to prayer finds his own experience the best reason for a holy life, and the best assistance to his endeavours. We know that God in a special manner is nigh unto his people: what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?

Verse 10. I believed, therefore have I spoken. I could not have spoken thus if it had not been for my faith: I should never have spoken unto God in prayer, nor have been able now to speak to my fellow men in testimony if it had not been that faith kept me alive, and brought me a deliverance, whereof I have good reason to boast. Concerning the things of God no man should speak unless he believes; the speech of the waverer is mischievous, but the tongue of the believer is profitable; the most powerful speech which has ever been uttered by the lip of man has emanated from a heart fully persuaded of the truth of God. Not only the Psalmist, but such men as Luther, and Calvin, and other great witnesses for the faith could each one most heartily say, "I believed, therefore have I spoken." I was greatly afflicted. There was no mistake about that; the affliction was as bitter and as terrible as it well could be, and since I have been delivered from it, I am sure that the deliverance is no fanatical delusion, but a self evident fact; therefore am I the more resolved to speak to the honour of God. Though greatly afflicted, the Psalmist had not ceased to believe: his faith was tried but not destroyed.

Verse 11. I said in my haste, All men are liars. In a modified sense the expression will bear justification, even though hastily uttered, for all men will prove to be liars if we unduly trust in them; some from want of truthfulness, and others from want of power. But from the expression, "I said in my haste," it is clear that the Psalmist did not justify his own language, but considered it as the ebullition of a hasty temper. In the sense in which he spoke his language was unjustifiable. He had no right to distrust all men, for many of them are honest, truthful, and conscientious; there are faithful friends and loyal adherents yet alive; and if sometimes they disappoint us, we ought not to call them liars for failing when the failure arises entirely from want of power, and not from lack of will. Under great affliction our temptation will be to form hasty judgments of our fellow men, and knowing this to be the case we ought carefully to watch our spirit, and to keep the door of our lips. The Psalmist had believed, and therefore he spoke; he had doubted, and therefore he spoke in haste. He believed, and therefore he rightly prayed to God; he disbelieved, and therefore he wrongfully accused mankind. Speaking is as ill in some cases as it is good in others. Speaking in haste is generally followed by bitter repentance. It is much better to be quiet when our spirit is disturbed and hasty, for it is so much easier to say than to unsay; we may repent of our words, but we cannot so recall them as to undo the mischief they have done. If even David had to eat his own words, when he spoke in a hurry, none of us can trust our tongue without a bridle.

Verse 12. What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? He wisely leaves off fretting about man's falsehood and his own ill humour, and directs himself to his God. It is of little use to be harping on the string of man's imperfection and deceitfulness; it is infinitely better to praise the perfection and faithfulness of God. The question of the verse is a very proper one: the Lord has rendered so much mercy to us that we ought to look about us, and look within us, and see what can be done by us to manifest our gratitude. We ought not only to do what is plainly before us, but also with holy ingenuity to search out various ways by which we may render fresh praises unto our God.

His benefits are so many that we cannot number them, and our ways of acknowledging his bestowments ought to be varied and numerous in proportion. Each person should have his own peculiar mode of expressing gratitude. The Lord sends each one a special benefit, let each one enquire, "What shall I render? What form of service would be most becoming in me?"

Verse 13. I will take the cup of salvation. "I will take" is a strange answer to the question, "What shall I render?" and yet it is the wisest reply that could possibly be given.

"The best return for one like me,
So wretched and so poor,
Is from his gifts to draw a plea
And ask him still for more."

To take the cup of salvation was in itself an act of worship, and it was accompanied with other forms of adoration, hence the Psalmist says, and call upon the name of the LORD. He means that he will utter blessings and thanksgivings and prayers, and then drink of the cup which the Lord had filled with his saving grace. What a cup this is! Upon the table of infinite love stands the cup full of blessing; it is ours by faith to take it in our hand, make it our own, and partake of it, and then with joyful hearts to laud and magnify the gracious One who has filled it for our sakes that we may drink and be refreshed. We can do this figuratively at the sacramental table, we can do it spiritually every time we grasp the golden chalice of the covenant, realizing the fulness of blessing which it contains, and by faith receiving its divine contents into our inmost soul. Beloved reader, let us pause here and take a long and deep draught from the cup which Jesus filled, and then with devout hearts let us worship God.

Verse 14. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people. The Psalmist has already stated his third resolution, to devote himself to the worship of God evermore, and here he commences the performance of that resolve. The vows which he had made in anguish, he now determines to fulfil: "I will pay my vows unto the Lord." He does so at once, "now," and that publicly, "in the presence of all his people." Good resolutions cannot be carried out too speedily; vows become debts, and debts should be paid. It is well to have witnesses to the payment of just debts, and we need not be ashamed to have witnesses to the fulfilling of holy vows, for this will show that we are not ashamed of our Lord, and it may be a great benefit to those who look on and hear us publicly sounding forth the praises of our prayer hearing God. How can those do this who have never with their mouth confessed their Saviour? O secret disciples, what say you to this verse! Be encouraged to come into the light and own your Redeemer. If, indeed, you have been saved, come forward and declare it in his own appointed way.

Verse 15. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints, and therefore he did not suffer the Psalmist to die, but delivered his soul from death. This seems to indicate that the song was meant to remind Jewish families of the mercies received by any one of the household, supposing him to have been sore sick and to have been restored to health, for the Lord values the lives of his saints, and often spares them where others perish. They shall not die prematurely; they shall be immortal till their work is done; and when their time shall come to die, then their deaths shall be precious. The Lord watches over their dying beds, smooths their pillows, sustains their hearts, and receives their souls. Those who are redeemed with precious blood are so dear to God that even their deaths are precious to him. The deathbeds of saints are very precious to the church, she often learns much from them; they are very precious to all believers, who delight to treasure up the last words of the

departed; but they are most of all precious to the Lord Jehovah himself, who views the triumphant deaths of his gracious ones with sacred delight. If we have walked before him in the land of the living, we need not fear to die before him when the hour of our departure is at hand.

Verse 16. The man of God in paying his vows rededicates himself unto God; the offering which he brings is himself, as he cries, O LORD, truly I am thy servant, rightfully, really, heartily, constantly, I own that I am thine, for thou hast delivered and redeemed me. I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid, a servant born in thy house, born of a servant and so born a servant, and therefore doubly thine. My mother was thine handmaid, and I, her son, confess that I am altogether thine by claims arising out of my birth. O that children of godly parents would thus judge; but, alas, there are many who are the sons of the Lord's handmaids, but they are not themselves his servants. They give sad proof that grace does not run in the blood. David's mother was evidently a gracious woman, and he is glad to remember that fact, and to see in it a fresh obligation to devote himself to God. Thou hast loosed my bonds, freedom from bondage binds me to thy service. He who is loosed from the bonds of sin, death, and hell should rejoice to wear the easy yoke of the great Deliverer. Note how the sweet singer delights to dwell upon his belonging to the Lord; it is evidently his glory, a thing of which he is proud, a matter which causes him intense satisfaction. Verily, it ought to create rapture in our souls if we are able to call Jesus Master, and are acknowledged by him as his servants.

Verse 17. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Being thy servant, I am bound to sacrifice to thee, and having received spiritual blessings at thy hands I will not bring bullock or goat, but I will bring that which is more suitable, namely, the thanksgiving of my heart. My inmost soul shall adore thee in gratitude. And will call upon the name of the Lord, that is to say, I will bow before thee reverently, lift up my heart in love to thee, think upon thy character, and adore thee as thou dost reveal thyself. He is fond of this occupation, and several times in this Psalm declares that "he will call upon the name of the Lord, "while at the same time he rejoices that he had done so many a time before. Good feelings and actions bear repeating: the more of hearty callings upon God the better.

Verse 18. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people. He repeats the declaration. A good thing is worth saying twice. He thus stirs himself up to greater heartiness, earnestness, and diligence in keeping his vow,—really paying it at the very moment that he is declaring his resolution to do so. The mercy came in secret, but the praise is rendered in public; the company was, however, select; he did not cast his pearls before swine, but delivered his testimony before those who could understand and appreciate it.

Verse 19. In the courts of the LORD'S house: in the proper place, where God had ordained that he should be worshipped. See how he is stirred up at the remembrance of the house of the Lord, and must needs speak of the holy city with a note of joyful exclamation—In the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. The very thought of the beloved Zion touched his heart, and he writes as if he were actually addressing Jerusalem, whose name was dear to him. There would he pay his vows, in the abode of fellowship, in the very heart of Judea, in the place to which the tribes went up, the tribes of the Lord. There is nothing like witnessing for Jesus, where the report thereof will be carried into a thousand homes. God's praise is not to be confined to a closet, nor his name to be whispered in holes and corners, as if we were afraid that men should hear us; but in the thick of the throng, and in the very centre of assemblies, we should lift up heart and voice unto the Lord, and invite others to join with us in adoring him, saying, Praise ye the LORD, or Hallelujah. This was a very fit conclusion of a song to be sung when all the people were gathered together at Jerusalem to keep the feast. God's

Spirit moved the writers of these Psalms to give them a fitness and suitability which was more evident in their own day than now; but enough is perceptible to convince us that every line and word had a peculiar adaptation to the occasions for which the sacred sonnets were composed. When we worship the Lord we ought with great care to select the words of prayer and praise, and not to trust to the opening of a hymn book, or to the unconsidered extemporizing of the moment. Let all things be done decently and in order, and let all things begin and end with Hallelujah, Praise ye the Lord.

Psalm 117

Verse 1. O praise the LORD, all ye nations. This is an exhortation to the Gentiles to glorify Jehovah, and a clear proof that the Old Testament spirit differed widely from that narrow and contracted national bigotry with which the Jews of our Lord's day became so inveterately diseased. The nations could not be expected to join in the praise of Jehovah unless they were also to be partakers of the benefits which Israel enjoyed; and hence the Psalm was an intimation to Israel that the grace and mercy of their God were not to be confined to one nation, but would in happier days be extended to all the race of man, even as Moses had prophesied when he said, "Rejoice. O ye nations, his people" (De 32:43), for so the Hebrew has it. The nations were to be his people. He would call them a people that were not a people, and her beloved that was not beloved. We know and believe that no one tribe of men shall be unrepresented in the universal song which shall ascend unto the Lord of all. Individuals have already been gathered out of every kindred and people and tongue by the preaching of the gospel, and these have right heartily joined in magnifying the grace which sought them out, and brought them to know the Saviour. These are but the advance guard of a number which no man can number who will come ere long to worship the all glorious One. Praise him, all ye people. Having done it once, do it again, and do it still more fervently, daily increasing in the reverence and zeal with which you extol the Most High. Not only praise him nationally by your rulers, but popularly in your masses. The multitude of the common folk shall bless the Lord. Inasmuch as the matter is spoken of twice, its certainty is confirmed, and the Gentiles must and shall extol Jehovah—all of them, without exception. Under the gospel dispensation we worship no new god, but the God of Abraham is our God for ever and ever; the God of the whole earth shall he be called.

Verse 2. For his merciful kindness is great toward us. By which is meant not only his great love toward the Jewish people, but towards the whole family of man. The Lord is kind to us as his creatures, and merciful to us as sinners, hence his merciful kindness to us as sinful creatures. This mercy has been very great, or powerful. The mighty grace of God has prevailed even as the waters of the flood prevailed over the earth: breaking over all bounds, it has flowed towards all portions of the multiplied race of man. In Christ Jesus, God has shown mercy mixed with kindness, and that to the very highest degree. We can all join in this grateful acknowledgment, and in the praise which is therefore due. And the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. He has kept his covenant promise that in the seed of Abraham should all nations of the earth be blessed, and he will eternally keep every single promise of that covenant to all those who put their trust in him. This should be a cause of constant and grateful praise, wherefore the Psalm concludes as it began, with another Hallelujah, Praise ye the LORD.

Psalm 118

Verse 1. O give thanks unto the LORD. The grateful hero feels that he cannot himself alone sufficiently express his thankfulness, and therefore he calls in the aid of others. Grateful hearts are

greedy of men's tongues, and would monopolize them all for God's glory. The whole nation was concerned in David's triumphant accession, and therefore it was right that they should unite in his adoring song of praise. The thanks were to be rendered unto Jehovah alone, and not to the patience or valour of the hero himself. It is always well to trace our mercies to him who bestows them, and if we cannot give him anything else, let us at any rate give him our thanks. We must not stop short at the second agent, but rise at once to the first cause, and render all our praises unto the Lord himself. Have we been of a forgetful or murmuring spirit? Let us hear the lively language of the text, and allow it to speak to our hearts: "Cease your complaining, cease from all self glorification, and give thanks unto the Lord."

For he is good. This is reason enough for giving him thanks; goodness is his essence and nature, and therefore he is always to be praised whether we are receiving anything from him or not. Those who only praise God because he does them good should rise to a higher note and give thanks to him because he is good. In the truest sense he alone is good, "There is none good but one, that is God"; therefore in all gratitude the Lord should have the royal portion. If others seem to be good, he is good. If others are good in a measure, he is good beyond measure. When others behave badly to us, it should only stir us up the more heartily to give thanks unto the Lord because he is good; and when we ourselves are conscious that we are far from being good, we should only the more reverently bless him that "he is good." We must never tolerate an instant's unbelief as to the goodness of the Lord; whatever else may be questionable, this is absolutely certain, that Jehovah is good; his dispensations may vary, but his nature is always the same, and always good. It is not only that he was good, and will be good, but he is good; let his providence be what it may. Therefore let us even at this present moment, though the skies be dark with clouds, yet give thanks unto his name.

Because his mercy endureth for ever. Mercy is a great part of his goodness, and one which more concerns us than any other, for we are sinners and have need of his mercy. Angels may say that he is good, but they need not his mercy and cannot therefore take an equal delight in it; inanimate creation declares that he is good, but it cannot feel his mercy, for it has never transgressed; but man, deeply guilty and graciously forgiven, beholds mercy as the very focus and centre of the goodness of the Lord. The endurance of the divine mercy is a special subject for song: notwithstanding our sins, our trials, our fears, his mercy endureth for ever. The best of earthly joys pass away, and even the world itself grows old and hastens to decay, but there is no change in the mercy of God; he was faithful to our forefathers, he is merciful to us, and will be gracious to our children and our children's children. It is to be hoped that the philosophical interpreters who endeavour to clip the word "for ever", into a mere period of time will have the goodness to let this passage alone. However, whether they do or not, we shall believe in endless mercy—mercy to eternity. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the grand incarnation of the mercy of God, calls upon us at every remembrance of him to give thanks unto the Lord, for "he is good."

Verse 2. Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth for ever. God had made a covenant with their forefathers, a covenant of mercy and love, and to that covenant he was faithful evermore. Israel sinned in Egypt, provoked the Lord in the wilderness, went astray again and again under the judges, and transgressed at all times; and yet the Lord continued to regard them as his people, to favour them with his oracles, and to forgive their sins. He speedily ceased from the chastisements which they so richly deserved, because he had a favour towards them. He put his rod away the moment they repented, because his heart was full of compassion. "His mercy endureth for ever" was Israel's national hymn, which, as a people, they had been called upon to sing upon many former occasions;

and now their leader, who had at last gained the place for which Jehovah had destined him, calls upon the whole nation to join with him in extolling, in this particular instance of the divine goodness, the eternal mercy of the Lord. David's success was mercy to Israel, as well as mercy to himself. If Israel does not sing, who will? If Israel does not sing of mercy, who can? If Israel does not sing when the Son of David ascends the throne, the very stones will cry out.

Verse 3. Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endureth for ever. The sons of Aaron were specially set apart to come nearest to God, and it was only because of his mercy that they were enabled to live in the presence of the thrice holy Jehovah, who is a consuming fire. Every time the morning and evening lamb was sacrificed, the priests saw the continual mercy of the Lord, and in all the holy vessels of the sanctuary, and all its services from hour to hour, they had renewed witness of the goodness of the Most High. When the high priest went in unto the holy place and came forth accepted, he might, above all men, sing of the eternal mercy. If this Psalm refers to David, the priests had special reason for thankfulness on his coming to the throne, for Saul had made a great slaughter among them, and had at various times interfered with their sacred office. A man had now come to the throne who for their Master's sake would esteem them, give them their dues, and preserve them safe from all harm. Our Lord Jesus, having made all his people priests unto God, may well call upon them in that capacity to magnify the everlasting mercy of the Most High. Can any one of the royal priesthood be silent?

Verse 4. Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy endureth for ever. If there were any throughout the world who did not belong to Israel after the flesh, but nevertheless had a holy fear and lowly reverence of God, the Psalmist calls upon them to unite with him in his thanksgiving, and to do it especially on the occasion of his exaltation to the throne; and this is no more than they would cheerfully agree to do, since every good man in the world is benefited when a true servant of God is placed in a position of honour and influence. The prosperity of Israel through the reign of David was a blessing to all who feared Jehovah. A truly God fearing man will have his eye much upon God's mercy, because he is deeply conscious of his need of it, and because that attribute excites in him a deep feeling of reverential awe. "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared." In the three exhortations, to Israel, to the house of Aaron, and to them that fear the Lord, there is a repetition of the exhortation to say, "that his mercy endureth for ever." We are not only to believe, but to declare the goodness of God; truth is not to be hushed up, but proclaimed. God would have his people act as witnesses, and not stand silent in the day when his honour is impugned. Specially is it our joy to speak out to the honour and glory of God when we think up, in the exaltation of his dear Son. We should shout "Hosannah, "and sing loud "Hallelujahs" when we behold the stone which the builders rejected lifted into its proper place.

In each of the three exhortations notice carefully the word "now." There is no time like time present for telling out the praises of God. The present exaltation of the Son of David now demands from all who are the subjects of his kingdom continual songs of thanksgiving to him who hath set him on high in the midst of Zion. Now with us should mean always. When would it be right to cease from praising God, whose mercy never ceases? The fourfold testimonies to the everlasting mercy of God which are now before us speak like four evangelists, each one declaring the very pith and marrow of the gospel; and they stand like four angels at the four corners of the earth holding the winds in their hands, restraining the plagues of the latter days that the mercy and long suffering of God may endure towards the sons of men. Here are four cords to bind the sacrifice to the four horns of the altar, and four trumpets with which to proclaim the year of jubilee to every quarter of the world. Let not the

reader pass on to the consideration of the rest of the Psalm until he has with all his might lifted up both heart and voice to praise the Lord, "for his mercy endureth for ever."

"Let us with a gladsome mind
Praise the Lord, for he is kind;
For his mercies shall endure
Ever faithful, ever sure."

Verse 5. I called upon the LORD in distress, or, "out of anguish I invoked Jah." Nothing was left him but prayer, his agony was too great for aught beside; but having the heart and the privilege to pray he possessed all things. Prayers which come out of distress generally come out of the heart, and therefore they go to the heart of God. It is sweet to recollect our prayers, and often profitable to tell others of them after they are heard. Prayer may be bitter in the offering, but it will be sweet in the answering. The man of God had called upon the Lord when he was not in distress, and therefore he found it natural and easy to call upon him when he was in distress. He worshipped he praised, he prayed: for all this is included in calling upon God, even when he was in a straitened condition. Some read the original "a narrow gorge"; and therefore it was the more joy to him when he could say "The Lord answered me, and set me in a large place." He passed out of the defile of distress into the well watered plain of delight. He says, "Jah heard me in a wide place, "for God is never shut up, or straitened. In God's case hearing means answering, hence the translators rightly put, "The Lord answered me, "though the original word is "heard." The answer was appropriate to the prayer, for he brought him out of his narrow and confined condition into a place of liberty where he could walk at large, free from obstruction and oppression. Many of us can join with the Psalmist in the declarations of this verse; deep was our distress on account of sin, and we were shut up as in a prison under the law, but in answer to the prayer of faith we obtained the liberty of full justification wherewith Christ makes men free, and we are free indeed. It was the Lord who did it, and unto his name we ascribe all the glory; we had no merits, no strength, no wisdom, all we could do was to call upon him, and even that was his gift; but the mercy which is to eternity came to our rescue, we were brought out of bondage, and we were made to delight ourselves in the length and breadth of a boundless inheritance. What a large place is that in which the great God has placed us! All things are ours, all times are ours, all places are ours, for God himself is ours; we have earth to lodge in and heaven to dwell in,—what larger place can be imagined? We need all Israel, the whole house of Aaron, and all them that fear the Lord, to assist us in the expression of our gratitude; and when they have aided us to the utmost, and we ourselves have done our best, all will fall short of the praises that are due to our gracious Lord.

Verse 6. The LORD is on my side, or, he is "for me." Once his justice was against me, but now he is my reconciled God, and engaged on my behalf. The Psalmist naturally rejoiced in the divine help; all men turned against him, but God was his defender and advocate, accomplishing the divine purposes of his grace. The expression may also be translated "to me, "that is to say, Jehovah belongs to me, and is mine. What infinite wealth is here! If we do not magnify the Lord we are of all men most brutish. I will not fear. He does not say that he should not suffer, but that he would not fear: the favour of God infinitely outweighed the hatred of men, therefore setting the one against the other he felt that he had no reason to be afraid. He was calm and confident, though surrounded with enemies, and so let all believers be, for thus they honour God. What can man do unto me? He can do nothing more than God permits; at the very uttermost he can only kill the body, but he hath no more that he can do. God having purposed to set his servant upon the throne, the whole race of mankind could do nothing to

thwart the divine decree: the settled purpose of Jehovah's heart could not be turned aside, nor its accomplishment delayed, much less prevented, by the most rancorous hostility of the most powerful of men. Saul sought to slay David, but David outlived Saul, and sat upon his throne. Scribe and Pharisee, priest and Herodian, united in opposing the Christ of God, but he is exalted on high none the less because of their enmity. The mightiest man is a puny thing when he stands in opposition to God, yea, he shrinks into utter nothingness. It were a pity to be afraid of such a pitiful, miserable, despicable object as a man opposed to the almighty God. The Psalmist here speaks like a champion throwing down the gauntlet to all comers, defying the universe in arms; a true Bayard, without fear and without reproach, he enjoys God's favour, and he defies every foe.

Verse 7. The LORD taketh my part with them that help me. Jehovah condescended to be in alliance with the good man and his comrades; his God was not content to look on, but he took part in the struggle. What a consolatory fact it is that the Lord takes our part, and that when he raises up friends for us he does not leave them to fight for us alone, but he himself as our chief defender deigns to come into the battle and wage war on our behalf. David mentioned those that helped him, he was not unmindful of his followers; there is a long record of David's mighty men in the book of Chronicles, and this teaches us that we are not to disdain or think little of the generous friends who rally around us; but still our great dependence and our grand confidence must be fixed upon the Lord alone. Without him the strong helpers fail; indeed, apart from him in the sons of men there is no help; but when our gracious Jehovah is pleased to support and strengthen those who aid us, they become substantial helpers to us. Therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me. The words, "my desire," are added by the translators; the Psalmist said, "I shall look upon my haters: I shall look upon them in the face, I shall make them cease from their contempt, I shall myself look down upon them instead of their looking down upon me. I shall see their defeat, I shall see the end of them." Our Lord Jesus does at this moment look down upon his adversaries, his enemies are his footstool; he shall look upon them at his second coming, and at the glance of his eyes they shall flee before him, not being able to endure that look with which he shall read them through and through.

Verse 8. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better in all ways, for first of all it is wiser: God is infinitely more able to help, and more likely to help, than man, and therefore prudence suggests that we put our confidence in him above all others. It is also morally better to do so, for it is the duty of the creature to trust in the Creator. God has a claim upon his creatures' faith, he deserves to be trusted; and to place our reliance upon another rather than upon himself, is a direct insult to his faithfulness. It is better in the sense of safer, since we can never be sure of our ground if we rely upon mortal man, but we are always secure in the hands of our God. It is better in its effect upon ourselves: to trust in man tends to make us mean, crouching, dependent; but confidence in God elevates, produces a sacred quiet of spirit, and sanctifies the soul. It is, moreover, much better to trust in God, as far as the result is concerned; for in many cases the human object of our trust fails from want of ability, from want of generosity, from want of affection, or from want of memory; but the Lord, so far from falling, does for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or even think. This verse is written out of the experience of many who have first of all found the broken reeds of the creature break under them, and have afterwards joyfully found the Lord to be a solid pillar sustaining all their weight.

Verse 9. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes. These should be the noblest of men, chivalrous in character, and true to the core. The royal word should be unquestionable. They are noblest in rank and mightiest in power, and yet as a rule princes are not

one whit more reliable than the rest of mankind. A gilded vane turns with the wind as readily as a meaner weathercock. Princes are but men, and the best of men are poor creatures. In many troubles they cannot help us in the least degree: for instance, in sickness, bereavement, or death; neither can they assist us one jot in reference to our eternal state. In eternity a prince's smile goes for nothing; heaven and hell pay no homage to royal authority. The favour of princes is proverbially fickle, the testimonies of worldlings to this effect are abundant. All of us remember the words put by the world's great poet into the lips of the dying Wolsey; their power lies in their truth:

"O how wretched
Is that poor man that hangs on princes' favours!
There is betwixt that smile we would aspire to,
That sweet aspect of princes, and their ruin,
More pangs and fears than wars or women have;
And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
Never to hope again."

Yet a prince's smile has a strange witchery to many hearts, few are proof against that tuft hunting which is the index of a weak mind. Principle has been forgotten and character has been sacrificed to maintain position at court; yea, the manliness which the meanest slave retains has been basely bartered for the stars and garters of a profligate monarch. He who puts his confidence in God, the great King, is thereby made mentally and spiritually stronger, and rises to the highest dignity of manhood; in fact, the more he trusts the more is he free, but the fawning sycophant of greatness is meaner than the dirt he treads upon. For this reason and a thousand others it is infinitely better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

Verse 10. All nations compassed me about. The hero of the Psalm, while he had no earthly friend upon whom he could thoroughly rely, was surrounded by innumerable enemies, who heartily hated him. He was hemmed in by his adversaries, and scarce could find a loophole of escape from the bands which made a ring around him. As if by common consent all sorts of people set themselves against him, and yet he was more than a match for them all, because he was trusting in the name of the Lord. Therefore does he joyfully accept the battle, and grasp the victory, crying, but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them, or "cut them in pieces." They thought to destroy him, but he was sure of destroying them; they meant to blot out his name, but he expected to render not only his own name but the name of the Lord his God more illustrious in the hearts of men. It takes grand faith to be calm in the day of actual battle, and especially when that battle waxes hot; but our hero was as calm as if no fight was raging. Napoleon said that God was always on the side of the biggest battalions, but the Psalmist warrior found that the Lord of hosts was with the solitary champion, and that in his name the battalions were cut to pieces. There is a grand touch of the ego in the last sentence, but it is so overshadowed with the name of the Lord that there is none too much of it. He recognized his own individuality, and asserted it: he did not sit still supinely and leave the work to be done by God by some mysterious means; but he resolved with his own trusty sword to set about the enterprise, and so become in God's hand the instrument of his own deliverance. He did all in the name of the Lord, but he did not ignore his own responsibility, nor screen himself from personal conflict, for he cried, "I will destroy them." Observe that he does not speak of merely escaping from them like a bird out of the snare of the fowler, but he vows that he will carry the war into his enemies' ranks, and overthrow them so thoroughly that there should be no fear of their rising up a second time.

Verse 11. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about. He had such a vivid recollection of his danger that his enemies seem to live again in his verses. We see their fierce array, and their cruel combination of forces. They made a double ring, they surrounded him in a circle of many ranks, they not only talked of doing so, but they actually shut him up and enclosed him as within a wall. His heart had vividly realized his position of peril at the time, and now he delights to call it again to mind in order that he may the more ardently adore the mercy which made him strong in the hour of conflict, so that he broke through a troop, yea, swept a host to destruction. But in the name of the LORD will I destroy them. I will subdue them, get them under my feet, and break their power in pieces. He is as certain about the destruction of his enemies as he was assured of their having compassed him about. They made the circle three and four times deep, but for all that he felt confident of victory. It is grand to hear a man speak in this fashion when it is not boasting, but the calm declaration of his heartfelt trust in God.

Verse 12. They compassed me about like bees. They seemed to be everywhere, like a swarm of bees, attacking him at every point; nimbly flying from place to place, stinging him meanwhile, and inflicting grievous pain. They threatened at first to baffle him: what weapon could he use against them? They were so numerous, so inveterate; so contemptible, yet so audacious; so insignificant and yet so capable of inflicting agony, that to the eye of reason there appeared no possibility of doing anything with them. Like the swarm of flies Egypt, there was no standing against them; they threatened to sting a man to death with their incessant malice, their base insinuations, their dastardly falsehoods. He was in an evil case, but even there faith availed. All powerful faith adapts itself to all circumstances, it can cast out devils, and it can drive out bees. Surely, if it outlives the sting of death, it will not die from the sting of a bee. They are quenched as the fire of thorns. Their fierce attacks soon came to an end, the bees lost their stings and the buzz of the swarm subsided; like thorns which blaze with fierce crackling and abundant flame, but die out in a handful of ashes very speedily, so did the nations which surrounded our hero soon cease their clamour and come to an inglorious end. They were soon hot and soon cold, their attack was as short as it was sharp. He had no need to crush the bees, for like crackling thorns they died out of themselves. For a third time he adds, for in the name of the Lord will I destroy them, or "cut them down, "as men cut down thorns with a scythe or reaping hook. What wonders have been wrought in the name of the Lord! It is the battle cry of faith, before which its adversaries fly apace. "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon" brings instant terror into the midst of the foe. The name of the Lord is the one weapon which never fails in the day of battle: he who knows how to use it may chase a thousand with his single arm. Alas! we too often go to work and to conflict in our own name, and the enemy knows it not, but scornfully asks, "Who are ye?" Let us take care never to venture into the presence of the foe without first of all arming ourselves with this impenetrable mail. If we knew this name better, and trusted it more, our life would be more fruitful and sublime.

"Jesus, the name high over all,
In hell, or earth, or sky,
Angels and men before it fall,
And devils fear and fly."

Verse 13. Thou hast thrust sore at me, "Thrusting, thou hast thrust at me." It is a vigorous apostrophe, in which the enemy is described as concentrating all his thrusting power into the thrusts which he gave to the man of God. He thrust again and again with the keenest point, even as bees thrust their stings into their victim. The foe had exhibited intense exasperation, and fearful

determination, nor had he been without a measure of success; wounds had been given and received, and these smarted much, and were exceeding sore. Now, this is true of many a tried child of God who has been wounded by Satan, by the world, by temptation, by affliction; the sword has entered into his bones, and left its mark. That I might fall. This was the object of the thrusting: to throw him down, to wound him in such a way that he would no longer be able to keep his place, to make him depart from his integrity, and lose his confidence in God. If our adversaries can do this they will have succeeded to their heart's content: if we fall into grievous sin they will be better pleased than even if they had sent the bullet of the assassin into our heart, for a moral death is worse than a physical one. If they can dishonour us, and God in us, their victory will be complete. "Better death than false of faith" is the motto of one of our noble houses, and it may well be ours. It is to compass our fall that they compass us; they fill us with their venom that they may fill us with their sin. But the Lord helped me; a blessed "but." This is the saving clause. Other helpers were unable to chase away the angry nations, much less to destroy all the noxious swarms; but when the Lord came to the rescue the hero's single arm was strong enough to vanquish all his adversaries. How sweetly can many of us repeat in the retrospect of our past tribulations this delightful sentence, "But the Lord helped me." I was assailed by innumerable doubts and fears, but the Lord helped me; my natural unbelief was terribly inflamed by the insinuations of Satan, but the Lord helped me; multiplied trials were rendered more intense by the cruel assaults of men, and I knew not what to do, but the Lord helped me. Doubtless, when we land on the hither shore of Jordan, this will be one of our songs, "Flesh and heart were failing me, and the adversaries of my soul surrounded me in the swellings of Jordan, but the Lord helped me. Glory be unto his name."

Verse 14. The LORD my strength and song, my strength while I was in the conflict, my song now that it is ended; my strength against the strong, and my song over their defeat. He is far from boasting of his own valour; he ascribes his victory to its real source, he has no song concerning his own exploits, but all his peans are unto Jehovah Victor, the Lord whose right hand and holy arm had given him the victory. And is become my salvation. The poet warrior knew that he was saved, and he not only ascribed that salvation unto God, but he declared God himself to be his salvation. It is an all comprehending expression, signifying that from beginning to end, in the whole and in the details of it, he owed his deliverance entirely to the Lord. Thus can all the Lord's redeemed say, "Salvation is of the Lord." We cannot endure any doctrine which puts the crown upon the wrong head and defrauds the glorious King of his revenue of praise. Jehovah has done it all; yea; in Christ Jesus he is all, and therefore in our praises let him alone be extolled. It is a happy circumstance for us when we can praise God as alike our strength, song, and salvation; for God sometimes gives a secret strength to his people, and yet they question their own salvation, and cannot, therefore, sing of it. Many are, no doubt, truly saved, but at times they have so little strength, that they are ready to faint, and therefore they cannot sing: when strength is imparted and salvation is realised then the song is clear and full.

Verse 15. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous. They sympathised in the delight of their leader and they abode in their tents in peace, rejoicing that one had been raised up who, in the name of the Lord, would protect them from their adversaries. The families of believers are happy, and they should take pains to give their happiness a voice by their family devotion. The dwelling place of saved men should be the temple of praise; it is but righteous that the righteous should praise the righteous God, who is their righteousness. The struggling hero knew that the voice of woe and lamentation was heard in the tents of his adversaries, for they had suffered severe defeat at his hands; but he was delighted by the remembrance that the nation for whom he had struggled would rejoice from one end of the land to the other at the deliverance which

God had wrought by his means. That hero of heroes, the conquering Saviour, gives to all the families of his people abundant reasons for incessant song now that he has led captivity captive and ascended up on high. Let none of us be silent in our households: if we have salvation let us have joy, and if we have joy let us give it a tongue wherewith it may magnify the Lord. If we hearken carefully to the music which comes from Israel's tents, we shall catch a stanza to this effect, the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly: Jehovah has manifested his strength, given victory to his chosen champion, and overthrown all the armies of the foe. "The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name." When he comes to blows, woe to his mightiest opponent.

Verse 16. The right hand of the LORD is exalted, lifted up to smite the enemy, or extolled and magnified in the eyes of his people. It is the Lord's right hand, the hand of his skill, the hand of his greatest power, the hand which is accustomed to defend his saints. When that is lifted up, it lifts up all who trust in him, and it casts down all who resist him. The right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. The Psalmist speaks in triplets, for he is praising the triune God, his heart is warm and he loves to dwell upon the note; he is not content with the praise he has rendered, he endeavours to utter it each time more fervently and more jubilantly than before. He had dwelt upon the sentence, "they compassed me about, "for his peril from encircling armies was fully realised; and now he dwells upon the valour of Jehovah's right hand, for he has as vivid a sense of the presence and majesty of the Lord. How seldom is this the case: the Lord's mercy is forgotten and only the trial is remembered.

Verse 17. I shall not die, but live. His enemies hoped that he would die, and perhaps he himself feared he should perish at their hand: the news of his death may have been spread among his people, for the tongue of rumour is ever ready with ill news, the false intelligence would naturally cause great sorrow and despondency, but he proclaims himself as yet alive and as confident that he shall not fall by the hand of the destroyer. He is cheerfully assured that no arrow could carry death between the joints of his harness, and no weapon of any sort could end his career. His time had not yet come, he felt immortality beating within his bosom. Perhaps he had been sick, and brought to death's door, but he had a presentiment that the sickness was not unto death, but to the glory of God. At any rate, he knew that he should not so die as to give victory to the enemies of God; for the honour of God and the good of his people were both wrapped up in his continued success. Feeling that he would live he devoted himself to the noblest of purposes: he resolved to bear witness to the divine faithfulness, and declare the works of the LORD. He determined to recount the works of Jah; and he does so in this Psalm, wherein he dwells with love and admiration upon the splendour of Jehovah's prowess in the midst of the fight. While there is a testimony for God to be borne by us to any one, it is certain that we shall not be hurried from the land of the living. The Lord's prophets shall live on in the midst of famine, and war, and plague, and persecution, till they have uttered all the words of their prophecy; his priests shall stand at the altar unharmed till their last sacrifice has been presented before him. No bullet will find its billet in our hearts till we have finished our allotted period of activity,

"Plagues and deaths around me fly,
Till he please I cannot die:
Not a single shaft can hit,
Till the God of love sees fit."

Verse 18. The LORD hath chastened me sore. This is faith's version of the former passage, "Thou hast thrust sore at me; "for the attacks of the enemy are chastisements from the hand of God. The devil tormented Job for his own purposes, but in reality the sorrows of the patriarch were

chastisements from the Lord. "Chastening, Jah hath chastened me," says our poet: as much as to say that the Lord had smitten him very severely, and made him sorrowfully to know the full weight of his rod. The Lord frequently appears to save his heaviest blows for his best beloved ones; if any one affliction be more painful than another it falls to, the lot of those whom he most distinguishes in his service. The gardener prunes his best roses with most care. Chastisement is sent to keep successful saints humble, to make them tender towards others, and to enable them to bear the high honours which their heavenly Friend puts upon them. But he hath not given me over unto death. This verse, like the thirteenth, concludes with a blessed "but," which constitutes a saving clause. The Psalmist felt as if he had been beaten within an inch of his life, but yet death did not actually ensue. There is always a merciful limit to the scourging of the sons of God. Forty stripes save one were all that an Israelite might receive, and the Lord will never allow that one, that killing stroke, to fall upon his children. They are "chastened, but not killed"; their pains are for their instruction, not for their destruction. By these things the ungodly die, but gracious Hezekiah could say, "By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." No, blessed be the name of God, he may chastise us, but he will not condemn us; we must feel the smarting rod, but we shall not feel the killing sword. He does not give us over unto death at any time, and we may be quite sure that he has not done so while he condescends to chasten us, for if he intended our final rejection he would not take the pains to place us under his fatherly discipline. It may seem hard to be under the afflicting rod, but it would be a far more dreadful thing if the Lord were to say, "He is given unto idols, let him alone." Even from our griefs we may distil consolation, and gather sweet flowers from the garden in which the Lord has planted salutary rue and wormwood. It is a cheering fact that if we endure chastening God dealeth with us as with sons, and we may well be satisfied with the common lot of his beloved family. The hero, restored to health, and rescued from the dangers of battle, now lifts up his own song unto the Lord, and asks all Israel, led on by the goodly fellowship of the priests, to assist him in chanting a joyful Te Deum.

Verse 20. This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter. Psalmist loves the house of God so well that he admires the very gate thereof, and pauses beneath its arch to express his affection for it. He loved it because it was the gate of the Lord, he loved it because it was the gate of righteousness, because so many godly people had already entered it, and because in all future ages such persons will continue to pass through its portals. If the gate of the Lord's house on earth is so pleasant to us, how greatly shall we rejoice when we pass that gate of pearl, to which none but the righteous shall ever approach, but through which all the just shall in due time enter to eternal felicity. The Lord Jesus has passed that way, and not only set the gate wide open, but secured an entrance for all those who are made righteous in his righteousness: all the righteous must and shall enter there, whoever may oppose them. Under another aspect our Lord is himself that gate, and through him, as the new and living Way, all the righteous delight to approach unto the Lord. Whenever we draw near to praise the Lord we must come by this gate; acceptable praise never climbs over the wall, or enters by any other way, but comes to God in Christ Jesus; as it is written, "no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Blessed, for ever blessed, be this wondrous gate of the person of our Lord.

Verse 21. Having entered, the champion exclaims, I will praise thee, not "I will praise the Lord," for now he vividly realizes the divine presence, and addresses himself directly to Jehovah, whom his faith sensibly discerns. How well it is in all our songs of praise to let the heart have direct and distinct communion with God himself! The Psalmist's song was personal praise too:—"I will praise thee"; resolute praise, for he firmly resolved to offer it; spontaneous praise, for he voluntarily and cheerfully

rendered it, and continuous praise, for he did not intend soon to have done with it. It was a life long vow to which there would never come a close, "I will praise thee." For thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. He praises God by mentioning his favours, weaving his song out of the divine goodness which he had experienced. In these words he gives the reason for his praise,—his answered prayer, and the deliverance which he had received in consequence. How fondly he dwells upon the personal interposition of God! "Thou hast heard me." How heartily he ascribes the whole of his victory over his enemies to God; nay, he sees God himself to be the whole of it: "Thou art become my salvation." It is well to go directly to God himself, and not to stay even in his mercy, or in the acts of his grace. Answered prayers bring God very near to us; realised salvation enables us to realise the immediate presence of God. Considering the extreme distress through which the worshipper had passed, it is not at all wonderful that he should feel his heart full of gratitude at the great salvation which God had wrought for him, and should at his first entrance into the temple lift up his voice in thankful praise for personal favours so great, so needful, so perfect. This passage (Ps 118:22-27) will appear to be a mixture of the expressions of the people and of the hero himself.

Verse 22. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. Here the people magnify God for bringing his chosen servant into the honourable office, which had been allotted to him by divine decree. A wise king and valiant leader is a stone by which the national fabric is built up. David had been rejected by those in authority, but God had placed him in a position of the highest honour and the greatest usefulness, making him the chief cornerstone of the state. In the case of many others whose early life has been spent in conflict, the Lord has been pleased to accomplish his divine purposes in like manner; but to none is this text so applicable as to the Lord Jesus himself: he is the living stone, the tried stone, elect, precious, which God himself appointed from of old. The Jewish builders, scribe, priest, Pharisee, and Herodian, rejected him with disdain. They could see no excellence in him that they should build upon him; he could not be made to fit in with their ideal of a national church, he was a stone of another quarry from themselves, and not after their mind nor according to their taste; therefore they cast him away and poured contempt upon him, even as Peter said, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders"; they reckoned him to be as nothing, though he is Lord of all. In raising him from the dead the Lord God exalted him to be the head of his church, the very pinnacle of her glory and beauty. Since then he has become the confidence of the Gentiles, even of them that are afar off upon the sea, and thus he has joined the two walls of Jew and Gentile into one stately temple, and is seen to be the binding cornerstone, making both one. This is a delightful subject for contemplation. Jesus in all things hath the preeminence, he is the principal stone of the whole house of God. We are accustomed to lay some one stone of a public building with solemn ceremony, and to deposit in it any precious things which may have been selected as a memorial of the occasion: henceforth that cornerstone is looked upon as peculiarly honourable, and joyful memories are associated with it. All this is in a very emphatic sense true of our blessed Lord, "The Shepherd, the Stone of Israel." God himself laid him where he is, and hid within him all the precious things of the eternal covenant; and there he shall for ever remain, the foundation of all our hopes, the glory of all our joys, the united bond of all our fellowship. He is "the head over all things to the church, "and by him the church is fitly framed together, and groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord. Still do the builders refuse him: even to this day the professional teachers of the gospel are far too apt to fly to any and every new philosophy sooner than maintain the simple gospel, which is the essence of Christ: nevertheless, he holds his true position amongst his people, and the foolish builders shall see to their utter confusion that his truth shall be exalted over all. Those who reject the chosen stone will stumble against him to their own hurt, and ere long will come his second advent, when he will fall upon them from the heights of heaven, and

grind them to powder.

Verse 23. This is the LORD'S doing. The exalted position of Christ in his church is not the work of man, and does not depend for its continuation upon any builders or ministers; God himself has wrought the exaltation of our Lord Jesus. Considering the opposition which comes from the wisdom, the power, and the authority of this world, it is manifest that if the kingdom of Christ be indeed set up and maintained in the world it must be by supernatural power. Indeed, it is so even in the smallest detail. Every grain of true faith in this world is a divine creation, and every hour in which the true church subsists is a prolonged miracle. It is not the goodness of human nature, nor the force of reasoning, which exalts Christ, and builds up the church, but a power from above. This staggers the adversary, for he cannot understand what it is which baffles him: of the Holy Ghost He knows nothing. It is marvellous in our eyes. We actually see it; it is not in our thoughts and hopes and prayers alone, but the astonishing work is actually before our eyes. Jesus reigns, his power is felt, and we perceive that it is so. Faith sees our great Master, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; she sees and marvels. It never ceases to astonish us, as we see, even here below, God by means of weakness defeating power, by the simplicity of his word baffling the craft of men, and by the invisible influence of his Spirit exalting his Son in human hearts in the teeth of open and determined opposition. It is indeed "marvellous in our eyes, "as all God's works must be if men care to study them. In the Hebrew the passage reads, "It is wonderfully done": not only is the exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth itself wonderful, but the way in which it is brought about is marvellous: it is wonderfully done. The more we study the history of Christ and his church the more fully shall we agree with this declaration.

Verse 24. This is the day which the LORD hath made. A new era has commenced. The day of David's enthronement was the beginning of better times for Israel; and in a far higher sense the day of our Lord's resurrection is a new day of God's own making, for it is the dawn of a blessed dispensation. No doubt the Israelitish nation celebrated the victory of its champion with a day of feasting, music and song; and surely it is but meet that we should reverently keep the feast of the triumph of the Son of David. We observe the Lord's day as henceforth our true Sabbath, a day made and ordained of God, for the perpetual remembrance of the achievements of our Redeemer. Whenever the soft Sabbath light of the first day of the week breaks upon the earth, let us sing,

"This is the day the Lord hath made,
He calls the hours his own;
Let heaven rejoice, let earth be glad,
And praise surround the throne."

We by no means wish to confine the reference of the passage to the Sabbath, for the whole gospel day is the day of God's making, and its blessings come to us through our Lord's being placed as the head of the corner. We will rejoice and be glad in it. What else can we do? Having obtained so great a deliverance through our illustrious leader, and having seen the eternal mercy of God so brilliantly displayed, it would ill become us to mourn and murmur. Rather will we exhibit a double joy, rejoice in heart and be glad in face, rejoice in secret and be glad in public, for we have more than a double reason for being glad in the Lord. We ought to be specially joyous on the Sabbath: it is the queen of days, and its hours should be clad in royal apparel of delight. George Herbert says of it:

"Thou art a day of mirth,
And where the weekdays trail on ground,
Thy flight is higher as thy birth."

Entering into the midst of the church of God, and beholding the Lord Jesus as all in all in the assemblies of his people, we are bound to overflow with joy. Is it not written, "then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord"? When the King makes the house of prayer to be a banqueting house, and we have grace to enjoy fellowship with him, both in his sufferings and in his triumphs, we feel an intense delight, and we are glad to express it with the rest of his people.

Verse 25. Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD. Hosanna! God save our king! Let David reign! Or as we who live in these latter days interpret it,—Let the Son of David live for ever, let his saving help go forth throughout all nations. This was the peculiar shout of the feast of tabernacles; and so long as we dwell here below in these tabernacles of clay we cannot do better than use the same cry. Perpetually let us pray that our glorious King may work salvation in the midst of the earth. We plead also for ourselves that the Lord would save us, deliver us, and continue to sanctify us. This we ask with great earnestness, beseeching it of Jehovah. Prayer should always be an entreating and beseeching. O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Let the church be built up: through the salvation of sinners may the number of the saints be increased; through the preservation of saints may the church be strengthened, continued, beautified, perfected. Our Lord Jesus himself pleads for the salvation and the prosperity of his chosen; as our Intercessor before the throne he asks that the heavenly Father would save and keep those who were of old committed to his charge, and cause them to be one through the indwelling Spirit. Salvation had been given, and therefore it is asked for. Strange though it may seem, he who cries for salvation is already in a measure saved. None can so truly cry, "Save, I beseech thee," as those who have already participated in salvation; and the most prosperous church is that which most imploringly seeks prosperity. It may seem strange that, returning from victory, flushed with triumph, the hero should still ask for salvation; but so it is, and it could not be otherwise. When all our Saviour's work and warfare were ended, his intercession became even more prominently a feature of his life; after he had conquered all his foes he made intercession for the transgressors. What is true of him is true of his church also, for whenever she obtains the largest measure of spiritual blessing she is then most inclined to plead for more. She never pants so eagerly for prosperity as when she sees the Lord's doings in her midst, and marvels at them. Then, encouraged by the gracious visitation, she sets apart her solemn days of prayer, and cries with passionate desire, "Save now," and "Send now prosperity." She would fain take the tide at the flood, and make the most of the day of which the Lord has already made so much.

Verse 26. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the LORD. The champion had done everything "in the name of the Lord": in that name he had routed all his adversaries, and had risen to the throne, and in that name he had now entered the temple to pay his vows. We know who it is that cometh in the name of the Lord beyond all others. In the Psalmist's days he was The Coming One, and he is still The Coming One, though he hath already come. We are ready with our hosannas both for his first and second advent; our inmost souls thankfully adore and bless him and upon his head unspeakable joys. "Prayer also shall be made for him continually: and daily shall he be praised." For his sake everybody is blessed to us who comes in the name of the Lord, we welcome all such to our hearts and our homes; but chiefly, and beyond all others, we welcome himself when he deigns to enter in and sup with us and we with him. O sacred bliss, fit antepast of heaven! Perhaps this sentence is intended to be the benediction of the priests upon the valiant servant of the Lord, and if so, it is

appropriately added, We have blessed you out of the house of the LORD. The priests whose business it was to bless the people, in a sevenfold degree blessed the people's deliverer, the one chosen out of the people whom the Lord had exalted. All those whose high privilege it is to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever, because they are made priests unto God in Christ Jesus, can truly say that they bless the Christ who has made them what they are, and placed them where they are. Whenever we feel ourselves at home with God, and feel the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba Father, "the first thought of our hearts should be to bless the elder Brother, through whom the privilege of sonship has descended to such unworthy ones. In looking back upon our past lives we can remember many delightful occasions in which with joy unutterable we have in the fulness of our heart blessed our Saviour and our King; and all these memorable seasons are so many foretastes and pledges of the time when in the house of our great Father above we shall for ever sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, "and with rapture bless the Redeemer's name.

Verse 27. God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light, or "God is Jehovah, "the only living and true God. There is none other God but he. The words may also be rendered, "Mighty is Jehovah." Only the power of God could have brought us such light and joy as spring from the work of our Champion and King. We have received light, by which we have known the rejected stone to be the head of the corner, and this light has led us to enlist beneath the banner of the once despised Nazarene, who is now the Prince of the kings of the earth. With the light of knowledge has come the light of joy; for we are delivered from the powers of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Our knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ came not by the light of nature, nor by reason, nor did it arise from the sparks which we ourselves had kindled, nor did we receive it of men; but the mighty God alone hath showed it to us. He made a day on purpose that he might shine upon us like the sun, and he made our faces to shine in the light of that day, according to the declaration of the twenty-fourth verse. Therefore, unto him be all the honour of our enlightenment. Let us do our best to magnify the great Father of lights from whom our present blessedness has descended. "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Some think that by this we are taught that the king offered so many sacrifices that the whole area of the court was filled, and the sacrifices were bound even up to the altar; but we are inclined to keep to our own version, and to believe that sometimes restive bullocks were bound to the altar before they were slain, in which case Mant's verse is correct":

"He, Jehovah, is our Lord:
He, our God, on us hath shined:
Bind the sacrifice with cord,
To the horned altar bind."

The word rendered "cords" carries with it the idea of wreaths and boughs, so that it was not a cord of hard, rough rope, but a decorated band; even as in our case, though we are bound to the altar of God, it is with the cords of love and the bands of a man, and not by a compulsion which destroys the freedom of the will. The sacrifice which we would present in honour of the victories of our Lord Jesus Christ is the living sacrifice of our spirit, soul, and body. We bring ourselves to his altar, and desire to offer him all that we have and are. There remains a tendency in our nature to start aside from this; it is not fond of the sacrificial knife. In the warmth of our love we come willingly to the altar, but we need constraining power to keep us there in the entirety of our being throughout the whole of life. Happily there is a cord which, twisted around the atonement, or, better still, around the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our only Altar, can hold us, and does hold us: "For the love of Christ constraineth

us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then all died; and that he died for all, that they that live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." We are bound to the doctrine of atonement; we are bound to Christ himself, who is both altar and sacrifice; we desire to be more bound to him than ever, our soul finds her liberty in being tethered fast to the altar of the Lord. The American Board of Missions has for its seal an ox, with an altar on one side and a plough on the other, and the motto "Ready for either, "—ready to live and labour, or ready to suffer and die. We would gladly spend ourselves for the Lord actively, or be spent by him passively, whichever may be his will; but since we know the rebellion of our corrupt nature we earnestly pray that we may be kept in this consecrated mind, and that we may never, under discouragements, or through the temptations of the world, be permitted to leave the altar, to which it is our intense desire to be for ever fastened. Such consecration as this, and such desires for its perpetuity, well beseem that day of gladness which the Lord hath made so bright by the glorious triumph of his Son, our covenant head, our well beloved. Now comes the closing song of the champion, and of each one of his admirers.

Verse 28. Thou art my God, and I will praise thee, my mighty God who hath done this mighty and marvellous thing. Thou shalt be mine, and all the praise my soul is capable of shall be poured forth at thy feet. Thou art my God, I will exalt thee. Thou hast exalted me, and as far as my praises can do it, I will exalt thy name. Jesus is magnified, and he magnifies the Father according to his prayer, "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." God hath given us grace and promised us glory, and we are constrained to ascribe all grace to him, and all the glory of it also. The repetition indicates a double determination, and sets forth the firmness of the resolution, the heartiness of the affection, the intensity of the gratitude. Our Lord Jesus himself saith, "I will praise thee"; and well may each one of us, humbly and with confidence in divine grace, add, on his own account, the same declaration, "I will praise thee." However others may blaspheme thee, I will exalt thee; however dull and cold I may sometimes feel myself, yet will I rouse up my nature, and determine that as long as I have any being that being shall be spent to thy praise. For ever thou art my God, and for ever I will give thee thanks.

Verse 29. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. The Psalm concludes as it began, making a complete circle of joyful adoration. We can well suppose that the notes at the close of the loud hallelujah were more swift, more sweet, more loud than at the beginning. To the sound of trumpet and harp, Israel, the house of Aaron, and all that feared the Lord, forgetting their distinctions, joined in one common hymn, testifying again to their deep gratitude to the Lord's goodness, and to the mercy which is unto eternity. What better close could there be to this right royal song? The Psalmist would have risen to something higher, so as to end with a climax, but nothing loftier remained. He had reached the height of his grandest argument, and there he paused. The music ceased, the song was suspended, the great hallel was all chanted, and the people went every one to his own home, quietly and happily musing upon the goodness of the Lord, whose mercy fills eternity.

Psalm 120

Verse 1. In my distress. Slander occasions distress of the most grievous kind. Those who have felt the edge of a cruel tongue know assuredly that it is sharper than the sword. Calumny rouses our indignation by a sense of injustice, and yet we find ourselves helpless to fight with the evil, or to act in our own defence. We could ward off the strokes of a cutlass, but we have no shield against a liar's

tongue. We do not know who was the father of the falsehood, nor where it was born, nor where it has gone, nor how to follow it, nor how to stay its withering influence. We are perplexed, and know not which way to turn. Like the plague of flies in Egypt, it baffles opposition, and few can stand before it. Detraction touches us in the most tender point, cuts to the quick, and leaves a venom behind which it is difficult to extract. In all ways it is a sore distress to come under the power of "slander, the foulest whelp of sin." Even in such distress we need not hesitate to cry unto the Lord. Silence to man and prayer to God are the best cures for the evil of slander.

I cried unto the LORD (or Jehovah). The wisest course that he could follow. It is of little use to appeal to our fellows on the matter of slander, for the more we stir in it the more it spreads; it is of no avail to appeal to the honour of the slanderers, for they have none, and the most piteous demands for justice will only increase their malignity and encourage them to fresh insult. As well plead with panthers and wolves as with black hearted traducers. However, when cries to man would be our weakness, cries to God will be our strength. To whom should children cry but to their father? Does not some good come even out of that vile thing, falsehood, when it drives us to our knees and to our God? "And he heard me". Yes, Jehovah hears. He is the living God, and hence prayer to him is reasonable and profitable. The Psalmist remembered and recorded this instance of prayer hearing, for it had evidently much affected him; and now he rehearses it for the glory of God and the good of his brethren. "The righteous cry and the Lord heareth them". The ear of our God is not deaf, nor even heavy. He listens attentively, he catches the first accent of supplication; he makes each of his children confess,—"he heard me". When we are slandered it is a joy that the Lord knows us, and cannot be made to doubt our uprightness: he will not hear the lie against us, but he will hear our prayer against the lie.

If these psalms were sung at the ascent of the ark to Mount Zion, and then afterwards by the pilgrims to Jerusalem at the annual festivals and at the return from Babylon, we shall find in the life of David a reason for this being made the first of them. Did not this servant of God meet with Doeg the Edomite when he enquired of the oracle by Abiathar, and did not that wretched creature believe him and betray him to Saul? This made a very painful and permanent impression upon David's memory, and therefore in commencing the ark journey he poured out his lament before the Lord, concerning the great and monstrous wrong of "that dog of a Doeg", as Trapp wittily calls him. The poet, like the preacher, may find it to his advantage to "begin low, "for then he has the more room to rise: the next Psalm is a full octave above the present mournful hymn. Whenever we are abused it may console us to see that we are not alone in our misery we are traversing a road upon which David left his footprints.

Verse 2. Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips. It will need divine power to save a man from these deadly instruments. Lips are soft: but when they are lying lips they suck away the life of character and are as murderous as razors. Lips should never be red with the blood of honest men's reputes, nor salved with malicious falsehoods. David says, "Deliver my soul": the soul, the life of the man, is endangered by lying lips; cobras are not more venomous, nor devils themselves more pitiless. Some seem to lie for lying sake, it is their sport and spirit: their lips deserve to be kissed with a hot iron; but it is not for the friends of Jesus to render to men according to their deserts. Oh for a dumb generation rather than a lying one! The faculty of speech becomes a curse when it is degraded into a mean weapon for smiting men behind their backs. We need to be delivered from slander by the Lord's restraint upon wicked tongues, or else to be delivered out of it by having our good name cleared from the liar's calumny. And from a deceitful tongue This is rather worse than downright falsehood. Those who fawn and flatter, and all the while have enmity in their hearts, are horrible beings; they are the

seed of the devil, and he worketh in them after his own deceptive nature. Better to meet wild beasts and serpents than deceivers: these are a kind of monster whose birth is from beneath, and whose end lies far below. It should be a warning to liars and deceivers when they see that all good men pray against them, and that even bad men are afraid of them. Here is to the believer good cause for prayer. "Deliver us from evil", may be used with emphasis concerning this business. From gossips, talebearers, writers of anonymous letters, forgers of newspaper paragraphs, and all sorts of liars, good Lord deliver us!

Verse 3. What shall be given unto thee? What is the expected guerdon of slander? It ought to be something great to make it worth while to work in so foul an atmosphere and to ruin one's soul. Could a thousand worlds be bribe enough for such villainous deeds? The liar shall have no welcome recompense: he shall meet with his deserts; but what shall they be? What punishment can equal his crime? The Psalmist seems lost to suggest a fitting punishment. It is the worst of offences—this detraction, calumny, and slander. Judgment sharp and crushing would be measured out to it if men were visited for their transgressions. But what punishment could be heavy enough? What form shall the chastisement take? O liar, "what shall be given unto thee?" Or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? How shalt thou be visited? The law of retaliation can hardly meet the case, since none can slander the slanderer, he is too black to be blackened; neither would any of us blacken him if we could. Wretched being! He fights with weapons which true men cannot touch. Like the cuttlefish, he surrounds himself with an inky blackness into which honest men cannot penetrate. Like the foul skunk, he emits an odour of falsehood which cannot be endured by the true; and therefore he often escapes, unchastised by those whom he has most injured. His crime, in a certain sense, becomes his shield; men do not care to encounter so base a foe. But what will God do with lying tongues? He has uttered his most terrible threats against them, and he will terribly execute them in due time.

Verse 4. Sharp arrows of the mighty. Swift, sure, and sharp shall be the judgment. Their words were as arrows, and so shall their punishment be. God will see to it that their punishment shall be comparable to an arrow keen in itself, and driven home with all the force with which a mighty man shoots it from his bow of steel,—"sharp arrows of the mighty". Nor shall one form of judgment suffice to avenge this complicated sin. The slanderer shall feel woes comparable to coals of juniper, which are quick in flaming, fierce in blazing, and long in burning. He shall feel sharp arrows and sharper fires. Awful doom! All liars shall have their portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. Their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched. Juniper coals long retain their heat, but hell burneth ever, and the deceitful tongue may not deceive itself with the hope of escape from the fire which it has kindled. What a crime is this to which the All merciful allots a doom so dreadful! Let us hate it with perfect hatred. It is better to be the victim of slander than, to be the author of it. The shafts of calumny will miss the mark, but not so the arrows of God: the coals of malice will cool, but not the fire of justice. Shun slander as you would avoid hell.

Verse 5. Woe is me, that sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar! Gracious men are vexed with the conversation of the wicked. Our poet felt himself to be as ill at ease among lying neighbours as if he had lived among savages and cannibals. The traitors around him were as bad as the unspeakable Turk. He cries "Woe is me!" Their sin appalled him, their enmity galled him. He had some hope from the fact that he was only a sojourner in Mesech; but as years rolled on the time dragged heavily, and he feared that he might call himself a dweller in Kedar. The wandering tribes to whom he refers were constantly at war with one another; it was their habit to travel armed to the teeth; they were a kind of plundering gypsies, with their hand against every man and every man's

hand against them; and to these he compared the false hearted ones who had assailed his character. Those who defame the righteous are worse than cannibals; for savages only eat men after they are dead, but these wretches eat them up alive.

"Woe's me that I in Mesech am
A sojourner so long;
That I in tabernacles dwell
To Kedar that belong.
My soul with him that hateth peace
Hath long a dweller been;
I am for peace; but when I speak,
For battle they are keen.
My soul distracted mourns and pines
To reach that peaceful short,
Where all the weary are at rest,
And troublers vex no more."

Verse 6. My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. Long, long enough, too long had he been an exile among such barbarians. A peace maker is a blessing, but a peace hater is a curse. To lodge with such for a night is dangerous, but to dwell with them is horrible. The verse may apply to any one of the Psalmist's detractors: he had seen enough of him and pined to quit such company. Perhaps the sweet singer did not at first detect the nature of the man, for he was a deceiver; and when he did discover him he found himself unable to shake him off, and so was compelled to abide with him. Thoughts of Doeg, Saul, Ahithophel, and the sons of Zeruah come to our mind,—these last, not as enemies, but as hot blooded soldiers who were often too strong for David. What a change for the man of God from the quietude of the sheepfold to the turmoil of court and the tumult of combat! How he must have longed to lay aside his sceptre, and to resume his crook. He felt the time of his dwelling with quarrelsome spirits to be long, too long; and he only endured it because, as the Prayer book version has it, he was constrained so to abide.

Verse 7. I am for peace. Properly, "I am peace"; desirous of peace, peaceful, forbearing,—in fact, peace itself. But when I speak, they are for war. My kindest words appear to provoke them, and they are at daggers drawn at once. Nothing pleases them; if I am silent they count me morose, and if I open my mouth they cavil and controvert. Let those who dwell with such pugilistic company console themselves with the remembrance that both David and David's Lord endured the same trial. It is the lot of the saints to find foes even in their own households. Others besides David dwelt in the place of dragons. Others besides Daniel have been cast into a den of lions. Meanwhile, let those who are in quiet resting places and peaceful habitations be greatly grateful for such ease. "Deus nobis haec otia fecit": God has given us this tranquillity. Be it ours never to inflict upon others that from which we have been screened ourselves.

Psalm 121

Verse 1. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. It is wise to look to the strong for strength. Dwellers in valleys are subject to many disorders for which there is no cure but a sojourn in the uplands, and it is well when they shake off their lethargy and resolve upon a climb. Down below they are the prey of marauders, and to escape from them the surest method is to fly to

the strongholds upon the mountains. Often before the actual ascent the sick and plundered people looked towards the hills and longed to be upon their summits. The holy man who here sings a choice sonnet looked away from the slanderers by whom he was tormented to the Lord who saw all from his high places, and was ready to pour down succour for his injured servant. Help comes to saints only from above, they look elsewhere in vain: let us lift up our eyes with hope, expectance, desire, and confidence. Satan will endeavour to keep our eyes upon our sorrows that we may be disquieted and discouraged; be it ours firmly to resolve that we will look out and look up, for there is good cheer for the eyes, and they that lift up their eyes to the eternal hills shall soon have their hearts lifted up also. The purposes of God; the divine attributes; the immutable promises; the covenant, ordered in all things and sure; the providence, predestination, and proved faithfulness of the Lord—these are the hills to which we must lift up our eyes, for from these our help must come. It is our resolve that we will not be bandaged and blindfolded, but will lift up our eyes. Or is the text in the interrogative? Does he ask, "Shall I lift up mine eyes to the hills?" Does he feel that the highest places of the earth can afford him no shelter? Or does he renounce the idea of recruits hastening to his standard from the hardy mountaineers? and hence does he again enquire, "Whence cometh my help?" If so, the next verse answers the question, and shows whence all help must come.

Verse 2. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. What we need is help,—help powerful, efficient, constant: we need a very present help in trouble. What a mercy that we have it in our God. Our hope is in Jehovah, for our help comes from him. Help is on the road, and will not fail to reach us in due time, for he who sends it to us was never known to be too late. Jehovah who created all things is equal to every emergency; heaven and earth are at the disposal of him who made them, therefore let us be very joyful in our infinite helper. He will sooner destroy heaven and earth than permit his people to be destroyed, and the perpetual hills themselves shall bow rather than he shall fail whose ways are everlasting. We are bound to look beyond heaven and earth to him who made them both: it is vain to trust the creatures: it is wise to trust the Creator.

Verse 3. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved. Though the paths of life are dangerous and difficult, yet we shall stand fast, for Jehovah will not permit our feet to slide; and if he will not suffer it we shall not suffer it. If our foot will be thus kept we may be sure that our head and heart will be preserved also. In the original the words express a wish or prayer,—"May he not suffer thy foot to be moved." Promised preservation should be the subject of perpetual prayer; and we may pray believing; for those who have God for their keeper shall be safe from all the perils of the way. Among the hills and ravines of Palestine the literal keeping of tim feet is a great mercy; but in the slippery ways of a tried and afflicted life, the boon of upholding is of priceless value, for a single false step might cause us a fall fraught with awful danger. To stand erect and pursue the even tenor of our way is a blessing which only God can give, which is worthy of the divine hand, and worthy also of perennial gratitude. Our feet shall move in progress, but they shall not be moved to their overthrow. He that keepeth thee will not slumber,—or "thy keeper shall not slumber". We should not stand a moment if our keeper were to sleep; we need him by day and by night; not a single step can be safely taken except under his guardian eye. This is a choice stanza in a pilgrim song. God is the convoy and body guard of his saints. When dangers are awake around us we are safe, for our Preserver is awake also, and will not permit us to be taken unawares. No fatigue or exhaustion can cast our God into sleep; his watchful eyes are never closed.

Verse 4. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The consoling truth must be repeated: it is too rich to be dismissed in a single line. It were well if we always imitated the sweet

singer, and would dwell a little upon a choice doctrine, sucking the honey from it. What a glorious title is in the Hebrew—"The keeper of Israel, "and how delightful to think that no form of unconsciousness ever steals over him, neither the deep slumber nor the lighter sleep. He will never suffer the house to be broken up by the silent thief; he is ever on the watch, and speedily perceives every intruder. This is a subject of wonder, a theme for attentive consideration, therefore the word "Behold" is set up as a waymark. Israel fell asleep, but his God was awake. Jacob had neither walls, nor curtains, nor body guard around him; but the Lord was in that place though Jacob knew it not, and therefore the defenceless man was safe as in a castle. In after days he mentioned God under this enchanting name—"The God that led me all my life long": perhaps David alludes to that passage in this expression. The word "keepeth" is also full of meaning: he keeps us as a rich man keeps his treasures, as a captain keeps a city with a garrison, as a royal guard keeps his monarch's head. If the former verse is in strict accuracy a prayer, this is the answer to it; it affirms the matter thus, "Lo, he shall not slumber nor sleep—the Keeper of Israel". It may also be worthy of mention that in verse three the Lord is spoken of as the personal keeper of one individual, and here of all those who are in his chosen nation, described as Israel: mercy to one saint is the pledge of blessing to them all. Happy are the pilgrims to whom this psalm is a safe conduct; they may journey all the way to the celestial city without fear.

Verse 5. The Lord is thy keeper. Here the preserving One, who had been spoken of by pronouns in the two previous verses, is distinctly named—Jehovah is thy keeper. What a mint of meaning lies here: the sentence is a mass of bullion, and when coined and stamped with the king's name it will bear all our expenses between our birthplace on earth and our rest in heaven. Here is a glorious person—Jehovah, assuming a gracious office and fulfilling it in person,—Jehovah is thy keeper, in behalf of a favoured individual—thy, and a firm assurance of revelation that it is even so at this hour—Jehovah is thy keeper. Can we appropriate the divine declaration? If so, we may journey onward to Jerusalem and know no fear; yea, we may journey through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil. The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. A shade gives protection from burning heat and glaring light. We cannot bear too much blessing; even divine goodness, which is a right hand dispensation, must be toned down and shaded to suit our infirmity, and this the Lord will do for us. He will bear a shield before us, and guard the right arm with which we fight the foe. That member which has the most of labour shall have the most of protection. When a blazing sun pours down its burning beams upon our heads the Lord Jehovah himself will interpose to shade us, and that in the most honourable manner, acting as our right hand attendant, and placing us in comfort and safety. "The Lord at thy right hand shall smite through kings". How different this from the portion of the ungodly ones who have Satan standing at their right hand, and of those of whom Moses said, "their defence has departed from them". God is as near us as our shadow, and we are as safe as angels.

Verse 6. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. None but the Lord could shelter us from these tremendous forces. These two great lights rule the day and the night, and under the lordship of both we shall labour or rest in equal safety. Doubtless there are dangers of the light and of the dark, but in both and from both we shall be preserved—literally from excessive heat and from baneful chills; mystically from any injurious effects which might follow from doctrine bright or dim; spiritually from the evils of prosperity and adversity; eternally from the strain of overpowering glory and from the pressure of terrible events, such as judgment and the burning of the world. Day and night make up all time: thus the ever present protection never ceases. All evil may be ranked as under the sun or the moon, and if neither of these can smite us we are indeed secure. God has not

made a new sun or a fresh moon for his chosen, they exist under the same outward circumstances as others, but the power to smite is in their case removed from temporal agencies; saints are enriched, and not injured, by the powers which govern the earth's condition; to them has the Lord given "the precious things brought forth by the sun, and the precious things put forth by the moon, "while at the same moment he has removed from them all glare and curse of heat or damp, of glare or chill.

Verse 7. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil, or keep thee from all evil. It is a great pity that our admirable translation did not keep to the word keep all through the psalm, for all along it is one. God not only keeps his own in all evil times but from all evil influences and operations, yea, from evils themselves. This is a far reaching word of covering: it includes everything and excludes nothing: the wings of Jehovah amply guard his own from evils great and small, temporary and eternal. There is a most delightful double personality in this verse: Jehovah keeps the believer, not by agents, but by himself; and the person protected is definitely pointed out by the word thee,—it is not our estate or name which is shielded, but the proper personal man. To make this even more intensely real and personal another sentence is added, "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil:" he shall preserve thy soul,—or Jehovah will keep thy soul. Soul keeping is the soul of keeping. If the soul be kept all is kept. The preservation of the greater includes that of the less so far as it is essential to the main design: the kernel shall be preserved, and in order thereto the shell shall be preserved also. God is the sole keeper of the soul. Our soul is kept from the dominion of sin, the infection of error, the crush of despondency, the puffing up of pride; kept from the world, the flesh, and the devil; kept for holier and greater things; kept in the love of God; kept unto the eternal kingdom and glory. What can harm a soul that is kept of the Lord?

Verse 8. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore. When we go out in the morning to labour, and come home at eventide to rest, Jehovah shall keep us. When we go out in youth to begin life, and come in at the end to die, we shall experience the same keeping. Our exits and our entrances are under one protection. Three times have we the phrase, "Jehovah shall keep", as if the sacred Trinity thus sealed the word to make it sure: ought not all our fears to be slain by such a threefold flight of arrows? What anxiety can survive this triple promise? This keeping is eternal; continuing from this time forth, even for evermore. The whole church is thus assured of everlasting security: the final perseverance of the saints is thus ensured, and the glorious immortality of believers is guaranteed. Under the aegis of such a promise we may go on pilgrimage without trembling, and venture into battle without dread. None are so safe as those whom God keeps; none so much in danger as the self secure. To goings out and comings in belong peculiar dangers since every change of position turns a fresh quarter to the foe, and it is for these weak points that an especial security is provided: Jehovah will keep the door when it opens and closes, and this he will perseveringly continue to do so long as there is left a single man that trusteth in him, as long as a danger survives, and, in fact, as long as time endures. Glory be unto the Keeper of Israel, who is endeared to us under that title, since our growing sense of weakness makes us feel more deeply than ever our need of being kept. Over the reader we would breathe a benediction, couched in the verse of Keble.

"God keep thee safe from harm and sin,
Thy Spirit keep; the Lord watch o'er
Thy going out, thy coming in,
From this time, evermore."

Psalm 122

Verse 1. I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. Good children are pleased to go home, and glad to hear their brothers and sisters call them thither. David's heart was in the worship of God, and he was delighted when he found others inviting him to go where his desires had already gone: it helps the ardour of the most ardent to hear others inviting them to a holy duty. The word was not "go," but "let us go"; hence the ear of the Psalmist found a double joy in it. He was glad for the sake of others: glad that they wished to go themselves, glad that they had the courage and liberality to invite others. He knew that it would do them good; nothing better can happen to men and their friends than to love the place where God's honour dwelleth. What a glorious day shall that be when many people shall go and say, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." But David was glad for his own sake: he loved the invitation to the holy place, he delighted in being called to go to worship in company, and, moreover, he rejoiced that good people thought enough of him to extend their invitation to him. Some men would have been offended, and would have said, "Mind your own business. Let my religion alone;" but not so King David, though he had more dignity than any of us, and less need to be reminded of his duty. He was not teased but pleased by being pressed to attend holy services. He was glad to go into the house of the Lord, glad to go in holy company, glad to find good men and women willing to have him in their society. He may have been sad before, but this happy suggestion cheered him up: he pricked up his ears, as the proverb puts it, at the very mention of his Father's house. Is it so with us? Are we glad when others invite us to public worship, or to church fellowship? Then we shall be glad when the spirits above shall call us to the house of the Lord not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

"Hark! they whisper: angels say,
Sister spirit, come away."

If we are glad to be called by others to our Father's house, how much more glad shall we be actually to go there. We love our Lord, and therefore we love his house, and pangs of strong desire are upon us that we may soon reach the eternal abode of his glory. An aged saint: when dying, cheered herself with this evidence of grace, for she cried, "I have loved the habitation of thine house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth," and therefore she begged that she might join the holy congregation of those who for ever behold the King in his beauty. Our gladness at the bare thought of being in God's house is detective as to our character, and prophetic of our being one day happy in the Father's house on high. What a sweet Sabbath Psalm is this! In prospect of the Lord's day, and all its hallowed associations, our soul rejoices. How well, also, may it refer to the church! We are happy when we see numerous bands ready to unite themselves with the people of God. The pastor is specially glad when many come forward and ask of him assistance in entering into fellowship with the church. No language is more cheering to him than the humble request, "Let us go into the house of the Lord."

Verse 2. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem; or, better, "our feet are standing." The words imply present and joyous standing within the walls of the city of peace; or perhaps the pilgrims felt so sure of getting there that they antedated the joy, and spoke as if they were already there, though they were as yet only on the road. If we are within the church we may well triumph in the fact. While our feet are standing in Jerusalem our lips may well be singing. Outside the gates all is danger, and one day all will be destruction; but within the gates all is safely, seclusion, serenity, salvation, and glory. The gates are opened that we may pass in, and they are only shut that our enemies may not

follow us. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion, and so do we when we are enclosed within them. What a choice favour, to be a citizen of the New Jerusalem! Why are we so greatly favoured? Many feet are running the downward road, or kicking against the pricks, or held by snares, or sliding to an awful fall; but our feet, through grace divine, are "standing"—an honourable posture, "within thy gates, O Jerusalem"—an honourable position, and there shall they stand for ever—an honourable future.

Verse 3. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together. David saw in vision the city built; no more a waste, or a mere collection of tents, or a city upon paper, commenced but not completed. God's mercy to the Israelitish nation allowed of peace and plenty, sufficient for the uprising and perfecting of its capital: that City flourished in happy times, even as the church is only built up when all the people of God are prospering. Thanks be to God, Jerusalem is builded: the Lord by his glorious appearing has built up Zion. Furthermore, it is not erected as a set of booths, or a conglomeration of hovels, but as a city, substantial, architectural, designed, arranged, and defended. The church is a permanent and important institution, founded on a rock, builded with art, and arranged with wisdom. The city of God had this peculiarity about it, that it was not a long, straggling street, or a city of magnificent distances (as some mere skeleton places have been styled), but the allotted space was filled, the buildings were a solid block, a massive unity: this struck the dwellers in villages, and conveyed to them the idea of close neighbourhood, sure standing, and strong defence. No quarter could be surprised and sacked while other portions of the town were unaware of the assault: the ramparts surrounded every part of the metropolis, which was singularly one and indivisible. There was no flaw in this diamond of the world, this pearl of cities. In a church one of the most delightful conditions is the compactness of unity: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." A church should be one in creed and one in heart, one in testimony and one in service, one in aspiration and one in sympathy. They greatly injure our Jerusalem who would build dividing walls within her; she needs compacting, not dividing. There is no joy in going up to a church which is rent with internal dissension: the gladness of holy men is aroused by the adhesiveness of love, the unity of life; it would be their sadness if they saw the church to be a house divided against itself. Some bodies of Christians appear to be periodically blown to fragments, and no gracious man is glad to be in the way when the explosions take place: thither the tribes do not go up, for strife and contention are not attractive forces.

Verse 4. Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD. When there is unity within there will be gatherings from without: the tribes go up to a compact centre. Note that Israel was one people, but yet it was in a sense divided by the mere surface distinction of tribes; and this may be a lesson to us that all Christendom is essentially one, though from various causes we are divided into tribes. Let us as much as possible sink the tribal individuality in the national unity, so that the church may be many waves, but one sea; many branches, but one tree; many members, but one body. Observe that the tribes were all of them the Lord's; whether Judah or Benjamin, Manasseh or Ephraim, they were all the Lord's. Oh that all the regiments of the Christian army may be all and equally the Lord's own, alike chosen, redeemed, accepted, and upheld by Jehovah. Unto the testimony of Israel. They went up to the holy city to hear and to bear testimony. Everything in the temple was a testimony unto the Lord, and the annual journeys of the tribes to the hallowed shrine partook of the same testifying character, for these journeys were Israel's open avowal that Jehovah was their God, and that he was the one only living and true God. When we assemble on the Sabbath a large part of our business is giving out and receiving testimony: we are God's witnesses; all the tribes of the one church of Jesus Christ bear witness unto the Lord.

To give thanks unto the name of the LORD. Another part of our delightful duty is to praise the Lord. Sacred praise is a chief design of the assembling of ourselves together. All Israel had been fed by the fruit of the field, and they went up to give thanks unto the name of their great Husbandman: we, too, have countless mercies, and it becomes us unitedly in our solemn gatherings to magnify the name of our loving Lord. Testimony should be mingled with thanks, and thanks with testimony, for in combination they bless both God and man, and tend to spread themselves over the hearts of our companions; who, seeing our joyful gratitude, are the more inclined to hearken to our witness bearing. Here, then, was part of the cause of the gladness of the pious Israelite when he had an invitation to join the caravan which was going to Zion: he would there meet with representatives of all the clans of his nation, and aid them in the double object of their holy assemblies, namely, testimony and thanksgiving. The very anticipation of such delightful engagements filled him to overflowing with sacred gladness.

Verse 5. For there are set thrones of judgment. If discontented with the petty judgments of their village lords, the people could bring their hard matters to the royal seat, and the beloved King would be sure to decide aright; for the judgment thrones were The thrones of the house of David. We who come to the church and its public worship are charmed to come to the throne of God, and to the throne of the reigning Saviour.

"He reigns! Ye saints, exalt your strains:
Your God is King, your Father reigns:
And he is at the Father's side,
The Man of love, the Crucified."

To a true saint the throne is never more amiable than in its judicial capacity; righteous men love judgment, and are glad that right will be rewarded and iniquity will be punished. To see God reigning in the Son of David and evermore avenging the just cause is a thing which is good for weeping eyes, and cheering for disconsolate hearts. They sang of old as they went towards the throne, and so do we. "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice." The throne of judgment is not removed, but firmly "set, "and there it shall remain till the work of justice is accomplished, and truth and right are set on the throne with their King. Happy people to be under so glorious a rule.

Verse 6. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Peace was her name, pray that her condition may verify her title. Abode of Peace, peace be to thee. Here was a most sufficient reason for rejoicing at the thought of going up to the house of the Lord, since that sacred shrine stood in the centre of an area of peace: well might Israel pray that such peace should be continued. In a church peace is to be desired, expected, promoted, and enjoyed. If we may not say "Peace at any price, "yet we may certainly cry "Peace at the highest price." Those who are daily fluttered by rude alarms are charmed to reach their nest in a holy fellowship, and abide in it. In a church one of the main ingredients of success is internal peace: strife, suspicion, party spirit, division,—these are deadly things. Those who break the peace of the church deserve to suffer, and those who sustain it win a great blessing. Peace in the church should be our daily prayer, and in so praying we shall bring down peace upon ourselves; for the Psalmist goes on to say, They shall prosper that love thee, or, perhaps we may read it as a prayer, "May they have peace that love thee." Whether the passage be regarded as a promise or as a prayer matters not, for prayer pleads the promise, and the promise is the ground of prayer. Prosperity of soul is already enjoyed by those who take a deep interest in the church and cause of God: they are men of peace, and find peace in their holy endeavours: God's people pray for

them, and God himself delights in them. Prosperity of worldly condition often comes to the lovers of the church if they are able to bear it: many a time the house of Obededom is blessed because of the ark of the Lord. Because the Egyptian midwives feared the Lord, therefore the Lord made them houses. No man shall ever be a permanent loser by the house of the Lord: in peace of heart alone. If in nothing else, we find recompense enough for all that we can do in promoting the interests of Zion.

Verse 7. Peace be within thy walls. See how the poet personifies the church, and speaks to it: his heart is with Zion, and therefore his conversation runs in that direction. A second time is the sweet favour of peace earnestly sought after: "There is none like it, give it me." Walls were needed to keep out the foe, but it was asked of the Lord that those walls might prove sufficient for her security. May the munitions of rock so securely defend the city of God that no intruder may ever enter within her enclosure. May her ramparts repose in safety. Three walls environed her, and thus she had a trinity of security. And prosperity within thy palaces, or "Repose within thy palaces." Peace is prosperity; there can be no prosperity which is not based on peace, nor can there long be peace if prosperity be gone, for decline of grace breeds decay of love. We wish for the church rest from internal dissension and external assault: war is not her element, but we read of old, "Then had the churches rest; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." The bird of Paradise is not a sternly petrel: her element is not the hurricane of debate, but the calm of communion. Observe that our Jerusalem is a city of palaces: kings dwell within her walls, and God himself is there. The smallest Church is worthy of higher honour than the greatest confederacies of nobles. The order of the New Jerusalem is of more repute in heaven than the knights of the Golden Fleece. For the sake of all the saintly spirits which inhabit the city of God we may well entreat for her the boons of lasting peace and abounding prosperity.

Verse 8. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. It is to the advantage of all Israel that there should be peace in Jerusalem. It is for the good of every Christian, yea, of every man, that there should be peace and prosperity in the church. Here our humanity and our common philanthropy assist our religious prayer. By a flourishing church our children, our neighbours, our fellow countrymen are likely to be blest. Moreover, we cannot but pray for a cause with which our dearest relatives and choicest friends are associated: if they labour for it, we must and will pray for it. Here peace is mentioned for the third time. Are not these frequent threes some hint of the Trinity? It would be hard to believe that the triple form of so many parts of the Old Testament is merely accidental. At least, the repetition of the desire displays the writer's high valuation of the blessing mentioned; he would not again and again have invoked peace had he not perceived its extreme desirableness.

Verse 9. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good. He prays for Jerusalem because of Zion. How the church salts and savours all around it. The presence of Jehovah, our God, endears to us every place wherein he reveals his glory. Well may we seek her good within whose walls there dwells God who alone is good. We are to live for God's cause, and to be ready to die for it. First we love it (Ps 122:6) and then we labour for it, as in this passage: we see its good, and then seek its good. If we can do nothing else we can intercede for it. Our covenant relation to Jehovah as our God binds us to pray for his people,—they are "the house of the Lord our God." If we honour our God we desire the prosperity of the church which he has chosen for his indwelling. Thus is the poet glad of an invitation to join with others in the Lord's service. He goes with them and rejoices, and then he turns his delight into devotion, and intercedes for the city of the great King. O church of the living God, we hail thine assemblies, and on bended knee we pray that thou mayest have peace and

felicity. May our Jehovah so send it. Amen.

Psalm 123

Verse 1. Unto thee lift I up mine eyes. It is good to have some one to look up to. The Psalmist looked so high that he could look no higher. Not to the hills, but to the God of the hills he looked. He believed in a personal God, and knew nothing of that modern pantheism which is nothing more than atheism wearing a fig leaf. The uplifted eyes naturally and instinctively represent the state of heart which fixes desire, hope, confidence, and expectation upon the Lord. God is everywhere, and yet it is most natural to think of him as being above us, in that glory land which lies beyond the skies. "O thou that dwellest in the heavens", just sets forth the unsophisticated idea of a child of God in distress: God is, God is in heaven, God resides in one place, and God is evermore the same, therefore will I look to him. When we cannot look to any helper on a level with us, it is greatly wise to look above us; in fact, if we have a thousand helpers, our eyes should still be toward the Lord. The higher the Lord is the better for our faith, since that height represents power, glory, and excellence, and these will be all engaged on our behalf. We ought to be very thankful for spiritual eyes; the blind men of this world, however much of human learning they may possess, cannot behold our God, for in heavenly matters they are devoid of sight. Yet we must use our eyes with resolution, for they will not go upward to the Lord of themselves, but they incline to look downward, or inward, or anywhere but to the Lord: let it be our firm resolve that the heavenward glance shall not be lacking. If we cannot see God, at least we will look towards him. God is in heaven as a king in his palace; he is here revealed, adored, and glorified: thence he looks down on the world and sends succours to his saints as their needs demand; hence we look up, even when our sorrow is so great that we can do no more. It is a blessed condescension on God's part that he permits us to lift up our eyes to his glorious high throne; yea, more, that he invites and even commands us so to do. When we are looking to the Lord in hope, it is well to tell him so in prayer: the Psalmist uses his voice as well as his eye. We need not speak in prayer; a glance of the eye will do it all; for—

"Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near."

Still, it is helpful to the heart to use the tongue, and we do well to address ourselves in words and sentences to the God who heareth his people. It is no small joy that our God is always at home: he is not on a journey, like Baal, but he dwells in the heavens. Let us think no hour of the day inopportune for waiting upon the Lord; no watch of the night too dark for us to look to him.

Verse 2. Behold—for it is worthy of regard among men, and O that the Majesty of heaven would also note it, and speedily send the mercy which our waiting spirits seek. See, O Lord, how we look to thee, and in thy mercy look on us. This Behold has, however, a call to us to observe and consider. Whenever saints of God have waited upon the Lord their example has been worthy of earnest consideration. Sanctification is a miracle of grace; therefore let us behold it. For God to have wrought in men the spirit of service is a great marvel, and as such let all men turn aside and see this great sight. "As the eyes of servants (or slaves) look unto the hand of their masters." They stand at the end of the room with their hands folded watching their lord's movements. Orientals speak less than we do,

and prefer to direct their slaves by movements of their hands: hence, the domestic must fix his eyes on his master, or he might miss a sign, and so fail to obey it: even so, the sanctified man lifts his eyes unto God, and endeavours to learn the divine will from every one of the signs which the Lord is pleased to use. Creation, providence, grace; these are all motions of Jehovah's hand, and from each of them a portion of our duty is to be learned; therefore should we carefully study them, to discover the divine will. "And as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, "this second comparison may be used because Eastern women are even more thorough than the men in the training of their servants. It is usually thought that women issue more commands, and are more sensitive of disobedience, than the sterner sex. Among the Roman matrons female slaves had a sorry time of it, and no doubt it was the same among the generality of Eastern ladies. "Even so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God." Believers desire to be attentive to each and all of the directions of the Lord; even those which concern apparently little things are not little to us, for we know that even for idle words we shall be called to account, and we are anxious to give in that account with joy, and not with grief. True saints, like obedient servants, look to the Lord their God reverentially: they have a holy awe and inward fear of the great and glorious One. They watch, obediently, doing his commandments, guided by his eye. Their constant gaze is fixed attentively on all that comes from the Most High; they give earnest heed, and fear lest they should let anything slip through inadvertence or drowsiness. They look continuously, for there never is a time when they are off duty; at all times they delight to serve in all things: Upon the Lord they fix their eyes expectantly, looking for supply, succour, and safety from his hands, waiting that he may have mercy upon them. To him they look singly, they have no other confidence, and they learn to look submissively, waiting patiently for the Lord, seeking both in activity and suffering to glorify his name. When they are smitten with the rod they turn their eyes imploringly to the hand which chastens, hoping that mercy will soon abate the rigour of the affliction. There is much more in the figure than we can display in this brief comment; perhaps it will be most profitable to suggest the question.—Are we thus trained to service? Though we are sons, have we learned the full obedience of servants? Have we surrendered self, and bowed our will before the heavenly Majesty? Do we desire in all things to be at the Lord's disposal? If so, happy are we. Though we are made joint heirs with Christ, yet for the present we differ little from servants, and may be well content to take them for our model.

Verse 3. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us. He hangs upon the word "mercy, "and embodies it in a vehement prayer: the very word seems to hold him, and he harps upon it. It is well for us to pray about everything, and turn everything into prayer; and especially when we are reminded of a great necessity we should catch at it as a keynote, and pitch our tune to it. The reduplication of the prayer before us is meant to express the eagerness of the Psalmist's spirit and his urgent need: what he needed speedily he begs for importunately. Note that he has left the first person singular for the plural. All the saints need mercy; they all seek it; they shall all have it, therefore we pray—"have mercy upon us". A slave when corrected looks to his master's hand that the punishment may cease, and even so we look to the Lord for mercy, and entreat for it with all our hearts. Our contemptuous opponents will have no mercy upon us; let us not ask it at their hands, but turn to the God of mercy, and seek his aid alone. "For we are exceedingly filled with contempt, "and this is an acid which eats into the soul. Observe the emphatic words. Contempt is bitterness, wormwood mingled with gall; he that feels it may well cry for mercy to his God. Filled with contempt, as if the bitter wine had been poured in till it was up to the brim. This had become the chief thought of their minds, the peculiar sorrow of their hearts. Excluding all other feelings, a sense of scorn monopolized the soul and made it unutterably wretched. Another word is added adverbially—exceedingly filled. Filled even to running over, as if pressed down and then heaped up. A little contempt they could bear, but now they were

satiated with it, and weary of it. Do we wonder at the threefold mention of mercy when this master evil was in the ascendant? Nothing is more wounding, embittering, festering than disdain. When our companions make little of us we are far too apt to make little of ourselves and of the consolations prepared for us. Oh to be filled with communion, and then contempt will run off from us, and never be able to fill us with its biting vinegar.

Verse 4. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease. Knowing no troubles of their own, the easy ones grow cruel and deride the people of the Lord. Having the godly already in secret contempt, they show it by openly scorning them. Note those who do this: they are not the poor, the humble, the troubled, but those who have a merry life of it, and are self content. They are in easy circumstances; they are easy in heart through a deadened conscience, and so they easily come to mock at holiness; they are easy from needing nothing, and from having no severe toil exacted from them; they are easy as to any anxiety to improve, for their conceit of themselves is boundless. Such men take things easily, and therefore they scorn the holy carefulness of those who watch the hand of the Lord. They say, Who is the Lord that we should obey his voice? and then they turn round with a contemptuous look and sneer at those who fear the Lord. Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion; their contempt of the godly shall hasten and increase their misery. The injurious effect of freedom from affliction is singularly evident here. Place a man perfectly at ease and he derides the suffering godly, and becomes himself proud in heart and conduct. "And with the contempt of the proud". The proud think so much of themselves that they must needs think all the less of those who are better than themselves. Pride is both contemptible and contemptuous. The contempt of the great ones of the earth is often peculiarly acrid: some of them, like a well known statesman, are "masters of gibes and flouts and sneers", and never do they seem so much at home in their acrimony as when a servant of the Lord is the victim of their venom. It is easy enough to write upon this subject, but to be selected as the target of contempt is quite another matter. Great hearts have been broken and brave spirits have been withered beneath the accursed power of falsehood, and the horrible blight of contempt. For our comfort we may remember that our divine Lord was despised and rejected of men, yet he ceased not from his perfect service till he was exalted to dwell in the heavens. Let us bear our share of this evil which still rages under the sun, and let us firmly believe that the contempt of the ungodly shall turn to our honour in the world to come: even now it serves as a certificate that we are not of the world, for if we were of the world the world would love us as its own.

Psalm 124

Verse 1. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Israel say. The opening sentence is abrupt, and remains a fragment. By such a commencement attention was aroused as well as feeling expressed: and this is ever the way of poetic fire—to break forth in uncontrollable flame. The many words in italics in our authorized version will show the reader that the translators did their best to patch up the passage, which, perhaps, had better have been left in its broken grandeur, and it would then have run thus:—"Had it not been Jehovah! He was for us, oh let Israel say! Had it not been Jehovah! He who was for us when men rose against us." The glorious Lord became our ally; he took our part, and entered into treaty with us. If Jehovah were not our protector where should we be. Nothing but his power and wisdom could have guarded us from the cunning and malice of our adversaries; therefore, let all his people say so, and openly give him the honour of his preserving goodness. Here are two "ifs," and yet there is no "if" in the matter. The Lord was on our side, and is still our defender, and will be so from henceforth, even for ever. Let us with holy confidence exult in this joyful fact: We are far too slow in declaring our gratitude, hence the exclamation which should be

rendered, "O let Israel say." We murmur without being stirred up to it, but our thanksgiving needs a spur, and it is well when some warm hearted friend bids us say what we feel. Imagine what would have happened if the Lord had left us, and then see what has happened because he has been faithful to us. Are not all the materials of a song spread before us? Let us sing unto the Lord.

Verse 2. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us. When all men combined, and the whole race of men seemed set upon stamping out the house of Israel, what must have happened if the covenant Lord had not interposed? When they stirred themselves, and combined to make an assault upon our quietude and safety, what should we have done in their rising if the Lord had not also risen? No one who could or would help was near, but the bare arm of the Lord sufficed to preserve his own against all the leagued hosts of adversaries. There is no doubt as to our deliverer, we cannot ascribe our salvation to any second cause, for it would not have been equal to the emergency; nothing less than omnipotence and omniscience could have wrought our rescue. We set every other claimant on one side, and rejoice because the Lord was on our side.

Verse 3. Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us. They were so eager for our destruction that they would have made only one morsel of us, and have swallowed us up alive and whole in a single instant. The fury of the enemies of the church is raised to the highest pitch, nothing will content them but the total annihilation of God's chosen. Their wrath is like a fire which is kindled, and has taken such firm hold upon the fuel that there is no quenching it. Anger is never more fiery than when the people of God are its objects. Sparks become flames, and the furnace is heated seven times hotter when God's elect are to be thrust into the blaze. The cruel world would make a full end of the godly seed were it not that Jehovah bars the way. When the Lord appears, the cruel throats cannot swallow, and the consuming fires cannot destroy. Ah, if it were not Jehovah, if our help came from all the creatures united, there would be no way of escape for us: it is only because the Lord liveth that his people are alive.

Verse 4. Then the waters had overwhelmed us. Rising irresistibly, like the Nile, the flood of opposition would soon have rolled over our heads. Across the mighty waste of waters we should have cast an anxious eye, but looked in vain for escape. The motto of a royal house is, "Tossed about but not submerged": we should have needed an epitaph rather than an epigram, for we should have been driven by the torrent and sunken, never to rise again. The stream had gone over our soul. The rushing torrent would have drowned our soul, our hope, our life. The figures seem to be the steadily rising flood, and the hurriedly rushing stream. Who can stand against two such mighty powers? Everything is destroyed by these unconquerable forces, either by being submerged or swept away. When the world's enmity obtains a vent it both rises and rushes, it rages and rolls along, and spares nothing. In the great water floods of persecution and affliction who can help but Jehovah? But for him where would we be at this very hour? We have experienced seasons in which the combined forces of earth and hell must have made an end of us had not omnipotent grace interfered for our rescue.

Verse 5. Then the proud waters had gone over our soul. The figure represents the waves as proud, and so they seem to be when they overleap the bulwarks of a frail bark, and threaten every moment to sink her. The opposition of men is usually embittered by a haughty scorn which derides all our godly efforts as mere fanaticism or obstinate ignorance. In all the persecutions of the church a cruel contempt has largely mingled with the oppression, and this is overpowering to the soul. Had not God been with us our disdainful enemies would have made nothing of us, and dashed over us as a mountain torrent sweeps down the side of a hill, driving everything before it. Not only would our goods

and possessions have been carried off, but our soul, our courage, our hope would have been borne away by the impetuous assault, and buried beneath the insults of our antagonists. Let us pause here, and as we see what might have been, let us adore the guardian power which has kept us in the flood, and yet above the flood. In our hours of dire peril we must have perished had not our Preserver prevailed for our safe keeping.

Verse 6. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Leaving the metaphor of a boiling flood, he compares the adversaries of Israel to wild beasts who desired to make the godly their prey. Their teeth are prepared to tear, and they regard the godly as their victims. The Lord is heartily praised for not permitting his servants to be devoured when they were between the jaws of the raging ones. It implies that none can harm us till the Lord permits: we cannot be their prey unless the Lord gives us up to them, and that our loving Lord will never do. Hitherto he has refused permission to any foe to destroy us, blessed be his name. The more imminent the danger the more eminent the mercy which would not permit the soul to perish in it. God be blessed for ever for keeping us from the curse. Jehovah be praised for checking the fury of the foe, and saving his own. The verse reads like a merely negative blessing, but no boon can be more positively precious. He has given us to his Son Jesus, and he will never give us to our enemies.

Verse 7. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers. Our soul is like a bird for many reasons; but in this case the point of likeness is weakness, folly, and the ease with which it is enticed into the snare. Fowlers have many methods of taking small birds, and Satan has many methods of entrapping souls. Some are decoyed by evil companions, others are enticed by the love of dainties; hunger drives many into the trap, and fright impels numbers to fly into the net. Fowlers know their birds, and how to take them; but the birds see not the snare so as to avoid it, and they cannot break it so as to escape from it. Happy is the bird that hath a deliverer strong, and mighty, and ready in the moment of peril: happier still is the soul over which the Lord watches day and night to pluck its feet out of the net. What joy there is in this song, "our soul is escaped." How the emancipated one sings and soars, and soars and sings again. Blessed be God, many of us can make joyous music with these notes, "our soul is escaped." Escaped from our natural slavery; escaped from the guilt, the degradation, the habit, the dominion of sin; escaped from the vain deceits and fascinations of Satan; escaped from all that can destroy; we do indeed experience delight. What a wonder of grace it is! What a miraculous escape that we who are so easily misled should not have been permitted to die by the dread fowler's hand. The Lord has heard the prayer which he taught us to pray, and he hath delivered us from evil.

The snare is broken, and we are escaped. The song is worth repeating; it is well to dwell upon so great a mercy. The snare may be false doctrine, pride, lust, or a temptation to indulge in policy, or to despair, or to presume; what a high favour it is to have it broken before our eyes, so that it has no more power over us. We see not the mercy while we are in the snare; perhaps we are so foolish as to deplore the breaking of the Satanic charm; the gratitude comes when the escape is seen, and when we perceive what we have escaped from, and by what hand we have been set free. Then our Lord has a song from our mouths and hearts as we make heaven and earth ring with the notes, "the snare is broken, and we are escaped." We have been tempted, but not taken; cast down, but not destroyed; perplexed, but not in despair; in deaths oft, but still alive: blessed be Jehovah! This song might well have suited our whole nation at the time of the Spanish Armada, the church in the days of the Jesuits, and each believer among us in seasons of strong personal temptation.

Verse 8. Our help, our hope for the future, our ground of confidence in all trials present and to come. Is in the name of the Lord. Jehovah's revealed character is our foundation of confidence, his person is our sure fountain of strength. Who made heaven and earth. Our Creator is our preserver. He is immensely great in his creating work; he has not fashioned a few little things alone, but all heaven and the whole round earth are the works of his hands. When we worship the Creator let us increase our trust in our Comforter. Did he create all that we see, and can he not preserve us from evils which we cannot see Blessed be his name, he that has fashioned us will watch over us; yea, he has done so, and rendered us help in the moment of jeopardy. He is our help and our shield, even he alone. He will to the end break every snare. He made heaven for us, and he will keep us for heaven; he made the earth, and he will succour us ripen it until the hour cometh for our departure. Every work of his hand preaches to us the duty and the delight of reposing upon him only. All nature cries, "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength." "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." The following versification of the sense rather than the words of this psalm is presented to the reader with much diffidence:

Had not the Lord, my soul may cry,
Had not the Lord been on my bide;
Had he not brought deliverance nigh,
Then must my helpless soul have died.

Had not the Lord been on my side,
My soul had been by Satan slain;
And Tophet, opening large and wide,
Would not have gaped for me in vain.

Lo, floods of wrath, and floods of hell,
In fierce impetuous torrents roll;
Had not the Lord defended well,
The waters had o'erwhelm'd my soul.

As when the fowler's snare is broke,
The bird escapes on cheerful wings;
My soul, set free from Satan's yoke,
With joy bursts forth, and mounts, and sings.

She sings the Lord her Saviour's praise;
Sings forth his praise with joy and mirth;
To him her song in heaven she'll raise,
To him that made both heaven and earth.

Psalm 125

Verse 1. They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion. The emphasis lies upon the object of their trust, namely, Jehovah the Lord. What a privilege to be allowed to repose in God] How condescending is Jehovah to become the confidence of his people! To trust elsewhere is vanity; and the more implicit such misplaced trust becomes the more bitter will be the ensuing disappointment; but to trust in the living God is sanctified common sense which needs no excuse, its result shall be its

best vindication. There is no conceivable reason why we should not trust in Jehovah, and there is every possible argument for so doing; but, apart from all argument, the end will prove the wisdom of the confidence. The result of faith is not occasional and accidental; its blessing comes, not to some who trust, but to all who trust in the Lord. Trusters in Jehovah shall be as fixed, firm, and stable as the mount where David dwelt, and where the ark abode. To move mount Zion was impossible: the mere supposition was absurd. Which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. Zion was the image of eternal steadfastness,—this hill which, according to the Hebrew, "sits to eternity, "neither bowing down nor moving to and fro. Thus doth the trusting worshipper of Jehovah enjoy a restfulness which is the mirror of tranquillity; and this not without cause, for his hope is sure, and of his confidence he can never be ashamed. As the Lord sitteth King for ever, so do his people sit enthroned in perfect peace when their trust in him is firm. This is, and is to be our portion; we are, we have been, we shall be as steadfast as the hill of God. Zion cannot be removed, and does not remove; so the people of God can neither be moved passively nor actively, by force from without or fickleness from within. Faith in God is a settling and establishing virtue; he who by his strength setteth fast the mountains, by that same power stays the hearts of them that trust in him. This steadfastness will endure "for ever, "and we may be assured therefore that no believer shall perish either in life or in death, in time or in eternity. We trust in an eternal God, and our safety shall be eternal.

Verse 2. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever. The hill of Zion is the type of the believer's constancy, and the surrounding mountains are made emblems of the all surrounding presence of the Lord. The mountains around the holy city, though they do not make a circular wall, are, nevertheless, set like sentinels to guard her gates. God doth not enclose his people within ramparts and bulwarks, making their city to be a prison; but yet he so orders the arrangements of his providence that his saints are as safe as if they dwelt behind the strongest fortifications. What a double security the two verses set before us! First, we are established, and then entrenched; settled, and then sentinelled: made like a mount, and then protected as if by mountains. This is no matter of poetry, it is so in fact; and it is no matter of temporary privilege, but it shall be so for ever. Date when we please, "from henceforth" Jehovah encircles his people: look on as far as we please, the protection extends "even for ever." Note, it is not said that Jehovah's power or wisdom defends believers, but he himself is round about them: they have his personality for their protection, his Godhead for their guard. We are here taught that the Lord's people are those who trust him, for they are thus described in the first verses: the line of faith is the line of grace, those who trust in the Lord are chosen of the Lord. The two verses together prove the eternal safety of the saints: they must abide where God has placed them, and God must for ever protect them from all evil. It would be difficult to imagine greater safety than is here set forth.

Verse 3. For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous. The people of God are not to expect immunity from trial because the Lord surrounds them, for they may feel the power and persecution of the ungodly. Isaac, even in Abraham's family, was mocked by Ishmael. Assyria laid its sceptre even upon Zion itself. The graceless often bear rule and wield the rod; and when they do so they are pretty sure to make it fall heavily upon the Lord's believing people, so that the godly cry out by reason of their oppressors. Egypt's rod was exceeding heavy upon Israel, but the time came for it to be broken. God has set a limit to the woes of his chosen: the rod may light on their portion, but it shall not rest upon it. The righteous have a lot which none can take from them, for God has appointed them heirs of it by gracious entail: on that lot the rod of the wicked may fall, but over that lot it cannot have lasting sway. The saints abide for ever, but their troubles will not. Here is a good argument in prayer for all righteous ones who are in the hands of the wicked. Lest the righteous put forth their

hands unto iniquity. The tendency of oppression is to drive the best of men into some hasty deed for self deliverance or vengeance. If the rack be too long used the patient sufferer may at last give way; and therefore the Lord puts a limit to the tyranny of the wicked. He ordained that an Israelite who deserved punishment should not be beaten without measure: forty stripes save one was the appointed limit. We may therefore expect that he will set a bound to the suffering of the innocent, and will not allow them to be pushed to the uttermost extreme. Especially in point of time he will limit the domination of the persecutor, for length adds strength to oppression, and makes it intolerable; hence the Lord himself said of a certain tribulation, "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." It seems that even righteous men are in peril of sinning in evil days, and that it is not the will of the Lord that they should yield to the stress of the times in order to escape from suffering. The power and influence of wicked men when they are uppermost are used to lead or drive the righteous astray; but the godly must not accept this as an excuse, and yield to the evil pressure; far rather must they resist with all their might till it shall please God to stay the violence of the persecutor, and give his children rest. This the Lord here promises to do in due time.

Verse 4. Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts. Men to be good at all must be good at heart. Those who trust in the Lord are good; for faith is the root of righteousness, and the evidence of uprightness. Faith in God is a good and upright thing, and its influence makes the rest of the man good and upright. To such God will do good: the prayer of the text is but another form of promise, for that which the Lord prompts us to ask he virtually promises to give. Jehovah will take off evil from his people, and in the place thereof will enrich them with all manner of good. When the rod of the wicked is gone his own rod and staff shall comfort us. Meanwhile it is for us to pray that it may be well with all the upright who are now among men. God bless them, and do them good in every possible form. We wish well to those who do well. We are so plagued by the crooked that we would pour benedictions upon the upright.

Verse 5. As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity. Two kinds of men are always to be found, the upright and the men of crooked ways. Alas, there are some who pass from one class to another, not by a happy conversion, turning from the twisting lanes of deceit into the highway of truth, but by an unhappy declension leaving the main road of honesty and holiness for the bypaths of wickedness. Such apostates have been seen in all ages, and David knew enough of them; he could never forget Saul, and Ahithophel, and others. How sad that men who once walked in the right way should turn aside from it! Observe the course of the false hearted: first, they look out for crooked ways; next, they choose them and make them "their crooked ways"; and then they turn aside into them. They never intend to go back unto perdition, but only to make a curve and drop into the right road again. The straight way becomes a little difficult, and so they make a circumbendibus, which all along aims at coming out right, though it may a little deviate from precision. These people are neither upright in heart, nor good, nor trusters in Jehovah, and therefore the Lord will deal otherwise with them than with his own people: when execution day comes these hypocrites and time servers shall be led out to the same gallows as the openly wicked. All sin will one day be expelled the universe, even as criminals condemned to die are led out of the city; then shall secret traitors find themselves ejected with open rebels. Divine truth will unveil their hidden pursuits, and lead them forth, and to the surprise of many they shall be set in the same rank with those who avowedly wrought iniquity. But peace shall be upon Israel. In fact the execution of the deceivers shall tend to give the true Israel peace. When God is smiting the unfaithful not a blow shall fall upon the faithful. The chosen of the Lord shall not only be like Salem, but they shall have salem,

or peace. Like a prince, Israel has prevailed with God, and therefore he need not fear the face of man; his wrestlings are over, the blessing of peace has been pronounced upon him. He who has peace with God may enjoy peace concerning all things. Bind the first and last verses together: Israel trusts in the Lord Ps 125:1, and Israel has peace Ps 125:5

Psalm 126

Verse 1. When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Being in trouble, the gracious pilgrims remember for their comfort times of national woe which were succeeded by remarkable deliverances. Then sorrow was gone like a dream, and the joy which followed was so great that it seemed too good to be true, and they feared that it must be the vision of an idle brain. So sudden and so overwhelming was their joy that they felt like men out of themselves, ecstatic, or in a trance. The captivity had been great, and great was the deliverance; for the great God himself had wrought it: it seemed too good to be actually true: each man said to himself,

"Is this a dream? O if it be a dream,
Let me sleep on, and do not wake me yet."

It was not the freedom of an individual which the Lord in mercy had wrought, but of all Zion, of the whole nation; and this was reason enough for overflowing gladness. We need not instance the histories which illustrate this verse in connection with literal Israel; but it is well to remember how often it has been true to ourselves. Let us look to the prison houses from which we have been set free. Ah, me, what captives we have been! At our first conversion what a turning again of captivity we experienced. Never shall that hour be forgotten. Joy! Joy! Joy! Since then, from multiplied troubles, from depression of spirit, from miserable backsliding, from grievous doubt, we have been emancipated, and we are not able to describe the bliss which followed each emancipation.

"When God reveal'd his gracious name
And changed our mournful state,
Our rapture seem'd, a pleasing dream,
The grace appeared so great."

This verse will have a higher fulfilment in the day of the final overthrow of the powers of darkness when the Lord shall come forth for the salvation and glorification of his redeemed. Then in a fuller sense than even at Pentecost our old men shall see visions, and our young men shall dream dreams: yea, all things shall be so wonderful, so far beyond all expectation, that those who behold them shall ask themselves whether it be not all a dream. The past is ever a sure prognostic of the future; the thing which has been is the thing that shall be: we shall again and again find ourselves amazed at the wonderful goodness of the Lord. Let our hearts gratefully remember the former loving kindnesses of the Lord: we were sadly low, sorely distressed, and completely past hope, but when Jehovah appeared he did not merely lift us out of despondency, he raised us into wondering happiness. The Lord who alone turns our captivity does nothing by halves: those whom he saves from hell he brings to heaven. He turns exile into ecstasy, and banishment into bliss.

Verse 2. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. So full were they of joy that they could not contain themselves. They must express their joy and yet they could not find expression for it. Irrepressible mirth could do no other than laugh, for speech was far too dull a thing

for it. The mercy was so unexpected, so amazing, so singular that they could not do less than laugh; and they laughed much, so that their mouths were full of it, and that because their hearts were full too. When at last the tongue could move articulately, it could not be content simply to talk, but it must needs sing; and sing heartily too, for it was full of singing. Doubtless the former pain added to the zest of the pleasure; the captivity threw a brighter colour into the emancipation. The people remembered this joy flood for years after, and here is the record of it turned into a song. Note the when and the then. God's when is our then. At the moment when he turns our captivity, the heart turns from its sorrow; when he fills us with grace we are filled with gratitude. We were made to be as them that dream, but we both laughed and sang in our sleep. We are wide awake now, and though we can scarcely realize the blessing, yet we rejoice in it exceedingly. Then said they among the heathen, the Lord hath done great things for them. The heathen heard the songs of Israel, and the better sort among them soon guessed the cause of their joy. Jehovah was known to be their God, and to him the other nations ascribed the emancipation of his people, reckoning it to be no small thing which the Lord had thus done; for those who carried away the nations had never in any other instance restored a people to their ancient dwelling place. These foreigners were no dreamers; though they were only lookers on, and not partakers in the surprising mercy, they plainly saw what had been done, and rightly ascribed it to the great Giver of all good. It is a blessed thing when saints set sinners talking about the lovingkindness of the Lord: and it is equally blessed when the saints who are hidden away in the world hear of what the Lord has done for his church, and themselves resolve to come out from their captivity and unite with the Lord's people. Ah, dear reader, Jehovah has indeed done marvellous things for his chosen, and these "great things" shall be themes for eternal praise among all intelligent creatures.

Verse 3. The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. They did not deny the statement which reflected so much glory upon Jehovah: with exultation they admitted and repeated the statement of Jehovah's notable dealings with them. To themselves they appropriated the joyful assertion; they said "The Lord hath done great things for us", and they declared their gladness at the fact. It is a poor modesty which is ashamed to own its joys in the Lord. Call it rather a robbery of God. There is so little of happiness abroad that if we possess a full share of it we ought not to hide our light under a bushel, but let it shine on all that are in the house. Let us avow our joy, and the reason of it, stating the "whereof" as well as the fact. None are so happy as those who are newly turned and returned from captivity; none can more promptly and satisfactorily give a reason for the gladness that is in them, the Lord himself has blessed us, blessed us greatly, blessed us individually, blessed assuredly; and because of this we sing unto his name. I heard one say the other day in prayer "whereof we desire to be glad." Strange dilution and defilement of Scriptural language! Surely if God has done great things for us we are glad, and cannot be otherwise. No doubt such language is meant to be lowly, but in truth it is loathsome.

Verse 4. Turn again our captivity, O LORD. Remembering the former joy of a past rescue they cry to Jehovah for a repetition of it. When we pray for the turning of our captivity, it is wise to recall former instances thereof: nothing strengthens faith more effectually than the memory of a previous experience. "The Lord hath done" harmonizes well with the prayer, "Turn again." The text shows us how wise it is to resort anew to the Lord, who in former times has been so good to us. Where else should we go but to him who has done such great things for us? Who can turn again our captivity but he who turned it before? As the streams in the south. Even as the Lord sends floods down on the dry beds of southern torrents after long droughts, so can he fill our wasted and wearied spirits with floods of holy delight. This the Lord can do for any of us, and he can do it at once, for nothing is too hard for

the Lord. It is well for us thus to pray, and to bring our suit before him who is able to bless us exceeding abundantly. Do not let us forget the past, but in the presence of our present difficulty let us resort unto the Lord, and beseech him to do that for us which we cannot possibly do for ourselves,—that which no other power can perform on our behalf. Israel did return from the captivity in Babylon, and it was even as though a flood of people hastened to Zion. Suddenly and plenteously the people filled again the temple courts. In streams they shall also in the latter days return to their own land, and replenish it yet again. Like mighty torrents shall the nations flow unto the Lord in the day of his grace. May the Lord hasten it in his own time.

Verse 5. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Hence, present distress must not be viewed as if it would last for ever; it is not the end, by any means, but only a means to the end. Sorrow is our sowing, rejoicing shall be our reaping. If there were no sowing in tears there would be no reaping in joy. If we were never captives we could never lead our captivity captive. Our mouth had never been filled with holy laughter if it had not been first filled with the bitterness of grief. We must sow: we may have to sow in the wet weather of sorrow; but we shall reap, and reap in the bright summer season of joy. Let us keep to the work of this present sowing time, and find strength in the promise which is here so positively given us. Here is one of the Lord's shalls and wills; it is freely given both to workers, waiters, and weepers, and they may rest assured that it will not fail: "in due season they shall reap." This sentence may well pass current in the church as an inspired proverb. It is not every sowing which is thus insured against all danger, and guaranteed a harvest; but the promise specially belongs to sowing in tears. When a man's heart is so stirred that he weeps over the sins of others, he is elect to usefulness. Winners of souls are first weepers for souls. As there is no birth without travail, so is there no spiritual harvest without painful tillage. When our own hearts are broken with grief at man's transgression we shall break other men's hearts: tears of earnestness beget tears of repentance: "deep calleth unto deep."

Verse 6. He. The general assurance is applied to each one in particular. That which is spoken in the previous verse in the plural—"they", is here repeated in the singular—"he." He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. He leaves his couch to go forth into the frosty air and tread the heavy soil; and as he goes he weeps because of past failures, or because the ground is so sterile, or the weather so unseasonable, or his corn so scarce, and his enemies so plentiful and so eager to rob him of his reward. He drops a seed and a tear, a seed and a tear, and so goes on his way. In his basket he has seed which is precious to him, for he has little of it, and it is his hope for the next year. Each grain leaves his hand with anxious prayer that it may not be lost: he thinks little of himself, but much of his seed, and he eagerly asks, "Will it prosper? shall I receive a reward for my labour?" Yes, good husbandman, doubtless you will gather sheaves from your sowing. Because the Lord has written doubtless, take heed that you do not doubt. No reason for doubt can remain after the Lord has spoken. You will return to this field—not to sow, but to reap; not to weep, but to rejoice; and after awhile you will go home again with nimbler step than today, though with a heavier load, for you shall have sheaves to bear with you. Your handful shall be so greatly multiplied that many sheaves shall spring from it; and you shall have the pleasure of reaping them and bringing them home to the place from which you went out weeping. This is a figurative description of that which was literally described in the first three verses. It is the turning of the worker's captivity, when, instead of seed buried beneath black earth, he sees the waving crops inviting him to a golden harvest. It is somewhat singular to find this promise of fruitfulness in close contact with return from captivity; and yet it is so in our own experience, for when our own soul is revived the souls of others are blessed by our labours. If any of us, having been once

lonesome and lingering captives, have now returned home, and have become longing and labouring sowers, may the Lord, who has already delivered us, soon transform us into glad hearted reapers, and to him shall be praise for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 127

Verse 1. Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it. The word vain is the keynote here, and we hear it ring out clearly three times. Men desiring to build know that they must labour, and accordingly they put forth all their skill and strength; but let them remember that if Jehovah is not with them their designs will prove failures. So was it with the Babel builders; they said, "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower"; and the Lord returned their words into their own bosoms, saying, "Go to, let us go down and there confound their language." In vain they toiled, for the Lord's face was against them. When Solomon resolved to build a house for the Lord, matters were very different, for all things united under God to aid him in his great undertaking: even the heathen were at his beck and call that he might erect a temple for the Lord his God. In the same manner God blessed him in the erection of his own palace; for this verse evidently refers to all sorts of house building. Without God we are nothing. Great houses have been erected by ambitious men; but like the baseless fabric of a vision they have passed away, and scarce a stone remains to tell where once they stood. The wealthy builder of a Non such Palace, could he revisit the glimpses of the moon, would be perplexed to find a relic of his former pride: he laboured in vain, for the place of his travail knows not a trace of his handiwork. The like may be said of the builders of castles and abbeys: when the mode of life indicated by these piles ceased to be endurable by the Lord, the massive walls of ancient architects crumbled into ruins, and their toil melted like the froth of vanity. Not only do we now spend our strength for nought without Jehovah, but all who have ever laboured apart from him come under the same sentence. Trowel and hammer, saw and plane are instruments of vanity unless the Lord be the Master builder.

Except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. Around the wall the sentinels pace with constant step; but yet the city is betrayed unless the alert Watcher is with them. We are not safe because of watchmen if Jehovah refuses to watch over us. Even if the guards are wakeful, and do their duty, still the place may be surprised if God be not there. "I, the Lord, do keep it", is better than an army of sleepless guards. Note that the Psalmist does not bid the builder cease from labouring, nor suggest that watchmen should neglect their duty, nor that men should show their trust in God by doing nothing: nay, he supposes that they will do all that they can do, and then he forbids their fixing their trust in what they have done, and assures them that all creature effort will be in vain unless the Creator puts forth his power, to render second causes effectual. Holy Scripture endorses the order of Cromwell—"Trust in God, and keep your powder dry": only here the sense is varied, and we are told that the dried powder will not win the victory unless we trust in God. Happy is the man who hits the golden mean by so working as to believe in God, and so believing in God as to work without fear. In Scriptural phrase a dispensation or system is called a house. Moses was faithful as a servant over all his house; and as long as the Lord was with that house it stood and prospered; but when he left it, the builders of it became foolish and their labour was lost. They sought to maintain the walls of Judaism, but sought in vain: they watched around every ceremony and tradition, but their care was idle. Of every church, and every system of religious thought, this is equally true: unless the Lord is in it, and is honoured by it, the whole structure must sooner or later fall in hopeless ruin. Much can be done by man; he can both labour and watch; but without the Lord he has accomplished nothing, and his wakefulness has not warded off evil.

Verse 2. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows. Because the Lord is mainly to be rested in, all carking care is mere vanity and vexation of spirit. We are bound to be diligent, for this the Lord blesses; we ought not to be anxious, for that dishonours the Lord, and can never secure his favour. Some deny themselves needful rest; the morning sees them rise before they are rested, the evening sees them toiling long after the curfew has tolled the knell of parting day. They threaten to bring themselves into the sleep of death by neglect of the sleep which refreshes life. Nor is their sleeplessness the only index of their daily fret; they stint themselves in their meals, they eat the commonest food, and the smallest possible quantity of it, and what they do swallow is washed down with the salt tears of grief, for they fear that daily bread will fail them. Hard earned is their food, scantily rationed, and scarcely ever sweetened, but perpetually smeared with sorrow; and all because they have no faith in God, and find no joy except in hoarding up the gold which is their only trust. Not thus, not thus, would the Lord have his children live. He would have them, as princes of the blood, lead a happy and restful life. Let them take a fair measure of rest and a due portion of food, for it is for their health. Of course the true believer will never be lazy or extravagant; if he should be he will have to suffer for it; but he will not think it needful or right to be worried and miserly. Faith brings calm with it, and banishes the disturbers who both by day and by night murder peace.

"For so he giveth his beloved sleep." Through faith the Lord makes his chosen ones to rest in him in happy freedom from care. The text may mean that God gives blessings to his beloved in sleep, even as he gave Solomon the desire of his heart while he slept. The meaning is much the same: those whom the Lord loves are delivered from the fret and fume of life, and take a sweet repose upon the bosom of their Lord. He rests them; blesses them while resting; blesses them more in resting than others in their moiling and toiling. God is sure to give the best thing to his beloved, and we here see that he gives them sleep—that is a laying aside of care, a forgetfulness of need, a quiet leaving of matters with God: this kind of sleep is better than riches and honour. Note how Jesus slept amid the hurly burly of a storm at sea. He knew that he was in his Father's hands, and therefore he was so quiet in spirit that the billows rocked him to sleep: it would be much oftener the same with us if we were more like HIM. It is to be hoped that those who built Solomon's temple were allowed to work at it steadily and joyfully. Surely such a house was not built by unwilling labourers. One would hope that the workmen were not called upon to hurry up in the morning nor to protract their labours far into the night; but we would fain believe that they went on steadily, resting duly, and eating their bread with joy. So, at least, should the spiritual temple be erected; though, truth to tell, the workers upon its walls are all too apt to grow cumbered with much serving, all too ready to forget their Lord, and to dream that the building is to be done by themselves alone. How much happier might we be if we would but trust the Lord's house to the Lord of the house! What is far more important, how much better would our building and watching be done if we would but confide in the Lord who both builds and keeps his own church!

Verse 3. Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD. This points to another mode of building up a house, namely, by leaving descendants to keep our name and family alive upon the earth. Without this what is a man's purpose in accumulating wealth! To what purpose does he build a house if he has none in his household to hold the house after him? What boots it that he is the possessor of broad acres if he has no heir? Yet in this matter a man is powerless without the Lord. The great Napoleon, with all his sinful care on this point, could not create a dynasty. Hundreds of wealthy persons would give half their estates if they could hear the cry of a babe born of their own bodies. Children are a heritage which Jehovah himself must give, or a man will die childless, and thus his

house will be unbuilt. And the fruit of the womb is his reward, or a reward from God. He gives children, not as a penalty nor as a burden, but as a favour. They are a token for good if men know how to receive them, and educate them. They are "doubtful blessings" only because we are doubtful persons. Where society is rightly ordered children are regarded, not as an incumbrance, but as an inheritance; and they are received, not with regret, but as a reward. If we are over crowded in England, and so seem to be embarrassed with too large an increase, we must remember that the Lord does not order us to remain in this narrow island, but would have us fill those boundless regions which wait for the axe and the plough. Yet even here, with all the straits of limited incomes, our best possessions are our own dear offspring, for whom we bless God every day.

Verse 4. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Children born to men in their early days, by God's blessing become the comfort of their riper years. A man of war is glad of weapons which may fly where he cannot: good sons are their father's arrows speeding to hit the mark which their sires aim at. What wonders a good man can accomplish if he has affectionate children to second his desires, and lend themselves to his designs! To this end we must have our children in hand while they are yet children, or they are never likely to be so when they are grown up; and we must try to point them and straighten them, so as to make arrows of them in their youth, lest they should prove crooked and unserviceable in after life. Let the Lord favour us with loyal, obedient, affectionate offspring, and we shall find in them our best helpers. We shall see them shot forth into life to our comfort and delight, if we take care from the very beginning that they are directed to the right point.

Verse 5. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them. Those who have no children bewail the fact; those who have few children see them soon gone, and the house is silent, and their life has lost a charm; those who have many gracious children are upon the whole the happiest. Of course a large number of children means a large number of trials; but when these are met by faith in the Lord it also means a mass of love, and a multitude of joys. The writer of this comment gives it as his own observation, that he has seen the most frequent unhappiness in marriages which are unfruitful; that he has himself been most grateful for two of the best of sons; but as they have both grown up, and he has no child at home, he has without a tinge of murmuring, or even wishing that he were otherwise circumstanced, felt that it might have been a blessing to have had a more numerous family: he therefore heartily agrees with the Psalmist's verdict herein expressed. He has known a family in which there were some twelve daughters and three sons, and he never expects to witness upon earth greater domestic felicity than fell to the lot of their parents, who rejoiced in all their children, as the children also rejoiced in their parents and in one another. When sons and daughters are arrows, it is well to have a quiver full of them; but if they are only sticks, knotty and useless, the fewer of them the better. While those are blessed whose quiver is full, there is no reason to doubt that many are blessed who have no quiver at all; for a quiet life may not need such a warlike weapon. Moreover, a quiver may be small and yet full; and then the blessing is obtained. In any case we may be sure that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of children that he possesseth.

They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate. They can meet foes both in law and in fight. Nobody cares to meddle with a man who can gather a clan of brave sons about him. He speaks to purpose whose own sons make his words emphatic by the resolve to carry out their father's wishes. This is the blessing of Abraham, the old covenant benediction, "Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies"; and it is sure to all the beloved of the Lord in some sense or other. Doth not the Lord Jesus thus triumph in his seed? Looked at literally, this favour cometh of the

Lord: without his will there would be no children to build up the house, and without his grace there would be no good children to be their parent's strength. If this must be left with the Lord, let us leave every other thing in the same hands. He will undertake for us and prosper our trustful endeavours, and we shall enjoy a tranquil life, and prove ourselves to be our Lord's beloved by the calm and quiet of our spirit. We need not doubt that if God gives us children as a reward he will also send us the food and raiment which he knows they need. He who is the father of a host of spiritual children is unquestionably happy. He can answer all opponents by pointing to souls who have been saved by his means. Converts are emphatically the heritage of the Lord, and the reward of the preacher's soul travail. By these, under the power of the Holy Ghost, the city of the church is both built up and watched, and the Lord has the glory of it.

Psalm 128

Verse 1. Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord. The last Psalm ended with a blessing,—for the word there translated "happy" is the same as that which is here rendered "blessed": thus the two songs are joined by a catch word. There is also in them a close community of subject. The fear of God is the corner stone of all blessedness. We must reverence the ever blessed God before we can be blessed ourselves. Some think that this life is an evil, an infliction, a thing upon which rests a curse; but it is not so; the God fearing man has a present blessing resting upon him. It is not true that it would be to him "something better not to be." He is happy now, for he is the child of the happy God, the ever living Jehovah; and he is even here a joint heir with Jesus Christ, whose heritage is not misery, but joy. This is true of every one of the God fearing, of all conditions, in all ages: each one and every one is blessed. Their blessedness may not always be; seen by carnal reason, but it is always a fact, for God himself declares that it is so; and we know that those whom he blesses are blessed indeed. Let us cultivate that holy filial fear of Jehovah which is the essence of all true religion;—the fear of reverence, of dread to offend, of anxiety to please, and of entire submission and obedience. This fear of the Lord is the fit fountain of holy living: we look in vain for holiness apart from it: none but those who fear the Lord will ever walk in his ways.

That walketh in his ways. The religious life, which God declares to be blessed, must be practical as well as emotional. It is idle to talk of fearing the Lord if we act like those who have no care whether there be a God or no, God's ways will be our ways if we have a sincere reverence for him: if the heart is joined unto God, the feet will follow hard after him. A man's heart will be seen in his walk, and the blessing will come where heart and walk are both with God. Note that the first Psalm links the benediction with the walk in a negative way, "Blessed is the man that walketh not", etc.; but here we find it in connection with the positive form of our conversation. To enjoy the divine blessing we must be active, and walk; we must be methodical, and walk in certain ways; and we must be godly, and walk in the Lord's ways. God's ways are blessed ways; they were cast up by the Blessed One, they were trodden by him in whom we are blessed, they are frequented by the blessed, they are provided with means of blessing, they are paved with present blessings, and they lead to eternal blessedness: who would not desire to walk in them?

Verse 2. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands. The general doctrine in Ps 128:1 here receives a personal application: note the change to the second person: "thou shalt eat", etc. This is the portion of God's saints,—to work, and to find a reward in so doing. God is the God of labourers. We are not to leave our worldly callings because the Lord has called us by grace: we are not promised a blessing upon romantic idleness or unreasonable dreaming, but upon hard work and honest industry. Though we are in God's hands we are to be supported by our own hands. He will give us daily bread, but it

must be made our own by labour. All kinds of labour are here included; for if one toils by the sweat of his brow, and another does so by the sweat of his brain, there is no difference in the blessing; save that it is generally more healthy to work with the body than with the mind only. Without God it would be vain to labour; but when we are labourers together with God a promise is set before us. The promise is that labour shall be fruitful, and that he who performs it shall himself enjoy the recompense of it. It is a grievous ill for a man to slave his life away and receive no fair remuneration for his toil: as a rule, God's servants rise out of such bondage and claim their own, and receive it: at any rate, this verse may encourage them to do so. "The labourer is worthy of his hire." Under the Theocracy the chosen people could see this promise literally fulfilled; but when evil rulers oppressed them their earnings were withheld by churls, and their harvests were snatched away from them by marauders. Had they walked in the fear of the Lord they would never have known such great evils. Some men never enjoy their labour, for they give themselves no time for rest. Eagerness to get takes from them the ability to enjoy. Surely, if it is worth while to labour, it is worth while to eat of that labour. "Happy shalt thou be", or, Oh, thy happinesses. Heaped up happinesses in the plural belong to that man who fears the Lord. He is happy, and he shall be happy in a thousand ways. The context leads us to expect family happiness. Our God is our household God. The Romans had their Lares and Penates, but we have far more than they in the one only living and true God. And it shall be well with thee, or, good for thee. Yes, good is for the good; and it shall be well with those who do well.

"What cheering words are these!
Their sweetness who can tell?
In time, and to eternal days,
'Tis with the righteous well."

If we fear God we may dismiss all other fear. In walking in God's ways we shall be under his protection, provision, and approval; danger and destruction shall be far from us: all things shall work our good. In God's view it would not be a blessed thing for us to live without exertion, nor to eat the unearned bread of dependence: the happiest state on earth is one in which we have something to do, strength to do it with, and a fair return for what we have done. This, with the divine blessing, is all that we ought to desire, and it is sufficient for any man who fears the Lord and abhors covetousness. Having food and raiment, let us be there with content.

Verse 3. Thy wife. To reach the full of earthly felicity a man must not be alone. A helpmeet was needed in Paradise, and assuredly she is not less necessary out of it. He that findeth a wife findeth a good thing. It is not every man that feareth the Lord who has a wife; but if he has, she shall share in his blessedness and increase it. Shall be as a fruitful vine. To complete domestic bliss children are sent. They come as the lawful fruit of marriage, even as clusters appear upon the vine. For the grapes the vine was planted; for children was the wife provided. It is generally well with any creature when it fulfils its purpose, and it is so far well with married people when the great design of their union is brought about. They must not look upon fruitfulness as a burden, but as a blessing. Good wives are also fruitful in kindness, thrift, helpfulness, and affection: if they bear no children, they are by no means barren if they yield us the wine of consolation and the clusters of comfort. Truly blessed is the man whose wife is fruitful in those good works which are suitable to her near and dear position. By the sides of thine house. She keeps to the house: she is a home bird. Some imagine that she is like a vine which is nailed up to the house wall; but they have no such custom in Palestine, neither is it pleasant to think of a wife as growing up by a wall, and as bound to the very bricks and mortar of her husband's dwelling. No, she is a fruitful vine, and a faithful housekeeper; if you wish to find her, she is

within the house: she is to be found both inside and outside the home, but her chief usefulness is in the inner side of the dwelling, which she adorns. Eastern houses usually have an open square in the centre, and the various rooms are ranged around the sides,—there shall the wife be found, busy in one room or another, as the hour of the day demands. She keeps at home, and so keeps the home. It is her husband's house, and she is her husband's; as the text puts it—"thy wife", and "thy house"; but by her loving care her husband is made so happy that he is glad to own her as an equal proprietor with himself, for he is hers, and the house is hers too.

Thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Hundreds of times have I seen the young olive plants springing up around the parent stem, and it has always made me think of this verse. The Psalmist never intended to suggest the idea of olive plants round a table, but of young people springing up around their parents, even as olive plants surround the fine, well rooted tree. The figure is very striking, and would be sure to present itself to the mind of every observer in the olive country. How beautiful to see the gnarled olive, still bearing abundant fruit, surrounded with a little band of sturdy successors, any one of which would be able to take its place should the central olive be blown down, or removed in any other way. The notion of a table in a bower may suit a cockney in a tea garden, but would never occur to an oriental poet; it is not the olive plants, but the children, that are round about the table. Moreover, note that it is not olive branches, but plants,—a very different thing. Our children gather around our table to be fed, and this involves expenses: how much better is this than to see them pining upon beds of sickness, unable to come for their meals! What a blessing to have sufficient to put upon the table! Let us for this benefit praise the bounty of the Lord. The wife is busy all over the house, but the youngsters are busiest at meal times; and if the blessing of the Lord rest upon the family, no sight can be more delightful. Here we have the vine and the olive blended—joy from the fruitful wife, and solid comfort from the growing family; these are the choicest products earth can yield: our families are gardens of the Lord. It may help us to value the privileges of our home if we consider where we should be if they were withdrawn. What if the dear partner of our life were removed from the sides of our house to the recesses of the sepulchre? What is the trouble of children compared with the sorrow of their loss? Think, dear father, what would be your grief if you had to cry with Job, "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when my children were about me."

Verse 4. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. Mark this. Put a Nota Bene against it, for it is worthy of observation. It is not to be inferred that all blessed men are married, and are fathers; but that this is the way in which the Lord favours godly people who are placed in domestic life. He makes their relationships happy and profitable. In this fashion does Jehovah bless God fearing households, for he is the God of all the families of Israel. We have seen this blessing scores of times, and we have never ceased to admire in domestic peace the sweetest of human felicity. Family blessedness comes from the Lord, and is a part of his plan for the preservation of a godly race, and for the maintenance of his worship in the land. To the Lord alone we must look for it. The possession of riches will not ensure it; the choice of a healthy and beautiful bride will not ensure it; the birth of numerous comely children will not ensure it: there must be the blessing of God, the influence of piety, the result of holy living.

Verse 5. The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion. A spiritual blessing shall be received by the gracious man, and this shall crown all his temporal mercies. He is one among the many who make up God's inheritance; his tent is part and parcel of the encampment around the tabernacle; and therefore, when the benediction is pronounced at the centre it shall radiate to him in his place. The blessing of the

house of God shall be upon his house. The priestly benediction which is recorded in Nu 6:24-26, runs thus: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." This is it which shall come upon the head of the God fearing man. Zion was the centre of blessing, and to it the people looked when they sought for mercy: from the altar of sacrifice, from the mercy seat, from the Shekinah light, yea, from Jehovah himself, the blessing shall come to each one of his holy people. And thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. He shall have a patriot's joy as well as a patriarch's peace. God shall give him to see his country prosper, and its metropolitan city flourish. When tent mercies are followed by temple mercies, and these are attended by national mercies,—the man, the worshipper, the patriot is trebly favoured of the Lord. This favour is to be permanent throughout the good man's life, and that life is to be a long one, for he is to see his sons' sons. Many a time does true religion bring such blessings to men; and when these good things are denied them, they have a greater reward as a compensation.

Verse 6. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children. This is a great pleasure. Men live their young lives over again in their grandchildren. Does not Solomon say that "children's children are the crown of old men?" So they are. The good man is glad that a pious stock is likely to be continued; he rejoices in the belief that other homes as happy as his own will be built up wherein altars to the glory of God shall smoke with the morning and evening sacrifice. This promise implies long life, and that life rendered happy by its being continued in our offspring. It is one token of the immortality of man that he derives joy from extending his life in the lives of his descendants. And peace upon Israel. With this sweet word Psalm 126 was closed. It is a favourite formula. Let God's own heritage be at peace, and we are all glad of it. We count it our own prosperity for the chosen of the Lord to find rest and quiet. Jacob was sorely tossed about; his life knew little of peace; but yet the Lord delivered him out of all his tribulations, and brought him to a place of rest in Goshen for a while, and afterwards to sleep with his fathers in the cave of Machpelah. His glorious Seed was grievously afflicted and at last crucified; but he has risen to eternal peace, and in his peace we dwell. Israel's spiritual descendants still share his chequered conditions, but there remains a rest for them also, and they shall have peace from the God of peace. Israel was a praying petitioner in the days of his wrestling, but he became a prevailing prince, and therein his soul found peace. Yes, all around it is true—"Peace upon Israel! Peace upon Israel."

Psalm 129

Verse 1. Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say. In her present hour of trial she may remember her former afflictions and speak of them for her comfort, drawing from them the assurance that he who has been with her for so long will not desert her in the end. The song begins abruptly. The poet has been musing, and the fire burns, therefore speaks he with his tongue; he cannot help it, he feels that he must speak, and therefore "may now say" what he has to say. The trials of the church have been repeated again and again, times beyond all count: the same afflictions are fulfilled in us as in our fathers. Jacob of old found his days full of trouble; each Israelite is often harassed; and Israel as a whole has proceeded from tribulation to tribulation. "Many a time", Israel says, because she could not say how many times. She speaks of her assailants as "they", because it would be impossible to write or even to know all their names. They had straitened, harassed, and fought against her from the earliest days of her history—from her youth; and they had continued their assaults right on without ceasing. Persecution is the heirloom of the church, and the ensign of the

elect. Israel among the nations was peculiar, and this peculiarity brought against her many restless foes, who could never be easy unless they were warring against the people of God. When in Canaan, at the first, the chosen household was often severely tried; in Egypt it was heavily oppressed; in the wilderness it was fiercely assailed; and in the promised land it was often surrounded by deadly enemies. It was something for the afflicted nation that it survived to say, "Many a time have they afflicted me." The affliction began early—"from my youth"; and it continued late. The earliest years of Israel and of the Church of God are spent in trial. Babes in grace are cradled in opposition. No sooner is the man child born than the dragon is after it. "It is", however, "good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth", and he shall see it to be so when in after days he tells the tale.

Verse 2. Many a time have they afflicted, me from my youth. Israel repeats her statement of her repeated afflictions. The fact was uppermost in her thoughts, and she could not help soliloquizing upon it again and again. These repetitions are after the manner of poetry: thus she makes a sonnet out of her sorrows, music out of her miseries. "Yet they have not prevailed against me." We seem to hear the beat of timbrels and the clash of cymbals here: the foe is derided; his malice has failed. That "yet" breaks in like the blast of trumpets, or the roll of kettledrums. "Cast down, but not destroyed", is the shout of a victor. Israel has wrestled, and has overcome in the struggle. Who wonders? If Israel overcame the angel of the covenant, what man or devil shall vanquish him? The fight was oft renewed and long protracted: the champion severely felt the conflict, and was at times fearful of the issue; but at length he takes breath, and cries, "Yet they have not prevailed against me." "Many a time;" yes, "many a time", the enemy has had his opportunity and his vantage, but not so much as once has he gained the victory.

Verse 3. The plowers plowed up on my back. The scourgers tore the flesh as ploughmen furrow a field. The people were maltreated like a criminal given over to the lictors with their cruel whips; the back of the nation was scored and furrowed by oppression. It is a grand piece of imagery condensed into few words. A writer says the metaphor is muddled, but he is mistaken: there are several figures, like wheel within wheel, but there is no confusion. The afflicted nation was, as it were, lashed by her adversaries so cruelly that each blow left a long red mark, or perhaps a bleeding wound, upon her back and shoulders, comparable to a furrow which tears up the ground from one end of the field to the other. Many a heart has been in like case; smitten and sore wounded by them that use the scourge of the tongue; so smitten that their whole character has been cut up and scored by calumny. The true church has in every age had fellowship with her Lord under his cruel flagellations: his sufferings were a prophecy of what she would be called hereafter to endure, and the foreshadowing has been fulfilled. Zion has in this sense been ploughed as a field. They made long their furrows:—as if delighting in their cruel labour. They missed not an inch, but went from end to end of the field, meaning to make thorough work of their congenial engagement. Those who laid on the scourge did it with a thoroughness which showed how hearty was their hate. Assuredly the enemies of Christ's church never spare pains to inflict the utmost injury: they never do the work of the devil deceitfully, or hold back their hand from blood. They smite so as to plough into the man; they plough the quivering flesh as if it were clods of clay; they plough deep and long with countless furrows; until they leave no portion of the church unfurrowed or unassailed. Ah me! Well did Latimer say that there was no busier ploughman in all the world than the devil: whoever makes short furrows, he does not. Whoever balks and shirks, he is thorough in all that he does. Whoever stops work at sundown, he never does. He and his children plough like practised ploughmen; but they prefer to carry on their pernicious work upon the saints behind their backs, for they are as cowardly as they are cruel.

Verse 4. The LORD is righteous. Whatever men may be, Jehovah remains just, and will therefore keep covenant with his people and deal out justice to their oppressors. Here is the hinge of the condition: this makes the turning point of Israel's distress. The Lord bears with the long furrows of the wicked, but he will surely make them cease from their ploughing before he has done with them. He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked. The rope which binds the oxen to the plough is cut; the cord which bound the victim is broken; the bond which held the enemies in cruel unity has snapped. As in Ps 124:7 we read, "the snare is broken; we are escaped", so here the breaking of the enemies' instrument of oppression is Israel's release. Sooner or later a righteous God will interpose, and when he does so, his action will be most effectual; he does not unfasten, but cuts asunder, the harness which the ungodly use in their labour of hate. Never has God used a nation to chastise his Israel without destroying that nation when the chastisement has come to a close: he hates those who hurt his people even though he permits their hate to triumph for a while for his own purpose. If any man would have his harness cut, let him begin to plough one of the Lord's fields with the plough of persecution. The shortest way to ruin is to meddle with a saint: the divine warning is, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye."

Verse 5. Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion. And so say we right heartily: and in this case vox populi is vex Dei, for so it shall be. If this be an imprecation, let it stand; for our heart says "Amen" to it. It is but justice that those who hate, harass, and hurt the good should be brought to naught. Those who confound right and wrong ought to be confounded, and those who turn back from God ought to be turned back. Loyal subjects wish ill to those who plot against their king.

"Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks,"

is but a proper wish, and contains within it no trace of personal ill will. We desire their welfare as men, their downfall as traitors. Let their conspiracies be confounded, their policies be turned back. How can we wish prosperity to those who would destroy that which is dearest to our hearts? This present age is so flippanant that if a man loves the Saviour he is styled a fanatic, and if he hates the powers of evil he is named a bigot. As for ourselves, despite all objectors, we join heartily in this commination; and would revive in our heart the old practice of Ebal and Gerizim, where those were blessed who bless God, and those were cursed who make themselves a curse to the righteous. We have heard men desire a thousand times that the gallows might be the reward of the assassins who murdered two inoffensive men in Dublin, and we could never censure the wish; for justice ought to be rendered to the evil as well as to the good. Besides, the church of God is so useful, so beautiful, so innocent of harm, so fraught with good, that those who do her wrong are wronging all mankind and deserve to be treated as the enemies of the human race. Study a chapter from the "Book of Martyrs", and see if you do not feel inclined to read an imprecatory Psalm over Bishop Bonner and Bloody Mary. It may be that some wretched nineteenth century sentimentalist will blame you: if so, read another over him.

Verse 6. Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up. Grass on the housetop is soon up and soon down. It sprouts in the heat, finds enough nutriment to send up a green blade, and then it dies away before it reaches maturity, because it has neither earth nor moisture sufficient for its proper development. Before it grows up it dies; it needs not to be plucked up, for it hastens to decay of itself. Such is and such ought to be the lot of the enemies of God's people. Transient is their prosperity; speedy is their destruction. The height of their position, as it hastens their progress, so it hurries their doom. Had they been lower in station they had perhaps

been longer in being. "Soon ripe, soon rotten", is an old proverb. Soon plotting and soon rotting, is a version of the old adage which will suit in this place. We have seen grass on the rustic thatch of our own country cottages which will serve for an illustration almost as well as that which comes up so readily on the flat roofs and domes of eastern habitations. The idea is—they make speed to success, and equal speed to failure. Persecutors are all sound and fury, flash and flame; but they speedily vanish—more speedily than is common to men. Grass in the field withers, but not so speedily as grass on the housetops. Without a mower the tufts of verdure perish from the roofs, and so do opposers pass away by other deaths than fall to the common lot of men; they are gone, and none is the worse. If they are missed at all, their absence is never regretted. Grass on the housetop is a nonentity in the world: the house is not impoverished when the last blade is dried up: and, even so, the opposers of Christ pass away, and none lament them. One of the fathers said of the apostate emperor Julian, "That little cloud will soon be gone"; and so it was. Every sceptical system of philosophy has much the same history; and the like may be said of each heresy. Poor, rootless things, they are and are not: they come and go, even though no one rises against them. Evil carries the seeds of dissolution within itself. So let it be.

Verse 7. Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom. When with his sickle the husbandman would cut down the tufts, he found nothing to lay hold upon: the grass promised fairly enough, but there was no fulfilment, there was nothing to cut or to carry, nothing for the hand to grasp, nothing for the lap to gather. Easterners carry their corn in their bosoms, but in this case there was nothing to bear home. Thus do the wicked come to nothing. By God's just appointment they prove a disappointment. Their fire ends in smoke; their verdure turns to vanity; their flourishing is but a form of withering. No one profits by them, least of all are they profitable to themselves. Their aim is bad, their work is worse, their end is worst of all.

Verse 8. Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the LORD be upon you: we bless you in the name of the LORD. In harvest times men bless each other in the name of the Lord; but there is nothing in the course and conduct of the ungodly man to suggest the giving or receiving of a benediction. Upon a survey of the sinner's life from beginning to end, we feel more inclined to weep than to rejoice, and we feel bound rather to wish him failure than success. We dare not use pious expressions as mere compliments, and hence we dare not wish God speed to evil men lest we be partakers of their evil deeds. When persecutors are worrying the saints, we cannot say, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you." When they slander the godly and oppose the doctrine of the cross, we dare not bless them in the name of the Lord. It would be infamous to compromise the name of the righteous Jehovah by pronouncing his blessing upon unrighteous deeds. See how godly men are roughly ploughed by their adversaries, and yet a harvest comes of it which endures and produces blessing; while the ungodly, though they flourish for a while and enjoy a complete immunity, dwelling, as they think, quite above the reach of harm, are found in a short time to have gone their way and to have left no trace behind. Lord, number me with thy saints. Let me share their grief if I may also partake of their glory. Thus would I make this Psalm my own, and magnify thy name, because thine afflicted ones are not destroyed, and thy persecuted ones are not forsaken.

Psalm 130

Verse 1. Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. This is the Psalmist's statement and plea: he had never ceased to pray even when brought into the lowest state. The depths usually silence all they engulf, but they could not close the mouth of this servant of the Lord; on the contrary,

it was in the abyss itself that he cried unto Jehovah. Beneath the floods prayer lived and struggled; yea, above the roar of the billows rose the cry of faith. It little matters where we are if we can pray; but prayer is never more real and acceptable than when it rises out of the worst places. Deep places beget deep devotion. Depths of earnestness are stirred by depths of tribulation. Diamonds sparkle most amid the darkness. Prayer de profundis gives to God gloria in excelsis. The more distressed we are, the more excellent is the faith which trusts bravely in the Lord, and therefore appeals to him, and to him alone. Good men may be in the depths of temporal and spiritual trouble; but good men in such cases look only to their God, and they stir themselves up to be more instant and earnest in prayer than at other times. The depth of their distress moves the depths of their being; and from the bottom of their hearts an exceeding great and bitter cry rises unto the one living and true God. David had often been in the deep, and as often had he pleaded with Jehovah, his God, in whose hand are all deep places. He prayed, and remembered that he had prayed, and pleaded that he had prayed; hoping ere long to receive an answer. It would be dreadful to look back on trouble and feel forced to own that we did not cry unto the Lord in it; but it is most comforting to know that whatever we did not do, or could not do, yet we did pray, even in our worst times. He that prays in the depth will not sink out of his depth. He that cries out of the depths shall soon sing in the heights.

Verse 2. Lord, hear my voice. It is all we ask; but nothing less will content us. If the Lord will but hear us we will leave it to his superior wisdom to decide whether he will answer us or no. It is better for our prayer to be heard than answered. If the Lord were to make an absolute promise to answer all our requests it might be rather a curse than a blessing, for it would be casting the responsibility of our lives upon ourselves, and we should be placed in a very anxious position: but now the Lord hears our desires, and that is enough; we only wish him to grant them if his infinite wisdom sees that it would be for our good and for his glory. Note that the Psalmist spoke audibly in prayer: this is not at all needful, but it is exceedingly helpful; for the use of the voice assists the thoughts. Still, there is a voice in silent supplication, a voice in our weeping, a voice in that sorrow which cannot find a tongue: that voice the Lord will hear if its cry is meant for his ear. Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication. The Psalmist's cry is a beggar's petition; he begs the great King and Lord to lend an ear to it. He has supplicated many times, but always with one voice, or for one purpose; and he begs to be noticed in the one matter which he has pressed with so much importunity. He would have the King hearken, consider, remember, and weigh his request. He is confused, and his prayer may therefore be broken, and difficult to understand; he begs therefore that his Lord will give the more earnest and compassionate heed to the voice of his many and painful pleadings. When we have already prayed over our troubles it is well to pray over our prayers. If we can find no more words, let us entreat the Lord to hear those petitions which we have already presented. If we have faithfully obeyed the precept by praying without ceasing, we may be confident that the Lord will faithfully fulfil the promise by helping us without fail. Though the Psalmist was under a painful sense of sin, and so was in the depth, his faith pleaded in the teeth of conscious unworthiness; for well he knew that the Lord's keeping his promise depends upon his own character and not upon that of his erring creatures.

Verse 3. If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand. If JAH, the all seeing, should in strict justice call every man to account for every want of conformity to righteousness, where would any one of us be? Truly, he does record all our transgressions; but as yet he does not act upon the record, but lays it aside till another day. If men were to be judged upon no system but that of works, who among us could answer for himself at the Lord's bar, and hope to stand clear and accepted? This verse shows that the Psalmist was Under a sense of sin, and felt it imperative upon him not only to cry as a suppliant but to confess as a sinner. Here he owns that he cannot stand

before the great King in his own righteousness, and he is so struck with a sense of the holiness of God, and the rectitude of the law that he is convinced that no man of mortal race can answer for himself before a Judge so perfect, concerning a law so divine. Well does he cry, "O Lord, who shall stand?" None can do so: there is none that doeth good; no, not one. Iniquities are matters which are not according to equity: what a multitude we have of these! Jehovah, who sees all, and is also our Adonai, or Lord, will assuredly bring us into judgment concerning those thoughts, and words, and works which are not in exact conformity to his law. Were it not for the Lord Jesus, could we hope to stand? Dare we meet him in the dread day of account on the footing of law and equity? What a mercy it is that we need not do so, for the next verse sets forth another way of acceptance to which we flee.

Verse 4. But there is forgiveness with thee. Blessed but. Free, full, sovereign pardon is in the hand of the great King: it is his prerogative to forgive, and he delights to exercise it. Because his nature is mercy, and because he has provided a sacrifice for sin, therefore forgiveness is with him for all that come to him confessing their sins. The power of pardon is permanently resident with God: he has forgiveness ready to his hand at this instant. "That thou mayest be feared." This is the fruitful root of piety. None fear the Lord like those who have experienced his forgiving love. Gratitude for pardon produces far more fear and reverence of God than all the dread which is inspired by punishment. If the Lord were to execute justice upon all, there would be none left to fear him; if all were under apprehension of his deserved wrath, despair would harden them against fearing him: it is grace which leads the way to a holy regard of God, and a fear of grieving him.

Verse 5. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait. Expecting him to come to me in love, I quietly wait for his appearing; I wait upon him in service, and for him in faith. For God I wait and for him only: if he will manifest himself I shall have nothing more to wait for; but until he shall appear for my help I must wait on, hoping even in the depths. This waiting of mine is no mere formal act, my very soul is in it,—“my soul doth wait.” I wait and I wait—mark the repetition! “My soul waits”, and then again, “My soul waits”; to make sure work of the waiting. It is well to deal with the Lord intensely. Such repetitions are the reverse of vain repetitions. If the Lord Jehovah makes us wait, let us do so with our whole hearts; for blessed are all they that wait for him. He is worth waiting for. The waiting itself is beneficial to us: it tries faith, exercises patience, trains submission, and endears the blessing when it comes. The Lord's people have always been a waiting people: they waited for the First Advent, and now they wait for the Second. They waited for a sense of pardon, and now they wait for perfect sanctification. They waited in the depths, and they are not now wearied with waiting in a happier condition. They have cried and they do wait; probably their past prayer sustains their present patience. And in his word do I hope. This is the source, strength, and sweetness of waiting. Those who do not hope cannot wait; but if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. God's word is a true word, but at times it tarries; if ours is true faith it will wait the Lord's time. A word from the Lord is as bread to the soul of the believer; and, refreshed thereby, it holds out through the night of sorrow expecting the dawn of deliverance and delight. Waiting, we study the word, believe the word, hope in the word, and live on the word; and all because it is “his word, ”—the word of him who never speaks in vain. Jehovah's word is a firm ground for a waiting soul to rest upon.

Verse 6. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning. Men who guard a city, and women who wait by the sick, long for daylight. Worshippers tarrying for the morning sacrifice, the kindling of the incense and the lighting of the lamps, mingle fervent prayers with their holy vigils, and pine for the hour when the lamb shall smoke upon the altar. David, however, waited more than these, waited longer, waited more longingly, waited more expectantly. He was not afraid of

the great Adonai before whom none can stand in their own righteousness, for he had put on the righteousness of faith, and therefore longed for gracious audience with the Holy One. God was no more dreaded by him than light is dreaded by those engaged in a lawful calling. He pined and yearned after his God. I say, more than they that watch for the morning. The figure was not strong enough, though one can hardly think of anything more vigorous: he felt that his own eagerness was unique and unrivalled. Oh to be thus hungry and thirsty after God! Our version spoils the abruptness of the language; the original runs thus—"My soul for the Lord more than those watching for the morning—watching for the morning." This is a fine poetical repeat. We long for the favour of the Lord more than weary sentinels long for the morning light which will release them from their tedious watch. Indeed this is true. He that has once rejoiced in communion with God is sore tried by the hidings of his face, and grows faint with strong desire for the Lord's appearing,

"When wilt thou come unto me, Lord?
Until thou dost appear,
I count each moment for a day,
Each minute for a year."

Verse 7. Let Israel hope in the LORD. Or, "Hope thou, Israel, in Jehovah." Jehovah is Israel's God; therefore, let Israel hope in him. What one Israelite does he wishes all Israel to do. That man has a just right to exhort others who is himself setting the example. Israel of old waited upon Jehovah and wrestled all the night long, and at last he went his way succoured by the Hope of Israel: the like shall happen to all his seed. God has great things in store for his people, they ought to have large expectations. For with the LORD there is mercy. This is in his very nature, and by the light of nature it may be seen. But we have also the light of grace, and therefore we see still more of his mercy. With us there is sin; but hope is ours, because "with the Lord there is mercy." Our comfort lies not in that which is with us, but in that which is with our God. Let us look out of self and its poverty to Jehovah and his riches of mercy. And with him is plenteous redemption. He can and will redeem all his people out of their many and great troubles; nay, their redemption is already wrought out and laid up with him, so that he can at any time give his waiting ones the full benefit thereof. The attribute of mercy, and the fact of redemption, are two most sufficient reasons for hoping in Jehovah; and the fact that there is no mercy or deliverance elsewhere should effectually wean the soul from all idolatry. Are not these deep things of God a grand comfort for those who are crying out of the depths? Is it not better to be in the deeps with David, hoping in God's mercy, than up on the mountain tops, boasting in our own fancied righteousness?

Verse 8. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. Our iniquities are our worst dangers: if saved from these, we are saved altogether; but there is no salvation from them except by redemption. What a blessing that this is here promised in terms which remove it out of the region of question: the Lord shall certainly redeem his believing people from all their sins. Well may the redemption be plenteous since it concerns all Israel and all iniquities! Truly, our Psalm has ascended to a great height in this verse: this is no cry out of the depths, but a chorale in the heights. Redemption is the top of covenant blessings. When it shall be experienced by all Israel, the latter day glory shall have come, and the Lord's people shall say, "Now, Lord, what wait we for?" Is not this a clear prophecy of the coming of our Lord Jesus the first time? and may we not now regard it as the promise of his second and more glorious coming for the redemption of the body? For this our soul doth wait: yea, our heart and our flesh cry out for it with joyful expectation.

Psalm 131

Verse 1. LORD, my heart is not haughty. The Psalm deals with the Lord, and is a solitary colloquy with him, not a discourse before men. We have a sufficient audience when we speak with the Lord, and we may say to him many things which were not proper for the ears of men. The holy man makes his appeal to Jehovah, who alone knows the heart: a man should be slow to do this upon any matter, for the Lord is not to be trifled with; and when anyone ventures on such an appeal he should be sure of his case. He begins with his heart, for that is the centre of our nature, and if pride be there it defiles everything; just as mire in the spring causes mud in all the streams. It is a grand thing for a man to know his own heart so as to be able to speak before the Lord about it. It is beyond all things deceitful and desperately wicked, who can know it? Who can know it unless taught by the Spirit of God? It is a still greater thing if, upon searching himself thoroughly, a man can solemnly protest unto the Omniscient One that his heart is not haughty: that is to say, neither proud in his opinion of himself, contemptuous to others, nor self righteous before the Lord; neither boastful of the past, proud of the present, nor ambitious for the future. Nor mine eyes lofty. What the heart desires the eyes look for. Where the desires run the glances usually follow. This holy man felt that he did not seek after elevated places where he might gratify his self esteem, neither did he look down upon others as being his inferiors. A proud look the Lord hates; and in this all men are agreed with him; yea, even the proud themselves hate haughtiness in the gestures of others. Lofty eyes are so generally hateful that haughty men have been known to avoid the manners natural to the proud in order to escape the ill will of their fellows. The pride which apes humility always takes care to cast its eyes downward, since every man's consciousness tells him that contemptuous glances are the sure ensigns of a boastful spirit. In Psalm 121 David lifted up his eyes to the hills; but here he declares that they were not lifted up in any other sense. When the heart is right, and the eyes are right, the whole man is on the road to a healthy and happy condition. Let us take care that we do not use the language of this Psalm unless, indeed, it be true as to ourselves; for there is no worse pride than that which claims humility when it does not possess it.

Neither do I exercise myself in great matters. As a private man he did not usurp the power of the king or devise plots against him: he minded his own business, and left others to mind theirs. As a thoughtful man he did not pry into things unrevealed; he was not speculative, self conceited or opinionated. As a secular person he did not thrust himself into the priesthood as Saul had done before him, and as Uzziah did after him. It is well so to exercise ourselves unto godliness that we know our true sphere, and diligently keep to it. Many through wishing to be great have failed to be good: they were not content to adorn the lowly stations which the Lord appointed them, and so they have rushed at grandeur and power, and found destruction where they looked for honour. Or in things too high for me. High things may suit others who are of greater stature, and yet they may be quite unfit for us. A man does well to know his own size. Ascertaining his own capacity, he will be foolish if he aims at that which is beyond his reach, straining himself, and thus injuring himself. Such is the vanity of many men that if a work be within their range they despise it, and think it beneath them: the only service which they are willing to undertake is that to which they have never been called, and for which they are by no means qualified. What a haughty heart must he have who will not serve God at all unless he may be trusted with five talents at the least! His looks are indeed lofty who disdains to be a light among his poor friends and neighbours here below, but demands to be created a star of the first magnitude to shine among the upper ranks, and to be admired by gazing crowds. It is just on God's part that those who wish to be everything should end in being nothing. It is a righteous retribution from God when every matter turns out to be too great for the man who would only handle

great matters, and everything proves to be too high for the man who exercised himself in things too high for him. Lord, make us lowly, keep us lowly, fix us for ever in lowliness. Help us to be in such a case that the confession of this verse may come from our lips as a truthful utterance which we dare make before the Judge of all the earth.

Verse 3. Let Israel hope in the LORD from henceforth and for ever. See how lovingly a man who is weaned from self thinks of others! David thinks of his people, and loses himself in his care for Israel. How he prizes the grace of hope! He has given up the things which are seen, and therefore he values the treasures which are not seen except by the eyes of hope. There is room for the largest hope when self is gone, ground for eternal hope when transient things no longer hold the mastery of our spirits. This verse is the lesson of experience: a man of God who had been taught to renounce the world and live upon the Lord alone, here exhorts all his friends and companions to do the same. He found it a blessed thing to live by hope, and therefore he would have all his kinsmen do the same. Let all the nation hope, let all their hope be in Jehovah, let them at once begin hoping "from henceforth", and let them continue hoping "for ever." Weaning takes the child out of a temporary condition into a state in which he will continue for the rest of his life: to rise above the world is to enter upon a heavenly existence which can never end. When we cease to hanker for the world we begin hoping in the Lord. O Lord, as a parent weans a child, so do thou wean me, and then shall I fix all my hope on thee alone.

Psalm 132

Verse 1. LORD, remember David, and all his afflictions. With David the covenant was made, and therefore his name is pleaded on behalf of his descendants, and the people who would be blessed by his dynasty. Jehovah, who changes not, will never forget one of his servants, or fail to keep his covenant; yet for this thing he is to be entreated. That which we are assured the Lord will do must, nevertheless, be made a matter of prayer. The request is that the Lord would remember, and this is a word full of meaning. We know that the Lord remembered Noah, and assuaged the flood; he remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of Sodom; he remembered Rachel, and Hannah, and gave them children; he remembered his mercy to the house of Israel, and delivered his people. That is a choice song wherein we sing, "He remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever"; and this is a notable prayer, "Lord remember me." The plea is urged with God that he would bless the family of David for the sake of their progenitor; how much stronger is our master argument in prayer that God would deal well with us for Jesus' sake! David had no personal merit; the plea is based upon the covenant graciously made With him: but Jesus has deserts which are his own, and of boundless merits these we may urge without hesitation. When the Lord was angry with the reigning prince, the people cried, "Lord remember David"; and when they needed any special blessing, again they sang, "Lord, remember David." This was good pleading, but it was not so good as ours, which runs on this wise, "Lord, remember Jesus, and all his afflictions."

The afflictions of David here meant were those which came upon him as a godly man his endeavours to maintain the worship of Jehovah, and to provide for its decent and suitable celebration. There was always an ungodly party in the nation, and these persons were never slow to slander, hinder, and molest the servant of the Lord. Whatever were David's faults, he kept true to the one, only, living, and true God; and for this he was a speckled bird among monarchs. Since he zealously delighted in the worship of Jehovah, his God, he was despised and ridiculed by those who could not understand his enthusiasm. God will never forget what his people suffer for his sake. No doubt innumerable

blessings descend upon families and nations through the godly lives and patient sufferings of the saints. We cannot be saved by the merits of others, but beyond all question we are benefited by their virtues. Paul saith, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name." Under the New Testament dispensation, as well as under the Old, there is a full reward for the righteous. That reward frequently comes upon their descendants rather than upon themselves: they sow, and their successors reap. We may at this day pray—Lord, remember the martyrs and confessors of our race, who suffered for thy name's sake, and bless our people and nation with gospel grace for our fathers' sakes.

Verse 2. How he swore unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob. Moved by intense devotion, David expressed his resolve in the form of a solemn vow, which was sealed with an oath. The fewer of such vows the better under a dispensation whose great Representative has said, "swear not at all." Perhaps even in this case it had been wiser to have left the pious resolve in the hands of God in the form of a prayer; for the vow was not actually fulfilled as intended, since the Lord forbade David to build him a temple. We had better not swear to do anything before we know the Lord's mind about it, and then we shall not need to swear. The instance of David's vows shows that vows are allowable, but it does not prove that they are desirable. Probably David went too far in his words, and it is well that the Lord did not hold him to the letter of his bond, but accepted the will for the deed, and the meaning of his promise instead of the literal sense of it. David imitated Jacob, that great maker of vows at Bethel, and upon him rested the blessing pronounced on Jacob by Isaac, "God Almighty bless thee" (Ge 28:3), which was remembered by the patriarch on his death bed, when he spoke of "the mighty God of Jacob." God is mighty to hear us, and to help us in performing our vow. We should be full of awe at the idea of making any promise to the Mighty God: to dare to trifle with him would be grievous indeed. It is observable that affliction led both David and Jacob into covenant dealings with the Lord: many vows are made in anguish of soul. We may also remark that, if the votive obligations of David are to be remembered of the Lord, much more are the suretyship engagements of the Lord Jesus before the mind of the great Lord, to whom our soul turns in the hour of our distress. Note, upon this verse, that Jehovah was the God of Jacob, the same God evermore; that he had this for his attribute, that he is mighty—mighty to succour his Jacobs who put their trust in him, though their afflictions be many. He is, moreover, specially the Mighty One of his people; he is the God of Jacob in a sense in which he is not the God of unbelievers. So here we have three points concerning our God:—name, Jehovah; attribute, mighty; special relationship, "mighty God of Jacob." He it is who is asked to remember David and his trials, and there is a plea for that blessing in each one of the three points.

Verse 3. Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed. Our translators give the meaning, though not the literal form, of David's vow, which ran thus, "If I go"—"If I go up", etc. This was an elliptical form of imprecation, implying more than it expressed, and having therefore about it a mystery which made it all the more solemn. David would not take his ease in his house, nor his rest in his bed, till he had determined upon a place for the worship of Jehovah. The ark had been neglected, the Tabernacle had fallen into disrespect; he would find the ark, and build for it a suitable house; he felt that he could not take pleasure in his own palace till this was done. David meant well, but he spake more than he could carry out. His language was hyperbolical, and the Lord knew what he meant: zeal does not always measure its terms, for it is not thoughtful of the criticisms of men, but is carried away with love to the Lord, who reads the hearts of his people. David would not think himself housed till he had built a house for the Lord, nor would he reckon himself rested till he had said, "Arise, O Lord, into thy rest." Alas, we have many around us who will never carry their care

for the Lord's worship too far! No fear of their being indiscreet? They are housed and bedded, and as for the Lord, his people may meet in a barn, or never meet at all, it will be all the same to them. Observe that Jacob in his vow spoke of the stone being God's house, and David's vow also deals with a house for God.

Verse 4. I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids. He could not enjoy sleep till he had done his best to provide a place for the ark. It is a strong expression, and it is not to be coolly discussed by us. Remember that the man was all on fire, and he was writing poetry also, and therefore his language is not that which we should employ in cold blood. Everybody can see what he means, and how intensely he means it. Oh, that many more were seized with sleeplessness because the house of the Lord lies waste? They can slumber fast enough, and not even disturb themselves with a dream, though the cause of God should be brought to the lowest ebb by their covetousness. What is to become of those who have no care about divine things, and never give a thought to the claims of their God?

Verse 5. Until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. He resolved to find a place where Jehovah would allow his worship to be celebrated, a house where God would fix the symbol of his presence, and commune with his people. At that time, in all David's land, there was no proper place for that ark whereon the Lord had placed the mercy seat, where prayer could be offered, and where the manifested glory shone forth. All things had fallen into decay, and the outward forms of public worship were too much disregarded; hence the King resolves to be first and foremost in establishing a better order of things. Yet one cannot help remembering that the holy resolve of David gave to a place and a house much more importance than the Lord himself ever attached to such matters. This is indicated in Nathan's message from the Lord to the king—"Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?" Stephen in his inspired speech puts the matter plainly: "Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." It is a striking fact that true religion never flourished more in Israel than before the temple was built, and that from the day of the erection of that magnificent house the spirit of godliness declined. Good men may have on their hearts matters which seem to them of chief importance, and it may be acceptable with God that they should seek to carry them out; and yet in his infinite wisdom he may judge it best to prevent their executing their designs. God does not measure his people's actions by their wisdom, or want of wisdom, but by the sincere desire for his glory which has led up to them. David's resolution, though he was not allowed to fulfil it, brought a blessing upon him: the Lord promised to build the house of David, because he had desired to build the house of the Lord. Moreover, the King was allowed to prepare the treasure for the erection of the glorious edifice which was built by his son and successor. The Lord shows the acceptance of what we desire to do by permitting us to do something else which his infinite mind judges to be fitter for us, and more honourable to himself.

Verse 6. Meanwhile, where was the habitation of God among men? He was wont to shine forth from between the cherubim, but where was the ark? It was like a hidden thing, a stranger in its own land. Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah. Rumours came that it was somewhere in the land of Ephraim, in a temporary lodging; rather an object of dread than of delight. Is it not wonderful that so renowned a

symbol of the presence of the Lord should be lingering in neglect—a neglect so great that it was remarkable that we should have heard of its whereabouts at all? When a man begins to think upon God and his service it is comforting that the gospel is heard of. Considering the opposition which it has encountered it is marvellous that it should be heard of, and heard of in a place remote from the central city; but yet we are sorrowful that it is only in connection with some poor despised place that we do hear of it. What is Ephratah Who at this time knows where it was? How could the ark have remained there so long?

David instituted a search for the ark. It had to be hunted for high and low; and at last at Kirjathjearim, the forest city, he came upon it. How often do souls find Christ and his salvation in out of the way places! What matters where we meet with him so long as we do behold him, and find life in him? That is a blessed Eureka which is embedded in our text—"we found it." The matter began with hearing, led on to a search, and concluded in a joyful find. "We found it in the fields of the wood." Alas that there should be no room for the Lord in the palaces of kings, so that he must needs take to the woods. If Christ be in a wood he will yet be found of those who seek for him. He is as near in the rustic home, embowered among the trees, as in the open streets of the city; yea, he will answer prayer offered from the heart of the black forest where the lone traveller seems out of all hope of hearing. The text presents us with an instance of one whose heart was set upon finding the place where God would meet with him; this made him quick of hearing, and so the cheering news soon reached him. The tidings renewed his ardour, and led him to stick at no difficulties in his search; and so it came to pass that, where he could hardly have expected it, he lighted upon the treasure which he so much prized.

Verse 7. We will go into his tabernacles. Having found the place where he dwells we will hasten thereto. He has many dwellings in one in the various courts of his house, and each of these shall receive the reverence due: in each the priest shall offer for us the appointed service; and our hearts shall go where our bodies may not enter. David is not alone, he is represented as having sought for the ark with others, for so the word "we" implies; and now they are glad to attend him in his pilgrimage to the chosen shrine, saying, "We found it, we will go." Because these are the Lord's courts we will resort to them. We will worship at his footstool. The best ordered earthly house can be no more than the footstool of so great a King. His ark can only reveal the glories of his feet, according to his promise that he will make the place of his feet glorious: yet thither will we hasten with joy, in glad companionship, and there will we adorn him. Where Jehovah is, there shall he be worshipped. It is well not only to go to the Lord's house, but to worship there: we do but profane his tabernacles if we enter them for any other purpose. Before leaving this verse let us note the ascent of this Psalm of degrees—"We heard...we found...we will go...we will worship."

Verse 11. Here we come to a grand covenant pleading of the kind which is always prevalent with the Lord. The LORD hath sworn in truth unto, David. We cannot urge anything with God which is equal to his own word and oath. Jehovah swears that our faith may have strong confidence in it: he cannot forswear himself. He swears in truth, for he means every word that he utters; men may be perjured, but none will be so profane as to imagine this of the God of truth. By Nathan this covenant of Jehovah was conveyed to David, and there was no delusion in it. He will not turn from it. Jehovah is not a changeable being. He never turns from his purpose, much less from his promise solemnly ratified by oath. He turneth never. He is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. What a rock they stand upon who have an immutable oath of God for their foundation! We know that this covenant was really made with Christ, the spiritual seed of David, for Peter quotes it at Pentecost,

saying, "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ." Christ therefore sits on a sure throne for ever and ever, seeing that he has kept the covenant, and through him the blessing comes upon Zion, whose poor are blessed in him. Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. Jesus sprang from the race of David, as the evangelists are careful to record; he was "of the house and lineage of David": at this day he is the King of the Jews, and the Lord has also given him the heathen for his inheritance. He must reign, and of his kingdom there shall be no end. God himself has set him on the throne, and no rebellion of men or devils can shake his dominion. The honour of Jehovah is concerned in his reign, and therefore it is never in danger; for the Lord will not suffer his oath to be dishonoured.

Verse 12. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them. There is a condition to the covenant so far as it concerned kings of David's line before the coming of the true Seed; but he has fulfilled that condition, and made the covenant indefeasible henceforth and for ever as to himself and the spiritual seed in him. Considered as it related to temporal things it was no small blessing for David's dynasty to be secured the throne upon good behaviour. These monarchs held their crowns from God upon the terms of loyalty to their superior Sovereign, the Lord who had elevated them to their high position. They were to be faithful to the covenant by obedience to the divine law, and by belief of divine truth, they were to accept Jehovah as their Lord and their Teacher, regarding him in both relations as in covenant with them. What a condescension on God's part to be their teacher! How gladly ought they to render intelligent obedience! What a proper, righteous, and needful stipulation for God to make that they should be true to him when the reward was the promise, Their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore. If they will sit at his feet God will make them sit on a throne; if they will keep the covenant they shall keep the crown from generation to generation.

The kingdom of Judah might have stood to this day had its kings been faithful to the Lord. No internal revolt or external attack could have overthrown the royal house of David: it fell by its own sin, and by nothing else. The Lord was continually provoked, but he was amazingly long suffering, for long after seceding Israel had gone into captivity, Judah still remained. Miracles of mercy were shown to her. Divine patience exceeded all limits, for the Lord's regard for David was exceeding great. The princes of David's house seemed set on ruining themselves, and nothing could save them; justice waited long, but it was bound at last to unsheathe the sword and strike. Still, if in the letter man's breach of promise caused the covenant to fail, yet in spirit and essence the Lord has been true to it, for Jesus reigns, and holds the throne for ever. David's seed is still royal, for he was the progenitor according to the flesh of him who is King of kings and Lord of lords. This verse shows us the need of family piety. Parents must see to it that their children know the fear of the Lord, and they must beg the Lord himself to teach them his truth. We have no hereditary right to the divine favour: the Lord keeps up his friendship to families from generation to generation, for he is loath to leave the descendants of his servants, and never does so except under grievous and long continued provocation. As believers, we are all in a measure under some such covenant as that of David: certain of us can look backward for four generations of saintly ancestors, and we are now glad to look forward and to see our children, and our children's children, walking in the truth. Yet we know that grace does not run in the blood, and we are filled with holy fear lest in any of our seed there should be an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

Verse 13. For the LORD hath chosen Zion. It was no more than any other Canaanite town till God chose it, David captured it, Solomon built it, and the Lord dwelt in it. So was the church a mere Jebusite stronghold till grace chose it, conquered it, rebuilt it, and dwelt in it. Jehovah has chosen his people, and hence they are his people. He has chosen the church, and hence it is what it is. Thus in the covenant David and Zion, Christ and his people, go together. David is for Zion, and Zion for David: the interests of Christ and his people are mutual. He hath desired it for his habitation. David's question is answered. The Lord has spoken: the site of the temple is fixed: the place of the divine manifestation is determined. Indwelling follows upon election, and arises out of it: Zion is chosen, chosen for a habitation of God. The desire of God to dwell among the people whom he has chosen for himself is very gracious and yet very natural: his love will not rest apart from those upon whom he has placed it. God desires to abide with those whom he has loved with an everlasting love; and we do not wonder that it should be so, for we also desire the company of our beloved ones. It is a double marvel, that the Lord should choose and desire such poor creatures as we are: the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in believers is a wonder of grace parallel to the incarnation of the Son of God. God in the church is the wonder of heaven, the miracle of eternity, the glory of infinite love.

Verse 14. This is my rest for ever. Oh, glorious words! It is God himself who here speaks. Think of rest for God! A Sabbath for the Eternal and a place of abiding for the Infinite. He calls Zion my rest. Here his love remains and displays itself with delight. "He shall rest in his love." And this forever. He will not seek another place of repose, nor grow weary of his saints. In Christ the heart of Deity is filled with content, and for his sake he is satisfied with his people, and will be so world without end. These august words declare a distinctive choice—this and no other; a certain choice—this which is well known to me; a present choice—this which is here at this moment. God has made his election of old, he has not changed it, and he never will repent of it: his church was his rest and is his rest still. As he will not turn from his oath, so he will never turn from his choice. Oh, that we may enter into his rest, may be part and parcel of his church, and yield by our loving faith a delight to the mind of him who taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy. Here will I dwell; for I have desired it. Again are we filled with wonder that he who fills all things should dwell in Zion—should dwell in his church. God does not unwillingly visit his chosen; he desires to dwell with them; he desires them. He is already in Zion, for he says here, as one upon the spot. Not only will he occasionally come to his church, but he will dwell in it, as his fixed abode. He cared not for the magnificence of Solomon's temple, but he determined that at the mercy seat he would be found by suppliants, and that thence he would shine forth in brightness of grace among the favoured nation. All this, however, was but a type of the spiritual house, of which Jesus is foundation and cornerstone, upon which all the living stones are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Oh, the sweetness of the thought that God desires to dwell in his people and rest among them! Surely if it be his desire he will cause it to be so. If the desire of the righteous shall be granted much more shall the desire of the righteous God be accomplished. This is the joy of our souls, for surely we shall rest in God, and certainly our desire is to dwell in him. This also is the end of our fears for the church of God; for if the Lord dwell in her, she shall not be moved; if the Lord desire her, the devil cannot destroy her.

Verse 15. I will abundantly bless her provision. It must be so. How can we be without a blessing when the Lord is among us? We live upon his word, we are clothed by his charity, we are armed by his power: all sorts of provision are in him, and how can they be otherwise than blessed? The provision is to be abundantly blessed; then it will be abundant and blessed. Daily provision, royal pie vision, satisfying provision, overflowing joyful provision the church shall receive; and the divine benediction

shall cause us to receive it with faith, to feed upon it by experience, to grow upon it by sanctification, to be strengthened by it to labour, cheered by it to patience, and built up by it to perfection. I will satisfy her poor with bread. The citizens of Zion are poor in themselves, poor in spirit, and often poor in pocket, but their hearts and souls shall dwell in such abundance that they shall neither need more nor desire more. Satisfaction is the crown of experience. Where God rests his people shall be satisfied. They are to be satisfied with what the Lord himself calls "bread", and we may be sure that he knows what is really bread for souls. He will not give us a stone. The Lord's poor shall "have food convenient for them": that which will suit their palate, remove their hunger, fill their desire, build up their frame, and perfect their growth. The breadth of earth is "the bread that perisheth", but the bread of God endureth to life eternal. In the church where God rests his people shall not starve; the Lord would never rest if they did. He did not take rest for six days till he had prepared the world for the first man to live in; he would not stay his hand till all things were ready; therefore, we may be sure if the Lord rests it is because "it is finished", and the Lord hath prepared of his goodness for the poor. Where God finds his desire his people shall find theirs; if he is satisfied, they shall be. Taking the two clauses together, we see that nothing but an abundant blessing in the church will satisfy the Lord's poor people: they are naked and miserable till that comes. All the provision that Solomon himself could make would not have satisfied the saints of his day: they looked higher, and longed for the Lord's own boundless blessing, and hungered for the bread which came down from heaven. Blessed be the Lord, they had in this verse two of the "I wills" of God to rest upon, and nothing could be a better support to their faith.

Verse 16. More is promised than was prayed for. See how the ninth verse asks for the priests to be clad in righteousness, and the answer is, I will also clothe her priests with salvation. God is wont to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or even think. Righteousness is but one feature of blessing, salvation is the whole of it. What cloth of gold is this! What more than regal array! Garments of salvation! we know who has woven them, who has dyed them, and who has given them to his people. These are the best robes for priests and preachers, for princes and people; there is none like them; give them me. Not every priest shall be thus clothed, but only her priests, those who truly belong to Zion by faith which is in Christ Jesus who hath made them priests unto God. These, are clothed by the Lord himself, and none can clothe as he does. It even the grass of the field is so clothed by the Creator as to out do Solomon in all his glory, how must his own children be clad? Truly he shall be admired in his saints; the liveries of his servants shall be the wonder of heaven. And her saints shall shout aloud for joy. Again we have a golden answer to a silver prayer. The Psalmist would have the "saints shout for joy." "That they shall do", saith the Lord, "and aloud too"; they shall be exceedingly full of delight; their songs and shouts shall be so hearty that they shall sound as the noise of many waters, and as great thunders. These joyful ones are not, however, the mimic saints of superstition, but her saints, saints of the Most High, "sanctified in Christ Jesus." These shall be so abundantly blessed and so satisfied, and so apparelled that they can do no otherwise than shout to show their astonishment, their triumph, their gratitude, their exultation, their enthusiasm, their joy in the Lord. Zion has no dumb saints. The sight of God at rest among his chosen is enough to make the most silent shout. If the morning stars sang together when the earth and heavens were made, much more will all the sons of God shout for joy when the new heavens and the new earth are finished, and the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride for her husband. Meanwhile, even now the dwelling of the Lord among us is a perennial fountain of sparkling delight to all holy minds. This shouting for joy is guaranteed to Zion's holy ones: God says they shall shout aloud, and depend upon it they will: who shall stop them of this glorying? The Lord hath said by his Spirit, "let them shout aloud": who is he that shall make them hold their peace? The Bridegroom is

with them, and shall the children of the bride chamber fast?: Nay, verily, we rejoice, yea and will rejoice.

Verse 17. There will I make the horn of David to bud. In Zion David's dynasty shall develop power and glory. In our notes from other authors we have included a description of the growth of the horns of stags, which is the natural fact from which we conceive the expression in the text to be borrowed. As the stag is made noble and strong by the development of his horns, so the house of David shall advance from strength to strength. This was to be by the work of the Lord—"there will I make", and therefore it would be sure and solid growth. When God makes us to bud none can cause us to fade. When David's descendants left the Lord and the worship of his house, they declined in all respects, for it was only through the Lord, and in connection with his worship that their horn would bud. I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. David's name was to be illustrious, and brilliant as a lamp; it was to continue shining like a lamp in the sanctuary; it was thus to be a comfort to the people, and an enlightenment to the nations. God would not suffer the light of David to go out by the extinction of his race: his holy ordinances had decreed that the house of his servant should remain in the midst of Israel. What a lamp is our Lord Jesus! A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel. As the anointed—the true Christ, he shall be the light of heaven itself. Oh for grace to receive our illumination and our consolation from Jesus Christ alone.

Verse 18. His enemies will I clothe with shame. They shall be utterly defeated, they shall loathe their evil design, they shall be despised for having hated the Ever Blessed One. Their shame they will be unable to hide, it shall cover them: God will array them in it for ever, and it shall be their convict dress to all eternity. But upon himself shall his crown flourish. Green shall be his laurels of victory. He shall win and wear the crown of honour, and his inherited diadem shall increase in splendour. Is it not so to this hour with Jesus? His kingdom cannot fail, his imperial glories cannot fade. It is himself that we delight to honour; it is to himself that the honour comes, and upon himself that it flourishes. If others snatch at his crown their traitorous aims are defeated; but he in his own person reigns with ever growing splendour.

"Crown him, crown him,
Crowns become the victor's brow."

Psalm 133

Verse 1. Behold. It is a wonder seldom seen, therefore behold it! It may be seen, for it is the characteristic of real saints,—therefore fail not to inspect it! It is well worthy of admiration; pause and gaze upon it! It will charm you into imitation, therefore note it well! God looks on with approval, therefore consider it with attention. How good and holy pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! No one can tell the exceeding excellence of such a condition; and so the Psalmist uses the word "how" twice;—Behold how good! and how pleasant! He does not attempt to measure either the good or the pleasure, but invites us to behold for ourselves. The combination of the two adjectives "good" and "pleasant", is more remarkable than the conjunction of two stars of the first magnitude: for a thing to be "good" is good, but for it also to be pleasant is better. All men love pleasant things, and yet it frequently happens that the pleasure is evil; but here the condition is as good as it is pleasant, as pleasant as it is good, for the same "how" is set before each qualifying word.

For brethren according to the flesh to dwell together is not always wise; for experience teaches that

they are better a little apart, and it is shameful for them to dwell together in disunion. They had much better part in peace like Abraham and Lot, than dwell together in envy like Joseph's brothers. When brethren can and do dwell together in unity, then is their communion worthy to be gazed upon and sung of in holy Psalmody. Such sights ought often to be seen among those who are near of kin, for they are brethren, and therefore should be united in heart and aim; they dwell together, and it is for their mutual comfort that there should be no strife; and yet how many families are rent by fierce feuds, and exhibit a spectacle which is neither good nor pleasant!

As to brethren in spirit, they ought to dwell together in church fellowship, and in that fellowship one essential matter is unity. We can dispense with uniformity if we possess unity: oneness of life, truth, and way; oneness in Christ Jesus; oneness of object and spirit—these we must have, or our assemblies will be synagogues of contention rather than churches of Christ. The closer the unity the better; for the more of the good and the pleasant there will be. Since we are imperfect beings, somewhat of the evil and the unpleasant is sure to intrude; but this will readily be neutralized and easily ejected by the true love of the saints, if it really exists. Christian unity is good in itself, good for ourselves, good for the brethren, good for our converts, good for the outside world; and for certain it is pleasant; for a loving heart must have pleasure and give pleasure in associating with others of like nature. A church united for years in earnest service of the Lord is a well of goodness and joy to all those who dwell round about it.

Verse 2. It is like the precious ointment upon the head. In order that we may the better behold brotherly unity David gives us a resemblance, so that as in a glass we may perceive its blessedness. It has a sweet perfume about it, comparable to that precious ointment with which the first High Priest was anointed at his ordination. It is a holy thing, and so again is like the oil of consecration which was to be used only in the Lord's service. What a sacred thing must brotherly love be when it can be likened to an oil which must never be poured on any man but on the Lord's high priest alone! It is a diffusive thing: being poured on his head the fragrant oil flowed down upon Aaron's head, and thence dropped upon his garments till the utmost hem was anointed therewith; and even so doth brotherly love extend its benign power and bless all who are beneath its influence. Hearty concord brings a benediction upon all concerned; its goodness and pleasure are shared in by the lowliest members of the household; even the servants are the better and the happier because of the lovely unity among the members of the family. It has a special use about it; for as by the anointing oil Aaron was set apart for the special service of Jehovah, even so those who dwell in love are the better fitted to glorify God in his church. The Lord is not likely to use for his glory those who are devoid of love; they lack the anointing needful to make them priests unto the Lord. That ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard. This is a chief point of comparison, that as the oil did not remain confined to the place where it first fell, but flowed down the High Priest's hair and bedewed his beard, even so brotherly love descending from the head distils and descends, anointing as it runs, and perfuming all it lights upon. That went down to the skirts of his garments. Once set in motion it would not cease from flowing. It might seem as if it were better not to smear his garments with oil, but the sacred unguent could not be restrained, it flowed over his holy robes; even thus does brotherly love not only flow over the hearts upon which it was first poured out, and descend to those who are an inferior part of the mystical body of Christ, but it runs where it is not sought for, asking neither leave nor license to make its way. Christian affection knows no limits of parish, nation, sect, or age. Is the man a believer in Christ? Then he is in the one body, and I must yield him an abiding love. Is he one of the poorest, one of the least spiritual, one of the least lovable? Then he is as the skirts of the garment, and my heart's love must fall even upon him. Brotherly love comes from the head, but falls to the feet. Its way is

downward. It "ran down", and it "went down": love for the brethren condescends to men of low estate, it is not puffed up, but is lowly and meek. This is no small part of its excellence: oil would not anoint if it did not flow down, neither would brotherly love diffuse its blessing if it did not descend.

Verse 3. As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion. From the loftier mountains the moisture appears to be wafted to the lesser hills: the dews of Hermon fall on Zion. The Alpine Lebanon ministers to the minor elevation of the city of David; and so does brotherly love descend from the higher to the lower, refreshing and enlivening in its course. Holy concord is as dew, mysteriously blessed, full of life and growth for all plants of grace. It brings with it so much benediction that it is as no common dew, but As that of Hermon which is specially copious, and far reaching. The proper rendering is, "As the dew of Hermon that descended upon the mountains of Zion", and this tallies with the figure which has been already used; and sets forth by a second simile the sweet descending diffusiveness of brotherly unity. For there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. That is, in Zion, or better still, in the place where brotherly love abounds. Where love reigns God reigns. Where love wishes blessing, there God commands the blessing. God has but to command, and it is done. He is so pleased to see his dear children happy in one another that he fails not to make them happy in himself. He gives especially his best blessing of eternal life, for love is life; dwelling together in love we have begun the enjoyments of eternity, and these shall not be taken from us. Let us love for evermore, and we shall live for evermore. This makes Christian brotherhood so good and pleasant; it has Jehovah's blessing resting upon it, and it cannot be otherwise than sacred like "the precious ointment", and heavenly like "the dew of Hermon." O for more of this rare virtue! Not the love which comes and goes, but that which dwells; not that spirit which separates and secludes, but that which dwells together; not that mind which is all for debate and difference, but that which dwells together in unity. Never shall we know the full power of the anointing till we are of one heart and of one spirit; never will the sacred dew of the Spirit descend in all its fulness till we are perfectly joined together in the same mind; never will the covenanted and commanded blessing come forth from the Lord our God till once again we shall have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Lord, lead us into this most precious spiritual unity, for thy Son's sake. Amen.

Psalm 134

Verse 1. Behold. By this call the pilgrims bespeak the attention of the night watch. They shout to them—Behold! The retiring pilgrims stir up the holy brotherhood of those who are appointed to keep the watch of the house of the Lord. Let them look around them upon the holy place, and everywhere "behold" reasons for sacred praise. Let them look above them at night and magnify him that made heaven and earth, and lighted the one with stars and the other with his love. Let them see to it that their hallelujahs never come to an end. Their departing brethren arouse them with the shrill cry of "Behold!" Behold!—see, take care, be on the watch, diligently mind your work, and incessantly adore and bless Jehovah's name. Bless ye the LORD. Think well of Jehovah, and speak well of him. Adore him with reverence, draw near to him with love, delight in him with exultation. Be not content with praise, such as all his works render to him; but, as his saints, see that ye "bless" him. He blesses you; therefore, be zealous to bless him. The word "bless" is the characteristic word of the Psalm. The first two verses stir us up to bless Jehovah, and in the last verse Jehovah's blessing is invoked upon the people. Oh to abound in blessing! May blessed and blessing be the two words which describe our lives. Let others flatter their fellows, or bless their stars, or praise themselves; as for us, we will bless Jehovah, from whom all blessings flow.

All ye servants of the LORD. It is your office to bless him; take care that you lead the way therein. Servants should speak well of their masters. Not one of you should serve him as of compulsion, but all should bless him while you serve him; yea, bless him for permitting you to serve him, fitting you to serve him, and accepting your service. To be a servant of Jehovah is an incalculable honour, a blessing beyond all estimate. To be a servant in his temple, a domestic in his house, is even more a delight and a glory: if those Who are ever with the Lord, and dwell in his own temple, do not bless the Lord, who will? Which by night stand in the house of the LORD. We can well understand how the holy pilgrims half envied those consecrated ones who guarded the temple, and attended to the necessary offices thereof through the hours of night. To the silence and solemnity of night there was added the awful glory of the place where Jehovah had ordained that his worship should be celebrated, blessed were the priests and Levites who were ordained to a service so sublime. That these should bless the Lord throughout their nightly vigils was most fitting: the people would have them mark this, and never fail in the duty. They were not to move about like so many machines, but to put their hearts into all their duties, and worship spiritually in the whole course of their duty. It would be well to watch, but better still to be "watching unto prayer" and praise. When night settles down on a church the Lord has his watchers and holy ones still guarding his truth, and these must not be discouraged, but must bless the Lord even when the darkest hours draw on. Be it ours to cheer them, and lay upon them this charge—to bless the Lord at all times, and let his praise be continually in their mouths.

Verse 2. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary. In the holy place they must be busy, full of strength, wide awake, energetic, and moved with holy ardour. Hands, heart, and every other part of their manhood must be upraised, elevated, and consecrated to the adoring service of the Lord. As the angels praise God day without night, so must the angels of the churches be instant in season and out of season. And bless the LORD. This is their main business. They are to bless men by their teaching, but they must yet more bless Jehovah with their worship. Too often men look at public worship only from the side of its usefulness to the people; but the other matter is of even higher importance: we must see to it that the Lord God is adored, extolled, and had in reverence. For a second time the word "bless" is used, and applied to Jehovah. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let every other soul bless him. There will be no drowsiness about even midnight devotion if the heart is set upon blessing God in Christ Jesus, which is the gospel translation of God in the sanctuary.

Verse 3. This last verse is the answer from the temple to the pilgrims preparing to depart as the day breaks. It is the ancient blessing of the high priest condensed, and poured forth upon each individual pilgrim. The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion. Ye are scattering and going to your homes one by one; may the benediction come upon you one by one. You have been up to Jehovah's city and temple at his bidding; return each one with such a benediction as only he can give—divine, infinite, effectual, eternal. You are not going away from Jehovah's works or glories, for he made the heaven above you and the earth on which you dwell. He is your Creator, and he can bless you with untold mercies; he can create joy and peace in your hearts, and make for you a new heaven and a new earth. May the Maker of all things make you to abound in blessings. The benediction comes from the City of the Great King, from his appointed ministers, by virtue of his covenant, and so it is said to be "out of Zion." To this day the Lord blesses each one of his people through his church, his gospel, and the ordinances of his house. It is in communion with the saints that we receive untold benisons. May each one of us obtain yet more of the blessing which cometh from the Lord alone. Zion cannot bless us; the holiest ministers can only wish us a blessing; but Jehovah can and will bless each one of his waiting people. So may it be at this good hour. Do we desire it? Let us then bless the Lord ourselves. Let us do it a second time. Then we may confidently

hope that the third time we think of blessing we shall find ourselves conscious receivers of it from the Ever blessed One. Amen.

Psalm 135

Verse 1. Praise ye the LORD, or, Hallelujah. Let those who are themselves full of holy praise labour to excite the like spirit in others. It is not enough for us to praise God ourselves, we are quite unequal to such a work; let us call in all our friends and neighbours, and if they have been slack in such service, let us stir them up to it with loving exhortations. Praise ye the name of the LORD. Let his character be extolled by you, and let all that he has revealed concerning himself be the subject of your song; for this is truly his name. Specially let his holy and incommunicable name of "Jehovah" be the object of your adoration. By that name he sets forth his self existence, and his immutability; let these arouse your praises of his Godhead. Think of him with love, admire him with heartiness, and then extol him with ardour. Do not only magnify the Lord because he is God; but study his character and his doings, and thus render intelligent, appreciative praise. Praise him, O ye servants of the Lord. If others are silent, you must not be; you must be the first to celebrate his praises. You are "servants", and this is part of your service; his "name" is named upon you, therefore celebrate his name with praises; you know what a blessed Master he is, therefore speak well of him. Those who shun his service are sure to neglect his praise; but as grace has made you his own personal servants, let your hearts make you his court musicians. Here we see the servant of the Lord arousing his fellow servants by three times calling upon them to praise. Are we, then, so slow in such a sweet employ? Or is it that when we do our utmost it is all too little for such a Lord? Both are true. We do not praise enough; we cannot praise too much. We ought to be always at it; answering to the command here given—Praise, Praise, Praise. Let the Three-in-one have the praises of our spirit, soul, and body. For the past, the present, and the future, let us render threefold hallelujahs.

Verse 2. Ye that stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God. You are highly favoured; you are the domestics of the palace, nearest to the Father of the heavenly family, privileged to find your home in his house; therefore you must, beyond all others, abound in thanksgiving. You "stand; "or abide in the temple; you are constant occupants of its various courts; and therefore from you we expect unceasing praise. Should not ministers be celebrated for celebrating the praises of Jehovah? Should not church officers and church members excel all others in the excellent duty of adoration? Should not all of every degree who wait even in his outer courts unite in his worship? Ought not the least and feeblest of his people to proclaim his praises, in company with those who live nearest to him? Is it not a proper thing to remind them of their obligations? Is not the Psalmist wise when he does so in this case and in many others? Those who can call Jehovah "our God" are highly blessed, and therefore should abound in the work of blessing him. Perhaps this is the sweetest word in these two verses. "This God is our God for ever and ever." "Our God" signifies possession, communion in possession, assurance of possession, delight in possession. Oh the unutterable joy of calling God our own!

Verse 3. Praise the LORD. Do it again; continue to do it; do it better and more heartily; do it in growing numbers; do it at once. There are good reasons for praising the Lord, and among the first is this—for the LORD is good. He is so good that there is none good in the same sense or degree. He is so good that all good is found in him, flows from him, and is rewarded by him. The word God is brief for good; and truly God is the essence of goodness. Should not his goodness be well spoken of? Yea, with our best thoughts, and words, and hymns let us glorify his name. Sing praises unto his

name, for it is pleasant. The adjective may apply to the singing and to the name—they are both pleasant. The vocal expression of praise by sacred song is one of our greatest delights. We were created for this purpose, and hence it is a joy to us. It is a charming duty to praise the lovely name of our God. All pleasure is to be found in the joyful worship of Jehovah; all joys are in his sacred name as perfumes lie slumbering in a garden of flowers. The mind expands, the soul is lifted up, the heart warms, the whole being is filled with delight when we are engaged in singing the high praises of our Father, Redeemer, Comforter. When in any occupation goodness and pleasure unite, we do well to follow it up without stint: yet it is to be feared that few of us sing to the Lord at all in proportion as we talk to men.

Verse 4. For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself. Jehovah hath chosen Jacob. Should not the sons of Jacob praise him who has so singularly favoured them Election is one of the most forcible arguments for adoring love. Chosen! chosen unto himself!—who can be grateful enough for being concerned in this privilege "Jacob have I loved", said Jehovah, and he gave no reason for his love except that he chose to love. Jacob had then done neither good nor evil, yet thus the Lord determined, and thus he spake. If it be said that the choice was made upon foresight of Jacob's character, it is, perhaps, even more remarkable; for there was little enough about Jacob that could deserve special choice. By nature Jacob was by no means the most lovable of men. No, it was sovereign grace which dictated the choice. But, mark, it was not a choice whose main result was the personal welfare of Jacob's seed: the nation was chosen by God unto himself, to answer the divine ends and purposes in blessing all mankind. Jacob's race was chosen to be the Lord's own, to be the trustees of his truth, the maintainers of his worship, the mirrors of his mercy. Chosen they were; but mainly for this end, that they might be a peculiar people, set apart unto the service of the true God. And Israel for his peculiar treasure. God's choice exalts; for here the name is changed from Jacob, the supplanter, to Israel, the prince. The love of God gives a new name and imparts a new value; for the comparison to a royal treasure is a most honourable one. As kings have a special regalia, and a selection of the rarest jewels, so the Lord deigns to reckon his chosen nation as his wealth, his delight, his glory. What an honour to the spiritual Israel that they are all this to the Lord their God! We are a people near and dear unto him; precious and honourable in his sight. How can we refuse our loudest, heartiest, sweetest music? If we did not extol him, the stones in the street would cry out against us.

Verse 5. For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. The greatness of God is as much a reason for adoration as his goodness, when we are once reconciled to him. God is great positively great comparatively, and great superlatively—"above all gods." Of this the Psalmist had an assured personal persuasion. He says positively, "I know." It is knowledge worth possessing. He knew by observation, inspiration, and realization; he was no agnostic, he was certain and clear upon the matter. He not only knows the greatness of Jehovah, but that as the Adonai, or Ruler, "our Lord" is infinitely superior to all the imaginary deities of the heathen, and to all great ones besides.

"Let princes hear, let angels know,
How mean their natures seem;
Those gods on high, and gods below,
When once compared with him."

Many have thought to worship Jehovah, and other gods with him; but this holy man tolerated no such notion. Others have thought to combine their religion with obedience to the unrighteous laws of

tyrannical princes; this, also, the sweet singer of Israel denounced; for he regarded the living God as altogether above all men, who as magistrates and princes have been called gods. Observe here the fourth of the five "fors." Ps 135:3-5,14 contain reasons for praise, each set forth with "for." A fruitful meditation might be suggested by this.

Verse 6. Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. His will is carried out throughout all space. The king's warrant runs in every portion of the universe. The heathen divided the great domain; but Jupiter does not rule in heaven, nor Neptune on the sea, nor Pluto in the lower regions; Jehovah rules over all. His decree is not defeated, his purpose is not frustrated: in no one point is his good pleasure set aside. The word "whatsoever" is of the widest range and includes all things, and the four words of place which are mentioned comprehend all space; therefore the declaration of the text knows neither limit nor exception. Jehovah works his will: he pleases to do, and he performs the deed. None can stay his hand. How different this from the gods whom the heathen fabled to be subject to all the disappointments, failures, and passions of men! How contrary even to those so called Christian conceptions of God which subordinate him to the will of man, and make his eternal purposes the football of human caprice. Our theology teaches us no such degrading notions of the Eternal as that he can be baffled by man. "His purpose shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure." No region is too high, no abyss too deep, no land too distant, no sea too wide for his omnipotence: his divine pleasure travels post over all the realm of nature, and his behests are obeyed.

Verse 7. He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth. Here we are taught the power of God in creation. The process of evaporation is passed by unnoticed by the many, because they see it going on all around them; the usual ceases to be wonderful to the thoughtless, but it remains a marvel to the instructed. When we consider upon what an immense scale evaporation is continually going on, and how needful it is for the existence of all life, we may well admire the wisdom and the power which are displayed therein. All around us from every point of the horizon the vapour rises, condenses into clouds, and ultimately descends as rain. Whence the vapours originally ascended from which our showers are formed it would be impossible to tell; most probably the main part of them comes from the tropical regions, and other remote places at "the ends of the earth." It is the Lord who causes them to rise, and not a mere law. What is law without a force at the back of it? He maketh lightnings for the rain. There is an intimate connection between lightning and rain, and this would seem to be more apparent in Palestine than even with ourselves; for we constantly read of thunderstorms in that country as attending heavy down pours of rain. Lightning is not to be regarded as a lawless force, but as a part of that wonderful machinery by which the earth is kept in a fit condition: a force as much under the control of God as any other, a force most essential to our existence. The ever changing waters, rains, winds, and electric currents circulate as if they were the life blood and vital spirits of the universe. He bringeth the wind out of his treasures. This great force which seems left to its own wild will is really under the supreme and careful government of the Lord. As a monarch is specially master of the contents of his own treasure, so is our God the Lord of the tempest and hurricane; and as princes do not spend their treasure without taking note and count of it, so the Lord does not permit the wind to be wasted, or squandered without purpose. Everything in the material world is under the immediate direction and control of the Lord of all. Observe how the Psalmist brings before us the personal action of Jehovah: "he causeth", "he maketh", "he bringeth." Everywhere the Lord worketh all things, and there is no power which escapes his supremacy. It is well for us that it is so: one bandit force wandering through the Lord's domains defying his control would cast fear and trembling over all the provinces of providence. Let us praise Jehovah for the

power and wisdom with which he rules clouds, and lightnings, and winds, and all other mighty and mysterious agencies.

Verse 8. Who smote the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast. Herein the Lord is to be praised; for this deadly smiting was an act of justice against Egypt, and of love to Israel. But what a blow it was! All the firstborn slain in a moment! How it must have horrified the nation, and cowed the boldest enemies of Israel! Beasts because of their relationship to man as domestic animals are in many ways made to suffer with him. The firstborn of beasts must die as well as the firstborn of their owners, for the blow was meant to astound and overwhelm, and it accomplished its purpose. The firstborn of God had been sorely smitten, and they were set free by the Lord's meting out to their oppressors the like treatment.

Verse 9. Who sent tokens and wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants. The Lord is still seen by the Psalmist as sending judgments upon rebellious men; he keeps before us the personal action of God, "who sent tokens", etc. The more distinctly God is seen the better. Even in plagues he is to be seen, as truly as in mercies. The plagues were not only terrible wonders which astounded men, but forcible tokens or signs by which they were instructed. No doubt the plagues were aimed at the various deities of the Egyptians, and were a grand exposure of their impotence; each one had its own special significance. The judgments of the Lord were no side blows, they struck the nation at the heart; he sent his bolts "into the midst of thee, O Egypt!" These marvels happened in the centre of the proud and exclusive nation of Egypt, which thought itself far superior to other lands; and many of these plagues touched the nation in points upon which it prided itself. The Psalmist addresses that haughty nation, saying, "O Egypt", as though reminding it of the lessons which it had been taught by the Lord's right hand. Imperious Pharaoh had been the ringleader in defying Jehovah, and he was made personally to smart for it; nor did his flattering courtiers escape, upon each one of them the scourge fell heavily. God's servants are far better off than Pharaoh's servants: those who stand in the courts of Jehovah are delivered, but the courtiers of Pharaoh are smitten all of them, for they were all partakers in his evil deeds. The Lord is to be praised for thus rescuing his own people, and causing their cruel adversaries to bite the dust. Let no true Israelite forget the song of the Red Sea, but anew let us hear a voice summoning us to exulting praise: "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously."

Verse 10. Who smote great nations, and slew mighty kings. The nations of Canaan joined in the desperate resistance offered by their monarchs, and so they were smitten; while their kings, the ringleaders of the fight, were slain. Those who resist the divine purpose will find it hard to kick against the pricks. The greatness of the nations and the might of the kings availed nothing against the Lord. He is prepared to mete out vengeance to those who oppose his designs: those who dream of him as too tender to come to blows have mistaken the God of Israel. He intended to bless the world through his chosen people, and he would not be turned from his purpose: cost what it might, he would preserve the candle of truth which he had lighted, even though the blood of nations should be spilt in its defence. The wars against the Canaanite races were a price paid for the setting up of a nation which was to preserve for the whole world the lively oracles of God.

Verse 11. Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan. These two kings were the first to oppose, and they were amongst the most notable of the adversaries: their being smitten is therefore a special object of song for loyal Israelites. The enmity of these two kings was wanton and unprovoked, and hence their overthrow was the more welcome to Israel. Sihon had been victorious in his war with

Moab, and thought to make short work with Israel, but he was speedily overthrown: Og was of the race of the giants, and by his huge size inspired the tribes with dread; but they were encouraged by the previous overthrow of Sihon, and soon the giant king fell beneath their sword. And all the kingdoms Of Canaan. Many were these petty principalities, and some of them were populous and valiant; but they all fell beneath the conquering hand of Joshua, for the Lord was with him. Even so shall all the foes of the Lord's believing people in these days be put to the rout: Satan and the world shall be overthrown, and all the hosts of sin shall be destroyed, for our greater Joshua leads forth our armies, conquering and to conquer. Note that in this verse we have the details of matters which were mentioned in the bulk in the previous stanza: it is well when we have sting of mercies in the gross to consider them one by one, and give to each individual blessing a share in our song. It is well to preserve abundant memorials of the Lord's deliverance, so that we not only sing of mighty kings as a class but also of "Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan" as distinct persons.

Verse 12. And gave their land for an heritage, an heritage unto Israel his people. Jehovah is Lord Paramount, and permits men to hold their lands upon lease, terminable at his pleasure. The nations of Canaan had become loathsome with abominable vices, and they were condemned by the great Judge of all the earth to be cut off from the face of the country which they defiled. The twelve tribes were charged to act as their executioners, and as their fee they were to receive Canaan as a possession. Of old the Lord had given this land to Abraham and his seed by a covenant of salt, but he allowed the Amorites and other tribes to sojourn in it till their iniquity was full, and then he bade his people come and take their own out of the holders' hands. Canaan was their heritage because they were the Lord's heritage, and he gave it to them actually because he had long before given it to them by promise. The Lord's chosen still have a heritage from which none can keep them back. Covenant blessings of inestimable value are secured to them; and, as surely as God has a people, his people shall have a heritage. To them it comes by gift, though they have to fight for it. Often does it happen when they slay a sin or conquer a difficulty that they are enriched by the spoil: to them even evils work for good, and trials ensure triumphs. No enemy shall prevail so as to really injure them, for they shall find a heritage where once they were opposed by "all the kingdoms of Canaan."

Verse 13. Thy name, O LORD, endureth for ever. God's name is eternal, and will never be changed. His character is immutable; his fame and honour also shall remain to all eternity. There shall always be life in the name of Jesus, and sweetness and consolation. Those upon whom the Lord's name is named in verity and truth shall be preserved by it, and kept from all evil, world without end. JEHOVAH is a name which shall outlive the ages, and retain the fulness of its glory and might for ever. And thy memorial, O LORD, throughout all generations. Never shall men forget thee, O Lord. The ordinances of thine house shall keep thee in men's memories, and thine everlasting gospel and the grace which goes therewith shall be abiding reminders of thee. Grateful hearts will for ever beat to thy praise, and enlightened minds shall continue to marvel at all thy wondrous works. Men's memorials decay, but the memorial of the Lord abideth evermore. What a comfort to desponding minds, trembling for the ark of the Lord! No, precious Name, thou shalt never perish! Fame of the Eternal, thou shalt never grow dim! This verse must be construed in its connection, and it teaches us that the honour and glory gained by the Lord in the overthrow of the mighty kings would never die out. Israel for long ages reaped the benefit of the prestige which the divine victories had brought to the nation. Moreover, the Lord in thus keeping his covenant which he made with Abraham, when he promised to give the land to his seed, was making it clear that his memorial contained in promises and covenant would never be out of his sight. His name endures in all its truthfulness, for those who occupied Israel's land were driven out that the true heirs might dwell therein in peace.

Verse 14. For the LORD will judge his people. He will exercise personal discipline over them, and not leave it to their foes to maltreat them at pleasure. When the correction is ended he will arise and avenge them of their oppressors, who for a while were used by him as his rod. He may seem to forget his people, but it is not so; he will undertake their cause and deliver them. The judges of Israel were also her deliverers, and such is the Lord of hosts: in this sense—as ruling, preserving, and delivering his chosen—Jehovah will judge his people. And he will repent himself concerning his servants. When he has smitten them, and they lie low before him, he will pity them as a father pitieth his children, for he doth not afflict willingly. The Psalm speaks after the manner of men: the nearest description that words can give of the Lord's feeling towards his suffering servants is that he repents the evil which he inflicted upon them. He acts as if he had changed his mind and regretted smiting them. It goes to the heart of God to see his beloved ones oppressed by their enemies: though they deserve all they suffer, and more than all, yet the Lord cannot see them smart without a pang. It is remarkable that the nations by which God has afflicted Israel have all been destroyed as if the tender Father hated the instruments of his children's correction. The chosen nation is here called, first, "his people", and then "his servants:" as his people he judges them, as his servants he finds comfort in them, for so the word may be read. He is most tender to them when he sees their service; hence the Scripture saith, "I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." Should not the "servants" of God praise him? He plagued Pharaoh's servants; but as for his own he has mercy upon them, and returns to them in love after he has in the truest affection smitten them for their iniquities. "Praise him, O ye servants of the Lord."

Verse 15. The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. Their essential material is dead metal, their attributes are but the qualities of senseless substances, and what of form and fashion they exhibit they derive from the skill and labour of those who worship them. It is the height of insanity to worship metallic manufactures. Though silver and gold are useful to us when we rightly employ them, there is nothing about them which can entitle them to reverence and worship. If we did not know the sorrowful fact to be indisputable, it would seem to be impossible that intelligent beings could bow down before substances which they must themselves refine from the ore, and fashion into form. One would think it less absurd to worship one's own hands than to adore that which those hands have made. What great works can these mock deities perform for man when they are themselves the works of man? Idols are fitter to be played with, like dolls by babes, than to be adored by grown up men. Hands are better used in breaking than in making objects which can be put to such an idiotic use. Yet the heathen love their abominable deities better than silver and gold: it were well if we could say that some professed believers in the Lord had as much love for him.

Verse 16. They have mouths. For their makers fashioned them like themselves. An opening is made where the mouth should be, and yet it is no mouth, for they eat not, they speak not. They cannot communicate with their worshippers; they are dumb as death. If they cannot even speak, they are not even so worthy of worship as our children at school. Jehovah speaks, and it is done: but these images utter never a word. Surely, if they could speak, they would rebuke their votaries. Is not their silence a still more powerful rebuke? When our philosophical teachers deny that God has made any verbal revelation of himself they also confess that their god is dumb. Eyes have they, but they see not. Who would adore a blind man—how can the heathen be so mad as to bow themselves before a blind image? The eyes of idols have frequently been very costly; diamonds have been used for that purpose; but of what avail is the expense, since they see nothing? If they cannot even see us, how can they know our wants, appreciate our sacrifices, or spy out for us the means of help! What a

wretched thing, that a man who can see should bow down before an image which is blind! The worshipper is certainly physically in advance of his god, and yet mentally he is on a level with it; for assuredly his foolish heart is darkened, or he would not so absurdly play the fool.

Verse 17. They have ears, and very large ones, too, if we remember certain of the Hindu idols. But they hear not. Useless are their ears; in fact, they are mere counterfeits and deceits. Ears which men make are always deaf: the secret of hearing is wrapped up with the mystery of life, and both are in the unsearchable mind of the Lord. It seems that these heathen gods are dumb, and blind, and deaf—a pretty bundle of infirmities to be found in a deity! Neither is there any breath in their mouths; they are dead, no sign of life is perceptible; and breathing, which is of the essence of animal life, they never knew. Shall a man waste his breath in crying to an idol which has no breath? Shall life offer up petitions to death? Verily, this is a turning of things upside down.

Verse 18. They that make them are like unto them. they are as blockish, as senseless, as stupid as the gods they have made, and, like them they are the objects of divine abhorrence, and shall be broken in pieces in due time. So is every one that trusteth in them. The idol worshippers are as bad as the idol makers; for if there were none to worship, there would be no market for the degrading manufacture. Idolaters are spiritually dead, they are the mere images of men, their best being is gone, they are not what they seem. Their mouths do not really pray, their eyes see not the truth, their ears hear not the voice of the Lord, and the life of God is not in them. Those who believe in their own inventions in religion betray great folly, and an utter absence of the quickening Spirit. Gracious men can see the absurdity of forsaking the true God and setting up rivals in his place; but those who perpetrate this crime think not so: on the contrary, they pride themselves upon their great wisdom, and boast of "advanced thought" and "modern culture." Others there are who believe in a baptismal regeneration which does not renew the nature, and they make members of Christ and children of God who have none of the spirit of Christ, or the signs of adoption. May we be saved from such mimicry of divine work lest we also become like our idols.

Verse 19. Bless the LORD, O house of Israel. All of you, in all your tribes, praise the one Jehovah. Each tribe, from Reuben to Benjamin, has its own special cause for blessing the Lord, and the nation as a whole has substantial reasons for pouring out benedictions upon his name. Those whom God has named "the house of Israel", a family of prevailing princes, ought to show their loyalty by thankfully bowing before their sovereign Lord. Bless the LORD, O house of Aaron. These were elected to high office and permitted to draw very near to the divine presence; therefore they beyond all others were bound to bless the Lord. Those who are favoured to be leaders in the church should be foremost in adoration. In God's house the house of Aaron should feel bound to speak well of his name before all the house of Israel.

Verse 20. Bless the LORD, O house of Levi. These helped the priests in other things, let them aid them in this also. The house of Israel comprehends all the chosen seed; then we come down to the smaller but more central ring of the house of Aaron, and now we widen out to the whole tribe of Levi. Let reverence and adoration spread from man to man until the whole lump of humanity shall be leavened. The house of Levi had choice reasons for blessing God: read the Levite story and see. Remember that the whole of the Levites were set apart for holy service, and supported by ten tribes allotted to them; therefore they were in honour bound above all others to worship Jehovah with cheerfulness.

Psalm 136

Verse 1. O give thanks unto the LORD. The exhortation is intensely earnest: the Psalmist pleads with the Lord's people with an "O", three times repeated. Thanks are the least that we can offer, and these we ought freely to give. The inspired writer calls us to praise Jehovah for all his goodness to us, and all the greatness of his power in blessing his chosen. We thank our parents, let us praise our heavenly Father; we are grateful to our benefactors, let us give thanks unto the Giver of all good. For he is good. Essentially he is goodness itself, practically all that he does is good, relatively he is good to his creatures. Let us thank him that we have seen, proved, and tasted that he is good. He is good beyond all others: indeed, he alone is good in the highest sense; he is the source of good, the good of all good, the sustainer of good, the perfecter of good, and the rewarder of good. For this he deserves the constant gratitude of his people. For his mercy endureth for ever. We shall have this repeated in every verse of this song, but not once too often. It is the sweetest stanza that a man can sing. What joy that there is mercy, mercy with Jehovah, enduring mercy, mercy enduring for ever. We are ever needing it, trying it, praying for it, receiving it: therefore let us for ever sing of it.

"When all else is changing within and around,
In God and his mercy no change can be found."

Verse 2. O give thanks unto the God of gods. If there be powers in heaven or on earth worthy of the name of gods he is the God of them; from him their dominion comes, their authority is derived from him, and their very existence is dependent upon his will. Moreover, for the moment assuming that the deities of the heathen were gods, yet none of them could be compared with our Elohim, who is infinitely beyond what they are fabled to be. Jehovah is our God, to be worshipped and adored, and he is worthy of our reverence to the highest degree. If the heathen cultivate the worship of their gods with zeal, how much more intently should we seek the glory of the God of gods—the only true and real God. Foolish persons have gathered from this verse that the Israelites believed in the existence of many gods, at the same time believing that their Jehovah was the chief among them; but this is an absurd inference, since gods who have a God over them cannot possibly be gods themselves. The words are to be understood after the usual manner of human speech, in which things are often spoken of not as they really are, but as they profess to be. God as God is worthy of our warmest thanks, for his mercy endureth for ever. Imagine supreme Godhead without everlasting mercy! It would then have been as fruitful a source of terror as it is now a fountain of thanksgiving. Let the Highest be praised in the highest style, for right well do his nature and his acts deserve the gratitude of all his creatures.

Praise your God with right good will,
For his love endureth still.

Verse 3. O give thanks to the Lord of lords. There are lords many, but Jehovah is the Lord of them. All lordship is vested in the Eternal. He makes and administers law, he rules and governs mind and matter, he possesses in himself all sovereignty and power. All lords in the plural are summed up in this Lord in the singular; he is more lordly than all emperors and kings condensed into one. For this we may well be thankful, for we know the superior Sovereign will rectify the abuses of the underlings who now lord it over mankind. He will call these lords to his bar, and reckon with them for every oppression and injustice. He is as truly the Lord of lords as he is Lord over the meanest of the land, and he rules with a strict impartiality, for which every just man should give heartiest thanks. For his

mercy endureth for ever. Yes, he mingles mercy with his justice, and reigns for the benefit of his subjects. He pities the sorrowful, protects the helpless, provides for the needy, and pardons the guilty; and this he does from generation to generation, never wearying of his grace, "because he delighteth in mercy." Let us arouse ourselves to laud our glorious Lord! A third time let us thank him who is our Jehovah, our God, and our Lord; and let this one reason suffice us for three thanksgivings, or for three thousand—

"For his mercy shall endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure."

Verse 4. To him who alone doeth great wonders. Jehovah is the great Thaumaturge, the unrivalled Wonder worker. None can be likened unto him, he is alone in wonderland, the Creator and Worker of true marvels, compared with which all other remarkable things are as child's play. His works are all great in wonder even when they are not great in size; in fact, in the minute objects of the microscope we behold as great wonders as even the telescope can reveal. All the works of his unrivalled skill are wrought by him alone and unaided, and to him, therefore, must be undivided honour. None of the gods or the lords helped Jehovah in creation, or in the redemption of his people: his own right hand and his holy arm have wrought for him these great deeds. What have the gods of the heathen done? If the question be settled by doings, Jehovah is indeed "alone." It is exceedingly wonderful that men should worship gods who can do nothing, and forget the Lord who alone doeth great wonders. Even when the Lord uses men as his instruments, yet the wonder of the work is his alone; therefore let us not trust in men, or idolize them, or tremble before them. Praise is to be rendered to Jehovah, for his mercy endureth for ever. The mercy of the wonder is the wonder of the mercy; and the enduring nature of that mercy is the central wonder of that wonder. The Lord causes us often to sit down in amazement as we see what his mercy has wrought out and prepared for us: "wonders of grace to God belong", yea, great wonders and unsearchable. Oh the depth! Glory be to his name world without end!

Doing wondrous deeds alone,
Mercy sits upon his throne.

Verse 5. To him that by wisdom made the heavens. His goodness appears in creating the upper regions. He set his wisdom to the task of fashioning a firmament, or an atmosphere suitable for a world upon which mortal men should dwell. What a mass of wisdom lies hidden in this one creating act! The discoveries of our keenest observers have never searched out all the evidences of design which are crowded together in this work of God's hands. The lives of plants, animals, and men are dependent upon the fashioning of our heavens: had the skies been other than they are we had not been here to praise God. Divine foresight planned the air and the clouds, with a view to the human race. For his mercy endureth for ever. The Psalmist's details of mercy begin in the loftiest regions, and gradually descend from the heavens to "our low estate" (Ps 134:23); and this is an ascent, for mercy becomes greater as its objects become less worthy. Mercy is far reaching, long enduring, all encompassing. Nothing is too high for its reach, as nothing is beneath its stoop.

High as heaven his wisdom reigns,
Mercy on the throne remains.

Verse 6. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters. Lifting it up from the mingled mass, the

dank morass, the bottomless bog, of mixed land and sea; and so fitting it to be the abode of man. Who but the Lord could have wrought this marvel? Few even think of the divine wisdom and power which performed all this of old; yet, if a continent can be proved to have risen or fallen an inch within historic memory, the fact is recorded in the "transactions" of learned societies, and discussed at every gathering of philosophers. For his mercy endureth for ever, as is seen in the original upheaval and perpetual upstanding of the habitable land, so that no deluge drowns the race. By his strength he sets fast the mountains and consolidates the land upon which we sojourn.

From the flood he lifts the land:
Firm his mercies ever stand.

Verse 7. To him that made great lights. This also is a creating miracle worthy of our loudest thanks. What could men have done without light? Though they had the heavens above them, and dry land to move upon, yet what could they see, and where could they go without light? Thanks be to the Lord, who has not consigned us to darkness. In great mercy he has not left us to an uncertain, indistinct light, floating about fitfully, and without order; but he has concentrated light upon two grand luminaries, which, as far as we are concerned, are to us "great lights." The Psalmist is making a song for common people, not for your critical savans,—and so he sings of the sun and moon as they appear to us,—the greatest of lights. These the Lord created in the beginning; and for the present age of man made or constituted them light bearers for the world. For his mercy endureth for ever. Mercy gleams in every ray of light, and it is most clearly seen in the arrangement by which it is distributed with order and regularity from the sun and moon.

Lamps he lit in heaven's heights,
For in mercy he delights.

Verse 8. The sun to rule by day. We cannot be too specific in our praises; after mentioning great lights, we may sing of each of them, and yet not outwear our theme. The influences of the sun are too many for us to enumerate them all, but untold benefits come to all orders of beings by its light, warmth, and other operations. Whenever we sit in the sunshine, our gratitude should be kindled. The sun is a great ruler, and his government is pure beneficence, because by God's mercy it is moderated to our feebleness; let all who rule take lessons from the sun which rules to bless. By day we may well give thanks, for God gives cheer. The sun rules because God rules; it is not the sun which we should worship, like the Parsees; but the Creator of the sun, as he did who wrote this sacred song. For his mercy endureth for ever. Day unto day uttereth speech concerning the mercy of the Lord; every sunbeam is a mercy, for it falls on undeserving sinners who else would sit in doleful darkness, and find earth a hell. Milton puts it well:

"He, the golden tressed sun
Caused all day his course to run;
For his mercy shall endure
Ever faithful, ever sure."

Verse 9. The moon and stars to rule by night. No hour is left without rule. Blessed be God, he leaves us never to the doom of anarchy. The rule is one of light and benediction. The moon with her charming changes, and the stars in their fixed spheres gladden the night. When the season would be dark and dreary because of the absence of the sun, forth come the many minor comforters. The sun

is enough alone; but when he is gone a numerous band cannot suffice to give more than a humble imitation of his radiance. Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, alone, can do more for us than all his servants put together. He makes our day. When he is hidden, it is night, and remains night, let our human comforters shine at their full. What mercy is seen in the lamps of heaven gladdening our landscape at night! What equal mercy in all the influences of the moon upon the tides, those life floods of the earth! The Lord is the Maker of every star, be the stars what they may; he calleth them all by their names, and at his bidding each messenger with his torch enlightens our darkness. For his mercy endureth for ever. Let our thanks be as many as the stars, and let our lives reflect the goodness of the Lord, even as the moon reflects the light of the sun. The nightly guides and illuminators of men on land and sea are not for now and then, but for all time. They shone on Adam, and they shine on us. Thus they are tokens and pledges of undying grace to men; and we may sing with our Scotch friends—

"For certainly
His mercies dure
Most firm and sure
Eternally."

Verse 10. We have heard of the glory of the world's creation, we are now to praise the Lord for the creation of his favoured nation by their Exodus from Egypt. Because the monarch of Egypt stood in the way of the Lord's gracious purposes it became needful for the Lord to deal with him in justice; but the great design was mercy to Israel, and through Israel mercy to succeeding ages, and to all the world. To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn. The last and greatest of the plagues struck all Egypt to the heart. The sorrow and the terror which it caused throughout the nation it is hardly possible to exaggerate. From king to slave each one was wounded in the most tender point. The joy and hope of every household was struck down in one moment, and each family had its own wailing. The former blows had missed their aim compared with the last; but that "smote Egypt." The Lord's firstborn had been oppressed by Egypt, and at last the Lord fulfilled his threatening, "I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn." Justice lingered but it struck home at last. "For his mercy endureth for ever." Yes, even to the extremity of vengeance upon a whole nation the Lord's mercy to his people endured. He is slow to anger, and judgment is his strange work; but when mercy to men demands severe punishments he will not hold back his hand from the needful surgery. What were all the firstborn of Egypt compared with those divine purposes of mercy to all generations of men which were wrapped up in the deliverance of the elect people? Let us even when the Lord's judgments are abroad in the earth continue to sing of his unfailing grace.

"For evermore his love shall last,
For ever sure, for ever fast."

Verse 11. And brought out Israel from among them. Scattered as the tribes were up and down the country, and apparently held in a grasp which would never be relaxed, the Lord wrought their deliverance, and severed them from their idolatrous task masters. None of them remained in bondage. The Lord brought them out; brought them all out; brought them out at the very hour when his promise was due; brought them out despite their being mingled among the Egyptians; brought them out never to return. Unto his name let us give thanks for this further proof of his favour to the chosen ones, For his mercy endureth for ever. Once the Israelites did not care to go out, but preferred to bear the ills they had rather than risk they knew not what; but the Lord's mercy endured

that test also, and ceased not to stir up the nest till the birds were glad to take to their wings. He turned the land of plenty into a house of bondage, and the persecuted nation was glad to escape from slavery. The unfailing mercy of the Lord is gloriously seen in his separating his elect from the world. He brings out his redeemed and they are henceforth a people who show forth his praise.

"For God doth prove
Our constant friend;
His boundless love
Shall never end."

Verse 12. With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm. Not only the matter but the manner of the Lord's mighty acts should be the cause of our praise. We ought to bless the Lord for adverbs as well as adjectives. In the Exodus the great power and glory of Jehovah were seen. He dashed in pieces the enemy with his right hand. He led forth his people in no mean or clandestine manner. "He brought them forth also with silver and gold, and there was not one feeble person in all their tribes." Egypt was glad when they departed. God worked with great display of force, and with exceeding majesty; he stretched out his arm like a workman intent on his labour, he lifted up his hand as one who is not ashamed to be seen. Even thus was it in the deliverance of each one of us from the thralldom of sin; "according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." For his mercy endureth for ever—therefore his power is put forth for the rescue of his own. If one plague will not set them free there shall be ten; but free they shall all be at the appointed hour; not one Israelite shall remain under Pharaoh's power. God will not only use his hand but his arm—his extraordinary power shall be put to the work sooner than his purpose of mercy shall fail.

See, he lifts his strong right hand,
For his mercies steadfast stand.

Verse 13. To him which divided the Red sea into parts. He made a road across the sea bottom, causing the divided waters to stand like walls on either side. Men deny miracles; but, granted that there is a God, they become easy of belief. Since it requires me to be an atheist that I may logically reject miracles, I prefer the far smaller difficulty of believing in the infinite power of God. He who causes the waters of the sea ordinarily to remain as one mass can with equal readiness divide them. He who can throw a stone in one direction can with the same force throw it another way: the Lord can do precisely what he wills, and he wills to do anything which is ten the deliverance of his people. For his mercy endureth for ever, and therefore it endures through the sea as well as over the dry land. He will do a new thing to keep his old promise. His way is in the sea, and he will make a way for his people in the same pathless region.

Lo, the Red Sea he divides,
For his mercy sure abides.

Verse 14. And made Israel to pass through the midst of it. HE gave the people courage to follow the predestined track through the yawning abyss, which might well have terrified a veteran host. It needed no little generalship to conduct so vast and motley a company along a way so novel and apparently so dangerous. He made them to pass, by the untrodden road; he led them down into the deep and up again on the further shore in perfect order, keeping their enemies back by the thick

darkness of the cloudy pillar. Herein is the glory of God set forth, as all his people see it in their own deliverance from sin. By faith we also give up all reliance upon works and trust ourselves to pass by a way which we have not known, even by the way of reliance upon the atoning blood: thus are we effectually sundered from the Egypt of our former estate, and our sins themselves are drowned. The people marched dry shod through the heart of the sea. Hallelujah! For his mercy endureth for ever. Mercy cleared the road, mercy cheered the host, mercy led them down, and mercy brought them up again. Even to the depth of the sea mercy reaches,—there is no end to it, no obstacle in the way of it, no danger to believers in it, while Jehovah is all around. "Forward?" be our watchword as it was that of Israel of old, for mercy doth compass us about;

Through the fire or through the sea
Still his mercy guards thee.

Verse 15. But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea. Here comes the thunder clap. Though we hear them sounding peal upon peal, yet the judgments of the Lord were only loud mouthed mercies speaking confusion to the foe, that the chosen might tremble before him no longer. The chariots were thrown over, the horses were overthrown. The King and his warriors were alike overwhelmed; they were hurled from their chariots as locusts are tossed to and fro in the wind. Broken was the power and conquered was the pride of Egypt. Jehovah had vanquished the enemy. "Art thou not it which cut Rahab and wounded crocodile?" None are too great for the Lord to subdue, none too high for Lord to abase. The enemy in his fury drove after Israel into the sea, but his wrath found a terrible recompense beneath the waves. For his mercy endureth for ever. Yes, mercy continued to protect its children, and therefore called in the aid of justice to fulfil the capital sentence on their foes. Taken red handed, in the very act of rebellion against their sovereign Lord, the adversaries met the fate which they had themselves invited. He that goes into the midst of the sea asks to be drowned. Sin is self damnation. The sinner goes downward of his own choice, and if he finds out too late that he return, is not his blood upon his own head? The finally impenitent, terrible their doom, will not be witnesses against mercy; but rather this shall aggravate their misery, that they went on in defiance of mercy, and would yield themselves to him whose mercy endureth for ever. To the Israelites as they sung this song their one thought would be of the rescue of their fathers from fierce oppressor. Taken like a lamb from between the teeth of the lion, justly praises her Deliverer and chants aloud:

Evermore his love shall reign;
Pharaoh and his host are slain.

Verse 16. To him which led his people through the wilderness. He led them into it, and therefore he was pledged to lead them through it. They were "his people", and yet they must go into the wilderness, and the wilderness must remain as barren as ever it was; but in the end they must come out of it into the promised land. God's dealings are mysterious, but they must be right, simply because they are his. The people knew nothing of the way, but they were led; they were a vast host, yet they were all led; there were neither roads nor tracks, but being led by unerring wisdom they never lost their way. He who brought them out of Egypt, also led them through the wilderness. By Moses, and Aaron, and Jethro, and the pillar of cloud he led them. What a multitude of mercies are comprehended in the conduct of such an enormous host through a region wherein there was no provision even for single travellers; yet the Lord by his infinite power and wisdom conducted a whole nation for forty years through a desert land, and their feet did not swell, neither did their garments wax

old in all the journey. For his mercy endureth for ever. Their conduct in the wilderness tested his mercy most severely, but it bore the strain; many a time he forgave them; and though he smote them for their transgressions, yet he waited to be gracious and speedily turned to them in compassion. Their faithfulness soon failed, but his did not: the fiery, cloudy pillar which never ceased to lead the van was the visible proof of his immutable love—

"For his, mercy, changing never,
Still endureth, sure for ever."

Verse 17. To him which smote great kings. Within sight of their inheritance Israel had to face powerful enemies. Kings judged to be great because of the armies at their back blocked up their road. This difficulty soon disappeared, for the Lord smote their adversaries, and a single stroke sufficed for their destruction. He who had subdued the really mighty ruler of Egypt made short work of these petty sovereigns, great though they were in the esteem of neighbouring princes. For his mercy endureth for ever. Mercy, which had brought the chosen tribes so far, would not be balked by the opposition of boastful foes. The Lord who smote Pharaoh at the beginning of the wilderness march, smote Sihon and Og at the close of it. How could these kings hope to succeed when even mercy itself was in arms against them.

Evermore his mercy stands
Saving from the foe man's hands.

Verse 18. And slew famous kings. What good was their fame to them? As they opposed God they became infamous rather than famous. Their deaths made the Lord's fame to increase among the nations while their fame ended in disgraceful defeat. For his mercy endureth for ever. Israelitish patriots felt that they, could never have too much of this music; God had protected their nation, and they chanted his praises with unwearied iteration.

Kings he smote despite their fame,
For his mercy's still the same.

Verse 19. Sihon king of the Amorites. Let the name be mentioned that the mercy may be the better remembered. Sihon smote Moab, but he could not smite Israel, for the Lord smote him. He was valiant and powerful, so as to be both great and famous; but as he wilfully refused to give a peaceful passage to the Israelites, and fought against them in malice, there was no choice for it but to let him run into that destruction which he courted. His fall was speedy and final, and the chosen people were so struck with it that they sung of his overthrow in their national songs. For his mercy endureth for ever. His mercy is no respecter of persons, and neither the greatness nor the fame of Sihon could protect him after he had dared to attack Israel. The Lord will not forsake his people because Sihon blusters.

Come what may
By night or day,
Still most sure,
His love shall dure.

Verse 20. And Og the king of Bashan. He was of the race of the giants, but he was routed like a

pygmy when he entered the lists with Israel's God. The Lord's people were called upon to fight against him, but it was God who won the victory. The fastnesses of Bashan were no defence against Jehovah. Og was soon ousted from his stronghold when the captain of the Lord's host led the war against him. He had to exchange his bedstead of iron for a bed in the dust, for he fell on the battle field.

Glory be to the divine conqueror,
for his mercy endureth for ever.
Giant kings before him yield,
Mercy ever holds the field.

If Sihon could not turn the Lord from his purpose we may be sure that Og could not. He who delivers us out of one trouble will rescue us out of another, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his grace in us.

Verse 21. And gave their land for an heritage. As Lord of the whole earth he transferred his estate from one tenant to another. The land did not become the property of the Israelites by their own sword and bow, but by a grant from the throne. This was the great end which all along had been aimed at from Egypt to Jordan. He who brought his people out also brought them in. He who had promised the land to the seed of Abraham also saw to it that the deed of gift did not remain a dead letter. Both our temporal and our spiritual estates come to us by royal charter. What God gives us is ours by the best of titles. Inheritance by God's gift is tenure which even Satan cannot dispute. For his mercy endureth for ever. Faithful love endures without end, and secures its own end. "Thou wilt surely bring them in", said the prophet poet; and here we see the deed complete.

Till they reach the promised land
Mercy still the same must stand.

Verse 22. Even an heritage unto Israel his servant. Repetitions are effective in poetry, and the more so if there be some little variation in them, bringing out into fuller light some point which else had not been noticed. The lands of the heathen kings were given to "Israel", the name by which the chosen seed is here mentioned for the third time in the Psalm, with the addition of the words, "his servant." The leasehold of Canaan to Israel after the flesh was made dependent upon suit and service rendered to the Lord of the manor by whom the lease was granted. It was a country worth singing about, richly justifying the two stanzas devoted to it. The division of the country by lot, and the laws by which the portions of ground were reserved to the owners and their descendants for a perpetual inheritance were fit subjects for song. Had other nations enjoyed land laws which ensured to every family a plot of ground for cultivation, much of the present discontent would never have arisen, beggary would soon have become uncommon, and poverty itself would have been rare. For his mercy endureth for ever. Yes, mercy fights for the land, mercy divides the spoil among its favoured ones, and mercy secures each man in his inheritance. Glory be to God the faithful One.

"For his mercy full and free.
Wins us full felicity."

Verse 23. Who remembered us in our low estate. Personal mercies awake the sweetest song—"he remembered us." Our prayer is, "Lord, remember me", and this is our encouragement—he has remembered us. For the Lord even to think of us is a wealth of mercy. Ours was a sorry estate,—an

estate of bankruptcy and mendicancy. Israel rested in its heritage, but we were still in bondage, groaning in captivity: the Lord seemed to have forgotten us, and left us in our sorrow; but it was not so for long: he turned again in his compassion, bethinking himself of his afflicted children. Our state was once so low as to be at hell's mouth; since then it has been low in poverty, bereavement, despondency, sickness, and heart sorrow, and we fear, also, sinfully low in faith, and love, and every other grace; and yet the Lord has not forgotten us as a dead thing out of mind; but he has tenderly remembered us still. We thought ourselves too small and too worthless for his memory to burden itself about us, yet he remembered us. For his mercy endureth for ever. Yes, this is one of the best proofs of the immutability of his mercy, for if he could have changed towards any, it would certainly have been towards us who have brought ourselves low, kept ourselves low, and prepared ourselves to sink yet lower. It is memorable mercy to remember us in our low estate: in our highest joys we will exalt Jehovah's name, since of this we are sure,—he will not now desert us—

For his mercy full and free
Lasteth to eternity.

Verse 24. And hath redeemed us from our enemies. Israel's enemies brought the people low; but the Lord intervened, and turned the tables by a great redemption. The expression implies that they had become like slaves, and were not set free without price and power; for they needed to be "redeemed." In our case the redemption which is in Christ Jesus is an eminent reason for giving thanks unto the Lord. Sin is our enemy, and we are redeemed from it by the atoning blood; Satan is our enemy, and we are redeemed from him by the Redeemer's power; the world is our enemy, and we are redeemed from it by the Holy Spirit. We are ransomed, let us enjoy our liberty; Christ has wrought our redemption, let us praise his name. For his mercy endureth for ever. Even to redemption by the death of his Son did divine mercy stretch itself. What more can be desired? What more can be imagined? Many waters could not quench love, neither could the floods drown it.

E'en to death upon the tree
Mercy dureth faithfully.

Verse 25. Who giveth food to all flesh. Common providence, which cares for all living things, deserves our most devout thanks. If we think of heavenly food, by which all saints are supplied, our praises rise to a still greater height; but meanwhile the universal goodness of God in feeding all his creatures is as worthy of praise as his special favours to the elect nation. Because the Lord feeds all life therefore we expect him to take special care of his own family. For his mercy endureth for ever. Reaching downward even to beasts and reptiles, it is, indeed, a boundless mercy, which knows no limit because of the meanness of its object.

"All things living he doth feed,
His full hand supplies their need;
For his mercy shall endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure."

Verse 26. O give thanks unto the God of heaven. The title is full of honour. The Lord is God in the highest realms, and among celestial beings. His throne is set in glory, above all, out of reach of foes, in the place of universal oversight. He who feeds ravens and sparrows is yet the glorious God of the highest realms. Angels count it their glory to proclaim his glory in every heavenly street. See herein

the greatness of his nature, the depth of his condescension, and the range of his love. Mark the one sole cause of his bounty—For his mercy endureth for ever. He hath done all things from this motive; and because his mercy never ceases, he will continue to multiply deeds of love world without end. Let us with all our powers of heart and tongue give thanks unto the holy name of Jehovah for ever and ever.

"Change and decay in all around I see,
O thou who changest not, abide with me."

Psalm 137

Verse 1. By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Water courses were abundant in Babylon, wherein were not only natural streams but artificial canals: it was place of broad rivers and streams. Glad to be away from the noisy streets, the captives sought the river side, where the flow of the waters seemed to be in sympathy with their tears. It was some slight comfort to be out of the crowd, and to have a little breathing room, and therefore they sat down, as if to rest a while and solace themselves in their sorrow. In little groups they sat down and made common lamentation, mingling their memories and their tears. The rivers were well enough, but, alas, they were the rivers of Babylon, and the ground whereon the sons of Israel sat was foreign soil, and therefore they wept. Those who came to interrupt their quiet were citizens of the destroying city, and their company was not desired. Everything reminded Israel of her banishment from the holy city, her servitude beneath the shadow of the temple of Bel, her helplessness under a cruel enemy; and therefore her sons and daughters sat down in sorrow, Yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. Nothing else could have subdued their brave spirits; but the remembrance of the temple of their God, the palace of their king, and the centre of their national life, quite broke them down. Destruction had swept down all their delights, and therefore they wept—the strong men wept, the sweet singers wept! They did not weep when they remembered the cruelties of Babylon; the memory of fierce oppression dried their tears and made their hearts burn with wrath: but when the beloved city of their solemnities came into their minds they could not refrain from floods of tears. Even thus do true believers mourn when they see the church despoiled, and find themselves unable to succour her: we could bear anything better than this. In these our times the Babylon of error ravages the city of God, and the hearts of the faithful are grievously wounded as they see truth fallen in the streets, and unbelief rampant among the professed servants of the Lord. We bear our protests, but they appear to be in vain; the multitude are mad upon their idols. Be it ours to weep in secret for the hurt of our Zion: it is the least thing we can do; perhaps in its result it may prove to be the best thing we can do. Be it ours also to sit down and deeply consider what is to be done. Be it ours, in any case, to keep upon our mind and heart the memory of the church of God which is so dear to us. The frivolous may forget, but Zion is graven on our hearts, and her prosperity is our chief desire.

Verse 2. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. The drooping branches appeared to weep as we did, and so we gave to them our instruments of music; the willows could as well make melody as we, for we had no mind for minstrelsy. In the midst of the willows, or in the midst of the rivers, or in the midst of Babylon, it matters little which, they hung their harps aloft—those harps which once in Zion's halls the soul of music shed. Better to hang them up than to dash them down: better to hang them on willows than profane them to the service of idols. Sad indeed is the child of sorrow when he grows weary of his harp, from which in better days he had been able to draw sweet solaces. Music hath charms to give unquiet spirits rest; but when the heart is sorely sad it only mocks

the grief which flies to it. Men put away their instruments of mirth when a heavy cloud darkens their souls.

Verse 3. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song. It was ill to be a singer at all when it was demanded that this talent should go into bondage to an oppressor's will. Better be dumb than be forced to please an enemy with forced song. What cruelty to make a people sigh, and then require them to sing! Shall men be carried away from home and all that is dear to them, and yet chant merrily for the pleasure of their unfeeling captors? This is studied torture: the iron enters into the soul. It is indeed "woe to the conquered" when they are forced to sing to increase the triumph of their conquerors. Cruelty herein reached a refinement seldom thought of. We do not wonder that the captives sat them down to weep when thus insulted. "And they that wasted us required of us mirth." The captives must not only sing but smile, and add merriment to their music. Blind Samson in former days must be brought forth to make sport for Philistines, and now the Babylonians prove themselves to be loaves of the same leaven. Plundered, wounded, fettered, carried into captivity and poverty, yet must the people laugh as if it were all a play, and they must sport as if they felt no sorrow. This was worm wood and gall to the true lovers of God and his chosen land. "Saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion." Nothing would serve their turn but a holy hymn, and a tune sacred to the worship of Jehovah. Nothing will content the Babylonian mockers but one of Israel's Psalms when in her happiest days she sang unto the Lord whose mercy endureth for ever: this would make rare fun for their persecutors, who would deride their worship and ridicule their faith in Jehovah. In this demand there was an insult to their God as well as a mockery of themselves, and this made it the more intensely cruel. Nothing could have been more malicious, nothing more productive of grief. These wanton persecutors had followed the captives into their retirement, and had remarked upon their sorrowful appearance, and "there" and then they bade the mourners make mirth for them. Could they not let the sufferers alone? Were the exiles to have no rest? The daughter of Babylon seemed determined to fill up her cup of iniquity, by torturing the Lord's people. Those who had been the most active agents of Israel's undoing must needs follow up their ferocities by mockeries. "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." Worse than the Egyptians, they asked not labour which their victims could have rendered, but they demanded mirth which they could not give, and holy songs which they dared not profane to such a purpose, sufferings of the weary and oppressed exiles by their mirth and their indecency. We are sorry to say that the resemblance still holds betwixt the Jews in a state of captivity and the Christians in the state of their pilgrimage. We have also to sustain the mockery of the profane and the unthinking. Ridicule and disdain are often the fate of sincere piety in this world. Fashion and frivolity and false philosophy have made a formidable combination against us; and the same truth, the same honesty, the same integrity of principle, which in any other cause would be esteemed as manly and respectable, is despised and laughed at when attached to the cause of the gospel and its sublime interests.—Thomas Chalmers.

Verses 3-4. St. John Chrysostom observes the improvement such tribulation effected in the Jews, who previously derided, nay, even put to death, some of the prophets; but now that they were captives in a foreign land, they would not attempt to expose their sacred hymns to the ridicule of the Gentiles.—Robert Bellarmine.

Verse 4. How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land How shall they sing at all? sing in a strange land? sing Jehovah's song among the uncircumcised? No, that must not be; it shall not be. With one voice they refuse, but the refusal is humbly worded by being put in the form of a question. If the men of Babylon were wicked enough to suggest the defiling of holy things for the gratification of

curiosity, or for the creation of amusement, the men of Zion had not so hardened their hearts as to be willing to please them at such a fearful cost. There are many things which the ungodly could do, and think nothing of the doing thereof, which gracious men cannot venture upon. The question "How can I?" or "How shall we?" comes of a tender conscience and denotes an inability to sin which is greatly to be cultivated.

Verse 5. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. To sing Zion's songs for the pleasure of Zion's foes, would be to forget the Holy City Each Jew declares for himself that he will not do this; for the pronoun alters from "we" to "I." Individually the captives pledge themselves to fidelity to Jerusalem, and each one asserts that he had sooner forget the art which drew music from his harp strings than use it for Babel's delectation. Better far that the right hand should forget its usual handicraft, and lose all its dexterity, than that it should fetch music for rebels out of the Lord's instruments, or accompany with sweet skill a holy Psalm desecrated into a common song for fools to laugh at. Not one of them will thus dishonour Jehovah to glorify Belus and gratify his veteraries. Solemnly they imprecate vengeance upon themselves should they so false, so faithless prove.

Verse 6. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. Thus the singers imprecate eternal silence upon their mouths if they forget Jerusalem to gratify Babylon. The players on instruments and the sweet songsters are of one mind: the enemies of the Lord will get no mirthful tune or song from them. If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. The sacred city must ever be first in their thoughts, the queen of their souls; they had sooner be dumb than dishonour her sacred hymns, and give occasion to the oppressor to ridicule her worship. If such the attachment of a banished Jew to his native land, how much more should we love the church of God of which we are children and citizens. How jealous should we be of her honour, how zealous for her prosperity. Never let us find jests in the words of Scripture, or make amusement out of holy things, lest we be guilty of forgetting the Lord and his cause. It is to be feared that many tongues have lost all power to charm the regations of the saints because they have forgotten the gospel, and God has forgotten them.

Verse 7. Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem. The case is left in Jehovah's hands. He is a God of recompenses, and will deal out justice with impartiality. The Edomites ought to have been friendly with the Israelites, from kinship; but there was a deep hatred and cruel spite displayed by them. The elder loved not to serve the younger, and so when Jacob's day of tribulation came, Esau was ready to take advantage of it. The captive Israelites being moved by grief to lodge their complaints with God, also added a prayer for his visitation of the nation which meanly sided with their enemies, and even Urged the invaders to more than their usual cruelty. Who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof. They wished to see the last of Jerusalem and the Jewish state; they would have no stone left standing, they desired to see a clean sweep of temple, palace, wall, and habitation. It is horrible for neighbours to be enemies, worse for them to show their enmity in times of great affliction, worst of all for neighbours to egg others on to malicious deeds. Those are responsible for other men's sins who would use them as the tools of their own enmity. It is a shame for men to incite the wicked to deeds which they are not able to perform themselves. The Chaldeans were ferocious enough without being excited to greater fury; but Edom's hate was insatiable. Those deserve to be remembered by vengeance who in evil times do not remember mercy; how much more those who take advantage of calamities to wreak revenge upon sufferers. When Jerusalem's day of restoration comes Edom will be remembered and wiped out of existence.

Verse 8. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed. Or the destroyer: let us accept the word

either way, or both ways: the destroyer would be destroyed, and the Psalmist in vision saw her as already destroyed. It is usual to speak of a city as a virgin daughter. Babylon was in her prime and beauty, but she was already doomed for her crimes. Happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. The avenger would be fulfilling an honourable calling in overthrowing a power so brutal, so inhuman. Assyrian and Chaldean armies had been boastfully brutal in their conquests; it was meet that their conduct should be measured back into their own bosoms. No awards of punishment can be more unanswerably just than those which closely follow the lex talionis, even to the letter. Babylon must fall, as she caused Jerusalem to fall; and her sack and slaughter must be such as she appointed for other cities. The patriot poet sitting sorrowfully in his exile, finds a solace in the prospect of the overthrow of the empress city which holds him in bondage, and he accounts Cyrus right happy to be ordained to such a righteous work. The whole earth would bless the conqueror for ridding the nations of a tyrant; future generations would call him blessed for enabling men to breathe again, and for once more making liberty possible upon the earth. We may rest assured that every unrighteous power is doomed to destruction, and that from the throne of God justice will be measured out to all whose law is force, whose rule is selfishness, and whose policy is oppression. Happy is the man who shall help in the overthrow of the spiritual Babylon, which, despite its riches and power, is "to be destroyed." Happier still shall he be who shall see it sink like a millstone in the flood, never to rise again. What that spiritual Babylon is none need enquire. There is but one city upon earth which can answer to the name.

Verse 9. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones. Fierce was the heart of the Jew who had seen his beloved city the scene of such terrific butchery. His heart pronounced like sentence upon Babylon. She should be scourged with her own whip of wire. The desire for righteous retribution is rather the spirit of the law than of the gospel; and yet in moments of righteous wrath the old fire will burn; and while justice survives in the human breast it will not lack for fuel among the various tyrannies which still survive. We shall be wise to view this passage as a prophecy. History informs us that it was literally fulfilled: the Babylonian people in their terror agreed to destroy their own offspring, and men thought themselves happy when they had put their own wives and children to the sword. Horrible as was the whole transaction, it is a thing to be glad of if we take a broad view of the world's welfare; for Babylon, the gigantic robber, had for many a year slaughtered nations without mercy, and her fall was the rising of many people to a freer and safer state. The murder of innocent infants can never be sufficiently deplored, but it was an incident of ancient warfare which the Babylonians had not omitted in their massacres, and, therefore, they were not spared it themselves. The revenges of providence may be slow, but they are ever sure; neither can they be received with regret by those who see God's righteous hand in them. It is a wretched thing that a nation should need an executioner; but yet if men will commit murders tears are more fitly shed over their victims than over the assassins themselves. A feeling of universal love is admirable, but it must not be divorced from a keen sense of justice. The captives in Babylon did not make music, but they poured forth their righteous maledictions, and these were far more in harmony with their surroundings than songs and laughter could have been. Those who mock the Lord's people will receive more than they desire, to their own confusion: they shall have little enough to make mirth for them, and more than enough to fill them with misery. The execrations of good men are terrible things, for they are not lightly uttered, and they are heard in heaven. "The curse causeless shall not come;" but is there not a cause? Shall despots crush virtue beneath their iron heel and never be punished? Time will show.

Verse 1. I will praise thee with my whole heart. His mind is so taken up with God that he does not mention his name: to him there is no other God, and Jehovah is so perfectly realized and so intimately known, that the Psalmist, in addressing him, no more thinks of mentioning his name than we should do if we were speaking to a father or a friend. He sees God with his mind's eye, and simply addresses him with the pronoun "thee." He is resolved to praise the Lord, and to do it with the whole force of his life, even with his whole heart. He would not submit to act as one under restraint, because of the opinions of others; but in the presence of the opponents of the living God he would be as hearty in worship as if all were friends and would cheerfully unite with him. If others do not praise the Lord, there is all the more reason why we should do so, and should do so with enthusiastic eagerness. We need a broken heart to mourn our own sins, but a whole heart to praise the Lord's perfections. If ever our heart is whole and wholly occupied with one thing, it should be when we are praising the Lord.

Before the gods will I sing praise unto thee. Why should these idols rob Jehovah of his praises? The Psalmist will not for a moment suspend his songs because there are images before him, and their foolish worshippers might not approve of his music. I believe David referred to the false gods of the neighbouring nations, and the deities of the surviving Canaanites. He was not pleased that such gods were set up; but he intended to express at once his contempt of them, and his own absorption in the worship of the living Jehovah by continuing most earnestly to sing wherever he might be. It would be paying these dead idols too much respect to cease singing because they were perched aloft. In these days when new religions are daily excogitated, and new gods are set up, it is well to know how to act. Bitterness is forbidden, and controversy is apt to advertise the heresy; the very best method is to go on personally worshipping the Lord with unvarying zeal, singing with heart and voice his royal praises. Do they deny the Divinity of our Lord? Let us the more fervently adore him. Do they despise the atonement? Let us the more constantly proclaim it. Had half the time spent in councils and controversies been given to praising the Lord, the church would have been far sounder and stronger than she is at this day. The Hallelujah Legion will win the day. Praising and singing are our armour against the idolatries of heresy, our comfort under the depression caused by insolent attacks upon the truth, and our weapons for defending the gospel. Faith when displayed in cheerful courage, has about it a sacred contagion: others learn to believe in the Most High when they see his servant

"Calm 'mid the bewildering cry,
Confident of victory."

Verse 2. I will worship toward thy holy temple, or the place of God's dwelling, where the ark abode. He would worship God in God's own way. The Lord had ordained a centre of unity, a place of sacrifice, a house of his indwelling; and David accepted the way of worship enjoined by revelation. Even so, the true hearted believer of these days must not fall into the will worship of superstition, or the wild worship of scepticism, but reverently worship as the Lord himself prescribes. The idol gods had their temples; but David averts his glance from them, and looks earnestly to the spot chosen of the Lord for his own sanctuary. We are not only to adore the true God, but to do so in his own appointed way: the Jew looked to the temple, we are to look to Jesus, the living temple of the Godhead.

And praise thy name for thy loving kindness and for thy truth. Praise would be the main part of David's worship; the name or character of God the great object of his song; and the special point of his praise the grace and truth which shone so conspicuously in that name. The person of Jesus is the

temple of the Godhead, and therein we behold the glory of the Father, "full of grace and truth." It is upon these two points that the name of Jehovah is at this time assailed—his grace and his truth. He is said to be too stern, too terrible, and therefore "modern thought" displaces the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and sets up an effeminate deity of its own making. As for us, we firmly believe that God is love, and that in the summing up of all things it will be seen that hell itself is not inconsistent with the beneficence of Jehovah, but is, indeed, a necessary part of his moral government now that sin has intruded into the universe. True believers hear the thunders of his justice, and yet they do not doubt his lovingkindness. Especially do we delight in God's great love to his own elect, such as he showed to Israel as a race, and more especially to David and his seed when he entered into covenant with him. Concerning this there is abundant room for praise. But not only do men attack the lovingkindness of God, but the truth of God is at this time assailed on all sides; some doubt the truth of the inspired record as to its histories, others challenge the doctrines, many sneer at the prophecies; in fact, the infallible word of the Lord is at this time treated as if it were the writing of impostors, and only worthy to be carped at. The swine are trampling on the pearls at this time, and nothing restrains them; nevertheless, the pearls are pearls still, and shall yet shine about our Monarch's brow. We sing the lovingkindness and truth of the God of the Old Testament,— "the God of the whole earth shall he be called." David before the false gods first sang, then worshipped, and then proclaimed the grace and truth of Jehovah; let us do the same before the idols of the New Theology.

For thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name. The word of promise made to David was in his eyes more glorious than all else that he had seen of the Most High. Revelation excels creation in the clearness, definiteness, and fulness of its teaching. The name of the Lord in nature is not so easily read as in the Scriptures, which are a revelation in human language, specially adapted to the human mind, treating of human need, and of a Saviour who appeared in human nature to redeem humanity. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the divine word will not pass away, and in this respect especially it has a preeminence over every other form of manifestation. Moreover, the Lord lays all the rest of his name under tribute to his word: his wisdom, power, love, and all his other attributes combine to carry out his word. It is his word which creates, sustains, quickens, enlightens, and comforts. As a word of command it is supreme; and in the person of the incarnate Word it is set above all the works of God's hands. The sentence in the text is wonderfully full of meaning. We have collected a vast mass of literature upon it, but space will not allow us to put it all into our notes. Let us adore the Lord who has spoken to us by his word, and by his Son; and in the presence of unbelievers let us both praise his holy name and extol his holy word.

Verse 3. In the day when I cried thou answerest me. No proof is so convincing as that of experience. No man doubts the power of prayer after he has received an answer of peace to his supplication. It is the distinguishing mark of the true and living God that he hears the pleadings of his people, and answers them; the gods hear not and answer not, but Jehovah's memorial is—"the God that heareth prayer." There was some special day in which David cried more vehemently than usual; he was weak, wounded, worried, and his heart was wearied; then like a child he "cried",—cried unto his Father. It was a bitter, earnest, eager prayer, as natural and as plaintive as the cry of a babe. The Lord answered it, but what answer can there be to a cry?—to a mere inarticulate wail of grief? Our heavenly Father is able to interpret tears, and cries, and he replies to their inner sense in such a way as fully meets the case. The answer came in the same day as the cry ascended: so speedily does prayer rise to heaven, so quickly does mercy return to earth. The statement of this sentence is one which all believers can make, and as they can substantiate it with many facts, they ought boldly to publish it, for it is greatly to God's glory. Well might the Psalmist say, "I will worship" when he felt

bound to say "thou answeredst me." Well might he glory before the idols and their worshippers when he had answers to prayer to look back upon. This also is our defence against modern heresies: we cannot forsake the Lord, for he has heard our prayers. And strengthenedst me with strength in my soul. This was a true answer to his prayer. If the burden was not removed, yet strength was given wherewith to bear it, and this is an equally effective method of help. It may not be best for us that the trial should come to an end; it may be far more to our advantage that by its pressure we should learn patience. Sweet are the uses of adversity, and our prudent Father in heaven will not deprive us of those benefits. Strength imparted to the soul is an inestimable boon; it means courage, fortitude, assurance, heroism. By his word and Spirit the Lord can make the trembler brave, the sick whole, the weary bright. This soul might will continue: the man having been strengthened for one emergency remains vigorous for life, and is prepared for all future labours and sufferings; unless, indeed, he throw away his force by unbelief, or pride, or some other sin. When God strengthens, none can weaken. Then is our soul strong indeed when the Lord infuses might into us.

Verse 4. All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord, when they hear the words of thy mouth. Kings have usually small care to hear the word of the Lord; but King David feels assured that if they do hear it they will feel its power. A little piety goes a long way in courts; but brighter days are coming, in which rulers will become hearers and worshippers: may the advent of such happy times be hastened. What an assembly!—"all the kings of the earth!" What a purpose! Gathered to hear the words of Jehovah's mouth. What a preacher! David himself rehearses the words of Jehovah. What praise! when they all in happy union lift up their songs unto the Lord. Kings are as gods below, and they do well when they worship the God above. The way of conversion for kings is the same as for ourselves: faith to them also cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Happy are those who can cause the word of the Lord to penetrate palaces; for the occupants of thrones are usually the last to know the joyful sounds of the gospel. David, the king, cared for kings' souls, and it will be wise for each man to look first after those who are of his own order. He went to his work of testimony with full assurance of success: he meant to speak only the words of Jehovah's mouth, and he felt sure that the kings would hear and praise Jehovah.

Verse 5. Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the LORD. Here is a double wonder—kings in God's ways, and kings singing there. Let a man once know the ways of Jehovah, and he will find therein abundant reason for song; but the difficulty is to bring the great ones of the earth into ways so little attractive to the carnal mind. Perhaps when the Lord sends us a King David to preach, we shall yet see monarchs converted and hear their voices raised in devout adoration. For great is the glory of the LORD. This glory shall overshadow all the greatness and glory of all kings: they shall be stirred by a sight of it to obey and adore. O that Jehovah's glory were revealed even now! O that the blind eyes of men could once behold it, then their hearts would be subdued to joyful reverence. David, under a sense of Jehovah's glory, exclaimed, "I will sing" (Ps 138:1), and here he represents the kings as doing the same thing.

Verse 6. Though the Lord be high. In greatness, dignity, and power, Jehovah is higher than the highest. His nature is high above the comprehension of his creatures, and his glory even exceeds the loftiest soarings of imagination. Yet hath he respect unto the lowly. He views them with pleasure, thinks of them with care, listens to their prayers, and protects them from evil. Because they think little of themselves he thinks much of them. They reverence him, and he respects them. They are low in their own esteem, and he makes them high in his esteem. But the proud he knoweth afar off. He does not need to come near them in order to discover their utter vanity: a glance from afar reveals to him

their emptiness and offensiveness. He has no fellowship with them, but views them from a distance; he is not deceived, but knows the truth about them, despite their blustering; he has no respect unto them, but utterly abhors them. To a Cain's sacrifice, a Pharaoh's promise, a Rabshakeh's threat, and a Pharisee's prayer, the Lord has no respect. Nebuchadnezzar, when far off from God, cried, "Behold this great Babylon which I have builded"; but the Lord knew him, and sent him grazing with cattle. Proud men boast loudly of their culture and "the freedom of thought", and even dare to criticize their Maker: but he knows them from afar, and will keep them at arm's length in this life, and shut them up in hell in the next.

Verse 7. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me. If I am walking there now, or shall be doing so in years to come, I have no cause for fear; for God is with me, and will give me new life. When we are somewhat in trouble it is bad enough, but it is worse to penetrate into the centre of that dark continent and traverse its midst: yet in such a case the believer makes progress, for he walks; he keeps to a quiet pace, for he does no more than walk; and he is not without the best of company, for his God is near to pour fresh life into him. It is a happy circumstance that, if God be away at any other time, yet he is pledged to be with us in trying hours: "when thou passest through the rivers I will be with thee." He is in a blessed condition who can confidently use the language of David,— "thou wilt revive me." He shall not make his boast of God in vain: he shall be kept alive, and made more alive than ever. How often has the Lord quickened us by our sorrows! Are they not his readiest means of exciting to fulness of energy the holy life which dwells within us? If we receive reviving, we need not regret affliction. When God revives us, trouble will never harm us. Thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. This is the fact which would revive fainting David. Our foes fall when the Lord comes to deal with them; he makes short work of the enemies of his people,—with one hand he routs them. His wrath soon quenches their wrath; his hand stays their hand. Adversaries may be many, and malicious, and mighty; but our glorious Defender has only to stretch out his arm and their armies vanish. The sweet singer rehearses his assurance of salvation, and sings of it in the ears of the Lord, addressing him with this confident language. He will be saved,—saved dexterously, decidedly, divinely; he has no doubt about it. God's right hand cannot forget its cunning; Jerusalem is his chief joy, and he will defend his own elect.

Verse 8. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me. All my interests are safe in Jehovah's hands.

"The work which his goodness began,
The arm of his strength will complete;
His promise is yea and Amen,
And never was forfeited yet."

God is concerned in all that concerns his servants. He will see to it that none of their precious things shall fail of completion; their life, their strength, their hopes, their graces, their pilgrimage, shall each and all be perfected. Jehovah himself will see to this and therefore it is most sure. Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever. The refrain of the former Psalm is in his ears, and he repeats it as his own personal conviction and consolation. The first clause of the verse is the assurance of faith, and this second one reaches to the full assurance of understanding. God's work in us will abide unto perfection because God's mercy towards us thus abideth. Forsake not the works of thine own hands. Our confidence does not cause us to live without prayer, but encourages us to pray all more. Since we have it written upon our hearts that God will perfect his work in us, and we see it also written in Scripture that his mercy changeth not, with holy earnestness entreat that we may not be forsaken. If there be anything

good in us, it is the work Of God's own hands: will he leave it? Why has he wrought so much in us if he means to give us up?—it will be a sheer effort. He who has gone so far will surely persevere with us to the end. Our hope for the final perseverance of the believer lies in the final perseverance of believer's God. If the Lord begins to build, and does not finish, it will not be his honour. He will have a desire to the work of his hands, for he knows it has cost him already, and he will not throw away a vessel upon which he has expended so much of labour and skill. Therefore do we praise him with our, whole heart, even in the presence of those who depart from his Holy Word, and, set up another God and another gospel; which are not another, but there be some that trouble us.

Psalm 139

Verse 1. O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. He invokes in adoration Jehovah the all knowing God, and he proceeds to adore him by proclaiming one of his peculiar attributes. If we would praise God aright we must draw the matter of our praise from himself—"O Jehovah, thou hast." No pretended god knows aught of us; but the true God, Jehovah, understands us, and is most intimately acquainted with our persons, nature, and character. How well it is for us to know the God who knows us! The divine knowledge is extremely thorough and searching; it is as if he had searched us, as officers search a man for contraband goods, or as pillagers ransack a house for plunder. Yet we must not let the figure run upon all fours, and lead us further than it is meant to do: the Lord knows all things naturally and as a matter of course, and not by any effort on his part. Searching ordinarily implies a measure of ignorance which is removed by observation; of course this is not the case with the Lord; but the meaning of the Psalmist is, that the Lord knows us as thoroughly as if he had examined us minutely, and had pried into the most secret corners of our being. This infallible knowledge has always existed—"Thou hast searched me"; and it continues unto this day, since God cannot forget that which he has once known. There never was a time in which we were unknown to God, and there never will be a moment in which we shall be beyond his observation. Note how the Psalmist makes his doctrine personal: he saith not, "O God, thou knowest all things"; but, "thou hast known me." It is ever our wisdom to lay truth home to ourselves. How wonderful the contrast between the observer and the observed! Jehovah and me! Yet this most intimate connection exists, and therein lies our hope. Let the reader sit still a while and try to realize the two poles of this statement,—the Lord and poor puny man—and he will see much to admire and wonder at.

Verse 2. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising. Me thou knowest, and all that comes of me. I am observed when I quietly sit down, and marked when I resolutely rise up. My most common and casual acts, my most needful and necessary movements, are noted by time, and thou knowest the inward thoughts which regulate them. Whether I sink in lowly self renunciation, or ascend in pride, thou seest the motions of my mind, as well as those of my body. This is a fact to be remembered every moment: sitting down to consider, or rising up to act, we are still seen, known, and read by Jehovah our Lord. Thou understandest my thought afar off. Before it is my own it is foreknown and comprehended by thee. Though my thought be invisible to the sight, though as yet I be not myself cognizant of the shape it is assuming, yet thou hast it under thy consideration, and thou perceivest its nature, its source, its drift, its result. Never dost thou misjudge or wrongly interpret me: my inmost thought is perfectly understood by thine impartial mind. Though thou shouldst give but a glance at my heart, and see me as one sees a passing meteor moving afar, yet thou wouldst by that glimpse sum up all the meanings of my soul, so transparent is everything to thy piercing glance.

Verse 3. Thou compassest my path and my lying down. My path and my pallet, my running and my

resting, are alike within the circle of thine observation. Thou dost surround me even as the air continually surrounds all creatures that live. I am shut up within the wall of thy being; I am encircled within the bounds of thy knowledge. Waking or sleeping I am still observed of thee. I may leave thy path, but you never leave mine. I may sleep and forget thee, but thou dost never slumber, nor fall into oblivion concerning thy creature. The original signifies not only surrounding, but winnowing and sifting. The Lord judges our active life and our quiet life; he discriminates our action and our repose, and marks that in them which is good and also that which is evil. There is chaff in all our wheat, and the Lord divides them with unerring precision. And art acquainted with all my ways. Thou art familiar with all I do; nothing is concealed from thee, nor surprising to thee, nor misunderstood by thee. Our paths may be habitual or accidental, open or secret, but with them all the Most Holy One is well acquainted. This should fill us with awe, so that we sin not; with courage, so that we fear not; with delight, so that we mourn not.

Verse 4. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. The unformed word, which lies within the tongue like a seed in the soil, is certainly and completely known to the Great Searcher of hearts. A negative expression is used to make the positive statement all the stronger: not a word is unknown is a forcible way of saying that every word is well known. Divine knowledge is perfect, since not a single word is unknown, nay, not even an unspoken word, and each one is "altogether" or wholly known. What hope of concealment can remain when the speech with which too many conceal their thoughts is itself transparent before the Lord? O Jehovah, how great art thou! If thine eye hath such power, what must be the united force of thine whole nature!

Verse 5. Thou hast beset me behind and before. As though we were caught in an ambush, or besieged by an army which has wholly beleaguered the city walls, we are surrounded by the Lord. God has set us where we be, and beset us wherever we be. Behind us there is God recording our sins, or in grace blotting out the remembrance of them; and before us there is God foreknowing all our deeds, and providing for all our wants. We cannot turn back and so escape him, for he is behind; we cannot go forward and outmarch him, for he is before. He not only beholds us, but he besets us; and lest there should seem any chance of escape, or lest we should imagine that the surrounding presence is yet a distant one, it is added,—And laid thine hand upon me. The prisoner marches along surrounded by a guard, and gripped by an officer. God is very near; we are wholly in his power; from that power there is no escape. It is not said that God will thus beset us and arrest us, but it is done—"Thou hast beset me." Shall we not alter the figure, and say that our heavenly Father has folded his arms around us, and caressed us with his hand It is even so with those who are by faith the children of the Most High.

Verse 6. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. I cannot grasp it. I can hardly endure to think of it. The theme overwhelms me. I am amazed and astounded at it. Such knowledge not only surpasses my comprehension, but even my imagination. It is high, I cannot attain unto it. Mount as I may, this truth is too lofty for my mind. It seems to be always above me, even when I soar into the loftiest regions of spiritual thought. Is it not so with every attribute of God? Can we attain to any idea of his power, his wisdom, his holiness? Our mind has no line with which to measure the Infinite. Do we therefore question? Say, rather, that we therefore believe and adore. We are not surprised that the Most Glorious God should in his knowledge be high above all the knowledge to which we can attain: it must of necessity be so, since we are such poor limited beings; and when we stand a tip toe we cannot reach to the lowest step of the throne of the Eternal.

Verse 7. Here omnipresence is the theme,—a truth to which omniscience naturally leads up. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Not that the Psalmist wished to go from God, or to avoid the power of the divine life; but he asks this question to set forth the fact that no one can escape from the all pervading being and observation of the Great Invisible Spirit. Observe how the writer makes the matter personal to himself—"Whither shall I go?" It were well if we all thus applied truth to our own cases. It were wise for each one to say—The spirit of the Lord is ever around me: Jehovah is omnipresent to me. Or whither spirit I flee from thy presence? If, full of dread, I hastened to escape from that nearness of God which had become my terror, which way could I turn? "Whither?" "Whither?" He repeats his cry. No answer comes back to him. The reply to his first "Whither?" is its echo,—a second "Whither?" From the sight of God he cannot be hidden, but that is not all,—from the immediate, actual, constant presence of God he cannot be withdrawn. We must be, whether we will it or not, as near to God as our soul is to our body. This makes it dreadful work to sin; for we offend the Almighty to his face, and commit acts of treason at the very foot of his throne. Go from him, or flee from him we cannot: neither by patient travel nor by hasty flight can we withdraw from the all surrounding Deity. His mind is in our mind; himself within ourselves. His spirit is over our spirit; our presence is ever in his presence.

Verse 8. If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. Filling the loftiest region with his yet loftier presence, Jehovah is in the heavenly place, at home, upon his throne. The ascent, if it were possible, would be unavailing for purposes of escape; it would, in fact, be a flying into the centre of the fire to avoid the heat. There would he be immediately confronted by the terrible personality of God. Note the abrupt words—"THOU, THERE." If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. Descending into the lowest imaginable depths among the dead, there should we find the Lord. THOU! says the Psalmist, as if he felt that God was the one great Existence in all places. Whatever Hades may be, or whoever may be there, one thing is certain, Thou, O Jehovah, art there. Two regions, the one of glory and the other of darkness, are set in contrast, and this one fact is asserted of both—"thou art there." Whether we rise up or lie down, take our wing or make our bed, we shall find God near us. A "behold" is added to the second clause, since it seems more a wonder to meet with God in hell than in heaven, in Hades than in Paradise. Of course the presence of God produces very different effects in these places, but it is unquestionably in each; the bliss of one, the terror of the other. What an awful thought, that some men seem resolved to take up their night's abode in hell, a night which shall know no morning.

Verse 9. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea. If I could fly with all swiftness, and find a habitation where the mariner has not yet ploughed the deep, yet I could not reach the boundaries of the divine presence. Light flies with inconceivable rapidity, and it flashes far afield beyond all human ken; it illuminates the great and wide sea, and sets its waves gleaming afar; but its speed would utterly fail if employed in flying from the Lord. Were we to speed on the wings of the morning breeze, and break into oceans unknown to chart and map, yet there we should find the Lord already present. He who saves to the uttermost would be with us in the uttermost parts of the sea.

Verse 10. Even there shall thy hand lead me. We could only fly from God by his own power. The Lord would be leading, covering, preserving, sustaining us even when we were fugitives from him. And thy right hand shall hold me. In the uttermost parts of the sea my arrest would be as certain as at home: God's right hand would there seize and detain the runaway. Should we be commanded on the most distant errand, we may assuredly depend upon the upholding right hand of God as with us in all mercy, wisdom, and power. The exploring missionary in his lonely wanderings is led, in his solitary

feebleness he is held. Both the hands of God are with his own servants to sustain them, and against rebels to overthrow them; and in this respect it matters not to what realms they resort, the active energy of God is around them still.

Verse 11. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me. Dense darkness may oppress me, but it cannot shut me out from thee, or thee from me. Thou seest as well without the light as with it, since thou art not dependent upon light which is thine own creature, for the full exercise of thy perceptions. Moreover, thou art present with me whatever may be the hour; and being present you discover all that I think, or feel, or do. Men are still so foolish as to prefer night and darkness for their evil deeds; but so impossible is it for anything to be hidden from the Lord that they might just as well transgress in broad daylight.

Darkness and light in this agree;
Great God, they're both alike to thee.
Thine hand can pierce thy foes as soon
Through midnight shades as blazing noon.

A good man will not wish to be hidden by the darkness, a wise man will not expect any such thing. If we were so foolish as to make sure of concealment because the place was shrouded in midnight, we might well be alarmed out of our security by the fact that, as far as God is concerned, we always dwell in the light; for even the night itself glows with a revealing force,—even the night shall be light about me. Let us think of this if ever we are tempted to take license from the dark—it is light about us. If the darkness be light, how great is that light in which we dwell! Note well how David keeps his song in the first person; let us mind that we do the same as we cry with Hagar, "Thou God seest me."

Verse 12. Yea, of a surety, beyond all denial. The darkness hideth not from thee; it veils nothing, it is not the medium of concealment in any degree what ever. It hides from men, but not from God. But the night shineth as the day: it is but another form of day: it shines, revealing all; it "shineth as the day,"—quite as clearly and distinctly manifesting all that is done. The darkness and the light are both alike to thee. This sentence seems to sum up all that went before, and most emphatically puts the negative upon the faintest idea of hiding under the cover of night. Men cling to this notion, because it is easier and less expensive to hide under darkness than to journey to remote places; and therefore the foolish thought is here beaten to pieces by statements which in their varied forms effectually batter it. Yet the ungodly are still duped by their grovelling notions of God, and enquire, "How doth God know?" They must fancy that he is as limited in his powers of observation as they are, and yet if they would but consider for a moment they would conclude that he who could not see in the dark could not be God, and he who is not present everywhere could not be the Almighty Creator. Assuredly God is in all places, at all times, and nothing can by any possibility be kept away from his all observing, all comprehending mind. The Great Spirit comprehends within himself all time and space, and yet he is infinitely greater than these, or aught else that he has made.

Verse 13. For thou hast possessed my reins. Thou art the owner of my inmost parts and passions: not the indweller and observer only, but the acknowledged lord and possessor of my most secret self. The word "reins" signifies the kidneys, which by the Hebrews were supposed to be the seat of the desires and longings; but perhaps it indicates here the most hidden and vital portion of the man; this God doth not only inspect, and visit, but it is his own; he is as much at home there as a landlord on his own estate, or a proprietor in his own house. Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. There I

lay hidden—covered by thee. Before I could know thee, or aught else, thou hadst a care for me, and didst hide me away as a treasure till thou shouldst see fit to bring me to the light. Thus the Psalmist describes the intimacy which God had with him. In his most secret part—his reins, and in his most secret condition—yet unborn, he was under the control and guardianship of God.

Verse 14. I will praise thee: a good resolve, and one which he was even now carrying out. Those who are praising God are the very men who will praise him. Those who wish to praise have subjects for adoration ready to hand. We too seldom remember our creation, and all the skill and kindness bestowed upon our frame: but the sweet singer of Israel was better instructed, and therefore he prepares for the chief musician a song concerning our nativity and all the fashioning which precedes it. We cannot begin too soon to bless our Maker, who began so soon to bless us: even in the act of creation he created reasons for our praising his name, For I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Who can gaze even upon a model of our anatomy without wonder and awe? Who could dissect a portion of the human frame without marvelling at its delicacy, and trembling at its frailty? The Psalmist had scarcely peered within the veil which hides the nerves, sinews, and blood vessels from common inspection; the science of anatomy was quite unknown to him; and yet he had seen enough to arouse his admiration of the work and his reverence for the Worker.

Marvellous are thy works. These parts of my frame are all thy works; and though they be home works, close under my own eye, yet are they wonderful to the last degree. They are works within my own self, yet are they beyond my understanding, and appear to me as so many miracles of skill and power. We need not go to the ends of the earth for marvels, nor even across our own threshold; they abound in our own bodies. And that my soul knoweth right well. He was no agnostic—he knew; he was no doubter—his soul knew; he was no dupe—his soul knew right well. Those know indeed and of a truth who first know the Lord, and then know all things in him. He was made to know the marvellous nature of God's work with assurance and accuracy, for he had found by experience that the Lord is a master worker, performing inimitable wonders when accomplishing his kind designs. If we are marvellously wrought upon even before we are born, what shall we say of the Lord's dealings with us after we quit his secret workshop, and he directs our pathway through the pilgrimage of life? What shall we not say of that new birth which is even more mysterious than the first, and exhibits even more the love and wisdom of the Lord.

Verse 15. My substance was not hid from thee. The substantial part of my being was before thine all seeing eye; the bones which make my frame were put together by thine hand. The essential materials of my being before they were arranged were all within the range of thine eye. I was hidden from all human knowledge, but not from thee: thou hast ever been intimately acquainted with me. When I was made in secret. Most chastely and beautifully is here described the formation of our being before the time of our birth. A great artist will often labour alone in his studio, and not suffer his work to be seen until it is finished; even so did the Lord fashion us where no eye beheld as, and the veil was not lifted till every member was complete. Much of the formation of our inner man still proceeds in secret: hence the more of solitude the better for us. The true church also is being fashioned in secret, so that none may cry, "Lo, here!" or "Lo, there!" as if that which is visible could ever be identical with the invisibly growing body of Christ.

And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. "Embroidered with great skill", is an accurate poetical description of the creation of veins, sinews, muscles, nerves, etc. What tapestry can equal the human fabric? This work is wrought as much in private as if it had been accomplished in the

grave, or in the darkness of the abyss. The expressions are poetical, beautifully veiling, though not absolutely concealing, the real meaning. God's intimate knowledge of us from our beginning, and even before it, is here most charmingly set forth. Cannot he who made us thus wondrously when we were not, still carry on his work of power till he has perfected us, though we feel unable to aid in the process, and are lying in great sorrow and self loathing, as though cast into the lowest parts of the earth?

Verse 16. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect. While as yet the vessel was upon the wheel the Potter saw it all. The Lord knows not only our shape, but our substance: this is substantial knowledge indeed. The Lord's observation of us is intent and intentional,—“Thine eyes did see.” Moreover, the divine mind discerns all things as clearly and certainly as men perceive by actual eye sight. His is not hearsay acquaintance, but the knowledge which comes of sight. And in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. An architect draws his plans, and makes out his specifications; even so did the great Maker of our frame write down all our members in the book of his purposes. That we have eyes, and ears, and hands, and feet, is all due to the wise and gracious purpose of heaven: it was so ordered in the secret decree by which all things are as they are. God's purposes concern our limbs and faculties. Their form, and shape, and everything about them were appointed of God long before they had any existence. God saw us when we could not be seen, and he wrote about us when there was nothing of us to write about. When as yet there were none of our members in existence, all those members were before the eye of God in the sketch book of his foreknowledge and predestination.

This verse is an exceedingly difficult one to translate, but we do not think that any of the proposed amendments are better than the rendering afforded us by the Authorized Version. The large number of words in italics will warn the English reader that the sense is hard to come at, and difficult to express, and that it would be unwise to found any doctrine upon the English words; happily there is no temptation to do so. The great truth expressed in these lines has by many been referred to the formation of the mystical body of our Lord Jesus. Of course, what is true of man, as man, is emphatically true of Him who is the representative man. The great Lord knows who belong to Christ; his eye perceives the chosen members who shall yet be made one with the living person of the mystical Christ. Those of the elect who are as yet unborn, or unrenewed, are nevertheless written in the Lord's book. As the form of Eve grew up in silence and secrecy under the fashioning hand of the Maker, so at this hour is the Bride being fashioned for the Lord Jesus; or, to change the figure,—a body is being prepared in which the life and glory of the indwelling Lord shall for ever be displayed. The Lord knoweth them that are his: he has a specially familiar acquaintance with the members of the body of Christ; he sees their substance, unperfect though they be.

Verse 17. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! He is not alarmed at the fact that God knows all about him; on the contrary, he is comforted, and even feels himself to be enriched, as with a casket of precious jewels. That God should think upon him is the believer's treasure and pleasure. He cries, “How costly, how valued are thy thoughts, how dear to me is thy perpetual attention!” He thinks upon God's thoughts with delight; the more of them the better is he pleased. It is a joy worth worlds that the Lord should think upon us who are so poor and needy: it is a joy which fills our whole nature to think upon God; returning love for love, thought for thought, after our poor fashion. How great is the sum of them! When we remember that God thought upon us from old eternity, continues to think upon us every moment, and will think of us when time shall be no more, we may well exclaim, “How great is the sum!” Thoughts such as are natural to the Creator, the Preserver, the Redeemer,

the Father, the Friend, are evermore flowing from the heart of the Lord. Thoughts of our pardon, renewal, upholding, supplying, educating, perfecting, and a thousand more kinds perpetually well up in the mind of the Most High. It should fill us with adoring wonder and reverent surprise that the infinite mind of God should turn so many thoughts towards us who are so insignificant and so unworthy! What a contrast is all this to the notion of those who deny the existence of a personal, conscious God! Imagine a world without a thinking, personal God! Conceive of a grim providence of machinery!—a fatherhood of law! Such philosophy is hard and cold. As well might a man pillow his head upon a razor edge as seek rest in such a fancy. But a God always thinking of us makes a happy world, a rich life, a heavenly hereafter.

Verse 18. If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand. This figure shows the thoughts of God to be altogether innumerable; for nothing can surpass in number the grains of sand which belt the main ocean and all the minor seas. The task of counting God's thoughts of love would be a never ending one. If we should attempt the reckoning we must necessarily fail, for the infinite falls not within the line of our feeble intellect. Even could we count the sands on the seashore, we should not then be able to number God's thoughts, for they are "more in number than the sand." This is not the hyperbole of poetry, but the solid fact of inspired statement: God thinks upon us infinitely: there is a limit to the act of creation, but not to the might of divine love. When I awake, I am still with thee. Thy thoughts of love are so many that my mind never gets away from them, they surround me at all hours. I go to my bed, and God is my last thought; and when I wake I find my mind still hovering about his palace gates; God is ever with me, and I am ever with him. This is life indeed. If during sleep my mind wanders away into dreams, yet it only wanders upon holy ground, and the moment I wake my heart is back with its Lord. The Psalmist does not say, "When I awake, I return to thee", but, "I am still with thee"; as if his meditations were continuous, and his communion unbroken. Soon we shall lie down to sleep for the last time: God grant that when the trumpet of the archangel shall waken us we may find ourselves still with him.

Verse 19. Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God. There can be no doubt upon that head, for thou hast seen all their transgressions, which indeed have been done in thy presence; and thou hast long enough endured their provocations, which have been so openly manifest before thee. Crimes committed before the face of the Judge are not likely to go unpunished. If the eye of God is grieved with the presence of evil, it is but natural to expect that he will remove the offending object. God who sees all evil will slay all evil. With earthly sovereigns sin may go unpunished for lack of evidence, or the law may be left without execution from lack of vigour in the judge; but this cannot happen in the case of God, the living God. He beareth not the sword in vain. Such is his love of holiness and hatred of wrong, that he will carry on war to the death with those whose hearts and lives are wicked. God will not always suffer his lovely creation to be defaced and defiled by the presence of wickedness: if anything is sure, this is sure, that he will ease him of his adversaries. Depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. Men who delight in cruelty and war are not fit companions for those who walk with God. David chases the men of blood from his court, for he is weary of those of whom God is weary. He seems to say—If God will not let you live with him I will not have you live with me. You would destroy others, and therefore I want you not in my society. You will be destroyed yourselves, I desire you not in my service. Depart from me, for you depart from God. As we delight to have the holy God always near us, so would we eagerly desire to have wicked men removed as far as possible from us. We tremble in the society of the ungodly lest their doom should fall upon them suddenly, and we should see them lie dead at our feet. We do not wish to have our place of intercourse turned into a gallows of execution, therefore let the condemned be removed out of our company.

Verse 20. For they speak against thee wickedly. Why should I bear their company when their talk sickens me? They vent their treasons and blasphemies as often as they please, doing so without the slightest excuse or provocation; let them therefore be gone, where they may find a more congenial associate than I can be. When men speak against God they will be sure to speak against us, if they find it serve their turn; hence godless men are not the stuff out of which true friends can ever be made. God gave these men their tongues, and they turn them against their Benefactor, wickedly, from sheer malice, and with great perverseness. And thine enemies take thy name in vain. This is their sport: to insult Jehovah's glorious name is their amusement. To blaspheme the name of the Lord is a gratuitous wickedness in which there can be no pleasure, and from which there can be no profit. This is a sure mark of the "enemies" of the Lord, that they have the impudence to assail his honour, and treat his glory with irreverence. How can God do other than slay them? How can we do other than withdraw from every sort of association with them? What a wonder of sin it is that men should rail against so good a Being as the Lord our God! The impudence of those who talk wickedly is a singular fact, and it is the more singular when we reflect that the Lord against whom they speak is all around them, and lays to heart every dishonour which they render to his holy name. We ought not to wonder that men slander and deride us, for they do the same with the Most High God.

Verse 21. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? He was a good hater, for he hated only those who hated good. Of this hatred he is not ashamed, but he sets it forth as a virtue to which he would have the Lord bear testimony. To love all men with benevolence is our duty; but to love any wicked man with complacency would be a crime. To hate a man for his own sake, or for any evil done to us, would be wrong; but to hate a man because he is the foe of all goodness and the enemy of all righteousness, is nothing more nor less than an obligation. The more we love God the more indignant shall we grow with those who refuse him their affection. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maranatha." Truly, "jealousy is cruel as the grave." The loyal subject must not be friendly to the traitor. And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? He appeals to heaven that he took no pleasure in those who rebelled against the Lord; but, on the contrary, he was made to mourn by a sight of their ill behaviour. Since God is everywhere, he knows our feelings towards the profane and ungodly, and he knows that so far from approving such characters the very sight of them is grievous to our eyes.

Verse 22. I hate them with perfect hatred. He does not leave it a matter of question. He does not occupy a neutral position. His hatred to bad, vicious, blasphemous men is intense, complete, energetic. He is as whole hearted in his hate of wickedness as in his love of goodness. I count them mine enemies. He makes a personal matter of it. They may have done him no ill, but if they are doing despite to God, to his laws, and to the great principles of truth and righteousness, David proclaims war against them. Wickedness passes men into favour with unrighteous spirits; but it excludes them from the communion of the just. We pull up the drawbridge and man the walls when a man of Belial goes by our castle. His character is a casus belli; we cannot do otherwise than contend with those who contend with God.

Verse 23. Search me, O God, and know my heart. David is no accomplice with traitors. He has disowned them in set form, and now he appeals to God that he does not harbour a trace of fellowship with them. He will have God himself search him, and search him thoroughly, till every point of his being is known, and read, and understood; for he is sure that even by such an investigation there will be found in him no complicity with wicked men. He challenges the fullest investigation, the innermost

search: he had need be a true man who can put himself deliberately into such a crucible. Yet we may each one desire such searching; for it would be a terrible calamity to us for sin to remain in our hearts unknown and undiscovered. Try me, and know my thoughts. Exercise any and every test upon me. By fire and by water let me be examined. Read not alone the desires of my heart, but the fugitive thoughts of my head. Know with all penetrating knowledge all that is or has been in the chambers of my mind. What a mercy that there is one being who can know us to perfection! He is intimately at home with us. He is graciously inclined towards us, and is willing to bend his omniscience to serve the end of our sanctification. Let us pray as David did, and let us be as honest as he. We cannot hide our sin: salvation lies the other way, in a plain discovery of evil, and an effectual severance from it.

Verse 24. And see if there be any wicked way in me. See whether there be in my heart, or in my life, any evil habit unknown to myself. If there be such an evil way, take me from it, take it from me. No matter how dear the wrong may have become, nor how deeply prejudiced I may have been in its favour, be pleased to deliver me therefrom altogether, effectually, and at once, that I may tolerate nothing which is contrary to thy mind. As I hate the wicked in their way, so would I hate every wicked way in myself. And lead me in the way everlasting. If thou hast introduced me already to the good old way, be pleased to keep me in it, and conduct me further and further along it. It is a way which thou hast set up of old, it is based upon everlasting principles, and it is the way in which immortal spirits will gladly run for ever and ever. There will be no end to it world without end. It lasts for ever, and they who are in it last for ever. Conduct me into it, O Lord, and conduct me throughout the whole length of it. By thy providence, by thy word, by thy grace, and by thy Spirit, lead me evermore.

Psalm 140

Verse 1. Deliver me, O LORD, from the evil man. It reads like a clause of the Lord's prayer, "Deliver us from evil." David does not so much plead against an individual as against the species represented by him, namely, the being whose best description is—"the evil man." There are many such abroad; indeed we shall not find an unregenerate man who is not in some sense an evil man, and yet all are not alike evil. It is well for us that our enemies are evil: it would be a horrible thing to have the good against us. When "the evil man" bestirs himself against the godly he is as terrible a being as a wolf, or a serpent, or even a devil. Fierce, implacable, unpitiful, unrelenting, unscrupulous, he cares for nothing but the indulgence of his malice. The persecuted man turns to God in prayer; he could not do a wiser thing. Who can meet the evil man and defeat him save Jehovah himself, whose infinite goodness is more than a match for all the evil in the universe? We cannot of ourselves baffle the craft of the enemy, but the Lord knoweth how to deliver his saints. He can keep us out of the enemy's reach, he can sustain us when under his power, he can rescue us when our doom seems fixed, he can give us the victory when defeat seems certain; and in any and every case, if he do not save us from the man he can keep us from the evil. Should we be at this moment oppressed in any measure by ungodly men, it will be better to leave our defence with God than to attempt it ourselves. Preserve me from the violent man. Evil in the heart simmers in malice, and at last boils in passion. Evil is a ragtag thing when it getteth liberty to manifest itself; and so "the evil man" soon develops into "the violent man" What watchfulness, strength, or valour can preserve the child of God from deceit and violence? There is but one sure Preserver, and it is our wisdom to hide under the shadow of his wings. It is a common thing for good men to be assailed by enemies: David was attacked by Saul, Doeg, Ahithophel, Shimei, and others; even Mordecai sitting humbly in the gate had his Haman; and our Lord, the Perfect One, was surrounded by those who thirsted for his blood. We may not, therefore, hope to pass through the world without enemies, but we may hope to be delivered out of

their hands, and preserved from their rage, so that no real harm shall come of their malignity. This blessing is to be sought by prayer, and expected by faith.

Verse 2. Which imagine mischiefs in their heart. They cannot be happy unless they are plotting and planning, conspiring and contriving. They seem to have but one heart, for they are completely agreed in their malice; and with all their heart and soul they pursue their victim. One piece of mischief is not enough for them; they work in the plural, and prepare many arrows for their bow. What they cannot actually do they nevertheless like to think over, and to rehearse on the stage of their cruel fancy. It is an awful thing to have such a heart disease as this. When the imagination gloats over doing harm to others, it is a sure sign that the entire nature is far gone in wickedness. Continually are they gathered together for war. They are a committee of opposition in permanent session: they never adjourn, but perpetually consider the all absorbing question of how to do the most harm to the man of God. They are a standing army always ready for the fray: they not only go to the wars, but dwell in them. Though they are the worst of company, yet they put up with one another, and are continually in each other's society, confederate for fight. David's enemies were as violent as they were evil, as crafty as they were violent, and as persistent as they were crafty. It is hard dealing with persons who are only in their element when they are at daggers drawn with you. Such a case calls for prayer, and prayer calls on God.

Verse 3. They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent. The rapid motion of a viper's tongue gives you the idea of its sharpening it; even thus do the malicious move their tongues at such a rate that one might suppose them to be in the very act of wearing them to a point, or rubbing them to a keen edge. It was a common notion that serpents inserted their poison by their tongues, and the poets used the idea as a poetical expression, although it is certain that the serpent wounds by his fangs and not by his tongue. We are not to suppose that all authors who used such language were mistaken in their natural history any more than a writer can be charged with ignorance of astronomy because he speaks of the sun's travelling from east to west. How else can poets speak but according to the appearance of things to an imaginative eye. The world's great poet puts it in "King Lear":

"She struck me with her tongue,
Most serpent like, upon the very heart."

In the case of slanderers, they so literally sting with their tongues, which are so nimble in malice, and withal so piercing and cutting, that it is by no means unjust to speak of them as sharpened. "Adders' poison is under their lips." The deadliest of all venom is the slander of the unscrupulous. Some men care not what they say so long as they can vex and injure. Our text, however, must not be confined in its reference to some few individuals, for in the inspired epistle to the Romans it is quoted by the apostle as being true of us all. So depraved are we by nature that the most venomous creatures are our fit types. The old serpent has not only inoculated us with his venom, but he has caused us to be ourselves producers of the like poison: it lies under our lips, ready for use, and, alas, it is all too freely used when we grow angry, and desire to take vengeance upon any who have caused us vexation. It is sadly wonderful what hard things even good men will say when provoked; yea, even such as call themselves "perfect" in cool blood are not quite as gentle as doves when their claims to sinlessness are bluntly questioned. This poison of evil speaking would never fall from our lips, however much we might be provoked, if it were not there at other times; but by nature we have as great a store of venomous words as a cobra has of poison. O Lord, take the poison bags away, and cause our lips to drop nothing but honey. Selah. This is heavy work. Go up, go up, my heart! Sink not too low. Fall not

into the lowest key. Lift up thyself to God.

Verse 4. Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked. To fall into their hands would be a calamity indeed. David in his most pitiable plight chose to fall into the hand of a chastising God rather than to be left in the power of men. No creature among the wild beasts of the wood is so terrible an enemy to man as man himself when guided by evil, and impelled by violence. The Lord by providence and grace can keep us out of the power of the wicked. He alone can do this, for neither our own watchfulness nor the faithfulness of friends can secure us against the serpentine assaults of the foe. We have need to be preserved from the smooth as well as the rough hands of the ungodly, for their flatteries may harm us as much as their calumnies. The hands of their example may pollute us, and so do us more harm than the hands of their oppression. Jehovah must be our keeper, or evil hands will do what evil hearts have imagined and evil lips have threatened. Preserve me from the violent man. His intense passion makes him terribly dangerous. He will strike anyhow, use any weapon, smite from any quarter: he is so furious that he is reckless of his own life if he may accomplish his detestable design. Lord, preserve us by thine omnipotence when men attack us with their violence. This prayer is a wise and suitable one. Who have purposed to overthrow my goings. They resolve to turn the good man from his resolve, they would defeat his designs, injure his integrity, and blast his character. Their own goings are wicked, and therefore they hate those of the righteous, seeing they are a standing rebuke to them. This is a forcible argument to use in prayer with God: he is the patron of holiness, and when the pure lives of his people are in danger of overthrow, he may be expected to interpose. Never let the pious forget to pray, for this is a weapon against which the most determined enemy cannot stand.

Verse 5. The proud have hid a snare for me. Proud as they are, they stoop to this mean action: they use a snare, and they hide it away, that their victim may be taken like a poor hare who is killed without warning—killed in its usual run, by a snare which it could not see. David's enemies wished to snare him in his path of service, the usual way of his life. Saul laid many snares for David, but the Lord preserved him. All around us there are snares of one sort or another, and he will be well kept, aye, divinely kept, who never falls into one of them. And cords. With these they pull the net together and with these they bind their captive. Thus fowlers do, and trappers of certain large animals. The cords of love are pleasant, but the cords of hate are cruel as death itself. They have spread a net by the wayside. Where it will be near their prey; where the slightest divergence from the path will bring the victim into it. Surely the common wayside ought to be safe: men who go out of the way may well be taken in a net, but the path of duty is proverbially the path of safety; yet it is safe nowhere when malicious persons are abroad. Birds are taken in nets, and men are taken by deceit. Satan instructs his children in the art of fowling, and they right speedily learn how to spread nets: perhaps they have been doing that for us already; let us make our appeal to God concerning it. They have set gins for me. One instrument of destruction is not enough; they are so afraid of missing their prey that they multiply their traps, using differing devices, so that one way or another they may take their victim. Those who avoid the snare and the net may yet be caught in a gin, and accordingly gins are placed in all likely places. If a godly man can be cajoled, or bribed, or cowed, or made angry, the wicked will make the attempt. Ready are they to twist his words, misread his intentions, and misdirect his efforts; ready to fawn, and lie, and make themselves mean to the last degree so that they may accomplish their abominable purpose. Selah. The harp needs tuning after such a strain, and the heart needs lifting up towards God.

Verse 6. I said unto the LORD, Thou art my God. Here was David's stay and hope. He was assured

that Jehovah was his God, he expressed that assurance, and he expressed it before Jehovah himself. That had need be a good and full assurance which a man dares to lay before the face of the heart searching Lord. The Psalmist when hunted by man, addressed himself to God. Often the less we say to our foes, and the more we say to our best Friend the better it will fare with us: if we say anything, let it be said unto the Lord. David rejoiced in the fact that he had already said that Jehovah was his God: he was content to have committed himself, he had no wish to draw back. The Lord was David's own by deliberate choice, to which he again sets his seal with delight. The wicked reject God, but the righteous receive him as their own, their treasure, their pleasure, their light and delight. Hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD. Since thou art mine, I pray thee hear my cries. We cannot ask this favour of another man's god, but we may seek it from our own God. The prayers of saints have a voice in them; they are expressive pleadings even when they sound like inarticulate moanings. The Lord can discern a voice in our waitings, and he can and will hearken thereto. Because he is God he can hear us; because he is our God he will hear us. So long as the Lord doth but hear us we are content: the answer may be according to his own will, but we do entreat to be heard: a soul in distress is grateful to any one who will be kind and patient enough to hearken to its tale, but specially is it thankful for an audience with Jehovah. The more we consider his greatness and our insignificance, his wisdom and our folly, the more shall we be filled with praise when the Lord attends unto our cry.

Verse 7. O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle. When he looked back upon past dangers and deliverances, the good man felt that he should have perished had not the Lord held a shield over his head. In the day of the clash of arms, or of the putting on of armour (as some read it), the glorious Lord had been his constant Protector. Goliath had his armour bearer, and so had Saul, and these each one guarded his master; yet the giant and the king both perished, while David, without armour or shield, slew the giant and baffled the tyrant. The shield of the Eternal is a better protection than a helmet of brass, When arrows fly thick and the battle axe crashes right and left, there is no covering for the head like the power of the Almighty. See how the child of providence glorifies his Preserver! He calls him not only his salvation, but the strength of it, by whose unrivalled force he had been enabled to outlive the cunning and cruelty of his adversaries. He had obtained a deliverance in which the strength of the Omnipotent was clearly to be seen. This is a grand utterance of praise, a gracious ground of comfort, a prevalent argument in prayer. He that has covered our head aforetime will not now desert us. Wherefore let us fight a good fight, and fear no deadly wound: the Lord God is our shield, and our exceeding great reward.

Verse 8. Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked. Even they are dependent upon thee they can do no more than thou dost permit. Thou dost restrain them; not a dog of them can move his tongue without thy leave and license. Therefore I entreat thee not to let them have their way. Even though they dare to pray to their, do not hear their prayers against innocent men. Assuredly the Lord Jehovah will be no accomplice with the malevolent; their desires shall never be his desires; if they thirst for blood he will not gratify their cruelty. Further not his wicked devices They are so united as to be like one man in their wishes; but do not hear their prayers. Though hand join in hand, and they desire and design as one man, yet do not thou lend them the aid of thy providence. Do not permit their malicious schemes to succeed. The Lord may allow success to attend the policy of the wicked for a time for wise reasons unknown to us, but we are permitted to pray that it be not so. The petition "Deliver us from evil" includes and allows such supplication. Lest they exalt themselves. If successful, the wicked are sure to grow proud, and insult the righteous over whom they have triumphed, and this is so great an evil, and so dishonouring to God, that the Psalmist uses it in his pleading as an

argument against their being allowed to prosper. The glory of the wicked is opposed to the glory of God. If God seems to favour them they grow too high for this world, and their heads strike against the heavens. Let us hope that the Lord will not suffer this to be. Selah. Here let us exalt our thoughts and praises high over the heads of self exalting sinners. The more they rise in conceit the higher let us rise in confidence.

Verse 9. As for the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them. To the Lord who had covered his head amid the din of arms the Psalmist appeals against his foes, that their heads may be covered in quite another sense—covered with the reward of their own malice. David's foes were so many that they hemmed him in, encircling him as hunters do their prey. It is little wonder that he turns to the Lord in his dire need. The poet represents his adversaries as so united as to have but one head; for there is often a unanimity among evil spirits which makes them the more strong and terrible for their vile purposes. The lex talionis, or law of retaliation, often brings down upon violent men the evil which they planned and spoke of for others: their arrows fall upon themselves. When a man's lips vent curses they will probably, like chickens, come home to roost. A stone hurled upward into the air is apt to fall upon the thrower's head. David's words may be read in the future as a prophecy; but in this verse, at any rate, there is no need to do so in order to soften their tone. It is so just that the mischief which men plot and the slander which they speak should recoil upon themselves that every righteous man must desire it: he who does not desire it may wish to be considered humane and Christlike, but the chances are that he has a sneaking agreement with the wicked, or is deficient in a manly sense of right and wrong. When evil men fall into pits which they have digged for the innocent we believe that even the angels are glad; certainly the most gentle and tender of philanthropists, however much they pity the sufferers, must also approve the justice which makes them suffer. We suspect that some of our excessively soft spoken critics only need to be put into David's place, and they would become a vast deal more bitter than he ever was.

Verse 10. Let burning coals fall upon them. Then will they know that the scattering of the firebrands is not the sport they thought it to be. When hailstones and coals of fire descend upon them, how will they escape? Even the skies above the wicked are able to deal out vengeance upon them. Let them be cast into the fire. They have kindled the flames of strife, and it is fair that they should be cast therein. They have heated the furnace of slander seven times hotter than it was wont to be heated, and they shall be devoured therein. Who would have pitied Nebuchadnezzar if he had been thrown into his own burning fiery furnace? Into deep pits, that they rise not up again. They made those ditches or fosses for the godly, and it is meet that they should themselves fall into them and never escape. When a righteous man falls he rises again; but when the wicked man goes down "he falls like Lucifer, never to hope again." The Psalmist in this passage graphically depicts the Sodom of the wicked persecutor: fire falls upon him from heaven; the city blazes, and he is cast into the conflagration; the vale of Siddim is full of slime pits, and into these he is hurried. Extraordinary judgment overtakes the extraordinary offender: above, around, beneath, all is destruction. He would have consumed the righteous, and now he is consumed himself. So shall it be: so let it be.

Verse 11. Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth. For that would be an established plague, a perpetual curse. Men of false and cruel tongues are of most use when they go to fatten the soil in which they rot as carcasses: while they are alive they are the terror of the good, and the torment of the poor. God will not allow the specious orators of falsehood to retain the power they temporarily obtain by their deceitful speaking. They may become prominent, but they cannot become permanent. They shall be disendowed and disestablished in spite of all that they can say to the contrary. All evil

bears the element of decay within itself; for what is it but corruption? Hence the utmost powers of oratory are insufficient to settle upon a sure foundation the cause which bears a lie within it. Evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him. He hunted the good, and now his own evil shall hunt him. He tried to overthrow the goings of the righteous, and now his own unrighteousness shall prove his overthrow. As he was violent, so shall he be violently assaulted and hunted down. Sin is its own punishment; a violent man will need no direr doom than to reap what he has sown. It is horrible for a huntsman to be devoured by his own hounds; yet this is the sure fate of the persecutor.

Verse 12. I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and, the right of the poor. All through the Psalm the writer is bravely confident, and speaks of things about which he had no doubt: in fact, no Psalm can be more grandly positive than this protest against slander. The slandered saint knew Jehovah's care for the afflicted, for he had received actual proofs of it himself. "I will maintain it" is the motto of the great Defender of the rights of the needy. What confidence this should create within the bosoms of the persecuted and poverty stricken! The prosperous and wealthy can maintain their own cause, but those who are otherwise shall find that God helps those who cannot help themselves. Many talk as if the poor had no rights worth noticing, but they will sooner or later find out their mistake when the Judge of all the earth begins to plead with them.

Verse 13. Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name. The former Psalm had its "surely", but this is a more pleasing one. As surely as God will slay the wicked he will save the oppressed, and fill their hearts and mouths with praises. Whoever else may be silent, the righteous will give thanks; and whatever they may suffer, the matter will end ill their living through the trial, and magnifying the Lord for his delivering grace. On earth ere long, and in heaven for ever, the pure in heart shall sing unto the Lord. How loud and sweet will be the songs of the redeemed in the millennial age, when the meek shall inherit the earth, and delight themselves in the abundance of peace! The upright shall dwell in thy presence. Thus shall they give thanks in the truest and fullest manner. This abiding before the Lord shall render to him "songs without words", and therefore all the more spiritual and true. Their living and walking with their God shall be their practical form of gratitude. Sitting down in holy peace, like children at their father's table, their joyful looks and language shall speak their high esteem and fervent love to him who has become their dwelling place. How high have we climbed in this Psalm—from being hunted by the evil man to dwelling in the divine presence; so doth faith upraise the saint from the lowest depths to heights of peaceful repose. Well might the song be studded with Selahs, or uplifters.

Psalm 141

Verse 1. Lord, I cry unto thee. This is my last resort: prayer never fails me. My prayer is painful and feeble, and worthy only to be called a cry; but it is a cry unto Jehovah, and this ennobles it. I have cried unto thee, I still cry to thee, and I always mean to cry to thee. To whom else could I go? What else can I do? Others trust to themselves, but I cry unto thee. The weapon of all prayer is one which the believer may always carry with him, and use in every time of need. Make haste unto me. His case was urgent, and he pleaded that urgency. God's time is the best time, but when we are sorely pressed we may with holy importunity quicken the movements of mercy. In many cases, if help should come late, it would come too late; and we are permitted to pray against such a calamity. Give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee. See how a second time he talks of crying: prayer had become his frequent, yea, his constant exercise: twice in a few words he says, "I cry; I cry." How he longs to be heard, and to be heard at once! There is a voice to the great Father in every cry, and

groan, and tear of his children: he can understand what they mean when they are quite unable to express it. It troubles the spirit of the saints when they fear that no favourable ear is turned to their doleful cries: they cannot rest unless their "unto thee" is answered by an "unto me." When prayer is a man's only refuge, he is deeply distressed at the bare idea of his failing therein.

"That were a grief I could not bear,
Didst thou not hear and answer prayer;
But a prayer hearing, answering God
Supports me under every load."

Verse 2. Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense. As incense is carefully prepared, kindled with holy fire, and devoutly presented unto God, so let my prayer be. We are not to look upon prayer as easy work requiring no thought. It needs to be "set forth"; what is more, it must be set forth "before the Lord, "by a sense of his presence and a holy reverence for his name: neither may we regard all supplication as certain of divine acceptance, it needs to be set forth before the Lord "as incense, "concerning the offering of which there were rules to be observed, otherwise it would be rejected of God. And the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Whatever form his prayer might take his one desire was that it might be accepted of God. Prayer is sometimes presented without words by the very motions of our bodies: bent knees and lifted hands are the tokens of earnest, expectant prayer. Certainly work, or the lifting up of the hands in labour, is prayer if it be done in dependence upon God and for his glory: there is a hand prayer as well as a heart prayer, and our desire is that tiffs may be sweet unto the Lord as the sacrifice of eventide. Holy hope, the lifting up of hands that hang down, is also a kind of worship: may it ever be acceptable with God. The Psalmist makes a bold request: he would have his humble cries and prayers to be as much regarded of the Lord as the appointed morning and evening sacrifices of the holy place. Yet the prayer is by no means too bold, for, after all, the spiritual is in the Lord's esteem higher than the ceremonial, and the calves of the lips are a truer sacrifice than the calves of the stall. So far we have a prayer about prayer: we have a distinct supplication in the two following verses.

Verse 3. Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth. That mouth had been used in prayer, it would be a pity it should ever be defiled with untruth, or pride, or wrath; yet so it will become unless carefully watched, for these intruders are ever lurking about the door. David feels that with all his own watchfulness he may be surprised into sin, and so he begs the Lord himself to keep him. When Jehovah sets the watch the city is well guarded: when the Lord becomes the guard of our mouth the whole man is well garrisoned. Keep the door of my lips. God has made our lips the door of the mouth, but we cannot keep that door of ourselves, therefore do we entreat the Lord to take the rule of it. O that the Lord would both open and shut our lips, for we can do neither the one nor the other aright if left to ourselves. In times of persecution by ungodly men we are peculiarly liable to speak hastily, or evasively, and therefore we should be specially anxious to be preserved in that direction from every form of sin. How condescending is the Lord! We are ennobled by being door keepers for him, and yet he deigns to be a door keeper for us. Incline not my heart to any evil thing. It is equivalent to the petition, "Lead us not into temptation." O that nothing may arise in providence which would excite our desires in a wrong direction. The Psalmist is here careful of his heart. He who holds the heart is lord of the man: but if the tongue and the heart are under God's care all is safe. Let us pray that he may never leave us to our own inclinations, or we shall soon decline from the right.

To practise wicked works with men that work iniquity. The way the heart inclines the life soon tends:

evil things desired bring forth wicked things practised. Unless the fountain of life is kept pure the streams of life will soon be polluted. Alas, there is great power in company: even good men are apt to be swayed by association; hence the fear that we may practise wicked works when we are with wicked workers. We must endeavour not to be with them lest we sin with them. It is bad when the heart goes the wrong way alone, worse when the life runs in the evil road alone; but it is apt to increase unto a high degree of ungodliness when the backslider runs the downward path with a whole horde of sinners around him. Our practice will be our perdition if it be evil: it is an aggravation of sin rather than an excuse for it to say that it is our custom and our habit. It is God's practice to punish all who make a practice of iniquity. Good men are horrified at the thought of sinning as others do; the fear of it drives them to their knees. Iniquity, which, being interpreted, is a want of equity, is a thing to be shunned as we would avoid an infectious disease. And let me not eat of their dainties. If we work with them we shall soon eat with them. They will bring out their sweet morsels, and delicate dishes, in the hope of binding us to their service by the means of our palates. The trap is baited with delicious meats that we may be captured and become meat for their malice. If we would not sin with men we had better not sit with them, and if we would not share their wickedness we must not share their wantonness.

Verse 5. Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness. He prefers the bitters of gracious company to the dainties of the ungodly. He would rather be smitten by the righteous than feasted by the wicked. He gives a permit to faithful admonition, he even invites it—"let the righteous smite me." When the ungodly smile upon us their flattery is cruel; when the righteous smite us their faithfulness is kind. Sometimes godly men rap hard; they do not merely hint at evil, but hammer at it; and even then we are to receive the blows in love, and be thankful to the hand which smites so heavily. Fools resent reproof; wise men endeavour to profit by it. And let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break ray head. Oil breaks no heads, and rebuke does no man any harm; rather, as oil refreshes and perfumes, so does reproof when fitly taken sweeten and renew the heart. My friend must love me well if he will tell me of my faults: there is an unction about him if he is honest enough to point out my errors. Many a man has had his head broken at the feasts of the wicked, but none at the table of a true hearted reprove. The oil of flattery is not excellent; the oil so lavishly used at the banquet of the reveller is not excellent; head breaking and heart breaking attend the anointings of the riotous; but it is otherwise with the severest censures of the godly: they are not always sweet, but they are always excellent; they may for the moment bruise the heart, but they never break either it or the head. For yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities. Gracious men never grow wrathful with candid friends so as to harbour an ill feeling against them; if so, when they saw them in affliction, they would turn round upon them and taunt them with their rebukes. Far from it; these wisely grateful souls are greatly concerned to see their instructors in trouble, and they bring forth their best prayers for their assistance. They do not merely pray for them, but they so closely and heartily sympathize that their prayers are "in their calamities, "down in the dungeon with them. So true is Christian brotherhood that we are with our friends in sickness or persecution, suffering their griefs; so that our heart's prayer is in their sorrows. When we can give good men nothing more, let us give them our prayers, and let us do this doubly to those who have given us their rebukes.

Verse 6. This is a verse of which the meaning seems far to seek. Does it refer to the righteous among the Israelites? We think so. David surely means that when their leaders fell never to rise again, they would then turn to him and take delight in listening to his voice. When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words; for they are sweet. And so they did: the death of Saul made all the best of the nation look to the son of Jesse as the Lord's anointed; his words became sweet to

them. Many of those good men who had spoken severely of David's quitting his country, and going over to the Philistines, were nevertheless dear to his heart for their fidelity, and to them he returned nothing but good will, loving prayers, and sweet speeches, knowing that by and by they would overlook his faults, and select him to be their leader. They smote him when he erred, but they recognized his excellences. He, on his part, bore no resentment, but loved them for their honesty. He would pray for them when their land lay bleeding at the feet of their foreign enemies; he would come to their rescue when their former leaders were slain; and his words of courageous hopefulness would be sweet in their ears. This seems to me to be a good sense, consistent with the context. At the same time, other and more laboured interpretations have their learned admirers, and to these we will refer in our notes from other authors.

Verse 7. David's case seemed hopeless: the cause of God in Israel was as a dead thing, even as a skeleton broken, and rotten, and shovelled out of the grave, to return as dust to its dust. Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth. There seemed to be no life, no cohesion, no form, order, or headship among the godly party in Israel: Saul had demolished it, and scattered all its parts, so that it did not exist as an organized whole. David himself was like one of these dried bones, and the rest of the godly were in much the same condition. There seemed to be no vitality or union among the holy seed; but their cause lay at death's door. As when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth. They were like wood divided and thrown apart: not as one piece of timber, nor even as a bundle, but all cut to pieces, and thoroughly divided. Leaving out the word "wood", which is supplied by the translators, the figure relates to cleaving upon the earth, which probably means ploughing, but may signify any other form of chopping and splitting, such as felling a forest, tearing up bushes, or otherwise causing confusion and division. How often have good men thought thus of the cause of God! Wherever they have looked, death, division, and destruction have stared them in the face. Cut and cloven, hopelessly sundered! Scattered, yea, scattered at the grave's mouth! Split up and split for the fire! Such the cause of God and truth has seemed to be. "Upon the earth" the prospect was wretched; the field of the church was ploughed, burrowed, and scarified: it had become like a wood chopper's yard, where everything was doomed to be broken up. We have seen churches in such a state, and have been heart broken. What a mercy that there is always a place above the earth to which we can look! There lives One who will give a resurrection to his cause, and a reunion to his divided people. He will bring up the dead bones from the grave's mouth, and make the dried faggots live again. Let us imitate the Psalmist in the next verse, and look up to the living God.

Verse 8. But mine eyes are unto thee, O GOD the Lord. He looked upward and kept his eyes fixed there. He regarded duty more than circumstances; he considered the promise rather than the external providence; and he expected from God rather than from men. He did not shut his eyes in indifference or despair, neither did he turn them to the creature in vain confidence, but he gave his eyes to his God, and saw nothing to fear. Jehovah his Lord is also his hope. Thomas called Jesus Lord and God, and David here speaks of his God and Lord. Saints delight to dwell upon the divine names when they are adoring or appealing. In thee is my trust. Not alone in thine attributes or in thy promises, but in thyself. Others might confide where they chose, but David kept to his God: in him he trusted always, only, confidently, and unreservedly. Leave not my soul destitute; as it would be if the Lord did not remember and fulfil his promise. To be destitute in circumstances is bad, but to be destitute in soul is far worse; to be left of friends is a calamity, but to be left of God would be destruction. Destitute of God is destitution with a vengeance. The comfort is that God hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Verse 9. Keep me from, the snares which they have laid for me. He had before asked, in Ps 141:3, that the door of his mouth might be kept; but his prayer now grows into "Keep me." He seems more in trouble about covert temptation than concerning open attacks. Brave men do not dread battle, but they hate secret plots. We cannot endure to be entrapped like unsuspecting animals; therefore we cry to the God of wisdom for protection. And the gins of the workers of iniquity. These evil workers sought to catch David in his speech or acts. This was in itself a piece of in equity, and so of a piece with the rest of their conduct. They were bad themselves, and they wished either to make him like themselves, or to cause him to seem so. If they could not catch the good man in one way, they would try another; snares and gins should be multiplied, for anyhow they were determined to work his ruin. Nobody could preserve David but the Omniscient and Omnipotent One: he also will preserve us. It is hard to keep out of snares which you cannot see, and to escape gins which you cannot discover. Well might the much hunted Psalmist cry, "Keep me."

Verse 10. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, whilst that I withal escape. It may not be a Christian prayer, but it is a very just one, and it takes a great deal of grace to refrain from crying Amen to it; in fact, grace does not work towards making us wish otherwise concerning the enemies of holy men. Do we not all wish the innocent to be delivered, and the guilty to reap the result of their own malice? Of course we do, if we are just men. There can be no wrong in desiring that to happen in our own case which we wish for all good men. Yet is there a more excellent way.

Psalm 142

Verse 1. I cried unto the LORD with my voice. It was a cry of such anguish that he remembers it long after, and makes a record of it. In the loneliness of the cave he could use his voice as much as he pleased; and therefore he made its gloomy vaults echo with his appeals to heaven. When there was no soul in the cavern seeking his blood, David with all his soul was engaged in seeking his God. He felt it a relief to his heart to use his voice in his pleadings with Jehovah. There was a voice in his prayer when he used his voice for prayer: it was not *vox et praeterea nihil*. It was a prayer *vivo corde* as well as *vivâ voce*. With my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. He dwells upon the fact that he spoke aloud in prayer; it was evidently well impressed upon his memory, hence he doubles the word and says, "with my voice; with my voice." It is well when our supplications are such that we find pleasure in looking back upon them. He that is cheered by the memory of his prayers will pray again. See how the good man's appeal was to Jehovah only: he did not go round about to men, but he ran straight forward to Jehovah, his God. What true wisdom is here! Consider how the Psalmist's prayer grew into shape as he proceeded with it. Its first poured out his natural longings,—"I cried"; and then he gathered up all his wits and arranged his thoughts,—"I made supplication." True prayers may differ in their diction, but not in their direction: an impromptu cry and a preconceived supplication must alike ascend towards the one prayer hearing God, and he will accept each of them with equal readiness. The intense personality of the prayer is noteworthy: no doubt the Psalmist was glad of the prayers of others, but he was not content to be silent himself. See how everything is in the first person,—"I cried with my voice; with my voice did I make my supplication." It is good to pray in the plural—"Our Father", but in times of trouble we shall feel forced to change our note into "Let this cup pass from me."

Verse 2. I poured out my complaint before him. His inward meditation filled his soul: the bitter water rose up to the brim; what was to be done? He must pour out the wormwood and the gall, he could not keep it in; he lets it run away as best it can, that so his heart may be emptied of the fermenting

mixture. But he took care where he outpoured his complaint, lest he should do mischief, or receive an ill return. If he poured it out before man he might only receive contempt from the proud, hardheartedness from the careless, or pretended sympathy from the false; and therefore he resolved upon an outpouring before God alone, since he would pity and relieve. The word is Scarcely "complaint"; but even if it be so we may learn from this text that our complaint must never be of a kind that we dare not bring before God. We may complain to God, but not of God. When we complain it should not be before men, but before God alone. I shewed before him my trouble. He exhibited his griefs to one who could assuage them: he did not fall into the mistaken plan of so many who publish their sorrows to those who cannot help them. This verse is parallel with the first; David first pours out his complaint, letting it flow forth in a natural, spontaneous manner, and then afterwards he makes a more elaborate show of his affliction; just as in the former verse (Ps 141:1-10) he began with crying, and went on to "make supplication." Praying men pray better as they proceed. Note that we do not show our trouble before the Lord that he may see it, but that we may see him. It is for our relief, and not for his information that we make plain statements concerning our woes: it does us much good to set out our sorrow in order, for much of it vanishes in the process, like a ghost which will not abide the light of day; and the rest loses much of its terror, because the veil of mystery is removed by a clear and deliberate stating of the trying facts. Pour out your thoughts and you will see what they are; show your trouble and the extent of it will be known to you: let all be done before the Lord, for in comparison with his great majesty of love the trouble will seem to be as nothing.

Verse 3. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. The bravest spirit is sometimes sorely put to it. A heavy fog settles down upon the mind, and the man seems drowned and smothered in it; covered with a cloud, crushed with a load, confused with difficulties, conquered by impossibilities. David was a hero, and yet his spirit sank: he could smite a giant down, but he could not keep himself up. He did not know his own path, nor feel able to bear his own burden. Observe his comfort: he looked away from his own condition to the ever observant, all knowing God: and solaced himself with the fact that all was known to his heavenly Friend. Truly it is well for us to know that God knows what we do not know. We lose our heads, but God never closes his eyes: our judgments lose their balance, but the eternal mind is always clear. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. This the Lord knew at the time, and gave his servant warning of it. Looking back, the sweet singer is rejoiced that he had so gracious a Guardian, who kept him from unseen dangers. Nothing is hidden from God; no secret snare can hurt the man who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, for he shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. The use of concealed traps is disgraceful to our enemies, but they care little to what tricks they resort for their evil purposes. Wicked men must find some exercise for their malice, and therefore when they dare not openly assail they will privately ensnare. They watch the gracious man to see where his haunt is, and there they set their trap; but they do it with great caution, avoiding all observation, lest their victim being forewarned should escape their toils. This is a great trial, but the Lord is greater still, and makes us to walk safely in the midst of danger, for he knows us and our enemies, our way and the snare which is laid in it. Blessed be his name.

Verse 4. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me. He did not miss a friend for want of looking for him, nor for want of looking in a likely place. Surely some helper would be found in the place of honour; some one would stand at his right hand to undertake his defence. He looked steadily, and saw all that could be seen, for he "beheld"; but his anxious gaze was not met by an answering smile. Strange to say, all were strange to David. He had known many, but none would know him. When a person is in ill odour it is wonderful how weak the memories of his

former friends become: they quite forget, they refuse to know. This is a dire calamity. It is better to be opposed by foes than to be forsaken by friends, When friends look for us they affect to have known us from our birth, but when we look for friends it is wonderful how little we can make them remember: the fact is that in times of desertion it is not true that no man did know us, but no man would know us. Their ignorance is wilful. Refuge failed me. Where in happier days I found a ready harbour I now discovered none at all. My place of flight had taken to flight. My refuge gave me a refusal. No man cared for my soul. Whether I lived or died was no concern of anybody's. I was cast out as an outcast. No soul cared for my soul. I dwelt in No man's land, where none cared to have me, and none cared about me. This is an ill plight—no place where to lay our head, and no head willing to find us a place. How pleased were his enemies to see the friend of God without a friend! How sad was he to be utterly deserted in his utmost need! Can we not picture David in the cave, complaining that even the cave was not a refuge for him, for Saul had come even there? Hopeless was his looking out, we shall soon see him looking up.

Verse 5. I cried unto thee, O Lord. As man would not regard him, David was driven to Jehovah, his God. Was not this a gain made out of a loss? Wealth gained by a failure? Anything which leads us to cry unto God is a blessing to us. This is the second time that in this short psalm we find the same record, "I cried unto thee, O LORD": the saintly man is evidently glad to remember his cry and its results. We hear often of the bitter cry of outcast London, here is another bitter cry, and it comes from an outcast, in wretched lodgings, forgotten by those who should have helped him. I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. There is a sort of progressive repetition all through this sacred song; he cried first, but he said afterwards: his cry was bitter, but his saying was sweet; his cry was sharp and short, but his saying was fresh and full. It gives a believer great pleasure to remember his own believing speeches: he may well desire to bury his unbelieving murmurings in oblivion, but the triumphs of grace in working in him a living faith, he will not dream of forgetting. What a grand confession of faith was this! David spoke to God, and of God "Thou art my refuge." Not thou hast provided me a refuge, but thou, thyself, art my refuge. He fled to God alone; he hid himself beneath the wings of the Eternal. He not only believed this, but said it, and practised it. Nor was this all; for David, when banished from his portion in the promised land, and cut off from the portion of goods which he by right inherited, found his portion in God, yea, God was his portion. This was so not only in reference to a future state, but here among living men. It is sometimes easier to believe in a portion in heaven than in a portion upon earth: we could die more easily than live, at least we think so. But there is no living in the land of the living like living upon the living God. For the man of God to say these precious things in the hour of his dire distress was a grand attainment. It is easy to prate bravely when we dwell at ease, but to speak confidently in affliction is quite another matter. Even in this one sentence we have two parts, the second rising far above the first. It is something to have Jehovah for our refuge, but it is everything to have him for our portion. If David had not cried he would not have said; and if the Lord had not been his refuge he would never have been his portion. The lower step is as needful as the higher; but it is not necessary always to stop on the first round of the ladder.

Verse 6. Attend unto my cry. Men of God look upon prayer as a reality, and they are not content without having an audience with God; moreover, they have such confidence in the Lord's condescending grace, that they hope he will even attend to that poor broken prayer which can only be described as a cry. For I am brought very low, and therefore all the prayer I can raise is a mournful cry. This is his argument with God: he is reduced to such a sad condition that if he be not rescued he will be ruined. Gracious men may not only be low, but very low; and this should not be a reason for

their doubting the efficacy of their prayers, but rather a plea with the Lord why they should have special attention.

Deliver me from my persecutors. If he did not get out of their hands, they would soon kill him out of hand, and as he could not himself effect an escape, he cried to God, "deliver me." For they are stronger than I. As he before found a plea in his sadness, so now in his feebleness: Saul and his courtiers were in power, and could command the aid of all who sought royal favour; but poor David was in the cave, and every Nabal girded at him. Saul was a monarch, and David a fugitive; Saul had all the forms of law on his side, while David was an outlaw: so that the prayer before us comes from the weak, who proverbially go to the wall,—a good place to go to if they turn their faces to it in prayer, as Hezekiah did in his sickness. The Lord is wont to take the side of the oppressed, and to show his power by baffling tyrants; David's supplication was therefore sure to speed. In these sentences we see how explicitly the man of God described his case in his private communings with his Lord: in real earnest he poured out his complaint before him and showed before him his trouble.

Verse 7. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name. That God may be glorified is another notable plea for a suppliant. Escaped prisoners are sure to speak well of those who give them liberty; Soul emancipation is the noblest form of liberation, and calls for the loudest praise: he who is delivered from the dungeons of despair is sure to magnify the name of the Lord. We are in such a prison that only God himself can bring us out of it, and when he does so he will put a new song into our mouths. The cave was not half such a dungeon to David's body as persecution and temptation made for his soul. To be exiled from the godly is worse than imprisonment, hence David makes it one point of his release that he would be restored to church fellowship—The righteous shall compass me about. Saints gather around a child of God when his Father smiles upon him; they come to hear his joyful testimony, to rejoice with him, and to have their own faith encouraged. All the true believers in the twelve tribes were glad to rally to David's banner when the Lord enlarged his spirit; they glorified God for him and with him and through him. They congratulated him, consorted with him, crowned him, and championed him. This was a sweet experience for righteous David, who had for awhile come under the censure of the upright. He bore their smiting with patience, and now he welcomes their sanction with gratitude. For thou shalt deal bountifully with me. God's bountiful dealing is sure to bring with it the sympathy and alliance of all the favourites of the Great King. What a change from looking for a friend and finding none to this enthusiastic concourse of allies around the man after God's own heart! When we can begin a psalm with crying, we may hope to close it with singing. The voice of prayer soon awakens the voice of praise.

Psalm 143

Verse 1. Hear my prayer, O Lord, give ear to my supplications. In the preceding psalm he began by declaring that he had cried unto the Lord; here he begs to be favourably regarded by Jehovah the living God, whose memorial is that he heareth prayer. He knew that Jehovah did hear prayer, and therefore he entreated him to hear his supplication, however feeble and broken it might be. In two forms he implores the one blessing of gracious audience:—"hear" and "give ear." Gracious men are so eager to be heard in prayer that they double their entreaties for that boon. The Psalmist desires to be heard and to be considered; hence he cries, "hear", and then "give ear." Our case is difficult, and we plead for special attention. Here it is probable that David wished his suit against his adversaries to be heard by the righteous Judge; confident that if he had a hearing in the matter whereof he was slanderously accused, he would be triumphantly acquitted. Yet while somewhat inclined thus to lay

his case before the Court of King's Bench, he prefers rather to turn it all into a petition, and present it before the Court of Requests, hence he cries rather "hear my prayer" than "hear my suit." Indeed David is specially earnest that he himself, and the whole of his life, may not become the subject of trial, for in that event he could not hope for acquittal. Observe that he offered so much pleading that his life became one continual prayer; but that petitioning was so varied in form that it broke out in many supplications. In thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness. Saints desire to be answered as well as heard: they long to find the Lord faithful to his promise and righteous in defending the cause of justice. It is a happy thing when we dare appeal even to righteousness for our deliverance; and this we can do upon gospel principles, for "if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Even the sterner attributes of God are upon the side of the man who humbly trusts, and turns his trust into prayer. It is a sign of our safety when our interests and those of righteousness are blended. With God's faithfulness and righteousness upon our side we are guarded on the right hand and on the left. These are active attributes, and fully equal to the answering of any prayer which it would be light to answer. Requests which do not appeal to either of these attributes it would not be for the glory of God to hear, for they must contain desires for things not promised, and unrighteous.

Verse 2. And enter not into judgment with thy servant. He had entreated for audience at the mercy seat, but he has no wish to appear before the judgment seat. Though clear before men, he could not claim innocence before God. Even though he knew himself to be the Lord's servant, yet he did not claim perfection, or plead merit; for even as a servant he was unprofitable. If such be the humble cry of a servant, what ought to be the pleading of a sinner? For in thy sight shall no man living be justified. None can stand before God upon the footing of the law. God's sight is piercing and discriminating; the slightest flaw is seen and judged; and therefore pretence and profession cannot avail where that glance reads all the secrets of the soul. In this verse David told out the doctrine of universal condemnation by the law long before Paul had taken his pen to write the same truth. To this day it stands true even to the same extent as in David's day: no man living even at this moment may dare to present himself for trial before the throne of the Great King on the footing of the law. This foolish age has produced specimens of n pride so rank that men have dared to claim perfection in the flesh; but these vain glorious boasters are no exception to the rule here laid down: they are but men, and poor specimens of men. When their lives are examined they are frequently found to be more faulty than the humble penitents before whom they vaunt their superiority.

Verse 3. For the enemy hath persecuted my soul. He has followed me up with malicious perseverance, and has worried me as often as I have been within his reach. The attack was upon the soul or life of the Psalmist: our adversaries mean us the worst possible evil, their attacks are no child's play, they hunt for the precious life. He hath smitten my life down to the ground. The existence of David was made bitter by the cruelty of his enemy; he was as one who was hurled down and made to lie upon the ground, where he could be trampled on by his assailant. Slander has a very depressing effect upon the spirits; it is a blow which overthrows the mind as though it were knocked clown with the fist. He hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. The enemy was not content with felling his life to the ground—he would lay him lower still, even in the grave; and lower than that, if possible, for the enemy would shut up the saint in the darkness of hell if he could. David was driven by Saul's animosity to haunt caverns and holes, like an unquiet ghost; he wandered out by night, and lay hid by day like an uneasy spirit which had long been denied the repose of the grave. Good men began to forget him, as though he had been long dead; and bad men made ridicule of his rueful visage as though it belonged not to a living man, but was dark with the

shadow of the sepulchre. Poor David! He was qualified to bless the house of the living, but he was driven to consort with the dead! Such may be our case, and yet we may be very dear to the Lord. One thing is certain, the Lord who permits us to dwell in darkness among the dead, will surely bring us into light, and cause us to dwell with those who enjoy life eternal.

Verse 4. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate. David was no stoic: he felt his banishment, and smarted under the cruel assaults which were made upon his character. He felt perplexed and overturned, lonely and afflicted. He was a man of thought and feeling, and suffered both in spirit and in heart from the undeserved and unprovoked hostility of his persecutors. Moreover, he laboured under the sense of fearful loneliness; he was for a while forsaken of his God, and his soul was exceeding heavy, even unto death. Such words our Lord Jesus might have used: in this the Head is like the members, and the members are as the Head.

Verse 5. I remember the days of old. When we see nothing new which can cheer us, let us think upon old things. We once had merry days, days of deliverance, and joy and thanksgiving; why not again? Jehovah rescued his people in the ages which lie back, centuries ago; wily should he not do the like again? We ourselves have a rich past to look back upon; we have sunny memories, sacred memories, satisfactory memories, and these are as flowers for the bees of faith to visit, from whence they may make honey for present use. I meditate on all thy works. When my own works reproach me, thy works refresh me. If at the first view the deeds of the Lord do not encourage us, let us think them over again, ruminating and considering the histories of divine providence. We ought to take a wide and large view of all God's works; for as a whole they work together for good, and in each part they are worthy of reverent study. I muse on the work of thy hands. This he had done in former days, even in his most trying hours. Creation had been the book in which he read of the wisdom and goodness of the Lord. He repeats his perusal of the page of nature, and counts it a balm for his wounds, a cordial for his cares, to see what the Lord has made by his skilful hands. When the work of our own hand grieves us, let us look to the work of God's hands. Memory, meditation, and musing are here set together as the three graces, ministering grace to a mind depressed and likely to be diseased. As David with his harp played away the evil spirit from Saul, so does he hero chase away gloom from his own soul by holy communion with God.

Verse 6. I stretch forth my hands unto thee. He was eager for his God. His thoughts of God kindled in him burning desires, and these led to energetic expressions of his inward longings. As a prisoner whose feet are bound extends his hands in supplication when there is hope of liberty, so does David. My soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. As the soil cracks, and yawns, and thus opens its mouth in dumb pleadings, so did the Psalmist's soul break with longings. No heavenly shower had refreshed him from the sanctuary: banished from the means of grace, his soul felt parched and dry, and he cried out, "My soul to thee"; nothing would content him but the presence of his God. Not alone did he extend his hands, but his heart was stretched out towards the Lord. He was athirst for the Lord. If he could but feel the presence of his God he would no longer be overwhelmed or dwell in darkness; nay, everything would turn to peace and joy. Selah. It was time to pause, for the supplication had risen to agony point. Both harp strings and heart strings were strained, and needed a little rest to get them right again for the second half of the song.

Verse 7. Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth. If long delayed, the deliverance would come too late. The afflicted suppliant faints, and is ready to die. His life is ebbing out; each moment is of importance; it will soon be all over with him. No argument for speed can be more powerful than this.

Who will not run to help a suppliant when his life is in jeopardy? Mercy has wings to its heels when misery is in extremity. God will not fail when our spirit fails, but the rather he will hasten his course and come to us on the wings of the wind. Hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Communion with God is so dear to a true heart that the withdrawal of it makes the man feel as though he were ready to die and perish utterly. God's withdrawals reduce the heart to despair, and take away all strength from the mind. Moreover, his absence enables adversaries to work their will without restraint; and thus, in a second way, the persecuted one is like to perish. If we have God's countenance we live, but if he turns his back upon us we die. When the Lord looks with favour upon our efforts we prosper, but if he refuses to countenance them we labour in vain.

Verse 8. Cause me to hear thy loving kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust. Lord, my sorrow makes me deaf,—cause me to hear: there is but one voice that can cheer me—cause me to hear thy lovingkindness; that music I would fain enjoy at once—cause me to hear it in the morning, at the first dawning hour. A sense of divine love is to the soul both dawn and dew; the end of the night of weeping, the beginning of the morning of joy. Only God can take away from our weary ears the din of our care, and charm them with the sweet notes of his love. Our plea with the Lord is our faith: if we are relying upon him, he cannot disappoint us: "in thee do I trust" is a sound and solid argument with God. He who made the ear will cause us to hear: he who is love itself will have the kindness to bring his lovingkindness before our minds. Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. The Great First Cause must cause us to hear and to know. Spiritual senses are dependent upon God, and heavenly knowledge comes from him alone. To know the way we ought to take is exceedingly needful, for how can we be exact in obedience to a law with which we are not acquainted? or how can there be an ignorant holiness? If we know not the way, how shall we keep in it? If we know not wherein we should walk, how shall we be likely to follow the right path?, The Psalmist lifts up his soul: faith is good at a dead lift: the soul that trusts will rise. We will not allow our hope to sink, but we will strive to get up and rise out of our daily griefs. This is wise. When David was in any difficulty as to his way he lifted his soul towards God himself, and then he knew that he could not go very far wrong. If the soul will not rise of itself we must lift it, lift it up unto God. This is good argument in prayer: surely the God to whom we endeavour to lift up our soul will condescend to show us what he would have us to do. Let us attend to David's example, and when our heart is low, let us heartily endeavour to lift it up, not so much to comfort as to the Lord himself.

Verse 9. Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies. Many foes beset us, we cannot overcome them, we cannot even escape from them; but Jehovah can and will rescue us if we pray to him. The weapon of all prayer will stand us in better stead than sword and shield. I flee unto thee to hide me. This was a good result from his persecutions. That which makes us flee to our God may be an ill wind, but it blows us good. There is no cowardice in such flight, but much holy courage. God can hide us out of reach of harm, and even out of sight of it. He is our hiding place; Jesus has made himself the refuge of his people: the sooner, and the more entirely we flee to him the better for us. Beneath the crimson canopy of our Lord's atonement believers are completely hidden; let us abide there and be at rest. In the seventh verse our poet cried, "Hide not thy face", and here he prays, "Hide me." Note also how often he uses the words "unto thee"; he is after his God; he must travel in that direction by some means, even though he may seem to be beating a retreat; his whole being longs to be near the Lord. Is it possible that such thirsting for God will be left unsupplied? Never, while the Lord is love.

Verse 12. And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul. He believes that it will be so, and thus prophesies the event; for the words may be read as a declaration,

and it is better so to understand them. We could not pray just so with our Christian light; but under Old Testament arrangements the spirit of it was congruous to the law. It is a petition which justice sanctions, but the spirit of love is not at home in presenting it. We, as Christians, turn the petition to spiritual use only. Yet David was of so generous a mind, and dealt so tenderly with Saul, that he could hardly have meant all that his words are made in our version to say. For I am lay servant; and therefore I hope that my Master will protect me in his service, and grant me victory while I fight his battles. It is a warrior's prayer, and smells of the dust and smoke of battle. It was heard, and therefore it was not asking amiss. Still there is a more excellent way.

Psalm 144

Verse 1. Blessed be the LORD my strength. He cannot delay the utterance of his gratitude, he bursts at once into a loud note of praise. His best word is given to his best friend—"Blessed be Jehovah." When the heart is in a right state it must praise God, it cannot be restrained; its utterances leap forth as waters forcing their way from a living spring. With all his strength David blesses the God of his strength. We ought not to receive so great a boon as strength to resist evil, to defend truth, and to conquer error, without knowing who gave it to us, and rendering to him the glory of it. Not only does Jehovah give strength to his saints, but he is their strength. The strength is made theirs because God is theirs. God is full of power, and he becomes the power of those who trust him. In him our great strength lieth, and to him be blessings more than we are able to utter. It may be read, "My Rock"; but this hardly so well consorts with the following words:

Which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight. The word rock is the Hebrew way of expressing strength: the grand old language is full of such suggestive symbols. The Psalmist in the second part of the verse sets forth the Lord as teacher in the arts of war. If we have strength we are not much the better unless we have skill also. Untrained force is often an injury to the man who possesses it, and it even becomes a danger to those who are round about him; and therefore the Psalmist blesses the Lord as much for teaching as for strength. Let us also bless Jehovah if he has in anything made us efficient. The tuition mentioned was very practical, it was not so much of the brain as of the hands and fingers; for these were the members most needful for conflict. Men with little scholastic education should be grateful for deftness and skill in their handicrafts. To a fighting man the education of the hands is of far more value than mere book learning could ever be; he who has to use a sling or a bow needs suitable training, quite as much as a scientific man or a classical professor. Men are too apt to fancy that an artisan's efficiency is to be ascribed to himself; but this is a popular fallacy. A clergyman may be supposed to be taught of God, but people do not allow this to be true of weavers or workers in brass; yet these callings are specially mentioned in the Bible as having been taught to holy women and earnest men when the tabernacle was set up at the first. All wisdom and skill are from the Lord, and for them he deserves to be gratefully extolled. This teaching extends to the smallest members of our frame; the Lord teaches fingers as well as hands; indeed, it sometimes happens that if the finger is not well trained the whole hand is incapable.

David was called to be a man of war, and he was eminently successful in his battles; he does not trace this to his good generalship or valour, but to his being taught and strengthened for the war and the fight. If the Lord deigns to have a hand in such unspiritual work as fighting, surely he will help us to proclaim the gospel and win souls; and then we will bless his name with even greater intensity of heart. We will be pupils, and he shall be our Master, and if we ever accomplish anything we will give our Instructor hearty blessing. This verse is full of personality; it is mercy shown to David himself

which is the subject of grateful song. It has also a presence about it; for Jehovah is now his strength, and is still teaching him; we ought to make a point of presenting praise while yet the blessing is on the wing. The verse is also preeminently practical, and full of the actual life of every day; for David's days were spent in camps and conflicts. Some of us who are grievously tormented with rheumatism might cry, "Blessed be the Lord, my Comforter, who teacheth my knees to bear in patience, and my feet to endure in resignation"; others who are on the look out to help young converts might say, "Blessed be God who teaches my eyes to see wounded souls, and my lips to cheer them"; but David has his own peculiar help from God, and praises him accordingly. This tends to make the harmony of heaven perfect when all the singers take their parts; if, we all followed the same score, the music would not be so full and rich.

Verse 2. Now our royal poet multiplies metaphors to extol his God. My goodness, and my fortress. The word for goodness signifies mercy. Whoever we may be, and wherever we may be, we need mercy such as can only be found in the infinite God. It is all of mercy that he is any of the other good things to us, so that this is a highly comprehensive title. O how truly has the Lord been mercy to many of us in a thousand ways! He is goodness itself, and he has been unbounded goodness to us. We have no goodness of our own, but the Lord has become goodness to us. So is he himself also our fortress and safe abode: in him we dwell as behind impregnable ramparts and immovable bastions. We cannot be driven out, or starved out; for our fortress is prepared for a siege; it is stored with abundance of food, and a well of living water is within it. Kings usually think much of their fenced cities, but King David relies upon his God, who is more to him than fortresses could have been.

My high tower, and my deliverer. As from a lofty watchtower the believer, trusting in the Lord, looks down upon his enemies. They cannot reach him in his elevated position; he is out of bow shot; he is beyond their scaling ladders; he dwells on high. Nor is this all; for Jehovah is our Deliverer as well as our Defender. These different figures set forth the varied benefits which come to us from our Lord. He is every good thing which we can need for this world or the next. He not only places us out of harm's way full often, but when we must be exposed, he comes to our rescue, he raises the siege, routs the foe, and sets us in joyous liberty. My shield, and he in whom I trust. When the warrior rushes on his adversary, he bears his target upon his arm, and thrusts death aside; thus doth the believer oppose the Lord to the blows of the enemy, and finds himself secure from harm. For this and a thousand other reasons our trust rests in our God for everything; he never fails us, and we feel boundless confidence in him.

Who subdueth my people under me. He keeps my natural subjects subject, and my conquered subjects peaceful under my sway. Men who rule others should thank God if they succeed in the task. Such strange creatures are human beings, that if a number of them are kept in peaceful association under the leadership of any one of the Lord's servants, he is bound to bless God every day for the wonderful fact. The victories of peace are as much worthy of joyful gratitude as the victories of war. Leaders in the Christian church cannot maintain their position except as the Lord preserves to them the mighty influence which ensures obedience and evokes enthusiastic loyalty. For every particle of influence for good which we may possess let us magnify the name of the Lord. Thus has David blessed Jehovah for blessing him. How many times he has appropriated the Lord by that little word My! Each time he grasps the Lord, he adores and blesses him; for the one word Blessed runs through all the passage like a golden thread. He began by acknowledging that his strength for fighting foreign enemies was of the Lord, and he concluded by ascribing his domestic peace to the same source. All round as a king he saw himself to be surrounded by the King of kings, to whom he bowed in lowly

homage, doing suit and service on bent knee, with grateful heart admitting that he owed everything to the Rock of his salvation.

Verse 3. LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him? What a contrast between Jehovah and man! The Psalmist turns from the glorious all sufficiency of God to the insignificance and nothingness of man. He sees Jehovah to be everything, and then cries, "Lord, what is man!" What is man in the presence of the Infinite God? What can he be compared to? He is too little to be described at all; only God, who knows the most minute object, can tell what man is. Certainly he is not fit to be the rock of our confidence: he is at once too feeble and too fickle to be relied upon. The Psalmist's wonder is that God should stoop to know him, and indeed it is more remarkable than if the greatest archangel should make a study of emmets, or become the friend of mites. God knows his people with a tender intimacy, a constant, careful observation: he foreknew them in love, he knows them by care, he will know them in acceptance at last. Why and wherefore is this? What has man done? What has he been? What is he now that God should know him, and make himself known to him as his goodness, fortress, and high tower? This is an unanswerable question. Infinite condescension can alone account for the Lord stooping to be the friend of man. That he should make man the subject of election, the object of redemption, the child of eternal love, the darling of infallible providence, the next of kin to Deity, is indeed a matter requiring more than the two notes of exclamation found in this verse. Or the son of man, that thou makest account of him! The son of man is a weaker being still,—so the original word implies. He is not so much man as God made him, but man as his mother bore him; and how can the Lord think of him, and write down such a cipher in his accounts? The Lord thinks much of man, and in connection with redeeming love makes a great figure of him: this can be believed, but it cannot be explained. Adoring wonder makes us each one cry out, Why dost thou take knowledge of me? We know by experience how little man is to be reckoned upon, and we know by observation how greatly he can vaunt himself, it is therefore meet for us to be humble and to distrust ourselves; but all this should make us the more grateful to the Lord, who knows man better than we do, and yet communes with him, and even dwells in him. Every trace of the misanthrope should be hateful to the believer; for if God makes account of man it is not for us to despise our own kind.

Verse 4. Man is like to vanity. Adam is like to Abel. He is like that which is nothing at all. He is actually vain, and he resembles that unsubstantial empty thing which is nothing but a blown up nothing,—a puff, a bubble. Yet he is not vanity, but only like it. He is not so substantial as that unreal thing; he is only the likeness of it. Lord, what is a man? It is wonderful that God should think of such a pretentious insignificance. His days are as a shadow that passeth away. He is so short lived that he scarcely attains to years, but exists by the day, like the ephemera, whose birth and death are both seen by the self same sun. His life is only like to a shadow, which is in itself a vague resemblance, an absence of something rather than in itself an existence. Observe that human life is not only as a shade, but as a shade which is about to depart. It is a mere mirage, the image of a thing which is not, a phantasm which melts back into nothing. How is it that the Eternal should make so much of mortal man, who begins to die as soon as he begins to live? The connection of the two verses before us with the rest of the psalm is not far to seek: David trusts in God and finds him everything; he looks to man and sees him to be nothing; and then he wonders how it is that the great Lord can condescend to take notice of such a piece of folly and deceit as man.

Verse 5. Bow thy heavens, O LORD, and come down. The heavens are the Lord's own, and he who exalted them can bow them. His servant is struggling against bitter foes, and he finds no help in men, therefore he entreats Jehovah to come down to his rescue. It is, indeed, a coming down for Jehovah

to interfere in the conflicts of his tried people. Earth cries to heaven to stoop; nay, the cry is to the Lord of heaven to bow the heaven, and appear among the sons of earth. The Lord has often done this, and never more fully than when in Bethlehem the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us: now doth he know the way, and he never refuses to come down to defend his beloved ones. David would have the real presence of God to counterbalance the mocking appearance of boastful man: eternal verity could alone relieve him of human vanity. Touch the mountains, and they shall smoke. It was so when the Lord appeared on Sinai; the strongest pillars of earth cannot bear the weight of the finger of God. He is a consuming fire, and his touch kindles the peaks of the Alps, and makes them smoke. If Jehovah would appear, nothing could stand before him; if the mighty mountains smoke at his touch, then all mortal power which is opposed to the Lord must end in smoke. How long suffering he is to his adversaries, whom he could so readily consume. A touch would do it; God's finger of flame would set the hills on fire, and consume opposition of every kind.

Verse 6. Cast forth lightning, and scatter them. The Eternal can hurl his lightnings wheresoever he pleases, and effect his purpose instantaneously. The artillery of heaven soon puts the enemy to flight: a single bolt sets the armies running hither and thither in utter rout. Shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them. Jehovah never misses the mark; his arrows are fatal to his foes when he goes forth to war. It was no common faith which led the poet king to expect the Lord to use his thunderbolts on behalf of a single member of that race which he had just now described as "like to vanity." A believer in God may without presumption expect the Almighty Lord to use on his behalf all the stores of his wisdom and power: even the terrible forces of tempest shall be marshalled to the fight, for the defence of the Lord's chosen. When we have once mastered the greater difficulty of the Lord's taking any interest in us, it is but a small thing that we should expect him to exert his great power on our behalf. This is far from being the only time in which this believing warrior had thus prayed: Ps 18:1-50 is specially like the present; the good man was not abashed at his former boldness, but here repeats himself without fear.

Verse 7. Send thine hand from above. Let thy long and strong arm be stretched out till thine hand seizes my foes, and delivers me from them. Rid me, and deliver me out of great waters. Make a Moses of me,—one drawn out of the waters. My foes pour in upon me like torrents, they threaten to overwhelm me; save me from their force and fury; take them from me, and me from them. From the hand of strange children. From foreigners of every race; men strange to me and thee, who therefore must work evil to me, and rebellion against thyself. Those against whom he pleaded were out of covenant with God; they were Philistines and Edomites; or else they were men of his own nation of black heart and traitorous spirit, who were real strangers, though they bore the name of Israel. Oh to be rid of those infidel, blaspheming beings who pollute society with their false teachings and hard speeches! Oh to be delivered from slanderous tongues, deceptive lips, and false hearts! No wonder these words are repeated, for they are the frequent cry of many a tried child of God;—"Rid me, and deliver me." The devil's children are strange to us: we can never agree with them, and they will never understand us: they are aliens to us, and we are despised by them. O Lord, deliver us from the evil one, and from all who are of his race.

Verse 8. Whose mouth speaketh vanity. No wonder that men who are vanity speak vanity. "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own. "They cannot be depended upon, let them promise as fairly as they may: their solemn declarations are light as the foam of the sea, in no wise to be depended upon. Good men desire to be rid of such characters: of all men deceivers and liars are among the most disgusting to true hearts. And their right hand is a right hand of falsehood. So far their hands and their

tongues agree, for they are vanity and falsehood. These men act as falsely as they speak, and prove themselves to be all of a piece. Their falsehood is right handed, they lie with dexterity, they deceive with all their might. It is a dreadful thing when a man's expertness lies more in lies than in truth; when he can neither speak nor act without proving himself to be false. God save us from lying mouths, and hands of falsehood.

Verse 9. I will sing a new song unto thee, O God. Weary of the false, I will adore the true. Fired with fresh enthusiasm, my gratitude shall make a new channel for itself. I will sing as others have done; but it shall be a new song, such as no others have sung. That song shall be all and altogether for my God: I will extol none but the Lord, from whom my deliverance has come. Upon a psaltery and an instrument of ten strings will I sing praises unto thee. His hand should aid his tongue, not as in the case of the wicked, cooperating in deceit; but his hand should unite with his mouth in truthful praise. David intended to tune his best instruments as well as to use his best vocal music: the best is all too poor for so great a God, and therefore we must not fall short of our utmost. He meant to use many instruments of music, that by all means he might express his great joy in God. The Old Testament dispensation abounded in types, and figures, and outward ritual, and therefore music dropped naturally into its place in the "worldly sanctuary"; but, after all, it can do no more than represent praise, and assist our expression of it; the real praise is in the heart, the true music is that of the soul. When music drowns the voice, and artistic skill takes a higher place than hearty singing, it is time that instruments were banished from public worship; but when they are subordinate to the song, as here, it is not for us to prohibit them, or condemn those who use them, though we ourselves greatly prefer to do without them, since it seems to us that the utmost simplicity of praise is far more congruous with the spirit of the gospel than pomp of organs. The private worshipper, singing his solo unto the Lord, has often found it helpful to accompany himself on some familiar instrument, and of this David in the present psalm is an instance, for he says, "I will sing praise unto thee",—that is, not so much in the company of others as by himself alone. He saith not "we", but "I."

Verse 10. It is he that giveth salvation unto kings. Those whom the Lord sets up he will keep up. Kings, from their conspicuous position, are exposed to special danger, and when their lives and their thrones are preserved to them they should give the Lord the glory of it. In his many battles David would have perished had not almighty care preserved him. He had by his valour wrought salvation for Israel, but he lays his laurels at the feet of his Lord and Preserver. If any men need salvation kings do, and if they get it the fact is so astonishing that it deserves a verse to itself in the psalm of praise. Who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword. He traces his escape from death to the delivering hand of God. Note, he speaks in the present tense—delivereth, for this was an act which covered his whole life. He puts his name to the confession of his indebtedness: it is David who owns without demur to mercy given to himself. He styles himself the Lord's servant, accepting this as the highest title he had attained or desired.

Verse 11. Because of what the Lord had done, David returns to his pleading. He begs deliverance from him who is ever delivering him. Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children. This is in measure the refrain of the song, and the burden of the prayer. He desired to be delivered from his open and foreign adversaries, who had broken compacts, and treated treaties as vain things. Whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood. He would not strike hands with those who carried a lie in their right hand: he would be quit of such at once, if possible. Those who are surrounded by such serpents know not how to deal with them, and the only available method seems to be prayer to God for a riddance and deliverance. David in Ps 144:7, according to the

original, had sought the help of both the Lord's hands, and well he might, for his deceitful enemies, with remarkable unanimity, were with one mouth and one hand seeking his destruction. Riddance from the wicked and the gracious presence of the Lord are sought with a special eye to the peace and prosperity which will follow thereupon. The sparing of David's life would mean the peace and happiness of a whole nation. We can scarcely judge how much of happiness may hang upon the Lord's favour to one man.

Verse 12. God's blessing works wonders for a people. That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth. Our sons are of first importance to the state, since men take a leading part in its affairs; and that the young men are the older men will be. He desires that they may be like strong, well rooted, young trees, which promise great things. If they do not grow in their youth, when will they grow? If in their opening manhood they are dwarfed, they will never get over it. O the joys which we may have through our sons! And, on the other hand, what misery they may cause us! Plants may grow crooked, or in some other way disappoint the planter, and so may our sons. But when we see them developed in holiness, what joy we have of them! That our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace. We desire a blessing for our whole family, daughters as well as sons. For the girls to be left out of the circle of blessing would be unhappy indeed. Daughters unite families as corner stones join walls together, and at the same time they adorn them as polished stones garnish the structure into which they are builded. Home becomes a palace when the daughters are maids of honour, and the sons are nobles in spirit; then the father is a king, and the mother a queen, and royal residences are more than outdone. A city built up of such dwellings is a city of palaces, and a state composed of such cities is a republic of princes.

Verse 13. That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store. A household must exercise thrift and forethought: it must have its granary as well as its nursery. Husbands should husband their resources; and should not only furnish their tables but fill their garners. Where there are happy households, there must needs be plentiful provision for them, for famine brings misery even where love abounds. It is well when there is plenty, and that plenty consists of "all manner of store." We have occasionally heard murmurs concerning the abundance of grain, and the cheapness of the poor man's loaf. A novel calamity! We dare not pray against it. David would have prayed for it, and blessed the Lord when he saw his heart's desire. When all the fruits of the earth are plentiful, the fruits of our lips should be joyful worship and thanksgiving. Plenteous and varied may our products be, that every form of want may be readily supplied. That our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets, or rather in the open places, the fields, and sheep walks where lambs should be born. A teeming increase is here described. Adam tilled the ground to fill the garner, but Abel kept sheep, and watched the lambs. Each occupation needs the divine blessing. The second man who was born into this world was a shepherd, and that trade has ever held an important part in the economy of nations. Food and clothing come from the flock, and both are of first consideration.

Verse 14. That our oxen may be strong to labour; so that the ploughing and cartage of the farm may be duly performed, and the husbandman's work may be accomplished without unduly taxing the cattle, or working them cruelly. That there be no breaking in, nor going out; no irruption of marauders, and no forced emigration; no burglaries and no evictions. That there be no complaining in our streets; no secret dissatisfaction, no public riot; no fainting of poverty, no clamour for rights denied, nor concerning wrongs unredressed. The state of things here pictured is very delightful: all is peaceful and prosperous; the throne is occupied efficiently, and even the beasts in their stalls are the better for it. This has been the condition of our own country, and if it should now be changed, who can wonder?

For our ingratitude well deserves to be deprived of blessings which it has despised. These verses may with a little accommodation be applied to a prosperous church, where the converts are growing and beautiful, the gospel stores abundant, and the spiritual increase most cheering. There ministers and workers are in full vigour, and the people are happy and united. The Lord make it so in all our churches evermore.

Verse 15. Happy is that people that is in such a case. Such things are not to be overlooked. Temporal blessings are not trifles, for the miss of them would be a dire calamity. It is a great happiness to belong to a people so highly favoured. Yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD. This comes in as an explanation of their prosperity. Under the Old Testament Israel had present earthly rewards for obedience: when Jehovah was their God they were a nation enriched and flourishing. This sentence is also a sort of correction of all that had gone before; as if the poet would say—all these temporal gifts are a part of happiness, but still the heart and soul of happiness lies in the people being right with God, and having a full possession of him. Those who worship the happy God become a happy people. Then if we have not temporal mercies literally we have something better: if we have not the silver of earth we have the gold of heaven, which is better still. In this psalm David ascribes his own power over the people, and the prosperity which attended his reign, to the Lord himself. Happy was the nation which he ruled; happy in its king, in its families, in its prosperity, and in the possession of peace; but yet more in enjoying true religion and worshipping Jehovah, the only living and true God.

Psalm 145

Verse 1. I will extol thee, my God, O king. David as God's king adores God as his king. It is well when the Lord's royalty arouses our loyalty, and our spirit is moved to magnify his majesty. The Psalmist has extolled his Lord many a time before, he is doing so still, and he will do so in the future: praise is for all tenses. When we cannot express all our praise just now, it is wise to register our resolution to continue in the blessed work, and write it down as a bond, "I will extol thee." See how David testifies his devotion and adherence to his God by the pronoun "my", how he owns his allegiance by the title "king", and how he goes on to declare his determination to make much of him in his song. And I will bless thy name for ever and ever. David determined that his praise should rise to blessing, should intelligently spend itself upon the name or character of God, and should be continued world without end. He uses the word "bless" not merely for variation of sound, but also for the deepening and sweetening of the sense. To bless God is to praise him with a personal affection for him, and a wishing well to him: this is a growingly easy exercise as we advance in experience and grow in grace. David declares that he will offer every form of praise, through every form of existence. His notion of duration is a full one—"for ever" has no end, but when he adds another "ever" to it he forbids all idea of a close. Our praise of God shall be as eternal as the God we praise.

Verse 2. Every day will I bless thee. Whatever the character of the day, or of my circumstances and conditions during that day, I will continue to glorify God. Were we well to consider the matter we should see abundant cause in each day for rendering special blessing unto the Lord. All before the day, all in the day, all following the day should constrain us to magnify our God every day, all the year round. Our love to God is not a matter of holy days: every day is alike holy to holy men. David here comes closer to God than when he said, "I will bless thy name": it is now, "I will bless thee." This is the centre and kernel of true devotion: we do not only admire the Lord's words and works, but himself. Without realizing the personality of God, praise is well nigh impossible; you cannot extol an

abstraction. And I will praise thy name for ever and ever. He said he would bless that name, and now he vows to praise it; he will extol the Lord in every sense and way. Eternal worship shall not be without its variations; it will never become monotonous. Heavenly music is not harping upon one string, but all strings shall be tuned to one praise. Observe the personal pronouns here: four times he says "I will": praise is not to be discharged by proxy: there must be your very self in it, or there is nothing in it.

Verse 3. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised. Worship should be somewhat like its object—great praise for a great God. There is no part of Jehovah's greatness which is not worthy of great praise. In some beings greatness is but vastness of evil: in him it is magnificence of goodness. Praise may be said to be great when the song contains great matter, when the hearts producing it are intensely fervent, and when large numbers unite in the grand acclaim. No chorus is too loud, no orchestra too large, no psalm too lofty for the lauding of the Lord of Hosts.

"And his greatness is unsearchable."
"Still his worth your praise exceeds,
Excellent are all his deeds."

Song should be founded upon search; hymns composed without thought are of no worth, and tunes upon which no pains have been spent are beneath the dignity of divine adoration. Yet when we meditate most, and search most studiously we shall still find ourselves surrounded with unknowable wonders, which will baffle all attempts to sing them worthily. The best adoration of the Unsearchable is to own him to be so, and close the eyes in reverence before the excessive light of his glory. Not all the minds of all the centuries shall suffice to search out the unsearchable riches of God; he is past finding out; and, therefore, his deserved praise is still above and beyond all that we can render to him.

Verse 4. One generation shall praise thy works to another. There shall be a tradition of praise: melt shall hand on the service, they shall make it a point to instruct their descendants in this hallowed exercise. We look back upon the experience of our fathers, and sing of it; even thus shall our sons learn praise from the Lord's works among ourselves. Let us see to it that we praise God before our children, and never make them think that his service is an unhappy one. And shall declare thy mighty acts. The generations shall herein unite: together they shall make up an extraordinary history. Each generation shall contribute its chapter, and all the generations together shall compose a volume of matchless character. David began with "I", but he has in this verse soon reached to an inconceivable multitude, comprehending all the myriads of our race of every age. The praise of the Lord enlarges the heart, and as it grows upon us our minds grow with it. God's works of goodness and acts of power make up a subject which all the eras of human story can never exhaust. A heart full of praise seems to live in all the centuries in delightful companionship with all the good. We are not afraid that the incense will ever cease to burn upon the altars of Jehovah: the priests die, but the adoration lives on. All glory be unto him who remains the same Lord throughout all generations.

Verse 5. I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty. 'Tis fit a king should speak of the majesty of the King of kings. David cannot give over the worship of God into the hands of others, even though all generations should undertake to perpetuate it: he must have his own individual share in it, and so he saith, "I will speak." What a speaker! for he no sooner begins than he heaps up words of honour—"the glorious honour of thy majesty", or "the beauty of the honour of thy majesty." His language labours to express his meaning; he multiplies the terms by which he would extol Jehovah,

his King. Everything which has to do with the Great King is majestic, honourable, glorious. His least is greater than man's greatest, his lowest is higher than man's highest. There is nothing about the infinite Lord which is unworthy of his royalty; and, on the other hand, nothing is wanting to the splendour of his reign: his majesty is honourable, and his honour is glorious: he is altogether wonderful. And of thy wondrous works. All the works of God among men are Godlike, but certain of them are specially calculated to create surprise. Many works of power, of justice, of wisdom, are wonderful; and his work of grace is wondrous above all. This specially, and all the rest proportionately, should be spoken of by holy men, by experienced men, and by men who have the ability to speak with power. These things must not be permitted to pass away in silence; if others do not remember them, representative men like David must make a point of conversing upon them in private, and speaking of them in public. Let it be the delight of each one of us according to our position to speak lovingly of our Lord.

Verse 6. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts. If unobservant of other matters these acts of judgment shall seize their attention and impress their minds so that they must talk about them. Did not men in our Saviour's day speak of the falling tower of Siloam and the slaughtered Galileans? Are there not rumours of wars, when there are not even whispers of other things? Horrible news is sure to spread: under mercies men may be dumb, but concerning miseries they raise a great outcry. The force of dread is a power which loosens the tongue of the multitude: they are sure to talk of that which makes the ear to tingle and the hair to stand upright. While they are thus occupied with "fearsome facts", such as the drowning of a world, the destruction of the cities of the plain, the plagues of Egypt, the destruction at the Red Sea, and so forth, David would look at these affairs in another light, and sing another tune. And I will declare thy greatness. Those acts which were terrible deeds to most men were mighty deeds, or greatneses to our holy poet: these he would publish like a herald, who mentions the titles and honours of his royal master. It is the occupation of every true believer to rehearse the great doings of his great God. We are not to leave this to the common converse of the crowd, but we are personally to make a declaration of what we have seen and known. We are even bound in deep solemnity of manner to warn men of the Lord's greatness in his terrible acts of justice: thus will they be admonished to abstain from provoking him. To fulfil this duty we are already bound by solemn obligations, and we shall do well to bind ourselves further by resolutions, "I will—God helping me, I will."

Verse 7. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness. They shall pour forth grateful memories even as springs gush with water, plenteously, spontaneously, constantly, joyously. The Lord's redeemed people having been filled with his great goodness, shall retain the happy recollection of it, and shall be moved often and often to utter those recollections. Not content with a scanty mention of such amazing love, they shall go on to an abundant utterance of such abundant favour. It shall be their delight to speak with one another of God's dealings with them, and to compare notes of their experiences. God has done nothing stintedly; all his goodness is great goodness, all worthy to be remembered, all suggestive of holy discourse. Upon this subject there is no scarcity of matter, and when the heart is right there is no need to stop from want of facts to tell. Oh, that there were more of these memories and utterances, for it is not meet that the goodness of the living God should be buried in the cemetery of silence, in the grave of ingratitude.

And shall sing of thy righteousness. They shall say and then sing. And what is the theme which impels them to leave the pulpit for the orchestra? What do they sing of? They sing of that righteousness which is the sinner's terror, which even good men mention with deep solemnity.

Righteousness received by gospel light is in reality the secret foundation of the believer's hope. God's covenant of grace is our strong consolation, because he who made it is righteous, and will not run back from it. Since Jesus died as our substitute, righteousness requires and secures the salvation of all the redeemed. This attribute is our best friend, and therefore we sing of it. Modern thinkers would fain expunge the idea of righteousness from their notion of God; but converted men would not. It is a sign of growth in cation when we rejoice in the justice, rectitude, and holiness of our God. Even a rebel may rejoice in mercy, which he looks upon as laxity; but a loyal rejoices when he learns that God is so just that not even to save his own would he consent to violate the righteousness of his moral government. Few men will shout for joy at the righteousness of Jehovah, but those who do so his chosen, in whom his soul delighteth.

Verse 8. The Lord is gracious. Was it not in some such terms that the Lord revealed himself to Moses? Is not this Jehovah's glory? To all living men his aspect: he is gracious, or full of goodness and generosity. He treats creatures with kindness, his subjects with consideration, and his saints favour. His words and ways, his promises and his gifts, his plans and his poses all manifest his grace, or free favour. There is nothing suspicious, diced, morose, tyrannical, or unapproachable in Jehovah,—he is condescending and kind. And full of compassion. To the suffering, the weak, the despondent, he is very pitiful: he feels for them, he feels with them: he this heartily, and in a practical manner. Of this pitifulness he is full, so the compassionates freely, constantly, deeply, divinely, and effectually. In fulness in a sense not known among men, and this fulness is all fragrant sympathy for human misery. If the Lord be full of compassion there is no in him for forgetfulness or harshness, and none should suspect him What an ocean of compassion there must be since the Infinite God is full of Slow to anger. Even those who refuse his grace yet share in long suffering. When men do not repent, but, on the contrary, go from bad to worse, averse to let his wrath flame forth against them. Greatly patient and anxious that the sinner may live, he "lets the lifted thunder drop", and still bears. "Love suffereth long and is kind", and God is love. And of great mercy. This is his attitude towards the guilty. When men at last repent, find pardon awaiting them. Great is their sin, and great is God's mercy, need great help, and they have it though they deserve it not; for he is good to the greatly guilty.

Verse 9. The LORD is good to all. No one, not even his fiercest enemy, can this; for the falsehood would be too barefaced, since the very existence lips which slander him is a proof that it is slander. He allows his live, he even supplies them with food, and smooths their way with many forts; for them the sun shines as brightly as if they were saints, and the rain waters their fields as plentifully as if they were perfect men. Is not this goodness to all? In our own land the gospel sounds in the ears of all who care to listen; and the Scriptures are within reach of the poorest child. It would be a wanton wresting of Scripture to limit this expression to the elect, as some have tried to do; we rejoice in electing love, but none the less we welcome the glorious truth, "Jehovah is good to all."

And his tender mercies are over all his works. Not "his new covenant works", as one read it the other day who was wise above that which is written, yea, contrary to that which is written. Kindness is a law of God's universe: the world was planned for happiness; even now that sin has so sadly marred God's handiwork, and introduced elements which were not from the beginning, the Lord has so arranged matters that the fall is broken, the curse is met by an antidote, and the inevitable pain is softened with mitigations. Even in this sin stricken world, under its disordered economy, there are abundant traces of a hand skilful to soothe distress and heal disease. That which makes life bearable is the tenderness of the great Father. This is seen in the creation of an insect as well as in the ruling of nations. The Creator is never rough, the Provider is never forgetful, the Ruler is never cruel.

Nothing is done to create disease, no organs are arranged to promote misery; the incoming of sickness and pain is not according to the original design, but a result of our disordered state. Man's body as it left the Maker's hand was neither framed for disease, decay, nor death, neither was the purpose of it discomfort and anguish; far otherwise, it was framed for a joyful activity, and a peaceful enjoyment of God. Jehovah has in great consideration laid up in the world cures for our ailments, and helps for our feebleness; and if many of these have been long in their discovery, it is because it was more for man's benefit to find them out himself, than to have them labelled and placed in order before his eyes. We may be sure of this, that Jehovah has never taken delight in the ills of his creatures, but has sought their good, and laid himself out to alleviate the distresses into which they have guiltily plunged themselves. The duty of kindness to animals may logically be argued from this verse. Should not the children of God be like their Father in kindness?

Verse 10. All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD. There is a something about every creature which redounds to the honour of God. The skill, kindness, and power manifested in the formation of each living thing is in itself to the praise of God, and when observed by an intelligent mind the Lord is honoured thereby. Some works praise him by their being, and others by their well being; some by their mere existence, and others by their hearty volition. And thy saints shall bless thee. These holy ones come nearer, and render sweeter adoration. Men have been known to praise those whom they hated, as we may admire the prowess of a warrior who is our foe; but saints lovingly praise, and therefore are said to "bless." They wish well to God; they would make him more blessed, if such a thing were possible; they desire blessings upon his cause and his children, and invoke success upon his work and warfare. None but blessed men will bless the Lord. Only saints or holy ones will bless the thrice holy God. If we praise Jehovah because of his works around us, we must go on to bless him for his works within us. Let the two "shalls" of this verse be fulfilled, especially the latter one.

Verse 11. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom. Excellent themes for saintly minds. Those who bless God from their hearts rejoice to see him enthroned, glorified, and magnified in power. No subject is more profitable for humility, obedience, hope, and joy than that of the reigning power of the Lord our God. His works praise him, but they cannot crown him: this remains for holy hands and hearts. It is their high pleasure to tell of the glory of his kingdom in its justice, kindness, eternity, and so forth. Kingdoms of earth are glorious for riches, for extent of territory, for victories, for liberty, for commerce, and other matters; but in all true glories the kingdom of Jehovah excels them. We have seen a palace dedicated "to all the glories of France"; but time, eternity, and all space are filled with the glories of God: on these we love to speak. And talk of thy power. This power supports the kingdom and displays the glory, and we are sure to talk of it when the glory of the divine kingdom is under discussion. God's power to create or to destroy, to bless or to punish, to strengthen or to crush, is matter for frequent rehearsal. All power comes from God. Apart from him the laws of nature would be inoperative. His power is the one source of force—mechanical, vital, mental, spiritual. Beyond the power of God which has been put forth, infinite force lies latent in himself. Who can calculate the reserve forces of the Infinite? How, then, can his kingdom fail? We hear talk of the five great powers, but what are they to the One Great Power? The Lord is "the blessed and only Potentate." Let us accustom ourselves to think more deeply and speak more largely of this power which ever makes for righteousness and works for mercy.

Verse 12. To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts. These glorious deeds ought to be known to all mankind; but yet few reckon such knowledge to be an essential part of education. As the State cannot teach these holy histories the people of God must take care to do it themselves. The

work must be done for every age, for men have short memories in reference to their God, and the doings of his power. They inscribe the deeds of their heroes upon brass, but the glorious acts of Jehovah are written upon the sand, and the tide of time washes them from present memory; therefore we must repeat the lesson, and yet again repeat it. The saints are the religious instructors of the race; they ought to be not only the historians of the past, but the bards of the present, whose duty it is to keep the sons of men in memory of the great deeds which the Lord did in the days of their fathers and in the old time before them. Note the contrast between the great deeds of God and the puny sons of Adam, who have even degenerated from their father, though he was as nothing compared with his Maker. And the glorious majesty of his kingdom. What a grand subject! Yet this we are to make known; the publication of it is left to us who bless the Lord. "The glory of the majesty of his reign." What a theme! Jehovah's reign as sovereign Lord of all, his majesty in that dominion, and the glory of that majesty! The threefold subject baffles the most willing mind. How shall we make this known to the sons of men? Let us first labour to know it ourselves, and then let us make it a frequent subject of discourse, so shall men know it from us, the Holy Spirit attending our word.

Verse 13. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. His meditation has brought him near to God, and God near to him: he speaks to him in adoration, changing the pronoun from "his" to "thy." He sees the great King, and prostrates himself before him. It is well when our devotion opens the gate of heaven, and enters within the portal, to speak with God face to face, as a man speaketh with his friend. The point upon which the Psalmist's mind rests is the eternity of the divine throne,—"thy reign is a reign of all eternities." The Lord's kingdom is without beginning, without break, without bound, and without end. He never abdicates his throne, neither does he call in a second to share his empire. None can overthrow his power, or break away from his rule. Neither this age, nor the age to come, nor ages of ages shall cause his sovereignty to fail. Herein is rest for faith. "The Lord sitteth King for ever." And thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. Men come and go like shadows on the wall, but God reigneth eternally. We distinguish kings as they succeed each other by calling them first and second; but this King is Jehovah, the First and the Last. Adam in his generation knew his Creator to be King, and the last of his race shall know the same. All hail, Great God I Thou art ever Lord of lords!

These three verses are a reverent hymn concerning "the kingdom of God": they will be best appreciated by those who are in that kingdom in the fullest sense, and are most truly loyal to the Lord. It is, according to these verses, a kingdom of glory and power; a kingdom of light which men are to know, and of might which men are to feel; it is full of majesty and eternity; it is the benediction of every generation. We are to speak of it, talk of it, and make it known, and then we are to acknowledge it in the homage directed distinctly to the Lord himself—as in Ps 145:13. In these three verses Jehovah is adored for his gracious providence towards men and all other creatures; this fitly follows the proclamation of his royalty, for we here see how he rules his kingdom, and provides for his subjects.

Verse 14. The Lord upholdeth all that fall. Read this verse in connection with the preceding, and admire the unexpected contrast: he who reigns in glorious majesty, yet condescends to lift up and hold up those who are apt to fall. The form of the verb shows that he is always doing this; he is Jehovah upholding. His choice of the fallen, and the falling, as the subjects of his gracious help is specially to be noted. The fallen of our race, especially fallen women, are shunned by us, and it is peculiar tenderness on the Lord's part that such he looks upon, even those who are at once the chief of sinners and the least regarded of mankind. The falling ones among us are too apt to be pushed down by the strong: their timidity and dependence make them the victims of the proud and

domineering. To them also the Lord gives his upholding help. The Lord loves to reverse things,—he puts down the lofty, and lifts up the lowly. And raiseth up all those that be bowed down. Another deed of condescension. Many are despondent, and cannot lift up their heads in courage, or their hearts with comfort; but these he cheers. Some are bent with their daily lead, and these he strengthens. Jesus loosed a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had so bound that she was bowed down, and could by no means lift up herself. In this he proved himself to be the true Son of the Highest. Think of the Infinite bowing to lift up the bowed, and stooping to be leaned upon by those who are ready to fall. The two "alls" should not be overlooked: the Lord has a kindly heart towards the whole company of the afflicted.

Verse 15. The eyes of all wait upon thee. They have learned to look to thee: it has become their nature to turn to thee for all they want. As children look to a father for all they need, so do the creatures look to God, the all sufficient Provider. It were well if all men had the eye of faith, and if all waited therewith upon the Lord. And thou givest them their meat in due season. They wait, and God gives. The thought of this brings God so near to our poet prophet that he is again speaking with God after the style of thee and thou. Is it to be wondered at when the Lord is feeding the hungry all around us,—giving food to all creatures, and to ourselves among them? Like a flock of sheep the creatures stand around the Lord as their great Shepherd; all eyes are to his hand expecting to receive their food; nor are they disappointed, for when the hour comes suitable provender is ready for each creature. Observe the punctuality of the Lord in giving food at meal time,—in the season when it is due. This he does for all, and each living thing has its own season, so that the Lord of heaven is feeding his great flock both by day and by night, during every moment of time.

Verse 16. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. You alone provide, O Jehovah! Thou doest it liberally, with open hand; thou doest it easily, as if it were only to open thine hand; thou doest this at once as promptly as if all supplies were ready to hand. Living things have needs, and these create desires; the living God has suitable supplies at hand, and these he gives till inward satisfaction is produced, and the creature sighs no longer. In spiritual things, when God has raised a desire, he always gratifies it; hence the longing is prophetic of the blessing. In no case is the desire of the living thing excited to produce distress, but in order that it may seek and find satisfaction. These verses refer to natural providence; but they may equally well apply to the stores of grace, since the same God is king in both spheres. If we will but wait upon the Lord for pardon, renewing, or whatever else we need, we shall not wait in vain. The hand of grace is never closed while the sinner lives. In these verses we behold our God in the realm of his free grace dealing well with his believing people.

Verse 17. The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. His ways and works are both worthy to be praised. Jehovah cannot be unjust or impure. Let his doings be what they may, they are in every case righteous and holy. This is the confession of the godly who follow his ways, and of the gracious who study his works. Whatever God is or does must be right. In the salvation of his people he is as righteous and holy as in any other of his ways and works: he has not manifested mercy at the expense of justice, but the rather he has magnified his righteousness by the death of his Son.

Verse 19. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: that is, those who reverence his name and his law. Inasmuch as they have respect unto his will, he will have respect unto their will. They shall have their way for they have his way in their hearts. A holy heart only desires what a holy God can give,

and so its desire is filled full out of the fullness of the Lord. He also will hear their cry, and will save them. Divinely practical shall his nearness be, for he will work their deliverance. He will listen to their piteous cry, and then will send salvation from every ill. This he will do himself personally; he will not trust them to angels or saints.

Verse 21. My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD. Whatever others may do, I will not be silent in the praise of the Lord: whatever others may speak upon, my topic is fixed once for all: I will speak the praise of Jehovah. I am doing it, and I will do it as long as I breathe. And let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever. Praise is no monopoly for one, even though he be a David; others are debtors, let them also be songsters. All men of every race, condition, or generation should unite to glorify God. No man need think that he will be rejected when he comes with his personal note of praise; all are permitted, invited, and exhorted to magnify the Lord. Specially should his holiness be adored: this is the crown, and in a certain sense the sum, of all his attributes. Only holy hearts will praise the holy name, or character of the Lord; oh, that all flesh were sanctified, then would the sanctity of God be the delight of all. Once let the song begin and there will be no end to it. It shall go on for ever and a day, as the old folks used to say. If there were two forevers, or twenty forevers, they ought all to be spent in the praises of the ever living, ever blessing, ever blessed JEHOVAH. Blessed be the Lord for ever for having revealed to us his name, and blessed be that name as he has revealed it; yea, blessed be he above all that we can know, or think, or say. Our hearts revel in the delight of praising him. Our mouth, our mind, our lip, our life shall be our Lord's throughout this mortal existence, and when time shall be no more.

Psalm 146

Verse 1. Praise ye the LORD, or, Hallelujah. It is saddening to remember how this majestic word has been trailed in the mire of late. Its irreverent use is an aggravated instance of taking the name of Jehovah our God in vain. Let us hope that it has been done in ignorance by the ruder sort; but great responsibility lies with leaders who countenance and even copy this blasphemy. With holy awe let us pronounce the word HALLELUJAH, and by it summon ourselves and all others to adore the God of the whole earth. Men need to be called to praise; it is important that they should praise; and there are many reasons why they should do it at once. Let all who hear the word Hallelujah unite immediately in holy praise. Praise the LORD, O my soul. He would practise what he had preached. He would be the leader of the choir which he had summoned. It is a poor business if we solely exhort others, and do not stir up our own soul. It is an evil thing to say, "Praise ye", and never to add, "Praise, O my soul." When we praise God let us arouse our innermost self, our central life: we have but one soul, and if it be saved from eternal wrath, it is bound to praise its Saviour. Come heart, mind, thought! Come my whole being, my soul, my all, be all on flame with joyful adoration! Up, my brethren! Lift up the song! "Praise ye the Lord." But what am I at? How dare I call upon others, and be negligent myself? If ever man was under bonds to bless the Lord I am that man, wherefore let me put my soul into the centre of the choir, and then let my better nature excite my whole manhood to the utmost height of loving praise. "O for a well tuned harp!" Nay, rather, O for a sanctified heart. Then if my voice should be of the poorer sort, and somewhat lacking in melody, yet my soul without my voice shall accomplish my resolve to magnify the Lord.

Verse 2. While I live will I praise the LORD. I shall not live here for ever. This mortal life will find a finis in death; but while it lasts I will laud the Lord my God. I cannot tell how long or short my life may be; but every hour of it shall be given to the praises of my God. While I live I'll love; and while I breathe I'll

bless. It is but for a while, and I will not while that time away in idleness, but consecrate it to that same service which shall occupy eternity. As our life is the gift of God's mercy, it should be used for his glory. I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being. When I am no longer in being on earth, I hope to have a higher being in heaven, and there I will not only praise, but sing praises. Here I have to sigh and praise, but there I shall only sing and praise. This "while I have any being" will be a great while, but the whole of it shall be filled up with adoration; for the glorious Jehovah is my God, my own God by covenant, and by blood relationship in Christ Jesus. I have no being apart from my God, therefore, I will not attempt to enjoy my being otherwise than by singing to his honour. Twice the Psalmist says "I will"; here first thoughts and second thoughts are alike good. We cannot be too firm in the holy resolve to praise God, for it is the chief end of our living and being that we should glorify God and enjoy him for ever.

Verse 3. Put not your trust in princes. If David be the author this warning comes from a prince. In any case it comes from the Spirit of the living God. Men are always far too apt to depend upon the great ones of earth, and forget the Great One above; and this habit is the fruitful source of disappointment. Princes are only men, and men with greater needs than others; why, then, should we look to them for aid? They are in greater danger, are burdened with greater cares, and are more likely to be misled than other men; therefore, it is folly to select them for our confidence. Probably no order of men have been so false to their promises and treaties as men of royal blood. So live as to deserve their trust, but do not burden them with your trust. Nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. Though you should select one son of man out of the many, and should imagine that he differs from the rest and may be safely depended on, you will be mistaken. There is none to be trusted, no, not one. Adam fell; therefore lean not on his sons. Man is a helpless creature without God; therefore, look not for help in that direction. All men are like the few men who are made into princes, they are more in appearance than in reality, more in promising than in performing, more apt to help themselves than to help others. How many have turned away heartsick from men on whom they once relied! Never was this the case with a believer in the Lord. He is a very present help in time of trouble. In man there is no help in times of mental depression, in the day of sore bereavement, in the night of conviction of sin, or in the hour of death. What a horror when most in need of help to read those black words, NO HELP!

Verse 4. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth. His breath goes from his body, and his body goes to the grave. His spirit goes one way, and his body another. High as he stood, the want of a little air brings him down to the ground, and lays him under it. Man who comes from the earth returns to the earth: it is the mother and sister of his body, and he must needs lie among his kindred as soon as the spirit which was his life has made its exit. There is a spirit in man, and when that goes the man goes. The spirit returns to God who gave it, and the flesh to the dust out of which it was fashioned. This is a poor creature to trust in: a dying creature, a corrupting creature. Those hopes will surely fall to the ground which are built upon men who so soon lie under ground. In that very day his thoughts perish. Whatever he may have proposed to do, the proposal ends in smoke. He cannot think, and what he had thought of cannot effect itself, and therefore it dies. Now that he is gone, men are ready enough to let his thoughts go with him into oblivion; another thinker comes, and turns the thoughts of his predecessor to ridicule. It is a pitiful thing to be waiting upon princes or upon any other men, in the hope that they will think of us. In an hour they are gone, and where are their schemes for our promotion? A day has ended their thoughts by ending them; and our trusts have perished, for their thoughts have perished. Men's ambitions, expectations, declarations, and boastings all vanish into thin air when the breath of life vanishes from their bodies. This is the narrow estate of man: his breath, his earth, and his thoughts; and this is his threefold climax therein,—his breath goeth forth, to

his earth he returns, and his thoughts perish. Is this a being to be relied upon? Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. To trust it would be a still greater vanity.

Verse 5. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help. Heaped up is his happiness. He has happiness indeed: the true and the real delight is with him. The God of Jacob is the God of the covenant, the God of wrestling prayer, the God of the tried believer; he is the only living and true God. The God of Jacob is Jehovah, who appeared unto Moses, and led the tribes of Jacob out of Egypt, and through the wilderness. Those are happy who trust him, for they shall never be ashamed or confounded. The Lord never dies, neither do his thoughts perish: his purpose of mercy, like himself, endures throughout all generations. Hallelujah! Whose hope is in the LORD his God. He is happy in help for the present and in hope for the future, who has placed all his confidence in Jehovah, who is his God by a covenant of salt. Happy is he when others are despairing! Happiest shall he be in that very hour when others are discovering the depths of agony. We have here a statement which we have personally tried and proved: resting in the Lord, we know a happiness which is beyond description, beyond comparison, beyond conception. O how blessed a thing it is to know that God is our present help, and our eternal hope. Full assurance is more than heaven in the bud, the flower has begun to open. We would not exchange with Caesar; his sceptre is a bauble, but our bliss is true treasure. In each of the two titles here given, namely, "the God of Jacob", and "Jehovah his God", there is a peculiar sweetness. Either one of them has a fountain of joy in it; but the first will not cheer us without the second. Unless Jehovah be his God no man can find confidence in the fact that he was Jacob's God. But when by faith we know the Lord to be ours, then we are "rich to all the intents of bliss."

Verse 6. Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is. Wisely may we trust our Creator: justly may we expect to be happy in so doing. He who made heaven can make a heaven for us, and make us fit for heaven. He who made the earth can preserve us while we are on earth, and help us to make good use of it while we sojourn upon it. He who made the sea and all its mysteries can steer us across the pathless deeps of a troubled life, and make it a way for his redeemed to pass over. This God who still makes the world by keeping it in existence is assuredly able to keep us to his eternal kingdom and glory. The making of the worlds is the standing proof of the power and wisdom of that great God in whom we trust. It is our joy that he not only made heaven, but the sea; not only things which are bright and blessed, but things which are deep and dark. Concerning all our circumstances, we may say the Lord is there. In storms and hurricanes the Lord reigneth as truly as in that great calm which rules the firmament above. Which keepeth truth for ever. This is a second and most forcible justification of our trust: the Lord will never permit his promise to fail. He is true to his own nature, true to the relationships which he has assumed, true to his covenant, true to his Word, true to his Son. He keeps true, and is the keeper of all that is true. Immutable fidelity is the character of Jehovah's procedure. None can charge him with falsehood or vacillation.

Verse 7. Which executeth judgment for the oppressed. He is a swift and impartial administrator of justice. Our King surpasses all earthly princes because he pays no deference to rank or wealth, and is never the respecter of persons. He is the friend of the down trodden, the avenger of the persecuted, the champion of the helpless. Safely may we trust our cause with such a Judge if it be a just one: happy are we to be under such a Ruler. Are we "evil entreated"? Are our rights denied us? Are we slandered? Let this console us, that he who occupies the throne will not only think upon our case, but bestir himself to execute judgment on our behalf. Which giveth food to the hungry. Glorious King art thou; O Jehovah! Thou dost not only mete out justice but thou dost dispense bounty! All food

comes from God; but when we are reduced to hunger, and providence supplies our necessity, we are peculiarly struck with the fact. Let every hungry man lay hold on this statement, and plead it before the mercy seat, whether he suffer bodily hunger, or heart hunger. See how our God finds his special clients among the lowest of mankind: the oppressed and the starving find help in the God of Jacob. The LORD looseth the prisoners. Thus he completes the triple blessing: justice, bread, and liberty. Jehovah loves not to see men pining in dungeons, or fretting in fetters: he brought up Joseph from the round house, and Israel from the house of bondage. Jesus is the Emancipator, spiritually, providentially, and nationally. Thy chains, O Africa! were broken by his hand. As faith in Jehovah shall become common among men freedom will advance in every form, especially will mental, moral, and spiritual bonds be loosed, and the slaves of error, sin, and death shall be set free. Well might the Psalmist praise Jehovah, who is so kind to men in bonds! Well may the loosened ones be loudest in the song!

Verse 8. The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind. Jesus did this very frequently, and hereby proved himself to be Jehovah. He who made the eye can open it, and when he does so it is to his glory. How often is the mental eye closed in moral night! And who can remove this dreary effect of the fall but the Almighty God This miracle of grace he has performed in myriads of cases, and it is in each case a theme for loftiest praise. The Lord raiseth them that are bowed down. This also Jesus did literally, thus doing the work peculiar to God. Jehovah consoles the bereaved, cheers the defeated, solaces the despondent, comforts the despairing. Let those who are bowed to the ground appeal to him, and he will speedily upraise them. The LORD loveth the righteous. He gives to them the love of complacency, communion, and reward. Bad kings affect the licentious, but Jehovah makes the upright to be his favoured ones. This is greatly to his glory. Let those who enjoy the inestimable privilege of his love magnify his name with enthusiastic delight. Loved ones, you must never be absent from the choir! You must never pause from his praise whose infinite love has made you what you are.

Verse 9. The Lord preserveth the strangers. Many monarchs hunted aliens down, or transported them from place to place, or left them as outlaws unworthy of the rights of man; but Jehovah made special laws for their shelter within his domain. In this country the stranger was, a little while ago, looked upon as a vagabond,—a kind of wild beast to be avoided if not to be assaulted; and even to this day there are prejudices against foreigners which are contrary to our holy religion. Our God and King is never strange to any of his creatures, and if any are left in a solitary and forlorn condition he has a special eye to their preservation. He relieveth the fatherless and widow. These excite his compassion, and he shows it in a practical way by upraising them from their forlorn condition. The Mosaic law made provision for these destitute persons. When the secondary fatherhood is gone the child falls back upon the primary fatherhood of the Creator; when the husband of earth is removed the godly widow casts herself upon the care of her Maker. But the way of the wicked he turneth upside down. He fills it with crooked places; he reverses it, sets it down, or upsets it. That which the man aimed at he misses, and he secures that for himself which he would gladly have avoided. The wicked man's way is in itself a turning of things upside down morally, and the Lord makes it so to him providentially: everything goes wrong with him who goes wrong.

Verse 10. The LORD shall reign for ever. Jehovah is King, and his kingdom can never come to an end. Neither does he die, nor abdicate, nor lose his crown by force. Glory be to his name, his throne is never in jeopardy. As the Lord ever liveth, so he ever reigneth. Even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Zion's God, the God of his worshipping people, is he who in every age shall reign. There

will always be a Zion; Zion will always have Jehovah for her King; for her he will always prove himself to be reigning in great power. What should we do in the presence of so great a King, but enter into his courts with praise, and pay to him our joyful homage? Praise ye the LORD. Again they said Hallelujah. Again the sweet perfume arose from the golden vials full of sweet odours. Are we not prepared for an outburst of holy song? Do not we also say—Hallelujah? Here endeth this happy Psalm. Here endeth not the praise of the Lord, which shall ascend for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 147

Verse 1. Praise ye the Lord, or Hallelujah: The flow of the broad river of the Book of Psalms ends in a cataract of praise. The present Psalm begins and ends with Hallelujah. Jehovah and happy praise should ever be associated in the mind of a believer. Jove was dreaded, but Jehovah is beloved. To one and all of the true seed of Israel the Psalmist acts as choir master, and cries, "Praise ye the Lord." Such an exhortation may fitly be addressed to all those who owe anything to the favour of God; and which of us does not? Pay him we cannot, but praise him we will, not only now, but for ever. "For it is good to sing praises unto our God." It is good because it is right; good because it is acceptable with God, beneficial to ourselves, and stimulating to our fellows. The goodness of an exercise is good argument with good men for its continual practice. Singing the divine praises is the best possible use of speech: it speaks of God, for God, and to God, and it does this in a joyful and reverent manner. Singing in the heart is good, but singing with heart and voice is better, for it allows others to join with us. Jehovah is our God, our covenant God, therefore let him have the homage of our praise; and he is so gracious and happy a God that our praise may best be expressed in joyful song. For it is pleasant; and praise is comely. It is pleasant and proper, sweet and suitable to laud the Lord Most High. It is refreshing to the taste of the truly refined mind, and it is agreeable to the eye of the pure in heart: it is delightful both to hear and to see a whole assembly praising the Lord. These are arguments for song service which men who love true piety, real pleasure, and strict propriety will not despise. Please to praise, for praise is pleasant: praise the Lord in the beauty of holiness, for praise is comely. Where duty and delight, benefit and beauty unite, we ought not to be backward. Let each reader feel that he and his family ought to constitute a choir for the daily celebration of the praises of the Lord.

Verse 2. The Lord doth build up Jerusalem. God appears both in the material and spiritual world as a Builder and Maker, and therein he is to be praised. His grace, wisdom, and power are all seen in the formation and establishment of the chosen seat of his worship; once a city with material walls, but now a church composed of spiritual stones. The Jews rejoiced in the uprising of their capital from its ruins, and we triumph in the growth of the church from among a godless world. He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel; and thus he repairs the waste places, and causes the former desolations to be inhabited. This sentence may relate to Nehemiah and those who returned with him; but there is no reason why it should not with equal fitness be referred to David, who, with his friends, was once an outcast, but ere long became the means of building up Jerusalem. In any case, the Psalmist ascribes to Jehovah all the blessings enjoyed; the restoration of the city and the restoration of the banished he equally traces to the divine hand. How clearly these ancient believers saw the Lord present, working among them and for them! Spiritually we see the hand of God in the edification of the church, and in the ingathering of sinners. What are men under conviction of sin but outcasts from God, from holiness, from heaven, and even from hope? Who could gather them from their dispersions, and make citizens of them in Christ Jesus save the Lord our God? This deed of love and power he is constantly performing. Therefore let the song begin at Jerusalem our home, and let every living stone

in the spiritual city echo the strain; for it is the Lord who has brought again his banished ones, and builded them together in Zion.

Verse 3. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. This the Holy Spirit mentions as a part of the glory of God, and a reason for our declaring his praise: the Lord is not only a Builder, but a Healer; he restores broken hearts as well as broken walls. The kings of the earth think to be great through their loftiness; but Jehovah becomes really so by his condescension. Behold, the Most High has to do with the sick and the sorry, with the wretched and the wounded! He walks the hospitals as the good Physician! His deep sympathy with mourners is a special mark of his goodness. Few will associate with the despondent, but Jehovah chooses their company, and abides with them till he has healed them by his comforts. He deigns to handle and heal broken hearts: he himself lays on the ointment of grace, and the soft bandages of love, and thus binds up the bleeding wounds of those convinced of sin. This is compassion like a God. Well may those praise him to whom he has acted so gracious a part. The Lord is always healing and binding: this is no new work to him, he has done it of old; and it is not a thing of the past of which he is now weary, for he is still healing and still binding, as the original hath it. Come, broken hearts, come to the Physician who never fails to heal: uncover your wounds to him who so tenderly binds them up!

Verse 4. He telleth the number of the stars. None but he can count the mighty host, but as he made them and sustains them he can number them. To Jehovah stars are as mere coins, which the merchant tells as he puts them into his bag. He calleth them all by their names. He has an intimate acquaintance with each separate orb, so as to know its name or character. Indeed, he gives to each its appropriate title, because he knows its constitution and nature. Vast as these stars are, they are perfectly obedient to his bidding; even as soldiers to a captain who calls their names, and allots them their stations. Do they not rise, and set, and move, or stand, precisely according to his order? What a change is here from the preceding verse! Read the two without a break, and feel the full force of the contrast. From stars to sighs is a deep descent! From worlds to wounds is a distance which only infinite compassion can bridge. Yet he who acts a surgeon's part with wounded hearts, marshals the heavenly host, and reads the muster roll of suns and their majestic systems. O Lord, it is good to praise thee as ruling the stars, but it is pleasant to adore thee as healing the broken in heart!

Verse 5. Great is our Lord. Our Lord and King is great—magnanimous, infinite, inconceivably glorious. None can describe his majesty, or reckon up the number of his excellencies. And of great power. Doing as he wills, and willing to do mighty deeds. His acts reveal something of his might, but the mass of his power is hidden, for all things are possible with God, even the things impossible with men. His understanding is infinite. There is no fathoming his wisdom, or measuring his knowledge. He is infinite in existence, in power, and in knowledge; as these three phrases plainly teach us. The gods of the heathen are nothing, but our God filleth all things. And yet how condescending! For this is he who so tenderly nurses sick souls, and waists to be gracious to sinful men. He brings his boundless power and infinite understanding to bear upon human distress for its assuagement and sanctification. For all these reasons let his praise be great: even could it be infinite, it would not exceed his due. In the building of his church and the salvation of souls, his greatness, power, and wisdom are all displayed: let him be extolled because of each of these attributes.

Verse 6. The LORD lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground. He reverses the evil order of things. The meek are down, and he lifts them up; the wicked are exalted, anti he hurls them down to the dust. The Lord loves those who are reverent to himself, humble in their own eyes,

and gentle to their fellow men: these he lifts up to hope, to peace, to power, to eternal honour. When God lifts a man, it is a lift indeed. Proud men are in their own esteem, high enough already; only those who are low will care to be lifted up, and only such will Jehovah upraise. As for the wicked, they must come down from their seats of vain glory. God is accustomed to overthrow such; it is his way and habit. None of the wicked shall in the end escape. To the earth they must go; for from the earth they came, and for the earth they live. It is one of the glories of our God for which his saints praise him, that he hath put down the mighty from their seats, and hath exalted them of low degree. Well may the righteous be lifted up in spirit and the wicked be downcast as they think of the judgments of the Lord God. In this verse we see the practical outcome of that character of Jehovah which leads him to count and call the stars as if they were little things, while he deals tenderly with sorrowful men, as if they were precious in his esteem. He is so great that nothing is great to him, and he is so condescending that nothing is little to him: his infinite majesty thus naturally brings low the lofty and exalts the lowly.

Verse 7. In this paragraph the contrast announced in the former section is enlarged upon from another point of view, namely, as it is seen in nature and in providence. Sing unto the LORD with, thanksgiving; or rather, "respond to Jehovah." He speaks to us in his works, let us answer him with our thanks. All that he does is gracious, every movement of his hand is goodness; therefore let our hearts reply with gratitude, and our lips with song. Our lives should be responses to divine love. Jehovah is ever engaged in giving, let us respond with thanksgiving. Sing praise upon the harp unto our God. Blend music with song. Under a dispensation of ritual the use of music was most commendable, and suitable in the great congregation: those of us who judge it to be less desirable for public worship, under a spiritual economy, because it has led to so many abuses, nevertheless rejoice in it in our privacy, and are by no means insensible to its charms. It seems profanation that choice minstrelsy should so often be devoted to unworthy themes: the sweetest harmonies should be consecrated to the honour of the Lord. He is our God, and this fact is one choice joy of the sing. We have chosen him because he has chosen us; and we see in him peculiarities which distinguish him from all the pretended deities of those among whom we dwell. He is our God in covenant relationship for ever and ever, and to him be praise in every possible form.

Verse 8. Who covereth the heaven with clouds. He works in all things, above as well as below. Clouds are not caused by accident, but produced by God himself, and made to assume degrees of density by which the blue firmament is hidden. A sky scape might seem to be a mere fortuitous concurrence of vapours, but it is not so: the Great Artist's hand thus covers the canvas of the heavens. Who prepareth rain for the earth. The Lord prepares clouds with a view to rain, and rain with an eye to the fields below. By many concurrent circumstances all things are made ready for the production of a shower; there is more of art in the formation of a rain cloud and in the fashioning of a rain drop, than appears to superficial observers. God is in the vapour, and in the pearly drop which is born of it. Who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. By the far reaching shower he produces vegetation where the hand of man is all unknown. He cares not only for Goshen's fertile plains, but for Carmel's steep ascents. God makes the heavens the servants of the earth, and the clouds the irrigators of the mountain meadows. This is a kind of evolution about which there can be no dispute. Nor does the Lord forget the waste and desolate places, but causes the lone hills to be the first partakers of his refreshing visitations. This is after the manner of our God. He not only causes rain to descend from the heavens to water the grass, and thus unites the skies and the herbs by a ministry of mercy; but he also thinks of the rocky ledges among the hills, and forgets not the pastures of the wilderness. What a God is this!

"Passing by the rich and great,
For the poor and desolate."

Verse 9. He giveth to the beast his food. By causing the grass to grow on the hills the Lord feeds the cattle. God careth for the brute creation. Men tread grass under foot as though it were nothing, but God causeth it to grow: too often men treat their cattle with cruelty, but the Lord himself feedeth them. The great God is too good, and, indeed, too great to overlook things that are despised. Say not, "Doth God care for oxen?" Indeed he does, and he permits himself to be here described as giving them their food as husbandmen are wont to do. And to the young ravens which cry. These wild creatures, which seem to be of no use to man; are they therefore worthless? By no means; they fill their place in the economy of nature. When they are mere fledgelings, and can only clamour to the parent birds for food, the Lord does not suffer them to starve, but supplies their needs. Is it not wonderful how such numbers of little birds are fed! A bird in a cage under human care is in more danger of lacking seed and water than any one of the myriads that fly in the open heavens, with no owner but their Creator, and no provider but the Lord. Greatness occupied with little things makes up a chief feature of this Psalm. Ought we not all to feel special joy in praising One who is so specially remarkable for his care of the needy and the forgotten? Ought we not also to trust in the Lord? for he who feeds the sons of the raven will surely nourish the sons of God! Hallelujah to Him who both feeds the ravens and rules the stars! What a God art thou, O Jehovah!

Verse 10. He delighteth not in the strength of the horse. Not to great and strong animals doth the Creator in any measure direct his special thought; but in lesser living things he has equal pleasure. If man could act the Creator's part, he would take peculiar delight in producing noble quadrupeds like horses, whose strength and speed would reflect honour upon their maker; but Jehovah has no such feeling; he cares as much for helpless birds in the nest as for the war horse in the pride of its power. He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. These are the athlete's glory, but God hath no pleasure in them. Not the capacities of the creature, but rather its weakness and necessity, win the regard of our God. Monarchs trust in their cavalry and infantry; but the King of kings exults not in the hosts of his creatures as though they could lend power to him. Physical or material greatness and power are of no account with Jehovah; he has respect to other and more precious qualities. Men who boast in fight the valour of gigantic might, will not find themselves the favourites of God: though earthly princes may feast their eyes upon their Joabs and their Abners, their Abishais and Asahels, the Lord of hosts has no pleasure in mere bone and muscle. Sinews and thews are of small account, either in horses or in men, with Him who is a spirit, and delights most in spiritual things. The expression of the text may be viewed as including all creature power, even of a mental or moral kind. God does not take pleasure in us because of our attainments, or potentialities: he respects character rather than capacity.

Verse 11. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him in those that hope in his mercy. While the bodily powers give no content to God, spiritual qualities are his delight. He cares most for those emotions which centre in himself: the fear which he approves is fear of him, and the hope which he accepts is hope in his mercy. It is a striking thought that God should not only be at peace with some kinds of men, but even find a solace and a joy in their company. Oh! the matchless condescension of the Lord, that his greatness should take pleasure in the insignificant creatures of his hand. Who are these favoured men in whom Jehovah takes pleasure? Some of them are the least in his family, who have never risen beyond hoping and fearing. Others of them are more fully developed, but still they

exhibit a blended character composed of fear and hope: they fear God with holy awe and filial reverence, and they also hope for forgiveness and blessedness because of the divine mercy. As a father takes pleasure in his own children, so doth the Lord solace himself in his own beloved ones, whose marks of new birth are fear and hope. They fear, for they are sinners; they hope; for God is merciful. They fear him, for he is great; they hope in him, for he is good. Their fear sobers their hope; their hope brightens their fear: God takes pleasure in them both in their trembling and in their rejoicing. Is there not rich cause for praise in this special feature of the divine character? After all, it is a poor nature which is delighted with brute force; it is a diviner thing to take pleasure in the holy character of those around us. As men may be known by the nature of the things which give them pleasure, so is the Lord known by the blessed fact that he taketh pleasure in the righteous, even though that righteousness is as yet in its initial stage of fear and hope.

Verse 12. Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. How the poet insists upon praise: he cries praise, praise, as if it were the most important of all duties. A peculiar people should render peculiar praise. The city of peace should be the city of praise; and the temple of the covenant God should resound with his glories. If nowhere else, yet certainly in Zion there should be joyful adoration of Zion's God. Note, that we are to praise the Lord in our own houses in Jerusalem as well as in his own house in Zion. The holy city surrounds the holy hill, and both are dedicated to the holy God, therefore both should ring with hallelujahs.

Verse 13. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates. Her fortifications were finished, even to the fastenings of the gates, and God had made all sound and strong, even to her bolts and bars: thus her security against invading foes was guaranteed. This is no small mercy. Oh, that our churches were thus preserved from all false doctrine and unholy living! This must be the Lord's doing; and where he has wrought it his name is greatly to be praised. Modern libertines would tear down all gates and abolish all bars; but so do not we, because of the fear of the Lord. He hath blessed thy children within thee. Internal happiness is as truly the Lord's gift as external security. When the Lord blesses "thy sons in the midst of thee", thou art, O Zion, filled with a happy, united, zealous, prosperous, holy people, who dwell in communion with God, and enter into the joy of their Lord. When God makes thy walls salvation thy gates must be praise. It would little avail to fortify a wretched, starving city; but when the walls are strengthened, it is a still greater joy to see that the inhabitants are blessed with all good gifts. How much our churches need a present and abiding benediction.

Verse 14. He maketh peace in thy borders. Even to the boundaries quiet extends; no enemies are wrangling with the borderers. If there is peace there, we may be sure that peace is everywhere. "When a man's ways please the Lord he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Peace is from the God of peace. Considering the differing constitutions, conditions, tastes, and opinions of men, it is a work of God when in large churches unbroken peace is found year after year; and it is an equal wonder if worldlings, instead of persecuting the godly, treat them with marked respect. He who builds Zion is also her Peace maker, the Lord and Giver of peace. And filleth thee with the finest of the wheat. Peace is attended with plenty,—plenty of the best food, and of the best sort of that food. It is a great reason for thanksgiving when men's wants are so supplied that they are filled: it takes much to fill some men: perhaps none ever are filled but the inhabitants of Zion; and they are only to be filled by the Lord himself. Gospel truth is the finest of the wheat, and those are indeed blessed who are content to be filled therewith, and are not hungering after the husks of the world. Let those who are filled with heavenly food fill their mouths with heavenly praise.

Verse 15. He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth. His messages fly throughout his dominions: upon earth his warrants are executed as well as in heaven. From his church his word goes forth; from Zion he missions the nations with the word of life. His word runneth very swiftly: his purposes of love are speedily accomplished. Oriental monarchs laboured hard to establish rapid postal communication; the desire, will, and command of the Lord flash in an instant from pole to pole, yea, from heaven to earth. We who dwell in the centre of the Lord's dominions may exceedingly rejoice that to the utmost extremity of the realm the divine commandment speeds with sure result, and is not hindered by distance or time. The Lord can deliver his people right speedily, or send them supplies immediately from his courts above. God's commands in nature and providence are fiats against which no opposition is ever raised; say, rather, to effect which all things rush onward with alacrity. The expressions in the text are so distinctly in the present that they are meant to teach us the present mission and efficiency of the word of the Lord, and thus to prompt us to present praise.

Verse 16. Here follow instances of the power of God upon the elements. He giveth snow like wool. As a gift he scatters the snow, which falls in flakes like fleecy wool. Snow falls softly, covers universally, and clothes warmly, even as wool covers the sheep. The most evident resemblance lies in the whiteness of the two substances; but many other likenesses are to be seen by the observant eye. It is wise to see God in winter and in distress as well as in summer and prosperity. He who one day feeds us with the finest of the wheat, at another time robes us in snow: he is the same God in each case, and each form of his operation bestows a gift on men. He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. Here again the Psalmist sees God directly and personally at work. As ashes powder the earth when men are burning up the rank herbage; and as when men cast ashes into the air they cause a singular sort of whiteness in the places where they fall, so also does the frost. The country people talk of a black frost and a white frost, and the same thing may be said of ashes, for they are both black and white. Moreover, excessive cold burns as effectually as great heat, and hence there is an inner as well as an outer likeness between hoarfrost and ashes. Let us praise the Lord who condescends to wing each flake of snow and scatter each particle of rime. Ours is no absent or inactive deity: he worketh all things, and is everywhere at home.

Verse 17. He casteth forth his ice like morsels. Such are the crumbs of hail which he casts forth, or the crusts of ice which he creates upon the waters. These morsels are his ice, and he casts them abroad. The two expressions indicate a very real presence of God in the phenomena of nature. Who can stand before his cold? None can resist the utmost rigours of cold any more than they can bear the vehemence of heat. God's withdrawals of light are a darkness that may be felt, and his withdrawals of heat are a cold which is absolutely omnipotent. If the Lord, instead of revealing himself as a fire, should adopt the opposite manifestation of cold, he would, in either case, consume us should he put forth all his power. It is ours to submit to deprivations with patience, seeing the cold is his cold. That which God sends, whether it be heat or cold, no man can defy with impunity, but he is happy who bows before it with childlike submission. When we cannot stand before God we will gladly lie at his feet, or nestle under his wings.

Verse 18. He sendeth out his word, and melteth them. When the frost is sharpest, and the ice is hardest, the Lord intervenes; and though he doth no more than send his word, yet the rocks of ice are dissolved at once, and the huge bergs begin to float into the southern seas. The phenomena of winter are not so abundant in Palestine as with us, yet they are witnessed sufficiently to cause the devout to bless God for the return of spring. At the will of God snow, hoarfrost, and ice disappear, and the time of the opening bud and the singing of birds has come. For this let us praise the Lord as we sun

ourselves amici the spring flowers. He causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow. The Lord is the great first cause of everything; even the fickle, wandering winds are caused by him. Natural laws are in themselves mere inoperative rules, but the power emanates directly from the Ever present and Ever potent One. The soft gales from the south, which bring a general thaw, are from the Lord, as were those wintry blasts which bound the streams in icy bonds. Simple but effectual are the methods of Jehovah in the natural world; equally so are those which he employs in the spiritual kingdom; for the breath of his Holy Spirit breathes upon frozen hearts, and streams of penitence and love gush forth at once. Observe how in these two sentences the word and the wind go together in nature. They attend each other in grace; the gospel and the Holy Spirit cooperate in salvation. The truth which the Spirit breathed into prophets and apostles he breathes into dead souls, and they are quickened into spiritual life.

Verse 19. He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He who is the Creator is also the Revealer. We are to praise the Lord above all things for his manifesting himself to us as he does not unto the world. Whatever part of his mind he discloses to us, whether it be a word of instruction, a statute of direction, or a judgment of government, we are bound to bless the Lord for it. He who causes summer to come in the place of winter has also removed the coldness and death from our hearts by the power of his word, and this is abundant cause for singing unto his name. As Jacob's seed of old were made to know the Lord, even so are we ill these latter days; wherefore, let his name be magnified among us. By that knowledge Jacob is ennobled into Israel, and therefore let him who is made a prevailing prince in prayer be also a chief musician in praise. The elect people were bound to sing hallelujahs to their own God. Why were they so specially favoured if they did not, above all others, tell forth the glory of their God?

Verse 20. He hath not dealt so with any nation. Israel had clear and exclusive knowledge of God, while others were left in ignorance. Election is the loudest call for grateful adoration. And as for his judgments, they have not known them; or, and judgments they had not known them, as if not knowing the laws of God, they might be looked upon as having no laws at all worth mentioning. The nations were covered with darkness, and only Israel sat in the light. This was sovereign grace in its fullest noontide of power. Praise ye the Lord. When we have mentioned electing, distinguishing love, our praise can rise no higher, and therefore we close with one more hallelujah.

Psalm 148

Verse 1. Praise ye the LORD. Whoever ye may be that hear this word, ye are invited, entreated, commanded, to magnify Jehovah. Assuredly he has made you, and, if for nothing else, ye are bound, upon the ground of creatureship, to adore your Maker. This exhortation can never be out of place, speak it where we may; and never out of time, speak it when we may. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens. Since ye are nearest to the High and Lofty One, be ye sure to lead the song. Ye angels, ye cherubim and seraphim, and all others who dwell in the precincts of his courts, praise ye Jehovah. Do this as from a starting point from which the praise is to pass on to other realms. Keep not your worship to yourselves, but let it fall like a golden shower from the heavens on men beneath. Praise him in the heights. This is no vain repetition; but after the manner of attractive poesy the truth is emphasized by reiteration in other words. Moreover, God is not only to be praised from the heights, but in them: the adoration is to be perfected in the heavens from which it takes its rise. No place is too high for the praises of the most High. On the summit of creation the glory of the Lord is to be revealed, even as the tops of the highest Alps are tipped with the golden light of the same sun which

glads the valleys. Heavens and heights become the higher and the more heavenly as they are made to resound with the praises of Jehovah. See how the Psalmist trumpets out the word "PRAISE." It sounds forth some nine times in the first five verses of this song. Like minute-guns, exultant exhortations are sounded forth in tremendous force—Praise! Praise! Praise! The drum of the great King beats round the world with this one note—Praise! Praise! Praise! "Again they said, Hallelujah." All this praise is distinctly and personally for Jehovah. Praise not his servants nor his works; but praise HIM. Is he not worthy of all possible praise? Pour it forth before HIM in full volume; pour it only there!

Verse 2. Praise ye him, all his angels. Living intelligences, perfect in character and in bliss, lift up your loudest music to your Lord, each one, of you. Not one bright spirit is exempted from this consecrated service. However many ye be, O angels, ye are all his angels, and therefore ye are bound, all of you, to render service to your Lord. Ye have all seen enough of him to be able to praise him, and ye have all abundant reasons for so doing. Whether ye be named Gabriel, or Michael, or by whatever other titles ye are known, praise ye the Lord. Whether ye bow before him, or fly on his errands, or desire to look into his covenant, or behold his Son, cease not, ye messengers of Jehovah, to sound forth his praise while ye move at his bidding. Praise ye him, all his hosts. This includes angelic armies, but groups with them all the heavenly bodies. Though they be inanimate, the stars, the clouds, the lightnings, have their ways of praising Jehovah. Let each one of the countless legions of the Lord of hosts show forth his glory; for the countless armies are all his, his by creation, and preservation, and consequent obligation. Both these sentences claim unanimity of praise from those in the upper regions who are called upon to commence the strain—"all his angels, all his hosts." That same hearty oneness must pervade the whole orchestra of praising ones; hence, further on, we read of all stars of light, all deeps, all hills, all cedars, and all people. How well the concert begins when all angels, and all the heavenly host, strike the first joyful notes! In that concert our souls would at once take their part.

Verse 3. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. The Psalmist enters into detail as to the heavenly hosts. As all, so each, must praise the God of each and all. The sun and moon, as joint rulers of day and night, are paired in praise: the one is the complement of the other, and so they are closely associated in the summons to worship. The sun has his peculiar mode of glorifying the Great Father of lights, and the moon has her own special method of reflecting his brightness. There is a perpetual adoration of the Lord in the skies: it varies with night and day, but it ever continues while sun and moon endure. There is ever a lamp burning before the high altar of the Lord. Nor are the greater luminaries allowed to drown with their floods of light the glory of the lesser brilliants, for all the stars are bidden to the banquet of praise. Stars are many, so many that no one can count the host included under the words, "all ye stars"; yet no one of them refuses to praise its Maker. From their extreme brilliance they are fitly named "stars of light"; and this light is praise in a visible form twinkling to true music. Light is song glittering before the eye instead of resounding in the ear. Stars without light would render no praise, and Christians without light rob the Lord of his glory. However small our beam, we must not hide it: if we cannot be sun or moon we must aim to be one of the "stars of light", and our every twinkling must be to the honour of our Lord.

Verse 4. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens. By these are meant those regions which are heavens to those who dwell in our heavens; or those most heavenly of abodes where the most choice of spirits dwell. As the highest of the highest, so the best of the best are to praise the Lord. If we could climb as much above the heavens as the heavens are above the earth, we could still cry out to all around us,

"Praise ye the Lord." There can be none so great and high as to be above praising Jehovah. And ye waters that be above the heavens. Let the clouds roll up volumes of adoration. Let the sea above roar, and the fulness thereof, at the presence of Jehovah, the God of Israel. There is something of mystery about these supposed reservoirs of water; but let them be what they may, and as they may, they shall give glory to the Lord our God. Let the most unknown and perplexing phenomena take up their parts in the universal praise.

Verse 5. Let them praise the name of the LORD; for he commanded, and they were created. Here is good argument: The Maker should have honour from his works, they should tell forth his praise: and thus they should praise his name—by which his character is intended. The name of JEHOVAH is written legibly upon his works, so that his power, wisdom, goodness, and other attributes are therein made manifest to thoughtful men, and thus his name is praised. The highest praise of God is to declare what he is. We can invent nothing which would magnify the Lord: we can never extol him better than by repeating his name, or describing his character. The Lord is to be extolled as creating all things that exist, and as doing so by the simple agency of his word. He created by a command; what a power is this! Well may he expect those to praise him who owe their being to him. Evolution may be atheistic; but the doctrine of creation logically demands worship; and hence, as the tree is known by its fruit, it proves itself to be true. Those who were created by command are under command to adore their Creator. The voice which said "Let them be", now saith "Let them praise."

Verse 6. He hath also stablished them for ever and ever. The continued existence of celestial beings is due to the supporting might of Jehovah, and to that alone. They do not fail because the Lord does not fail them. Without his will these things cannot alter; he has impressed upon them laws which only he himself can change. Eternally his ordinances are binding upon them. Therefore ought the Lord to be praised because he is Preserver as well as Creator, Ruler as well as Maker. He hath made a decree which shall not pass. The heavenly bodies are ruled by Jehovah's decree: they cannot pass his limit, or trespass against his law. His rule and ordination can never be changed except by himself, and in this sense his decree "shall not pass": moreover, the highest and most wonderful of creatures are perfectly obedient to the statutes of the Great King, and thus his decree is not passed over. This submission to law is praise. Obedience is homage; order is harmony. In this respect the praise rendered to Jehovah from the "bodies celestial" is absolutely perfect. His almighty power upholds all things in their spheres, securing the march of stars and the flight of seraphs; and thus the music of the upper regions is never marred by discord, nor interrupted by destruction. The eternal hymn is for ever chanted; even the solemn silence of the spheres is a perpetual Psalm.

Verse 7. Praise the LORD from the earth. The song descends to our abode, and so comes nearer home to us. We who are "bodies terrestrial", are to pour out our portion of praise from the golden globe of this favoured planet. Jehovah is to be praised not only in the earth but from the earth, as if the adoration ran over from this planet into the general accumulation of worship. In Ps 148:1 the song was "from the heavens"; here it is "from the earth": songs coming down from heaven are to blend with those going up from earth. The "earth" here meant is our entire globe of land and water: it is to be made vocal everywhere with praise. Ye dragons, and all deeps. It would be idle to inquire what special sea monsters are here meant; but we believe all of them are intended, and the places where they abide are indicated by "all deeps." Terrible beasts or fishes, whether they roam the earth or swim the seas, are bidden to the feast of praise. Whether they float amid the teeming waves of the tropics, or wend their way among the floes and bergs of polar waters, they are commanded by our sacred poet to yield their tribute to the creating Jehovah. They pay no service to man; let them the more

heartily confess their allegiance to the Lord. About "dragons" and "deeps" there is somewhat of dread, but this may the more fitly become the bass of the music of the Psalm. If there be aught grim in mythology, or fantastic in heraldry, let it praise the incomprehensible Lord.

Verse 8. Fire and hail. Lightning and hailstones go together. In the plagues of Egypt they cooperated in making Jehovah known in all the terrors of his power. Fire and ice morsels are a contrast in nature, but they are combined in magnifying the Lord. Snow and vapours. Offsprings of cold, or creations of heat, be ye equally consecrated to his praise. Congealed or expanded vapours, falling flakes or rising clouds, should, rising or falling, still reveal the praises of the Lord. Stormy winds fulfilling his word. Though rushing with incalculable fury, the storm wind is still under law, and moves in order due, to carry out the designs of God. It is a grand orchestra which contains such wind instruments as these! He is a great leader who can keep all these musicians in concert, and direct both time and tune.

Verse 9. Mountains, and all hills. Towering steeps and swelling knolls alike declare their Creator. "All hills" are to be consecrated; we have no longer Ebal and Gerizim, the hill of the curse and the hill of the blessing, but all our Ebals are turned to Gerizims. Tabor and Hermon, Lebanon and Carmel, rejoice in the name of the Lord. The greater and the lesser mounts are one in their adoration. Not only the Alps and the mountains of the Jura thunder out his praise; but our own Cotswolds and Grampians are vocal with songs in his honour. Fruitful trees, and all cedars. Fruit trees and forest trees, trees deciduous or evergreen, are equally full of benevolent design, and alike subserve some purpose of love; therefore for all and by all let the great Designer be praised. There are many species of cedar, but they all reveal the wisdom of their Maker. When kings fell them, that they may make beams for their palaces, they do but confess their obligation to the King of trees, and to the King of kings, whose trees they are. Varieties in the landscape are produced by the rising and falling of the soil, and by the many kinds of trees which adorn the land: let all, and all alike, glorify their one Lord. When the trees clap their hands in the wind, or their leaves rustle in the gentle breath of Zephyr, they do to their best ability sing out unto the Lord.

Verse 10. Beasts, and all cattle. Animals fierce or tame; wild beasts and domestic cattle; let all these show forth the praises of Jehovah. Those are worse than beasts who do not praise our God. More than brutish are those who are wilfully dumb concerning their Maker. Creeping things, and flying fowl. The multitudes that throng the earth and the air; insects of every form and birds of every wing are called upon to join the universal worship. No one can become familiar with insect and bird life without feeling that they constitute a wonderful chapter in the history of divine wisdom. The minute insect marvellously proclaims the Lord's handiwork: when placed under the microscope it tells a wondrous tale. So, too, the bird which soars aloft displays in its adaptation for an aerial life an amount of skill which our balloonists have in vain attempted to emulate. True devotion not only hears the praises of God in the sweet song of feathered minstrels, but even discovers it in the croaking from the marsh, or in the buzz of "the blue fly which singeth in the window pane." More base than reptiles, more insignificant than insects, are songless men.

Verse 11. Kings of the earth, and all people: princes, and all judges of the earth. Now the poet has reached our own race, and very justly he would have rulers and subjects, chieftains and magistrates, unite in worshipping the sovereign Lord of all. Monarchs must not disdain to sing, nor must their people refrain from uniting with them. Those who lead in battle and those who decide in courts must neither of them allow their vocations to keep them from reverently adoring the Chief and Judge of all. All people, and all judges, must praise the Lord of all. What a happy day it will be when it is

universally acknowledged that through our Lord Jesus, the incarnate Wisdom, "kings reign and princes decree justice"! Alas, it is not so as yet! kings have been patrons of vice, and princes ringleaders in folly. Let us pray that the song of the Psalmist may be realized in fact.

Verse 12. Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children. Both sexes and all ages are summoned to the blessed service of song. Those who usually make merry together are to be devoutly joyful together: those who make up the ends of families, that is to say, the elders and the juveniles, should make the Lord their one and only end. Old men should by their experience teach children to praise; and children by their cheerfulness should excite old men to song. There is room for every voice at this concert: fruitful trees and maidens, cedars and young men, angels and children, old men and judges—all may unite in this oratorio. None, indeed, can be dispensed with: for perfect Psalmody we must have the whole universe aroused to worship, and all parts of creation must take their parts in devotion.

Verse 13. Let them praise the name of the LORD. All that is contained in the name or character of Jehovah is worthy of praise, and all the objects of his creating care will be too few to set it forth in its completeness. For his name alone is excellent. It alone deserves to be exalted in praise, for alone it is exalted in worth. There is none like unto the Lord, none that for a moment can be compared unto him. His unique name should have a monopoly of praise. His glory is above the earth and heaven: it is therefore alone because it surpasses all others. His royal splendour exceeds all that earth and heaven can express. He is himself the crown of all things, the excellency of the creation. There is more glory in him personally than in all his works united. It is not possible for us to exceed and become extravagant in the Lord's praise: his own natural glory is infinitely greater than any glory which we can render to him.

Verse 14. He also exalteth the horn of his people. He hath made them strong, famous, and victorious. His goodness to all his creatures does not prevent his having a special favour to his chosen nation: he is good to all, but he is God to his people. He lifts up the down trodden, but he in a peculiar manner lifts up his people. When they are brought low he raises up a horn for them by sending them a deliverer; when they are in conflict he gives them courage and strength, so that they lift up their horn amid the fray; and when all is peaceful around them, he fills their horn with plenty, and they lift it up with delight. The praise of all his saints. He is their glory: to him they render praise; and he by his mercy to them evermore gives them further reasons for praise, and higher motives for adoration. He lifts up their horn, and they lift up his praise. He exalts them, and they exalt him. The Holy One is praised by holy ones. He is their God, and they are his saints; he makes them blessed, and they bless him in return.

Even of the children of Israel. The Lord knoweth them that are his. He knows the name of him with whom he made a covenant, and how he came by that name, and who his children are, and where they are. All nations are bidden in Ps 148:11 to praise the Lord; but here the call is specially addressed to his elect people, who know him beyond all others. Those who are children of privilege should be children of praise. A people near unto him, near by kin, and near by care; near as to manifestation and near as to affection. This is a highly honourable description of the beloved race; and it is true even more emphatically of the spiritual Israel, the believing seed. This nearness should prompt us to perpetual adoration. The Lord's elect are the children of his love, the courtiers of his palace, the priests of his temple, and therefore they are bound beyond all others to be filled with reverence for him, and delight in him. Praise ye the Lord, or, Hallelujah. This should be the Alpha and

Omega of a good man's life. Let us praise God to the end, world without end. The field of praise which lies before us in this Psalm is bounded at beginning and end by landmarks in the form of Hallelujahs, and all that lieth between them is every word of it to the Lord's honour. Amen.

Psalm 149

Verse 1. Praise ye the LORD. Specially you, ye chosen people, whom he has made to be his saints. You have praised him aforetime, praise him yet again; yea, for ever praise him. With renewed zeal and fresh delight lift up your song unto Jehovah. Sing unto the LORD a new song. Sing, for it is the fittest method for expressing reverent praise. Sing a hymn newly composed, for you have now a new knowledge of God. He is ever new in his manifestations; his mercies are new every morning; his deliverances are new in every night of sorrow; let your gratitude and thanksgivings be new also. It is well to repeat the old; it is more useful to invent the new. Novelty goes well with heartiness. Our singing should be "unto the Lord"; the songs we sing should be of him and to him, "for of him, and to him, and through him are all things." Among our novelties there should be new songs: alas! men are fonder of making new complaints than new Psalms. Our new songs should be devised in Jehovah's honour; indeed all our newest thoughts should run towards him. Never can we find a nobler subject for a song than the Lord, nor one more full of fresh matter for a new song, nor one which we are personally so much bound to sing as a new song "unto the Lord." And his praise in the congregation of saints. Saints are precious, and a congregation of saints is a treasure house of jewels. God is in the midst of saints, and because of this we may well long to be among them. They are so full of his praise that we feel at home among them when we are ourselves full of praise. The sanctuary is the house of praise as well as the house of prayer. All saints praise God: they would not be saints if they did not. Their praise is sincere, suitable, seasonable, and acceptable. Personal praise is sweet unto God, but congregated praise has a multiplicity of sweetnesses in it. When holy ones meet, they adore The Holy One. Saints do not gather to amuse themselves with music, nor to extol one another, but to sing his praise whose saints they are. A congregation of saints is heaven upon earth: should not Jehovah, the Lord of saints, have all the praise that can come from such an assembly? Yet at times even saintly conclaves need to be stirred up to thanksgiving; for saints may be sad and apprehensive, and then their spirits require to be raised to a higher key, and stimulated to happier worship.

Verse 2. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him. Here is that new creation which calls for the new song. It was Jehovah who made Israel to be Israel, and the tribes to become a great nation: therefore let the Founder of the nation be had in perpetual honour. Joy and rejoicing are evidently to be the special characteristics of the new song. The religion of the dead in sin is more apt to chant dirges than to sing hallelujahs; but when we are made new in the spirit of our minds we joy and rejoice in him that made us. Our joy is in our God and King: we choose no lower delight. Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Those who had seen the tribes formed into a settled kingdom as well as into a united nation should rejoice. Israel is the nation, Zion is the capital of the kingdom: Israel rejoices in her Maker, Zion in her King. In the case of our God we who believe in him are as glad of his Government as we are of his Creation: his reign is as truly the making of us as was his divine power. The children of Israel are happy to be made a people; the children of Zion are equally happy to be ruled as a people. In every character our God is the source of joy to us: this verse issues a permit to our joy, yea it lays an injunction upon us to be glad in the Lord.

Verse 3. Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp. Thus let them repeat the triumph of the Red Sea, which was ever the typical glory of Israel.

Miriam led the daughters of Israel in the dance when the Lord had triumphed gloriously; was it not most fit that she should? The sacred dance of devout joy is no example, nor even excuse, for frivolous dances, much less for lewd ones. Who could help dancing when Egypt was vanquished, and the tribes were free? Every mode of expressing delight was bound to be employed on so memorable an occasion. Dancing, singing, and playing on instruments were all called into requisition, and most fitly so. There are unusual seasons which call for unusual expressions of joy. When the Lord saves a soul its holy joy overflows, and it cannot find channels enough for its exceeding gratitude: if the man does not leap, or play, or sing, at any rate he praises God, and wishes for a thousand tongues with which to magnify his Saviour. Who would wish it to be otherwise? Young converts are not to be restrained in their joy. Let them sing and dance while they can. How can they mourn now that their Bridegroom is with them? Let us give the utmost liberty to joy. Let us never attempt its suppression, but issue in the terms of this verse a double license for exultation. If any ought to be glad it is the children of Zion; rejoicing is more fit for Israel than for any other people: it is their own folly and fault that they are not oftener brimming with joy in God, for the very thought of him is delight.

Verse 4. For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people; and therefore they should take pleasure in him. If our joy be pleasing to him let us make it full. What condescension is this on Jehovah's part, to notice, to love, and to delight in his chosen! Surely there is nothing in our persons, or our actions, which could cause pleasure to the Ever blessed One, were it not that he condescends to men of low estate. The thought of the Lord's taking pleasure in us is a mine of joy never to be exhausted. He will beautify the meek with salvation. They are humble, and feel their need of salvation; he is gracious, and bestows it upon them. They lament their deformity, and he puts a beauty upon them of the choicest sort. He saves them by sanctifying them, and thus they wear the beauty of holiness, and the beauty of a joy which springs out of full salvation. He makes his people meek, and then makes the meek beautiful. Herein is grand argument for worshipping the Lord with the utmost exultation: he who takes such a pleasure in us must be approached with every token of exceeding joy. God taketh pleasure in all his children as Jacob loved all his sons; but the meek are his Josephs, and upon these he puts the coat of many colours, beautifying them with peace, content, joy, holiness, and influence. A meek and quiet spirit is called "an ornament", and certainly it is "the beauty of holiness." When God himself beautifies a man, he becomes beautiful indeed and beautiful for ever. The verse may be read, "He shall beautify the meek with salvation", or "He shall beautify the afflicted with deliverance", or, "He shall beautify the meek with victory"; and each of these readings gives a new shade of meaning, well worthy of quiet consideration. Each reading also suggests new cause for joyful adoration. "O come, let us sing unto the Lord."

Verse 5. Let the saints be joyful in glory. God has honoured them, and put a rare glory upon them; therefore let them exult therein. Shall those to whom God is their glory be cast down and troubled? Nay, let their joy proclaim their honourable estate. Let them sing aloud upon their beds. Their exultation should express itself in shouts and songs, for it is not a feeling of which they have any need to be ashamed. That which is so fully justified by fact, may well be loudly proclaimed. Even in their quietest retreats let them burst into song; when no one hears them, let them sing aloud unto God. If confined by sickness let them joy in God. In the night watches let them not lie awake and weep, but like nightingales let them charm the midnight hours. Their shouts are not now for the battlefield, but for the places of their rest: they can peacefully lie down and yet enjoy the victory with which the Lord has beautified them. Without fighting, faith wins and sings the victory. What a blessing to have our beds made into thrones, and our retirements turned into triumphs!

Verse 6. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two edged sword in their hand. It seems they are not always on their beds, but are ready for deeds of prowess. When called to fight, the meek are very hard to overcome; they are just as steady in conflict as they are steadfast in patience. Besides, their way of fighting is of an extraordinary sort, for they sing to God but keep their swords in their hands. They can do two things at a time: if they do not wield the trowel and the sword, at least they sing and strike. In this Israel was not an example, but a type: we will not copy the chosen people in making literal war, but we will fulfil the emblem by carrying on spiritual war. We praise God and contend with our corruptions; we sing joyfully and war earnestly with evil of every kind. Our weapons are not carnal, but they are mighty, and wound with both back and edge. The word of God is all edge; whichever way we turn it, it strikes deadly blows at falsehood and wickedness. If we do not praise we shall grow sad in our conflict; and if we do not fight we shall become presumptuous in our song. The verse indicates a happy blending of the chorister and the crusader. Note how each thing in the believer is emphatic: if he sings, it is high praises, and praises deep down in his throat, as the original hath it; and if he fights, it is with the sword, and the sword is two edged. The living God imparts vigorous life to those who trust him. They are not of a neutral tint: men both hear them and feel them. Quiet is their spirit, but in that very quietude abides the thunder of an irresistible force. When godly men give battle to the powers of evil each conflict is high praise unto the God of goodness. Even the tumult of our holy war is a part of the music of our lives.

Verse 7. To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people. This was once literally the duty of Israel: when they came into Canaan they fulfilled the righteous sentence of the Lord upon guilty nations. At this hour, under the gentler dispensation of grace, we wrestle not with flesh and blood; yet is our warfare none the less stern, and our victory none the less sure. All evil shall eventually be overthrown: the Lord shall display his justice against evildoers, and in that warfare his servants shall play their parts. The saints shall judge the world. Both the conflict and the victory at the end of it shall cause glory to God, and honour to his holy ones.

Verse 8. To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron. Thus are the greatest enemies of Jehovah and his people reduced to shame, rendered helpless, and themselves punished. This was Israel's boast in actual fact, it is ours spiritually. The chief powers of evil shall be restrained and ultimately destroyed. Those who made captives of the godly shall themselves be made captive. The powers of evil cannot bind our King, but by his power their king shall be bound with a great chain, and shut up in the bottomless pit, that he may at length be trodden under the feet of saints.

Verse 9. To execute upon them the judgment written. Israel as a nation had this to do, and did it, and then they rejoiced in the God who gave success to their arms. We praise our God after another fashion; we are not executioners of justice, but heralds of mercy. It would be a sad thing for any one to misuse this text: lest any warlike believer should be led to do so, we would remind him that the execution must not go beyond the sentence and warrant; and we have received no warrant of execution against our fellow men. Christians have no commission of vengeance; it is theirs to execute the command of mercy, and that alone. This honour have all his saints. All the godly shared in the triumphs of the Lord when he smote Israel's foes. We have like honour, but it is shown in victories of another sort. All the holy ones are sent upon errands by their holy Lord. The honours described in this Psalm are common to all the family of grace; and such service as the Lord appoints is to be undertaken by every one of them, without exception. The Lord honours all his chosen here, and he will glorify them all hereafter: this rule is without exception. Surely in this we have the best argument for glorifying the Lord, wherefore we close our new song with another Hallelujah, Praise ye the Lord.

Psalm 150

Verse 1. Praise ye the LORD. Hallelujah! The exhortation is to all things in earth or in heaven. Should they not all declare the glory of him for whose glory they are, and were created? Jehovah, the one God, should be the one object of adoration. To give the least particle of his honour to another is shameful treason; to refuse to render it to him is heartless robbery. Praise God in his sanctuary. Praise El, or the strong one, in his holy place. See how power is mentioned with holiness in this change of names. Praise begins at home. "In God's own house pronounce his praise." The holy place should be filled with praise, even as of old the high priest filled the sanctum sanctorum with the smoke of sweet smelling incense. In his church below and in his courts above hallelujahs should be continually presented. In the person of Jesus God finds a holy dwelling or sanctuary, and there he is greatly to be praised. He may also be said to dwell in holiness, for all his ways are right and good; for this we ought to extol him with heart and with voice. Whenever we assemble for holy purposes our main work should be to present praises unto the Lord our God. Praise him in the firmament of his power. It is a blessed thing that in our God holiness and power are united. Power without righteousness would be oppression, and righteousness without power would be too weak for usefulness; but put the two together in an infinite degree and we have God. What an expanse we have in the boundless firmament of divine power! Let it all be filled with praise. Let the heavens, so great and strong, echo with the praise of the thrice holy Jehovah, while the sanctuaries of earth magnify the Almighty One.

Verse 2. Praise him for his mighty acts. Here is a reason for praise. In these deeds of power we see himself. These doings of his omnipotence are always on behalf of truth and righteousness. His works of creation, providence, and redemption, all call for praise; they are his acts, and his acts of might, therefore let him be praised for them. Praise him according to his excellent greatness. His being is unlimited, and his praise should correspond therewith. He possesses a multitude or a plenitude of greatness, and therefore he should be greatly praised. There is nothing little about God, and there is nothing great apart from him. If we were always careful to make our worship fit and appropriate for our great Lord how much better should we sing! How much more reverently should we adore! Such excellent deeds should have excellent praise.

Verse 3. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet. With the loudest, clearest note call the people together. Make all men to know that we are not ashamed to worship. Summon them with unmistakable sound to bow before their God. The sound of trumpet is associated with the grandest and most solemn events, such as the giving of the law, the proclamation of jubilee, the coronation of Jewish kings, and the raging of war. It is to be thought of in reference to the coming of our Lord in his second advent and the raising of the dead. If we cannot give voice to this martial instrument, at least let our praise be as decided and bold as if we could give a blast upon the horn. Let us never sound a trumpet before us to our own honour, but reserve all our trumpeting for God's glory. When the people have been gathered by blast of trumpet, then proceed to praise him with the psaltery and harp. Stringed instruments are to be used as well as those which are rendered vocal by wind. Dulcet notes are to be consecrated as well as more startling sounds. The gospel meaning is that all powers and faculties should praise the Lord—all sorts of persons, under all circumstances, and with differing constitutions, should do honour unto the Lord of all. If there be any virtue, if there be any talent, if there be any influence, let all be consecrated to the service of the universal Benefactor. Harp and lyre—the choicest, the sweetest, must be all our Lord's.

Verse 4. Praise him with the timbrel and dance. Associated with the deliverance at the Red Sea, this form of worship set forth the most jubilant and exultant of worship. The hands and the feet were both employed, and the entire body moved in sympathy with the members. Are there not periods of life when we feel so glad that we would fain dance for joy? Let not such exhilaration be spent upon common themes, but let the name of God stir us to ecstasy. Let us exult as we cry,

"In the heavenly Lamb thrice happy I am,
And my heart it doth dance at the sound of his name."

There is enough in our holy faith to create and to justify the utmost degree of rapturous delight. If men are dull in the worship of the Lord our God they are not acting consistently with the character of their religion. Praise him with stringed instruments and organs. We have here the three kinds of musical instruments: timbrels, which are struck, and strings, and pipes; let all be educated to praise the Lord. Nothing is common and unclean: all may be sanctified to highest uses. Many men, many minds, and these as different as strings and pipes; but there is only one God, and that one God all should worship. The word translated "organs" signifies pipe—a simpler form of wind instrument than the more modern and more elaborate organ. Doubtless many a pious shepherd has poured out gracious pastorals from a reed or oaten pipe, and so has magnified his God.

Verse 5. Praise high upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let the clash of the loudest music be the Lord's: let the joyful clang of the loftiest notes be all for him. Praise has beaten the timbrel, swept the harp, and sounded the trumpet, and now for a last effort, awakening the most heavy of slumberers, and startling the most indifferent of onlookers, she dashes together the disks of brass, and with sounds both loud and high proclaims the glories of the Lord.

Verse 6. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. "Let all breath praise him": that is to say, all living beings. He gave them breath, let them breathe his praise. His name is in the Hebrew composed rather of breathings than of letters, to show that all breath comes from him: therefore let it be used for him. Join all ye living things in the eternal song. Be ye least or greatest, withhold not your praises. What a day will it be when all things in all places unite to glorify the one only living and true God! This will be the final triumph of the church of God. Praise ye the LORD. Once more, Hallelujah! Thus is the Psalm rounded with the note of praise; and thus is the Book of Psalms ended by a glowing word of adoration. Reader, wilt not thou at this moment pause a while, and worship the Lord thy God? Hallelujah!

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